"Serving the Spirits": Emergent Identities in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*

SARAH WOOD

■ In a recent article for *Science Fiction Studies* Istvan Csicery-Ronay makes the claim that "sf is the genre of empire" (241). Csicsery-Ronay cites that, in support of his claim, the "conditions for the emergence of sf as a genre are made possible by three factors: the technological expansion that drove real imperialism, the need felt by national audiences for literary-cultural mediations as their societies were transformed from historical nations into hegemons, and the fantastic model of achieved techno-scientific Empire" (231). In Csiscery-Ronay's formulation the nascent genre of science fiction parallels and responds to not only the techno-scientific progression experienced in the West in the nineteenth century but also to the corresponding imperial impulse that sees the colonisation of peoples, land and cultures, the complexities of which can be mediated in the imaginary spaces offered by sf. Whilst there is clearly a correlation to be drawn between science fiction and empire, I would be wary of homogenising the experiences of empire, and science fiction's response to it, within a given temporal moment or geographic space. Indeed, science fiction's ability to map new worlds with words could offer a correlate with the early travelogues of European explorers. The "sensawonder" that adherents to the genre cite as its main attraction bears a striking similarity to the awe and wonder which, as Stephen Greenblatt suggests, was "the central figure in the

Extrapolation, Vol. 46, No. 3 © 2005 by The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

initial European response to the New World" (14). In its generation of awe in the possibilities of new worlds, sf echoes the European's supposed discovery of uncharted land. Sf responds, then, on a number of levels, to the colonialist's experience of Empire. Thus some sf texts can be situated as offering a worldview that correlates and expresses the Imperialist view of colonisation.

Whilst sf encodes the experience of Empire it need not, as Csiscery-Ronay argues, be limited to the coloniser's perspective: "To say that sf is the genre of empire does not mean that sf artists seek to serve the empire" (241). Like all colonial artefacts, sf narratives may be appropriated, and "written back." The genre's ability to imagine and re-imagine colonial relations offers a space for fictions that whilst colonialist in framework need not necessarily be imperialist in their ideological impetus. However, in order to resist what postcolonial theorist Stephen Slemon refers to as "the purchase of genre. . .[the] contract between text and reader and thus a set of centralizing codes" (31), the narrative logic of sf needs to be examined to detect whether it encodes a worldview that substantiates the politics of Empire. If so, an agenda of resistance can only be articulated if these "centralizing codes" are queried. Helen Tiffin describes this process as a "counter-discursive strategy" arguing that these strategies "involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjective 'local'" (23). Tiffin's thesis that postcolonial literatures offer "fields" of resistance suggests that it is the articulation of the specific, subjective and localised that is able to subvert the hegemony of imperialist-centred discourses. That these counter-discourses can only ever be partial and incomplete is, Slemon suggests, part of the "untranscendable ambiguity of literary or indeed any contra/dictory or contestatory act which employs a First-World medium for the figuration of a Third-World resistance" (37). What this means is that writers who wish to articulate a postcolonial perspective in discourses predominantly employed by and associated with the coloniser must necessarily interrogate the epistemological framework within which they write: they need to examine "ways of knowing" and how those "ways of knowing" work to construct the worlds they inhabit.

As such, this paper will argue that Nalo Hopkinson's debut novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, attempts to offer a localized resistance to imperialist assumptions that can be found in sf. Hopkinson's fiction operates a counter-discursive strategy of resistance which is invoked not only at the level of the dramatic action of the text but which is also evident in her use of stylistic conventions drawn from sf, fantasy and mythology to inform and structure her text. In doing so, Hopkinson locates *Brown Girl* at the margins of science fiction thus making use of the malleability of this territory's boundaries in order to offer a space for possible new emergent identities grounded in a postcolonial context.

The setting of Hopkinson's first novel is the devastated urban core of a near-future Toronto, the economic collapse of which has occasioned the "white flight" of the middle-classes into the safety of suburbia and the subsequent abandonment of the city by the representatives of law and order. The text focuses on three generations of displaced African Caribbean women and their struggle for both physical and psychic survival in this transformed world. Specifically drawing on the varied strands of this family's heritage, *Brown Girl* dramatises the battle between a mythical and mystical Caribbean culture and the demands of a postindustrial, postcolonial, and here posturban society. Hopkinson's text focuses on the coming-of-age of the youngest female member of the family, Ti-Jeanne. The text is a *bildungsroman* which seeks to articulate the dynamics of identity acquisition for those who are located at the nexus of competing cultural forces. Hopkinson's novel, however, details not only the emergent identities of the characters located within the confines of the narrative, but also examines, in its amalgamation of science fiction, fantasy, and mythology possible new definitions of the insignia of sf.

Brown Girl has been described as "walking the tightrope" between two cultures (Barak 96). Whilst the novel's action is set in Canada, the space of the Caribbean is a striking but ethereal presence. Hopkinson populates her text with a variety of mythological figures taken directly from Caribbean folklore and the depiction of ritual practices such as spirit possession and zombification suggests a religious backdrop that vividly evokes the syncretic culture of the Caribbean. Epigraphs are supplied from Caribbean folklore, chants, children's games and more recent literary sources: the title of the text, *Brown Girl in the Ring,* refers to a chant that accompanies a ring game, and Hopkinson's naming of her protagonist, Ti-Jeanne, directly references one of Derek Walcott's early plays, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. Reconstructing "everyman" as "everywoman" *Brown Girl* also undermines racist, imperialist, and patriarchal assumptions common to the logic of both colonialism and science fiction. This cultural syncretism pervades the text and becomes emblematic of both its content and its structure. Syncretism is typically associated with the transformation and amalgamation of African belief systems and cultures into the New World context of the Caribbean. "Syncretic processes" are described by the Cuban novelist and critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo as "realiz[ing] themselves through an economy in whose modality of exchange the signifier of *there*—of the Other—is consumed ('read') according to local codes that are already in existence; that is codes from *here*" (21). Rojo summarizes this process as acting "like a ray of light within a prism; that is, they reproduce phenomena of reflection, refraction, and decomposition" (21). In employing Caribbean religious tropes within the imagined space of a postcolonial Toronto *Brown Girl* makes use of this process of reflection, refraction, and decomposition to articulate the complex subjectivity of the doubly displaced. In this, Hopkinson is clearly responding

to the cultural concerns of contemporary Canadian life. Canada's traditional "colonial" status as a "white settler colony" has, in recent years, been complicated by a new wave of immigration: Canada is, after all, a country that, in 1971, officially recognised itself as multicultural (Hutcheon 13). This re-colonisation of Canada has led to a confrontation between old and new cultures. In an ironic but diluted echo of the colonial moment, immigrants from postcolonial countries need to negotiate two spaces, what Alan Lawson (in an echo of Benítez-Rojo), albeit referring to the white settler occupation of Canada, describes as a mediation between "both 'there' and 'here'" (Turner 9).

When we first encounter *Brown Girl's* protagonist Ti-Jeanne she is caught between two spaces: "here" is the immediate, physical space of Canada, and "there" is the remembered space of the Caribbean. These spaces are personified in the text by the two most immediate figures in her life: her grandmother, Gros-Jeanne and the father of her child, Tony. Her grandmother is a woman who makes her living as a result not only of her nurse's training and experience but also through her knowledge of Caribbean bush-medicine, whereas Tony, whilst sharing Ti-Jeanne's African Caribbean heritage, is clearly aligned with the consumerist impulses of this potentially destructive Canadian culture. This is epitomised in Tony's association with the mafia-like "posse" who now control the city, and for whom he deals drugs, thereby supporting his own addiction.

Ti-Jeanne's immediate sense of reality is informed by the physical space which constitutes the "here" of Canada, but specifically the ruined city of Toronto. As the text progresses, however, Ti-Jeanne's awareness of the world and her place within it is increasingly augmented by the remembered space of the Caribbean. It is significant, therefore, that the space of the Caribbean is remembered for her by her grandmother, Gros-Jeanne. As a literal and symbolic ancestral presence Gros-Jeanne is able to enact this remembrance of the Caribbean. That she does so in order to re-configure this space as a life-sustaining and protective presence for herself and her family can be read as a parallel of the reconstruction of Africa by its diasporic communities post-Middle Passage. Gros-Jeanne is a representative of the syncretic, communal religions of African slaves who, transported to the Caribbean, used religion as a means of resistance to white slavers and as a method through which their transported and transcribed cultures could be articulated. Caribbean religions, then, become one method through which the displaced are able to make sense of their new and altered situations. As ethnologist Joan Dayan argues: "It was the survival of these customs and gods that provided continuity for the dispossessed. This continuum leapt across, or superseded the European imposed periodicities of such categories as colonial and post-colonial" (13). Dayan's argument suggests that the sustaining framework of syncretic religion becomes a counter-discourse detailing localized resistance to imperial and European assumptions. This is clearly evident in the plethora of subtle but significant variations not

only of the separate religions found in the Caribbean—voudou, obeah, Gaga, Santeria—but also within the religions themselves: ethnologist Maya Deren prefaces her 1953 study of Haitian voudou with an acknowledgement of the significant variations in worship which she observed between one *hounfor* (parish) and the next (18-19). This not only accounts for the difficulties that commentators experience in arriving at an agreed and comprehensive definition of Caribbean religions but also hints at these religions' ability to adapt and survive in the cruellest of climates providing the basis for counter-discourses which, lodged in memories of Africa, begin localized resistances against imperial domination. That these beliefs are often viewed as African in framework does not necessarily posit a fixed point of origin. Rather, it suggests a confluence of diverse ethnic identities and cultural, social and religious practices that result in a multiple, shifting and dynamic "spectrum" (Cary 98). In terms of *Brown Girl* tracing specific religious references seems to become an academic enterprise; that Osian, the orisha that Gros-Jeanne worships is a lesser god of the Santerian pantheon, or that Ti-Jeanne's loa Prince of Cemetery is one face of Ghede, god of death and an aspect of Legba is perhaps more interesting in terms of the renewed syncretism that Hopkinson's text evokes in the future-space of Toronto than it is in our ability to "place" or locate these deities and practices.

Ti-Jeanne's understanding of the Caribbean becomes the locus of these contradictory and disorientating elements. The Caribbean is configured for Ti-Jeanne through traditional forms of knowledge, such as root-work, cooking and obeah, that her grandmother attempts to teach her. Evidently, from Ti-Jeanne's reluctance to learn and her resistance to this teaching, she views these sessions as indoctrination, and is deeply sceptical of the "old world" that her grandmother represents. Ti-Jeanne, locked into the circumscribed reality of Toronto, refuses to see the relevance of history: for her the past, like the traditional medicines her grandmother distils from Caribbean plants and herbs, has "lost [its] potency"(*BG* 13). That Ti-Jeanne substitutes these impotent Caribbean remedies with Gros-Jeanne's "stockpiles" (*BG* 13) of Western medicine clearly signals, in Ti-Jeanne's mind, at least, the primacy of Canadian knowledge—even ruined Canadian knowledge—over that which emerges from the Caribbean.

In the text the contradictory and contestatory aspect of the syncretic knowledge and religion of the Caribbean enables it to resist classification. Mami Gros-Jeanne describes her religion as a system which simultaneously eludes categories but is identifiable to all:

> You will hear people from Haiti and Cuba and Brazil and so call them different names. You will even hear some names I ain't tell you, but we all mean the same thing. Them is the ones who does carry we prayers to God Father, for he too busy to listen to every single one of we here on earth talking at he all the time. Each of we have a special one

> who is we father or mother, and no matter what we call it, whether Shango or Santeria, or Voudou or what, we all doing the same thing. Serving the spirits. (*BG* 126)

Identifying her beliefs as "serving the spirits" Gros-Jeanne also aligns herself with the community. Gros-Jeanne's figuration as a healer and a *mamba* (a female spiritual leader) signals not only her authority to preside over religious ceremonies, but is also evidence of her standing in the community. The syncretic religions of the Caribbean have historically been used as sources of strength through which oppression can be resisted. On a literal level this resistance can be seen as culminating in the slave rebellions of the Caribbean, the most successful being the rebellion on the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which, in 1804, became the black republic of Haiti.[1] As with other religions of the Caribbean, voudou becomes not simply a religious narrative but the basis for political, social, cultural, and perhaps more pertinently, physical freedom. And it is through the entire community's service to the spirits that the spirits sanction and encourage this insurrection. Joseph Murphy further explains this reciprocal spiritual arrangement:

> [S]ervice to the spirit is service to the community; and service to the community is service to the spirit. Service is revealed to be the central value of communal life. Service shows the spirit, in ceremony, but also whenever one member serves another. It is 'service' in all its elegant, multiple meanings, that shows the active quality of the spirituality of the African diaspora. (6-7)

Gros-Jeanne's participation in the community of the new world of Toronto, however, is not initially mirrored by her granddaughter. Ti-Jeanne's non-participation in community life is signalled by her alienation from traditional Caribbean practices and the people who practice them. In a certain sense the scepticism displayed by both Ti-Jeanne and Tony signals their alignment with Western modes of perception. In an echo of the colonial construction of New World religions as savage and primitive, Caribbean spirituality becomes, for Ti-Jeanne and Tony, both exotic and frightening, forbidden and dangerous. Tony's response to Gros-Jeanne's invocation of her loa, Papa Osain is to interpret the performance of the ritual as an elaborate hoax and to label the religion that Gros-Jeanne practices as "mumbo-jumbo" (*BG* 98). Tony's appropriation of colonial language does not result in a hybrid moment, but rather exemplifies how fully he is implicated in the values of Western consumer capitalism. Ti-Jeanne's position is perhaps more ambiguous. Having been on the receiving end of her grandmother's albeit unwanted "lessons" she has a greater awareness than Tony of the complexities of her cultural heritage. Whereas Tony persists in labelling Gros-Jeanne's religion *obeah*, which can be interpreted in the text as a practice close to that of black magic, and views Gros-Jeanne as a

witch-like figure, Ti-Jeanne's distance is equated to an obstinacy to learn rather than a willing misinterpretation of Caribbean spirituality:

> Ti-Jeanne had once asked her mother who had responded disdainfully, "Is one set of clap hand and beat drum and falling down and getting the spirit, oui. Stupidness!". . .Ti-Jeanne had joined them that one time, but after being frightened away she had refused to join them for any more ceremonies. Mami tried to explain what went on in the chapel, but Ti-Jeanne had become so agitated that Mami soon stopped talking about her work there altogether. . .Many nights Ti-Jeanne would lie on her little cot, awake and restless from the compelling sound of the drumming and singing coming from the back house. The occasional screams, grunts, and moans frightened her. (*BG* 87)

As her ambiguous response to the sounds of her grandmother's religion demonstrates Ti-Jeanne cannot escape the legacy of her Caribbean heritage and from the start of the text is haunted by apparitions—"duppies"—from Caribbean folklore. The appearance of the Soucayant, and the ubiquitous Jab-Jab figure are clearly terrifying visions that because of Ti-Jeanne's unwillingness to acknowledge their presence threaten madness and the dissolution of her identity. It is not until Ti-Jeanne has been "possessed" by the orisha "Prince of Cemetery" that she starts to participate in the community. In this Hopkinson draws directly on the interpretation of spirit possession common to Caribbean religion.

As a cornerstone of many Caribbean faiths, spirit possession is "less an individual act, and more a communal event, in which the 'possessed gives herself up to become an instrument in a social and collective drama'" (Tretzner 40). Ti-Jeanne's possession by Prince of Cemetery gives her access to a heritage that works to shield her and Tony in the shadows of Guinea Land (read Africa) in order to facilitate his escape from the hands of the posse. In this context "possession" is seen as empowering. The connotations that accompany the Western understanding of the term possession are not necessarily applicable here. Indeed Joan Dayan warns that "in voudoun practice, to talk about possession is risky business, since those who *serve the gods* do not use the term." Instead, she argues, "the experience of being . . .seized by a spirit is described as being mounted (the horse ridden by the rider)" (11).The consequences for the "horse's" identity are significant: instead of the self being subsumed by an other, the identities of the two merge, blurring the distinction between god and human. For Ti-Jeanne confronted with the massed might of the posse this "puny little woman" possesses the ability to resist and defend herself against their threat of domination:

> Ti-Jeanne chuckled, in a deep, rumbling voice, the same unearthly sound that she'd made in the chapel. "Brothers, brothers, don't fight! It have plenty of me to go around." She suddenly seemed much taller than Jay. She broke his hold with ease, reached to her own neck with long, long arms and grasped the neck of Carpaund's dazer. (*BG* 117)

Prince of Cemetary's possession of Ti-Jeanne gives her the necessary strength to resist the physical oppression of the posse's armed gang thereby refusing their authority and their ability to control her actions.

Writing in the context of a First World discourse the deliberate invocation of the term "possession" can be viewed as a counter-discursive act, answering back the colonial possession of lands and peoples through the articulation of the needs and desires of the dispossessed. Indeed James Scott suggests that spirit possession is one element of "a large arsenal of techniques that serve to shield [the slave's] identity while facilitating open criticism, threats, and attacks" (Tretzner 306). In this sense spirit possession becomes a palimpsest over which the possession of the coloniser can be written again, but not, significantly, erased. *Brown Girl* attests to this in the text's configuration of a dichotomy between the two proponents of Caribbean mythology, Gros-Jeanne, and her former husband, now posse-boss, Rudy.

Gros-Jeanne's status as community leader is predicated upon her belief in and ability to practice her religion. Indeed, for her, this is a religion that unites self with community. In contrast, Rudy's overt individualism is configured for us through his practice of obeah. Obeah, as Margarite Fernandez Olmos informs us "involves the 'putting on' and 'taking off' of 'duppies' or 'jumbees' (ghosts or spirits of the dead) for either good or evil purposes. It differs from voudou and Santeria in that its beliefs and rituals are not centred on the participation of the community but involve secret individualised consultations aimed at fostering specific ends" (6). It's interesting that the "specific ends" that Rudy aspires to in his ritual practice of obeah are the Western elixir of youthful appearance, material wealth and gain and physical prowess and power at the expense of both community and family. The correlation of Western capitalist values and the form of obeah which Rudy practices signifies a perversion of traditional Caribbean knowledge: whereas Gros-Jeanne describes herself as "serving the spirits" Rudy, the text tells us expects "the spirits to serve he" (*BG* 219). Rudy's use of obeah means that "he does work the dead to control the living" (*BG* 121). Rudy's sating of his own individual desires results in an imbalance, a perversion of the relation maintained between the living and the dead, gods and humanity.

This correlation of extreme Western capitalism (which serves only individual interests) and the use of obeah (a practice traditionally performed for the benefit of the individual as opposed to the community) is further enhanced through the literalised metaphor of the zombi. Rudy's power is invested in his ability to control, subjugate, and possess those around him, a power which takes its most extreme form in the enslavement of the spirits of the living. The Haitian myth of the zombi, transported through the Middle Passage from Africa, was reconfigured in the New World to serve the needs of the specific historical situation of the slaves of Saint-Domingue. In Saint Domingue/ Haiti

the zombi is a man or woman who, brought back to life through the ritualised use of potions and incantations, is robbed of his or her autonomy. The zombi, then, is a beast-of-burden, an enslaved figure doomed to serve the one who gave it a perverted form of life. In *Brown Girl* Rudy's zombification of both the living and the dead is only ever performed on women. Melba, a former prostitute sentenced to serve Rudy for attempting to gain control over her own body, appears as a figure who has lost "her will, her *volition*" (*BG* 28). This feminisation of the zombi is further enhanced if we consider the process and desired consequences of zombification:

> "The first stage for making a zombi. Combine the paralysis and the suggestibility with the right kind of, um, indoctrination, and the zombi go do anything me tell it. Sometimes me want a little help 'round here, you understand? To keep the place clean and so." (*BG* 212)

The violence perpetrated against others in the type of possession that Rudy practices is in stark contrast to the possession of the loa or orishas of Gros-Jeanne's religion. Whilst they offer empowering methods of resistance, Rudy in his possession of both the living and the dead, can only impose the limitations and restrictions that objectification brings.

Hopkinson's repetition of the Haitian myth of the zombi involves its own act of displacement in the context of an extrapolated Canadian society: in this New World context zombification refers not only to the economic slavery brought on by Melba's prostitution, but also to what the text establishes as a more insidious type of zombification emblematic of the malaise of contemporary Western society: drug addiction. In a move typical of sf's tendency to literalise metaphors the particular drug of choice here is a derivative of the poison of the buffo toad, the toxin that is used in Haitian rituals of zombification. This syncretic revision of the figure of the zombi is modified in order to articulate the specificity of postcolonial identity. In the text, however, this is an identity that needs to acknowledge the impact and influence of a variety of traditions.

In this, the contrast between Ti-Jeanne and her grandfather is stark and is located primarily in their deployment of the religion of their ancestors. Both Rudy and Ti-Jeanne rely on the presence of "duppies" spirits which serve to instruct initiates in the complexities of Caribbean tradition. Rudy, in order to preserve his youth and vitality (and also virility) captures the souls of these "tutelary spirits" and imprisons them at the heart of his empire, For Ti-Jeanne it is through the initially frightening apparitions of the Jab-Jab and the Soucouyant that she becomes equipped with the knowledge which will help her defeat her grandfather. Once Ti-Jeanne begins to learn from these "guardians of tradition" (Benítez-Rojo 206) she can start to resist the suffocating and imprisoning aspects of her heritage, that, to a greater or lesser extent both of

her grandparents represent, and adapt her awareness of the Caribbean to its Canadian context.

The religion in which Ti-Jeanne finally participates, then, is neither completely that of her grandmother, nor of her grandfather. Instead, in order for the religions of the Caribbean to become useful in the space of Toronto[2] they must be adapted to the needs of the location, in what Margarite Fernandez Olmos describes as "secondary types of syncretism, ones [which occur] between (ex)colonised peoples" (5). This dynamic syncretism is signalled, finally, in the creation of a new place of worship, a new space in which to summon the gods. The CN tower which Ti-Jeanne has initially viewed as disorientating—Ti-Jeanne tells us that "I swear that tower reach right to the stars. It make me giddy, like I can't tell top from bottom no more, and gravity ain't have no meaning" (*BG* 191)—becomes the ultimate "centre pole" the conduit used in both voudou and Santeria ceremonies to connect the various realms comprising reality. Ti-Jeanne states that:

> The CN Tower. And she understood what it was: 1,815 feet of the tallest centre pole in the world. Her duppy body almost laughed a silent kya-kya, a jokey Jab-Jab laugh. For like the spirit-tree that the centre pole symbolised, the CN Tower dug roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived. The tower was their ladder into this world. A Jab-Jab type of joke, oui? (BG 221)

Working as a conduit for the loa and for the duppies of those whom Rudy has killed, the amalgamation of the techno-scientific architecture of the city, with the religious iconography of the Caribbean makes this what Benítez-Rojo refers to as a "syncretic artefact," which he describes as "not a synthesis, but rather a signifier made of differences" (21). This disorientating symbol of technology which as Ti-Jeanne has already noted, defies the laws of gravity, turns the world upside-down becomes, then, characteristic of the dynamism that is an integral part of emergent identities in a New World context.

All this, however, does not suggest an easy synthesis and happy resolution of events, cultures and religions at the close of the text. Whilst Ti-Jeanne ultimately defeats her grandfather she is positioned, finally, like the loa of her guardian spirit, Prince of Cemetary, on the threshold, at the crossroads of cultures, religions and spaces, and it is clear that this confluence requires constant mediation.

Nalo Hopkinson's first novel is an attempt to provide new modes of perception, new myths and metaphors through the dynamic interchange characteristic of Caribbean syncretic cultures. Hopkinson's invocation of a worldview grounded in Caribbean mythology poses a challenge to the structural differentiation made between science fiction and fantasy. If, as Suvin suggests, sf is distinguished from fantasy because of "the interposition of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical

environment" (8) then by populating her text with characters and figures taken from Caribbean religions and folklore Hopkinson would seem to be in contravention of the strict generic rules that Suvin proposes. Whilst Hopkinson's fiction could easily be situated on the all too malleable boundaries of sf her amalgamation of Western space with a Caribbean imaginary disrupts the epistemological framework usually associated with this rigid generic definition of science fiction. Benítez-Rojo writes that "In the Caribbean, epistemological transparency has not displaced the dregs and sediments of the cosmological arcana, the spatterings of sacrificial blood. . .but rather, unlike what happens in the West, scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge coexist as differences within the same system" (17). Benítez-Rojo is suggesting, therefore, a knowledge system that differs radically from Western understandings of the tangible and imaginary, the plausible and implausible, the scientific and the mythological. In the framework of the Caribbean, Benítez-Rojo argues, these incompatible dichotomies of Western knowledge systems are simply differences that coexist on the same plane. In other words, in the Caribbean worldview it would be more surprising, more implausible, to imagine a world where the living and dead, humans and gods did not coexist than one where they did. As such, this requires a reworking and a reconception of what constitutes the plausible and the implausible in Hopkinson's re-reading of science fiction. Hopkinson's fiction, therefore, asks us to reassess our understanding of plausibility, and in doing this it mounts a critical challenge to the generic underpinnings of science fiction and fantasy.

Hopkinson's own reading of the insignia of sf locates her work as "speculative fiction" (Rutledge 589), but perhaps it can also be read as syncretic fiction. Not only is her work suggestive of a "second order of syncretism" in its transplantation of African Caribbean religious, mythological and folk-loric beliefs into the physical space of postcolonial Canada, but her manipulation of these malleable generic boundaries of science fiction, science fantasy, and mythology suggests a revision that is powerfully reminiscent of the religious syncretism that underpins her work. Hopkinson's first novel therefore, seeks not only to articulate the emergent identities of second and third generation immigrants in the complicated confluence of postcolonial spaces, but in her appropriation of a First World narrative to tell a Second/ Third World story she challenges our assumptions not only about the stories that science fiction can tell but also how they are told.

Notes

1. For further information see Antonio Benítez-Rojo, p.161.
2. Toronto, originally named York by the white settler colonists, was renamed in 1834 from a Huron word meaning 'meeting place'(OED 1956).

Works Cited

Barak, Judith Misrahi. "Beginner's Luck among Caribbean-Canadian Writers: Nalo Hopkinson, André Alexis and Shani Mootoo." *Commonwealth Essays* 22/1 (1999): 89-96.

Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Trans James E. Maranist. 2nd ed, London: Duke UP, 1996.

Cary, Norman Reed. "Religion and the West Indian Novel." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 10/2 (1988): 98-106.

Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. Istvan. "Science Fiction and Empire." *Science Fiction Studies* 30/ 2 (2003): 231-245.

Dayan, Joan. "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti." *Research in African Literatures* 25/ 2 (1994): 5-31.

Deren, Maya. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1953.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1991.

Hopkinson, Nalo. *Brown Girl in the Ring*. London: Warner Aspect, 1998.

Hutcheon, Linda. "*A Spell of Language: Introducing* Other Solitudes." *Of Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. Ed. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 1-16.

Murphy, Joseph. *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Olmos, Margarite Fernandez. and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. "Religious Syncretism and Caribbean Culture." *Sacred Possessions: Voudou, Santeria, Obeah and the Caribbean*. Eds. Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997. 1-12.

Rutledge, Gregory. "Speaking in Tongues: An Interview with Science Fiction Writer Nalo Hopkinson." *African American Review* 33/4 (1999): 589-601.

Slemon, Stephen. "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World." *World Literature Written in English* 30/2 (1990): 30-41.

Tiffin, Helen. "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse." *Kunapipi* 9/3 (1987): 17-34.

Turner, Margaret. *Imagining Culture: New World Narrative and the Writing of Canada*. London: McGill Queen's UP: 1995.

Tretzner, Annette. "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*." *African American Review* 34/2 (2000): 299-312.