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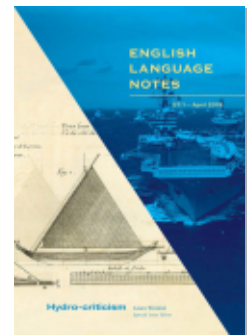
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Canal Zone Modernism: Cendrars, Walrond, and Stevens at the  
"Suction Sea"

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## Canal Zone Modernism

### Cendrars, Walrond, and Stevens at the “Suction Sea”

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HARRIS FEINSOD

*Abstract* This essay is a narrowly drawn exercise in comparison at a narrow passage of marine transit—the Panama Canal Zone. It argues that the spatial typology of the “zone” might supply one of the figures for a tropological history of comparative modernism at sea. The essay follows disparate works—by the Swiss avant-garde poet Blaise Cendrars, the West Indian writers Claude McKay and Eric Walrond, the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, and the American modernist poet Wallace Stevens—into the space of conflicts and disparities that characterizes the Canal Zone as a peculiar choke point of maritime globalization.

*Keywords* Panama Canal, transoceanic modernism, Eric Walrond, Wallace Stevens, Blaise Cendrars

An illusion of cosmopolitan choice accompanies the reader who contemplates transoceanic modernism’s many ports of embarkation—Alexandria, Antwerp, Buenos Aires, Colón, Hamburg, Lisbon, San Francisco, Shanghai, Yokohama, and so on. It is the sort of illusion rhapsodized by Fernando Pessoa’s heteronym Álvaro de Campos, the British naval engineer whose poem “Ode marítima” (“Maritime Ode,” 1915) praises “O Grande Cais Anterior” (The Great Primordial Wharf) from which he gazes out upon the world.<sup>1</sup> Intoxicated by modernity’s quayside coal fumes, Campos expresses in his expansive odes a futurist fantasy of union with the very engines of oceanic passage and the cargoes they carry: “Içam-me em todos os cais. / Giro dentro das hélices de todos os navios” (I’m hoisted up on every dock. I spin in the propellers of every ship). Even Campos’s most conditional, reflective lamentations intensify and broaden his yearning for seaborne totality: “Ah não ser eu toda a gente e toda a parte!” (Ah if only I could be all people and all places).<sup>2</sup> In this sort of *saudade*, I cannot help but hear a modernist amplification of the famous Andrew Marvell complaint—“Had we but world enough and time”—that looms large as an epigraph over Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, another of the early twentieth century’s boldest attempts at a world-literary synthesis. And in hearing this echo, how can I fail to collocate the topic of this cluster of essays—*modernism and the sea*—with the problems and methods of comparative literary history? Such a collocation

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certainly makes sense if we understand comparative literary history in Auerbach's terms: as a tension among "diverse backgrounds" converging on a "common fate," accessed by a method that seeks out multiple "points of departure" coalescing around a synthetic or "coadunatory" intuition.<sup>3</sup> A reader of transoceanic modernism, balancing the impulses of Pessoa and Auerbach, might well desire to be hoisted up on every dock and to spin in the propellers of every ship—to take in a synthetic view of a cosmopolitan totality made of human cultures fated, by commerce and technology, to connect as never before.

Yet modernist writers themselves often confronted obstructions to the synthetic cosmopolitanism desired or observed by Pessoa and Auerbach, obstructions that took such forms as customs houses, immigration bureaus and passport control, deferred wages, state surveillance, and world war. Thus the phrase *modernism and the sea* refers to a world of literature and art at once connected by intensifying flows and fortified by proliferating blockages. The commercial forms and regulatory regimes of transoceanic technologies like the great liner, the tramp steamer, the commerce raider, the canal tug, and the coastal barge each resynthesize the dialectic between free trade and protectionism, fluid and impeded transit. Literary works situated in the micropolitical environments of such ships, or at their various ports of call, do not follow Auerbach's "coadunatory intuition" so much as they express a version of Aamir Mufti's claim that "world literature, far from being a seamless and traversable space, has in fact been from the beginning a regime of *enforced* mobility and therefore of *immobility* as well."<sup>4</sup> For every Álvaro de Campos, some other character like John Dos Passos's able-bodied seaman Joe Williams shows up "on the beach": undocumented, out of work, and booted by immigration bureaus from La Boca to the British Isles.<sup>5</sup>

In all the coastal nations of the modernizing world, often-discarded works of literature and art—proletarian novels, sentimental plays, avant-garde poems, lyric sea diaries, silent films, radical leaflets, photographs and paintings—attest to this push and pull of connection and blockage and string its tension along several axes of identity and difference. Each work can be understood as a strand in a cat's cradle<sup>6</sup> of crossings between competing sociopolitical discourses of maritime space, including syndicalism and statism, communism and commerce, exile and empire. Some works may go so far as to allegorize the entire system. However, when the archives of modernism at sea are viewed from the perspective of a given national literature or language tradition, these worldly entanglements tend to appear obscure. This may be true even in our contemporary age of transnational and oceanic scholarly turns, for too often an Anglosphere can be mistaken for the world and an ocean for a transactional arena of fluid connection. In recent years I have sought to articulate a different kind of "modernism at sea," whose worldwide imaginaries do not vindicate the usual language of accelerating connections and simultaneities so much as they trace the outlines of missed appointments, deferred arrivals, lags, and collisions. In my view, these negative experiences most often frame the expression of maritime modernism, and any given work tropes this comparative problem of modernist world literature.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, this work's discursive situation tends to

implicate other disconnected works from within the maritime world system and to draw in even those works that might refuse the very terms of comparison.

For instance, a story about laboring in the shadows of a great liner will tend to cast in a new light a poem about reveling in a sunny passage on its decks, and vice versa. This essay is a narrowly drawn exercise in such forms of comparison at one narrow passage of marine transit—the Panama Canal Zone. I argue that the spatio-temporal typology of the zone supplies a key figure for a tropological history of comparative modernism at sea. To make this argument, I follow disparate works—by the Swiss avant-garde poet Blaise Cendrars, the West Indian writers Claude McKay and Eric Walrond, the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, and the American modernist poet Wallace Stevens—into the zone of conflicts, disparities, and experiments in sovereignty that best characterizes the Panama Canal as a peculiar choke point of maritime globalization.

### The Panama Panic

. . . the Panama Canal, mechanical toy that Messrs. Roosevelt and Goethals managed to make work when everyone else had failed; a lot of trouble for the inhabitants of the two Americas you have dammed up within your giant locks.  
—John Dos Passos, “Homer of the Transsiberian”

“C’est le crach du Panama que fit de moi un poète!” (It’s the Panama panic that made me a poet!) exclaims the speaker of Cendrars’s long poem *Le Panama ou Les aventures de mes sept oncles* (*Panama, or the Adventures of My Seven Uncles*, 1918).<sup>8</sup> The “crash” or “panic” in question is the bankruptcy and liquidation in 1888–89 of the French Panama Canal Company, directed by Ferdinand de Lesseps. At that time Cendrars was a two-year-old Swiss boy named Frédéric-Louis Sauser, but it is true that the specter of the crash proved a source of childhood anguish to the young “Freddy,” whose father had quit his job teaching math in the watchmaking town of La Chaux-de-Fonds to participate in a rash of increasingly risky and ruinous financial speculations of the sort excoriated by Émile Zola’s novel *L’argent* (*Money*, 1891). These included a hotel venture in Heliopolis, Egypt; a German beer export scheme; and an Italian land deal, as well as investments in the canal.<sup>9</sup>

In *Le Panama* Cendrars associates the crash’s “importance plus universelle” (universal importance) with the shattering of his generation’s comfortable youth. “Car il a bouleversé mon enfance” (it turned my childhood upside down), he recalls:

Mon père perdit les  $\frac{3}{4}$  de sa fortune  
Comme nombre d’honnêtes gens qui perdirent leur argent dans ce crach,  
Mon père  
Moins bête  
Perdait celui des autres<sup>10</sup>

[My father lost three-fourths of his fortune  
Like a number of upright people who lost their money in that crash,  
My father

Less stupid  
 Lost other people's money<sup>11</sup>

While these events are verifiable elements of Cendrars's notoriously cloudy biography, the incendiary personae of Cendrars's poems rarely speak with a strong commitment to autobiographical veracity. Instead, they voice collective and allegorical aspirations for the project of literature in the age of a shrinking, technomodern world—a world conceived of as canalized and crossed by an ever more routine latticework of steamers, railways, and cables.

Accordingly, we might extrapolate from the exclamation "C'est le crach du Panama que fit de moi un poète!" an underdeveloped origin story for the cascading international avant-gardes of the next several decades. By Cendrars's logic, the avant-garde's poetic vocation was structured by financial speculations of roving state-private infrastructure projects in an era when they began to replace formal empire and attentive colonial administrations with neglectful leases, the wobbly legal regimes of "assigned sovereignty,"<sup>12</sup> the onset of "petromodernity,"<sup>13</sup> precarious migrant labor, the production of civil conflicts,<sup>14</sup> commodity capitalism stitched together by huge communication and transportation networks, and new, extraterritorial zones of free trade. As the architectural theorist Keller Easterling has noted, the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) and the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) that now dominate the spatial form of capitalism were imagined for Panama's Colón as early as 1917, just three years after the first ship transited the completed canal. They were enacted in 1948.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore Cendrars's exclamation suggests an aesthetic modernism at the dawn of "the zone." To be clear, this is neither Mary Pratt's "contact zone" nor Guillaume Apollinaire's Parisian "Zone" but the Canal Zone itself: scion of "historic entrepôts and free ports" and predecessor to contemporary EPZs and FTZs, the typologies that, according to Easterling, have rapidly emerged from a backstage "enclave for warehousing and manufacturing" to become the templates of the "world city."<sup>16</sup> If Pratt's model of the contact zone asks us to put together our comparative understanding of global modernism through a focus on the relationships between "travelers and travelees,"<sup>17</sup> the Canal Zone invites us to note the relations of concerns and interests colliding in the teeth of convulsive spatiotemporal and economic logics: booms and busts, annexation and assigned sovereignty, migratory labor and geo-engineering at sublime scales. Hardly the radiant metropolis associated with the historical avant-garde of Apollinaire, the zone is nonetheless the site of an experimental poetry that "beat a rhythm," in Dos Passos's phrase, from an "age of giant machines and scuttleheaded men."<sup>18</sup> The literature of the zone renders visible the collisions of financial, infrastructural, and labor conditions.

Among the avuncular diaspora of Cendrars's *Le Panama*, none of the uncles works the canal per se, but all seven face their fortunes in the shadows of the infrastructural, planetary transformation it represents. These include the "butcher in Galveston" who "disappeared in the cyclone of 1895"; the cabin boy on the tramp steamer who turns into a gold prospector in California and Alaska; and the railroader in India who becomes a Buddhist anarchist, plotting anti-imperial violence against the British in Bombay. Cendrars's uncles might therefore be regarded as

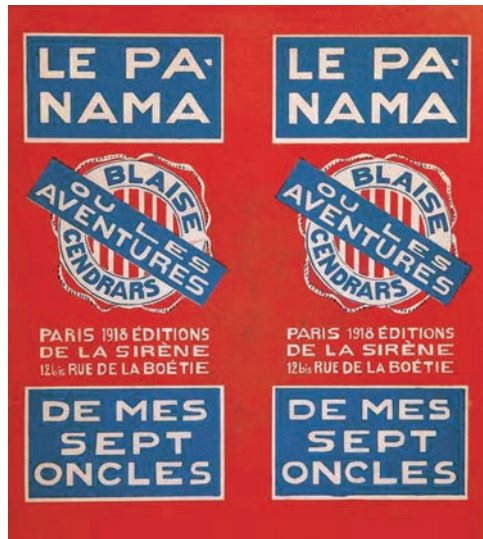


Figure 1. Raoul Dufy, cover art for Cendrars, *Le Panama*.

latter-day “heads” on the “many-headed hydra” that, in struggles with the Herculean forces of capitalism, constitute the master trope of the revolutionary Atlantic for the radical historians Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, any “hydro-criticism” worth its salt will probably want to also be a *hydra*-criticism, attentive to the social histories and foreclosed political futures of stateless sailors, deportees, coalers, wharf rats, and other subjects of dispossession forever emerging in the press of neglectful imperial circumstance.

Cendrars portrays his own vanguard company trailing in the wake of these obliterated people on the speculative fringes of capitalist expansion. His poet belongs to a generation of “Jeunes gens / Qui ont subi des ricochets étranges” (Young people / who experienced weird ricochets), who scrounge their way around the globe shipboard in “la cage des méridiens” (the cage of meridians), to quote one of Cendrars’s many ways of deflating the glamour of steamer travel.<sup>20</sup> In his own “baptême de la ligne” (baptism of the line)<sup>21</sup> on a 1912 Atlantic crossing more routine than the one he pictures for his nineteenth-century uncles, Cendrars nonetheless imagined that “j’ai partagé tous les sorts du marin. Beau temps des premiers jours, enchantements, vagues, vents, tempêtes, ouragan, dépontement, avaries, dérive, refuge dans un port de fortune. Je n’attendais pas ces choses au XXe” (I shared all the sailor’s spells. Initial days of fair weather, enchantments, waves, winds, storms, the hurricane, a swerve, damage, drift, the fortunate port of refuge. I did not expect these things in the 20th C).<sup>22</sup> In the fauvist artist Raoul Dufy’s cover image for *Le Panama* (fig. 1), a send-up of a railway timetable, Cendrars’s name adorns a life preserver, aligning avant-garde authorship with salvage work in a decade defined by maritime disasters from the *Titanic* to the *Lusitania*.

### The Slow Cyclone

Beginning with mid-nineteenth-century projects helmed by competing French and American surveyors to cut diverse trans-isthmian routes through Nicaragua and

Panama, the story of the Canal Zone is well known to us from histories focused on sublime feats of engineering as well as revisionary labor and colonial history.<sup>23</sup> In such accounts, the canal emblemizes the age of the “shrinking world” and what Julio Ramos calls “hemispheric compression”—a swift, commoditized connectivity, often anthropomorphized in boosterist artworks as a “kiss” of the Atlantic and Pacific.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in the framework of transnational and comparative literary history, the shrinking world enabled by the Canal Zone hardly unites the Central American, Caribbean, US, and European vanguardists who variously inhabited it. What would it mean to recompose a literary history of global modernism around the zone, instead of around conventional literary-historical categories of connectivity such as exchange, translation, circulation, intertextuality, and the like? From competing standpoints and historical removes, writers including Cendrars (Switzerland), Stevens (US), Walrond (British Guiana), McKay (Jamaica), Cardenal (Nicaragua), Demetrio Aguilera Malta (Ecuador), Malcolm Lowry (England), Olive Senior (Jamaica), and Juan Gabriel Vásquez (Colombia) all investigate the zone’s complex temporalities: sometimes luxuriating in swift cruises to and fro, but more often commenting on its slow, grinding excavations, its swelling locks, its rusting hulks among liana vines, its demolished political horizons and laboring bodies.

In his 1954 poem “Greytown” Cardenal charts this desolate century of speculative development projects that has just passed “como un lento ciclón” (like a slow cyclone) at the great primordial “pier of the Americas.”<sup>25</sup> Cardenal’s poem offers an anti-imperialist reversal of Ezra Pound’s historical montage poetics, ironizing the failures of Cornelius Vanderbilt’s Nicaraguan canal projects of the 1850s. At first these projects draw in an exuberantly multilingual, migrant labor community:

Americanos, alemanes, irlandeses,  
franceses, mulatos, chinos, españoles,  
venían, se encontraban aquí, y partían.

[Americans, Germans, Irishmen,  
Frenchmen, mulattoes, Chinamen, Spaniards,  
they’d all come, meet each other here, and leave.]

But when they rove elsewhere, all they leave behind is one mendicant freebooter who could easily have been one of Cendrars’s “uncles”: “Edwards E. Brand, de Kentucky, fue el último norteamericano / que se quedó en Greytown, esperando el Canal” (Edwards E. Brand, from Kentucky, was the last North American / who stayed in Greytown, waiting for the canal).<sup>26</sup> Barefoot among the corroded hulls of the paddlewheel steamers that Vanderbilt’s concerns have discarded on the shoals of the Mosquito Coast, Brand no longer works as an agent of nascent US imperialism but is fated instead to receive Nicaraguan alms. Cardenal beggars the imperial agencies that arrive at what he calls “the pier of the Americas.” Cardenal was therefore uniquely equipped, in 2014, to emerge from retirement for a withering editorial against President Daniel Ortega’s concession of a no-bid Nicaraguan canal project to the Chinese Telecom magnate Wang Jing—part of a new “connectography” that



makes our age of capricious interoceanic cuts a cynical replay of the first age of liberal globalization that Cardenal had previously decried.<sup>27</sup>

Within Cardenal's slow century, certain synchronic flashpoints make visible the disparate histories of modernism in the zone, such as the decade or so surrounding the Panama Canal's completion in 1914. To put the works of that decade in dialogue with Cendrars's *Le Panama* is to signal the diverse ideologemes the zone represented for Latin American, Francophone, Afro-Caribbean, and Anglo-American modernisms. It renders the Canal Zone not as a feat of connectivity or connectography but as a site of visibility for the conflicting patterns of representation making up a situation of ongoing cultural and ideological disconnection.

### The Suction Sea

McKay's dialect poem "Peasants' Ways o' Thinkin'" (1912) suggests the logics by which West Indian migrant labor assembled at the canal.

We hea' a callin' from Colon,  
 We hea' a callin' from Limon,  
 Let's quit de t'ankless toil an' fret  
 Fe where a better pay we'll get.<sup>28</sup>

The poem's pursuant pro and con calculations are extensive and precise. According to McKay's speaker, the migrant stands to face a regime of legal discrimination and a society that does not recognize Obeah religion. He faces the incalculably bad trade-off of Jamaican rum for Latin American beer and will suffer the loss of sexual gratification, the comfort of family, the experience of village integrity, and more. He will have to learn a new language, do hard labor without weekends off, and face exposure to tropical disease. But face it he will, for the peasant imagines the possibility of remitting money to his family and the promise of a triumphant homecoming rather than permanent diaspora. McKay's peasant can even resign black Jamaicans to a lesser lot than "bucra" (white folk), for like the white of an egg, he announces, "we content wi' de outside."

This kind of resignation seemed implausible to some West Indian writers in the zone. Stories such as "The Wharf Rats" in Walrond's *Tropic Death* (1926), which recollects the world of Colón that Walrond witnessed as the child of a "Panama Man," valorize "the motley crew recruited to dig the Panama Canal" as "artisans from the four ends of the earth."<sup>29</sup> And, even if "dusky peon" imperial subjects of the British, French and Dutch Caribbean supply "the bulk of the actual brawn," Walrond's validation of artisanship over peasant mentality signals an important politicization of Canal Zone labor.<sup>30</sup>

But as far as the Canal Zone is concerned, Walrond also charts more extreme forms of precarity than McKay. In the simple plot of "The Wharf Rats," a West Indian family lives in a shanty by the Colón coaling station. Whenever the tourist ships arrive, two boys—Philip and Earnest—go out in a little rowboat to dive for coins that wealthy passengers toss into the sea. Finally, owing to a convoluted love triangle, a spurned and vindictive woman named Maffi, who practices Obeah, probably curses Philip to his fate: a death by shark attack as he dives in the murky waters



for the tourists' coins. The ship for which Philip performs his final dive is named *Kron Prinz Wilhelm*, a ship with an important history (though one that only tangentially includes the Canal Zone).<sup>31</sup> Walrond peoples the ship's deck with wealthy spectators: "Huddled in thick European coats, the passengers" of the ship "viewed from their lofty estate the spectacle of two naked Negro boys peeping up at them from a wiggly *bateau*."<sup>32</sup> Here Walrond offers a stark contrast between West Indian migrant labor and a form of tourism that collapses belle époque and interwar tropes—more stark even than the protocubist class allegory of Alfred Stieglitz's photograph *The Steerage*. For Philip represents a class that does not access steerage passage. Instead, it earns its living from rickety skiffs in the shadows of the imperial liners, and only when passengers are amused by tossing scraps of multinational currency—American pennies and quarters, British sovereigns, Dutch guilders—into the shark-infested waters. Walrond's description of these waters, as the mixed-up currency sinks, makes it plain how they are figures for the maelstroms of investment and ruination that power the spatial typology of the zone: "It was a suction sea, and down in it Philip plunged. And it was lazy, too, and willful—the water. Ebony-black, it tugged and mocked. Old brass staves—junk dumped there by the retiring French—thick, yawping mud, barrel hoops, tons of obsolete brass, a wealth of slimy steel faced him."<sup>33</sup> The half-submerged ruins of the abandoned project of de Lesseps—where "Iron staves bruised his shins"<sup>34</sup>—prefigure the Middle Passage chains rolling at the bottom of Édouard Glissant's Atlantic, but Walrond's story is shaped less by the history of slavery than by the specific disaster of the "Panama Panic."<sup>35</sup> And here the "yawping mud" deflates the preferred Whitmanian term for voicing New World praise poetry, as if belching a critique of Whitman's celebrations of de Lesseps's Suez Canal in "Passage to India."<sup>36</sup>

A cruel irony presides over the fact that Walrond's attention to de Lessep's discarded remnants, which linger so menacingly as rusted metal in the dark waters of "The Wharf Rats," would only ever be realized as their own fragmentary ruin. Walrond arrived in Paris in 1928 to continue research on a major work of muckraking Canal Zone history, *The Big Ditch*, supported by a Guggenheim grant and an advance from Liveright. He promised to do for the canal what C. L. R. James would do for the Haitian Revolution. In Paris, Walrond doled out praise on Cendrars, noting his particular esteem for *Le Panama*. Liveright advertised *The Big Ditch* in a 1928 catalog, but by 1930 the press had broken the contract for the hundred-thousand-word book. Walrond later serialized pieces of it as "The Second Battle" in *Roundway Review*, the newsletter of the sanatorium where he resided in the 1950s. They are yet to be republished.<sup>37</sup>

### Sea Surface

Stevens is among the best-known writers to take the kind of cruise for which Walrond's coin divers performed. He departed from New York on October 18, 1923, aboard the *SS Kroonland* of the Panama Pacific line, calling in Havana, Colón, Tijuana, and finally Los Angeles. His first and only trip through the canal was also his farthest trip south. His wife, Elsie, kept an elliptical diary on the trip, toward the end of which they conceived their daughter. Stevens also conceived a celebrated



Figure 2. The SS *Kroonland* of the Panama Pacific Line passes southward through the Panama Canal—Gaillard Cut on October 25, 1923. Wallace and Elsie Stevens are aboard. James Gordon Steese Family Papers. Courtesy of Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

poem, “Sea Surface Full of Clouds,” venerating the choreography of water and sky off the Tehuantepec peninsula. It was one of Stevens’s only poems between *Harmonium* (1923) and *Owl’s Clover* (1936). It was also the *Kroonland*’s first trip through the canal since 1915.<sup>38</sup> A photographer captured the ship, newly retrofitted, painted white, and put into use in the trans-isthmian pleasure industry in October 1923, in transit through the Pedro Miguel Lock on the canal, October 25, 1923 (fig. 2). Wallace and Elsie can be imagined promenading somewhere in the frame. That same day Elsie describes the “changeable weather” along the canal and a visit ashore to shop for luxury goods in the free zone, ferried about by a “colored driver” who “spoke English as well as any ordinary darky in Hartford.”<sup>39</sup> Observing the casual racism of Elsie’s account, it should not surprise us that passengers on Panama Pacific cruises participated in blackface pageantry and cross-class masquerades.<sup>40</sup>

In “Sea Surface Full of Clouds” Stevens’s readers have observed a postsymbolist exercise in the production of metaphor through the repetitious, narcissistic descriptions of the “obese machine” of sky and ocean, but in his luxuriant pose of touristic description, outrageous moments of cartoonish racial masquerade interrupt placid reflection:

And the sea as turquoise-turbaned Sambo, neat  
At tossing saucers—cloudy-conjuring sea?  
*C’était mon esprit bâtard, l’ignominie.*<sup>41</sup>

Walrond’s “suction sea” and Stevens’s “sea as turquoise-turbaned Sambo” each are forged in racialized revisions of belle époque literary aspiration, but they do not

reflect or embrace each other as do the sea and sky of Stevens's poem. Instead, they begin to suggest how the Canal Zone's compression of hemispheric space enabled only stark consolidations of racial and class divisions. Walrond's Philip dives to his death for the tourists in the same sea Stevens imagines as a reflection of blackface cruise-line pageantry, cut through with the affectations of the French symbolists, whose language Cendrars had sought to jettison.

Another peculiar fact presides over Stevens's placid transits over the "suction sea." He passes over the ruined subaqueous world of de Lesseps that Walrond makes vivid, content to read the water's glimmering surface as the mirror of his inventive acoustical pleasures. But over the next decades Stevens was no stranger to the risky speculations involved in infrastructural projects on the order of the canal, or what he calls the "writhing wheels of this world's business" in his poem "Repetitions of a Young Captain."<sup>42</sup> In fact, Stevens devoted his career to precisely the financial instruments designed to interrupt another "Panama panic." During Stevens's tenure as a bond surety lawyer and later as vice president of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity, the company underwrote construction contracts bonding large-scale transportation and security infrastructure projects, including the Hoover Dam (completed 1931), the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge (completed 1936), the Saint Lawrence Seaway (completed 1959), and the Texas Towers, Cold War radar outposts anchored in the Atlantic for the detection of attacks (completed 1958).<sup>43</sup> But earlier, in the reflective, glittering surfaces of Stevens's poetics, he fashioned distinct bulwarks against Walrond's imagination of the coin diver and its knowledge of the social costs of infrastructural finance.

In all, the financing and construction of an infrastructure space like the Panama Canal Zone—a figure for maritime globalization as the spatial form of capitalism—invite us to reassemble a vision of worldwide modernism structured by disparities among destructive French speculators, the acrobatic West Indians who perform their work among jagged ruins, and the Anglo-American tourist-spectators who take in such performances from aloft. This sort of comparative purchase, from the "wiggly *bateau*" down after the guilders and sovereigns toward the submerged ruins of de Lesseps, and then again up toward the decks of the SS *Kroonland*, might be a model for an account of modernism and the sea that rejects the surface view of Stevens in order to work across divides of class, language, and culture and that remains sensitive to colliding stories of money and labor, cosmopolitan mobility and immobility. Such collisions suggest that a "slow cyclone" or a "suction sea" might be maritime figures that reveal more about how worlds come to connect than do a kiss of the Atlantic and the Pacific or a "sea surface full of clouds."

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### Notes

- 1 Pessoa, “Ode marítima,” 71; Pessoa, *A Little Larger than the Entire Universe*, 168.
- 2 Pessoa, “Ode triunfal,” 108; Pessoa, *A Little Larger than the Entire Universe*, 160.
- 3 Auerbach, “Philology and Weltliteratur.”
- 4 Mufti, *Forget English!*, 9.
- 5 Dos Passos, 1919, 2–42.
- 6 For an account of the cat’s cradle as a figure of comparison, see Morse, *New World Soundings*, 61–89.
- 7 I argue these points at greater length in Feinsod, “Vehicular Networks”; and Feinsod, “Death Ships.” For a welcome turn toward the problem of disconnection, see also Miller and Rogers, “Translation and/as Disconnection.”
- 8 Cendrars, *Le Panama*, n.p. See also Cendrars, *Panama*.
- 9 Bchner, *Blaise Cendrars*, 16.
- 10 Cendrars, *Le Panama*, n.p.
- 11 Cendrars, *Complete Poems*, 34.
- 12 DuVal, *Cadiz to Cathay*, 31.
- 13 Whalan, “‘Oil Was Trumps’”; LeMenager, *Living Oil*.
- 14 See, e.g., Mufti, *Civilizing War*, 85–134.
- 15 Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*, 29–30.
- 16 Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*, 25.
- 17 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7–8.
- 18 Dos Passos, “Homer of the Transsiberian,” 202.
- 19 Rediker and Linebaugh, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 2–6.
- 20 Cendrars, *Complete Poems*, 38.
- 21 Cendrars, *Panama*, n.p.
- 22 Cendrars, *Inédits secrets*, 178, quoted in Bchner, *Blaise Cendrars*, 27. My translation.
- 23 McCullough, *Path between the Seas*; Newton, *Silver Men*; Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*; Greene, *Canal Builders*; Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*.
- 24 Ramos, “Hemispheric Domains”; Rosenberg, “Transnational Currents.”
- 25 Cardenal, *With Walker*, 78–79.
- 26 Cardenal, *With Walker*, 78–79.
- 27 Cardenal, “La monstrosidad del Canal.” For a prognostic account of twenty-first-century projects like the Nicaraguan Inter-Oceanic Canal, see also Khanna, *Connectography*. On China’s connectographic imaginaries, see Chin, “Invention of the Silk Road, 1877.”
- 28 McKay, *Complete Poems*, 11.
- 29 Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 67.
- 30 Owens, “‘Hard Reading.’”
- 31 The actual SS *Kronprinz Wilhelm* never made port near the Canal Zone during its tenure as one of the great prewar German passenger liners. In 1914 the German Imperial Navy requisitioned it as a commerce raider, in which role it captured and sank fifteen British ships off the coast of Brazil in the year before low supplies forced it to dock at then-neutral Newport News, Virginia, where nearly one thousand crew members and officers from the captured ships remained as “guests,” building a scrap village called Eitel Wilhelm. The SS *Kronprinz Wilhelm* was rechristened the USS *Von Steuben* and commissioned as a US naval auxiliary vehicle involved in troop transport, leading to its only stop in the Canal Zone to recoal in 1918. The young Walrond might well have seen it on that occasion while working as a journalist for the *Panama Star*, even if it was no longer sailing under the German flag. Walrond’s anachronistic placing of the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* in the zone therefore links the relations in maritime history between prewar Euro-American passenger tourism, wartime commerce raiding, and US military involvement.
- 32 Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 80.
- 33 Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 82.
- 34 Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 82.
- 35 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6.
- 36 Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 346.
- 37 Davis, *Eric Walrond*, 325–31.
- 38 Christened in 1902, the SS *Kroonland* served twelve years, running from Antwerp to New York for the Belgian Red Star Line. Reflagged as an American ship in 1911 for preferential tax purposes, it was put briefly into use as a Canal Zone mail carrier. Repainted in dazzle camouflage, it served as a troop transport ship from 1917 to 1920 and thence returned briefly to the Red Star Line before two years in the Panama Pacific Line. After this it spent two years running from New York to Miami, but the same hurricane of 1926 that Hart Crane experienced on the Isle of Pines destroyed the tourist market the SS *Kroonland* served, and it was scrapped in 1927.
- 39 Lensing, “Mrs. Wallace Stevens’ ‘Sea Voyage.’”
- 40 See the promotional film on the Panama Pacific Line *Over Sapphire Seas* (1934). For a general account of Stevens’s lifelong racism, see Galvin, “Race.”
- 41 Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 85.
- 42 Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 273.
- 43 Daniel, *Hartford of Hartford*, 267.

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