

The 2010 Haitian Earthquake: Disaster and the Limits of Narrative

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Abstract

This thesis examines narrative responses to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Analysing a selection of fictional and non-fictional texts written in both French and English, it demonstrates the ways in which literary representations of the earthquake interrogate current definitions of ‘disaster’, ‘reconstruction’, and ‘recovery’ while attempting to create narrative forms that approximate the experience of the event. These representations work towards a vision of Haiti that goes beyond standard portrayals of the country as a place of misery; but they also show the limitations of narrative form to capture the complexity of the 2010 earthquake and other disastrous events. The thesis situates the primary texts at the crossroads of postcolonial disaster studies, Haitian studies, and narrative theory, giving equal attention to the texts’ formal qualities as well as the historical contexts in which they intervene and the contemporary debates in which they partake.

The structure of the thesis reflects this mixed methodology. Following a discussion of temporality that brings out the untimely character of the 2010 earthquake (Chapter One), the thesis focuses on histories of space and place, challenging the binary construction of Haiti as rural idyll/urban disaster zone (Chapter Two). It then shifts attention to notions of self and subjectivity, examining some of the meanings that post-disaster reconstruction takes in the context of personal transformation (Chapter Three). Together, these insights demonstrate the relevance of interdisciplinary analysis to our understanding of the social and political as well as geophysical histories behind ‘natural’ disasters, and of the long-term reverberations they cause.

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Introduction

How to account for the devastation of a town in which almost every concrete structure collapsed within a minute? ¹ How to explain the 19-40 million m³ of debris,² the non-natural destruction of a capital, left behind after a magnitude 7.0 earthquake hit Haiti on the 12th of January 2010? Devastation on such a scale seems, at least initially, beyond comprehension and representation. Literary accounts, responding to the need to testify to scale of personal and collective loss, attempt to recreate a composite picture of that January day and to come to terms with the disaster and its aftermath. At the same time, in their struggle to render the complexity of the event and the histories underlying it, they reveal the limitations of narrative form as well as of current definitions of disaster. At 4:53 pm EST, at the end of the working day, many people were trying to navigate their way through the Haitian capital's infamous traffic jams. There was no right place or time when the first 35-second long shock struck approximately 16 miles west of Port-au-Prince near Léogâne and rocked the two cities. The iconic Cathedral of Our Lady of Assumption, the wedding-cake-like National Palace, as well as fifteen out of seventeen ministries crumbled. Mainly built out of concrete for lack of cheap and sustainable resources, most residential houses collapsed within seconds, leaving

¹ Laura Zanotti, 'Cacophonies of Aid, Failed State Building and NGOs in Haiti: setting the stage for disaster, envisioning the future', *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (2010), 755-71 (p. 756).

² United Nations Development Programme, *Fact Sheet-Haiti Earthquake Debris Management* (United Nations Development Programme, 2012) <<http://api.ning.com/files/kPIViGB-YXcsimOZSEEdBuSDRUbwWnvL6sfdTK9wHNI3pgcoft0cTg0QYohVynrICiYGi5dvVz74iBgG3UtOzT4JQOYZ6zl/Debrisfactsheet2010JuneUNDP.pdf>> [accessed 14 March 2014].

thousands buried under the rubble.³ The disaster levelled over 80 percent of the capital.⁴ Clouds of dust engulfed the city. Aerial photographs of Port-au-Prince revealed the enormous scale of the devastation, with most densely populated neighbourhoods flattened almost entirely. Images of the disaster flooded the internet and quickly focused the world's attention on Haiti. Discrepant statistics and assessments poured in, only adding to the general sense of confusion and powerlessness in face of the overwhelming scale of destruction. Some estimates suggest that the earthquake killed 217,000 and left over a million homeless.⁵ Others give a much higher figure, claiming that approximately 300,000 people were killed directly in the earthquake and that another 300,000 were wounded.⁶ In the days immediately following upon the disaster, Champ de Mars with the towering figure of Henri Christophe and the famous sculpture of Neg Mawon (Le Nègre Marron, The Black Maroon), a tribute to slaves in hiding who ran away to the mountains to later form slave armies, became a tent camp. The Unknown Slave was no longer commemorating a historical turning point. Instead, the statue was used as a drying rack and became a reference point helping to navigate the maze of tents.

No one experience or memory of the earthquake is the same, with each telling of the story and the chain of events of that fateful day—that is, each *narrative* of the 12th of January—bearing a distinct perspective on the disaster. Narrative is

³ Another 97,294 residential houses were destroyed and 188,383 were left damaged in Port-au-Prince and much of southern Haiti. Heidi Koontz and Clarice Nassif Ransom, *Haiti Dominates Earthquake Fatalities in 2010* (U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, 1 November 2011) <<http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2679>> [accessed 20 January 2014].

⁴ Zanutti, p. 756.

⁵ Center for Economic and Policy Research, *Haiti by the Numbers, Four Years Later* <<http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/relief-and-reconstruction-watch/haiti-by-the-numbers-four-years-later>> [accessed 20 January 2014].

⁶ Guglielmo Schininà, Mazen Aboul Hosn, Amal Ataya, Kety Dieuveut & Marie-Ade' le Salem, 'Psychosocial Response to the Haiti Earthquake: the Experiences of International Organization for Migration', *Intervention*, 8 (2010), 158 – 64 (p.58).

defined here as ‘a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee.’⁷ A narrative consists of ‘a set of events (the story) recounted in a process of narration (or discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the plot).’⁸ Most of these personal stories and impressions were told to just the closest friends: some were collected and archived as oral histories of the disaster;⁹ whereas others were shared with the wider global community as published narratives, among them the six texts chosen in this thesis. In their immediacy and linguistic and generic diversity, these literary narratives of the earthquake testify to the urgent need to give form and sense to an overwhelming experience. They approach the disaster from radically different perspectives—such as that of a Haitian Canadian diasporic writer, an American relief worker, or a fictional teenage boy—and occupy contrasting interpretative standpoints revealing its global impact and its many translations. These accounts try to grapple with a highly particular event, determined by multiple pre-existing contexts, while providing an insight into the deeply personal effect the earthquake had on individual lives. As they attempt to forge a narrative form that approximates and helps to navigate this complex experience these texts raise the following key questions about the event and its narrative representations: What can we learn about this and other disasters from literary responses? What is the nature and role of narratives of the 2010 earthquake? How do narratives work—or not—as explanatory mechanisms? What is at stake in the particular processes of narrativising the 2010 earthquake, and in putting disasters in general into narrative form? What are the

⁷ Chris Baldick, ‘narrative’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms Online* (Oxford University Press, 2008) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view.10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-760>> [accessed 07 January 2014].

⁸ Baldick, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms Online*.

⁹ *Haiti Memory Project* <<http://haitimemoryproject.org/>> [accessed 14 May 2015].

limits and limitations of narrative engagements with this particular event and other natural disasters more generally?

The thesis takes these questions as a point of entry into an interrogation of some of the narrative responses to the 2010 earthquake that were published by Haitian and non-Haitian authors in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The value and contribution of my thesis lies in capturing divergent literary histories of the ongoing disaster, and analysing them from an interdisciplinary perspective that is attuned to the multiple functions these texts fulfil as personal testimonies of trauma, commentaries on the socio-political dimensions of the catastrophe, and explorations of narrative aesthetics. By prioritising the subjective experience and recollection of the event, narratives of the January disaster allow us to see the many contrasting meanings of *goudougoudou*¹⁰ and are ways of engaging with the inherently multifarious nature of disasters and their longer histories. Narratives also enable a comparative analysis while reiterating the specificity of particular events and the discrepant histories that underlie them. In turning personal and collective experiences of disaster into narrative form, such accounts may also attempt to reclaim voice and agency for the various people who are victimised by disaster and to reconfigure long-term disaster recovery processes so as to facilitate individual/collective liberation and emancipation. Finally, imaginative responses to the disaster, in combining personal expressions of the experience with an overview of the disaster's wider context and significance, offer valuable insights into the collective and individual impact of the event, which transcends strict categories of nation, state,

¹⁰ *Goudougodou* is an onomatopoeic approximation of the sound of the earthquake and is now used to refer to the 12 January 2010 disaster. Nancy Dorsinville, 'Goudou Goudou', in *Haiti After the Earthquake*, ed. by Paul Farmer (New York, NY.: Public Affairs, 2011), pp. 273-81.

and belonging.

As the title of the thesis already suggests, these narratives, too, have their own limits and limitations. Attempting to grapple with the different potential meanings of disaster and to give it narrative shape and resonance, the selected texts at once expand and put to the test the different generic conventions they embrace, such as those of a memoir, a conversion account, or a young-adult novel. In so doing, and with varying levels of self-reflexivity, they expose the tensions within their own design and the limitations, both formal and conceptual, of narrative form to convey an event of such scale and the histories that underlie it. First, narrative form, even as it aims to provide a sense of resolution, struggles to account for the extended temporality of the event and its processual, unfolding character. Second, narrative focalisation limits the possibilities of recognising and sharing the suffering of others. Moreover, on the conceptual level, although narratives can contribute to our increased understanding of individual experience and the contexts for it, they can equally obfuscate it by using facile imagery and metaphors that omit historical and cultural particulars. As such, narratives have the potential to challenge, but also to re-affirm, generalising victim discourses (cf. hegemonic constructions of Haiti as a failed state and a political/environmental disaster zone)¹¹ as well as interpretative frameworks and

¹¹ Beverly Bell also points to the prevalence of the discourse of Haiti as a ‘failed state’: ‘The message had long been drummed, but the tempo picked up after the earthquake, pounded by foreign governments, academics, and media, such as *Time* magazine’s piece “The Failed State That Keeps Failing.” Later, Haiti would even come in fifth in the 2011 Failed States Index of the think tank Fund for Peace, after Somalia, Chad, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.’ Beverly Bell, *Fault Lines: Views Across Haiti’s Divide* (Ithaca, NY. and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 80. For some examples of the workings of this discourse, see: Tim Padgett, ‘The Failed State That Keeps Failing: Quake-Ravaged Haiti Still without a Government’, *Time Online*, 10 September 2011 <<http://world.time.com/2011/09/10/the-failed-state-that-keeps-failing-quake-ravaged-haiti-still-without-a-government>> [accessed 15 July 2013] ; Tim Weiner, ‘Life Is Hard and Short in Haiti’s Bleak Villages’, *New York Times Online*, 14 March 2004 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/14/world/life-is-hard-and-short-in-haiti-s-bleak-villages.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>> [accessed 15 July 2013].

methodologically confined approaches to the January disaster. In effect, they risk rehearsing and reproducing the very clichés they want to contest while appropriating the earthquake as, for example, a vehicle for personal transformation. Finally, depending on their target audience, narratives also risk performing an ethically dubious form of tourist writing, one which re-affirms a voyeuristic gaze on Haiti and reconfigures it as an exotic and marginal site.

While providing a source of insight into individual traumatic experience of the 2010 earthquake, the narratives I will seek to analyse are equally embedded in the multiple material contexts that directly determined the scale of the devastation and the personal and collective impact it had. These histories of the event are interlaced into the fabric of each of the narratives as they try to tell their individual story of the earthquake. By engaging with material context, these narratives of the earthquake draw out the collective histories of the disaster. As such, they can help us recognise and understand the complex nature of the January earthquake and other events that seem to escape easy comprehension, yet which leave an ugly mark in the lives of those directly affected, challenging in effect the wider categories of time and space, self and other. Building blocks of narrative form and subjective experience, these categories also correspond to the contexts—Haiti’s history, politics, ecology and religious traditions—that determined the scale of the 2010 disaster and immediate responses to it. An analysis of narrative engagements with the January earthquake therefore necessitates a composite approach that combines an enquiry into the material histories of the tremors, elucidated through disaster studies approach, with an exploration, rooted in postcolonial trauma theory and narrative theory, of the narrative aesthetics these texts embrace.

Aware of the need for a culturally, conceptually, and contextually astute analysis of the January disaster and of the variety of cultural expressions it triggered, I turn in this thesis to a series of literary works which engage with the 2010 Haitian earthquake. My approach is necessarily selective: there was an outpouring of literary representations of the disaster, narratives in particular, in the months following upon it. My emphasis is on the shape and form some of these narratives took as a means of ordering an experience that was at once chaotic and overwhelming. Here, narrative operates as a formal and structural organising device and a means of moulding the overpowering experience of disaster into manageable form. This focus on form will allow for a comparative analysis of aesthetically and conceptually distinct literary responses without assuming easy categorisations according to the language, authorship or intended audience of each text. I will examine the following works: *Le Tremblement: Haïti, 12 janvier 2010* (Paris: Arléa, 2010) by Lionel Édouard-Martin; *Tout Bouge Autour de Moi* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle 2011) by Dany Laferrière; *Haïti, kenbe la!* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Éditions Michel Lafon, 2010) by Rodney Saint-Éloi; *Rubble: The Search for a Haitian Boy* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2012) by Sandra Marquez Stathis; *In Darkness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) by Nick Lake; and *Unshaken: Rising from the Ruins of Haiti's Hotel Montana* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011) by Dan Woolley. Rather than prioritising some responses over others, I aim to provide an inclusive comparative analysis of early literary treatments of the 2010 disaster. Emphasising the heterogeneity of texts composed both immediately after the earthquake and in the years immediately following upon it, the thesis brings together fictional and non-fictional narratives written in both English and French. The project thus adopts a bilingual, cross-disciplinary approach and

devotes equal attention to accounts written by established and first-time authors. By engaging differently with the same event, and by attempting to configure its possible meanings, these literary works point to the multiple histories—of international intervention, political emigration, and the development of disaster and humanitarian tourism—underlying the 2010 earthquake and its aftermath.

Distinct disciplinary approaches to such complex disasters, like those offered by disaster studies, trauma studies, and narrative theory can provide some insight into the event, demonstrating the ways in which it unfolded and gauging its effects on local populations. These explanatory methodologies attempt to interrogate the past, present, and future of each particular disaster and to assess its social, collective, and personal impact. The field of disaster studies, using qualitative and quantitative analytical tools and socio-scientific methodology, sets out to address the impact of ‘[such] events on all social units ranging from individuals and households to nation-states.’¹² In contradistinction to the socio-scientific and often policy-making orientation of disaster studies, trauma theory focuses on the subjective, direct or indirect, experience of such events and their aftermath. Broadly seen, trauma theory denotes ‘a body of 20th- century psychological research into the effects upon people of various traumatic events (assault, rape, war, famine, incarceration, etc.).’¹³ The concepts and approaches developed from this work have been increasingly adapted by a number of other disciplines, not least literary studies. Here, the analysis of attempts to make sense of traumatic events through literary forms of expression is intertwined with an exploration of questions of memory,

¹² Michael K. Lindell, ‘Disaster studies’, *Current Sociology*, 61 (2013), 797-825, abstract.

¹³ Chris Baldick, ‘trauma theory’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms Online* (Oxford University Press, 2008) <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-1161>> [accessed 15 August 2014].

forgetting, and remembrance. Literature, with its attention to cultural and historical specificity and its examination of identity categories, can usefully compensate for the limits of a disaster studies methodology that remains strongly rooted in the discipline's technocratic origins. In addition, a narrative theory approach to these texts allows for a critical analysis of dominant discourses on Haiti and the 2010 earthquake—for example victim narratives, tropes of Haiti's negative or positive 'uniqueness', and discourses of exceptionalism—and an assessment of some of the ways in which these discourses were presented, challenged, or reinforced in the aftermath of the disaster. On their own, however, the distinct disciplines can offer only limited insight into the nature of such events, in accordance with their methodologies. In direct response to the complexity of the earthquake and respective disciplinary limitations, in this thesis I offer instead a joint, theoretically nuanced aesthetic and contextual analysis of literary responses to the January earthquake that aims to complicate our understanding of the island's past and present by questioning these discursive frames and exposing the limitations of employing a single dominant approach to narratives of the 2010 disaster.

The interdisciplinary character of my thesis, along with its focus on narrative as an organising device, is reflected in the structure of the introductory chapter, which outlines the multiple contexts to which the selected narratives respond and in which they are embedded. After giving an overview of the immediate aftermath of the disaster and the outpouring of aid that followed, I analyse the historical background to the event—what led up to the earthquake and what created the context for it. Next, I turn to a consideration of the character of the disaster. I first sketch a summary of the field of disaster studies, then outline recent methodological developments within the discipline in the wake of the 'interdisciplinary turn.' After a general discussion of the need for an

engagement with cultural, especially literary, responses to disasters, I provide a more specific summary of the range of literary works that emerged in response to the January 2010 earthquake. I suggest that both the overall character of the event and the diverse nature of literary responses to it call for an interpretative approach, centred on narrative; this is then followed by an explanation of my choice of primary works. Considering the personal significance of the disaster as manifested in these texts, I then turn to literary trauma theory and discuss its relevance and applicability to the study of such narratives. The final section of the Introduction, an outline of the three comparative chapters to follow, reiterates the thesis's central focus on narrative and the interdisciplinary nature of its enquiry. The chapters are organised around three main concepts—time, place, and self—which are at once building blocks of narrative and key categories of individual and collective experience. This division allows for an engagement with the personal impact of the disaster, with its wider contexts, and with the different forms through which these were mediated. The closing chapter of the thesis, by bringing together the insights from the analyses that precede it, points to the ways in which imaginative writing can enrich our understanding of the 2010 Haitian earthquake in the light of narrative theory and in the context of postcolonial disaster studies. Together, these chapters form an intervention into the field of narrative theory, postcolonial studies, and Haitian studies while offering a gesture of solidarity with Haiti long after the general media focus shifted to other disasters.

The Immediate Aftermath of the 2010 January Earthquake: Aid and Response

Following the first media broadcasts and reports from Port-au-Prince, the international community was quick to respond to the scale of the devastation caused by the January 12 earthquake. In 2010, \$4 191 000 000 was promised to Haiti to aid the country in the reconstruction process.¹⁴ The American Red Cross alone raised \$486 million.¹⁵ From telethons to auctions and bake sales, everyone seemed to be involved in some sort of fundraising initiative. Sean Penn, Demi Moore, and John Travolta all felt the urge to contribute in different ways to the relief effort. By the end of 2012, however, Haiti had received less than half of the money promised. In addition, the UN-caused cholera outbreak, for which the UN has yet to apologise, has claimed over 9 thousand lives so far and afflicted another 749,285.¹⁶ As the months went by, and as media attention shifted to other, more recent tragedies, resignation and privatisation seemed to replace the initial enthusiasm and grassroots character of the early reconstruction efforts. It quickly became apparent that the recovery projects were only a repeat of earlier, unsustainable and inefficient models of aid development which had merely increased Haiti's dependency on international assistance and foreign investment. In sum, by December 2012, over \$2 billion had not yet reached Haiti.¹⁷ Contrary to all promises and assurances, the likelihood of this money ever reaching the country remains extremely low.

¹⁴ Arte, *Haiti 2010-2013: Où sont passés les dons?* <<http://assistance-mortelle.arte.tv/intro>> [accessed 10 January 2014].

¹⁵ Center for Economic and Policy Research, *Haiti by the Numbers, Three Years Later* <<http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/relief-and-reconstruction-watch/haiti-by-the-numbers-three-years-later>> [accessed 20 January 2014].

¹⁶ Just Foreign Policy, *Haiti Cholera Counter* <<http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/haiti-cholera-counter>> [accessed 15 May 2015].

¹⁷ Arte, *Assistance mortelle: conclusion* <<http://assistance-mortelle.arte.tv/conclusion>> [accessed 13 January 2014].

The scale of the 2010 earthquake revealed the limits of the international community's capacity to deal efficiently with such a complex event. It also demonstrated that universal emergency aid scenarios cannot simply be transferred and translated from one disaster context into another. This became increasingly manifest in the inability of foreign humanitarian efforts to offer a model of aid that might pave a way for efficient Haiti-led long-term reconstruction. With approximately 8-10 thousand NGOs¹⁸ operating on the ground, Haiti has been long dubbed 'the republic of NGOs'¹⁹—a fittingly sardonic representation of the decentralising effects this international presence has.²⁰ The long-term international preference for NGOs as providers of basic services became even more apparent in the months immediately following upon the disaster. By granting financial assistance to NGOs, donors have been able to maintain a greater level of control over how their money is spent; in many cases assistance was dependent upon the implementation of specific policies. Donors' reluctance to channel aid directly to the Haitian state has also frequently been seen as a tool for fighting corruption. Contrary to their aims, however, these reconstruction practices have only created parallel structures and undermined an already enfeebled Haitian state by draining financial resources away from it. The rationale behind such distribution of aid reveals a highly questionable logic: international assistance, which

¹⁸ It is almost impossible to provide an exact number of all the NGOs operating in Haiti and the figure varies considerably between different estimates. Regardless of the exact number of NGOs, 'something like 80 percent of basic public services (the provision of water, health care, education, sanitation, food distribution...) are undertaken by NGOs; the largest organizations have budgets bigger than those of their corresponding government departments.' In USAID Democracy and Governance Program, Program Data Sheet 521-005, <<http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti-archive-new/msg11338.html>>, in Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti and the Politics of Containment* (London, New York, NY.: Verso, 2010), p. 178.

¹⁹ Robert Fatton, 'Haiti in the Aftermath of the Earthquake: The Politics of Catastrophe', *Journal of Black Studies*, 42 (2011), 158-85 (p. 173).

²⁰ Since 1990s these organisations, with varying political, ideological, and operational aims, have been providing a range of basic services and have been the main receivers of foreign financial support.

has focused on the “democratic” form and “cost effectiveness” of institutional arrangements rather than on fostering the state’s capacity to provide services to populations,’²¹ has effectively limited the state’s ability to become a credible ‘democratic’ provider of resources. Coupled with calls for the decentralisation of political and economic governance in the wake of the disaster, these humanitarian practices have only worsened the already difficult position of the Haitian government.²²

In effect, post-earthquake reconstruction and development came to signify a further expansion of the neoliberal market economy, epitomised in the growth of the sweatshop garment industry and, more recently, the luxury tourism industry.²³ In Michel Martelly’s infamous declaration: ‘Haiti is open for business.’²⁴ The \$300 million Caracol industrial park development, which took over three years to complete and was supposed to provide around 60000 jobs, encapsulates the false promises of neoliberal development policies.²⁵ For the project to be completed, over 300 families were forcibly relocated, losing their farming and grazing land. Caracol now employs less than 2,000 people and, despite earlier assurances, does not comply with the minimum-wage requirement of \$7/day set by Haitian law. In comparison, the cost of a basic food basket which allows one person to consume approximately

²¹ Zanotti, p. 757.

²² International Crisis Group, *Haiti: Stabilization and Reconstruction after the Quake, Latin America and Caribbean Report* (International Crisis Group, 31 March 2010) <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/haiti/32_haiti___stabilisation_and_reconstruction_after_the_quake.pdf> [accessed 02 November 2013].

²³ Recent developments include investments into Île à Vache, the recently opened Best Western Premier, the re-opened Royal Oasis Hotel and the new Marriott Hotel.

²⁴ Inter Press Service/Haiti Grassroots Watch, ‘Haiti: Open For Business – Part 1’, 20 December 2011 <<http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/12/haiti-open-for-business-part-1/>> [accessed 13 February 2014].

²⁵ The Clinton Foundation website in the following offers reassurances about the benefits of the Caracol Industrial Park will have on a local and a national scale: ‘In collaboration with the Government of Haiti, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the U.S. State Department, the Clinton Foundation assisted with the development of the Caracol Industrial Park. [...]. Today, the Korean apparel manufacturer Sae-A is the anchor tenant and will create 20,000 jobs alone.’ Clinton Foundation, *Clinton Foundation*, ‘Clinton Foundation in Haiti: Caracol Industrial Park’ <<https://www.clintonfoundation.org/our-work/clinton-foundation-haiti/programs/caracol-industrial-park>> [accessed 06 August 2014].

2,000 calories per day is \$10.²⁶ This ‘development opportunity,’ a free-market illustration of the attempt to ‘build back better,’²⁷ only benefits Western markets and the multinational clothing industry. The situation of Haitian employees is ever more desperate: they are under no real legal protection and, having no other opportunity for fair employment, they are forced to work under conditions which aggravate rather than alleviate their poverty. Thanks to preferential tariff agreements, none of which have been revoked despite apparent labour violations, companies such as Caracol can maximise their profit without having to contribute anything to the Haitian state.²⁸ It is clear that humanitarian pledges are not detached from political and economic interests and that reconstruction has become, in the cruelly ironic terms of Raoul’s Peck eponymous film, *fatal assistance*.²⁹

Contexts Underlying the 2010 Earthquake

These so-called ‘reconstruction’ efforts were not neutral interventions. Rather, they were a continuation of earlier exploitative neoliberal designs that have long shaped Haiti’s social, economic, and ecological landscape. When analysing the scale of the devastation following the January 2010 earthquake, it is important to note that that 2010 Chile earthquake, which struck the country on the 27th of February, despite having a magnitude of 8.8, killed only 723 people with a further 25

²⁶ ‘Haiti by the Numbers, Four Years Later.’

²⁷ Lilianne Fan, *Disaster as Opportunity? Building Back Better in Aceh, Myanmar and Haiti* (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, November 2013) <<http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/8007-resilience-build-back-better-bbb-aceh-tsunami-cyclone-myanmar-earthquake-haiti-disaster-recovery#downloads>> [accessed 13 February 2014], p. 1.

²⁸ It is important to note that currently almost 70 percent of state budget comes from external funding as the state’s capacity to generate income through taxation is minimal. Corporate tax would provide the state with much needed additional revenues. International Crisis Group, p. 2.

²⁹ Title of Raoul Peck’s 2012 film.

going missing. In September 2010 an earthquake of similar magnitude to the Haitian one struck just outside of Canterbury, New Zealand. There were no casualties.³⁰ With an annual global average of fifteen earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or greater³¹ and widely accessible online technology which is capable of tracking earthquake activity on a daily basis,³² the scale of the January 2010 tremors and their aftermath distinguishes it clearly from other disasters of a similar kind. The goal is not to engage a type of ‘comparison of suffering’ where the severity and importance of one disaster over another, as well as the attention we give to it, are determined by lives lost. All lives are irreplaceable regardless of where the disaster happens. In the case of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the scale of the comparative devastation highlights the disparity between this and other similar ‘natural’ events, pointing to the importance of pre-existing factors that directly shaped the disaster and its impact.

What happened on the 12th of January 2010 was a singular event, especially for those directly affected by the disaster. In its original, etymological sense, the earthquake was a catastrophe, ‘an event producing a subversion of the order of things’³³ and ‘a sudden turn, conclusion.’³⁴ Unprecedented in its scale and impact, the January tremors forever changed subjective and collective perceptions of past, present, and future—now always interpreted in the light of the disaster. With all its

³⁰ Here, the disparity between the scale of the loss and the ensuing devastation could not be more striking and instructive. Even though, tremors 500 times more powerful shook Chile, Chile’s earthquake claimed 723 lives. ‘True, Chile’s earthquake was farther away from a major city. An earthquake of the same magnitude as Haiti’s struck just outside the major city of Canterbury, New Zealand, in September 2010. No deaths were recorded.’ Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales, ‘Haiti’s Vulnerability to Disasters’, in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake* (Sterling, VA.: Stylus Publishing 2012), pp. 11-13 (p. 12).

³¹ British Geological Survey, *Earthquakes* <<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/hazards/earthquakes/home.html>> [accessed 21 January 2014].

³² One such example is *Earthquake Track* <<http://earthquaketrack.com/>> [accessed 21 January 2014].

³³ ‘catastrophe’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2012) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28794?redirectedFrom=catastrophe#eid>> [accessed 12 December 2012].

³⁴ ‘catastrophe’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

philosophical weight, for the victims of the disaster this was ‘*bagay la*’ (‘that thing’ or ‘the thing’ in Haitian Creole) as ‘what had happened had no name and was so outside what we considered livable or bearable, that it could not be named.’³⁵ Yet at the same time, the earthquake revealed previous societal, ecological, and political fault lines.³⁶ It was certainly a ‘natural’ disaster, but like all disasters it had to be seen in socio-political and cultural terms. Even the World Bank Report makes this clear:

[N]atural disasters, despite the adjective, are not “natural.” Although no single person or action may be to blame, death and destruction result from human acts of omission—not tying down the rafters allows a hurricane to blow away the roof—and commission—building in flood-prone areas. Those acts could be prevented, often at little additional expense.³⁷

Here, the analysis recognises the importance of the historically produced pattern of vulnerability, namely ‘social policies, political decisions, conflicts, land-use decisions, exclusions, economic forces, and so on,’³⁸ that has directly increased the scale of loss and devastation. Yet the question as to whether the World Bank’s own policies and engagement in Haiti has reflected these critical insights or has effectively contributed to the country’s vulnerability and economic dependence

³⁵ The use of the term here is a direct reference to Nancy Dorsinville’s analysis of the scale of the disaster and its collective impact. ‘*Bagay la*’ more than ‘the earthquake’, though socio-scientifically and descriptively correct, is more culturally accurate as ‘the ambiguous word expressing our [Haitians’]. post-traumatic stupor’ ‘*Bagay la*’ was also more ‘indicative of the sense of collective powerlessness that people felt during the very first moments following the earthquake. Not being able to name or define what had happened, while recognizing the full force of its effects individually and collectively, bespoke the sense of utter despair and desolation that immediately gripped the survivors’ The onomatopoeic neologism that represented the noise of the tremors and the crumbling buildings, *godou goudou*, was later created and has been used since to refer to the January 2010 earthquake. Dorsinville, pp. 280-1.

³⁶ In a direct meditation on the apocalyptic character of the Haitian earthquake, Junot Díaz repeatedly emphasises the disaster’s revelatory character as a ‘disruptive event that provokes revelation.’ Díaz goes on to enumerate the multiple factors that determined the disaster’s scale with the most important force being ‘this new, rapacious stage of capitalism.’ Junot Díaz, ‘Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal’, *Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum*, 1 May 2011 <<http://www.bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>> [accessed 25 May 2015].

³⁷ United Nations and the World Bank, *Natural Hazards, Unnatural Disasters: the Economics of Effective Prevention* (Washington, D.C.: United Nations and the World Bank, 2010) <http://www.gfdr.org/sites/gfdr.org/files/nhud/files/NHUD-Report_Full.pdf> [accessed 20 January 2014], p. 23.

³⁸ Schuller and Morales, ‘Haiti’s Vulnerability to Disasters’, in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, pp. 11-13, (p. 12).

remains unanswered. Focused as they are on direct relief, aid efforts have often overlooked Haiti's complex history, politics, and cultural specificity. Similarly, the long-term reconstruction plans failed to or refused to take into account the particular histories of colonial exploitation, forced marginalisation and, more recently, foreign intervention which differentiate this 'natural' disaster from other earthquakes. In this context, it becomes apparent that the events of January 2010 were not a disconnected happenstance escaping all comparison and defying comprehension. Rather, they were underpinned by systemic violence, colonialism, and specific histories of environmental exploitation and degradation in a particular—and particularly impoverished—part of the world.

Environmental History

This brief overview of the post-earthquake situation and limitations of immediate aid responses raises some key points I aim to consider in the following section: What was so particular about the 2010 Haitian earthquake? What were the historical, political, and ecological processes that determined the scale of the disaster? What factors, processes, and agents shaped the reconstruction efforts? In order to answer these questions about the history of the earthquake, it is necessary to provide an overview of the ecological and the historical backgrounds to the January event, as it is precisely these distinct pre-earthquake conditions which defined in so many ways the immediate and long-term aftermath of the disaster.

Firstly, the earthquake was deeply embedded within the previous contexts of ecological devastation,³⁹ caused by extreme deforestation⁴⁰ and linked to unsustainable agricultural and construction practices. In effect, by January 2010, in Richard Foxx's estimate, Haiti's forests had 'decreased from covering 60% of the country in the 1920s to less than 2% today.'⁴¹ Less optimistic calculations suggest that Haiti's forest cover is now only 1% of the country's total surface.⁴² Deforestation in Haiti, which dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has its roots in a colonial history that continues to have profound economic and ecological consequences for the island, namely soil erosion, increased flooding, migration from provinces to the capital, and mass immigration to other countries,

³⁹ The UN report on Haiti 2011 clearly states the impact of climate change and deforestation on Haiti. As the authors state: '[Haiti]. was recently identified as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change: each disaster causes more damage to the country's infrastructures and resource, and this increased vulnerability, in turn, heightens the impact of subsequent crises.' United Nations, *Report of the United Nations in Haiti 2011* (United Nations in Haiti, 2011) <<http://www.onu-haiti.org/Report2011/>> [accessed 18 October 2012], p. 34. In addition, the ecological devastation of the island, mainly due to the extreme scale of deforestation, has greatly increased its exposure to the destructive effects of tropical storms, hurricanes, and earthquakes. As Michèle Pierre-Louis, then the country's prime minister, in commenting on the losses during the 2008 hurricane season, warns: 'The whole country is facing an ecological disaster. We cannot keep going on like this. We are going to disappear one day. There will not be 400, 500 or 1,000 deaths. There are going to be a million deaths.' Rory Carroll, 'We Are Going To Disappear One Day', *The Guardian*, 8 November 2008 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/08/haiti-hurricanes>> [accessed 3 October 2012].

⁴⁰ In 'Weathering the Storms like Bamboo: The Strengths of Haitians in Coping with Natural Disasters', Guerda Nicolas, Billie Schwartz and Elizabeth Pierre clearly indicate the fatal consequences of deforestation. Building on Kathrine Arine's insights, they state: 'In 1980 Haiti had 25 percent of its forests in existence, enabling the country to avoid devastation despite the heavy rain of Hurricane Emily (a category 3 storm). However, only 1.4 percent of the forests remained in 2004 and they are believed to have decreased even more in the last two years.' Nicolas Guerda and others, 'Weathering the Storms Like Bamboo: The Strengths of Haitians in Coping with Natural Disasters', in *Mass Trauma and Emotional Healing Around the World: Rituals and Practices for Resilience and Meaning-Making*, ed. by Ani Kalayjian and Dominique Eugene (Santa Barbara, CA.: Praeger, 2010), pp. 93-106. See also Kathrine Arie, 'Why Haiti Is So Prone to Disaster', *ReliefWeb*, 30 September 2004 <<http://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/talking-point-why-haiti-so-prone-disaster>> [accessed 5 October 2012].

⁴¹ Richard M. Foxx, "'Te terre a fatigue The Earth is Tired": Reversing Deforestation in Haiti', *Behavioral Interventions*, 27 (2012), 105-08 (p. 105).

⁴² During the 2002 Earth Summit, former Haitian President Aristide underlined that 'between 1940 and 2002, the forest cover in Haiti decreased from 40% to 1%.' Institute for Research in Social Sciences & Politics, *Concretizing Democracy. Highlights of Government of Haiti Achievements 2002* <<http://www.pcgroup.biz/IRSP/pr020901.htm>> [accessed 20 August 2015].

primarily the U.S. and Canada.⁴³ In this context, it becomes clear that the overcrowding of Haiti's capital and its poor infrastructure, which considerably contributed to the scale of the loss, need to be considered within the country's environmental history.

The country's geographical location and geological formation are further determinants of the island's vulnerability. Hispaniola is located directly on the path of tropical storms and is consequently exposed to a range of natural disasters—flooding, heavy rainfalls, landslides—which are aggravated by the scale of manmade environmental exploitation and degradation.⁴⁴ In addition, scientists have identified and located at least four major faults in Haiti – the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden Fault, the Septentrional Fault, the Trans-Haitian Fault, and the Léogâne Fault⁴⁵—that pose a continuous threat to the island's population. It is important to note that the 2010 earthquake, contrary to initial analyses, did not involve the straightforward

⁴³ Stefan Alscher provides extensive background information on the problem, pointing in particular to the interconnectedness of historical, economic, and ecological processes: 'Deforestation in Haiti started as early as the 17th and 18th century, when first the Spanish and then the French colonial power cleared forests for the plantation economy and wood production. After gaining independence, the situation became even worse: in 1825, the political elite of Haiti agreed with the former colonial power to pay for independence, with the promise of being recognized as member of the international community. In order to repay the debt of around 21 billion US dollars at current rates (Johnson, 2007: 4) the Haitians cut down forests and sold the tropical wood for furniture production. But even after having repaid the debt (as late as 1947) deforestation continued, logging trees for charcoal production and land clearing. In 1950, about 25 per cent of Haiti was still covered with forests. In the late 1980s, the forest cover decreased to 10 per cent and reached only 4 per cent in 1994 (Bracken, 2004).' Stefan Alscher, 'Environmental Degradation and Migration on Hispaniola Island', *International Migration*, 49 (2011), e164-e88 (p. 168). The other studies he references are: Amy Bracken, *Deforestation Exacerbates Haiti Floods* 22 September, 2004)

<<http://www.globalexchange.org/news/deforestation-exacerbates-haiti-floods>> [accessed 26 August 2013].; Sterling Johnson, *Inventory of Conflict and Environment Case Studies* (American University, May 2007) <<http://www1.american.edu/ice/haiti-hurricane.htm>> [accessed 26 August 2013].

⁴⁴ In his comparative study of the effects of environmental degradation on Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Stefan Alscher explains: 'Sharing the same island, the Dominican Republic and Haiti are confronting similar environmental challenges. Located on the path of tropical storms, Hispaniola Island is frequently exposed to natural disasters like heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides, aggravated by human-induced environmental degradation.' Alscher, abstract.

⁴⁵ 'The Enriquillo-Plantain Garden Fault has been silent since 1770 and the Septentrional Fault since 1842, when it leveled Cap Haitian.' Jean-Germain Gros, 'Anatomy of a Haitian Tragedy: When the Fury of Nature Meets the Debility of the State', *Journal of Black Studies*, 42 (2011), 131-157 (p. 148).

accommodation of oblique relative motion between the Caribbean and North American plates along the Enriquillo–Plantain Garden fault zone. Rather, the rupture process ‘involved slip on multiple faults,’ and only the ‘primary surface deformation was driven by rupture on blind thrust faults with only minor, deep, lateral slip along or near the main Enriquillo–Plantain Garden fault zone.’⁴⁶ It is predicted that the remaining ‘shallow shear strain will be released in future surface-rupturing earthquakes on the Enriquillo–Plantain Garden fault zone’⁴⁷ as it has already occurred ‘in inferred Holocene and probable historic events.’⁴⁸ As this brief outline of Haiti’s ecology and geology demonstrates, the country’s complex environmental history decisively shaped the ways in which the January 2010 disaster was unveiled.

Political History

These environmental processes were directly linked to Haiti’s wider political history, defined as it is by internal instability and foreign intervention (both economic and military). The latter is a crucial determinant of the country’s pre-earthquake vulnerability and of the ways in which the post-disaster relief and reconstruction efforts have been envisaged since the disaster struck (see previous section). The six narratives analysed in the thesis, in varying ways and to contrasting ends, evoke key events from

⁴⁶ For a detailed analysis of the geological specifications of the 2010 Haitian earthquake, referred in the study as the 2010 Léogâne earthquake, see: Gavin. P. Hayes and others, ‘Complex Rupture During the 12 January 2010 Haiti Earthquake’, *Nature Geoscience*, 3 (2010), 800-05, abstract.

⁴⁷ Hayes and others, abstract.

⁴⁸ Analysis by Hayes and others explains historic similarities between the events: The initial location and mechanism for this event suggested rupture on the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden fault zone (EPGF) [...]. The EPGF is the probable source of several large historic earthquakes in the region (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Geophysical Data Center (NGDC); <http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/hazard/hazards.shtml>) including major events in November 1751 and June 1770. Both caused significant damage in Port-au-Prince; several hundred fatalities were directly attributed to the 1770 event (NOAA NGDC).’ Hayes and others, p. 803.

across the country's history. By providing a sketch of Haiti's post-Independence history in this section, I aim to facilitate the contextualisation of these texts in order to pave the way for an analysis in subsequent chapters of the ways in which these references to historical events function across the different narratives.

The aforementioned exploitation of resources which accompanied colonial rule did not terminate with Haiti's Independence. Instead, foreign interference took on different forms, whether economic, military, or otherwise. Soon after Independence, in 1825, France regained effective economic control over the island by demanding 150 million francs to be paid in compensation for the 'slave revolt.' This amount was then reduced to 90 million francs. This 'Independence debt' effectively immobilised Haiti in its marginal economic and political position and significantly weakened the state's capacity, forcing the country into financial dependency. Haiti was not permitted to enter the community of nations, which could have provided some limited possibilities to create a new economy, without first paying off the indemnisation agreement—a 'castration of national capital'⁴⁹—and, later, the loans taken out to pay for it. In addition, a large portion of Haiti's GDP 'was sent abroad to pay interest on this debt'⁵⁰ which, in effect, further thwarted Haiti's post-Independence efforts to establish a new sovereign state. The last instalment of the second debt to French banks was paid off in 1952. This draining of financial resources permanently weakened the Haitian state and undermined its attempts to establish its regional and international position.

⁴⁹ Benoît Joachim uses this illustrative comparison first in *Les racines du sous développement en Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: Henri Deschamps, 1979). This metaphor is later developed by Hector and Hurbon in their analysis of 19th-century Haiti in Michel Hector and Laënnec Hurbon, *Genèse de l'état haïtien (1804-1859)* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2009), pp. 111-2.

⁵⁰ Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, 'Independent Haiti in a Hostile World: Haiti in the Nineteenth Century', in *Haitian History: New Perspectives*, ed. by Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall (New York, NY.: Routledge, 2013), pp.103-23 (p. 105).

The early twentieth century was marked by an even greater degree of international involvement, financial destabilisation and, in particular, the increased strategic interest of the U.S. in Haiti. This paved the way for what would become the nineteen-year-long American Occupation (1915-1934)—part of a larger policy of intervention in the Caribbean with a view to ensuring American control of the Haitian state and economy. The move was strongly contested both within and outside of the country. Following Haitians’ continuing opposition, punctuated by violent protests (such as the 1929 students’ protests in Aux Cayes), and the advent of the Good Neighbor Policy, ‘which stressed cooperation with America’s neighbors rather than coercion,’⁵¹ the U.S. decided to withdraw its military forces from Haiti in 1934. Yet, despite the lack of visible military presence, the U.S. has retained effective control over Haiti’s markets and economy and has continued to intervene in its domestic policies. Contemporary foreign involvement in the country, evidenced in all of the narratives examined here, and the presence of MINUSTAH troops,⁵² cannot be analysed in isolation from the previous violent history of external intervention. Similarly, Haitians’ attitudes towards ‘les casques bleus’—named after the UN’s iconic blue helmets—have a complex historical grounding and need to be understood within that previous context.

The turbulent times following upon the end of American Occupation saw a rise in anti-government opposition, first against Sténio Vincent and then Elie Lescot, and a

⁵¹ Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, ‘From the Occupation to the Earthquake: Haiti in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries’, in *Haitian History: New Perspectives*, pp.215- 41 (p. 215).

⁵² MINUSTAH stands for The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. The mission was established on 1 June 2004 by Security Council resolution 1542. As of 30 June 2014 there is a total of 7,436 uniformed personnel, 362 international civilian personnel, 1,229 local civilian staff and 166 United Nations Volunteers working in Haiti. The members of the military and police personnel come from 55 countries from across the world, amongst them Lithuania, Nepal, Serbia, Russia, Mali, and many others. The approved budget (1 July 2013 - 30 June 2014) is \$576,619,000. United Nations, *MINUSTAH: United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti* <<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/facts.shtml>> [accessed 06 August 2014].

formulation of distinct ideological camps: Marxists and *noiristes*.⁵³ Whereas the former emphasised class struggle, the latter, inspired to an extent by *indigénisme*,⁵⁴ saw oppression as being defined in predominantly racial terms. Among the *noiristes* was François Duvalier [‘Papa Doc’] who, benefitting from U.S. backing and popular support for black nationalism, ascended to power in 1957. Over almost two decades of his authoritarian rule (1957-1971), political opposition was eradicated. Instead, the newly created paramilitary squadron of loyal troops, the Tontons Macoutes, effectively replaced Haiti’s armed forces, ‘perpetua[ted] popular animosity toward an ambiguously defined mulatto elite and orchestra[ted] a reign of terror that would keep him [Papa Doc] in power.’⁵⁵ Duvalier’s son, Jean-Claude aka ‘Baby Doc’, succeeded ‘Papa Doc’ in 1971 and ruled Haiti until a mass uprising forced him to flee in 1986. A shared sentiment that ‘things must change here’⁵⁶ could be sensed. Following violently repressed demonstrations (1984-1985), a general strike (1986), and the final withdrawal of U.S. support, ‘Baby Doc’ finally left Haiti on the 7th of February 1986. Yet it soon became clear that

⁵³ One such key traumatic event shaping regional histories was the 1937 Parsley Massacre or Kouto-a in which between 15,000 and 20,000 Haitians working in neighbouring Dominican Republic were killed.

⁵⁴ Indigenisme (*indigénisme*) refers to a radical movement in Haitian literary history provoked by a nationalistic rejection of the American Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). It inspired a renewed interest in Haiti’s traditional culture, placed ‘emphasis on the African roots of peasantry’ s folk beliefs and practices as a valid source of creative inspiration’, and ‘encouraged a literary investment in the popular imagination—an imagination profoundly connected to the vodou faith.’ As a political stance, *indigénisme* also ‘called for a renouncing of the assimilationist tendencies exhibited by Haiti’ s bourgeois intellectual and socio-economic elite.’ Kaiama Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 57. On the formal level, indigenisme’s interest in the popular ‘dictated relatively simple forms, structures, and techniques that echoed or appropriated, those of oral tradition.’ Martin Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrrière, Danticat* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 14.

⁵⁵ David Sheinin, ‘The Caribbean and the Cold War: Between Reform and Revolution’, in *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples*, ed. by Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano (Chicago, IL. and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 491-505 (pp. 498-9).

⁵⁶ ‘ Il faut bien en effet que les choses changent.’ John Paul II, *Congrès Eucharistique Port-au-Prince, Haïti: Homélie du Pape Jean-Paul II*, 9 March 1983 <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1983/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19830309_congresso-eucaristico_fr.html> [accessed 19 February 2013].

[e]ven with the Duvaliers gone, Haiti's problems did not vanish. The country entered what scholars have called the "interminable transition to democracy," with Duvalierists and the army working to prevent civilians from taking power. The country also continued to deal with the consequences of the "development" projects that had begun under the post-occupation and Duvalier regimes, in concert with U.S. and international institutions.⁵⁷

Here, the key challenges facing more recent international aid programmes and tensions underlying all foreign interventions become apparent: while responding to immediate needs for resources and political stability, foreign interference often results in creating parallel, non-accountable structures which ultimately produce more socio-political tensions and undermine the agency and credibility of the state. Contemporary practices of external intervention, whether economic or humanitarian, thus need to be seen within a historical context of foreign involvement in Haiti's politics that long preceded the 2010 disaster.

In 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide's victory in Haiti's first free elections inspired a wave of optimism and hope that, after years of oppression, Haiti-led change might finally be possible. A former priest and a long-time opposition activist, Aristide enjoyed unprecedented levels of popular support and his electorate included 'peasant organizations and the urban poor, together with progressive members of the church and the liberal elite.'⁵⁸ However, Aristide's presidency, and his radical electoral programme, often presented in highly dramatic and biblically charged terms, posed a real threat to the status quo and soon met with opposition. Eight months after the election, a coup led by General Raoul Cédras forced Aristide into exile. Aristide conducted his lobbying campaign from exile and his supporters in Haiti and abroad called for an international intervention to help reinstate him. Finally, in 1994, following a series of unsuccessful

⁵⁷ Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, 'From the Occupation to the Earthquake: Haiti in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries', in *Haitian History: New Perspectives*, pp.215- 41 (p. 220).

⁵⁸ Hallward, p. 74.

negotiations with the coup leaders, President Bill Clinton sent U.S. Marines to Haiti with Aristide on board. This help was not unconditional: Aristide had to commit to a number of neoliberal market policies which contradicted his earlier socially oriented political and economic programme. At the same time, he was highly aware that Haiti's position was a precarious one and that the country could not afford 'to plan a political economy that would turn the entire world against it.'⁵⁹ The choice for Aristide seemed clear: "“either we enter a global economic system in which we know we cannot survive, or, we refuse, and face death by slow starvation.”"⁶⁰ Further pressures from the U.S. and international financial organisations to privatise state assets followed, and Aristide was left with little room for manoeuvre. One thing he insisted on carrying out, despite U.S. opposition, was the full demobilisation of the army. Having completed his term in 1996, he then ceded power to his supporter René Préval, who remained in office until 2001.

In 2001, Aristide was re-elected after a vote that many members of the international community considered rigged.⁶¹ The anti-Aristide opposition, too, denounced the electoral process as undemocratic and illegitimate. The following years were marked by increasing political stalemate and Aristide faced growing accusations of allowing or even encouraging state-sanctioned violence against opponents. Indeed, the use and extent of violence during Aristide's regime continues to be one of the most hotly

⁵⁹ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Dignity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), p. 47, in Hallward, p. 55.

⁶⁰ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Eyes of the Heart: Seeking a Path for the Poor in the Age of Globalization* (Monroe, ME.: Common Courage Press, 2000), pp. 16-17, in Hallward, p. 55.

⁶¹ See, for example, Human Rights Watch 2001 Report or Robert Fatton Jr's, *Haiti's Predatory Republic: the Unending Transition to Democracy* which traces back the roots of the electoral crisis and Haiti's political impasse. Robert Fatton Jr., *Haiti's Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002); Human Rights Watch, *2001 Report*, <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k1/americas/haiti.html>> [accessed 19 January 2016].

debated aspects of his rule.⁶² Equally, his departure in 2004, when he was escorted from Haiti by U.S. Marines, remains a point of controversy, with contrasting interpretations of the event as either a voluntary departure, a kidnapping, or a coup. Sandra Marquez Stathis's *Rubble* (Chapter Two) and Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (Chapter Three) directly refer to these events of the decade and the controversies surrounding Aristide's presidency, viewing them from the perspective of a sceptical American observer (*Rubble*) and a young boy (*In Darkness*) for whom Aristide is a legendary figure. In 2006, René Préval returned to office, and despite severe challenges—a global food crisis and an exceptionally devastating hurricane—a sense of progress and internal stability and cautious optimism could finally be sensed. The comparatively stable last few years of a turbulent decade would come to a sudden close at 4.53 pm EST on the 12th of January 2010.

Discursive Framings of Haiti and the 2010 Earthquake

The events I have sketched above constitute a brief prehistory of the disaster—the material contexts that precipitated it and that shaped its aftermath. This material *history* cannot be divorced from the considerations of *historiography*: how events are written and remembered. The following section will first consider some of the ways in which the recent earthquake and Haiti's longer past have been discursively framed, then assess the implications these discursive constructs have had on global perceptions of Haiti. Despite growing scholarly interest in and public awareness of Haiti's global

⁶² A recent issue of *Small Axe* 13 (2009) was a forum for an extensive debate between Alex Dupuy, Lyonel Trouillot, Peter Hallward, Valerie Kaussen and Nick Nesbitt on the question of violence, and its scale, during Aristide's presidency. Hallward's assessment of it in *Damning the Flood* is in stark contrast to Dupuy's analysis in Alex Dupuy, *The Prophet and Power: Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the International Community, and Haiti* (New York, NY.: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2007).

significance,⁶³ the country's post-revolutionary history remains largely unknown or is often reduced to a series of disasters, dictatorships, and ever-growing poverty that followed the heroic, but ultimately fatal, revolutionary impulse. However, neither history nor historiography can be reduced to discourse and discursive practices. The historical excavation of the earthquake therefore has two dimensions. First, it reveals a number of processes and dynamics which, to varying degrees, would condition the scale, impact, and specificity of the earthquake; and second, it interrogates the different ways in which, and ends to which, the past is narrativised and remembered as a whole.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, this dual task of contextualisation and interrogation would become ever more urgent. Despite an increasing realisation of the many socio-economic fault lines, as well as the role of foreign intervention in determining the scale of the events and their aftermath, the rhetorical framings of the earthquake, and of Haiti's present predicament more generally, have not substantially changed. Instead, they have tended to cite previous tropes of failure, vulnerability, progress-resistant culture, and lack of 'political culture' as reasons behind the country's current parlous position.⁶⁴ These hasty configurations mask neocolonial and neoliberal interpretative frames which fix Haiti in a position of dependence on

⁶³ Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall in the Introduction to *Haitian History: New Perspectives* points to the growing acknowledgement of the importance of the Haitian Revolution (especially in the English-speaking academic world) which is not, however, matched with an equal scholarly interest in the later periods of Haiti's history. For her full discussion of the Haitian Revolution and its historical and cultural representations see Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, 'Representations of the Haitian Revolution in French literature', in *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, ed. by David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 339-52.

⁶⁴ One example of an objectifying approach, which uncritically mirrors colonial and neo-liberal discourses, is David Brook's article 'The Underlying Tragedy.' In it, Brooks emphasises inefficacy of international aid and its lack of real impact, asserting that 'Haiti, like most of the world's poorest nations, suffers from a complex web of progress-resistant cultural influences. There is the influence of the voodoo religion which spreads the message that life is capricious and planning futile. There are high levels of social mistrust. Responsibility is often not internalized. Child-rearing practices often involve neglect in the early years and harsh retribution when kids hit 9 or 10.' David Brooks, 'The Underlying Tragedy', *The New York Times*, 15 January 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/15/opinion/15brooks.html?_r=0> [accessed 25 February 2014].

external assistance and intervention. In addition, such re-inscription of Haiti as a failed (and continually failing) state positions its ‘glorious past’ in radical contrast to its ‘doomed present.’ In this binary framework, international interventions—whether humanitarian, economic, or political—have been presented as attempts to ‘save’ Haiti against all odds. These easily rehearsed rhetorical portrayals depict Haiti as a place of multiple colliding realities, no longer governed by a set of rules, and as a site outside of global modernity and the processes which have shaped it.

Aware of the ways in which Haiti’s history and culture have been subject to effacement, Haitian Studies scholars have long fought against these problematic narratives of Haiti which were uncritically re-affirmed in response to the disaster:

While the media maintained its focus on the narrative of Haiti as impoverished country through images of naked and wounded black bodies, Haitian scholars and scholars of Haitian Studies were quick to intervene to expose the ways in which this narrative of degradation presented by the media effaces a long history. That is the history of enslavement, involuntary migration and displacement; the history of colonialism, foreign intervention, forced isolation, and economic exploitation.⁶⁵

Here, the tensions between competing media and scholarly narratives are made explicit.

The complexity of the latter is generally set against the ignorance of the former. Fatton, Katz, Bellegrade-Smith, Asante⁶⁶ and Lundy, among others,⁶⁷ have all underlined

⁶⁵ Nadège T. Clitandre, ‘Haitian Exceptionalism in the Caribbean and the Project of Rebuilding Haiti’, *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 17 (2011), 146-53 (p. 146).

⁶⁶ Molefi Kete Asante analyses earlier representations of Haitian history as well as the 2010 earthquake within ‘a tripartite framework based on the *class narrative*, the *religious narrative*, and the *cultural narrative*’ (p.277; emphasis original). Stressing that the earthquake is ‘a natural geological action that has nothing to do with Haitian capability, character, or potential’ (p. 286), he underlines the need to confront, in the aftermath of the event, ‘the organizational, institutional, social, and economic issues that may not have been radically changed in the natural disaster’ (p. 286). Molefi Kete Asante, ‘Haiti: Three Analytical Narratives of Crisis and Recovery’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 42 (2011) 76-87.

⁶⁷ An entire special issue of *Journal of Black Studies*, 42 (2011), entitled ‘The Haiti Earthquake of 2010: The Politics of a Natural Disaster,’ was published in the wake of the event as a response to the speculation and misinformation that would flood the internet, and the media more generally, immediately after the disaster. As Garvey Lundy, the editor of the issue, makes clear: ‘Most of the

the need to consider the multiple contexts for the event, its long history, as well as for the differentiated responses it elicited. Against instant depictions of Haiti as ‘marginal’ and ‘unique,’ the country’s recent and distant past offers reminders that Haiti’s politics and history have long been marked by different forms of external intervention which cannot be analysed in isolation from wider Atlantic and world history. Haiti is not an exception that stands outside time and history, but ‘rather has a history deeply intertwined with other national histories, a history that is an exemplar of many modern historical processes.’⁶⁸ As soon becomes evident, the dominant rhetoric deployed to account for the scale of the event was a reiteration of earlier practices of marginalisation of Haiti in political, epistemological, and discursive terms.

As should be clear by now, the methodological approaches these scholars suggest, and which this thesis in turn embraces, emphasise connections between the earthquake, Haiti’s wider past, and global historical-political developments, as well as the discourses through which these have been interpreted in socio-scientific as well as literary terms. Considerations of what happened, what followed afterwards, and what led up to it, all allow for a detailed engagement with the intertwined histories of the event. The exploration of the multiple contexts for the 2010 earthquake greatly expands our knowledge of the disaster and its significance. It equally highlights the need to revisit current definitions of, and approaches to, disasters more generally while interrogating

information presented was ahistorical and bordered on gross racial caricature. What little context was provided was compressed into 30-second sound bites that did an injustice to the complexity of Haitian society and history. Ironically, many of the contributors to this issue were called upon by media outlets to provide insights into the earthquake, but given the structure of the news, they were allowed, in most cases, just a few minutes to expound on a situation that was worthy of a book.’ Garvey Lundy, ‘The Haiti Earthquake of 2010: The Politics of a Natural Disaster’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 42 (2011), 127-30 (p. 128).

⁶⁸ Sepinwall, ‘Introduction’, in *Haitian History: New Perspectives*, pp. 1-13 (p. 7).

the ways in which our understanding of such phenomena is formed. The thesis directly responds to the need for a wider scrutiny of the discursive practices and disciplinary frameworks employed to explain and interpret the 2010 January earthquake in Haiti. Literary narratives, which offer insight into the personal experience of the disaster while also engaging with its wider history and context, are a point of entry into this examination. This thesis thus seeks to build on and contribute to the field of Haitian studies, disaster studies, trauma theory and narrative theory through a critical analysis of some of the imaginative writing that the 2010 Haitian earthquake would produce.

Towards New Approaches in Disaster Studies

To date, the rapidly developing field of disaster studies has been dominated by a functionalist approach which has only recently been challenged by more interdisciplinary methodologies.⁶⁹ Over the years the discipline has transitioned

⁶⁹ 'Disaster studies as a distinct field of studies has its origins in early 1950s.' E.L. (Henry) Quarantelli, 'A Social Science Research Agenda For the Disasters of the 21st Century: Theoretical, Methodological and Empirical Issues and their Professional Implementation', in *What is a Disaster? New Answers to Old Questions*, ed. by Ronald W. Perry and E.L. (Henry) Quarantelli, (Philadelphia, PA.: Xlibris, 2005), pp. 325-96 (p. 326). However, some see Samuel Prince's study of the 1917 Halifax earthquake, published in 1920, as the first piece of systematic analysis of disaster and treat this publication date as the beginning of the discipline. Anthony Oliver-Smith dates the beginnings of disaster studies back to the 1920s and Samuel Henry Prince's pivotal work ('Catastrophe and Social Change: Based upon a sociological study of the Halifax Disaster' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1920)), on 1917 Halifax explosion in Halifax, Canada. Anthony Oliver-Smith, 'What Is a Disaster?: Anthropological Perspectives On a Persistent Question', in *The Angry Earth*, ed. by Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 18-34. Equally important to the establishment of the field was the creation of the Disaster Research Centre in 1963 by Russell Dynes and the publication for the first time in March 1983 of *The International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*. Despite several attempts by Fritz, Baker and Chapman, Barton and others, a commonly accepted definition of disaster was never established; indeed, the great majority of academic debate still focuses on the varying and often contrasting understandings of what 'disaster' is. See: Charles E. Fritz, 'Disaster', in *Contemporary Social Problems: An Introduction to the Sociology of Deviant Behavior and Social Disorganization*, ed. by Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet (New York, NY.: Harcourt Brace & World, 1961), pp. 167-98; George Walter Baker and Dwight W. Chapman, *Man and Society in Disaster* (New York, NY.: Basic Books 1962); Allen H. Barton, *Communities in Disaster: A Sociological Analysis of Collective Stress Situations* (Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday, 1969). Michel Lindell, after Perry, points out that traditionally conceived '

from a focus on different types of disasters, through recognition of the need to understand the wider context of each event and the varied manifestations it had—whether geological, ecological, or societal—to the reconsideration of the category of disaster itself. As a result, the field has started to move towards a more inclusive framework in which culture and the cultural production created in response to particular disasters are belatedly acknowledged as playing an integral part. According to Oliver-Smith, the steadily growing interdisciplinary make-up of disaster studies has in effect shaped the reconsideration of disasters ‘as less the result of geophysical extremes (earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts, etc.) and more as functions of ongoing social orders, human-environment relations, and historical structural processes.’⁷⁰ The relationship between ‘disaster recovery’ and the market economy is now also increasingly seen as being crucial to an understanding of disasters and their impact.⁷¹ The growing emphasis in scholarship on the contexts in which these events occur further manifests itself in such recently introduced categories as ‘na-tech disaster’⁷² and ‘mega’ and ‘urban disaster’.⁷³ These key

definitions of disaster can be classified into three categories—classic, hazards/disasters and socially focused’ (Perry, 2006). Ronald W. Perry, ‘What is a disaster?’ , in *Handbook of Disaster Research*, ed. by Enrico L. Quarantelli and Russell Dynes Havidan Rodriguez (New York, NY.: Springer 2006), pp. 1-15, in Michael K. Lindell, ‘Disaster studies’, in *International Sociological Association* <www.sagepub.net/isa/resources/pdf/Disaster%20Studies.pdf> [accessed 22 October 2012].

⁷⁰ Oliver-Smith, p. 22.

⁷¹ For example, in a comparative analysis of post-1975 New York City and post-Katrina New Orleans, Jamie Peck examines the relationship between ‘the intellectual project of the “new urban right,” highlighting the role of conservative and free-market think tanks in the formation, elaboration, and diffusion of market-oriented or “neoliberal” urban policy in the period since the late 1970s.’ Jamie Peck, ‘Liberating the City: Between New York and New Orleans’, *Urban Geography*, 27 (2006), 681-713, (p.618). Later studies by Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg build on Peck’s approach. See Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg, ‘Post-Disaster Recovery and Rebuilding in New York and New Orleans’, *Social Forces*, 87 (2008) 1-24.

⁷² These terms have also been discussed in Laura J. Steinberg and Ana Maria Cruz, ‘When Natural and Technological Disasters Collide: Lessons from the Turkey Earthquake of August 17, 1999’, *Natural Hazards Review*, 5 (2004), 121-30; Steven J. Picou and others, ‘Disaster, Litigation and the Corrosive Community’, *Social Forces*, 82 (2004). ‘The term ‘na-tech’ depicts ‘a catastrophe that combines the most debilitating consequences of both “natural” and “technological” disasters. It occurs ‘when natural disasters produce a direct, *indirect* and/or *purposeful* releases of toxins and hazardous materials into the biophysical environment (emphasis original). Hurricane Katrina provides a recent example of a ‘na-tech’ disaster.’ David Brunnsma and Steven J. Picou, ‘Disasters in the Twenty-First Century: Modern Destruction and Future Instruction’, *Social Forces*, 87 (December 2008), 983-991 (p. 985).

methodological shifts within the field allow for a greater engagement with the specificity of each event as well as its many manifestations, not least its cultural effects.

The aforementioned ‘interdisciplinary turn’ is visible in the work of Oliver-Smith and, later, Williams, both of whom call for a relational approach to the study of disasters and the links between society and the environment. Oliver-Smith, building on Ingold’s earlier analysis, underscores their ‘mutual constitution, interaction, and adaptation’⁷⁴ since, in his view, the whole ‘debate over situating disasters in nature or in society [establishes] a pointless dualism.’⁷⁵ Instead, Oliver-Smith argues for the validity of political ecology: an approach that recognises the mutuality of influences between society and the environment. Williams’s work also challenges the ‘instrumental scientific reason’⁷⁶ which, for him, continues to define dominant methodologies in the field of disaster studies. He, too, calls for a relational approach: one that acknowledges ‘humans’ constitutive relationship with space, place and landscape.’⁷⁷ Current methods of research, in his view, are driven by ‘instrumental rationality’⁷⁸ and, as a consequence, objectify and obscure the role of the environment in disaster. On the contrary, what he calls ‘post-social understanding’⁷⁹ ‘proposes more relational approaches that better connect

⁷³ Elizabeth Ferris and Sara Ferro-Ribeiro, ‘Protecting People in Cities: the Disturbing Case of Haiti’, *Disasters*, 36 (2012), 44-63 (p. 49).

⁷⁴ Anthony Oliver-Smith, ‘“What Is a Disaster?” Anthropological Perspectives On a Persistent Question’, in *The Angry Earth*, ed. by Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 18-34 (p. 28). Here, Oliver-Smith is building on Ingold’s analysis in Tim Ingold, ‘Culture and Perception of the Environment’, in *Bush Base: Forest Farm: Culture, Environment and Development*, ed. by Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin (London: Routledge 1992), pp. 39-55.

⁷⁵ Oliver-Smith, p. 28.

⁷⁶ Brunsma and Picou, p. 988.

⁷⁷ Stewart Williams, ‘Rethinking the Nature of Disaster: From Failed Instruments of Learning to a Post-Social Understanding’, *Social Forces*, 87 (2008), 1115-38 (p. 1127).

⁷⁸ Williams, p. 1127.

⁷⁹ Williams, p. 1128.

individuals with social structures and networks.’⁸⁰ This ‘post-social understanding’ is built on the rejection of the Cartesian mind/body dualism, influenced by the Actor-Network theory (ANT) developed by Bruno Latour and others, and ‘eschew[s] the dualistic language of “nature” and “society,” “people” and “environment,” and so on.’⁸¹ Instead, ANT emphasises that while ‘humans possess unique attributes and are able to construct their own linguistic, symbolic, and physical worlds,’ they are ‘also continually dependent on a myriad of non-human “actants”’ for their daily survival and for new ventures.’⁸² Adopting an interdisciplinary and relational approach in the field of disaster studies therefore allows for ‘deeper engagements with the complexity of natural and other hazards’.⁸³

As previously suggested, disaster studies’ self-critical reassessment of its methodological foundations and analytical tools has been accompanied by calls from within the field for an increased consideration of the relationship between culture, cultural production, and disaster response. Up until recently, examinations of these complex links were very limited in scope and revolved around the notion of ‘disaster subcultures.’⁸⁴ Writing in 2000, Webb judges that disaster studies as a field, ‘after nearly three decades of highlighting the importance of resources, organizational structure, and political opportunities’⁸⁵ and the predominance of functionalism and symbolic interactionism,⁸⁶ is only now ‘moving towards an approach that integrates

⁸⁰ Williams, p. 1131.

⁸¹ Noel Castree and others, ‘Actor-Network Theory’, in *Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013) <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199599868.001.0001/acref-9780199599868-e-13?rsk=RUo85J&result=5>> [accessed 23 January 2014].

⁸² Castree and others, in *Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography Online*.

⁸³ Williams, p. 1131.

⁸⁴ Dennis E. Wegner and Jack M. Weller, *Disaster Subcultures: The Cultural Residues of Community Disasters* (Newark, DE.: Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware, 1973).

⁸⁵ Gary R. Webb and Anne Eyre, ‘Bringing Culture Back In Exploring the Cultural Dimension of Disaster’, *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disaster*, 18 (2000), 5-19 (p. 10).

⁸⁶ Symbolic interactionism ‘emphasises the importance of symbols, actors’ definitions of the situation, and emergence in social interactions [and puts emphasis on]. behavioral improvisation,

the study of structure and culture.’⁸⁷ Recent work by Freudenburg and others⁸⁸ provides one example of the possible uses of literary and philosophical concepts in order to account (in their case) for floods in the upper Mississippi River Valley and in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Drawing on the Aristotelian concepts of tragedy and hubris, the authors interpret the aftermath of hurricane Katrina as a modern variation on the triple tragedy:

First, the hubris of a number of ‘great’ or at least politically powerful people unleashes serious environmental harm. Second, that environmental harm worsens “natural” hazards, bringing damage to humans and the economy. It is the third of the more modern tragedies, however, that may be the most notable: in many if not most cases, the suffering is done not by those who initiated the cycle of harm, but by others —particularly those who are least able to protect themselves from it.⁸⁹

Here, the authors establish a clear link between the scale of the so-called ‘natural’ disaster and the identifiable human actions that precede it. By stressing the environmental history of this particular event, they point to the pre-existing socio-political inequalities made visible in the disproportionate effect Hurricane Katrina had on communities and individuals. The turn to literary comparison exemplified in their work enables an analysis which encompasses the social, political, and individual dimensions of the disaster. In effect, the literary does not just act as a representation of lived experience, but rather provides a distinct interpretative approach that aims to grasp the complex nature of disasters and their aftermath.

organizational flexibility and adaptation, and structural emergence during the emergency period.’ Webb and Eyre, p. 11.

⁸⁷ Webb and Eyre, p. 10.

⁸⁸ William R. Freudenburg and others, ‘Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters? Improving the Recognition of Political-Economic Factors in the Creation of Disasters’, *Social Forces*, 87 (2008), 1015-38.

⁸⁹ According to the authors, ‘the word “disaster” has connections to past ways of thinking [as it] comes from *dis* + *astro*, or “bad star” – origins that come from astrology, rather than science, or for that matter, from any (recognized) human responsibilities.’ Over and against this, the Aristotelian concept of tragedy and the notion of ‘hubris’, which is ‘now applied to any outrageous act or exhibition of pride’ includes the acknowledgement of human responsibility for the engineering of disaster. Freudenburg and others, pp.1029-30.

One recent, direct exploration of the relationship between literary production, disasters, and discourses which frame them is Mark D. Anderson's *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (2011).⁹⁰ In Anderson's work, which explicitly engages with the 2010 Haitian earthquake, literature is not only employed as a useful comparison but is itself a productive source of knowledge of the disaster and the politics behind different cultural representations of it. Anderson posits that the so-called 'natural' disasters 'give rise to powerful cultural and political discourses,'⁹¹ literary production among them, which provide competing explanations of each particular event. Narrativisations of disaster partake in this process of negotiation. By pointing to the multiple histories which underlie a specific disaster, they can disclose and challenge existing power dynamics, offering new ways of remembering the event:

In the end, the triumphant version of events, often formulated through consensus with various competing accounts, achieves canonical status as the basis for political action, and frequently, but not always, it persists as memory in the popular imagination.⁹²

Moreover, literary responses usefully indicate the collective importance of a given disaster and its political and cultural significance:

The volume of literature written about a particular disaster and the involvement of canonical literary figures are prime indicators of its [disaster's] cultural and political relevancy for the nation. Likewise, more developed and sophisticated cultural production on a disaster allows for a deeper reading of the forces at work. It is for this reason that I do not study the recent (2010) disasters in Haiti and Chile. As horrifyingly mesmerizing as they may be, a modicum of historical distance is necessary to judge the implications of literary and artistic production for political change.⁹³

In this extended quotation, Anderson establishes a very clear relationship between specific kinds of literary production and their value as a source of knowledge.

⁹⁰ Mark D. Anderson, *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (Charlottesville, VA. and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

⁹¹ Anderson, p. 2.

⁹² Anderson, p. 7.

⁹³ Anderson, p. 28.

However, the binary differentiation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature results in an overlooking of ‘less sophisticated’ forms of expression, which can also enrich one’s understanding of the disaster and its aftermath and should not be dismissed so easily. In addition, in direct reference to the 2010 Haitian earthquake, Anderson problematises the timely character of many of these post-seismic interventions and insists on the importance of ‘a modicum of historical distance’—a temporal remove from the event. Certainly, our apprehension of disasters changes throughout time, but ‘historical distance’ is not in itself a guarantee of a work’s quality and sophistication. Within Anderson’s framework the emphasis is placed on the function of literary texts rather than their generic and aesthetic qualities. As a result, the value of literature is seen primarily in terms of its potential to shape the cultural politics of disaster, namely its influence on ways of remembering the event and the discourses surrounding it, and its ability to expose the ‘deeper forces at work’ that define a particular event.

Exceptional in its scope and focus, Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales’s recent edited collection, *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake* (2012) also recognises the need for paradigm change in disaster studies and for an increased consideration of the outpouring of creative responses to disasters, here the 2010 Haitian earthquake, and their socio-political significance. In the editors’ view, in the case of the January tremors, many of the early responses only confirmed structural inequalities, thereby contributing to the silencing of the Haitian majority and their experiences of the earthquake. In the light of these insights, the task the collection sets itself is to expose ‘the various levels of the emerging disaster that tend to get

overlooked, ignored or suppressed'⁹⁴ and which, over the years, have contributed to a historically produced pattern of vulnerability:⁹⁵

The story of Haiti's earthquake has been told and retold in tens of thousands of blog entries, news stories, You Tube videos, and at least 10 English language books. Given the inequalities that marginalize Haiti, particularly the poor majority, the points of view presented to date are dominated by white, foreign do-gooders, either volunteer missions or professional humanitarians. Their stories necessarily celebrate their good intentions and minimize and even denigrated the contribution of Haitians, while also often failing to fully and accurately report the many difficulties that too many Haitians still face.⁹⁶

In this passage, the editors are quick to characterise the general nature of these responses, with little if any scrutiny of the formal and conceptual heterogeneity among them—an oversight partly down to the collection's anthropological and political focus. Indeed, a number of humanitarian and charity workers published accounts of the disaster and its aftermath, Sandra Marquez Stathis's travelogue (Chapter Two) and Dan Woolley's narrative (Chapter Three) among them. Yet even between these two seemingly similar examples, there are considerable differences as to the interpretation of the event and its meaning. As will be explored in the subsequent section, these 'do-gooders' accounts were far from the only responses released in the months following upon the earthquake. Again, similarly to Anderson, insights offered by literary responses to complex disasters are defined by Schuller and Morales in terms of the easily identifiable politics to which these texts seem to subscribe.

Still, Schuller and Morales's reformulation of disaster as a *process* remains helpful in approaching literary narrativisations which, too, are processes of ordering

⁹⁴ Schuller and Morales, 'Introduction', in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, pp. 1-11 (p.3).

⁹⁵ This pattern of vulnerability is 'evidenced in the location, infrastructure, sociopolitical structure, production patterns, and ideology that characterize a society.' Anthony Oliver-Smith, 'Haiti's 500-Year Earthquake', in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, pp. 18-26 (p. 18).

⁹⁶ Schuller and Morales, 'Introduction', in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, pp. 1-11 (p.3).

a complex experience of long duration. Disasters ‘are deeply rooted in the social, economic, and environmental history of the societies where they occur’⁹⁷ and, as such, ‘have historical roots, unfolding presents, and potential futures according to the forms of reconstruction.’⁹⁸ In its complexity, the January disaster was not a defined occurrence but a ‘*kriz konjonkti*—a conjunctural crisis,’⁹⁹ that is ‘the intersection of neoliberalism and foreign control, together with the complicity of Haiti’s elite and government.’¹⁰⁰ The prolonged geopolitical context of structural vulnerability, the protracted past of the event, helped transform the Haitian earthquake into a disaster on such a scale.¹⁰¹ Its present is the immediate aftermath of January 12; the future of the disaster is shaped by the material, socio-economic, and cultural reconstruction processes that have ensued. Narrativisation is also a process, but one that aims to organise and contain an overwhelming subjective experience, imbuing it with a sense of order and completion, albeit of a limited kind. This extended, incomplete temporality of the earthquake is a key challenge for narrative responses to *goudougoudou*.

An analytical approach that brings together seemingly distinct attempts to comprehend the prolonged temporality of disaster, one rooted in both the socio-scientific enquiries of disaster studies and subjective experience of the earthquake, enables us to expose the limitations of, and challenges faced by, respective methodologies when confronted with an event of this scale and complexity. First,

⁹⁷ Oliver-Smith, p. 18.

⁹⁸ Oliver-Smith, p. 18.

⁹⁹ Schuller and Morales, ‘Haiti’s Vulnerability to Disasters’, in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, pp. 11-13 (p.12).

¹⁰⁰ Schuller and Morales, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Sculler and Morales do not deny the geological causes of the earthquake—that is the movement of the tectonic plates. Yet the impact these shifts had, the scale of the devastation, is defined by the context in which they occurred, Haiti’s socio-economic landscape: ‘True, the tectonic plates that shifted along the faults underneath Haiti were by no means products of human action. But to be a *disaster* requires vulnerability.’ Schuller and Morales, ‘Introduction’, in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, pp. 1-11 (p.4).

disaster studies as a field has not yet fully disentangled itself from its military and technocratic beginnings and is just starting to address the relationship between disaster and colonial history. Similarly, the relationship between identity categories, which are of key interest to the humanities, and the event's wider impact also remains largely unexamined. The emergent field of postcolonial disaster studies,¹⁰² to which this thesis contributes, has a key role in addressing this lack. Finally, scholarly approaches to disaster studies in its current paradigm do not give enough consideration to the value and nature of literary production and the workings of these texts as *narratives*, rather than as just instruments to challenge or uphold the status quo. This need for paradigm change is essential to the field's future and its relevance for our understanding of an age of 'general disaster'¹⁰³ and "the before and after of the [January 2010] catastrophe"¹⁰⁴ in Haiti.

An interdisciplinary reading of post-earthquake narratives of the kind this thesis undertakes enables us to tease out formal and aesthetic nuances and tensions within the texts and reveals often contrasting understandings of the event. At the same time, such enquiry does not shy away from confronting the limitations of these specific narratives as they attempt to provide an effective means of ordering and coming to terms with the disaster and its ongoing duration. The majority of the texts analysed in this thesis directly engage with the questions of pre- and post-earthquake

¹⁰² Recent academic initiatives include Anthony Carrigan's two-year AHRC fellowship *Representing Postcolonial Disaster* (University of Leeds, UK). University of Leeds Faculty of Arts, *Representing Postcolonial Disaster* <<http://arts.leeds.ac.uk/postcolonialdisaster/>> [accessed 07 August 2014]. Another example is the Dutch-British AHRC-NWO Research Network on *(Post)colonial representations of Southeast Asian and Caribbean disasters 1800-2012. The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe: (Post)colonial Representations of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Disasters 1800-2012*, <<http://representingcatastrophe.com/>> [accessed 07 August 2014].

¹⁰³ Brian Massumi, 'Everywhere You Want to Be: Introduction to Fear', in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 3-38 (p. 8).

¹⁰⁴ Laënnec Hurbon, 'Catastrophe permanente et reconstruction', *L'Observatoire de la reconstruction*, 6 (2012), pp.8-10, in Martin Munro, *Writing the Fault Line: Haitian Literature and the Earthquake of 2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p. 6.

discourses on Haiti, and with the country's politics and economy. An in-depth contextualised reading of literary responses to the disaster thus allows us to examine the relationship between representations of these events and local/global distributions of power. However, a limiting of their role to the binary of appraisal or rebuttal largely overlooks the variety of audiences, contexts, and ends to which these texts were produced. Such a polarised positioning would also seem to suggest a homogenous view across these texts of the past, present, and future of the earthquake. The strengths of the field of literary studies, namely its attention to subjective experience and the cultural and historical specificity of narrative aesthetics, can thus usefully be employed to question the normative nature of disaster studies, to challenge the key terms the field uses, and to reconfigure the different forms through which disasters are analysed.

Narratives of the Past, Scenarios for the Future: Literary Responses to the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti

The immediate aftermath of the earthquake and the months following upon it would see an outpouring of literary creativity. Easily accessible self-publishing opportunities contributed to the proliferation of highly diverse post-seismic literary responses. Formal and conceptual heterogeneity characterises these early treatments of the disaster. These representations also reflect a profound sense of interconnectedness between subjective experiences of the event and their wider collective, political, and historical significance. One of the earliest literary engagements with the earthquake was *Haiti Rising: Haitian History, Culture and the*

Earthquake of 2010 (2010), edited by Martin Munro.¹⁰⁵ The volume brings together a series of short personal accounts and scholarly analyses of the disaster. Another early anthology, which focused primarily on post-earthquake responses written by Haitians living in Haiti or in the Diaspora, was *How to Write an Earthquake: Comment écrire et quoi écrire/Mo pou 12 janvye* (2011), edited by Pierre Beudelaine and Nataša Đurovičová.¹⁰⁶ The anthology underlines the responsibility of the writer and the significance of literary production in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. Here, the emphasis is on the ethics of writing as well as the deeply personal commemorative function it has:

Writing bridges the two times and provides a shelter for memory, individual and collective. Through poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, it traces the ethos of pain and care that affected everyone on the threshold of the fault line.¹⁰⁷

This poetic formulation points to literature's potential to offer an interpretative framework and ethical standpoint from which to approach the earthquake. The anthology aims to present and preserve the many memories and impressions of the disaster, and sees the act of braiding together these voices as a gesture of solidarity and an expression of its direct commitment to Haiti's reconstruction: 'The authors of *Mo pou 12 Janvye* keep the memory of Haiti alive, and beyond their individual differences, beyond all political affiliations, they have come together [...].'¹⁰⁸ The various narratives assembled in *How To Write an Earthquake* thus see themselves as contributing to the country's recovery efforts and as fostering a spirit of unity and hope against everyday challenges and frustrations:

Today, after the earthquake, the ongoing cholera epidemic, the indefinite duration of life in tent camps, the disappointments of the international

¹⁰⁵ Martin Munro, *Haiti Rising: Haitian History, Culture and the Earthquake of 2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Beudelaine and Nataša Đurovičová, *How to Write an Earthquake: Comment écrire et quoi écrire/Mo pou 12 janvye* (Iowa City, IA.: Autumn Hill Books, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ Beudelaine and Đurovičová, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Beudelaine and Đurovičová, p. 6.

community in spite of genuine global solidarity, and the general uncertainty about a democratically elected government, the narratives and the songs that tell the stories of the departed and the survivors are still very poignant and central, and remind us of the need for unity and forging forward together. Nou la! Nou ansanm!¹⁰⁹

Here, the aims of the anthology are made clear, with the collective impact of these works being considered more important than individual authors' ambitions for each text. Through its commitment to commemoration and remembrance, *How To Write an Earthquake* attempts to counter a prevailing sense of anxiety and disappointment. Its call is clear: we are here, we are together! These two volumes hope to preserve the many distinct memories of the event and its impact, to demonstrate its complexity, and to express their solidarity with and commitment to Haiti and its peoples.

Other post-earthquake published responses include survivors' accounts written both by Haitians and non-Haitians (aid and charity workers, members of the rescue forces) as well as narratives of those who visited Haiti in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Among these are the following works: *Le Tremblement: Haïti, 12 janvier 2010* (2010) by Lionel Édouard-Martin; *Tout Bouge Autour de Moi* (2011) by Dany Laferrière; *Haïti, kenbe la!* (2010) by Rodney Saint-Éloi; *Failles* (2010) by Yanick Lahens; *Shaken, Not Stirred: A Survivor's Account of the January 12, 2010 Earthquake in Haiti* (2010) by Jeanne G. Pocius; and *Unshaken: Rising from the Ruins of Haiti's Hotel Montana* (2011) by Dan Woolley. In the second group are Gerard Thomas Straub's *Hidden in the Rubble: A Haitian Pilgrimage to Compassion and Resurrection* (2010); Sandra Marquez Stathis's *Rubble: The Search for a Haitian Boy* (2012); and Ronald J McMiller Jr.'s *My 34 Day Memoir of Haiti: From Whence We Come* (2013). In addition, a number of fictional works were

¹⁰⁹ 'We are here! We are united together!' Beudelaine and Ďurovičová, p. 6.

published in the wake of the earthquake, among them Marvin Victor's *Corps mêlés* (2011), Gustave Dabresil's *Récit d'une journée de cauchemar et d'horreur* (2011), and M. Rouzier and J. Rouzier's *38 Seconds: Beyond the Breaking Point* (2011). There were also a few publications aimed specifically at children and young adults: Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (2012), Edwidge Danticat's *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti* (2010), Ann E. Burg's *Serafina's Promise* (2013), and, most recently, Laura Rose Wagner's *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go* (2015).

Another sub-category of literary response consists of 'fundraising works' which combine the need for personal engagement with the event and the desire to contribute to relief efforts. One such work is a collection of reflections by Elaine M. Hughes, Patricia J. Koenig, Christina L. Ruotolo, Elizabeth B. Thompson and Lynne C. Wigent entitled *The Day the Earth Moved Haiti: From Havoc to Healing* (2011). The authors assure us that all proceeds from this book will be donated to the following charities: Compassion Weavers, Hope for Haiti Foundation, and Ryan Epps Children's Home. Similarly, Sachin Sharma's *Lespri, A Novel About the 2010 Haitian Earthquake* (2012), sees itself as a direct part of the relief effort. On his Amazon website the author clearly outlines his goal: 'All proceeds from the sale of this book up to January 12, 2013, the third anniversary of the 2010 earthquake, will be donated to the Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. [...] After that date, 10% of proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated.'¹¹⁰ Finally, Lee Rainboth, author of *The Grinder: One Community's Journey through Pain and Hope from the Great Haiti Earthquake* (2013), announces that he will be donating a 'portion of the profits from the sales [...] to support the community programs of Living Media

¹¹⁰ Sachin Sharma, *Lespri, A Novel About the 2010 Haitian Earthquake* (Kindle Edition, 2012) <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Lespri-novel-about-Haitian-Earthquake-ebook/dp/B008XBIQ68/ref=wl_it_dp_o_pC_nS_nC?ie=UTF8&colid=85WPEPCUSTB&coliid=11GKHJ46B4NTI0> [accessed 23 January 2014].

International.’¹¹¹ Each in its own way, these fundraising texts hope to employ narrative aesthetics as a means of advancing the post-earthquake relief effort.

Even this brief overview of the literary responses published so far reveals varying motivations and aims behind each narrative. The specific narrative responses to the earthquake analysed in this thesis also have distinct aesthetic, ethical, and political aims. They, too, hope to preserve and construct individual and collective memories of the event. The selected texts allow for an exploration of the multiple meanings of the earthquake, accounting for the histories which underlie the disaster as well as those which shape other literary engagements with it. Instead of attempting a comprehensive analysis of all the works published since the 12th of January 2010—a well-nigh impossible task—this thesis identifies some of the key literary perspectives from which the 2010 earthquake has been approached, namely those of Haitian and non-Haitian survivors of the disaster, direct witnesses to the event, and those for whom writing was a way of countering the physical remove from the scene of the disaster, by attempting to create emotional proximity to the victims of the earthquake. The narratives selected for this thesis reflect this heterogeneity and offer an insight into the diversity of interpretations of the disaster while also reflecting on some of the limitations of these readings. They are written by both Haitians (Laferrière, Saint-Éloi) and non-Haitians (Martin, Woolley, Marquez Stathis, Lake); by those who have witnessed the disaster as it unfolded (Laferrière, Saint-Éloi, Martin, Woolley), as well as others who travelled to Haiti in its immediate aftermath (Marquez Stathis). Lake’s work, for its part, is a novel which creatively intertwines the events of January 2010 with a re-imagining of the

¹¹¹ Lee Rainboth, *The Grinder: One Community’s Journey Through Pain and Hope from the Great Haiti Earthquake* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013) <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Grinder-Communitys-Journey-Through-Earthquake/dp/1492104906/ref=sr_1_16?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1390490600&sr=1-16&keywords=haiti+earthquake> [accessed 23 January 2014].

1791-1804 Haitian Revolution. The analysis of post-earthquake narratives thus implicitly questions the ethics of readership and authorship of each text while also considering their formal aspects and their portrayal of Haiti.

In addition, an enquiry into the ethics of post-earthquake narratives is directly linked to the question of tourism—both as a traveling practice and as an aesthetic form. Hundreds of well-intentioned individuals and groups travelled to Haiti in the days following upon the disaster—an example of a phenomenon known more generally as disaster tourism or medical parachuting.¹¹² Hoping to contribute directly to earthquake recovery, these uncoordinated medical efforts were often ill-matched to local needs, using culturally inappropriate methods and competing for the same scarce financial and logistic resources as other charities, NGOs, and local agents contributing to the development of competitive humanitarianism.¹¹³ Tourism, understood more broadly, can include the work of missionaries, aid workers, and foreign visitors, but also the displaced or indirect practices of imaginative writers who risk enacting a voyeuristic gaze in their narratives that appropriates the traumatic experience of the earthquake. Marquez Stathis's *Rubble: The Search for a Haitian Boy* (2012) and Dan Woolley's *Unshaken: Rising from the Ruins of Haiti's Hotel Montana* (2011), both analysed here, perform a voyeuristic gaze that reveals the mixed motivations behind each text. The former reiterates tropes of exoticism and difference in its depiction of Haiti. The latter, an autobiographical conversion narrative of a survivor of the earthquake that is explicitly aimed at a non-Haitian audience, has a defined Christian evangelical purpose. Both link their traumatic experiences, whether in relation to the disaster or to previous personal traumas, to a community of survivors while re-enacting through their writing the discursive tropes

¹¹² Daniël J. Van Hoving and others, 'Haiti Disaster Tourism—A Medical Shame', *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, 25 (2010), 201-02 (p. 202).

¹¹³ Van Hoving and others, p. 202.

and manoeuvres of a tourist gaze. As these two accounts reveal through their narrative aesthetics, the question of tourism as a material, but also a representational, practice and narrative perspective is a particularly pertinent one in the context of the 2010 Haitian disaster.

This risk of appropriating the earthquake is central to Andrew Leak's critique of some of the early literary treatments of the disaster. In Leak's polemic, he accuses a number of Haitian intellectuals of being complicit in the creation and affirmation of negative discursive constructions of Haiti as well as the economic and military recolonisation of Haiti over the last decade.¹¹⁴ In his view, literary responses to the earthquake by a number of Haitian Francophone writers reveal their narcissism, their need to be recognised by 'the gaze of the prestigious Other.'¹¹⁵ Commenting directly on narratives by Laferrière, Lahens, and Saint-Éloi, Leak dismisses these authors' literary expressions of solidarity, qualifying them pejoratively as a false "we are all in this together" refrain.¹¹⁶ In the texts by Laferrière (Chapter Two) and Saint-Éloi (Chapter One), specifically, Leak sees this gesture of solidarity as being translated into a distorted utopic vision of a new post-earthquake community that their accounts seem to envisage:

But Laferrière and Saint-Éloi go much further, detecting in the immediate, human reaction of shell-shocked people the dawning of a new community.

¹¹⁴ 'Some Haitian intellectuals sought to combat those images but in so doing they inadvertently revealed their complicity not only in the negative discursive construction of their country, but also in the economic and military re-colonisation of Haiti over the last decade.' Andrew Leak, 'A Vain Fascination: Writing from and about Haiti after the Earthquake', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 32 (2013). 394-406, abstract.

¹¹⁵ Leak, p. 396. On another occasion, he characterises these writers' responses as expressions of loyalty to and financial dependence on 'Mother France': 'Except that, in our case, it is Mother France whose benign approbation is so craved by the francophone Haitian intellectuals. (Not to mention the generous artistic subsidies handed out to Haitian writers who take the 'correct' view of Franco-Haitian relations). Put simply, Haitian intellectuals of the likes of Trouillot and co. feed the images of Haiti produced in the centres of imperialist and neo-colonial power and then react to those images with pathetic gratitude (if they flatter their narcissism) or with uncontrollable fury (should they wound their narcissism).' Leak, pp. 398-9.

¹¹⁶ Leak, p. 397.

As if, in levelling Port-au-Prince, the earthquake had also created a level playing field, sweeping away two centuries of social apartheid.¹¹⁷

Here, the authors' naivety is contrasted with the complex, historically constructed landscape of social inequalities, described in a gesture of cross-cultural translation as 'social apartheid.' Although pointing usefully to the question of diasporic privilege, Leak's analysis seems to overlook the authors' heightened awareness of the complexity of the disaster and its history and their own complicated commitment to Haiti. Equally, Leak makes little distinction between the manifestly different positions Trouillot, Lahens, Laferrière and Saint-Éloi write from, and the equally obvious formal differences between immediate online responses—like those necessarily emotive if overly hopeful *témoignages* in the French progressive *Libération* by Lahens and others¹¹⁸—and later published narratives. For example, both *Haïti, kenbe la!* (2010) by Rodney Saint-Éloi, examined in Chapter One, and *Tout bouge autour de moi* (2011) by Dany Laferrière, analysed in Chapter Two, explicitly address the question of the writer's own privilege, not least by problematising their respective decision whether to stay or not in Haiti after the earthquake. As the range of literary responses to the January tremors demonstrates, both immediate and later treatments of the disaster run the risk of aestheticising violence, appropriating the event and, in effect, contributing to simplistic interpretations of it.

Moreover, the narrative form of these highly autobiographical texts partakes in their respective writers' attempts to suggest an ethics of writing the disaster—one that decentres the individual narrator and claims no narrative authority. But the workings of these texts as *narratives* remain largely unexamined in Leak's

¹¹⁷ Leak, p. 397.

¹¹⁸ 'Je t'écris Haïti', *Libération*, 19 January 2010 <<http://www.liberation.fr/haiti-seisme-janvier-2010-je-t-ecris-haiti,99856>> [accessed 12 August 2014].

analysis. Instead, in his evaluation he focuses almost exclusively on the authors' past and their present political commitments and personal histories, treating their personalities as a key to unlocking the ultimate meaning of their texts. These are of course important issues to be addressed, and my thesis also takes into account the ethics and politics of authorship. Yet questions of literary form and aesthetic choice require equal attention when attempting to evaluate 'writing from and about Haiti after the earthquake', as Leak's analysis sets out to do. Building on these critical insights, my thesis examines the context, form, and aesthetics of each narrative while considering its ethical ramifications. As such, the analytical approach embraced in the thesis is at once an engagement with the context in which each of the texts intervenes, the discourses they employ, and the distinct generic conventions, imagery, and narrative structure they embrace. Rather than treating the narratives as direct reflections of the authors' political commitment or as overt commentaries on Haiti's past and present, I put literary analysis in dialogue with other fields of enquiry, such as politics, trauma theory, and disaster studies in order to tease out the nuances offered by these texts. An analysis such as Leak's that only seeks to establish the politics of literary works risks misrepresenting their formal heterogeneity, easily characterising them as 'narcissistic' accounts of little value. In contradistinction to such generalising and dismissive approaches, the thesis emphasises the distinctiveness of each text, exploring the ways in which they shape our understanding of literary narrative and try, not always successfully, to impart order to the overwhelming experiences and multiple histories of the January events.

Trauma Theory and Post-Earthquake Narratives

The ethical dimensions and formal complexity of these diverse post-earthquake accounts cannot be divorced from their personal testimonial character. The thesis recognises that the 2010 disaster was especially traumatic to those who experienced it first hand. Trauma theory, as discussed in the opening section of this chapter, remains as central to my analysis as it is to work on the physical and psychological effects of disaster as a whole. As a rapidly growing field since the 1990s, branching out from psychological research via cognitive science to cultural studies and literary criticism, trauma theory now encompasses numerous, not necessarily compatible, methodological and conceptual approaches. Within literary criticism, trauma theory has opened new avenues of interpretation for texts written in response to overpowering events and processes (war, natural disaster, domestic violence, discrimination, oppression) witnessed and experienced both directly and indirectly. The thesis encompasses the insights offered by recent reformulations within the increasingly heterogeneous field of trauma studies without excluding other sources of insight into these post-earthquake narratives, such as those gained, for example, from Vodou spirituality.

Despite the apparent consolidation of trauma theory as a body of scholarship, definitions of 'trauma' itself often remain loose. The many different ways in which 'trauma' has been employed range from psychoanalytical, largely Freudian, approaches to those adopted by cultural studies. Often referred to in terms of its etymology as a 'wound,' trauma denotes a set of physical conditions as well as psychological ones. In its current usage, which departs from its original medical applications, trauma is often associated with physic scars and wounds which permanently alter one's sense of self and one's relation to the surrounding

environment. These can be experienced in terms of repetition, the haunting presence of previous overpowering events (via dreams, memories, and flashbacks), extreme alertness, or, conversely, in terms of emotional numbness, omission, and the absence of recall of the original event.¹¹⁹ Symptoms of trauma, e.g. those gathered under the definition of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),¹²⁰ can appear chronically or belatedly, months or even years after the initial experience. In addition, there is an increasing recognition that not only those directly affected by the traumatic event but also so-called ‘secondary’ victims (such as bystanders, relatives, rescue workers and journalists) can be traumatised by the experiences they have witnessed. Indeed, whole communities, e.g. national and ethnic groups, can be marked by a traumatic event and this sense of a shared traumatic experience is often seen as a source of collective memory and national identity. For Andreas Huyssen, the twentieth century, in particular, seems to have unfolded ‘under the sign of [historical] trauma,’¹²¹ with trauma being the key to defining individual and collective identity in the aftermath of overpowering events. In this context, proximity and distance both seem to function as privileged markers of identity, pointing to the risks of appropriating traumatic events as a source of personal and collective empowerment. Indeed, ‘founding’ events like the 9/11 attacks have been re-inscribed within a highly politicised narrative of commemoration that has been used to justify national and strategic policies around, e.g., homeland security as well as to legitimise war. Any attempt to define trauma points to the seemingly contradictory manifestations of its aftermath. Recurring questions around what trauma is, who is affected by it,

¹¹⁹ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 1.

¹²⁰ PTSD in its first formulation in the 1980 *Diagnostic Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association ‘initially defined only those suffering from symptoms *directly* related to their experience of the traumatic event. Since then, the definition has been expanded in each new edition of the Association’s *Diagnostic Manual* to include secondary victims, witnesses and bystanders at the event, but also relatives, therapists and friends of victims.’ Irene Visser, ‘Trauma theory and postcolonial literary studies’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47 (2011), 270-82 (p. 272).

¹²¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 9.

and how it is experienced all suggest the difficulty, even impossibility, of arriving at a universally applicable definition.

However, as Roger Luckhurst suggests, these definitional debates should not be seen as insurmountable obstacles, but rather embraced as productive opportunities that allow for reflection on the conceptual complexity and flexibility of the term. A full grasp of the category of trauma is effectively unattainable, requiring formidable transhistorical expertise in fields as diverse as psychoanalysis, neuroscience, psychiatry and cultural studies.¹²² But this near-impossible task should not be seen as an impasse to further productive engagement with the question of trauma and its many manifestations and effects. Rather than attempting to delimit trauma, the category is best conceptualised as a ‘knot’: a heterogeneous concept whose use and permeation in a number of disciplines and historical and cultural contexts ‘must be understood by the impressive range of elements that it ties together and which allows it to travel to such diverse places in the network of knowledge.’¹²³ Here Luckhurst, after Latour, argues for relational rather than hierarchical practices of knowledge which demonstrate that it is precisely the heterogeneity of a term that proves its conceptual value—a repositioning akin to that advocated by relational approaches in disaster studies. The aim here, then, is not to disentangle the knot of trauma as a concept, but rather to engage with the range of ‘elements that it ties together and which allows it to travel to such diverse places in the network of knowledge.’¹²⁴

One such knotted relationship is between trauma theory and postcolonial studies. Postcolonial scholars have pointed to the limitations of applying ‘trauma

¹²² Roger Luckhurst illustratively enumerates the range of disciplines and scholarly expertise that an attempt to grasp the many meanings and uses of trauma would require. Luckhurst, p. 4.

¹²³ Luckhurst, p. 15.

¹²⁴ Luckhurst, p. 14.

theory' conceptual vocabulary to non-western contexts.¹²⁵ Among these limitations are its Eurocentric orientation, its lack of historical particularity and attention to the complex histories of colonisation and decolonisation, its lack of engagement with spirituality and diverse religious practices, and the insufficient consideration of different modes of political agency that its collective terms seems to imply.¹²⁶ Stef Craps, for example, contends from a postcolonial perspective that the founding works of trauma theory have 'largely fail[ed] to live up to [the] promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement.'¹²⁷ According to him, such texts effectively

marginalize or ignore [the] traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas.¹²⁸

Here, the charges against trauma theory are made explicit. It runs the risk of 'assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices, and structures that maintain existing injustices and inequalities.'¹²⁹ Trauma theory, in Craps's assessment of it, seems not only to overlook historical and cultural particularities, but also to prescribe a certain, limited kind of literary aesthetic inadequate to expressing the full range of experience that trauma encompasses. Rather than

¹²⁵ The special issue of *Studies in the Novel: Postcolonial Trauma Novels*, 40 (2008) was exclusively devoted to the project of bringing together postcolonial studies and trauma theory. The editors acknowledge that '[i]nstead of promoting solidarity between different cultures, trauma studies risks producing the very opposite effect as a result of this one-sided focus: by ignoring or marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world.' Consequently, they attempt to 'examine whether and how trauma studies can break with Eurocentrism through the analysis of novels that bear witness to the suffering engendered by colonial oppression.' Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, 'Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels', *Studies in the Novel*, 40 (2008), 1-12 (p. 1).

¹²⁶ Irene Visser provides a detailed account of the core concepts and tenets of cultural trauma theory in order to contribute to a clearer understanding of the relationship between trauma theory and postcolonial studies. Visser, pp. 270-82.

¹²⁷ Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

¹²⁸ Craps, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Craps, p. 2.

attempting to categorise the modes of post-earthquake narrative engagement as employing either a modernist or postmodernist aesthetic,¹³⁰ I will later suggest that works like Rodney Saint-Éloi's *Haiti, kenbe la!* (2010) (Chapter One), perform a new, multivocal empowering narrative of trauma—one which merges personal memories of the 2010 disaster with others' impressions of it. These considerations of form and style, and the ethics and politics underlying such formal choices, are key to an analysis of post-earthquake narrative responses and raise the wider question of 'the possibility of the recuperative and empowering qualities of narrative of traumatic events and memories'¹³¹ in postcolonial contexts such as Haiti's.

Moreover, the formal aspects of narratives of trauma are directly linked to the types of subjectivity and agency that literary texts seem to imply. The emphasis on individual/collective suspension in a state of post-traumatic melancholia, which is often deemed to be the most frequent reaction to trauma,¹³² greatly limits the ways in which political agency can be envisaged in the wake of traumatic events. This charge is echoed in Valerie Kaussen's criticism of trauma theory as an overarching interpretative framework which covers a wide range of responses to different forms of violence and oppression:

Trauma theory, in its focus on individual memory, ultimately rejects organized political responses to social inequities and violence, [while] in its tendency to see collective history as pathological, it limits the articulation of history in terms of future-oriented, progressive politics.¹³³

Here, Kaussen identifies parallels between trauma theory and postcolonial theory insofar as both emphasise 'memory and the individual experience of historical

¹³⁰ According to Visser, 'In literary criticism, the criteria of trauma testimony deriving from Holocaust studies are often classified as modernist and postmodernist formal aspects.' Visser, p. 278.

¹³¹ Visser, p. 274.

¹³² As Luckhurst suggests: 'To be frozen or suspended afterwards, it seems to be assumed, is the only proper ethical response to trauma'; this reasoning situates memory "entirely under the sign of post-traumatic melancholia.' Luckhurst, p. 210.

¹³³ Valerie Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2008), p. 192.

forces over “official” histories that efface the complex effects of history on the subject.¹³⁴ She then accuses postcolonial theory of ‘levelling [...] the distinctions between colonizer and the colonized, master and slave,’ which, for her, ‘resembles trauma theory’s levelling of the difference between victims and perpetrators.’¹³⁵ Finally, she claims that both trauma theory and postcolonial theory disregard history. In the former, ‘history itself is defined as traumatic’ while the latter rejects ‘History [as] an example of the colonizer’s violent discourses that seek to contain and to render all “The Same and the One.”’¹³⁶ As a result, for Kaussen these two theoretical frameworks prescribe a limiting aesthetic that forecloses the political empowerment of a collective.

Such a characterisation of two distinct conceptual approaches seems however to overlook the critical debate within both trauma theory and postcolonial studies on the limits of any universalising conceptual vocabulary to highly diverse social and cultural contexts. Here as elsewhere, Kaussen does not engage sufficiently with the founding ethical programme of trauma theory emphasised in founding works by Cathy Caruth and Dominic LaCapra. These key theorists stress that trauma theory cannot be treated as a homogenous approach, but is rather a collection of mixed practices and methodologies. Kaussen also disregards the field’s later political turn, made manifest in work by—among others—Brown, Edkins, Mbembe and Žižek.¹³⁷ Recent scholarship in trauma studies, such as the edited

¹³⁴ Kaussen, p. 191.

¹³⁵ Kaussen, pp. 191-2.

¹³⁶ Kaussen, p.192. The original extract from *Éloge*, which Kaussen quotes here, has slightly different formatting: ‘Et si nous recommandons à nos créateurs cette exploration de nos particularités c’est parce qu’elle ramène au naturel du monde, hors du *Même* et *l’Un* [...].’ ‘And if we recommend to our artists this exploration of our singularities, that is because it brings back to what is natural in the world, outside the *Same* and the *One* [...].’ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité/ Édition bilingue français-anglais*, trans. by M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993 [1989]), p.55 and p.114.

¹³⁷ Laura S. Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy: Beyond the Flashback* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2008); Laura S. Brown, ‘ Not Outside the Range: One

collection *Unconscious Dominions: Psychoanalysis, Colonial Trauma, and Global Sovereignties* (2011), even more clearly addresses the relationship between psychoanalysis, the socio-political *Weltanschauung* in which the practice has historically been immersed, and colonialism and colonial ideology, with a view to uncovering the ‘continuing past of psychoanalysis, whether as an alibi for colonial power or as positioned in dialectical relation to colonialism.’¹³⁸ The task the contributors set themselves has a clear postcolonial dimension. By recognising that analysis is inseparable from its conditions of production, and by uncovering the ways in which psychoanalysis can disturb identity, disrupt homogeneity, and interrogate sovereignty, they seek to ‘give new historical depth and political nuance to psychoanalytic elements of postcolonial theory.’¹³⁹ These recent critical attempts respond to the charges levelled at trauma theory in Kaussen’s earlier work. Yet despite its obvious shortcomings, her critique registers an important call for a renewed assessment of trauma theory, of its applicability to postcolonial context, and of its commitment to socio-political transformation in the wake of complex disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 100-12; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD., London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Slavoj Žižek, ‘Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject’, *Filozofski vestnik*, 29 (2008), 9-29.

¹³⁸ *Unconscious Dominions: Psychoanalysis, Colonial Trauma, and Global Sovereignties*, ed. by Deborah Jenson and Richard C. Keller Warwick Anderson (Durham, NC. and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 16.

¹³⁹ Warwick Anderson, p. 3.

Trauma Theory and Haitian Spiritual Traditions

Crap's criticism of trauma theory's lack of engagement with religious and spiritual practices is pertinent to many postcolonial contexts where the emphasis is placed on cultural confrontation, political power struggles, and varying notions of self and other. This is all the more prevalent in Haiti where the religious and spiritual landscape has long been defined by a difficult interaction between traditional Vodou practices and an increasing number of Christian denominations. Vodou and its history have been subject to processes of silencing, erasure, and denigration,¹⁴⁰ not least after the January disaster which was interpreted by a number of Evangelical groups in terms of the rightful punishment of an idolatrous nation (see Chapter Three). These otherwise distinct religious and spiritual traditions provide a significantly different conceptualisation of the relationship between personhood, emotions, embodiment and injustice, offering a culturally specific understanding of mental illness and emotional distress. In the wake of a disaster such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, religious belief can offer a sense of consolation and belonging to a wider community and can provide explanatory frameworks for the event by placing it as a part of a greater, if not immediately accessible, pattern. An analysis of personal as well as literary responses to events such as the January earthquake therefore needs to account for the ways in which divergent cosmologies shape culturally rooted notions of trauma.

¹⁴⁰ Laurent Dubois, in an analysis long preceding the earthquake, examines the ways in which Vodou, and the scholarship on it, have developed in response to Haiti's histories of oppression, displacement, and contemporary migration. Experiences of slavery and plantation economy were foundational for the development of Haitian Vodou. Other key moments that have shaped it include 'the re-emergence of the foreign priesthood in Haiti, the development of the urban centers, the U.S. occupation of 1915-1934, which incited new revolts and new cultural developments, the Duvalier dictatorship and the dechoukaj that struck many ougans and manbos (priestesses) in its wake, not [p.95] to mention the creation of a massive Haitian diaspora which itself is auguring a new set of transformations in the religion.' Laurent Dubois, 'Vodou and History', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43 (2001), 92-100 (pp. 94-5).

Erica Caple James, in her comparative examination of the disaster and its long-term impacts, emphasises the need for nuanced understandings of trauma within the overall context of non-Western conceptions of self and other such as those represented by Vodou. Firstly, within the Vodou-inspired outlook, ‘the person is constituted of multiple parts and is situated at the nexus of social relationships among the *lwa*,¹⁴¹ the ancestors, and the family.’¹⁴² All of these are embodied relationships. In such culturally specific modes of embodiment, the different psychosocial forces involved can ‘cause imbalances between the body, the blood, and the emotions, which can destabilize personhood and the sense of self and can result in physical illness.’¹⁴³ One such illness, ‘*sezisman*’ (‘*saisir*’ in French for ‘to seize’, ‘take hold of’),¹⁴⁴ is ‘the illness related to the sensitivity of the “head” and the balance of “blood” in the body’ and can be caused by a sudden fear, shock or “an excess of indignation at being victimized.”¹⁴⁵ Understandings of trauma need to include these cultural and anthropological underpinnings. As a result, responses to trauma and ways of dealing with it in non-Western contexts such as Haiti’s may vary significantly, including considerations of healers, traditional herbal remedies, and participation in rituals that tend to be less valued—if valued at all—in Western

¹⁴¹ *Lwa (loa)* are spirits in the Haitian Vodou tradition. They are intermediaries between God the Creator and the humanity. They are supernatural beings that are thought to be present in all realms of nature and create a web of linkages between human activities and various aspects of human life. They can enter the human body, interfere in the affairs of the living, and take control of an individual’s life from birth to death. Also, they explain the origins of the world, providing a way of classifying life in society that takes on meaning through the agency of the *lwa*. *Lwa* are believed to come from the mythical Guinea, and the different categories of *lwa* reflect the various African ethnic groups. *Lwa* are regrouped into families called nations (*nanchon*) and each has distinctive ceremonies and rituals. The three important rituals are Rada, Kongo, and Petro. *Lwa* carry different weight and importance in each of the pantheons corresponding to the three main rituals. Laënnec Hurbon, *Voodoo Search for the Spirit* (New York, NY. and London: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), pp. 65-72.

¹⁴² Erica Caple James, ‘Haiti, Insecurity, and the Politics of Asylum’, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 25 (2011), 357-76 (p.360).

¹⁴³ James, p. 360.

¹⁴⁴ ‘*saisir*’, in *Reverso Dictionary Online* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012) <<http://dictionary.reverso.net/french-english/saisir> > [accessed 25 February 2014].

¹⁴⁵ Erika Bourguignon, ‘Belief and Behavior in Haitian Folk Healing’, in *Mental Health Services: The Cross-Cultural Context*, ed. by Paul B. Pedersen, Norman Sartorius, and Anthony J. Marsella (Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage 1984), pp. 243–66 (p. 261).

clinical responses to traumatic events.

What becomes clear is that the 2010 January disaster in Haiti was contingent on the historical, ecological, and cultural contexts in which it occurred and which in turn shaped individual and collective responses to it. As already suggested, new ways of thinking comparatively about disaster, for example those gleaned from recent interpretations of Hurricane Katrina or the 2010 earthquake in Chile, can be helpful in approaching the 2010 Haitian tremors, but that singular event will still always be likely to escape the easy analogies across multiple contexts that may sometimes be encouraged by a general comparative approach. This analysis takes its cue from Craps's spirited if over-generalised call for a reassessment of the theoretical framework of trauma studies without denying the importance of that field or the relevance of its key findings. The thesis equally hopes to contribute to the *rapprochement* of trauma studies and postcolonial studies by applying the insights these two approaches offer, alongside those provided by disaster studies, to the consideration of post-earthquake narratives. Finally, it also draws attention to trauma in the context of *ecological* devastation and exploitation—long-term processes which often become violently apparent in sudden events. In the preface to *The Future of Trauma: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (2014), Michael Rothberg makes clear that

not all violence and suffering are best described by trauma—even if something we can recognize as trauma often accompanies those other forms of violence and suffering. Exploitation and ecological devastation can be traumatic—and can certainly lead indirectly to trauma of various sorts—but their essence (also) lies elsewhere.¹⁴⁶

To sum up, the thesis builds on these insights, fully acknowledging the importance

¹⁴⁶ Michael Rothberg, 'Beyond Tancred and Clorinda-trauma studies for implicated subjects', in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone (London and New York, NY.: Routledge, 2014), pp. xi-xviii (p. xvii).

of comparative trauma studies and incorporating seminal questions of memory and trauma into its analysis. Yet it is wary, at the same time, of applying a universalistic vocabulary to an event that was particular in so many ways, and is equally attuned to the depoliticising and reductive effects that such an approach can engender. As argued above, the thesis places itself at the intersection of the emerging field of literary postcolonial disaster studies, Haitian studies, trauma theory and narrative theory. Acknowledging the value of these separate disciplines, it emphasises the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literary responses to the 2010 earthquake. The thesis continually underlines the specific context of each of the narratives it analyses while remaining attuned to their aesthetic qualities as literary representations. In this sense, it does not aim to reproduce trauma theory's auto-critique, but rather to offer the kind of interdisciplinary methodology that might account best for the histories that underpinned the 2010 Haitian earthquake, and that might go some way towards explaining the narrative responses it inspired. The project therefore seeks to demythologise Haiti and to counteract persistent myth-laden representations of Haiti as a disaster zone by exposing the 'passive hurt'¹⁴⁷ Haitians are subjected to, that is, the lack of urgency on the part of the international community. As such, the thesis directly answers the call made to Haitian Studies scholars to contribute to a brave new imagining of an empowered 'future for/with Haitians, one that can also be shared with the rest of the world.'¹⁴⁸ Literature and

¹⁴⁷ Edwidge Danticat, contesting the ways in which the trope of Haitians' resilience was used after the earthquake to justify the international community's neglect, draws attention to the long-term suffering the affected population is subject to: 'After three post-earthquake visits to Haiti, I began to ask myself if this much-admired resilience would not in the end hurt the affected Haitians. It would not be an active hurt, like the pounding rain and menacing winds from the hurricane season, the brutal rapes of women and girls in many of the camps, or the deaths from cholera. Instead, it would be a passive hurt, as in a lack of urgency or neglect. "If being resilient means that we're able to suffer much more than other people, it's really not a compliment," a young woman at the large Champs de Mars camp in downtown Port-au-Prince told me.' Edwidge Danticat, 'Lòt Bò Dlo, The Other Side of the Water', in *Haiti After the Earthquake*, ed. by Paul Farmer (New York, NY.: Public Affairs, 2011), pp. 249-59 (p. 257).

¹⁴⁸ Clitandre, p. 152.

literary analysis can directly support this process by confronting history in new ways and gesturing to new histories, both of recent disaster and of the country's longer past.

Narrative, its Values and Limitations

In its comparative treatment of narrative responses to the 2010 Haitian earthquake, this thesis responds to calls made by Haitian Studies scholars and builds upon the relational and interdisciplinary analyses of disasters and postcolonial trauma studies. My choice of narrative texts, which vary greatly in their level of formal and conceptual complexity, might be seen as one manifestation of this intentionally mixed approach. Rather than dismissing formally less nuanced narratives, the thesis sees such texts as offering valuable insight into the discursive frameworks employed to interpret the disaster. The bilingual focus of the thesis allows for a wider comparative frame and reflects the global nature of the January earthquake and creative responses to it. Whereas Martin Munro's recently published monograph focuses specifically on Haitian literature since 2010 and the ways in which '[it] has played a primary role in recording, bearing testimony to, and engaging with the social and psychological effects of the disaster,'¹⁴⁹ my analysis explores the global dimensions of the earthquake and its many narrative translations both within and outside Haiti. The thesis is attuned to the different contexts and traditions—literary, cultural, ideological—that inform each of the texts and positions the exploration of these fields within an interrogation of the extent to which narratives can account for the experience of this particular event, and of disasters more generally. A detailed analysis of these backgrounds to the disaster allows for a

¹⁴⁹ Munro, p. 2.

greater and a more nuanced reading of selected texts. For example, it brings to the fore some of the ways in which these narratives intervene, or are implicated, in the broader context of humanitarian neoliberalism that has shaped international responses to the disaster and post-earthquake relief and recovery efforts. More significantly, the thesis poses the following overarching research questions: What is the role and significance of narrativising the 2010 Haitian earthquake? What contexts and discourses shape literary forms of representation and in what ways? What insights do these narratives offer? In what ways do the texts under concern demonstrate and/or play with narrative limits? How does this knowledge transform theoretical approaches to disasters and disaster narratives? Seen as a whole, the thesis is a two-fold engagement with, on the one hand, the specific context of the 2010 earthquake and the nature of literary responses it inspired, and, on the other, methodological approaches to disasters and post-disaster cultural production.

An exploration of post-earthquake literary aesthetics is therefore a point of entry into an investigation of the wider narrative and epistemological categories of time, self, and space. These categories are building blocks of narrative and, at the same time, key elements of experience that would be radically altered by the disaster and its aftermath. The thesis emphasises this sense of interconnections between a subjective sense of the earthquake, as explored through its various narrative treatments, and the wider historical, political, and environmental contexts for this particular disaster and for disasters as a whole. While providing testimony for traumatic experience and an insight into narrative politics, disaster accounts of the kind examined here can also offer a ‘testing ground’, a way to reveal and rework the cultural framework through which we perceive disaster.¹⁵⁰ They try to grapple with

¹⁵⁰ Isak Winkel Holm, ‘Earthquake in Haiti: Kleist and the Birth of Modern Disaster Discourse’, *New German Critique*, 39 (2012), 49-66 (p. 50).

the composite nature of disasters while exposing the many contrasting meanings of the January tremors that cannot be captured by methodologically confined approaches to disasters.

Although there has been a growing critical interest in cultural (including literary) responses to the 2010 earthquake, comparatively little attention has been given to the complex narrative heterogeneity of these texts and their potential to reinforce, but also dismantle, discursive practices that have direct material effects.¹⁵¹ Yet rather than restricting itself to an analysis of whether the selected works succeed in doing one or the other, the thesis seeks to go beyond binary evaluations of post-earthquake narratives, exploring the complexity and significance of these responses as *narratives*. In their immediacy and ability to capture the multifarious nature of disasters, these early works can in many ways anticipate socio-scientific analysis, depicting realities that are otherwise omitted. At the same time, literary responses to the 2010 earthquake, while sharing some thematic preoccupations, ‘insist on the freedom to express those themes in original ways’¹⁵² that best correspond to individual authors’ aims and aspirations. They offer a means of pausing to reflect upon lived experience by forging a narrative space that brings together an awareness of the difficulty of accounting for exactly what happened and the impossibility of forgetting it.¹⁵³ In addition, such literary inventions, for Munro, constitute ‘one of

¹⁵¹ Among the most recently published critical responses are: Emmanuelle Anne Vanborre, ed., *Haiti après le tremblement de terre : la forme, le rôle et le pouvoir de l’écriture* (New York, NY.: Peter Lang, 2014); and the aforementioned monograph: Martin Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line: Haitian Literature and the Earthquake of 2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).

¹⁵² Munro, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Vanborre also sees the ability to create a space of reflection as the main task and value of literary responses to the disaster: ‘Nous ne pouvons pas effleurer la réalité du tremblement de terre, de la catastrophe, de la souffrance et de la mort. Mais la littérature offre un moyen de réfléchir, de penser, sans prétendre nous offrir la réalité de l’expérience dont nous n’avons justement pas fait l’expérience. Il est impossible de se souvenir de la réalité exacte, de l’expérience, il est également impossible de ne pas se souvenir, et la littérature seule peut maintenir cette tension impossible et nécessaire.’ We cannot touch the reality of the earthquake, catastrophe, suffering, and death. But literature gives the opportunity to reflect and think without pretending to offer the reality of an experience which we had not experienced. It is impossible to remember the exact reality or the

the most striking and important means of communicating the effects of such a disaster,¹⁵⁴ offering ‘one of the most privileged ways for the outsider in particular to begin to comprehend the experience of living in and through a time of catastrophe.’¹⁵⁵ Building on these critical insights, my analysis complicates the classic insider/outsider binary to argue for the value and importance of diasporic and ‘foreign’ narrativisations of the disaster: these, too, shape the cultural frameworks through which we apprehend such complex events.

Moreover, narrative representations of disaster, with varying levels of self-reflexivity determined partly by generic conventions, draw on their potential to shape the readers’ affective investment, an issue particularly relevant to post-earthquake writing. This can take the form of a direct appeal to the reader, as employed in Woolley’s account (Chapter Three), or can be embedded within the narrative design and the relations of empathy it establishes within the text and between the text and the reader. An analysis of narrative focalisation and voice, as well as the discursive tropes employed across these works, is central to any consideration of the varied ways in which these empathetic relations are formulated. As such, by reflecting on both the personal and collective experiences of disaster through narrative form and demonstrating the limitations of fixed victim discourses, such accounts may also contribute to personal/collective emancipation and liberation by forging non-hierarchical empathetic relations and by giving voice and agency to those directly affected by the disaster.

Furthermore, the post-earthquake accounts examined here allow for a comparative analysis of narrative form, its many complexities and the multiple

experience, it is also impossible not to remember, and only literature can maintain this impossible and necessary tension.’ Emmanuelle Anne Vanborre, ‘Haïti après le tremblement de terre: le témoignage impossible et nécessaire’, in Vanborre, pp. 3-14 (p. 12).

¹⁵⁴ Munro, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ Munro, p. 3.

contexts within which it is embedded, while also asserting the specificity of the January earthquake and the personal/collective histories that underlie it. By showing the value if also the limitations of the literary, the thesis offers a counterpoint to the theoretical, primarily socio-scientific, frameworks through which disasters have been conceptualised. It equally underlines the need for a reassessment of the theoretical paradigm of trauma studies as a framework through which to approach post-disaster narratives. At the centre of this creative interdisciplinary enquiry are selected post-earthquake accounts which bring out the heterogeneity of literary responses published in the immediate aftermath of the January disaster.

The process of narrativising the January tremors then becomes a search for a form and language which can approximate this testing experience and reflect the particularity of Caribbean histories of disaster. Kamau Brathwaite famously claimed that '*hurricane does not roar in pentameter.*'¹⁵⁶ The Barbadian poet insisted on the need to find a new form of literary representation and expression, rooted in histories of imperialism, that might reflect the ecologies and histories of the Caribbean region. Similarly, post-earthquake narratives, to a varying extent and with different results, attempt to create a narrative form which reflects and represents the experience of the disaster and the impact it had on individuals and communities locally and globally. Overlapping in some of their aims, the literary texts to be analysed in this thesis all demonstrate formal and conceptual limitations. These arise primarily from the difficulty of sharing the personal experience of the earthquake and of engaging with the multiple contexts of the event through narrative form without silencing or objectifying other victims of the disaster. The challenge, both formal and conceptual, for these narratives is to go beyond tired metaphors of Haiti's ruin and degradation,

¹⁵⁶ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984), p. 265.

to expose their dominative function, and to move towards synecdochic modes of representation of Haiti and the 2010 earthquake that position the country and its predicament as a part of a bigger whole and in terms of contiguity, proximity, and connectedness between the event, its context, and wider global history.

The texts' limitations relate to both narrative ambition and textual aesthetics. Firstly, it is important to note that while many of the texts have an autobiographical character, they are first and foremost literary *representations*; that is, they depict, mediate, and make present again a subjective experience, whether real or imagined. As such, they are necessarily partial and contestable. As attempts to write *témoignage*, at once an account of and a testimonial to¹⁵⁷ the disaster, they demonstrate the difficulty of reconciling the mix of fictional and real elements that constitutes testimonial writing: 'Le témoignage est donc constitué d'éléments opposé et irréconciliables. Il contient la possibilité de la fiction tout en l'écartant pour prendre son statut de témoignage ancré dans le récit relaté par un témoin, dans une certaine réalité vécue et rapportée.'¹⁵⁸ This tension does not necessarily preclude literary creation but rather, similarly to the conceptual 'knot' of trauma, calls for an engagement with these inescapable limitations. While negotiating these constraints, narratives of the 2010 Haitian earthquake nevertheless allow us to think about what is real, to imagine alternatives to it, and to act upon it.

At the formal level, the texts, in seeking to disentangle 'the knot' that is the experience of the earthquake, all attempt to chart a progression of events and to provide a sense of formal and thematic resolution—an impossible task. In the case

¹⁵⁷ 'témoignage', in *Reverso: Collins Online English-French Dictionary* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012) <<http://dictionary.reverso.net/french-english/t%C3%A9moignage>> [accessed 26 May 2015].

¹⁵⁸ 'The testimonial account is therefore composed of opposing and irreconcilable elements. It contains the possibility of fiction while eliminating it in order to assume its status as a testimony anchored in an account of a witness and in some lived and recounted reality.' Emmanuelle Anne Vanborre, 'Haïti après le tremblement de terre: le témoignage impossible et nécessaire', in Vanborre, pp. 3-14 (p. 4).

of post-earthquake narratives, narrative *dénouement*, where earlier enigmas are resolved and conflicts unravelled, is inherently an unreachable goal. The 2010 tremors cannot be bracketed off in this way. Neither the event nor Haiti itself can simply be ‘solved’; the disaster is still ongoing in the different forms taken by post-earthquake reconstruction. This extended temporality of the event, now manifest through its social, cultural, and ecological repercussions rather than physical aftershocks, disrupts teleological narrative designs of this kind.

In addition, narrative focalisation and voice, as reflected in some of the discursive tropes employed across the selected texts, pose an additional challenge for these narratives which, against the objectifying images of wounded black bodies and anonymous masses, aspire to provide an empowering vision of post-earthquake Haiti.¹⁵⁹ For Rodney Saint-Éloi (Chapter One) this ambition is embodied in the multi-vocal form of his narrative, while Martin chooses to shape his account as a requiem for all those whose voices will never be heard again. Laferrière (Chapter Two), for his part, opposes the view of Haiti as a ‘laboratory of trauma,’¹⁶⁰ rejects claims to narrative authority, and does not seek to impose an overarching design onto his text or to suggest a panoptic view of events.¹⁶¹ In contrast, works by

¹⁵⁹ The repeated use of these images is voyeuristic at best, as Sibylle Fischer remarks, creating an image of Haiti as *incomprehensible*. These anonymous bodies exposed to our gaze are without name, history or identity: ‘dead black bodies, wherever you look. People without names, without history, without location: mere bodies, all black, all shoveled into mass graves without much ado. So different from our protective sense of bodily integrity in the North; yet familiar, since it is Haiti: exposed to a gaze which at times borders on the pornographic, a country up for grabs.’ Sibylle Fischer, ‘Beyond Comprehension’, *Social Text: Ayiti Kraze/Haiti in Fragments*, 26 January 2010, <http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/beyond_comprehension/> [accessed 01 August 2014].

¹⁶⁰ The notion that Haiti functions as a laboratory is explicitly voiced and criticized by Dany Laferrière in *Tout bouge autour de moi* (2011): ‘Depuis que quelques psychiatres ont raconté à la télé qu’ Haïti est un bon laboratoire de recherches pour les traumatismes post-séisme, c’ est devenu l’ épice qu’ on met à toute les sauces. Tout est vu sous cet angle.’ Dany Laferrière, *Tout bouge autour de moi* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle 2011), p. 145. ‘Ever since some psychiatrists got on TV and declared that Haiti is an excellent laboratory for studying post-earthquake stress disorder, that spice is being added to every sauce. Everything is seen from that angle.’ Dany Laferrière, *The World is Moving Around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake*, trans. by David Homel (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013). [Unless otherwise stated, all translations of *Tout bouge* come from this edition].

¹⁶¹ I discuss this in detail in Chapter Two.

Marquez Stathis (Chapter Two) and Woolley (Chapter Three) do not challenge internal narrative focalisation, hoping that the thematic content, or the accompanying fundraising call in Woolley's case, will be a sufficient gesture of solidarity with the victims of the disaster. As a result, they create an objectifying distance between the voice of the matured narrator-protagonist, the degraded environment, and the impoverished people their respective narrators encounter during their stay in Haiti. Finally, Lake's fictional account (Chapter Three) adopts parallel narrative voices as a means of portraying the life of Toussaint L'Ouverture and that of a boy buried under hospital rubble in Port-au-Prince. Despite this creative play with narrative form, the text struggles to go beyond individual focalisation and to offer a meditation on the collective rather than personal dimension of these two distinct historical moments. Regardless of these key differences, all six writers analysed in the thesis, with varying levels of self-reflexivity, use their respective narrativisations of the disaster to draw attention to the scale of collective suffering caused by the event.

Dominant ideological and discursive constructions of Haiti further delimit the interventions these works want to make. One such frame, recurring especially in media analyses, is the presentation of Haiti as a 'failed state', 'unable to properly govern itself, done in by itself and acts of nature.'¹⁶² Disasters and dictators are seen as Haiti's plague. The country is presented as isolated from the rest of the world, as

¹⁶² Amy E. Potter, 'Voodoo, Zombies, and Mermaids: U.S. Newspaper Coverage of Haiti', *The Geographical Review*, 99 (2009), 208-30 (p. 208). Potter's analysis provides a study of seven hundred articles on Haiti in six major American newspapers in 2004. Robert Lawless's book is the key critical study of media portrayals of Haiti. It analyses disconnect between journalistic and ethnographic, scholarly ways of seeing Haiti—a prevailing dichotomy. See Lawless, *Haiti's Bad Press* (Rochester, VT.: Schenkman Books, 1992). Bob Corbett's website database of the same title, *Haiti's Bad Press*, takes up the challenge set by Lawless's work, 20 years after its publication, by providing a sample of recent media portrayals of Haiti which reinforce damaging stereotypes of the island. See: Bob Corbett, *Haiti's Bad Press* <<http://haitibadpress.tumblr.com/>> [accessed 25 February 2014]. For an analysis of specifically post-earthquake media response, many of which are just reiterations of earlier tropes and denigrating imagery, see also Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, 'A Man-Made Disaster: The Earthquake of January 12, 2010- A Haitian Perspective', *Journal of Black Studies*, 42 (2011), 264-275.

in need of outside interference, and as an exotic, dangerous, threatening and diseased space. The overwhelmingly negative imagery and metaphorical diction of degradation, despair, and ruination employed to depict post-earthquake Haiti has an obscuring effect; a simple image of rubble and dust that supposedly only documents the real, equally creates it—Haiti is ‘all ruin.’ In its most recent, post-earthquake reconfigurations, ‘Haiti is more or less all earthquake, all the time.’¹⁶³ In this reading, the recent disaster and its aftermath are just another example of the country’s many failings, easily fitting into the compound narrative of repeated catastrophes that, in one version or another, has long been attached to Haiti. The nation’s history is thus posited as unique, its suffering as singular, and Haitians’ resilience to it as exceptional. This insistence on Haiti’s exceptionalism, whether used positively to counter the island’s marginalisation or employed in order to underline its otherness, ultimately ‘conflates the *super-* and the *subhuman*.’¹⁶⁴ It positions Haiti and its people ‘at the extreme poles of the human condition—to the point where Haitians are excluded from existence and, to an extent, from consideration within the borders of recognizable and lovable (empathy-inducing) humanity.’¹⁶⁵ In effect, Haiti still functions as ‘the Other’, as a site of unbridgeable and incomprehensible difference. Individual and collective agency seems unattainable. In this configuration, the underlying reasons for the particularity of Haiti’s history—not least centuries of foreign intervention, ongoing ecological challenges, and internal instability linked to international economic policies—remain unacknowledged. As a result, these depictions—which still echo in some of the texts analysed here, re-affirming a vision of Haiti as an antithesis to all that is orderly and cultured—risk contributing

¹⁶³ Kaiama L. Glover, ‘New Narratives of Haiti; or, How to Empathize with a Zombie’, *Small Axe*, 16 (2012), 199-207 (p. 198).

¹⁶⁴ Glover, p. 201.

¹⁶⁵ Glover, p. 201.

to racialised discourses on the country's 'backwardness' that are then translated into 'benevolent' policies of aid and practices of international development.

This double marginalisation of Haiti is a direct translation of earlier discursive frames that link Haiti's contagious vulnerability with its traditional religious practices and continue to haunt the portrayals of country's past and present. For example, the inaccurate media coverage of AIDS in the 1980s, which portrayed Haiti as a breeding ground for the disease, permanently damaged its tourist industry and contributed to the ostracisation of Haitians, both those living in the country and in the Diaspora. These framings were reiterations of earlier tropes of cannibalism (emphasised in the nineteenth century), the communist threat (the dominant portrayal in the 1960s), Tontons Macoutes and zombies,¹⁶⁶ and the degraded image of the 'boat people'¹⁶⁷—impoverished, desperate, and anonymous masses. In addition, Haiti's indigenous religious practices, Vodou in particular, have repeatedly been invoked as proof of Haiti's 'backwardness' and reasons behind the country's many problems and its 'progress resistant culture.'¹⁶⁸ Pat Robertson's¹⁶⁹ and David Brooks's now infamous statement, made a few days after the earthquake, stuck and was quickly followed by Lawrence Harrison's equally denigrating claims in *The Wall Street Journal*,¹⁷⁰ only reiterating earlier pairings of 'backwardness' and Vodou, or 'voodoo' as they both inaccurately refer to it (see Chapter Three). This largely imagined religion, a figment of the popular imagination, 'serves as a venue

¹⁶⁶ Potter, p. 211.

¹⁶⁷ Michael J. Dash's work is a seminal study of U.S. stereotypes of Haiti and how these have prevailed in cultural and literary representations. See Michael J. Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (New York, NY.: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

¹⁶⁸ Brooks.

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, 'Pat Robertson: Haiti "Cursed" Since Pact with the Devil', *Christianity Today*, 13 January 2010 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2010/january/pat-robertson-haiti-cursed-since-pact-with-devil.html?paging=off>> [accessed 11 February 2015].

¹⁷⁰ Lawrence Harrison, 'Haiti and the Voodoo Curse: The Cultural Roots of the Country's Endless Misery', *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 February 2010 <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704533204575047163435348660>> [accessed 25 February 2014].

for the expression of more-or-less undiluted racial anxieties, manifested as lurid fantasies about black peoples’¹⁷¹ and their religiosity. This scapegoating and misuse of religion,¹⁷² which has its roots in the incomprehension of Vodou as a philosophical system, misrecognising its history and the complexity of worldview it offers, has been a recurring tactic in media representations, neoliberal analyses, and neo-evangelical re-writings of Haitian history alike (Chapter Three).¹⁷³

As will be seen in subsequent chapters, literary works can interrogate the aforementioned discursive constructions of Haiti’s wider history, culture, and politics, showing how these were employed to explain the earthquake while never fully disentangling themselves from the circumstances and conditions under which they are reproduced. However critically intended, the narratives I will analyse often reveal their complicity with dominant discursive framings of Haiti, demonstrating insufficient critical assessment of their own form, tone, and language, and sometimes falling into the re-enactment of an objectifying tourist gaze. After all, they are themselves reconstructions, instruments of control and vehicles for personal and cultural memory. In each narrative, the experience of disaster ‘as it happened’ is retrospectively revised and reinterpreted in the light of earlier, previously

¹⁷¹ Adam M. McGee, ‘Haitian Vodou and Voodoo: Imagined Religion and Popular Culture’, *Studies in Religion/ Sciences Religieuses*, 41 (2012), 231-56 (p. 232).

¹⁷² Scholars of Haitian Studies and Black Studies have fought against denigrating and inaccurate portrayals of Vodou, both before and after the 2010 earthquake. Jean Dayan in her now classic work, where she exposes many silenced voices of the past, argues for a consideration of Vodou rituals and narratives as sources of historical knowledge. See Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1998). For most recent scholarly analyses of the treatments and misuses of Vodou see Kate Ramsey, ‘Vodou, History, and New Narratives’, *Transition*, 111 (2013); Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹⁷³ Elizabeth McAllister in her recent work traces the ways in which the symbolic politico-religious ceremony at Bois Caïman in 1791 was appropriated and rewritten by contemporary neo-evangelical movements as a ‘blood pact with Satan.’ ‘[N]eo-evangelicals re-signified key symbols of the event—an oath to a divine force, blood sacrifice, a tree, and group unity—from the mythical grammar of Haitian nationalism to that of neo-evangelical Christianity. In the many ironies of this clash between the political afterlife of a slave uprising with the political afterlife of biblical scripture, Haiti becomes a nation held in captivity, and Satan becomes the colonial power who must be overthrown.’ Elizabeth McAlister, ‘From Slave Revolt to a Blood Pact with Satan: The Evangelical Rewriting of Haitian History’, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 41 (2012), 1-29 (p. 1).

inaccessible knowledge and information. In effect, the different narrative engagements analysed in this thesis all run the risk of reproducing reductive framings of Haiti, in general, and the 2010 earthquake in particular. They thus have the potential to contribute to further simplifications and mythologisations of Haiti's past and present predicament. They can create new myths or reinforce old ones. Challenging such persistent discourses represents one of the most important tasks that postcolonial disaster studies and Haitian studies set themselves—a challenge this thesis also explicitly confronts.

Thesis Structure

The rest of the thesis is split into three main comparative chapters organised around the concepts of time, space, and self. They are designed to enable a cross-disciplinary treatment of narrative responses to the earthquake as literary texts and as interventions into the discursive and imaginary constructs of Haiti. The first chapter—focusing on time, temporality, and the history of the disaster—is a comparative study of Martin's *Le Tremblement: Haïti, le 12 janvier 2010* (2010) and Saint-Éloi's *Haïti kenbe la! 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire* (2010). These vivid survivors' accounts, despite significant formal differences, both reveal the difficulties of locating temporal reference points within which to narrate the traumatic experience of the earthquake. Both view the event as the marker of a new history—one defined by a continuing present. The analysis is organised into subsections which reflect the texts' formal and thematic exploration of the questions of time and temporality: 'The Time of the Earthquake,' 'Untimely Memoirs,' 'Formal Temporalities,' 'The Timing of the Disaster,' 'Objects of Time,' 'Rewriting Narrative Ethics,' and 'New Beginnings and Untimely Futures.' These subdivisions invite us to consider the formal features these

accounts employ in order to create a linear narrative. The chapter then moves on to an analysis of a thematic engagement with the January disaster which undermines conventional narrative chronology and reveals the impossibility of achieving a sense of closure and separation from this unprecedented event. The two texts, by demonstrating their awareness of literary form and its limits and by questioning the conventional methods of temporal arrangement they use, reflect on their own inability to control a traumatising experience. They consequently challenge standard categories of linear narrative composition, indicating the difficulty of distinguishing between the event and its aftermath. The twin processes of structuring and narrativising the disaster, which are undertaken in the hope of achieving some sense of closure, become instead a re-enactment and an experience of reliving the initial event. What is revealed in the process, the chapter suggests, is the *untimely* character of the earthquake (Chambers) and of its narrative representations.

Whereas Martin's work has a distinctly personal character, Saint-Éloi's account gestures towards a collective dimension of the process of narrativisation and its ethical significance. The former expresses his solidarity by composing a narrative as a requiem for the dead victims of the disaster, those buried in mass graves and those whose bodies, deprived of individual identity and funeral rites, were never removed from the rubble or were burnt for fear of contamination. Martin's narrator hopes that by uttering the words of his prayerful address he will experience a sense of relief and consolation. No relief is possible, however, and the event comes back, refrain-like, to haunt the narrator long after his departure from Port-au-Prince. In Saint-Éloi's account, narrativisation is a double attempt to recall Haiti's recent and more distant past by remembering the events of January 12 and by undoing discursive framings of the country's history. By merging his impressions of the disaster, his childhood memories, and folk tales with others'

recollections of the event, he attempts to forge a new, multi-vocal narrative form which makes audible otherwise silenced voices. Through this formal reconfiguration, *Haiti, kenbe la!* undermines the idea of a single, authoritative account of the past and attempts to revise earlier simplistic and objectifying portrayals of Haiti and its history. Analysed together, these two narratives demonstrate the ways in which literary aesthetics can contribute to more nuanced understandings of the disaster and its duration.

The second chapter of the thesis—concentrating on place and landscape—builds on this notion of untimeliness in order to examine the different ways in which the past, present, and future of local island landscapes are reconfigured. It compares Dany Laferrière’s autobiographical work, *Tout bouge autour de moi* (2011), and Sandra Marquez Stathis’s account of her journey to Haiti in the aftermath of the event, *Rubble: The Search for a Haitian Boy* (2012). Both texts, albeit in very different ways, explore the relationship between a radically altered landscape and personal/cultural memory; and between the broader sweep of the country’s history, which can be conceived in terms of continuity in Laferrière’s memoir, and the distinct forms of depoliticising distance and nostalgia that can be found in Stathis’s travelogue. The chapter is divided into three interconnected subsections: ‘Past Landscapes’, ‘Present Devastation,’ and ‘Future Reconstructions.’ This tripartite structure reflects the analysis’s emphasis on the *temporal* dimensions of space and landscape: the histories it embodies, the tensions it exposes, and, more crucially, the possible futures it permits itself to imagine.

Rubble (2012), despite the narrator’s assertion to the contrary, re-affirms earlier categorisations of Haiti as a ‘brainteaser’¹⁷⁴ and portrays Haitian landscape in binary terms. The text struggles to engage with the complex histories of island

¹⁷⁴ Sandra Marquez Stathis, *Rubble: The Search For a Haitian Boy* (Guilford, CT.: Lyons Press, 2012), p. 219.

environments. Instead, it pairs the nostalgic sense of *changelessness* embodied in the Haitian countryside with *unchangeability*, the impossibility of any real change occurring in the future. The island is thus conceived of as an ‘other’ reality, the ‘other America,’¹⁷⁵ and is ultimately configured as marginal in geographical, epistemological, and political terms. What the account charts is a narrative of personal transformation and salvation: the narrator’s trip to Haiti saves her from her ignorance and, in turn, she can now help and rescue the titular Haitian boy from his plight. What is also preserved is the narrator’s apprehension of the island environment in terms of a confrontation between ‘infernal’ and ‘idyllic’ elements.

Tout bouge autour de moi (2011), for its part, offers a more nuanced engagement attuned to the multiple contexts behind the January earthquake. Through the fragmentary form of this collection of short *vignettes* the narrator refuses to embrace a linear narrative progression and underlines the impossibility of achieving a full grasp of the event and its natural histories. This collage highlights the fact that space and landscape are never ‘timeless’, but are deeply embedded within the full range of complex long-term transformations that characterise them. The earthquake may well have been an experience of rupture, but it is one that cannot be decontextualised and dehistoricised. Sugar-cane agriculture, deforestation, urban development, or sudden events like the January 2010 disaster are all interlinked and, together, they sculpt island landscapes. These long-term forces and sudden upheavals shed light on Haiti’s potential futures as well as its actual pasts. Haiti’s island geography has shaped both its history and politics, offering, in Michael J. Dash’s gloss, ‘easily mastered terrain that invites experiments in radical

¹⁷⁵ J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville, VA. and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

transformation;'¹⁷⁶ that appears to have 'no essential meaning but, from the outset, to be a kind of tabula rasa on which various projects, experiments, and utopias could be conceived.'¹⁷⁷ This view seems still to underlie many 'development' and 'reconstruction' initiatives, all the more so after the 2010 earthquake, which configure the country as a double site of experiment: a laboratory of trauma and a test site for models of development. By exploring the contrasts between, as well as limitations of, these two narrative responses, the chapter seeks to draw out the temporal and discursive dimensions of Haiti's landscapes.

Following on from the analysis of temporality and the relationship between landscape and individual/collective memory, the final chapter of the thesis—centring on subjectivity, agency, and voice—examines the unsettling effect of the earthquake on foundational categories of self and subjectivity in Dan Woolley's *Unshaken: Rising from the Ruins of Haiti's Hotel Montana* (2011) and Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (2012). The chapter is divided into subsections which reflect the twin analytical focus on the formal qualities of the texts and their ramifications for the wider cultural politics of the earthquake and its aftermath: 'Twinned Structures,' 'Spirited Selves: Agency and Subjectivity in *Unshaken*,' 'Twinned Selves: Zombies, Spirituality and Agency in *In Darkness*,' 'Narrative Relief: Transformation for Whom?' and 'Rising from the Rubble: The (Im)possible Opening.' In these two otherwise very different narratives, twinning functions as a structuring device that allows the narrators to draw comparisons across distinct historical periods (in Lake's novel) and various moments in personal family history in (Woolley's text). The latter's autobiographical conversion account *Unshaken* and the former's *In Darkness*, a fictional narrative of a boy trapped under the rubble, offer parallel narratives which complement each other on both formal and thematic

¹⁷⁶ Dash, p. 13.

¹⁷⁷ Dash, pp. 13-14.

levels. The chapter compares some of the ways in which the texts' respective narrators present the earthquake as a trigger for subjective transformation, whether this change is understood through a specifically religious framework or is portrayed as a general metamorphosis: the ontological process of becoming someone else. It also probes the significance of parallel narrative strands, looking in particular at Lake's analogy between his narrator's life and that of Toussaint L'Ouverture in the context of the 1804 Revolution. The analysis asks whether the narrative frames the earthquake as offering a moment of redefinition of the Haitian state—an opportunity, like the Revolution, to claim political agency—or whether it is more interested in drawing a contrast between the post-earthquake dynamics of objectification and disempowerment and the subjective and collective affirmation of 1804. Finally, the chapter examines the implications these narratives have for wider considerations of the politics of the earthquake and its aftermath.

In Woolley's conversion narrative, which situates the earthquake as part of a larger divine plan in the narrator's life, change is envisaged primarily as an individual spiritual conversion of the narrator and, as the text hopes, that of the reader. Emphasis is placed on the rebuilding of one's relationship with God rather than on the need for a structural shift in the politics of aid and development. The text's aspiration is to act as an expression of the narrator's love of God and a means of sharing this religious experience with readers. Woolley's account, which follows the basic movement from fragmentation to wholeness and darkness to light, is the key component of the book's overall fundraising design: the confessional narrative, complemented by moving photographs and the narrator's direct appeal, is designed to inspire the reader to consider supporting Compassion International (an Evangelical Christian charity for which Woolley works). The narrative's efficacy can be measured here in clear financial

terms—a translation of newly found faith and compassion. By contributing to the charity's efforts, both narrator and reader can experience a reassuring sense of relief: they have done their part to help Haiti.

Lake also employs thematic twinning as well as religious symbolism to chart the histories of 1804 and 2010 and the personal and collective processes of transformation. Contrary to Woolley's literalist uses of Christian Evangelical theology, *In Darkness* draws on the Vodou symbols of *marasa* twins and the zombie, employing them figuratively but with little attention to the markedly different ways in which they function within Haitian folklore and the popular Western imaginary. This creative interweaving of 1804 and 2010 suggests, at first, an achievable re-establishment of Haiti following the disaster. Similarly, the potentially subversive zombie metaphor can point in the direction of a collective *prise de conscience* and empowered affirmation. However, as the twinned narratives develop such collective transformative openings are effectively foreclosed. Rather, renewal and metamorphosis are construed in exclusively personal and pedagogic terms: as the novel concludes and the protagonist is freed from the rubble he commits to a life without violence and crime. He is now a new self, born again as Shorty-Toussaint L'Ouverture and resolved to start a new, better, chapter in his life. Despite its revolutionary resonance, this metaphorical moment of coming out into the light, the novel culminates with a strictly personal revelation: only the protagonist is 'in the light' whereas the collective 'we' remains indeterminately in the titular 'darkness'—a state of ghostly, marginalised existence. A comparative analysis of these two narratives of transformation thus exposes the difficulty of narrative form to envisage and enact an empowered collective aesthetic.

The three categories of time, space, and self are a point of entry into a wider examination of the three-way relationship between the 2010 Haitian

earthquake, aesthetic convention, and the conceptual frameworks used to explain the earthquake's history and its individual and collective impact. These narratives complicate our understanding of such events, pointing to the difficulty of providing a coherent interpretation of the disaster without falling back on disempowering discursive framings of Haiti. At the same time, they emphasise the need to narrativise disaster and to examine its impact on space and self while attempting to forge empathetic relations that go beyond the reading experience. The thesis concludes with a reflection on the wider methodological implications of the textual analyses offered in preceding chapters, particularly in terms of how insights gained from literary comparisons might be incorporated into wider considerations of narrative theory and postcolonial disasters and their aftermath. This includes an emphasis on the importance of post-earthquake literary production, although this is bound by its own limitations, and on its potential to offer insights into the individual experience of the event as well as the embedded character of the 2010 disaster. The thesis ends by providing a brief reassessment of disaster as a conceptual category and the significance it bears for envisaging modes of empowered reconstruction and solidarity.

Chapter 1: Time and Temporality in Lionel Édouard-Martin's *Le Tremblement: Haïti, le 12 janvier* and Rodney Saint-Éloi's *Haïti kenbe la! 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire*.

Personne ne sait plus si le présent est un passé décomposé.

Tout le monde a la certitude que le présent est un prétexte à la catastrophe.¹

The Time of the Earthquake

Defined both as a moment of rupture, a marker of new history, and as another example of continuing historical violence, the latest Haitian earthquake is often encapsulated in the symbolic date of its occurrence: January 12th 2010. After the first tremors, in the six weeks following the disaster there were approximately fifty-nine aftershocks of magnitude 4.5 or greater; sixteen of these were magnitude 5.0 or greater. The most powerful aftershock, registered at magnitude 6.0, occurred seven minutes after the main tremors on January 12th.² The sense of temporal precision conveyed by these figures contrasts with subjective perceptions of the event and its duration. The disjunction between chronology and temporally shifting experiences of the catastrophe is at the centre of two survivor narratives written immediately after the earthquake: *Le Tremblement: Haïti, le 12 janvier 2010* (2010), by Lionel-Édouard Martin, and *Haïti*

¹ 'No one knows anymore if the present is a present imperfect [a play on the name of the tense passé composé-present perfect]. Everyone is convinced that the present is only an excuse for a disaster.' [unless otherwise stated translations are my own]. Rodney Saint-Éloi, *Haïti kenbe la! 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Éditions Michel Lafon, 2010), p. 66.

² 'In the time period since the earthquake's origin at 2010-01-12 21:53 to 2010-02-23 17:00 UTC, the USGS NEIC has located 59 aftershocks of magnitude 4.5 or greater. Sixteen of these aftershocks have magnitudes of 5.0 or greater. The two largest aftershocks were magnitude 6.0 and 5.9. The M 6.0 aftershock occurred 7 minutes after the main shock on January 12 and the M 5.9 event occurred at 11:03 UTC on January 20.' U.S. Geological Survey, *Magnitude 7.0 Haiti* (U.S. Geological Survey: National Earthquake Information Center, 2013) <<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2010/us2010rja6/#summary>> [accessed 02 April 2013].

kenbe la! 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire (2010), by Rodney Saint-Éloi. Both texts, on a formal and thematic level, explore questions of time and temporality as they try to present an overwhelming event that escapes easy temporal categorisation. The two post-earthquake narratives I want to analyse here play with notions of narrative time and temporality—and related ideas of untimeliness, recalling the past, and temporal suspension—in their attempts to account for the overwhelming experience of the disaster.³ While trying to convey the immediacy of the incident through their form, these narratives equally recognise that memories of what happened are filtered through several layers of mediation.

Time, temporality, and narrative are critical concepts that have long been subject to literary-theoretical debate. At its most basic level, narrative can be described in terms of a story which has the core properties of an event or events, which proceeds chronologically through time, and which is conveyed through some representational medium.⁴ A similar if more abstract definition is given by Susan Onega and José Ángel García Landa, for whom narrative is ‘the semiotic representation of a series of events

³ In their attempt to comprehend traumatic experience, numerous post-earthquake narratives also employ religious diction which has complex theological connotations. Several of the texts analysed in the thesis exemplify the multiple uses of theologically resonant language. In *Le Tremblement*, for example, the vocabulary of regeneration and redemption, which is rooted in the concept of Messianic history, is employed to honour the deaths of the disaster victims. The narrator openly states that he wants to transform his account into a prayer (a claim analysed in depth later in this chapter), and throughout the text he engages with the religious character of the form. Another use of religious diction is exemplified in Dan Woolley’s *Unshaken*—a survivor account which will be analysed in Chapter 3. Here, the narrator uses religious discourse to frame the experience of the disaster within a conversion narrative. The concepts of memory, remembrance, testimony and witness, which are key terms in relation to post-seismic texts, also have complex religious provenance. Kerwin Lee Klein emphasises that not enough attention is given to the theological origins of these terms, which are so prominent in current scholarship and popular discourse: ‘In academic and popular discourse alike, *memory*, and its associated key words continue to invoke a range of theological concepts as well as vague connotations of spirituality and authenticity. Authors writing in secular academic contexts necessarily trade upon these associations but seldom make them explicit. Part of that trade stands upon the place of remembrance in Judeo-Christian tradition – “*Zakhor*” (remember) in the Old Testament, and “Do this in remembrance of me,” in the New.’ Kerwin Lee Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse’, *Representations: Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering*, 69 (2000), 127-50 (p. 130).

⁴ H. Porter Abbott, ‘Narrative’, in *The Encyclopedia of The Novel*, ed. by Peter Melville Logan (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), pp. 533-40 (p. 533).

meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way.’⁵ Story, temporality, and causality are the key elements of narrative. Story is not the same thing as narrative, ‘for where story events always proceed in chronological sequence, they can be narrated out of chronological sequence.’⁶ This key differentiation, which is based on temporal difference between the occurrence of events and the ways in which they are accounted for, is shared by otherwise very different theoretical approaches to time and narrative. Despite the lack of critical consensus on the myriad ways in which novels organise time, most theoretical frameworks of analysis tend to follow Gérard Genette’s distinction between *histoire* (story), for the mere chronology of events; *récit* (narrative), for the temporal order in which they are arranged; and *discours* (narrating), for the act of telling as represented or implied in the fiction.⁷ In this framework, time can be compared to ‘*histoire*’, ‘story’; while temporality, the sum of narrative techniques for representing time, is equated with ‘*discours*’, ‘narrating.’ Genette compares the relationship between the two under the categories of order, duration, and frequency.⁸ Order refers to the relation between ‘the chronological sequence of the story events and the sequence in which they appear in the discourse’; duration denotes ‘the relation between the length of time an event takes and the amount of space given to it in the novel’; and frequency is the ‘relation between the number of times an event occurs and the number of times it is narrated.’⁹ Narrative time can also be characterised in terms of anti-transience, anti-sequence, and anti-irreversibility (Phelan). Narratives such as the two *récits* analysed here, when understood in relation to the transience of successive moments measured against objective time, i.e. a regular sequence of past-present-future, offer numerous techniques to recall the past, to make it present again, and to elongate, suspend, and

⁵ Susan Onega and José Ángel García Landa, *Narratology: An Introduction* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 3.

⁶ Abbott, p. 534.

⁷ Catherine Gallagher, ‘Time’, in *The Encyclopedia of The Novel*, pp.811-17 (p. 813).

⁸ James Phelan, ‘Narrative Technique’, in *The Encyclopedia of The Novel*, pp. 549-53 (p. 550).

⁹ Phelan, p. 550.

disrupt the presentation and experience of the passing of time.

To a varying extent, theirs is a work of narrative reconstruction marked by both temporal and spatial displacement: Martin composes his account in the week following the earthquake as he moves between Fort-de-France (Martinique) and Paris (France), whereas Saint-Éloi completes his in June 2010 in Sauve (Canada). This remove from the ‘here and now’ of the disaster adds a layer of mediation to the texts that raises wider questions about the privileged status of two diasporic writers whose non-resident status, in this particular context, would help to save their lives. However, their works also complicate easy binaries between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives—a categorisation which often equates the physical proximity or national belonging of the author with the authenticity and ethical value of the text. Such simplistic divisions are inadequate reflections of the experience of displacement that is shared by many writers and intellectuals from Haiti and the wider Caribbean. Nor do they capture the complexity of affective and material ties between Haiti and the *Dizyèm Depatamen* (10th Department)—a neologism for the Haitian *dyaspo* or *diaspora* (diaspora).¹⁰ These writers’ is an experience of a double displacement, of being a diaspora within a diaspora as ‘descendants of Africans who were displaced by the slave trade, who then reconstituted themselves into a new multi-ethnic African nationality (and nation state), and who were dispersed again by poverty and political turmoil.’¹¹ No longer living with their friends and relatives in Haiti, those in exile continue to contribute to the country’s

¹⁰ Up until 2003 Haiti was divided into nine departments: Sud-Est, Sud, Ouest, Nord-Ouest, Nord-Est, Nord, Grand’ Anse, Centre Hinche, and Artibonite. The Diaspora was then referred to as ‘the Tenth Department.’ In 2003, an additional department was designated in mainland Haiti, Nippes. Following violent manifestations and road blockages in September 2014, there have been calls for a further decentralisation and an increase in the number of departments from ten to fourteen or even sixteen. As of 2015 there are still ten departments. Frantz Duval, ‘Editorial’, *Le Nouvelliste*, 29 September 2014 <<http://lenouvelliste.com/lenouvelliste/article/136410/Le-nouvel-ordre-geographique-et-administratif-dHaiti.html>> [accessed 17 November 2014].

¹¹ Gage Averill, “*Mezanmi, Kouman Nou Ye? My Friends, How Are You?*” Musical Constructions of the Haitian Transnation’, in *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. by Jennifer C. Post (New York, NY. and London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 261-73 (p. 261).

development and the wellbeing of those they left behind through remittances.¹²

Whereas Saint-Eloi directly meditates on the author-narrator's diasporic position, Martin contemplates his own sense of dislocation as shaped by the long-term affective ties he has to Haiti.

Clearly, any close analysis of Martin's and Saint-Éloi's works, and of their respective engagement with time and temporality after the earthquake, needs to account for the broader historical and material conditions that have shaped their respective experiences of diasporic displacement and, with it, diasporic privilege (see Introduction). Saint-Éloi, who left Haiti for Canada in 2001, writes mainly from the position of a diasporic writer as 'semi-insider.'¹³ Martin's life is also characterised by displacement, if of a different kind: originally from France, he lived for many years in Germany and Morocco before moving to Martinique—still a French overseas department and thus the European Union's outermost region—where he currently resides. Both writers travelled to Haiti to participate in the literary festival *Les Étonnants Voyageurs*, which was due to take place in Port-au-Prince from January 14th to 17th 2010. Martin was in Haiti on one of his regular visits to the island, while for Saint-Éloi, this was an occasion to meet some of his fellow writers (for example Dany Laferrière, whose work is discussed in the next chapter) and to visit family relatives who still live there. The earthquake struck

¹² Most recent estimates suggest that 'Haitians in the U.S. remit about \$2 billion a year—more than triple actual international aid disbursements. 'Even before the earthquake, 'remittances from the Haitian diaspora accounted for about 20 percent of Haiti's GNP, close to double its total export earnings, and higher than Haiti's total foreign aid receipts.' Tatiana Wah, 'Engaging the Haitian Diaspora: Emigrant Skills and Resources are Needed for Serious Growth and Development, Not Just Charity', *Cairo Review*, 9 (2013), 56-69 (p. 64).

¹³ Graham Huggan usefully employs Rob Nixon's concept of the 'semi-insider' to analyse travel narratives and the ambivalent position the narrator within these works: 'In classically Orientalist travel narratives, the narrator operates as an enabling interlocutor, usually for the purpose of peddling stereotypes under the guise of supplying cultural information to the West. A variant on this is the type of account produced by what Rob Nixon calls a "semi-insider," such as someone born and bred in the Orient, but reporting back on it from and for the West.' Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V.S. Naipul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 28, in Graham Huggan, *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization* (Ann Arbor, MI.: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 162-3.

while Saint-Éloi and Laferrière were having lunch at Hotel Karibe soon after the two authors' arrival in Port-au-Prince. Martin's *Le Tremblement: Haïti, le 12 janvier 2010* (henceforth *Le Tremblement*) and Saint-Éloi's *Haïti kenbe la! 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire* (henceforth, *Haïti kenbe la!*) are wide-ranging accounts of this violently interrupted journey. Neither was badly hurt, at least physically, in the earthquake. This sense of the arbitrariness of survival, partly due to their location, and the resulting obligation to witness it on behalf of those who died, are central to their respective narratives.

Untimely Memoirs

Through their emphasis on discontinuity and non-linear time, *Le Tremblement* and *Haïti, kenbe la!* both operate as memoirs of the earthquake and its aftermath. The split category of memoir, which 'refers to writing as a process of note-taking and to a piece of writing as a finished product at the same time,'¹⁴ captures well the fractured nature of these two post-earthquake narratives. Memoir has long been considered in literary criticism as being inferior to autobiography and as a secondary form of mass-market life writing. However, as Lee Quinby and Julie Rak among others suggest, memoir is a distinct genre that preceded autobiography by more than two centuries: *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* 'lists the date of the first appearance of the singular *memoir* as 1567 and of the plural *memoirs* as 1659. *Autobiography* makes its first appearance in 1809.'¹⁵ Moreover, in contrast to autobiography's discursive unity, memoir is a hybrid form, representing an uneasy ensemble of several conflicting

¹⁴ Julie Rak, 'Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity', *Genre*, 36 (2004), 305-26 (p. 319).

¹⁵ Lee Quinby, 'The Subject of Memoirs: The Woman Warrior's Technology of Ideographic Selfhood', in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 297-321 (p. 298).

discourses. This marked formal difference reflects different ways of envisaging the self in these two genres; for against the subjectivity of autobiography, ‘which is presumed to be unitary and continuous over time, memoirs (particularly in their collective form) construct a subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous.’¹⁶ Heterogeneity and discontinuity are likewise amplified in the respective narratives’ treatment of time and temporality. Varying in the temporal scope of their engagement, and inhabiting a different relationship to Haiti and its history, the two accounts confront the difficulty of distinguishing between the earthquake and its aftermath while testifying to the impossibility of confining the traumatic event within standard narrative categories. Linear perceptions of time, i.e. those divided into clearly distinguishable concepts of past, present, and future, are directly challenged by the traumatic experience of the earthquake, which inhabits all of these temporal categories at once while also inaugurating a new division of time into ‘before’ and ‘after’. As we will see, the polyphonic and unfinished character of memoir is highly relevant to these two post-disaster narratives that freely merge stories, reminiscences, and their own personal experiences along with those of other survivors, with the aim of creating a mosaic-like narrative that is appropriate to the broken nature of events. The kind of narrative linearity that usually accompanies autobiographical accounts is an unattainable goal; the traumatising roar of *goudougoudou* (the unearthly sound made by the tremors) permanently disrupts any attempt to account for it as just one in a sequence of many life-events.

In what follows, a comparative analysis of *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti, kenba la!* will allow me to engage with the different narrative methods these texts use to recreate their authors’ respective experiences of the disaster and its aftermath. But as I will also show, the two texts, in demonstrating their awareness of the limits of narrative form and

¹⁶ Quinby, p. 298.

by questioning the conventional temporal categories it uses, reflect on their inability to master a traumatic experience that can never fully be brought under control. The interpretative approach adopted here responds to the multiform aesthetics of two texts, which cannot be accounted for through only one critical lens. Accordingly, the chapter interweaves insights from recent postcolonial reformulations of trauma theory with an analysis of formal and thematic features in the two post-earthquake narratives, and examines their ethical aims as well as the highly specific Haitian historical context with which they engage. In distinguishing between the formal and thematic layers of each narrative, my wider aim is to highlight the tensions that exist within *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti ,kenbe la!*, and in disaster narratives more broadly, as they attempt to confront the experience of an overwhelming event. I will suggest that it is above all the event's *untimely* character that defines Saint-Éloi's and Martin's accounts of the earthquake, and which informs the ethical interventions that both authors are trying—not entirely successfully—to make.

The structure of the chapter reflects the two-fold nature of its enquiry into time and temporality. The first part, 'Untimely Survivorhood,' will examine formal aspects of the texts, and the second will provide a comparative thematic analysis. I will begin by engaging with the Nietzschean concept of 'untimeliness', which Ross Chambers translates into the contemporary context of AIDS narrative, and with the interlinked notions of 'aftermath' and 'surviving trauma,' all three of which are integral elements of the interpretative framework I will be adopting here. Following on from this theoretical outline, in 'Formal Temporalities' I will explore formal ways of engaging with the concepts of continuity, duration, and sequence in the aftermath of the earthquake. Both texts, I will suggest, are permeated by a tension between the devastating experience of the event as a moment of *rupture* and the reassuring sense of temporal *continuity* that

their respective accounts hope to sustain. As I will demonstrate, the works' formal narrative methods, notably their attempts at a chronological presentation of events, only succeed in creating a simulacrum of control over the disaster and its aftermath. More specifically, such means reveal a state of 'surviving trauma' that testifies to the texts' untimely character. The use of deixis and temporal markers, e.g. times and dates, will also be examined since these are formal ways of fashioning a narrative chronology and signs of an attempt to bring about narrative closure and, with it, a measure of psychological relief. Throughout the analysis, particular attention will also be given to the texts' literariness and their self-reflexive awareness of the narrative form they take—and its limitations. These elements are integral to Martin's and Saint-Éloi's respective formulation of an ethics of 'aftermath writing' (Chambers): the search for a narrative mode that responds to the urgency of witnessing while conveying the massive scale of the event, its untimely character, and the personal and collective agony it leaves behind.

Following on from the examination of formal components of the texts, the second part of the chapter (consisting of the sections 'The Timing of the Disaster', 'Objects of Time', and 'Histories of the Past') explores the different ways in which they frame the event in relation to personal and collective history while attempting to forge an ethics of post-disaster writing. Martin focuses, to a greater extent than Saint-Éloi, on the physical and psychological effects of the earthquake and envisages the collective experience of the tremors in terms of a shared state of untimely survivorhood. *Hàïti, kenbe la!*, for its part, presents the event within the wider context of national history, which is depicted by the narrator as a series of metaphorical earthquakes. It examines, more than does *Le Tremblement*, the significance of the disaster as a historical event. January 12th 2010 was indeed a singular occurrence, yet at the same time one that was inseparable from the distinct and multi-layered contexts in which it happened. Both

works, in different ways and to varying degrees, underline that extended and always necessarily *collective* temporality that connects the narrator-survivor to other victims of the disaster, and to the wider global histories in which the event is entangled. This emphasis on connectedness challenges both positive and negative claims of the earthquake's 'uniqueness' (see Introduction) and forms a basis for the texts' ethical intervention. Theirs, I will suggest, is an ethics of relation based on the simultaneous impossibility of restricting the disaster to its personal and emotional impact, and of absenting oneself from the natural, political, and cultural histories it enfolds.

As both authors show, however, the impact of the earthquake is not limited to the past, but also manifests itself in the ways in which their respective accounts envisage the possibility of a 'new history' marked by the disaster and its aftermath. This is explored in two closing sections: 'Rewriting as Intervention' and 'New Beginnings and Untimely Futures.' In *Le Tremblement*, the experience of the event gives rise to a subjective perception of temporality as suspended. Despite the seemingly chronological nature of the account, past, present, and future no longer form a linear sequence; rather, the passing of time is viewed as a dreaded, because inescapable, repetition of the original catastrophe. The narrator hopes that by translating the event into a structured narrative form—one folding together memoir and prayer—he can achieve a sense of release from the traumatic experience. However, release proves unattainable, and he is forced repeatedly to relive the experiences of January 12th. *Haiti, kenbe la!*, for its part, presents the future as the possibility of a new beginning, however hard this might be, and an affirmation of individual and collective agency against objectifying portrayals of Haitians as perpetually immobilised in a state of victimhood: victims of ongoing exploitation, political dictatorships, and their own capricious nature. As such, the 'new

histories' these authors write partake in their attempt to forge a committed narrative aesthetic.

Together, the two texts interweave an enquiry into the limits, both formal and conceptual, of disaster narratives with an exploration of the ethics of their respective responses to the 2010 earthquake. As post-earthquake accounts of the country's recent and more distant past that are critically attuned to their own limitations, they effect the work of double recall as *remembering* and *reclaiming*, calling into question and transforming the ways in which Haiti's history has been discursively framed and suggesting, instead, collectively empowering ways of narrativising the island's past. This commitment to forging new forms of writing the disaster is rooted in an acknowledgement that, like other untimely events, the earthquake cannot and should not be forgotten.¹⁷ Immersed in the 'after' of the event, these works realise their duty to witness to the scale of the catastrophe for the sake of all those lost under the rubble. But whereas Martin responds with an ethics of personal remembrance—one that accepts that the initial event needs to be relived for the sake of all its victims—Saint-Éloi suggests an ethics of *collective* memory that counteracts earlier silencings of Haiti's recent and more distant past.

¹⁷ Here, I am referring to the title of Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980) and the ways in which the text can be productively re-read in the context of contemporary ecological crises, such as those directly preceding and shaping the January earthquake, since, in Joshua Schuster's gloss, 'to engage with contemporary ecology one must also engage with disaster' (Schuster, p. 164). The writing of the disaster contemplates the punctual yet embedded nature of disasters: '[d]isaster is not just loss, then, but an event that marks a catastrophic or irrevocable change in a system that was implicit in the system to begin with and that effectuates a new kind of system' (Schuster, p.166). Narrative responses to the January earthquake, such as those analysed in Chapter Two, attempt to grapple precisely with this composite character of disasters as an irrevocable change yet one that 'effectuates a new kind of system': here, a complex post-earthquake island ecology. Joshua Schuster, 'How to Write the Disaster', *The Minnesota Review*, 83 (2014), 163-71 (p. 164, p. 166).

Untimely Survivorhood

The earthquake's echoing presence gives an untimely character to both Martin's and Saint-Éloi's narrative reconstructions of the disaster. The concept of 'untimeliness,' usually associated with Friedrich Nietzsche (e.g. his *Untimely Meditations* (1873-6)), is brought into a contemporary context by Ross Chambers in his 2004 study *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting*. In Nietzsche's case, untimeliness denotes the mode of anachronism that he sees as characterising critical thinking. For the German philosopher, 'a genuinely critical form of thinking must be *unzeitgemäss*—untimely, inopportune, unmodern—because it demands a rejection of everything governed by fashion.'¹⁸ As Daniel Breazeale suggests, '[w]hereas the slave public opinion strives always to be "timely", a declared critic of the same will instead flaunt his deliberate "untimeliness."¹⁹ Hence untimeliness is 'doubly anachronistic' as, in the first instance, it 'entails a perspective informed by the past' and, in the second, it is 'resolutely future-orientated, as can be seen from Nietzsche's overriding concern with cultural renewal and rebirth.'²⁰ Untimeliness as an example of temporal disorder—as anachronism—brings together the categories of past and future. Thanks to its dual temporal character, it avoids the rigidity associated with linearity and hierarchy that are central to many literary narratives.

Contemporary uses of the 'untimely', including Chambers', draw on an overriding sense of discontinuity and disruption of the linear relationship between conventional categories of time in the context of what he calls 'aftermath writing.' Aftermath writing signifies 'the breakdown of reassuring categories that place trauma

¹⁸ Helen Groth and Paul Sheehan, 'Introduction: Timeliness and Untimeliness', *Textual Practice*, 26 (2012), 571-85 (pp. 571-2).

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. xlvi.

²⁰ Groth and Sheehan, p. 572.

and survival of trauma in separate compartments,²¹ and testifies to the return and repetition of the initial trauma at a time when it is supposedly over. Untimeliness, in this context, denotes the impossibility of differentiating between the trauma of the event and its aftermath while expressing the difficulty of ‘returning “from” trauma to untraumatized life.’²² Untimeliness, which is at once a state of separation and an awareness of co-presence, defines the experience of survivorhood that the narrators of both *Le Tremblement* and *Haïti, kenbe la!* inhabit. Survivorhood is an experience of “surviving trauma,”²³ understood both as an affirmation of one’s survival of a traumatic event and as a registering of the ‘fact of the pain’s surviving into the present, the fact that one has not survived it so much as one is (still) surviving it.’²⁴ As a consequence, aftermath narratives are accounts of “surviving trauma” and of the experience of ‘trauma’s not being over when one wishes it to be in the past.’²⁵ Aftermath writing, Chambers suggests, acts as the ‘after-math of an initial “math” (the etymological metaphor is of a second mowing of grass in the same season as the first):’²⁶ it is ‘a repetition—in transformed guise—of the initial traumatic event.’²⁷ Aftermath writing thus has a double character. On the one hand, it involves the exploration of survival as an experience of untimeliness, i.e. ‘of a baffling experience of time as, conjointly, the separation of past and present and their continuing copresence.’²⁸ On the other, it constitutes ‘an art of untimely intervention, seeking to introduce an awareness of untimeliness into a culture that prefers to live in time as if the

²¹ Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. xxii.

²² Chambers, p. xxii.

²³ Chambers, p. xxi.

²⁴ Chambers, p. xxi.

²⁵ Chambers, p. xxi.

²⁶ Chambers, p. xxi.

²⁷ Chambers, p. xxi.

²⁸ Chambers, p. 191.

past had no place in the present and did not haunt (i.e., inhabit) it.’²⁹

Furthermore, aftermath writing has both a personal and a collective dimension as well as strong religious connotations. In Chambers’ words, it registers

[an] urge to witness, to awaken those who sleep, and to reawaken them, with a message of extremity that has trouble getting through [...] but does not lose its power to interrupt, disturb, trouble, and remind the sleepers (an anamnesis or counterforgetting in the strictest sense) of what they (we) had never ceased to know.³⁰

This process of awakening is an act of breaking the ‘cultural haze’ created by a sense of relative comfort—of ‘being comfortably at home, well fed’³¹—and of being at a remove from the extremity of the disaster to which witness narratives testify. As such, aftermath writing is a manifestation of an individual urge to share an experience which, despite countervailing attempts, cannot be classified as ‘over.’ Chambers characterises this process of counter-forgetting as ‘anamnesis’, pointing at the same time to the potentially religious character of the act of witnessing. ‘Anamnesis’ comes from the Greek and has two seemingly contradictory meanings. In its wider, etymological sense, it refers to ‘[a] calling to mind, remembrance, or memorial.’³² Yet in its theological context, it ‘is not the mere mental recall of something past, over and done with, nor is it the fond recollection of something or someone absent.’³³ Rather, it is the *making present*, in the Christian liturgical context of an acknowledgement of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist.³⁴ This theological dimension to the act of recollection becomes apparent in Martin’s work, which draws on requiem and frequently uses liturgical references.³⁵ In

²⁹ Chambers, p. 191.

³⁰ Chambers, pp. viii-ix.

³¹ Chambers, p. viii.

³² Allan Bouley, ‘Anamnesis’, in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Joseph, A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), pp. 16-7 (p.16).

³³ Bouley, in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, pp.16-7 (p.17).

³⁴ Paul VI, ‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium’, (1963) <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html> (para. 102 of 130).

³⁵ These include: the use of diction with strong religious and liturgical resonance such as ‘le saveur,’ ‘notre saveur’ (‘the saviour,’ ‘our saviour’ (p.71)); references to Christ’s Last Supper, ‘la cène’

so doing, Martin hopes to transform his account into a prayer—both an offering for and a conversation with the victims of the disaster—as I will show more fully below.

In effect, aftermath writing does not make claims to total control over haunting memories. Instead, it bears witness to ‘[the] aporia of art and to its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it.’³⁶ It is an attempt to respond to the demand of witnessing on behalf of the victims of the event, ‘but in a mode other than talking (representing).’³⁷ *Le Tremblement* and *Haïti, kenbe la!*, on both formal and thematic levels, are defined by this two-fold experience of untimeliness as a joint apprehension of temporal separation and co-presence synonymous with a state of *hauntedness*: ‘experience of trauma as that which fails to end, but continues to repeat and to return, even when it is supposedly “over.”’³⁸ The twin processes of structuring and narrativising the disaster, initially undertaken in the hope of achieving some sense of closure, become instead a re-enactment: a painful experience of reliving the initial event.

Formal Temporalities

The tensions between conventional chronology and the subjective experience of time in the aftermath of the earthquake are first visible in the formal aspects of the two

(p.107); and the reference to Jesus’ s act of breaking the bread and sharing the cup of wine with his disciples: ‘Prenez et mangez-en tous [...]. Car ceci est mon corps [...]. Car ceci est mon sang’ (‘Take, eat; this is my body’ and ‘ for this is my blood’ (Mt, 26:26-29) (pp.65-6). Both the breaking of bread and the Last Supper are signs that anticipate the sacrament of the Eucharist, ‘ an action of thanksgiving to God [which]. recalls the Jewish blessings that proclaim [...]. God’ s works: creation, redemption and sanctification’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 298, para. 1328). In this particular context, these references add to the character of the memoir as a prayer and an offering for the victims of the disaster that, in contrast to Woolley’ s narrative (Chapter Three), refuses to be centred on the narrator’ s own suffering. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Chapman, 1994), p. 298.

The latter references, which follow the biblical wording and that of the Catholic Mass, are used in a dialogue between the narrator, Dany Laferrière, and Rodney Saint-Éloi as they share the food they managed to buy from a shop that was still open.

³⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the Jews”*, trans. by Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis, MN. and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 47.

³⁷ David Carroll, ‘The Memory of Devastation and the Responsibilities of Thought: “And let’ s not talk about that”’, in *Heidegger and “the Jews”*, pp. vii-xxix (p. xi).

³⁸ Chambers, p. 190.

narratives. Titles, chapter breaks, temporal markers and epigraphs are all employed in both accounts to signal attempts to control the recent traumatic experience. Lionel-Édouard Martin's seemingly ordered diary-form *Le Tremblement: Haïti, le 12 janvier 2010*, for example, tries chronologically to recreate the narrator's first-hand experience of the earthquake and the three days following it. However, the title of the work already contrasts the precise time and place of the event with the undefined concept of 'le tremblement'—'the tremors.' The multiple meanings of the word 'tremblement' undermine the initial impression of precision and challenge any sense of a clearly identifiable narrative with a marked beginning and end. 'Tremblement' in its dictionary sense combines continuity and interruption, and can simultaneously mean '[s]uccession rapide de petites secousses, de petits mouvements d'oscillation;' ³⁹ '[v]acillement, variation rapide d'intensité'⁴⁰; and '[b]rusque variation dans la hauteur, l'intensité, sous l'effet d'une sensation, d'une émotion.'⁴¹ In fact the earthquake, 'le tremblement de terre,' defined as 'un [e]nsemble de secousses plus ou moins fortes imprimées à l'écorce terrestre, qui apparaît toujours à une certaine profondeur à partir d'un epicentre,'⁴² is only one of many different kinds of both literal and metaphorical disruptions and tremors—'tremblements'—in the text. The title thus brings to the fore the tension between the idea of a singular temporal moment and a repeated occurrence that marks the subjective perception of the earthquake throughout Martin's memoir.

The full title of Saint-Éloi's work—*Haïti, kenbe la! 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire*⁴³—also plays, albeit in a different way, with the notion of continuity and the contrasting brevity of the event which, according to the author, lasted only 35

³⁹ 'a series of minor shocks, small swaying movements' in 'tremblement', in *Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé* (2012) <<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/tremblement>> [accessed 08 December 2012]. [Unless otherwise stated all translations are my own].

⁴⁰ 'swaying, rapid change'

⁴¹ 'sudden change in height, intensity as a result of a sensation or emotion'

⁴² 'a set of tremors of varying magnitude which are a result of release of energy in the Earth's crust'

⁴³ *Haïti, Never Give Up! 35 Seconds and My Country to Rebuild*. [Unless otherwise stated all translations are my own].

seconds. The title combines an exhortation to the country, ‘Haiti, never give up!’⁴⁴ with an expression of Saint-Éloi’s personal relationship, which is all the more significant in the context of his own diasporic position, to his homeland. In addition, the short duration of the disaster is contrastively juxtaposed with the sense of continuity indicated by the verb ‘reconstruire,’ which can mean ‘[c]onstruire de nouveau un édifice, un ouvrage d’art’ or, alternatively, ‘[s]oumettre une œuvre à un nouveau plan, assembler des éléments de manière différente pour refaire un ensemble.’⁴⁵ Both meanings of the word accentuate the link between past and present and suggest the process of re-assembling existing elements. In this way, the title of Saint-Éloi’s account implies that the event’s unprecedented impact, and the sense of new history it potentially inaugurates, cannot be separated from the country’s past.

The chapter breaks in *Le Tremblement* and *Haïti, kenbe la!* also significantly contribute to the creation of narrative temporality by indicating different ways of framing the event and varying levels of retrospective re-ordering. Allowing the narrator ‘to play games on a metafictional level,’⁴⁶ chapter breaks permit him at the same time to ‘expound at length on generic, aesthetic and metanarrative matters.’⁴⁷ In Martin’s text, each entry is marked by a subsequent date (‘Le 12 janvier’, ‘Le 13 janvier’, etc.), beginning with the fateful day the earthquake struck. This simple chronological ordering lends a sense of urgency to the account and gives the narrative a highly personal character. *Haïti kenbe la!*, unlike Martin’s memoir, is divided into twelve chapters, each with its own descriptive title, for example ‘Le terre a fait *goudou-goudou*,’⁴⁸ which

⁴⁴ Literally, ‘Haiti, withhold’.

⁴⁵ ‘to construct anew a building, a piece of art’ or ‘to subject a work to a new plan, reassemble the components in a new way in order to recreate a whole’ in ‘reconstruire’, in *Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé* (2012) <<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/reconstruire>> [accessed 08 December 2012].

⁴⁶ Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, trans. by Patricia Häusler-Greenfield and Monika Fludernik (London and New York, NY.: Routledge, 2009), p. 24.

⁴⁷ Fludernik, p. 24.

⁴⁸ ‘The earth sounded *goudou-goudou*...’

reveals the act of retrospective ordering in the light of new, previously inaccessible knowledge. Although the first chapter title establishes the earthquake as a definitive beginning, subsequent chapter titles—for example ‘Les saveurs de l’enfance,’ ‘Les jours d’après’⁴⁹—do not convey the linear succession of events that is suggested in *Le Tremblement*. Rather, they implicitly comment on the form of testimonial memoir as a mixed-mode collection of interweaving narratives: the narrator’s account of the earthquake, his memories of childhood folk tales, and personal reflections on the country’s past. Varying in their construction of narrative temporality, the two accounts point to the limitations of both approaches: neither linear chronology nor retrospective ordering can fully capture the untimely experience of ‘that thing,’ *bagay la*.⁵⁰

Other extratextual features, such as epigraphs, equally contribute to the creation of narrative temporality in terms of disjointed chronology and moment of writing. At the same time, they highlight the process of narrativisation as a link between the past, which is understood both as the experience of the disaster and in terms of wider national history, and the present of survivorhood that the narrators inhabit. *Le Tremblement* opens with two epigraphs: one from Aimé Césaire’s narrative poem *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939) and the other from part III, ‘*Conversation entre les dormeurs moribonds*,’⁵¹ of Jean-Pierre Duprey’s *Trois Feux et une tour* (1950):

... comme la pénétrance d’une guêpe apocalyptique.⁵²

⁴⁹ ‘Flavours of childhood’, ‘The days after’

⁵⁰ See Introduction for the discussion of the use of the term ‘that thing’ (*bagay la* in Haitian Creole) for the 2010 January earthquake.

⁵¹ Conversation between the dying sleepers.

⁵² ‘...like the penetration of an apocalyptic wasp.’ The words come from the following passage in Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*: ‘Et nous sommes debout maintenant, mon pays et moi, les cheveux dans le vent, ma main petite maintenant dans son poing énorme et la force n’est pas en nous, mais au-dessus de nous, dans une voix qui vrille la nuit et l’audience comme la pénétrance d’une guêpe apocalyptique. Et la voix prononce que l’Europe nous a pendant des siècles gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences, car il n’est point vrai que l’œuvre de l’homme est finie que nous n’avons rien à faire au monde/que nous parasitons le monde/ qu’il suffit que nous nous mettions au pas du monde/ mais l’œuvre de l’homme vient seulement de commencer/et il reste à l’homme de conquérir toute indirection immobilisée/aux coins de sa ferveur/et aucune race ne possède

Aimé Césaire,

*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*Talamède: *Et la mort?*Philime: *Est un bouton que j'ai au nombril, et si j'appuie dessus, l'heure-cadavre va s'annoncer.*Talamède: *Et l'au-delà?*Philime: *Est la mort vue de haut, de face, et de profil, en voyant de côté.*Talamède: *Et les mains jointes?*Philime: *Sont une prière partie au galop, ou plutôt un oiseau cousu dans le ciel.*⁵³

Jean-Pierre Duprey,

Trois Feux et une tour

The latter epigraph, taken from a Surrealist play, is a dialogue between two characters about death, the absurd, and the irreconcilable sense of void they are both experiencing. The piece culminates with a scene of annihilation: a gunshot and an explosion of a firecracker can be heard, then the stage is plunged into darkness only to be revealed again, filled with rubble.⁵⁴ This sense of existential emptiness and obscurity, shared by Martin, is integral to Duprey's *œuvre*, the creative aspiration of which is summed up by

le monopole de la beauté, de l' intelligence, de la force/et il est place pour tous au rendez-vous de la conquête et nous savons maintenant que le soleil tourne autour de notre terre éclairant la parcelle qu' à fixée notre volonté seule et que toute étoile chute de ciel en terre à notre commandement sans limite.' 'And now we are standing, my country and I, hair in the wind, my hand small now in its enormous fist and strength is not within us, but above us in a voice piercing the night and the audience like the penetrance of an apocalyptic wasp. And the voice pronounces that Europe has been stuffing us with lies and bloating us with pestilence for centuries,/ for it is not true that man' s work is completed/ that we have nothing to do in the world/ that we parasite the world/ that all we need is to walk in step with the world/ but man' s work has only begun/ and man has yet to conquer every prohibition paralysed in the corners of his fervour and no race holds a monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of strength/ and there is room for all at the rendez-vous of conquest and now we know that the sun revolves around our land shining over the plot chosen by our will alone and that every star falls from sky to earth at our limitless command.' Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land/ Cahier d' un retour au pays natal*, trans. by Mireille Rosello with Annie Pritchard (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995), pp. 124-7.

⁵³ 'T: And death?/ P: Is a button I have in my navel and when I press it, the time/hour of death will announce itself. /T: And the next world?/P: It is death seen side on, full face and sideways at the same time. T: And the joined hands?/ P: Are a prayer left at a gallop, or rather a bird stitched in the sky' (unless otherwise stated, translations are my own) .

⁵⁴ '(Après un coup de pistolet et l'éclair d' un petard, la scène s' obscurcit et s' emplit de décombres. Salex, Talamède et Quicri-Kirat deviennent les héritiers des propriétaires de la Mort.)' Jean-Pierre Duprey, 'Trois feux et une tour', in *Derrière son double: Œuvres complètes*, ed. by François Di Dio (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp.49-59 (p. 57).

André Breton in one phrase: ‘Que la ténèbre soit!’⁵⁵ Martin’s post-earthquake narrative is at once an acknowledgement of the all-encompassing darkness that lurks behind each word and an act of refusal to give in to that immobilising desperation. In their creative work, both Duprey and Martin see a space where the fragmented self can be tentatively re-assembled.⁵⁶ These themes of death and disaster in the opening pages of the book are central to the narrator’s aim to create a hybrid narrative form, incorporating elements of dialogue and prayer, through which he can provide insight into the event, illustrate its personal and collective impact, and commemorate those who died.

In addition, the former epigraph from Césaire powerfully evokes the theme of the apocalypse, yet places it within the context of resistance against defeatism and colonial domination. In *Le Tremblement*, similarly, the strength to carry on the struggle against historical and contemporary forms of oppression can only come from the act of joining the community of survivors in their collective attempt to express an overriding sense of sorrow and loss. This in turn affirms the victims’ presence and agency: ‘the strength is not within us but above us in a voice piercing the night and the audience like the sting of an apocalyptic wasp.’⁵⁷ Against the background of deadening images of Haiti as a defeated nation, Martin’s narrative envisages the possibility of an empowered coming together of the affected collective, fashioned from the refusal to forget the event and its haunting impact. This affirmation of the survivors’ agency and voice begins with

⁵⁵ ‘Let there be darkness.’ The phrase coined by Breton to characterise Duprey’s work is an obvious inversion of the biblical invocation ‘Let there be light!’ from Genesis 1.3. André Breton, ‘Préface’, in *Derrière son double: Œuvres complètes*, ed. by François Di Dio (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp.23-7 (p. 25).

⁵⁶ This unifying potential of writing is also emphasised by Anne Bourgain in her commentary on Duprey’s work. Following the traumatic experience of having to bury the dismembered victims of the bombardment of Rouen, Duprey’s sense of self involves fragmentation and disjunction between mind and body. He is ‘ toujours plongé dans un monde étrange, fragmentaire ’ ; his writing ‘ tente de recoudre les morceaux d’ un moi disloqué.’ Anne Bourgain, ‘L’ autre en soi ou la question du double chez un poète,’ *Le Coq-héron*, 1 (2008), 97-104 (p. 97).

⁵⁷ Aimé Césaire, *Return to My Native Land*, trans. by John Berger and Anna Bostock (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 30. Some translations prefer to use ‘penetrance’ for the French ‘ pénétrance.’ See, for example, Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, trans. by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), p. 44.

a discursive shift and the forging of a narrative form that is rooted in this untimely experience of the earthquake.

Moreover, the adjective ‘apocalyptic’ (in the first epigraph) implies a set of literary and theological connotations that contribute to the untimely character of the narrative. In everyday language, the word ‘apocalypse’ is most often used as an adjective that ‘refers to a set of ideas about the end of the world or the end of time in which the cataclysmic event breaks suddenly in upon an unsuspecting world, and results in massive destruction and disaster.’⁵⁸ Yet in its etymological sense, the word has a much more complex significance, one that is not limited to images of annihilation and plight. The word comes from ‘the Greek term *apokalupsis* [which] means—disclosure or unveiling’⁵⁹; in the more specific context of biblical studies, it ‘refers to a specific genre of text linked predominantly to Jewish and Christian traditions.’⁶⁰ The biblical Book of Revelation is the defining example of the genre. In addition to its obvious eschatological connotations, the term ‘apocalyptic,’ as Stefan Skrimshire suggests, also denotes ‘a revelation or disclosure of the spatial and temporal *transformation* of the world [and] not simply a prediction of the “end time”’ (my emphasis).⁶¹ Christopher Rowland and John Barton also stress apocalypse’s transformative potential, for ‘interest in the end is not part of the definition of an apocalypse, simply a common feature.’⁶² In this more inclusive context, the earthquake can be seen as initiating a transformative process which, far from denoting the ‘end of times,’ leads to an entirely different world order. In this last sense—and as Martin uses it—the earthquake is a total event marking an irreversible change and an end to the world as he previously knew it.

⁵⁸ Christopher Rowland and John Barton, eds., *Apocalyptic in History and Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 1.

⁵⁹ Rowland and Barton, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Stefan Skrimshire, ‘How Should We Think About the Future’, in *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. by Stefan Skrimshire (London: Continuum, 2010), pp.1-11 (p. 4).

⁶¹ Skrimshire, p. 4.

⁶² Rowland and Barton, p. 1.

Furthermore, through the form of his account Martin hopes to make visible the unfolding of events, from the initiating moment onwards, to those who have been denied the chance to witness them. In a metaphorical vein, he provides a causal link between the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of the earthquake, both for himself and the many friends and colleagues he lost in the disaster. The prayer the narrator wishes to compose is to be brief and consequently easy to memorise, being described as ‘une succession résumée, allant à l’essentiel, comme est résumé, resserrée, sur quelques paroles, la prière jamais si longue qu’on ne puisse la connaître par cœur.’⁶³ In this way, the narrativisation of events becomes an attempt to establish a dialogue between survivors and non-survivors of the disaster. In a footnote to the entry ‘Le 15 janvier’, the narrator summarises this conversation as follows: ‘Écrire, c’est toujours converser avec des morts, aucun écrivain ne peut s’abstraire de ces dialogues [...] Moi, j’écris avec mes dédicataires, là, mon *Tremblement*—tout droit tiré d’un coup de téléphone et d’outre-tombe.’⁶⁴ Writing is compared here to a conversation ‘from beyond the grave,’⁶⁵ thereby creating a link between both the living and the dead and forging a connection between the past, which is synonymous with destruction and loss, and the present, which is experienced as a state of survival. The text thus testifies to a relationship of ‘double continuity, with the dead and the living, combined with a double separation, from the living but also from the dead, with whom one nevertheless identifies and who are, so to speak, one’s closest kin, as is death itself.’⁶⁶ This constitutive tension between the tacit desire to separate oneself from the event and the acknowledged impossibility of

⁶³ ‘a series of words which, like a prayer, can be easily memorised.’ Lionel-Édouard Martin, *Le Tremblement: Haïti, 12 janvier 2010* (Paris: Arléa, 2010), p. 121.

⁶⁴ ‘To write is always to converse with the dead and no writer can cut himself off from these dialogues [...]. I write with those to whom my work is dedicated, there, my *Tremor* [reference to the title of the work]. – a phone call from beyond the grave.’ Martin, p. 118.

⁶⁵ Martin, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Chambers, p. xxiv.

doing so is ingrained in the fabric of Martin's narrative as he tries to contain the experience within a conventional narrative design.

In effect, the narrator's prayer-like invocation works against the chronological linearity that otherwise forms the main organising principle of the narrative and is seemingly confirmed by the finality of its closing credits: Fort-de-France-Paris 16 janvier- 22 février 2010.⁶⁷ Far from being a 'closed' occurrence in the past, the earthquake, once converted into a prayer, is relived repeatedly each time the supplication is uttered. As a consequence, the narrator is forced to re-immense himself in the same traumatising events from which he seeks an insulating distance. The sense of continuity that the narrative hopes to sustain is emphatically not a linear ordering with a clear beginning and end, as the chapter and closing dates might indicate. On the contrary, it is an untimely chronology in which it becomes impossible to differentiate between the initial event and its aftermath, and which consequently transforms the prayer in the text from a simple invocation into an elaborate requiem:

Il me fallait, maintenant, chercher dans ma mémoire les éléments du requiem, trouver les phrases, d'abord disjointes: puis les *animer* d'enchaînements, puis les orchestrer—faire, du tremblement, un chant sacré [italics original].⁶⁸

Requiem, in its original sense 'a solemn choral service for the dead sung in Roman Catholic Churches,'⁶⁹ becomes a way of entering into a dialogue with the dead and is a means of addressing God and asking him: '[r]equiem aeternam dona eis, Domine'—'Lord, grant them eternal rest.'⁷⁰ By offering a requiem for the dead, the narrator hopes that he can honour the disaster victims, giving them the funeral they never had while

⁶⁷ 'Fort-de-France-Paris the 16th of January- 22nd of February 2010.' Martin, p. 131.

⁶⁸ 'I now had to search in my memory for the parts of the requiem and find phrases, loose at first, to then animate them into a sequence of movements, orchestrate them and transform the tremor into a sacred hymn.' Martin, p. 121.

⁶⁹ 'requiem', in *World Encyclopaedia Online* (Philip's, 2012) <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199546091.001.0001/acref-9780199546091-e-9811?rskey=NFhIGO&result=1&q=reqiem>> [accessed 01 February 2013].

⁷⁰ John Bowker, 'requiem', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions Online* (Oxford University Press, 2012) <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780192800947.001.0001/acref-9780192800947-e-6057>> [accessed 01 February 2013].

also claiming the closure and relief that he himself yearns for. His imperfectly crafted prayer is an attempt to join other Haitian survivors in singing songs of sorrow and praise: ‘Prière, action de grâce? Il est difficile de savoir. Mais les voix sont là, présentes, interminablement dignes, puissamment belles.’⁷¹ This chorus fills the vacuum created by the irrevocable absence of loved ones. Yet far from providing closure, the requiem forces the narrator to revisit the experience of the disaster: *relieving* becomes *reliving*. But though they are painfully present in each verse and refrain, these rekindled memories paradoxically enable the survivors to form a non-hierarchical community that asserts itself against the void; as long as the joint prayer lasts, the menacing tremors become reassuring vibrations echoing the humble vibrato of prayer and repentance.⁷²

Similarly, Saint-Éloi’s account contains metatextual epigraphs that signal the way in which the narrative intends to relate the earthquake to personal and collective history while acknowledging the inadequacy of past division of time into past, present, and future. To a greater extent than *Le Tremblement, Haïti, kenbe la!* is aware of the empowering potential of the text, which has the capacity to become a historical artefact for future generations of Haitians. The first epigraph is by a Haitian American author, Edwidge Danticat: ‘Nous n’avons pas l’habitude de laisser notre chagrin nous réduire au silence.’⁷³ The second is an African proverb: ‘Tant que le lion n’aura pas son historien, les histoires de chasse glorifieront toujours le chasseur.’⁷⁴ Pointing to the importance of

⁷¹ Martin, p. 38.

⁷² ‘Prière, action de grâce? Il est difficile de savoir. Mais les voix sont là, présentes, interminablement dignes, puissamment belles. Nous, les Blancs, nous écoutant ; nous la blanchaille, allongés, les yeux dans les ténèbres. Cela dure, et la terre est dure, que nous endossons à plein corps, et qui, désormais, ne tremble plus mais vibre, à l’unisson des voix, d’un vibrato comme humble et chargé de repentir.’ Martin, p. 38. ‘A prayer, an act of thanksgiving? It is difficult to know. But the voices are there, present, unendingly dignified and powerfully beautiful. We, the Whites, we are whitish and listen to them, stretching our eyes in the darkness. This lasts and the ground, which we carry on our backs, is firm and it does not shake anymore but vibrates in an unison of voices like a vibrato full of humility and repentance.’

⁷³ ‘We are not used to letting grief reduce us to silence’ (Edwidge Danticat). Saint-Éloi, opening epigraph.

⁷⁴ ‘As long as the lion will not have is historian, the stories of hunting will always glorify the hunter’

testimony and the historical dimension of the account, the epigraphs suggest that the unfolding process of narrativisation offers the chance both to *reclaim* and to *revise* the historical narratives of Haiti. In this context, *Haiti, kenbe la!* becomes an attempt to assert individual and collective agency in the aftermath of the earthquake and to compose an empowering narrative of the country's recent past. Rather than simply underlining the commemorative nature of the account, the epigraphs suggest that this narrative is future-oriented and has a collective importance. The two texts thus both attempt, in their different ways, to create a bridge between the past of the event and the present state of survivorhood that the narrators inhabit, while also envisaging possible futures in the wake of the earthquake. But in the aftermath of the disaster, it is no longer possible to separate these three temporal categories or to present the unfolding of events in terms of a chronological sequence that relies on sustaining clear divisions between the present and the past. Instead, the overwhelming experience has its own untimely chronology.

The Timing of the Disaster

The various formal ways in which the texts engage with categories of time and narrative temporality foreshadow the key tensions that permeate them at the thematic level. In what follows, a comparative examination of the two accounts, I will analyse the representation of the 2010 earthquake as at once a measurable moment and a temporal break which, in registering a continuous impact, also works to redefine the previous sense of personal and collective time. I will then explore the altered significance of units of time, time markers, and everyday objects that refer back to the original moment when *goudougoudou* struck. In *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti, kenbe la!* the earthquake allows for

(African proverb). Saint-Éloi, opening epigraph.

the establishment of a ‘new history’ that has a twofold significance in both works. First, it denotes a collective past that is forever marked by the January tremors. Second, it suggests a future-oriented mode of rewriting the country’s history, one rooted in the untimely experience of the disaster. The chapter subsections—‘Histories of the Past’ and ‘New Beginnings and Untimely Futures’—explore that link between new pasts and futures and offer a different kind of temporal ordering: one that acknowledges the enduring impact of the event, but also asserts a collective ownership of history that goes against earlier silencing accounts of Haiti’s past.

At one level, *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti, kenbe la!* seek to present the disaster as a seemingly punctual event that can be measured using the standard units of objective clock-time. *Le Tremblement* repeatedly attempts to assign to the disaster a measured and defined duration: approximately one minute. A minute, as a standard measure of time, becomes synonymous with the event, and the ordinary unimportance of one minute in the narrator’s previous life is contrasted with the extraordinary significance of each second. Acknowledging this drastic shift, the narrator contemplates:

Qu’est-ce qu’une minute, celle qui fait le compte rond ? Pas grand-chose dans la vie d’un homme. Mais il est, quelquefois, des minutes qui dilatent à l’extrême leurs secondes et leur confèrent une épaisseur de gravats et de mort.⁷⁵

Minutes and seconds, ‘expanded to the extreme,’⁷⁶ are no longer neutral measures of temporality, but rather become irresistible reminders of the earthquake; from now on they can determine life or death.

⁷⁵ ‘A minute does no more than round things up. It’s not a big thing in the life of a man. But, sometimes, there are minutes which expand their seconds to the extreme conferring on them the layers of rubble of death.’ Martin, p. 120.

⁷⁶ ‘[des minutes]. qui dilatent à l’ extrême leurs secondes.’ Martin, p. 120.

The short duration of the event, indicated here even more precisely as 35 seconds, is also recalled throughout Saint-Éloi's account. Reflecting on its brevity, the narrator remarks:

Trente-cinq secondes.

Trente-cinq secondes.

Et tout tremble avec la terre.

Trente-cinq secondes de saccage.⁷⁷

The visual presentation of the lines, which appear after consecutive breaks of two lines in the text, reflects the symbolic significance of time measurement and reinforces the portrayal of the earthquake as a moment of rupture. Yet the emphasis on the measurable length of the event, the 35 seconds of its duration, suggests that its end can be easily identified and confined within a defined time span. Revisiting the events of January 12th, the narrator insists that they have ended in a clear-cut manner. As he notes:

La terre a la bougeotte, et tout autour pirouette.

Trente-cinq secondes.

Je regarde du côté gauche pour m'orienter au cas où les murs de l'hôtel tomberaient. Soudain, le *goudou-goudou* s'arrête. Net.⁷⁸

However, the sense of dizzying confusion that is expressed at the beginning of the passage contrasts with the temporal precision suggested in the following sentence, where the earthquake is again presented as a precise and finished occurrence. What *is* definite is the impact the brief tremors have had, instantly transforming the relationship between self and other, the individual and the national collective. Employing diction and imagery rich in historical references, the narrator remarks:

⁷⁷ 'Thirty-five seconds./Thirty-five seconds./And everything shakes with the earth./Thirty-five seconds of devastation.' [Double spacing in the original]. Saint-Éloi, p. 18.

⁷⁸ 'The earth is restless and everything around spins. Thirty-five seconds. I look to my left to get a sense of direction in case the wall of the hotel fell. Suddenly *goudou-goudou* stops. In a sharp and clear manner.' Saint-Éloi, pp. 34-5.

En trente-cinq secondes, tout change pour chacun d'entre nous, et pour le pays. Je suis alors un autre. L'identité se décline-t-elle toujours au pluriel ? Je ne suis plus celui que, fraîchement débarqué, voulait redécouvrir l'île natale. J'ai un air plutôt effaré. Désespéré. [...] Dans un désastre général, il y a toujours le désastre de soi.⁷⁹

Here, the narrator differentiates between, but does not categorically separate, the exploration of this redefined subjectivity from the historical context of his enquiry. The language and imagery of the remark point to the personal experience of emigration while also hinting at the history of colonisation that underlies it. The earthquake is interpreted both as a 'general disaster' and 'a disaster of self'⁸⁰ and, in accordance with these dual dimensions, it remodels the sense of personal as well as collective past and future. While admitting that everything has changed for each individual as well as for the country as a whole, the narrator still struggles to see himself as part of the national collective united by the shared experience of the disaster. Rather, he now perceives himself as 'a being at the bottom of the abyss, "an other,"'⁸¹ and his earlier expressions of enthusiasm and communal fraternity are replaced by a sense of overwhelming despair and fright. In a similar fashion, the precision the narrator initially attributes to the earthquake is later revised, and he is no longer certain how long the initial tremors lasted: 'La terre a tremblé en moins d'une minute. Les hommes ont tremblé avec. Et tout est devenu poussière.'⁸² The shattering experience of the disaster, like the material devastation of the city, is simply too overwhelming to comprehend. As the two narratives ultimately reveal, the temporal limits that are ostensibly imposed on the earthquake can in no way measure the real impact of the event.

⁷⁹ 'In thirty-five seconds everything changes for each of us and for the whole country. I am an other. Is identity always declined in the plural? I am not the same person who, newly-landed, wanted to discover his native island. I looked alarmed. Desperate. [...]. In a general disaster there is always a disaster of oneself.' Saint-Éloi, p. 38.

⁸⁰ Saint-Éloi, p. 38.

⁸¹ Saint-Éloi, p. 38.

⁸² 'The earth trembled in less than a minute. The people trembled with it. And everything turned into dust.' Saint-Éloi, p. 104.

Objects of Time

As previously mentioned, the earthquake not only transforms the conventional meaning of temporal categories and units of time but also, as *Le Tremblement* in particular demonstrates, redefines the temporal significance of everyday objects such as photographs and personal travel accessories. These now function, in varying ways, as mnemonic triggers. In the aftermath of the earthquake, photographs become untimely souvenirs of the experience—tokens of remembrance⁸³—that displace the narrator from the ‘here and now’ to the experiential site of the disaster. In Martin’s account, the photographs of destruction with which the narrator is presented cause an experience of temporal disjunction that forces him to acknowledge his inability to control the circumstances surrounding the event. In looking at a series of images of urban devastation that have been given to him by a journalist, the narrator in *Le Tremblement* is re-immersed in the original traumatic experience, reliving it as a series of haunting repetitions. Commenting on the disturbance these images create, he writes:

C’est une lente suite informatique de destructions. Chaque photo ne dure, dans son visionnement, que les quelques secondes imparties par des circuits électroniques - toujours les mêmes quelques secondes, quelle que soit la photo. Mais la durée de ces images n’est pas celle de *mes* images [italics original].⁸⁴

The passage reveals a dichotomy between prior *knowledge* of the duration of time, which is measured in seconds, and the contrasting *experience* of temporality as a conflation of the narrator’s past memories, accumulated over ten years of regular visits to Haiti, with present scenes of post-earthquake devastation. The photographs redefine the way in which the narrator interprets his past and records his memories of events and places. Each photographic image, displayed only for a few seconds, triggers analepsis, a

⁸³ ‘souvenir’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185321?rskey=0KQdXq&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 12 April 2013].

⁸⁴ ‘It’s a long computing sequence of destructions. The viewing of each photo does not last more than few seconds allotted by electronic circuits – always the same few seconds regardless of the photo. But the duration of these images is not the same as the duration of *my* images.’ Martin, p. 85.

resurfacing of earlier associations and memories, and these merge inexorably with the disaster. The photographs reproduce and repeat, in mechanical form, that which ‘could never be repeated existentially,’⁸⁵ thereby forcing the narrator to re-encounter the destruction and personal loss caused by *goudougoudou*. As souvenirs of the traumatic rupture, the images of the ruined capital ‘*fill the sight by force*’ [italics original] and violently override previous memories of Port-au-Prince.⁸⁶

Moreover, the sequence in which the photographs are displayed to the narrator has a cumulative rather than ordering effect in so far as the images keep referring to the original moment the earthquake struck. In Susan Sontag’s terms, the photographs present ‘a neat slice of time, not a flow,’⁸⁷ which re-affirms the status of the event as a redefining moment in the narrator’s life. Consequently, the years preceding the earthquake seem to speed up, compressing the gap between ‘before’ and ‘after’ the disaster:

Ces dix années que je me suis rendu régulièrement en Haïti se superposent, se succèdent, en une façon de fond enchaîné où, bien plus vite que dans la réalité, l’avant se métamorphose en l’après, comme on filme en accéléré l’épanouissement d’une fleur.⁸⁸

In this passage, the narrator evokes cinematic effects of time-manipulation and superimposition, i.e. when two or more images are placed over each other in the frame, to distil the general sense of temporal confusion into a single image. Again, the temporal control he hopes to sustain cannot withstand the overwhelming nature of the experience, and he finds himself no longer able to recall the individual sites as he had remembered

⁸⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York, NY.: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 4.

⁸⁶ Barthes, p. 91.

⁸⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 17.

⁸⁸ ‘The ten years during which I visited Haïti regularly become undistinguishable, they follow one another more quickly than in reality and in a cross-fade manner, like time-lapse film of a blossoming flower.’ Martin, pp. 85-6.

them before the disaster struck. Rather, hidden under shattering images of debris, these sites and their images function as ghostly reminders of an inaccessible past.

Similarly, the objects that the narrator has collected from Hotel Karibe, shampoo and soap, disrupt the linear perception of time, undermining his ability to mark an end to the disaster and thus achieve a sense of closure. Attempting to detach himself from the scene of the catastrophe, the narrator writes:

C'est ça, la force: posséder ces petites choses, les maîtriser, rendues inoffensives - comme on désamorce des grenades, et dès lors elles ne peuvent plus exploser -, et par leur entremise établir une passerelle entre ici et *là-bas* [italics original].⁸⁹

His hope is that physical ownership of the objects from the hotel will give him a sense of mastery over his memories and the associations they can potentially trigger. However, as the passage reveals, such momentary assertions of control are continually thwarted. The military comparison the narrator makes between 'those little things' and 'grenades'⁹⁰ suggests that, despite his earlier claims, the items still provoke overpowering memories of the event.

In addition, the italicised deixis, '*là-bas*,'⁹¹ implicitly refers back to the site of the disaster—a place so traumatic he is unable to name it. Deixis provides a useful strategy, a 'linguistic means by which the speaker anchors utterances in the concrete place of enunciation ("here," "there," "this table").'⁹² The narrator uses temporal and spatial deictic markers—'there', '*là-bas*', and 'before,' '*avant*'⁹³—to register shifts in narrative setting, exposing in the process his inability to name the original date of the disaster and to fix its primary location. The passage contrasts two deictic markers: 'here

⁸⁹ 'That's what power is: to have those little things, master them, render them powerless – in the same way we disarm grenades so that they can't explode anymore – and through them establish a bridge between here and *there*.' Martin, p. 111.

⁹⁰ Martin, p. 111.

⁹¹ Martin, p. 111.

⁹² Russell West-Pavlov, *Spaces of Fiction/Fictions of Space: Postcolonial Place and Literary Deixis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 2.

⁹³ West-Pavlov, p. 121.

and *there*, 'ici et là- bas.'⁹⁴ The first of these refers to Guadeloupe, where the narrator temporarily resides; the second, whose importance is underlined by italics, to the site of destruction. Port-au-Prince, now associated only with the earthquake, becomes a 'place' in Jeff Malpas's phenomenological understanding of place as a site for the formation of subjectivity, one 'not founded *on* subjectivity, but [...] rather that on which subjectivity is founded.'⁹⁵ The structure of subjectivity is 'given in and through the structure of place'⁹⁶ and the destruction of it requires a redefinition of one's perception of self (see Chapter Two). Likewise, the temporal referents used by the narrator to depict these objects continually revert to the moment the earthquake struck. Contemplating the significance of the soap and the shampoo from the Hotel, the narrator remarks:

Le savon, le shampoing du Karibé *d'avant*. J'ai compris le plaisir que j'avais eu, la veille, à les utiliser: parce qu'ils émanaient *d'avant*, qu'ils créaient une continuité sans faille dans l'espace et le temps [italics original].⁹⁷

The verb 'émaner,' which means 'to emanate, to originate,'⁹⁸ signals the object's rootedness in the past, conceived here as the time '*before*' the earthquake struck. The disaster again becomes a total reference point that redefines retrospectively even the most seemingly trivial reminders of the narrator's life before January 12th. Similarly, the expression 'sans faille,' which conveys a sense of undisturbed continuity, draws attention to the rift the narrator is attempting to heal and the time 'without breaks' that he is melancholically longing for. Referents of time and place, acting as rhetorical substitutes for the disaster, become metonymies of the traumatic experience and trigger

⁹⁴ Martin, p. 111.

⁹⁵ In my analysis, I build on Malpas's understanding of the idea of place which encompasses both the idea of the social activities that are expressed through the structure of a particular place and the idea of the physical objects and events in the world that constrain, and are sometimes constrained by, those social activities and institutions. Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 35.

⁹⁶ Malpas, p. 35.

⁹⁷ 'The soap and the shampoo from Karibé from *before*. I understood the pleasure I had in using them the night before; they emanated *before* and created a flawless continuity of time and space.' Martin, p. 113.

⁹⁸ 'émaner', in *Reverso: Collins Online English-French Dictionary* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012) <<http://dictionary.reverso.net/french-english/émaner>> [accessed 22 November 2012].

the process of cognitive and semantic association. Without being directly named, the earthquake is consistently present in the narrative's treatment of space and time and is the defining spatial and temporal referent in the text.

The narrator's willingness to control these objects of time through the use of deixis reflects the authorial ambition to create a narrative frame that can contain the recent traumatic experience. But each time the narrator employs temporal and spatial references—'here', 'there', 'now' and 'before'—he indirectly acknowledges the rupture caused by the earthquake. It becomes a catastrophe in its original etymological sense: 'an event producing a subversion of the order of things' and 'a sudden turn, conclusion.'⁹⁹ This catastrophic rupture has a two-fold character: it is a sudden break but it also has a haunting quality that challenges the conventional perceptions of time and temporality. Narrativising the earthquake enables the narrator to assume a God-like omnipotence—to alter the disaster's outcomes, to halt its continuous impact—even if this power is simultaneously recognised to be illusory. His hope is to be able to maintain as much control as possible over his retrospective narrative, which he sees in terms of the metaphorical attempt to bring back to life those who died: 'recréer l'Homme en soufflant sur le clavier de l'appareil.'¹⁰⁰ Each beat of the keyboard performs a rhythmical evocation, a calling back to life, of all those lost in the earthquake. Paradoxically, it is the painful if necessary act of revisiting the original time and site of the disaster that can at least potentially bring a sense of relief, albeit of a limited kind.

⁹⁹ 'catastrophe', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2012) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28794?redirectedFrom=catastrophe#eid>> [accessed 12 December 2012].

¹⁰⁰ '[...] to recreate Man by typing on my computer keyboard.' Martin, p. 128.

Histories of the Past

The disaster's untimely character, manifested in altered subjective perceptions of temporality and the passing of time, also reveals itself in the ways in which history and the writing of 'new history' are envisaged in the two texts in the event's aftermath. Martin's work emphasises a shared untimely survivorhood in which the narrator and his fellow survivors are now immersed. This state is by definition unstable, but it also implies a newly gained maturity. Saint-Éloi's narrative, in comparison, enlarges the notion of collective experience and interprets the earthquake as the beginning of a new sense of national history, seen from now on in extreme terms. This rupture creates an opportunity to reclaim narratives of the past and imagine scenarios for the country's future that go beyond reiterations of previous discursive frames. The narrator of *Haiti, kenbe la!* wants to make sure that records of the event acknowledge the victims of the disaster and make their voices audible to all those who have not witnessed it. In this sense, his narrative goes beyond the personal experience of trauma to capitalise on the event's collective significance and show the empowering potential of untimely narrative accounts. Both *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti, kenbe la!*, albeit in different ways, suggest an ethics of writing rooted in the refusal, however painful, to mute the haunting echoes of *goudougoudou*.

This relationship between individual and collective perceptions of time is at the centre of *Le Tremblement*'s treatment of temporality. As previously mentioned, the event draws the individual into the collective, communicating a shared experience of survival in the context of proximity to death and devastating loss. As the narrator remarks:

[...] il n'y a aura plus jamais de « comme avant », et que la rupture, même colmatée, comblée de plâtre, de mortier, restera vive, à vif dans les murs et dans l'homme mûr que, désormais, définitivement je suis, sans espoir de retour.¹⁰¹

Here, the event, annihilating previous temporal divisions, is signalled as becoming an ever-present rupture, alive in the narrator's memory and defining his whole life from now on. In the process, a new sense of subjectivity emerges in the aftermath of the disaster. The narrator is a new man and there is no returning to pre-earthquake ways of understanding himself and his relation to others. However, the maturity he has gained does not indicate that he has become a better person, although a *Bildungsroman* type of personal development is envisaged by other survivor accounts such as those of Lake and Marquez Stathis (see Chapter Three); nor does it correspond to the traditional definition of the word 'maturity' as '[s]agesse, capacité de raisonnement, de réflexion.'¹⁰² Rather, it refers to an experience of frailty and powerlessness that results from the sense of uncontrollable acceleration of time caused by the event and the sudden deaths of many of the narrator's friends and colleagues. At the same time, the word 'mûr,' 'mature,' becomes a homonym for 'mur,' 'wall' or a 'barrier,' and this unlikely pairing refers back to the devastation caused by the event as well as to ideas of radical separation between current and former definitions of time and self. In a later commentary on his work, Martin defines the survivors' maturity in terms of an encounter with a scale of loss unimaginably greater than the one we usually have to face in everyday life:

J'ai perdu, le 12 janvier, des centaines de collègues et d'étudiants haïtiens—et ce, en quelques secondes: qui ont accéléré le temps, qui m'ont confronté, d'un coup, massivement, à bien plus de morts que dans une existence « normale ». C'est cela qui fait mûrir.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ '[...]. there will never again be 'like before', the breach, even sealed off and filled with plaster and mortar, will remain alive in the walls and in me; from now on I have definitively become a mature man with no hope of turning back.' Martin, p. 49.

¹⁰² 'Wisdom, reflection and reasoning ability'; 'mûr', in *Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé* (2012) <<http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/mûr>> [accessed 20 November 2012].

¹⁰³ 'On the 12th of January, I lost hundreds of Haitian colleagues and students: and all that in few seconds which have accelerated time and made me confront, suddenly, more deaths than I would encounter in 'normal' life. This is what makes one mature.' Marc Villemain, 'Entretien avec Lionel-Édouard Martin', *L'Anagnoste*, (2011) <<http://anagnoste.blogspot.fr/2011/04/lionel-edouard-martin->

Again, the brevity of the event, the few seconds it seems to have lasted, is contrasted with the permanent impact it has had and the irretrievable loss of hundreds of friends and acquaintances. This amplified experience of death and mourning is characterised as ‘abnormal’ and the narrator’s life following the earthquake defies comparison with any experience he has known before.

The narrator’s newfound state of maturity is shared by his fellow survivors, who have been presented with an unprecedented scale of loss and are now unsure how to go about confronting it. Following the earthquake they, too, are depicted as frail and aged in a matter of days:

En quarante-huit heures, nos regards ont terriblement vieilli, qui ne nous donnent plus à percevoir le monde qu’à travers une brume, où plus rien n’est perceptible des contours naguère encore si bien définis.¹⁰⁴

Although he knows that only forty-eight hours have passed since the earthquake, the narrator’s subjective perception of time is a completely different one. Neither he nor his fellow survivors can distinguish the contours of things; instead, they see everything through ‘a mist’ that corresponds to the untimely presence of the event. Their new state of survivorhood is also characterised by a necessary detachment from their previous personal history. This severance has an almost visceral dimension that intensifies the pain of loss:

Nous, quoi que nous laissions derrière nous, c’est un peu de nous-mêmes que nous nous délésterons, d’un peu de notre histoire - pour, il est vrai, si nous nous sortons de cette débâcle, rejaillir dans une nouvelle histoire.¹⁰⁵

A sense of uncertainty and doubt permeates this passage with the plural pronoun ‘nous’ accentuating the collective nature of the experience. The verb ‘déléstrer,’ which means

le-tremblement.html> [accessed 8 December 2012].

¹⁰⁴ ‘In forty-eight hours our looks have aged very rapidly, and we now perceive the world through a mist through which the sharp contours that were so clear not so long ago are no longer visible.’ Martin, p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Whatever we are leaving behind, it is a part of ourselves and our personal history we are getting rid of- in order to, if we survive this battle, be thrown into a new history.’ Martin, p. 81.

‘to unballast’, ‘to relieve,’¹⁰⁶ further adds to this ambiguity as it denotes both a separation and freeing from a burden—here, that of a traumatic past. However hopeful he might be, the narrator is equally aware that any such attempt will fail and that the ‘new history’ the event inaugurates will always be linked to the disaster from which it springs.

Although *Haiti, kenbe la!* also points to the earthquake’s redefining impact on perceptions of time, self, and other, it stresses more than does *Le Tremblement* the significance of the disaster for collective perception of Haiti’s national history. In so doing, it challenges previous notions of the past as both a temporal and a discursive category. The event is a fracture without precedent¹⁰⁷ and, as such, it permanently redefines the ways in which the chronological time informing history is perceived and referred to from now on. In short, the earthquake has turned the entire history of the country upside down and a new history has emerged, to be defined by and as from the moment the disaster struck.¹⁰⁸ Directly responding to this experience of disrupted history, *Haiti, kenbe la!* forges a composite narrative aesthetic that merges different accounts of the earthquake in an attempt to create a multivocal narrative that weaves between different ‘memories of the times.’ These recounted, overheard, and shared memories of recent events seem to be indistinguishable from the narrator’s own impressions of the disaster. By bringing together fragments of the past, he hopes to rescue those ‘minor’ voices that might otherwise be silenced in more conventionally structured narratives. In a letter to his editor that accompanies the narrative, Saint-Éloi

¹⁰⁶ ‘délestrer’, in *Reverso: Collins Online English-French Dictionary* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012) <<http://dictionary.reverso.net/french-english/d%C3%A9lestrer>> [accessed 10 April 2013].

¹⁰⁷ ‘[u]ne fracture sans pareille.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Je dois désormais compter avec les victimes et ce *godou-godou* qui a chambardé une certaine histoire du pays. On vivra *après* toute sa vie pour classer les choses en deux temps : *avant* le séisme et *après* le séisme.’ [italics added]. ‘I need to include (myself) among the victims of the *goudou-goudou* which has turned upside down a certain history of the country. We will all live our whole lives classifying things into two tenses: before the earthquake and after the earthquake.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 38.

explains the aims and motivations behind his account:

J'ai écrit ce livre pour accompagner d'une berceuse ce cri *goudou-goudou* enraciné dans les entrailles de tous les Haïtiens. [...] Je pense à ma mère qui recueille des histoires pour inventer son propre récit. Je fais pareil, en enfonçant dans ma tête toutes ces histoires de séisme pour que rien ne soit oublié. À la fin, je ne sais plus ce qui tient de moi ou des autres.¹⁰⁹

Saint-Éloi sees his literary pursuit, in other words, as an attempt to incorporate and represent the multitude of diverse experiences that the earthquake elicits. Narrativisation is not synonymous with recording the unfolding of events; rather, it signifies the possibility of a creative interweaving of first-hand experience with other survivor accounts. This act of incorporation and reconstruction becomes an ethical gesture of opposition against those kinds of silencing accounts that are dominated by just one voice or just one author. In effect, Saint-Éloi's narrative is no longer 'authored' at all but is rather re-assembled by a narrator-figure who is not directly synonymous with the author. By destabilising the idea of singular authorship and fixed narratorial subjectivity, the narrator implicitly undermines any claims to the historical authority of his text. Rather, *Haïti, kenbe la!* should be treated as one of many possible sources of knowledge of the recent disaster and not as a definitive record of the event or a definite and unchangeable 'past.'

The account's formal features, when coupled with its thematic concerns and the self-reflexive character of the narrative, mark out *Haïti, kenbe la!* as a complex artistic work that opposes easy categorisations of the event as either disconnected from the past

¹⁰⁹ 'I wrote this book to accompany the lullaby lament of *goudou-godou* deep-rooted in all Haitians [...] I think about my mother, who collects different stories so as to create her own story. I did something similar by merging all those stories of the earthquake so that nothing was forgotten. Eventually, I do not know anymore which story belongs to me and which to others.' Saint-Éloi, p. 266. The use of the future tense 'on vivra,' which signifies both 'we will live' and 'one will live,' underlines the ways in which the event strengthens the relationship between the narrator and his fellow survivors. Immersed together in this state of shared victimhood, they are aware that in the aftermath of the disaster, previous temporal divisions are no longer valid. The past, no matter how remote, is now synonymous with 'before the earthquake,' and present and future merge into one composite temporal category: 'after the disaster.'

or just as another of Haiti's many failures. The text challenges stable definitions of Haitian past and the discursive frames through which it was previously interpreted, while also suggesting new, future-oriented modes of narrative engagement that go beyond traditional means of literary expression and conventional narrative form. As should be apparent by now, the 2010 earthquake cannot be divorced from the histories, whether personal or collective, that underpin it. Any subsequent representations of the event must therefore engage with the disaster's wider past and the discursive representations in which it was framed. *Haiti, kenbe la!* accordingly embeds the earthquake within the long histories of imperialism and colonialism, presenting it as one of the many metaphorical 'tremors' that have shaken the country, but also as the potential beginning of a new, revisionist history. For the narrator, the foundational 'earthquake' in the country's history happened in 1492, with Columbus's 'discovery' being the first in a series of massive upheavals that punctuated the nation's violent past. As the narrator affirms: '[l]e premier séisme de notre histoire s'appelle Christophe Colomb.'¹¹⁰ In an extension of the metaphor, the history of the country is envisioned as a sequence of tremors followed by regular aftershocks. Paraphrasing the words of his grandmother Grann Tida, the narrator asserts: 'l'histoire du pays depuis l'indépendance est une suite de séismes suivis de répliques régulières.'¹¹¹ In this reformulation, he plays with the contrasting ideas of a singular historical event and a repeated one. He does not want however to suggest a circular vision of the country's past or its future; rather, the contrast between repetition and singularity emphasises that this particular disaster, in its scale and impact, is indeed an unprecedented occurrence yet still one that does not exist outside of previous global historical and political processes. Finally, he points to the importance of collective memory of the Haitian Revolution and subsequent

¹¹⁰ '[t]he first earthquake in our history is called Christopher Columbus.' Saint-Éloi, p. 202.

¹¹¹ 'the country's history since its independence is a sequence of earthquakes followed by regular aftershocks.' Saint-Éloi, p. 215.

political upheavals and dictatorial regimes. These experiences, transmitted to him through family stories, ‘seem to constitute memories in their own right,’¹¹² and to contribute to the polyphonic quality of his account, with these earlier traumatic events, recalled as postmemory,¹¹³ reverberating in this composite narrative of the most recent disaster.

This metaphorical re-imagining of the country’s history is, at the same time, a gesture of critique directed against popularised depictions of Haiti’s past and present predicament as ‘unique’ and ‘beyond comparison,’ common representations that depoliticise and marginalise the country (see Introduction). Several years after the 2010 earthquake and despite growing critical scholarship, attention-grabbing newspaper titles and media coverage—for example ‘Beauty vs. Poverty’¹¹⁴ and ‘The graveyard of hope’¹¹⁵—continue to re-affirm homogenising depictions of post-earthquake Haiti as ‘discarded’ and Haitians as ‘devastated’ people. History and myth collide in those popular portrayals, where Haiti is presented as at once disaster-prone and disaster zone. Such representations configure temporality in triadic terms: the country’s past is described as ‘heroic’; its present is conceived in terms of the ‘affirmation of resilience’; and the future is phrased in terms of ‘unfulfilled hopes’ and ‘lack of change.’ Over and against such simplifications, the narrator examines the ideological nature of history and historical narratives, which far from being ‘neutral’

¹¹² Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, *Poetics Today*, 29 (2008), 102-128 (p. 107).

¹¹³ Hirsch uses the term ‘postmemory’ to describe ‘the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to constitute memories in their own right.’ Here, I use the term in a wider sense to illustrate this passing on of foundational traumatic memories around which individual identity is established. Hirsch, p. 107.

¹¹⁴ Trenton Daniel, ‘Beauty vs Poverty: Haitian Slums Get Psychedelic Make-Over in Honour of Artist Prefete Duffaut’s *Cities in the Sky*’, *Independent*, 26 March 2013 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/beauty-vs-poverty-haitian-slums-get-psychedelic-makeover-in-honour-of-artist-prefete-duffauts-cities-in-the-sky-8549331.html>> [accessed 02 May 2013].

¹¹⁵ Peter Popham, ‘Haiti: The Graveyard of Hope’, *Independent*, 13 January 2013 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/haiti-the-graveyard-of-hope-8449775.html>> [accessed 02 May 2013].

categories are discursive constructs in which objectified images of Haiti and its people continue to be manipulated in both ‘epic’ and ‘quotidian’ ways:

Le cycle de l’histoire nationale oscillait, d’après ceux qui l’écrivaient, entre la grandeur d’un rêve épique et la dépravation du quotidien. L’image qui reste de nous: la gravité d’un peuple à la fois héroïque et loufoque. Soit on rit. Soit on pleure. Jamais entre le deux. Jamais la mesure.¹¹⁶

By juxtaposing these contrasting yet equally objectifying qualifiers, the narrator establishes a direct correlation between two misrepresentations of the country’s past. His narrative intervention thus becomes a creative attempt to suggest a more nuanced view of the ways in which Haiti’s pasts and futures can be remembered—a view that destabilises the discursive and epistemological constructs within which it was previously imprisoned.

In order to celebrate these new, empowering narratives of Haiti’s recent past, the narrator elevates the importance of memory over archival records: History (with a capital ‘H’) is, he suggests, ‘a memory of the times’—*la mémoire du temps*.¹¹⁷ As he says: ‘L’Histoire, c’est la mémoire du temps. Cette part de nous, toujours rêvée.’¹¹⁸ This new History he hopes to write is very much a collective undertaking, a ‘work-in-progress’ that seeks to recall, but also to undo, previous histories and archival accounts that reflected imperial power structures: ‘Les vainqueurs ont toujours pour eux les archives. Ils ont leur livre jauni et les versions de toutes les histoires.’¹¹⁹ In several respects, this attempt to broaden the concept of history creatively adds to a much earlier critical debate in historiography, which has grown exponentially since the 1980s,¹²⁰ on

¹¹⁶ ‘The cycle of national history varied, depending on the author, between the grandeur of an epic dream and everyday depravation. The image that remains of us: the seriousness of a nation at once crazy and heroic. Either we laugh or we cry. Never anything in between or in moderation.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 203.

¹¹⁷ Saint-Éloi, p. 198.

¹¹⁸ ‘History is a memory of the times. It is the part of us we always dream of.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 198.

¹¹⁹ ‘The winners will always own the archives. They have their faded books and versions of all histories.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 199.

¹²⁰ According to Kerwin Lee Klein, the 1980s saw the emergence of ‘memory’ as an object for scholarly enquiry; since then ‘memory’ has become a metahistorical category which is used to

the non-neutral character of historical narratives and the mutual relationship between memory and history. Two key voices in this debate—Jacques Le Goff and Michel Trouillot—have questioned conventional readings of history and the sources used to construct it, seeing such accounts as insufficiently self-reflexive. The French historian (Le Goff) and the Haitian anthropologist (Trouillot) both challenge the seemingly objective character of archival documents, highlighting instead the power dynamics involved in the creation of historical narratives. Rather than being an objective and comprehensive source of knowledge, the historical record ‘expresses past society’s power over memory and over the future: the document is what remains.’¹²¹ These archival artefacts of the past in turn create an exclusive and silencing account which, in the postcolonial context of Haiti, becomes a reiteration of the colonial and neo-colonial discourses to which the country has been subjected over centuries.

In contradistinction to configurations of history as a closed narrative, the narrator’s definition of History as ‘a memory of the times’ accentuates the open-ended and subjective character of all historical accounts—a view shared by both Le Goff and Trouillot. This reformulation, however, is not without its problems. At times, the narrator simplistically positions memory as an antithesis of history, while at others he

describe individual and collective experience of the past. ‘Memory’ has become a ‘subject in its own right a subject in its own right, free to range back and forth across time’ (Klein, p.136). The *History and Memory* journal, which was established in 1989 and has since been published twice a year, is another example of the growing interest in the mutually informing relationship between memory and history. The journal ‘explores the manifold ways in which the past shapes the present and is shaped by present perceptions.’ <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history_and_memory/> [accessed 24 April 2013]. Key to the emergence of the field of memory studies were, to name a few: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s *Zakhor’s Jewish History and Jewish Memory*; the seven-volume *Les Lieux de mémoire* ed. by Pierre Nora; Jacques Le Goff’s *History and Memory*; and later on Dominick LaCapra’s *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma and Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* is one of the recent examples of critical developments in the field. This important work points to the concept of ‘multidirectional memory’ as a way of analysing the past. See LaCapra; Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* trans. by Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 1992); Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard 1984-1992); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2009); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor’s Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

¹²¹ Le Goff, p. xvii.

seems to equate memory with history, exemplifying a naïve trend that ‘seem[s] virtually to identify history with memory, and even [gives] preference in some sense to memory, on the ground that it is more authentic, “truer” than history, which is presumed to be artificial and, above all, manipulative of memory.’¹²² Yet as Le Goff makes clear, the two are neither mutually exclusive nor simply synonymous:

Memory is the raw material of history. Whether mental, oral, or written, it is the living source from which historians draw. [...] Moreover, the discipline of history nourishes memory in turn, and enters into the great dialectical process of memory and forgetting experienced by individuals and societies.¹²³

Here, Le Goff points to the complexity of the relationship between history and memory and underlines the interdependence of the two. Aware of possible manipulations of history, he emphasises the continuing need to re-assess our knowledge of the past and to question the sources and forms of this knowledge. For Le Goff, both memory and history are dynamic and fluid categories, and are continually subject to change and revision. They co-exist in a dialectical relationship: they are different forms of remembering that bleed into each other.

Similarly, Trouillot scrutinises the ambiguities inherent in the concepts of knowledge and history, reminding us that the production of history is a complex dynamic process:

For what history is changes with time and place or, better said, history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives. What matters most are the process and conditions of production of such narratives. Only a focus on that process can uncover the ways in which the two sides of historicity intertwine in a particular context. Only through that overlap can we discover the differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others.¹²⁴

For Trouillot, history is a discursive site of continued negotiation and confrontation between multiple narratives and voices, some of them deliberately silenced at various

¹²² Le Goff, p. xi.

¹²³ Le Goff, p. xi.

¹²⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 25.

points in time. However, rather than valuing some narratives over others, as Anderson seems to do in relation to literary responses (see Introduction), Trouillot stresses the importance of critically comparing ‘the two sides of historicity [in each] particular context.’¹²⁵ The narrator’s distinction between the ‘memory of the times’ and the ‘record of times’ in *Haiti, kenbe la!* in many ways echoes Trouillot’s methodological scrutiny and acts as a meta-thematic comment. The narrator is aware that the narrative he is creating also has a historical dimension and that narrativisation is in itself a process of selection and editing. By interrogating his own narrative practice and redefining it as a process of recalling, of remembering and undoing the past simultaneously, he hopes that his account can provide a heteroglossic presentation of the earthquake and its aftermath that is empowering for all Haitians, both now and in times to come.

Rewriting Narrative Ethics

It should be clear by now that this critical awareness of the tensions and ambiguities inherent in the concepts of ‘the past’ and ‘history’ does not entail ‘an absence of purpose’¹²⁶ or the impossibility of taking an ethical position. On the contrary, it can determine one’s engagement in current socio-political struggles, and it is precisely this realisation of the exclusive character of narrative accounts of the past, and of their continuing disempowering impact, that animates *Haiti, kenbe la!*’s insistence on writing ‘new History.’ The creative process in turn acquires a trans-temporal character: it is an act of historical revision that partakes in contemporary struggles. As Trouillot posits and Saint-Éloi creatively enacts, the rewriting of collective history is itself a mode of action:

¹²⁵ Trouillot, p. 25.

¹²⁶ Trouillot, p. 153.

But we may want to keep in mind that deeds and words are not as distinguishable as we often presume. History does not belong only to its narrators, professional or amateur. While some of us debate what history is or was, others take it in their own hands.¹²⁷

Against the scholarly tendency to compartmentalise history as a distinct entity available for scrutiny only to professional historians—a position that potentially masks detachment from current political concerns and crises—Trouillot suggests a view of history as open-ended and collectively created and owned.¹²⁸ By using the idiomatic expression of ‘taking something into one’s own hand,’ he pairs the idea of direct action with the re-envisioning of history as a discursive category. In this context, the process of reworking traditional narrative structures, along with a self-reflexive investigation into the nature of history in the aftermath of the earthquake, acquires a direct ethical significance. Aware of the importance of the creative process, Saint-Éloi attempts to write Haiti’s ‘new History’ in such a way as to make audible both the silenced voices of the past and those muted by the recent disaster: ‘[I]a nouvelle histoire du pays débute par ce cri perçant qui fendille le ventre de la terre: rafales des mitrailleuses lourdes, tremblement des toits, craquelure des chaises.’¹²⁹ The highly emotive and onomatopoeic language of the passage mimics the ravage caused by the earthquake—the sudden strike of *goudougoudou*. This roar that cannot and must not be silenced marks a point of temporal rupture and the violent beginning of a new history. *Haiti, kenbe la!*’s poetically charged formulation of this ‘new History’ is intricately linked to the ethical aims that underpin its aesthetic concerns: the creative reshaping of the past as a dual category, marked from now on by its untimeliness, becomes an attempt to

¹²⁷ Trouillot, pp. 152-3.

¹²⁸ ‘The more historians wrote about the past worlds, the more The Past became real as a separate world. But as various crises of our times impinge upon identities thought to be long established or silent, we move closer to an era when professional historians will have to position themselves more clearly within the present, lest politicians, magnates, or ethnic leaders alone write history for them.’ Trouillot, p. 152.

¹²⁹ ‘The country’s new history starts with the piercing cry which splits the centre of the earth: the gust of machine guns, the shaking of the roofs, the cracking of chairs.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 178.

formulate a new ethics of collective remembrance in the disaster's wake.

A similar pairing of literary aesthetics and historical enquiry can be found in Walter Benjamin's work. The German philosopher's critical writings help to reveal the complexity of *Haiti, kenbe la!* and point to its direct ethical and political engagement. Benjamin, as is well known, defined history as a form of ethical remembrance that violently disrupts any sense of continuity. In Brem Mertens's gloss, Benjamin's work speaks of the necessity

to lift a historical period or event out of the continuum of history, or in even more violent and apocalyptic terms, of the necessity to blast an era out of the historical continuum or to detonate history itself.¹³⁰

In metaphorically charged terms, Benjamin opposes the view of history as progress, whether this is understood within the framework of bourgeois or orthodox Marxist ideology. Merging theological and political discourse, he defines violent break as 'the only point of contact between a postlapsarian world and a redeemed world,'¹³¹ which occurs 'when the Messiah or the messianic moment interrupts the continuity of history and brings history itself to a halt.'¹³² This view of history, which is inspired by the Judaic Messianic tradition,¹³³ aims to redefine the existing 'formulations of the concepts of history and historical origin'¹³⁴—an ambition also visible in Saint-Éloi's narrative.

In Benjamin's reformulation, history and progress are no longer viewed as

¹³⁰ Bram Mertens, "'Hope, Yes, But Not For Us': Messianism and Redemption in the Work of Walter Benjamin", in *Messianism, Apocalypse and Redemption in 20th-Century German Thought*, ed. by Wayne Cristaudo and Wendy Baker (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2006), pp. 63-79 (p. 72).

¹³¹ Mertens, p. 72.

¹³² Mertens, p. 72.

¹³³ 'The term messianism is derived from messiah, a transliteration of the Hebrew *mashiah* ("anointed"), which originally denoted a king whose reign was consecrated by a rite of anointment with oil. In the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament), *mashiah* is always used in reference to the actual king of Israel: Saul (1 Sm. 12:3-5, 24:7-11), David (2 Sm. 19:21-22), Solomon (2 Chr. 6:42), or the king in general (Ps. 2:2, 18:50, 20:6, 28:8, 84:9, 89:38, 89:51, 132:17). In the intertestamental period, however, the term was applied to the future king, who was expected to restore the kingdom of Israel and save the people from all evil.' Helmer Ringgren, 'Messianism: An Overview', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Lindsay Jones (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2005), pp.5972-74 (p. 5972).

¹³⁴ Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles, 'Walter Benjamin', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta (2012) <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/benjamin/>> [accessed 20 April 2013].

teleological; rather, '[t]he concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe.'¹³⁵ In 'On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress,' taken from *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940), Benjamin writes further that '[p]rogress has its seat not in the continuity of elapsing time but in its interferences—where the truly new makes itself felt for the first time, with the sobriety of dawn.'¹³⁶ Instead of conceiving of temporality in terms of clear divisions between past and present, Benjamin asks us to think about historical time as a relationship between the 'now' and the 'then.' These concepts are brought together in the historical object and the figure of the historian as collector: 'It is owing to this monadological structure that the historical object finds represented in its interior its own fore-history and after-history.'¹³⁷ History, in Benjamin's radical reconfiguration of the term, 'is not simply a science but also a form of remembrance, "*Eindenken*."¹³⁸ According to Rebecca Comay, "'*Eindenken*" denotes the moment of "blasting open" the continuum'¹³⁹ and announces 'a mindfulness or vigilance which refuses to take in (or to be taken in by) a tradition authorizing itself as the continuity of an essential legacy, task or mission to be transmitted, developed or enacted.'¹⁴⁰ As a form of remembering, it is characterised by a sense of incompleteness, and this recognition enables Benjamin to create a narrative that restores justice to the vanquished who 'may have lost the war, but [...] did not lose their history.'¹⁴¹ Embodying his critical methodology in the form of literary montage, Benjamin creates a narrative collage of seemingly unimportant and unrelated objects. He opposes the idea of a linear record of history, challenges the arbitrary valuation of one historical object over the

¹³⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress', in *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 456-88 (p. 473).

¹³⁶ Benjamin, p. 474.

¹³⁷ Benjamin, p. 475.

¹³⁸ Benjamin, p. 471.

¹³⁹ Rebecca Comay, 'Benjamin's Endgame', in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London and New York, NY.: Routledge, 1994), pp. 251-92 (p. 266).

¹⁴⁰ Comay, p. 266.

¹⁴¹ Mertens, p. 75.

other, and rescues these discarded objects from the refuse of history. Benjamin's method resonates in Saint-Éloi's account, which features multiple voices and seemingly disjointed memories as part of the narrator's attempt 'to perform a small but never insignificant *restitutio in integrum*,¹⁴² if only by doing as little as simply refusing to accept the finality of past suffering.'¹⁴³ Much like Benjamin, Saint-Éloi underscores the urgency of remembrance, emphasising the responsibility that lies with survivors who, in preserving the memory of the vanquished, can subvert dominant historical discourses and create new history as a 'memory of the times.'

Yet this restoration of justice, rooted in the experience of the catastrophe, challenges and goes beyond the legal category of *restitutio in integrum*. Justice is not simply 'reversing history', going back to the 'previous condition.' *Haiti, kenba la!* calls for a different type of restitution and justice by refusing to accept the finality of past suffering—the disaster is not yet over—and by making clear that no return to the pre-earthquake conditions is possible, nor should it be wished for. *Restitutio in integrum*, if indeed the restoration is to be complete, entails the elimination of both the structures of exploitation and the discourses of Haiti's 'permanent' vulnerability. As such, the process of constructing a new narrative of the

¹⁴² The *Oxford Dictionary of Law Online* defines the term simply as 'Restoration to the original position.' Jonathan Law and Elizabeth A. Martin, 'restitutio in integrum', in *A Dictionary of Law Online* (Oxford University Press, 2009) <www.oxfordreference.com/10.1093/acref/9780199551248.001.0001/acref-9780199551248-e-3401> [accessed 24 February 2015]. *OED* adds to the definition: 'Placement of an injured party in the situation which would have prevailed had no injury been sustained; restoration of the status quo ante.' 'restitutio in integrum, n.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/163965?redirectedFrom=restitutio+in+integrum>> [accessed 24 February 2015]. Finally, the *Guide to Latin in International Law Online* provides a more contextualised definition of the term: 'Restitution of a damaged or taken thing to its previous condition, as by the restoration of the thing (or a comparable substitute) to the owner who has been deprived of it. In modern times, the term has sometimes been used to refer to the payment of full compensation for the loss sustained in the event that restoration or replacement of the thing damaged or taken is not feasible (for example, when it has been depleted or destroyed).' Aaron X. Fellmeth and Maurice Horwitz, 'restitutio in integrum', in *Guide to Latin in International Law Online* (Oxford University Press, 2009) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195369380.001.0001/acref-9780195369380-e-1856>> [accessed 24 February 2015].

¹⁴³ Mertens, p. 75.

country's recent history has a direct ethical dimension: by refusing to recover previous divisions of time and discourses of the country's past, Saint-Éloi's account of the event allows for a restoration of collective justice, albeit of a limited kind.

New Beginnings and Untimely Futures

As I have been suggesting here via the works of Martin and Saint-Éloi, the 2010 Haitian earthquake has provided a moment of redefinition of the past as a discursive category and historical construct. It has inaugurated a 'new history,' both personal and collective, which has had a defining impact on the ways in which the immediate and long-term future can be understood. Martin's narrative accentuates the uncertainties attendant on this, the extreme difficulty of predicting and preparing for a future experienced as a state of suspense in which the possibility always exists of further devastating aftershocks. However painful this might be, haunting impressions of the disaster must not be effaced if the memory of those lost under the rubble is to be preserved. Saint-Éloi's account shares this anxiety, but also gestures towards a more hopeful beginning—one rooted in revised narratives of the past—even though the larger history within which this is contained is one that oscillates between violent extremes.

In *Le Tremblement*, the narrator's personal experience of the future is characterised by a sense of temporal uncertainty and a possible repetition of the initial event. Echoing, to some extent, the tone of Samuel Beckett's absurdist drama *Waiting for Godot* (1949), *Le Tremblement* encodes the waiting experience in negative terms of inertia and disempowering passivity. Immediately after the earthquake, the narrator feels trapped within a seemingly interminable state of stasis. The repetition of the words

‘attente’, ‘immobilité’, ‘temps suspendu’¹⁴⁴ throughout the narrative, underscores an overwhelming sense of entrapment from which there appears to be no escape. The narrator’s role is reduced to the plain act of waiting: ‘toujours il n’y rien à faire—qu’attendre. Et le temps passe.’¹⁴⁵ His vision of the future anxiously combines his legitimate belief that aftershocks will follow in the wake of the original tremors with his total inability to predict when these might occur. As the afternoon of January 13th passes, and the fatal hour again draws near, the narrator finds himself counting down the time to possible aftershocks:

Il est quinze heures. Nous attendons la forte réplique [...] Peut-on se fier à cette histoire des vingt-quatre heures? La terre va-t-elle de nouveau trembler à précisément 16h 52? Ou n’est-ce qu’un mythe étayé de vaines statistiques?¹⁴⁶

Trapped in a state of paralysis, he can neither trust the past nor the future since these temporal categories either revert to the initial experience of the disaster or signify a repetition of it. Extreme anxiety is the result:

[...] la terre, cette terre pour l’heure si quiète, innocente, enfantine, elle allait de nouveau trembler; des « répliques » allaient nécessairement survenir, parce que c’est la règle et qu’à toute forte secousse font suite des tremblements de normalement moindre importance, mais erratiques et devant s’étaler sur des jours et des jours, sans qu’on puisse en rien les anticiper. Nous attendons dans cette attente improbable.¹⁴⁷

If scientific knowledge at least provides a simulacrum of certainty, the narrator cannot imagine the future any differently than as a mode of waiting for an unavoidable repetition of the initial event. Waiting is both anticipation of change and, paradoxically, an act of deferral of the future. It is a dialectical state directed in its positive modality

¹⁴⁴ ‘waiting,’ ‘immobility,’ ‘suspended time.’

¹⁴⁵ ‘[...]there is nothing to do but wait. And the time passes.’ Martin, p. 82.

¹⁴⁶ ‘It’s three p.m. We are waiting for a strong aftershock [...]. Can we trust the history of the last twenty four hours? Will the earth shake again precisely at 4.52 p.m.? Or is it only a myth supported by empty statistics?’ Martin, p. 69.

¹⁴⁷ ‘[...]the earth, so tranquil, innocent and child-like at the moment, will tremble again; ‘the aftershocks’ will surely follow because it is a rule that a strong tremor is followed by a sequence of shocks, which are usually smaller, erratic and can spread over days so that we cannot predict when they occur. We’re caught in this improbable expectation.’ Martin, p. 22.

‘toward something that is desired,’¹⁴⁸ and in its negative modality ‘toward something that is not desired: it is dread.’¹⁴⁹

Distinguishing between waiting for *something* and waiting for *anything*, the anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano suggests that waiting is a predominantly passive state which produces ‘feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability.’¹⁵⁰ It is organised around the principles of ‘[the] backward glance, [the] seeking [of] security in the experience of the past, [the] taking solace in history, [all of] which devitaliz[e] the here and now.’¹⁵¹ For the narrator of *Le Tremblement*, though, even the past can offer no sense of security as previous knowledge and possibilities of reaction seem non-transferable to the new reality of the disaster. The rhythms of seasonal change are no longer a source of reassurance. Instead, after the earthquake weather assumes a distinctly threatening dimension, signalling the potential repetition of the disaster. Pondering the durability of nature, the narrator remarks:

On serait presque bien, dans l’insouciance de l’avenir, quand l’avenir, aux Antilles, petites et grandes, c’est toujours la même histoire, les jours se succédant sans qu’interfèrent les saisons [...] [s]auf quand passe un cyclone, ou qu’on volcan mugit comme une vache au pis gonflé [...] [s]auf quand la terre tremble.¹⁵²

The initial emphasis on predictability and the reassuring nature of repetition, signalled here by the adverb ‘toujours’ (‘always’), is quickly undermined by the second temporal adverb ‘presque’ (‘almost’). In the Haitian context, the rhythmic recurrence of seasonal change cannot be separated from the equally regular, yet still inherently erratic,

¹⁴⁸ Vincent Crapanzano, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa* (New York, NY.: Vintage Books, 1986), p. 45.

¹⁴⁹ Crapanzano, p. 45.

¹⁵⁰ Crapanzano, p. 44.

¹⁵¹ Crapanzano, p. 45.

¹⁵² ‘We would be almost well in our untroubled, carefree vision of the future because the future in the Greater and Lesser Antilles is always the same, the days follow one another without the interference of the seasons [...] except when a hurricane passes or a volcano roars like a cow with swollen udders [...] expect when the earth shakes.’ Martin, p. 54.

environmental disasters that threaten the country. To wait for the next one of these is to experience waiting in its negative modality: as dread.

Similarly, in *Haïti, kenbe la!* the immediate future has a twofold character, being envisaged in terms of the possibility of a new, hopeful beginning, but also as a heightened consciousness of the devastating scale of destruction and loss. The two merge in the apocalyptic rhetoric that surrounds the account's vision of the future:

Le premier matin a un air de commencement de monde. Le 13 janvier, le terrain de tennis se vide dès l'aube. Hagards, certains sont accrochés dans un tissu d'illusions. Paralysés par la lumière du jour, ils traînent près de la piscine désemparés. D'autres déploient une énergie folle pour ne pas avoir l'air vaincu. Ils se déplacent et refusent d'admettre le fait que la terre a tremblé.¹⁵³

The first day of this new world is a time during which the survivors struggle to affirm their very existence. Described as wild, distraught, blinded by the light, they are helpless in face of the destruction that visibly surrounds them. Saint-Éloi's densely metaphorical language conveys the double—psychological and physical—impact of the event on those it has subjected to its whim; and this apocalyptic vision is later juxtaposed with a more positive representation in which the extraordinary resilience of the survivors is underlined:

Le soleil... Imperturbable, il se lève déjà sur la ville. Mercredi 13 janvier. 8h15. [...] C'est un matin clair, gorgé de promesses. Chacun cherche une raison de ne pas s'abandonner au désespoir.¹⁵⁴

In this first reflection on the near-future, the sun is no longer depicted as bullying, but is rendered as calm and unshakeable. It is a clear morning, bursting with promises ('gorgé de promesses'), and people are looking for a way to abandon the otherwise overpowering feeling of despair.

¹⁵³ 'The first morning resembles the beginning of the world. Since the morning of the 13th of January the tennis courts have been gradually emptying. Distraught, some cling onto a web of illusions. Paralysed by the sun, they hang about helpless near the swimming pool. Others expend incredible energy to deny defeat. They move and refuse to admit that the earth has trembled.' Saint-Éloi, p. 49.

¹⁵⁴ 'The calm sun extends already over the city. Wednesday, the 13th of January. 8.15 am. It's a clear morning full of promises. Everyone is looking for a reason to defy despair.' Saint-Éloi, p. 57.

This affirmation of sense of purpose proves only momentary, however, and the tension between resilience and denial permeates even the most positive depictions of January 13th. The narrator's emphasis on the survivors' struggle, manifested in the repetition of everyday gestures, suggests their refusal to acknowledge the immensity of the disaster. By suppressing the unprecedented impact of the event, they can create a sense of relative continuity and control, though this also turns out to be illusory. Analysing the reactions of some of his fellow survivors, the narrator remarks: 'Certains nient l'ampleur de séisme, accomplissant avec le même entrain les gestes quotidiens.'¹⁵⁵ The recourse to daily habits is an attempt to assert some degree of agency, to defy the scale of the disaster, and to counteract the impact of the experience on one's sense of self. Yet in the face of such staggering loss, these actions cannot be sustained for long and the effort to carry on with everyday existence soon gives way to disillusionment and desperation. This shift in perception is reflected in the narrator's revised description of the day after:

Le jour d'après est pire. On a appris la veille que plus rien n'a de sens. Même les phrases qui font croire en la solidité de la terre.¹⁵⁶

Here, the day after the earthquake is seen as being worse than the day itself, since it forces the narrator and other survivors to face the inadequacy of finding words to express what has happened to them and to confront 'the familiarity of despair.'¹⁵⁷ The future the narrator now envisages is one that continues to be defined by the untimely presence of the event.

In bringing together his knowledge of time passing, marked by 'yesterday' and

¹⁵⁵ 'Some negate the scale of the earthquake repeating everyday gestures with the same will.' Saint-Éloi, p. 64.

¹⁵⁶ 'The day after is even worse. We discovered that nothing makes sense anymore. Even assurances that the earth is solid.' Saint-Éloi, p. 120.

¹⁵⁷ 'La nuit du 13 janvier ressemble à celle de la veille, avec la familiarité du désespoir. Les cauchemars. Les pleurs. Chacune des répliques informes que désormais rien ne sera comme avant.' 'The night of the 13th of January resembles the night before with its familiarity of despair. Nightmares. Cries. Each aftershock states that nothing will be like before.' Saint-Éloi, p. 125.

‘the day after,’ with his renewed sense of doubt, the narrator painfully acknowledges that he is unable to separate his vision of the future from the experience of a disaster that may always continue to haunt him:

Le jour se lèvera-t-il sur cette nuit ? L’aube mangera-t-elle les couleurs de feu du ciel ?

Demain !

C’est vrai que c’est un autre jour.

Demain !

Est-ce un autre soleil ?

J’ai si peur du mot *demain* [italics original].¹⁵⁸

Having acknowledged the full force of the disaster, the narrator struggles to assess its scale. He trawls through various literary representations of post-apocalyptic landscapes, frenetically seeking comparisons for the destruction he has just witnessed:

Je me demande dans quels romans ou dans quels films j’ai déjà croisé ces ombres fuyantes. Ces villes défaulfilées par la catastrophe. Je ferme les yeux et me rappelle certaines scènes de *L’Aveuglement* de José Saramago, de *Trilogie new-yorkaise* de Paul Auster, de *La Route* de Cormac McCarthy. Désastre. Désolation. Paradis perdu.¹⁵⁹

By attempting to establish analogies between the real ravaging of the city and familiar symbolic images of desolation and debris, the narrator hopes to contain the scale of the disaster within known narrative frameworks. But no image of fictional ruination, however familiar, can help him come to terms with the real havoc he has encountered. In a moment of sobering realisation he admits: ‘Ces paysages auxquels j’appartiens ne sont pas les scènes d’une fiction.’¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ ‘Will the day break after this night? Will the fire coloured skies disappear with the dawn? Tomorrow. It’s true, it’s a new day. Tomorrow! Is there a new sun? I am scared of the word *tomorrow*.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 47.

¹⁵⁹ ‘I ask myself in which novels and films I’ve already seen those vanishing silhouettes. Those cities dismantled by the catastrophe. I close my eyes and remind myself of specific scenes in *Blindness* by José Saramago, *The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. Disaster. Desolation. Paradise lost.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 63.

¹⁶⁰ ‘These landscapes to which I belong are not fictional scenes.’ Saint-Éloi, p. 63.

Moreover, the sheer scale of devastation and loss determines the ways in which *Haiti, kenbe la!* envisages the more distant future in the aftermath of the earthquake. The passing of time can bring a difficult-to-accept yet still-longed-for confirmation (e.g. of death), or it can turn into a prolonged experience of anticipation. Painful though it is, for Saint-Éloi as for Martin, only the certainty of death can allow the narrator to move on. At the same time, the impossibility of mourning and achieving a sense of closure severely limits his ability to envisage the future other than as a mode of impotent waiting:

Comment pleurer un proche quand on ne sait pas vraiment s'il est décédé ? Comment pleurer quand secrètement on attend le retour de celui qui est sorti le matin ? On l'attend le soir du 12 janvier et les jours à venir, à chaque bruissement de pas, à chaque réplique. On risque d'attendre *ad vitam*.¹⁶¹

In passages like this one, the inevitable passing of time is contrasted with the experience of temporality as a state of interminable *attente*. Seen in these terms, the future, far from signifying a new beginning, becomes a melancholic, possibly life-long prolongation of the original event that shapes the untimely interventions these texts make.¹⁶²

'On Tuesday, January 12, 2010, eternity lasted less than sixty seconds [...] and forever altered the landscape of a city, a country, and our memory.'¹⁶³ However it is framed, the sudden and arbitrary character of the experience, which is affirmed in

¹⁶¹ 'How to mourn a loved one if we're not sure if he or she is dead? [...]. How to cry when we're secretly waiting for the return of someone who has left in the morning? We wait for the person on the evening of the 12th of January and the days to come, in each rustle of the feet, in each aftershock. We risk waiting *ad vitam*.' Saint-Éloi, p. 62.

¹⁶² The distinction between mourning and melancholia is based on Freud's now classic essay 'Mourning and Melancholia.' Nouri Gana summarises Freud's argument: 'While mourning is a normal affect that is accomplished once all object-cathexes are withdrawn from the lost object and displaced onto a new object, melancholia results from an unflinching fixation on the lost object and culminates in a regressive process of incorporating, if not devouring, the lost other—a process that might eventually enact a primary narcissism, and that Freud suspects of being of a pathological disposition. Thus, whereas in mourning the lost object is remembered so as to be consciously knitted, in accordance with the commands of reality, into the texture of the psyche, in melancholia the object is unconsciously engraved within the psyche.' Nouri Gana, 'Remembering Forbidding Mourning: Repetition, Indifference, Melancholy, Hamlet', *Mosaic: A Journal For the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 37 (2004), 59-78 (p. 60).

¹⁶³ Evelyne Trouillot, 'Eternity Lasted Less than Sixty Seconds....', in *Haiti Rising: Haitian History, Culture and the Earthquake of 2010*, ed. by Martin Munro (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 55-59 (p. 55).

Evelyne Trouillot's remark and explored in detail in *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti, kenbe la!*, contrasts with its lasting personal and collective impact. In the two literary narratives I have been examining in this chapter, the earthquake is both a point of rupture and an untimely event that disrupts conventional notions of time as based on the separation of past, present, and future. In neither account can the process of narrativisation and its formal framings, or the act of distancing oneself from the site of the disaster, lessen the event's continuous impact. In both texts, instead, the untimely character of *goudougoudou* is made manifest in the disruption of previous temporal categories. The earthquake is a punctual event that is presented initially as a defined, measurable occurrence in the past, but then becomes a radical point of rupture marking a separation between the new temporal divisions of 'before' and 'after.' Previous notions of past, present, and future are no longer applicable, and standard units of time and everyday objects likewise cease to be neutral indicators, becoming reminders of the initial trauma and the dreadful possibility of its repetition.

In so far as they both emphasise the personal, collective, and historical significance of the event, *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti, kenbe la!* portray the earthquake in terms of the beginning of a new history. In Martin's prayer-like memoir, this involves the detachment from previous personal history and the wholesale redefinition of earlier experiences and memories of Haiti in light of the event. Present and future merge into one in an experience of temporal suspense in which the seemingly unavoidable reprise of *goudougoudou* is fearfully anticipated. In this context, the future becomes but a mode of repetition of the past, and is filled with echoes of destruction. For Saint-Éloi, meanwhile, the earthquake challenges the meanings of history itself while also offering a chance—however painful—to recall earlier narratives of national history and to create an empowering, ethically committed account of History as the memory of the times.

The new temporal category the event inaugurates is at once a hopeful and a frightening one, necessitating the acceptance of loss and the confrontation of mass destruction. Yet this recognition is not an immobilising one; on the contrary, it motivates the narrator to challenge the idea of the past as a stable and neutral category. Varying though they are in their narrative form, in their ways of framing the event, and in the provisional conclusions they offer for interpreting its collective significance, *Le Tremblement* and *Haiti, kenbe la!* are both powerfully untimely narratives of individual and collective survivorhood. Against a historical background of disempowering and silencing narratives, such narratives forge a new ethics of writing: a dialogue addressed to and commemorating the lost voices of the past. Fully aware of their duty to preserve the painful memory of the event, they accept, in the words of the historian Laura Wagner, that although '[t]he initial moment of rupture is over [...] this disaster has no foreseeable end.'¹⁶⁴ Forever disrupting individual and collective notions of time and history, the force of the tremors also permanently reshapes Haiti's urban and rural landscapes, which each have their own history, as the subsequent chapter explores.

¹⁶⁴ Laura Wagner, 'Salvaging', in *Haiti Rising: Haitian History, Culture and the Earthquake of 2010*, ed. by Martin Munro (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 15-24 (p. 23).

**Chapter 2: Place and Landscape in Sandra Marquez Stathis's
*Rubble: The Search for a Haitian Boy and Dany Laferrière's Tout
bouge autour de moi***

So many things in these West Indian territories, I now begin to see, speak of slavery. There is slavery in the vegetation.¹

The devastating events of January 2010 were not a disconnected happenstance escaping all comparison and defying comprehension; rather they were underpinned by systemic violence—particularly the haunting violence of colonialism—and by specific histories of environmental exploitation and degradation in a particular, and particularly impoverished, part of the postcolonial world. The 2010 disaster emerges as both an individuated site of subjective experience on which subjectivity is founded and a multilayered, collectively experienced ecology, a densely constructed network through which the interconnected social, historical, and environmental coordinates of the disaster can be creatively charted and explored. This was a highly specific disaster, after all, characterised by its postponed future impact and bearing some resemblance to past geological ruptures.² Similarly, the immediate events associated with it extended well beyond the confined moment and location of their occurrence. They intervened and were embedded in a complex context of environmental interactions that were shaped in turn by socio-economic and political processes. Narrative treatments of the earthquake, such as Dany Laferrière's *Tout*

¹ V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London: André Deutsch, 1962), p. 182.

² Martin Munro provides a helpful historical overview of seismic activity on the island of Hispaniola in the five centuries since its colonisation by the Spanish. See Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line*, pp. 3-6.

bouge autour de moi (2011, henceforth *Tout bouge*) and Sandra Marquez Stathis's *Rubble: The Search for a Haitian Boy* (2012, henceforth *Rubble*), while understandably focusing on the moment the earthquake struck and its immediate impact, thus also evoke the disaster's various pasts and contemplate their significance for future times.

This chapter, building on the notion of untimeliness (see Chapter One), examines the unfolding histories of local island landscapes, 'the slavery [visible] in the vegetation,' and contemplates the historical, political, and ecological processes that determined the scale of the January 2010 disaster. The chapter explores dominant representations of Haiti's urban and rural environments, which oscillate between the pastoral and the post-apocalyptic, and scrutinises some of the ways in which the island's different geographical sites have been marked by sudden events, such as the 2010 earthquake, as well as the longer eco-historical processes of exploitation embedded within them. By using in-depth literary analysis as its guiding method, the chapter demonstrates the ways in which knowledge of the natural histories of earthquakes transforms theoretical approaches to disasters and disaster narratives. As will be seen, *Tout bouge* and *Rubble*—both loosely autobiographical accounts, which use autobiographical narrators—creatively consider the histories of different urban and rural sites and the thoughts they elicit by intertwining their respective narrators' past memories of Haitian landscapes with reflections on the contemporary state of devastation. In so doing, they also attempt to engage imaginatively with the country's immediate and long-term future and with the island's geography, which is seen in the process in both *temporal* and *discursive* terms.

Both narratives draw on the dominant geographical discourses that have helped define how pre- and post-earthquake Haiti has been conceptualised. These connect the past to the pastoral, equate the present with devastation, and envisage the future as being marked by a sense of enduring ruination. In what follows, I will explore how *Rubble* and *Tout bouge*, through their form and thematic engagement, negotiate these discursive frames and the literary tropes associated with them. Sharing a sense of urgency, the two narratives have varying aims which are reflected in their formal arrangements. Laferrière's series of one hundred and twenty-eight impressionistic sketches is a way of reacting to the earthquake rather than coming to terms with it or providing an exhaustive commentary on it. He builds a loose-fitting collage of thoughts and experiences of the 2010 disaster, hoping to point to some of its many personal and collective histories. These vignettes and meditations, inspired by single objects and encounters, become literary mementos: i.e. they serve as '[reminders] of a past event or condition, of an absent person, or of something that once existed.'³ *Tout bouge*, through its itemised account which is akin to an inventory, attempts to grapple with the aftermath of the disaster while confronting the limits of its own form.

Rubble, for its part, is a confessional account. Suffused with nostalgia and operating as both memoir and travelogue, it is a text of self-exploration with the narrator working through her own journey via the January events. In creating her 'travel-memoir', the narrator draws on the genre of memoir as a hybrid form representing an uneasy ensemble of several conflicting discourses which construct a subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous⁴ (see Chapter One), yet one that is framed here within an overarching chronological narrative of her journeys to Haiti. By

³ 'memento, n.' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116329?redirectedFrom=memento>> [accessed 10 March 2015].

⁴ Quinby, p. 298.

exploiting the possibilities of memoir to provide a personal account and those of a travelogue which allows her to chart her own journey, the narrator hopes to create the sympathetic imagination needed to elicit readers' empathetic response to the text as well as the disaster it depicts. Finally, by incorporating the earthquake as one among many formative episodes in her journey of self-exploration, the narrator attempts to comment on the event's impact by providing a 'synoptic view of the whole or totality of destruction.'⁵

The thematic emphasis is also different in each case. *Rubble* is imbued with bucolic imagery that accompanies the narrator's first, fondly remembered trip to Haiti, and these nostalgic images then come to colour the text's representation of Haiti's rural landscapes both before and after the earthquake struck. Laferrière's collection of short vignettes, by contrast, is more explicitly concerned with the urban devastation the earthquake caused, with its immediate implications for Haiti's reconstruction, and with the ways—as much limiting as enabling—in which both the damage and its aftermath have been discursively framed. This varying emphasis can be seen in the dominant literary modes on which the two works draw: pastoral and post-apocalyptic. Despite their simplifying effects, these modes, and the contrasting connotations of 'idyll' and 'ruin' they carry, allow for a reading of Haitian geography that is rooted in narrative self-reflexivity—as the following contextualised analysis will show. The chapter divisions reflect this double emphasis

⁵ Todd Samuel Presner employs this term to describe W.G. Sebald's aesthetic response to violence and idiosyncratic ways of representing it in narratives, e.g. in *On the Natural History of Destruction* and *Austerlitz*. Linking Sebald's two distinct forms of literary enquiry Presner claims: 'Sebald calls for a literature that creates a "synoptic" view of the whole or totality of destruction. Such a view would be "artificial" or perhaps even artful, since no eyewitness could have had a synthetic view of the destruction; however, it is precisely the reality effect of such a synoptic view that testifies to the modernism of Sebald's realism. As in *Austerlitz*, it is the imaginary and fictional that contributes to and extends the real and historical.' Although Presner conflates the two works and omits the distinction the writer himself makes between them, his commentary still raises productive doubts as to any narrative's ability to provide a complete view of a disaster. Todd Samuel Presner, "'What a Synoptic and Artificial View Reveals': Extreme History and the Modernism of W.G. Sebald's Realism', *Criticism*, 46 (2004), 341-60 (p. 351).

on the temporal and discursive character of island landscapes, with their subheadings—'Past Retreats', 'Present Devastation' and 'Future Reconstructions'—attaching the disaster to previous ecological, cultural, and political contexts as well as asserting its future significance for the country. In their divergent approach, the two texts under scrutiny both show how literary narratives can contribute to our understandings of the 2010 earthquake by critically examining the natural histories that underlie it—histories that are sometimes concealed as much as they are exposed.

Past Retreats

As numerous critics have pointed out, the category of the pastoral is anything but stable and its divergent uses, particularly in relation to different geographical and cultural contexts and literary traditions, suggest a confusing versatility. Bryan Loughrey, for example, goes so far as to claim that there is an 'almost bewildering variety of works'⁶ to which modern critics attribute the term, 'ranging from anything rural, to any form of retreat, to whatever form of simplification or idealisation.'⁷ In his 1999 study, *Pastoral*, Terry Gifford also highlights the changing applications of the term and the wide variety of associations it triggers. Gifford identifies three main ways in which the pastoral has been employed: as a historical literary category, as a qualification of content, and as a pejorative qualifier.⁸ In its historical use, 'pastoral' refers to a specific, yet in no way homogeneous, literary mode for representing countryside life and rural landscapes. The roots of the pastoral, so defined, can be traced back to the Greco-Roman tradition and the idylls of Theocritus. This classical form witnessed a radical revival during the Renaissance and, later, the Romantic

⁶ Bryan Loughrey, *The Pastoral Mode: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 8.

⁷ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York, NY.: Routledge, 1999), p. 4.

⁸ Gifford, pp. 1-13.

period.⁹ As a literary category, the pastoral has thus undergone numerous modifications, each shaped by the particular socio-political and cultural context of its period, and has influenced a large number of other literary genres: drama, the elegy, the epic and, more recently, the novel.¹⁰ This has led, in turn, to the increasingly widening definition of pastoral as a literary mode rather than a fixed genre: one which can be applied to qualify the stylistic dimensions of a literary work, poetic or otherwise, as well its content and ideological underpinnings.

Employed as it is in relation to markedly different regional contexts and distinct literary traditions, the term ‘pastoral’ is now, as a consequence, more often used to denote the content of a given work rather than ‘the artifice of [a] specific literary form.’¹¹ In this wider sense, pastoral as a mode can potentially encompass ‘any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban.’¹² However, even this binary formulation of ‘the urban’ and ‘the rural,’ the former being associated with a postlapsarian state and the latter with innocence and idealism, is by no means a historically fixed feature of the pastoral. Theocritus’s *First Idyll* does indeed contain motifs that are still now regularly regarded as inherent in the pastoral, such as ‘idyllic landscape, landscape as a setting for song, an atmosphere of *otium*, a conscious attention to art and nature, herdsmen as singers, and, in the account of the gifts, herdsmen as herdsmen.’¹³ But as Renaissance reformulations testify, rather than simply reproducing a certain set of images and themes, pastoral as a genre has long been a historically diversified form. In fact, it is

⁹ Paul Alpers, *What Is A Pastoral?* (Chicago, IL. and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 8.

¹⁰ Peter V. Marinelli gives the following example of the influence of the pastoral on other literary genres: ‘[Pastoral]. appears not only in the specific form in which it came to birth (the ‘Grecian song’ or idyll of Theocritus), but [also]. interpenetrates the drama, as in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and *The Winter’s Tale*; the elegy, as in Spenser’s *Astrophel*; and the epic, as in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*.’ Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 7.

¹¹ Gifford, p. 2.

¹² Gifford, p. 2.

¹³ Alpers, p. 22.

only in the Romantic period, following Friedrich Schiller's seminal *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795-6), that the image of Golden Age nature, filled with a sense of innocence, nostalgia, and loss, became the defining characteristic of the pastoral.¹⁴ It is this last sense of pastoral as an inherently conservative mode of nostalgic longing for a better, untroubled past that has been widely picked up in contemporary readings of the genre. When translated to the various socio-political contexts with which it engages, the pastoral's pejorative characteristics, as they become visible in Marquez Stathis's work, can easily 'emphasise the stability, or work toward the stabilisation, of the dominant order, in part through the symbolic management—which sometimes means the silencing—of less privileged social groups.'¹⁵ This use of pastoral as a pejorative qualifier rather than a literary category in its own right draws on the political quietism the form sometimes suggests, leading some critics to challenge its relevance to contemporary literary depictions of landscape, country life, and the relationship between urban and rural contexts.¹⁶

However, as Terry Gifford and Lawrence Buell are quick to point out, pastoral's potential to re-affirm lost innocence and nostalgia can serve in contrasting, sometimes contradictory, ways. Pastoral, for example, can be conscripted for critique by challenging complacent visions of political escapism and retreat into an

¹⁴ As Paul Alpers explains: 'Nature and idyllic landscape figure prominently in most scholarly and critical accounts of pastoral and are regularly associated with the Golden Age, innocence, and nostalgia. It is not self-evident that these are the defining features of pastoral. The idea that they are derives from a specific poetics, which, so far as it concerns pastoral, has its profoundest statement in Friedrich Schiller's *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795-6).' Alpers, p. 28.

¹⁵ Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: From Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 8-10.

¹⁶ Roger Sales, for example, in his *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), mounts a sharp attack on the pastoral mode which, in his political reading of it, represents '[r]efuge, reflection, rescue and requiem.' He characterises the pastoral as an escapist mode since it seeks refuge in the country and offers a simplified vision of country life in which the values of the past are rescued by the text, creating a falsified reconstruction of a much more complex reality. For Sales, the pastoral mode was used, in effect, to prevent any questioning of the extant social order. Roger Sales, *English Literature in History, 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p. 17.

idealised landscape.¹⁷ The ‘ideological grammar’ of the pastoral is ‘always contingent, always shifting:’¹⁸ it is more than just a retrograde form rooted in bourgeois ideals.¹⁹ Similarly, for Peter Marinelli, pastoral is not inherently evasive of social problems but has the potential to stage confrontation. The poetic persona in search of Arcadia can never fully escape the city and its complexity. Thus, to arrive in Arcadia is only ‘to have one’s problems sharpened by seeing them magnified in a new context of simplicity,’²⁰ and a temporary state can only be a ‘prelude to return.’²¹ It remains unclear in this formulation, however, whether this realisation leads to a more critical view of the past that goes beyond sentiments of nostalgia and loss.

Recognising the limits of ‘pastoral’ as an ever more inclusive form, recent criticism has introduced the sub-categories of ‘anti-pastoral’ and ‘post-pastoral’ in order to offer a more specific consideration of the significance of pastoral as a literary-historical mode for contemporary debates on narrative aesthetics and ethics. The former sub-category can be ‘characterised as the opposite of pastoral in that [it] entail[s] a journey to a kind of underworld and return harrowed rather than renewed.’²² The latter, a rejection of easy literary cliché, is marked by respect and ‘an awe in attention to the natural world [which derive] not just from a naturalist’s

¹⁷ Gifford reiterates this double potential of the pastoral as both re-affirmation and critique: ‘So the pastoral can be a mode of political critique of present society, or it can be a dramatic form of unresolved dialogue about the tensions in that society, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension.’ Gifford, p. 11.

¹⁸ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London and New York, NY.: Routledge, 2010), p. 85.

¹⁹ Lawrence Buell in his 1995 *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1995) explores the versatility of the form in a distinctly New World context, which he terms the “ideological pastoral.” For him, ‘[t]his duality was built into Euro-American pastoral thinking from the start, for it was conceived as both a dream hostile to the standing order of civilization (decadent Europe, lateor hypercivilizing America) and at the same time a model for the civilization in the process of being built.’ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 50.

²⁰ Marinelli, p. 11.

²¹ Marinelli, p. 12.

²² Gifford, p. 120.

intimate knowledge or a modern ecologist's observation of the dynamics of relationships, but from a deep sense of the immanence in all natural things.'²³ In addition, the mixed category of 'post-pastoral' represents an attempt to reconfigure pastoral's ideological underpinnings (e.g. the values of the landowning class in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and to examine the implications they carry for contemporary debates on representations of space and place. In this last redefinition, post-pastoral signifies a literary mode 'informed by ecological principles of uneven interconnectedness.'²⁴ Characterised by 'educated understandings of the symbiotic link between environmental and social justice, at both the local level and beyond,'²⁵ it allows, in effect, for a more nuanced engagement with the landscape's material histories.

This emphasis on interconnectedness is crucial to an understanding of Caribbean ecologies, in general, and the 2010 Haitian earthquake in particular. Drawing on Gifford's definition of post-pastoral, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin suggest a distinctly postcolonial application of the term—one I will draw upon in my subsequent analysis of the ways in which the pastoral mode is used in the two narratives.²⁶ In their 2010 study *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Huggan and Tiffin demonstrate the relevance of pastoral to postcolonial criticism.²⁷ This particular pairing allows them to examine the complex histories of postcolonial landscapes, which are shaped by long-term processes as

²³ Gifford, p. 152.

²⁴ Huggan and Tiffin, p. 115.

²⁵ Huggan and Tiffin, p. 115.

²⁶ Annabel Patterson, whose claims I second in my own analysis, emphasises that it is more productive to focus on the ways in which the pastoral mode is used across different literary texts rather than to try to find a definition of the term, an attempt which 'inevitably leads to the narrowing strictures of normative criticism, statements of what constitutes the "genuine" or the "true" to the exclusion of exemplars that the critic regards as "perverse."' Patterson, p. 7.

²⁷ Huggan and Tiffin identify three main reasons why the pastoral remains relevant to postcolonial discussions of literary works: it is a vehicle for sublimated (sometimes more directly articulated) bourgeois ideology; it tends to be defined by 'a coyness in the face of social injustice'; and it is predominantly European in sensibility and form. Huggan and Tiffin, pp. 83-4.

well as sudden events:

Pastoral, in this sense, is about the legitimization of highly codified relations between socially differentiated people: relations mediated, but also mystified, by supposedly universal attitudes to land.²⁸

This last point suggests how pastoral can serve to re-affirm existing structures of power and social hierarchies. In the Caribbean context, such uses of pastoral can be employed to hide whole histories of socio-economic inequality, dispossession, and exploitation of land and labour. What becomes clear is that categories of ‘nature’ and ‘landscape’ have a two-fold spatial and temporal character: they denote a particular space, but also the ongoing processes that shape it. As such, they are entwined within a net of relations linking labour, plantation agriculture, deforestation, tourism and, not least, natural disasters, all of which influence the ‘natural’ transformations and reconfigurations of space and landscape in the Caribbean and, more specifically, Haiti. Any analysis of literary portrayals of Haitian environments, taking its cue from post-pastoral ecological sensitivities, must therefore account for the island’s *natural history*: the nexus of socio-economic and political as well as environmental processes that have influenced it.

Rubble: The Search for a Haitian Boy, a personal account of the narrator’s different journeys through Haiti’s urban and rural landscapes, draws on one such seemingly fixed meaning of the ‘sentimental pastoral,’²⁹ configured here primarily as a bucolic idyll and an unspoilt prelapsarian landscape of harmony between ‘man’ and ‘nature.’ On the face of it, *Rubble* is a conventionally structured, linear

²⁸ Huggan and Tiffin, p. 84.

²⁹ Here, I draw on Leo Marx’s use of the term. Marx, in his celebrated *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), distinguishes between ‘the complex and sentimental kinds of pastoralism’ (p.25). The latter, visible throughout Marquez Stathis’s text, is a widely diffused popular and sentimental type of pastoralism and is ‘an expression less of thought than of feeling’ which expresses itself in ‘the mawkish taste for retreat into the primitive and rural felicity’ (pp.5-6). Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

travelogue written by a former UN human rights observer who was part of the newly set-up Organization of American States-United Nations Mission and a foreign correspondent for Reuters. As its title already foreshadows, the aim of the travelogue is two-fold: on the one hand, it attempts to provide a detailed account of the earthquake's impact; while on the other, it traces the narrator's personal quest to find Junior, the titular Haitian boy. At different points in the text, the narrator explains how her first assignment in Haiti back in the 1990s was an unforgettable adventure: one she had decided to embark upon, without much forethought, accompanied by fellow human rights and development workers. Marquez Stathis then returns a decade after her last trip, spurred by the news of the January 2010 earthquake, in the hope of finding and helping Junior—a young boy she had previously befriended and cared for during her last stay. By contributing to the boy's wellbeing and safety, Marquez Stathis hopes to participate directly in the post-disaster recovery efforts. This most recent trip is an occasion to return to the urban and rural sites that had previously shaped her perception of Haiti, and, consequently, to revisit the memories these landscapes elicit as well as the knowledge they impart. It also forces her to confront the pre-history of the disaster and the contexts underlying it. Together, the two narratives of her past and recent trips to Haiti create a composite travel-memoir that gives shape to the narrator's observations on Haiti's changing landscapes and the accompanying journey of self-exploration.

The book's extratextual features—a map of Haiti, a photograph of Marquez Stathis and Junior, the latter's drawings, the synopsis and reviews on the back cover—further signal its goal to provide an accurate as well as an intimate testimony; to reconstruct and document the narrator's experience of events. The reviewers' appraisals emphasise this double endeavour, with Ana Menédez describing *Rubble*

as ‘a moving and deeply felt biography of love’s persistence,’³⁰ and Oscar Hijueles characterising it as ‘[a] quite interesting and heartwarming tale’ in which ‘Haiti and its people are brought to vivid life.’³¹ In both reviews, the emotional honesty and intensity of the account are coupled with the credibility of the text—frankness is translated into accuracy and authenticates the narrative. Similarly, *Rubble*’s synopsis points out the multiple positions the author-narrator occupies as ‘a mother, journalist, and former human rights observer,’ ‘chronicl[ing] her soul-etching and life-altering years living and working in Haiti.’³² Here again, *Rubble* is seen as at once a ‘chronicle,’ a register of events ‘without philosophic treatment, or any attempt at literary style,’³³ and an ‘eyes-wide-open portrait of Haiti’³⁴—a creative work coloured by one person’s necessarily limited perception. ‘Chronicle’ and ‘portrait’ are perceived as complementary threads that, despite their different functions, can nevertheless be interwoven into the fabric of the text. The ‘authenticity’ of the narrator’s personal account thus becomes a guarantor of its ‘accuracy,’ an equivalence that is re-affirmed in the latter part of the synopsis: ‘Marquez Stathis is determined to find out if he [Junior] has survived the quake and to express her gratitude for his enduring friendship. In so doing, she learns that Junior’s story *is* Haiti’s story’ [italics added].³⁵ This sense of easy complementarity between the two main narrative threads and formal conventions suggests in effect that emotional honesty equals narrative impartiality.

Yet, as the subsequent analysis demonstrates, it is precisely this two-fold aspect of the work—personal memoir as well as collection of scattered observations

³⁰ Marquez Stathis, back cover.

³¹ Marquez Stathis, back cover.

³² Marquez Stathis, back cover.

³³ ‘chronicle, n.’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/32576?rskey=tBvYZE&result=1>> [accessed 3 June 2015].

³⁴ Marquez Stathis, back cover.

³⁵ Marquez Stathis, back cover.

on Haiti's past and present—that is a key source of tension within the text. On one hand, the narrator emphasises the deeply emotional character of her narrative and stakes a powerful claim for personal experience. The single narrative voice contributes to this sense of intimacy, with the reader being exposed only to the narrator's perspective on Haiti, and with no countervailing viewpoint or voice being incorporated into the text. On the other hand, she uses the honest appraisal of her own experience of Haiti as the basis for a generalising analysis of the country's predicament in which emotional honesty and authenticity—central features of memoir—limit rather than increase the reliability of the contextual account. In effect, contrary to the narrator's ambitions, the two interweaving components do not create a seamless narrative design, but rather one that reveals the formal tensions within the text.

Meanwhile, the importance of direct sensory experience, the 'eyes-wide-open-portrait of Haiti,' is further emphasised through the bipartite division of the book into Part I—'Je/Eyes'—and Part II—'Ké/Heart.' Each is preceded by an epigraph which foregrounds the narrator's aspirations. A quotation from Mary Catherine Bateson's *Composing a Life* (1989) opens Part I: '*she grasped the idea that one could study culture, one's own or that of others, truly attending to it rather than using the stance of an observer as a way to dominate*' [italics original].³⁶ Part II opens with a quotation from Jorge Luis Borges's 'Two English Poems' (1934):

*I offer you that kernel of myself that I have saved,
Somehow—the central heart that deals not
in words, traffics not with dreams, and is
untouched by time, by joy, by adversities* [italics original].³⁷

Integral to the narrative's design are the implied sense of proximity and care, as suggested by the verb 'attending to;' and of emotional memory preserved, this

³⁶ Marquez Stathis, p. 1.

³⁷ Marquez Stathis, p. 69.

‘central heart [...] untouched by time.’ Together, the epigraphs mark the two stages of Marquez Stathis’s account, reiterate the task she has set herself, and point to the primary method—emotional honesty—she will employ in order to fashion and give meaning to her text.

In addition, the use of personal narrative as the means towards a wider commentary on Haiti’s predicament is directly linked to *Rubble*’s ambition to counteract stereotypical perceptions of the island. Aware to some degree at least of the ways in which Haiti and its people have been exoticised, the narrator does not want her memoir to do the same. She sees her narrative, on the contrary, as challenging such objectifying readings:

I have tried to be judicious, never revealing more than needed to be told and never holding back in the service of emotional honesty.

I have tried to take that same approach in writing about Haiti and her people, looking beyond the accepted narrative of violence, chaos, misery, and tragedy—and instead looking deeply into Haiti’s mirror image to source our common humanity.³⁸

With this self-reflexive remark, the text’s aspirations and aims are clearly communicated: to look beyond ‘the accepted received narrative of violence chaos, misery, and tragedy,’ and to learn from a direct experience of Haiti. The narrator’s experiential knowledge, which is the source of her analysis of the country’s predicament, is opposed to the alleged ignorance of these received narratives.

This emotional frankness, along with the importance of personal experience made evident in the narrator’s commentary on her own endeavour, is central to the text’s portrayal of Haiti’s natural landscapes. Here, too, the narrator tries to provide a judicious yet intimate account of her first impressions of Haiti’s countryside. After its opening personal remarks, *Rubble* shifts to offer background information about

³⁸ Marquez Stathis, p. 293.

the narrator's relationship with Junior and to present the reader with an account of her stay in Haiti in the 1990s. It is during this trip that Marquez Stathis first frames her depiction of the country, which she retrospectively revisits in 2010, in terms of irreconcilable contrasts embodied in the environment:

As I fell asleep, I remembered the explosive beauty of the flamboyant tree that captured my imagination [...] It was the first time I noticed the singular grace of this tree, and from then on, it would remain branded in my mind as a symbol of the beauty and pathos of Haiti.³⁹

During her stay, the countryside had paradisiac qualities, functioning as an uncorrupted space that sustained her as she attempted to 'save' Haiti through her work for the UN. The use of the religiously rooted word 'grace' in the passage, followed by the pairing of 'beauty' and 'pathos,' creates a vision of Haiti as a country outside time and history that can only 'evoke sadness or sympathy.'⁴⁰ This mythologising image imparts *timelessness* to nature, suggesting that the narrator's experience of the natural world is one of transition from a complex and difficult present to a simple and comforting past, with the pastoral tone and imagery being used here to impart a sense of retreat and temporal displacement. As such, the narrator's nostalgic reflections on the past preclude an analytical consideration of the *historicity* of Haiti's rural landscapes that is characteristic of post-pastoral aesthetics (at least in Huggan and Tiffin's sense).

Contrary to the narrator's impressions, violence has never been absent from this imaginary garden. Extermination of the native Taíno population, plantation slavery, and deforestation all go unmentioned.⁴¹ Similarly, the sense of abundance

³⁹ Marquez Stathis, p. 24.

⁴⁰ 'pathos, n.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138808?redirectedFrom=pathos>> [accessed 1 August 2013].

⁴¹ As Henry Paget makes clear, 'the plantation became the institution that provided the broad framework through which subsistence, feudal, patrimonial, and other precapitalist economies would be transformed and incorporated into the global capitalist system.' Henry Paget, 'The Caribbean Plantation: Its Contemporary Significance', in *Sugar, Slavery, and Society: Perspectives on the*

that the above image connotes is totally detached from the Caribbean-wide processes of commodification and exploitation of resources that began with the European ‘discoveries.’ The narrator’s Edenic evocations are questionable in the context of the Caribbean, a geographical region defined by ‘imperial genocide and colonial plantation slavery,’⁴² both of which continue to shape island ecologies to this day. Notwithstanding, the narrator seems to want to uphold her sentimental view of Haiti even after the earthquake. Despite the disaster, the countryside is still perceived as a timeless and peaceful refuge, expressed in the uncritical language of longing and nostalgia. Here, from her first trip:

I am on a quest today to find trace of pastoral Haiti—bright sugarcane fields, neatly tended row of crops, children attending village schoolhouses, women riding horseback to market, people living simply off the land, just as they did hundreds of years ago.⁴³

And here, from her second:

Outside my window, thick groves of banana trees fill the landscape. This is exactly what I have been longing to see once again. The lush, emerald green fields and flashes of the sparkling Caribbean Sea revel themselves like a translucent watercolor painting, each color subtly blurring into the next. A woman bathes in a nearby river.⁴⁴

These two passages revisit standard tropes of the timeless, the exotic, and the primitive. The landscape has Edenic qualities of plenitude; it functions as a haven; and its beauty compensates for the violence and chaos that surround this seemingly secluded and uncontaminated space. The woman who bathes in a nearby river is ‘naturalised’—objectified against a tropical-paradise backdrop, she is fully unaware of the narrator’s voyeuristic gaze. In a gesture of hope and nostalgia, the narrator

Caribbean, India, the Mascarenes, and the United States, ed. by Bernard Moitt (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), pp. 157-87 (p. 158). The demographic of the indigenous population in Hispaniola remains uncertain. But, as Roger Plant demonstrates, the scale of the extermination is clear: ‘By 1508, official Spanish census figures could count only 60,000 survivors. By the 1550s that number had been halved, and in 1570 contemporary documents gave a figure of approximately 500.’ Roger Plant, *Sugar and Modern Slavery: A Tale of Two Countries* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Zed Books, 1987), p. 5.

⁴² Huggan and Tiffin, p. 117.

⁴³ Marquez Stathis, p. 159.

⁴⁴ Marquez Stathis, pp. 258-9.

wants to recover lost landscapes that might bring back and, at the same time, validate her first impressions of Haiti as a ‘unique blend of beauty and pain, eternal need and dignity.’⁴⁵

For all its apparent critique of the ethnographic gaze, the text does little to offer a different vantage point. Against its own self-proclaimed goals, the treatment of nature in Marquez Stathis’s text does not differ greatly from earlier stereotypical descriptions of the Caribbean, nor does she seem fully aware of the implications of these depictions or what particular visions of the country’s future they might suggest. Even when she does acknowledge the temporal dimensions of the landscape, as in the final sentence of the first remark ‘just as they did hundreds of years ago,’⁴⁶ there is no critical consideration of what time-frame the phrase points to. The natural landscape is a bountiful timeless space that apparently requires no labour:

That is one of the dualities of life in the Haitian countryside. There is abundance and a lulling quality of life, but it has not been matched with economic opportunity.⁴⁷

Repeatedly, the countryside is characterised as a dreamy place removed from the bustle and chaos of the city and the dynamics of the market economy. At the same time, this unspecified ‘abundance’ contrasts with an alleged lack of ‘economic opportunit[ies]’: ‘I reflected on the contrast between Haiti’s exquisite beauty and its enduring poverty and violence.’⁴⁸ The simplistic juxtaposition of beauty and poverty, underlain by primitivist tropes, circumvents complex questions of Haiti’s economic hardships, which can be traced to French indemnity demands in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The timeless ‘natural’ landscape is robbed of its own history

⁴⁵ Marquez Stathis, p. 145.

⁴⁶ Marquez Stathis, p. 159.

⁴⁷ Marquez Stathis, p. 262.

⁴⁸ Marquez Stathis, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Fr 50 million indemnity (later Fr 90 million, comparable to US\$12.7 billion as of 2009 with consideration to inflation). However, when a similar demand was made in 2009 for France to pay its

and, instead, has a mythical, almost prelapsarian character to it. It offers ‘a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension.’⁵⁰ In effect, depictions such as the one above, which populate Marquez Stathis’s travel-memoir, revisit standard exoticist tropes, revealing the narrative to be saturated with colonial discourse.

To a great extent, this narrative rhetoric builds on earlier colonial readings of the island’s landscape, which are rooted in romantic histories of ‘the Noble Savage’ and mystical ‘native space.’ Michael J. Dash in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998) traces the development of such romantic figurations of the tropics. Shaped by advances in European thought, the tropics, at different historical moments, have been presented through tropes of wildness and savagery as well as images of prelapsarian innocence and purity. At first, the former evoked horror and disgust; only later would the New World evolve ‘into a utopian site—a positive, idealized metamorphosis.’⁵¹ This positive re-imagining of the tropics,⁵² influenced by socio-political changes in Europe, was accompanied by the introduction of the idea of a ‘Noble Savage’ at a time when the Old World was witnessing an increasingly critical attitude towards the nobility and their privileged status, with ‘the idea of the Noble Savage [being] used, not to dignify the native but rather to undermine the idea of nobility itself [and to] represent not so much an

historic debt, no action was taken. For an overview of the demands and action taken. See: ‘Un appel pour que la France rembourse à Haïti la dette de son indépendance’, *Le Monde*, 16 August 2010 <http://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2010/08/16/un-appel-pour-que-la-france-rembourse-a-haiti-la-dette-de-son-independance_1399330_3222.html#6Q7gOCIso3YTrmVC.99> [accessed 20 August 2015] and Isabel Macdonald, ‘France’ s debt of dishonour to Haiti’, *Guardian*, 16 August 2010 <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/aug/16/haiti-france>> [accessed 06 August 2013].

⁵⁰ Gifford, p. 11.

⁵¹ Dash, p. 27.

⁵² ‘By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Tropics, in particular, began to be seen in terms of a kind of a pagan sensuality, very different from Rousseau’ s vision of the divine in nature or the impulse to establish a social and moral order in the face of nature’ s disorder.’ Dash, p. 31.

elevation of the idea of the native as a demotion of the idea of nobility.’⁵³ Dash, building on Hayden White’s earlier analysis, stresses that the trope of the Noble Savage served the ideological needs of a rising bourgeoisie demanding revolutionary change, ‘for it at once undermined the nobility’s claim to a special human status and extended that status to the whole of humanity.’⁵⁴ White’s and Dash’s remarks hint at the duality of those literary representations of tropical nature which served to critique European society while re-asserting an essentialist notion of otherness and, with it, the related concepts of the ‘primitive’ and the ‘exotic’ and the growing association of sensuality with the tropics. These tropical forms of otherness, however, were not only evoking places in need of being ‘saved,’ but were also vehicles of ‘salvation’ for their creators, allowing them to escape—albeit only imaginatively—from the constraints of societies hidebound by puritanical values.⁵⁵ In accordance with these tropical myths, the New World has been consistently portrayed as a realm of the ‘natural’, whether a route to the sensual sublime or a site of chaos and disorder⁵⁶; devoid of its own proper culture and history and inextricably entangled in global networks of commerce and trade.

For all its insufficiencies, the pastoral mode does not necessarily preclude a more contextualised engagement with Haiti’s natural landscapes as complex environments including ‘all of the external abiotic and biotic factors, conditions, and influences that affect the life, development, and survival of an organism or a

⁵³ White goes so far as to claim that the concept of ‘the Noble Savage’ only served the ideological needs of the rising middle classes, who wanted to share in the ‘natural’ privileges that the nobility enjoyed and inherited. The claim to ‘nobility’ was only extended to the whole of humanity in principle as in fact it was ‘meant to extend neither to the natives of the New World nor to the lowest classes of Europe, but only to the bourgeoisie’ (p.194). Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 191.

⁵⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York, NY.: HarperPerennial, 1992), p.5, in Dash, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Dash, p. 32.

⁵⁶ According to J. Michael Dash, the view of nature as a route to sublime can be traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Later, similar images would resonate in Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs Du Mal* (1857), which presented nature as a place of worship. The portrayal of nature as potentially chaotic is manifested, meanwhile, in works like *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Dash, p. 29.

community.’⁵⁷ This broader definition stresses the interconnectedness of abiotic and biotic components and allows for a conceptualisation of social and ecological resilience, not only as a passive capacity to withstand but also as an active adaptability. Beverly Bell employs pastoral imagery and botanical metaphors to challenge the depoliticisation of Haitian nature and to put forward more empowering models of individual/collective response to testing events such as the 2010 earthquake. In her formulation, resilience is not a passive state of waiting and inertia, but rather the manifestation of an active and informed refusal to succumb to the violence of a particular event:

The bamboo symbolizes the Haitian people [...] The bamboo is really weak, but when the wind comes, it bends, but it doesn’t break. Bamboo takes whatever adversity comes along [...] that’s what resistance is for us Haitians; we might get bent [...] but we’re able to straighten up and stand.⁵⁸

Such imagery, while traditionally pastoral, also points to the individual and collective resolve of Haitian people—a determination, agency, and resourcefulness notably missing in Marquez Stathis’s work. Bell’s imagery also makes reference to a popular Haitian proverb, ‘Ayiti se bwa wozo, li kap pliye men li pap kaze,’⁵⁹ which asserts individual and collective resolve to confront the difficulties the country might be facing, whether internally or externally. Finally, in her use of pastoral, Bell demonstrates the potential of the mode to expose the violence inherent in any transformation of Haiti’s landscapes.

Moreover, by highlighting the interconnectedness between different environmental components as well as within the affected community, Bell points to

⁵⁷ Chris Park, ‘environment’, in *Oxford Dictionary of Environment and Conservation Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199641666.001.0001/acref-9780199641666-e-2563>> [accessed 9 March 2015].

⁵⁸ Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women’s Stories of Survival and Resistance* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 23. Here, in the epigraph to the chapter, Bell quotes a remark by Yvette Etienne.

⁵⁹ Haiti is like reed (or bamboo). It bends but it doesn’t break. I would like to thank Sophonie Zidor for this reference.

the complexity of culturally defined mechanisms of resilience—sets of beliefs and practices, community structures, personal/collective experience—that can help to interpret and react to complex political, economic, and environmental events. Guglielmo Schininà and others, for example, in their extended analysis of psychosocial responses to the 2010 Haitian earthquake, stress the importance of the traditional *lakou* system, religion, and creativity, all of which can be seen to have helped in responding to the disaster.⁶⁰ Alison Schafer also underlines the importance of religion as a coping mechanism, since both ‘spiritual beliefs and practice directly contribute to a community’s frame of reference and their finding meaning in a crisis and, ultimately, their access to resources and capacities for coping.’⁶¹ On their own of course, none of these automatically protect survivors from the impact of disasters like the 2010 earthquake, nor can they replace professional medical assistance. They do however provide an invaluable support structure and an interpretative framework that can help to make sense of catastrophic events by incorporating them into a wider cosmology.

Such politicised and culturally rooted translations of pastoral imagery are conspicuously lacking in Marquez Stathis’s work. Instead, her reading of Haiti’s pre- and post-earthquake rural landscapes is overwhelmingly defined by a sense of nostalgic longing for an impossible return to, and equally impossible repetition of, an idealised past. Her emphasis on the timelessness of the countryside works as a mode of political escapism which negates the complex and violent processes that

⁶⁰ Schininà.

⁶¹ Alison Schafer, ‘Spirituality and Mental Health in Humanitarian Hontexts: an Exploration Based on World Vision’s Haiti Earthquake Response’, *Intervention*, 8 (2010), 121-30 (p. 122). Earlier studies, which Schafer draws on in her analysis, also underline this point. See: Jennifer H. Wortmann and Crystal L. Park, ‘Religion/Spirituality and Change in Meaning After Bereavement: Qualitative Evidence for the Meaning Making Model’, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 14 (2009), 17-34; Marian Tankink, ‘The Moment I Became Born Again the Pain Disappeared: the Healing of Devastating War Memories in Born-Again Churches in Mbarara District, Southwest Uganda’, *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 44 (2007), 203-31.

once defined Haiti, while also upholding the sentimental view the narrator longs for—that of an untroubled past. In this and other ways, the narrative pairs a nostalgic sense of *changelessness* embodied in the Haitian countryside with *unchangeability*, the perceived impossibility of any real change occurring in the future. In stark contrast to the all-too-evident devastation surrounding her, the narrator’s vision of post-earthquake recovery seems to be imagined primarily in terms of the impossible recreation of a pastoral garden that exists outside time and history altogether rather than being lodged in some idealised version of the past. Consequently, rural spaces are still and timeless and, likewise, the population that inhabits this imaginary Eden is detached from any material contexts that might surround it. In effect, the text does little other than reiterate tired metaphors that place Haiti outside global ecologies and portray it instead as an enchanted far-away place of ‘Voodoo, Zombies, and Mermaids.’⁶²

Present Devastation

The idealised presentation of rural landscapes in *Rubble* as timelessly exotic is in stark contrast to the text’s portrayal of urban devastation, to which I now turn. Destruction, accounted for in similarly hyperbolic terms, is total and permanent: Haiti is now configured as a *discarded* as well as a *devastated* space. Yet, as a comparative analysis of *Rubble* and *Tout bouge* will later reveal, these same images of debris and destruction, an undeniable material feature of post-earthquake city space, can be employed to suggest markedly different readings of the country’s predicament. For one, the terms ‘ruin,’ ‘ruination’ and ‘devastation’ can alternately

⁶² See the title of Potter’s 2009 article: ‘Voodoo, Zombies, and Mermaids: U.S. Newspaper Coverage of Haiti.’

refer to specific depictions of post-earthquake urban landscape and to general discourses of underdevelopment that characterise Haiti as a ‘failed state’ (see Introduction). And for another, their temporal signification may connote either a sense of permanence and impenetrability or point to the long-term processes that contributed to a state of ruination. ‘Ruin,’ as Ann Laura Stoler explains in her insightful analysis of imperial debris, can be both a claim about the state of a thing and a process affecting it.’⁶³ ‘Ruin,’ after all, functions as a verb as well as a noun; it is ‘the state or condition of a fabric or structure’⁶⁴ or a person, but also an action of inflicting ‘great and irretrievable damage, loss, or disaster upon (a person or community).’⁶⁵ ‘Ruins’ and ‘ruination,’ in this wider sense, can refer to three distinct moments across time, showing how past, present, and future are all shaped by a range of ‘violences and degradations that may be immediate or delayed, subcutaneous or visible.’⁶⁶ The following close reading of *Rubble* and *Tout bouge* builds upon this wider significance of ruins and ruination for Haiti’s past, present, and future. The analysis points to the contrasting means by which future reconstruction, both physical and symbolic, can be achieved and opens onto an examination, which I will go on to undertake in the next chapter, of the ways in which individual and collective categories of post-earthquake collective subjectivity are defined.

As its title already suggests, the overpowering presence of debris characterises the narrative portrayal of post-earthquake urban devastation in *Rubble*.

⁶³ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 23 (2008), 191-221 (p. 195).

⁶⁴ ‘ruin, n.’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/168689?rskey=rk5JU5&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 12 March 2013].

⁶⁵ ‘ruin, v.’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/168690?rskey=rk5JU5&result=2&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 12 March 2013].

⁶⁶ Stoler, pp. 195-6.

Haiti's capital is a benighted place of permanent ruin and primeval darkness, in stark contrast to the lush bucolic greenery of the Haitian countryside. The emotional charge of the narrator's observations reflects her shock at the scale of the devastation. From the prologue onwards, rubble accumulates relentlessly to present an image of Haiti as a post-apocalyptic space. Here are her first impressions of the country:

It goes on and on for as far as the eye can see. Rubble, a mass grave of final breaths and buried dreams. Rubble, a newly formed tundra of boulders, concrete slab, mangled metal rods, detritus of daily life, and cinder blocks returned to their natural state of cement ash. Rubble, a shifting archipelago forever altering the topography of land and memory.⁶⁷

Her later observations of the city space reiterate these images of omnipresent decay:

In its stead are heaping piles of trash, a monument to the presidential stalemate paralyzing the country right now. The sky has grown overcast and the sight of all the trash weighs on me. I'm not sure if it's just a matter of my eye needing to adjust to Haiti or if the country has slipped ever deeper into the muck.⁶⁸

In the first quotation, the debris reaches 'as far as the eye can see' and has an enduring, timeless character to it. Debris is at once a category of space and a property of experience. The scene in which the narrator is immersed resembles a labyrinth of concrete, metal, and cement ash that she, a latter-day explorer-figure, attempts with great difficulty to navigate. In contradistinction to earlier representations of Haiti's rich flora and fauna, and to the associations of peace, simplicity, and purity these evoke, the natural formations recalled here (e.g. tundra) have no such positive connotations. Rather, these portrayals amplify a sense of overpowering density that exacerbates the violence and chaos of an afflicted city.

In the second observation, post-earthquake Port-au-Prince is depicted as a

⁶⁷ Marquez Stathis, p. vii.

⁶⁸ Marquez Stathis, pp. 180-1.

place that has ‘collapsed into a state of prehistoric rubble.’⁶⁹ An overriding sense of blight and immobility permeates the passage, conjoining images of physical decay and political paralysis—lacklustre metaphors of an inert state. Meteorological imagery further contributes to this anguished picture of Haiti as a discarded and devastated place, its urban landscape desolate and empty. The scene seems timeless or, perhaps better, to exist in jumbled time, with the country being presented not only as the site of a recent disaster but also of other disasters waiting to happen, other catastrophes inevitably to come. Although these highly charged passages are presumably aimed at triggering a sympathetic response on the part of the reader, they ultimately do the opposite, producing a disempowering effect. For the narrator, the whole country has been transformed into a dystopian wasteland, a paradigmatic ‘Disasterland’⁷⁰ with the neologism becoming a synonym for Haiti itself.⁷¹ In this characteristic simplification, Haiti is deprived of its history and culture, becoming only a pile of debris to take away or leave behind. In effect, in one sweeping gesture, the world’s first Black republic is reconfigured as ‘a brainteaser,’⁷² a place where ‘expectation and reality so often clash’⁷³ and where ‘reality is a constant puzzle, existing on multiple layers’.⁷⁴

Moreover, the hyperbolic diction and imagery of Marquez Stathis’s observations, in language uncannily echoing Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), works towards portraying Haiti as a toxic residue; the leftover product of a chronic process of decomposition, it is a godforsaken place that has ‘slipped even deeper

⁶⁹ Marquez Stathis, p. 70.

⁷⁰ ‘As the 767 transporting me through the clouds comes in for landing, I see white tents dotting the perimeter of the airport. This is my first glimpse of the ‘new Haiti.’ Once on the ground, we share runway space with a C-130 American military cargo plane and we park near a curiously named Planet Airways plane, harbingers that we have arrived in Disasterland.’ Marquez Stathis, p. 80.

⁷¹ ‘I feel as if I am standing in line amidst a group of foreigners waiting to return home from Disasterland’, Marquez Stathis, p. 252.

⁷² Marquez Stathis, p. 219.

⁷³ Marquez Stathis, p. 260.

⁷⁴ Marquez Stathis, p. 219.

into the muck.’⁷⁵ The use of the word ‘muck,’ which denotes ‘[m]ud, dirt, filth; rubbish, refuse,’⁷⁶ along with the familiar light versus dark binary, creates a disturbing image of Haiti as a helpless and devastated place, immobilised in its vulnerability. No change, whether political, social, or environmental, seems possible in this failed state,’ this political-cum-environmental ‘disaster zone.’⁷⁷ Presented in *Rubble* as being some way short of a modern nation, Haiti is trapped in darkness and needs to be guided towards the light, which is unsurprisingly embodied in the text by the narrator’s own home country. *Rubble* sets up the U.S. as a ‘truly’ modern, democratic society, ‘a beacon of hope to so many around the world,’⁷⁸ and the embodiment of what democracy should look like. Within this binary positioning, the text seems to draw on the American metaphor of the nation as ‘a city upon a hill:’ an image first used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount⁷⁹ and then famously employed by John Winthrop in his *A Modell of Christian Charity* (1630),⁸⁰ which

⁷⁵ During her trip to Delmas, a neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, the narrator observes: ‘I’ m not sure if it’ s just a matter of my eye needing to adjust to Haiti, or if the country has slipped even deeper into the muck. I’ m afraid it’ s the latter.’ Marquez Stathis, p. 180.

⁷⁶ ‘muck’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/123164?rskey=5XwKKH&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 17 June 2015].

⁷⁷ As Robert Muggah, in his analysis of the effects of the stabilisation mission in Haiti, suggests: Even before the notorious Duvalier dictatorships came to an end in the mid-1980s, Haiti was described alternately as “failing,” “failed,” and “fragile” in international policy circles.’ Robert Muggah, ‘The Perils of Changing Donor Priorities in Fragile States: The Case of Haiti’, in *Exporting Good Governance: Temptations and Challenges in Canada’ s Aid Programme* ed. by Jennifer Welsh and Ngaire Woods (Waterloo: Centre for International Governance Innovation and Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008), pp. 169-203 (p. 169). Beverly Bell also points to the prevalence of discourses of Haiti as a ‘failed state’: ‘The message had long been drummed, but the tempo picked up after the earthquake, pounded by foreign governments, academics, and media, such as *Time* magazine’ s piece ‘The Failed State That Keeps Failing.’ Later, Haiti would even come in fifth in the 2011 Failed States Index of the think tank Fund for Peace, after Somalia, Chad, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.’ Bell, p. 80. For other examples of the operations of this discourse, see Tim Padgett, ‘The Failed State That Keeps Failing: Quake-Ravaged Haiti Still without a Government’, *Time Online*, 10 September 2011 <<http://world.time.com/2011/09/10/the-failed-state-that-keeps-failing-quake-ravaged-haiti-still-without-a-government>> [accessed 15 July 2013] and Tim Weiner, ‘Life Is Hard and Short in Haiti’ s Bleak Villages’, *New York Times Online*, 14 March 2004 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/14/world/life-is-hard-and-short-in-haiti-s-bleak-villages.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>> [accessed 15 July 2013].

⁷⁸ Marquez Stathis, p. 176.

⁷⁹ ‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.’ Matthew 5.14.

⁸⁰ John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity* (1630) (Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society: Boston, 1838) 7,31-48 <<https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>> [accessed 01 October 2015].

has since been used in political discourse to signify the idea of American exceptionalism. In accordance with simple translations of this trope, *Rubble* presents the U.S. as a model and a guiding example for other aspiring nations to follow:

[...] it is the core building blocks of democracy—the rights to free speech, free assembly, and the peaceful transition of power—so embedded in our political DNA, that truly define us as a nation and make the American body politic a beacon of hope to so many around the world.⁸¹

Such heady rhetoric establishes a hierarchical relationship between the two neighbour states that is paralleled in the narrative design of the text, where the enlightened narrator guides the reader through Haiti's bleak reality.

However, such windy phrase-making overlooks Haiti's proximity as well as its centrality in terms of both its geographical positioning and the role it played in the histories of the Caribbean and the Americas, with the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) functioning as a founding *modern* event.⁸² The first aspect challenges the notion of Haiti as a periphery. The Caribbean Sea functions in symbolic and physical terms as both a separator and a link between the insular states and the U.S., which has now become a dream destination for many Haitians. The Sea is a site of 'an unceasing traffic [...] that joins and isolates the first Republics in the New World'⁸³ and this continuous movement, epitomised in the contemporary context, in the image of 'boat people,'⁸⁴ can be traced across time and space. Meanwhile the second aspect, the Revolution, a radical realisation of the ideals of equality, fraternity, and liberty, was an unprecedented challenge to French rule, the global

⁸¹ Marquez Stathis, p. 176.

⁸² Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (Charlottesville, VA.: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

⁸³ J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and Literary Imagination*, p. 136.

⁸⁴ J. Michael Dash elaborates on this particular form of sea traffic: 'The first refugees who turned up on the shores of the United States were French families fleeing the violence of the Haitian War of Independence at the end of the eighteenth century. By 1915 the ships that find their way to Port-au-Prince are American warships that land Admiral Caperton and his Marines. The mass exodus of black, impoverished refugees from Duvalier's regime retraces the journey made almost two centuries earlier by white colonizers.' Dash, pp. 135-6.

colonial system, and the resulting economic supremacy of the colonial powers. A singular political and symbolic undertaking that resulted in the establishment of the world's first free Black republic, the event was an act of reclamation enmeshed in the global histories of imperialism and the developing colonial market. Indeed, from its revolutionary inception Haiti has been at the *heart* of global socio-political transformations—a defining role that *Rubble* effectively negates, but one that *Tout bouge*, to which I now turn, explicitly recognises and respects.

Like *Rubble*, *Tout bouge* tries to come to terms with the scale of devastation caused by the earthquake and to assess the significance of this historic rupture. Aware of the impossibility of achieving a full grasp of events—an understanding that might be reflected in a more controlled linear narrative form—the narrator chooses instead to emphasise the fragmentary nature of his account. It seems significant that in the English translation of the text, the title and the extratextual information suggest a generic qualification of Laferrière's collection: *Tout bouge autour de moi* becomes *The World is Moving Around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake* (2013).⁸⁵ This additional sub-title, as well as the summary information provided on the back cover, which describes the text as a 'revelatory book [and] an eyewitness account,'⁸⁶ accentuate the importance of the narrator's own direct experience of the event. The sub-title also seems to be a marketing ploy in response to the growing popularity of memoirs in the North American publishing market and the 'memoir boom' of the last decades.⁸⁷ The summary further posits a link between Laferrière's account and earlier post-Holocaust testimonial narratives: 'In this way,

⁸⁵ Dany, Laferrière, *The World is Moving Around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake*, trans. by David Homel (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013).

⁸⁶ Laferrière. Back cover. [Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent translations are from this edition. In order to differentiate between the original and the translated editions, I will reference the English text as Homel, followed by page number.]

⁸⁷ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, NY. and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 2.

this book is not only the chronicle of a natural disaster; it is also a personal meditation on the responsibility and power of the written word in a manner that echoes certain post-Holocaust books.’⁸⁸ By creating this parallel, the cover information takes away a degree of specificity from the event, stressing instead the importance of the transferable cross-cultural insights the narrative offers. Likewise, a foreword by Michaëlle Jean (former Governor General of Canada and Special Envoy for Haiti for the UNESCO) as well as a meta-thematic closing section, ‘How It Came to Be,’ both again absent from the French original, widen the appeal of the account by presenting it as a generic example of literary testimony. In effect, the foreword and the title of the English edition create a set interpretative frame that seems to work against the fragmentary, jumbled nature of the original text.

Although *Tout bouge* does begin with the moment the earthquake struck, there is no overarching theme or goal to the collection. On the contrary, it points to the futility of such literary ambitions in the context of an event that can neither be represented in its entirety—it is still ongoing—nor fitted neatly into a pre-determined narrative frame. Throughout the text, the narrator-author figure draws repeated attention to the limitations of narrative representations of the earthquake, which are additionally coloured by the kinds of subjective vision and emotional investment that are the stock-in-trade of first-person autobiographical accounts. What the collection *can* offer, however, is a series of encounters with people, objects, and situations that the narrator makes as he tries to navigate the new city space and to make sense of what has happened. He is not interested in his work becoming an authoritative guide: on the contrary, his entries, which have a deeply intimate and self-contained character, neither reach out directly to the reader nor make any attempt to provide a broader rationale for the account. Instead, in all its complexity,

⁸⁸ Homel. Back cover.

Tout bouge, in Fabienne Pascaud's gloss, offers 'a surprising memento'⁸⁹—at once a summary, a reminder, and a souvenir of the 'past event or condition, of an absent person, or of something that once existed.'⁹⁰

Despite their differing emphases, both French original and English translation are conspicuously fragmentary in design, with the mosaic-like form of the work acting as a meta-thematic comment on the nature of the experience undergone and the necessarily limited view it offers, thereby reinforcing the narrator's general criticism of totalising representations of Haiti over time:

J'ai l'impression que tout le monde puise dans la même banque d'images. En deux heures, j'ai vu une douzaine de fois le visage fermé de cette petite fille debout dans la foule.⁹¹

This is a direct challenge to the stultifying character of mainstream media portrayals of Haiti, and it is followed by an equally bracing reminder that some of the 'expected' scenes of chaos did not occur:

Finalement, on n'a pas eu ces scènes de débordement que certains journalistes (sûrement pas tous) ont appelées de leurs vœux.⁹²

Here as elsewhere, the narrator questions reductive readings of the disaster and refuses to subscribe to the dominant media image of Haiti as a site of enduring violence in which the most recent episode of material devastation comes to embody the general, 'permanent' state of Haiti's collapse. What the narrator remarks on briefly here, the American journalist Jonathan M. Katz analyses more extensively in his book-length study of the inadequacies of foreign aid and the ideological assumptions behind it. As Katz makes clear, negative images of Haiti had a similarly adverse impact on the way in which post-disaster relief and the recovery effort were

⁸⁹ '[...]. cet étonnant memento.' Laferrière, back cover.

⁹⁰ 'memento, n.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

⁹¹ Laferrière, p. 88. 'I get the impression that everyone is using the same bank of images.' Homel, p.84.

⁹² Laferrière, p. 73. 'In the end, there never were those chaotic scenes that some journalists (but not all) no doubt wanted to see.' Homel, p. 70.

directed: ‘Having sought above all to prevent riots, ensure stability, and prevent disease, the responders helped spark the first, undermine the second, and by all evidence caused the third.’⁹³ In effect, both the fragmentary form and explicit narratorial commentary contribute to *Tout Bouge*’s self-reflexivity, which works against stereotypical and totalising depictions of Haiti such as those advanced in the media.

In addition, Laferrière’s criticism of stock disaster imagery reveals how the predictable portrayal of Haiti’s ‘extreme violence,’ paired with the ‘natural and innate resilience’ of its population, is tinged with exoticism, presenting Haiti as essentially ‘unknowable’ and, in more negative versions, the Haitian people as a ‘disorderly mob.’ Such vocabulary thinly disguises racial essentialism and re-affirms the construction of Haiti as a site of exceptionality and singularity.⁹⁴ Challenging uses of ‘resilience’ and ‘ruination’ as antithetical and transtemporal categories, Laferrière insists on the *specificity* of the earthquake, which in one sense could have happened anywhere, but whose multiple informing contexts, for example its urban character, clearly differentiate it from other, similar but non-identical global events:

Ce n’était pas à cause d’un coup d’Etat, ni d’une de ces sanglantes histoires où vaudou et cannibalisme s’entremêlent - c’était un séisme. Un événement sur lequel on n’avait aucune prise. Pour une fois, notre malheur ne fut pas exotique. Ce qui nous arrive pourrait arriver partout.⁹⁵

⁹³ Jonathan M. Katz, *The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster* (New York, NY.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 278.

⁹⁴ In her 2010 account, *Failles* [*Fault lines*], Yannick Lahens comments in the following manner on the disempowering effect of this lexicon of resourcefulness and resilience: ‘La resilience est devenu le terme commode, hâtif, souvent teinté d’exotisme, pour en parler, presque comme d’une essence. Le racisme n’est pas loin non plus.’ ‘Resilience has become a handy and quick term tinged with exoticism, to speak about it, and almost an essentialism. Racism is not far away either.’ Yannick Lahens, *Failles* (Paris: Sabine Wespieser, 2010), p. 105.

⁹⁵ Laferrière, p. 94. ‘And it wasn’t because of a coup or one of those bloody stories mixing voodoo and cannibalism—it was because of an earthquake. An event over which no one has any control. For once, our misfortune wasn’t exotic. What happened to us could have happened anywhere.’ Homel, p.90.

In this extract from ‘L’instant pivotal’ (‘The pivotal moment’) the narrator explicitly contests the dominant rhetorical frames, e.g. those attributing the earthquake to ‘Voodoo’ or ‘Haiti’s culture,’ that were used to account for the disaster. Such bogus ‘explanations’ are of course anything but new. For the narrator, they are rehearsals of earlier responses to an equally important moment, the 1804 Revolution, and the establishment of the world’s first Black republic—an inconceivable and unacceptable event for the world’s major colonial powers. One response was for the world to turn its back, a punishment that (for Laferrière) would last two hundred years. In the context of the 2010 earthquake, this narrative of uniqueness ‘is premised not only on the notion of Haiti’s endless suffering but also on a concomitant notion of the Haitian people’s endless *capacity* for suffering’ [italics original].⁹⁶ If unqualified, such claims of ‘natural resilience’, as discussed above, can dangerously imply some sort of ‘innate’ ability on the part of Haitians to cope with disasters while confirming that, whatever the future might bring, Haitians will somehow ‘rise above it all.’

While the Haitian state and economic elite are condemned, excoriated, and reviled, the nonelite Haitian population is consistently heralded for its exceptional, superhuman ability to withstand. To be bullied. To be displaced and disenfranchised.⁹⁷

Although one might argue that Haitians have indeed faced ‘many political, economic and environmental storms over the centuries,’⁹⁸ such all-purpose statements belie the complex processes and causes behind each particular event. ‘Natural resilience’ features here almost as a remedy for the vulnerability of island populations such as Haiti’s.⁹⁹ (Routine exposure to natural hazards like the

⁹⁶ Glover, p. 200.

⁹⁷ Glover, p. 200.

⁹⁸ Guerda and others, p. 97.

⁹⁹ Turner and others emphasise the need to go beyond the two standard models that have informed vulnerability analysis, namely the risk-hazard and the pressure-and-release models. Vulnerability, according to them, ‘is registered not by exposure to hazards (perturbations and stresses) alone but

earthquake is only one dimension of this vulnerability, and is ‘typically a product of physical location and the characteristics of the surrounding built and natural environment.’¹⁰⁰ Other components include socio-political instability and a corresponding inability to respond adequately to extreme situations.)

This longer view, and the composite nature of vulnerability stressed here, are also apparent in socio-scientific analyses of the earthquake. Elizabeth Ferris and Sara Ferro-Ribeiro, for example, classify the earthquake as ‘an urban disaster’¹⁰¹ that began long before 2010. As they suggest, in cramped, under-resourced cities like Port-au-Prince the immediate and long-term effects of natural disasters are structurally complex and far-reaching. Poor urban neighbourhoods are disproportionately affected, e.g. through the chronic lack of building regulations and adequate construction material, while the risk of potential epidemics is much greater in areas with a high concentration of people and lack of access to clean water.¹⁰² The uncontrolled growth of urban neighbourhoods, which tend to spread to marginal

also resides in the sensitivity and resilience of the system experiencing such hazards. This recognition requires revisions and enlargements in the basic design of vulnerability assessments, including the capacity to treat coupled human–environment systems and those linkages within and without the systems that affect their vulnerability. A vulnerability framework for the assessment of coupled human–environment systems is presented.’ Billie L. Turner and others, ‘A Framework for Vulnerability Analysis in Sustainability Science’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 100 (2003), 8074-79, abstract.

¹⁰⁰ As Ingram and others make clear: ‘exposure is an external dimension of vulnerability (Füssel and Klein, 2006) that is typically a product of physical location and the characteristics of the surrounding built and natural environment (Pelling, 2003).’ See Jane C. Ingram and others, ‘Post-Disaster Recovery Dilemmas: Challenges in Balancing Short-Term and Long-Term Needs for Vulnerability Reduction’, *Environmental Science & Policy*, 9 (2006), 607-13 (p. 610). This summary definition of exposure draws on the work of Füssel and Klein; also that of Pelling. See Hans-Martin Füssel and Richard J. T. Klein, ‘Climate Change Vulnerability Assessments: An Evolution of Conceptual Thinking’, *Climatic Change*, 75 (2006) 301-29; Mark Pelling, *The Vulnerability of Cities: Natural Disasters and Social Resilience* (London and Sterling, VA.: Earthscan Publications, 2003).

¹⁰¹ According to the authors, ‘[i]n sum, before the earthquake, Haiti was an urban disaster. Even organisations experienced in working in urban environments, such as Grozny (Chechnya) and Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina), found themselves hard pressed to respond to conditions in Port-au-Prince.’ Ferro-Ribeiro, p. 49.

¹⁰² ‘Urban areas also are especially susceptible to the effects of natural disasters. With mounting rural–urban migration, poor urban neighbourhoods spread to ever-more marginal land, which means that when an earthquake, hurricane, or mudslide occurs, they are affected disproportionately. In addition, of course, the potential for epidemics is much higher in urban areas because of the concentration of people.’ Ferris and Ferro-Ribeiro, p. 48.

land, further contributes to people's vulnerability in case of flood, mudslide, or earthquake. These factors converge with long-term socio-economic challenges—high youth unemployment, endemic violence, crime—to shape a general context for this particular event.

Where socio-scientific analyses tend to underline environmental interconnectedness, Laferrière's account explores the everyday manifestations of this through a non-hierarchical bringing together of multiple perspectives, with the narratorial 'I' being only one of many voices involved. In 'Le bois' ('Wood'), for example, the narrator talks about deforestation via the difficulty of acquiring building materials, whereas in 'L'électricité' ('Electricity') he portrays his family's joy for the few hours a day when the electricity is on. Finally, in 'Le golf' ('Golf'), the narrator transitions from general observations on a displaced population to a commentary about the politics of overcrowding in Port-au-Prince. The city's golf course, ordinarily a status symbol for the capital's elite, was transformed into a makeshift camp for earthquake survivors, and this specific site functions as an ironic reminder of the jarring socio-economic disparities that were mapped onto urban space long before the disaster struck. In his characteristically unemotional manner, the narrator juxtaposes the image of the overcrowded camp with the vast space required to play the game—one that seems inappropriate for such a populous city:

Un tel jeu est difficilement compréhensible dans une ville aussi surpeuplée. Il exige trop d'espace pour un public restreint [...] Une minuscule balle blanche pour un si vaste terrain, ce qui semble une provocation de plus.¹⁰³

In the closing sentence, the narrator highlights this tension by contrasting the minuscule white golf ball with the vast green terrain, its fertile soil squandered for leisure despite the lack of arable land: '[i]ci la terre est bonne mais pas un arbre

¹⁰³ Laferrière, p. 125. 'The game is hard to comprehend in a city so overpopulated. [...] A tiny white ball for such a vast surface—it seems like another provocation.' Homel, p. 119.

fruitier dessus.’¹⁰⁴ The use of space for luxury leisure pursuits is starkly opposed to the real labour required to farm land; excluded from this site of privilege and recreation, Port-au-Prince’s local population can only reclaim the space temporarily, with each day marked by a threat of eviction or displacement to another camp. Yet even in this direct commentary there is no claim to authority; rather, the narrative provides fleeting glimpses of systemic fragility and frustrated individual attempts to mitigate it. There is no guiding narrative voice that authoritatively interprets post-earthquake realities or claims to provide a solution to complex issues. Instead, by loosely assembling his own observations, combining these with strangers’ passing comments and family conversations, the narrator offers a mixed perspective on the earthquake, the factors determining its scale, and the plethora of responses it provoked.

A Ruined State

Among the many sites of destruction encountered, Hotel Montana, Hotel Christopher, and the National Palace engender particularly powerful responses in both *Rubble* and *Tout bouge*. In their respective engagements with these urban locations, both texts reveal the multiple, often discordant, personal and collective meanings they carry. In Marquez Stathis’s account, the now-ruined National Palace is depicted through the use of anthropomorphic metaphors that evoke images of decline and waste, and produce feelings of grief and confusion: ‘I can still feel the shock I felt when I saw that first crushed image of the destroyed neoclassical beauty-like seeing a bride turned into a corpse.’¹⁰⁵ The arresting metaphor of the Palace as a

¹⁰⁴ Laferrière, p. 125. ‘The land is good, but there’s not a single fruit tree in sight.’ Homel, p. 119.

¹⁰⁵ Marquez Stathis, p. 88.

dead bride is an extension of earlier images of the country as a vulnerable female friend who must be saved and a place slipping ever deeper ‘into the muck.’

This lovely beauty, her face cracked, her spine crushed. She can no longer stand. And yet, she is regal, dignified, and grand. Her scars perfectly mirror the pain and struggle of her noble people.¹⁰⁶

This accumulation of corporeal metaphors and staccato sentences creates a double-edged portrayal of Haiti as a suffering yet dignified nation. The imagery seems, in turn, to imply that it is precisely the country’s hardship that is the source of its nobility. Both Haiti and its peoples are ‘cracked’ and ‘crushed,’ yet in their vulnerability they acquire an ennobling dimension. Emotion prevails; history and politics are drained of specificity and significance. This pattern is reinforced by the juxtaposition of vertical and horizontal elements, with the most direct being the levelling of Port-au-Prince’s urban landscape. It is true that the National Palace, the Caribbean Market, the National Cathedral and other key landmarks were all seriously damaged or destroyed in the earthquake. But within the wider context of Marquez Stathis’s narrative the spatial referents used to depict the hotels and the presidential palace function metonymically as a collective reminder of Haiti’s collapse.

Consequently, the choice of figurative language, while justifiable in itself, sets up a tension between the alleged aims of the text and what it actually achieves; and one result is that *Rubble* risks reinforcing the same discursive frames it sets out to deconstruct. This is a recurring tension throughout the text’s representation of key political sites, one directly linked to *Rubble*’s attempt to join two literary genres. During a previous visit to the National Palace, the narrator had used highly emotive, grossly racialised imagery in order to comment on current political affairs:

¹⁰⁶ Marquez Stathis, p. 228.

The earthquake shook the foundation of the Haitian state, destroying Devil's House and creating a space for two vermin to crawl out of their hiding places from France and South Africa.¹⁰⁷

The repeated image of the 'Devil's House,' which she overhears someone else use, re-establishes the demonic imagery and media rhetoric that, between 1990 and 2004, had shifted its view of Jean-Bertrand Aristide from 'beloved leader' to 'despised president'¹⁰⁸—an unsubtle rhetorical transition aimed at discrediting Aristide's rule.¹⁰⁹ The narrator is no more subtle in her interpretation of the former priest's presidency, equating it with the Duvalier dictatorship—both leaders are 'vermin.' The syntax structure reinforces this sense of correspondence between Aristide and Duvalier, and establishes a causal link between the earthquake and the material and symbolic collapse of the state. The first part of the sub-clause identifies the earthquake as the prime cause of destruction, with the state consequently deprived of its physical location and political power. The use of two gerundive verb forms, 'destroying' and 'creating,' in the following sub-clause reinforces this direct link between the event that shook Haiti, the disintegration of the state, and the re-appearance of the two former leaders. As a consequence, *Rubble* brushes over the major historical and political differences between these leaders, not least Aristide's popular support and the democratic, non-military character of his presidency. This is

¹⁰⁷ Marquez Stathis, p. 278.

¹⁰⁸ In *Damning the Flood* (2010 [2007]), Peter Hallward analyses changing portrayals of Aristide and exaggerated claims about the scale of violence during his presidency. He makes this rhetorical transition clear: 'Virtually without exception, all through February 2004 western newspapers adopted versions of the same basic story: "although beloved when elected in 1990, "wrote the *Los Angeles Times* on the day he was abducted, "Aristide is now widely resented for dashing fervent hopes of lifting his country out of the misery, repression and corruption that have defined it throughout its 200 years of independence.' Hallward, p. 113.

¹⁰⁹ See, in particular, Chapter Seven, '2001-2004: The Winner Loses?', pp. 141-175, in *Damning the Flood: Haiti and the Politics of Containment* (2010). In a response to Lyonel Trouillot's extremely critical, yet largely unsubstantiated, review of the book, Hallward again exposes the logic behind simply equating Duvalier and Aristide: '[...] according to their critics, Aristide's supporters may have been responsible for killing around thirty of their political opponents, in contested circumstances, whereas Duvalier's army and Macoutes killed some fifty thousand people.' Peter Hallward, 'Lyonel Trouillot, or The Fictions of Formal Democracy', *Small Axe*, 13 (2009), 174-85 (p. 175). Lyonel Trouillot's original review was also published in *Small Axe*: Lyonel Trouillot, 'Hallward, or The Hidden Face of Racism', *Small Axe*, 13 (2009), 128-36.

not to say there were no problems when Aristide was in power (see Introduction); even highly supportive analyses like Peter Hallward's are quick to point this out. Yet the equation of an oppressive regime with a struggling democracy reveals—at the very least—an erroneous judgement on the narrator's part that undermines her assessment of Haiti's current predicament.¹¹⁰

If the National Palace functions as a symbol of consecutive corrupt and inefficient regimes, then Hotel Montana and Hotel Christopher illustrate the presence of the international community in Haiti. The two destroyed hotels, however, are not accorded the same significance as other sites of urban debris. Rather, their ruins, unlike those elsewhere in the city, are sanctified by the heroic deaths of the foreign workers who resided there—an acquired dignity reflected in the narrator's observations. Hotel Christopher, former UN headquarters, is compared to the Acropolis,¹¹¹ and Hotel Montana, famous for its international clientele, is characterised as a sacrificial site:

I still can't imagine how such a pillar of Haiti's development community, with so many of its citizen soldiers trapped inside Trojan Horse-style, could crumble, collapse, and pancake into an entirely different state of matter with such devastation, speed, and efficiency.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Finally, in insisting on the earthquake being the prime cause of Haiti's ruin, the narrator omits earlier processes of erosion, not least the American Occupation (see Introduction), which contributed to the weakening of the state but is here presented as having no bearing at all on the scale of Haiti's collapse.

¹¹¹ 'The shell of a building still standing, like a silhouette rising from the hotel remains, bears a certain resemblance to the Acropolis in Greece. I soon find myself staring off into infinity. I hear the familiar echo of song rising from the hillside down below. It's comforting. The natural thought that develops is that I try to imagine what those final moments were like for Andrea and her colleagues in this building.' Marquez Stathis, p. 226. Acropolis (in 'ancient Greek *ἀκρόπολις* upper or higher city, citadel, especially that of Athens) is composed of two combining forms ' *ἄκρο-* acro-' (*OED*) and ' *πόλις* – polis-' (*OED*). 'Polis' denotes a type of town or a city and the former, similar to the 'Indo-European base as edge' and 'forming terms relating to height, or to the highest or foremost part of something.' 'acropolis, n.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/1854?redirectedFrom=acropolis>> [accessed 17 January 2015].

¹¹² Marquez Stathis, p. 139.

The first passage employs classical references, e.g. the inaccurately used image of the Trojan horse,¹¹³ as well as biblical metaphor in order to set the sites apart from other, equally chaotic scenes of urban debris—a distance that paradoxically reflects the actual detachment of the international community from the local population. For the narrator, Hotel Montana has ‘become a true cathedral, a gathering spot and final resting place that continues to bring people together.’¹¹⁴ It is a battlefield and a site of heroic sacrifice of the ‘citizen soldiers’ who were trapped inside, were ‘a part of a global chain,’ and whose deaths were ‘[a] sacrifice [which] mattered’ and which will be built upon.’¹¹⁵

Similarly, its reconstruction is accounted for in richly metaphorical language: the Montana has risen from the ashes with the most sophisticated modern design of any hotel in Haiti’s capital.¹¹⁶ The hotel, risen Phoenix-like, can now return to being a haven for ‘Haiti’s humanitarian soldiers’, who can ‘continue to report for duty—and enjoy a refreshing dip in the clarifying water.’¹¹⁷ Its collapse, however, like that of hundreds of other buildings in Port-au-Prince, was due to the sheer force of the seismic shock allied to inadequate building material and lack of regulation. Its reconstruction was largely profit-driven and part of a larger push for the growth of tourism industry in the aftermath of the earthquake. The whole city was levelled by the disaster; and in this respect, the Montana’s and the Christopher’s destruction, despite their obvious emotional significance for the narrator, were in no way

¹¹³ The Trojan horse was a huge, hollow wooden horse constructed by the Greeks to gain entrance into Troy during the Trojan War. Greeks, pretending to desert the war, sailed to the nearby island of Tenedos, leaving behind Sinon, who persuaded the Trojans that the horse was an offering to Athena that would make Troy impregnable. Despite the warnings of Laocoon and Cassandra, the horse was taken inside. That night warriors emerged from it and opened the city’s gates to the returned Greek army. The term ‘Trojan horse’ has come to refer to subversion introduced from the outside. See ‘Trojan horse’, in *Britannica Online* (2013) <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/606297/Trojan-horse>> [accessed 13 August 2013].

¹¹⁴ Marquez Stathis, p. 143.

¹¹⁵ Marquez Stathis, p. 145.

¹¹⁶ Marquez Stathis, pp. 282-3.

¹¹⁷ Marquez Stathis, p. 283.

different to the collapse of other civic and residential buildings.¹¹⁸ Consequently, though the use of biblical and classical imagery is meant to lend a certain dignity to these particular sites and those who died there, it effectively takes such dignity away from many other, ordinary victims of the disaster.

Moreover, the use of the word ‘sacrifice’ in the text, while meant to encapsulate the scale of the loss, carries the involuntary suggestion that the victims’ death was a means towards a greater good, a necessary offering. The noun ‘sacrifice,’ ‘[p]rimarily, the slaughter of an animal [...] [and], in wider sense, the surrender to God or a deity,’¹¹⁹ refers to the biblical story of Abraham and his son Isaac in the Book of Genesis,¹²⁰ a story that illustrates Abraham’s trust in a benevolent and omnipotent God.¹²¹ It remains unclear, however, in what ways the accidental death of many might be seen as being ‘for the attainment of some higher advantage or dearer object.’¹²² In this emotionally charged depiction, the text proffers vague biblical allusions without due consideration of the dubious implications these might carry, and imparts a heroic dimension to the death of foreign workers which gives the reconstruction process a similarly quasi-sacred character reflected in the language of mythological renewal and rebirth.

Aware of the difficulty of this task, *Tout bouge* resists fatalistic or overly personal focus in describing the country’s political landmarks. The narratorial ‘I’ is noticeably absent from those entries that contemplate the multiple associations of

¹¹⁸ In fact, within the overall scale of loss, the casualties among international workers were relatively small—which is not to dismiss the narrator’s acute sense of loss or her need to mourn the death of her friends and colleagues.

¹¹⁹ ‘sacrifice’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2012) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/169571?rskey=4fvYPa&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 05 November 2012].

¹²⁰ Genesis 22.1-24.

¹²¹ Genesis 22.11-13: ‘And behold an angel of the Lord from heaven called to him, saying: Abraham, Abraham. And he answered: Here I am. And he said to him: Lay not thy hand upon the boy, neither do thou anything to him: now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only begotten son for my sake. Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw behind his back a ram amongst the briers sticking fast by the horns, which he took and offered for a holocaust instead of his son.’

¹²² ‘sacrifice’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

these sites, which include the National Palace and Hotel Montana, and the collective impact of the buildings' collapse:

Le fait que les dictateurs l'on squatté, plus souvent qu'à leur tour, depuis plus de deux cents ans, ne le [Palais National] rend nullement indigne. Les gens n'ont jamais fait l'erreur de confondre le bâtiment avec son occupant. Ils espèrent un jour lui redonner sa splendeur. Si l'importance d'un édifice réside dans l'émotion que son absence déclenche, celui-là a une valeur plus que symbolique. Une houle d'émotion a submergé la ville, le pays même, quand on a su que le Palais avait explosé sous la violence de la première secousse.¹²³

Here, despite its obvious connection with previous dictatorial regimes, the National Palace remains a collective symbol of national identity, and it is Haitians themselves who will 'restore its splendour.' The narrator acknowledges Haiti's difficult political history, but does not disallow the possibility of a fully functioning future state. Rather than simply rehearsing the rhetoric of victimhood and passivity, he contemplates the revolutionary potential this disappearance of material and symbolic frames offers:

Rien ne nous retient. Plus de prison, plus de cathédrale, plus de gouvernement, plus d'école, c'est vraiment le moment de tenter quelque chose. Ce moment ne reviendra pas. La révolution est possible, et je reste assis dans mon coin.¹²⁴

State structures have clearly dissolved and the narrator—here as elsewhere—does not fight shy of saying this.¹²⁵ Yet the use of anaphora in the second sentence emphasises the paradoxical opportunities that this state of dissolution allows. There

¹²³ Laferrière, p. 137. 'The fact that dictators have squatted here, more often than not over the past two hundred years, doesn't make that piece of furniture [presidential armchair-the National Palace]. any less desirable. People have never mistaken the building for its occupier. One day they hope to restore its splendor. A wave of feeling submerged [p.131]. the city, the whole country even, when we learned the palace had fallen with the first tremor.' Homel, pp. 130-1.

¹²⁴ Laferrière, p. 66. 'Nothing is holding us back. No more prisons, no [p. 64]. more cathedral, no more government, no more school—it's the perfect opportunity to try something new. An opportunity that won't knock twice. The revolution is at hand, and here I am, sitting under a tree.' Homel, pp. 63-4.

¹²⁵ 'La radio annonce que le Palais national est cassé. Le bureau des taxes et contributions, détruit. Le palais de justice, détruit. Les magasins, par terre. Le système de communication, détruit. La cathédrale, détruite. Les prisonniers dehors. Pendant une nuit, ce fut la révolution.' Laferrière, p. 29. 'The radio announced that the Presidential Palace has been destroyed. The taxation and pension office, destroyed. The courthouse, destroyed. Stores, crumbled. The communication network, destroyed. Prisoners on the streets. For one night, the revolution had come.' Homel, p. 30.

is no state, no church, no school, and therefore the possibility still exists to build the country's future from the ground up, however difficult this process might be.

At the same time, the narrator is clear that Haiti's metaphorical and material collapse is associated with multiple factors, including the unsolicited presence of foreign NGOs, which have contributed to the gradual erosion of the state and Haitians' capacity to function independently. His assessment of this issue, distinct from other more cautious statements, is clear and unapologetic: 'Le problème c'est que ces populations du tiers-monde ont développé, avec le temps, une vraie mentalité d'assistés. On sent bien qu'ils connaissent tous les rouages du système d'aide internationale. Ils l'ont étudié attentivement.'¹²⁶ Collectively disempowering, the prolonged presence of aid agencies and NGOs has had a negative structural effect, with a post-crisis 'state of exception,'¹²⁷ used to justify further humanitarian interference, becoming an everyday reality. In his analysis of foreign involvement in Haiti, Patrick Bellegarde-Smith draws attention to the destabilising impact that

¹²⁶ Laferrière, p. 174. 'The problem is that, over time, Third-World populations have developed a welfare mentality. They know the workings of the international aid system—we can sense that. They have studied it carefully.' Homel, p. 165.

¹²⁷ Here the reference is both to the legal-political concept of 'state of exception,' as elaborated by Giorgio Agamben, who builds on an earlier debate between Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt after Schmitt's publication of *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (1922), especially in relation to refugee camps and IDP-camps, as well as the conjunction of aid practices and international policies (e.g. Interim Haiti Recovery Commission led by Bill Clinton, the continued presence of MINUSTAH, protected by a mandate of immunity) which effectively replaced the Haitian state following the 2010 earthquake. In Agamben's discussion of the term, the state of exception 'is not a dictatorship, but a space devoid of law.' The state of exception defines 'a regime of the law within which the norm is valid but cannot be applied (since it has no force), and where acts that do not have the value of the law acquire the force of law.' Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception* (Extract from a lecture given at the Centre Roland-Barthes (Université Paris VII, Denis-Diderot) and an edited translation of 'Lo stato di eccezione come paradigma di governo': the first chapter of Agamben's *Stato di eccezione. Homo Sacer II* (Bollati Boringhieri, May 2003, Torino <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben/articles/state-of-exception/>> [accessed 13 August 2015]. State of exception is not something external but rather has to be understood as 'a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other.' Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by Kevin Attell (London; Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 23. This blurring is also visible in the involvement of foreign governments and stakeholders (e.g. OAS, UN) in the direct shaping of Haiti's internal politics (e.g. the 2010 presidential elections) and post-earthquake reconstruction policies.

international (especially American) interference has had on the development of the Haitian state:

The very presence of 11,000 largely American NGOs [...] impedes the proper development of state structures and the healthy evolution of national institutions and the growth of Haitian “agency” in the first place. This conscious and subconscious “bleeding” of *res publica*, the public “thing,” in order to benefit the American private sector, renders the Haitian government rather ineffectual and always at the mercy of its foreign benefactors.¹²⁸

The blood metaphor has two intertwined uses here. First, it evokes the collective idea of ‘the body politic:’ ‘the people of a nation, state, or society considered collectively as an organized group of citizens;’¹²⁹ and second, it expresses a poignant critique of the economic and hegemonic underpinnings of international intervention in Haiti, whose entire civic body is effectively ‘bled’. This is not a metaphor meant to arouse sympathy or pity, as in Marquez Stathis’s corporeal imagery, but rather to expose the structural violence inflicted on the country. For Bellegarde-Smith and others, international involvement in Haiti’s internal politics has hindered rather than supported its stability and has curtailed individual and collective political agency. This is not to say (and Bellegarde-Smith does not say it) that all international NGOs contribute equally to this weakening of the state. Some, like Partners in Health, work alongside Haitian government and local communities, but aid workers’ well-intentioned commitment and motivation still ‘cannot alter the structural nonaccountability and power iniquity between their employer, the government of their host country, and the people with whom they work.’¹³⁰ The 2010 earthquake, as well as the political crisis it amplified, thus need to be seen as embedded within longstanding practices of foreign involvement and intervention

¹²⁸ Bellegarde-Smith, p. 266.

¹²⁹ ‘body politic’, in *New Oxford American Dictionary*, ed. by Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg (Oxford University Press, 2011) <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195392883.001.0001/m_en_us1227580?rskey=sNSZri&result=4> [accessed 29 August 2013].

¹³⁰ Bell, p. 84.

that were already well established prior to the disaster and were consolidated in the months that followed upon it.

Similar commentary is interwoven into Laferrière's reading of the destruction of Hotel Montana, the subject of an entire entry in the collection. While reflecting on the pre- and post-earthquake meanings of space, the narrator offers a seemingly dispassionate yet pointed critique of the political and humanitarian power relationships the Hotel has historically come to signify:

Alors qu'il y a tout ce remue-ménage autour de Montana, juste à côté on demande de l'aide. [...] Un homme, debout près de la voiture, fait remarquer, sans trop d'amertume, qu'il n'y a pas que le Montana. Mais c'est le lieu où on négocie de gros contrats et où d'importantes décisions politiques se prennent. L'hôtel favori des vedettes internationales qui s'intéressent à la misère des pauvres gens.¹³¹

Here, the passage reveals the dichotomy between the theory and practice of the international aid effort. The bitterly ironic tone of the last sentence targets the abuses of disaster tourism,¹³² but also those of the media-trumpeted relief effort, which is profoundly out of touch with the very local people it is claiming to help.¹³³ As the exasperated authors of one post-intervention report urge: 'If you crave media attention and the world's spotlight, do disaster victims a favor and stay at home;

¹³¹ Laferrière, p. 56. 'I can scarcely imagine the disaster. All this effort to save the Montana, while right next to it people are pleading for help. [...] A man standing next to the car remarks, without much bitterness, that there's more here than the Montana. But it's the place where big contracts are negotiated and important political decisions made. The favorite hotel of the international stars who have gotten interested in human misery.' Homel, p. 55.

¹³² Disaster tourism, travelling to sites that have recently experienced disasters, is linked to forms of 'thanatourism' defined by Dann and Seaton as 'travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death.' A. V. Seaton, 'Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2 (1996), 234-244 (p.240), in Anthony Carrigan, *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture, and Environment* (New York, NY.: Routledge, 2011), p. 219. Recent examples of disaster tourism include bus tours in post-Katrina New Orleans, the Chernobyl Power Plant, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill and many others. For example, a UK-based company, *Disaster Tourism*, offers bespoke disaster tours in the following categories: Tsunami Volunteering, Storm Chasing, Plane Crash, Volcano Disaster, and Nuclear Disaster. See *Disaster Tourism* <<http://disastertourism.co.uk/disaster-tourism.html>> [accessed 13 March 2015].

¹³³ Jonathan Katz in his *The Big Truck That Went By* (2013) traces the equally problematic 'relief career' of two American figures: Sean Penn and Bill Clinton.

disaster relief is hard enough for everyone involved.’¹³⁴ In refraining from overtly emotional language and first-person focalisation, *Tout bouge* succeeds in shifting its focus from personal to *collective* histories and meanings of space—a change that also allows for the greater contextualisation of key urban sites. Finally, the text’s nuanced reflections on the social production of space offer a useful antidote to clichéd counter-images of Haiti as either ‘exotic’ (rural) or ‘deprived’ (urban). Against such binary positioning, Laferrière’s literary aesthetic repeatedly stresses that the local and global, past and present material conditions underlying the earthquake and its aftermath are deeply intertwined.

Future Reconstructions

Through their portrayal of rural and urban landscapes, *Rubble* and *Tout bouge* offer commentaries on Haiti’s present, but also its future. Here, too, the generic conventions embraced by the two works directly shape their divergent visions of post-earthquake reconstruction. Within the overarching frame of Marquez Stathis’s narrative of personal self-exploration and advancement, there is little possibility for collective renewal. In its evaluation of post-earthquake recovery, *Rubble* extends the metaphor of devastated space to suggest the near-impossibility of rebuilding Haiti: post-earthquake city ruination seems destined to continue into an indefinite future. Only the Haitian countryside offers some hope for rejuvenation. By contrast, in analysing the same urban devastation Laferrière resists creating a defined trajectory, whether negative or positive, for the country’s recovery and instead reconfigures debris as a site of collective endurance and resistance. To be

¹³⁴ Van Hoving and others, p. 202.

sure, city space is marked by many political and natural upheavals, yet these act as reminders of previous struggles, not just successive defeats.

Re-affirming its earlier division between urban and rural landscapes, *Rubble* struggles to envisage positive scenarios for the metaphorical and literal reconstruction of Haiti's capital. Restoration projects are initially invested with collective hopes and desires, with '[t]he sight of the crushed palace [...] now filtered through dreamscapes of what Port-au-Prince's future could be like.'¹³⁵ But these future ambitions are soon thwarted. The semi-ruined Palace, for example, is hidden away behind 'large panels depicting architectural renditions and planning announcements acting as a screen to reframe the crowd's vision.'¹³⁶ The public are thus denied access to the very site that purports to represent them, while the narrator, speaking from her own position of economic privilege, quickly dismisses the possibility of any real and long-term change: 'They [the architects] might as well put up images of the Champs Elysee [sic] in Paris. For now, these renditions are utterly disconnected from the grim reality of Haiti's capital.'¹³⁷ The scale of the destruction is obvious, with the ruined city only further exposing the economic and political gulf that needs to be breached if any long-term change is to occur.

These seemingly out of place designs *are* connected, though, to existing places and the narrator herself remarks on the similarity between Miami and the artist's vision: 'It's a drawing that could be Lincoln Road, the Miami Beach pedestrian mall, with its vibrant cafes, bookstore, shops, and street life.'¹³⁸ For the narrator, what is a quotidian sight in America becomes somehow 'out of place' in Haiti and its grim capital city. Here, the symbolic significance of the image is more

¹³⁵ Marquez Stathis, p. 228.

¹³⁶ Marquez Stathis, p. 228.

¹³⁷ Marquez Stathis, p. 228.

¹³⁸ Marquez Stathis, p. 228.

important than its accuracy. The Miami-inspired design of the new civic space appears to represent, like the golf course in *Tout bouge*, the ambition to be part of an economically privileged society. The narrator's interpretation conjures up the American Dream and the possibility of social and economic advancement through individual efforts—ideals that underpin her vision of Junior's future. However, the positive scenario she is trying to script for the boy, for example by making sure he is enrolled in a good school and has English language classes, is unavailable to most Haitians; nor does she seem to approve of such collective aspirations. In her response to a passer-by's comment, she goes so far as to discourage him from even contemplating a life abroad. Shortly after making the comparison between the architect's sketch and Miami she observes:

[a] young Haitian who is standing there [...] says irresistibly, "It's nice there, isn't it?" I pause, wondering how best to offset the expectation that I have just unwittingly created. "Yet, it's nice," I say. "But like everywhere in the world, they have problems, too."¹³⁹

Here, the dynamics of space and place are made clear, with the American city embodying the young Haitian's desire to be part of it. As her response demonstrates, the narrator is aware of her own privilege, but not so aware as to resist reinforcing it; in the process, the site of the National Palace is emptied of any collective promise it might hold.

One of few envisaged scenarios for Haiti's development in the text is the growth of 'sustainable tourism'—effectively a translation of the pastoral vision into the corporate dynamics of the neoliberal market economy. With a typical mix of personal touch and seemingly impartial observation, the narrator enthusiastically commends her friend's 'unique' contribution to Haiti's development:

[...] Carole is part of a unique effort to discover and preserve Haiti's caves, unique natural underworlds that retain traces of the island's pre-Columbian

¹³⁹ Marquez Stathis, p. 228.

Taino culture, in hopes of renewing tourism to Haiti in a way that is both good for the economy and the environment. The Caves of Haiti project, of which she is a co-founder, has garnered support from UNESCO.¹⁴⁰

While this vision is at least consistent with the text's earlier romantic portrayals of rural idyll, it raises questions as to ecotourism's links with other, more obviously opportunistic forms of tourism, e.g. disaster tourism and 'disaster business.'¹⁴¹ Such depictions also fetishise the idea of 'wilderness,' equating it with 'nature' as a category of landscape while ignoring that there 'is no singular "nature" as such, only a diversity of contested natures [...] constituted through a variety of socio-cultural processes.'¹⁴² Moreover, tourism, rather than assisting the local population or protecting the environment, can potentially lead to even greater social stratification, creating a class of poorly paid workers, increasing the exploitation of limited environmental resources, and contributing to a growing reliance on external investment.¹⁴³ Michel Martelly's¹⁴⁴ infamous declaration—made on November 28th 2011 at the inauguration of the Caracol Industrial park¹⁴⁵—that 'Haiti is [now] open

¹⁴⁰ Marquez Stathis, p. 256.

¹⁴¹ See Beverly Bell, 'The Business of Disaster: Where's the Haiti-Bound Money Going?', *Other Worlds Are Possible*, 8 April 2010 <<http://www.otherworldsarepossible.org/business-disaster-where-s-haiti-bound-money-going>> [accessed 07 January 2014]. See also her book *Fault Lines* (2013), in particular Chapter Eighteen, 'The Superbowl of Disasters: Profiting from Crisis' (pp. 146-53), gives a detailed analysis of the distribution of post-earthquake aid reconstruction contracts.

¹⁴² Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, *Contested Natures* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 1.

¹⁴³ In his *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture, and Environment* (2011), Anthony Carrigan offers a highly original analysis, rooted in postcolonial studies and interdisciplinary tourism studies, of the tensions of island tourism and how these are explored and staged in literary works. One of the key tensions is between employment and exploitation: 'Tourism propels environmental transformation, cultural commoditization, and sexual consumption—all processes that are acutely felt in many countries still grappling with the legacies of western colonialism. At the same time, tourism is consistently welcomed across the postcolonial world as a much-needed source of job creation and foreign exchange, even if the power relations that condition these transactions are distinctly asymmetrical.' Carrigan, p. ix.

¹⁴⁴ After controversial elections, Martelly was elected president of Haiti in May 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Contrasting analyses of such 'development' opportunities are best visible when comparing a report from Haiti Grassroots Watch (which overtly calls them a sourcing of slave labour) and an article from *The Economist*, which recognises Martelly's efforts: 'Mr Martelly may be right that to attract private investment Haiti needs to change its image of eternal aid supplicant into one of a hard-working place.' 'Open for Business', *The Economist*, 7 January 2012 <<http://www.economist.com/node/21542407>> [accessed 19 August 2013]. See also Haiti Grassroots Watch, 'Haiti "Open for Business": Sourcing Slave Labor for U.S.-Based Companies: Is the Caracol Industrial Park Worth the Risk?', *Haiti Liberté*, 13 March 2013 <<http://www.globalresearch.ca/haiti-open-for-business-sourcing-slave-labor-for-u-s-based-companies/5327292>> [accessed 19 August 2013].

for business,’¹⁴⁶ epitomises this neoliberal model of development.¹⁴⁷ The return envisaged here is not to the prelapsarian garden but rather to the rebuilt sweatshop—the countryside’s dominating motif. If *Rubble* does not necessarily subscribe to this model, then it does little to consider other potential routes for collective change and post-earthquake reconstruction. Instead, the text romantically hopes for the ‘return of the pastoral’ as a basis for the future expansion of the tourism industry in Haiti—an extension of the narrator’s romantic vision which in effect overlooks tourism’s exploitative dimension and the scale and pace of urbanisation and gentrification of space this might imply.

Whereas Marquez Stathis’s ‘emotional chronicle’ continues to shape her vision of Haiti’s future landscapes, Laferrière’s more detached narrative partly departs from its guiding principle of nonlinear organisation in its portrayal of the country’s reconstruction. As he makes clear, neither the event nor its aftermath can be divorced from the histories that underpin rural and urban space; it follows, then, that any rebuilding of the city is itself a process of continuation, redefinition, and negotiation—however different the new capital might be. The narrator insists on the importance of connecting pre-earthquake histories of space and place to possible post-earthquake futures, and the text’s customary focus on fragmentation is replaced by a collective call to look beyond and above the current destruction. This sense of continuity comes to the fore most obviously in the narrator’s response to the radically altered topography of Port-au-Prince:

¹⁴⁶ Haiti Grassroots Watch, ‘Martelly Government Betting on Sweatshops: Haiti: “Open for Business”’, *Haiti Liberté*, 29 November 2011 <<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-20/Martelly%20government.asp>> [accessed 19 August 2013].

¹⁴⁷ Before the construction of the Caracol Industrial Park (CIP), the Caracol municipality in the north-east of Haiti was the so-called ‘breadbasket of the Northeast department,’ yet from the start of construction, farmers were expelled from their land and, contrary to previous claims of tens of thousands of jobs, the site currently employs approximately 1,388. In addition, the real wages of the workers at the CIP, after the costs of transport and a midday meal, are 57 gourdes or approximately \$1.36 per day. See Haiti Grassroots Watch, ‘Haiti “Open for Business”: Sourcing Slave Labor for U.S.-Based Companies: Is the Caracol Industrial Park Worth the Risk?’

Le séisme n'a pas détruit Port-au-Prince, car on ne pourra construire une nouvelle ville sans penser à l'ancienne. Le paysage humain compte. Et sa mémoire fera le lien entre l'ancien et le nouveau. On ne recommence rien. C'est impossible d'ailleurs. On continue. Il y a des choses qu'on ne pourra jamais éliminer d'un parcours: la sueur humaine. Que fait-on de ces deux siècles, et de tout ce qu'ils contiennent qui ont précédé l'année zéro. Les jette-t-on à la poubelle? Une culture qui ne tient compte que des vivants est en danger de mort.¹⁴⁸

In this quotation, the narrator challenges the temporal logic behind the creation of a post-earthquake 'year zero,' which would place the event outside of the multiple contexts that inform it. The 'year zero' motif also risks discarding the country's earlier history and presenting its revolutionary heritage and culture as no longer being relevant to its future. The earthquake, in other words, does not annihilate previous histories and memories of Port-au-Prince, but rather adds further layers of complexity to its urban topography.

Moreover, destruction is incorporated into and reshapes the fabric of the capital, while spatial coordinates are reorganised in relation to the city's former buildings and collective sites. As a result, a hybrid topography emerges, combining old reference points with new structural features:

Cette situation a créé une nouvelle réalité à laquelle il fallait rapidement s'adapter. «Tu vois où se trouvait le Caribbean Market? Alors tu continues un peu jusqu'à passer deux immeubles par terre... » A la réalité de cette ville en miettes, les gens ont ajouté des éléments de l'ancienne ville qui flotte encore dans leur mémoire.¹⁴⁹

As this and earlier depictions underline, Port-au-Prince might be in ruins, yet even these destroyed spaces are not devoid of meaning and history. On the contrary, they

¹⁴⁸ Laferrière, pp. 85-6. 'The earthquake didn't destroy Port-au-Prince; no one can build a new city without thinking of the old. The human landscape counts. Its memory will link the old and the new. Nothing is ever begun from scratch. It's impossible, in any case. All we do is continue. There are things you can never eliminate from a trajectory, like human sweat. What should be done with the two centuries, and all they contain, that preceded Year Zero? Throw it all in the garbage? A culture that pays attention only to the living risks its own death.' Homel, p. 82.

¹⁴⁹ Laferrière, p. 124. 'That situation created a new reality and people had to adapt fast. "You know where the Caribbean Market used to be? Well, you go past it, and then two buildings that collapsed..." To the landscape of this crumbled city, people have added elements of the old one still present in their memory.' Homel, p. 118.

are given profound significance, evoking at once the pre-earthquake capital, the moment the disaster struck, and the resulting losses, as well as pointing to possible future reconstructions of city space. In refusing to erase his memories of Port-au-Prince and its architecture, the narrator points to the risk of seeing recovery in terms of a complete break with the past. Rather, post-earthquake rebuilding should be conceived in terms of *renewal* rather than *recovery*, i.e. an improvement rooted in collective histories and memories, not just a return to the original pre-disaster state (see Chapter One).

As should be clear by now, urban topography cannot be dissociated from the socio-historical interactions that shape and are shaped by it. In two separate entries, entitled ‘Une nouvelle ville’ (‘A New City’) and ‘Une ville d’art’ (‘A City of Art’), Laferrière foregrounds the relationship between the city’s topography and social stratification, calling for an egalitarian re-envisioning of the capital so that it can become a civic, shared space. In ‘Une ville d’art,’ he establishes the importance of material reconstruction for individual/collective identity and global perceptions of post-earthquake Haiti. He calls for a creative redefinition of city space so that it might evoke associations other than those of chaos, violence, and vulnerability—the same interpretative frames Marquez Stathis aims, but largely fails, to deconstruct:

Pourquoi ne pas penser à peindre certains quartiers? A faire de Port-au-Prince une ville d’art où la musique pourrait jouer un rôle? Haïti doit profiter de cette trêve pour changer son image. On n’aura pas une pareille chance (façon de parler) une deuxième fois. Présenter un visage moins crispé.¹⁵⁰

The narrator’s aim is not to glorify the city’s poverty, but rather to reposition Haiti and its people so that they are no longer reduced to the category of ‘the poorest

¹⁵⁰ Laferrière, p. 129. ‘Why not consider painting certain neighborhoods? Or turning Port-au-Prince into a city of art where music could play a role too? Haiti should use this truce to change its image. We won’t have a chance like this a second time, if I can put it that way. Let’s show a more relaxed face.’ Homel, p. 122.

nation in the Western hemisphere.’ The idea of repainting neighbourhoods might seem extravagant at a time when even the more basic forms of reconstruction have not yet been completed. However, since the first French edition of the work, a similar initiative to repaint Jalouise,¹⁵¹ one of the capital’s informal neighbourhoods which borders with affluent Pétionville and is home to over forty thousand people, has been carried out. This rather controversial government project, which was allegedly inspired by the work of Prêfête Duffaut (a famous Haitian painter who passed away in 2012), received a mixed response from both inhabitants of the neighbourhood and foreign commentators. Whether the initiative only contributes to ‘poorism’ (poverty tourism) or slum tourism¹⁵²—allegations that Yvanka Jolicoeur, mayor of Pétionville, denies—or whether it brings a real and permanent improvement in living conditions for the local population, remains to be seen.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ For an overview of the project and the initial reactions to it, see Marie-Julie Gagnon, ‘«Jalousie en couleur»: transformation extrême d’un bidonville’, *Le Huffington Post Québec*, 16 May 2013 <http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/05/16/jalousie-haiti_n_3287761.html> [accessed 19 August 2013]; ‘Haïti - Reconstruction : Deuxième phase des travaux de rénovation du quartier de Jalousie’, *Haiti Libre*, 15 August 2013 <<http://www.haitilibre.com/article-9228-haiti-reconstruction-deuxieme-phase-des-travaux-de-renovation-du-quartier-de-jalousie.html>> [accessed 20 September 2013].

¹⁵² The term ‘poverty tourism’ or ‘poorism’ has been introduced in order to conceptualise ‘a new form of tourism that has emerged [since the mid-1990s]. in the globalising cities of several so-called *developing countries* or *emerging nations*.’ One of the essential features of this form of tourism is visiting the most disadvantaged parts of a respective city. Among the most popular destinations are townships in Cape Town, favelas in Rio de Janeiro, and the Dharavi informal neighbourhood in Mumbai. Other terms include ‘slumming’, ‘reality tours’, and ‘cultural and ethnic tourism.’ These, to varying extents, can be seen as linked to the wider category of ‘dark tourism’: see Manfred Rofles, ‘Poverty tourism: theoretical reflections and empirical findings regarding an extraordinary form of tourism’, *GeoJournal*, 75 (2010), 421–442 (p. 421). One of the key paradoxes of poverty tourism or slum tourism (also referred to as ‘slumming’) is the claim that this type of activity can contribute to poverty alleviation in a given neighbourhood. But ‘[i]f slum tourism was a successful strategy for poverty mitigation, would it not undermine its own premise?’. See Fabian Frenzel, ‘Slum tourism in the context of the tourism and poverty (relief) debate’, *Die Erde: Journal of the Geographical Society of Berlin*, 144 (2013), 117–28 (p. 118). See also Fabian Frenzel and others, ‘Development and globalization of a new trend in tourism’, in *Slum Tourism: Poverty, Power and Ethics*, ed. by Fabian Frenzel, Malte Steinbrink, and Ko Koens (New York, NY.: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–18.

¹⁵³ There have been other, less controversial projects carried out in Jalouise which markedly improved the welfare of the local population, such as the Projet Jalouise part of the UNESCO’s Projet Villes/ MOST Cities Project (1996–2001) which was implemented in Dakar, Senegal and Jalouise, Haiti. In Jalouise, inhabitants of the neighbourhood, under the guidance of Patrick Vilairé, a Haitian sculptor and painter, created a 30-metre-long mural that leads to a source of water where they need to pay only 1 gourde per bucket. Before, young girls had to fetch water far away and were often victims of rape. This was a multi-actor project with a number of local organisations and NGOs, with UNESCO acting as a ‘catalyst’ to legitimise the initiative. Together with the creation of the football field, public squares lit by night and a pedestrian bridge, the mural significantly contributed to the

Increasingly, however, it seems that the project is merely sugar-coating the neighbourhood's deep-rooted problems such as lack of housing¹⁵⁴—even more acute after the January earthquake—and the constant threat of demolition and displacement, some of it a direct cause of the June 2012 protests.¹⁵⁵

Moreover, the reconstruction process as envisaged by Laferrière is given a spiritual as well as a material dimension. But the narrator in no way suggests that sacred space is timeless; rather, he forges connections between the reconfiguration of urban landscape and the recreation of social identity:

Chacun a le droit de savoir dans quel genre de ville il aimerait vivre. Et mieux, il devrait pouvoir intervenir dans l'élaboration du plan de la nouvelle ville. [...] Le matériau le plus important, c'est encore l'esprit. Un esprit qu'on voudrait voir tourné vers le monde, et non replié sur lui-même. [...] Une nouvelle ville qui nous forcerait à entrer dans une nouvelle vie. C'est cela qui prendra du temps. Ce temps qu'on refuse de s'accorder.¹⁵⁶

Here, the 'spirit of the city' stands above all for the social transformation that the new space might trigger and for the collective dimension of this long-term and permanent change. The new city is a crossroads, *kafou* (in Creole), a meeting place and a coming together of the old and the new: it is at once a juncture and a symbolic turning point as there can be no going back to the pre-earthquake Port-au-Prince. Still, the narrator is aware that such profound redefinitions of city space require time, which no one can afford. Yet this realisation does not preclude a cautious optimism

improvement of the local infrastructure and social interactions. For a detailed description and evaluation of the project, see Denis Merklen, *Management of Social Transformations MOST: Urban Development Projects: Neighbourhood, State and NGOs, Final Evaluation of the MOST Cities Project* (UNESCO, October 2000) <<http://www.unesco.org/most/dp54merklen.pdf>> [accessed 29 December 2014].

¹⁵⁴ For an analysis of the historical construction of Port-au-Prince's vulnerability, amplified by a lack of housing codes, intense migration to the city under the Duvalier regime, and destructive agricultural policies, see Kathleen A. Tobin, 'Population Density and Housing in Port-au-Prince: Historical Construction of Vulnerability', *Journal of Urban History*, 39 (2013), 1045-61.

¹⁵⁵ Al Jazeera, 'Haitians Protest Home Demolition Plans', <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/06/201262665643926283.html>> [accessed 09 September 2013].

¹⁵⁶ Laferrière, pp. 166-7. 'People have the right to say what kind of city they want to live in. Even better, they should be able to get involved in drawing up the plans. [...] The most important material is the spirit. A spirit open to the world, not concentrated on itself. [...] A new city that will compel us to enter a new life. That's what will take time. Time we haven't given ourselves.' Homel, pp.157-8.

on the narrator's part in the closing sketches of the collection. In all its complexity, *Tout bouge* does not seek to give clear-cut answers, nor is its goal to provide an exhaustive reading of the situation as such pronouncements are impossible so soon after the earthquake. Instead, rather than claiming socio-scientific authority through the single narrative voice of a seemingly impartial observer, *Tout bouge* leaves the reader to ponder this and other reconstruction attempts which are being undertaken as the collection draws to an end.

To conclude, differing widely in temporal scope and narrative perspective, the two literary responses analysed in this chapter offer equally divergent interpretations of the impact the 2010 earthquake had on rural and urban landscapes in Haiti. In contrasting ways, *Tout bouge* and *Rubble* draw on formal conventions and literary modes such as the pastoral and the post-apocalyptic and translate these, with varying degrees of success, into Haiti's complex post-disaster context. Marquez Stathis's account emphasises the primacy of one narrative voice, which guides the reader on a journey of exploration in which rural landscapes come to represent a sacred unspoilt space and refuge, and current devastation is depicted as an embodiment of the country's material and symbolic collapse. Future regeneration is envisaged primarily as a return to this bucolic garden, reinforcing the text's ahistorical presentation of nature and its simplistic view of the scenarios of reconstruction and development that Haiti should follow. Falling some way short of an acknowledgment of the violent cultural and natural histories that underlie it, Marquez Stathis's narrative involuntarily works to re-affirm previous discursive accounts of Haiti as the 'irredeemable Other,' and apparently envisages its future in similar terms. For Marquez Stathis, Haiti continues to be a 'brainteaser,'¹⁵⁷ an island

¹⁵⁷ Marquez Stathis, p. 219.

largely conceived of as marginal in geographical, epistemological, and political terms. *Rubble* reveals, at the same time, how the rhetoric of ‘recovery’ can work to erase the history of violent ‘cultural remaking[s] of [Caribbean] human, floral, and faunal populations.’¹⁵⁸ In addition, the linear form of Marquez Stathis’s account, in which the earthquake is just one of many experiences that shape her friendship with Junior, suggests the possibility of achieving a positive ‘resolution’ of the disaster—one available however only to the narrator herself, who, suitably enriched by her experience, can now safely leave the island behind. Finally, through its mixed form, which relies on ‘emotional honesty’ as justifying grounds for sometimes crudely general socio-cultural observations, *Rubble* suggests the possibility of providing a ‘complete’ view of the January disaster in which personal reminiscence doubles as a source of analytical objectivity. This possibility, however, soon dissolves; and through the tensions that emerge, the text points to the key issue of post-earthquake literary aesthetics: the problem of how to account for the event’s highly particular character, its unprecedented impact, and the distinct context that informs it without falling back into discourses of ‘uniqueness’ regarding Haiti’s present and future as well as its past.

Tout bouge is much more inclined than *Rubble* to acknowledge its own confusion in face of the earthquake. The mosaic-like structure of the text suggests the impossibility of achieving a ‘total’ or ‘complete’ view of the disaster. Rather, each entry focuses on a different object, an encountered site or person, and in this way reveals interconnections between the personal, environmental, and socio-political histories behind the January 2010 tremors. Laferrière’s collection of short

¹⁵⁸ This point is made in Alfred W. Crosby’s seminal work : *The Columbian Exchange: The Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* . In it, Crosby explores the impact that exchanges of food and disease between the Old and New Worlds had on respective ecosystems and lifestyles. See Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1972).

essays and sketches does not provide one simple answer; rather it repeatedly asserts *histories* of space, the ways in which rural and urban landscapes are placed within time and belong to a complex web of global interrelations. Laferrière's work thus offers a very different type of testimonial narrative of the disaster than that suggested by Marquez Stathis. Instead of employing narrative focalisation as a way of circumscribing the aftermath of the earthquake—an attempt to delimit the scale of devastation and control the psychological impact of the event—*Tout bouge* repeatedly points to the narrator's own sense of confusion and his awareness of the limitations of his own account. The narrator thus problematises persistent portrayals of Haiti in terms of its 'uniqueness' and 'otherness.' The fragmentary form of the text further asserts the impossibility of constructing an overarching narrative of Haitian landscapes, and the narrator continually questions his own ability to come to terms with—and find an adequate literary vehicle for—the sheer scale of loss. In addition, through the fractured style it adopts, the text challenges the idea that there might be a 'master narrative' of Caribbean landscape while simultaneously indicating the impossibility of providing the 'synoptic view' that Marquez Stathis attempts to chart in her narrative. In so doing, the text stresses the complexity of the contexts and histories behind the disaster without succumbing to the circular vision of Haiti's future as a mere repetition of its past. Each of the two narratives struggles in different ways to capture the cacophonies of *goudougoudou*—a challenge equally evident in the next two texts to which I now turn, which contemplate transformations of subjectivity and self in the aftermath of the event. The January 2010 tremors in Haiti certainly produced a radical reconfiguration of space and self, but they also took place within a discursive, historical, and ecological continuum—one that still has its own 'natural' history today.

Chapter 3: Subjectivity and Self in Nick Lake's *In Darkness* and Dan Woolley's *Unshaken: Rising from the Ruins of Hotel Montana*

The tremors in Haiti may have ended, but the experience of catastrophe is far from over. Like the permanently changed landscape, the survivors' sense of self has been left unsettled, with the earthquake redefining the significance of all previous life-events. Yet prevailing images of wholesale destruction and homogenising portrayals of those affected by the disaster risk masking those natural histories of the landscape (see Chapter Two) and those pre-existing social inequalities that significantly shaped responses to the event—the tremors may have levelled buildings, but they did not level social inequalities and dynamics of power. The experience of the event's impact was anything but universal. The only affinity between a foreign humanitarian worker who had just arrived in Haiti and an inhabitant of one of Port-au-Prince's informal neighbourhoods was the sense of being *there* and *then* at the same time, as a direct witness to the earthquake. In such a context, what does it mean to narrate one's own experience of the disaster or to create a fictional narrative out of it? How are one's subjectivity and sense of collective agency redefined in the process? What are the ethical and political dimensions of narrative attempts to offer post-earthquake definitions of self?

These are the fundamental questions to be addressed in this chapter, which takes two narratives of the 2010 earthquake as an entry point into an examination of the unsettling effect the disaster had on categories of self and subjectivity—foundational components of individual experience and narrative form. Dan Woolley's autobiographical conversion account *Unshaken: Rising from the Ruins of Hotel*

Montana (2011) (thereafter *Unshaken*) and Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (2012), a fictional narrative of a boy trapped under hospital rubble, are two examples of texts that bring to the fore questions of narrative subjectivity, its textual reformulations, and the wider ethical implications of such literary endeavours. These aesthetically and formally diverse accounts explore transformations triggered by the earthquake within the context of an individual's life and the wider histories behind the 2010 tremors. With varying levels of self-reflexivity and complexity, they attempt to find ways of reconstructing individual and collective agency in the disaster's wake. In drawing out connections between the formal and extratextual commentary offered by these two accounts as well as the socio-political backgrounds in which they are situated, I also explore the extent to which Woolley's and Lake's focalised narratives can offer an affirmative vision of collective agency. The texts' aesthetic features raise the following questions: Are they as 'successful' in recreating the community as they are in reconstructing the individual? What possibilities are offered for the Haitian collective? What collective futures are imagined? What political underpinnings of their respective visions for post-earthquake Haiti can be discerned?

In what follows, I explore some of the formal and thematic ways in which the two narratives present the earthquake as a direct cause for subjective transformation, whether understood through a specifically religious framework, as it is for Woolley, or portrayed, as in Lake's novel, as a general metamorphosis: the ontological process of becoming someone else. I first analyse the texts' formal features, namely chapter division and sequence, epigraphs, authorial remarks and epilogues. These allow me to consider generic differences between the two narratives and the formal and thematic conventions they embrace. These insights are then used to look at some of the ways in which the two texts envisage self, subjectivity, and agency through their respective

engagement with Vodou religion, Haitian folklore, and evangelical Christian theology. In my analysis of Woolley's text, the formal features it uses, and the message it conveys, I also point to the implications this narrative of personal conversion might have for questions of collective agency and for the politics of the January earthquake and its aftermath. Finally, I go on to consider the pairing of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and the 2010 disaster in Lake's narrative and the fundamental question this parallel raises. Is the novel attempting to frame the earthquake as a moment of redefinition of the Haitian state—an opportunity, like the Revolution, to claim political agency—or does it want to draw a contrast between the post-earthquake dynamics of objectification and disempowerment and the subjective affirmation of 1804? The chapter subsections—'Twinned Structures', 'Spirited Selves', 'Twinned Selves' and 'Narrative Relief'—illustrate this double focus and point to the ways in which narrative designs can shape discourses on Haiti's present, past, and future, in both positive and negative ways.

Twinned Structures

Questions of self and subjectivity are first introduced in *Unshaken* and *In Darkness* through their shared structure and paratextual features such as preface, epigraphs, chapter sequence and epilogue. These embody the respective aims of the two texts and complement their thematic emphasis on coming to terms with the event and envisaging new post-earthquake definitions of subjectivity and individual and collective agency. Dan Woolley's *Unshaken: Rising from the Ruins of Hotel Montana* (2011) is an autobiographical account of the interactive strategies director for Compassion International—a large international evangelical charity—who came to Haiti just a couple of days before the earthquake struck. Compassion International

is a Christian child advocacy ministry that ‘releases children from spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty and enables them to become responsible, fulfilled Christian adults.’¹ The charity was founded in 1952 in South Korea by American evangelist Rev. Everett Swanson, who ‘felt compelled to help 35 children orphaned by the Korean conflict.’² Since then, the organisation has expanded globally. It now has over 6214 international church partners, sponsors over 1,500 000 children worldwide, and claims to have inspired 125,042 conversions last year alone.³ Woolley was in Haiti to make a video showcasing one of Compassion’s projects in Haiti, the Child Survival Program, and encouraging current and potential donors to support the organisation’s work. This specific context for Woolley’s presence in Port-au-Prince, one linked to the continued expansion of Protestant missions,⁴ frames the text’s consideration of subjective transformation and defines the function of its paratextual features.

From the outset, the autobiographical narrator is very clear about his work and the task he needs to accomplish:

¹ Compassion International, *About Us* <<http://www.compassion.com/about/about-us.htm> > [accessed 22 July 2015].

² Compassion International, *History* <<http://www.compassion.com/history.htm>> [accessed 22 July 2015].

³ Compassion International, *Compassion International: Releasing Children from Poverty in Jesus’ Name* <<http://www.compassion.com/default.htm> > [accessed 22 July 2015].

⁴ Already since the 1970s there had been a rapid expansion of Protestant missions in Haiti as well as in other countries in Latin America. At the same time, this decade was also marked by a mass emigration of Haitians to the United States, fleeing the political persecution and economic hardship of the Duvalier regimes. As evangelism spread throughout the country with the increased presence of American churches and missionary groups, so too did the values of North American capitalist culture and the ‘American Dream.’ Fred Conway, in his 1978 ethnographic study of rural Haiti, argues that “‘missionary Protestantism in Haiti gives rise less to the Protestant ethic of self-help than to the idea that the way to worldly success is identified with direct dependence on the foreign—North American—missionary.’” Signifying modern, capitalist principles, these new congregations have often provided ‘career’ and self-advancement opportunities in areas where unemployment is high and local prospects are very limited. In the context of Haiti and the seemingly ever-increasing number of NGOs working there (see Introduction), it is impossible to dismiss these ‘added values’ that accompany Gospel preaching and shape religious affiliation among local populations, especially at times of crisis. See Fred Conway, ‘Pentecostalism in the context of Haitian religion and health practice’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, American University, 1978), p. 193 in Karen Richman, ‘Religion at the Epicenter: Agency and Affiliation in Léogâne After the Earthquake’, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 41 (2012), 1-18 (p. 5).

Typically, my job at Compassion was to take existing photos and videos produced by others and present them online to tell stories about the work of Compassion was doing all over the world. But this was the first time I was the one responsible for actually capturing the stories and images I would need. I had four days to find video that would move donors to care about mothers and babies they'd never met in places they'd never been.⁵

Here, his motivations are spelled out clearly: the video he is about to make is intended to advertise Compassion's work with children and to inspire further financial support. On the morning of January 12, 2010, Woolley joins a local pastor from a partner church in order to film a group of mothers and children who have gathered in the church hall. His search for 'the right story' is marked by a sense of urgency; for if it is to be successful in attracting contributions, the video must create an intimate relationship between the mothers and children from the congregation as well as potential donors in the U.S.:

Most donors will never get within three hundred miles of the poverty in Haiti, but if they can watch a video on their computer that gets them even three steps closer to a mom who lives it every day, then we will have done our job well.⁶

On the next day, Woolley spends his time filming women at a local church centre. Just after entering Hotel Montana, where he is staying during his trip, the earthquake strikes and the hotel collapses, imprisoning Woolley and other fellow members of his team. The notes he makes in his notebook during this time provide the substance of his account. All previous aspirations set aside, his main objective now is to survive until the arrival of the rescue teams.

In *Unshaken*, a direct response to his personal experience of surviving the earthquake, Woolley uses a religious frame for the narrative of the few hours

⁵ Dan Woolley with Jennifer Schuchmann, *Unshaken: Rising From the Ruins of Hotel Montana* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2011), p. 18. Although the account is Woolley's, Jennifer Schuchmann is listed in the acknowledgments as the co-writer of *Unshaken* and her name appears on the front cover of the book. There is no further information provided anywhere else in the texts on the extent of her involvement in the process of writing the narrative. For this reason, in my analysis I name Woolley as the author and narrator of *Unshaken*.

⁶ Woolley, p. 17.

preceding the disaster, its immediate aftermath, and his time trapped in the Montana, adding a retrospective reflection on his marriage and his wife's depression, from which she suffered over a six-year period from 1992 to 1998. As the preface already makes evident, Woolley's book is an act of thanksgiving to God and a re-affirmation of faith:

Some may wonder why I have chosen to share this story of survival and rescue, especially since the stories of many others impacted by the earthquake did not end well, at least in human terms. [...] I tell my story because I had an encounter with God in the midst of this crisis [...] I feel compelled to give voice to my experience and testify to the grace of the God who was with me in the depths of my ruin.

It is for this purpose—to glorify God—that I was created, and this is the only reason for this book.⁷

In this extended quotation, the aims of the text, composed of the narrator's memories of his marital difficulties and his survivor account, are expressed in strong religious terms, and the narrative itself becomes an act of praise that glorifies '[the] unshakable God.'⁸ The adjective 'unshakable' refers back to the title of the book, which contrary to initial impressions refers not so much to Woolley's faith as to God's; for the author's religious beliefs are indeed shaken and put to the test on numerous occasions during the course of the account. The narrative is thus at once a story of religious doubt (and its eventual overcoming) and a form of address to the Creator, who constitutes the only certainty in the author's life. Woolley's narrative duly acquires a psalmic character: it is a testimony of physical but also religious survival, of rising from the material and spiritual ruins towards a new, potentially better, life.

In its confessional and didactic aspects, *Unshaken* also belongs to an easily identifiable, yet far from homogenous, Christian tradition of conversion narratives

⁷ Woolley, p. 9.

⁸ Woolley, p. 9.

which can be traced back to St Augustine's *Confessions* (c398-400).⁹ Openly evangelical, Woolley's text embraces many of the characteristics that define evangelical conversion narratives, namely 'the intent itself to convert, to propagate the kingdom of the faithful by persuading unconverted readers and listeners of their own need for redemption.'¹⁰ However, apart from these general common aims, conversion narratives are characterised by diversity of form and by complex variations in the theology and spiritual traditions they endorse. In the context of Woolley's account, it is important to note that his is a work of spiritual renewal and strengthening of religious zeal rather than the rendering of an original encounter with God experienced by a non-believer. Still, the narrator of *Unshaken* draws on the rhetorical conventions of evangelical conversion accounts, framing two traumatic experiences (his troubled marriage and the 2010 earthquake, respectively) as parallel moments of crisis that lead to being 'born again.'

By pairing up these two distinct moments in his life and re-interpreting them in the light of his strengthened religious outlook, the narrator affirms that conversion is 'an iterative process'¹¹: one that might well begin with a strong and identifiable moment of epiphany, but can only be completed through the believer's sustained commitment to recovered values. Echoing the increasing emphasis within the evangelical tradition on the ongoing character of metanoia,¹² Woolley's narrative

⁹ The title of St Augustine's seminal work means 'both 'confessing' in the biblical sense of praising God, and also the avowal of faults.' 'Confessions of St Augustine', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church Online*, ed. by Frank Leslie Cross and Elizabeth Anne Livingstone (Oxford University Press, 2005) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095631523>> [accessed 3 March 2014].

¹⁰ Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 3-5 in Kendrick Oliver, 'How to be (the Author of) Born Again: Charles Colson and the Writing of Conversion in the Age of Evangelicalism', *Religions*, 5 (2014), 886-911 (p. 888).

¹¹ Oliver, p. 893.

¹² Kendrick Oliver identifies a number of distinct stages in the formation of the Protestant tradition of conversion narratives in the U.S., from its development in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries among Reformers in response to the Catholic rite of confession and penance, through an increasing complexity within the genre from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, to a growing realisation of the

also suggests that the original experience of spiritual awakening is repeated as a ‘cyclic pattern of conversion and reconversion as if the converted [is] predisposed to repeat and reinforce this fundamental experience over and over.’¹³ Within this pattern, any new challenges and doubts are recast retrospectively, as opportunities to grow in faith. Consequently, the composing of a conversion narrative, which paradoxically aims at a sense of finality, is constitutive of the back-and-forth process of conversion itself. Similarly to other narratives of religious awakening, Woolley’s text seeks to produce a convincing account by presenting ‘an integrated, continuous personality which transcends the limitations and irregularities of time and space and unites all of his or her apparently contradictory experiences into an identifiable whole.’¹⁴ Doubling as an autobiography and a conversion account in the evangelical tradition, *Unshaken* is simultaneously a work of narrative *reconstruction* and one of subjective *recovery*: it is both a ‘[r]etrospective prose narrative that a real person makes of his own existence’¹⁵ and ‘an artistic arrangement of facts, an imaginative organization of experience with an aesthetic, intellectual and moral aim.’¹⁶ In this dual context, *Unshaken* hopes to return to ‘the truth’ of faith while crafting a carefully designed recreation of self for the reader. At once ‘intimately

reconstructive rather than ‘authentic’ character of conversion narratives and the complex experiences and phenomena they describe. The increasing heterogeneity of the genre also suggests the ambiguous nature and character of experiences of conversion. The tradition of evangelical spiritual autobiography, in Oliver’s gloss, ‘encouraged the narration of conversion as once-in-a-lifetime event, but it also admitted accounts in which sensations of spiritual resolution were disclosed as premature and superficial and the final attainment of Christian maturity had to await the convert’s passage—often interrupted by back-sliding—through a sequence of profound challenges and their claims of new faith.’ Oliver, p. 897.

¹³ Peter A. Dorsey, *Sacred Estrangement: The Rhetoric of Conversion in Modern American Autobiography* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁴ William C. Spengemann and L. R. Lundquist, ‘Autobiography and the American Myth’, *American Quarterly*, 17 (1965), 501-19 (p. 516), in Charles J. G. Griffin, ‘The rhetoric of form in conversion narratives’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 76 (1990), 152-63 (p. 152).

¹⁵ Here, I am drawing on Philippe Lejeune’s famous definition of autobiography as a ‘[r]écit rétrospectif en prose qu’une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu’elle met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité.’ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil 1975), p. 14.

¹⁶ Shapiro, Stephen A., ‘The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 5 (1968), 421-54 (p. 435) in Isabel Duran, ‘Autobiography’, in *The Literary Encyclopedia Online* (<<http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopsis.php?rec=true&UID=1232>> [accessed 17 August 2015]).

autobiographical'¹⁷ and committed to a system of beliefs,¹⁸ *Unshaken* allows its narrator to gain a better understanding of his life while hoping that readers, suitably moved by his narrative, will follow his example. Two distinct experiences, Woolley's wife's depression and his entrapment under the rubble, are correspondingly brought together via a double metaphor, namely the transition from darkness to light and from fragmentation to wholeness. These two narrative arcs enable the narrator to create a sense of formal completeness and intimacy between himself and the reader that amplifies the reader's emotional response to the text.

Chapter titles and sequence similarly re-affirm the unity of the account and the character of the text as a narrative of religious renewal that traces the transition from spiritual and psychological darkness into light, mapping out the different stages of this transformation. From 'Buried in Haiti' (Chapter One), the narrative moves to 'God Is Good?' (Chapter Thirteen), 'Worship Time' (Chapter Twenty-Two), 'I'm in hell' (Chapter Twenty-Four), then 'Something Good' (Chapter Thirty) and 'Saved' (Chapter Thirty-One). The parallel narrative of the author's marital crisis follows a similar pattern. Chapter Four, 'Tremors', depicts early marital difficulties, and subsequent chapters, 'Groundhog Days', 'Calls,' and 'Doubts', describe the stages of his wife Christy's depression and the long period of darkness that ensued. These are then followed by 'Choices' and 'Believing', which mark the turning point in their struggle and depict the gradual improvement of Christy's mental health. Both the narrator and his wife share this experience of crisis, and the internal structure of the closing chapters underlines the complementarity of the two narratives of trial by varying the narrative voice of the closing sections. Chapters Twenty-Seven and

¹⁷ 'confessional', in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online* (2015) <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/confessional>> [accessed 15 January 2015].

¹⁸ 'confessional, adj.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2014) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/38782?rskey=mLXXcq&result=2&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 13 November 2014].

Twenty-Eight are authored by Christy and give an insight into her experience of the earthquake and her efforts to find Dan. Subsequently, three joint chapters alternate between the author's and Christy's narratives. Finally, the epilogue, written by Dan, provides the reader with information on the fate of fellow victims of the disaster and the lives of the Woolley family in the immediate post-earthquake years. This variation stresses the equal importance of the two narrative strands and their function as equal components of the overarching narrative of spiritual renewal. As such, the chapter sequence and the closing interweaving of narrative voices attest to the unity of the account as well as the re-integration of the narrator's family into 'normal' life, imparting a sense of formal closure and completion to a retrospective work.

In this last sense, *Unshaken* functions as a rescue narrative in which the author expresses his gratitude for his family's perseverance in the face of crisis and the life-saving inspiration they have provided. This second narrative of survival reinforces the sense of intimacy between reader and narrator, with the latter sharing personal details about his life in order to authenticate his account. The affectionate dedication that precedes the text of *Unshaken* already creates this bond of trust between them:

*To my wife, Christy,
from whom I learned the meaning of courage,
and in whom I found a reason to love.
I am yours—forever and always.
And to my sons, Joshua and Nathan.
You make me proud and give me hope for the future [italics
original].¹⁹*

Here, the deeply emotional and personal character of the narrative is evident, with the text, ostensibly a spiritual journey, doubling as an account of the trials that

¹⁹ Woolley, opening dedication.

Woolley's family had to face and have since successfully overcome. Indeed, it is the narrator's anxiety about his wife, revealed here, that originally motivated him to write down his thoughts, experiences, and advice for his family. The first words he jots down in his diary are words of farewell and spiritual counsel to Christy and their two sons, Josh and Nathan; photos of these first pages written in the dark are included in the book. Soon after, he turns to everyday considerations and writes 'lists of practical things, like how to access [their] online banking information, passwords for [his] e-mail accounts, and details of how to access [their] assets and pay bills.'²⁰ As he lies buried under the rubble, Woolley reflects on his wife's depression, which started soon after they got married, and this renewed realisation of Christy's emotional vulnerability and the financial difficulties she would be faced with following his death inspires him to seek other ways of being rescued. Rather than passively waiting for the arrival of the relief teams, he decides to leave the lift-shaft in which he is hiding and explore the surrounding rubble in the hope of finding an alternative exit and establishing contact with other survivors. In this retrospective reading of events, Woolley's concern for his family, vocalised in the dedication, inspires a life-saving decision proactively to seek out rescue troops.

These two threads, which complement and mirror each other throughout the account, are tied together in a surprising comparison in the book's epilogue that is followed by words of advice to the reader. Revisiting the two disasters to which he was witness, the narrator comes to realise that it was indeed this 'other rescue' of his wife from depression that was the more significant:

Though the Haitian earthquake shook our lives in unexpected ways, I readily tell people that the trauma I experienced in Haiti was second to the trauma Christy faced in the six long years she worked to overcome depression.²¹

²⁰ Woolley, p. 81.

²¹ Woolley, p. 232.

The relative brevity, approximately sixty-five hours, of being buried under the rubble is contrasted with the six long years of his wife's depression, with the difference in duration seeming to imply the greater emotional impact these former events had on Woolley and his wife. This comparison is quickly followed by a call to the reader who, the author assumes, might suffer from depression or know someone who does: 'If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of depression, please seek professional help. Rescue from *your* darkness is possible too' [italics added].²² This gesture of reassurance, similar to his notes of advice to Christy, completes the metaphorical movement from darkness to light in Woolley's narrative. With this concluding appeal, anchored in his own experience, he also hopes to trigger direct action on the part of the reader, e.g. seeking professional help or encouraging others to do so. While re-affirming the narrative design of the account, these paratextual features contribute to the sense of intimacy and mutual trust that the narrator hopes to create. The composite structure of *Unshaken* thus extends beyond the 2010 earthquake to take in a wider audience that can relate to one or more of the book's aspects, whether it is the story of Woolley's survival, his marital difficulties, or the uplifting moral message of the text.

The evangelical character of *Unshaken* and its aim to be an inspiration to others and a trigger for change are intricately linked to its fundraising appeal. The narrator hopes that his readers will be touched by the narrative and will then consider supporting Compassion International. In the paragraph following upon the comparison of the two 'dark moments' in the narrator's life, the author endorses the charity's public work: 'Finally, I encourage you to support Compassion International [...] Learn more about [...] how *you* can make a difference in the lives

²² Woolley, p. 232.

of mothers, babies, and children trapped in poverty’ [italics added].²³ The accompanying address to the reader, which follows the author’s acknowledgments, provides a comprehensive outline of the range of activities that fall under Compassion’s Child Survival Program. In an accumulation of staccato sentences, the narrator underlines the difference each donation can make: ‘Your support can literally mean the difference between life and death for a young vulnerable child.’²⁴ The tone of the address is overwhelmingly emotional, aimed at increasing the reader’s sympathy for the plight of Haitian women and children while inspiring his/her active response: ‘If you are moved by the needs of children in poverty, please do something about it. Today. Right now.’²⁵ It is no longer only the narrator or the reader that needs to be rescued from darkness, but entire communities. Thanks to an individual donation, these communities can be given a chance to escape the all-engulfing trap of poverty, disease, and malnutrition. By answering the book’s call and helping the work of Compassion International, the reader is co-authoring new stories of rescue and salvation.

In order to re-affirm these aims, the book includes a photo insert and the back cover features an evangelical review by Wess Stafford,²⁶ the president and CEO of the organisation, who seconds the appeal of *Unshaken*. Along with the photographs that accompany the text, which are inserted in the middle of the book, this appraisal functions to authenticate Woolley’s narrative while the two paratexts re-affirm the sense of proximity between the reader and the narrative by providing a commentary on Haiti before and after the earthquake. This commentary, however, is deeply suspect. The photograph captions, for example, ‘Beauty and Poverty in Haiti

²³ Woolley, p. 232.

²⁴ Woolley, p. 239.

²⁵ Woolley, p. 239.

²⁶ ‘Dan emerged from that dark and dusty tomb alive in so many ways—and unshaken!—with a vital message for all of us. Don’t miss it.’ Woolley, back cover.

in *Living Color*' and 'Rescuing Moms and Babies from Extreme Poverty,' reiterate tired tropes of Haiti's unique beauty, dignity, and poverty. In effect, these images aestheticise poverty by endowing it with an ennobling dimension (see also Chapter Two), and alongside the review provide a justification for Compassion International's work—a material-spiritual intervention. The success of the book's appeal relies on maintaining a balance between distance and proximity: Haiti may be too far away to concern us, but now the scale of the suffering makes it 'close to our hearts.' In this way, the text seeks to mobilise a more emotionally invested response from the target audience who can distinguish and identify with familial themes, or with recognisable 'Third World' images of poverty, innocence, and vulnerability, even if the complexities of the 2010 disaster might escape, or possibly even not interest, them. This carefully crafted emotional proximity transforms the significance of donating; it is no longer just a gesture of financial support but instead becomes a means of contributing to real change and, for religious readers, a direct expression of the Gospel call to charity—one which in turn overwrites the particularities of this specific disaster, contributing to the dehistoricisation and depoliticisation of the earthquake and its victims.

Moreover, in line with its narrative transition from darkness to light and in order to gain more resonance, Woolley's appeal, which is aimed primarily at an American audience, evokes a historically rooted rhetoric that merges civic ideals and religious values, reinforcing America's 'sacred' mission to assist global development.²⁷ Within this dynamic, the nation seems to be endowed with the God-

²⁷ In his 1949 Inaugural Address, President Harry Truman, spells out America's double duty to the world: 'The peoples of the earth face the future with grave uncertainty, composed almost equally of great hopes and great fears. In this time of doubt, they look to the United States as never before for good will, strength, and wise leadership. [...] The American people desire, and are determined to work for, a world in which all nations and all peoples are free to govern themselves as they see fit, and to achieve a decent and satisfying life. Above all else, our people desire, and are determined to work for, peace on earth—a just and lasting peace—based on genuine agreement freely arrived at by

given moral and historical ‘capacity and responsibility to act, even through sacrifice, by virtue of a grand historic mission of being a “light to the nations.”’²⁸ Tropes of poverty, helplessness, and disempowerment play an equal part in this discursive configuration. The reader of Woolley’s account is challenged to step up to the plate and assume his/her civic responsibility, to be this ‘light to the nations’ by helping Compassion International to continue its work in Haiti. Haitians’ collective empowerment can only come as a result of this enlightened assistance. In this context, the reader’s donation has a cathartic dimension: by contributing to the relief effort s/he experiences personal relief at having fulfilled civic and religious duty. As such, the ‘success’ of the narrative extends beyond its particular aesthetic goals and can be measured in tangible ways, namely donations made to Compassion International.

Despite its empathetic appeal and its ambition to raise awareness of the plight of Haiti’s most vulnerable communities, *Unshaken* falls short of a meaningful acknowledgment of the collective trauma suffered by the Haitian people, who were disproportionately affected by the 2010 disaster and for whom there was no easy way out of the structures of exploitation and poverty in which they had been trapped long before the earthquake struck. Moreover, far from experiencing the proximity with the poor that his book claims to want to create, during his stay in Haiti Woolley is accommodated in Hotel Montana (see Chapter Two), one of the most expensive hotels in Port-au-Prince. The Montana is known for its high-class international clientele (Bill Clinton and Brad Pitt, among others) and has also served, along with

equals. In the pursuit of these aims, the United States and other like-minded nations find themselves directly opposed by a regime with contrary aims and a totally different concept of life.’ Harry S. Truman, *Inaugural Address* (Harry S. Truman Library and Museum 20 January 1949) <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/50yr_archive/inagural20jan1949.htm> [accessed 08 May 2014].

²⁸ Elizabeth McAlister, ‘Soundscapes of Disaster and Humanitarianism: Survival Singing, Relief Thelethons and the Haiti Earthquake’, *Small Axe*, 39 (2012), 22-38 (p. 29).

Hotel Christopher, as headquarters for members of the MINUSTAH mission. The narrator does briefly acknowledge the socio-economic tensions that the Montana embodies and sheepishly admits that, due to the Hotel's high profile, he might indeed end up being saved by American troops:

I wasn't ethnocentric enough to think I deserved any special treatment because I was a white American. In fact, I thought quite the opposite. The Haitians would already have so much on their hands that they should pay attention to their own people first. I was a guest in their country, staying where few Haitians could afford to stay. If I was going to be rescued, it was more likely that Americans would rescue me.²⁹

With this self-reflexive remark, the narrator introduces a level of nuance into his narrative, and indirectly engages with the thorny question of economic disparities between foreign NGOs and the local population they serve.³⁰ However, the guiding organising principles of the account limit the possibility of a more sustained critical engagement. The text's emphasis on the narrator's personal experience of the earthquake and the spiritual renewal it triggered, along with the priority given to individual donations, result in a lack of consideration for the long-term causes of post-earthquake damage and its lasting impact on individual and collective lives. Rather, consistent with its evangelical and fundraising aims, the narrative focuses on the positive trajectory of the narrator's, and hopefully the reader's, journey, pointing to charitable work as a practical translation of recovered religious sentiments. Privilege is thus paired with providence, the necessity of giving with the experience of grace.

²⁹ Woolley, p. 103.

³⁰ As Jonathan M. Katz, an American foreign correspondent who was in Haiti during the earthquake observes: 'An enormous effort targeted the collapsed Hotel Montana which had some two hundred people inside—mostly foreigners—when it fell. [...] The places where ordinary Haitians lived and worked—schools, stores, homes, and offices, many with equally ghastly numbers inside—got far less attention. [...] There were many reasons for this disparity. Most foreign rescuers arrived without clear orders where to go. The Haitian government had no reporting mechanism in place for those in need, and there was no formal coordination of rescue efforts [...] Foreign officials knew the UN headquarters, Montana, and Caribbean Supermarket. [...] The coverage of those few featured rescue sites provided a much-needed uplift for viewers abroad. [...] When new rescue teams came in, they knew where to go. They had already seen the priority sites on TV.' Katz, pp. 72-73.

In contradistinction to Woolley's autobiographical account, Nick Lake's *In Darkness* is an award-winning young-adult novel³¹ set in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 January earthquake. It presents the reader with a story of a young boy, Shorty, who is trapped under the rubble of one of Port-au-Prince's hospitals. He was treated there a few days prior to the disaster following a shooting between rival gangs in Cité Soleil, one of the Haitian capital's most deprived neighbourhoods. *In Darkness* is dedicated to 'the people of Site Solèy' (Creole for Cité Soleil) and opens with two epigraphs. The first is an extract from Toussaint L'Ouverture's letter to Napoléon Bonaparte, and the second is the last six lines from William Wordsworth's 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' (1802).³² Although initially the link between the dedication, the epigraphs relating to the Haitian Revolution, and the subject of the novel (the 2010 earthquake) seems rather unclear, the rationale behind this pairing soon becomes apparent. The novel is divided into two sections, 'Now' and 'Then,' and intertwines the story of Shorty with that of Toussaint L'Ouverture,

³¹ The book was the winner of the 2013 Michael L. Printz award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature and a 2013 ALA Best Fiction for Young Readers.

³² The following fragment of the letter is used for the epigraph: 'At the beginning of the troubles in Haiti, I felt that I was destined to do great things. When I received this divine intimation I was four-and-fifty years of age; I could neither read nor write.' Nick Lake, *In Darkness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012). Epigraph. Although unacknowledged, this seemingly direct extract from L'Ouverture's letter to Bonaparte is actually a citation from John Rely Beard, *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, The Negro Patriot of Hayti: Comprising an Account of the Struggle for Liberty in the Island, and a Sketch of Its History to the Present Period* (London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853), <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/beardj/beard.html>> [accessed 26 February 2015]. in University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *Documenting the American South: Primary Resources for the Study of Southern History, Literature, and Culture* <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/beardj/beard.html>> [accessed 26 February 2015]. Beard, an English Unitarian minister, wrote the biography in order to 'supply the clearest evidence that there is no insuperable barrier between the light and the dark-coloured tribes of our common human species' (Beard, p. 1) In his work Beard argues for L'Ouverture's supremacy as a military and political leader over George Washington or Bonaparte. He argues that L'Ouverture is a better man than Bonaparte because 'the two differed in that which is the dividing line between the happy and the wretched; for while, with Bonaparte, God was a name, with Toussaint L'Ouverture, God was at once the sole reality and the sovereign good' (Beard, p. 283). For Beard, L'Ouverture's ultimate failure to liberate Haiti and his untimely death were the product of unfortunate circumstances—not an indictment of his character or leadership abilities.' Zachary Hutchins, 'Summary', in *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Negro Patriot of Hayti: Comprising an Account of the Struggle for Liberty in the Island, and a Sketch of Its History to the Present Period*, (Documenting the American South: Primary Resources for the Study of Southern History, Literature, and Culture: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2004) <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/beardj/summary.html>> [accessed 19 August 2015].

the famous leader of Haiti's struggle for independence. The epigraphs act as framing devices, foreshadowing the text's narrative structure, which switches between the fictional story of Shorty and the fictionalised account of Toussaint L'Ouverture's life and the beginnings of the Haitian Revolution. The alternating design of the text allows Lake to create points of comparison between Shorty and Toussaint, to explore the complex significance of these two events—each being a historical marker in its own right—within the conventions of the genre and, in turn, to suggest ways in which individual/collective subjectivity and agency can be envisaged in the wake of such testing moments.

The genre of the young-adult novel distinguishes *In Darkness* from other accounts analysed in this thesis and allows for a productive comparison of the different kinds of limitations apparent in fictional responses to the disaster. The category of young-adult literature (YAL) is a complex one and encompasses a wide selection of books targeted primarily at the 13-18 age range. It originated in the United States as an area of 'children's literature addressed to the adolescent/teenage market,' and has since been adopted in other countries in response to the growth of the juvenile reading audience.³³ At the most basic level, YAL can be defined as '(1) that written especially for them [young adults], and (2) that which, while not written especially for them, is available for their use.'³⁴ Yet even this early definition of the term, suggested by Alberghene in 1985, does not provide any clear-cut criteria by which to classify and evaluate YAL. Rather, it points to the unavoidable blurring of lines between literature written for children and that aimed at young adults, an obscuring that 'reflects the lack of absolute boundaries between childhood,

³³ Dinah Birch, 'young adult literature', in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2009) <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780192806871.001.0001/acref-9780192806871-e-9563>> [accessed 22 January 2015].

³⁴ Jannice M. Alberghene, 'Will the Real Young Adult Novel Please Stand Up?', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 10 (1985), 135-36 (p. 135).

adolescence, and adulthood.’³⁵ A decade later, the task of defining YAL had not become any easier. In 1996, Michel Cart observed that ‘even to try to *define* the phrase “young adult (or adolescent) literature” can be migraine inducing’ [italics original].³⁶ In response, recent criticism, which is dominated by New Critical approaches, emphasises the heterogeneity of the genre, ‘consciously seeking new paths of analysis’³⁷ rather than trying to settle the definitional debate within the field—in any case a near impossible task.

Current discussions of young-adult literature have tried to move beyond questions of thematic relevance, pedagogical dimension, and accessibility that were previously hailed as the distinct and, at times, the only qualities of the genre. These characteristics were also employed as the main reasons for the inclusion of YAL in school curricula, with less critical attention being given to the stylistic diversity and sophistication of the genre or its potential to provide an apt socio-political commentary. Challenging such limiting approaches, which see YAL as an aesthetically less developed form, Anna O. Soter and Sean P. Connors affirm ‘[t]hat literature for adolescents might be stylistically complex, that it might withstand rigorous critical scrutiny, and that it might set forth thoughtful social and political commentaries.’³⁸ Similarly, Jeffrey S. Kaplan suggests the extent to which ‘the

³⁵ Ruth Cline and William McBride, *A Guide to Literature for Young Adults: Background, Selection, and Use* (Glenview, IL.: Scott, Foresman 1983), preface, in Alberghene, p. 135.

³⁶ Michael Cart, *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature* (New York, NY.: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 8, in Amanda K. Allen, ‘Breathlessly Awaiting the Next Installment: Revealing the Complexity of Young Adult Literature’, *Children's Literature*, 40 (2012), 260-69 (p. 260).

³⁷ Allen, p. 260.

³⁸ In their analysis of YAL, its merits beyond relevance to adolescents, and its perception by secondary school teachers and literary critics, Soter and Connors provide an extensive list of young-adult novels that engage with larger socio-political questions and conflicts: ‘[...] we believe that young adult literature is capable of providing thoughtful social and political commentary that raises questions about complex issues—immigration (An Na’ s *A Step from Heaven*), the exploitation of children (Patricia McCormick’ s *Sold*), sexual orientation (M.E. Kerr’ s *Deliver Us from Evie*), terrorism (Cormier’ s *After the First Death*), roles of men and women in contemporary culture, social and political responsibility (M.T. Anderson’ s *Feed*), the individual challenge of social and political institutions (Suzanne Collin’ s *Hunger Games*), social conformity, religion (Pete Hatman’ s *Godless*),

world of young adult literature is being transformed by topics and themes that years ago would have never ever been conceived'³⁹ such as biotechnology or post-humanism. Thirty years after Alberghene's early attempt to characterise YAL in opposition to other literary forms, Stephen Roxburgh takes a contrasting stance by accentuating the artistic qualities they share: '*There is no difference between the young adult novel and the adult novel. There are distinctions to be made between them, but they are not different art forms*' [italics original].⁴⁰ Rather, in accounting for the specificity of the genre he argues that narrative point of view and voice, 'composed of diction and syntax, word choice and word order [...] along with meter and rhyme,'⁴¹ are of much greater importance for character construction in YAL than elsewhere. According to Roxburgh, 'it is the fundamental role of voice that is 'the very essence of the young adult novel'⁴²; '[the] [c]haracter is made manifest in and by the protagonist's voice'⁴³ rather than through action, appearance, or description. In short, '[v]oice is character is plot' [italics original].⁴⁴

Lake's *In Darkness* is one such example of the stylistic sophistication of young-adult novels, manifested in their use of narrative voice as well as their capacity to engage with complex questions such as identity formation and socio-political issues: terrorism, immigration, or natural disasters.⁴⁵ In what follows, I

poverty, political morality (Walter Dean Myer's *Fallen Angels*), patriotism (Collier's *My Brother Sam Is Dead*), the strength of individuals to face disaster (Paul Volponi's *Hurricane Song: A Novel of New Orleans*), and the individual search of enduring truths (Gary Paulsen's *The Island*) among others.' Anna O. Sotter and Sean P. Connors, 'Beyond Relevance to Literary Merit: Young Adult Literature as "Literature"', *The ALAN Review*, 37 (2009), 62-67 (pp. 63, 64).

³⁹ Jeffrey S. Kaplan, 'Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century Moving Beyond Traditional Constraints and Conventions', *The ALAN Review*, 32 (2005), 11-18 (p. 11).

⁴⁰ Stephen Roxburgh, 'The Art of the Young Adult Novel. Keynote Address: ALAN Workshop, Indianapolis, IN., November 20, 2004', *The ALAN Review*, 32 (2005), 4-10 (p. 5).

⁴¹ Roxburgh, p. 8.

⁴² Roxburgh, p. 9.

⁴³ Roxburgh, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Roxburgh, p. 9.

⁴⁵ In response to the 2010 earthquake two further publications, aimed specifically at children and young adults, were: Edwidge Danticat, *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti* (New York, NY.: Orchard Books, 2010), and Ann E. Burg, *Serafina's Promise* (New York, NY.: Scholastic Press, 2013).

interweave an examination of the novel's formal features, such as its bipartite structure (akin to the parallel threads of Woolley's text) and its use of two distinct yet gradually merging narrative voices, with an exploration of the ways in which it engages with the two key events in Haiti's history around which it is organised, namely the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and the 2010 earthquake. Questions of individual subjectivity and collective agency, as shaped by these defining events, are central to the novel's composite aesthetic. These are connected, in turn, to a more general exploration of the text's potential to contemplate the implications of Haiti's past for its collective post-earthquake future.

In considering these literary modes of representation, it is important to recognise that factual accuracy is not the goal of *In Darkness*; rather, historical narrative functions as a point of departure for an unorthodox creative engagement with the country's recent and more remote past:

I occasionally simplified and adjusted the facts to fit into the shape of the story [...] The simple answer is that I believe that the book is true in essence [...] I did not invent the character of Toussaint l'Ouverture, and I have been faithful to his story, at least in spirit and in essentials. It was necessary to smooth out the history to some extent.⁴⁶

Here, the motivations guiding the structure of the text are spelled out clearly: the novel wants to alert the reader to key contemporary and historical issues without claiming to provide an authoritative explanation of either defining events or the figures that symbolise them. Instead, the account, 'true in essence,' weaves between fictional and factual material, and both of its main narratives seem equally important. The author's self-reflexive comments, as well as the book's target audience, seem to pre-empt the twin charge of uncritical appropriation of the Haitian Revolution and sensationalisation of the traumatic experience of the 2010 earthquake. At the same time, both factors point to the ways in which each narrative account, regardless of

⁴⁶ Lake, p. 339.

the extent of its realism and factual accuracy, represents a ‘smoothing out’ of historical complexities.

Rather than attempting to convey the intricacies of the late eighteenth-century Revolution or the early twenty-first-century earthquake, the author points his readers to additional resources that might provide them with more factual background on these two epochal events. This complementary material is hinted at in the publisher’s closing note: ‘For more information about Nick Lake and his astonishing novel, including an author interview and a reading guide, visit www.in-darkness.org.’⁴⁷ The book’s website does indeed provide, among other things, a brief overview of the key figures and events from the novel. The page also has a list of recommended reading on Haiti and the slave trade,⁴⁸ a downloadable reading guide, and even a fundraising appeal. The reading guide consists of a brief summary of the text and provides a number of extracts from the novel, followed by a list of suggested questions. These questions focus on the more universal issues *In Darkness* raises, such as those of power, healing, religion and spirituality, which can be easily discussed in a variety of classroom contexts and differ significantly in terms of the complexity and level of knowledge they assume. The first part of the handout focuses on the text of the novel, whereas the second section explores its formal aspects (plot construction, characters, etc.) and provides ideas for possible creative writing activities as well as suggested links to related topics such as gang culture in Britain, Vodou, or Cité Soleil. These supplementary pointers move beyond the

⁴⁷ Lake, supplement.

⁴⁸ The following works (in this order) are listed on the page without any explanation or even a brief gloss on their content, scholarly value, or relevance to the novel: *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography* by Ellen Gibson Wilson (William Sessions Ltd., 1996); *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* by Simon Schama (BBC Books, 2006); *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* by Adam Hochschild (Macmillan, 2005); *The Grand Slave Emporium: Cape Coast Castle and the British Slave Trade* by William St Clair (Profile Books, 2006); *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* by Peter Fryer (Pluto Press, 1984); *Slaves Who Freed Haiti* by Katherine Scherman (1954); *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James (1963); and *This Guilted African, Toussaint L’Ouverture* by Wenda Parkinson (1978).

particularity of the Haitian context, suggesting parallels between the world of the novel and that of target readers of the text.

It is this additional material to *In Darkness* that gives an insight into the author's preoccupation with the categories of knowledge and representation. The penultimate question on the text asks the reader to consider the following:

Metaphors of birth and rebirth suffuse Lake's book. What is Toussaint saying about his womb-like cave? There is an obvious echo of Plato in the idea that we only see our own flickering version of reality in the small light the cave gives us. What do you think about the way Lake has renamed that central idea of Western philosophy and given Toussaint ownership of it? How will such ideas be reborn?⁴⁹

These questions direct the reader's response to the text by encouraging him/her to see the novel not only as a fictional work, but also as a voice in a philosophical debate. In contrast to the more specific questions the handout suggests, such as the nature of guns in the text,⁵⁰ this discussion point allows for a more complex engagement with the novel and its use of a central philosophical idea to think through issues of representation, truth, and reality: key concerns for any self-reflexive narrative work.

This sense of analogy and necessary adaptation is central to the book's design and the generic conventions it negotiates. At the most basic level, the bipartite structure of the text already hints at the comparability of the Haitian Revolution and the 2010 earthquake. This formal correspondence, later complemented by the thematic interplay between the 'Now' and 'Then' sections of the text, suggests the ways in which the adventures and lessons learned by the two protagonists are applicable to the reader's everyday experience. This last aspect of

⁴⁹ Bloomsbury, *Reading Guide for In Darkness by Nick Lake* <<http://supadu.com/images/ckfinder/352/pdfs/In%20Darkness%20Reading%20Group%20Guide4.pdf>> [accessed 15 January 2015], p. 5.

⁵⁰ Following a passage narrated by Shorty, in which he reflects on his use of guns, the guide suggests discussing these two questions: 'What is Lake saying about the nature of guns? And about taking responsibility?' Bloomsbury, *Reading Guide for In Darkness by Nick Lake*, p. 5.

In Darkness is particularly important in the context of the book's designation as a young-adult novel: through a creative rendering of key events in Haiti's history it popularises the country's past and creates a compelling story that frames the book's more pedagogical message. The acknowledged simplification of the historical account does not limit the 'success' of the novel. Rather, such abridged presentation enables the narrator to create a formally complete and generically consistent narrative that speaks to its target audience in the ways that are deemed most relevant to it.

However, the imaginative and didactic possibilities opened up by the genre of YAL do not eliminate the risks that aestheticisation and pairing up of events entail. Artistic representations of the Revolution⁵¹ and its most noted leader, C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938) being the most famous, have helped to increase public awareness and scholarly interest in the topic (see Introduction). At the same time, by blurring the boundary between history and literature or cinema, such representations risk contributing to misleading portrayals of Haiti's history. One such example is the Bois Caïman ceremony, which is at the centre of Lake's portrayal of L'Ouverture and the beginning of the Haitian Revolution. This still-debated event is said symbolically to inaugurate the Haitian struggle for independence but, due to the lack of historical sources and the persistent stereotyping of Vodou and Haitians in general,⁵² it has often been presented as a diabolical pact that is then blamed for

⁵¹ One recent production is the French TV two-episode mini-series *Toussaint Louverture* [sic]. (2012). For a discussion of the series, and the challenges of cinematic representations of the Haitian Revolution in the context of French cultural amnesia, see Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, 'Happy as a Slave: The Toussaint Louverture Miniseries', in *Film and Fiction for French Historians: A Cultural Bulletin* <<http://h-france.net/fffh/maybe-missed/happy-as-a-slave-the-toussaint-louverture-miniseries/>> [accessed 27 May 2014].

⁵² One of these recurring tropes was that of Haiti as a demonic body in a state of repulsive otherness. As J. Michael Dash points out, '[i]n the early days of the AIDS epidemic, the old biological trope of Haiti as a demonic body once more generated fantasies of Haiti's satanic otherness.' Dash, p. x.

Haiti's later misfortunes.⁵³ By invoking this event, Lake's work reveals the ways in which literary narratives belonging to the genre of young-adult fiction partake in these politics of representation⁵⁴ at the level of discourse, structure, and imagery.

In addition to its role as an educational support tool, the complementary material on the website reveals an unexpected dimension of the book, namely its ambition to contribute to post-earthquake humanitarian efforts. Just before the recommended further reading, the web page has a short section entitled 'Haiti Aid,' which emphasises the importance of continued relief work:

Charities are still continuing their aid in Haiti by helping people recover from the 2010 earthquake. Ten months after the earthquake, an outbreak of cholera added to Haiti's woes. To find out more about aid in Haiti, and how you can help, visit: Disaster Emergency Committee, Save the Children, Red Cross.⁵⁵

Unlike Woolley's account, Lake's has no great ambition to act as a fundraising tool for a specific NGO. There is no explicit endorsement of any relief organisation in the published text and the novel's portrayal of the romance between a white female relief worker and Dread Wilmè, the leader of one of the gangs, might be treated as a pointed critique of naïve humanitarian efforts to 'help' Haiti without addressing the structural issues that are at the source of the country's vulnerability. This particular paratextual suggestion, less prescriptive than Woolley's, modifies the text's popularisation of Haiti's recent and more remote history so that readers can draw instructive lessons from it. By encouraging the reader, in this case most likely the

⁵³ Here, Pat Robertson, in his now infamous comments made soon after the earthquake, is probably referring to the Bois Caïman ceremony, often presented as a dark vodou ritual which set off the bloody revolt. These racialised and romanticised depictions are highly inaccurate. As Jeremy D. Popkin makes clear: 'The secret meeting in the woods at a site known as Bois Caïman, which probably took place on the night of 21 August, may have included a *vodou* ceremony, and perhaps an inspirational speech like the one attributed to Boukman [...] Probably the main purpose of the meeting, however, was to decide how to react to the danger that the whites might have discovered the slaves' plan.' Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 37-8.

⁵⁴ For a recent study of artistic representations of the Haitian Revolution and the political visions they evoked, see Philip Kaisary, *The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imagination: Radical Horizons, Conservative Constraints* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

⁵⁵ *In Darkness.org* <<http://www.in-darkness.org/haiti>> [accessed 27 January 2015].

teacher who is consulting this additional material, to make a donation, *In Darkness* translates its pedagogical aims into direct action. In effect, despite key generic differences, this paratextual appeal creates surprising parallels between Woolley's autobiographical account and Lake's fictional work.

The novel's conventions and aspirations raise the key question of how narrative voice is employed in the text and what relationship it sets up between narrator, narratee, and audience. The two narrative strands, one narrated by Shorty and the other by Toussaint L'Ouverture, are distinct. The latter is a third-person omniscient narration which recounts the life of Toussaint L'Ouverture from his ascent to power to his imprisonment by the French colonial authorities. The former is a first-person narrative addressed to an imagined 'you', the recipient of Shorty's account, and has a strong dialogic quality: the teenage boy is looking for the narratee's understanding and a certain degree of sympathy. Shorty is at once an autodiegetic and intradiegetic narrator: he tells his own story and takes part in it.⁵⁶ His account is narrated consistently in the present tense; the narrative unfolds in time, with the reader and the narrator being equally uncertain of its outcome. *In Darkness* opens with Shorty's story and immediately draws the reader into it through a series of repeated self-characterisations:⁵⁷

I am the voice in the dark, calling out for your help.

I am the quiet voice that you hope will not turn to silence, the voice you want to keep hearing cos it means someone is still alive. I am the voice calling for

⁵⁶ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin and Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 245.

⁵⁷ In my analysis, I build upon Maria Nikolajeva's insights on the importance of approaching children's literature from the perspective of narrative theory, since it allows us to differentiate between the narrator and the focalisation of the text, and the reader's formation of subjectivity. See Maria Nikolajeva, 'Beyond the Grammar of Story, or How Can Children's Literature Criticism Benefit from Narrative Theory?', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 28 (2003), 5-16 (p. 11).

you to come and dig me out. I am the voice in the dark, asking you to unbury me, to bring me from the grave out into the light, like a zombie.⁵⁸

This captivating opening address necessitates a response: someone is calling out for help and, as the likely recipients of this cry, we cannot turn away. This dramatic framing immediately establishes a relationship between the narratee, who can be defined as ‘a figure imagined within the text as listening to—or receiving a written narration from—the narrator,’⁵⁹ and the unnamed voice in the dark. Shorty addresses this unspecified narratee repeatedly throughout the account and the narratee’s presumed unvoiced questions shape the narrator’s recounting of events. As he is telling the story of his birth and early years, the narrator suddenly interrupts his account: ‘You’re thinking, how can I know this? How can my manman have remembered Aristide’s words? And I answer you—she didn’t. But Aristide wrote them down in a book, and I have that book still.’⁶⁰ Self-reflexive interruptions of this kind add a degree of complexity to the relationship between the narrator and the narratee within the text. These breaks reveal the multiple, both oral and written, accounts that Shorty is weaving together in order to compose his own story.

The boy draws on different sources, such as Aristide’s book or his mother’s memories, and these are incorporated into his story as seemingly unmodified fragments of recalled conversations. The direct speech of these extracts quickens the pace of the plot, creates a polyphonic account, and adds a sense of immediacy to the scenes being depicted:

⁵⁸ Lake, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Chris Baldick, ‘narratee’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms Online* (Oxford University Press, 2008) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-758>> [accessed 29 January 2015]. The narratee is ‘the fictive entity to which the narrator directs his narration’ and can be further divided into two entities, namely the addressee and the recipient; whereas, ‘the addressee is the narrator’s image of the one to whom the message is sent, the recipient is the factual receiver.’ Wolf Schmid, ‘Narratee’, in *The Living Handbook of Narratology Online*, ed. by Peter Hühn and others (Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2013) <<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narratee>> [accessed 19 August 2015].

⁶⁰ Lake, p. 16.

He [Aristide] used to be a preacher, so he was accustomed to shouting at people. He was saying:

—Ever since it was discovered by Christopher Columbus this nation has been enslaved.⁶¹

However, contrary to first impressions, these recounted dialogues are not free from narratorial commentary, already revealing the dynamic between the protagonist and other key characters such as the boy's best friend, Tintin. Immediately after recalling a conversation between them,⁶² Shorty adds: 'But that's Tintin. He's like, so full of holes, so easy to hurt, that he stops the world from hurting him by hurting it first.'⁶³ The stylised diction of the comment, which is marked by repetition and the use of colloquial qualifiers, contrasts with the psychological insight the remark provides. This dissonance between the narrator's cognitive and verbal skills reveals an emotional maturity beyond his years that increases the credibility of his narration and his later moral evaluation of his own actions.⁶⁴ While adding pace to the account, this serves to establish the protagonist's narratorial position as well as the complexity of his character, revealing the web of relations that shapes him.

By contrast, the second account, which focuses on Toussaint L'Ouverture, is a more conventional third-person narration, with the omniscient narrator recalling events directly preceding the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution. The future leader is also presented as an outsider, with his rational attitude and philosophical sophistication distinguishing him from his comrades and moderating his

⁶¹ Lake, p. 15.

⁶² ' -How are you? he asked me.

-I got shot, I said. How do you think I am? [...].

-Everyone in the hood be giving you props, blud, Tintin said in English. Tintin was one of those gangsters who talk all the time in English, like they' re from the hood or something, the real hood, like New York or Baltimore.' Lake, p. 4.

⁶³ Lake, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Maria Nikolajeva observes a general correspondence between the age of the narrator and his/her ability to express emotional states: 'a personal narrator who is a child telling the story more or less as it unfolds, in simultaneous personal narration, lacks both verbal and cognitive skills to articulate his emotions.' Nikolajeva, p. 12.

participation in the Boïs Caiman ceremony—the symbolic initiation of the Revolution under L'Ouverture's leadership:

—But Ogou ⁶⁵ will not possess us all! The man he chooses will be the one sent to free us.

More shouting from the assembly:

—You!

—We choose you!

—Lead us, Boukman! Command us to victory!

Boukman graciously waved their words away.

—No, the lwa will choose.

Toussaint sighed. Their cause was just. Hadn't Rousseau himself said that man is born free, but everywhere is in chains? So Boukman had told him, anyway. The philosophers agreed that liberty was a right which could not be taken away, except as a punishment for criminal acts. So could they not simply rise up, with justice in their hearts, and take their freedom by force? Was it necessary that they cement their alliance with this superstitious ceremony? ⁶⁶

In this extended quotation, the use of direct speech adds to the pace of the narrative and contributes to the characterisation of the future revolutionary leader by consistently establishing his position of authority in relation to other characters in the story. In addition, the stark contrast between his sceptical reserve and the animated cries of those around him imply that Toussaint's analytical mind is not bound by folkloric superstition—a suggestion that inadvertently chimes with portrayals of Vodou as nothing more than a magic ritual. Finally, these dialogic interruptions energise the conventional narrative frame and bring to life seemingly remote historical events, allowing contemporary teenage readers to enter the historical context and relate more easily to the dilemmas the narrator faces.

Although it is never revealed who the narrator of the historical narrative is,

⁶⁵ Ogou Ferray is the *lwa* of blacksmiths, fire, and war. He is known for his warrior qualities. Hurbon, pp. 73-4.

⁶⁶ Lake, pp. 46-7.

as the novel develops it seems increasingly possible that Toussaint's story unfolds in Shorty's dreams. Indeed, the transitions between the two sections, 'Now' and 'Then', often occur when Shorty seems to be falling asleep or when Toussaint is dreaming. On other occasions, an image, theme, or prolepsis bridges the two strands. About a third into the novel, for example, Toussaint suddenly experiences a vision of himself as a young boy listening to music and someone speaking English; with this image the chapter abruptly ends.⁶⁷ The subsequent 'Now' section opens with Shorty trying to recall the song *Ready To Die* by Notorious B.I.G., an American rapper. Similarly, the protagonists' actions across the two narrative strands echo each other, a correspondence which only becomes clear retrospectively. Both Shorty and Toussaint, for example, devise a cooling system in order to keep food fresh for longer.⁶⁸ These repeated parallels across *In Darkness* introduce a complex interplay between the two narrative strands, suggesting that questions of subjectivity and agency are similarly explored across two narrative levels in the novel.

To summarise the argument thus far, while reinforcing the respective aims of the two texts, their form and extratextual material also expose the limitations of their narrativisation of disaster. The need to provide extensive additional material, such as epigraphs, author's notes, and online guides so as to frame the autobiographical conversion account as well as contextualise the fictional narrative, seems to imply that narrative on its own struggles to engage sufficiently with the lasting impact of

⁶⁷ 'He [Toussaint]. crossed worlds and time, and he was a boy, and loud music was playing—except he thought perhaps it was all in his head—and a man was saying something in English that Toussaint could not understand, and the notes and beats of the music were like a scream of furious anger, like a murder made sound.' Lake, p. 105.

⁶⁸ Here is Shorty's invention: 'So I thought to myself, if there was a way to surround food with wet sand, maybe the water would dry from the sand and take the warmth from the food away with it. That was the story with the bowls [...]. – it was a fridge [...]' Lake, p. 180. Thirteen pages later, the reader encounters a comparable description of Toussaint's creation: 'He had devised a simple system of two bowls, one inside the other, with watered sand between, which allowed food to remain cool for longer, and therefore not to spoil.' Lake, p. 193.

the disaster. Self-reflexive authorial commentary, as well as the more or less explicit fundraising appeal of each text, complement the work of the narrative and respond to the need for a tangible translation of the affective experience of reading. Both Woolley and Lake hope for a two-stage transformation of the reader: a moral change, followed by direct fundraising action.

Spirited Selves: Agency and Subjectivity in *Unshaken* (2011)

The aspirations expressed by the texts' formal and extratextual features shape their respective explorations of individual and collective transformations in the wake of the January 2010 disaster. For the narrator of *Unshaken*, being saved from the rubble is a manifestation of God's omnipotence and an unrepeatable opportunity, which Woolley duly seizes, granted to him by God to live a full life of total devotion. The protagonist's individual metamorphosis and spiritual renewal triggered by the earthquake have their beginnings in the experience of the liminal state of survival. Trapped under the debris of the Hotel Montana, he battles with feelings of extreme uncertainty and incomprehension. First, he tries to understand what has happened, then he attempts to come to terms with the fact of his random survival. Yet as time passes, the chances of being rescued steadily decrease and this realisation forces him to confront the increasing likelihood of death. It is at this moment of profound unease that spirituality, here framed in the evangelical Christian tradition, helps him to negotiate the liminal position he occupies, to find meaning in his suffering, and to intuit a parallel between this recent ordeal and earlier times of crisis. The text's narrative arc re-affirms the coupling of these two processes of reconstruction and clearly demarcates the main stages of Woolley's spiritual journey: first comes the experience of profound spiritual doubt and despair;

second is the act of turning to God, a moment of personal conversion followed by a gradual acceptance of whatever outcome lies ahead. At heart, this is a narrative of progress and spiritual advancement and a movement from fragmentation to wholeness.

An all-encompassing (both metaphorical and literal) darkness marks the first stage of this double struggle for survival and spiritual renewal:

I spit out the blood and dust that coats my mouth but I can't spit out the fear. [...] I'm hanging on to the realization that I lived through an earthquake. I survived! But I also know that if I want to make it out of this black tomb alive, if I ever hope to see my family again, it will take a miracle—a series of miracles.

Miracles I'm not sure I have the faith to believe in.⁶⁹

Here, the sense of anguish and utter confusion are mixed with the narrator's self-assurances of hope and faith. The ambiguous tone of the passage reveals his uncertainty whether to rejoice or not at having survived the earthquake. Although he is still alive, he doubts the possibility of ever being rescued from the rubble (the juxtaposition of 'tomb' and 'miracle' emphasises the unlikeliness of this happening). At the same time, the two images have a clear religious resonance as they evoke Christ's resurrection and the biblical stories of Lazarus,⁷⁰ the widow's son,⁷¹ or Jairus's daughter⁷² being raised from the dead. This pairing contrasts with the engulfing darkness of the tomb, prefiguring the narrator's possible death, with the imagery of light and vision, suggesting the chance to see his family once again. He hopes that he too can be rescued from darkness, brought back to life by God, and be reunited with those he loves. Yet as the two closing lines of the passage make clear, this hope is a fading one; the narrator is no longer certain that divine intervention

⁶⁹ Woolley, p. 11.

⁷⁰ John 11.12. *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). [Unless otherwise stated all references come from this edition].

⁷¹ Luke 7.11-17.

⁷² Mark 5.21-43; Matthew 9.18-26; Luke 8.40-56.

can occur. At this stage, his faith fully depends on one particular ‘miracle,’ namely whether he can be rescued from the rubble or not.

However, as the initial experience of shock gives way to a contemplation of his current predicament, the narrator begins to revise his initial response to the aftermath of the earthquake. There is a constant tension at work here. On the one hand, the likelihood of his survival decreases as the hours since the disaster pass; but on the other, he refuses to give up hope in his rescue and continues to struggle to find meaning for the testing events in which he is embroiled: ‘I had lost a lot of blood; there was no food or water; and the aftershocks continued. I tried to postpone my death in every way I could, but I knew very little was up to me.’⁷³ Left with little, if any, possibility to affect his situation, the narrator totally depends on the external help of the rescue teams who, God willing, will save him and those buried with him in Hotel Montana. It is this sense of powerlessness and dependency that triggers the narrator’s re-evaluation of his life. Proximity to death makes him re-assess the strength of his commitment to faith, which is the only thing, however uncertain, to which he can now turn. Recalling the words of the Book of Revelation,⁷⁴ Woolley realises that his heart ‘was lukewarm—neither hot nor cold toward God’⁷⁵ and that, as a result, he had previously led a ‘pretty standard, mediocre Christian life.’⁷⁶ With the biblical call to repentance echoing in his mind, Woolley is quick to admit that the comparable sense of security he had enjoyed before coming to Haiti has resulted in his spiritual lukewarmness and made him more distant from God: ‘In the face of death and eternity, [he] could not lie to [himself]. Something in [his] soul, in the

⁷³ Woolley, p. 49.

⁷⁴ ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.’ Revelation 3.15-17.

⁷⁵ Woolley, p. 50.

⁷⁶ Woolley, p. 50.

core of [his] being, was off-kilter, and [he] knew it.’⁷⁷ This lack of spiritual zeal is synonymous with losing the harmony on which identity and subjectivity depend; for Woolley, his Christian beliefs are ‘an important part of who [he is], of [his] essence.’⁷⁸ In order to better assess and counter his spiritual malaise, the narrator asks himself a number of questions as to the extent of his commitment to God.⁷⁹ By repeatedly using the first person singular in this self-examination, the narrative directly reaches out to the reader, who is also enjoined to ponder possible responses. Although Woolley does not have all the answers yet, he knows he ‘[doesn’t] want to be that kind of Christian—a follower of Christ in name but barely in reality.’⁸⁰ This moment of awakening, which follows upon Woolley’s re-examination of his life before his arrival in Haiti, transforms the narrator’s initial reading of the situation: what needs to change in order for him to be truly ‘saved’ is his interior predisposition, not necessarily the material circumstances he is in now.

Faced with the sobering realisation of his separation from God, the narrator desperately turns to prayer in the hope that this can alleviate this pain, help him realign himself with the will of God, and find meaning in his current suffering. He is yearning for a sense of comfort, however limited, and indeed he soon experiences the moment of reassurance he is longing for: ‘And while I worshipped and prayed, I heard a voice in my head say: *You are mine!*’ [italics original].⁸¹ This epiphany strengthens his resolve to lead a more Christian life, one of a ‘consistent posture of devotion and surrender to God that bears fruit in my life.’⁸² Here, the psalmic

⁷⁷ Woolley, p. 49.

⁷⁸ Woolley, p. 49.

⁷⁹ These questions include, for example: ‘I believed he [God]. had created me with a specific purpose in mind and I called him the Lord of my life, yet for how long had I made my own plans and manager the details of my life without involving him? How often did I seek his guidance and direction—really ask, and then wait for an answer? Who was in the driver’s seat of my life?’ Woolley, p. 50.

⁸⁰ Woolley, p. 50.

⁸¹ Woolley, p. 51.

⁸² Woolley, p. 50.

character of the narrator's address becomes evident as the words he hears clearly echo those of Psalm 119: 'I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts.'⁸³ The protagonist's plea is answered, and it is God who assures the penitent of his salvation. Just as it seems that the rescue teams might forget about him after all or call off the search altogether, the narrator again turns to the Bible and, in an attempt to regain this earlier sense of peace and serenity, paraphrases the words from the Book of Isaiah 49:16⁸⁴:

As I sang the words "my name is written on His hands," I choked up, remembering that even if the French team lost their list of survivors, God knew I was here—I was on *his* list [italics original].⁸⁵

Here, the spiritual experience of being in dialogue with God⁸⁶ starkly contrasts with the lack of communication⁸⁷ with the search teams and the sense of Babel-like chaos⁸⁸ that characterises the early rescue efforts. Powerless and desperate, Woolley's only hope comes from his belief in God's promise, and he seeks confirmation of his renewed conviction in the change of immediate material

⁸³ Psalm 119.94.

⁸⁴ 'See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;/ your walls are continually before me.' Isaiah 49.16.

⁸⁵ Woolley, p. 155.

⁸⁶ On numerous occasions, Woolley emphasises this experience of dialogue between himself and God: 'He [God]. wasn't just the audience in this worship experience, but somehow he was a participant in a two-way dialogue.' Woolley, p. 156. On another occasion he remarks: 'I was aware of a clear and unmistakable message from God. This time it was not like I was hearing specific words in my mind, but rather like I was hearing the final note of our worship time, like the sustained resonance that lingers in the air after the ringing of a bell.' Woolley, p. 158.

⁸⁷ "Be quiet! Be quiet!" someone yelled.

But I wouldn't shut up. I kept yelling. [...].

To *make* them respond to me.

And then finally, one did.

"We're not coming for you. We're not going to rescue you! Shut up!" [italics original]. Woolley, p. 163.

⁸⁸ As the rescue teams approach, he remarks: 'Whoever Sam was, he'd just confirmed my suspicion that there [p.160] were communication difficulties because of the chaos. I wondered how many teams there were and how many countries were represented, and whether anyone was in charge' Woolley, pp. 159-60. Later on, this sense of multi-lingual confusion becomes even more evident:

'I could hear jackhammers in the distance.

The sounds of saws from above.

Voices to my left.

They spoke French.

And English.

And other languages I couldn't recognize.' Woolley, p. 162.

conditions in which he finds himself. Surrender and devotion define the narrator's understanding of self and subjectivity: only by emptying himself of his individual desires and aspirations can he grow closer to God. The initial, involuntary experience of powerlessness in the face of disaster is now replaced, thanks to prayer, by conscious abandonment to the will of God.

However, this seemingly gradual progression towards a greater sense of spiritual abandon is repeatedly interrupted by an equally intense experience of doubt, one which is never fully dealt with in the account. At the source of this mistrust is the recurring question of the purpose of his and his family's suffering. As the hours pass and the chances of being rescued fade, the narrator becomes immersed in a mixed state of joy and despair. He is grateful to God for being alive, seeing no reason why he, an American citizen, should be rescued instead of anyone else.⁸⁹ But he still cannot imagine any positive material or spiritual outcome that his death might bring his family:

Still the question of *good* lingered for me. How could any of this be good?
How could I long for heaven when I ached to be with my wife and boys?
[italics original]⁹⁰

The narrator's remarks capture the essence of his spiritual struggle: the difficulty of trusting that good will come out of this situation regardless of the outcome of the rescue efforts. Although his comments point to a longstanding Christian philosophical-theological debate on the meaning and sense of suffering, he does not engage explicitly with these scholarly arguments as they might alienate the book's potential target audience and distract the reader from the main purpose of the account, which is to act as a personal testimony of faith and a confirmation that 'life-

⁸⁹ See Chapter Three, p. 207.

⁹⁰ Woolley, p. 123.

changing encounters with God can, do, and should take place.’⁹¹ Emphasis is therefore placed on aspects of faith that are common across evangelical denominations such as reliance on scripture, as manifested in the work through frequent recourse to biblical passages, and the concern for conversion, as expressed in the narrative arc of the account.⁹² This disregard for theological nuances, however, undermines the sense of completeness and *dénouement* that the narrative hopes to create.

Rather than being resolved, the tension between faith and doubt is smoothed over through the use of analogy and metaphor as the account draws to a close. The narrator once again re-affirms the parallel between his experience of the earthquake and his wife’s depression and goes so far as to conclude that Christy’s illness was the more traumatic of the two events. In this re-reading, both testing experiences are given a clear sense of purpose, allowing Woolley to grow in faith and trust in God. Both the six years of his wife’s depression and the sixty-five hours of being trapped in the Montana become life-lessons which have brought him closer to the fullness of life: ‘With God’s grace, I am no longer living a half life; instead, I am living a new kind of life.’⁹³ This double (structural and formal) parallel suggests that his current ordeal will ultimately lead to something positive. Gone is the earlier doubt in God’s plan; from now on the narrator’s main motivation for being rescued is to reunite with his family and fulfil the promises he had made under the rubble. In

⁹¹ Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 25.

⁹² In his analysis of American Evangelical Christianity, Mark A. Noll builds on the earlier work of David Bebbington, who ‘has identified the key ingredients of evangelicalism as conversionism (an emphasis on the “new birth” as a life-changing experience of God’), biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross, usually pictured as the only way of salvation.)’ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Britain: a History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman 1989), pp. 2-17, in Noll, p. 13. These, according to Noll, are still valid as general characteristics of American evangelicalism, though how this reliance on scripture is expressed or how conversion is understood differs greatly across evangelical churches. Noll, pp. 24-5.

⁹³ Woolley, pp. 224-5.

metaphorical terms, the first stage of his imprisonment is a time of darkness; the second is the experience of light which comes from the joy of being re-affirmed in one's beliefs and the hope of seeing his family again.

The narrator is able to incorporate the two instances within his ultimately reassuring theological-spiritual worldview only by establishing a parallel between these two events which allows him to focus almost exclusively on the personal dimensions of these crises. Woolley interprets both his wife's depression and the earthquake as moments of individual suffering, to be accounted for as opportunities to grow closer to God. The two events function effectively as two complementary narratives of conversion and renewal. Their impact on Woolley is seen in overwhelmingly positive terms: the joy of living a better, fuller life close to God compensates for the extreme suffering and the many difficulties he has had to endure. Contrary to other survivors' accounts explored in this thesis (see Chapters One and Two), the earthquake seems to have no enduring impact on the narrator. The permanent wounds it leaves are mainly physical, yet even these are given a positive significance:

My body has healed almost completely, but I will always have the battle scars on my leg and the back of my head. They serve as tangible reminders of the lessons I've learned, and I am grateful for both. I occasionally have nightmares, but for the most part I feel like I have adjusted emotionally as well as I have physically.⁹⁴

Here, the scars seem to represent the triumphant spiritual combat against all-engulfing darkness, with the narrator emphasising his successful 'readjustment' to reality. Woolley glosses over the nightmares he still occasionally experiences and stresses his emotional and physical equilibrium, as if in admitting his continuing struggle he might risk invalidating the whole account. In order to sustain the

⁹⁴ Woolley, p. 231.

narrative arc of the text and its spiritual message, transformation is given a strictly personal dimension and post-earthquake recovery primarily denotes the restoration of one's faith. Christy's depression, which might return any time, and the narrator's post-earthquake trauma, which might resurface in uncontrollable ways and throw him once again into a state of darkness, are only hinted at in the passage. Etched onto the narrator's body, these scars become ornamental reminders of two victorious battles on the part of a 'good and faithful servant.'⁹⁵

Moreover, the text's reading of the January events as a traumatic yet ultimately enriching experience that triggered spiritual improvement builds on the conviction of mandatory repentance for a previously misguided life. This interpretation evokes the 'deuteronomistic view of history embraced in many literal readings of the Bible,'⁹⁶ which see disasters and curses as punitive judgment against those who do not obey God and do not adhere to His commandments.⁹⁷ Such a way of responding to natural disasters stresses the spiritual causes of material events like the earthquake. Within this conservative theology, as promoted for example by the Christian New Apostolic Reformation and other charismatic congregations, the disaster and its aftermath figured as 'God's punishment of a sinful nation whose

⁹⁵ Woolley, p. 50. Here he is paraphrasing the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25.14-30.

⁹⁶ Catherine Wessinger, 'Religious Responses to the Katrina Disaster in New Orleans and the American Gulf Coast', *Journal of Religious Studies* (Japanese Association for Religious Studies), 86 (2012), in Elizabeth McAlister, 'Humanitarian Adhocracy, Transnational New Apostolic Missions, and Evangelical Anti-Dependency in a Haitian Refugee Camp', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 16 (2013), 11-34 (p. 24).

⁹⁷ One source for this vision of history is a literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 30.15-20: 'See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God[b]. that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.'

church is divided, whose people worship demons, and whose government is corrupt.⁹⁸ The emphasis, both here and in Woolley's text, is placed on spiritual rather than material determinants of events, and there is little room to consider the complex contexts which shaped the aftermath of the disaster; instead, the scale of the earthquake seems to reflect similarly high levels of spiritual corruption and wrong-doing. Only a blanket conversion to a very specific type of evangelical Christianity—regardless of the fact that the majority of Haitians already declare some type of religious affiliation⁹⁹—will save the country from future disasters. Within such literal theological interpretations, Haiti's material impoverishment is easily coupled with spiritual crisis, with the country turning once again into a blank missionary space.

In effect, *Unshaken*'s pedagogical narrative framing, along with its emphasis on individual struggle rather than on the context in which it occurs, raises many unanswered questions about the narrator's own ability to lead a balanced life in the wake of the disaster and the significance of the event for Haiti and its people. The conventions the narrative adopts do not necessarily preclude a wider consideration of the catastrophe. Lionel-Édouard Martin's text (see Chapter One), for example, also has a clear religious dimension, adopts a personal approach, and is shaped as a prayer. Both accounts are narratives of survival, and both have a devotional character. Yet whereas Martin aligns his suffering with that of other victims affected by the disaster, Woolley focuses exclusively on his own personal experiences,

⁹⁸ McAlister, p. 14.

⁹⁹ The most recent General Census of Population and Living Conditions (2003) conducted by L'Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d'Informatique (The Haitian Institute of Statistics and Data) indicates that 54.7 % of population declares itself Catholic, 15.4 % Baptist, 7.9 % Pentecostal, and approximately 10.2 % declares no religious affiliation. L'Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d'Informatique, *Recensement Général de la population et de l' Habitat: Enquête nationale sur la population sa structure et ses caractéristiques démographiques et socio-économiques* (L'Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d'Informatique 2007) <http://www.ihsi.ht/rgph_resultat_ensemble_population.htm> [accessed 17 February 2015].

seeing the local Haitian community primarily as recipients of aid in need of help and salvation—an image epitomised in the scene of Lukeson’s conversion under the rubble and his ‘accept[ance] [of] Jee-sus’ [sic]¹⁰⁰ into his life. Even this dramatic moment of his friend’s metanoia is neatly slotted into the overwhelmingly positive pedagogical frame of *Unshaken*. As this and other scenes show, Woolley’s consideration of the wider context of the 2010 disaster is minimal and is framed accordingly within the book’s more specific spiritual and fundraising aims, without any acknowledgment of the extreme psychological vulnerability of his friend at the desperate moment leading up to his religious experience.

Commenting on Haiti’s post-earthquake religious landscape, Richman stresses the fluidity of denominational affiliations and conversions, which are often determined by pragmatic rather than by theological motives: ‘[s]trategic positioning for purposes of personal advancement and/or protection, rather than deep conviction in the superiority of Protestant doctrine, is the reason many convert to Protestantism.’¹⁰¹ Fear of death and sorcery, coupled with direct benefits such as access to education and material aid, are important factors that influenced religious identification before the disaster, and even more so in its immediate aftermath. In no way is this affiliation, whether to a Protestant group or to the Catholic Church, a fixed and stable one. Nor does it necessarily put an end to one’s belief in the power of traditional Vodou practices or charms.¹⁰² Fully aware of these socio-economic and psychological factors,¹⁰³ local Haitian Protestants speak of a wave of ‘bad

¹⁰⁰ Lukeson is a Haitian man who is trapped with Woolley under the rubble of Hotel Montana, where he worked prior to the earthquake. He is then rescued by the same emergency teams. Throughout the text, the narrator uses stylised speech (e.g. grammar mistakes, ‘dat’ for ‘that’) for Lukeson, which is meant to mirror his relatively poor command of English. Woolley, p. 110.

¹⁰¹ Richman, pp. 152-3.

¹⁰² Richman, p. 154.

¹⁰³ In psychological terms, the idea of disaster as divine punishment and victims’ responsibility for their own suffering is termed “‘negative religious coping.’” Harold G. Koenig, *In the Wake of Disaster: Religious Responses to Terrorism and Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, PA.: Templeton

conversions’—ephemeral and motivated by fear and panic rather than a lasting commitment to faith—that the earthquake triggered.¹⁰⁴ Both the narrator’s rekindling of religious zeal and Lukeson’s conversion are direct consequences of traumatic events that are retrospectively interpreted as God’s call to lead a more devout life. The cataclysm is decontextualised and becomes—quite literally—a blessing in disguise. In effect, the text focuses almost exclusively on individual conversion (and/or donation) rather than on creating the sense of proximity to other survivors experienced by Martin. With renewed faith and a new set of resolutions, Woolley and Lukeson emerge unscathed and enriched from the Sheol,¹⁰⁵ ready to start a new chapter in their life. A new man, Woolley, unlike Lukeson, can leave Haiti and its people behind and return home in order to bear witness to his experience and inspire others to change their lives.

Twinned Selves: Zombies, Spirituality, and Agency in *In Darkness* (2012)

The question of narrative rehearsal and transformation, and of the relationship between these practices and the notions of post-earthquake agency, is equally pertinent to Nick Lake’s *In Darkness*. The formal parallels the novel establishes between pre-Revolutionary and post-earthquake Haiti emphasise similarities between the two protagonists, Shorty and Toussaint L’Ouverture. They also create a sense of correspondence between the two contexts, with events from

Foundation Press, 2006), pp.31-33, in McAlister, p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ For example, Kanès, one of the members of the Assembly of God congregation interviewed by Richman, provides the following commentary on the post-earthquake religious landscape in Ti Rivyè, Léogâne: ‘A lot of people converted after the goudou-goudou. They were afraid. They had never experienced anything like it. The earth opened up and then it rose and fell. People thought it was Bondye (not Iwa). It was a natural occurrence like the hurricanes that come every year. They believed Bondye wanted them to convert; they thought if they did, it would protect them the next time. But many have already left it. They weren’t good conversions.’ Richman, p. 158.

¹⁰⁵ ‘The underworld; the abode of the dead or departed spirits, conceived by the Hebrews as a subterranean region clothed in thick darkness, return from which is impossible.’ ‘sheol, n.’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2014) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/177962?redirectedFrom=sheol>> [accessed 3 March 2014].

the imaginatively invoked Revolution foreshadowing specific moments in Shorty's life in contemporary Haiti. *In Darkness*, like *Unshaken*, traces the movement from fragmentation to wholeness and the accompanying notions of subjectivity and agency. However, Lake's text considers them through the lens of Vodou religion by making extensive references to *marasa* (divine twins) and via the metaphorical use of the figure of zombie and zombification.¹⁰⁶ As such, *In Darkness* distinguishes itself from the other texts analysed in this thesis by its explicit engagement with Vodou symbolism and Haiti's national history. By invoking the story of the Haitian Revolution, which has been the subject of numerous creative works¹⁰⁷ and 'has always been an ideological battleground,'¹⁰⁸ the novel suggests the need for a reconsideration of founding national narratives and their relevance to the shattered post-earthquake context. In effect, Lake's novel brings together two familiar discourses on Haiti's predicament, the country's unique historical beginnings, and its equally exceptional contemporary impoverishment, and ponders the possibility of contributing to new narratives in the aftermath of the disaster. The questions the novel creatively asks are: What can we learn from Haiti's past? How can it help us envisage a post-earthquake future for Haiti?

The figures of zombie and *marasa*, which are used to complement the formal and thematic twinning of these two narrative strands, have a significantly different

¹⁰⁶ For the more attentive reader, the front cover of the book already foreshadows the narrative's engagement with Vodou, with *vévés* of Papa Legba and Erzulie visible against the cover's red background.

¹⁰⁷ Philip Kaisary, in his study *The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imaginary*, emphasises the role of the Revolution as an inspiration for a number of literary works, pieces of art and works of music from the nineteenth century onwards. Among them are literary works by William Wordsworth, Harriet Martineau, Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, Henrich von Kleist, John Greenleaf Whittier; contemporary musical pieces such as Charles Mingus' s 1957 'Haitian Fight Song', Santana' s 1971 'Toussaint L' Overture' b (*sic*), Wyclef Jean' s 2009 concept album *Toussaint St. Jean—From the Hut, to the Projects, to the Mansion*; and films such as Jean Negulesco's 1952 *Lydia Bailey* or "Toussaint"—a project by the American company Louverture films that has been long in development. Kaisary, pp. 4-8. Differentiating between ' radical' and ' conservative' works, Kaisary examines the ways in which 'certain aesthetic modes of recuperating the Haitian Revolution have enabled or hindered particular political visions.' Kaisary, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Kaisary, p. 3.

spiritual and historical-cultural resonance, however—a discrepancy that carries far-reaching ethical implications for Lake’s narrative. Whereas the divine twins and the cult of twins are central to Vodou, the figure of zombie, an important trope in Haitian folklore, has long been appropriated and misused in Western popular culture to present a highly racialised and denigrating view of Haiti and its history and culture. From the early days of colonisation, Vodou held the attention of colonial travellers, whose tales offered an image of the religion as a form of satanic ritual combining cannibalism, superstition, the cult of the dead and human sacrifice.¹⁰⁹ These ‘primitive’ practices, which of course did not figure in Vodou at all, came to embody and explain Haiti’s racial and cultural ‘backwardness.’ Racist ideology, on the rise in the nineteenth century, further sustained this view of the country as trapped in a satanic-like darkness that could only be countered by emulating the enlightened practices of modern European states. Already in 1881, a former British consul, Spencer St. John, declared that ‘voodoo, attended by cannibalism and human sacrifice was the main reason for the regression of Haitian civilization.’¹¹⁰ In 1900, Heskett Pritchard published *Where Black Rules White: A Journey Across and About Hayti* (1900),¹¹¹ an account of his journey to Haiti in 1899, characterising ‘Vaudoux’ as ‘West African superstition, serpent-worship, and child-sacrifice.’¹¹² The religion and its many traditions were reduced to a form of bloody cult, involving chickens, goats, and child-sacrifice,¹¹³ which exemplified ‘the bottom stratum of the black

¹⁰⁹ Hurbon, p. 53.

¹¹⁰ Hurbon, p. 54.

¹¹¹ Heskett Pritchard, *Where Black Rules White: A Journey Across and About Hayti* (New York, NY.: Charles Scribner, 1900) <<https://archive.org/stream/whereblackrulesw00pric#page/74/mode/2up>> [accessed 23 February 2014].

¹¹² Pritchard, p. 75.

¹¹³ ‘There are said to be two sects of Vaudoux ; one which sacrifices only fruits, white cocks, and white goats to the serpent-god ; the other, that sinister cult above referred to, whose lesser ceremonies call for the blood of a black goat, but whose advanced orgies cannot be fully carried out without the sacrifice of “the goat without horns” — the human child.’ Pritchard, p. 76.

nature’ and belonged to one of the many superstitions of ‘old, old time.’¹¹⁴ Trapped in these practices of the past, which ‘voodoo’ was taken to embody and perpetuate, Haitians were portrayed in these first narrative accounts as incapable of self-governance and in need of an external guiding hand that might point them towards the light of civilisation—a historical context that cannot be easily dismissed.

Such discourses, which linked race, religion, and governance, were also employed to frame the American Occupation (1915-1934) and to justify, during that time, such military actions ‘as pillaging the voodoo temples and destroying the “idols” of the African ancestors.’¹¹⁵ During the Occupation, works like *Magic Island* (1929) by William Seabrook, *The White King of La Gonave* (1931)¹¹⁶ by Lt. Faustin Wirkus and Taney Dudley, which sold approximately ten million copies, or *Cannibal Cousins* (1934) by John Houston Craige, painted a vivid picture of the black-magic rituals practised in Haiti, including such troubling customs as reviving the dead, paving the way for the popular appropriation of Vodou and zombies in the genre of American horror films. These and other works¹¹⁷ were used to justify the U.S. occupation of Haiti, stressing its liberatory rather than predatory dimension, and claiming to provide readers with an unprecedented insight into this dark, magical, and unchartered “land of the ghosts.”¹¹⁸ Such fictitious narratives only solidified earlier racialised misperceptions of Vodou, which framed Haitians as the

¹¹⁴ ‘Vaudoux, Juju, Obi, or some analogous superstition seems to belong to the bottom stratum of black nature. Vaudoux is a religion of old, old time. When William the Norman came to England it was no doubt flourishing amongst the African tribes of the West Coast.’ Pritchard, p. 78.

¹¹⁵ Hurbon, p. 56.

¹¹⁶ Faustin Wirkus and Taney Dudley, *The White King of la Gonave* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1931) <<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001465244>> [accessed 12 May 2014].

¹¹⁷ Other works published during these years were Joseph Williams’ s *Voodooos, and Obeays: Phases of West Indian Witchcraft* (1933), and Richard A. Loederer’ s *Voodoo Fire in Haiti* (1932) published in Germany.

¹¹⁸ Laënnec Hurbon, ‘American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou’, in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. by Donald J. Cosentino (Los Angeles, CA.: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), pp. 181-98 (p. 188).

Other and Haiti as an impenetrable, exotic land. After these early publications, Western literary and cinematic representations quickly appropriated the trope of the zombie and permanently altered cultural understandings of what a zombie is. Film productions such as Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932) and Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) are early examples of what is now classified as a distinct subgenre of horror movies, 'zombie films.'¹¹⁹ In contemporary culture—films,¹²⁰ literature, TV series, 'zombie-walks' and flash-mobs, video games,¹²¹ even financial analysis¹²²—this image of the zombie as a flesh-eating, contagious, soulless corpse, a walking-dead, is predominant. Such misrepresentations of Vodou and 'zombie mythology,' which contrary to its spiritual significance in Vodou was presented only in terms of a reawakened soulless dead body, increasingly featured in popular and literary discourses, becoming a synonym for Haiti and its culture that has endured to the present day.

These cultural representations, along with pseudo-scientific studies of 'zombie death', the most famous being Wade Davis's *The Serpent and the Rainbow*

¹¹⁹ Jon Stratton emphasises the rapid increase in the 2000s in the number of films and other media releases featuring zombies. Among the examples he gives are the video game *Resident Evil* (1996); Seth Grahame-Smith's retake on Austen's classic *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Philadelphia, PA: Quirk Books, 2009); Steve Hockensmith's prequel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls* (Philadelphia, PA: Quirk Books, 2010); and Danny Boyle's film *28 Days Later* (2002). Zombie-walk is a type of a public gathering, usually occurring in big cities, of people dressed up in zombie costumes. The idea originated in the United States and has since spread internationally. Some types of walks can have a charitable fundraising purpose, whereas others might be similar to a pub crawl or include a number of tasks and challenges set for the participants. There is now an international database of zombie-walks around the world and resources for those interested in organising a similar event. See: *Zombiewalk.com* <<http://zombiewalk.com/forum/index.php>> [accessed 14 May 2014].

¹²⁰ For a comprehensive list of 'zombie films', see Shawn McIntosh and Marc Leverette, *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead* (Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press, 2008), pp. 213-18.

¹²¹ For an analysis of the proliferation of zombies in popular North American contemporary culture, see Elizabeth McAlister, 'Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85 (2012), 457-86.

¹²² The term 'zombie' denotes 'a company more dead than alive. Such a company is only kept alive by the goodwill and support of creditors, especially lenders.' Peter Moles and Nicholas Terry, 'zombie', in *The Handbook of International Financial Terms Online* (Oxford University Press, 1997) <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198294818.001.0001/acref-9780198294818-e-8501>> [accessed 12 May 2014].

(1985),¹²³ not only validated popular cultural misconceptions, but were also a direct source of those later anti-Haitian attitudes that, to cite a particularly scandalous example, deemed Haitians responsible for the spread of AIDS in the United States. In both popular media and scientific circles, Haitians were presented as disease-ridden, backwards, and at risk of contracting or spreading AIDS. The alleged animal and human sacrifice practices of ‘voodoo’ rituals were widely perceived to be to blame for the spread of the epidemic.¹²⁴ New Haitian immigrants disembarking at America’s shores, always seen as potential carriers and thus as a threat, were zombie-like figures ‘leaving a trail of unwinding gauze bandages and rotting flesh.’¹²⁵ Yet, as research has shown, AIDS did not come to America with Haitian immigrants at all; rather ‘it [went] south with North American tourists.’¹²⁶

The rhetoric surrounding Vodou has changed little over time, and recent post-earthquake media responses to the disaster have been quick to evoke these facile images of Haiti’s barbarity, backwardness, and underdevelopment as a direct consequence of its dark ‘voodoo’ past (as epitomised in the aforementioned Bois Caiman ceremony). Pat Robertson’s now infamous 2010 reading of the earthquake (see Introduction) is one such extreme example of the strategic abuse of Vodou and

¹²³ For Hurbon, the following early studies also contributed to the pseudo-scientific reductions of Vodou and zombification: Walter B. Cannon, “‘VOODOO’ DEATH’, *American Anthropologist*, 44 (1942); David Lester, ‘Voodoo Death: Some New Thoughts on an Old Phenomenon’, *American Anthropologist*, 74 (1972) 386-90. Harry D. Eastwell, ‘Voodoo Death and the Mechanism for Dispatch of the Dying in East Arnhem, Australia’, *American Anthropologist*, 84 (1982), 5-18. These, however, rather than engaging with Vodou as an Afro-Haitian system of thought, used ‘voodoo death’ as an umbrella term to analyse ‘psycho-cultural’, nonphysical causes of a death which ‘characteristically occurs among native peoples after putative sorcery, from taboo violation.’ Eastwell, p.5. As for Walter B. Cannon, he is treated as a key figure in physiological psychology, and his 1942 study is still hailed for its ‘remarkable accuracy’ sixty years later. See Esther M. Sternberg, ‘Walter B. Cannon and “‘Voodoo’ Death”: A Perspective From 60 Years On’, *American Journal of Public Health*, 92 (2002), 1564-66.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Peter Moses and John Moses, ‘Haiti and the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome’, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 99 (1983), 565-65; William R. Greenfield, ‘Night of the living dead II: Slow Virus Encephalopathies and AIDS: Do Necromantic Zombiists Transmit HTLV-III/LAV During Voodooistic Rituals?’, *JAMA*, 256 (1986), 2199-200.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy* (New York, NY.: McGraw-Hill, 1988), pp. 254-55.

¹²⁶ Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA.: University of California Press, [1992], 2006), p. xii.

its cultural importance for the Haitian Revolution. Robertson's simple logic of equating all Vodou with evil leads him to a damning verdict: that the start of the Revolution and the founding of Haiti are rooted in this diabolical practice, and that Haitians now need to repent for this zombie-like past. Even seemingly more nuanced readings, like those offered by *The New York Times* (January 2010) under the guise of market analysis, claim that Vodou is responsible for Haiti's 'progress-resistant' culture.¹²⁷ For example, David Brooks's commentary in *The New York Times*, which was quickly followed by Lawrence Harrison's equally disparaging claims in *The Wall Street Journal* (February 2010), perpetrate denigrating portrayals of Vodou spirituality. Such pronouncements are ultimately not too dissimilar from Robertson's claims. Both present the country's heritage and traditions as inherently inferior, implying that these practices hinder Haiti's cultural, economic, and political 'progress', which is defined in terms of the abandonment of non-Western customs, the expansion of the neoliberal market economy, and Haiti's increased participation in global markets. Such interpretations see the 2010 earthquake and its aftermath as just another fatal manifestation of Haiti's inability to govern itself.

These easy pairings of Vodou and Haitian underdevelopment overlook numerous 'historical, demographic, geological, material, and institutional causes for Haiti's problems,'¹²⁸ such as the isolation of Creole-only speakers (primarily rural

¹²⁷ Harrison calls Vodou a 'progress-resistant force' and offers the following assessment of the religion's influence on Haiti: 'Voodoo [sic] is practiced mostly by poor Haitians, who make up the vast majority of the country's population. But all Haitians feel its influence, as one of my sons-in-law, who is Haitian and holds a graduate degree from Harvard, assures me. Wallace Hodges, an American missionary who lived in Haiti for 20 years, observed: "A Haitian child is made to understand that everything that happens is due to the spirits. He is raised to externalize evil and to understand he is in continuous danger. Haitians are afraid of each other. You will find a high degree of paranoia in Haiti.' Brooks echoes Harrison's comments and adds lack of responsibility, bad child-rearing practices, and inability to plan to the list: 'Haiti, like most of the world's poorest nations, suffers from a complex web of progress-resistant cultural influences. There is the influence of the voodoo religion, which spreads the message that life is capricious and planning futile. There are high levels of social mistrust. Responsibility is often not internalized. Child-rearing practices often involve neglect in the early years and harsh retribution when kids hit 9 or 10.' See Brooks and Harrison.

¹²⁸ Benjamin Hebblethwaite, 'The Scapegoating of Haitian Vodou Religion: David Brooks's (2010)

populations and the urban poor) in the French-speaking school system, and ignore the 300-year-long period of legislative marginalisation of Vodou.¹²⁹ They are also factually inaccurate: by describing the Vodou religion as ‘satanic,’ commentators like Brooks impose ‘Protestantism’s dualistic theological system’¹³⁰ (Satan as the enemy of God), which does not have an easy parallel in the Vodou worldview. In the concluding paragraphs of his rebuttal of Brooks’s article, Hebblethwaite pertinently asks:

Does Brooks really believe that Haiti’s problems with dictatorships, state kleptomania, corruption, bribery, absent code enforcement, nepotism, political instability, militarism, state violence, criminal gangs, kidnapping, and so on are rooted in the religion of Haiti’s most precarious peasantry and proletariat?¹³¹

These inaccurate accusations by Brooks and others,¹³² criticised here by Hebblethwaite, fail to provide any meaningful insight into the real causes of Haiti’s underdevelopment, such as the state’s educational language policy, which benefits five to ten percent of the population while excluding the other ninety to ninety-five. Rather, such reductive explanations reveal ‘stereotypical and xenophobic rhetorical tropes from a received tradition, one connected to impulses stemming from colonial period in which a culture of racism, exclusion, and slavery inflicted much harm on

Claim That “Voodoo” Is a “Progress-Resistant” Cultural Influence’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 46 (2015), 3-22 (p. 16).

¹²⁹ As Hebblethwaite explains: ‘The first prohibitions against non-Catholic religions were enacted in the 1685 *Code noir* (Castaldo, 2006). It was only with the Constitution of 1987 that prohibitions against Vodou were dropped.’ Hebblethwaite, p. 16. See also André Castaldo, *Codes noirs: De l’esclavage aux abolitions* (Paris: Dalloz, 2006).

¹³⁰ Hebblethwaite, p. 6.

¹³¹ Hebblethwaite, p. 17.

¹³² Among them, Hebblethwaite lists works by Louis (2007), DeWitt (2010), Emmanuel Félix (2009), Olivier (2007), and the most recent direct response to the 2010 earthquake by Pat Robertson (2011). See: Andrew DeWitt, *Give Your best: How Willem Charles Transformed His Haitian Village From Poverty in Voodoo to Prosperity in Christianity* (Charleston, SC: Mountain Top Ministries, 2010); Emmanuel Félix, *Understanding Haitian Voodoo* (LaVergne, TN.: Xulon Press, 2009); Fritz Olivier, *The Relevance of Christian Education for Lay Pastors in Haiti: A New Vision* (Charleston, SC.: BookSurge Publishing, 2007); André Louis, *Voodoo in Haiti: Catholicism, Protestantism & a Model of Effective Ministry in the Context of Voodoo in Haiti* (Mustang, OK.: Tate, 2007).

African religions.’¹³³

There is little connection between this imagined ‘voodoo,’ epitomised in ‘flesh-eating zombies,’ and the real Vodou tradition; rather what is ‘religious about the spirit zonbi—the fact that the human spirit lives on beyond death in an invisible part of the cosmos and has dealings with the living—has been turned inside out.’¹³⁴ The zombie as ‘a former human with a body but no soul, spirit, consciousness, interiority, or identity’ has ‘become the common understanding of zombies in contemporary culture.’¹³⁵ These simplistic appropriations of the zombie as a trope ignore its complex historical roots and its spiritual significance as well as the use of the figure in Haitian literary tradition. First, the historical genesis of belief in zombification cannot be separated from Haiti’s African origins and the slave system of St. Domingue in eighteenth century, since ‘the zombie is the living-dead, subjected completely to the wills and caprices of a master (his proprietor) for whom he must work.’¹³⁶ As such, the figure of the zombie is ‘the perfect realisation of the slave condition, the very ideal sought by the master in his slave.’¹³⁷ In Haitian folklore, contrary to the image of the zombie in Western films, the zombie can only become violent if ordered by his master, does not eat human flesh, and is not contagious.¹³⁸ Second, zombification in the Vodou tradition refers to the act of capturing one of the two souls that each human being possesses. The first one is ‘the little good angel, ti bon anj (responsible for the will) and the [second is] big good angel gwo bon anj (responsible for consciousness).’¹³⁹ For Vodouists then, ‘the act

¹³³ Hebblethwaite, p. 17.

¹³⁴ McAlister, p. 473.

¹³⁵ McAlister, p. 473.

¹³⁶ Hurbon, p. 192.

¹³⁷ Hurbon, p. 192.

¹³⁸ Lucy Swanson, ‘Zombie Nation? The Horde, Social Uprisings, and National Narratives’, *Cincinnati Romance Review*, 34 (2012), 13-33 (p. 14).

¹³⁹ Hurbon, p. 192.

of zombification is a matter of capturing the *ti bon anj* and thus exerting an absolute power over the individual.’¹⁴⁰ In Afro-Haitian religious thought, Cartesian mind-body dualism is replaced by a belief that ‘part of [an individual’s] spirit goes immediately to God after death, while another part lingers near the grave for a time [and it] is this portion of the spirit that can be captured and made to work.’¹⁴¹ Reductive and politically motivated readings of Vodou avoid engaging with the philosophical complexity of this very different cosmology, presenting it instead as the sole reason for Haiti’s socio-economic difficulties.

Moreover, Vodou and the figure of the zombie, specifically, have been a great cultural repository for the Haitian literary tradition. In particular during François ‘Papa Doc’ and Jean-Claude ‘Baby Doc’ Duvalier dictatorships (1956-71 and 1971-1986),¹⁴² the zombie ‘represent[ed] one of the most useful figures to emerge from the folkloric tradition’¹⁴³ and was often employed as an ‘an allegory either of stasis or change within the national setting’ and as ‘as an emblem of contemporary societal problems.’¹⁴⁴ In this highly specific historical-political context, the regime appropriated Vodou to maintain its totalitarian grip¹⁴⁵ yet, at the same time, the religion’s evocative figures such as the zombie provided a fitting description for lived reality under the dictatorships. Zombie, seen as the antithesis of the romanticised hero in the Indigenist novels¹⁴⁶ ‘and of the noble peasant extolled

¹⁴⁰ Hurbon, p. 192.

¹⁴¹ McAlister, p. 462.

¹⁴² Among some of the works that re-use the figure of the zombie from that period are Frankétienne, *Les affres d’ un défi* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1979); Dany Laferrière, *Pays sans chapeau* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996); Gérard Etienne, *Le Nègre crucifié* (Gèneve: Éditions Métropolis, 1974).

¹⁴³ Glover, p. 56.

¹⁴⁴ Swanson, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ ‘[...]“Papa Doc” Duvalier rose to power, perverting Haiti’s popular culture to his own end and ultimately establishing himself as the vodou-empowered embodiment of the state.’ Glover, p. 57. Joseph M. Murphy also speaks of the “Duvalierization of vodou” during that time. See Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 14, in Glover, p. 57.

¹⁴⁶ Indigenisme was an aesthetic and a political movement in Haiti. Its rise corresponded with the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). It ‘inspired a renewed interest in and appreciation for Haiti’s traditional culture’, placed ‘particular emphasis on the African roots of the peasantry’s folk beliefs

in Indigenist theoretical writings,¹⁴⁷ was a polar opposite of those characters defined by ‘the idea of happiness and the will to live fully’ in accordance with ideas of ‘collective struggle and liberation.’¹⁴⁸ The hapless creature was viewed rather as a ‘subject on the underside of the marvellous,’¹⁴⁹ and as an ““emblem of [the] apathy, anonymity, and loss”¹⁵⁰ that would characterise the rule of Papa Doc and Baby Doc. Zombie would thus offer, during the time of the father-and-son dictatorship, ‘a fitting vehicle for intellectuals interested in affirming their commitment to Haiti’s popular culture as well as an ideal metaphor through which to condemn Haiti’s social and political ills.’¹⁵¹

From the ‘body-and-soul-fracturing dictatorships’¹⁵² of the Duvaliers onwards, zombification as a literary and visual trope has represented the broader experience of exploitation, alienation, suffering and victimhood which, albeit in different forms, is shared by equally disenfranchised social groups, whether

and practices as a valid source of creative inspiration’, and ‘encouraged a literary investment in the popular imagination—an imagination profoundly connected to the vodou faith.’ Glover, p. 57. In his seminal *Ainsi Parla l’ Oncle* (1928) (*So Spoke the Uncle*), Jean Prince-Mars identified the causes of Haiti’s ‘national malaise as a failure to embrace its own traditions and a denial of the African origins of those traditions, such as the African roots of Vodou. He called for elevating the pride of Haitians and resisting U.S. Occupation through the glorification of Haitian peasant traditions. This singular book is said to have given birth to the social and literary movement known as the Indigenist Movement.’ Garvey Lundy, ‘Price-Mars, Jean’, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*, ed. by Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.258-60 (pp. 259-60). As a movement of opposition to the Occupation it evolved around the ‘poetics of resistance’ (Munro, p.15) and was predicated ‘on the poetics of difference and on exploring an alternative genealogy to that imposed by Western culture. Haitian otherness became a fiercely nationalistic mask for confronting the nineteen-year occupation of Haiti by the U.S. Marines. [...]Indigenism was about beginning again, about creating a new methodology, a new history, where poets would be the keepers of knowledge. The rhetoric of power, therefore, reached well beyond the poetic act to envisage total, political solutions—or perhaps dissolutions—for a new, purified Haiti.’ Dash, p. 74. Munro, p. 15.

¹⁴⁷ Glover, p. 57.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Le zombi: les œuvres du réalisme merveilleux étaient, rappelons-le, doublement marquées par l’idée de bonheur et par la volonté de vivre pleinement. Lorsqu’ il y avait registre épique, c’était de la lutte collective.’ Régis Antoine, ‘Le réalisme merveilleux dans la flaque’, *Notre Librairie*, 133 (1998), 64-81 (pp.67-8) <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k64967354/f2.image.r=r%C3%A9gis.langEN#>> [accessed 19 August 2015].

¹⁴⁹ Antoine, p. 67.

¹⁵⁰ Joan Dayan and René Dépestre, *A Rainbow for the Christian West. Translation of René Depestre’s Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’ Occident Chrétien* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. 37, in Glover, p. 58.

¹⁵¹ Glover, p. 58.

¹⁵² Glover, p. 58.

members of the political opposition or the urban poor. Zombies stand for all that is ‘uncontainable within an order of things;’¹⁵³ as creatures trapped in the present and subject to the whims of black magic, they provide a ‘negative mirror of what is or should be the human self.’¹⁵⁴ These are not the bloodthirsty monsters of the movie screens, but rather the ‘lowest being[s] on the social scale [...] reduced to [their] productive capacity.’¹⁵⁵ In short, zombies have no agency and zombified individuals lose their willpower, becoming fully obedient to their master. According to the folkloric tradition, however, this immobilised subjugated state lasts only as long as the creature is denied salted food, and as soon as it tastes any salt it awakens and becomes aware of its predicament. Dezombification therefore denotes individual/collective awakening and reassertion of one’s agency often leading to action or, in political terms, some sort of affirmative positioning akin to historical practices of resistance such as *marronage*.¹⁵⁶ As such, contrary to popular misrepresentation, zombie’s subjugation, and by extension the social exploitation it metaphorically represents, is not necessarily a definitive one, and there is always a possibility of awakening; ‘the hero is always dormant in the zombie.’¹⁵⁷ The complexity of the zombie figure and its historical significance have contributed to its importance for the collective imaginary as well as its continued relevance. It is in this double context of the historical-spiritual origins of the zombie and its contemporary translations that Lake’s *In Darkness* has to be assessed. Of course, the target audience of the text, young-adult readers, and the aims of the novel limit the author’s ability to engage fully with these complexities. However, as it is precisely cinematic and literary representations that largely gave rise to and continue to

¹⁵³ Gerald L. Bruns, ‘Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)’, *New Literary History*, 38 (2007), 703-20 (p. 704).

¹⁵⁴ Glover, p. 59.

¹⁵⁵ Glover, p. 59.

¹⁵⁶ Swanson, p. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Glover, p. 58.

sustain these stereotypes of Vodou and Haiti, the importance of imagery and metaphor, and their historical-political resonance in works like Lake's, cannot be completely overlooked—an issue central to my subsequent analysis of the text's narrative politics.

Alongside the zombie, *marasa*, the divine twins, are an equally complex symbol, firmly rooted in the Vodou religion. As distinct from zombies, the twins have received a much smaller degree of popular Western attention and have not been appropriated to the same extent by contemporary cultural producers. They continue to be of great importance to Vodou practitioners, however, and occupy an unchallenged position within Vodou's divine pantheon. The spiritual and cultural significance of *marasa* can be traced back to Africa, more specifically Dahomey (present day Republic of Benin),¹⁵⁸ where 'twins were considered sacred.'¹⁵⁹ A simple set of twins, which can be of different genders, is referred to as *marasa de* whereas a set of three is called *marasa twa*. *Dosou* denotes a male child born after a set of twins, whereas *dosa* signifies a female. The child complements the twins and is seen as being even more powerful than the twins themselves.¹⁶⁰ In the Vodou-inspired worldview, the Divine Twins are a whole and a three.¹⁶¹ They contain, in

¹⁵⁸ Until 1975, Dahomey was the official name of the West African state now known as the Republic of Benin. The area equivalent to present-day Benin contained, during the precolonial period, several independent kingdoms. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Kingdom of Allada was the dominant polity. A century later Dahomey developed into the most powerful kingdom. It was a French colony from the end of the nineteenth century and gained independence from France in 1960. The Fon people, most of whom practised the national religion Vodun, founded the kingdom of Dahomey. During the Atlantic slave trade, slaves shipped from Dahomey took the religion with them to the Americas. These traditional beliefs became an integral part of what is now the Haitian Vodou. See Tamba E. M' bayo, 'Dahomey', in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*, pp. 269-71 (p. 269).

¹⁵⁹ Toni Pressley-Sanon, 'One Plus One Equals Three: Marasa Consciousness, the Lwa, and Three Stories', *Research in African Literatures*, 44 (2013), 118-37 (p. 120).

¹⁶⁰ Florence Bellande-Roberston, 'A Reading of the Marasa Concept in Lilas Desquiron's *Les Chemins de Loco-Miroir*', in *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, and Reality*, ed. by Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press 2006), pp. 103-11 (p. 104).

¹⁶¹ 'In Voudoun one *and* one make three; two *and* two make five; for the *and* of the equation is the third and fifth part, respectively, the relationship which makes all the parts meaningful.' Maya Deren,

Maya Deren's gloss, 'the notion of the segmentation of some original cosmic totality' and are 'a celebration of man's twinned nature: half matter, half metaphysical; half mortal, half immortal; half human, half divine.'¹⁶² They are at once first humans and first ancestors: they are the origin of *loa* (also spelled as *lwa*)¹⁶³ (Vodou spirits) and, as such, are the first to be saluted at the start of all Vodou ceremonies. *Marasa* symbolise 'abundance, plurality, wholeness, innocence, and newness, thus their representation as children.'¹⁶⁴ Sometimes referred to as *kalfou marasa* (literally intersection or junction), they are also considered to be 'guardians in control of the crossroads and [...] are linked to the Lwa-spirit Legba, who opens the gate to the crossroads.'¹⁶⁵ This continued metaphysical importance of *marasa* results in a special regard for twins, who are also seen as two parts of a whole: whatever affects the one (e.g. violence or disease) threatens to affect the other.¹⁶⁶

In Darkness uses these two figures of zombie and *marasa* to trace Shorty's and Toussaint's respective transformations, which are triggered by very different yet equally powerful experiences of exclusion and violence. Whereas *marasa* is a key metaphor for Shorty's changing sense of subjectivity, the figure of the zombie allows for the possible formation of a new awakened collective self. After losing his

Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti (London and New York, NY.: Thames and Hudson, 1953), p. 41.

¹⁶² Deren, p. 39.

¹⁶³ '[The] lwa are both related to and different from their West African progenitors. The religious systems of the Fon and the Yoruba, both of which made central contributions to Haitian Vodou, have complex pantheons of spirits. These spirits have hegemony over a wide variety of life domains, including natural phenomena such as thunder, wind, rain, and smallpox, as well as cultural activities such as farming and hunting. When these rich spiritual systems were transported to the Caribbean, their considerable power to make sense of the world came to focus almost exclusively on the most problematic arena of life there, the social arena.' Karen McCarthy Brown, 'Afro-Caribbean Spirituality: A Haitian Case Study', in *Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture: Invisible Powers*, ed. by Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (New York, NY.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1-27 (p. 17).

¹⁶⁴ Bellande-Roberston, p. 105.

¹⁶⁵ Bellande-Roberston, p. 105.

¹⁶⁶ Deren, p. 39.

twin sister, his ‘other half’, Shorty considers himself a ‘half-person’¹⁶⁷ and goes on to become a full member, a ‘vre chimère’ of the local gang, Route 9.¹⁶⁸ As an inhabitant of a ‘no-man’s land’¹⁶⁹ in Cité Soleil, a cordoned-off shanty town in Port-au-Prince’s metropolitan area, and as a gangster, he is a ghostly figure trying to formulate his new unbroken identity through violence. By fighting the rival gang, which he thinks is responsible for his sister’s disappearance, he hopes to avenge his loss, to give a meaning to the void he is experiencing, and to find a new, ‘whole’ identity. The acts of violence he needs to commit in order to be accepted into the gang and rise within its ranks, confirm his newly earned ‘full’ gangster status and counter the fear of subjective emptiness:

When you keep hurting someone, you do one of three things. Either you fill them up with hate, and they destroy everything around them. Or you fill them up with sadness, and they destroy themselves. Or you fill them up with justice, and they try to destroy everything that’s bad and cruel in this world.

Me, I was the first kind of person.¹⁷⁰

In this moment of retrospective self-evaluation, Shorty comes to realise the reasons for his previous actions and his eventual transformation: they are responses to the violence inflicted upon him as well as his negative experience of double marginalisation.

¹⁶⁷ Shorty emphasises this sense of emptiness after his sister’s disappearance throughout his account. See, for example: ‘My sister, she was my twin. She was one half of me.’ Lake, p. 8. ‘[...]so when she was gone I became half a person. I would like you to remember this, so that you don’t judge me later. Remember: even now, as I lie in this ruined hospital, I am only one half of a life, one half of a soul.’ Lake, p. 9.

¹⁶⁸ This is a highly complex term that means both ‘a real ghost’ and ‘a real gangster.’ In the contemporary Haitian context, the designation also has obvious political connotations as it was used in the mainstream media as a derogatory term for Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s supporters, who were accused of using violence against Aristide opponents.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Anyway, Route 9 came later. For now, all you need to know is that me and my family, we were living on a strop in the middle, between Dread Wilmè’s territory and that of the rebels. You understand? No man’s land. Manman told Papa we should leave, but he didn’t want to.’ Lake, p. 80.

¹⁷⁰ Lake, p. 87.

Moreover, the statement reveals a level of passivity and detachment between the narrator's evolving sense of self and the destructive acts he commits. It is the unspecified 'you' that is responsible for 'filling [Shorty] up with hate' and it is against this 'you,' the external agent that seems to influence the boy's life, that his anger is directed. Trapped under the rubble, he now hopes that this outside force, which has shaped his life in uncontrollable ways, can also affect his present predicament. While awaiting rescue, he calls out to anyone who can save him from a 'double death:' that of not being found in time and that of being forgotten without being forgiven.¹⁷¹ He hopes, against all odds, for an opportunity to explain and justify, at least to the unnamed addressee, his life of crime: 'Maybe, maybe, if I tell you my story, then you'll understand me better and the things I've done. Maybe you'll, I don't know, maybe you'll...forgive me.'¹⁷² This self-reflexive comment, addressed to the narratee, seeks to explain how the experience of violent half-emptiness had previously determined Shorty's pursuit of revenge and, through it, his 'other' half.

Violence, the defining component of Shorty's new, re-invented self, also shapes—albeit in very different ways—Toussaint's transformation from a coachman to a revolutionary leader:

[...] there were three kinds of slaves, three kinds of people. There were those who were so filled with hate by their experience, by their oppression, that they snapped and destroyed property or people. There were those who were so filled with sadness by their experience that they snapped and destroyed

¹⁷¹ The opening paragraphs of the novel establish this pairing between rescue and memory: 'I am the voice in the dark, calling out for your help./I am the quiet voice that you hope will not turn to silence, the voice you want to keep hearing cos it means someone is still alive. I am the voice calling for you to come and dig me out. I am the voice in the dark, asking you to unbury me, to bring me from the grave out into the light, like a zombi./I am a killer and I have been killed, too, over and over. I have no name. There are no names in the darkness cos there is no one else, only me, and I already know who I am (I am the voice in the dark, calling out for your help) , and I have no questions for myself and no need to call upon myself for anything, except to remember.' Lake, p. 1. For Shorty forgetting someone is synonymous with destroying that person: 'Not only have I lost her [his mother] in the darkness, but I've also lost the memory of her. She's destroyed completely.' Lake, p. 329.

¹⁷² Lake, p. 8.

themselves [...] The third kind of person, though, was filled by their experience with a fierce desire to make things right in the world, to redress the balance.

In the darkness, Toussaint fancied that he was the third kind of person, and to fire his soul, to fill himself with a sense of the need for justice, he called up the faces that embodied for him slavery's evil.¹⁷³

In this extended quotation, we see a clear parallel between Shorty and the fictionalised Toussaint. Again, the aim is didactic relevance rather than historical accuracy. In line with its genre and pedagogical design, *In Darkness* points to the ways in which violence works across different contexts to shatter one's identity and create a subjective void. Thanks to the focalisation and high level of self-reflexivity of the passage, the historical figure (Toussaint) is brought alive and rendered more relevant to the contemporary reader. He is not some distant revolutionary general but rather a sensitive individual struggling to accept the unjust reality around him, and hoping to redress exploitation and racial inequality. Both Shorty and Toussaint respond to the lived experience of oppression, exploitation, and marginalisation and attempt to reconstruct a sense of wholeness, that of a 'full' individual and of a 'full' citizen. These two self-characterisations, only five pages apart from each other in the text, reinforce its didactic ambitions. They underline the contrast between the two protagonists by presenting the reader with two radically different reactions to the experience of violence: the boy's self-destructive pursuit is in stark opposition to Toussaint's transformative aspirations.

As the narrative unfolds, the adventures and experiences of the two characters echo, complement, or anticipate each other across the two narrative levels. This increasing proximity culminates in the last ('Then') section of the novel. In this section, Toussaint's spirit travels across time from his prison cell to the hospital

¹⁷³ Lake, p. 93.

ruins in Port-au-Prince to take up residence in Shorty's body. They are the new *marasa*:

His [Toussaint's] journey had ended; his exodus was over.

He *had* returned.

But to where? [...]

He was trapped in an impenetrable ruin, with something heavy bearing down on his leg. [...]

He was in a cave, and there was no way out [*italics original*].¹⁷⁴

In these closing lines of the chapter, Toussaint metaphorically becomes Shorty's 'other half,' replacing the void the boy experienced after his sister's death and that he had been trying, unsuccessfully, to counter with violence. The symbolic awakening, transformation, and corporeal union between Shorty and Toussaint also have composite potential as they collectively join the two nation-defining moments: 1804 and 2010. The scene caps the novel's formal interplay of the two narrative threads; from being parallel then interlacing narrative strands, they are now joined in this highly symbolic moment. On a thematic level, this narrative climax, which brings together the present and the past, seems to herald the coming of *dosou/dosa*—an even more powerful third element, an anticipated time of change.

Yet the capacity of the metaphor to evoke a third potentiality is only partially realised: the individual's post-earthquake agency is made synonymous with the protagonist's resolution to become a better person. The structural constraints, such as poverty and marginalisation, which had previously determined Shorty's decision to join the gang remain unaltered. As the novel draws to a close, the boy is eventually rescued by the relief team and is now ready to start a new life, guided by a firm resolution to do good. Infused with the leader's spirit, Shorty is once again

¹⁷⁴ Lake, pp. 324-5.

whole, reborn to the light, and this new force allows him to overcome the difficulties he will almost certainly face upon his return to Cité Soleil:

And I have feelings and a soul in my chest, and I can talk and laugh and cry just like a real person, and I'm capable of doing good things. I've fucked up in the past, oh yes, I know I have, but, Manman, I'll try to make you proud.¹⁷⁵

Despite the lack of an obvious religious framework, the diction of the passage starkly resembles that of Woolley's account. Although traumatic, Shorty's experience ultimately has a positive impact as it leads to a firm decision to abandon his misguided past life. No longer trying to assert his subjectivity through violence and crime, Shorty is now driven by a desire to become a better person and to atone for the hurt he previously inflicted on his family and those around him: 'I kept shooting and I made a goal, but I'm not gonna shoot no more.'¹⁷⁶ Framed in this way, the experience of being buried under the rubble has a clear pedagogical dimension. In typical *Bildungsroman* mode, the narrative culminates with an individual's bettering of himself; a stronger, more mature person, Shorty is ready to face new challenges, and now 'there's nothing that can get in and hurt [him].'¹⁷⁷

The narrative re-affirms its pedagogical message by returning, in the closing paragraph of the novel, to the metaphors of darkness and light, death and rebirth:

Yes, I died, over and over.

But now I've been reborn.

Yes...

Yes...

Yes...

¹⁷⁵ Lake, p. 331.

¹⁷⁶ Lake, p. 337.

¹⁷⁷ Lake, p. 337.

I was in darkness, but now I am in light.¹⁷⁸

With this image of light and triumphant rebirth the novel draws to a close, offering the reader a cathartic experience of a passage from the underworld which leads to a clear sense of completion, fulfilment, and arguably a happy ending (at least for the protagonist). Shorty, now infused with Toussaint's spirit and inspired by his example, returns to his mother in a loving embrace—a gesture that echoes his earlier coming together with Toussaint and fills the void of losing his twin sister. His mother's words, uttered in response to Shorty's assertion that he loves her, add to the balance-restoring qualities of the scene: 'And she's saying words all the time, too. Words like, love, my boy, words of fierceness, words of joy, love, love, love.'¹⁷⁹ No longer condemned to obscurity and once again capable of forming an intimate parent-child bond, the two characters are replenished by each other's presence. The hope-filled tone of the ending seems to suggest that from now on everything will be better for them; mutual love and willingness to improve will help to overcome any possible obstacles.

Narrative Relief: Transformation for Whom?

The text's didactic character defines the ways in which collective post-earthquake agency is envisaged in this dual narrative of personal transformation, in which Shorty and Toussaint collectively become one person. In contrast to Woolley's literal use of a Christian evangelical framework to formulate its vision of collective empowerment, *In Darkness* employs spirituality figuratively in its considerations of post-earthquake collective agency. In keeping with this

¹⁷⁸ Lake, p. 337.

¹⁷⁹ Lake, p. 337.

metaphorical transformation, Lake's work sees Haiti's revolutionary past and its religious tradition, which cannot be separated from the cultural memory of slavery and struggle for emancipation, as sources of post-earthquake identity and agency. Yet to what extent does this pairing of 1804 and 2010, and of Toussaint and Shorty's joint dezombification, establish a positive collective vision? Does the pairing suggest that after the darkness, first that of slavery and now of total post-disaster devastation, will come a moment of light—the (re)establishment of Haiti? Will the *ouverture* of 1804 return in the form of a parallel ascent from the post-earthquake rubble?

The novel's penultimate chapter, entitled 'Always', is key to a consideration of the implications Lake's work might have for the politics of the disaster and its collective aftermath. The section follows on from the experience of Shorty and Toussaint becoming one and the narrative voice adopts the first-person plural 'we.' This shift seems to suggest that the focalisation of the two parallel narratives, which despite thematic twinning have remained two separate strands, will be replaced in the remaining chapters of the novel by some form of collective narration:

We are in darkness.

We are always in the darkness [...]

Far beyond our walls, far beyond the bounds that hold us, there are people who want to help. There are always people who want to help, but they are too far away, and we are too silent. Though we have control of our own body, can animate our limbs to touch the boundaries of our reality, we are powerless to break through our reality, powerless to go out into the light, where the masters live.

We are a slave [...]

There is no future and no past.

We are in the darkness.

We are one.¹⁸⁰

The incantatory tone of the passage creates an uncanny presence that lends it a sense of urgency. Similarly, the corporeal imagery, along with the repeated use of the possessive pronoun ‘our,’ seems to create an evocative link between the bodily powerlessness of the collective ‘we’ and that of the maimed Haitian state. At the same time, the sudden change of narrative voice has a defamiliarising effect on the reader, while still allowing the narrative to offer empowering definitions of collective agency in the aftermath of the earthquake: the concluding ‘we are one’ echoes the motto from Haiti’s 1807 coats of arms ‘l’union fait la force’—unity makes strength. The country’s revolutionary legacy is again invoked in this section, suggesting the possibility of a collective coming together in the wake of the disaster: together we are strong. Two are becoming one, heralding the coming of the powerful *dosou/dosa*.

However, this affirmative vision is tainted by the very imagery of light and darkness employed to depict transformations of subjectivity and agency. First, this contrast seems to evoke the language of colonial discourses on race, which traditionally oppose the ‘darkness’ of blackness with the light of ‘whiteness.’ Voiced in terms of the master-slave dialectic, the comparison establishes darkness as synonymous with servile exploitation and light as the domain of ‘the masters.’ Not only does this echo earlier racist discourses of Haiti’s ‘backwardness,’ but it also overwrites, with a binary positioning that mirrors designated stages of socio-economic progress, Haiti’s history of slavery, foreign intervention, and the resulting unequal distribution of wealth and power among the nation’s white and black (then black and mulatto) populations. Second, the ‘we’ employed in the passage does not

¹⁸⁰ Lake, pp. 326-7.

refer to a specific group, but rather to some unidentified mass living in the obscure margins who are ‘powerless to break through [their] reality to the ‘light where the masters live.’¹⁸¹ Here, the ‘masters’ light is precisely what these masses, devoid of individual identity, should aim for. The only solution to escape this ghostly predicament, the novel seems to suggest, is to accept external aid. Liberation, if it exists, can only come from the outside, and is in the hands of all those ‘people who want to help’¹⁸² but are too far away to hear and respond to Haitians’ desperate cries for support: ‘Far beyond our walls, far beyond the bounds that hold us, there are people who want to help. There are always people who want to help, but they are too far away, and we are too silent.’¹⁸³ In addition, the passage implies that it is up to those trapped in this physical and metaphorical darkness to ‘make themselves be heard’ and ‘let themselves be helped.’ In effect, this pairing creates a patronising and disempowering portrayal of the collective ‘we.’ They are receivers rather than initiators of transformation.¹⁸⁴ No longer a group of citizens, they are a desperate, anonymous mob. The only ‘present’ state is that of darkness; even though Shorty-Toussaint has undergone a metaphorical transformation, collective rebirth seems impossible.

Finally, unlike the novel’s earlier commentary, this section repeatedly underlines collective powerlessness and the inability to break through obscurity, ‘our reality,’¹⁸⁵ into the light. However, a consideration of what constructs these barriers to liberation is strikingly absent. The present ‘decay of trapped things’¹⁸⁶ is all there is: the experience of exploitation and imprisonment is unending and

¹⁸¹ Lake, p. 327.

¹⁸² Lake, p. 326.

¹⁸³ Lake, p. 326.

¹⁸⁴ This contrasts with the novel’s critical considerations of humanitarianism, its relationship with military intervention, and the ways in which, under the guise of assistance, such development initiatives often mask exploitative rather than empowering politics.

¹⁸⁵ Lake, p. 327.

¹⁸⁶ Lake, p. 327.

ruination seems timeless. Gone is the revolutionary promise of the earlier twinned narratives; although 1804 might have been an instance of enlightenment, an opening leading onto collective liberation, in 2010 there is no such coming together and awakening imaginable. Only Shorty, who returns as the sole narrator of the last chapter, ‘Now,’ is freed from this all-encompassing darkness. Following a change of heart, he is ‘capable of doing good things,’¹⁸⁷ has come to forgive his mother for concealing Marguerite’s death, and can happily be reunited with her amidst expressions of mutual love. For the collective, however, ‘there is no future and no past’;¹⁸⁸ the ‘we’ remains ‘in the darkness’¹⁸⁹ and is there as the narrative draws to a plaintive close.

To conclude, in both *Unshaken* and *In Darkness* the movement from darkness to light and from fragmentation to wholeness defines the formal qualities of the texts, with extratextual material supporting this narrative arc. Despite considerable differences, both texts fall short of envisaging empowered models of collective post-earthquake agency. In Woolley’s autobiographical conversion account the focus is solely spiritual and, accordingly, the January 2010 earthquake is not seen in terms of the particularity of its context. Instead it is conceived as just one of the many possible instances, Christy’s depression being another, through which God intervenes in an individual’s life. The parallel narrative structure, which focuses primarily on the narrator’s own life experiences, suggests an easy comparison between these two strikingly different events. Such a pairing, determined by an overarching teleology, allows the narrator to confine the effects of these two traumatising life moments and to create a defined narrative frame: both are testing but ultimately enriching trials. He can only explain his personal experience by

¹⁸⁷ Lake, p. 331.

¹⁸⁸ Lake, p. 327.

¹⁸⁹ Lake, p. 327.

creating parallels that function across distinct contexts, that of his family life and the earthquake in Haiti. The text works to initiate personal change, that of the reader, while contributing to collective change that can only be triggered by an external agent: the helping hand of Compassion International, holding within it the reader's donation. Consequently, the narrative *dénouement* is not limited to the narrator's conversion, but also includes the reader's active response, both spiritual and financial, to the book's appeal.

Similarly, Lake's *In Darkness* has a twinned narrative structure that follows this basic movement from fragmentation to wholeness. The text establishes a parallel between the Haitian Revolution and the 2010 earthquake (and between Toussaint L'Ouverture and Shorty) in order to contemplate the ontological process of becoming someone else. Yet, it is precisely the novel's overemphasis on the 'twinning' of individuals that reduces two highly complex and particular events to two emblematic figures and, in so doing, limits the novel's ability to contemplate an empowered *collective* agency in the wake of the recent disaster. In its uses of narrative focalisation, Haitian folklore, and Vodou symbolism, *In Darkness* struggles to extend the metaphors of dezombification and *dosou/dosa* in order to envisage possible modes of post-earthquake collective empowerment. Despite these metaphors' potential, transformation remains at the level of individual experience: the collective 'we' remains trapped in a darkness that can only be broken by an external force. Only then, the text suggests, can collective agency be conferred upon these zombified and maimed victims of the disaster.

Although Woolley's and Lake's focalised narratives of individual progress and atonement have some effect as didactic tools, they reveal at the same time the relative inability of the two texts to offer an affirmative vision of collective agency.

As they draw to a close, both narratives return to individual transformations of subjectivity, which, whether fictional or autobiographical, are presented in clear pedagogical terms. In both *Unshaken* and *In Darkness*, the experience of the earthquake triggers a process of personal transformation: Woolley renews his commitment to Christian faith, and Shorty resolves to lead a life free of violence and crime. These two narratives of improvement draw the individual reader, in turn, into a journey of self-betterment that translates more or less explicitly into an appeal for financial support. These personal resolutions might indeed provide a cathartic experience and a sense of relief for individual readers, yet for the massed ranks of Haitian victims who are left to confront the aftermath of the disaster, there is no happy ending in sight.

Conclusion

Jean-Ulrick Désert's *Ciel au-dessous de Port-au-Prince Haiti 12 January 2010 21:53 UTC* (*The Sky over Port-au-Prince Haiti 12 January 2012 21:53 UTC*) (2012) is an approximately 300cm x 300cm installation, made up of nine individual 100cm x 100cm panels, with red velours-papers on foam and hundreds of embossed metal-foil pins scattered across the canvas. The central five panels are joined together to make the shape of a cross or junction. The other four panels are at a few centimetres remove and, in a slightly disjointed manner, complete the square. From a distance, approximately seven hundred and fifty silver pins, which stick out of the canvas-like fabric backdrop, glimmer star-like against the dark red of the velours sky over Port-au-Prince. Only on a very close inspection can one see that each of the pins holds a portrait of Josephine Baker, 'the Goddess,' embossed in metal foil, an image otherwise imperceptible from afar. The legendary artist and civil-rights activist joins the earth and the sky and, at the same time, watches over Haiti's capital captured at a specific moment on the 12th of January 2010 at 21:53 UTC, or 4:53 pm EST as we are more accustomed to seeing it.

The installation's ambition to capture the importance of that particular moment, and to commemorate it without disempowering the individual lives lost, is shared by the otherwise very different narratives of the 2010 Haiti earthquake I have been discussing in this thesis. Taken together, these narratives register the attempt to create an image, however incomplete, of the indelible mark the catastrophe left upon all those who witnessed it, whether at first hand (Dany Laferrière, Rodney Saint-Éloi, Lionel-Édouard Martin and Dan Woolley) or at different levels of remove (Sandra Marquez-Stathis and Nick Lake). In their heterogeneity, these texts not only compel literary critics to examine how aesthetically diverse accounts of the disaster have

tested the limitations of narrative form, but have also enhanced core debates within the emerging field of postcolonial disaster studies. In particular, they demonstrate the importance of attending to the formal variety of narratives that have emerged in dialogue with the past, present, and future of the January disaster as well as with the foundational categories of time, space, and self.

The readings offered in this thesis, which are organised around these three conceptual ‘knots,’ interweave in-depth close-up analysis with more general long-range views of context. I have examined the productive intersections that arise from an approach that combines individual and collective experiences of complex natural disasters and their material histories. Like the individual panels of Désert’s piece, each thematic subheading has contributed to the coming together of disaster studies and narrative theory, of literary enquiry and socio-scientific analysis. This cross-disciplinary approach has allowed me to show how narrative responses to the disaster enrich our understanding of the multifaceted nature of the event, of the different material contexts which shaped it, and of the equally diverse cultural and discursive responses it elicited. Rather than mapping a specifically *Haitian* engagement with the earthquake, or one shaped by canonical literary figures, I have shown how a range of Francophone and Anglophone texts have engaged in open-ended debates on the material manifestations of the January 2010 earthquake and on its discursive representations, thereby enhancing our understanding of complex ‘natural’ disasters as a whole.

Embodying this method, each chapter is equally attuned to the material, discursive, and aesthetic dimensions of the selected texts. Together, these dimensions suggest that disaster is a *process* that cannot be confined to the specific time, place, and date of its occurrence. This processual view is supported by

bringing together the formal qualities these texts take on as *narratives*, the various contexts in which they were produced, and the multiple material realities to which they respond. Narrativisation is itself a process, an attempt to enclose potentially overwhelming experience within an orderly and recognisable form. This ambition is shared by socio-scientific analyses that aim to provide a causal explanation for what happened. Yet whereas the latter tend to focus on socio-environmental factors, the former offer a privileged insight into the personal experience—the lived reality—of the disaster and its aftermath, while also calling for an ethical response to the loss of each individual life.

Chapter One, in addressing the untimely experience of the earthquake, challenges the event's finished character. Although the tremors may be over, the disaster is still present in the form of recurring traumatic memories as well as the threat that the island's geological faults will open again—a highly likely yet equally unpredictable event. In this context, it becomes clear that the duration of the disaster extends well beyond the moment of the first and last aftershocks. Moreover, the earthquake has to be placed in the context of the country's national history and discursive framings of it. *Goudougoudou* is neither a detached and unique occurrence, nor just another in a long sequence of Haitian 'natural' disasters. Rather, its unprecedented scale and impact reveal the ways in which long-term processes of ecological and economic exploitation directly contributed to the scale of the devastation. This longer view invites a reconsideration of the definition of post-disaster reconstruction which, in order to be empowering and ethical, must work towards transforming the pre-earthquake conditions of collective vulnerability that have held both Haiti and Haitians back.

In Chapter Two, I reposition this vulnerability in discursive terms by looking at how conventional literary portrayals of pastoral and urban sites have informed natural histories of Haitian landscapes. These often exoticised portrayals have tended to reinforce dehistoricised views of space that negate the collective histories sedimented within Haitian landscape. These, in turn, challenge the exoticising binary positioning of the city and the countryside, with ‘natural’ disruption problematising the romantic representation of nature as a life-giving refuge. Embedded within these histories, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, the earthquake cannot be separated from personal pasts, presents, and futures, such as those contained within conversion narratives which offer pedagogic readings of the disaster as a turning point towards a better life. While such narratives of self-renewal and improvement may have a positive personal effect, they can also obscure the structural determinants of complex ‘natural’ disasters, limiting their educational benefits as well as their more immediate fundraising appeal.

In sum, the thesis offers an examination of the possibilities, but also the limitations, of literary representations of the 2010 Haitian earthquake. Akin to Désert’s piece, which contrasts the soft velours fabric of the ‘sky’ with the concrete boulders below it, the texts I have been exploring here variously point to the limitations of their own form and the gap between experiences of the disaster and their narrative expression. While trying to create a narrative form that approximates the experience of the earthquake and that attests to its personal and collective impact, the six texts analysed in the thesis are all—to a greater or lesser extent—bound up with practices of post-disaster writing understood as a form of literary aesthetics that enacts a voyeuristic gaze. Of all the texts, Rodney Saint-Éloi’s *Haiti, kenbe la!* (analysed in Chapter One) and Dany Laferrière’s *Tout bouge autour de moi*

(explored in Chapter Two) do most to challenge this gaze and to interrogate the discursive frames that surround it. Against standard discourses on Haiti that present it as an endemically impoverished yet resilient country, a view crowded with undifferentiated ‘images of naked and wounded black bodies,’¹ their texts oppose the portrayal of Haitians as an anonymous and disempowered mass. Similarly, by refusing to assume narratorial authority in the form of a singular narrative voice, Laferrière and Saint-Éloi attempt to reclaim agency for those silenced in dominant, trauma-laden accounts of Haiti’s recent and more distant past.

This sense of obligation to bear witness is also central to the form of Martin’s narrative requiem (Chapter One). Like the scattered pins of Désert’s artistic piece, the author’s deeply personal impressions compose a prayer for each of the victims of the disaster. Whereas Martin’s response to the disaster is a psalmic one, Lake’s and Woolley’s texts (Chapter Three) hope to trigger the transformation of the reader in pursuit of educational and fundraising outcomes. Their emphasis is on individual change, which also shapes the form of Marquez Stathis’s ‘travelogue’ (Chapter Two). An uncomplicated journey of self-exploration, Marquez Stathis’s text demonstrates that even the least conceptually complex narratives are capable of offering productive insights into the ethics of post-disaster writing, for example by showing the ways in which affect plays a fundamental role in guiding readers’ responses to the text and the disaster it depicts. Taken together, the observations offered by the thesis underscore how the understanding of ‘natural’ disaster as a multi-layered process can be enhanced by comparing the different levels at which literary narratives work.

¹ Clitandre, p. 146.

At the same time, the thesis emphasises the limitations of current definitions of disaster, recovery, and reconstruction, which remain foundational categories in international aid, development, and disaster management as practised in Haiti and elsewhere. Against a frequent understanding of these categories as fixed, bound by the exact time and specific location of the disaster, the thesis emphasises their unfinished and processual character. In so doing, it challenges those responses to the earthquake rooted in Haitian exceptionalism, which ultimately reinforce the discursive marginalisation of Haiti. As such, the observations made here are also potentially applicable to other postcolonial regions which continue to struggle to combat the vulnerability imposed upon them by their colonial past by repeated ecological exploitation, and by the pressures of the current neoliberal global economy. After the 12th of January 2010, ‘Haiti will never be the same. And must not be the same.’² Likewise, as this thesis has demonstrated, discipline-bound definitions of disaster, reconstruction, resolution and recovery no longer have the capacity to convey the complexity of postcolonial disasters and their aftermath. In this context, the 2010 earthquake and the literature it has inspired have a crucial role to play in advancing new narratives of Haiti that can contribute to the burgeoning field of Haitian studies, and that can shape the emerging field of postcolonial disaster studies in years to come.

² Gina Athena Ulysse, *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post-Quake Chronicle* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), p. 7.

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