John Patrick Walsh, *Migration and Refuge: An Eco-Archive of Haitian Literature, 1982–2017*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019. ix + 254 pp. (Cloth US\$120.00)

Ecological disaster is not so much a consequence as a necessary condition of European colonization in the Caribbean. On many islands, the near or total decimation of the indigenous Amerindian population went hand in hand with the cutting down of forests. As Antonio Benítez-Rojo has written in an essay entitled “Sugar and the Environment in Cuba,” the Caribbean “plantation machine” was “one of the most powerful and devastating to the environment of any the world has seen.” On Saint-Domingue, colonists wrote in the eighteenth century of the environmental damage caused by plantation agriculture. By the end of the century, planters had already observed how deforestation had led to a drastic decrease in rainfall, which in turn lowered the levels of nearby rivers. Thus was set in motion a cycle of environmental decay that makes Haiti an extreme instance of the ecological crisis of the Caribbean, a crisis felt to varying degrees in all the islands of the region. For better or worse—but in this case surely for worse—Haiti is often seen as a precursor, an outlier, and what happens there tends to be repeated in other places, near and far.

John Walsh similarly argues that Haitian literature has “long anticipated epochal thought with stories from the echo-archive that challenge the neocolonial and neoliberal political economies that undergird the dominant narratives of the Anthropocene” (p. 10). He reads a broad range of fiction and nonfiction from before and after the earthquake of 2010 in order to show how the various political and environmental problems that the earthquake highlighted have a long history, one that is told in the “echo-archive” of modern and contemporary Haitian writing. The long history of migration and refuge is part of that archive. In an almost counterintuitive way, Walsh, instead of being pulled along by the future-oriented discourse of disaster and climate change, turns to the past in order to show that “the global ethical questions [the earthquake] raised concerning poverty, political corruption, and ecological degradation have long been treated in Haitian literature” (p. 11).

Haitian authors have long written about issues that are just now being seen as urgent, locally but also globally. Walsh’s study reaches back to the early 1980s and the remarkable work of Jean-Claude Charles, and ends with Néhémie Pierre-Dahomey’s *Rapatriés* (2017), though the story he and the works tell has no real beginning or end. The corpus is in effect a multivolume work that preceded the earthquake and that continues to play out in the urgent literary production of this country, where literature is produced in the most difficult circumstances yet remains an essential means of understanding the nation’s past,

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present, and future. For Walsh, literature forms an important archive in that it “gives voice to characters, places, and stories that go unheard and unseen” (p. 14). Many Haitian authors, he argues, turn to the environment as a “source of *poiesis*, a making of meaning that shapes, and is shaped by, a social language that bears witness to silence and oppression” (p. 15). The texts he works with are seen as a “key layer, a textual substratum, of a larger echo-archive,” that bears witness to environmental and social injustice (p. 15).

The book thus proposes a “strategic alliance between ecocriticism and Haitian literary studies,” one that seeks to divert the former away from its largely European and North-American foci to consider the Caribbean, and specifically Haiti, and the rich, multilayered archive that exists in its literature. In this regard, he builds on and diversifies the foundational work of Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley in, for example, *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*. Walsh makes the argument for this strategic alliance and lays the theoretical groundwork with great skill and intelligence, and the book proceeds to put to work his idea of the echo-archive, which proves to be a most useful and revealing way of thinking about Haitian literature. His archive consists of a wide range of authors writing in different places and times, but who deal with similar issues that travel with them and that have their roots in Haiti, its history and contemporary realities.

The book is persuasive in the best ways: gently, intelligently, insistently, so that it achieves finally something that is quite rare—it leads you to rethink a whole literary tradition in ways that will resonate for years and generations to come.

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