



**WHERE THE SEA REMEMBERS BLUE HUMANITIES,  
OCEANIC MEMORY, AND POSTCOLONIAL  
BECOMING IN MONIQUE ROFFEY'S  
*THE MERMAID OF BLACK CONCH***

|                                                                                                  |                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Farah Amjad<br><a href="mailto:farahamjad1705@gmail.com">farahamjad1705@gmail.com</a>            | MPhil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan. |
| Areej Rana<br><a href="mailto:areejrana16@gmail.com">areejrana16@gmail.com</a>                   | MPhil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan. |
| Maryam Shabbir<br><a href="mailto:maryamshabbir.4288@gmail.com">maryamshabbir.4288@gmail.com</a> | MPhil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan. |

**Abstract**

This article examines Monique Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch* through the combined lenses of Blue Humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism, and transcorporeality. It argues that the novel constructs the Caribbean Sea not as a scenic backdrop but as a living archive of colonial violence, indigenous memory, ecological vulnerability, and postcolonial becoming. Centering on Aycayia, the mermaid figure is read as a site of indigenous remembrance, ecofeminist resistance, and embodied oceanic subjectivity. The article also shows how the novel represents colonial and neocolonial oceanic relations through extraction, tourism, and commodification, while proposing reciprocity, relationality, and ethical return as alternatives. Finally, it demonstrates that the novel's polyphonic structure, creolized language, and temporal disjunction formally enact oceanic consciousness rather than merely describing it. By linking close textual analysis with environmental and postcolonial theory, the article positions Roffey's novel as a significant contribution to Caribbean blue literary studies and to broader debates on oceanic memory and ecological justice.

**Keywords:** *Blue Humanities, Caribbean Literature, Ecofeminism, Oceanic Memory, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Transcorporeality.*

**Corresponding Author:** Farah Amjad (MPhil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan)  
**Email:** [farahamjad1705@gmail.com](mailto:farahamjad1705@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

Monique Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch* offers a powerful literary meditation on the Caribbean Sea as a space of memory, history, and transformation. Rather than functioning as a passive setting, the ocean in the novel becomes an active presence through which colonial afterlives, indigenous belonging, ecological precarity, and alternative modes of relation are made visible. This article reads the novel within the framework of Blue Humanities and postcolonial ecocriticism in order to show how maritime space shapes both meaning and form. It also argues that Aycayia's figure is central to the novel's political and ethical imagination, since her body carries indigenous memory, gendered vulnerability, and the possibility of postcolonial becoming.

This study examines the Caribbean Sea as a living, historically saturated space that shapes cultural memory, identity, and experience. It explores Aycayia as a symbol of memory, resistance, and postcolonial subjectivity, highlighting its role in negotiating historical trauma and cultural survival. The study further analyzes the novel's representation of colonial and neocolonial oceanic relations, emphasizing the sea as a site of power, exploitation, and contestation. In addition, it investigates how the novel's formal strategies create an oceanic mode of narration that reflects the fluid, interconnected, and dynamic nature of maritime spaces. By focusing on these dimensions, the study addresses a significant gap in existing scholarship, which has often interpreted the novel primarily as a mythic romance or a work of magical realism, thereby overlooking its oceanic politics, ecological ethics, and formal experimentation.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

- To demonstrate the interpretive richness that Blue Humanities frameworks bring to the analysis of Caribbean literary fiction.
- To establish *The Mermaid of Black Conch* as a significant text within the canon of oceanic and postcolonial literature.
- To contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions on the relationship between environmental humanities and Indigenous epistemologies in the Caribbean context.

### 1.2. Research Questions

1. How does *The Mermaid of Black Conch* construct the Caribbean Sea as a living, agentive, and historically saturated space, and what does this construction contribute to Blue Humanities discourse?
2. In what ways does the figure of Aycayia function as a symbol of indigenous memory, ecofeminist resistance, and postcolonial subjectivity?
3. How does the novel represent colonial and neocolonial relationships to the ocean, and what ethical alternatives does it propose?

4. Through what formal and linguistic strategies do the novel enact, rather than merely describe, an oceanic mode of consciousness and narration?

## 2. Literature Review

Monique Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch* invites a critical reading at the intersection of Blue Humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism, maritime anthropology, and feminist environmental thought. The novel's oceanic world is not simply a scenic backdrop but an active archive in which ecological vulnerability, colonial afterlives, memory, and transformation are continuously negotiated. As the material in your file argues, the sea functions as "oceanic memory," a living medium through which submerged histories and postcolonial identities surface and reconfigure themselves. In this sense, the novel is best understood not as a fantasy of marine romance but as a complex meditation on the historical, ecological, and affective meanings of water in the Caribbean postcolonial context.

Blue Humanities has become increasingly significant in literary and cultural studies because it shifts attention from terrestrial paradigms to the ocean as a site of history, relation, and epistemology. Stefan Helmreich's work is foundational here because it treats seawater as a medium that unsettles rigid distinctions between nature and culture. In "Nature/Culture/Seawater," Helmreich argues that seawater occupies an ambiguous place in anthropological thought: it can appear as uncontainable flux, but it also functions as a medium of travel, sustenance, labor, and disaster (Helmreich, 2011). More importantly, Helmreich shows that water has often acted as a "theory machine," generating conceptual models for understanding human social life, globalization, and mobility (Helmreich, 2011). This insight is especially useful for reading *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, where the sea is not static setting but a force that organizes narrative meaning, bodily transformation, and historical return.

Helmreich's intervention also helps clarify why oceanic space matters so profoundly in postcolonial Caribbean fiction. The sea has historically been the route of colonization, forced migration, and ecological exploitation, but it has also been imagined as a space of possibility, resistance, and transoceanic connectivity. The file attached to this project reads Roffey's novel in exactly this way, describing the sea as a place where memory survives even when colonialism seeks erasure. Blue Humanities therefore, allows the novel to be read as a marine archive in which history is not stored on land alone but circulates through waves, currents, and marine bodies [Helmreich, 2011]. This is crucial for an article that seeks to show how the ocean in Roffey's fiction becomes both material environment and conceptual framework.

Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* provides the broader environmental critical vocabulary necessary for this discussion. Garrard defines ecocriticism as the study of the relation between the human and the non-human in cultural history, emphasizing that

environmental criticism is inseparable from moral and political questions (Garrard, 2012). He argues that ecocriticism examines the large-scale metaphors through which cultures imagine their relationship to nature, including wilderness, apocalypse, pastoral, and dwelling (Garrard, 2012). These categories are highly relevant to *The Mermaid of Black Conch* because the novel repeatedly unsettles the boundary between human and nonhuman life, while also revealing the ecological and political forces that shape such boundaries.

Garrard's framework is especially valuable because it moves ecocriticism beyond a simplistic celebration of nature. Instead, it shows that ecological representation is always ideologically charged and historically situated. In Roffey's novel, the sea is not an innocent natural space but a site where colonial violence, environmental precarity, and racialized history converge. The file's treatment of the novel already points toward this postcolonial ecocritical reading by connecting the ocean with colonial legacies and ecological consciousness. Garrard helps strengthen that argument by making clear that environmental discourse itself is structured by cultural assumptions and political priorities, not by nature alone (Garrard, 2012). For this reason, his work is indispensable to any reading of the novel's oceanic ecology.

Ursula K. Heise's *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* deepens the ecological dimension of the review by shifting attention from environmental description to the cultural meanings of loss. Heise argues that extinction is not simply a scientific fact but a cultural narrative shaped by images, genres, values, and ethical frameworks (Heise, 2016). She shows that conservation practices, biodiversity discourse, and public environmental imagination are all informed by assumptions about what counts as valuable life and what forms of life are allowed to disappear (Heise, 2016). This insight resonates strongly with *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, where marine life, myth, and memory are intertwined with vulnerability and disappearance.

Heise is particularly useful for understanding why the mermaid figure in Roffey's novel has such critical force. The mermaid is both a mythic presence and a sign of endangered relation: she embodies the precariousness of marine life while also drawing attention to what colonial history has submerged or erased. In Heise's terms, one might say that the novel turns extinction into a cultural and ethical question rather than a purely biological one. The sea is the site where endangered histories and endangered forms of life become narratable [Heise, 2016]. The file's emphasis on oceanic memory and ecological representation aligns well with this approach, since both suggest that environmental crisis must be read together with history, affect, and value. This is especially important for Caribbean literature, where ecological harm and colonial violence often overlap.

Catriona Sandilands' ecofeminist work adds another crucial layer to the article's argument. In *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*, Sandilands explores the political implications of linking ecology, feminism, and

democratic thought (Sandilands, 1999). Her work is useful for reading *The Mermaid of Black Conch* because it helps conceptualize the mermaid not merely as a mythological figure but as a gendered body through which the novel interrogates power, vulnerability, and relationality. The file already suggests that the mermaid functions as a feminist reclamation of agency, one that resists colonial and patriarchal objectification. Sandilands provides the theoretical support for such a reading.

Ecofeminism is especially relevant because Roffey's novel situates female embodiment within a world shaped by extraction, desire, surveillance, and environmental transformation. The sea in the novel is not a purely nurturing maternal force; it is also a space of danger, loss, and historical burden. This complexity matters because ecofeminist criticism has long argued that women and nature are often symbolically linked in ways that naturalize domination. Sandilands' work complicates this by insisting on democratic and ethical forms of relation rather than simple identity between woman and nature (Sandilands, 1999). In *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, the mermaid becomes a figure of negotiated agency, where embodiment is shaped through vulnerability, adaptation, and interdependence rather than mastery. That makes ecofeminism an essential part of the article's critical architecture.

The Caribbean context gives the novel its particular historical and political urgency. In Caribbean thought and literature, the ocean is rarely a neutral expanse; it is a dense historical medium marked by enslavement, trade, displacement, piracy, and creolization. The file reflects this by describing the sea as a carrier of colonial memory and as a site of postcolonial becoming. This is precisely where Blue Humanities and postcolonial ecocriticism meet most productively. The sea becomes a place where histories of violence are not erased but sedimented into cultural and ecological relation.

This Caribbean framing also prevents Blue Humanities from becoming an abstract or universalist discourse. The maritime world of *The Mermaid of Black Conch* is shaped by the specific histories of the Caribbean basin, where oceanic space has been tied to empire, slavery, and the unequal distribution of ecological harm. As Helmreich notes more generally, seawater can function as a "theory machine" for thinking global circulation and connectivity, but that circulation is never politically innocent (Helmreich, 2011). In the Caribbean case, the ocean is both connection and catastrophe, both route and wound. The novel's mermaid reworks myth from within this historical terrain, allowing the sea to become a medium of cultural memory rather than merely a symbol of fantasy.

The concept of becoming is central to the article's interpretive frame because it captures identity as process, relation, and transformation rather than fixed essence. In *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, becoming is oceanic: characters are shaped by the sea, by marine presence, and by the historical residues that the sea carries. This resonates with the Blue Humanities' emphasis on fluidity and with postcolonial ecocriticism's concern for how

imperial histories continue to structure the present (Helmreich, 2011; Garrard, 2012). The mermaid figure is especially important here because she crosses boundaries between species, genders, and epistemologies, making visible the novel's challenge to colonial categories.

This is why the novel's marine imaginary should be understood as a politics of postcolonial becoming. The sea is not just where identity is displayed; it is where identity is remade. The file emphasizes that oceanic memory enables reclamation, survival, and hybrid belonging. Heise's account of extinction and Sandilands' account of feminist relationality both reinforce this reading, since they show how life, value, and agency are shaped by the conditions of vulnerability and interdependence (Heise, 2016; Sandilands, 1999). In Roffey's fiction, becoming does not signify abstract transformation alone; it names the struggle to live meaningfully amid ecological and historical rupture.

Taken together, these critical frameworks offer a robust basis for reading *The Mermaid of Black Conch* as a blue, ecological, and postcolonial text. Helmreich helps establish the ocean as a material and conceptual medium; Garrard provides the foundational ecocritical vocabulary; Heise clarifies the cultural politics of extinction; and Sandilands introduces a feminist ecological ethics (Helmreich, 2011; Garrard, 2012; Heise, 2016; Sandilands, 1999). Your file brings these strands into direct conversation with Roffey's novel by showing how oceanic memory and postcolonial becoming are shaped through marine space. The result is a reading of the sea not as a passive setting but as an archive, a force, and a field of ethical relation. This literature review therefore positions the article within an interdisciplinary critical conversation that is both theoretically grounded and textually specific.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

This study uses close reading as its primary method, combining detailed textual analysis of narrative voice, diction, temporality, and formal structure with interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis from Blue Humanities, transcorporeality, and postcolonial ecocriticism. The analysis moves from micro-level linguistic and formal evidence to macro-level claims about oceanic agency, archival memory, and political economy. It is also dialogic and comparative, situating Roffey's novel alongside key theoretical interventions to show how literary form and thematic content jointly produce claims about memory, belonging, and ethical relation in a Caribbean maritime context.

#### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study operates at the intersection of three mutually reinforcing theoretical positions: the Blue Humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism, and transcorporeality. Together, these frameworks provide the conceptual vocabulary necessary to read Monique Roffey's

*The Mermaid of Black Conch* with the rigor and interpretive sensitivity its political and ecological ambitions demand.

### 3.2.1 Blue Humanities and Wet Ontology

The primary theoretical lens of this article is the Blue Humanities, an interdisciplinary field that repositions the ocean not as a passive backdrop to human events but as an active, agentive, and historically saturated space in its own right. Steve Mentz has argued for a blue cultural studies that reads oceanic spaces as dynamic, disruptive, and resistant to narrative closure. Applied to Caribbean fiction, this framework asks readers to attend not merely to what the sea represents in a literary text, but to what the sea does: how it shapes character, narration, and ethical possibility.

Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters extend this argument through the concept of wet ontology, which emphasizes the materiality, mobility, and depth of oceanic space as a corrective to land-based assumptions about territory, sovereignty, and belonging. The ocean is not simply a surface to be crossed or a resource to be extracted, but a lived environment that defies the flat and static logic of maps and national borders. In this article, the ocean is also understood as a profoundly historical space shaped by the transatlantic slave trade, colonial extraction, forced migration, and indigenous displacement.

### 3.2.2 Transcorporeality

The second theoretical strand is Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality. Transcorporeality names the condition by which human bodies are always already permeable, entangled with, and constituted by their material environments. The human body is not a bounded, sovereign entity but a porous, dynamic system in continuous exchange with air, water, soil, and the bodies of other organisms.

The relevance of transcorporeality to *The Mermaid of Black Conch* is immediate and literal. Aycayia's centuries of oceanic existence have not simply preserved her body; they have transformed it, constituting her flesh through the rhythms, pressures, temperatures, and chemistry of the Caribbean Sea. When she re-emerges into human form, she does not shed the ocean; she carries it within her in her altered speech, her non-human temporality, and her instinctive attunement to tidal rhythms. The framework also helps explain the novel's ecofeminist dimensions, especially the way Aycayia's body becomes the site upon which patriarchal punishment, colonial extraction, and ecological violence all converge.

### 3.2.3 Postcolonial Ecocriticism

The third theoretical framework is postcolonial ecocriticism, which brings together the concerns of postcolonial studies with those of ecocriticism. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that the natural environments depicted in postcolonial literatures are never simply nature but are always already shaped by colonial histories. In the Caribbean

context, this means that the sea is inseparable from the histories of the Middle Passage, plantation economies, and the ongoing extraction of natural and human resources.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey's concept of tidalectics is particularly useful here because it describes the rhythmic, back-and-forth relationship between Caribbean cultures and the sea as a model of identity formation. Ann Laura Stoler's archival theory also informs the reading of the ocean as a counter-archive, a space that preserves what the official, land-based record has erased. Aycayia's body becomes precisely such a repository: living testimony to a pre-colonial Taíno world that colonial historiography has declared extinct.

Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation further underpins the framework. His concepts of creolization and opacity are relevant to the novel's formal choices, especially Aycayia's creolized, fragmented narration, which refuses the colonial logic of linguistic legibility. Possible counter-readings may treat the novel as mythic romance or as a critique of tourism and commodification, but these readings remain partial because they cannot account for the novel's layered temporality, embodied historical testimony, and formal enactment of oceanic consciousness.

#### **4. Textual Analysis**

##### **4.1 The Ocean as Counter-Archive: Indigenous Memory and the Taíno Sea**

The article's first major claim is that the ocean functions as a counter-archive to colonial, land-based records. It presents Aycayia not as a mythic invention but as a historical Taíno woman who survives across generations of colonial upheaval through the sea. Her body, preserved in oceanic suspension, carries traces of a precolonial world that colonial history has attempted to erase. This is most powerfully expressed in Aycayia's opening verse narration, one of the novel's most formally striking passages. She speaks in a fractured, layered idiom that treats the Caribbean Sea not as metaphor but as inhabited geography:

"Island once where Taino people live / and the people before Taino / North in this pattern of islands and west too / The island I remember / was shaped like a lizard / I have seen the sea / I have seen its glory / I have seen its power / the power of its kingdom / I have swum its angers / I have swum its misery / I have swum its velvet floor / the corals / the cities underneath / I have swum under islands / I have swum close to shore in shallow waves / and seen children playing" (Roffey, 2020).

The significance of this passage lies in its temporal depth. Aycayia refers to "the people before Taino," pushing memory beyond the specifically named Indigenous group into an even older historical layer. The ocean therefore holds multiple pasts, not a single precolonial moment. The sea is also rendered as a fully inhabited world, with its own terrain, moods, and social structures: "kingdom," "cities underneath," "angers," and "misery" all suggest a living, historical environment. In this sense, the ocean becomes a "living, agentive, and historically saturated space" (Roffey, 2020).

The article also uses Ann Laura Stoler's archival perspective to describe the sea as a "colonial archive in reverse," a space that preserves what official records conceal. Aycayia's emergence in 1976 is therefore not simply the appearance of a strange body but the return of a living repository of Taíno history, memory, and cosmology. David immediately recognizes this when he reads her body as historical evidence rather than fantasy: "She looked like a woman from long ago, like old-time Taíno people I saw in a history book at school" (Roffey, 2020). This comparison is crucial because it displaces the authority of the colonial archive by making a living woman more legible than the book that claims to explain her.

The capture of Aycayia by the American tourists is read as a repetition of colonial extraction. A Caribbean body is once again removed from its context, commodified, and placed in service of foreign desire. The novel's language makes this clear when Nicer, who helps crew the boat, thinks that "if it had been him alone, he would have thrown her back in the sea" (Roffey, 2020). The phrase "thrown her back" confirms that Aycayia belongs to the ocean, and that the ethical response would be restoration rather than possession. That instinct is overpowered by the lure of money, showing how market logic defeats relational belonging (Roffey, 2020).

#### **4.2 Ecofeminism and the Mermaid Body: Sanctuary, Punishment, and Freedom**

The article's second claim is that Aycayia functions as an ecofeminist figure. Her curse reflects the parallel domination of women and nature, both treated as excessive, unruly, and in need of control. At the same time, the novel refuses a simple liberation narrative because Aycayia's oceanic exile is both punishment and refuge. Aycayia's own reflection on the curse makes this ambivalence explicit:

"Good joke to seal up that part of me men like [...] They curse me good / Goddess Jagua was the goddess of their curse / She keep me lonely all those years" (Roffey, 2020).

The phrase "good joke" is deeply ironic. Aycayia is not merely suffering the curse; she understands its logic. Her sexuality is precisely what made her dangerous to patriarchal order, and the curse seals that sexuality away. Yet the punishment also protects her by placing her beyond the reach of the structures that once controlled her. The ocean therefore imprisons and shelters her at the same time. Her transformation back into human form is rendered in material, bodily detail that supports the article's transcorporeal reading. David notes:

"The mermaid was coming back to woman, and a woman from another time. I didn't know how long ago, but long. She had markings on her shoulders. Tattoos. They looked like spirals, and the spirals looked like the moon and the sun. I guessed she was a woman from the tribes that lived in these islands when everything was still a garden. I saw her enormous silver tail begin to come apart" (Roffey, 2020).

The phrase “when everything was still a garden” carries political force. It evokes a precolonial Caribbean rendered as Edenic, but the past tense also marks that world as irretrievably lost. More importantly, the transformation is literal, not symbolic: the tail is later discarded “in a black garbage bag” (Roffey, 2020). The novel insists on the materiality of the body and its dependence on environment, which is exactly what transcorporeality describes.

The line “the sea had never washed out of her” (Roffey, 2020) becomes the clearest statement of this idea. Even on land, Aycayia remains materially marked by the ocean. Her body is not separate from its environment; it is constituted by it. For that reason, her return to human form is not fully emancipatory. When she says, “I was human again, trying to learn quick / I was not sure if this was my dreams come true / I was lonely I missed the sea / I missed my loneliness / I was trying to understand everything / Heart mixed up / The man David make me feel mixed up” (Roffey, 2020), the key phrase is “I missed my loneliness.” Loneliness becomes a form of freedom, because it protected her from patriarchal constraint. The novel therefore refuses to make human life automatically preferable to oceanic exile.

The ending extends this ambiguity. When the hurricane restores her mermaid form and sends her back to sea, her farewell is neither tragic nor triumphant: “Do not be sad / if you hear about me / Aycayia the mermaid / Do not be sad / I forgive those women / who curse me / They long dead now / I could have grown to be a woman too / and curse other women / Use bad thoughts / I am not sad / I am not lonely too much this time” (Roffey, 2020).

The phrase “too much” is especially important. Aycayia is not free of loneliness; she is only less burdened by it. The ending thus produces not resolution but an unstable equilibrium.

#### **4.3 Colonial Extraction and Neocolonial Tourism: The Sea as Resource**

The article’s third argument is that the Clayson party represents neocolonial extraction. They see the sea as a resource and spectacle, not as a living ecosystem or cultural space. The novel opens this sequence by personifying the ocean as a “giant woman,” fluid and contrary, which immediately genders the sea as something excessive and difficult to control (Roffey, 2020). The men’s physical reaction to it—unease, shrinking, fear—shows that they are encountering a world that does not exist for their comfort.

The sea’s warning is explicit: “Be careful what you ask for. I am bigger than you. Take only what you need” (Roffey, 2020). This is the novel’s ethic of reciprocity, which stands in opposition to extraction. The Claysons cannot hear it because their relationship to the Caribbean has already been shaped by entitlement and consumption.

Their capture of Aycayia extends that logic. Thomas Clayson's suggestion that she could be sold "to the Rockefeller Institute. For research" (Roffey, 2020) turns her into an object of scientific and commercial use. His son's possessive fantasies reduce her to a sexual commodity, while the men's decision to hood her face with tarp is also an epistemic violence: they refuse her the power to look back (Roffey, 2020). Thomas's later claim that he "had papers to prove she belonged to him" makes the colonial logic unmistakable (Roffey, 2020). The language of papers, ownership, and possession echoes the legal vocabulary through which colonial powers historically claimed land and bodies.

David offers the novel's ethical alternative. Unlike the Claysons, he approaches the sea through reciprocity and care. He names his pirogue Simplicity, reads the ocean's moods, and wants to return Aycayia to the sea when he first finds her (Roffey, 2020). His response is not perfect, but it is grounded in restoration rather than possession. The article rightly avoids idealizing him; instead, it presents him as a flawed man whose relationship to the ocean models a different form of belonging, one based on coexistence rather than extraction (Roffey, 2020).

#### **4.4 Oceanic Form: Narration, Language, and the Poetics of Depth**

The article's fourth claim is that the novel does not only represent oceanic consciousness; it formally enacts it. This happens through the novel's polyphonic structure, creolized language, and open ending. The narrative alternates between David's journal, Reggie's third-person narration, and Aycayia's verse sections. These voices do not sit in a hierarchy; instead, they create a tidal structure that moves, returns, and refuses linear progression (Roffey, 2020). David writes retrospectively from 2015 and 2016 about events in 1976, while Aycayia speaks in an ongoing present that feels outside ordinary time. This temporal dissonance mirrors oceanic movement, which is cyclical rather than linear. Aycayia's verse is especially important because it renders sensation before explanation. In her account of capture, she says:

"My lungs fill up with water / but I know the sea better than Yankee men [...] down, down to the floor of the ocean [...] At first I think I could take the boat / to the ocean floor / but the Yankee men / have big big boat" (Roffey, 2020).

The repeated "down, down" performs descent rather than merely describing it. Her voice moves by feeling, not by detached narration. The line "I know the sea better than Yankee men" asserts Indigenous oceanic knowledge against colonial technological power (Roffey, 2020).

The creolized language throughout the novel also matters politically. Expressions such as "I ent know" or "she belong in the sea" are not decorative local color; they resist standard English and affirm Caribbean vernacular as a legitimate mode of knowledge (Roffey, 2020). This is the novel's linguistic form of creolization. The ending also refuses closure. David frames Aycayia's return through a doubled fairy-tale formula:

“Once upon a time, there was a young woman, and a big storm carried her away to sea; second upon a time, there was a young woman and a big storm came to carry she back to the sea. That's what she tell me. That her life had to play a certain way, no change from the ol' time legend” (Roffey, 2020).

The phrase “second upon a time” is the key innovation. It reworks mythic language without resolving the story into a neat ending. Myth here is not escape from history; it is the form that carries histories too deep for realist narration (Roffey, 2020). The novel ends by refusing to say whether Aycayia chose the sea or was claimed by it, whether love was enough, or whether the curse was punishment or protection. That refusal is central to its oceanic poetics.

#### **4.5 The Politics of Belonging: Island, Ocean, and Creole Identity**

The article’s final argument is that belonging is the novel’s deepest concern. It does not privilege one form of belonging over another; instead, it holds together Aycayia’s precolonial oceanic belonging and the creolized belonging of the contemporary island community (Roffey, 2020). The ocean preserves memory, but it also carries the histories of colonial violence, slavery, and displacement.

When Miss Rain says, “She belong in the sea” (Roffey, 2020), the statement is rooted in intimate local knowledge. But the same sea is also the site of the Middle Passage and colonial transportation. Roffey therefore presents belonging as historically entangled rather than innocent. Aycayia belongs to the sea, but the sea itself has been shaped by imperial history.

This is why the novel’s use of the ocean is so politically powerful. It refuses to let the sea be only sanctuary, only trauma, only resource, or only memory. Instead, it becomes all of these at once. The article’s invocation of Christina Sharpe’s concept of the wake is useful here: the Caribbean Sea is both a site of survival and a witness to racial and colonial violence. Roffey’s novel holds these contradictions without flattening them, and that is what gives its ending both emotional force and political depth.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Monique Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch* transcends the boundaries of mythic romance to emerge as a politically and ecologically charged work of Caribbean blue literature. Through the interlocking frameworks of Blue Humanities, transcorporeality, and postcolonial ecocriticism, the article demonstrates that the Caribbean Sea functions simultaneously as a living counter-archive of indigenous memory, a site of colonial and neocolonial extraction, and a relational horizon of postcolonial becoming. Aycayia's centuries-long oceanic existence literalizes the permeability of body and environment, while her ambivalent return to human form captured in the devastating phrase "I missed my loneliness" refuses easy liberation narratives and insists that the boundary between punishment and refuge is never clean. The

novel's polyphonic structure, creolized vernacular, and open ending formally enact oceanic consciousness rather than merely describing it, resisting narrative closure just as the sea resists resolution. Ultimately, *The Mermaid of Black Conch* holds in productive tension the ocean as sanctuary and as wound, as indigenous memory and as colonial graveyard, positioning it as a significant contribution to both Caribbean literary studies and to wider conversations about ecological justice, indigenous epistemology, and ethical belonging in oceanic worlds.

### References

- Alaimo, S. (2010). *Bodily natures: Science, environment, and the material self*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- DeLoughrey, E. (2007). *Routes and roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific island literatures*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). London, England: Routledge.
- Glissant, É. (1997). *Poetics of relation* (B. Wing, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Heise, U. K. (2016). *Imagining extinction: The cultural meanings of endangered species*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Helmreich, S. (2011). *Nature/culture/seawater*. *American Anthropologist*, 113(1), 132–144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01311.x>
- Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2009). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. London, England: Routledge.
- Mentz, S. (2009). *At the bottom of Shakespeare's ocean*. London, England: Continuum.
- Roffey, M. (2020). *The mermaid of Black Conch*. London, England: Peepal Tree Press.
- Sandilands, C. (1999). *The good-natured feminist: Ecofeminism and the quest for democracy*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On Blackness and being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Steinberg, P. E., & Peters, K. (2015). Wet ontologies, fluid spaces: Giving depth to volume through oceanic thinking. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 33(2), 247–264.
- Stoler, A. L. (2008). *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.