

SHAPESHIFTING FOR EARTHLY SURVIVAL

TOOLKIT



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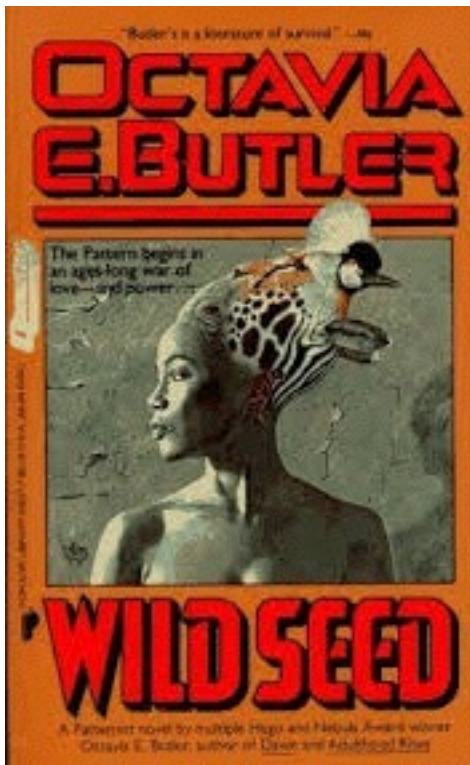
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SPECULATIVE FICTION



WILD SEED
OCTAVIA BUTLER

FULL TEXT ONLINE:
<https://epdf.pub/wild-seed.html>

EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 5:

Anyanwu tore off her cloth and dived into the sea before her confidence deserted her entirely. There, she transformed herself as quickly as was comfortable. She became the dolphin whose flesh she had eaten. And she was moving through the water alongside the ship, propelling her long, sleek body forward with easy beats of her tail. She was seeing differently, her eyes now on the sides of her head instead of in front. Her head had extended itself into a hard beak. She was breathing differently—or rather, she was not breathing at all until she felt the need and found herself surfacing in a slow forward roll that exposed her blowhole-nose briefly and allowed her to expel her breath and take new air into her lungs.

She observed herself minutely, saw that her dolphin body used the air it breathed much more efficiently than an ordinary human body. The dolphin body knew tricks her own human body

had taken time and pain to learn. How to expel and renew a much larger portion of the air in its lungs with each breath. How to leach more of the usable portion of that air from the rest, the waste, and use it to fuel the body. Other things. None of it was new to her, but she thought she would have learned it all much sooner and more easily with the help of a bit of dolphin flesh. Instead, she had had only men who attempted to drown her.

She revelled in the strength and speed of her new body, and in its keen hearing. In her human shape, she kept her hearing abnormally keen—kept all her senses keen. But dolphin hearing was superior to anything she had ever created in herself. As a dolphin, she could close her eyes and perceive an only slightly diminished world around her with her ears. She could make sounds and they would come back to her as echoes bearing with them the story of all that lay before her. She had never imagined such hearing. Finally, she directed her attention from herself to the other dolphins. She had heard them too, chattering not far from her, keeping alongside the ship as she did.

Strangely, their chatter sounded more human now—more like speech, like a foreign speech. She swam toward them slowly, uncertainly. How did they greet strangers? How would they greet one small, ignorant female? If they were speaking among themselves somehow, they would think her mute—or mad. A dolphin swam to meet her, paralleled her, observing her out of one lively eye. This was a male, she realized, and she watched him with interest. After a moment, he swam closer and rubbed his body against hers. Dolphin skin, she discovered, was pleasantly sensitive. It was not scaly as was the skin of true fish which she had never imitated, but whose bodies she understood. The male brushed her again, chattering in a way she felt was questioning, then swam away.

She turned, checking the position of the ship, and saw that by keeping up with the dolphins, she was also keeping up with it. She swam after the male. There were advantages, she thought, to being a female animal. The males of some species fought each other, mindlessly possessive of

territory or females. She could remember being bullied as a female animal, being pursued by persistent males, but only in her true woman-shape could she remember being seriously hurt by males—men. It was only accident that made her a female dolphin; she had eaten the flesh of a female. But it was a fortunate accident. A very small dolphin, a baby, she assumed, came to make her acquaintance, and she swam slowly, allowing it to investigate her. Eventually, its mother called it away, and she was alone again. Alone, but surrounded by creatures like herself—creatures she was finding it harder to think of as animals.

Swimming with them was like being with another people. A friendly people. No slavers with brands and chains here. No Doro with gentle, terrible threats to her children, to her. As time passed, several dolphins approached to touch her, rub themselves against her, get acquainted. When the male who had touched her first returned, she was startled to realize that she recognized him. His touch was his touch—not quite like that of any of the others as they were not quite like each other. Suddenly, he leaped high out of the water and arced back, landing some distance ahead of her. She wondered why she had not tried this herself and leaped a short distance. Her dolphin body was wonderfully agile. She seemed to fly through the air, plunging back smoothly and leaping again without strain or weariness. This was the best body she had ever shaped for herself. If only dolphin speech came as easily as dolphin movement. Some part of her mind wondered why it did not, wondered whether Doro was superior to her in this. Did he gain a new language, new knowledge when he took a new body—since he actually did possess the body, not merely duplicate it? Her male dolphin came to touch her again and drove all thoughts of Doro from her mind. She understood that the dolphin's interest had become more than casual. He stayed close to her now, touching her, matching his movements with her own. She realized that she did not mind his attention. She had avoided animal matings in the past. She was a woman. Intercourse with an animal was abomination. She would feel unclean reverting to her human form with the seed of a male animal inside her.

But now . . . it was as though the dolphins were not animals. She performed a kind of dance with the male, moving and touching, certain that no human ceremony had ever drawn her in so quickly. She felt both eager and restrained, both willing and hesitant. She would accept him, had already accepted him. He was surely no more strange than the ogbanje, Doro. Now seemed to be a time for strange matings. She continued the dance, wishing she had a song to go with it. The male seemed to have a song. She wondered whether he would leave her after the mating, and thought he probably would. But his would not be the greatest leave-taking. He would not leave the group as she would, deserting everyone. But that was something to think about in the future. It did not matter. Only what was happening now mattered.

EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER 6:

Anyanwu had too much power. In spite of Doro's fascination with her, his first inclination was to kill her. He was not in the habit of keeping alive people he could not control absolutely. But if he killed her and took over her body, he would get only one or two children from her before he had to take a new body. Her longevity would not help him keep her body alive. He did not acquire the use of his victims' special abilities with his transmigrations. He inhabited bodies. He consumed lives. That was all. Had he killed Lale, he would not have acquired the man's thought-transfer ability. He would only have been able to pass on that ability to children of Lale's body. And if he killed Anyanwu, he would not acquire her malleability, longevity, or healing. He would have only his own special ability lodged within her small, durable body until he began to hunger—hunger in a

way Anyanwu and Isaac could never understand. He would hunger, and he would have to feed. Another life. A new body. Anyanwu would last him no longer than any other good kill. Therefore, Anyanwu must live and bear her valuable young. But she had too much power. In her dolphin form, and before that, in her leopard form, Doro had discovered that his mind could not find her. Even when he could see her, his mind, his tracking sense, told him she was not there. It was as though she had died, as though he confronted a true animal—a creature beyond his reach. And if he could not reach her, he could not kill her and take her body while she was in animal form. In her human shape, she was as vulnerable to him as anyone else, but as an animal, she was beyond him as animals had always been beyond him.



LAGOON

NNEDÍ OKORAFOR

Welcome to Lagos, Nigeria.

The city takes its name from the Portuguese word for "lagoon".

The Portuguese first landed on Lagos Island in the year 1472.

Apparently, they could not come up with a more creative name.

Nor did they think to ask one of the natives for suggestions.

And so the world turns, masked by millions of names, guises,
and shifting stories.

It's been a beautiful thing to watch.

My designs grow complicated.

EXTRACT FROM ACT 1, PROLOGUE:

PROLOGUE

MOOM!

She slices through the water, imagining herself a deadly beam of black light. The current parts against her sleek, smooth skin. If any fish gets in her way, she will spear it and keep right on going. She is on a mission. She is angry. She will succeed and then they will leave for good. They brought the stench of dryness, then they brought the noise and made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water's surface. She often sees these rainbows whenever she leaps over the water to touch the sun. Inhaling them stings and burns her gills.

The ones who bring the rainbows are burrowing and building creatures from the land and no one can do anything about them. Except her. She's done it before and they stopped for many moons. They went away. She is doing it again.

She increases her speed.

She is the largest predator in these waters. *Her* waters. Even when she migrates, this particular place remains hers. Everyone knows it. She was not born here but after all her migrations, she is happiest here. She suspects that this is the birthplace of one of those who created her.

She swims even faster.

She is blue-grey and it is night. Though she cannot see, she doesn't need to. She knows where she is going. She is aiming for the thing that looks like a giant dead snake. She remembers snakes; she's seen plenty in her past life. In the sun, this dead snake is the color of decaying seaweed with skin rough like coral.

Any moment now.

She is nearly there.
She is closing in fast.
She stabs into it.

From the tip of her spear, down her spine, to the ends of all her fins, she experiences red-orange bursts of pain. The impact is so jarring that she can't move. But there is victory; she feels the giant dead snake deflating. It blows its black blood. Her perfect body goes numb and she wonders if she has died. Then she wonders what new body she will find herself inhabiting. She remembers her last form, a yellow monkey; even while in that body, she loved to swim. The water has always called to her.

All goes black.

She awakens. Gently but quickly, she pulls her spear out. The black blood spews in her face from the hole she's made. She turns away from the bittersweet tasting poison. *Now* they will leave soon. As she happily swims away in triumph, the loudest noise she's ever heard vibrates through the water.

MOOM!

The noise ripples through the ocean with such intensity that she tumbles with it, sure that it will tear her apart.

Then the water calms. Deeply shaken, she slowly swims to the surface. Head above the water, she moves through the bodies that glisten in the moonlight. Several smaller fish, jellyfish, even crabs, float, belly up or dismembered. Many of the smaller creatures have probably simply been obliterated. But she has survived.

She swims back to the depths. She's only gone down a few feet when she smells it. Clean, sweet, sweet, *sweet!* Her senses are flooded with sweetness, the sweetest water she's ever breathed. She swims forward, tasting the water more as it moves through her gills. In the darkness, she feels others around her. Other fish. Large, like herself, and small . . . so some small ones *have* survived.

Now, she sees many. There are even several sharp-toothed ones

and mass killers. She sees this clearly now because something large and glowing is down ahead. A great shifting bar of glimmering sand. This is what is giving off the sweet, clean water. She hopes the sweetness will drown out the foul blackness of the dead snake she pierced. She has a feeling it will. She has a very good feeling.

The sun is up now, sending its warm rays into the water. She can see everyone swimming, floating, wiggling right into the glowing thing below. There are sharks, sea cows, shrimps, octopus, tilapia, codfish, mackerel, flying fish, even seaweed. Creatures from the shallows, creatures from the shore, creatures from the deep, all here. A unique gathering. What is happening here?

But she remains where she is. Waiting. Hesitating. Watching. It is not deep but it is wide. About two hundred feet below the surface. Right before her eyes, it shifts. From blue to green to clear to purple-pink to glowing gold. But it is the size, profile and shape of it that draws her. Once, in her travels, she came across a giant world of food, beauty and activity. The coral reef was blue, pink, yellow and green, inhabited by sea creatures of every shape and size. The water was delicious and there was not a dry creature in sight. She lived in that place for many moons before finally returning to her favorite waters. When she traveled again, she was never able to find the paradise she'd left.

Now here in her home is something even wilder and more alive than her lost paradise. And like there, the water here is clean and clear. She can't see the end of it. However, there is one thing she is certain of: what she is seeing isn't from the sea's greatest depths or the dry places. This is from far, far away.

More and more creatures swim down to it. As they draw closer, she sees the colors pulsate and embrace them. She notices an octopus with one missing tentacle descending toward it. Suddenly, the octopus grows brilliant pink-purple and straightens all its

tentacles. Then right before her eyes, it grows its missing tentacle back and what looks like boney spokes erupt from its soft head. It spins and flips and then shoots off, down into one of the skeletal caves of the undulating coral-like thing below.

When a golden blob ascends to meet her, she doesn't move to meet it. But she doesn't flee either. The sweetness she smells and its gentle movements are soothing and non-threatening. When it communicates with her, asking question after question, she hesitates. It doesn't take long for her apprehension to shift to delight. What good questions it asks. She tells it exactly what she wants.

Everything is changing.

She's always loved her smooth, grey-blue skin but now it is impenetrable, its new color golden like the light the New People give off. The color that reminds her of another life when she could both enjoy the water and endure the sun and air.

Her sword-like spear is longer and so sharp at the tip that it sings. They made her eyes like the blackest stone and she can see deep into the ocean and high into the sky. And when she wants to, she can make spikes of cartilage jut out along her spine as if she is some ancestral creature from the deepest ocean caves of old. The last thing she requests is to be three times her size and twice her weight.

They make it so.

Now she is no longer a great swordfish. She is a monster.

Despite the FPSO Mystras's loading hose leaking crude oil, the ocean water just outside Lagos, Nigeria, is now so clean that a cup of its salty-sweet goodness will heal the worst human illnesses and cause a hundred more illnesses not yet known to humankind. It is more alive than it has been in centuries and it is teeming with aliens and monsters.

EXTRACT FROM ACT 1, CHAPTER 14:

CHAPTER 14

THE BLACK NEXUS

No matter how carefully Jacobs walked, his heels made too much noise. Click, click, click. The hallway of the abandoned secondary school amplified the sound. It was afternoon and the sun shone brightly outside, and he was wearing his favorite long black dress and high heels. They'd parked right beside the building and quickly run inside. Right now was a terrible time to draw attention to himself, but he couldn't show up to this meeting speaking the Pidgin English he spoke with the guys, nor could he arrive *dressed* like a "guy". He needed to present this new development to his friends as *himself*. He needed to show he was serious and unafraid.

"Walk faster," Jacobs instructed, wincing at the sound of his footsteps as they picked up speed.

"It's been such a weird day," said Fisayo, her heels clicking just as loudly. "Everything being closed, all the checkpoints . . . the *wahala* at Bar Beach. My God, Jacobs, I don't know what I saw last night, but whatever's going on is *not* over."

"Trust me, I know," he said, putting a strong arm around his sister's shoulder and giving her a squeeze of reassurance. He was glad she was OK. He'd hated leaving her to walk Bar Beach looking for work alone. Usually he stayed around to at least make sure she was OK, but last night he had eaten some bad soup and thus had a bad case of indigestion. And look what had happened to her.

Worse yet, she'd probably want to return to Bar Beach when they finished here. She'd go home, change and get herself ready

and arrive at Bar Beach in the evening. Right now was the best time to pick up the safest johns. Late-afternoon johns were looking for a girl to spend an evening with and this usually included fine treatment and a meal. Evening johns were crueler and looking for something less companionable.

Jacobs needed to spend more time with his younger sister. In the last month, he hadn't even had the time to stop by her apartment. Not that she'd have been home. Fisayo was rarely home. After all the crazy events in Lagos, today was the first chance he'd gotten to see her.

He'd met with Moziz, Tolu and Troy earlier, so he'd only briefly heard Fisayo's bizarre story about what she'd seen on Bar Beach when the boom hit. And that conversation was via mobile phone. He'd said nothing about the footage Moziz had shown him and the others, or the plan to kidnap the alien. Not yet.

"Yes, I think things are going to get weirder, too," he said. "That's why I don't want you on the streets."

"Bar Beach is closed anyway," she shrugged. "My regular guys won't even know where to find me."

The executive members of the Black Nexus, Rome and Seven, stood up when Jacobs and his sister entered the empty classroom. Rome was immaculate, as always. Tall, lean and as statuesque as a runway model, he wore dark blue skinny jeans and a loose white blouse. His tiny gold hoop earrings perfectly accented his closely cut hair. Even without make-up, he passed as a beautiful woman. Though he never outright said he was one, most people on campus just assumed. Seven was only an inch shorter than Rome. She had the curves of Osun the Yoruba goddess, a shiny bald head, and eyes so expressive she barely had to speak.

The two were the presidents of one of the only LGBT student organizations in Nigeria, the Black Nexus. Though most of its members were out or semi-out, the group still only met secretly once a month, in the dead of night. This was not one of those

meetings. It was the afternoon and this meeting's purpose was more specific.

"Hi there," Rome said, giving them each a hug.

"It's good to see you," Seven added, her voice low and husky. The hug she gave Fisayo lasted much longer than the one she gave Jacobs. Fisayo shyly stepped back. She was in no way attracted to women, yet Seven always made her want to giggle like a schoolgirl.

Seven didn't have to invite Jacobs and Fisayo to have a seat. They could read it in her eyes. Seven and Rome sat on desks across from them.

"OK, man, what's so important that you dragged us out when Lagos is on lockdown?" Seven said, leaning forward. Her eyes added, *And it better be a good reason.*

"It's a good reason," Jacobs said, bringing out his mobile phone. "Come close. It's better if we all see it at the same time."

Jacobs had a nice phone, so the footage was even clearer than it had been on Moziz' cheap disposable one. Jacobs had watched it at least fifty times and it still blew his mind. She was a young woman, then she seemed to turn inside herself to become a smoky, metallic-looking cloud, then she turned inside out again to become a completely different woman who was old and bent. She'd even spoken with an ancient sounding voice. And Jacobs knew the man the shape-shifting thing was talking to; he was the bishop of his mother's diocese. His mother had gotten Jacobs to attend service with her once, three years earlier.

That day, Father Oke happened to be giving a sermon on the "evils and filth of homosexuality". Jacobs had had to sit there beside his mother in his suit and tie, itchy and miserable with embarrassment and sweat as the bishop equated homosexual activity with bestiality. Afterwards, the bishop had come up to him and said that Jacobs' mother had told him all about Jacobs' ... habits. Jacobs experienced a moment of complete panic.

He had seen Father Oke slapping the hell out of those he disapproved of and calling them "the foulest *devil*". And when the bishop slapped, he slapped you hard. The receivers of the front or back of his hand were usually women but, once in a while, he slapped a man, too. Jacobs knew that if the bishop "slap delivered" him, he'd punch the bishop in the face. But he also knew that, if he did, the bishop would never forgive him; he would out Jacobs and run him out of the city, or worse.

To his relief, the bishop only shook his hand and congratulated Jacobs for taking the first step toward "healing his soul in the name of Jesus". But Jacobs felt so humiliated that he couldn't bring himself to tell the bishop (or his mother) that he wasn't gay at all. He just liked wearing women's clothes.

He loved the colors, the feel, the material, the creativity, and, oooh, the fit. A year later, he joined the Black Nexus because they were the only people who accepted his ways. If anyone needed the help of the Lord, it was his sister Fisayo, who was too smart and sweet to be out hustling her body.

"Whaaaaat?" Rome whispered, bringing his face close to the high-definition images on Jacobs' mobile phone.

"Play it again," Seven said, grinning. "Is this for real? Even if it's not, that's a person changing into another person! Would've been better if it changed from a woman to a man but this will do. We could have some fun sending this around."

Fisayo was quiet, biting her nails.

Jacobs replayed it. "My boy Moziz got this from his girlfriend Philo," he said. "It's real. No Photoshop or anything." He turned off his phone. "Philo says that this woman . . . man . . . whatever is an *alien* who is at the house of the people she works for." He thought about mentioning the kidnapping plan but held off. He needed to get out of his parents' house and he needed money for tuition when the university reopened. Kidnapping an alien would solve all of that. Yet . . .

"Hey! We should go see her. Get her on our side," Rome said. "The Black Nexus can come out of secrecy for *this*. Who better to understand than a shape-shifter?"

"My exact thought!" Seven agreed, breathless with excitement. "This is what we've been waiting for, o."

Fisayo raised an index finger and frowned. "Wait . . . wait just a minute," she whispered. "Last night, I saw . . ." She looked at Jacobs. "Did you tell them?"

Jacobs shook his head. "Thought it would be better if you did."

Fisayo got up. "I was on the beach talking to a guy when I heard the loud booming noise."

"The one they are all talking about on the news?" Rome asked. "You were there?"

Fisayo nodded. "Everyone was looking around, all scared. The guy I was with ran off to check his car. A lot of windows shattered from the noise."

"That man left you alone?" Seven said, looking disgusted. "Anuofia!"

"He wasn't gone for long," Fisayo replied uncomfortably. "Anyway, before he returned, I was just standing there looking at the water. It looked . . . it was moving strangely. The waves had kind of lost their rhythm and the water was rising. I saw what I am sure was one of the creatures come out of the water! It looked like smoke at first, like smoke that bubbled out of the sea." She paused, bothered by her own recollection. "Then it was a woman. *That* same woman in the video. She dove back in the water and seconds later I saw a huge wave go after these three people on the beach, one woman and two men, I think. I couldn't see them that well. They ran, but the water . . ."

Fisayo frowned and pressed her lips together. When she spoke again, it was in a whisper. "There . . . there weren't any other waves, just that one. It splashed over them and pulled back into the sea . . . *with* them. They were gone! Stolen. If you're saying

this woman-thing is an alien, then that must have been what took them! They're taking people! Maybe eating them or something!" Tears squeezed from her eyes. "Like in that old American movie . . . I forget the name. When are aliens ever *not* evil?"

"E.T.?" Rome said.

Jacobs put his arm around Fisayo. "Relax. It's—"

"No," she said, throwing his arm off. She sat down on one of the desks and began to sob. Jacobs put his arm back around her and looked at Seven and Rome.

"She's just upset and tired," he said.

"No I'm *not*, I know what I saw."

"Well, how do you know they didn't bring them back?" Seven said carefully.

"I heard that noise and I saw those people get taken. That's all I needed to see."

"Let me see it again," said Rome.

All of them watched the footage, even Fisayo. After it finished, none of them said a word, yet in their minds, they saw plenty. Jacobs saw an end to living with parents who refused to accept him. His sister Fisayo saw all of Lagos in flames. Seven saw infinite possibilities and a people from outer space that could make the world embrace and love everyone. Rome saw the rise of Rome.

"Let's get the Black Nexus together tomorrow," Rome said.

"We've been hiding for too long. Tell me you don't feel it. This is it. This is *revolution*."

Jacobs *did* feel it. And if there were more of these aliens, then the Black Nexus could definitely come out of hiding, whether they came out to meet the one at the girl's house or some other one. Jacobs could see it clearly. He could be a part of the money-making kidnapping scheme *and* the Black Nexus revolution. He'd have his cake and eat it, too.



A SHOAL OF LOVERS LEADS ME HOME

AMA JOSEPHINE
BUDGE

FULL TEXT ONLINE:

<http://www.anathemamag.com/a-shoal-of-lovers-leads-me-home>

Interview with Ama Josephine Budge with a full reading of this story: <http://m-a-r-s.online/transmissions/ama-josephine-budge-a-shoal-of-lovers-lead-me-home>

EXTRACT 1

“Please don’t ask me to be that which I am not,” she said instead.

“Have I ever?” Abenana asked.

“No, nihal.” Kwakua melted into her lover, nuzzling her neck with butterfly kisses until Abenana giggled. “Tell me the story of us.”

Abenana smiled. “Of us? You, Faneyo, and I?”

“No,” Kwakua responded dreamily. “Of us—all of us, how we got here.”

Abenana's smile folded away into negative space. She said nothing. Kwakua turned and looked at her, hunger leaking from the corners of her eyes, and then the familiar words tumbled out, as if escaping something in Kwakua's gaze that Abenana could not, or would not acknowledge.

"Almost five hundred and fifty summers now, from when this story was told to me, something called the West African Association of Environmental Rehabilitation launched the 'Envolution Project,' asking for volunteers to remedy humanity's destruction of Our Land. Only a few came forward. Times were suspicious, desperate. The world was changing faster than survival allowed. These volunteers underwent changes that would turn them from what they *were* into what we *are*: the last hope of humanity. They took away that which they deemed made us dangerous. Where they were predators, hunters dominating land, sea, and sky, we are prey, one organism of many."

Abenana's deep voice fell into the rhythmic confidence of words that had been said a thousand times before. Words that had almost lost their meaning. None of them could now fathom what West Africa might have been, much less what an "association" was. Only the story remained, told word for word with faithful diligence. Each generation adding their own count of fifty. Nevertheless, Kwakua was always enraptured as though hearing it for the first time, ever the indefatigable listener.

"Before the last war and the terrible drought that followed, they took us, the Khana people, and left us here by the coast, where no one else wanted to live. The ground had become

too hot, the sea full of poison. The blood that was spilled in the castle, so many hundreds of years earlier, had spread to the roots of the trees until their very sap was toxic to inhale. But changed as we were, we had been given scentsation to survive the hostile world that humanity had left behind. To scentse as one with all other living things—not greater or lesser, but as an equal, essential part. Until we return to the beginning and the Earth can be made anew.”

EXTRACT 2

That night, Kwakua lay with her arms splayed. Abenana nestled into one breast and Faneyo the other, both sets of hands resting upon her belly. Kwakua wondered what was growing inside her: what it would be like, how she would find water for it when the river ran dry, whether it would have eyes like hers—deep and distant—or hair like Abenana’s, or a gap-toothed smile like Faneyo. She knew they would love it with or without her. The old story played round and round in her ears as she rubbed her stomach. Kwakua wondered if it would be the one to ‘go back to the beginning.’

Over the past few months, a veil had come down between Kwakua and those she loved, pulling her further and further away, and there didn’t seem to be anything she could do to stop it. Her mind was constantly pulling her back to her other love—that coldest and most formidable of consummations and endless liquid graves. Shoals of small wet mouths seemed to close in on her sensitive flesh. Kwakua reflexively moved to grip her stomach,

disturbing Faneyo on her right side. She stirred, absently caressing Kwakua's geilers in her sleep.

Kwakua shivered in delight at the touch, and, desperate to evade the terrifying, irresistible draw of the deep, she clutched at that feeling, familiar and attainable. She shifted her weight until her swollen nipples rubbed up against Faneyo's lips. Somewhere between waking and sleep, dream and nightmare, her lover took her into herself. After a few minutes that could have been hours, Abenana woke to find her beloveds entwined and panting, wet, open and inviting. She slipped her hands between Faneyo's thighs and found her hard and ready. The three heaving bodies made one another's many openings weep with desire and satisfaction. They'd always had this, the three of them, for many harmattans now. Love, yes, but this, too. Days and nights of dry, dusty air and rich, wet monsoons, rainwater mixing with their salts, breeding love, conceiving life. Faneyo went stiff and erupted, her shaking limbs tipping the other two into climaxes of their own. Kwakua snarled, raking sharpened fingernails down Abenana's back, drawing blood. Abenana yowled into Faneyo's hair and came all over their thighs. They collapsed into one another's limbs, quaking, stroking lips, gasping kisses and whispering breaths. Kwakua threw herself into this feeling, this moment, the aliveness of her body and those entangled about her. She felt connected to every living thing for miles around. She could scent it all: dying wood smoke, drying leaves, rodent droppings, shucked snake skins, the riverbed rasping for water. And far away, a mountainous ocean swelling uproariously, ready to drown them all

EXTRACT 3

When they were near enough to the water that the stench of burning was lessened by the salt in the air, they turned at last to behold the devastation. Their home was ablaze, a final reclamation by Our Land. Abenana dropped onto the sand, clutching at her still smouldering arm. Faneyo was immediately at her side, tearing off a strip of sleeping cloth from around her middle to bind the wound. Behind them, Kwakua's breathing slowed and she thought of her Ma, whose bones now lay under a mountain of burning vegetation, and of her Mama, who now stood, or walked, or died she knew not where. She shushed her baby, placing an already leaking nipple into its searching mouth. She hummed a tune older than the ruins that now stood outlined in firelight to their left, as the putrid marination of smoke and salt finally overwhelmed the smell of blood that seemed to soak those ancient foundations.

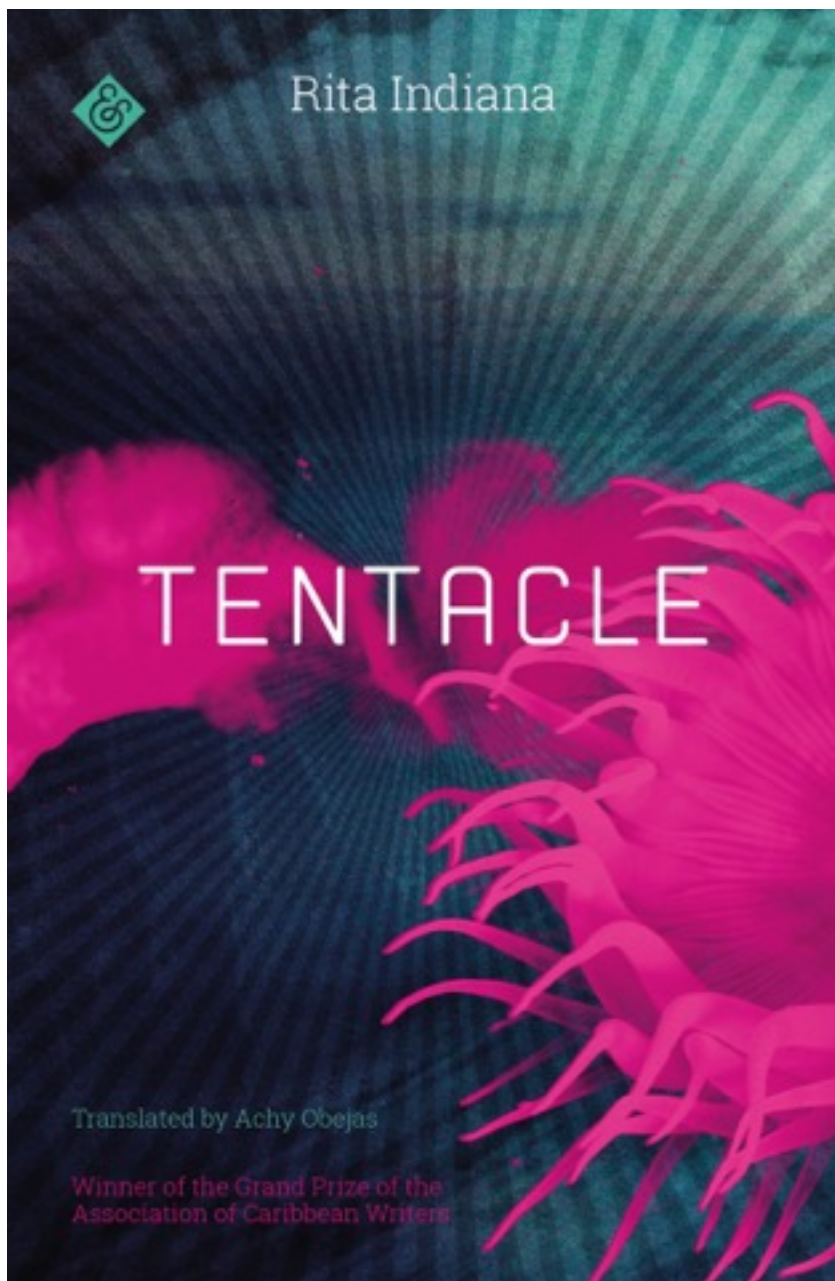
Kwakua turned and faced the ocean, her first mother, and at last she understood.

"Until we return to the beginning and the Earth can be made anew," Kwakua murmured to no one in particular. Her beloveds, clutching one another and watching the disintegration of the only home they had ever known, barely noticed as she wandered toward the waves, which seemed to lessen in intensity the closer she came. As her footpads broke the surface, to Kwakua's surprise there was no pain at all. The expected fire, singeing, and searing pain associated with the toxic anger of the ocean did not come. It felt not wet but warm, like Abenana's soft, weeping openings. It had been many harmattans since she had

thrown herself into the river's clutches, but she still remembered what it felt like to drown. Would this be any different?

By the time the cries of her lovers reached her, Kwakua was already beyond their grasp. If she had turned she might have smiled at them, might have gestured at them to follow, but all she could do was keep on, away from all that she had known and loved, and travel onward to the beginning. She burned then as the waves crested her hips and salt water flowed into both her geilers and her still-raw birth canal. But she submerged herself nonetheless, feeling her baby's gums clamp down about her nipple as it, too, felt a penetrating pain. Yet she kept on, thrashing in the surf until the pain at last subsided.

Kwakua opened her eyes; saw the swirling dark that surrounded her as it separated into murky brilliance—beams of light, flashes of silver current—and breathed.



TENTACLE

RITA INDIANA

EXTRACT P47 - 51 :

grabbed back but she explained, typing on the screen. "I just needed it for a few minutes. 'What, now you're a feminist?' asked the girls as she stepped into the kitchen and the stove. Joel showed that he was the only one who had a twin bed. 'And your sister?' Acilde asked, looking at the table. But Joel was already in the kitchen, serving himself what he had been left on the stove.

Acilde sent Eric a picture of a monkey. Eric sent back a photo of the Titanic. Acilde responded with a photo of the Titanic at the bottom of the sea and a photo of a rainbow. After a minute of more photos, Acilde had sent him one of Pancho Villa, one of Matías Mella, another of Mama Tingó, and one of a postcard of a sunset on the beach from back when the sea reflected the sky and wasn't just contaminated chocolate. The monkey was still the most well-known call for help. Even the police knew what it meant. Eric got the message: Acilde was in Villa Mella, in deeper than the Titanic, she had the sea creature with her, and she would return it to him in exchange for Rainbow Brite. She'd wait for him around the Mama Tingó metro station after dark.

Eric had taken care to come in a public car, a 2007 Honda Civic, which still preserved the original ash gray paint job twenty years later. The Cuban climbed out of the car and pulled a suitcase from the trunk. He looked wasted and shaky and Acilde rushed to help him with the luggage. She brought him up to date as they strolled through the plastic garbage-laden puddles on the way to Joel's. Once there, Eric gave Samantha two hundred dollars and ordered her and Joel to leave. "Go find someplace else to stay for a few days. You won't want to be here when the cops come."

"I didn't kill her," Acilde said as soon as they were alone.

"That's not important now. I'm going to help you with the shot. You can't do it yourself."

Acilde was surprised by this reaction; maybe his illness had finally done him in. He pulled out five IVs, gauze and clamps, several bottles, and a piece of cascarilla Esther had used to trace white lines on doors and in the corners of her apartment.

He ordered Acilde to give herself an enema, take a bath, and shave her vulva and head. She did everything with a little shaver, thinking all the while: This guy's a doctor, he knows what he's doing. He made her lie down on the bed, over which he'd erected a kind of white tent to keep the space around her body sterile. There was a plate of uncooked rice at the foot of the bed. "You're getting pretty folkloric," Acilde said, anxiously watching as Eric pulled a sealed metallic envelope out of a jacket pocket. He tore the envelope with his teeth. "They're offerings so everything will go smoothly," he explained, showing her a vial with about two inches of a white and viscous liquid in it. "It'd better work, cuz it cost me my right ball," he said as he filled a syringe that danced in his hand. When he showed Acilde some latex belts, she sprang up from the bed. "I'm just following instructions," he said and cackled like a chicken to test her courage. Defiantly, Acilde lay back down and let him tie her with the belts. "Try to break loose," he said. She struggled but couldn't move.

Before beginning, Eric took a quick look at the jar where the sea anemone rested. It was in bad shape, like him, and he'd have to act fast. As soon as the Rainbow Brite entered her bloodstream, Acilde began to convulse. I've killed her, thought Eric. They sold me rat poison! But she soon stabilized and he checked her vital signs at intervals. Two hours later she complained about the heat and later still told him she was burning alive. When the bed began to shake from

her tremors, Eric gave her a sedative. At midnight her small breasts began to fill with smoky bubbles as her mammary glands consumed themselves, leaving a wrinkled web that looked like gum around her nipple, which Eric removed with pincers so it wouldn't get infected. Underneath grew a masculine skin. Her cells reconfigured themselves like worker bees around her jaw, her pectorals, her neck, her forearms, and her back, filling up to become hard where before there were just soft curves. It was daybreak when the body, confronted with the total annihilation of the female reproductive system, convulsed again. With contractions that made her lower abdomen rise and fall, she expelled what had been her uterus through her vagina. Her labia sealed in a cellular fizz and quickly formed a scrotum, which would give birth to the testicles, while her clitoris grew, making her stretching skin bleed. Eric removed the old skin as he had done around her nipples, sterilizing as he went along, as the makers of Rainbow Brite advised. At noon the next day, Acilde Figueroa was wholly a man. Eric protected his designer body, still encased in raw flesh, with layers of antiseptics and cotton.

Eric sat in a plastic chair next to the bed and battled sleep by contemplating his own death. He thought the scene where death would find him was amusing, and this, his last act of caring for a patient, seemed straight out of the mission statement of the Latin American School of Medicine in Cuba, where he'd graduated. "Science and conscience" was the mantra at the school, which had been founded to create an army of white-robed doctors in service to the most needy, and whose Third World missions the Castros used to excuse everything that had gone wrong with the revolution.

At sunset the Servants of the Apocalypse screamed verses into loudspeakers that the wind blew right into the room:

"He had seven stars in his hand, and from his mouth emerged a sharp double-bladed sword." Eric was astonished as he watched the powerful drug accelerate the healing process. The metamorphosis was reaching its conclusion: the skin that would forever protect this masterpiece now covered every altered centimeter of flesh. In contrast to this body's robust health, Eric's was deteriorating. His fragile lungs, already filled with liquid, began to hurt more than he could bear. He'd made a mistake, but at least he was on the verge of finishing the job for which he'd been put on earth.

Eric was nine years old when, playing marbles one afternoon in the hallway of his home, his eyes rolled back when he tried to look at his mother, as if he were having an epileptic fit, and he shot out of the house.

They found him on the outskirts of the city, at a ritual in honor of Yemayá, where he'd come by himself, speaking in tongues, speaking in Yoruba. That same year, Omidina, who was also Esther Escudero's godfather, initiated Eric as Babaloshá.

In the prophecy delivered at his initiation, it was revealed he would be the one to find Olokun's legitimate son, the one with the seven perfections, the Lord of the Deep. That's why his godfather called him Omioloyu, the Eyes of Yemayá, convinced that one day this clever young boy would discover in the flesh the one who knew what lies at the bottom of the sea.

The oracle had told Esther Escudero, Omicunlé, that she would receive the Chosen One in her own home, and that she would meet her death at his hands. She'd accepted that future calamity with equanimity. She trusted Eric to carry out her plan to have him initiate Omo Olokun when she was no longer here. Eric loved the old woman like a mother and, wanting to avoid the prophecy's fatal outcome, he'd tried to improvise a way out. If he crowned himself as Omo Olokun,

he could get rid of Acilde, the supposed Chosen One, but his experiments with the anemone behind Esther's back had ended up making him ill and angering her.

Their evangelical neighbors grew ever more strident. The new Acilde, still dazed, asked Eric what he was doing when he saw him, with a sporadic pulse, writing symbols on the floors and walls. Startled with a sudden fervor, Eric brought the anemone out of the jar. Acilde was still strapped to the bed and asked for a mirror. Eric didn't have time to explain and knelt by the head of the bed, the anemone's tentacles pointing to Acilde's shaved head. Acilde had a crown of moles, dark spots that made a circle all the way around his head. Eric had noticed it when the girl, now finally in the male form she'd so desired, had knelt before him to suck him off that night at the Mirador.

Acting as a priest now, Eric began to pray in a sharp and nasal voice: "Iba Olokun fe mi lo're. Iba Olokun omo re wa se fun oyío." As he prayed, he joined the tentacles to the moles on Acilde's head. A weak Acilde whimpered and cursed, unable to move. The tentacles stayed put, as though with Velcro, and the marine creature's smell supplanted the neighborhood's garbage stink, transporting Eric back to Matanzas Bay, to the silver lights the sun set moving on the water, and a strong smell of iodine and algae that infused him with the vigor he needed to finish the ritual. "Olokun nuni osi oki elu reye toray. Olokun ni'ka le. Moyugba, Aché." He let go of the creature and brought his face next to Acilde's. "Olokun, here is your child, Eric Vitier, Omioloyu, Omo Yemayá, Okana Di en si Awofaka, paying homage and asking for a blessing." He got even closer to the ear of this newborn man and used his last breath to let him know: "Esther knew what was going to happen. I'm done for. We gave you the body you wanted and now you've given us the body we needed."

DAHUT AND THE CITY OF YS



PODCAST EPISODE: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/4aFM3fsLMiLqfXVFXRyxi5?si=hfltznzrQvmQgwQ1tGhMCA>

The legend of Ys

There are many versions of the legend. Most have Gradlon, or Galon as the king who built the city. The oldest versions say the city was originally located in an area of the Bay of Douarnenez that was just above the waterline and was built 2,000 years before King Gradlon. But by the time of

King Gradlon's reign the land had become so eroded that the sea was inundating the city at high tides. To keep the sea at bay huge walls were built around it with massive gates placed in them to control the flow of the sea.

Other versions have Gradlon building the city below sea level at the request of his daughter, Dahut, who had a love and deep affinity with the sea and worshiped it. What all seem to agree on is that the city was protected by a huge dyke equipped with flood gates that had to be shut at high tide to prevent the sea flooding the city. At low tide it could be opened to allow ships to dock at the harbour. The gate had a lock and Gradlon was the keeper of the only key which he kept on a chain around his neck.

The city of Ys

The city of Ys was famed throughout Europe for its beautiful gardens and buildings but over time its reputation fell into disrepute. This came about through the pagan practices of Dahut. Unlike her father who had been converted to Christianity by Saint Winwaloe, Dahut and many of the city dwellers retained their pagan ways and worshiped the old gods. Dahut would swim naked in the sea around the walls of the city and preside at ceremonies dedicated to it which were attended by all of its citizens and people came from far and wide to participate.

It did not take long before the city came to be seen as a safe haven for pagans to practice their rituals and beliefs and they flocked there. The city grew rich and prosperous and many fine buildings and gardens were built and it became renowned as the most beautiful city in the world.

St Winwaloe's warning

But the world was changing for good or ill and with the increasing spread and growing power of Christianity the city became known as a place of sin and debauchery, at least in Christian eyes. Dahut was rumoured to take lovers to her bed and in a perverse sort of game made them wear a black satin mask. Just after midnight springs fitted inside the mask would grip the victim's throat strangling them. Later, a dark figure would be seen leaving her chamber carrying a heavy bundle and placing it on a horse, then riding to the cliff tops and throwing it into the sea. It was believed, rightly or wrongly, that the victim had been sacrificed to the sea who Dahut worshiped.

In the eyes of the early Christian church paganism was sinful and needed to be eradicated to make way for Christianity. Despite warnings from St Winwaloe about what he saw as the the evil and corruption of the citizens of Ys, Dahut's behavior grew ever more excessive in his eyes. Gradlon adored his daughter and although St Winwaloe urged him to rein her in he continuously ignored her excesses much to the Church's great frustration and the conflict with the Church grew.

The Red Knight

One day, to the great excitement of Dahut, a handsome knight dressed all in red rode through the city gates and up to the palace. Dahut was intrigued by the handsome stranger and went to great pains to introduce herself to him offering all the hospitality the city could provide. She soon became besotted with him and he teased her asking what she would do to prove her love for him. The pair ate and drank and made merry and when night came Dahut took him to her bed chamber. Because she was so besotted by the Red Knight she did not make him wear the mask. That night

a great storm rolled in from the sea and broke over the city. Great waves battered the sea walls and gates but could not break through due to their strength and width.

"Fear not," said Dahut to the Red Knight, "the walls are high and wide and the gates are strong enough to withstand any storm."

"Let us open the gates to see the power of the storm!" said the Red Knight.

"The gates can only be opened with a key my father King Gradlon has and he keeps it around his neck. Let the storm rage!"

"But you said you would do anything for me!" said the Red Knight, "Your father sleeps you could easily take the key if you wanted, if you truly loved me!"

"That I could and that I will to show my love," she said, and crept into her father's chamber and took the key from his neck without disturbing him and took it in triumph to the Red Knight.

As soon as she gives him the key reveals himself as the devil. In some versions of the story it is the devil who then opens the gates in others it is the drunken Dahut who does the deed. Either way it is disastrous for the city as great waves flow, into the city drowning everything and everybody in its path.

The city floods

Gradlon, awakening from sleep by the crashing of water, looks out of his window and sees that disaster had befallen Ys. Quickly dressing he runs to the stables and saddles his magical horse, Morvarc'h. Finding Dahut he lifts her up behind him and together they ride for the high ground. Morvarc'h was a magical horse that could gallop over the sea, but it was now struggling to make its way through the water. As they struggled to climb to higher ground they were approached by St Winwaloe who commanded Gradlon to cast off the demon at his back, meaning Dahut. But Gradlon loved his daughter dearly despite her faults and refused.

The sea was about to engulf them when God spoke to Gradlon and commanded him to throw off the demon at his back. Hearing the voice of God, Gradlon obeyed and thrust his daughter into the sea. At that Morvarc'h immediately gained speed and raced over the sea to the high ground. Although the sea claimed Dahut she did not drown but was turned into a sea morgen a type of water spirit that lures sailors to their deaths.

MORGAN LE FAY : SHAPESHIFTER

BY JILL M. HERBERT

INTRODUCTION: TO BE A SHAPESHIFTER

The Problem of Boxes and Binaries

Authors tend to portray, and critics to analyze, the character of Morgan le Fay in dichotomous terms, as either a benevolent healer who tends to Arthur after his final battle or as an evil witch out to bring Arthur down. Sometimes both these roles are attributed to Morgan in the very same source, such as in Malory, where she is viewed by the other characters (and critics) as attempting to destroy knights, kill Arthur, and demolish Camelot. Yet at the end of the *Morte*, this most enigmatic of characters comes to heal Arthur's wounds, scolding him in a comforting fond-older-sister tone for getting hurt so that she must take care of him.¹ Morgan displays changeable behavior from text to text as well; she is widely accepted as a benevolent healing force in earlier medieval works, while other eras often judge her pejoratively. Even in contemporary fantasy, authorial use of Morgan's voice, and the addition of motives for her actions either try to redeem her or ultimately relegate her to malevolent roles.

Morgan's variance has provided much fodder for critics who attempt to reconcile what they interpret as the polar 'evil' and 'good' states she so often occupies in Arthurian literature, both within single texts and across works from the Middle Ages to the present moment.² At the same time, scholars seem reluctant to expend much effort into trying to explain contrary behavior in male Arthurian characters, though they too exhibit changeability. As Norris J. Lacy points out, Arthur himself is frequently contradictory both within and across sources "without apparent discomfort."³ Yet, despite the fact that "inconsistent and even conflicting characterization is one of the commonest phenomena in Arthurian romance," according to Helaine Newstead,⁴ Morgan's apparently contradictory behavior resists easy explanation.

Perhaps because Morgan's actions are so unpredictable, critical attempts to resolve her 'inconsistencies' are likewise widely divergent in their interpretations of her motives, purpose, and meaning. One common explanation

is expressed by critics such as Elisa Marie Narin, who has seen Morgan as a manifestation of the Other,⁵ a character upon whom fear of the unknown or unpredictable is projected, making her a receptacle for mysterious and negative, if not evil, aspects of ourselves. In Frederic Jameson's formulation of the symbolic nature of narrative, he explains that

Evil...continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my own existence...the woman, whose biological difference stimulates fantasies of castration and devoration...behind whose apparently human features a malignant and preternatural intelligence is thought to lurk. [It] is not so much that [s]he is feared because [s]he is evil; rather [s]he is evil *because* [s]he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar.⁶

In a survey of contemporary fantasy accounts in which Morgan is a featured player, Raymond Thompson attributes her behavior toward Arthur to ambivalent yet normative sibling relations,⁷ while Malory scholars such as Elizabeth Sklar view her as "an essentially sociopathic personality, respecting no boundaries and acknowledging no rules save those dictated by her own ambitions, envy, and lust."⁸ Maureen Fries defines Morgan as a 'counter-hero,' rather than a traditional heroine, because she does not occupy conventional female roles, but instead has the ability to "violate the norms of the patriarchy" and "possess the hero's superior power of action without possessing his or her adherence to the dominant culture."⁹ In other words, each critic attempts to find a consistent role designed to encompass Morgan's oftentimes unsettling inconsistencies, using the metaphor of the Other as a starting point and a catch-all answer.

However, as Jameson's definition of the Other and these critical positions illustrate, scholarly commentary tends to follow a binary path, defining Morgan as different and therefore malevolent. Of the responses cited here, Fries's explanation is the most promising in that it moves Morgan outside traditional categories of thought. Yet her attempt to revalue Morgan's negative characterization still imposes a too-restrictive, oppositional definition; like other critics, Fries's strategy for reconciliation is ultimately unsatisfactory. Such efforts to find consistencies in Morgan's behavior reinforce dichotomous categories that many of the original sources also impose. In their attempts to force constancy on Morgan's multifarious nature, critics relegate her once again to stereotypes such as the benevolent healer, archetypes such as the femme fatale, and ideological prisons such as the Ave/Eva dichotomy.¹⁰

Unfolding the Box, or, How Not to Arche the Type

In her feminist analysis of archetypal thought, *The Bitch is Back: Wicked Women in Literature*, Sarah Aguiar argues that Jungian archetypal theory “connote[s] universal and essentialist properties.”¹¹ She sees “the Jungian reliance upon binary oppositions” as a handicap to feminist thought, concluding that “feminist questioning and re-envisioning of archetypes can only result in the enlarging of meanings that surround the types.”¹² Archetypes are, by their nature, limited: they are employed to help define a person or character, to say ‘this, but not that,’ to attempt to contain that which is uncontainable. Morgan is problematic because she neither conforms to conventional models of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ femininity nor adheres to the traditional place of women in society. Because of this tendency, authors and critics tend to invoke outmoded archetypal, androcentric explanations of her behavior to keep her in her place. Frequently, writers and scholars attribute to Morgan the ‘femme fatale’ archetype, which presents women as ‘man-eaters’ whose sexual allure leads to a man’s destruction. While Morgan’s character often traps men and exhibits sexually voracious behavior, she is much more than such a definition would allow. She is not the ‘Eve’ side of the Ave/Eva opposition; rather, she embodies characteristics and behaviors that cannot be classified by simple-minded dichotomies. For example, Morgan does not quite fit the description of a supernatural ‘enemy’ provided by Hilda Ellis Davidson and Anna Chaudri: “Supernatural enemies may be ambivalent in nature and not invariably hostile, but they are *always* potentially dangerous. They may not confine themselves to one form: they are often shape-shifters, able to appear as unfamiliar monsters or phantoms or in apparently familiar human or animal form, but they are *always* endowed with monstrous or terrifying characteristics.”¹³ The applicability of such definitions or archetypes like the femme fatale breaks down when Morgan also exhibits traits that fall outside their bounds, such as beauty or healing, as demonstrated in her ubiquitous role as Arthur’s caregiver after his final battle. Archetypes, with their ‘either/or’ orientation, cannot, then, usefully be applied to a character like Morgan who refuses to fit into artificially constructed patterns of behavior.

One solution to the problem of defining such troubling characters is expansion of the archetype, or what Aguiar describes as “enlarging the meanings that surround the types.”¹⁴ However, this solution rapidly becomes problematic too. Expanding an archetype’s definition implies at least two potential pitfalls: one involves simply showing how the archetype shares or does not share characteristics of another, an operation that reinforces the inherent problem of reductivity and constraint. Another

opens up the archetype too much, quickly making that definition useless for purposes of comparison and thus invalidating its purpose of identifying a particular 'type.' As Aguiar rightly points out, an archetype's "applicability to literature is not, nor can be, universal, because many male-authored female characters have little or no inner consciousness, the attribution of a feminine archetypal form becomes nearly impossible."¹⁵ Early literature in which Morgan plays a significant role lacks psychological depth, and only in recent works such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* can she express an inner life and motives for her actions. For a literary character who does not conform to archetypes or dichotomous definitions, and who cannot be analyzed productively in Jungian terms, archetypes become an outmoded means of examination. When authors and critics attempt to confine this particular character to definitive categories, the need to escape them quickly becomes evident. Writers and critics thus need to move beyond the impulse to impose restrictive categorizations on Morgan's character.

Working toward an Acceptance of Complexities and Contradictions

If Morgan cannot be made to fit a definition, or any definitions for that matter, a productive analysis of her appearances requires freedom from the kind of expectations created by binaries and archetypes. This study engages in such an analysis by examining specific works and scenes within these works where Morgan initially appears hemmed in by the critical or authorial impulse toward restriction and social constraint. For example, Morgan's 'presence in absence' in early modern, Romantic, and Victorian works highlights those eras' attempts, and failures, to dictate clearly a woman's place in society. Yet even as her appearances or absences illustrate the concerns of each era, the many manifestations of Morgan continually evade and confound such reductive attempts at categorization, demonstrating the potential for more expansive, if not more imaginative, representations.

A study that maps out Morgan's fluidity from early medieval through contemporary Arthurian sources requires a flexible theoretical approach, one compatible with the changeable nature of the subject. For such a study, New Medievalism, articulated by Stephen G. Nichols and others, provides the means "to interrogate and reformulate assumptions about the discipline of medieval studies."¹⁶ Nichols argues that we should view the Middle Ages as a period that revels in improvisation even as it builds on and reveres a tradition, that endorses fluidity even as it cherishes fixed systems. New Medievalism is appropriate to my study in several

interrelated ways. Because Morgan is a character who undergoes multiple and sometimes seemingly contradictory portrayals, there are both 'disjunctions' and 'continuities' in the way she is depicted (such as whether she possesses the power to heal and harm), and whether she is depicted at all in some literary epochs.¹⁷ Many authors seem to have taken liberties in adaptations of Morgan's role, or some leave her out entirely. For this reason, she is an excellent subject for the interrogation of what is 'known' as well as for what is unknown. Emblematic of female power, Morgan literally represents the concept of the potential for representation; her ability to cross and/or blur boundaries, making them personally irrelevant while simultaneously illustrating the restrictions they place on others, is but one example. Only by moving beyond limited conceptions, by accepting multiple and new 'modes of representation' can we understand how well suited Morgan is to such an exploration. Her character invalidates preconceptions of woman's place and troubles social and gender boundaries, in both medieval and postmedieval eras. The primary sources provide evidence that Morgan does not change from 'good' to 'evil' over time, but retains the potential for a range of representations right from the beginning. She is a shapeshifter, after all.

An Undefined: The Shapeshifter

For the purpose of this study, the term 'shapeshifter' is both a denotative and a connotative term signaling Morgan's ability to change 'shape,' to evade being shaped by others, and to manipulate the shape of others such as the knights with whom she interacts. In Malory, Morgan physically transforms herself and her retinue into stone to evade Arthur's wrath, while in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* she changes her shape into that of a bird. These incidents suggest an earlier association with the Morrigan, a Celtic goddess who can become a black bird, and the loathly lady figure who alters her appearance from ugly to beautiful.

Morgan's ability to change shape signifies her potential to evade and to resist the shape(s) that others—authors, critics, and characters—attempt to impose upon her, to use the expectations of others against them, and to move among, outside of, and around assumptions as necessary. Unlike some of the loathly lady characters whose shapes are changed by the curses of others, Morgan's power in part comes from the fact that she always retains agency, choosing among multiple forms at will. As a marker of reform, she can also influence others to change their shapes, and so she often appears at points where a change or expansion of the limits of identity is required. In this sense, the shapeshifter metaphor is useful not only for examining Morgan, but also for exploring how her

ability to elude constraint demonstrates, by comparison, how strict culturally determined definitions of identity inhibit other characters (such as knights) with whom she interacts. Morgan shapeshifts both literally and metaphorically as she confounds traditional social and gender expectations; her power in Arthurian literature is generated by that very agency. This study allows one to do for Morgan what society does not seem able to do for women in general: to remove her from the Eve/Ave dichotomy and allow her to be contradictory, inconsistent, and unclassifiable. But rather than imposing the 'definition' of shapeshifter on Morgan, this term opens up rather than closes down her 'potential for representation' and celebrates her indefinable nature.

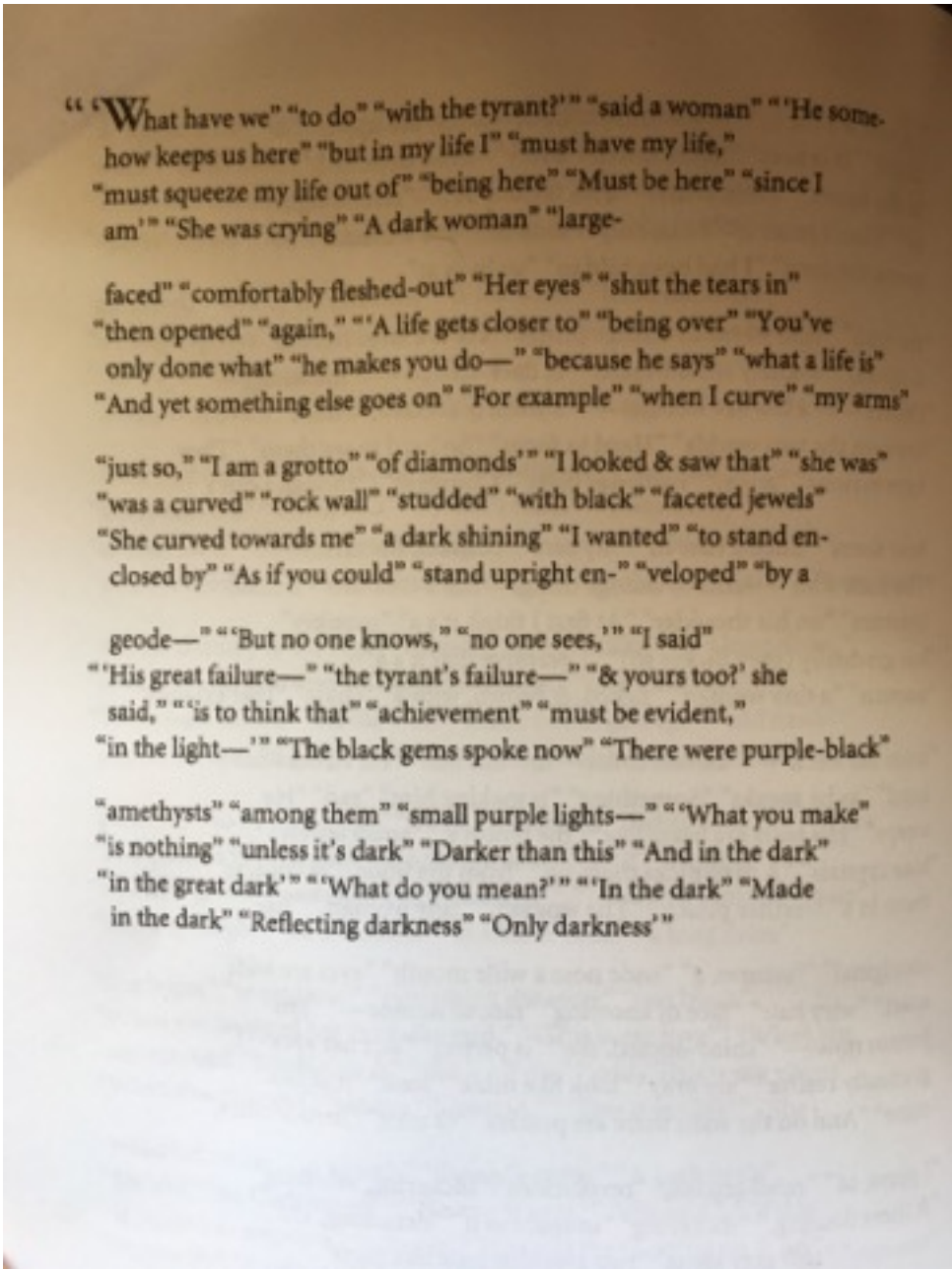
THE DESCENT OF ALETTE

ALICE NOTLEY

FULL TEXT:

<https://jasonzuzga.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/the-descent-of-alette-by-alice-notley-book-one.pdf>

EXTRACT PAGE 40



"What have we "to do" "with the tyrant?" "said a woman" "He some-
how keeps us here" "but in my life I" "must have my life,"
"must squeeze my life out of" "being here" "Must be here" "since I
am'" "She was crying" "A dark woman" "large-
faced" "comfortably fleshed-out" "Her eyes" "shut the tears in"
"then opened" "again," "A life gets closer to" "being over" "You've
only done what" "he makes you do—" "because he says" "what a life is"
"And yet something else goes on" "For example" "when I curve" "my arms"
"just so," "I am a grotto" "of diamonds'" "I looked & saw that" "she was"
"was a curved" "rock wall" "studded" "with black" "faceted jewels"
"She curved towards me" "a dark shining" "I wanted" "to stand en-
closed by" "As if you could" "stand upright en-" "veloped" "by a
geode—" "But no one knows," "no one sees," "I said"
"His great failure—" "the tyrant's failure—" "& yours too?" she
said, "is to think that" "achievement" "must be evident,"
"in the light—" "The black gems spoke now" "There were purple-black"
"amethysts" "among them" "small purple lights—" "What you make"
"is nothing" "unless it's dark" "Darker than this" "And in the dark"
"in the great dark'" "What do you mean?" "In the dark" "Made
in the dark" "Reflecting darkness" "Only darkness'"