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Haunted Houses and Ghostly Homes: Kacen Callender's *Hurricane Child* as a Rewriting of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*

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Abstract: This essay responds to the dearth of analysis of young adult literature in postcolonial scholarship by placing Kacen Callender's LGBTQ+ middle-grade novel *Hurricane Child* (2018) adjacent to Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1987), a foundational text of contemporary Caribbean literature. I employ Homi Bhabha's reformulation of Sigmund Freud's *unheimlich*, or "unhomely," to interrogate how both novels complicate ideas of literal home and island home as places of fun, comfort, and safety. Just as the nostalgic image of the adoring mother discombobulates Kincaid's Annie, the figure of the physically absent mother plagues Callender's Caroline. Both characters live in symbolically haunted houses. Additionally, shame lurks in the corners of Caroline's psyche as she comes to recognize her budding same-sex desires, which put her at risk of being ghosted, or erased, as a valued member of her community. Extending the psychic trauma from the narrators to the histories of their islands, and relying on critical work on the Gothic by Avery F. Gordon, Maisha Wester, and others, this essay excavates politically charged depictions of landscapes for signs of literal spirits and evidence of haunting by slavery, colonialism, and the neocolonial systems of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Keywords: Caribbean, Gothic, haunting, young adult, LGBTQ+

I. Introduction

This essay interprets Kacen Callender's middle-grade (MG) novel *Hurricane Child* (2018), winner of a 2019 Stonewall Young Adult

Literature Award,[1] as an intentional rewriting of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985), one of the foundational texts of contemporary Caribbean literature. Whereas the eponymous character of Kincaid's novel grieves the loss of the physical and emotional intimacy she had with her mother when she was a little girl, Caroline, the protagonist of Callender's narrative, mourns the literal loss of her mother, who left her and her father over a year before the story begins. In this way, Callender creates a precise manifestation of what Annie perceives as maternal absence, with both narrators experiencing similar emotional devastation. The girls occupy symbolically haunted houses: the ostensibly perfect, doting mother—a figment from and of the past—discombobulates Annie, erupting into her present, and the figurative specter of a physically absent mother similarly plagues Caroline. Employing Homi Bhabha's reformulation of Sigmund Freud's *unheimlich*, or "unhomely," as well as more recent conversations on Gothic traditions in African diasporic and postcolonial fiction, I illustrate how *Hurricane Child* and *Annie John* can be read as more than simple coming-of-age stories. These narratives push beyond instructions on how to cope with the changes of adolescence. Specifically, ghosts and notions of haunting disrupt hegemonic ideologies, such as the dismissal of non-Western cultural practices, rigid conceptualizations of family, the denigration of queer desire as perverse, and a belief in the intrinsic safety and stability of home spaces, including one's nation of citizenship. Below, I outline the traits of conventional Gothic literature to explore how Callender inverts these tropes; investigate the significance of ghosts and apparitions in *Hurricane Child*—including the specter of *Annie John* that haunts the young adult (YA) novel; and consider the particular impact of LGBTQ+ perspectives on the interventions Callender makes as an African Caribbean writer who invokes the Gothic.

As a work of MG/YA literature, and a rare LGBTQ+ Caribbean text, *Hurricane Child* exists as a potent resource for postcolonial critiques and decolonization. It has the potential to expose and inspire young readers who are primed for activist engagement yet are often conditioned to accept the status quo by conventional school curricula. One might question whether the conservatism entrenched in much children's

literature—the "top-down power" ensconced in materials created by adults who define and dictate children's behaviors (Bernstein 879)—can be successfully countered in any narrative for adolescents, particularly one published by Scholastic Press, which has sponsored and supplied weeklong book fairs across the United States, Canada, Australia, India, Thailand, and the United Kingdom for over thirty years and must cater to a range of political and social environments.[2] *Hurricane Child*, however, is a striking vehicle for confronting the established frameworks of home, church, and state; its focus on haunting is particularly effective for eroding hierarchical notions of the Real, the logical, and binary definitions of developed and undeveloped/underdeveloped cultures. This terminology of development means that the latter grouping of cultures is constructed as unsophisticated, immature, and lacking adequate progress: a timeline parallel to the advancement one is expected to make when maturing from childhood to adulthood. As a work for young readers, however, Callender's novel distills rather than simplifies themes. Further, Callender's adolescent protagonist contests readings of children as powerless and naive in tandem with unnuanced perceptions of colonial subjects as either complicit and subjugated or defiant and active. Caroline Murphy embodies resistance despite belonging to one of the most silenced, invisible, and symbolically ghosted populations of many communities. She is not just a child living in a colonized state; she is female, of African descent, dark-skinned, from a rural community, and queer.

II. Employing the Gothic

Hurricane Child relates the adolescent encounters of twelve-year-old Caroline Murphy, who lives in the present-day Caribbean and travels frequently between tiny Water Island and the more heavily populated St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands (USVI), where she attends school in the archipelago's capital city of Charlotte Amalie. Caroline's existence as a girl about to enter her teenage years is marked by eruptions of a physical nature (hormones, hair, breasts, curves) and a psychological one, in the form of ideas previously blocked from her consciousness: possible reasons for her mother's departure, her parents' romantic and

sexual histories, her own burgeoning sexuality, and an awareness of herself as a racialized subject and a "less than" US citizen living away from the mainland.[3] As a person who sees ghosts and has a missing mother, Caroline is the perfect subject for a Gothic narrative in which specters "appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (Gordon xvi).

European and US Gothic narratives, long associated with terror and the macabre, are rife with apparitions, spirits, and forces beyond the control of the main characters. Other common motifs identified by Gothic literature scholars include death, darkness, and decay; impressions of psychic deterioration and disintegration; mounting paranoia; isolation; claustrophobia in enclosed spaces; old houses or mansions—often haunted—with labyrinthine or subterranean passageways; sublime natural landscapes; diabolical villains who threaten the innocence of the protagonist; and a sense of deep foreboding when it comes to confronting the forbidden.[4] David Punter notes that this body of work often engages with concepts of "the barbaric" and "bring[s] us up against the boundaries of the civilized" (183–84).[5] Gothic tropes must therefore be scrutinized for the ways they present the Caribbean and other spaces that were appropriated as part of European imperialism and US expansionism: as monolithic sites of seduction and savagery, disease, and geographical, human, and demonic dangers. These tropes continue to linger even as they are mitigated by tourists' desires for sun, sea, and sand; danger and savagery might not be as evident in mainstream depictions of the region, but the potential for seduction and the satiation of every craving are commonly promised by the tourist industry.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth-century, British Gothic writers mined the colonies for "a vast source of frightening 'others' who would . . . bring freshness and variety to the genre" (Paravisini-Gebert 229), making the Caribbean and other locations in the global South "both part of and alien to the empire . . . [and thus popular] repositories of Gothic conventions" (Ibarra 125). Specifically, anxieties about slave rebellions, African religious practices, miscegenation, and the unfamiliar climate and landscapes generated many of the specters of classical Gothic writing in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British texts. In

twentieth-century literature, "popular revolts, military dictatorships, [and] economic speculation and exploitation . . . produced their share of violence and anxiety. . . . [I]mperialist and economic interests . . . assumed less concrete, insidious forms, though they [were] ever more powerful in their transnational character, rapacity and aggressiveness" (Edwards and Vasconcelos 5). Perhaps most insidiously, Gothic texts from Europe and the US have conflated the physical darkness of night and shadows with the complexions of people of African descent, crafting strong associations between blackness and evil. Black readers of these narratives have found themselves in the precarious position of being haunted by their own cultures, family members, and reflections.

As Ann B. González unpacks in her discussion of Latin American children's literature, postcolonial studies as a field strives "to dismantle . . . the entrenched belief that civilization, modernity, and progress are the patrimony of Europe" (*Postcolonial* 3). This project, she suggests, must include educational and popular texts for young people. *Hurricane Child* illuminates how colonial legacies conjure their own types of ghosts and add to the number of spirits haunting present-day landscapes where people of color reside. For example, early in the novel, Caroline worries that the specters of enslaved peoples might stalk her. Rather than channel European apprehensions about slave revolts and Black violence, the novel speaks to the brutality endured by people of African descent in the Americas. Thus, when Caroline's father awakens her one night to see a school of glowing jellyfish that has drifted close to shore near their home, she notes: "I was scared at first, because by then I'd learned in school about how slaves were sometimes dumped off slave ships before they could even make it to the island. I thought the lights were the ghosts of those slaves coming for me because they were jealous that I'd been born free" (Callender 6). Even as a pre-teen, she is aware of the history of racial trauma that plagues her home island, the larger Caribbean, and much of the rest of the hemisphere, making these sites haunted homespaces.[6] Callender effectively challenges the notion that all homes—whether temporary residence on a ship during the months-long Middle Passage, a plantation house in which one was forced to labor as a slave, an entire island, or a nation—are inherently safe for all subjects.[7]

Hurricane Child's adolescent protagonist and setting in the USVI provide the perfect vehicle for the growing unease featured in an expanding number of Gothic texts for adults by contemporary African diasporic writers and signal the genre's potential for resistance, regardless of the reader's age. These recent narratives are by no means uniform; they map out a range of responses to the Gothic as described in Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's analysis of the Caribbean as "a space that learned to 'read' itself in literature through Gothic fiction" and thus used the mode for self-examination (233), sometimes adopting anxieties and themes but more often, especially in later years, defying them. Speaking to the recent use of the Gothic as a counterstrike to anti-Blackness, literary scholar Sheri-Marie Harrison argues that because the ghosts of racist violence are clearly not fading away, contemporary artists of African descent have been more engaged than ever with staging a "literary Gothic revival" ("New Black Gothic"). *Hurricane Child* and other YA works are clearly a part of this movement, which challenges imperial and neocolonial portraits of the Caribbean that perpetuate a "spectacular fascination for foreign otherness in the form of dark and unknown tropical fears" (Ibarra 121). Additionally, unlike the myriad fantasy novels that Ebony Elizabeth Thomas astutely assesses for their attempts to pose a "supposedly raceless terrain . . . [as] a means of escape from our raced, embodied existences" but which end up with a "colormuteness" that "does *not* render Black bodies shadowless," as one might initially expect—"Quite the contrary. The shadow cast becomes darker and more ominous still for its very unspeakability" (30; emphasis in original)—Callender specifies colors, complexions, and culture. Local beliefs and practices are presented from the point of view of the ostensibly marginalized subject, shifting fear and anxiety away from racialized individuals onto systemic racism, as well as cultural, economic, and political exploitation. Materials for young audiences can be incredibly effective at driving these messages home because they convey young protagonists' interior conflicts and observations of the world with plain language; they describe everyday experiences that turn sharply away from conventional Gothic ideas of the region as "synonymous with extravagance and excess; . . . sensuality and exoticism" (Edwards and Vasconcelos 4).

III. Ghosts and Apparitions in *Hurricane Child*

In *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, editors María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren identify 1993 as a watershed year for the field: Jacques Derrida published *Specters of Marx*, marking the initiation of a turn towards the spectral in cultural criticism and prompting an increasing number of scholars to employ the figure of the ghost as an instrument of analysis and methodology.[8] In US African American literary studies, however, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) had already impelled readers to engage with questions of haunting and possession and explore links between the past, present, and future—particularly the question of what the spirits of the past might mean for people of African heritage. In narratives such as *Beloved* and August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1987), the ghost is revealed not to be "some ineffable excess" (Gordon xvi); instead, each spirit "has a real presence and demands its due, your attention" (xvi). Like the presence of the crawling already baby in Morrison's novel and the specter of James Sutter in Wilson's play, the ghosts in Caroline's world refuse to be ignored. When Caroline's father identifies the glowing jellyfish as "almost as pretty as heaven" but Caroline perceives them as the spirits of enslaved people who died by suicide, she gets "stung so bad [she] had a rash for days" (Callender 7). Just as apparitions, although not physically tangible, have the power to affect those living in the present in substantive ways, the beings Caroline interacts with—from the jellyfish to a variety of phantasmic presences—clamor for her notice.

Many studies of the Gothic in women's literature assert that ghosts "reestablish a form of historical continuity by linking past to present," especially in eras of "massive social, political, and economic upheaval," and anchor the past "to an unsettled and chaotic present" (Weinstock 7). Morrison's novel, however, emphasizes the simultaneous damage that the past can wreak on the present for traumatized subjects, and how this process was distinctly racialized in the case of formerly enslaved peoples. Speculative fiction scholar Avery F. Gordon hones in on this issue: "[P]aying attention to ghosts can, among other things, radically change how we know and what we know about state terror and about slavery and the legacy of American freedom that derives from it" (27–28).

Callender's protagonist occupies a Caribbean space that is also a US territory. Some might call this the colonial periphery, but Callender disputes the authority of colonial centers—influence and power that have rendered the periphery as almost invisible—by destabilizing Eurocentric knowledge systems that define what is real. In other words, by bringing the beyond to the center—both in terms of the otherworldly but also in terms of the Virgin Islands' relationship to the US—*Hurricane Child* promotes alternate ways of knowing and seeing the world.[9]

The novel is populated with many examples of literal phantoms and apparitions, which serve a variety of functions. Caroline, like many children around the world, is afraid of the ghost-story spirits that are associated with death and threaten harm. When she passes by a child's grave, for example, she remembers to "keep [her] hands behind [her] back, since the ghosts of children have been known to bite off fingers, or so [she has] been told" (Callender 80). Readers of *Hurricane Child* will likely understand that Caroline has absorbed adult warnings about the impoliteness of pointing, which have been channeled into folktales: accounts of finger-eating ghosts are meant to curb unmannerly behavior. However, many of the spirits that Caroline witnesses are of a more mundane type: "I see the things no one else sees. A woman is standing behind a tree in the shade, watching me, but when I turn my head to say good morning, she's gone again—nothing but the sunshine and baby green leaves swaying in the breeze" (7). These beings seem to be a part of her everyday, ordinary world. They are not the spectacularly gruesome ghouls of Eurocentric fare, according to Enrique Ajuria Ibarra's description of the European Gothic's "fascination for foreign otherness in the form of dark and unknown tropical fears" (121). Callender's narrator speaks from the center of her own world and illuminates literal and figurative shadowy spaces—including the boundary between life and death—detaching them from notions of terror.

Importantly, the style of Callender's novel is mimetic. It appears to follow the bildungsroman plot and employs a realistic style. It is quite similar to *Annie John* in this way; Kincaid's novel is not typically considered to be speculative fiction. The herbal baths and protective black sachets prescribed by Annie's mother's obeah woman, for instance, are not

presented as existing in a fantastic world of spells and magic. Although some critics have labelled *Annie John* magical realism,[10] Kincaid insists that she was constructing the reality of her cultural upbringing:

> [There was] a strange perception about reality where I grew up [in Antigua]. Reality was not to be trusted[.] [T]he thing you saw before you was not really quite to be trusted because it might represent something else. And the thing you didn't see might be right there—I mean, there were so many stories about people who were followed home by a dead person, and the dead person eventually led them into a pond. (qtd. in Cudjoe 230)

Kincaid identifies the idea of a singular verifiable reality as desirable but also "very childish": "[O]nly a child, really, would ask, 'Well, can't you just give me one answer, and that's that, and it stays there and it doesn't move, and it doesn't do anything except . . . what it does, and it's just itself. And it's not two-sided, and it's not full of this-and-that" (qtd. in Cudjoe 231). Kincaid undermines the alleged superiority of Western Enlightenment philosophical traditions, overturning European systems of scientific thought that privilege logic and supposedly rational beliefs. Callender, in turn, reiterates this assertion of the complexity of Caribbean culture and modes of understanding.

In recent spectralities theory, scholars take more care to respect beliefs like Callender's and Kincaid's, situating ghosts as a part of contemporary reality. Gordon writes that "[h]aunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import" (7). Rather than understanding the invisible as absence, Gordon focuses on the mental, emotional, and physical effects that can result from the things that haunt us. She asserts that "that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (8). When Caroline's new friend and classmate, Kalinda Francis, mentions to Caroline that her house in Barbados was haunted, "as most houses in the islands are" (Callender 110), some readers will recall Morrison's *Beloved*, in which Baby Suggs attests to the

uselessness of moving away from her haunted home: "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (5). Haunting in the contemporary moment is not solely a matter of "being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed," but is rather one of many ways "in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance)" (Gordon xvi).

Scholars like Kathleen Brogan and Kirsten Møllegaard also focus on this aspect of "there" versus "not there": Brogan writes of the ghost as "both presence and absence, . . . stand[ing] as an emblem of historical loss as well as a vehicle of historical recovery" (29), while Møllegaard discusses the "deceptive surface realism of the there-ness" which is "foiled by a not-there-ness of historical events and people who are made silent and invisible in the . . . geocultural imaginary" (141). She also describes how "[p]hantoms of the past often represent unfulfilled desires and wrongful deeds that need attention and possible correction" (Møllegaard 139), just as haunted landscapes reveal how the past "harbors unresolved conflicts, things buried but not forgotten, ugly truths concealed beneath layers of lies, and the faint echo of a heteroglossia of muted voices" (140). Concentrating only on the symbolic nature of apparitions, however, suggests a somewhat Eurocentric perspective. In the postcolonial Caribbean context of *Hurricane Child*, hauntings are not exclusively representational; they reflect injustice but they do not merely function as allegory, and purely allusive.

Callender makes the possibility of spirits a distinct reality: Caroline and her friends do not just fear the idea of ghosts; they fear the presence of ghosts who might interact with them. Wandering around downtown one day, Caroline notes that "a little girl no one else can see follows [her], skipping along the road" (Callender 14). On another occasion, walking with her principal, Miss Joe, she observes "[a] girl even smaller than [her] run[ning] toward [them] before she bursts into moths that fly into [Caroline's] hair and make [her] near jump right out of [her] skin. Miss Joe takes no notice" (54). In the school courtyard, she sees a "little dead girl that looks like [her] sister" (132) and "a white woman standing in her nightgown" (41–42). A variety of specters populate the landscape,

not necessarily harming Caroline but carrying on their existence in the midst of the living.

Caroline is also haunted by a figure she calls "the woman in black" (28) who first appears to her when she falls out of a boat and nearly drowns: "[T]he woman . . . was standing on the ocean floor. She was black, blacker than black, blacker than even me" (4). Readers familiar with Caribbean folklore might interpret this woman as potentially threatening: *La Siren* from the French-speaking and Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the mermaids in many English-speaking regions are described as physically beautiful, but they lure humans into joining them in their watery homes, sometimes drowning them and sometimes disappearing them forever. Staying with the woman on the ocean floor would mean Caroline's separation from her parents and community, if not her death.

The woman in black reappears to Caroline later in the story during a moment of adolescent anger. As Caroline storms out of her house to her father's small fishing boat, she "see[s] her sitting there—sitting across from me like an old friend whose name I don't recall" (27). Although the woman in black is a neutral figure in their first few meetings, she seems more explicitly ominous in later incarnations: "She's standing there in the corner of my room, and she's not leaving this time, even when I look at her directly in the eye. She watches me without an expression on her face, because it seems even that is shrouded in blackness, in shadow, in darkness that's growing and spreading across my wall and my bed" (90–91). This dispersal of blackness might be read as comparable to disease, plague, or moral darkness—not only by young adult audiences but also by adults viewing the Caribbean through the lens of Gothic conventions. Perceptive readers will observe, however, that this phantasm only appears when Caroline is in crisis. She is not purely evil, nor purely good; instead, she reflects the intricacies of Caroline's own emotional landscape and the complexity of human nature—necessary for young people to recognize as they mature if they are to survive and thrive in a variety of social situations. During this bedroom scene, for instance, Caroline is experiencing debilitating doubt about her commitment to her mother after having "one of the best afternoons of [her] life"

at Kalinda's home (90). She questions "[i]f [she] even really deserve[s] to be loved at all—and if [she] do[es]n't deserve to be loved, then perhaps [she] do[es]n't deserve to be alive" (90). It would be easy to read the apparition as the embodiment of Caroline's distress, or even suicidal ideation. Rather than interpret the figure as solely metaphorical, however, I argue that Callender continually undermines the reader's ability to draw purportedly logical conclusions and explain away Caroline's encounters. By doing so, the author defies the rational explanations that are frequently employed at the conclusions of traditional Gothic texts to reassert male authority, white supremacy, and the triumph of European cultures, post-Enlightenment philosophies, and capitalist enterprises.

Caroline unsuccessfully tries to employ logic to explain the figure's presence; on one occasion, longing for her mother, she whispers, "Is that you, Mom?" (28). On another, she wonders if the spirit has frightened her mother away or has taken her against her will (92). She initially abides by traditional Gothic notions of this silent black figure (black in terms of clothing and skin color) as a malevolent force: a scary "demon" who "want[s] [her] dead" (203). However, Callender upends these constructs (blackness as evil, the Caribbean as a perpetual site of Gothic terror, etc.). Near the novel's end, Caroline gets thrown overboard (again) and "everything's so dark that I almost don't see her. And there's my woman in black. Waiting for me like she's been waiting my whole life. Come like she's ready to take me away now. Nothing I can do about that. I just close my eyes" (189). She perceives the ghost as a harbinger of death, eager to carry her into the spirit world, but her calm identification of the figure as "my" woman instead of "the" woman adds a sense of intimacy. Caroline is rescued by a neighbor and taken to the hospital. The conclusion to the event suggests that the spirit may have been serving as a protector, keeping Caroline in the physical world rather than waiting to take her out of it.

By the end of the novel, readers might still question whether the woman in black is an external force or the psychological manifestation of some part of Caroline's self, but Callender does not permit a definitive answer. She casts the figure as both darkness and light—realistic wholeness and complexity rather than unachievable perfect goodness

or all-encompassing evil. The woman in black is a "shadow going in and out, like a candle's flame flickering in the breeze" (89). Just as Caroline claims to be both alone and in the company of the woman in black (152), Callender urges readers to reject simplistic binaries and either/or models.

Despite these complexities, the narrative eventually spells out the ghostly presence as a benign one: "I haven't seen the woman in black in a long while. . . . [N]ow when I think about her, I can't help but feel a peace surging beneath my skin. I still don't really know who the woman in black is—if she's my guardian angel, if she's an ancestor from my past or future—but I know that she'll always be with me" (209). The figure is still cloaked in ambiguity, however, since the novel gestures toward the woman's existence as both external to Caroline and part of her interior life, belonging to Christian beliefs ("guardian angel"), West African cultural systems ("an ancestor" who returns to walk among the living), and an Afrofuturist speculative framework (a visitor "from my past or future").[11] Regardless of what the reader concludes, the apparition reworks conventional associations between blackness, evil, and despair in Gothic narratives; she neutralizes what Morrison identifies as the "fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire" found in much American literature (*Playing* 38).

Callender thus demonstrates a fine attunement to the vulnerability of all readers (but especially adolescents) to the racism and colonial ideology embedded in canonical fiction. Callender also highlights how texts provided in educational environments frequently contribute to the systemic degradation of the voices of the Other. Caroline's schoolbooks provide her with a plethora of information that causes her to doubt her own experiences, culture, and sanity. She reads that supernatural beings "are made up completely in one's own mind, and especially in the minds of those who are delusional and have been through emotional traumas to help them cope" (Callender 96). This knowledge possesses her, in a sense, and her community's knowledge is ghosted, erased—a process Gordon links to Michel Foucault's work on repressed or subjugated knowledge, which she defines as "'disqualified,' marginalized, fugitive knowledge from below and outside the institutions of official

knowledge production" (Gordon xviii). Callender's choice to write a novel about a child's healthy adolescent development spotlights the ways that European colonialism frequently tied notions of backwardness and lack of advancement to matters of faith and cultural beliefs, relegating entire peoples and their future generations to the status of children who fail to mature properly. Recycled in the name of science, the remnants of colonial ideology haunt the sources Caroline finds in the library, and, in turn, her own psychic resources, in quiet but no less ghastly ways.[12] The "[e]xcess, monstrosity, perversion, nightmares, rattling machinery" that Patricia Yaeger identifies as the "rhetorical structures" of eighteenth-century gothic texts (90) are revealed as quieter, more subtle, in *Hurricane Child*, but the danger is no less real. Individual incidents of easily discernable haunting—horrors in single rooms or residences, on stretches of road, or beleaguering particular people—have become inconspicuous disturbances that permeate whole regions, cultures, and multiple generations, or what Yaeger calls "a regime of haunting" in her analysis of the Southern Gothic.[13]

When considering this "regime of haunting" in *Hurricane Child*, one should not overlook the nature of the US presence in the Virgin Islands. The governing nation can be framed as a malevolent spirit possessing the body of the tiny band of islands. As I have explored elsewhere, Callender's novel addresses the enduring presence of colonial exploitation through its many gestures toward tourist involvement in the culture and economy of the USVI and, by extension, the rest of the Caribbean (Anatol 81). Anne McClintock brings attention, however, to how "imperial ghosting" limits readers' perceptions of the US as a colonizing force. Contemporary rhetoric and records create

> a doubleness, whereby administered forgettings and guarded secrets leave a kind of counter-evidence: material and spectral traces, shadowy aftereffects, and temporal disturbances. . . . Imperial ghosting throws haunted shadows across different historical moments and generations, creating the temporal palimpsests, visual figures, and the uncanny anachronisms that I call imperial déjà vu. (McClintock 821)

Thus, although the US joins Great Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, and the Knights of Malta as having, at various points in time, laid claim to what are now called the USVI, only the European countries are traditionally associated with the ghostly remnants of colonialism. Perhaps because governmental control passed to the US near the end of World War I, it is not usually aligned with the more egregious human rights violations perpetrated by colonizers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although it is equally culpable of different types of oppression, the US did not directly administer the legal, physical, and psychological violence of slavery and sugar, cotton, and indigo production on the islands prior to the Virgin Islands' Emancipation Day in 1848 or the punishing labor laws that followed over the second half of the nineteenth century (never mind that it benefitted enormously from the triangle trade established between Europe, Africa, and North America/the Caribbean). *Hurricane Child* raises the specter of the ways the US continues to profit as a neocolonial power, owning the islands and denying them sovereignty. Residents of the USVI are classified as part of the US without being viewed as integral parts of it.[14] Callender's ghostly narrative effectively plays with notions of who gets threatened with possession—of lands, of bodies—and who is haunted by a history of imperial and racist brutality.

IV. The Spirit of *Annie John*

After publishing *Annie John*, Kincaid followed up on its implicit anticolonial critique in *A Small Place* (1988), which issues a searing indictment of colonialism's reprehensible legacies in the Caribbean and specifically on the island of Antigua. The essay begins by implicating tourists in the neocolonial campaign, a strategy echoed by Callender in *Hurricane Child*. Most significantly for my analysis, Library of Congress cataloguing data classifies *A Small Place* as "Kincaid, Jamaica—Homes and haunts—Antigua." The word "haunts" is not literal (i.e., it is meant as a noun instead of a verb), but the idea of a spiritual haunting is definitively evoked in the book's illustrations: black-and-white reproductions of several colonial prints of Black laborers are rendered in such faded, low resolution that the figures appear to be mere shadows—phantoms

of the colonial past that linger in the government corruption, lack of quality healthcare and public education, tourist exploitation, and other contemporary travesties depicted in Kincaid's writing.

Extending the notion of Kincaid's work as a vehicle for spirits, I posit that in addition to the ghostly presences that dot the landscape of *Hurricane Child*, the MG novel is symbolically haunted by Kincaid's *Annie John*, which was published over thirty years earlier.[15] Each narrator bears a striking resemblance to her mother—an element of congruence between the texts but also the type of eerie doubling for which conventional Gothic texts are known.[16] Caroline suggests that viewing her mother is like looking at her own reflection (Callender 178–79), and Annie and her mother even share the same name: "She was my mother, Annie; I was her daughter, Annie" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 105). Unsettling mirror images and doppelgangers are frequently associated with the Gothic, but Callender's duplications do not carry the same unhomely edge. Neither does the absent mother, a common feature of conventional Gothic texts. Both Annie and Caroline perseverate on their ostensibly lost mothers, but Kincaid and Callender carefully undermine the Gothic foundations that situate absent maternal figures as the sources of female protagonists' vulnerability and the heart of the Gothic novel's terror.

Both narrators are unnerved—haunted, so to speak—by the notion that a child without an adoring mother is a source of humiliation, such as when Caroline wonders, "[H]ow do I begin to explain . . . [h]aving a mother that's left me behind? Would Kalinda think I'd done something to deserve being deserted?" (Callender 72). However, both narratives hint at the fact that social constructions of motherhood and mother-daughter bonding can bind, like a trap: Annie and Caroline become symbolically possessed by visions of a perpetual, never-changing form of mother-love. Adolescent Annie, for example, recalls delightful instances of going through the contents of her mother's trunk. The items, which include old baby clothes, blankets, and photographs, are each removed, aired, and connected to a story about her infancy and toddler years. Storytelling that bonds mother and child inhabits Callender's book as well: Caroline recalls that her mother used to relate the story of her

birth "at least once a month, but sometimes twice, whenever she was extra in love with me" (30). Both characters hear these tales so often that they have been "practically memorized" (Callender 30). The relationships remain frozen in the past, without the potential for growth or a vision of the future. Neither narrative frames the retrieval of the past in a frightening way, with the Gothic eeriness of a text like *Beloved*, for example, in which memories can possess physical bodies, chase, and attack. However, the Gothic preoccupation with the ghosts of the past still rears up. The everyday manner of this resurrection, antithetical to Gothic conventions, is quite important.

One cannot doubt Callender's acquaintance with Kincaid's oeuvre: Caroline's school principal, Loretta Joseph ("Miss Joe") mentions Kincaid in a list of African diasporic women authors who once "saved her life" (Callender 56). Other traces of *Annie John* crop up throughout Callender's novel. On the most basic level, each protagonist is an only child, struggling with the process of growing up on a small Caribbean island. The initial chapters of both works are rooted in death—a striking detail given that narratives in the bildungsroman tradition often begin with births. *Annie John*, for instance, opens with Annie observing a cemetery from the yard of the house her family has rented for the summer holidays and commenting that until then she "had not known that children died" (Kincaid 4). In *Hurricane Child*, Caroline goes to visit her father's abandoned fishing boat as the narrative commences, and "walk[s] through the dead mangrove, brown water smelling like something besides the trees died, . . . dead palms from coconut trees covering the ground like hairy carcasses" (Callender 2). She also notes that in the family's garden, "the flowers have been slowly dying, no matter how much [she] water[s] them" (5). And later, when she accompanies Kalinda home from school, the two must walk by the neighboring cemetery that houses "the children's grave with the overflowing brown and crispy flowers, fluttering in the wind like cockroach wings" (80). This reference to a house next to a graveyard and the specificity of the decaying flowers at a children's burial site evokes Kincaid's novel, conjuring the spirit of the earlier narrative into the latter. These unusual starting points allow readers to consider that what ensues in each narrative is

taking place in a metaphorical space of life-after-death—an environment filled entirely with spirits.

A number of other small but striking details in *Hurricane Child* summon the specter of *Annie John*. Just as Annie often keeps the books she has borrowed from the library, knowing full well that she is stealing, Caroline also pilfers books from her school library (Callender 98). And like Annie, Caroline expresses anxiety about the danger of the sea. Annie's fear surges despite her mother's comfort level in the water and despite growing up on an island, while Caroline states that she is "afraid of the ocean" (Callender 148) notwithstanding her daily boat trips from Water Island to St. Thomas to get to and from school. Annie's father is an accomplished carpenter who has made several pieces of furniture in their home "with his own hands" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 132–33), and although Caroline's father is not a carpenter, Kalinda's father is. Kalinda mentions that he is "[n]ot just [interested in] fixing cabinets and that kind of thing, you know, but carving whole chairs and tables and chests and anything else imaginable from wood" (Callender 69). The ghosts of *Annie John* also surface in Caroline's burgeoning awareness of the physical changes she is experiencing due to puberty. Her remarks on her changing body's odor ("[I]t became apparent that a horrible smell had begun to ooze from my skin" [Callender 43]) resemble Annie's observations ("[W]hen I perspired the smell was strange, as if I had turned into a strange animal" [Kincaid, *Annie John* 25]). Uncanny doubling persists as both girls are surveilled by their mothers: late in Callender's narrative, Doreen admits to watching Caroline "on Main Street" without letting her know (184). This confession resurrects one of the most explosive scenes in *Annie John*, which occurs when Annie's mother confronts her daughter about speaking to boys on a street downtown: "[S]he said that she had been standing inside a store that afternoon, . . . when, on looking up, she observed me making a spectacle of myself in front of four boys" (Kincaid 102).[17] The literary haunting signifies a strong relationship between one "small island" African Caribbean writer and another, who is not a male or European antecedent.

To be clear, I envision *Annie John* as a specifically spectral presence in *Hurricane Child* and not simply as an artistic influence on the YA novel

(and far less, a Bloomian predecessor); in other words, Callender's book does not simply pay tribute to its literary forerunner. My argument for intertextual haunting is an important first step toward undermining certain models of authority, including Western constructs of linear time and logic and the heterosexual imperatives of contemporary society. Building on Jarrod Hayes' investigations in *Queer Roots for the Diaspora: Ghosts in the Family Tree*, I seek a way to resist ideas of bona fide beginnings and the weight granted to notions of origins perpetuated by "roots narratives": these searches for origins rely on a "model of kinship that excludes alternative forms of affiliation and descent" (Hayes 10). Interpreting *Annie John* as an apparition, instead of presenting Kincaid as a literary foremother, avoids imagery that privileges biological lines of descent in conventional family trees—trees that Hayes describes as "haunted by the queer others that patrilineal genealogy seems to marginalize" (2). Édouard Glissant's formulations of rhizomatic identity, inspired by the theoretical work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and the mangrove swamps of the Caribbean landscape, provide a productive model, in which "roots do not necessarily precede the tree" and "'unauthorized' models of descent" can exist (Hayes 4). Thus, Callender holds authority as a queer writer, as a Black writer, as a Caribbean writer, and as a writer of works specifically intended for children and young adults—all frequently marginalized categories.

V. Queering the Gothic Caribbean

Besides residing in houses haunted by their ideas of lost mothers and on islands haunted by the legacies of slavery and neocolonial exploitation, Annie and Caroline live in societies haunted by the specter of the queer, and in this way I read *Hurricane Child* as channeling the spirit of *Annie John* once again. Callender does not simply inherit the key features of Kincaid's work; the author summons scenes and characters in ways that connect spectrality, queer identities, and Blackness in a tangle of roots and limbs, with the novel becoming its own distinct generative point. As it employs the Gothic to expose the terrors of colonial domination and dispel the alleged horrors of dark spaces such as Caribbean landscapes and the mindscapes and cultural practices of African Caribbean people,

it simultaneously brings light to the shadowy existence of Queer-Trans* (QT) people in the diaspora, and notions of queer perversion.[18]

The ghost of the woman in black, for example, appears to Caroline when Anise, who has long taunted Caroline at school, finds out about her feelings for Kalinda and declares that she will "burn in hell, and that [she is] disgusting, and that [she] shouldn't even be alive" (Callender 127). The intensity of adolescent homophobia is not reminiscent of any scene in Kincaid's work, but Caroline's passionate emotions for her new classmate are. When Annie believes she has fallen out of her mother's favor, for example, she turns to Gwen, a girl she meets on her first day at a new school: "At the end of the day, Gwen and I were in love, and so we walked home arm in arm together" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 33). Annie later expresses fascination for the Red Girl, a tomboyish child who hates baths and whose hair "was so unruly it had to be forcibly twisted into corkscrews. . . . [T]hey stood straight up, and when she walked they bounced up and down as if they were something amphibian and alive" (56). Kalinda's dreadlocks strongly resemble the Red Girl's corkscrew twists. Furthermore, the Red Girl appears and disappears suddenly, leaving the island much like Kalinda does. In these ways, Callender amplifies the hints of a fleeting queer presence in Kincaid's text, one that is suggestive not of a supernatural or alternative reality but a very real (im)materiality.

Caroline initially links her sightings of apparitions with her homoerotic feelings for Kalinda since both fall into the realm of social taboos: "[The woman in black's] existence reminds me of when I think of something so outlandish and silly, such as the desire to hold Kalinda's hand" (Callender 97). As Kara Keeling discusses in *Queer Times, Black Futures*, we live in a time of "quotidian violence that secures the existing organization of things. . . . [It] does so in part by making the concepts 'queer' and 'Black' appear as aberrations while at the same time generating those concepts as sutures through which existing reality disavows its founding genocidal wars against Black and many other native peoples" (16). The queer African Caribbean subject connects powerfully to the spectral in that both are regarded as (socially) dead in the contexts of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and the politics and economies of

the global North. This connection is reinforced when Caroline gains enough confidence to ask Kalinda if she also sees ghosts. Kalinda throws her hand over Caroline's mouth and orders her to be quiet: "They don't like being spoken about. Speaking about the spirits is like calling their names, and once you call their names, they'll have the freedom to follow you and torture you until the end of time" (Callender 106). This silencing is reminiscent of the infamous "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" legislation in the US and the QT slogan "Silence = Death."

The silencing of QT people in Caribbean spaces becomes painfully evident in *Hurricane Child* when Caroline and Kalinda observe two older white lesbian tourists walking downtown and holding hands while adult islanders stare at them in disbelief and disapproval. Caroline, a budding queer youth, identifies with this open physical affection between two adult women. She notes that while "[g]irls my age, like Kalinda and me, hold hands all the time to show that they care for each other" (78), this expression amongst older women is forbidden in her community. Kalinda, in contrast, is overtly homophobic: "'Disgusting,' she says. 'They can't see they're both women?' She laughs. 'Does one of them think that she's a man?' She laughs again" (78). Shortly afterward, she reiterates: "I think it's gross. It's wrong" (79). She has already adopted the language of church and state. Caroline eventually challenges her friend's binary conceptualizations of right and wrong by calling for the decolonization of her knowledge base. When Kalinda asks Caroline if she believes in God, Caroline points out that "[w]hite people once used the Bible to say that we should be slaves" (135). According to the teachings of the colonizers, African beliefs in the spectral presence of the ancestors were superstitious nonsense, while Christianity preached about the Holy Spirit, ethereal angels, and an invisible God. Caroline, and hopefully the reader, comes to recognize a need for decolonizing all types of knowledge.[19]

Queer relationships between girls in *Annie John*—Annie and classmate Sonia, Annie and Gwen, and Annie and the Red Girl—have been explained away in much early Caribbean literary scholarship as Annie's displacement of her affection for her mother, but in Callender's work these non-heteronormative relationships are rendered more explicitly.

During their childhood years, for example, Caroline's mother and Miss Joe vowed to live together after graduating from high school: "We even said we would marry each other" (Callender 57), Miss Joe tells Caroline. Likewise, Caroline's feelings for Kalinda are declared and sustained over the course of the novel. She recalls her schoolmistress, Mrs. Wilhelmina, "teaching us about stories of children falling in love, and saying that no one so young can really love so deeply—that we don't even know what love truly is—but I know now, in this moment, that I love Kalinda Francis" (102–03). Caroline stares at Kalinda in class, often thinking of nothing and no one else, and the textual details powerfully reproduce those feelings of first love and the pressure of a teenaged crush: "I love seeing her, her dark skin the kind of brown that can't be found anywhere else in nature, only on her, and I love seeing her twisted locks piled up onto her head. I love being near her. Love how she always smells like lemongrass" (101). Significantly, Caroline's feelings are articulated in terms of the natural world, rather than with language that would position them as the product of an unnatural, non-reproductive sexual desire. Also notable is the fact that Caroline's sentiments are eventually reciprocated and validated. Kalinda is, over time, able to admit that she "feel[s] the same way" (170).

Callender overturns numerous stereotypes of women-loving women in the novel's depiction of Miss Joe, who is represented as independent, strong, and proud rather than a corruptor of young minds:

> She doesn't have a husband, and she doesn't have any children of her own. . . . I know that not many mothers like Miss Joe. They say she's a woman that isn't really a woman at all, but is a snake in disguise. When her red pickup truck breaks down, she doesn't have a man to call, so she fixes it herself. When she's thirsty or hungry, she cooks for herself and only herself. . . . She's like the slaves back in the day who weren't really slaves at all because they'd taken their freedom, and lived in their own houses, and owned their own clothes, and ate their own food. People didn't like seeing slaves like that, and people don't like seeing a woman like that now either. . . . I decide in that

> moment that I want to be precisely like Miss Joe, and I stand a little straighter. (55)

Rather than tie this character to Western beliefs and practices and the notion that homosexuality is a European import, Callender connects Miss Joe's sexual identity to the maroons, who are often perceived as Caribbean freedom fighters, the preservers of West African culture, and protectors of safe homes and enclaves away from enslavement and plantation life. In other words, the novel links same-sex desire both to freedom and to Africa. Callender never suggests that Miss Joe wishes to be a man, in adherence to binary constructions of sexual identity and simplistic extensions of how sexuality relates to gender performance. Miss Joe knows how to cook and she nurtures children in her career as a school principal. She is also allowed to maintain the authority of that position, making her a force to be reckoned with.

Additionally significant is the fact that Callender's depictions of same-sex relationships are not limited to the past. The relationship between Miss Joe and Caroline's mother does not come to fruition as they dream of in primary school, but the liaison between Caroline and Kalinda carries more hope. While Kalinda initially rejects Caroline, she does not shun her completely: she responds that she still wants to be Caroline's friend, even though she believes that "what [she] feel[s] is a sin" (150). Her reaction is problematic, but it opens up a space for queer adolescent existence in ways that news stories about the stonings and other physical attacks on QT people in the Caribbean and much adult QT fiction do not. If, as Harrison contends, works by Audre Lorde, Patricia Powell, Shani Mootoo, and others represent one wave of writing that asserts the place of the non-heteronormative Caribbean subject "and presents queerness as a site of potential regeneration rather than of devolution" ("Marlon James" 8), and Marlon James' writing functions "a new iteration of the black Gothic aesthetic" (5) that is "preoccup[ied] with the enduring legacies of various forms of historical racialized oppression" but projects "a sense of the inescapability" and hopelessness of this oppression (7), *Hurricane Child*, alongside texts like Junauda Petrus' *The Stars and the Blackness Between Them* (2019), represents yet another

surge: Caribbean/diaspora fiction for children and young adults that helps them to negotiate still-forming identities and look with more confidence toward the future.

VI. Conclusion

Callender's *Hurricane Child* makes critical interventions as an African diasporic text that adapts Gothic tropes and plays with notions of what constitutes being haunted. In depicting the spirits that occupy Caroline's world as ordinary, Callender erodes conventional boundaries between the mundane and the frighteningly bizarre, the domestic and the alien, and the living and the dead but also, by extension, the center and the periphery, the metropolitan here and there of the colonies, the civilized self and the primitive or otherworldly Other. Dispelling conventional sources of Gothic eeriness and terror allows Callender to dismantle the trope's frequent correlations between spirits, evil, queerness, ignorance, darkness, and people of African descent.

McClintock urges readers to consider the ways that ghosts symbolize "the irruption into the present of an unresolved past, pointing thereby to the possibilities of alternative futures" (827), and *Hurricane Child* provides a pathway for young readers to take up this task. While many adults might be prone to ignoring colonialism as a contemporary concern and/or to displacing its legacies onto European nations, Callender's novel outs US involvement in an ongoing imperial enterprise—a long "regime of haunting" (Yaeger 90). The trauma of colonial violence clearly erupts in the book's depictions of present-day USVI, and irrupts in Caroline's initial interpretations of the ghosts she sees, promising to distort the future if permitted to go unacknowledged and unchecked.

Allowing audiences access to a multitude of Caribbean/African/American stories, including the lost and forgotten histories of queer subjects, helps Callender to steer readers of all ages away from engaging in the violence of ghosting Black and Brown peoples who do not fit the models that have been laid out for centuries and are still perpetuated by mainstream global media. By its conclusion, *Hurricane Child* offers young readers a good deal of hope and inspiration for change, but a larger readership is necessary for true social transformation. Representing as

powerful a rendition of the unhomeliness/*unheimlich* of the island space as any adult work, the MG novel complicates fantasies of the Caribbean, and this rethinking is essential if people from the region are to have a chance of being understood in the world as fully realized, complex beings. Listening to ghosts provides one way of disrupting the authority of established transcripts.

Notes

1 The Stonewall Young Adult Literature Award is awarded annually to a picture book and a MG or young adult book for exceptional merit relating to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender experiences.

2 Correspondingly, Buckley cites scholars who debate whether the Gothic mode is inherently conventional, potentially transgressive, or "neither conservative nor radical" (23).

3 Wester's discussion of US African American Gothic narratives (from the continental US) works well here: "If American Gothic literature is concerned with . . . the problem of the repressed—specifically repressed histories—returning to haunt and demand recognition, then African American Gothic is more exactly concerned with the problem of repression itself" (28). I seek to expand definitions of "African Americans" to include African diasporic subjects in US territories like the USVI, paying close attention to historical and cultural specificities but also noting areas of coherence.

4 For example, see Goddu, Hogle, and Punter.

5 Brantlinger identifies European characters' "regression or 'going native'" and the fear of "an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism" as quintessential elements of "Imperial Gothic" narratives (230).

6 Møllegaard's insightful article on haunted landscapes in Sachar's MG novel *Holes* has been influential to my thinking on this subject. Sachar intimates that the character of Sam appears as a ghost because he was never buried; Møllegaard adds that as a Black man whose body was discarded in a lake, he also represents the hundreds of thousands who lost their lives in similarly "watery grave[s]" during the Middle Passage (153).

7 Multiple scholars of conventional Gothic literature focus on the haunted house due to longstanding architectural associations positing the house as a reflection of the human body (Büsing 160); however, this concept does not resonate in the same way for African diasporic subjects. Enslaved Africans and their descendants endured forced migrations, were positioned as property, and were tortured in the homes they were required to build and upkeep. They experienced centuries of living "unhomed," unable to fully access, claim, and identify with the landscapes, structures, or mindset of ownership required by these metaphors.

8 Møllegaard and Büsing also cite *Specters of Marx* (1994) for discussions of "hauntology": ways that specters allow readers to consider "how the past saturates the present" (Møllegaard 139) and interrogate "the veracity or solidity of the present" (Büsing 164).

9 The US government purchased the archipelago in 1917 and currently rules the islands as an unincorporated, organized territory, meaning that the US Constitution does not fully apply there; citizens are left without complete legal rights under the federal government (e.g., they cannot vote in national elections).

10 See, for example, Ngwa.

11 When Caroline asks who she thinks the spectral white woman is, Kalinda replies, "[M]aybe I will meet her in the future . . . [since] Time isn't real at all. The time before I was born, and all the days that I'm alive, and the time after I will die is all one in the same. . . . The spirits could be friends from the future or people from our past. Who knows? Maybe a spirit I see could even be me" (Callender 109). This merging of past, present, and future reveals how works from the African diaspora and the African continent have long considered time to be more flexible than European conceptions permit.

12 For a more extensive consideration of how contemporary Gothic works for young readers can be used to challenge "the ideological underpinnings, crucial omissions and problematic assumptions" of modern-day history curricula (Buckley 26), see Buckley.

13 Yaeger states that these quieter, "less operatic forms" of haunting exist "in which fragments, residues, or traces of trauma fashion a regime of haunting" (90). I am indebted to Professor Maude Hines for this source and others. She provided invaluable help on my initial draft of this essay.

14 As McClintock notes, "[t]he founding tenet of American empire is that it is no empire at all" (826).

15 Although Kincaid's short story "Ovando" has been characterized as a work of African American Gothic (see, for instance, Wester 256), *Annie John* is traditionally interpreted solely as a bildungsroman: Kincaid's semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story that charts the experiences of an adolescent girl growing up in Antigua in the 1950s.

16 Weinstock specifically connects mother-daughter doubling in supernatural fiction by nineteenth-century US women writers to mother-daughter friction. Citing Claire Kahane's "The Gothic Mirror" essay in *The (M)other Tongue*, he identifies the female Gothic as "confrontation with the mother" (Weinstock 11).

17 These scenes of maternal surveillance, in which the unseen figure of the mother trails behind her daughter, might be interpreted as additional instances of symbolic haunting.

18 Although the term "queer" has been critiqued for its exclusivity and rigid association with particular national origins, and/or racial, ethnic, and class identities, I employ it here for its potential to be encompassing and inclusive of a range of

sexualities, genders, individual practices, spaces, time periods, possibilities for existence, and challenges to a fixed and monolithic norm. Similarly, I use "QT" (Queer-Trans) as a term that embraces more groups and possible identities than LGBTQIA2S+, which risks accidentally omitting and/or misnaming people.

19 Callender's "Missus Wilhelmina," one of Caroline's teachers, serves as the embodiment of colonized knowledge and white-skin privilege. The woman "had a white great-great-great-grandpa from Saint Martin that she likes to talk about all the time because he made her clear-skinned" (9), and she dislikes Caroline, who is "the darkest student in the school with the thickest hair" (10). She tells the narrator that she must behave especially well since "it'll be hard for me to get married with skin as dark as mine" (10).

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