

SLASH

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Abstract

An experimental text that introduces and tries out wavewriting. Wavewriting is the all-connected yet perpetually withdrawing turn of phrase that does not lead to clear conclusions, truths and certainties, but to an accumulation of wavings that approximate a direction without a thesis. To do this, I bring together eight literary fiction texts on water, and elicit their legal dimensions, while interspersing them with 'waves', short ruminations/explanations/deviations/comments on the process and brief autoethnographic vignettes. This is orchestrated around the *slash*, a dividing yet connecting punctuation sign that I take both metaphorically and materially as a way to make waves.

/First Wave/

We use the *slash* to regulate the flow of the text. We interrupt and interweave. Just wait a little, the slash says. The slash brings line breaks in poetry / breaths in songs / caesuras of a linearity that enable the return to the linear.

We use slash to go deeper into law. We dive deeper into the sections / then the paragraphs / then the subparagraphs. Slash zooms in the law, it allows the law to bring up the particular, or at least the law's ambitions towards the particular. Just swim further in, the slash says.

We use a slash like a weir to regulate the flow of the water. Slash stops the water from running or allows it to flow forth even more profusely. Slash is the wall of the reservoir, the inner lining of the sluice gate, the open mouthing of the slush.²

Slash separates and links. Slash is the text's skin, a suture, a process of knitting together the two skin lips and the scar of the wound.³ Slashing the water generates waves. Slash as the shape of the wave, rising and falling into the *ondoyant*.

In this text, I use the slash as a tool to mix water, law and literature. I visit some well-known and some less known works of fiction and I zoom into the moments where the aquatic and

¹ With thanks to Jan Hogan, Yusuf Patel, Ifor Duncan, Olivia Barr, Peter Rush, Daniela Gandorfer and Peter Goodrich for their comments.

² John K. Donaldson, 'As Long as the Waters Shall Run: The "Obstructed Water" Metaphor in American Indian Fiction' (2002) 40(2) *American Studies International*, 73- 93

³ Mark B. Salter, 'Theory of the / : The Suture and Critical Border Studies' (2012) 17(4) *Geopolitics*, 734-755.

the legal come together. In order to do this, I rewrite parts of them, I interject my own experiences, I become reader, academic commentator, fiction author, plagiarist, con artist, ballast thrown into the sea, all in an attempt to tease out the way these texts employ the aquatic and the legal.⁴ The fact that I offer no literary context for the works I am using is deliberate: while this text aims to have a direction of questioning, and a practice of flowing law, literature and water together, it does not have a thesis. Rather it invites the reader to tease this thesis, should they wish. This performative practice of writing, inalienable from the text itself, is about waves, their disruptive singularity and their diffractive multiplicity.

I call this wavewriting: a writing in waves; a writing that makes waves. This unfolds in nine + one waves, wavewriting method and commentary at the same time, an attempt at linking the fiction works with each other.

In between my reading and rewriting of these texts, however, I do offer a commentary on the questions in the heart of this chapter. The reader is invited to slash in this text, dip in and out of it, trace or dwell the spaces around the slash.

Let's see whether we can make some waves then.

Franz Kafka's *Poseidon* / When will we stop calculating?

Poseidon sits at the bottom of the sea and gets on with his calculations. That's all he does. "The administration of all the waters was a huge task."⁵ Yet "one couldn't say that the work made him happy either; he only did it because it was his to do." Who made him do this? "They". "Kafka does not say who 'they' are, but that is what makes him Kafka."⁶ History or myth, original fact, a role as deep as the earth's breath. Underwater breath. He just knew he had to get on with it. Endless calculations. That's just how it was.

"The thing that most angered him was when he got to hear what people thought it involved, that is, forever parting the waves with his trident. And when all the time he was sitting at the bottom of the ocean up to his ears in figures." (46)

The calculable stops him from diving into the incalculable. He just about manages to stay afloat in the calculable. He never even gets to see the sea. He is in it but there never is enough time to actually see the sea.

⁴ Hoping for what T.J. Demos calls the "unanticipated connections between narratives, virtual openings that offer places where the unexpected appears and where discovery can take place." T.J. Demos, 'On Terror and Beauty: John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*', *Revista Atlantica* 56, 2016 <http://www.revistaatlantica.com/en/contribution/on-terror-and-beauty-john-akomfrahs-vertigo-sea/>

⁵ Franz Kafka, 'Poseidon' in *Investigations of a Dog and Other Creatures* (ed and trans. M. Hofmann, New Directions, 2017) 45

⁶ Cees Nooteboom, *Letters to Poseidon* (Quercus 2014) 32

The calculable is an impermeable, plastic mantle made of figures and guilt that keeps Poseidon dry. It is a law, as deep as the deepest sea. This law protects Poseidon from life. Let's list its qualities: separating, covering, categorising, appeasing, protecting, waiting. There are no waves here. All is contained. All is calculated. Waiting for the law to end and for the waves of life to start. This is the water, finally, open and life-giving, or life-taking, it doesn't matter, life is what matters, not calculations. We must wait for that; we must work for that. Poseidon's Messiah is wet and titanic: "he was waiting for the world to end first, because there was bound to be a quiet moment just before the end when he had signed off on his last calculation and would be able to take himself on a little cruise somewhere." (46) Law has convinced us all: there will be a last calculation. A last judgement. And then, the water will be ours.

/Second Wave/

Life versus law: that was a bit too easy, wasn't it? But sometimes one needs crude binaries, awkward slashings and rough divisions. This might be the way to make waves.

Let's slash another crude division then: Law / Literature: slanted Ls domino-collapsing onto each other. Let's add some nuance by reconsidering the need for prepositions. Why insist on distinguishing between these parallelisms, law *and/of/in/as* literature? What do we achieve? Clarity, categorisation, cleaving.

Let's multiply the slash: law / (breath) / literature.

Why else would we (academics, fiction authors, readers) read law and literature together if not to take a breath? To put calculables and incalculables together? To get a glimpse of the sea? To escape the unidimensional impression of the individual in which the law pushes us?⁷ Why else would we read law and literature together if not to see that law's illusions are more brittle and even more multipliable than those of literature? Why else, if not to put ourselves squarely in the centre of the action? Why else, if not to try and understand, something, anything, about why we do what we do?

My partner once described me as a 'slasher': academic slash artist slash fiction author slash poet slash slash. I liked it when he said it, it had a freshness and sounded like a compliment – which is how he meant it. But I now see it as responsibility: it is not enough just to do different things (so what?). The important is to circulate also in that **space** above and below the slash, where the waves, the excess, the overflow and the offcuts pool, and ease these into a cyclical channel, a hydrocircumference, a gentle moat from where our political positions will be launched.

In this text, I am author/reader/fictional personality. I flow between these slashes, and as I do, I follow laws of writing and referencing, editorial decrees of word-limits and handbook exigencies, technological norms of typing. At the same time, I imagine myself going against

⁷ Maria Aristodemou, *Law and Literature: Journeys from Her to Eternity* (Oxford UP, 2008)

or perhaps complementing what 'We' do: I generate new laws that we might not accept as law yet, but might be interested in exploring; I carve canals that others might find navigable, new sluice gates (between disciplines, between styles, between self-narrative and literary analysis, between flows and slashes) that others might appreciate my holding open for them. My time is limited. I become part of the We as soon as I set foot on the coast.

I want to see the sea. I want to make waves. I want to emerge from the calculable and dive into the incalculable. I am taking a risk: the incalculable will flood into me and all my legal calculations. The incalculable brings along its own law.

I still want to see the sea. Come along and we might find some waves there.

Karl Ove Knausgaard's *A Time for Everything* / The water cannot save us

It takes Knausgaard almost three hundred pages to rewrite the biblical flood. We are in that curve of world's time, when the angels fly off and the waters rush in, undisturbed by walls and laws. Unlike Poseidon though, Knausgaard's god releases his water from above. Like Poseidon, this god does not see the water. He has already departed, abandoning his creation to its final struggle: "Only after the cherubim had gone did they fully understand just how important their proximity had been. It was as if a wall had been removed in the room they inhabited."⁸ No walls, no gods, no laws. Just a seemingly smooth space opening up, freedom/fear chiaroscuro. But right then, the waters rush in. "There was suddenly an opening, through which even the most unexpected could pour in. The sky darkened, the water rose, and when they looked to the west, where the light of the cherubim had once been, their glance no longer met any resistance, but swept on through more of the same: trees, mountains, a darkening sky, rising water." (Loc 2703-2705)

Laws as walls. A room without walls is draughty, smooth, exposed. How long can one last in such a room? Not long. **We** draw lines, build walls, make laws, breed gods. Laws are mantles, protective walls, flapping angel wings, presences of relative proximity – never quite here, never without. Until they depart, and the world opens up like a wounded horse mouth spitting torrents.

Little Noah—and not his sister Anna—is his father's favourite child. Noah is a fragile boy, given to obsessively categorising everything around him: living things, dead things, god, the sun... A volatile lawmaker who calms down only when his father picks him up and consoles him. And his other Father (here I can capitalise if you insist) makes the best of this categorising spirit: one pair from every species. Heterosexual obviously. Fully abled obviously. Lovingly monogamous obviously. Check, check, check.

As every lawmaker (every one and every thing that moves, stands still, floats or drowns) knows, what counts is what you leave out of your calculations: Noah's sister Anna, for

⁸ Karl Knausgaard, *A Time to Every Purpose under Heaven* (trans. J. Anderson, Portobello, 2008) Locations 5610-5612

example; her family, Noah's nephews and nieces; their wives and husbands; their children – to name but a few. They are left out, looking onto a future that does not include them. They see the arc from the mountaintop they took shelter: “the water rose relentlessly up the ship's sides, and when half the hull was submerged, it began to glide forward slowly. It glided between the trees, huge and dark. There wasn't a sign of life aboard. “A ship in the forest,” whispered Omak. “What sort of being could have made it?” “It's a death ship,” whispered Ophir...The aura of death that clung to it strengthened the assumption. The ship was their last hope. In just a few hours' time the sea would cover this mountain too. They thought the ship had been sent by God.” (Loc 5870-5874)

We think that literature will save us from the law, just as the water will save us from sins. Nice little constructions that rely on facile binaries again. But does law ever truly depart, even when flooded by the redeeming water? “They saw him quite clearly... ‘Noah!’ Anna shouted. ‘You must save us! Save us, Noah!’ Noah remained motionless where he stood...Anna took the baby from Rachel and raised him above her head so that he could see. He saw.” (Loc 6075-6081) Noah's Father, yes, *that* Father, has picked him up and is holding him tight, radiating his paternal love from within, flooding Noah's body with an embodied law that knew no other judgement. Noah *is* the last judgement, one in a series of lasts but who's got time to count now that the waters are swallowing up mountains and creations? Not Noah. He just signed off the last calculation and took himself on that little cruise.

No waves here either. This is just the swelling of death.

“‘I'm sorry about that,’ Anna said. Gently, she pushed the baby down and held him under the water... ‘I'm sorry about that,’ she said again.” (Loc 6088-6091) Forgotten by that looming law of the Father, the only thing left to embrace all those incalculable masses of misfits was the silent waveless water.

/Third Wave/

I must try harder. Waves are hard to come by, and much harder to write on. I must find a different god or water or law. An ondoyant writing methodology, “the language of waveshape”.⁹ I need something else to show what a waveshape language might be, something other than language that returns to the soundwaves that make up language. Music perhaps. The Vanuatu women, waist-deep in the ocean, slashing and creating water music: *vus lamlam* or slashing the water. A rough melody, a gurgle and an incantation, a repetition.¹⁰ Or Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* – possibly one of the dullest operas in the global repertoire yet with two or three of the most devastatingly beautiful passages. The finale with three sopranos is wavewritten: sound wavelets from multiple directions, confluence and conflict, a constantly postponed gratification, particle explosions of desire at every note, a slashing of expectations, a new law.

⁹ Wu Ming-Yi, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (trans. D. Sterk, Vintage, 2014) 169

¹⁰ *Vanuatu Women's Water Music*, a film Directed by Tim Cole, <https://vimeo.com/97992375>

It is the kind of wavewriting I am aiming at: small waves, not showy. Corroding yet inviting. These waves remain together because they have a horizon of movement, but not much else. Manifold yet streamlined, precariously contained by slashes: the reader's small sharp breaths, or her quick parentheses to google this and that book, add them to the list, more waves.

Wavewriting to accommodate the three meanings of the word *Nalu* in the Hawai'ian Kanaka language: wave / to ponder and to speculate / amnion, amniotic fluid.¹¹

Wavewriting to accommodate a multiplicity of laws and ethics, their confluence and conflicts, their differentiated power and affective displacement.

Wavewriting as the affective intermingling of justice and injustice.

José Saramago's *The Gospel according to Jesus* / We can never leave the law behind

OK, let me try another god, to see whether I make any waves. This time, the god is slashed up in three. The first one is already waiting, "big man, elderly, with a great flowing beard"¹² The second is about to arrive: "I am going to the water. At his shoulder, Mary Magdalene asks, Must you go, and Jesus replied...At last I shall know who I am and what is expected of me...he began rowing out towards that invisible space in the middle of the lake" (278) towards the locus of the contract, the radiating space of law: "a diffused light turns the mist white and lustrous... The boat comes to a halt, it has reached the middle of the lake." Jesus says to the man with the beard, "I've come to find out who I am and what I shall have to do henceforth in order to fulfil my part of the contract." (278).

The middle is not the centre. It is a fold that collapses under its own gravitas, a dark green hole, life-giver and life-taker. Like another covenant presaging another last judgement, the boat of the contract floats in the middle of the water, lake below and mist above, a mist the gods breathe in and out.

This is quite remarkable, considering that the law is hydrophobic. The law cannot deal with water.¹³ It still thinks of water as land, markable and striatable, flat and for the taking.¹⁴ Yet it's only on water that the law can be agreed. Water is the locus of the contract. It is what makes the tellurian law, solidifies it, contrasts it and reflects it, feeds its narcissism. Water is the *sine-qua-non* that enables Schmitt to carry on drawing lines on the terraferma.¹⁵ Water

¹¹ Karin Amimoto Ingersoll, *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology* (Duke University Press, 2016) 45

¹² José Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (trans. G. Pontiero, Mariner Books, 2014) 278

¹³ "The emphasis on the transportation surface neglects vertical zones in favor of horizontal trajectories, making the deep seas the void of the void." Stacy Alaimo, 'Violet-Black, in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed) *Prismatic Ecology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013) 234

¹⁴ Mara Ntona and Mika Schröder, 'Regulating oceanic imaginaries: the legal construction of space, identities, relations and epistemological hierarchies within marine spatial planning' *Maritime Studies* (2020) 19 (2), 241

¹⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth* (trans. G. L. Ulmen, Telos Press, 2003)

protects the law from itself, dilutes it and layers it, shakes its solidity, gives it its escape. Water unmakes the law, damps it down, rots it, grates on its surface with the diluvial force of aeons. Water outlasts the law.

Ah finally, here comes the third: "In the silence that followed one could hear somewhere in the mist the noise of someone swimming this way...His hands grabbed the edge of the boat... hands belonging to a body which like that of God must be tall, sturdy and advanced in years. The boat swayed under the impact...a Leviathan rising from the lower depths...I've come to join you, he said, settling himself on the side of the boat equidistant between Jesus and God." (280). The devil has joined in, three men in a boat, our aquatic unholy trinity: we can now proceed with the contract.

"God arranged the folds of his tunic and the hood of his mantle and then with mock solemnity, like a judge about to pass formal sentence, he said, Let us start from the beginning." (285) The negotiations are tough. Jesus wants out. God wants eternal power and he can only get that through Jesus. The devil wants to be loved again by his father. Jesus cannot take it anymore, "I am breaking our contract, I am detaching myself from you... Empty words, My son, can't you see you're in my power and that all these sealed documents we refer to as agreements, pacts, treaties, contracts, alliances, and in which I figure, could be reduced to a single clause, and waste less paper and ink, a clause which would bluntly state that, Everything prescribed by the law of God is obligatory, even the exceptions." (283) Jesus jumps back on his boat and begins to row away, "Farewell, I'm off home, and you can both go back the way you came" (284), he rows and rows but ends up exactly where he was, in the middle, always moving, never leaving.

There is no escape from the law. What would have happened if Jesus managed to reach the coast? This means, what would happen if one could finally escape the middle, that luminous space of the law? The space of need? I don't know. I never reached it. I tried, several times. Maybe my world has always been a coastless lake. Once, I woke up, early autumn morning, haven't talked to him for three months, I really could not forgive what he did, shall I tell you? yes, ok although this is hard, but I write, that's what I do, whatever I do, this is what I do, I write and I have always been writing, and here it is, my writing, my text, published under his name, a bloated narcissistic gesture befitting the long bearded guy type, although my father's beard was neither flowing nor white at that point but it still choked me, three months later I woke up with a black metal cube weighing on my chest, shiny black metal cube that started barking at my face, metal resonant barking, "I'm proud of you, I can see you're an intelligent lad and perceptive, And you're not afraid, No, Don't worry, you will be, fear always comes, even to a son of God" (279), fear did come of course, I am no son of god but a mere offspring of the law, just like all of us. The law demanded of me that I remain his son, the son of law, with that calm sense of entitlement, with that raging sense of threat, ok I will do it, I will tell stories, fake it all up, even perform miracles, but with one condition, "But you know perfectly well you cannot lay down conditions, God replied angrily" (288), ok then on one understanding, that I will be able to, no, nothing, he says, you will do this in my name, you are nothing but my son, "So, I'm to make up stories, Yes, stories, parables, moral tales, even if it means distorting the law ever so slightly, don't let that bother you... for it was I who put justice into the laws I handed down, It's a bad sign when You start allowing men to tamper with your laws, Only when it suits Me and proves to be useful" (287), but

you did not write that text, I did, if I pretend that this is ok, if I tell stories, don't I tamper not just with your law but also with that justice of yours? And then what?

"A voice came down from the mist and said, Perhaps this God and the one yet to come are one and the same god. Jesus, God and the Devil pretended not to hear but could not help looking at each other in alarm, mutual fear is like this." (297) We are all characters in a play of course and stage directions travel quick over water. We choose to ignore the law overhead even when it soothingly whispers 'you are not to blame'.

/Fourth Wave/

I tried to make waves, didn't I? Did you see me trying to escape the law, trying to make waves on my way to the coast? I failed of course. But something moved, the surface of the lake trembled a little. Or maybe not at all. I don't know.

Here is someone who manages it rather well: "The waves broke and spread their waters swiftly over the shore. One after another they massed themselves and fell; the spray tossed itself back with the energy of their fall... The waves fell; withdrew and fell again."¹⁶ Virginia Wolfe wrota a narrative of whirls, reversals and non-endings, untruths and unquests. How illegal therefore to suggest wroting for a text at least partly about law. How illegal not to be on a quest for truth, on a line for decision, on a line of depth. But wait: "at first sight it wasn't just a wave crashing in so much as the sea itself surging up, silently and suddenly. Before I got a good look at it, it had returned whence it came. It did not make any sound. It merely confiscated a few things. That's all it did."¹⁷ This confiscation, a mere nothing, a taking away, a stealing from the façade of truth, a slashing away from the solid: wroting is licking the face of the law in order to unmask it. So perhaps I did make some waves after all when I was rowing back to the coast, even though I never reached it. Moving *with* the law means moving uncertainly but with direction, with underwater power but with differentiated surfacing.

Is there a deeper desire here, in my literary choices, to forget the law? To depart from the law, to leave it behind on the coast, the echo of a wave, dead memory, flattened liminality? This is the symbolism of the water after all: unmarkable by law, open and seemingly free. This is what this author might be trying to say.

Well, what a neat little binary. And how mendacious.

Even in the water, I cannot forget the law. Especially in the water I cannot depart from the law. On the land, the law is everywhere, its omnipresence banalised, becoming white noise. In the water, the law is luminous. It becomes water itself.

¹⁶ Virginia Wolfe, *The Waves* (Wordsworth, 2000) 83

¹⁷ Ming-Yi, 150

So perhaps my deeper desire is to depart from the law *and* to float on the law. To have my pie and eat it.

You see what I mean? how legal indeed is wavewriting! And how truly constant. For we never truly depart from the law, however much we might recede. All legal writing is wavewriting.

Mercè Rodoreda's *Death in Spring* / The law is our body

OK, I am now determined. Get ready for some waves.

“They built the village over the river, and when the snows melted, everyone was afraid the village would be washed away. That is why every year a man entered the water on the upper side and swam under the village and came out on the lower side. Sometimes dead. Sometimes without a face because it had been ripped away when the desperate water hurled him against the rocks that supported the village.”¹⁸ Our waters kill. Maybe all waters kill. They gorge flesh and spit out appeasement. They swallow sacrifice and vomit future. We need rituals to neutralise the killing, laws as brutal as the river, as linear as its water flow, as spiralling as its turbulence. And so we throw our men into the river and ask them to cross it, to come out the other side.

No one has ever handed us these laws. No one makes us follow them. *We* want to follow them. It is our choice, for the sake of the village. These norms are the only thing saving us from the waters.

I promise, we've left the gods behind now. But Senyor overlooks everything we do. Not really but we want to believe he does. “Senyor observed it all from his towering window... He could see when a man entered the water and when he emerged. As soon as the man had left the water, Senyor would close his window.” (61) It isn't Senyor that makes us throw these men in the river. We know he is made of nothing. Thin air, weak flesh, moribund asthma, nothing. An authority that tries to sneak into our prayers. Oh Lord. Fake. All fake. But we still like to think he overlooks everything we do. He is wealthy and his house is up the hill, the only house free from flood risk. He is old and dies halfway through the book. He dies just like everyone else, with cement poured down his throat. He did not want it that way. He pleaded for a natural death. It doesn't matter. We followed our rituals. We carry on exactly as before, even after Senyor dies, because we carry our rituals under our skin. We are all the law.

We are one with the river, the fear of water has become one with us, it wakes us up at night. We become one with the turbulence, our faces splayed open, sacrificial otherness, Levinasian faciality flayed by the disfiguring rocks. The river kills us; and so we kill ourselves before it does.

¹⁸ Mercè Rodoreda, *Death in Spring* (trans. Martha Tennent, Penguin, 2018) 8

A soundwave, the voice of the reader: *just stop with these rituals! They are absurd, inane, meaningless!*

Who said that?

The voice travelled from outside the book, from the edge of the village. It brought the smell of rotting mucus, green smell in green nostrils. We cannot unhear it. It has been written on the surface of the water, under our skins. But the rituals are us. We all carry the law in our bodies. We breathe the law, and when we choke, we choke with the law in our throats. The mist coming out of the river permeates our skin, becomes our body fluid. The law of the water is our law, it is us.

When the book's narrator is chosen to become the next sacrifice, he follows the law without complaining. He resists any resistance. The riverbed becomes a field of hands waving back and forth, cradling their power like scythes. "When I was little my father was a hand. A hand behind my head, pushing me forward, grow up fast, you're a nuisance" (124). When I was growing up, I did not want to be a nuisance. My breath was wrapped in fear: not too loud, not too present, not too me. "I lowered myself gently into the water, hardly daring to breathe, always with a fear that, as I enter the water world, the air – finally rid of my nuisance – would begin to rage." (3) My father's hand is pushing me forward. Or aside. Rage. "Standing beside the water, my back to everyone, I felt as if I were more insignificant than the thing I was before I was born. A large hand gave me a shove on the head." (123)

My father's hand kept on working on other bodies: painting portraits, sometimes for money, often because he just liked to paint. He was what I would now call a naturalist painter, his realism mixed with months maybe years studying Rubens, the Florentines, Goya. He never painted me. Except once, when he was making the oil portrait of a sitter, a girl of my age, 4 or 5 years old, and I asked him to paint me too, make my portrait, I want to be touched by you. He dismissed me or perhaps he should have, it would have been better, no he didn't dismiss me, not in that way, he actually entertained my request, very well, take a seat, the girl and her father standing next to us in the studio admiring the girl's just finished portrait, were they looking at us while I was being painted? I was hoping so, I was full of pride, my father's hand is painting my portrait, I am seen. But something made me worried, I was always worried so this was not a new state, but this was a worry seen from the outside, the other side of the river, across the water, worry as ritual, a fear that pulsed under my skin making me wonder: is he already done? but how? It took days for the girl, how can he be done with me so quickly, all smiles and giggles, the clients and my father and maybe me too, because no one handed me my ritual, I am a good boy, I smile when I am expected to smile, the water is under my skin, here it is! a rapid sketch in pencil, was there any colour, maybe a dash of watercolour, red or maybe green, a lake whose water has not been renewed, here you are! my portrait was the rough sketch of a clown.

The origin of the law is trauma.

/Fifth Wave/

I understand now. In order to make waves, I need to make a sacrifice. I need to give you a piece of me. I will never make waves unless I show you my trauma.

But now I must withdraw. It cannot always be drama. It is too much. No one can take that. Wavewriting is like waves: it cannot all be dramatic crests. It needs some nice sleek troughs.

Law, like wave, is both withdrawn and all-connected. Withdrawn when the wave reaches the shore, an individual movement, a wink of an ocean, a turn of a sea, an effect. And connected to the volumes of water below and around, the waves before and after, the terrain, the wind, the moon. We might, like Schmitt,¹⁹ forget the water when waves surge. We might think of the water only as waves. But the water remains, the unmoved volumes underneath are always there, the vast complexity of depths, indifferent to the wind and to the land crashed overhead, following other currents.

So, not a mad text. Just the slight madness of a text held together by an aquatic membrane. The text waves up at the moment of getting it all together, those singular moments when complexity appears simple, formed, black and white, or rather blue and white. All molecules in order. And then, boom, flat, nothing. Until the next wave.

This text cannot give you what you want. Well, it might. But it will take it away almost at the same time. Trauma. Deal with it.

Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* / As many laws as waters

You know those land juts where waters from two or more seas converge? That aquatic liminality that plays away from the land? Waves are guaranteed here. Let's call it legal pluralism.

They are all laws: the laws of the colonisers, the laws of the army coming to blow up the last vestiges of the old community around the lake, the laws of the swans that slide on the surface, the law of Oblivia that came from a tree and ended up following those swans. Wright interweaves the aboriginal mode of being with western erudition.²⁰ Law is archipelagic.²¹ The water surrounds all laws' movements: water as an emollient to the harm caused by law, water as an abyss to exacerbate the trauma.

In water, we feel the law because we feel our body move: "I begin locally, navigating yellow-watered floods that grow into even greater inland sea-crossings, to reach an alluvial plain that feeds shaded gardens, where the people who live there say they do not know me and

¹⁹ "On the waves, there is nothing but waves." Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth* (trans. G.L. Ulmen, Telos Press, 2003) 43

²⁰ "Dystopic, anti-elegiac narrative": Honni van Rijswijk, 'Encountering Law's Harm Through Literary Critique: An Anti-elegy' (2015) 27(2) *Law and Literature* 237

²¹ John Selden's formulation that makes all laws one, all islands an archipelago.

ask why I have come.”²² I do not simply follow ‘my’ law. With every flooded step, my body is the law of its own movement. Not a maverick or a hero that follows his (typically) own destiny, but a body that slides amongst other alluvial bodies tracing legal arcs that connect and separate. Not a human privilege either: “swans had Law too. But now...nobody remembered the stories in the oldest Law scriptures of these big wetland birds.” (loc 999) “and on they went, forging into territory [where] great flocks might have travelled their law stories over the land.” (loc 254) And of course, the law itself as a body of movement “old Law forms its own footpaths.” (1243) Law of water-finding (swans becoming “gypsies, searching the deserts for vast sheets of storm water soaking the centuries-old dried lakes” 254) but also law of the desire to move, whether away from or towards something.

Law is also stories: movement is a story, in turn generating stories that make up the law. The country is brought to life by “law music” (loc 2667). Stories raise bodies up, willing in them the law of flight: “the swans were now glued to the shores of the swamp where they looked dolefully towards the hull, waiting for the old woman’s world of stories to appear.” (loc 1323); but also water is law,²³ “the law of breaking waves” (491), a story that gives wing to the law and to the bodies that carry it, reminding them of their wounds. These stories are marks on the body, colonizing, environmentally devastating, raping wounds that cannot heal except perhaps collectively, in a flock of law that gazes at its reflection on the water and dances..

And law is also its conflicts: “all of these big law people thought tribal people across the world would be doing the same, and much like themselves, could also tell you about the consequences of breaking the laws of nature by trespassing on other people’s land. They were very big on the law stories about the natural world.” (loc 277) And clash of laws within, “those laws of the two sides of the local world” (1174), mixing the Dreamings, there is no other level, no voice from above to tell us how to do this. Law is the clash between voice and writing, “two laws, one in the head, the other on worthless paper in the swamp” (498).

Law’s origin stretches across lands, stories, minds, texts. A multiple, proliferating origin of emphatically not one source, indeed not a source. The water of the law comes from elsewhere – not a source but a horizon. When the water is no longer there, we crave the law: “she and the swan were joined as companions, of being both caught in a *mal de mer* from the yellow waves of dust spreading over the land.” (loc 4660)

/Sixth Wave/

I was riding the trough just now. No, I don’t think that this can actually happen. But never mind. Reading *The Swan Book* as a legal academic is a smooth wave, expected, all set up ready for the ride. I did not have to try much.

²² Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book* (Giramondo, 2013) Loc 100

²³ Stephanie Jones, ‘Maritime Space as Law and Light: Retrieving William Clark Russell’s *An Ocean Free-Lance* (1882)’ (2014) 15(1) *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*

What if a wave then is an ontological condition that emerges regardless of how much I try to bring it about? This would mean that as long as there is an encounter (between water and land, or water and hand) there would be waves. Like law: an ontological affect that emerges at every encounter.²⁴ This confluence (law, water, wave) can get messy, but I am willing to give it a go without succumbing to the temptation of untangling the mess. We have slashes for that. They keep things separate. Not for long but enough.

This is the method of wavewriting. A matterphor to start with.²⁵ But also, away from any figure of speech, an ocean methodology,²⁶ a seascape epistemology,²⁷ a wet ontology,²⁸ an enquiry of submerged perspectives.²⁹ It is persistent, fathoming, layering, uncovering. Like Michel Serres's analysis of *la belle noiseuse*,³⁰ the repetitive ruckus of waves, the noise that reveals existence. It is also about a readiness to ride a certain wave. It is collective, and at ease with losing control and becoming one with the elemental.

And here is a bit of a political strategy recommendation: just when the crest of a revolutionary banner becomes visible on the horizon, I must let it boom itself out, reach its peak, become the last wave. I need to *believe* that this will be the last ever wave, the one that will flood and change everything. But I should also imagine what happens after the wave is gone. Or at least to know that the wave will be gone and that, although it might well be the last ever wave, there is always one after that.

We must write both crest and trough.

Mary Okon Ononokpono's *Inyang* / Law's buoyancy

"Fetch a barrel of sea water" she said.³¹ But I got distracted, as I do. The water could wait. This is our home, the home of the river. The water can always wait. There is a myriad of market stalls to explore, a forest to wander in, worlds to imagine, white people to mock dressed all wrong for the climate.

Like this little guy, "skin the colour of the golden sand, eyes the colour of their waters...I felt a prickle of friendliness within me." (258) We got lost in the forest, him chasing me or the other way around, it doesn't matter. "I've always wanted to see the sea" I say. "But you are close to it, he said, suddenly jovial...You can hear them now, the waters...That stream can't make all that noise by itself. It's the sea. Listen to her. She's breathing." And then I saw: from deep in the forest, volumes and waves and those majestic winged vessels, stuff of lore,

²⁴ Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Spatial Justice: Body Lawscape Atmosphere* (Routledge 2014)

²⁵ Daniela Gandorfer and Zulaikha Ayub, 'Matterphorical' (2021) 24(1) *Theory & Event* 2-13

²⁶ Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law* (Duke UP, 2018)

²⁷ Karin Amimoto Ingersoll, *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology* (Duke UP, 2016)

²⁸ Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters, 'Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking', (2015) 33(1) *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 247 – 264

²⁹ Marcarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone* (Duke UP, 2017)

³⁰ Michel Serres, *Genesis* (trans. G. James and J. Nielson, University of Michigan Press, 1995)

³¹ Mary Okon Ononokpono, 'Inyang', in Nick Mulgrew and Karina Szczurek (eds), *Water: New Short Fiction from Africa* (New Internationalist, 2015) 254

dreams from other lands moored on our mouths waiting for something. I did not know what.

Come the evening, we fell asleep on the branches of a tree overhanging the estuary waters. The water can wait. But what it carries in its belly, the flow of capital, doesn't."³² "It appeared unexpectedly, the body of a tree of gigantic proportions...hollowed to accommodate a vast number of bodies...I saw them...faces in the water...scores upon scores of small dark islands...Some of them saw me...but the faces could not call out, for their mouths were bound." (264) One hundred and forty mouths in the first boat. Eight boats in total. Thousand boats in past and future, taking bodies "to the realms of the living-dead, never to return to the land of their birth" (264). I recognised people "grabbed as pawns for defaulting on payments" (265). The boat fate is 'legitimate' punishment for crimes. The slave boats are kept buoyant by legal tendrils, seaweeds of justice rotting under their bellies, bubbles of lawful putrefaction ushering these bodies into the Black Atlantic.³³

And then I saw the face of the law, "Proud. Regal. Surveying his newly acquired wealth...Etubom, Father of the Canoes, his new title never more befitting...Attired as both Obong and white man. My father." (265) When our eyes met, I shrieked and fell from the tree and down in the raging waters.³⁴ I was drowning, churned by the water of a law I could not live to bear, choked by the law of a water I no longer wanted to touch my skin. I surrendered to my liquid death, but just then "I discovered I could breathe. I became the ocean. I became the watcher of the water...I saw figures in the waters...rising from the bottom of the deep" (266).³⁵

Waves that smudge the black and white of the law. Well, black and white were never there to start with. The lines between bodies have always run into each other, churned by centuries of grief. I spit on your categories and smudge them with my wet hands. Your law is no longer dry. It drips bleeding.

³² "The "flows of capital" metaphor is exceptional in that it not only borrows water's meanings, but appropriates them directly. That is, as investment comes to be regarded as an essential source of health, good livelihood, and agency, water's more fundamental association with these qualities falls into the background...a quasi-abstraction like capital comes to seem as real as a river." Janine MacLeod, 'Water and the Material Imagination: Reading the Sea of Memory against the Flows of Capital', in Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis (eds), *Thinking with Water* (McGill UP, 2013). For sea metaphors, see Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator* (trans Steven Rendall, MIT Press 1997)

³³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Harvard UP, 1995). See also TT Arvind, 'Though it Shocks One Very Much': Formalism and Pragmatism in the "Zong" and "Bancoult" *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, (2012) 32(1), 113-151

³⁴ "The image of Kant on his insular promontory wavers, seen from a watery depth. For down here, down underneath, there may be an underwater city of bones, magical, miraculous, an entirely new way of being or of being re-borne, of understanding and knowing." Maurya Wickstrom, 'Wet Ontology, Moby-Dick, and the Oceanic in Performance' (2019) 71(4) *Theatre Journal*, 475-491

³⁵ On the Black Atlantic: "Is it possible that they could have given birth at sea to babies that never needed air? Recent experiments have shown mice able to breathe liquid oxygen, a premature human infant saved from certain death by breathing liquid oxygen through its underdeveloped lungs." Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (Quartet Books, 1998) 83.

/Seventh Wave/

“ROME, July 9 (Reuters) - Italian authorities have seized a boat operated by a German NGO that last month rescued more than 200 people stranded at sea, because it did not comply with safety rules, the Coast Guard said on Thursday. In April, Italy banned migrant rescue ships from docking in its ports until July 31 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It now transfers all those saved at sea onto large ferries which must wait off its coast. The mainly African passengers were moved to the Italian ferry Moby Zaza, where 28 tested positive for the new coronavirus. In a statement posted on Twitter, the Coast Guard said an inspection had found a number of irregularities that threatened the safety of those on board and the ship must fix the irregularities before resuming operations.”³⁶

Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* / Excretal Jurisdiction

“Garbage is fair.”³⁷ An island made of rubbish is washing over the coast of Taiwan. The plastic vortex is breaking up and the island is spreading, from ambulatory irrelevance in the middle of the ocean to a jurisdictional problem covering the coast stretches of several Pacific Rim nations. Its anthropocenic sludge adds an aesthetic layer, the soft hand of disaster: “The garbage glittered in the sunshine like it was encrusted with jewels.” (150) “The wind blew up light plastic bags that had dried in the sun...unbearably putrid flowers.” (155) You need to be on the ground to see this from the perspective of sovereign sclerosis, from the micromyopia of artificial borders. The real thing cannot, once again, be captured by the law: “the confetti of plastic rubbish is translucent and lies just below the water’s surface, it’s not detectable in satellite photographs. It can only be seen passing along the hull of a ship.” (122) But the vortex becomes a problem only when it accosts a state. And then only for that state. Or so the jurisdictional narrative goes. Yet the plastic vortex is a hyperobject,³⁸ always here even if geographically distant: “all those things we tossed out assuming the tide would take them away and the ocean would digest them were now floating slowly back” (116)

We have all found ourselves on that island, picking up the plastic debris of humanity and learning to ignore the stench of planetary decomposition. This time though, there is a different, odd reliance: the rubbish island becomes the protagonist’s refuge. He wakes up on it, half-dead, after he had been ostracised (the law again) from his own mid-pacific island “far from any continent” (10), an island so small that “the islanders could neither walk to a place where the sea could not be heard nor have a conversation in which the sea was not mentioned.” (12) His old world where water and law are tautologous, is replaced by this new shiny dead world where plastic is the only law and the sea is supplanted: “the island

³⁶ Reuters Staff, <https://www.reuters.com/article/healthcoronavirus-migrants-italy/italy-seizes-german-flagged-charity-vessel-for-breaking-safety-rules-idUSL8N2EG1PJ>

³⁷ Wu Ming-Yi, 156

³⁸ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

under the island was even more immense than the island itself. It was almost like an underwater maze, so big as to be another kind of sea.” (35) Against all odds, he survives on that unrooted emanation of death: “the island sometimes looked like a giant floating cage...the cemetery of all creation...Creatures that died from eating bits of the island eventually became part of the island.” (40)

Was that the other law? The other water? Did the original gods “still rule over this other world?” (127) No. It is all the same. We are all in it. This is our shared room without walls, exposed to planetary flows of destruction against which we erect ricepaper walls of jurisdictional smugness. Law melts in water, because water is never just water. Water and bodies are co-extensive,³⁹ excretal and solidified, filled with corpses of slaves, plastic bourgeoisie and sickening nostalgia. But garbage is fair. We are all complicit in the whirls of the vortex.

/Eighth Wave/

We are approaching the last wave. The one wave to end all waves. We are generating it with out slashes, every moment of our comfortable Western lives. Brace yourselves.

But we now begin to understand at least that: every legal text is wavewritten. Every text is turning blue.⁴⁰ Every law is turning blue.⁴¹ This is not just a fad. “Despite international efforts and tireless research, there is no permanent solution—no barriers to erect or walls to build—that will protect us in the end from the drowning of the world as we know it.”⁴² This wave might well be the last. From water scarcity, droughts and massive global fires to flooded cities, melting icecaps, submerging islands and drowned states, water is becoming the determining element of our century, asphyxiatingly present and scorchingly absent. Rivers, underground water reserves, oceans: they are all claiming their textuality.⁴³

³⁹ We are bodies of water, Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (Bloomsbury, 2017) 1, writes again and again. Not embodied on the one hand and comprising water on the other. “We are both of these things, inextricably and at once – made mostly of wet matter, but also aswim in the discursive flocculations of embodiment as an idea.”

⁴⁰ For the blue turn in humanities and social sciences, see e.g., Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters, ‘Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume Through Oceanic Thinking’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (2015) 33(2), 247-264; Stefan Helmreich, *Alien Oceans: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas* (University of California Press, 2009). For a different kind of blue, see Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1994 [1942]).

⁴¹ Irus Braverman and Elizabeth R. Johnson (Eds), *Ocean Legalities: The Life and Law of the Sea* (Duke UP, 2019).

⁴² Jeff Goodell, *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World* (Little, Brown and Company, 2017) from the cover.

⁴³ “The ocean is involved in the writing and reading process, affecting how we create and shape both ourselves and our nations.” Amimoto Ingersoll, 2016, 93

Two provisos. First, the disengagement of the legal from the purely tellurian, especially when it comes to questions of sovereignty and jurisdiction.⁴⁴ And second, it is not about fully knowing the water. It is not about surface and depth control.⁴⁵ It is about maintaining the aquatic unknowability while acknowledging the affinities with our own, more proximate bodies of water.⁴⁶ Acknowledging the continuum between our body and the hydrosphere.⁴⁷ Wavewriting, and legal wavewriting specifically, requires a radical immersion: “In these early days for ocean justice, I propose thinking with the ocean’s midnight aphotic depths, invoking it to bubble up through a juridical imaginary that would not deny its lively worlds and our relations with them.”⁴⁸

Rachel Armstrong’s *Invisible Ecologies* / Excretal Return

We finally reach Venice, the city that embodies the tautology between law and water. Building the city with and against water was a juridical necessity, a distancing from the laws of the land and the hordes of the mountains for the aquiferous construction of a sodden republic. Here all lines are smudged by the lagunar mucus: buildings and terrain, humans and nonhumans, the dead and the living, “a city that is built upon the bones of its populations, where in some places it is said that the earths are half mulch and half human.”⁴⁹ Armstrong’s near-future Venice is vibrating with the awareness of its posthumanity: “the entire ecological realm is in meltdown, where the familiar distinctions between things disappear. Plants, stones and creatures are continuous with each other, blending together more like shadows and objects...There is a background stench and gurgling noise through which all the voices appear to dispute the nature of existence. Life is in a state of oscillation.” (97) These ways of thinking of the world are not new.⁵⁰ But here, they become the only way. The affective body of the city is in material and immaterial continuum with our moods: “the lagoon’s constantly changing chemical trails, biomolecule standing waves, structured currents, water memory channels and complex and pervasive bouquets of substances...These feelings feed moods, make new kinds of experience and

⁴⁴ The classic example is UNCLOS Article 76 (1) which defines a state’s continental shelf as “the natural prolongation of its land territory” with the result that “Complex, intra-active ocean elements and relations are effectively redacted in a governance framework based on law of the land.” Susan Reid, ‘Solwara 1 and the Sessile Ones’, in Braverman and Johnson (eds), 57

⁴⁵ We can nowadays control even the most evanescent of water forms: “it is possible, to some extent, to control and command ocean waves: to build infrastructures that guard shorelines, to mold beaches that generate waves of stipulated measure and shape, and to engineer devices that “harness” wave energy.” Stefan Helmreich, ‘Wave Law’, in Braverman and Johnson (eds), 168

⁴⁶ Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law* (Duke University Press, 2018).

⁴⁷ “the lake’s water now seemed an extension of his own bloodstream. As the dull pounding rose, he felt the barriers which divided his own cells from the surrounding medium dissolving, and he swam forwards, spreading outwards across the black thudding water.” JG Ballard, *The Drowned World* (Fourth Estate, 2012) 71

⁴⁸ Susan Reid, 47-48. See also Stefan Helmreich, ‘Seagoing Nightmares’ *Dialogues in Human Geography* (2019) 9(3), 308-11

⁴⁹ Rachel Armstrong, *Invisible Ecologies* (NewCon Press, 2019) 32

⁵⁰ See e.g., Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010).

linger in aftertastes... These feelings are being produced by the spaces between things.” (96)⁵¹

But things have deteriorated, and the city’s fragile ecology is suffering. “While these artificial materials have always been part of [the water], it previously found ways to stimulate them into its living mass. These current accumulations are toxic, proliferative and malignant. Like a festering wound they split the [water’s] flesh and hold it open to trauma and poisons.” (214-5) Amidst this rapid decline, a bunch of nomads, illegally moored at Venice’s cemetery island, are working on the democratisation of the ultimate privilege, a Venetian burial. They defy the hierarchy of death, so explicit in Venice in terms of both how and where one is allowed to be buried. Instead they set up in the folds of the lagoon memorials of the beloved made out of smartly processed waste, that eventually become assimilated into the environment through their plastic-eating and toxin-neutralising “planned obsolescence”. A second death, a second offering to the leakage of bodies,⁵² an ecological burial practice which they insist that it take place according to the law, providing all necessary legal documents including a “mortuary passport”. (112)

This business idea has the fluidity of the city, bridging legality and illegality, operating from an unlawful mooring yet hoping for a new ecological necropolitics that helps assuage the grief of a dying planet. “We are born into a world of plastic...Our lives are plastic coated” (215), yet we can allow our dead bodies to become remedies.

A molecular eternal return that works as a metaphor for the city of liquid legality, where nothing ever disappears forever.

/Ninth Wave/

Repeat. Even if this is the last wave.

These waves break our skins down, and with them pulverise our anthropocentric physicality. We are leaking bodies, excretions are our offsprings, clotted morasses of our ancestors. Our defences are corroded, our exceptionalism flooded. Seepages make slippery, undesirable alliances. We pay our debt in discharges. And from within that collapse, the real planetary collectivity emerges. Astrida Ingersoll Ingersoll writes: “Bodies of water puddle and pool. They seek confluence. They flow into one another in life-giving ways, but also in unwelcome, or unstoppable, incursions. Even in an obstinate stagnancy they slowly seep and leak. We owe our own bodies of water to others, in both dribbles and deluges. These bodies are different – in their physical properties and hybridizations, as well as in political,

⁵¹ See also Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media* (Duke UP, 2020)

⁵² “It’s not dust to dust, that’s for sure, it’s water to water. We are made of water, it’s the most obvious thing, still we don’t get it, we think we are solid, we are not, we are pockets of moisture. We bleed. Our mouths, our eyes, our every opening to the air are filled with saliva, mucus, or wax.” J. M. Ledgard, *Submergence* (Vintage, 2012) 115

cultural, and historical terms – but their differing from one another, their differentiation, is a collective worlding.”⁵³

Our epistemes shed their skins too: “the boundaries between hitherto discrete bodies of knowledge have blurred to challenge both the hierarchical organisation of distinct disciplines and the division between theory and practice.”⁵⁴ There has always been knowledge produced in the materiality of the passage of water from body to body, from aquatic collectivity to aquatic collectivity, and from immensity to momentary individuality. But now we know that these knowledges, these epistemes, follow the same destiny as our physical bodies. Everything becomes a Venetian renaissance painting where forms give way to the *coloristi*'s fearless acrobatics in the unknown spaces beyond the line.

And from within the fold of these waves, new waves emerge.

Repetition: Mercè Rodoreda's *Death in Spring* (II)

/ I was always afraid of the law

/ I was always afraid of the water

Rodoreda shows me the riverbed of violence: “It’s fear. They want to be afraid... If the rocks and water rip away your face, it’s for the sake of everyone. If you live with a belief that the river will carry away the village, you won’t think about anything else.” (82) We never think about anything else. This groundless violence, the groundlessness that has become its ground, mossy, slippery cutting ground, bodies and movement entangled into the production of violence. It’s fear.

But sedimented fear is no longer just fear. It multiplies, it becomes fear *of* fear, angst, paralysis, life. It makes one turn against oneself. I am the clown and the clown laughs at himself. Especially at himself. What a good boy. Now, swim.

The law says, be afraid. The law says, do not desire anything other than fear. “That’s why they’re afraid. They are consumed by the fear of desire”, says Rodoreda. “They want to suffer so they won’t think about desire. You are maimed when you’re little, and fear is hammered into the back of your head. Because desire keeps you alive, they kill it off while you’re growing up, the desire for all things.” (83) I do not know what desire for all things is. My desire is a fetish, no outlet, just inlets of concentrated failures. My desire is my stepmother. My desire is actually my father. My desire, false and fetid, has blinded my desire for all things.

Here is fear. Again.

And here is law. Again.

The waters have reached us.

⁵³ Neimanis, 28

⁵⁴ Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* (Routledge, 1997) 4

It is afternoon. I am sitting on the riverbank, or was it a beach? and I am looking at the water. No, I cannot see the water. It is evening and I cannot see the water. I am surrounded by teenagers, I am a teenager myself, surrounded by pungent sweaty fear. This is a summer like every summer, a summer of fear and hiding. There is a game going on, the girls are lying on the sand, a river flowing overhead in the night sky transporting “stars and pieces of moon” (36), late evening waves that cannot save me keep on lapping at the end of the girls’ legs. The boys kiss the girls, this is the game but really nothing random or playful, there is a system of desire here, the girls have to lie on the sand, agentless lipglossed strawberries reshuffled after every boy, this is all there is, while the boys have to hunt down the already splayed prey, lie on top of every girl and kiss them in turn, kiss where the other boy had kissed before them but better, believably better, full of real desire better. I am one of the boys, and I want to be nowhere beneath and nowhere above, but I cannot but be. These are our rituals, no-one has handed them to us. The rituals are us. A head is pushing the back of my head. Swim! Kiss! Be a man. This is the desire you have.

In the book, I am in the same scene but different. From within the water floods the water. “The water by the canes was calm. I shut my eyes as if I were dead. I was dead...All of me was weighed down. As I was feeling the weight, I heard a splash and raised my head. Rings had formed in the water, giving birth to other rings, as if someone had hurled a flat rock. The rings kept spreading until they reached the point where they died... I glimpsed a hand by the canes. A hand above the water...The hand rose, then fell furiously, striking the water...I caught sight of a girl who climbed out of the water and got dressed... We looked at each other. She stood in front of me, I in front of her. Eye to eye, mouth to mouth...As if I had passed on to her the wish to do what I had done, she extended her arm towards me, her hand open. That was enough...We remained like that as the morning mist grew thinner, as if the water in the middle of the river had swallowed it, instead of spitting it out.” (93-94).

All waters give life. They swallow laws and open up horizons. They become mist, fog, vapour, ice, cloud, tree, amoeba, human. We need to forget these rituals, to stop building atmospheres out of frozen water pillars. We need other rituals, as translucent as the water we are thirsty for, as light as pure desire, as round as womb. We just need to learn how to become these waters, to come out the other side.

I long to have had that desire, and for that desire to have been heard by the water. I long for the mist to wrap around my desire and diffuse it, make it a desire for all things. I long for the law to invite me in and let me find the other bank, the other water, the other law.⁵⁵

/The last wave/

Here it comes.

⁵⁵ Peter G writes: “The jurisographer would say that you long to find your law, precisely not the vagueness of ‘another’ law, another’s law, but your law, your water, your land and your body yourself.”