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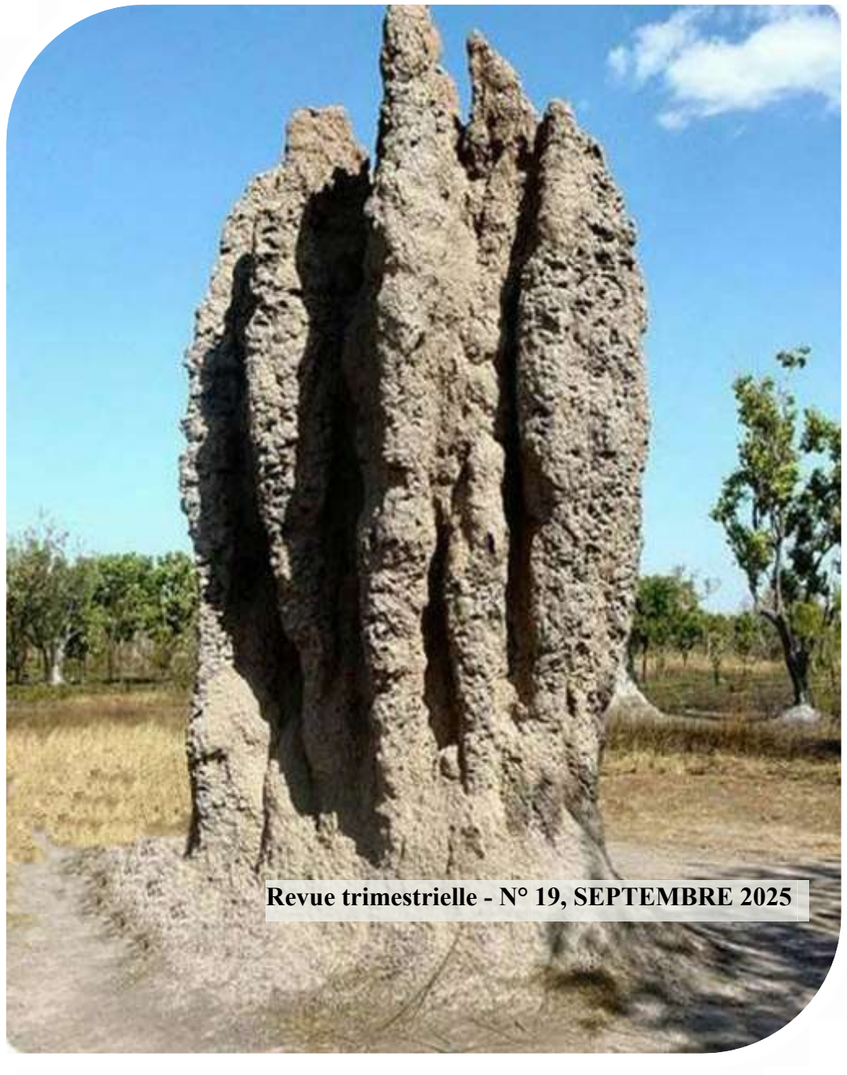

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"Dama Ninao" est une revue scientifique interdisciplinaire qui accepte et publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines. A cet effet, elle s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques. La Revue "Dama Ninao", entendu "L'Entente" en langue kabyè du Nord Togo, est créée dans l'intention de matérialiser la mondialisation ou la globalisation qui s'opère avec l'esprit d'équipe et d'échanges et la désuétude du monde autarcique. Le monde scientifique universitaire ne peut échapper à cet esprit d'équipe qui fonde un creuset où « le fer aiguise le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité.

La Revue Dama Ninao nous renvoie à la Civilisation de l'Universel du poète sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor, qui prône la porosité des âmes avec l'acceptation de l'autre, de ce qu'il dispose d'utile pour mon avancement : sa civilisation, sa culture, sa langue … Elle se fonde notamment sur la philosophie de Paul Ricœur qui préconise la perception de Soi-même comme un autre. Considérer soi-même comme un autre aux yeux de l'autre, nous amènerait à faire taire nos distensions et ressentiments afin de redimensionner notre espace, reconstruire notre histoire et notre société.

La Revue Dama Ninao s'est inspirée de la nature. Des insectes en miniature nous produisent de bels chefs-d'œuvre architecturaux, conjuguent leur génie créateur et leur force dans la patience et dans la tolérance. Ils créent des œuvres monumentales qui dépassent l'entendement humain, les termitières. A cet effet, la nature semble nous parler, nous guider, nous instruire dans le silence. Seules ces créations nous interpellent sans autant faire de nous des disciples. Comme la termitière qui, pour la plupart du temps, est une composante de maillons surgissant de la même matière, la Revue Dama Ninao se veut une termitière scientifique dont les enseignants-chercheurs en sont les maillons.

Au confluent de diverses sciences, la Revue Dama Ninao se propose de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

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La taille des articles

Volume : 10 à 15 pages ; interligne 1.5, police 12 pour le corps du texte et les courtes citations ; police 11 pour les longues citations, Times New Roman, les références des citations doivent être incorporées dans le texte. Exemple : Guy Rocher (1968, p. 29), pas de référence en foot-notes à l'exception de quelques commentaires.

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- Un **TITRE** en caractère d'imprimerie et en gras. Le titre ne doit pas être trop long ;

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- Un **Résumé (Abstract)** de 8 lignes en français et anglais, en interligne simple, suivi de 6 **Mots clés** (**Key words**)

- Une **Introduction** : elle doit avoir une problématique, une méthode et une structure.

- Un **Développement** : les articulations du développement du texte doivent-être titrées comme suit :

1-Pour le **Titre** de la première section

1-1-Pour le **Titre** de la première sous-section

1-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième section

2-1-Pour le **Titre** de la première sous-section

2-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

3- Pour le **Titre** de la troisième section (si l'auteur de l'article le souhaite)

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Objectifs et portée

La revue Dama Ninao, de par son nom qui signifie « entente », a pour objectifs :

- de matérialiser le monde universitaire qui est un creuset où « le fer aiguise le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité ;
- de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

La revue Dama Ninao a une portée scientifique et sociale. A cet effet, elle publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines et s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques sur appel à contribution thématique (colloque) ou varia. Elle est un espace de rencontre, de construction et de reconstruction des réseaux relationnels et scientifiques.

Professeur Koutchoukalo TCHASSIM

Université de Lomé

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DIVINING THE THREAD: *FÂ*, TEMPORAL FUGITIVITY, AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE IN KIESE LAYMON'S *LONG DIVISION (2013)*

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&
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Abstract: This paper argues that Kiese Laymon's Long Division (2013) uses a novel-within-a-novel structure to enact principles of fâ (Ifá) divination, a West African epistemology. The novel rejects techno-scientific time travel, framing it instead as temporal fugitivity that challenges racist, linear timelines which erase Black trauma. Laymon uses fâ cosmology to model narrative as a tool for reclaiming agency, interpreting destiny, and resisting historical erasure. The embedded novel acts as a divinatory Odu sign the protagonists interpret to navigate crises. This approach situates Long Division within Afrofuturist and African American literary traditions, subverting Western time paradigms and highlighting African cosmologies as tools for liberation and self-recovery.

Keywords: fâ/Ifá divination, temporal fugitivity, Afrofuturism, counter-narrative

Resume: Le présent article soutient que Long Division (2013) de Kiese Laymon utilise une structure de roman imbriqué pour incarner les principes de la divination fâ (Ifá), une épistémologie ouest-africaine. Le roman rejette le voyage temporel techno-scientifique, le présentant plutôt comme une fugacité temporelle qui remet en cause les chronologies linéaires et racistes qui effacent les traumatismes noirs. Laymon mobilise la cosmologie fâ pour modéliser le récit comme un outil de reconquête d'agence, d'interprétation du destin et de résistance à l'effacement historique. Le roman imbriqué agit comme un signe divinatoire Odu que les protagonistes interprètent pour surmonter leurs crises. Cette approche inscrit Long Division dans les traditions littéraires afrofuturistes et afro-américaines, subvertissant les paradigmes temporels occidentaux et mettant en avant les cosmologies africaines comme outils de libération et de réappropriation de soi.

Mots-clés : divination par le fâ/Ifá, fugitivité temporelle, afrofuturisme, contre-récit, cosmologie africaine, temporalité noire.

Introduction

Kiese Laymon's *Long Division (2013)* utilizes its embedded narrative structure to perform the principles of *fâ* divination. The novel frames time travel as a necessary act of counter narrative, a means to reclaim personal and collective destiny, or *ayanmo*, from the oppressive linear timelines that, as Christina Sharpe (2016) argues, function within the wake of slavery to isolate Black trauma in a sealed past. Through this framework, Laymon posits narrative itself as the ultimate technology for what Toni Morrison (1987) termed *re-membering* the self and history. This conflation of narrative and temporal movement is established from the novel's outset.

Long Division (2013) begins with a deceptively simple premise. A teenager named City Coldson becomes a viral sensation for what the author describes as problematizing everything during a national quiz show. This leads to a summer of humiliation and a mysterious assignment to read a book (Laymon, 2013, p. 9). The novel he is given, however, is also titled *Long Division*, and its protagonist is a boy named City Coldson living in 1985. This initial metafictional conceit, a character reading the very novel that contains him, is the first clue that Laymon is engaged in a project far more ambitious than postmodern playfulness. The novel's central mechanism of time travel is activated not by a machine, but by the act of reading and engaging with narrative. This conflation of narrative and temporal movement invites a reading not through the conventional lens of science fiction, but through that of African divination.

Literary critics such as Jason McCall (2013) have rightly noted the novel's postmodern aesthetics and its critique of post-racial America, a concept that asserts the diminished significance of racism in contemporary society, especially after Barack Obama's election. However, to fully unpack its philosophical and structural mechanics, a deeper, culturally specific framework is necessary. This study argues that Kiese Laymon's *Long Division* (2013) utilizes its embedded narrative structure to perform the principles of *fâ* divination. It frames time travel as a necessary act of counter narrative, a means to reclaim personal and collective destiny, or *ayanmo*,

from the oppressive linear timelines imposed by a racist and anti-Black social order (Sharpe, 2016). Through this framework, Laymon posits narrative itself as the ultimate technology for *re-membering* the self and history.

To advance this argument, the paper first establishes the theoretical framework of *fâ* philosophy, contrasting its non-linear conception of time with the linear temporality used as a tool of oppression. Second, it analyzes the novel's formal structure as a divinatory process, arguing that the novel-within-a-novel functions as an *Odu*, a divinatory sign, and the Void that City travels through to move between 1985 and 2013 as a maroon space for temporal fugitivity. Last, it examines how the protagonists' journeys mirror the quest for destiny, using concepts like *ìpònjà*, or crisis, and re-memory to demonstrate how Laymon's work models narrative as a practice of liberation.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Afrofuturism, Form, and the Politics of Post-Raciality

The critical discourse surrounding Kiese Laymon's *Long Division* (2013) has effectively positioned the novel within broader conversations in African American literature, postmodernism, and Afrofuturism. However, a significant gap remains in scholarship that interprets the complex temporal and narrative structure of the novel through a specific African cosmological lens, particularly the Fon and Yoruba[136] system of *fâ* (Ifá) divination. This review synthesizes existing scholarship across four key areas to contextualize this study's intervention. Scholarship on *Long Division* frequently highlights its Afrofuturist elements, particularly its use of time travel. Critics like Ytasha Womack (2013) and Reynaldo Anderson (2016) define Afrofuturism as a cultural aesthetic that combines science fiction, history, and fantasy to reimagine the past and future of the African diaspora.

[136] The Yoruba, located primarily in southwestern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo, are the originators of the Ifá system (Abimbola, 1977). The Fon, an ethnolinguistic group from Benin, share a closely related spiritual worldview, V*Odu*n, and cosmological principles (Herskovits, 1938). Together, they are the primary sources for the fâ/Ifá divination epistemology central to this analysis.

Within this framework, *Long Division* (2013) is seen as part of a tradition that includes Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), both of which use non-linear temporality to critique historical and contemporary forms of oppression. However, many analyses stop at categorizing the novel's time travel as a fantastical or science fictional device. A second strand of criticism focuses on the novel's self-reflexive, metafictional form. The novel-within-a-novel structure has been analyzed through the lens of postmodernism, with scholars noting its affinities with the work of authors like Kurt Vonnegut or John Barth (Hutcheon, 1980). Gates's (1988) theory of *Signifyin(g)* has also been applied to show how Laymon's repetition with difference critiques essentialist's notions of Black identity.

Concurrently, the novel's sharp satire of post-racial America has been a central focus of literary critique. Scholars have compellingly argued that *Long Division* dismantles the myth of a post-racial society by exposing the continuous, everyday manifestations of racism in education, language policing, and media representation (Cunningham, 2017; Borshuk, 2018). This critique is often linked to Patterson's (1982) seminal concept of "social death," the process by which enslaved Africans were systematically alienated from lineage and identity. Finally, a growing body of scholarship applies African indigenous knowledge systems to the analysis of African American literature. This work, exemplified by Thompson (1984) and more recent studies by scholars like Omovo (2021), seeks to decode cultural retentions and cosmological patterns within diasporic art, moving beyond thematic analysis to identify epistemological underpinnings.

1.2. Identifying the Critical Gap: Toward a Fâ Divination Framework

While the aforementioned scholarship provides valuable context, a critical disconnect remains between these analyses and the specific African cosmological system that provides the novel's deepest structural and philosophical logic. The prevailing use of Western theoretical models to explain a work deeply informed by African epistemologies creates an interpretive gap.

This paper builds on but diverges from Afrofuturist readings that employ a techno-scientific paradigm for time travel, a tradition rooted in the mechanistic devices of authors like H.G. Wells. Instead, it argues that the mechanism in Laymon's work is fundamentally cosmological, drawing on theories of Black temporality such as Sharpe's (2016) "wake" and Yun's (2024) "graded inequality." While analyses using Linda Hutcheon's (1980) concept of metafiction, the self-conscious reflection on the nature of fiction itself, effectively describe the novel's formal mechanics, they often rely on Euro-American models. This paper seeks to advance this conversation by proposing that the novel's structure is a deliberate performance of *fâ* divination. The novel-within-a-novel functions not as a superficial postmodern trick—a self-reflexive gesture privileging form over meaning, but as the *Odu*, the sacred text to be interpreted. Furthermore, while acknowledging vital political readings that diagnose the problem of post-raciality and social death, this article contends they are incomplete without a consideration of the novel's proposed solution. It argues that the *fâ* framework provides the cultural logic for the characters' acts of re-memory (Morrison, 1987), positioning narrative as a restorative practice against social death.

It is within the emerging field of African cosmologies that this study finds its most significant opportunity for contribution. While the application of concepts like àse (life force) to literature exists, the specific application of the *fâ* divination system as a hermeneutic for analyzing narrative structure is profoundly underexplored. No significant scholarship has yet proposed that the novel-within-a-novel device in *Long Division* is a literary *Odu* or that the characters' journeys mirror a divinatory consultation. This paper addresses this gap by introducing *fâ* divination as the essential critical framework for understanding the novel's narrative mechanics and its radical proposition that storytelling is a technology for discerning destiny and achieving temporal liberation.

2. Theoretical Framework: Fâ Cosmology Versus the Linear Imperative

2.1. The Foundations of Fâ Cosmology: Destiny, Divination, and Non-Linear Temporality

To understand the narrative architecture of Kiese Laymon's *Long Division (2013)*, one must first grasp the West African cosmological system that fundamentally structures it. *Fâ*, more commonly spelled Ifá in academic literature, is a comprehensive epistemology, philosophy, and system of divination practiced by the Yoruba and Fon peoples. It is centered on a vast literary corpus of poetic verses, the *Odu Ifá*, which function as a repository of ancestral wisdom, philosophical inquiry, and narrative patterns used to interpret human experience and navigate life's challenges (Abimbola, 1976; Bascom, 1969). This system provides a critical lens through which Laymon's novel can be understood not as mere metafiction, but as a literary performance of divination.

Central to this worldview is a conception of time that is inherently cyclical, spiraling, and deeply interconnected. This stands in stark contrast to the dominant Western modernist model of time as a linear, progressive arrow moving irreversibly from past to future. Within *fâ* philosophy, the past (*igan*), present (*isinsinyi*), and future (*ikehin*) exist in a dynamic and communicative relationship. The past is not a sealed archive but a living resource, an active repository of wisdom and experience that can be consulted to navigate present challenges and consciously shape future possibilities (Mbiti, 1969). The technology for this consultation is divination, a ritual process of revealing the patterns, or *Odu*, that connect these temporal realms and illuminate the seeker's path.

This process is oriented around the core concept of destiny, or *ayanmo* (Yoruba). In this framework, an individual is understood to choose a path or destiny before birth. However, this destiny is not a fixed or predetermined script fatalistically awaiting fulfillment. Rather, it is a dynamic pattern that must be actively discovered, interpreted, and actualized through one’s choices, actions, and interventions in the world. When one faces obstacles, confusion, or a life disrupting

crisis (*ìpònjà*), divination serves as the essential technology for uncovering the root of the disruption. It provides guidance, often through the poetic verses of the *Odu*, on how to restore balance and realign with one's chosen path. This entire cosmological system provides the essential cultural and philosophical logic underpinning the narrative mechanics of *Long Division (2013)*.

2.2. Chronological Colonialism, the Wake, and the Maroon Practice of Temporal Fugitivity

The *fâ* conception of cyclical, accessible time stands in direct opposition to what can be termed the linear imperative of Western modernity: a paradigm that functions as a tool of social control and a legacy of colonialism. Sociologist Johan Galtung's (1969) concept of "structural violence" is critically useful here, as it describes harm embedded within social institutions and power structures, rendering that harm invisible and seemingly natural. This linear temporal paradigm is inextricably linked to the project of colonialism. The colonial enterprise required not only the physical subjugation of land and bodies but also the epistemic subjugation of time itself.

A progressive, linear timeline where history moves irreversibly from a primitive past to a civilized future provided the ideological justification for colonial violence. It positioned European modernity as the teleological endpoint of human development and Indigenous and African temporalities as archaic, something to be evolved from or erased (Quijano, 2007; Rifkin, 2017). This chronological colonialism created a temporal hierarchy that rendered alternative ways of knowing the past and future as invalid, thereby naturalizing the colonial order. The *fâ* conception of cyclical, communicative time is thus not merely different; it represents a direct epistemological challenge to this colonial framework.

This violence operates not only socially and economically but also temporally. A linear, progressive timeline that insists slavery is conclusively "in the past," that the civil rights movement achieved its goals, and that we now inhabit a "post racial" society is a primary tool of what Christina Sharpe (2016) calls "the

wake" of slavery. It is a narrative that actively perpetuates oppression by strategically denying the continuous, present tense impact of historical trauma, thereby isolating instances of injustice and severing their systemic connections.

This enforced linear timeline creates and maintains what Yun (2024) theorizes as a structure of "graded inequality": a system where oppression is stabilized through a carefully managed hierarchy of groups, each invested in maintaining the status quo against those positioned below them. The legitimacy of this entire system relies on a widespread belief in the linear narrative of progress.

Therefore, to consciously break from this imposed timeline constitutes a radical political act. It is an act of temporal fugitivity, a concept deeply rooted in the history of marronage. This historical process involved enslaved Africans fleeing plantations to establish autonomous, free communities in the wilderness, beyond the reach of oppressive colonial institutions (Roberts, 2015). Scholars Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) theorize this fugitive space as "the undercommons": a realm of radical sociality, study, and existence that operates outside the surveillance and control of oppressive power structures. The fâ principle of consulting the past to shape the future is, in a socio-temporal context, the philosophical underpinning of this practice of temporal marronage.

In *Long Division* (2013), the act of time travel represents precisely this form of marronage into the temporal undercommons. It constitutes a definitive rejection of the official, linear historical narrative born from chronological colonialism. At the same time, it affirms a core *fâ* principle: that answers to pressing contemporary questions lie in deliberate, interpretive, and ethical engagement with a past that is not dead and a future that is not yet fixed. The novel's protagonists engage in this fugitive practice to reclaim their agency and their destiny from the structural violence of linear time.

3. The Structure as Divinatory Counter-Narrative: Uncasting the Odu of the Text

3.1. The Book as Odu: Initiation into the Divinatory Process

Laymon's novel is a meticulous literary enactment of the divinatory process where the entire book functions as the divination session itself. The most potent symbol of this is the novel-within-a-novel. The physical novel *Long Division* that City finds is not just a plot device; it is the cast *Odu*, the specific sign revealed for his consultation. This process is vividly depicted in the moment Citoyen Coldson first receives the mysterious text from his principal. This scene is not merely an expository plot point; it is the narrative equivalent of the *Babalawo*[137] casting the palm nuts to reveal the sign that must be interpreted. The exchange is charged with a sacred and mysterious significance that transcends a simple school assignment:

> Principal Reeves just looked at me. I tried to look away toward the bookshelf so I wouldn't have to look at her face.
> "What's that?" I asked her. "That's so crazy."
> "It's just a book," she said.
> "I thought you said we were never supposed to say 'just a book' about a book."
> Principal Reeves made that rule up last year. She had every book in her bookshelf placed in alphabetical order but on the floor underneath the shelf was a book called *Long Division*. There wasn't an author's name on the cover or the spine. I couldn't tell from looking at it if it was fiction or a real story. The cover had the words "*Long Division*" written in a thick black marker over what looked like the outside of this peeling work shed behind my grandma's house.
> "Who wrote that book?"

[137] In Yoruba tradition, the *Babalawo* interprets the Odu Ifá—divinatory signs that encode wisdom about human life, ethical choices, and cosmic order. In literary terms, the Babalawo can be seen as a metaphor for the reader, critic, or narrator: someone who decodes patterns in a text to understand meaning, anticipate consequences, and act ethically within the story world.

> Principal Reeves ignored my question and just looked at me.
> "Please stop looking at me, Principal Reeves."
> "I'll stop looking at you when you start looking at you. You've got to respect yourself and the folks who came before you, Citoyen. You," she paused. (Laymon, 2013, pp. 18-19)

This passage establishes several key qualities that align the novel with the nature of an *Odu*. First, its origin is obscured and mystical; it exists outside the logical, alphabetical order of Principal Reeves's bookshelf, literally placed on the floor, destabilizing the Western epistemological order it challenges. Its lack of an author denies it a single, authoritative origin point, making it a collective, timeless text whose authority derives from its function, not its provenance.

Second, its presentation is ritualistic. Principal Reeves's intense, silent gaze and her uncharacteristic dismissal of her own rule, that one must never diminish a book by calling it "just a book," signal that this transaction is of a different order. Her gaze is not that of a school administrator but approximates the focused, knowing look of a diviner who has revealed a sign. Her final, unfinished statement completes this ritual. The directive "I'll stop looking at you when you start looking at you" is the core instruction of the divinatory session (Laymon, 2013, p. 19). It frames the entire novel not as a passive reading experience but as an active, introspective quest. She explicitly links this self-examination to ancestral respect ("the folks who came before you"), directly connecting City's personal crisis (*ìpònjà*) to a collective, historical destiny (*ayanmo*) that he must uncover.

Finally, the physical novel itself is described as a palimpsest, its title scrawled in marker "over what looked like the outside of this peeling work shed" (Laymon, 2013, p. 19). This image evokes a layered history, a surface that has been written over but whose past is still visible, still present. This is a perfect metaphor for the novel's, and *fâ*'s, conception of time, which is not linear, but layered, with the past visibly informing and constituting the present text. The connection to his grandma's shed further roots this mystical object in a personal and cultural history, making it a

specific sign for him to decode. This moment is the genesis of the divinatory consultation, setting City on his path to navigate his *ìpònjà* through the interpretive act of reading.

This mysterious object, with "no author's name on the cover or the spine" (Laymon, 2013, p. 19), becomes the focus of City's initial engagement, which is his first act of divinatory consultation. As he reads, he experiences a profound sense of recognition, stating, "I didn't know what to do with the fact that the narrator was black like me, stout like me, in the ninth grade like me, and had the same first name as me" (Laymon, 2013, p. 29). He is, as Principal Reeves commanded, beginning to "look at [him]self."

This mirroring effect is the core mechanism of the *Odu*. His crisis, or *ìpònjà*, which includes his public humiliation and the disappearance of Baize Shephard, is reflected back at him through the text. The book becomes a dynamic sign he must decipher to understand his path forward, or *ayanmo*. His act of reading becomes an act of temporal fugitivity, pulling him out of the linear timeline of his public shame and into a cyclical, interpretive engagement with a past that holds the keys to his present.

3.2. Narrative as Divinatory Pattern: Signifyin(g) and Temporal Fugitivity

The divinatory process reaches its most terrifying pitch when the *Odu* ceases to be a reflective sign and becomes an accusatory one. In a climactic confrontation, the bound and gagged Pot Belly reveals the book's ultimate function which is to point not to an external culprit, but back at City himself.

> "You killed that girl," he said through some quivering lips.
> "Who?"
> "You," he said, as calm as anything I'd heard in days. "You know what you did to that girl, and that's your business."
> ...

> "You did it, man. You did it. You wrote it in your book." (Laymon, 2013, p. 214)

Here, *Long Division* fulfills the most profound role of the *Odu*. It reveals an uncomfortable and transformative truth that the seeker must integrate. Pot Belly, in his role as an unlikely and unwilling oracle, interprets the sign for City. The author of the narrative is responsible for the fate of its characters. This forces City, and the reader, to confront the weight of narrative authority and the painful responsibility that comes with *re-membering* and telling a story. The divination reveals that the seeker's destiny (*ayanmo*) is inextricably linked to the stories they tell and their courage in facing the truths within them.

The two overlapping narratives, City in 2013 and City in 1985, are not separate stories. They are interconnected verses of the same literary *Odu*. They comment on, clarify, and complicate one another, revealing patterns that would be invisible if read in isolation. For example, the theme of standardized testing and linguistic policing appears in both timelines. The 2013 City is shamed for his use of language, while the 1985 City must compete in a "Can You Use This Word in a Sentence" contest (Laymon, 2013, p. 35).

This repetition is not coincidence. It is a pattern revealed by the cast *Odu*, pointing to a deep, systemic truth about the policing of African American intellect and language across generations. This is a classic example of signifyin(g), the African American rhetorical strategy of repetition with difference, which Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) identifies as a foundational African American trope. Laymon signifies on the tradition of time travel narratives themselves, replacing techno-scientific explanations with a concrete cultural logic rooted in African cosmology.

The mystical Void that City travels through to move between 1985 and 2013 is the literalization of this liminal, sacred space. It is the narrative embodiment of what Harney and Moten (2013) theorize as the undercommons, a fugitive space where communication with other times is possible, free from the surveillance of a

racist society. Within this space, City can truly study his own condition, make connections, and plan his fugitive path forward. This aligns perfectly with the purpose of the maroon community and the divinatory space, which is to create a zone of autonomy from which to strategize and heal.

This function of the hole as a maroon space is most starkly revealed when City, Baize, Shalaya Crump, and Jewish Evan use it not for travel but for exile. Confronted by a teenage Klansman, they choose to banish him to an unknown time. This act is a radical form of temporal justice and community self-defense, a fugitive maneuver that operates completely outside the state's linear legal system. As City rationalizes, "We want him to experience what we went through" (Laymon, 2013, p. 204). The hole becomes a tool for imposing a counter-narrative of consequences, a means to forcibly reorient a perpetrator of racial terror within the non-linear timeline of trauma he helps perpetuate. The complexity of this act is not lost on the characters; they debate the morality of it, questioning if making him "suffer" is the point or if they will remember their suffering "whether he suffers or not" (Laymon, 2013, p. 204). This moment crystallizes the role of the Void, understood as a narrative analog to the undercommons (Harney & Moten, 2013), as a space for enacting the difficult, ambiguous, and painful work of liberation that the official, linear timeline refuses to countenance.

4. Re-Membering Destiny in the Face of Erasure: The Quest for Ayanmo

4.1. The Cyclical Crisis: Ìpònjà as Historical and Systemic Inheritance

The protagonists' journeys in *Long Division (2013)* are not random adventures but narrative performances of the quest to uncover and align with one's *ayanmo* (destiny) in the face of systemic obstacles. City's humiliation following his viral video is his *ìpònjà*, a Yoruba term for a life-disrupting crisis that forces an individual to seek deeper understanding. This crisis is not merely personal; it is systemic, exposing how his suffering is entangled with broader historical and racial injustices (Laymon, 2013).

The cyclical nature of this trauma becomes terrifyingly apparent when City confronts Pot Belly, his present-day tormentor, and realizes he is a recurrence of an old one. City's question, "Wait. You're the white boy my granddaddy died trying to save?" (Laymon, 2013, p. 213), explosively connects his trauma to that of his grandfather, Tom Henry. This revelation demonstrates how the past is not a closed chapter but an active, living force that shapes present crises, making Pot Belly a living symbol of the cyclical inheritance of anti-Black violence and unresolved grief.

City's shame is a manifestation of what W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) termed double consciousness, the sense of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 9). The viral video represents the hostile, white gaze that defines him, and his time-travel journey becomes a divinatory consultation to shed this imposed definition.

4.2 Re-Membering as Liberation: Naming, Narrative, and the Painful Path to Ayanmo

The remedy to this crisis is an act of *re-membering*, a term Toni Morrison (1987) coined to describe the painful, active process of piecing together a fragmented and traumatic past into a coherent whole. For City and Baize, time travel is this *re-membering*. They are not changing the past but confronting it, gathering its fragments, the stories of their grandparents, the hidden histories of their town, and using them to reassemble their understanding of themselves and their world. This process is deeply tied to naming.

The recurrence of names across time periods, City, Baize, the Shephard family, is a powerful rejection of what Orlando Patterson (1982) identified as social death, a process of genealogical isolation. By asserting these continuous names, Laymon's characters defy erasure, honoring an African and African American tradition where names carry spiritual weight and connect the individual to their ancestry and destiny. The quest to understand what it means to be "City" is the quest to understand one's *ayanmo*.

Their movement through time allows them to confront the "single story" (Adichie, 2009) that stereotypes their community, challenging reductive narratives of pathology by witnessing the complexity, love, and resilience that exist across time. This is the ultimate goal of the divination, to move from a state of crisis and confusion (*ìpònjà*) to a state of clarity and alignment with one's purpose (*ayanmo*). However, Laymon shows this clarity is often achieved through profound loss and a painful acceptance of one's role within a larger, cyclical pattern. The quest for *ayanmo* is not a triumphant return but a painful, collective agreement to carry the weight of history forward in a more conscious way, thereby achieving a sovereignty of self that is forever cognizant of its connection to a re-membered community.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to introduce the West African epistemological system of *fâ* divination as a vital hermeneutic for interpreting the complex temporal and narrative structure of Kiese Laymon's *Long Division* (2013). The key findings of this research demonstrate that Laymon moves beyond Afrofuturist tropes by using the structure of *fâ* divination as his narrative engine, thereby grounding his time-travel narrative in a specific, African-derived cosmological system. This analysis has established three central arguments. First, the novel's embedded structure is not a mere postmodern gimmick but a sophisticated representation of the *Odu*, the divinatory sign that must be interpreted. Second, the mechanism of time travel functions as a form of temporal fugitivity, a maroon journey into the past to liberate the present from the constraints of chronological colonialism. Third, the characters' crises are systemic *ìpònjà*, and their quest is for nothing less than the re-membering of their destiny (*ayanmo*) from the fragments of historical trauma and ongoing oppression.

In the end, Laymon's novel reveals that for African American subjects navigating a world that seeks to fragment their history and control their future, narrative itself is the most powerful technology for self-discovery and sovereignty. The ability to tell your own story, to move through time on your own terms, to

interpret the patterns of your own life—this is the ultimate act of divination. It is how one divines a path to liberation, however painful and costly that path may be. *Long Division* (2013) asserts that our destinies are not fixed points in a linear past, condemned to be endured, but are living, breathing patterns waiting to be interpreted, claimed, and reshaped through the stories we dare to tell and the histories we dare to traverse. In doing so, Laymon offers not just a story, but nothing less than a methodology for freedom.

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