

Leaking: women's fluid embodiments in contemporary archipelagic narratives



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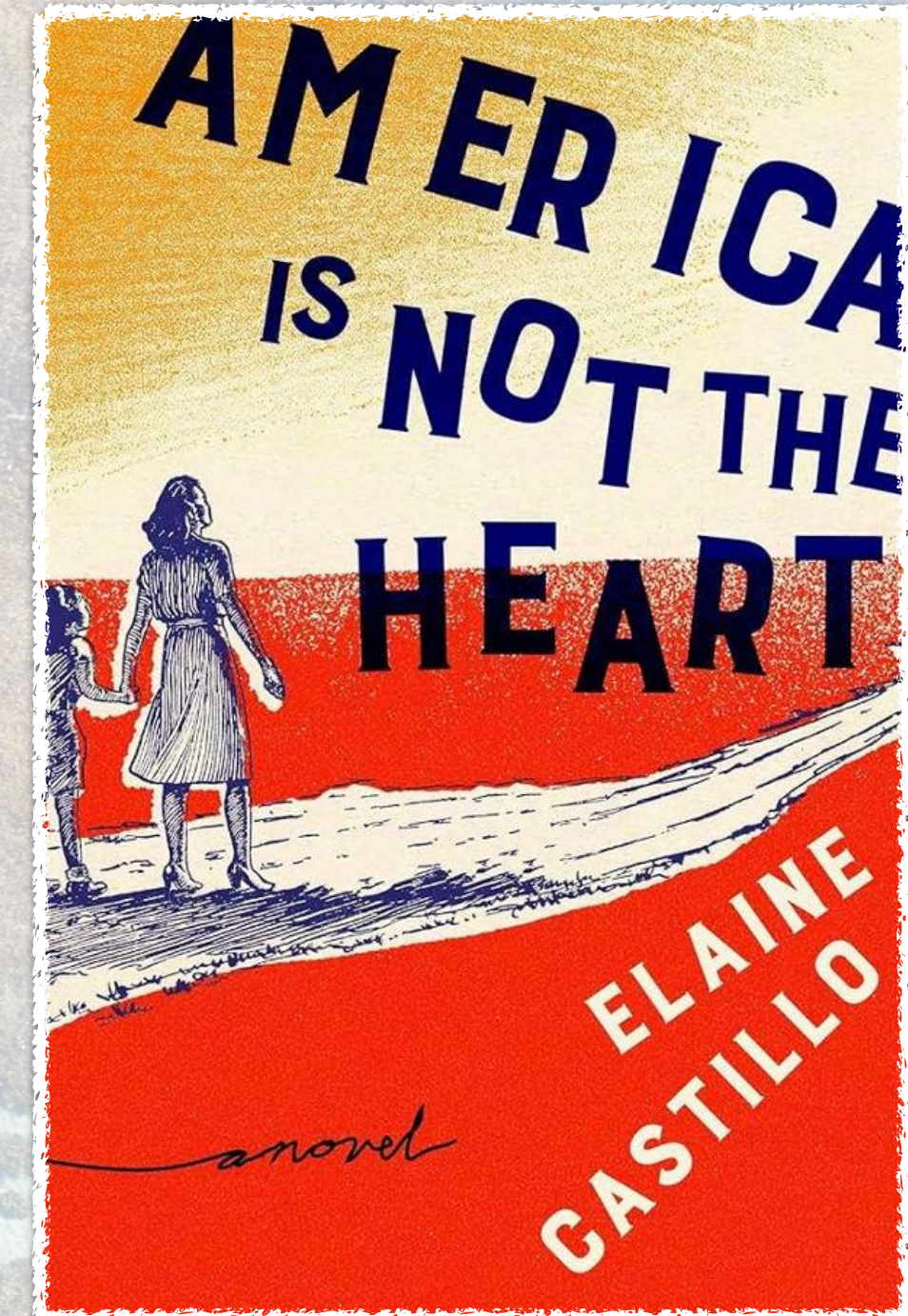
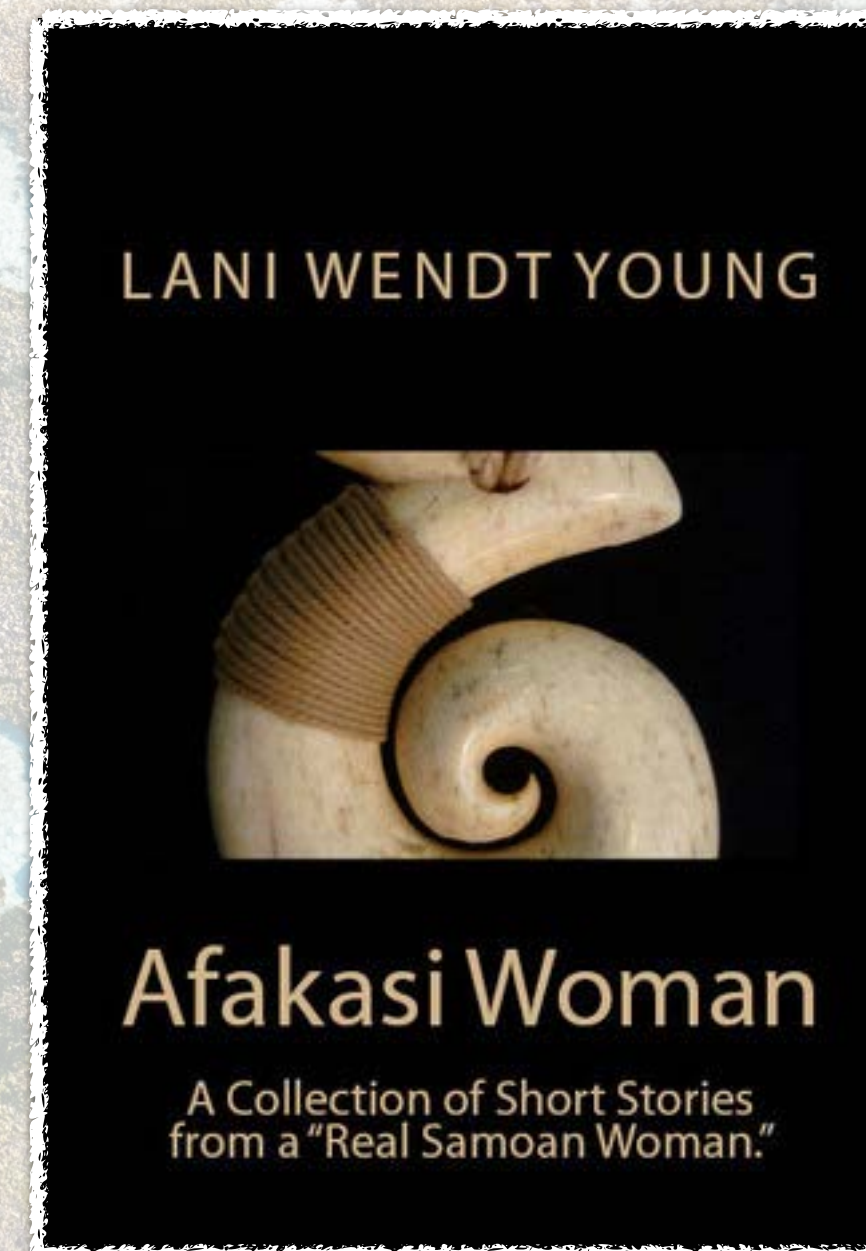
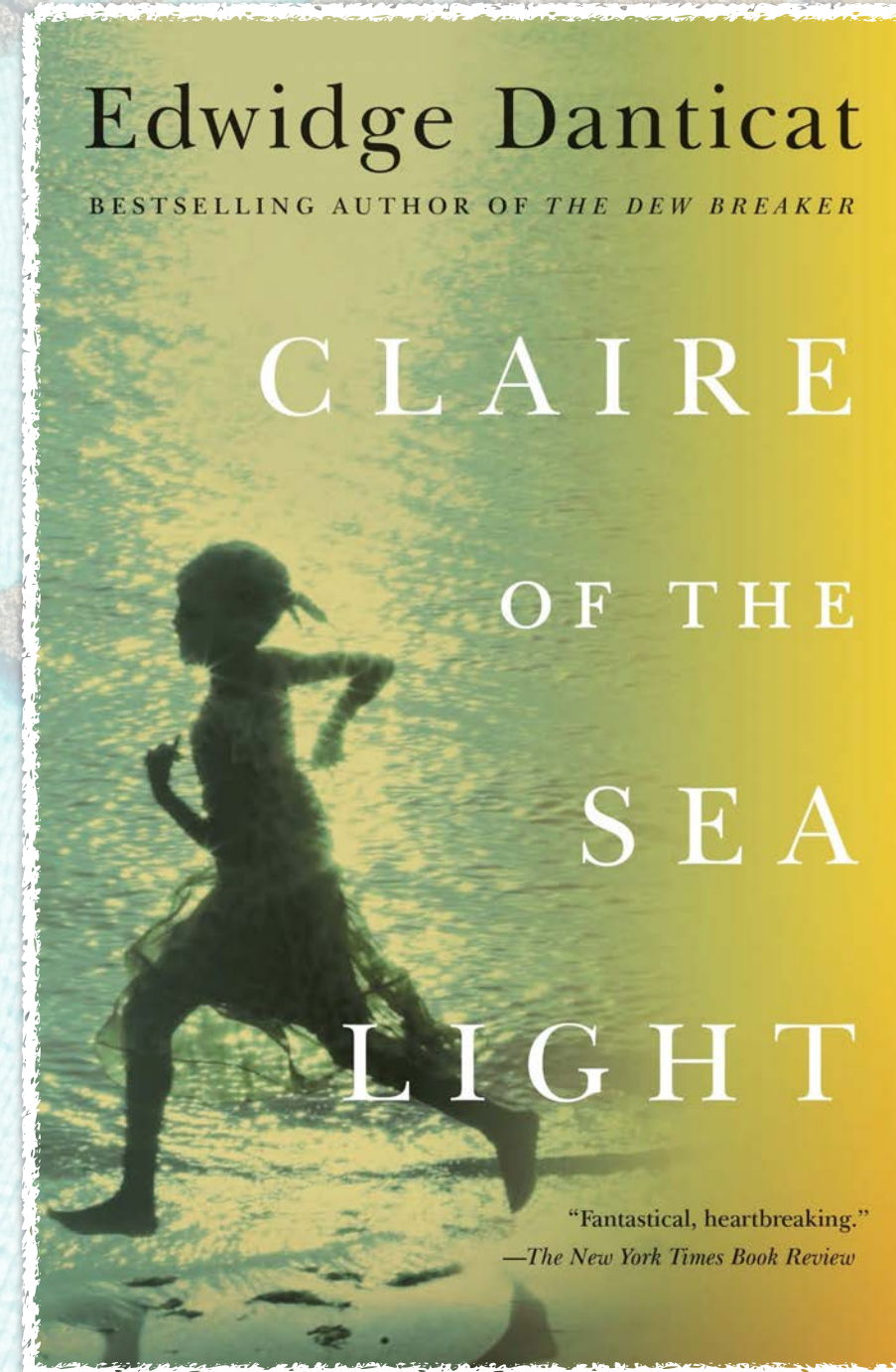
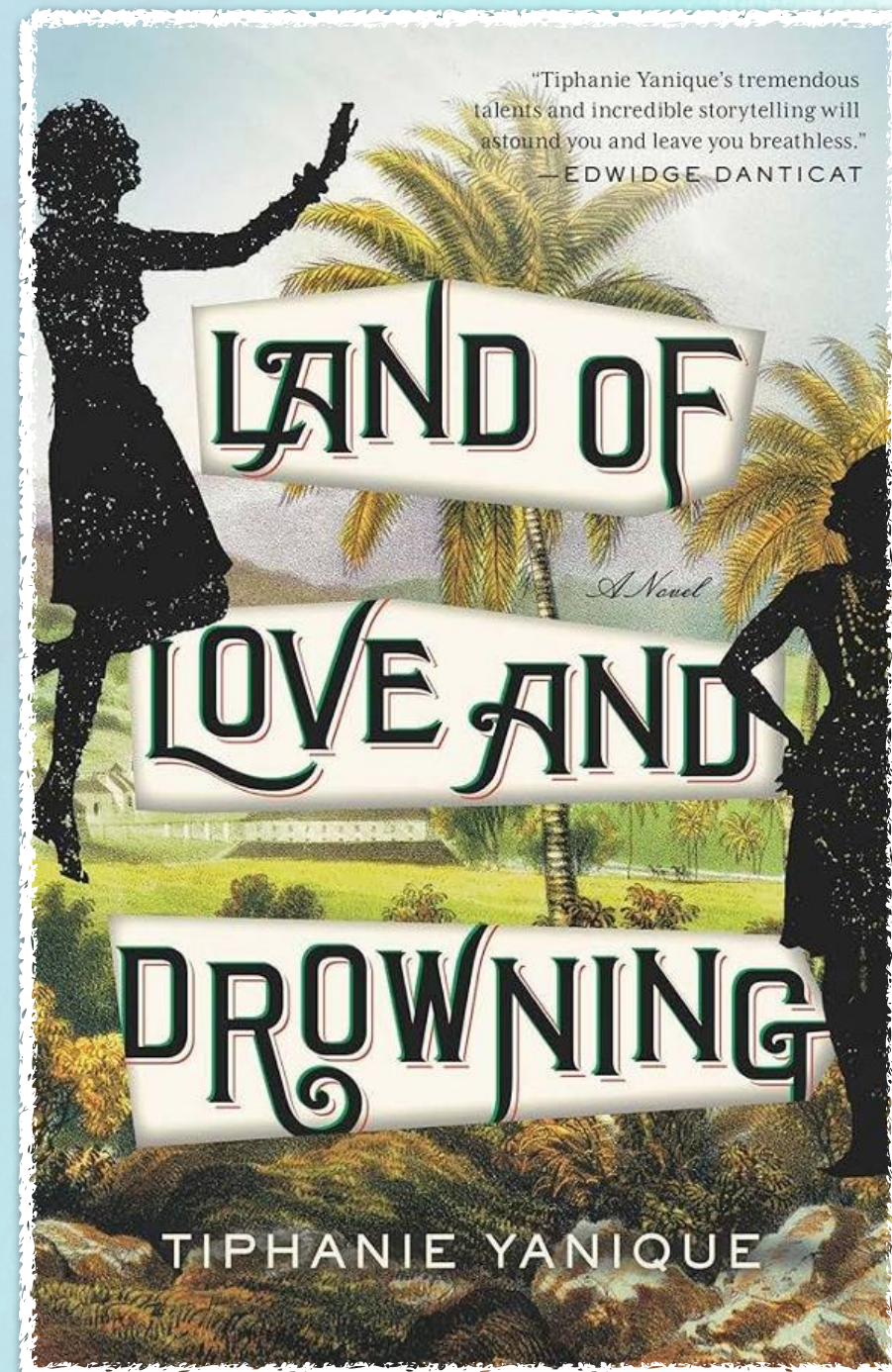
“WAVES”

Women’s Archipelagic NarratiVES

Gendered Eco-consciousness in Water-related Anglophone Literature

- ~ **Overarching goal:** To improve **ocean literacy** and foster a **shift in social imaginary** towards water, combining scientific research and poetic imagination;
- ~ **Theoretical framework:** Archipelagic thinking, Diaspora studies, and Gender Studies.

What?



How does *WAVES* go beyond the state of the art?

- ~ Tackles the “ocean deficit” (Dobrin 2021) in ecocriticism;
- ~ Expands the Blue Humanities beyond its Euro-American orientation;
- ~ Enriches archipelagic studies with a diasporic perspective.

Embodiment within the archipelago

- ~ Theoretical framework: island feminism and archipelagic ecocriticism;
- ~ Gendered ecocritical reading of Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (2020).

The ongoing leaking between human and nonhuman realms is not a detrimental condition to repair, but a vital resource for imagining survival on an increasingly precarious planet.



Between land and sea

- ~ **Interdependency** of ecological, social, and cultural systems (De Loughrey 2019);
- ~ “A microcosm of **multispecies alliances**” (Mentz 2024, p. 95);
- ~ Contemporary women’s archipelagic narratives as **ecofeminist interventions** (Marland 2023).



(Image taken from: Caribbean University Fund website, <https://caribbeanbiodiversityfund.org>)

Island feminism

- ~ A critical framework that investigates “the agency, geographical awareness, resourcefulness, and forms of community of lives shaped by categories of islandness” (Karides 2017, p. 32);
- ~ It emphasizes the interplay between place (islands) and social construction (**gender**);
- ~ It situates islands as fundamental sites of **epistemic** and **political insight**.

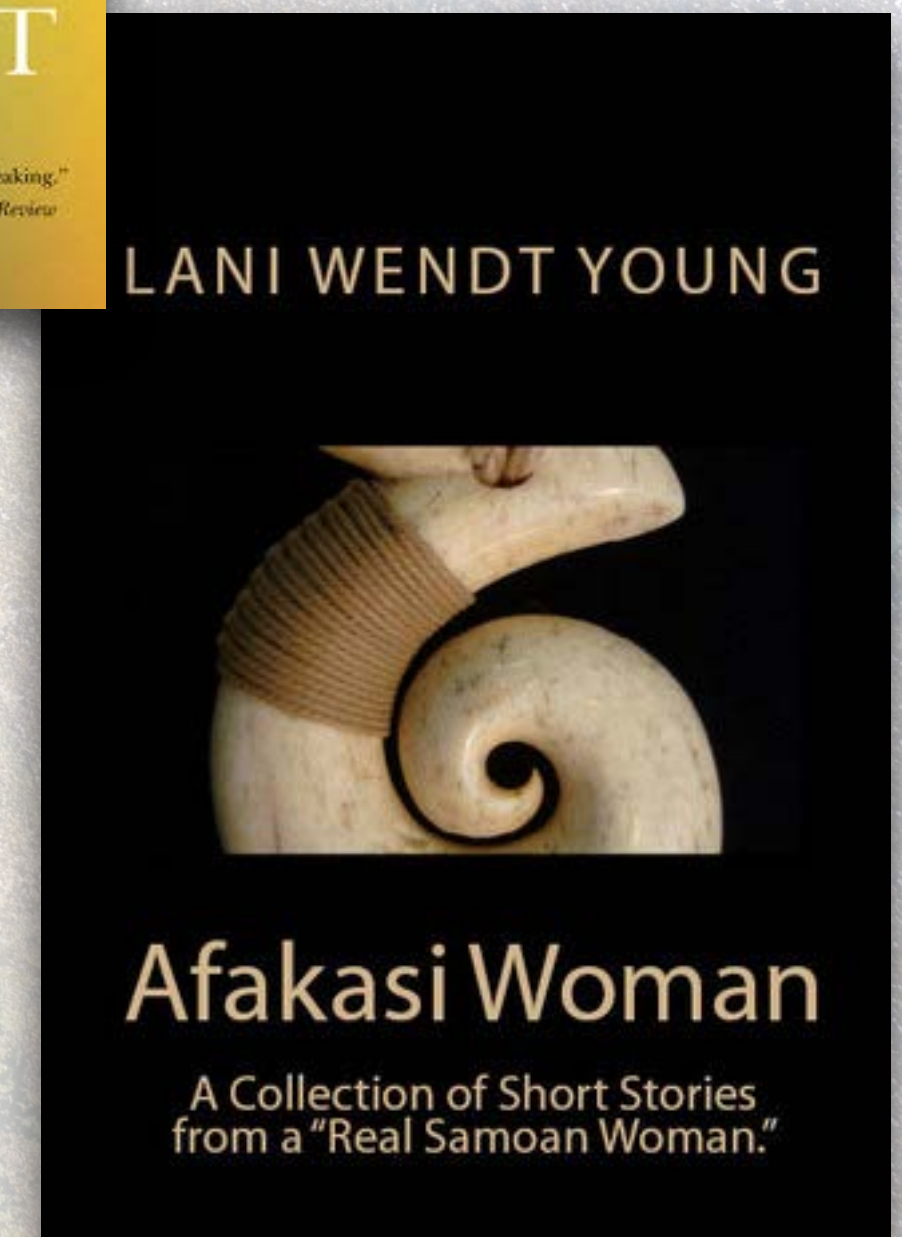
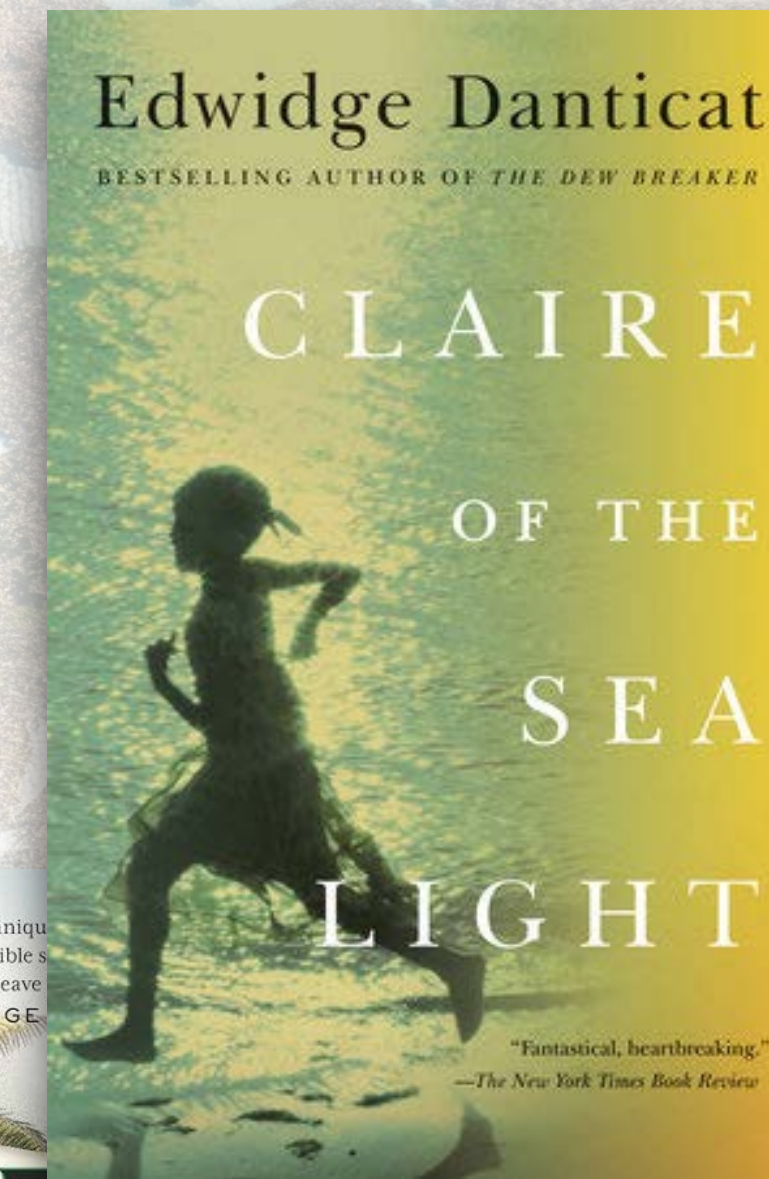
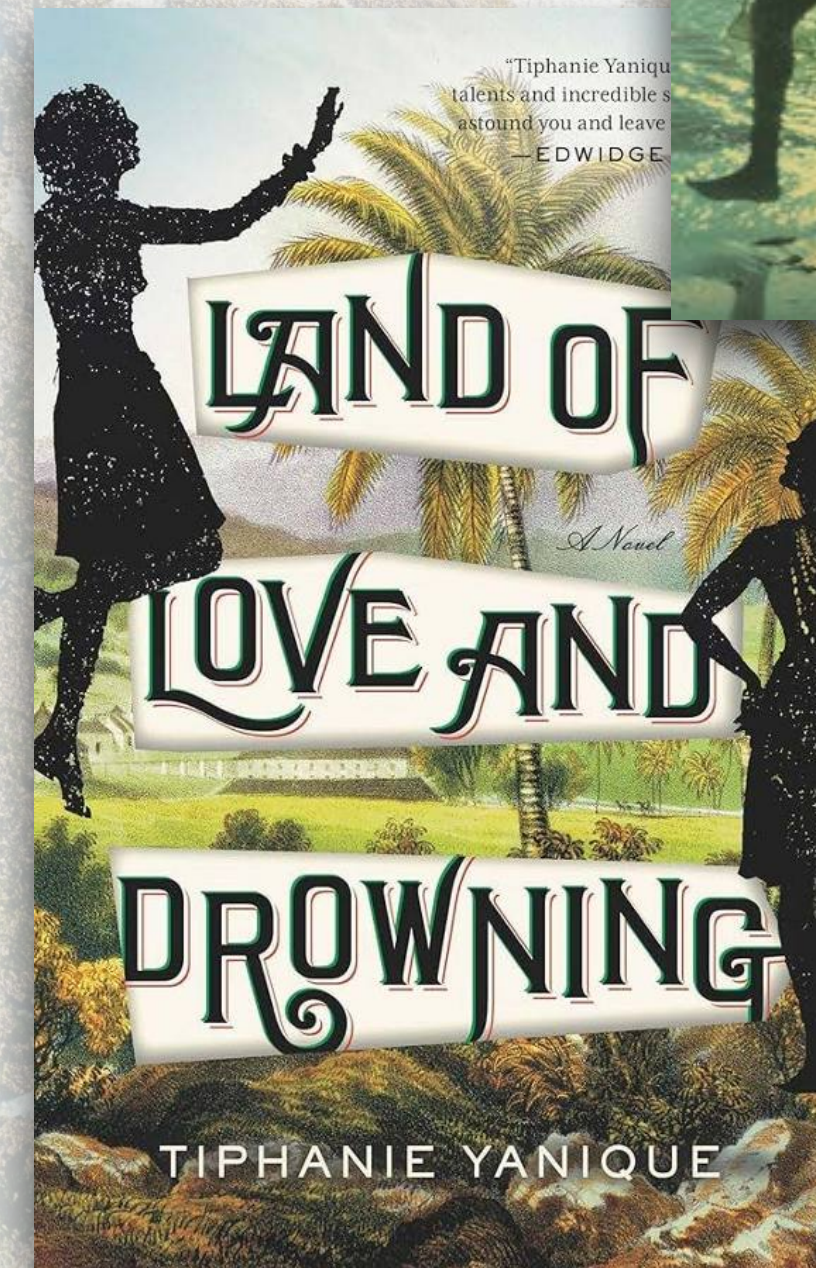


(Image taken from: Unesco website, <https://www.unesco.org/en/multi-stakeholder-gender-equality>)

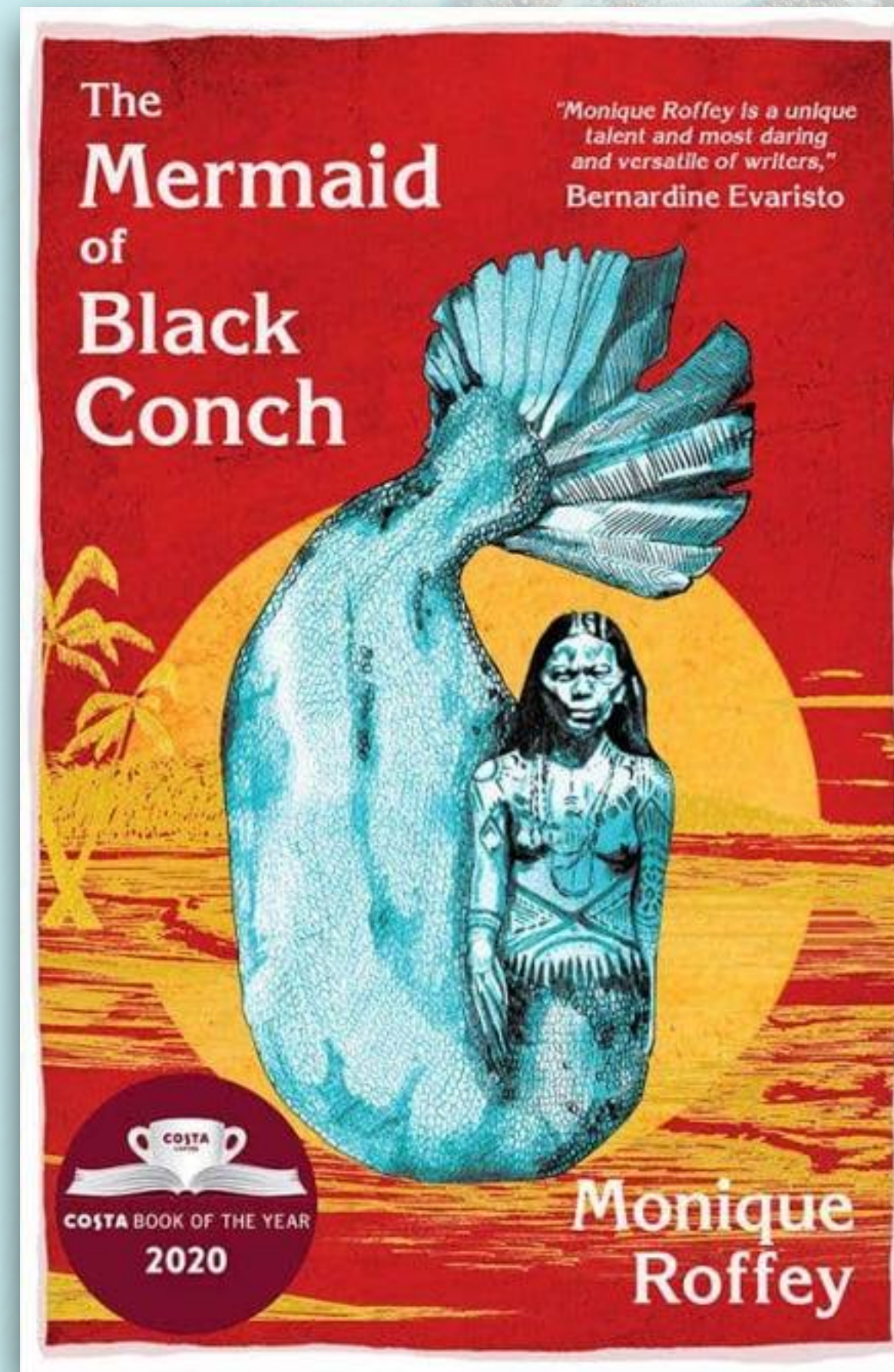
Archipelagic ecofeminism

- ~ Reposition center/periphery;
- ~ Challenge land-centric and patriarchal epistemologies;
- ~ Focus on embodiment:

“To be human is always to leak beyond the limits of that humanity.” (Neimanis 2017, p. 45)



The Mermaid of Black Conch



The Mermaid of Black Conch

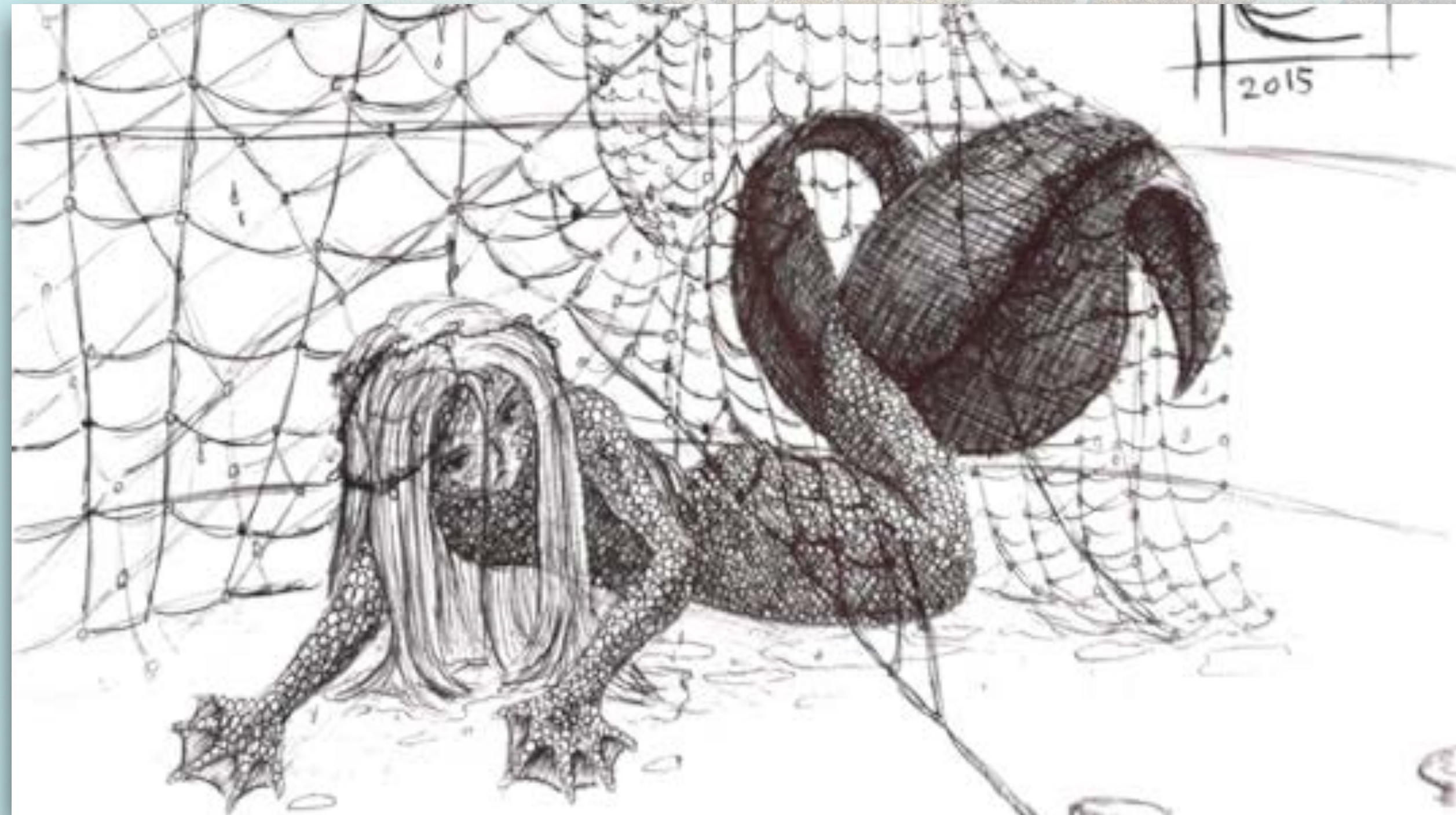


“A red-skinned woman, not black, not African. Not yellow, not a Chinese woman, or a woman with golden hair from Amsterdam. Not a blue woman, either, blue like a damn fish. Red. She was a red woman, like an Amerindian. Or anyway, her top half was red. [...] Her shoulders, her head, her breasts, and her long black hair [were] like ropes, all sea mossy and jook up with anemone and conch shell. A merwoman.”

(Roffey 2020, p. 2)



A “human fish”



“[The fishermen] didn’t like she was half-naked, half-female. [...] Was she fish or meat? [...] She was a mutation of the natural world.”

(Roffey 2020, pp. 53-55)

Metamorphosis as relational adaptation



She “[came] back to woman, and a woman from another time. [...]

Her enormous **silver tail** [began] to **come apart**.” (Roffey 2020, p. 55)



“She was from ancient times, from times when people knew magic, when people saw gods everywhere and talked to the plants, the animals and even the fish in the sea.” (Roffey 2020, p. 66)



Interspecies entanglement



“Her feet were enormous and bunioned; her toes were webbed. The arches had collapsed and so her feet caved inwards. [...] **She still smelled like the ocean**, a strong sea salt scent.” (Roffey 2020, p. 79)



“[H]e parted her legs, the legs where once there had been a fish’s tail, sealed off, banished and cursed for eternity.” (Roffey 2020, p. 144)



Elemental cycles



“Blood came back

Then fish scales

Full change to woman

And then change back to fish”

(Roffey 2020, p. 181)



Archipelagic existence



“I will live until there is no more water in the sea

I am now and forever

I will be here for the whole of time

Aycayia, Sweet Voice”

(Roffey 2020, p. 181)



Conclusion

“Changing with circumstances is the stuff of survival.” (Tsing 2015, p. 31)



Image taken from: <https://humanitiescenter.byu.edu/>.

“Trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures . . . human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems . . . shaping selves and worlds through material exchange.” (Alaimo 2010, p. 2)

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Thank you!

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