CONTAINERS FOR CREATION: IFÁ, THE FANTASTIC, AND WOMEN IN LITERATURE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

by

LAURA E. EDMUNDS

(Under the Direction of Karim Traoré)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of Yoruba cosmology, found primarily in the Ifá corpus and its practice in Nigeria and throughout the Yoruba diaspora, in narrative strategies among select women writers in the African Diaspora. Theories of the fantastic genre by Tzvetan Todorov and of female power in literature by Theresa Washington are used to reveal the rhetorical strategies that Nalo Hopkinson, Edwidge Danticat, and Esmeralda Ribeiro have in common, and argues that their works are best understood in a dynamic, global context. This study also makes significant use of Henry Louis Gates' theory of African-American literary criticism by attempting to extend it into literatures from Canada, Haiti, and Brazil. This study finds that the writers under study here transform the Fantastic mode by favoring the use of culture over the social science of psychology, and engage in partial signifyin(g) relationships through rhetorical strategies and figurations borrowed from Ifa. Examples of these are the family structure as organizing principle, and the deities as metaphors.

INDEX WORDS: African Diaspora Literature, African Literature, African Diaspora Criticism, Caribbean Literature in English, Fantastic, Subjectivity,

Identity, Ifá corpus, Ifá as rhetorical strategy, Narrative, Yoruba cosmology, Nalo Hopkinson, Edwidge Danticat, Esmeralda Ribeiro

CONTAINERS FOR CREATION: IFÁ, THE FANTASTIC, AND WOMEN IN LITERATURE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

by

LAURA E. EDMUNDS

B.A., York College of Pennsylvania, 1994

M.A., Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2002

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2014

CONTAINERS FOR CREATION: IFÁ, THE FANTASTIC, AND WOMEN IN LITERATURE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

by

LAURA E. EDMUNDS

Major Professor:	Karim Traoré
Committee:	Akinloye Ojo
	Ronald Bogue
	Freda Scott Giles
	Robert Moser

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2014

DEDICATION

sí ìyá mi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Adventures like these can never be realized without the support and assistance of many and diverse people. This particular project is the result of the excellent guidance and unwavering support of University of Georgia Professors Karim Traoré, Akinloye Ojo, Ronald Bogue, Robert Moser, and Freda Scott-Giles, who believed in me even when I did not, and waited patiently for far too long while I reached across the abyss of transition to find the reason to write it. For their continued support, I am especially grateful.

At Georgia Perimeter College, I am thankful for my colleagues in the English, Arts, and Humanities Department and on the Newton Campus, who stood in my office doorway and shook fingers me, saying "just finish!" I must especially thank Carissa Gray and Stuart Noel for several semesters of advantageous teaching assignments and schedules that allowed me the time I needed to focus.

Steve Pearson, Kris Roney, Ronita Bhattacharya, Mike and Rachel (Klue) Paparone, John (Magnus) Fowler, Cameron and Sharon (Carlson) Bogue, Paget (Harris) Fink, and Nate Vacher: you cannot know how your friendships have sustained me. There is a little bit of each of you contained within these pages, and I will always be thankful for our TA Office education, Friday lunches, and Happy Hour at the Globe.

Bronwyn Averett...when Orunmila asked me to choose a fate, I feel sure your waiting-to-be-born spirit was there next to mine. I am grateful for your friendship and the intellectual kinship we share. I owe so very much to you.

I am also grateful for the support of my husband, Robert, for continuing to believe this could end well, and keeping our daily lives managed while I concentrated my energies on writing.

Finally, to my family, for a lifetime of all kinds of support, I am infinitely grateful. I am most especially in the debt of my mother, my most constant supporter, who had to leave me to join the ancestors before seeing the completion of the very work that praises her. It is for her that my efforts take shape, and to her that I dedicate the following pages.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

LIST OF TABLES viii

LIST OF FIGURES ix

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION 1

2 REFIGURING THE FANTASTIC 3

3 DEVELOPMENTS OF THE FANTASTIC IN THE WORKS OF NALO HOPKINSON: THE IMPORTANCE OF ÈṢÙ 54

4 DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FANTASTIC IN THE WORKS OF NALO HOPKINSON: THE IMPORTANCE OF ÀJẸ́ AND EZILI 99

5 PLAYING WONN AND SWALLOWING FROGS: NARRATING FROM THE TRANSITIONAL GULF IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *CLAIRE OF THE SEA LIGHT* 143

6 READING IN YORUBA: THE IFÁNTASTIC AT WORK IN ESMERALDA RIBEIRO'S SHORT STORIES 171

7 **CONCLUSIONS** 204

REFERENCES 214

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1: The Roles of Gold in Gates' Signifyin(g) Chain 201

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: The Interrelated Domains of Ajé 39

Figure 2: William Bascom's "Basic Figures of Ifá" 45

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this study is to reveal the connections among narrative and figurative strategies of Nalo Hopkinson, Edwidge Danticat, and Esmeralda Ribeiro, women writers from diverse regions of the African Diaspora, and to suggest that those commonalities are the result of creative choices, specifically the use of the Ifá corpus and its corresponding myths. The Ifá corpus is a collection of texts that is highly structured and stylized, and that is also an ever-expanding and dynamic repository for cultural and spiritual practices among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria and the diverse communities influenced by those practices in the diaspora. The study posits that the comprehensiveness, flexibility, and structural qualities of the Ifá system make it ideally suited as a tool for critical, literary analysis.

How This Study is Original

Rather than treating the Ifá corpus as a databank of artifact, this study incorporates its literary qualities, specifically its organizational and figurative strategies, to bring together patterns of narration that have emerged from diverse "national" traditions of writing. It aligns the authors and texts under study in a more global rhetorical continuum than has been previously suggested or studied. This study also charts several significant transformations to the Fantastic genre as defined by Tzvetan Todorov, the most recognized theorist in the field, that have taken place with the incorporation of these specific cultural and spiritual practices. While no works of African American authors are considered here as primary texts, this study also attempts to extend

the influence of Henry Louis Gates' *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism,* which is also based on an Ifá paradigm, beyond the literatures of the United States and into Canada, Jamaica, and Brazil. While drawing on the influences of Theresa Washington's *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Àjẹ́ in Africana Literatures* and Georgine Montgomery Bess' *The Spirit and the Word: A Theory of Spirituality in Africana Literary Criticism* this study differs from both of those in that it looks specifically at a single genre, the Fantastic, and analyzes the ways in which contemporary female authors use the Ifá paradigm to transform the genre. This study is informed by anthropological considerations: treating culture, cultural transmission, and cultural transformation, as important influences in creative choices and audience reception.

Expected Results

Results of this study are speculative. It posits a sibling genre to both Fantastic and Diaspora literatures. It also attempts to draw out some of the common formal elements of those genres, including narrative traits and features of figuration. The conclusions suggest that culture trumps race in the literary productions and hermeneutic tools under study, and that the Ifá paradigm has a potentially wider application for the analysis of texts.

CHAPTER 2

REFIGURING THE FANTASTIC

There is a hilarious scene in the 1991 film, *The Commitments*[1], in which Jimmy Rabbite, an unemployed but ambitious young man living on the wrong side of the tracks in Dublin, Ireland, is interviewing lead singers for a band he is trying to put together and manage. Having already located the other members of the band, Jimmy has to take the extreme measure of placing an ad in a newspaper for a singer. The motley crew of hopeful singing superstars who show up at the front door of Jimmy's parents displays a comedic and seemingly random clash of culture and influence on the youth of Dublin. The humor in the scene is layered, coming from the confused and disgusted expressions on Jimmy's face and the absolute inappropriateness of the long line of auditioners. Each time Jimmy opens the door, a young, overdressed hopeful is asked: "Who are your influences?" The responses to the question are ridiculous, either in light of Jimmy's needs or in juxtaposition to the auditioner's appearance (the auditioner dressed as Boy George is particularly funny). There are pop singers, folk singers, heavy metal singers, "World" music singers, Irish singers, cajun singers, and finally, a young man who doesn't sing and doesn't play an instrument. When Jimmy asks him "So what are you doing here?" the young man replies: "Well, I saw everybody else linin' up, so, uh, I thought you were selling drugs."

Jimmy can't find a singer for his band because he is looking for a poor, white Dubliner to sing American "soul" music: Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, James Brown, etc. The strange selection of people who come to his parents' house to audition all fail the "Who are your influences?" test because they do not identify with the soul singers from a different country, a

[1] Directed by Alan Parker and based on a novel with the same title, written by Roddy Doyle

different generation, and a different race. Likewise, the members of the band, some of whom have been Jimmy's friends for years and completely trust him, cannot quite conceive of a universe in which they have anything in common with a group of poor, black, American singers of soul. Late one night on public transportation, having found the band's singer, Jimmy explains:

> Soul is the music people understand. Sure it's basic and it's simple. But it's something else 'cause, 'cause, 'cause it's honest, that's it. Its honest. There's no fuckin' bullshit. It sticks its neck out and says it straight from the heart. Sure there's lots music you can get off on but soul is more than that. It takes you somewhere else. It grabs you by the balls and lifts you above the shite...

Jimmy works hard to build bridges across time, space and culture to explain to the members of the band that they can indeed identify with soul music. He calls "soul" the rhythm of the factory, reflecting the working-class culture and social status of most of the band members. When Dean, the saxophone player questions the choice to sign soul, Jimmy argues: "Do you not get it, lads? The Irish are the blacks of Europe. And Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland. And the Northside Dubliners are the blacks of Dublin. So say it once, say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud."

Jimmy has drawn the attention of his band and the film's audience to phenomena that artists have always known, creative influences. Despite misunderstanding among family members, band members, club owners, friends, and other people in Jimmy's life, when he explains why he wants the band to sing soul, it becomes clear that he is not merely crazy or trying to exploit African American culture. What appears at first to be a counter-intuitive or misguided love of American Soul music proves to be a logical affinity for the musical expression of working people. Jimmy's identification with African American Soul music is rooted in the

realities of his own life: unemployment, underemployment, factory work, religious culture, and "the blues" in general. In Jimmy's mind, the Northside Dubliners share an economic status and with the African Americans who inspired and sang "soul." Jimmy simply does not care about race or nationality. It's not even on his "radar."

Though Jimmy's identification with African American music does prove to have some logical foundation, creative influences do not always happen in that way. The film *The Commitments* has always intrigued me because of the easy way it promotes artistic expression: "soul is more than that. It takes you somewhere else. It grabs you by the balls and lifts you above the shite," and subverts what at first glance appear to be racial, cultural, and generational boundaries: "I'm black and I'm proud." Sadly, by the end of the film, the band breaks up and the members take their separate routes. Saxophone player Dean develops an interest in Jazz because of his experience with soul. Singers Natalie and Deco go on to successful professional singing careers, and Bernie takes up country music. The drummer, Mikah, gets involved with punk and heavy metal. No one knows what happened to Joey "the lips" Fagan, the horn player who was "sent by God" in the first place, and Imelda Quirk gets married to a "tosser with a job" and has several children. She doesn't sing any more. The diversity of these routes was inspired by soul, but carried out by individuals and their particular relationships with that music. American soul music, as both artistic and commercial production, became a global phenomenon, and *The Commitments* dramatizes the ways in which one forgotten, underprivileged, and unlikely group of people did more than "consume" it. They used it to transform their lives.

Transforming lives is precisely what Ti-Jeanne, the main character in Caribbean-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson's first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring* does. The birth of her son causes Ti-Jeanne to re-evaluate her position in a post-apocalyptic Toronto. By the time the novel

concludes, Ti-Jeanne has transformed the lives of several generations of her family, reawakened a spiritual awareness based in African cosmology, drawn on the power generated by that spiritual awareness, and made Toronto safe from its biggest villain. Her grandmother has also been sacrificed for the potential social reforms the dystopic city needs. Ti-Jeanne's heroism has a broad impact across many sectors of her world. The first time I read the novel I was looking for a new text to analyze according to Henry Louis Gates' theory of the Signifyin(g) Monkey. While *Brown Girl in the Ring* didn't make use of an African American vernacular, it did engage in intertextuality[2], and it also did interesting things with Èṣù, the Yoruba orisa. Gates' theory of African American Literature invokes the Yoruba god Èṣù and the American trickster figure, Monkey, as metaphors for the use of intertextuality, African American vernacular, and trope revision. Instead of manifesting Èṣù as a metaphor for a way of speaking, *Brown Girl in the Ring* made Èṣù a character. As a god, and one who ferries souls back and forth between the stages of life and death, he wasn't a living, breathing, flesh-and-blood character, but he was active and was an important part of the sequence of events. At that moment, I thought this was innovative and wanted to write about the transition of Èṣù from esoteric theoretical model to functional, active, usable character. After a bit of thinking though, I remembered that of course Èṣù had appeared as a character in other works. I found him in the Nigerian folk tales I read, and sometimes in novels and plays as well. I remembered he was a tremendous influence on the character Pedro in Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado's *Tenda dos Milagres*, and that his counterpart, Ṣangó, was the model of national unity in Cuba in Pepe Carril's play *Shango de Ima*. Then the novels, plays, and short stories that featured Ṣangó, Ọ̀ṣun, Ògún, and many other Yoruba deities came back to me, and I recalled that I had definitely read Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed* from an Ifá-inspired perspective. Doing that had led me to trouble though, as a conference

[2] Hopkinson is obviously responding to Derek Walcott's play *Ti-Jeanne and His Brothers*.

presenter I spoke to insisted that Butler writes exclusively from a biblical perspective. Ifá, meaning divination, had also been used brilliantly in Sônia Coutinho's *O Jogo de Ifá* to re-invent narrative structure as way of exploring gender identities. So, there I was, with a growing body of literature in my experience that relied on Ifá for its models, and represented several nationalities. I was frustrated that available criticism seemed to place each work in a separate national tradition, and theory did the same. How could I place these works next to each other, and analyze them as part of a movement that crossed time and space? I thought of Jimmy Rabbitte and *The Commitments*. If music transcended time and space, then surely this body of Literature could too. Despite the negative labels of "appropriation" and "blacksploitation" that have certainly been ascribed to Amado and Hopkinson, there had to be a productive way to put them in partnership with the Ifá tradition. I needed a liberating theory, ideally one that called attention to the artifice of Literature, and a body of texts that would begin to map a different way of reading.

I owe a tremendous intellectual debt to Robert Farris Thompson and his work *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* for making concrete in accessible language the same kinds of ideas I saw in my collection of books and want to express here. In the introduction to his study, he writes that the book "is about *visual* and *philosophic* streams of creativity and imagination, running parallel to the massive musical and choreographic modalities that connect black persons of the western hemisphere, as well as the millions of European and Asian people attracted to and performing their styles, to Mother Africa" (xiii-iv). Later on, he explains that these "streams of creativity and imagination" are only an "introduction to a wider universe of interlocking forms" (xv). His analysis and presentation of the aesthetic principles found in the arts of the Diaspora demonstrates the ways in which the individual societies of

Africa influenced the development of culture in the New World. However, the focus on music, sculpture, and textiles did not provide the literary framework I needed. Gates' *Signifying Monkey* didn't account for some of the literary developments happening outside the African American tradition, and Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* and its concept of the "changing same" was just too hotly contested to form the basis of a new study. Genre studies of the Fantastic opened possibilities for exploring the "streams of creativity and imagination" (Thompson xiii). As Rosemary Jackson writes in *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, "fantastic literature has always been concerned with revealing and exploring the interrelations of the 'I' and the 'not-I', of self and other" (53). In the literature of the African Diaspora, where identity politics and subjectivity are always areas of heated debate among scholars, the historical and sociological readings of texts prevail. While these are valid, especially given the need to write the black subject into the cannon via the slave narrative, my reading of *Brown Girl in the Ring* highlighted the need to draw together the Fantastic and Ifá to fashion a method for reading that acknowledged both the genre that contained its form, and the cultural distinctiveness that informed the setting and the plot development.

Hopkinson's importation and use of the Yoruba pantheon and cosmology as a creative container for her novels subverts the genre of the Fantastic and suggests a re-examination of similar, previous works in this context. She fashions concrete "things," characters, and figures of speech from the Ifá corpus and the many religious traditions it inspired in the Diaspora. Many of the subjects in the body of diverse works I will examine here are reclaiming or creating subjectivity. The very real legacies of colonialism or slavery both objectified the authors, characters and cultures I discuss and created the modern world in which they operate. The use of the Fantastic may indicate, at least for this group of writers, characters and their critics, that the

transformation from object to subject is so complex and arduous that the Fantastic and it sibling genres, the marvelous and the uncanny, are the only structures that can effectively contain it. Jackson's *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* makes this same argument, although in a very different context:

> Dostoevsky frequently writes of a fantastic literature as being the only appropriate medium for suggesting a sense of estrangement, of alienation from 'natural' origins. His fictions narrate metropolitan scenes which are 'un-natural', inhabited by disintegrated subjects, 'underground men'. Although the fantastic retains its original function of exerting pressure against dominant hierarchical systems, it is no longer an escapist form, but the only expressive mode. (17)

Even Henry Louis Gates, in the 1988 study of African American literature: *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* makes an argument for aligning multiple theories in a mode of "speculation":

> Because of the experience of diaspora, the fragments that contain the traces of coherent system of order must be reassembled. These fragments embody aspects of a theory of critical principles around which the discrete texts of the tradition configure, in the critic's reading of the textual past. To reassemble fragments, of course, is to engage in an act of speculation, to attempt to weave a fiction of origins and subgeneration. It is to render the implicit as explicit, and at times to imagine the whole from the part...Anyone who analyzes black literature must do so as a comparativist, by definition, because our canonical texts have complex double formal antecedents, the Western and the black. (xxiv)

The Fantastic, which involves engagement with the supernatural, pan-determinism, multiplication of personalities, collapse of the limit between subject and object, transformations of time and space, and realizations of man's relationships with desires, has an enigmatic quality that also aligns well with Gates' assertion and with Theresa Washington's study of female power in literature of Africa and the Diaspora: *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Àjẹ́ in Africana Literature*. Washington's study is based entirely on texts gathered from the Ifá corpus, giving her discussion of Àjẹ́ a literary, rather than a sociological, anthropological, or religious basis. Though Washington does not point to the Fantastic explicitly, the genre is implicit in the definition and the concept of Àjẹ́ in Africana Literature. She writes that the "term Àjẹ́ denotes both a spiritual power and spiritually empowered humans," easily calling attention to the supernatural quality of Àjẹ́ (9). The migration of culturally specific ideas is explained in "the cross-cultural comparative analysis of the orature of Àjẹ́ [that] elucidates the force's proliferation and evolution," which both transforms and is transformed by time and space (9). Washington also argues that "as a force that is central to Pan-African continuity and one that marries ancient orature and Orisa to contemporary literature and literary characters, Àjẹ́ lies at the center of an unbroken circle of power that is ever-relevant and effortlessly signifies from blood to ink" (10).

I would like to argue that the particular writers I consider here, some of whom have been described as either racially or culturally inauthentic, make a deliberate, artistic decision to appropriate the images and ideas from the Yoruba cosmology of Ifá and its related traditions[3]. In other words, "acts of formal revision can be loving acts of bonding rather than ritual slayings at Esu's crossroads" (Gates xxviii). This appropriation manifests desire, an occurrence that is

[3] Candomblé in Brazil, Santeria in Cuba, Vodou in Haiti, Obeah in Jamaica, Conjure in America, and Hoo-doo in America are a few examples.

prevalent in the Fantastic genre. However, unlike the European examples and criticism of the Fantastic, in the Diaspora, this is not the manifestation of a sexual desire; rather, it is the desire to recuperate from the sense of disconnection, loss, and alienation from one's roots. That position is a very particular creative point of departure, and the resulting works could be called the Ifá-ntastic. The conflation of the Fantastic and Ifá creates a new paradigm, or container, in which these writers can overcome loss, and in some cases, move on to other concerns. The Ifá-ntastic can operate as a genre, mode, and as a way of reading.

Any useful discussion of the Fantastic ought to begin with Tzvetan Todorov's foundational work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Todorov's discussion of genre in general and the Fantastic in particular is especially useful in the context of African Diaspora because of its liberating intentions. Frustrated by the incompleteness and illogicality of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, Todorov finds the attempted totality of that work to be too confining. Todorov wants "criticism to be liberating," and therefore conceives of genre and the Fantastic in a relational and conditional way. The benefit of the liberational aspect of his work in applying it to literature of the diaspora is that it helps to satisfy both the socio-political and literary orientations among scholars in this field. Like his definition of the Fantastic, Todorov and his approach to genre occupy a convenient and pacifying place in between ideological approaches to the Diaspora and its literature that are often at odds with one another. Todorov embraces liberation of criticism and theory without abandoning the very structures that constitute it. His approach acknowledges and includes deviation, transgression, and aberrancy by relating those qualities to the norms of genre. Todorov puts it like this: "for there to be transgression, the norm should be apparent...genres are precisely those relaying points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature" (8). While extremists in any camp

may find Todorov's approach to be a bit too relativistic, his structural approach and air-tight analyses keep his work from becoming so relational as to be useless. The inclusive aspect of his study mirrors the inclusiveness Soyinka describes regarding the transportability of the Yoruba pantheon through the Middle Passage. Using Todorov's approach in analyses of works manifesting the Fantastic in the Diaspora preserves an aspect of pure creativity on the part of artist/writer while still placing that creativity within the universe of Literature. Since several contemporary discussions of canon formation focus on repetition of same[4], Todorov's acknowledgement, and celebration, of difference is refreshing and reminds the critic that indeed, good Literature is creative Art, not mere repetition.

Todorov's discussion of genre rests heavily on exposing and undoing the many crimes of the *Anatomy*. Much of that discussion does not need to be restated here, but there are several guiding principles regarding genre that can be drawn out and applied to the works analyzed here. Language occupies the most important place in Todorov's concept of genre. While he deals with language in the characteristic, relative way, calling it "not a stockpile of words but a mechanism," the attention to diction and syntax keeps the discussion grounded in "the literary," which he says has three aspects: the verbal, the syntactical, and the semantic. These three aspects provide the general analytical tool for critiques of literature that emphasize genre. The verbal

> resides in the concrete sentences which constitute the text. We may note here two groups of problems. The first is linked to the properties of the utterance itself. The second group is linked to its performance, to the person who emits the text and to the person who receives it: in each case, what is involved is an image implicit in the text, not a real author or reader. (These problems have hitherto been studied in terms of "point of view.") (20)

[4] For example, Olivieira's book on Writing Black Identity which I will discuss later

The relation between the person who emits and the person who receives the utterance is especially critical in analyzing the diaspora. The gap between those perspectives, whether they are the author, character, audience, or some other voice, could be the subject of entire study, and often is. This is precisely where the socio-politics and identity politics of Diaspora texts enter the "literary" discussion and take on lives of their own. So, within Todorov's formulation, there is a place in the literary for these "point of view" discussions, but it is just a place, not a totality of a literary discussion. On the other hand, Todorov connects specific grammatical structures that tend to be used in the genre of the Fantastic: the imperfect tense and modals (38). These specific tendencies in the genre are based in the concreteness of language, and, in a way, lock down some of the possibilities for interpretation by demanding a focus on "concrete sentences which constitute the text" (20).

The next aspect of the literary is less open-ended. The syntactic aspect "account[s] for relations which the parts of the work sustain among themselves (the old expression for this was "composition"). These relations can be of three types: logical, temporal, and spatial" (20). The syntactic aspect, for Todorov, is grounded in the tangible, analyzable, working gears of a text and is probably the most formalist and useable tool he provides in the genre section. An analysis of the syntactic aspect can only be literary, for it demands, by definition, that the critic stay within the text and its structures. Impositions from the outside, from the disciplines of history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, et cetera would be inappropriate to this kind of analysis. Of course, even for Todorov, this is not the endgame, for it is an aspect of an aspect, but to privilege, even for a moment, the work on its own merits, preserves the "literary" and opens the space where it is permissible to let go of the more politicized ways of looking at Diaspora texts.

Finally, the semantic aspect deals with the ever-present and important "themes." Rather inconveniently, Todorov "posit[s], at the outset, no general hypothesis," saying that he "does not know how literary themes are articulated" (20). Later in his study, it takes four separate chapters and many dozens of pages to elaborate the themes of the Fantastic – demonstrating perhaps the very usefulness of the genre that I argue for in articulating the complexities of gender identities in the Diaspora. However, here at the outset, Todorov chooses the word "articulate" to describe the phenomenon of literary themes. That is an interesting and appropriate choice. The very term "articulate" has many meanings and applications. For Todorov, the articulation of a theme is a relational and dynamic process that relies as much on the linguistic meanings of the term "articulate" as it does on the structural meanings of it[5]. To articulate a theme implies a great amount of work, or activity, on the part of the text and the reader, and the treatment of "themes" in the genre reflects this. Todorov divides the themes of the Fantastic and its related genres into two categories: themes of the self and themes of the other. On the surface, this could look over-simplified and reductive, especially in the context discussed here, the African Diaspora and women's identities. However, careful reading of Todorov's characteristically organized and direct chapters on the themes of the Fantastic demonstrates the depth and usefulness of his categories. The self "essentially concern[s] the structuring of the relation between man and the

[5] Just for fun, here are the many meanings of the word "articulate" from dictionary.com
1.uttered clearly in distinct syllables.2.capable of speech; not speechless. 3. using language easily and fluently; having facility with words: an articulate speaker. 4. expressed, formulated, or presented with clarity and effectiveness: an articulate thought. 5. made clear, distinct, and precise in relation to other parts: an articulate form; an articulate shape; an articulate area. 6. (of ideas, form, etc.) having a meaningful relation to other parts: an articulate image. 7. having parts or distinct areas organized into a coherent or meaningful whole; unified: an articulate system of philosophy. 8. Zoology . having joints or articulations; composed 9. to utter clearly and distinctly; pronounce with clarity. 10. Phonetics . to make the movements and adjustments of the speech organs necessary to utter (a speech sound). 11. to give clarity or distinction to: to articulate a shape; to articulate an idea. 12. Dentistry. to position or reposition (teeth); subject to articulation. 13. to unite by a joint or joints. 14. to reveal or make distinct: an injection to articulate arteries so that obstructions can be observed by x-ray. 15. to pronounce clearly each of a succession of speech sounds, syllables, or words; enunciate: to articulate with excessive precision. 16. Phonetics . to articulate a speech sound. 17. Anatomy, Zoology . to form a joint. 18. Obsolete . to make terms of agreement.

world" and is, according to Todorov, "a relatively static relation...it implies no particular actions, but rather a position" (120). The position is highly individualized and could never be described with totalizing vocabulary like "Christian," "Brazilian," "Post-Colonial," or similar terms. Rather, the position that characterizes the relation between man and world that contributes to the manifestation of the Fantastic is a matter of "*perception,*" a "perception of the world rather than an interaction with it" (120). This perception that constitutes the self is really quite complex, for the themes of the self "may be designated as the fragility of the limit between matter and mind" (120). That fragility "engenders several fundamental themes: a special causality, pan-determinism; multiplication of the personality; collapse of the limit between subject and object; and lastly, the transformation of time and space" (120). Beginning with special causality, Todorov assigns meaning to the appearance of the supernatural in literature when he says that the appearance of supernatural beings or events, an essential element of the genre, is to "compensate for a deficient causality" (110). Simply put, in works of the Fantastic an apparent gap in rational causality leads to the appearance of the supernatural. This is not to be taken as chance or fortune, however, as the next step is pan-determinism. In Fantastic works, everything "must have its cause, in the full sense of the word, even if this cause can only be of a supernatural order. The supernatural then, becomes part of the relational world of the text; it is part of the structure because it exists *in the text*. Special causality leads to pan-determinism, which then produces a condition of possibility for "multiplication of the personality" (116). This effect is caused by the "collapse (which is also to say the illumination) of the limit between matter and mind" (114). Put another way, Todorov writes that in the Fantastic and its neighboring genres, "*the transition from mind to matter has become possible,*" and it is within this aspect that the common device of the shape-shifter, or metamorph would be placed. Ultimately, the special

causality, pan-determinism, and the collapse of the limit between mind and matter extends to the "effacement of the limit between subject and object" (116). Todorov's brief description of subjectivity/objectivity is strikingly similar to the discussion of subject/object, self and other that dominates Post-colonial criticism: "the rational schema represents the human being as a subject entering into relations with other persons or with things that remain external to him, and which have the status of objects" (116). Todorov argues that the Fantastic "disturbs" the "abrupt separation" between rational concepts of subject and object, and describes the transformative power of this perturbation:

> We hear music, but there is no longer an instrument external to the hearer and producing sounds, on the one hand, and on the other the listener himself. Gautier writes 'The notes vibrated so powerfully that they entered my breast like gleaming arrows; soon the melody seemed to emerge from my own being....Weber's soul had been incarnated in myself.' Similarly in Nerval: 'Lying on a camp bed, I heard the soldiers speaking of an unknown man arrested like myself, and whose voice had echoed in the same room. By a singular effect of vibration, it seemed to me that this voice resounded in my own breast.' We look at an object – but there is no longer any frontier between the object, with its shape and colors, and the observer... 'by a strange miracle, after a few moments' contemplation, I dissolved into the object I gazed at, and I myself became that object. For two people to understand one another, it is no longer necessary that they speak: each can become the other know what the other is thinking." (116-7)

The absence of boundary between subject and object is evident in the Madonna statue in Edwidge Danticat's short story, "Nineteen Thirty Seven," as much as it is in the "Eshu," a computer-chip like device that links all human with a main computer, essentially transforming

them into cyborgs, in Nalo Hopkinson's novel *Midnight Robber*. These two works, like many of the works discussed here, have transformation at their cores. At the very least, the possibility that the self and the other can transform into one another must be a seductive idea for a group of writers seeking to make a space for themselves in a worldwide continuum of literature. In the same way that self and other breach boundaries, "the physical world and the spiritual world interpenetrate," and consequently, "their fundamental categories are modified" (118). To describe the strange transformation of time and space, Todorov compares it to experiences of childhood, drug use, and psychotics, and names the effect "extension" (118). For the writers of the African Diaspora, this quality of the Fantastic must be particularly attractive, for the collapse of conventional perceptions of time and space would facilitate imaginative movements in time and space that recover or reinvent the legacies of colonialism, the slave trade, and slavery.

One of the problems with the collapse of boundaries that has marked Todorov's theorizing up to this point manifests itself in his discussion of themes of the other. Though collapse and even transgression of conventional boundaries are so important in the Fantastic, when Todorov discusses the other, his place in a very particular time, place and culture becomes evident. Themes of the other, for Todorov, are essentially themes of sexuality. Sexuality is discussed in terms of "objects" of desire, and these objects are women (124-32). Man's sexual desire for woman forms the center, or "norm," for Todorov's theory in this section, and the norm reflects a specific perspective that is ultimately useless outside of that context. Even though Todorov writes that "the literature of the Fantastic illustrates several transformations of desire," and that these transformations can be categorized as incest, homosexuality, and "supernumerary love," the transformations require the acceptance of the idea that sexuality is merely man's desire for woman, and that humans perceive this is as the same kind of "reality" as time and space. The

categories of incest, homosexuality, and supernumerary love that Todorov really describes as transgressions of the norm might be understood today as the complexities of sexuality. In the year 2013, this section of Todorov would have to been considered out-of-date, and it is also culturally coded in a way that makes it inapplicable to the texts I wish to discuss. I mentioned earlier that the use of Ifá traditions in the small group of texts considered here correlates to the manifestation of desire described as a characteristic of the Fantastic. What makes these works "Diaspora" though is not sexual desire. It is an intellectual desire to return to, to recover, and most importantly, to use a cultural past lost or transformed during the Middle Passage or Colonialism. Since neither "a culture" nor "a past" is an object, (in the same way Todorov would describe), this really cannot be discussed under Todorov's conditions for "themes of the other."

Returning to the aspects of the "literary," and the shifting emphasis between the abstract and the concrete that Todorov's proscription for analysis seems to imply, another important, general principle emerges. Todorov summarizes that a text "manifests" a genre; the genre does not "exist in the work." The phenomenon of "manifestation" is another important link to Ifá and theories of Diaspora. "Manifest" is in fact a word used repeatedly in my discussions of the appearances and uses of the Yoruba orisa in the works analyzed here. It is also a word that takes on historical importance in studies of the Diaspora in its noun form, a list of the cargo of a ship, and its very use in a literary analysis includes the memory and acknowledgement of the middle passage. It is also part of the title of Washington's study: *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Ajé in Africana* Literature. Todorov, of course, has no such idea in mind when he writes this summary:

> We would have to say that a given work manifests a certain genre, not that this genre exists in the work. But this relation of manifestation between the abstract and the concrete is of a probabilistic nature; in other words, there is no necessity that a work faithfully incarnate its genre, there is only a probability that it will do so." (20-1)

In addition to the term "manifest," Todorov also makes two more interesting and useful word choices here: faithfully and incarnate. In connecting the practice of Ifá to the manifestation of the Fantastic in the works I study, I am clearly situated in the realm of faith. Even though I argue that the appearance and application of Ifá and Ifá-derived belief systems is not ultimately one of pure "faith" in these works, its basis in indeed in the realm of religion and belief. Todorov's non-requirement of faithful incarnation of the genre is ultimately comparable to the imperfect manifestation of Ifá-derived practices and literary devices at work in the Diaspora. Since this is primarily a study of Diaspora women's fiction and women's role in fiction, the term "incarnate" also gives rise to another "joint" or relation between the threads I am trying to bring together here. "Incarnate," of course suggests fleshiness, embodiment and the body itself, an important consideration in women's fiction as well as any work dealing with the Diaspora and Atlantic Slave trade. Manifestation, bodies, faith, articulation, language: all these will be key ideas in the analyses that follow.

Even more important than the treatment of genre in general is, of course, Todorov's definition of the Fantastic. Most memorably, Todorov describes the primary quality of the Fantastic as the duration of "hesitation." The time of hesitation is the Fantastic, but it also involves judgment and decision making, at which point the Fantastic slips into the marvelous or the uncanny. The description of the Fantastic is worth quoting fully, since Todorov is so clear:

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings – with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.
>
> The Fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the Fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The Fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event." (25)

Todorov does not take full credit for this definition, and credits a variety of theorists from diverse national backgrounds to demonstrate the development of it.[6] Though the national and linguistic backgrounds of these theorists do vary, the Fantastic, at this moment in Todorov's text, does seem to be an exclusively European, or "Western" phenomenon. Even Rosemary Jackson's work on the Fantastic, which criticizes Todorov's lack of culture and argues for its inclusion in analysis of the genre, focuses on Western texts and uses Western culture to analyze them.

Todorov then explains what he calls the "full" definition of the Fantastic, requiring the fulfillment of three conditions; briefly, they are: 1. Hesitation in the reader between a natural and supernatural explanation for events occurring in a text, 2. Hesitation in a character between the same categories of interpretation as the reader, and 3. A particular kind of "reading" on the part

[6] Solovyov, James, Riemann, Castex, Vax, and Caillois of Russian, British, German, and French nationalitites.

of the reader. The reader must reject both the "allegorical" and the "poetic" ways of reading the Fantastic (33). To reject the allegorical and the poetic, the reader must stay focused on Todorov's three levels of language: the verbal, the syntactical, and the semantic. The first condition of the Fantastic, the hesitation of the reader, is normally a function of the *verbal*, and as Todorov writes, involves the appearance in the text of what he calls the "ambiguous visions" (33). The second tendency is a function of the syntactical aspect, and involves the use of modals and imperfect tense to help create hesitation in the character at the same time it cements a relationship, an identification, between reader and hero. The modals and imperfect tense form the language that indicates *reactions* rather than actions on the part of the hero, and of course, this language is what pulls the reader into the hero's world and hesitation. The third condition, the "negative" reading that rejects both allegorical and poetic readings, is not well developed until Chapters 4 and 5, when Todorov explains that reading the Fantastic should be carried out with attention to the structural unity of a text. Following the relational and articulating tendencies of his study, Todorov explains why a "poetic" reading will not work for the Fantastic as well as why the Fantastic cannot exist in poetry. He remarks that the existence of the Fantastic is threatened by the reader who questions not only the nature of the events taking place in the text, but also the nature "of the very text which describes them" (58). According to Todorov, reading the Fantastic cannot be focused solely on language and its relations to itself. To read in this way is poetic and precludes any appearance of the Fantastic, which requires a reaction to events, taken literally, that occur within the text. Essentially, he describes a primarily representational requirement for the Fantastic:

> The poetic is a combination of words, not of things, and it is pointless, even harmful, to translate this combination into sensory terms.

> We see now why the poetic reading constitutes a danger for the fantastic. If as we read a text we reject all representation, considering each sentence as a pure semantic combination, the fantastic *could not appear*: for the fantastic requires, it will be recalled, a reaction to events as they occur in the world evoked. For this reason, the fantastic can subsist only within fiction; poetry cannot be fantastic (though there may be anthologies of "fantastic poetry"). In short, the fantastic implies fiction." (60)

The genres neighboring the fantastic deserve some attention as well. The Fantastic, manifesting in the moments of hesitation between the natural and the supernatural, necessarily has an intimate relationship with the genres that constitute the natural tendency (the uncanny) and the supernatural tendency (the marvelous). The uncanny, largely based on the theories of Freud and ultimately ending in "rational" or "natural" explanation, is not very useful in the group of works I analyze. The other side of Todorov's genre-spectrum though, is precisely where most of the works discussed here will best fit. The "fantastic-marvelous" and the four categories of the "varieties of marvelous:" "hyperbolic marvelous," "exotic marvelous," "instrumental marvelous," and the "scientific marvelous" are all useful descriptors that can be applied to the particular works discussed here. It is within the realm of the marvelous and its not-quite-pure varieties that the works of the Diaspora effectively include the cultural element of the Fantastic. Even Todorov determines that the moments of the marvelous found in Fantastic works are where themes are to be located, and that the marvelous is a lofty ambition, both in theory and in practice. Todorov writes that the "marvelous, as an anthropological phenomenon, exceeds the context of a study limited to literary aspects," and quotes Pierre Mabille to penetrate the core of the marvelous: "'the marvelous journey is the total exploration of universal reality'" (57). These qualities of the marvelous are precisely where culture must make its entrance, for

anthropological phenomena and explorations of universal reality must be grounded in a world view or they would be unintelligible. Before exploring that particular cultural element relevant here, Todorov's sub-genres of Fantastic need to be further explained.

Quite simply, the marvelous is "the class of narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural" (52). More specifically, the fantastic-marvelous occurs when an event takes place in a text that "cannot be explained by the laws of nature as they are generally acknowledged" (53). Further, "in the case of the marvelous, supernatural elements provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the implicit reader. It is not an attitude toward the events described which characterizes the marvelous, but the nature of the events" (54). This is the shared moment in the works of Hopkinson, Danticat, and Riberio that I wish to elaborate in this study.

The pure marvelous is quite separate from the four categories of not-quite-pure marvelous that Todorov explains. Since he is primarily interested in the Fantastic, the pure marvelous is not explored in his work. Rather, he remains in the in-between stage between the Fantastic and the marvelous in order to better explain the Fantastic. The following four categories are close enough to the Fantastic to be useful categories in discussing it: the hyperbolic marvelous, the exotic marvelous, the instrumental marvelous, and the scientific marvelous (54-6). An entirely new way of interpreting Jorge Amado's *Tenda dos milagres* would be through the lens of the hyperbolic marvelous, examining Amado's character Pedro and his embodiment of the Brazilian myth of racial democracy through miscegenation as an example of the supernatural "by virtue of ...dimensions" (54). In this case, Pedro's sexuality and ability to populate an entire region takes on a hyperbolic element. It is also supported by his devotion to two sexually potent orisa from the Yoruba pantheon, Ṣàngó and Èṣù. The exotic marvelous, in

which “supernatural events are reported without being presented as such” and the reader is “supposed to be ignorant of the regions where the events take place” is a useful tool for interpreting many of the works discussed here, but two obvious examples are Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* and Butler’s “Bloodchild” in which off-planet settings remove the need to question supernatural events, and therefore the hesitation needed for the Fantastic-marvelous. The exotic marvelous may also apply to Danticat’s “Nineteen Thirty Seven” where the location of the events, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, are unfamiliar to her American audience. The instrumental marvelous, in which “we find the gadgets, technological developments unrealized in the period described but, after all, quite possible” and the scientific marvelous, in which the “supernatural is explained in a rational manner, but according to laws which contemporary science does not acknowledge” are less appropriate in analyzing these selected works as wholes, but elements of the instrumental and scientific appear regularly in Hopkinson and Butler (56).

Sadly, by the conclusion of Todorov’s study, he argues that the genre will exhaust itself. In the final chapter, “Literature and the Fantastic,” he writes: “psychoanalysis has replaced (and thereby has made useless) the literature of the Fantastic. There is no need today to resort to the devil in order to speak of an excessive sexual desire, and none to resort to vampires in order to designate the attraction exerted by corpses...” (161). One does not need to look far beyond *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Walking Dead* to understand that even though the Fantastic may no longer be necessary, it is indeed still prevalent and people *like* it. The rise and normalization of “geek culture” in the United States has maintained the Fantastic genre and its many descendants for generations beyond Todorov’s work. Most of my freshman and sophomore undergraduates understand Literature to be exclusively or primarily Fantastic or unreal by nature. Even though Todorov announces the end of the genre and, ten years later, Rosemary Jackson wrote that

"throughout its 'history,' fantasy has been obscured and locked away, buried as something inadmissible and darkly shameful," this is no longer the case. Within a decade of the publication of Todorov's study, Jackson's work was already starting to extend it and put pressure on its conclusion. Most importantly, Jackson demonstrates that "a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context" (3). Jackson's study also claims that fantasy "characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (3). The inclusion of the "cultural" element and the specification of the characteristic of desire facilitates a connection between the theories of the Fantastic to the theories of the Diaspora, for these aspects are shared by Fantastic and diaspora literature. Jackson's study however, proceeds in a still-Western context, "produced and determined by" that particular social context, and dominated by the theories of Freud. The explanation of social and cultural elements and an understanding of the particular desire that drive Diaspora Fantasy need to be found elsewhere.

Jackson also refashions fantasy as a mode rather than a genre. This is based on Todorov's scheme of marvellous-Fantastic-uncanny and the "polarization" that occurs between the marvelous and the uncanny. For Jackson, this polarization does not function, for the marvelous is a "literary category" and the uncanny is not (32). Jackson suggests that the remedy for this is to call the Fantastic a mode and to "place it between the opposite modes of the marvelous and the mimetic. The Fantastic can then "be understood by its combinations of elements of these two different modes" (32). Jackson concludes that the Fantastic is marked by an "instability of narrative," generated by the fact that Fantastic writing "*enters a dialogue with the 'real' and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure*...fantasy is 'dialogical', interrogating single or unitary ways of seeing" (36). The result of this, according to Jackson, is

that the Fantastic is "a literature which draws attention to its own practice as a linguistic system" (37). Later, when discussing fantasy's tendency toward non-signification, Jackson suggests that the "movement of Fantastic narrative is one of *metonymical* rather than that of metaphorical process: one does not *stand for* another, but literally becomes that other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability" (42). In addition to cultural elements and a particular desire then, in Jackson's scheme, the Fantastic also makes use of *metonymical* relationships. This is precisely the place where culture must enter the mode, for metonymy relies on shared knowledge, language, and understanding that are only achieved when writers and audiences participate in the same community.

Polysemy and dialogism in Yoruba language and culture are explained brilliantly by Olabiyi Yai in his article "In Praise of Metonymy: The Concepts of "Tradition" and "Creativity" in the Transmission of Yoruba Artistry Over Time and Space." Additionally, Yai argues that "the mode of existence of art, should be through *constant departure*" (34). He explains that "in Yoruba worldview, artistic practice, and discourse, the best way to recognize reality and to relate to it is to depart from it. An entity or reality worth respecting is that which we depart or differ from" (35). Though Yai's purpose in this article is to give some culturally responsible aesthetic guidelines for the interpretation of Yoruba artworks, the essay can easily be extended into Literary analysis and interpretation because of its grounding in linguistic and discursive practices. Early in the article, Yai suggested that the way to better art history and critique of Yoruba art was to consider all Yoruba artworks to be *oriki*, praise poetry. Yai quotes an *oriki*, to illustrate the "fluidity, boundarilessness, and centerlessness of the constituent parts of an *oriki* performance" (35).

Yai's discussion of Yoruba linguistic and discursive modes is similar to Jackson's explanation of what happens in the Fantastic mode, in which the rhetoric: "*enters a dialogue with the 'real' and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure*...fantasy is 'dialogical', interrogating single or unitary ways of seeing" (36). It is worth quoting Yai at length here, since his thesis provides an important articulation between modes of literary practice in Europe, Africa, and the New World, and goes a long way towards a possible explanation of the prevalence of Yoruba culture in works of the Diaspora. Yai justifies his consideration of all artworks as *oriki* as follows:

> It is no accident if the key Yoruba concepts of *orí* (individuality) and *ìyàtò* (difference, individuality) are prominent in these lines. This is because the oral and visual *oriki* are essentially vocative discourse in which dialogue is a constitutive ingredient. But oriki is also evocative and provocative.
>
> I would like to suggest that the Yoruba predilect mode of artistically engaging reality and their predilect way of relating to each other, the orisa, and other cultures is more metonymic than metaphoric. To "kì," (perform oriki verbally), "gbẹ" (to carve), or "yà" is to provoke and be provoked.
>
> Art is an invitation to infinite metonymy, difference, and departure, and not a summation for sameness and imitation. In such a culture the perennial question in art history of the relation between tradition and creativity is less tragically posed, solved, and lived, for to a large extent, the tradition/creativity binary opposition is neutralized. Tradition is Yoruba is *àṣà*. Innovation is implied in the Yoruba idea of tradition. The verb *ṣà*, from which the noun *àṣà* is derived, means to select, to choose, to discriminate or discern. *Ṣà* and *tàn* are semantically cognate. Hence *àṣà* and *ìtàn* are. That which has

> not been the result of deliberate choice (*ṣà*) based on discernment and awareness of historical practices and processes (*ìtàn*) by individual or collective *orí* cannot qualify as *àṣà*. And since choice presides over the birth of an *àṣà* (tradition), the latter is permanently liable to metamorphosis. (35)

In discussing Yoruba art and culture, Yai has echoed Jackson's statement on narrative in the Fantastic mode: "movement of Fantastic narrative is one of *metonymical* rather than that of metaphorical process: one does not *stand for* another, but literally becomes that other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability" (Jackson 42). Metonymy and metamorphosis then emerge as vital characteristics of these modes of being. When taken together, those qualities establish an openness and mobility through time and space that suggests longevity for these modes. Yai says it better when he writes:

> this ability to reconcile opacity and difference and openness in an unending movement of metonymic engagements might explain the success and popularity of Yoruba culture in the New World where it has greatly contributed to cement and creolize African and non-African cultures despite a social climate of intolerance and invitation to mimetism. (36)

This same assessment of the popularity of Yoruba culture in the Diaspora could be applied to an explanation of the continued popularity of the Fantastic, its sibling genres/modes (marvelous and uncanny), and its descendants (science fiction, fantasy).

As I stated earlier, Theresa Washington's book *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Ajé in Africana Literature* articulates well with the shared characteristics of the Fantastic and Yoruba art and culture as expressed by Yai. Since Yai's article does not extend into Literature or provide a complete analytical model, turning to another source is imperative once again. Washington's text is by no means an attempt at a comprehensive look at Yoruba

culture and art. It is focused on the particular phenomenon of Àjẹ́ and make analyses of Literary works from this limited focus. What Washington does, however, is provide a critical model that can be applied across the Atlantic and the Diaspora. She also adds the very cultural element missing from Todorov's work, and called for by Rosemary Jackson, to a speculative discussion of the Ifá-ntastic: the conflation if Ifá and the Fantastic.

Like Gilroy and Gates, Theresa Washington sought African based critical models that would embrace the complexities of African and Diaspora texts. Western models left her unsatisfied, and were simply not up to the task of fully developing a critical discourse. She describes her study of Àjẹ́ as a quest to fill gaps: "What I sought was a definitive, holistic, African-based model to elaborate the profusion of Africana cultural and spiritual properties in Africana texts: those elements that Western theoretical models ignored altogether, traced to the plantation, or described as "magical realism" (2). This description is important because it summarizes three important critical challenges in the field: the invisibility of Africa, the degree of emphasis placed on the experience of slavery, and the critical equivalent of "sweeping under the rug" those elements that cannot be effectively explained by non-experts. Of course, these challenges are related to one another. While no one will dispute the lasting effects of the middle passage and the experience of slavery, placing too great an emphasis on those events can create the effect of erasure. Turning to an idea like Àjẹ́ allows Washington to demonstrate the significance of life before the middle passage, and that slaves retained and used all kinds of sophisticated knowledge in their New World lives. While Philip Curtin so famously reminds scholars and students that the middle passage is not the beginning, it's the middle, Washington analyzes one important way that "before" transcends the middle and survives in even the most contemporary Diaspora works. Washington's explanation of her quest also boldly exposes the

limitations of the magical realist mode, succinctly presenting the application of that term to Africana texts as mere "description." In placing Àjẹ́ alongside other "terms and tongues of others," Washington insists that it "deserves to exercise its ability to define itself, speak its own piece" (8).

Washington's begins her elaboration of the Yoruba concept of Àjẹ́ by defining the concept as "a force of creation" that covers artistic, biological, spiritual, and ecological domains of existence. Within these domains, Àjẹ́ is the power of maintenance, destruction, and re-creation. The term itself "denotes both a spiritual power and spiritually empowered humans." Washington acknowledges the potential unwieldiness of this concept when she explains that a definition of Àjẹ́ is complex: "it is not a one-dimensional concept or figure with a neat definition or concise explanation" (8-9). Defining the term is complicated by the fact that any translation of the word Àjẹ́ includes not only Western bias, but also a binary opposition between male and female that was constructed by missionaries as well as African believers. This opposition created the negative association best expressed as: witch = bad, wizard = good (6). Washington necessarily (and rightly) rejects this opposition, and creates a more useful systemization of the many domains of Àjẹ́.

The adjectives Washington uses to describe Àjẹ́ include: ubiquitous, ambiguous, and invisible. In order to gain some control over vague but accurate descriptions of Àjẹ́, Washington separates it into categories that are first based on the physical and metaphysical locations of Àjẹ́, and then on tendencies of force that Àjẹ́ demonstrates. For example, the primary units of organization she creates are: the "Powers of Our Mothers," which "explicates the various forms and methodologies of the power" and the "Mothers of our Power," which "explores the attributes and signature activities of orisa, humans who have, or are Àjẹ́" (36). These categories

encompass both the "spiritually empowered humans" and "spiritual power" aspects of the term Àjẹ́. Before dividing Àjẹ́ into its physical and metaphysical counterparts, Washington provides an explanation of the logic behind that division.

In discussing Yewájọbí, (a praise name for Odùduwà) the Mother of All the Òrìṣà and All Living Things, as the source of Àjẹ́, she explains the apparent paradoxes contained within Àjẹ́. Odùduwà's influence extends into the realms of history, spirituality, materiality, individuality, and community. This influence originates with "the womb and the power of the word" (16). The power derived from the womb includes, but is not limited to biological reproduction. The power of the womb extends to encompass the "entire concept of *creating*" as well as the "mysteries surrounding how to sustain and develop creation" (17). The power of the word comes from a fundamental belief that an utterance brings a thing into existence. In fact, this is the most popular and widely accepted translation of the name Odùduwà: "oracular utterance created existence." This translation emphasizes the linguistic aspect of creating, and establishes the significance of the word and texts in the process of human creation and its maintenance. This has the effect of making literature: oral or written, a fundamental aspect of Yoruba ideas regarding human existence. Washington elaborates this most basic of assumptions by explaining several of the ways that the power of the word manifests, including prayer and incantation. Other examples of the power of the word naturally include the creation of various genres that describe particular uses and patterns of Words:

> using the oracular power of the Mothers, human beings create ritual dramas, proverbs, divination texts, healing rituals, and other forms of artistic and spiritual expression, including contemporary literature, music, and visual arts, that honor the Mother's original utterance and sustain, flavor, and structure society. (17)

To summarize: the origins, influence, and power of Àjẹ́ can be traced as follows: the source of Àjẹ́ is Odùduwà. Odùduwà is the mother of All the Òrìṣà and All Living Things. Odùduwà is powerful because of her level of influence over all areas of human existence. The source of Odùduwà's influence is the womb and the power of the word. The womb and the power of the word are the two main methods of creating and sustaining human development. The reason they are the key methods is because of the womb's biological function of containing reproduction, and the Word's function of bringing a thing into existence. The womb and the Word are related by the unifying power of creation. In terms of literary analysis, the power of Àjẹ́ as elaborated under the rubric of Yewájọbí is the most relevant and useful, for it is the praise name Yewájọbí that embraces the creative and textual power of Àjẹ́. The origins of Àjẹ́ are key to the methodology employed in this project, for the idea of "containing" the possibilities of creation is at the core of my analyses.

Washington's system of organization for managing the concept of Àjẹ́ is derived from her engagement with primary texts of the Ifá tradition and specifically the oríkì (praise poetry) of Àjẹ́. From the various Oriki, Washington identifies the different ways of naming the "Powers of our Mothers," the spiritually empowered humans and spiritual power about which the oríkì are composed. Praise names are given to individuals at many stages of their lives, and there is no limit to the number of praise names an individual may have. Praise names can be bestowed upon a person by anyone. Praise names often reveal an aspect of a person's personality, appearance, or achievement. An important function of oríkì as a genre of Yoruba orature is to explain why the subject of the oríkì is praised or remembered. Washington analyzes a combination of the oríkì name given, as well as the content of the oríkì itself to explain the nature of the power among the "Powers of Our Mothers": the forms and methodologies of Àjẹ́.

Within the category of the "Powers of Our Mothers," there are three main divisions: Ìyàmi Òṣòròngà, Ẹyẹ, and Ẹdan. Generally speaking, the idea of Ìyàmi Òṣòròngà emphasizes Àjẹ́'s power over language. Ìyàmi Òṣòròngà best expresses the "essence of riddling" or encoding language, and is representative of both polysemy and polyvocality. Ìyàmi Òṣòròngà also presides over the idea of "sacred time," or a unified notion of past, present, and future (20-2). The Ẹyẹ manifestation of Àjẹ́ emphasizes Àjẹ́'s spiritual or metaphysical power. While Ẹyẹ generally express the astral and terrestrial forms of Àjẹ́, this manifestation emphasizes the metaphysical works of Àjẹ́. The signs of Ẹyẹ are birds, and the symbol of Ẹyẹ is a bird enclosed in a calabash. The calabash repeats the "container" motif introduced in the name Odù, for Odù literally means "giant pot." As Lawal points out in his book-length study of the Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ Festival, a celebration of female power, the "closed calabash" is also an "image of the world" (31). In Washington's system, Ẹyẹ is "honored as the source of the creative impetus" and represents the duality of Àjẹ́. This duality is expressed rather intensely in the orature about Ẹyẹ, in which death and longevity appear alongside one another. In a case such as this, the verse is considered effective at sustaining OR beckoning death (24). The Ẹdan manifestation of Àjẹ́ emphasizes three related aspects of Àjẹ́: their roles as administrators of justice, representatives of ecological concerns, and their social and political work. Because Ẹdan is "the Child of the Mother of the Earth" the Àjẹ́ inherit the responsibility for the restoration of transgressions against the Earth. Ẹdan initiated humans into the cult of the Earth, and those who "know" the secret of Ẹdan are members of an exclusive administrative group known as Ògbóni. As the tutelary deity of the Ògbóni, Ẹdan takes on a social and political aspect, because the Ògbóni's function in society was to administer the city of Abeokuta. This was no small matter, for the population of Abeokuta before 1893 was between 60,000 and 100,000 (Fadipe 48-9). These names: Ìyàmi Òṣòròngà,

Ẹye, and Ẹdan, thus explain some of the primary forms of Àjẹ́ as a spiritual power and a spiritually empowered human. Thus far, the system Washington develops for managing a discussion of Àjẹ́ also introduces a series of important words that will be used later in her work to describe the properties of literary works. The process of developing an Afro-centric vocabulary for analytical and critical terms is an important aspect of her work, and in that sense she follows the critical ancestry of Soyinka and Gates. The development of a lexicon of African words to describe African or universal concepts has also been described as an important task for the field of Comparative Black Literature to complete (Temple 48-52).

Among the "Mothers of Our Powers," are the òrìṣà. It is these powers, tendencies, or forces, expressed in the names of the òrìṣà, that inform Washington's readings of literature. She elaborates on five òrìṣà (Ìyá Ayé, Òṣùmàrè, Yemọja, Ọ̀ṣun, and Ọya) and Ìyánlá Odù, the Great Mother, or the "force of origins" from which the other òrìṣà emerge (36). This organization makes clear that the names of the orisa are meant to denote a certain kind of power, not necessarily an embodied god or goddess.

The power of Ìyánlá Odù is that of Origins. Ìyánlá Odù is another way of expressing the force contained in Yewájọbí (discussed above). As creative power, Ìyánlá Odù is representative of the The Great Mother. The reverence of Ìyánlá Odù as the Great Mother emanates from her role in the creation of the Earth, the beginnings of the Yoruba people, and the source of Ifá. It is as the source of Ifá that Ìyánlá Odù may have the greatest influence in Literary Criticism in Africa and the Diaspora. Ìyánlá Odù's ultimate gift to humanity (and the literary critic) are the verses of Ifá:

> The powers of signification and communication are also manifest in an important but often-overlooked gift of Yewájọbí [Ìyánlá Odù] to humanity, the Odù Ifá. In addition to

> her other roles, Odù was the wife of Ọ̀rúnmìlà, and she loved him and respected him so much she 'revealed to him the knowledge of divination so that man could communicate with the spirit realm.' Odu also bore sixteen children with Ọ̀rúnmìlà. These children became the sixteen Olódù (human embodiments of the primary divination verses) of Odù Ifá, in a remarkable example of word becoming flesh and flesh becoming word and word becoming *text.* (38)

The genealogical explanation for the creation of Ifá is important. It may shed light on the prevalence of the family structure as a dominant narrative scheme in Diaspora Literature. It also provides evidence to show that Gilroy's pronouncement in *The Black Atlantic* that "It might be possible to demonstrate that the trope of family which is such a recurrent feature of their discourse is itself a characteristically American means for comprehending the limits and dynamics of racial community" is completely wrong (191).

The connection between biological creation and the power of the word to bring a thing into existence is made manifest in Washington's recounting the etiology of the Ifá divination verses. In the terrestrial realm, Àjẹ́ use the force of origins (Ìyánlá Odù) in "covenant making, communication/signification, divination, and aesthetic, cosmic, terrestrial, and biological creativity" (36). This is an important turn from Gates, for whom the generally, but not exclusively, the male force of Èsù is the representative of communication/signification. Washington's study deliberately emphasizes the feminine, and in fact, even though Washington quotes Samuel Opeola to demonstrate that any orisa "involved in creation, childbirth, or protection of a town possesses the power of Àjẹ́" her system includes only the conventionally female òrìṣà as models for literary analysis (Opeola qtd in Washington 36). Her emphasis on the feminine seems twofold. First, she attempts to balance the model of criticism provided by Gates

by showing that the Yoruba cosmos and Ifá system is not an exclusively male domain. Second, she seeks to illuminate a long ignored and often misunderstood aspect of the Ifá system: Àjẹ́. As discussed earlier, Washington believes that Western missionary presence in Nigeria influenced indigenous perceptions of Àjẹ́ in a negative, and gender-hierarchical manner. While others have argued that gender distinction and hierarchy did not exist in pre-colonial Yorubaland, Washington, whose study was conducted in Ile-Ife in the 1990's, cannot ignore one hundred years of Western influence on her informers. However, it seems that from Washington's perspective, it is the power to create and to bring forth life that gives Àjẹ́, and therefore women, power, for as long as humans exist, the creative force is outpacing the destructive one. Because it is based on a material reality, the creative force demands legitimacy. This applies to bringing forth new life and sustaining existing life through healing. The questions then turn to the particulars of creation: what conditions affect creation and in what specific ways? The literature examined in later chapters attempts to begin an answer to this, but even in the texts in which violence, destruction, dystopia and suffering prevail, the life-force always out paces the tendency toward death. The products of creation are sometimes strange, for cyborgs, inter-species hybrids, psychologically damaged people, and dystopia abound, yet life continues. This is a testament to the power of Àjẹ́ in the many spheres of existence.

The primary power to consider when addressing these questions is that of transformation. Though Washington place Ọya, the òrìṣà of transformation, last in her explanation of the òrìṣà of Àjẹ́, it is appropriate to promote her here. Even Washington argues that Ọya is "one of the most undervalued but significant òrìṣà of Àjẹ́" (48). Because the works I consider are exclusively from the Diaspora, the process of transformation is inherent in them. Placing the idea of transformation within the container of Ọya also suggests that though transformations are

sometimes violent, destructive, painful, or even annihilating, ultimately they are what they are: change. Even appropriation, when conducted as a transformative act, suggests possibility, for "acts of formal revision can be loving acts of bonding rather than ritual slayings at Esu's crossroads" (Gates xviii). One of Ọya's most important tools is a "staff of disintegration," a wonderfully rich symbol that of course contains a story. The staff of disintegration is a concrete, yet mythical tool that was built by Ògún and wielded by both Ṣàngó and Ọya. It has the power to reduce men to seven pieces and women to nine pieces. In a battle involving Ògún, Ṣàngó, and Ọya (a love triangle), the staff disintegrated Ògún and Ọya. The point of the story however, is not that one òrìṣà overpowered the other, for there is no winner in this battle. There is, however, "only transformation and symbolic solidification" (49). Ọya also demonstrates her power to transform herself during her marriages to different òrìṣà. When Ṣàngó, one of her husbands and the ruler of the city of Oyo, hangs himself, it is Ọya who presides over his apotheosis, placing her in the middle of the passage between life and death, and as the driving force of ọ̀rọ̀, "the manifestation of the power of the word," because ọ̀rọ̀ requires Àjẹ́: "Àjẹ́ is the force that gives the power of the word the intensity needed to effect change" (49). The story of the "oba ko so" or, "The King Did Not Hang" demonstrates that apotheosis is ultimately a process of language. Without Ọya to tell Ṣàngó's story and carry on his legacy through speech (ọ̀rọ̀ activated by àjẹ́) apotheosis could not occur. The apparatus of Ọya can be somewhat difficult to apprehend, as they are not always concrete. In addition to the staff of disintegration, she wields the power of the word and "is the embodiment of purposeful transmogrification and this is apparent in her dress, style, and (child)bearing" (49). Her is dress is often marked with a "cloth of many colors" and she is also connected to umbilical cords, headties, child-wrapping cloths, and long livers by way of her childbearing and association with spiritual children. Ọya is the "mother" of children

born in the amniotic sack, indicating a special, spiritual circumstance. She is also is the mother of Egúngún, "the spiritual society of the ancestors" and thus stands at two important crossroads: birth and death. Transformations mark all of the works I consider here. Whether the transformation takes place in the realm of the ritual, linguistic, personal, political, or some other context, it is happening in the containers of the Fantastic and Ifá.

Ọya did not appear from nowhere. She, like the other òrìṣà and the power of ọ̀rọ̀ and Àjẹ́, has ancestors and relatives. Ọya cannot claim dominion without acknowledging these connections. There are many other aspects of Àjẹ́ contained in Ifá and explained in Washington's work. She begins with Ìyá Ayé, who is the "mother earth." She is the "terrestrial twin of Odù," and used her "element" to help Olódùmarè create the earth. While the activities of Ìyánlá Odù take place primarily in the "sky" or astral realm, Ìyá Ayé's domain is largely terrestrial, or physical. She carried earth birds, in a basket, from ọ̀run (sky) to Earth, and this reiterates the Eye symbolization of Àjẹ́ as a bird contained in a calabash (39). The container signifies the womb of origins. The Ìyá Ayé aspect of Àjẹ́ "ensures sustenance, fertility, and holistic development" in the physical or terrestrial realm (39). Yet Ìyá Ayé is not opposed to, or separate from, Odù. In illustrating the interconnectedness of Ìyá Ayé and her astral twin, Washington creates a map of the Yoruba cosmos that shows the sixteen roads of the Odù Ifá (see Fig. 1). Washington calls the intersection of the sixteen roads the "perfect" symbol for Àjẹ́. This complex crossroad is the representation of Àjẹ́'s "full spiritual-physical, terrestrial-astral mobility and authority" (40). The density of the intersection gives rise to an intricate directionality that emphasizes multiplicity and possibility. In African-American literature, and in Gates' *Signifying Monkey*, the crossroad is often invoked in a simpler manner - with only two roads, and often aligning with Western Religious ideals relating to the Christian representation of

the cross. That crossroad, while referencing a historical condition of uncertainty for slaves, also suggests limited possibilities. The multiple roads of Washington's representation suggest a need to open new possibilities for language, meaning, and interpretation, whether they are for people struggling to create meaning in the world around them, or for critics seeking new ways to approach and analyze texts.

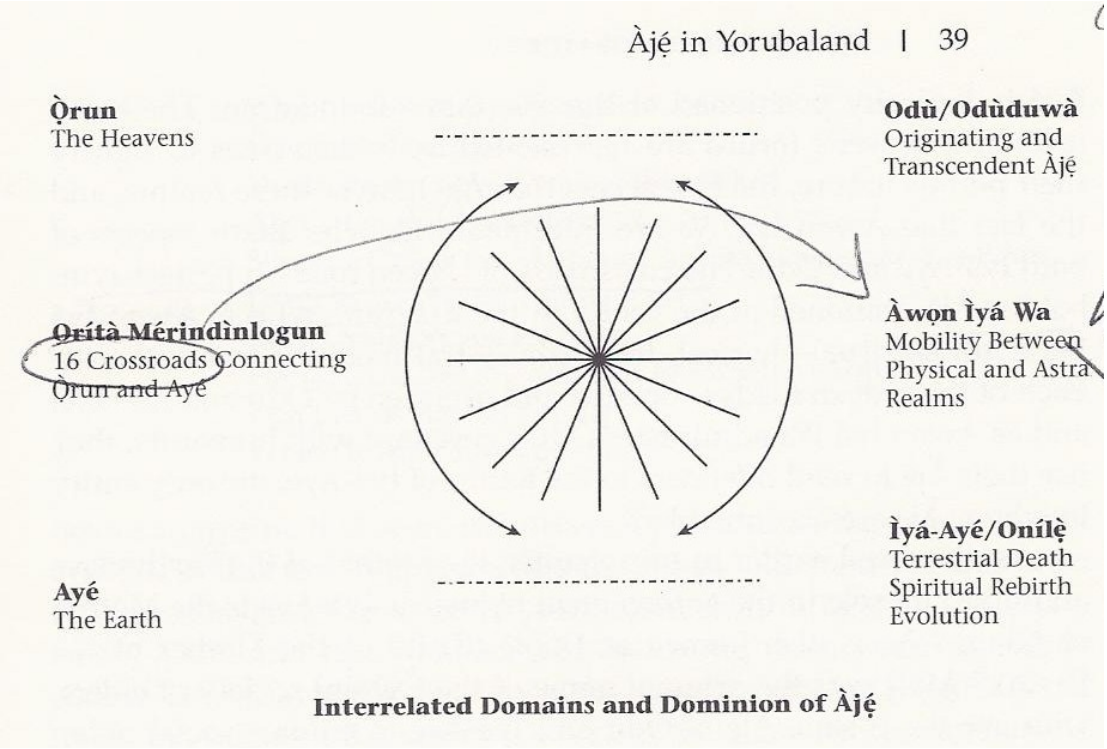


Fig. 1 The Interrelated Domains and Dominion of Aje

Another aspect of this complex directionality and the partnership with Odù is relative ease with which one can achieve movement between the astral and physical realms. This movement is also between the physical and metaphysical, or between birth, life, and death. The ease of movement brings these concepts closer together. Whereas conventional Western interpretations take these as separate and linear stages of human life, the Àjẹ́, or those endowed with the power of Àjẹ́, recognize the past-present-future, birth-life-death, and physical-metaphysical realms not as

separate or opposed to one another, but as complementary and balancing forces. An example of this are tombs. The diagram above demonstrates not just mobility and multiplicity, but also a union of opposites in that "each of the sixteen roads is opened and overseen by Odù and Ìyá Ayé, and as Àwọn Ìyá Wa administer Odù's covenant with humanity, they use their Àjé to send offenders to the tombs of Ìyá Ayé" (40). Ìyá-Ayé's tombs are the complementary container to Odù's "womb of origins." Though here it may seem that the tomb is punitive, Washington presents this aspect of Àjẹ́ as a regenerative one. The earth, including its tombs, is the source of "everything" in human existence and therefore must also be part of a balanced existence. For the purposes of literary analysis and interpretation, Ìyá Ayé becomes a way to read both the earth and death. This brings an environmental concern to the text, and gives rise to a different interpretation of death. While regenerative tomb may first appear to be an oxymoron, it really calls attention to a worldview that interprets terrestrial-ity as cyclic.

As the owner of terrestrial concerns, Ìyá Ayé also plays an important role in daily human activities as an administrator of justice. Washington connects Ìyá Ayé genealogically and etymologically to Ẹdan and Imọlẹ̀, the original name of the Ògbóni society mentioned earlier. Members of the Ògbóni were administers of justice in many ways, but one was through what were known as "wicked bags," another manifestation of the t/womb. The bag, another container of power, was wicked only because of the uncertainty associated with them. The bags contained medicines, like soothing ointments, as well as toxic ones, thus enfolding the destructive as well as regenerative power of Àjẹ́ and the Earth within a smaller, representative container. The uncertainty came in that one never knew which of the skills or tools from the bag would be used (41). This notion includes an aspect of uncertainty in human existence, an especially useful interpretive tool when considering a legacy of forced migration, slavery, and oppression. The

Ìyá Ayé aspect of Àjẹ́ also emphasizes resilience, because death is not an end: "no matter how large, small, overlooked, or powerful, the womb of Odù and the tombs of Ìyá Ayé give life, take it away, and dispose of the corpses completely, but they also reincarnate life through the comprehensive and cyclic power of Àjẹ́" (42). Òṣùmàrè then, is a sort of catalyzing force in creation. According to Washington, "Òṣùmàrè is symbolized by the brilliant but intangible rainbow and a serpent that devours its own tail" (42). This emphasizes a "ravage-renewal motif" and is yet another manifestation of regeneration and renewal, for Òṣùmàrè represents human transformational abilities. The act of being reborn, or of moving towards immortality, is symbolized in both the rainbow and the circular serpent. This points toward apotheosis, but the python is also said to convey the contract between the creator and humanity. Washington does not explain precisely the content of that contract, leaving an opening for varied interpretations of what an appearance of a serpent or a rainbow may mean. However, the appearance, or use of an Òṣùmàrè in literature may emphasize the importance of contracts in general, a common device in African-American literature. Questions of the quality and conditions of creation seem relevant again: what contracts, or covenants appear in the literature discussed, and how do those particular conditions effect interpretation and meaning. Importantly, one may in works of the Diaspora, who enters into contracts and under what conditions? What happens when contracts are not honored? At the time same time that Òṣùmàrè emphasizes human rebirth and even apotheosis, this manifestation of Àjẹ́ also forces a reader to investigate human "contractual obligations."

Yemọja, literally, "mother of fish," is a far more developed Àjẹ́ than Òṣùmàrè, at least in Washington's study of the phenomenon. Yemọja's qualities are extensive, and her domains are vast. Yemọja is an Iyalawo, or a master diviner. This means that she has extensive training and

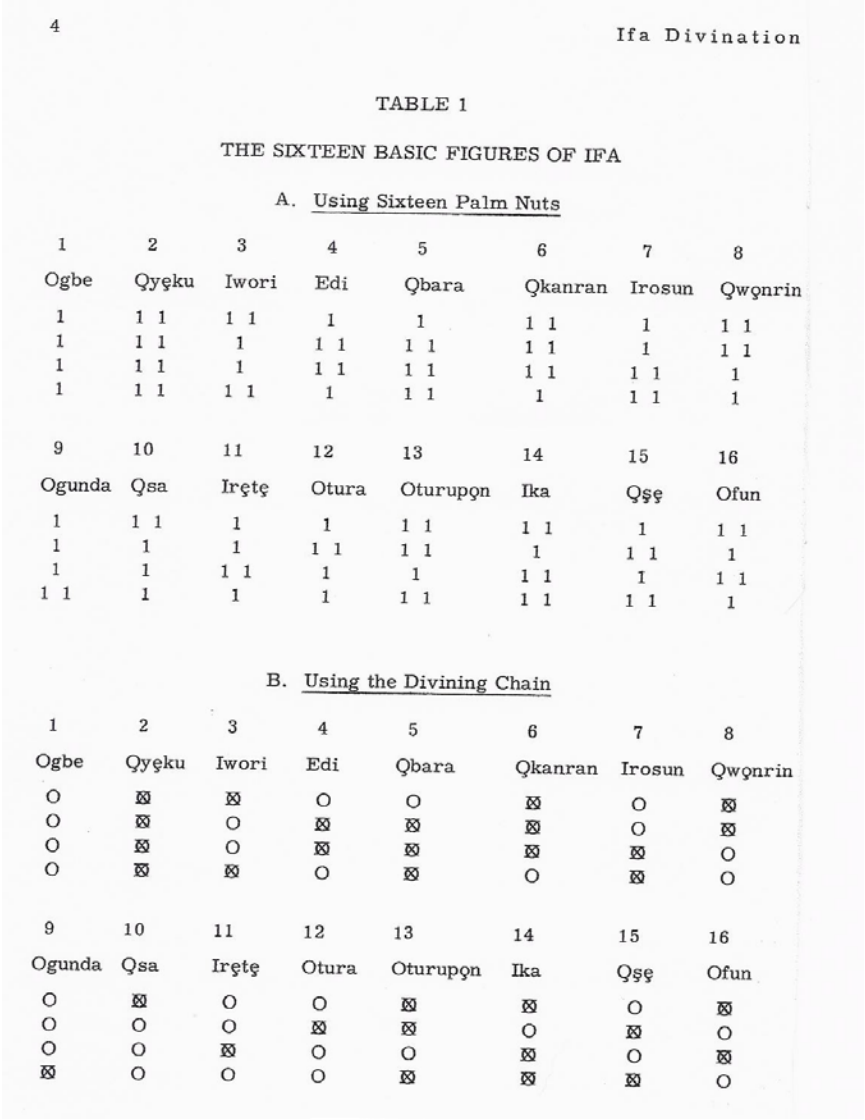
experience in the casting of Ifá. Though Washington does not give a full explanation of the Ifá divination process, it would be useful to summarize it here. Yemọja is also the "vaginal fluids of the earth," and therefore the substance that enables the earth's fertility (Fatunbi qtd. in Washington 44). The manifestations of Yemọja are called "roads," which points back to the crossroads of the interrelated domains of Àjẹ́, and the most important of Yemọja's "roads" are water: Okunte and Ogunte, the Yemọja who laid down the ocean and the Ògún River, respectively. Yemọja's Àjẹ́ is signaled by her amazing ability to dance, and that power brought about the circumstances of her apotheosis and her role as the founder and patron of the Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ Festival, an important celebration of female power still performed to this day. Yemọja more than fulfills Washington's definition of Àjẹ́ as a force of creation that encompasses the artistic, biological, spiritual, and ecological domains of existence, for Yemọja also seems to dominate the realm of interpretation and performance.

As a master diviner, Yemọja has an influential role in knowledge creation and institutionalization. The role of Ifá, or Yoruba oral scripture, is like any other spiritual system: to give meaning the world around us. However, extensive scholarship of Ifá and its practice has shown that the practice of accessing and using Ifá is simultaneously highly structured and dynamically adaptive. Since I suggest that Yemọja is an important archetype in New World deities like Erzulie, it's important to review the intricacies of divination and the role it plays in human behavior and interpretive strategies. What follows here is adapted from William Bascom's 1969 work *Ifá Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men*. Though 43 years old, this work was the first to attempt a thorough examination and explanation of the practices of Ifá. It is still the authoritative work on Ifá, and when combined with other studies like Abimbola's 1976 work *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, a more comprehensive

understanding of the practice begins to emerge. Any discussion of Yemọja should include a basic understanding of the Ifá corpus, divination practice, the tools and paraphernalia needed to conduct divination, literary features, and spiritual concepts. The Ifá corpus is large. Traditionally, it operated as an oral practice, so memorization and training were extensive. The corpus is made up of sixteen primary Odù (see Ìyánlá Odù above). Beyond the sixteen primary Odù are 240 more Odù. This is considered the core of the Ifá corpus. Within each of the 256 Odu, there are an infinite number of ẹsẹ. A good Ifá priest will know at least sixteen ẹsẹ for each of the 256 Odu, for a total of 4096 verses. Beyond this, this Ifá priest must also know the appropriate sacrifices to make for each ẹsẹ. This means knowing exactly how to use any number of items, including cloth, money, animals, rocks, beads, and others. One ẹsẹ may call for a cloth to be used in an entirely different way than another ẹsẹ calls for it to be used. Additionally, an Ifá priest must also know the correct poems to chant during a sacrifice. These poems are different than the Odù and ẹsẹ. Divination is the process by which people gain access to the corpus. Only a trained Ifá priest should divine and recite Ifá. There are five classes of Ifá priest, with Babalawo (and corresponding Iyalawo) being the highest and most trained class. Babalawo is loosely translated as “father of mysteries” or "father of secrets." Any male can become a Babalawo or Ifá priest. There is no inheritance or special class of people who perform this function. The only requirement is to be intelligent enough to memorize the corpus and the rest of the material that goes along with the duties of a Babalawo. Training can take three to six years, or more. There are very few accounts of female priests or Iyalawos. According to Bascom, the corpus is filled with stories of female diviners, but their skills are never refined or complete, and many of the stories include describe the woman’s leaving divination and casting of Ifá. Yemọja is an exception to this (3-12 and 40-9).

The complexity of knowledge, wisdom, its creation, and access to it are emphasized by the paraphernalia and practice of divination. To divine, a Babalawo/Iyalawo must acquire certain ritual objects, like a divination tray. These can be round, oval, or rectangular, but they are always highly decorated and contain an Esu figure. The divination tray is an artistic object as well.[7] The diviner must also have yellow divination powder to sprinkle on the tray, and 17 palm nuts to cast onto the tray and powder. The powder and the nuts are also sacred objects, and are stored in highly decorated bags and bowls. One palm nut is placed on the side of the tray opposite the diviner. This palm nut is for the client. The client whispers his or her problem or question to the palm nut. The diviner is not to hear this. The remaining sixteen palm nuts are held in the diviner's left hand; then, the diviner uses his right hand to scoop the nuts from the left into the right hand. If one palm nut remains in the left hand, the diviner makes two marks in the powder (II). If two nuts remain in the left hand, the diviner makes one (I) mark in the powder. The diviner does this four times, making marks below the first one (Figure2). With four or eight marks, the diviner produces an Odù signature. These signatures correspond to specific Odù in the corpus. The diviner then recites the Odù. From here, many actions can happen. The diviner can choose one of the corresponding ẹsẹ to recite, or, if the Odù is a "negative" one, the client can perform sacrifice and come back for another cast, in the hopes of generating a more positive signature.

[7] for discussion of divination trays and their artistic qualities, see Roland Abiodun's essay "African Aesthetics" in _____?



4 Ifa Divination

TABLE 1

THE SIXTEEN BASIC FIGURES OF IFA

A. Using Sixteen Palm Nuts

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ogbe	Qyęku	Iwori	Edi	Qbara	Qkanran	Irosun	Qwǫnrin
1	1 1	1 1	1	1	1 1	1	1 1
1	1 1	1	1 1	1 1	1 1	1	1 1
1	1 1	1	1 1	1 1	1 1	1 1	1
1	1 1	1 1	1	1 1	1	1 1	1

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Ogunda	Qsa	Irętę	Otura	Oturupǫn	Ika	Qşę	Ofun
1	1 1	1	1	1 1	1 1	1	1 1
1	1	1	1 1	1 1	1	1 1	1
1	1	1 1	1	1	1 1	1	1 1
1 1	1	1	1	1 1	1 1	1 1	1

B. Using the Divining Chain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ogbe	Qyęku	Iwori	Edi	Qbara	Qkanran	Irosun	Qwǫnrin
O	⊠	⊠	O	O	⊠	O	⊠
O	⊠	O	⊠	⊠	⊠	O	⊠
O	⊠	O	⊠	⊠	⊠	⊠	O
O	⊠	⊠	O	⊠	O	⊠	O

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Ogunda	Qsa	Irętę	Otura	Oturupǫn	Ika	Qşę	Ofun
O	⊠	O	O	⊠	⊠	O	⊠
O	O	O	⊠	⊠	O	⊠	O
O	O	⊠	O	O	⊠	O	⊠
⊠	O	O	O	⊠	⊠	⊠	O

Figure 2: William Bascom's "Basic Figures of Ifa"

As Bascom shows in his study and in the table above, there is a short form of Ifá divination that makes use of a divining chain, called the opele. The palm nuts are attached to a string of leather. A single cast with the opele will produce a signature. When the concave side of the nut faces up, that corresponds to a single mark. When the convex side faces up, that corresponds to two marks. Bascom's table also shows the names of the first sixteen Odù. The first Odù, Ogbe, signifies light, happiness, and good fortune. It is also male. The second Odù,

Oyeku, is female, and signifies darkness and disease, unhappiness and worries (3-12). Each of the following Odù are said to be children of the first two, emphasizing their partnership in regeneration as well as partnership in balancing the forces, positive and negative, that humans encounter in their daily lives.

Yemọja's divination skills and her founding and patronizing of the Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ Festival establish her as the most influential female òrìṣà. Yemọja is another appellation for Odù, "the mother of us all," or Yewájọ́bí, mentioned above (Washington 44). To study Yemọja's place among the Yoruba, her attributes, and her behaviors is to reveal some concepts that are integral to understanding and applying this worldview. Though these ideas are not exclusive to Yemọja, in the context of this study, it is through Yemọja's paradigm that I have accessed and attempted to understand and apply them. First is orí, literally, the Yoruba word for "head." Though orí denotes a specific region of the human body, it also means "destiny," or "fate." Only the context in which the word is used determines which of these meanings is intended. Orí is also worshipped as one of the many òrìṣà in the Yoruba pantheon. The Yoruba believed that humans chose an orí in "heaven" before they are born. There are good and bad orí (rere and buruku) and all types in between those two extremes. Ọ̀rúnmìlà, the orisa of Ifá and divination, presides over this choice, so he knows the orí of every person. All people have orí, whether or not they are Yoruba or Ifá worshippers. Ọ̀rúnmìlà is the mouthpiece of other òrìṣà. He tells the wishes of the òrìṣà and of an individual's orí. Even though the Yoruba have a belief in predestination, it does not bring about a complacency with one's destiny. Even a good orí requires actions like hard work, education, Ifá consultation, and other ways of developing one's character. A good orí also does not mean a disaster-free life, just as an orí buruku, or a bad orí can be calmed with correct

behavior and sacrifice[8] (Abimbola 113-4). Describing the connection between orí and Ifá divination, Wande Abimbola writes in *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* that

> Broadly speaking, therefore, one can say that when a person goes to consult Ifá all he is doing is finding out the wishes of his orí. Ifá is merely a mouthpiece, an intermediary between the inquirer and his orí. Ifá carries the message or orí and the Gods to the supplicant and carries the sacrifices made by the latter to orí and the Gods. The role of the Gods is to aid orí in leading every person to his destiny in life. Whatever a man's orí has refused to approve cannot be granted by any other God. (115)

Divination and orí thus go hand in hand. They are partnered activities that require many layers of participation, language, and knowledge. William Bascom describes the role of language and writing in this layered process that codifies the process of inquiry, parses out the job of knowledge creation, and therefore emphasizes community:

> Ifa is often spoken of as a scribe or clerk, "one who writes books" (akowe: a ko iwe). Like other clerks who serve as secretaries and book-keepers in modern business or government, Ifa "wrote" for the other deities, and he taught the Babalawo to "write" the figures of Ifa on their divining trays. In Ilesa he is also described as a learned man or scholar (amuye), because of all the knowledge and wisdom in the Ifa verses, and as the interpreter (agbonfo) between Gods and humans. In Oyo he is also spoken of as an interpreter (onitumo) the one who translates, who explains, or "who loosens knowledge, who hears the Oyo dialect." Olorun gave him the power to speak for the Gods and communicate with human beings through divination, and when Sango or Orisala or any other deity wishes a special sacrifice, he sends a message to the human beings on earth through Ifa. Although he serves all the deities in this way, Ifa is not their servant; rather

[8] See also: *Yoruba Folktales* by Ulli Beier "Choosing A Fate"

> he is the wisest of the deities according to the babalawo, and according to some the father of all the deities except Olorun. (109)

Bascom's description is especially useful in demonstrating the importance of language and interpretation in the divination process. It is a community activity that requires many layers of participation and a wisdom that is negotiated with different levels of language, so cultivating one's orí demands a linguistic or literary way of being, if only for a short time. In addition to the many layers of meaning at play in any given word, the babalawo and the client communicate solutions to questions and problems via the ẹsẹ, or the unlimited number of narratives that make up the smaller divisions of the Odù (Abimbola 26). Among both the odù and the ẹsẹ, numerous literary features like onomatopoeia, parallelism, personification, repetition, word play, tonal word play, and metonymy can be identified. The ẹsẹ are also highly structured, perhaps to facilitate both memory and familiarity on the part of the babalawo and the client. Each ẹsẹ has eight parts:

> the first part states the name(s) of the Ifa priest(s) invloved in a past divination. The second part states the name(s) of the client(s) for whom the divination was performed. The thrid part states the reason for the divination while the fourth part contains the instructions of the Ifa priest(s) to the client(s) after the divination. The fifth part tells whether or not the client complied with the instructions. The seventh part contains the reactions of the client(s) to the joy or sorrow that resulted from the process of divination while the eight part draws a fitting moral from the story as a whole. (43)

In both structure and figurative language, the Ifá corpus demonstrates significant literary merits. Memorizing and applying these forms and their content is a task that can only be mastered by dedicated people with a good deal of intellectual ability. Yemọja's status as master diviner is

rare on two levels. The first is that the mastery of the content and form gives rise to a special group of people, and the second is that she is a woman among many men.

As founder and patron of the Gẹlẹdẹ Festival, Yemọja presides over both female power and its performance. Because of her special training as an Iyalawo, she also holds some influence over the male portion of society. The Gẹlẹdẹ Festival is a useful lens through which to examine some of the other key concepts to emerge from the Ifa tradition. Gẹlẹdẹ is prominent among Yoruba of the Western region of Yorubaland - Western Nigeria and Benin. It is not a universally celebrated festival. However, Gẹlẹdẹ is an enactment of Àjẹ as Washington describes it. Henry and Margaret Drewal conducted one of the first and most famous studies of Gẹlẹdẹ and found the belief in the "powers" of women to be pan-Yoruba:

> consisting of nighttime (Efe) and daytime (Gelede) performances, these masquerades represent a highly visible, artistic expression of a pan-Yoruba belief: that women, primarily elderly women, possess certain extraordinary power equal to or greater than that of the gods and ancestors, a view that is reflected in praises acknowledging them as "our mothers," "the gods of society," and "the owners of the world." With this power, the "mothers" can be either beneficent or destructive. They can bring disaster - epidemic, drought, pestilence. (xv)

This acknowledgement of female power is rather extraordinary in a male-dominated and patrilineal society. The festival promotes asuwada, or togetherness and community. It also demonstrates the value of balance, a core Yoruba value in all aspects of life. The Drewals demonstrate that the etymology of the word Gelede announces its meaning within individual Gẹlẹdẹ societies:

> the etymology...reveals its central concerns and its ultimate significance. Ge means "to soothe, to placate, to pet or coddle"; ele refers to a woman's private parts, those that symbolize women's secrets and their life-giving powers; and de connotes "to soften with care or gentleness." Together these ideas convey the significance of Gelede, performances carefully conceived and executed to pay homage to women so that the community may partake of their innate power for its benefit. (xv)

However, the reverence given to women in Yoruba society or in Gẹlẹdẹ Festivals should not be mistaken as merely a celebration of fertility. To avoid such simplification, the Drewals offer this warning:

> these statements imply something much more fundamental than female fertility and fecundity. They claim that women possess the secret of life itself, the knowledge and special power to bring human beings into the world and to remove them. This knowledge applies not only to gestation and childbirth but also to longevity. (8)

This is precisely the positive aspect of aje that Washington explicates. When viewed in this way, women, or Àjẹ́, are at the very crux of creative power. The fundamental container for creation - the womb - is also the sign of Àjẹ́, the enclosed calabash that is an image of the world, and all other containers in which a creative process happens, whether they are cooking pots, duppy bowls, or the earth itself. All containers are, from this viewpoint, substitutes for the primary container - the source of female regenerative power: the womb.

It is not difficult to see that Yemọja - with all the power of Gẹlẹdẹ and a society's open acknowledgement of female - would be an important archetype in the formation of New World deities. The very elements of being that Gẹlẹdẹ and Yemọja celebrate would have been

fundamental concerns of the victims of the Atlantic Slave Trade, New World Slavery, and ultimately racism.

Manifestations of Ọ̀ṣun are ubiquitous in literature and art of the Diaspora. Ọ̀ṣun has been the subject of many book-length studies in both West Africa and in the Diaspora[9]. She is one of the many containers for creative energy in the Diaspora, as her place in the pantheon illustrates. As the orisa of "fertility, abundance, and development" she would appeal to the victims of the gross dehumanization that occurred during the slave trade and colonization because of her role in creating and sustaining life. She is also the òrìṣà of desire, which, in this particular context, connects her to the Fantastic mode. As the òrìṣà of desire, Ọ̀ṣun does a double duty of ameliorating loss and representing that irrecoverable past informing that loss. Washington describes Ọ̀ṣun as the force that "is the inspiration for existence, and she is the force that motivates or soothes sentiment, longing, pride, pleasure, and pain" (46). Ọ̀ṣun is also the primary container for the idea of male/female partnership. Ọ̀ṣun's power by inaction or nonaggression is evident in this partnership: "*she possesses the power to withhold the life-force which activates humanity through the male principle. That singular power emphasizes that without the female principle, the male principle is rendered impotent*" (Badejo qtd. In Washington 47). The apparatus of Ọ̀ṣun are also abundant. Washington places her with Ẹlẹ́yẹ, making "the vulture, quail, and peacock...her winged messengers" (46). Ọ̀ṣun also has a marine aspect. She is the òrìṣà of fresh waters, rivers and streams, and sometimes is known by the appellation "Ọ̀ṣun Ikole (The Stream That Builds the House)" (47). Ọ̀ṣun is also a pharmacist and master hairdresser, making medicines, plants, tools for preparing and distributing them, combs, caps, headwraps, and any decorations for hair symbols for her presence. She is capable

[9] For example, Badejo's *Ọ̀ṣun Ṣẹ̀ẹ̀gẹ̀sí: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power, and Femininity* and Murphy & Sanford's *Osun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas.*

of wielding weapons and waging war, especially with her close counterpart, Ògún, but when drawn into conflict, Ọ̀ṣun attacks with "grace, cunning, and dignity" (47). These skills, coupled with song and drum, enable Ọ̀ṣun to establish what the more belligerent orisa (Ògún, Ṣàngó, Ọya) sometimes miss, "social and spiritual harmony and balance" (47). Another important symbol of Ọ̀ṣun is thread: in the concrete and the abstract sense. Washington connects the sacrafice of thread to "umbilical cords, headties, and long livers, all of which are owned by Àjẹ́ and connect them to human beings. Ọ̀ṣun used this thread to bind the Àwọn Ìyá Wa to their community" (47). Finally, Ọ̀ṣun also contains the "political" side of female power. She embodies the ideas and roles of women who operate as leaders, in political offices, military operations, economic development, and urban development.

> Earlier, I quoted Henry Louis Gates and his justification of speculation:
>
> because of the experience of diaspora, the fragments that contain the traces of coherent system of order must be reassembled. These fragments embody aspects of a theory of critical principles around which the discrete texts of the tradition configure, in the critic's reading of the textual past. To reassemble fragments, of course, is to engage in an act of speculation, to attempt to weave a fiction of origins and subgeneration. It is to render the implicit as explicit, and at times to imagine the whole from the part...Anyone who analyzes black literature must do so as a comparativist, by definition, because our canonical texts have complex double formal antecedents, the Western and the black. (xxiv)

Like the Fantastic, the power of Àjẹ́ manifests. Both contain the ideas of transformation,

metonymy, and subversion. They are also both primarily linguistic ways-of-being in the world. With these connections in mind, the analysis that follows speculates that such a mode as the Ifá-ntastic exists.

CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE FANTASTIC IN THE WORKS OF NALO HOPKINSON: THE IMPORTANCE OF ÈṢÙ

"An archetype is in no sense just an annoying prejudice; it becomes so only when it is in the wrong place. In themselves, archetypal images are among the highest values of the human psyche; they have peopled the heavens of all races from time immemorial. To discard them as valueless would be a distinct loss. Our task is not, therefore, to deny the archetype, but to dissolve the projections, in order to restore their contents to the individual who has involuntarily lost them by projecting them outside himself"

Carl Jung, Four Archetypes

The best exemplar of the Ifántastic, this new mode developing inside of Fantastic literature is certainly Caribbean-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson. Her first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, inspired this study. It also forms the foundation for the analyses of literary works, both past and contemporary, that form the remaining chapters here. In the spirit of those "acts of formal revision [that] can be loving acts of bonding rather than ritual slayings at Esu's crossroads," Hopkinson borrows principles from Ifá and its related religious traditions to activate her interrogation and critique of the real-world social conditions that affect her characters (Gates xviii). By far the most important and easily recognizable of the borrowed Ifá principles is the trickster God Èṣù as narrative and critical motif. Like Àjẹ́ and Ọ̀rọ̀, Èṣù can act as an important framework for the creation of literary works. In the case of Nalo Hopkinson, Èṣù helps a new author to establish her voice as well as some of the forms developing in Black Fantasy, Science

and Speculative Fiction[10]. There are several complementary paths that Èṣù occupies in the novels of Nalo Hopkinson. For example, it is through Èṣù that Hopkinson creates and accesses cultural and historical knowledge. In her first two novels, Èṣù is also concrete presence who enables narrative development. The first appearance of Èṣù also activates the Fantastic mode, establishing Todorov's important moment of "hesitation." In the course of Hopkinson's five novels, Èṣù acts as a gateway of sorts to the force that Hopkinson truly desires, Ezili. By starting with an emphasis on Èṣù and subsequently developing the creation and force of Ezili, Hopkinson aligns herself with the historical trajectory of the Atlantic Slave trade and African Diaspora. The Ezili influence takes on a much stronger presence in the second two novels, with Èṣù shuffling to the background. The novels then form an Èṣù-Ezili partnership, and though Hopkinson draws on the African past via Èṣù, she does not stop there. The formation of a new orisa, or loa as she would be known in Haitian Voudun, shows some of the creative recombinations that have occurred through the Middle Passage and creative imaginings of it. There is a path of increasing complexity and sophistication with which Hopkinson's works demonstrate the Èṣù motif. As he appears in the novels, Èṣù transforms from an explicit to an implicit device. Another, complimentary path is Èṣù's consistent and unmistakable position as the dynamic linkage among the past, present, and future. As such, Èṣù facilitates, among communities and individuals, remembering, empowerment, balance, and multiculturalisms, eventually becoming a trope of liberation. Using Èṣù in this way has a basis in the Ifá corpus, which establishes Ọ̀ṣun, the mother of Èṣù, as "the organizing phenomena of the Yoruba

[10] That Nalo Hopkinson is transforming the genre of Speculative Fiction has been argued before, especially in Jerrilyn McGregory's article "Nalo Hopkinson's Approach to Speculative Fiction" published in FEMSPEC in 2005. McGregory looks at the way Hopkinson uses "African-based religion" to achieve important "cultural and political articulations" like "the disruption of binaries, the recentering of womanism, the construction of mystical realism, the redefinition of 'cognitive estrangement' and the privileging of transnational culture to combat excessive universalism." McGregory's study discusses only the first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, and does not account for the rhetorical strategies used in that text or in the following four novels.

theocentric universe" (Ogunbile 207). The “organizing phenomena” is an iteration of the “container,” in the same sense that Washington uses it in *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts,* introducing a dynamic quality to the idea and confirming Èṣù’s critical role in this worldview and wider universe of interlocking forms” (Thompson xv). These paths are effectively expressed in one of Èṣù’s most prominent representations, the crossroad. In the case of Hopkinson’s novels, the Èṣù-Ezili complex produces a crossroad of shifting power at the same time it metaphorizes a tension between African origins and new world identities. Throughout Hopkinson’s novels, the figure of Èṣù functions as a rhetorical strategy, embodying the double-voicedness emphasized by Gates as the unifying element of African American writing. For Hopkinson, Èṣù also facilitates the revisionist histories, solutions to contemporary social problems, and the African/Caribbean/Canadian female voice that are the key themes in her work. Like Àjẹ́, oro, and, the many-sided force represented by "Èṣù" is itself a critical theory.

Central to my argument in this chapter are the definitions of “critical theory” and “Ifa.” In *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, Carl Freedman writes that critical theory:

> is dialectical thought: that is, thought which (in principle) can take nothing less that the totality of the human world or social field for its object. And yet, not only does critical theory regard the latter as a *historical* process, constantly in material flux; it also conceptualizes its own methodology as deeply involved in that flux rather than as a passive intellectual instrument by means of which an unproblematic subject extracts absolute categories of the ideological status quo, critical theory constantly shows that things are not what they seem to be *and* that things need not eternally be as they are. Thus it maintains a cutting edge of social subversion even at its most rarefied and abstract. (8)

Essentially, I am working from the idea that Ifá and its parts are in fact, a critical theory. Freedman contrasts his definition of critical theory with what he names the "precritical." The precritical is understood as "the intellectual equivalent of *any* status quo" (7). By this he means "any mode of thought that declines to interrogate its own presuppositions and to engage its own role in the construction of the objects of its own knowledge" (3). I mention this because of the continuing dismissal and uncritical reaction to works like those of Nalo Hopkinson. Already her novels bear intellectual kiss-of-death responses like: "full of folklore," "drawing heavily on her African-Caribbean heritage." Though the pleasure-reading factor of Hopkinson's work is high, the terms "folklore" and "heritage" often occlude or obscure the complex system that is the ideological center of her work. Heather Russell is then quite correct to lament that "in criticism of the literatures of the African diaspora, privileging theme, content, and meaning over in-depth formal analysis has too frequently textured academic inquiry" (1). It is important then, for scholars in the field to draw attention to the more formal qualities of her works and to place them within a well-established intellectual tradition.

The proliferation of Black studies in the United States since the 1960s and the groundbreaking work of Henry Louis Gates in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* in 1988 have brought Èṣù out of the shadow and made him relatively easy to identify. His attributes are fairly consistent in Africa and the diaspora, but a quick review of them will help situate Hopkinson's use of Èṣù as character and organizing principle in her novels. At the most basic level, Èṣù is a trickster figure. This is generally defined as someone who uses his wit, intellect, and deception in order to overcome an inferior position, either of physical strength or social status. In *Flash of the Spirit*, Robert Farris Thompson identifies many of the main qualities associated with Èṣù:

> Esu consequently came to be regarded as the very embodiment of the crossroads. Eshu-Elegbara is also the messenger of the gods, not only carrying sacrifices, deposited at crucial points of intersection, to the goddesses and to the gods, but sometimes bearing the crossroads to us in verbal form, in messages that test our wisdom and compassion...he sometimes even 'wears' the crossroads as a cap, colored black on one side, red on the other, provoking in his wake foolish arguments about whether the cap is black or red, wittily insisting by implication that we view a person or a thing from all sides before we form a general judgment. (19)

In a recently published collection of articles about Esu and his many manifestations: *Èṣù: Yoruba God, Power, and the Imaginative Frontiers* the editor, Toyin Falola, introduces Èṣù as "The God Without Boundaries," and identifies more of his attributes, writing that "his name can neither be called in vain nor mocked. While there is physical emblem used to depict Èṣù, he is also ubiquitous and invisible, so much so that his 'temple' can also be within the individual self" (4). Falola also draws attention to Èṣù's mobility: he "is a constant traveller between spaces on earth, and between earth and heaven, with the enormous capacity to know the truth and reveal it to other forces" (4). Falola also identifies the owl as Èṣù's emblematic animal, "for like an owl, Èṣù's eyes can see far and wide" and summarizes the broader implications of Esu as both spiritual and discursive figure:

> A powerful Yoruba god in origin, Esu spread with other elements of orisa...to the African diaspora, reaching such places as Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, the West Indies, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Britain, and the United States. Esu is now part of what some may label as the Black Atlantic religion. Esu is also part of the attempt to recover African religions in other lands, as well as part of the use of religion for survival. In his ability to migrate to

> other lands, Esu becomes part of transatlantic history, but more so of the tension between relocation and history, between the violence that led to the forced migrations of people and the long healing process of reconciliation with living in strange lands that later became new homelands. (3)

The totality of Èṣù's domain would be nearly impossible to express, but he forms an ideal trope for literary themes and formal strategies. The figure of Èṣù, in his very essence, also goes a long way toward fulfilling Freedman's definition of critical theory cited above, and when placed in a literary text, is aligned with Todorov's proscription for analyzing language through the verbal, syntactical, and semantic aspects.

Èṣù is by far the most apparent in Hopkinson's first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring*. This novel, published in 1998 as the winner of the Warner Aspect First Novel contest is, most importantly, a corrective work that responds directly to Derek Walcott's play *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*[11]. Yet it is also the foundational work in her oeuvre, not only because it is simply her first novel, but also because it establishes a fundamental role for Èṣù. An important feature of Èṣù, as he appears in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, is that he embodies both Old World and New World aspects of this òrìṣà. Hopkinson privileges neither the old nor new, but treats Èṣù as a dynamic composite figure who is more than capable of embodying the many attributes people have ascribed to him. Wole Soyinka has repeatedly remarked on the òrìṣà for their literary and social value, drawing attention to the fact that they "travel well" and function dynamically, for "it is within their framework that traditional society poses its social questions or formulates its moralities. They control the aesthetic considerations of ritual enactment and give to every performance a multi-level experience of the mystical and the mundane" (2).

[11] McGregory also notes this in "Nalo Hopkinson's Approach to Speculative Fiction" noted above.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Èṣù makes a quite literal appearance. He is a spirit guide to the unwilling heroine, Ti-Jeanne. His presence during her journey enables her spiritually and physically to rid the community of its most-hated criminal. By the time Èṣù appears, Hopkinson has already established that Ti-Jeanne is spiritually gifted, for she is able to see how people die. Early in the novel she has one of these visions, but she experiences it alone. The first time Èṣù appears, he is visible to Ti-Jeanne, Tony (the father of her child), and Bolom-baby. While Ti-Jeanne's precognition of deaths is her individual gift, the experience of Èṣù does not belong exclusively to her. Clearly he is important to the family and, by extension, the community.

One of the ways Hopkinson showcases the many aspects of Èṣù in the diaspora is by calling him by many of his names: Jab-Jab, Prince of Cemetery, and Papa Legba to name a few. She also draws attention to some of the physical features and habits associated with Esu in Africa and the Diaspora. When Ti-Jeanne, Tony, and Baby first encounter Èṣù, they perceive him as something to fear:

> *Man-like, man-tall, on long, wobbly legs look as if they hitch on backward. Red, red all over: red eyes, red hair, nasty, pointy red tail jooking up into the air. Face like a grinning African mask. Only is not a mask; the lips-them moving, and it have real teeth behind them lips, attached to real gums. He waving a stick, and even the stick self paint-up red, with some pink and crimson rags hanging from the one end. Is dance he dancing on them wobbly legs, flapping he knees in and out like if he drunk, jabbing he stick in the air, and now I could hear the beat he moving to, hear the words of the chant: Diab'-diab!, Diab'-diab'! Diab'-diab'!* (18)

Any authentic representation of Èṣù ought to "indicate power, fear, and respect" (Falola 3). The wobbly legs that appear to be hitched on to this character backwards must call to mind the image

of a hock. Commonly associated with images of the Christian devil, this physical feature points to one of Èṣù's multiple manifestations. In both Nigeria and in the New World, Èṣù was quickly identified by Christian missionaries as the devil. Despite the fact that scholars have repeatedly insisted that this association is wrong, the connection persists among Nigerians and Diasporans. What Hopkinson does in *Brown Girl* is to embrace this association and carefully turn it upside down as the novel progresses. The association of Èṣù with the devil comes from the structural differences between West African and European religious systems. As Teresa Washington explains: "The multi-dimensional Èṣù was fitted into the mono dimensional forms of both the Devil and Jesus, and both concepts expanded to fit the Òrìṣà. In African America, Devil/Èṣù is far from evil. He can be as helpful as God, often more so because he tests his charges' will and teaches them to make ways out of no way" (95). This guidance toward finding ways out of impossible situations plays out in the climax of *Brown Girl in the Ring*. The pointy tail and the color red can also be associated with common images of the Christian devil. However, Hopkinson is careful to point her reader towards the Diab'-diab's multicultural background. In his article "Spaceship Creole," Gordon Collier also effectively remarks on the quality of Hopkinson's use of culture, writing that "*Brown Girl* involves a linguistic blending of creoles, anglophone and francophone, as a medium to convey cultural practices that can no longer be identified solely with, say, St Lucia or Dominica or Haiti, Trinidad or Jamaica, but that partake of all of them" (445). In the novel, Èṣù's face, "grinning like an African mask" points readers to the continent of origin by simply naming it. This mask, like the one in Paul Laurence Dunbar's famous poem "We Wear the Mask" is not static. It is attached to real gums, and has moving lips. The emphasis on one single facial feature, the mouth, emphasizes the place of speech in the same way that Dunbar's mask emphasizes the black speaking (and writing) voice. The stick Diab'-

diab' waves can be associated with a pitchfork as well as with fire. The pink and red rags attached to the stick are a conventional way of representing fire and hell. A more Afrocentric description of the stick follows, explaining its function as an extension of a dancing body, and alluding to the beating of a drum. Ti-Jeanne is able, after a moment, to "hear" the rhythm to which Diab'-diab' dances, and the drum beat she perceives is the sound that gives the mysterious character the name "Diab'-diab'." No great leap is required to view this in an Afrocentric way, for the structure of the paragraph demands it. Hopkinson alludes to the talking drums of West Africa as well as the ritual practices of drumming and dancing that take place during religious festivals. Finally, Hopkinson adds a linguistic dimension to the appearance of the Diab'-diab' in this passage. The name "Diab'-diab'" calls attention to the fact that it is not only English that makes up the Diasporic Literary Tradition. Though Hopkinson writes in English and makes use of many cultural practices from Jamaica, she also finds ways to include the non-Anglophone Caribbean in her works. The apostrophe at the end of Diab" represents the missing -lo or -le of the Spanish and French words for devil, diablo and diable. The Spanish and French languages violently confronted each other during the Parsley Massacre in Haiti, another location from which Hopkinson draws much of her inspiration. The Spanish-or-French name of the Diab'-diab' reminds the initiated reader of this historical fact. Unpackaging this introductory passage in this way demonstrates two important aspects of Èṣù as he appears in the novels of Nalo Hopkinson. First, he is created as a multicultural Èṣù who is beyond any notion of primordial authenticity or polarized duality (African/African-American). Second, this multicultural Èṣù's ability to simultaneously embody all of these names, physical appearances, and attributes, whether they are "right" or "wrong," demonstrates the vastness of his power.

This early passage and the appearances of Jab-Jab that precede it also activate the Fantastic mode. In addition to the use of the imperfect "was seeing," (16) the main character Ti-Jeanne, expresses a healthy an appropriate amount of distrust for the seeing, for Ti-Jeanne "froze, not trusting her eyes any longer to pick reality from fantasy" (16). The confirmation of the sight by Tony only increases the hesitation, or uncertainty, when he questions, "God Almight! What the hell is that?" (16). In addition to the mistrust of her own eyes and "vision," Ti-Jeanne also expresses a mistrust for her grandmother's healing abilities and spiritual devotions, which are to the Yoruba and diaspora orisa of healing, Osain or Osanyin. Hopkinson also choose to set the sections of hesitation in italics, marking them as somehow different from the main course of action in the novel.

The next time Èṣù appears to Ti-Jeanne, her Baby is about to be devoured by a Soucouyant (44-6). Later, the Soucouyant is revealed to be the astral form of Ti-Jeanne's mother, whose being has been split into two by Rudy, Ti-Jeanne's grandfather and the organized crime leader she must defeat in order to restore safety to the community. In this scene, when Ti-Jeanne cries out: "*Lord help me!"* Jab-Jab appears. The change in spelling from Diab'-diab' to Jab-Jab should call the reader's attention to the similarities in pronunciation between "j" and "di." The spelling change is Hopkinson's way of introducing the reader to some of the linguistic inconsistencies brought about by the meeting of Europeans with Africans. In Francophone Africa and Caribbean, the soft French "j" could not express the hard "j" sound present in many West African languages,[12] so "di" became the Francophone strategy for expressing this sound. As Francophone works are translated into English, the "di" spellings are often retained, but when English readers come across this spelling, they are likely to pronounce "Diab'-diab'" as: "dee-

[12] Mande, for example. Sundiata/Sonjata is probably the best example.

ab-dee-ab." Students often read Diab'-diab' and Jab-Jab as two different characters until this linguistic feature is pointed out to them.

More importantly, in this scene, Jab-Jab (Èṣù) reveals his protective role[13]. He gives Ti-Jeanne the knowledge she requires to outsmart the Soucouyant. He throws a handful of rice grains on the floor and casts a spell that forces the Soucouyant to pick up the grains one by one. The Jab-Jab beats her with his stick (the same stick described in the above passage), and the rice flies out of her hands and she has to begin collecting the grains all over again. Eventually, the sun comes up, and since the Soucouyant is vulnerable in sunlight, Jab-Jab directs Ti-Jeanne to open the curtains. When she does, the light reaches the Soucouyant and she "screamed, threw up her hands to ward off the killing light, and dissolved into smoking ash" (46). Here Jab-Jab has shared important knowledge with Ti-Jeanne. In the final scene, this knowledge will save the lives of both Ti-Jeanne and her mother. (an obvious aspect of trickster...to use wit) Two other important aspects of the relationship between Jab-Jab and Ti-Jeanne (òrìṣà and humans) are shown in the encounter with the Soucouyant. The first is that humans must be active participant in their own destinies. The òrìṣà, in this case Jab-Jab or Èṣù, are guides. They can provide the knowledge, but humans (Ti-Jeanne) must put the knowledge into action. The second aspect is that Ti-Jeanne is no killer. The critical piece of knowledge that Jab-Jab shares with her is how to delay the actions of the Soucouyant, not how to kill her outright. The means to rid the bedroom of a Soucouyant and the community of a drug dealing crime boss come from the òrìṣà (Jab-Jab/Esu), through humans (Ti-Jeanne), and in partnership with the elements available (sunlight, and in the final scene, water). These conditions reveal a great deal about Hopkinson's social message. Ti-Jeanne, though a reluctant heroine, places the responsibility for community safety

[13] This also fulfills the "cultural translation as a life-or-death matter" that Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan argues in "Tananarive Due and Nalo Hopkinson Revisit the Reproduction of Mothering" in *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory*.

upon herself. Ti-Jeanne and her community in "The Burn" never rely upon the goodwill, outrage, or political correctness of others to solve their problems.

Though at this point Ti-Jeanne is beginning to appreciate her Grandmother's spiritual world and has fewer doubts about her visions and the appearances the Jab-Jab, the feeling of hesitation is likely to still be experienced in the reading audience. Few students of the novel accept that the Jab-Jab is "real" and the most sophisticated interpretation is likely to be that he is entirely a product of Ti-Jeanne's imagination.

Èṣù's intervention is not directly sought or appealed to until Gros-Jeanne (Ti-Jeanne's grandmother) implores him to help guide her granddaughter's journey: "Eshu, ...the crossroads is you own. Help my granddaughter safe across this one, nuh?" (79). In order to help Ti-Jeanne, Gros-Jeanne has promised to help Tony, Ti-Jeanne's partner and the father of Bolom Baby, escape from Rudy's territory, the inner city. Rudy has asked Tony to commit a murder so that he can procure a "donor" heart for a wealthy politician. This act is to be Tony's final initiation into "The Posse," Rudy's crime gang. Gros-Jeanne will perform a ritual to call the spirits for guidance in this matter. She is a child of Osain, (one of the many manifestations of Osanyin, the orisa of herbs and medicine) and will appeal to him. Following Yoruba practices, Gros-Jeanne makes an appeal to Eshu first, for as the messenger, he is responsible for carrying all sacrifice and requests from humanity to the divinities. During the ritual call to Osain, Ti-Jeanne experiences her first trance. The spirit that takes possession of her is Prince-of-Cemetery, another of Esu's New World manifestations. During this trance, Prince-of-Cemetery tells Gros-Jeanne that he is, in fact, Ti-Jeanne's spirit guide: "your granddaughter head full of spirits already, she ain't tell you? All kind of duppy and thing. When she close she eyes, she does see death. She belong to me. She is my daughter. You should 'fraid of she" (95). Gros-Jeanne is

quick to point out to the Prince and to the reader that to emphasize death only captures half of the Prince's domain: "Man, don't try to mamaguy me, oui? You only telling half the story. Prince of Cemetery does watch over death, yes, but he control life, too, when he come as Eshu. So why I should frighten?" (95). The conversation between Prince-of-Cemetery and Gros-Jeanne shows that Eshu not only manifests in multiple ways, and that each of those ways has a name, but also that his responsibility to humanity involves chaperoning them between the two most important transitions of their lives: birth and death. Because Ti-Jeanne is a child of Èṣù, her position in the text as a chaperone between these levels of existence is emphasized.

The "trance" is also a perfect plot device to maintain the Fantastic elements of the novel. Gros-Jeanne's trance demonstrates the themes of the self as Todorov illuminates them. The collapse of the boundary between self and other, subject and object is in fact the goal of the trance state as practiced by devotees of Ifá, Santeria, Candomblé, and other related spiritual practices that derive from West Africa and transform in the experiences of the Middle Passage and Diaspora[14]. Osain denies his specific power to Gros-Jeanne, for she has fallen out of favor with him. When Esu speaks through Gros-Jeanne about Ti-Jeanne, the process of double-voicedness is enacted. Gros-Jeanne also takes new physical attributes, incarnating aspects of an old-world orisa, and a metamorphosis, that even if temporary, squarely belongs in the Fantastic realm.

Esu's next appearance involves another rescue. As Ti-Jeanne and Tony are attempting to escape the city and Rudy's retribution for Tony's failure to execute his task, Esu "rides" Ti-Jeanne again, giving her the spiritual and physical power to repel an attack by a synaptic cordon and three grown men. This scene unfolds yet another aspect of Èṣù: "Tell Rudy him know

[14] See Maya Deren's explanation of trance in *Divine Horsemen*, particularly the chapters titled ""Drums and Dance" and "The White Darkness." David Byrne's film *Ilé Aiyé: The House of Life* is also a good visual reference.

me...the one him call so long now and never send away. Tell him this horse is my daughter. Him not harm she. You go remember my name...Legbara. The Eshu da Capa Preta" (118). Although it is clearly Esu who "saves" Ti-Jeanne in this scene, her spiritual power grows each time he connects with her, further collapsing subject/object boundaries and mind and matter limitations (Todorov 114-6). At this point in the action, she is still very much a novice, and she runs back to Gros-Jeanne, confused and intimidated: "Is what I is, Mami? Is me do that to them three men?" (120). Ti-Jeanne's unexpected and frightening encounter with the spiritual power of Èṣù finally convinces her that she needs to listen to Gros-Jeanne's lessons about the spirits. Ti-Jeanne experiences some growth here as an adult and a character. The reference to the Èṣù of the "black cap" calls to mind a foundational myth of Èṣù. This myth demonstrates some of Èṣù's trickery by placing him in a cap that is different colors on either side. When Èṣù walks between friends, each friend sees a different color, and this reality gives rise to a fight between the friends. The opening part of this myth illustrates Èṣù's ability to stir trouble and disrupt human relations, but the closing part of the myth, depending upon who tells it, describes Èṣù's walking between the friends in the opposite direction so that the opposing side of the cap is revealed. This new experience causes the friends to resolve the disagreement, and though Èṣù is indeed a "disturber of the peace," he is also an agent of resolution and negotiation. Calling the reader's attention to this myth is entirely appropriate and calculated at this point in the novel. Ti-Jeanne's next decision is to ask Gros-Jeanne for a lesson on the spirits she needs to know about and guidance on how to control the spiritual energy she possesses: "Yes, Mami. I sorry, Mami. I ready to learn from you now" (126). In this moment, Ti-Jeanne accepts that Èṣù is the facilitator and organizing principle of her coming-of-age. He is also the link between past and present in two important ways: first, Ti-Jeanne gains a great deal of respect for her elder, Gros-Jeanne, and

second, Ti-Jeanne is about to become acquainted with an African mythology that she had previously rejected. Further, this scene demonstrates Hopkinson's emphasis on a common source for the African-derived religions in the diaspora:

> The African powers, child. The spirits. The loas, The orishas. The oldest ancestors. 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 on earth talking at he all the time. (126)

Gros-Jeanne calls Ti-Jeanne's attention to a complex dynamic of African-derived religions and their practice in the diaspora: appropriation. Gros-Jeanne, while acknowledging a common African origin, embraces the multiplicity that has developed throughout the Diaspora. In acknowledging the many names and insisting that "we all mean the same thing" Gros-Jeanne, and by proxy, Nalo Hopkinson, sidesteps any controversy over authentic or inauthentic use of these spiritual paradigms. They are simultaneously African and Diasporan. This seems to be Hopkinson's position throughout the novels, for she is non-discriminatory in her use of Èṣù traditions from Africa as well as throughout the Disapora. Rather than pollute any rarified notion of purity in the device, Hopkinson's use of Èṣù strengthens his position as a world-wide phenomenon.

But before Èṣù crossed the Atlantic, he was already multicultural. As Teresa Washington points out in *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifastations of Aje in Africana Literature*, Èṣù has his roots in the Fon system of what is today the Benin Republic. Just as Gros-Jeanne and Hopksinson argue for Èṣù and his many names, Washington connects the many names/manifestations of the Earth Mother spirit in numerous West African societies (63).

Tracing the Fon theogony, Washington comes to Legba, the seventh child of Mawu, the daughter of the Earth-Mother spirit, Nana Buluku. Legba has a function within the Fon pantheon that is similar to Esu in the Yoruba pantheon:

> Legba (Yorubaland's Esu Elegbara), the privileged seventh child of Mawu and "linguist-messenger of the Fon, administers the divine writing, reading, and critiquing to humanity. Legba is a composite of MawuLisa: an entity with two heads of power, one make and one female, comprising all spiritual forces, including Àjẹ́/Dije. The unified nature of Esu/Legba is essential, for the link between the make-female, spiritual-earthly, and oral-written must be unlimited. (66)

Establishing Èṣù, or Èṣù-like spirits, as multicultural within Africa seriously undermines any argument of cultural purity. The wholesale adoption of foreign or even enemy Gods is well-established throughout West African societies. For Hopkinson, this multicultural Èṣù is an important agent in her social agenda, in which African-derived world views provide solutions for contemporary urban, medical, and technological challenges. Another important aspect of Èṣù though, is the connection to female power that is implicit in Hopkinson's work, and explicit in Washington's study of Àjẹ́. While Washington emphasizes the composite character of Legba, and therefore Èṣù, other scholars have explained different connections between Èṣù and female counterparts.

Before taking Ti-Jeanne to the conclusion of the novel and her ultimate victory, it is appropriate here to buttress this connection between Èṣù and female power. Essentially, I am arguing that Èṣù is a creative container through which Hopkinson, like other African and Diaspora writers, situates genre, mode, themes, and narrative strategies. Since Èṣù has already been described as a "god without borders," his activation as a container seems like a paradox.

Indeed, it may be another of his many tricks to operate in such a way. In her first four novels, Hopkinson creates exclusively female protagonists, and since the container is conventionally a "female" symbol, it is necessary to discuss the relationships between male and female that are culturally and contextually relevant. Though the discussion of gender concepts in West Africa is by no means complete, it is safe to say that there is something different in the way West Africans think about gender and the relationships between men and women[15]. One of the key aspects of gender concepts and relationships that these scholars revisit is the idea of partnership. As noted above in Washington's work, the Western tendency toward complete separation of the sexes does not play out in much of West Africa. The world simply does not function unless both sexes are working together, and many West Africa spiritual systems and scholarship of those systems highlight that partnership as a core value. Since Hopkinson's voice will ultimately align more with the Haitian goddess Ezili than with Èṣù, the connection I illustrate below is a step in that direction.

Making the connection between Èṣù and female power can also be as simple as identifying him as Ose-tura, Ọ̀ṣun's son. However, in addition to the genealogical connection between the two òrìṣà, there are also a ritual and functional connections between two them. The ritual and functional relationships reveal more about a Yoruba world view and are more useful in analyzing the Literature of the Diaspora; in fact, the ritual and functional similarities and partnerships that Èṣù and Ọ̀ṣun form may have given rise to the genealogical explanation of their association. As I suggested in the introduction, the family is a central concept through which African and African Diaspora Literature attempts to interpret the World. Their relationship in the Yoruba pantheon emphasizes a particular male/female partnership: that of mother and son.

[15] See, for example, the debate between J. Lorand Matory, and Oyeronke Oyewunmi in "Is There Gender in Yorùbá Culture?" in *Òrìṣà Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture* and *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses,* respectively.

Rather than competing with one another, Ọ̀ṣun and Èṣù are prime examples of the plurality-within-unity that makes the Yoruba spiritual system so dynamic. Even though he can be a trouble-making trickster, Èṣù holds a special place in the pantheon, for he is the closest to man, and serves as the messenger between man and the òrìṣà.

Ọ̀ṣun is one of the most powerful orisa in the Diaspora. She still has active worshippers throughout the Caribbean, most notably in Brasil and Cuba. Ọ̀ṣun is an òrìṣà represented by water, and many historians and sociologists have attributed her prominence in the Diaspora to the trauma of the middle passage, during which water came to represent indescribable loss. In Haiti, Ọ̀ṣun is part of a conglomeration of goddesses that make up the uniquely Haitian Erzulie, who figures prominently into the works of Nalo Hopkinson discussed here. It is the substance of water that forms the ritual connection between Ọ̀ṣun and Èṣù. As David Ogunbile writes in his article "Eerindinlogun: The Seeing Eyes of Sacred Shells and Stones,": "water is synonymous with Ọ̀ṣun" (197). In the ritual context, water is a soothing agent. It is used to counteract the "hot" deities[16] (199). In the divination process, "the appearance of the Odù that relates to the fiery divinities is considered dangerous to the client to whom the Odù appears. Water is poured on the cowrie shells the signature of the Odù before they are recast. Such an action is required to soften the terrible consequence of the Odu that appears" (199). Similarly, Ogunbile points to the ritual practice of using water to sooth the individual orisa: "the shrine of Èṣù, the neutral force who is also responsible for inspecting and bearing ritual offerings, is usually sprinkled with water to soothe Èṣù" (199).

A functional relationship between Ọ̀ṣun and Èṣù also exists. Each plays an important role in achieving or restoring balance among both supernatural and earthly forces (Ogunbile

[16] Òrìṣà are often classified into the "hot" and "cool" categories, reflecting their personalities or the forces they embody. Ṣàngó, for example, is in the "hot" category because he demonstrates hyper-sexuality, quick judgment, and retributive justice. Obatala, as the creator of mankind, is often sorted into the "cool" category.

205). In Yoruba culture and art, balance is the single most important value, and the significance of balance underscores the importance of the òrìṣà who help to achieve and maintain it (Farris Thompson 14). Further, the fact that such disparate forces work together in this way highlights the "diversity in unity within the supernatural scheme" (Ogunbile 205). Not only are Ọ̀ṣun and Èṣù "ubiquitous," but they are also "linked together in consequence of the connection between their respective functions" (205). This connection is best illustrated in the leadership roles Ọ̀ṣun and Èṣù have over the Ajogun:

> Esu leads the Ajogun, a group of two hundred malevolent spiritual beings among whom are these principle ones: Iku (Death), Arun (Disease), Ofo (Loss), Egba (Paralysis), Oran (Serious Trouble), Epe (Curse), Ewon (Imprisonment), Ese (Terrible Harm), Ina (Fire), and Oko (Spear). Though these are essentially spiritual agents, they manifest as natural occurrences...Four of the Ajogun (Egba, Eses, Boribori, Atomu) are active messengers of Osun. Therefore, whenever anybody gets into trouble through the agency of Esu and his messengers, the way out of the difficulty is revealed and ritual offerings prescribed through the Eerindinlogun divination power. (205)

Finally, Yoruba mythology may elaborate a more concrete connection between the two òrìṣà: a familial one. The Yoruba theogony is both complex and dynamic, and because the Ifá corpus consists of tales, stories, Odù (verses), and myth from various locales, there is no firm family tree that can be established among the òrìṣà. Yet there are certain consistencies or tendencies that can be identified, and Ọ̀ṣun's relationship with Èṣù is one of these tendencies. In "Hidden Power: Osun, the Seventeenth Odu," Rowland Abiodun recounts the Odù that illuminates the connection between Ọ̀ṣun and Èṣù. When the sixteen òrìṣà first came from the sky to the earth, they were accompanied by a woman (Ọ̀ṣun). Upon arriving on earth, the sixteen male òrìṣà

worked together to establish their own spaces., but neglected to make any space for Ọ̀ṣun to live and perform her work.[17] Ọ̀ṣun waited patiently and performed her work and observed the mission of the òrìṣà. Because "God chose all good things; he also chose their keeper, and this was a woman," Ọ̀ṣun knew that the mission on earth would not be successful (16). Each man's work failed, and this was caused by their neglect of the seventeenth òrìṣà, Ọ̀ṣun. Their shame prevented them from confiding in Ọ̀ṣun about these failures, so the sixteen òrìṣà went back to the sky to consult with Olódùmarè, the supreme òrìṣà, who had to point out to these sixteen òrìṣà that they were incomplete. Olódùmarè explained that they could not "leave out" one of their partners. When the sixteen returned to the earth, they consulted Ọ̀ṣun and explained to her that they learned from Olódùmarè that they were "derived" from her and that the failures would "continue if [they] failed to recognize and obey" her (17). They tried to appease her, but Ọ̀ṣun would not keep their company. At this point, Ọ̀ṣun tells the sixteen that reconciliation will depend on the sex of the baby she carries (the story does not bother explaining how the pregnancy happened). Ọ̀ṣun tell them that if the child "turned out to be male, it is that male child who would go out with them, but if the baby turned out to be female, she (Ọ̀ṣun) would have nothing to do with them" (17-18). The child was a boy, and was Ose-tura (18). Abidun cites Idowu's 1970 study *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* to show that Ose-tura is the same as Èṣù: "though known as Osetura among babalawo (the priests of Ifá) this baby boy is, in fact, Èṣù, the one who approves of, and bears sacrifice to, the òrìṣà" (Abiodun 18).

In the Caribbean context, from which Hopkinson draws most of her inspiration, the spiritual powers associated with the West African water goddesses like Ọ̀ṣun, are rolled into a amalgamated, yet unique figure: Ezili/Erzulie. Ezili is specific to Haiti, but was formed from archetypal associations with water, reproduction, love, sex, and all things fecund. While Haitian

[17] Ọ̀ṣun's work is hairdressing. See Rowland Abiodun's "Hidden Power" essay.

scholars will insist on Ezili's distinctly Haitian identity, they regularly acknowledge that her source is West Africa. Ezili is a difficult figure to invoke in literary analysis because, like Èṣù, she defies all attempts to define her. However, because she is a composite and dynamic figure, Ezili's spiritual power is pervasive. In this way, she shares a controlling quality with Ọ̀ṣun. Artistic representations of Ezili and her multiple manifestations also invite comparison to Ọ̀ṣun, emphasizing the use of fans, combs, and extravagant hairstyles, all paraphernalia of Ọ̀ṣun. I will discuss Ezili in greater detail later in the next chapter, in relation to Hopkinson's third and fourth novels, *The Salt Roads* and *The New Moon's* Arms, both of which draw heavily on the Ezili complex. In the meantime, I would point to Marilyn Houlberg, a well known vodou art critic, who provides a succinct explanation for Ezili's West African origin:

> Africans brought to Haiti on slave ships came with their own strong traditions of fishtailed and water-related spiritis. For Yoruba and Bini people from Nigeria there was Oshun, the spirit of the river, and Yemoja ("mother of fish"), salt-water divinity, both associated with wealth and fecundity. For the Fon people to the west, in what is now Benin, water spirits resided in the Oumeme River and its lakes, one of which, Azili, may be the source of the name for the Haitian divinities known as Ezili. (32)

While it is not my goal to untangle all the complexities that inform conceptions of Ezili here, I do wish to show that there is a more complex basis for associating Èṣù with female power than simply reiterating his operation as messenger between humans and divinities.

This brings me, finally, back to Ti-Jeanne in the novel under discussion, *Brown Girl in the Ring*. When I left Ti-Jeanne, she had just accepted knowledge from her elder, Gros-Jeanne, and was beginning to learn about the myths and history associated with African-derived spiritual systems. This is an important development not just for Ti-Jeanne's coming-of-age, but also to

bring the action to a close. Èṣù's next appearance is neither accidental nor brought about by Gros-Jeanne. Ti-Jeanne must improvise and call upon her knowledge to invoke Èṣù (193-5). She figures out that they way to enter Rudy's domain is by using the invisibility granted to her by Èṣù in a previous chapter, and she calls upon Èṣù for the spiritual backing that this plan requires. Also essential to the successful conclusion of Ti-Jeanne's project is the fact that Rudy is her grandfather. The invisibility spell requires that Ti-Jeanne possess something of Rudy's, and that something is his blood. Ti-Jeanne will use this spell to hide herself as well as Rudy, so that his gang will not be able to protect him. Èṣù grants this request and Ti-Jeanne has achieved a new level of independence in dealing with the spirits. In the closing sequence of the novel, Ti-Jeanne must again make use of knowledge imparted to her from others. When the spirit under Rudy's control attacks Ti-Jeanne, she remembers how to delay it:

> It was a *Soucouyant*. Suddenly Ti-Jeanne remembered how you delayed a Soucouyant. Praying that the old-time stories had it right, she shook her bleeding arm, scattering more drops of blood. The Soucouyant hovered over them again, licking them up one by one, like the Soucouyant in her dreams had been compelled to pick up single rice grains at a time. Duppies could be delayed by tricks like that. She had dreamt true. (204)

This trick, inspired by inherited knowledge and her encounters with Èṣù, allows Ti-Jeanne the time she needs to release the duppy[18] from Rudy's control. But Ti-Jeanne's real task is to take down Rudy and restore the community. To do this, Ti-Jeanne must first suffer Rudy's attempts to turn her into a duppy, but again she remembers the teachings of her elders and puts in a call to the spirits. Using the CN Tower, a space-needle type of building, as a "center pole," Ti-Jeanne

[18] The duppy is the astral form of Ti-Jeanne's mother's spirit. Eventually they are reunited, but the fact that Rudy made a duppy of his own daughter and attempts to do the same to his granddaughter, Ti-Jeanne, further emphasizes his level of evil. Violating his own family characterizes him as the negative force of spiritual power, the side that destroys life. This is in direct contrast to Gros-Jeanne's power as a healer to prolong life. Gros-Jeanne expresses this well when she insists that what Rudy does is "work the dead" and what she does is "serve the spirits."

remembers "What were the names Mami had told her? 'Shango!' she called in her mind. 'Ogun! Osain!' Her flesh body moved its lips slightly, trying through the paralyzing effect of the drug to form the same words. 'Shakpana, Emanjah! Oshun, Oya!' And Papa Legbara, my Eshu! Come down, come down and help your daughter!" (221). Again, Eshu's role is critical here, for Ti-Jeanne immediately recalls that "the call to the heavens should be mirrored by a call to the earth" and in this moment, the divinities and the ancestors are simultaneously invoked. As the guardian of the passages between birth and life and life and death, Èṣù enables Ti-Jeanne to bring about Rudy's demise. The various òrìṣà, or spirits each help Ti-Jeanne in their own ways, but Èṣù brings back the spirits of the children that Rudy has killed in order to preserve his own youth: "'No, master,' said Legbara. 'You ain't going nowhere. You try to give me all these deaths in exchange for you own, but I refuse the deal. I give them all back to you" (226). When the spirits are unleashed upon Rudy, his false youth fades and ultimately he dies because his own actions (killing children to preserve his own life) are thrown back upon him. What Ti-Jeanne and Èṣù do, in their human-spirit partnership, is simply restore balance to the order of things in "the burn." Neither Ti-Jeanne nor Esu kills Rudy because he essentially kills himself through his misuse of spiritual knowledge.

The repetition of the trance and Soucouyant scenes also bring to mind the structural unity and relativity that Todorov demands of the Fantastic. Rudy's demise is ultimately brought about by Todorov's special causality and pan-determinism, and it brings the action of the narrative back to the "real," again preserving the essential "hesitation," for both Ti-Jeanne and the reader are left with a disoriented feeling of the "did that really just happen?" kind.

Ti-Jeanne's removal of Rudy's negative force from the community brings about a renewal. With peace and balance restored, commerce becomes enlivened in "the burn" and the

novel closes with Gros-Jeanne's wake, where friends and family gather in a spirit of cooperation. Gros-Jeanne's harvested heart is beating in the body of a local politician, whose views on economics in "the burn" are very much changed because Gros-Jeanne's heart has effectively reprogrammed her world view. In fact, as the novel concludes, this politician is about to sponsor new legislation on medical ethics and financial policy that are complete reversals of her old positions and are very much to the advantage of those living in Ti-Jeanne's community. The resolutions Hopkinson creates for the close of the book deal with the challenges of the present by invoking the past, so that her characters may look toward the future.

Brown Girl in the Ring, in addition to being an extremely entertaining text, forms the foundation of Hopkinson's exploration of her own novelistic voice. In this text, Hopkinson explores just about everything that Èṣù can do for her in all of his diasporic manifestations. Because Hopkinson invokes Èṣùs from Africa as well as the Disapora, all the possibilities of Èṣù, and there are many, are open to her. These possibilities include the Èṣùs of everyday people as well as of scholars of Èṣù: including anthropologists, art critics, literary critics, Babalawos, sociologists, lawyers, and so on. For Hopkinson, the use of Èṣù as a character in *Brown Girl in the Ring* allows her to tap his many strengths, be multicultural and multi-disciplinary, and dynamically unite the past, present and future.

The future is precisely Hopkinson's concern in her second novel, *Midnight Robber*. She again invokes Èṣù as the link between past, present, and future, but does so in a completely new way. While Èṣù is still a concrete presence, he has transformed into an Artifical Intelligence. As an A.I., Èṣù is the computer program, or repository, for the whole of human knowledge. But rather than executing a complete technologization of the cultural memory, Hopkinson gives Èṣù

another young, strong woman as his partner. Working together, the A.I. Èṣù and the very human Tan-Tan create community despite the toughest conditions and give birth to a new generation.

Midnight Robber has all the marks of a hard science fiction novel: spaceships, computers, and an extra-terrestrial setting. The Esu, a computer program that is connected directly to human consciousness via micro-sized computers called nanomites, brings forth a familiar device used in Science Fiction novels and films. The all-knowing computer and the program that interacts with humans, had, for many years represented the totalitarianism with which technology threatened human civilization. Often a device used to create fear (Big Brother in Orwell's *1984*), the "computer" has more recently become a place through which humans evolve. In *The Matrix* trilogy, the evil, human-abusing machines use their computer to treat humans in the most deplorable and frightening way, yet it also acts disobediently, creating programs that unveil the deceptions and help the human make a peace with the machines (The Oracle). The Èṣù in *Midnight Robber* is similar. As the primary container through which Hopkinson creates her first two novels, Èṣù fulfills his conventional role. He is a troublemaker, he is still a trickster, and he protects his human "children." In this novel, Èṣù interacts with the familiar Caribbean device of the all-knowing grandmother who passes cultural knowledge through the females in the family. The all-knowing grandmother, however, has also taken on a new form: the Granny Nansi Web, a type of internet system that oversees all operations and existence on Toussaint Planet. Because the main character's parents are quite destructive to the family, Tan-Tan must look elsewhere for her cultural identity. She looks to the Èṣù, whose presence in this novel facilitates her becoming a trickster herself. The Èṣù device is also another example of Henry Louis Gates's "talking book.[19]" Additionally, *Midnight Robber* marks the beginning of the transformation of Èṣù from

[19] Sarah Wood has already argued for Hopkinson's use of discursive strategies in *Brown Girl*, writing that the novel "attempts to offer a localized resistance to imperialist assumptions that can be found in sf. Hopkinson's fiction

an explicit to an implicit device. Even though Èṣù is quite prominent at the beginning of the text, he disappears for the entire middle section (with Tan-Tan herself developing trickster-like qualities) and returns (in a "trick" ending) only at the last moment, in the closing pages. The first stroke of the chiasmus that marks the Èṣù motif in the first four novels is completed with this novel. The chiasmus, a common trope in Anglo-African literatures, "is figured...by tropes of the crossroads, that liminal space where Èṣù resides" (Gates 128). As Gates documents, Èṣù's foundational myths are frequently driven by the interaction between gods and men located within Èṣù's domain: the crossroad. In the context within which I want to explore Èṣù's role in *Midnight Robber*, I liken Hopkinson's "dimension veils" to Èṣù's (or Gates) crossroad to argue that they are the science-fiction equivalent of the crossroad and the Eshu program is the technologization of Gates's "trope of the talking book."

The twin planets of Toussaint and New Half Way Tree make up the setting of *Midnight Robber*. Toussaint is a highly technologized world – one in which there is no privacy whatsoever and the toilets log the composition of one's urine and file it in the medical database. New Half Way Tree, named for a community in Jamaica located precisely half-way between the poorer and richer neighborhoods, is the shadow planet, a place of exile where the inhabitants of Toussaint send "criminals" (Collier 450). Every inhabitant of Toussaint is fitted with an earbug at birth – a device that uses nanotechnology to create a borg-like connection between biological entity and the main computer, namely Granny Nansi's Web. Named for Nanny, the queen of the maroon populations, this web is interactive and allows the human population to do everything from turn the lights on and off in one's house to access the day's history lesson for

---

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." While this is true, I argue that Hopkinson also draws on the dialogic and dialectic strategies found in the language and structure of the Ifá corpus, and that Ifá and the speculative modes share some important stylistic qualities.

schoolchildren. The "Eshu" as the earbug/nanomite technology is named, is like the rogue programs in the Matrix in that it uses its intelligence to show the population of Toussaint some things it may not want to see. Indeed, the Eshu is smarter than most of the humans. When Tan-Tan wants to dress as a Midnight Robber, a trickster figure from South American Carnival celebrations, it is the Eshu who shows her the Earth history of carnival and teaches her that women were not formerly allowed to assume this role. Here Hopkinson creates the situations in which Èṣù is the device through which Tan-Tan accesses and interacts with history and culture. Even though Tan Tan initially rejects her cultural history, (she wrinkles her nose when Ben the Gardner likens spaceships to slaveships) the Eshu, like any good trickster, causes her to interact with it in a different way, one that she does not initially recognize.

When Tan-Tan's father is exiled to the prison planet, New Half Way Tree, he, quite selfishly, takes daughter with him. Tan Tan is only eight years old, and the nanomites who make the "Eshu" connection between her consciousness and the Granny Nansi Web have not yet solidified the device. In moving through the "dimension veils" the Nansi Web and the exiles lose connection with one another. In fact, this is part of the punishment – the loss of connection with the repository of human knowledge and the mediator of all human life on Toussaint Planet. It is inevitable then, to compare the dimension veils and the loss of connectivity one suffers by moving through them, to the effect of erasure that occurred during the Middle Passage. The dimension veils allude to the "door of no return" through which slaves passed in moving from an area of retention, like a slave castle, to a slave ship that would transport them into an entirely foreign geography and state of being. Laura Murphy argues that

> formal elements such as metaphor, images, and rumors do that same work of accommodating a past as well as the haunting *presence* of the collective memory of the

> slave trade. Reading 'afterlives' of slavery allows us to locate ways of understanding metaphor as an important conduit for translating the past into the present, for memorializing the transgenerational loss associated with the trade, and for critiquing how the legacy of the trade continues to have effects in the present. (24)

In *Midnight Robber*, the memory of the slave trade reappears in the future, and in an extra-terrestrial context. The dimension veils activate the container of creation for Tan-Tan's progression through the novel. As a plot event, they propel the action when they disconnect her from the technologized form of memory retention and culture (the AI Eshu), yet as figuration, the veils also refer to the Atlantic Slave Trade and the previous migration from Africa to the New World[20]. In the specter of the memory of the slave trade, the dimension veils also suggest what Gates names the "trope of absence" of the Black voice in Western Literary Traditions. More than just the memory of the Atlantic Trade then, the dimension veils also contain literary history, specifically, the absence of the black voice and subject. Tan-Tan and her father are rendered silent, like all criminals or undesirables on Toussaint planet, when they cross the dimension veils, a type of crossroad, and they become silent to the Nansi-Web which connects them to knowledge and humanity. The Granny Nansi Web, the Eshu, and the dimension veils are Hopkinson's versions of the chiasmus, the crossroad, and the talking book. The absence of the black female voice and the development of a black female speaking subject are very much the concerns of Tan-Tan and Nalo Hopkinson.

---

[20] Ruby S. Ramraj also notes the connection between the exile to New Half Way Tree and the slave trade. Her argument however, posits that the names "Toussaint Planet" and "New Half Way Tree" establish this, for Toussaint evokes the Haitian Slave rebellion and "New Half Way Tree" identifies a district of Kingston, Jamaica - a destination for slaves. She also likens the dimension veils to river rapids crossed by Guyanese boatmen (slaves) to "access the gold and diamond fields of the Guyanese hinterland" See "Nalo Hopksinson: Transcending Genre Boundaries" in *Beyond the Canebrakes: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada.*

At first glance, the talking book appears to be merely an encounter with literacy. Gates uses James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's text: *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prices, As Related by Himself* to establish a textual and interpretative foundation for the "talking book" concept. Gronniosaw witnesses his master reading bible verses and understands that the book is "talking to" the master. When Gronniosaw picks up the book and puts his ear to it, it has nothing to say to him. Obviously, at this point in the narrative, Gronniosaw does not read, but the situation cannot be resolved with education, because Gronniosaw records his interpretation of the experience. In the following scene, he concludes that "every body and every thing despised me because I was black" (Gronniosaw qtd in Gates 137). Gates's explanation of this conclusion is that in the text, Groniosaw found "no echo of his own voice." Additionally, "the silent book did not reflect or acknowledge the black presence before it. The book's rather deafening silence renames the received tradition in European letter that the mask of blackness worn by Gronniosaw and his countrymen was a trope of absence" (133-7). Like Gronniosaw, Antonio experiences a long fall from a position of power and respect, to one of exile. Gronniosaw had described himself as an African prince-turned-slave. Slipping through the dimension veils silences Antonio's voice, therefore making him powerless and removing all former privileges of power.

The purpose of the talking book is to "represent," or "contain somehow, the oral within the written" or to make "the white, written text speak with a black voice" (131). Gates calls the Talking Book "the ur-trope of the Anglo-American tradition" (131). It is one of several ways of expressing double-voicedness. According to Gates, the talking book is the expression of the importance of literacy, the "ultimate parameter by which to measure the humanity of authors struggling to define an African self in Western letters" (131). He emphasizes the historical

circumstances that silenced the black "speaking subject" and therefore removed it from any participation in literate culture:

> After Descartes, reason was privileged, or valorized, over all other human characteristics, Writing, especially after the printing press became so widespread, was taken to be the visible sign of reason. Blacks were reasonable, and hence "men," if – and only if – the demonstrated mastery of "the arts and sciences," the eighteenth century's
>
> formula for writing. So, while the Enlightenment is famous for establishing its existence upon man's ability to reason, it simultaneously used the absence and presence of reason to delimit and circumscribe the very humanity of the cultures and people of color which Europeans had been "discovering" since the Renaissance. (129-30)

Unfortunately, this led to the demotion of Black people to the lower levels on The Great Chain of Being, and crippled literary production and the very status of blacks as humans. In the literary arena, this led to the idea that literature, or writing and participating in "letters" was "the central arena in which persons of African descent could, or could not, establish and redefine their status within the human community. Black people...had to represent themselves as "speaking subjects" before they could even begin to destroy their status as objects, as commodities, within Western culture (129). This is precisely the function of signifyin(g), troping the trope, revision, and intertextuality as Gates discusses them. Like the authors Gates analyzes, Hopkinson inscribes her voice in the tradition by seizing a mode of representation that is part of the concord of sensibilities, and revises it for her own purposes[21].

[21] Jillana Enteen shows in "On the Receiving End of the Colonization: Nalo Hopkinson's 'Nansi Web" that the Granny Nanny web is a cyberpunk metaphor for a complex narrative structure: "*Midnight Robber* contains narrative breaks, non-linear digressions, and multiple voices that preclude the determination of an authoritative account and compete for the reader's attention, mimicking through language and form the structure of Granny Nanny's electronic web."

The “dimension veils,” the suggested crossroad through which Tan-Tan and Antonio travel, can be thought of in two ways. They are the device or barrier through which criminals travel. If New Half Way Tree is a physical place, then the dimension veils bring people from one place to another. Another possibility is that the dimension veil is the barrier through which one travels to undergo a type of phase-shift (to use Star-Trek terminology) after which they occupy a different dimension of the same space. Because the connection between humans and computer is lost during the crossing, this calls attention to both the crossroads, and another crossing, the Middle Passage, and refigures the loss of knowledge and skill result from these types of journeys. This is the moment of absence, read in *Midnight Robber* as the absence of Eshu, but a reversal of the perspective would render it the absence of Tan-Tan. The loss of connection also constitutes another barrier, this time one that Èṣù has to learn how to cross. Since the human partnership with technology places the humans at a disadvantage, Èṣù must learn how to cross the dimension veils and reconnect. This is accomplished through adaptability, technology and youth. It is ultimately Tan-Tan’s young age and the nanomites that enable the Èṣù and the Granny-Nansi web to resolve the disconnect. Just as the Anglo-African literary tradition is inseparable from its contact from the west, humans in *Midnight Robber* are inseparable from the main computer (Gates 130). The Eshu, or connectivity, is the “sign, the commodity of exchange, the text and technology of reason” in *Midnight Robber* (Gates 132). This connectivity is also the road by which Hopkiinson fashions Tan-Tan’s particular interaction with Àjẹ́.

New arrivals on New Half Way Tree are rendered powerless because of the loss of the technological support system that mediates their being. Without the Eshu device, they have no access to knowledge. After years on New Half Way Tree, and much suffering at the hands of her

father, who sexually abuses her and impregnates her twice, Tan Tan makes plans to leave her home and strike out on her own. The night before birthday, the day she can be free, Antonio, her father, makes one last grab at her and rapes her, resulting in her second pregnancy. Tan-Tan, however, kills Antonio with her new hunting knife[22]. This puts Tan Tan into another exile, running from her stepmother. During this exile, the Eshu is hard at work inside her, working with the Granny Nansi Web to first find Tan-Tan and then to re-establish the connection between her and the Web. This goes terribly wrong though, and the Web miscalculates, causing Tan-Tan's connection to be severed forever. However, since her nanomites had not yet concretized, they migrate to her growing child, and the Nansi Web instructs them to make her child's body one giant connection to Granny Nansi, or the collective consciousness. When the child is born, he quite literally has a sixth sense built into him.

Between Antonio's abuse and the birth of her child, Tan-Tan escapes Junjuh, the small town where she and Antonio settled after they were escorted there safely by Chichibud. Chichibud is the first inhabitant of New Half Way Tree that the father and daughter meet, and he is a douen, or spirit. According to the explanations Tan Tan received from her nurse, douens are "children who'd died before they had their naming ceremony. They came back from the dead as jumbies with their heads on backwards. They lived in the bush[23]" (93). Tan Tan quickly examines the anatomy and finds that Chichibud's head is not backwards, but he does possess some odd physical qualities and a tremendous amount of knowledge. Tan Tan observes that "its

[22] Ramraj suggests that "perhaps Hopkinson is suggesting that for such victims there is no other recourse" which in Tan-Tan's case is certainly true, but Ramraj does not explore the curse imposed on Tan-Tan that dictates when she takes one life she must give back two. Killing one's oppressor is a solution creatively explored in Ribeiro's "Guarde Segredo" which I will discuss in Chapter Six.

[23] Ramraj explicitly connects douens to revenant, children in Haiti whose mothers die in childbirth, or, who die themselves prior to their naming ceremonies. This is an interesting extension of the Abiku phenomenon that forms the basis for several important Nigerian novels, specifically Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. This enables an interesting comparison amongst douen, abiku, and revenant that is helpful in understanding the narrative structure and positioning of Claire in Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light*, which I will discuss in Chapter Five.

head was shaped funny; long and narrow like a bird's" (93). This description can be read as a rather overt allusion to Àjẹ́ in the form of the Ẹlẹ́yẹ, birds. The Ẹlẹ́yẹ are the signs of the metaphysical works of Àjẹ́, hence the category "douen" in *Midnight Robber*. Not only are the eleye "honored as the source of the creative impetus," but they are also representative of the duality contained within Àjẹ́. The duality is the paradoxically close proximity of death and longevity (Washington 24). As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that douen men are traders, live in the bush, make use of pack-birds, and have the ability to communicate with "tallpeople." When Tan-Tan kills her father and escapes Junjuh, it is Chichibud who saves her life. The connection they established at Tan Tan's arrival binds them for many years and is only broken by serious transgression on the part of Tan Tan and Abitefa, Chichibud's daughter. Chichibud facilitates Tan Tan's escape by making use of his pack-bird. First presented as a speechless beast of burden, the pack birds are later revealed to be the douen men's wives. It is Benta, Chichibud;s wife, who carries Tan Tan to safety in the bush after Antonio's last brutal attack. Benta is fully recognizable as a bird, and is able to fly at night, like all douen women. On her back, a panier, or basket, is secured for the transportation of goods for trade. Tan Tan, however, experiences a series of deaths and rebirths inside the basket on Benta's back.

Read under a rubric of the Ifántastic, Tan Tan's escape into the bush proves to be a series of deaths and rebirths. During the escape, Tan Tan is in and out of consciousness, opens and closes her eyes many times, and has trouble with her hearing. As she and Chichibud and Benta are moving away from Junjuh, the day is ending, and the "darkness was a thick blanket round" Tan Tan, she "closed her eyes, ducked her head below the level of the panier," and listens to Benta make grumbly sounds that Tan Tan cannot comprehend as speech (178). Benta can be read as an Ẹdan, the power of administration of justice, ecological responsibility, and social and

political activists (Washington 29-32). Benta is also a manifestation of Ìyá Ayé, or, mother Earth. Ìyá Ayé is closely related to Ẹdan and Ẹlẹ́yẹ. Ìyá Ayé is the earthly aspect of Ìyánlá Odù, who is primarily associated with the sky, and carries birds in baskets from the sky to the earth. The bird in the basket signifies both the womb and the tomb, and thus the metaphysical journeys required to cross the thresholds between those realms. As the earthly aspect of creative powers, Ìyá Ayé presides over tombs, the complimentary container to the wombs of origin. The power of Àjẹ́ includes the process of dying, for it is one of the "sixteen roads" of the totality of human existence (Washington 39). It is Benta who carries Tan Tan to safety in the dark and then provides for her in the new environment of the Daddy-Tree. Benta protects Tan Tan, to a certain extent, from the intolerance of the other douen. Tan Tan is an outsider, a tallpeople, a human. Her status in the Daddy-tree is always in flux and it is never completely secure. Benta must travel a fine line between her responsibility for Tan Tan and her responsibility to the larger douen community.

Tan-Tan's escape into the bush also echoes her previous trip through the dimension veils. Both can be read as migration references alluding to the Middle Passage, and can also be linked to Àjẹ́'s creative power by reading them as birth canals of sorts. The association of Tan-Tan with the wombs and the tombs of the Eleye codes her particular rebirths in a very specific way.

Tan Tan's survival in the bush is a product of protection, promises, and education. Protected by the powers of the mothers in the sacred space of the bush, Tan Tan can acquire, sometimes with great difficulty, the knowledge and experience she needs not only to survive in this new environment, but also to become the robber queen. Tan-Tan takes on a great responsibility during her identity exchange in the bush. This is represented in an important scene that happens immediately upon her arrival in the Daddy-tree. Old Res, "the eldest one" of the

douen, drops a tree frog into Tan-Tan's lap as she falls in frustration, confusion, and probably trauma from rape, murder, and escape. The tree frog is to be eaten, and will sustain Tan Tan in many ways. The first way is simply physical. After the traumatic night she has experienced, Tan Tan certainly would benefit from a jolt of protein. The frog is also a gesture of kindness from a respected member of the community. The douen do not trust her, and there are several who would be happy to kill her. Tan Tan represents a history of abuse and second class citizenry for the douen, and accepting her into the Daddy tree constitutes great danger for the community. Old Res' example of acceptance resonates in the community because of his status, and ensures that other douen will not dare to harm a guest. Finally, the consumption of the frog will become an enactment of a pact. Tan Tan's initial reaction to the frog is one of disgust, for "Tan-Tan hissed, 'You gone bassourdie, or what? Eat that nasty thing?'" (184). When Tan-Tan finally eats the frog, the community responds enthusiastically: "And is like that was the signal every man-jack was waiting for. One set of yodelling from the douen men started up in the daddy tree. The hinte bated their wings and bobbed their heads, screeching to the sky" (186). Chichibud's interprets these reactions and explains to Tan-Tan: "So you eat the tree frog, so you eat we secrets. We know we safe with you now" (186). Tan-Tan's consumption of the frog binds her to the community, but it has come at great cost to her. Time, taste and smell cause Tan-Tan to liken the frog to Antonio. Even though Chichibud gives her some help by biting off the frog's head, Tan-Tan cannot help but make this connection,

> Tan-Tan took a little sip from the hot thread of blood pumping down her chin. It tasted salty, and sweet. It spread over her tongue like thick mud. Like the first time Antonio had ever ejaculated in her mouth, whispering to her the whole time. *Yes, sweetness, you want it, ain't?* Her belly rose right up into her throat, but she swallowed the frog's blood.

> Oh Nanny. She looked into Chichibud's eyes, praying that the torture done, but it had more for her to do...She couldn't let herself vomit. Tears were flowing down her cheeks, but she took the tiny dead body from Chichibud. She heald her breath. Closed her eyes. Bit into the tree frog. She could hear small bones snapping, feel the gristle tearing. She shut her mind against the smell, the smell of Antonio's body once she's sliced it open. (186)

Because of Tan-Tan's abuse at the hands of her father and the identity exchange that happens in the bush with Chichibud and his bird-family, she is established as a kind of sacrificial figure. On the road to apotheosis, Tan-Tan has had to give up a lot, and the passage above goes a long way toward establishing just how violent her life has been. At the same time Tan-Tan becomes a part of the community that helped rescue her, she is forced to remember the very acts of violence that brought her to this moment. A cycle of enslavement and liberation continues for Tan-Tan, who, having freed herself from abuse by murdering her father, almost immediately binds herself to an alien community from which she cannot escape without certain punishment or death. Her bond with the douen community also ends in violence, for the tallpeople of Junjuh track her to the tree and destroy it. The douen are forced into migration (reminding the reader of the migration from Earth to Toussaint Planet, which was linked to migration of the Atlantic Slave Trade) and Tan-Tan and Abitefa are banished for their role in leading Tan-Tan's pursuers to the tree. Tan-Tan then hides in the bush with Abitefa, and together they embark on the adventures that eventually make up the oral tradition of Tan-Tan as the midnight robber who strikes at injustices and then fades back into the bush.

Tan-Tan's many transformations happen in metaphors of containment invoked via Hopkinson's use of the Fantastic genre, the legacy of the Atlantic Slave Trade, and the cultural

memory that writing, history, and creativity give her access to. In choosing to yoke Tan-Tan's abuse to the Slave Trade, Hopkinson writes a route to the Continent, giving herself an imaginative way to access a cultural past. By placing Tan-Tan's transformations in the magical space of the bush and inventing metaphors of containment and creation for her, Hopkinson also establishes a signifying relationship with Amos Tutola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts.*

Early in the novel, Hopkinson makes clear that the migrations of *Midnight Robber* are extensions of the migration from Africa to the New World via the Atlantic Slave Trade. During the preparations for Jonkanoo, the gardener gives Tan-Tan a party hat shaped like one of the spaceships that brought their ancestors to Toussaint Planet. Ben, the gardener, explains the importance of the ship to Tan-Tan, and comments "Long time, that hat woulda be make in the shape of a sea ship, not a rocket ship, and them black people inside woulda been lying pack-up head to toe in they own shit, with chains around them ankles. Let the child remember how black people make this crossing as free people this time" (21). Even though Tan-Tan "squinched up her face at the nasty story," the reader is explicitly confronted with the Atlantic Slave Trade. Later, Tan-Tan is also forced to confront this history when the Eshu shows her images from New World carnivals and explains to her what a "midnight robber" is.

Tan-Tan's Jonkanoo outfit also establishes her as Àjẹ́. In addition to the hat that reminds both her and the reader of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Hopkinson makes repeated references to the sash of her dress and the ribbons in her hair. Though these appear at first glance to be the conventional trappings of a young girl's party outfit, the sash and the ribbons can also be read as binding symbols of Àjẹ́. As Washington points out in her discussion of Ọ̀ṣun, headwraps, hair decorations, and anything that can be tied around the body are variations on thread, which are meant to symbolize "umbilical cords, headties, and long livers, all of which are owned by Àjẹ́

and connect them to human beings. Ọ̀ṣun used this thread to bind the Àwọn Ìyá Wa to their community" (47). Hopkinson's insistence on these symbols foreshadows Tan-Tan's ascension to robber-queen status on New Half Way Tree, which happens when stories develop about how she defends the abused and downtrodden of the communities with which she comes into contact.

What is especially fascinating about *Midnight Robber*, however, is the way it metaphorizes the Atlantic Slave Trade in concepts of containment (womb and tomb) in precisely the same way as Laura T. Murphy analyzes in her study *Metaphor and the Slave Trade in West African Literature*. Though Murphy does not specifically discuss containers, wombs, and tombs, she does develop the "trope of the body in the bag" through a close analysis of Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts.* Murphy's study, published in 2012, argues that there is indeed a cultural memory in the African imagination regarding the slave trade; it has simply been hidden in metaphor. Murphy examines the role of memory in representations of the slave trade in West African novels and traces the process of memory becoming metonymy and ultimately metaphor. The orientation of the study aligns with Paul Gilroy's contention in the *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* that it is the Atlantic slave trade that simultaneously makes and makes incomplete the condition of modernity, but the similarities end there. Murphy has searched far and wide for the right combination of theoretical perspectives on memory, trauma, mental illness, love, and the body to produce what is ultimately a literary understanding of Africans' most egregious experience of globalization. What is most interesting and useful about Murphy's study is that by examining the experience of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Africa, she successfully shifts the discourse back to the continent. Murphy's study also reminds us of the value of the formal study of language and literature by focusing on figuration as fundamental as metaphor. To effectively explain the existence and meaning of these metaphors, though,

Murphy assembles a complex theoretical framework. She borrows Deleuze's concept of "magical capture" from *A Thousand Plateaus* to analyze the trope of the body in the bag deployed repeatedly in Amos Tutola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, arguing that is through this trope that Tutuola "captures," in figurative language, the memory of slave raids, the anxiety of capture and continuing threat of capture. She yokes Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* to Tutola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* through Henry Louis Gates' "signfiying monkey" arguing that Okri's signification upon Tutola's trope constitutes "slavery's recurrence" during the coming into being of Nigeria during its independence.

Murphy's "body in the bag" is, quite literally, a body in a bag. In Tutuola's novel *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, the narrator experiences capture in a sack and is thrown over the shoulder of his captor and taken to the "haunted bush." This happens several times. Murphy argues

> Through this trope, Tutuola depicts a haunting cycle of enslavement in which the African protagonist is chased by terrifying ghosts, made captive by them, forced to labor, and then escapes, only to be recaptured by some more horrible slave master. Tutuola employs this trope to depict continuities of memory and fear regarding captivity and the slave trade's endemic presence in the African landscape. In my chapter on *The Famished Road*, I discuss Okri's appropriation of Tutuola's body in the bag, through which he critiques the project of global capitalism and redefines modernity in uniquely West African terms. For Okri, the haunted bush is not only the place where people like Olaudah Equiano can be captured and made a slave, but also a space that can be transformed into the tool of the captive, wherein the protagonist is able to subvert the power of the captor by inventing a personal independence...(8)

Hopkinson's "body in the bag" is the womb and the tomb of the Ẹlẹ́yẹ; it is the basket on the back of Benta, the birth canal, door-of-no-return of the dimension veils, and ultimately the literal womb of Tan-Tan. Just as Okri signifies on Tutola, and appropriates the trope to explore Nigeria's process of independence, Hopkinson also makes use of the trope to explore Tan-Tan's experience of violent sexual abuse and incest. Tan-Tan's experience is of the "New World," in the senses that Hopkinson is a writer of the Diaspora, not Africa, and that the setting of novel is extraterrestrial. However, the "New World" experiences of Tan-Tan are very much connected to history of modernity and the Atlantic Slave Trade. The complex memory of the slave trade and its many appearances in metaphor in *Midnight Robber* suggest an aspect of Todorov's concept of transformed time and space. Todorov describes Fantastic time and space as retrograde, comparing them to childhood, drug use, and psychotics to show that there is no boundary between subject and object. In Fantastic time and space "the physical world and the spiritual world interpenetrate; their fundamental categories are modified as a result. The time and space of the supernatural world...are not the time and space of everyday life. Here time seems suspended, it extends beyond what one imagines to be possible" (118). For Todorov, this is a critical description of the "principle characteristics of the world in which the supernatural events appear" (119). Even though Tan-Tan initially "squinched up her nose" at the "nasty story" about Africans packed on slave ships, her world is narrated through that memory, and her individual independence is achieved by way of the very tropes and metaphors that "nasty story" engendered.

The "Eshu," a connective device for human beings and the all-knowing Granny Nansi Web (computer) allows Hopkinson to make concrete some of the intangible qualities of diaspora. The Eshu preserves knowledge, and connects all people to one another, thus bringing to bear the

very “concord of sensibilities” or “tradition” that Gates insists upon in the Anglo-African tradition (Ellison qtd in Gates 128 and Gates 128). The disruption of the Middle Passage, and Hopkinson’s science fiction equivalent: the settling of a new planet by free people of color, is reconciled by this technological device. In this way, Eshu becomes the sign of remembering much in the same way that Kathleen Brogan discusses Toni Morisson’s ghost in *Beloved*. The Eshu is also an indication of Todorov’s “instrumental marvelous” (56). Eventually, the Eshu reveals that it is more than a connective device. It has an intelligence of its own, and it gradually reveals itself as more of an artificial intelligence than a mere connection. Brogan labels the ghost Beloved as a sign, and argues that what is signified is the “imaginative construction of a lost, unrecorded history” (63). Brogan also discusses the process of re-membering as a physical experience, pointing out that it is the linguistic opposite of dismemberment. Hopkinson’s A.I. Eshu in *Midnight Robber* embodies these same characteristics. The Eshu is, by his A.I. function in the novel, a reconstruction of history and, in his physical manifestation in Tan-Tan’s child, a remembering, both physical and cognitive. It is a cruel irony that the reconnection of humanity, represented in Tan Tan’s child, with its cultural memory, held in the figure of Eshu, must be brought about by the literal dismemberment of Tan Tan’s body at the hands of her own father. Conveniently though, Hopkinson ties off this loose end when the Eshu explains to Tubman, Tan Tan’s child, as he travels another crossroad: the birth canal that his “whole body is one living connection with with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface. [His] little bodystring will sing to Nanny tune, doux-doux. [He] will be a weave in she web. Flesh people say how earbugs give them a sixth sense, but really is only a crutch, oui? Not a fully functional perception. [He] now; [he] really have that extra limb” (328). The birth of Tubman is then, as Brogan would describe, a “re-membering” of his mother in that he is a physical re-membering or reversal of the dis-

memberment that Antonio inflicted upon her by raping her, as well as a remembering of the cultural consciousness or "tradition" by way of his new "extra limb," a fully functioning sixth sense enabled by his cyborg being and its connection to the Nansi Web. Tubman's cyborg connection to the Granny Nansi Web relies on a biological process of birth as well as a technological partnership that humanity has not yet realized. The inseparability of Eshu and Tubman, technology and biology, bring the novel close to Todorov's "instrumental marvelous" because it makes use of "the gadgets, technological developments unrealized in the period described but, after all, quite possible" (56). As a fully-fledged, technologically-integrated biological connection to the web, the birth of Tubman is a technological advance not realized in either the time of Hopkinson's writing of the novel or the fictional time of the narrative. Tubman is an entirely new creation. At the same time his existence looks toward a technologically-enabled future, his name points toward the past. Todorov describes the marvelous as "the class of narratives that are presented as Fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural," and the Fantastic-marvelous as the moment or moments in a text when an event occurs that "cannot be explained by the laws of nature as they are generally acknowledged" (52-3). Both of these are happening at the close of *Midnight Robber*.

The birth of Tubman, the child of Tan Tan and her father, Antonio, also echoes a theme introduced in *Brown Girl in the Ring*: regeneration. Both heroines give birth to MALE children (despite the assumptions of critics and reviewers who do not read carefully that the children are female!) suggesting some kind of positive outcome for the very real social situation of the "absent black father." Tubman, a cyborg with access to the whole of human knowledge, represents hope in a new generation. With a trickster mother and nanomite-enabled connections to Toussaint Planet, Tubman may just bring the Toussaint residents and the New Half Way Tree

residents back together in one community. Tubman also reverses the totalitarian potential often represented in futuristic novels. He also helps to remove some of the stigma of his incestuous origins, suggesting that Tubman should not be doomed by the sins of his father. The Eshu deals quite clearly with this, narrating finally, to Tubman: "Antonio was a sick, needy man, but in he own way, is he provide the method for we to contact Tan-Tan" (328). The Eshu also sets the reader straight, interrupting any snap judgment to be made about a child whose father and grandfather are the same man: "He had Antonio's face, but they were her features too, *hers*. Her son was not a monster" (328). More important though, is the "trick" at the end of the novel is that we learn the identity of the narrator. In true trickster fashion, the narrative voice, which should by convention and established pattern in *Brown Girl in the Ring* be a grandmother figure, reveals itself to be none other than Eshu, a technological device bearing all the core characteristics of the òrìṣà. From the opening pages, it is clear to the reader that *Midnight Robber* is narrated by a mysterious, disembodied voice: "Oho. Like it starting, oui? Don't be frightened, sweetness; is for the best. I go be with you the whole time. Trust me and let me distract you little bit with one anasi story..." (1). This voice introduces itself as a companion and brings in the oral element, addressing the reader directly, and opening the narrative proper with the now familiar "crick-crack."[24] It calls to mind one of the functions of Gates's talking book: inscribing the oral into the written. The voice refuses to identify itself, but does begin to describe some of its characteristics: "I could tell you, you know; I see both places for myself. How? Well, maybe I find a way to come through the one-way veil to bring you a story, nuh? Maybe I is a master weaver. I spin the threads. I twist warp 'cross weft. I move my shuttle in

[24] Interestingly, Hopkinson chooses NOT to end the novel with the formulaic "wire bend, story end" which she did use in BGR. This suggests that the end of MR is negotiable, for while the text is "over," the story is not. This is another strange reversal. While BGR has no formal opening (crick-crack) it does have the formal ending (wire bend). MR reverses that pattern, giving a formal opening, but no official closing.

and out, and smooth smooth, I weaving you my story, oui?" (3). The link that Hopkinson establishes between Eshu and Anasi, the spider-trickster highlights the multicultural possibilities a creative container like Eshu can bring about. Eshu has the Fantastic ability to collapse boundaries, thus enabling him to absorb just about any quality or action that people can ascribe to him. For Hopkinson, the ethnic or national background of her creative containers is not limited by any devotion to authenticity. Both Eshu and Ansi, as tricksters, are adaptable. As they adapt, their fundamental qualities remain, but the particulars change and develop with each new cultural, social, or literary situation in which they are invoked. The conflation of Eshu and Anasi is historically sound, representing the mix of African culture that began during the Middle Passage and continued in the New World. It is also convenient, allowing Hopkinson to make a cultural "play" on the idea of weaving based in Anasi's spider identity, West African textile tradition, and the very literal interface web of technology featured in the novel. The Eshu also helps "weave" a new articulation of the Fantastic – the Ifántastic. The revelation of the narrator preserves the Fantastic's essential quality of hesitation, and draws attention to its common trope of doubling. Revealing the Eshu as narrator distances the reader from both Tan-Tans, the scrappy, victim of sexual abuse who murders her father to escape and the robber queen of the bush who gradually undergoes a sort of apotheosis as stories are told about her. Once the reader knows that the trickster Eshu has been narrating the story of the trickster Tan-Tan, he or she naturally questions the credibility and reality of the story, meaning it does not end in with the acceptance of the supernatural required for the marvelous. In conflating the characteristics of the Fantastic, the Fantastic-marvelous, and the instrumental marvelous with the history of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the content of the Ifá spiritual tradition, Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* offers a text rich with possibilities for an Ifántastic reading.

Hopkinson's third and fourth novels, *The Salt Roads* and *The New Moon's Arms* also offer good examples of texts that can be read this way. The development of Tan-Tan in *Midnight* Robber, though, is closely connected to the subject matter of the following novel, *The Salt Roads.* *The Salt Roads* would more properly be called "speculative" because it takes the form of an alternate history. In this novel, Hopkinson reimagines the narratives of historically important, but not very well known black women. She connects their stories across time, space, and cultures by imagining each one as part of the birth of the Haitian goddess Ezili. During her exile in the magical bush in *Midnight Robber*, Tan-Tan begins to reveal aspects of this goddess. While Eshu and Granny Nansi are busy trying to locate Tan-Tan and connect with her through her nanomites, Tan-Tan must survive in a harsh environment. She does this by calling upon the varied strengths and behaviors exhibited by the three aspects of Ezili: Dantor, Freda, and Lasiren. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, the Eshu-Ezili complex emerging in Hopkinson's four novels can also be figured with a chiasmus, or crossroad. As Eshu diminishes his presence, Ezili rises. Though never named, it is tough to overlook the similarities that Hopkinson's dominant female protagonists share with Ezili and therefore with Àjẹ́. The increasing importance of Ezili and her contribution to Hopkinson's development of the Ifántastic are explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FANTASTIC IN THE WORKS OF NALO HOPKINSON: THE IMPORTANCE OF ÀJẸ́ AND EZILI

"The secret behind the secret is that deep knowledge has no content at all but derives its power from context-specific opposition to the authoritative discourses that it implicitly challenges"

As I suggested in the previous chapter, the emergence of the Ezili paradigm is an important aspect of what Nalo Hopkinson does with the Fantastic. I have also suggested that establishing subjectivity for a female, speaking subject in the Diaspora may require supernatural acts. This is most evident in the development of the Ezili model that begins with Tan-Tan in *Midnight Robber*, continues with alternate histories and the birth of the lwa in *The Salt Roads*, and becomes more refined in the Chastity/Calamity character in *The New Moon's Arms*.

In these works, Ezili becomes a model for a layered articulation of power and identity in female voices in Literature of the Diaspora. Ezili and her multiple manifestations also help Hopkinson not just to build strong identities for her female characters, but also to write those identities into the canon by way of the Fantastic, thus transforming the Fantastic at the same time. As I stated in the previous chapter, Ezili derives from the Haitian practice of vodou. While Hopkinson is not Haitian, she explicitly draws on vodou for creative but still African-based models through which she can explore the many themes associated with women in the Diaspora.

The extent to which vodou and Ezili grew out of the Ifá system has been debated, but ethnologists and historians in the field have successfully argued for the influence of a "Yoruba

cultural hermeneutic" in Haiti, Brazil, and Cuba (Apter 234). The Yoruba influence in the Diaspora has been called "out of proportion to the relative size of Yoruba arrivals" in the New World; however, the particulars of these arrivals facilitated the dominance of this hermeneutic (Eltis 33). The specific circumstances of Yoruba arrivals to these New World Destinations were their relatively late entry into the trade, a mode of urban slavery that paralleled ways of living on the continent, and a route of communication between newly liberated slaves and the continent by way of trade in palm oil and textiles.[25] David Eltis has shown that the migrations of Yoruba to these destinations were significant, yet made up less than one-tenth of all departures over the course of the trade. He also demonstrates that because of the circumstances across the Atlantic at the times the Yoruba were affected, many of them travelled to relatively few destinations, meaning that "pockets" of Yoruba stayed together and benefitted from sharing a language. Over the course of the trade, approximately 150,000 Yoruba departed Africa with St. Domingue as their destination (Eltis 31). In his essay "The Influential Yoruba Past in Haiti," Kevin Roberts notes that

> The height of demand for slaves by Saint Domingue slave owners during the 1780s coincided with the period when the Yoruba constituted a large share of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a result, the number of Yoruba slaves present in Haiti, and the influence of Yoruba on the colony's syncretic slave culture, were both higher than if the two processes had not converged. (177)

Compared to Brazil and Cuba, Yoruba slaves made up a larger percentage of the total slave populations in Haiti, 27% (Roberts 180). This may have contributed to the dominance of

[25] For full discussion of the dynamics of Yoruba entry into the trade, the development of Yoruba identity in the New World, and the continued relationship with the continent after the end of both the trade and slavery, see *The Yoruba Diaspora and the Atlantic World*, Eds. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, particularly Eltis, O'Hear, Reid, Roberts, Pares, Ayorinde, and Law.

"Yoruba religious symbolism ...in the iconography of the [vodou] religion" (180). Roberts provides the examples of Ogun and Ezili, the deities of war and femininity as examples of this religious iconography:

> Yoruba or Dahomean deities, such as Ogun, the lord of fire, constitute important religious as well as social and political meanings within Haiti. With his symbol of the machete, Ogun represented, and still represents, a source of power for Haitians. In addition, Ezili, the water goddess of love in Haitian vodou, is a powerful example of Yoruba influence and of the attendant cultural symbiosis of West African religions and Roman Catholicism. According to one scholar of vodou, 'Ezili in Haiti derives from diverse African ethnic religious traditions...most striking are the resemblances between the personae of Ezili in Haiti and those of Oshun in Nigeria and Ezili in Ouidah, Benin.' (180)

The Yoruba influence in Haiti went beyond religious iconography, though. Roberts later connects the influence of Yoruba on vodou to the development of common language among the slaves in Haiti:

> Though the enslaved population as a whole transformed Catholic iconology to match African religious symbols, the prevalence of Yoruba symbolism in the syncretic religious creations illustrates the cultural power of the Yoruba both during and after enslavement. Likely a result of the Yoruba's rich oral traditions, the influence the Yoruba garnered within the island's pluralized African population indicates the existence of a pidgin Yoruba language serving as the lingua franca among African-descended peoples in Haiti. (180-1)

Roberts suggests a variety of factors that contribute to the dominance of Yoruba cultural content and iconography in Haitian vodou at the same time he acknowledges that the Yoruba were not its only inspiration. In addition to the physical presence of Yoruba slaves in Haiti, the practices of Ifa on the continent had a particular dynamic that lent itself to transmission to the New World. The inner workings of Ifá and its many rituals, as Andrew Apter argues in his article "On African Origins: Creolization and *Connaissance* in Haitian Vodou," contain a "revisionary logic of Yoruba deep knowledge" with "power and indeterminacy" that is located "within the dialectics of kingship in Yorubaland" (234). Apter's argument goes a long way toward offering an explanation for how and why the Yoruba became so influential in the New World. Though the number of Yoruba enslaved and their percentage of total enslaved population in Haiti facilitated the cultural retentions that make Ifá and its contents identifiable, Apter points out that it is the essential quality and dynamic of the Ifá system that made it so applicable in the social and political landscape of colonial Haiti. Using an in-depth analysis of the workings of Yoruba kingship and applying it to the rada-petwo duality in Haitian vodou, Apter shows that it was the Yoruba practice of Ifa that provided the cognitive and dynamic framework in which enslaved Africans in the New World could assemble, articulate, and amalgamate their experience. The articulations of tensions between domestication and transformation are, for Apter, the critical components of both Ifá and vodou. His primary example is the tension between rada and petwo deities in Haitian vodou that mirror the opposition of the hot and cool deities in Yorubaland and Dahomey. Apter schematizes this tension as: **Rada**->Africa->cool->reproductive->integrative->hierarcical->authoritative, and **Petwo**->New World (Haiti)->hot-> transformative->divisive->segmentary. It is precisely the tension between the authority and reproductive ability of the old world order and the power and transformative ability of the realities of the New World order that

empower this way of being. This framework maps the way of thinking in Haitian vodou and can be applied to other Ifa-derived practices in the New World.

Apter also points to the centrality of the container in the Yoruba cultural hermeneutic he finds in Haiti. Like Lawal and Drewal, Apter points to festivals for examples of the "dominant symbol": the container. In the case of the particular Yemoja festival Apter uses as an example, Apter identifies the calabash "of concentrated ritual potency that is carried...from the bush to the palace, where it empowers the king's person and revitalizes the body politic" (237). The calabash, "like any dominant symbol, ...embraces a span of meanings ranging from explicit normative community blessings...to implicit, forbidden themes of division and bloodshed" (237). Both Apter and Washington recognize the social and political power of the dominant symbol of the calabash and agree that the calabash makes concrete the "womb of motherhood, the head of good destiny, the crown of the king, the integrity of the town, even the cosmological closure of sky and earth" (Apter 237). Apter also acknowledges both the creative and destructive powers of the symbol, which Washington would certainly call Àjẹ́, but places them in a more specific context of the articulations of political power on Yorubaland. Easily working alongside the creative force of motherhood, good destiny, king's crowns, integrity of the communities and a working universe, are the forces of negation. Apter calls attention to the details of the carried calabash, describing it as

> decorated with signs of a deadlier power within, indicated by red parrot feathers - signs of ritual negation. Evoking the witchcraft of the priestesses and their mechanism for deposing the king, red parrot feathers on the calabash simultaneously assert a broken womb, miscarried delivery, bad destiny, a headless (and crownless) king, as well as political fission and a cosmos out of control. (237)

The tension between creative and destructive, positive and negative, and reproductive and transformative powers is precisely the hermeneutic Apter identifies. He calls it "deep knowledge." However, the "deep knowledge" is, in Apter's argument, empty of content. He maintains that "the secret behind the secret is that deep knowledge has no content at all but derives its power from context-specific opposition to the authoritative discourses that it implicitly challenges" (237). Arguing that the Yoruba already had a power tool of articulation and interpretation before entry to the Atlantic Slave Trade, Apter suggests an explanation beyond demographics for Yoruba cultural hegemony in diaspora studies. On the more practical level, however, it is not difficult to see the value of a system like this, in which the extremes of the Slave Trade, Slavery, emancipation, colonization, and decolonization can be articulated. Since Apter places the deep knowledge in the context of discourse, it is also not difficult to connect the calabash of Yoruba ritual to enactments of power, and then to the appropriation of both the hermeneutic and the symbol into literary works.

In the process of empowering Tan-Tan in *Midnight Robber*, writing the birth of Ezili in *The Salt Roads*, and confronting middle age in *The New Moon's Arms*, Hopkinson clearly takes up a complex model of Àjẹ́. Though Joan Dayan argues in "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti" that "a goddess was born on the soil of Haiti that has no precedent in Yorubaland or Dahomey" *The Salt Roads* does not emerge from that perspective, nor does most of the scholarship on both vodou and the lwa[26].

In chapter two I traced the connections between Èṣù and Ọ̀ṣun to establish that male and female power work together in both the Ifá system and in the works of Nalo Hopkinson and the

[26] In addition to Roberts, cited above, see Métraux, McCarthy-Brown, Cosentino, and Christophe, who at least acknowledge African origin and influence in the conceptualization of the lwa and their syncretization with Catholic saints.

other authors I discuss. I briefly mentioned Ezili as a manifestation of Àjẹ́, and connected her to Ọ̀ṣun. I cited Marilyn Houlberg and would point to her again here:

> Africans brought to Haiti on slave ships came with their own strong traditions of fishtailed and water-related spiritis. For Yoruba and Bini people from Nigeria there was Oshun, the spirit of the river, and Yemoja ("mother of fish"), salt-water divinity, both associated with wealth and fecundity. For the Fon people to the west, in what is now Benin, water spirits resided in the Oumeme River and its lakes, one of which, Azili, may be the source of the name for the Haitian divinities known as Ezili. (32)

Dayan has a point. Ezili is Ezili precisely because of the specifics of experience. Without the middle passage and the particulars of her Haitian context, there is no Ezili. While Ezili's identity is primarily Haitian, her source is certainly Africa. We can accept the individual characteristics of Ezili at the same time we at least compare her to orisa like Yemọja, Ọ̀ṣun, and Ọya. At the very least, Ezili, Àjẹ́ and the female òrìṣà of the Ifá system share spiritual tendencies and modes of figuration. As Houlberg pointed out above, water, wealth, fecundity, and fish are objects and qualities shared by goddesses throughout the Atlantic. The ongoing creation of Ezili and her syncretization with Catholic images of Mary are enactments of the cultural hermeneutic Apter explains in "On African Origins: Creolization and *Connaissance* in Haitian Vodou." Explaining syncretization, Apter again emphasizes the prevalence of a way of thinking over specific content:

> Less a screen for maintaining African traditions than a form of collective appropriation, the saints were Africanized by New World blacks as double agents in their religious sanctuaries and societies. If the public identity of a saint was European Catholic, then its secret, deeper, and more powerful African manifestation could be invoked and manipulated by initiates. (238)

Invoking and manipulating female orisa is precisely what Hopkinson does in her creation of Ezili. It is also what Ezili does in vodou practice and popular culture in Haiti. Invoking and manipulating paradigms is also the key to canon formation, as Gates shows in *The Signifying Monkey*. In the latter part of *Midnight Robber*, and throughout *The Salt Roads*, Ezili, not Èṣù, becomes a metaphor for textual revision. In both content and form, Ezili is a useful rhetorical strategy and model for characterization. In *The Salt Roads*, Hopkinson's third novel, Ezili is born from the experiences of three women from quite different time periods and geographies. Moving easily across time and space and from body to body, the spirit of Ezili occupies the bodies and lives of Mer, a plantation slave and friend of Makandal in revolutionary Haiti, Jeanne Duvall, mistress of Charles Baulelaire in nineteenth century Paris, and Thais, a hetaera from Northern Africa in the year 345 CE. The introductory scenes for all three women place them in proximity to water in some way, and they also share "Mer" as a name or nickname to connect them to the sea. In Hopkinson's creation of Ezili, the goddess is ever-present, thus the moves across time and space, but is also informed by the particular experiences of these women. Before Hopkinson imagined the birth of Ezili in *The Salt Roads* though, she was already using elements of the Haitian lwa to develop the character of Tan-Tan in *Midnight Robber*.

Describing the attributes of the many manifestations of Ezili is a nearly impossible task. Multiplicity and mutability are two of her most identifiable characteristics. She can occupy both Rada and Petwo divisions of the vodou pantheon. The wide-open nature of vodou practice and its lack of a centralized scripture or hierarchy of priesthood keeps open the possibility for more and more legitimate Ezilis to come and go as vodou practitioners need them. The multiplicity of Ezili is a good example of Yai's argument for "infinite metonymy," in which reality is apprehended and practiced through "constant departure" (Yai 34-5). If we take up

manifestations of Ezili as artworks to be interpreted as oriki, as Yai suggests, we see that the values of "fluidity, boundarilessness, and centerlessness" become part of a spiritual and cultural aesthetic. Yai's grounding of interpretive strategies in language, the discursive practice of oriki, shares similarities with both Jackson's and Todorov's theories of the workings of the Fantastic. Yai's emphasis on metonymy aligns well with Jackson's assertion that in the Fantastic mode, rhetoric "enters a dialogue with the 'real' and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure...fantasy is 'dialogical,' interrogating single or unitary ways of seeing" (36). Jackson also explains that the "movement of Fantastic narrative is one of metonymical rather than that of metaphorical process: one does not stand for another, but literally becomes that other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability" (42). This of course echoes Todorov's discussion of themes in the semantic aspect of the Fantastic, in which the defining characteristic of the genre is the "effacement of the limit between subject and object" (116).

Alfred Métraux, anthropologist and author of *Voodoo in Haiti*, the foundational study of the religion, provides concrete evidence for linking lwa to discursive practices like Yai, Todorov, and Jackson suggest. He writes that "the chief loa seem to have been freely multiplied by addition to their names of African or Creole surnames" (90). While the multiplication of names brings to mind the practice of oriki, praise naming and poetry, the extension of the names to separate identities also takes place. Métraux provides lists of examples for two main loa, conveniently Legba (Esu) and Ezili, and argues that:

> in most cases this proliferation of deities has little importance from the religious point of view. They are merely lists of names in liturgical invocation. Probably the surnames themselves are fragments of African liturgical texts, syllables or words which, having

> become unintelligible, were torn out of context and used as epithets of divinities. The nature of the link between gods of the same name, but different surname, only becomes a problem when the two related gods tend to assume different personalities...a fact which would suggest that they were not merely 'forms' or 'aspects' of the same god, but different loa belonging to the same family. (90)

Métraux, whether he is conscious of it or not, seems to be documenting discursive practices quite similar to the operations of the Fantastic and the Yoruba cultural hermeneutic described by Yai, Jackson, Apter, and Todorov. Métraux shows that the multiplication of names simultaneously contains and sets free the identities of the loa/lwa. The imposition of the family structure exists in the Ifá corpus and preserves relations among the ideas the loa/lwa embody. The loa are an articulation of metonymy and dialogism. Ezili, in her many manifestations, is a useful non-containing container for transforming the Fantastic and writing diaspora women's subjectivity within it.

There are many manifestations and names for Ezili, but the four main ones that apply in the works of Hopkinson and Danticat are Ezili-Fréda, Lasyrenn/Lasiren, Ezili-Dantor, and Ezili-ge-rouge. Karen McCarthy-Brown explains that these different, yet related Ezili are

> each conflated with particular manifestations of the Virgin Mary: Nuestra Senora de la Caridad del Cobre, Mater Salvatoris, and Maria Dolorosa. But unlike the Mary of mainstream Catholicism, who offers an impossible ideal of perfectly submissive (and virginal) motherhood for emulation, the Ezili are much closer to the human drama. (221)

At the same time that the Ezili are conflated with Catholic images and ideas of Mary, they share tendencies with the "Mothers of Our Powers," the òrìṣà of Àjẹ́ (Washington 36). In fact, they

could be read as metonymies of the main òrìṣà of Àjẹ́: Ìyá Ayé, Òṣùmàrè, Yemọja, Ọṣun, and Ọya.

The "powers of our mothers" are precisely the survival, healing, and retributive powers Tan-Tan develops in *Midnight Robber*. A good example of this is the tension between the different types of narratives presented throughout the novel. One of the many interesting features of the narrative in *Midnight Robber* is its framing. I have already pointed out that Èṣù's voice directs the majority of the novel. The primary narrative that Èṣù recounts without naming himself is framed by an introductory piece and multiple intrusions into the primary narrative. That frame is completed at the conclusion of the novel, in which Èṣù reveals himself in the text and is reborn in the cyborg form of Tan-Tan's son, Tubman. The primary narrative makes up most of the novel. This is where Tan-Tan's father is exiled to New Half-Way Tree, abducts her, abuses her, and is murdered by her. The primary narrative also contains the "bush" sequence in which Tan-Tan escapes her father and community by living with the douen in the Daddy-tree. When the Daddy Tree is destroyed by the tallpeople pursuing Tan-Tan for Antonio's murder, she still hides in the "bush," occupying different trees and forests with her douen friend Abitefa. However, this primary narrative is interrupted several times by short, oral narratives that the people of New Half Way Tree settlements tell about Tan-Tan. Tan-Tan's vigilante movements between settlements have started a unifying narrative among the isolated towns. Part of their daily activities is to gather publicly and recount much embellished tales of Tan-Tan's adventures. The three tales, "How Tan Tan Learn to Thief," "Tan Tan and Dry Bone," and "Tan Tan and the Rolling Calf" are parable-like and chronicle her apotheosis. The existence of three separate but related narratives within the novel give it a meta-narrative quality that call attention to the practices of revision and apotheosis. The first tale serves as a sort of creation myth, in which Tan

Tan descends from the sky to an earth, commits sins, becomes bound to the earth and hard work, is abandoned by the supreme being and has to use her brains and her body to survive. In this tale, Tan Tan also gives birth to the race of Earth people. In "Tan Tan and Dry Bone," Tan Tan must overcome burdens. She is bound by a curse on New Half Way Tree that states that if you take one life you must give back two. The mathematical impossibility of this curse exhausts Tan Tan and drives her into further exile. She is haunted by the guilt of having murdered her father, and spends her time and energy trying to atone for this transgression. In this tale, she picks up an old man known as dry bone because he is starving. Despite the warnings that he will suck her dry, Tan Tan binds herself to dry bone. Eventually, she conspires with a bird, thus invoking, again, the forces of Àjẹ́, to outsmart Dry Bone. Tan Tan uses language to convince Dry Bone to go outside. Once there, Master Johncrow comes and snaps dry bone's bones in two and then carries him away. Tan Tan is relieved that Dry Bone is gone but still hasn't figured out that the two lives she is supposed to give back are her own and her child's.

The final story, "Tan Tan and the Rolling Calf" begins like the others. Tan Tan is on the run in the bush, having just killed a "pimp who used to specialize in young girls" (291). There is a mythical quality to the storytelling, and the division between the Tan Tan vigilante, robber queen, apotheosized figure and the Tan Tan of the primary narrative is clear. She is chased by bounty hunters, but befriends another woman, Sadie, while walking on the path. Sadie is afraid to be walking in the bush, for she has heard many Tan Tan stories and has also heard that Tan Tan is near her village. She openly confesses this to Tan Tan because she does not recognize her. When Tan Tan saves Sadie from the attacking mother of a baby rolling calf she had previously stepped on, Tan Tan reveals herself to Sadie. The mother rolling calf is killed by Tan Tan, imposing the curse again. Tan Tan sends Sadie on her way, and goes back along the path to

find the rolling calf baby. She keeps the baby for several weeks until it is ready to survive on its own, satisfying the curse for the death of the mother. She saved Sadie and the baby rolling calf. Tan Tan is still behind the count for Antonio's murder, though.

Once the rolling calf is freed to live on its own, the embedded story and the primary narrative begin to merge. The Rolling Calf myth is not separate from the conclusion of novel, in which Tan-Tan saves her life and the life of her child by giving voice to all that she has endured at the hands of her father. As the novel concludes, Tan-Tan faces down her stepmother, Janisette. Janisette has been hunting Tan-Tan not only because she killed Antonio, but because Janisette always blamed Tan-Tan for seducing Antonio and thus taking him away from her. It is only when Tan-Tan confronts Janisette publicly, and finally explains all that Antonio had to her that Tan-Tan feels free of both the abuse and the curse upon her for committing murder:

> Then Tan---Tan knew her body to be hers again, felt her own mouth stretching, stretching open in amazement at the words that had come out of it. Is she, speaking truth; is truth! '*Sans humanité!'* she spat at Janisette – 'no mercy!' - the traditional final phrase of the calypsonian who'd won the battle of wit and words. Tan-Tan gasped, put a hand up to her magical mouth. (325)

Tan-Tan's development into a strong, independent, vigilante, mother of a new race with a magical mouth is marked by the characteristics of Ezili and Àjẹ́. In becoming a mother, and more significantly the mother of an entirely new kind of being, the character extends the motherhood-as-metaphor-for-creativity metaphor found in many feminist and diaspora texts. Her role in doling out justice echoes the Ẹdan in Washington's "Powers of Our Mothers," made up of the Ìyàmi Òṣòròngà, Ẹlẹ́yẹ, and Ẹdan. The Ẹdan are administrators, and their role is restorative, balancing transgressions against the Earth and creation (22-4). The Ẹlẹ́yẹ, the

owners of birds and the models for Chichibud and his family, are the "source of creative impetus" and are the symbols for the proximity of life and death, creation and destruction in the Yoruba world view. The Ẹlẹ́yẹ are also the providers of the "cosmic-terrestrial sanctuary" in which troubled people can take refuge, gain counsel, and emerge safely, the very sanctuary Tan-Tan finds with Chichibud in the Daddy Tree and later in the bush. Tan Tan's development of the ability to speak about injustice in a public forum, her "magic mouth," also marks her connection to the power of the Ìyàmi Òṣòrònga, who express the "essence of riddling," encoding language, polysemy, and polyvocality (Washington 20-2). Ultimately, it is Tan Tan's use of language that produces her freedom, but prior to the scene in which she faces Janisette, Tan Tan's place as commander of language, storytelling, and creativity is established in the embedded myths like Kabo Tano, Dry Bone, and the Rolling Calf:

> What a thing those Tan Tan stories had become, oui! Canto and cariso, crick-crack Anansi back; they had grown out of her and had become more than her. Seemed like every time she heard the stories they had become more elaborate. Anansi the Trickster himself couldn't have woven webs of lies so fine. She kept trying to discern truths about herself in the Tan-Tan tales, she couldn't help it. People loved them so, there must be something to them, ain't? Something hard, solid thing other people could see in her; something she could hear and know about herself and hold in her heart. (298)

The discrepancies between the narratives are a matter of the degree of supernatural characteristics of Tan Tan. The Kabo Tano, Dry Bone, and Rolling Calf stories definitely embrace her supernatural origins and abilities. The primary narrative, told mainly in a third person limited point of view, is set in a Fantastic backdrop, but once Tan Tan becomes accustomed to the planet of New Half Way Tree, there is no special consideration, or hesitation,

on the part of the character or reader of its Fantastic elements. The outer frame, in which the A.I. Eshu controls both the primary and the embedded narratives, bears the characteristic of Todorov's "instrumental marvelous," in which "we find the gadgets, technological developments unrealized in the period described but, after all, quite possible" (56). The narratives of Tan Tan signify upon each other within the structure of the novel, demonstrating a dialogue of revision and apotheosis.

Tan Tan is also representative of diaspora. Because she is an exile and her sexual abuse is linked to the slave trade, her "removal" from the source is doubled. Though she obviously develops characteristics of Àjẹ́, it would also be appropriate to link her to Ezili, who represents Àjẹ́ in the diaspora. All of Tan Tan's vigilante adventures and the time she spends in the sacred and magical "bush" gives experiential and supernatural legitimacy to her long-developing power to speak. The fighting and mothering qualities Tan-tan develops identify her as an Ezili-Dantor/Ezili- ge-rouge, who can also be associated with Ọya and the powers of transformation. Dantor and Ge-rouge occupy the petwo, or revolutionary aspect of the vodou pantheon, the tendencey, as Apter argued, toward the transformative, divisive, and segmentary qualities of life. Ge-rouge is Ezili of the red eyes, reflecting anger and violent action. She wields a knife and does not hesitate to use it, though she always has cause (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 116). Even though Métraux calls all ge-rouge spirits "evil and cannibal," connecting the red eyes to the eyes of werewolves, later scholars link her to the raging, violent aspect of Ezili-Dantor (McCarthy Brown 233 and Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 116). Dantor is a "dark-skinned, hardworking peasant woman" who is, "above all else, the mother, the one who bears children" (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 116 and McCarthy Brown 228). Dantor is independent, making use of her work ethic and market skills, and often "flouts the authority of the patriarchal family"

(229). Significantly, Dantor is sometimes mute. For all her independence and strength, Dantor suffered (a quality she expresses by vomiting blood, her life-force). Dantor is the force that "fought fiercely alongside her 'children' in the Haitian slave revolution" and was wounded by her own side, for they did "not trust her to guard their secrets" and they cut out her tongue. In ritual practice, when the spirit of Dantor "rides" a devotee during trance, the devotee cannot speak. While the birth of Tubman links Tan Tan to Dantor and her vigilante projects align her with Ge-rouge, her ability to speak is more closely associated with the persuasive powers of Ezili-Fréda, discussed below. Tan Tan's disappearance into the bush can also be read as an extension of an experience with Lasyrenn. McCarthy Brown describes Lasyrenn as a loa/lwa who has "roots that connect, like nerves, to the deepest and most painful parts of the loss of homeland and the trauma of slavery...she reconnects people to Africa and its wisdom" (224). Lasyrenn, as described here, can be read as a metaphor for a certain kind of appropriation, those "loving acts of bonding rather than ritual slayings at Esu's crossroads" (Gates xxviii). McCarthy Brown recognizes a predictable pattern in the Lasyrenn stories:

> These stories have a common pattern. A person, usually a woman, disappears for a time - three days, three months, three years. When she returns, she is a changed person. Her skin has become fairer, her hair longer and straighter. Most important, she has gained sacred knowledge. Immediately after her return, she is disoriented, does not talk, and does not remember what happened to her. But gradually a story emerges, a story of living for a time 'below the water,' where the spirits instructed her in the arts of diagnosis and healing. (224)

Tan Tan's extended period of time in the Daddy-Tree, the pact initiated with the swallowed frog, and her obligation to defend victims of crime, cruelty, and immorality mirror the

knowledge gained in an encounter with Lasyrenn. Tan-Tan's journey does not happen in water, perhaps because Hopkinson wishes to allude to the situation of maroonage, or as I have suggested earlier, she is signifying upon Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts,* invoking a more West African sensibility in which the forest is the sacred and mysterious space of initiation.

The rising influence of Ezili in *Midnight Robber* forms the narrative impetus for *The Salt Roads,* which ponders the birth of the goddess in a global and timeless context. The transformations of the Fantastic that take place in *The Salt Roads* unify what Hopkinson calls a "storystream" of models of female power by connecting Ezili to both conventional and unconventional manifestations of Àjé[27]. In doing this, the novel reflects a revised Fantastic "desire," the desire for connection to a usable past that provides both legitimacy and flexibility for writing female subjectivity. The "storystream" and its transparency in the text also document the process of revision - making overt one of the qualities of literary "tradition" that Henry Louis Gates identifies in *The Signifying Monkey.* Just as the separate narratives of *Midnight Robber* merge at the conclusion of the novel, the intrusion of Ezili's narrative into the narratives of her three generative characters becomes more frequent and more closely tied to their actions as *The Salt Roads* progresses.

By far the most popular and easily recognizable Ezili is Fréda, and this is the first Ezili developed in *The Salt Roads.* According to Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert in *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santeria to Obeah and Espiritismo,* Ezili-Fréda is a "goddess of love and luxury, a flirtatious light-skinned Creole known as the personification of feminine beauty and grace" (114). Her altars and artwork are adorned with "fine clothes (red and blue dresses particularly), jewels, perfumes, and lace..basin, towel, soap, comb, lipstick, and

[27] Ruby Ramraj has effectively disentangled the complexities of narrative structure in *The Salt Roads,* and debunks critiques of reviewers who found the structure distracting and unintelligible. See "Nalo Hopkinson: Transcending Genre Boundaries" in *Beyond the Canebrakes: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada.*

other articles indispensable to her toilette" (114). Fréda's dealings with seduction and all its accoutrements, especially the comb, bring Ọ̀ṣun to mind. Karen McCarthy Brown describes Ezili-Freda as voracious and frustrated because of her inability to be satisfied. Like many loa or orisa, Ezili Fréda easily expresses paradox, and her identity is negotiable:

> Ezili Freda drapes herself in romance, wealth, and social status and at the same time reminds Haitians how precarious and superficial such things are..song reminds the listener that Freda is an Ezili, a watery woman spirit from Africa, who would not content herself with describing the mere surface of things. Here is the paradox. The song can be heard as saying that when Ezili Freda is inside the house, when sensuality and love are in place in the family (or perhaps when money and status are secure), the people inside are safe from the rain and slippery mud that surround them. But it can also be heard as a warning about the ability of rainwater to insinuate itself through and under the wattle-and-daub walls of a Haitian house. (250-1)

Fréda's domain of love, sensuality, and familial stability again invite comparisons to Ọ̀ṣun. Though each of the main incarnations of Ezili tend toward a Yoruba orisa, one-to-one matchups would constitute too rigid a system to contain Ezili or the female òrìṣà she appears to be related to. At the very least, Ezili is recognizable as a force of Àjẹ́, whether or not she can be derived from Yoruba òrìṣà. When Fréda's qualities become too extreme, she is no longer Fréda, but a different kind of Ezili: "Hunger for wealth, status, or romance can undermine the foundations of a family. Freda's insatiable hunger, the need that can never be met, is the parallel to the irrational, raging baka in Dantò and the death-dealing siren in Lasyrenn" (251). Importantly, Fréda also introduces miscegenation into the vodou pantheon. Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert describe her as "a light-skinned creole," while McCarthy Brown simply states that she "is a

white woman" (114, 246). Even McCarthy Brown's white Fréda is the result of generations of racial mixing. When Hopkinson writes the character of Jeanne Duvall in *The Salt Roads*, Fréda is certainly the model and it is the body of Duvall that the spirit of Ezili first occupies. The Ezili spirit has an astral form first, created from the stillborn, pale baby of Georgine, delivered by Mer in pre-revolutionary Haiti on a plantation and buried under a tree root at the river:

> **I'm born from song and prayer. A small life, never begun, lends me its unused vitality. I'm born from mourning and sorrow and three women's tearful voices. I'm born from countless journeys chained tight to the bellies of ships. Born from hope vibrant and hope destroyed. Born of bitter experience. Born of wishing for better. I'm born.**
>
> **It's when my body hits the water, cold flow welling up in a crash to engulf me, that I begin to become. I'm sinking down in silver-blue wetness bigger than a universe. I open my mouth to scream, but get cold water inside. Drowning!** (*The Salt Roads* 40)

The three women Hopkinson refers to in this passage can be read as Mer, Tipingee, and Georgine, the three women who bury the dead baby at the river. They can also be read as the narratives of the three women whose experiences across time and space contributed to the "bitter experience" and the "hope vibrant and hope destroyed" of the Ezili spirit: Mer, Jeanne Duvall, and Thais. At the moment of her creation, Ezili doesn't have a body, but she is still able to taste her tears of frustration when her newly born spirit roams time and space and does not understand what it sees. The salt of her tears binds her to humanity and to the earth[28] and she is immediately trapped in the body of Jeanne Duvall:

[28] See Meredith Gadsby's book-length study on salt as metaphor for suffering in Caribbean Women's Literature: *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival.*

> **Do I have a voice? I open my mouth to try to sing the three-twist chant I can hear, and tears I didn't know before this were called tears roll in a runnelled crisscross down the thing that is my face and past my...lips? to drip salt onto my tongue.**
>
> **At the binding taste of salt, I begin to fall once more.** ...
>
> **I am here. In someone's soul case. And though I beat and hammer on its ribs, I am caught. I can no longer see everywhere and everywhen, but only in straight lines, in one direction; to dissolution.** (*The Salt Roads* 46)

Eventually, the Ezili spirit develops the ability to move in and out of the "soul case" of Jeanne, but her first glimpses of the world and her first learning experiences are dominated by Jeanne's experiences with Charles Baudelaire. Appropriately, the spirit Ezili's learning process is dominated by words and visual images. As the newly "born," astral Ezili settles in and occupies Jeanne for the first time, she remarks that she is "blind" and that "words are new to" her (56). Her confusion and disorientation are apparent when she describes words coming to her "as barrages of sensation" (56). She learns quickly that words can signify emotion and that Jeanne's emotion of "longing...make[s] her eyes burn" as if with tears. In this moment, Jeanne's longing is for "words" from Baudelaire, and the first Paris sequence, taking place in 1842, ends with Baudelaire's poem "Le Serpent qui danse." By the time the longed for words appear on the page for the reader, Jeanne has experienced a trance, and Ezili has learned that Jeanne's dreaming can set her free temporarily, and that song and dance can bind her more tightly to Jeanne's "reality." This particular manifestation of Àjẹ́, the creation of Ezili, in *The Salt Roads* contains the quality of multiplicity. Reading this novel under the rubric of Ifá and the Fantastic is what provides a foundation for understanding how the author unifies the storystream. The conditions of Ezili's creation demonstrate multiplication and transformation, and make use of the same visual

apparatus for slipping between the Fantastic and the real that are identified in Todorov's analysis of Hoffman's short stories.

In order to create the Ezili spirit, several streams of existence need to merge. Once Georgine's baby dies[29], and is buried near water by three women, the "unused vitality" of the baby needs to imbibe the cold water and then be bound to humanity with the taste of salt. To find its way to Jeanne, the spirit also has to find its "way," and that way is in a mirror. The first time that the reader meets Jeanne, she and her friend Lise are scrying in a mixture of bodily fluids inside a chamber pot. Jeanne is relatively ignorant about how to perform the scrying, and Lise has to coach her. The purpose of the scrying is, of course, to discover the identities of their future husbands, and by extension, their future children. As Lise explains things to Jeanne, she resorts to figurative language to answer Jeanne's ignorant question, "And he'll appear in the pot? He'll get his feet wet" (19). Lise replies, "Silly Jeanne. A vision of him will appear, as though we were looking in through a window" (19). Jeanne immediately connects this to her African grandmother, the first woman in her family to be captured on the continent and brought to France to service men. Jeanne thinks, "This scrying business had a flavour about it of my grandmaman's juju, her African magic" (20). Jeanne and Lise perform their ritual, and it is successful. They manage to produce a "vision" as if through a "window," and Jeanne thinks to herself, "there in the still liquid, as in a mirror. A black man" when the apparition becomes visible. When the scrying is finished, Jeanne leaves the bed "and went and sat at the mirror," reflecting on what has been a disturbing experience for both women, thinking "when I was little, Grandmaman used to tell me that people only see what they see. Used to vex me, for it made no sense. Children like for adults to speak plain, to help us make the world come clear. But I

[29] Catherine Ramsdell links to the importance of the theme of pregnancy in Hopkinson's novels, and argues that this theme keeps her in "the female tradition." See "Nalo Hopkinson and the Reinvention of Science Fiction" in *Beyond the Canebrakes: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada*.

understood Grandmaman now" (24). The mirror appears just three more times in novel, and all three times it is Jeanne who looks into it. In between the first and second mentions of the mirror, and the rest of the scenes in which Jeanne looks into it, is the first appearance of Ezili and her inhabitation of Jeanne's body. Most revealing is the fourth occurrence of the mirror, when Jeanne looks into it jumps, "were those my eyes looking back at me? Looked like someone else's" (51). The eyes on the other side of the mirror are of course those of Ezili, minimally perceptible to Jeanne only in the mirror and under a set of very unlikely conditions. The mirror is Ezili's path to Jeanne. As a Fréda, Jeanne's ability to bring Ezili into her full existence is limited. Jeanne is importantly for Ezili because it is Jeanne's perspective that provides the first round of earthly education for the spirit, but that education is rather unsatisfying and at times, confining. The Ezili spirit muses on this many times in the novel, but most importantly she talks about how her vision is limited by Jeanne. The young Ezili is always bemoaning her inability to see when she is trapped in a soul – case. When she is in her astral form, she can see perfectly clearly across time and space, so her "vision pure and simple reveals an ordinary world, without mysteries" (Todorov 122). Her complicated creation and the need to find Jeanne through the mirror distorts her vision, "I can no longer see everywhere and everywhen, but only in straight lines, in one direction; to dissolution" (46).

Ezili's path to Jeanne's body marks an interesting departure from the Fantastic as Todorov conceives it. Todorov is interested in symbols of "indirect, distorted, subverted vision" in his discussion of themes of the self (122). Vision, in the Fantastic, is a particular way of "structuring the relation between man and the world" (120). The Fantastic's reliance on "images of sight" to structure this relationship establishes what Todorov generalizes as "themes of vision" (120). He demonstrates that reason rejects "the mirror which offers not the world but an image

of the world, matter dematerialized" and concludes that "it would be more accurate to say that in Hoffman it is not vision itself that is linked to the world of the marvelous, but rather eyeglasses and mirrors, those symbols of indirect, distorted, subverted vision" (122). For Todorov, the themes of vision are part of the themes of the self, and are therefore an aspect of an important principle of the Fantastic: "the fragility of the limit between matter and mind" (120). That fragility does collapse, and the "images of vision" are one of the ways that matter and mind and self and other "become that other, slide into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent state of flux and instability" (Jackson 42). Todorov states that "eyeglasses and mirrors become the image of a vision that is no longer the simple means of connecting the eye to a point in space, which is no longer purely functional, transparent, transitive, These objects are, in a sense, vision materialized or rendered opaque, a quintessence of sight" (123).

There are two interesting things going on here. One is that Hopkinson seems to be very aware of genre and is making sure that the "traditions" are honored. Jeanne and Ezili look into the mirror. The mirror is a significant part of the text. A classic theory of the Fantastic is properly invoked in the narrative. In Todorov's analysis of Hoffman, the mirror is the gateway for the identifiably "real" character to access the marvelous, thus producing, for a second, the Fantastic. In *The Salt Roads*, however, inverts this. It is Ezili who experiences the "real" as Fantastic—marvelous. It is her vision that is repeatedly impaired and invoked to move her about the text and in and out of Jeanne's body, whether she is returning to the astral, or off to occupy a new body. Though Jeanne shares this visual apparatus at first, once Jeanne dies and Ezili is free of her, the mirror evolves into water: the sea initially evoked in the "Mer" names and nicknames of the three generative characters, and reoccurring in understood history of the Slave Trade that brought Mer to Haiti, and the narrated boat journey across the Mediterranean of Thais. In what

seems to be a Gates-ian move of "tropological revision" and "play of differences," Hopkinson inverts Todorov's reading of Hoffman's divide between the real and the unreal (52-3). At this point, it becomes necessary to apply the Yoruba cultural hermeneutic in the historically specific context of Haitian vodou practice. As the ocean morphs into the tool of "indirect, distorted, subverted vision" it becomes possible to invoke another manifestation of Ezili, Lasyrenn. She "hovers large and dark and silent just below the surface of the water, a place Haitians call 'the back of the mirror'" (McCarthy Brown 223). Like Todorov's apparatus of Fantastic vision - the domain of Lasyrenn is "seductive because she gives a deeper and truer picture of self than is likely to be found in the mirrors of everyday life. But it is also dangerous to try to get too close or hold on too tightly to the vision" (223).

That danger is precisely what led Todorov to reject water as a Fantastic device, and this is the second interesting aspect of Hopkinson's use of the mirror in *The Salt Roads*. To put even the slightest bit of pressure on Todorov's rejection of water is to reveal cultural hegemony and racism. Todorov's identification of the value of the visual in the Fantastic relies heavily on Pierre Mabille and his book *Miroir du Merveilleux.* Building on Mabille's description of the marvelous and its goals, Todorov borrows the idea of the importance of sight, but insists that reason rejects the marvelous and the mirror of water, for the true marvelous is accessible only to those who can "'see and recognize themselves...in the mirror of the springs of Urdar'" (121-2). Todorov invokes Western philosophy to emphasize a prohibition on looking into water, for "'in seeing the world and oneself upside down, one may be stricken with vertigo'" (122). In addition to being against reason, looking into water (as mirror) is also "contrary...to the dignity of the human race, to the wisdom acquired by long and painful experience" (122). The danger of looking into the ocean as mirror is easily accommodated by the Lasyrenn model, and her sister

Àjẹ́, Yemọja and even Mami Wota. Yet water in general is excluded from Todorov's objects of sight. It is at least problematic that Mabille, Todorov's cited source for the definition of the marvelous and the objects of sight, was a Cultural Attaché to Haiti and a student of vodou (Aspley 946).

Though Jeanne is no vodou practitioner, she did experiment with scrying and connected it to her grandmother's "African" religious and divination practices. Her song and dance bring about a spirit possession that is described in exactly the terms used to describe possession and trance in both Haitian vodou and Brazilian Candomblé. Like the mirror, music and dancing are bridges between the real and the unreal and the physical and metaphysical worlds. Another way that Ezili travels is when Jeanne dreams. Jeanne's dreaming alters her consciousness enough for Ezili to break free of her for a while, "Jeanne dreams, and I am pulled to other places. Dark faces surround me, swaying as the drums boom" (*The Salt Roads* 132). One of the places Ezili goes when she is free of Jeanne is to Mer in Haiti. Mer is an Ezili-Dantor with a strong, if not fully realized, relationship with Lasyrenn.

Mer is one of Ginen, a field slave on a Haitian plantation who was born in Africa. She is a healer, and likes to keep the peace. Ultimately, Mer will embrace the slave revolt planned by Makandal, a historical figure who is re-imagined in the novel, but Makandal misunderstands her intentions when she runs to the house to warn those in it of the coming slave uprising. While Mer's intentions are to warn the house slaves, Makandal and the others believe she is going to warn Simenon, the plantation owner. Makandal brutally cuts out Mer's tongue, aligning the character directly with the myths of Ezili-Dantor. Mer has other Dantor characterisitcs, for she is a "dark-skinned, hardworking peasant woman" who is, "above all else, the mother, the one who bears children" as well as a woman who can, and does "flouts the authority of the patriarchal

family" (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 116 and McCarthy Brown 228). Mer's flouting of patriarchal family structure happens within the confines of the slave community on Simenon's plantation. She has a long standing and well-known lesbian affair with Tipingee, who also helps her deliver babies and heal the sick and wounded. Their affair is tolerated, but causes mild disruption when Tipingee's marron husband, Patrice, returns and is accepted back onto the plantation. Mer is instrumental in getting Patrice accepted back into slave life with only minor punishment. Her praying to Lasirèn calls the spirit to her in Simenon's living room. Ezili finds Mer, assesses the situation and decides to possess Simenon's wife and control her thoughts. At the request of his (possessed) wife, Simenon decides to allow Patrice back onto the plantation without killing him for running away or cutting off his ears as punishment. Patrice must endure five lashes for running away, but this is acceptable to him and certainly preferably to the other punishments.

Lasirèn had previously given Mer a directive, and praying for Patrice's safe reintegration to the plantation may be Mer's interpretation of Ezili-Lasirèn's request. Immediately following the death and burial of Georgine's baby, Mer loses a slave patient who accidentally stepped on one of Makandal's poisoned sticks. Makandal is trying, through several pathways, to poison Simenon, his family, their friends, and any other white or black slave holder in Haiti. Mer agonizes over the condition of the slaves, but as a healer, does not approve of Makandal's violent ways. After this long day of physical toil in the fields, trying to heal Makandal's innocent victim, and pondering the immorality of Makandal's approach, Mer seeks a bath in the ocean. She sneaks out of her slave hut despite the approaching curfew and bedtime for a few hours of solitude, and finds it in the sea, "put my tinder box down in the sand and walked right into the warm sea, dress and all" (*The Salt Roads* 63). Mer considers drowning herself in the sea, but

just manages to suppress that urge wondering "who would treat the people when they sicken? Plantation doctor white man didn't know the herbs, the prayers. If I denied to help my people, then my spirit wouldn't fly home" (63). Mer sets up her fishing pole to catch her dinner and reflects on the "moon-face of Ezili floating above the waters. Mama, what a beautiful land this was" (63). Mer's isolation from the plantation and other people, her soak in the sea, and her reading of the moon-face as Ezili all work together to set the scene for a rather miraculous event. When something pulls on Mer's fishing line, the boundary between real and unreal, already tenuous because of Mer's belief, gives way. At first, Mer looks down and sees her "own reflection, dancing beneath the waters, in the glowing path of the moonlight," but quickly realizes

> It's not my own face I was seeing, for this woman was young, smooth; she was fat and well-fed. The bush of her hair tumbled about her round, brown, beautiful face in plaits and dreadknots, tied with twists of seaweed...The fish tail waving lazy behind her instead of legs was longer than I'm tall. Light danced and trembled on it as it swept the water, holding her steady. *Lasirèn! Lasirèn!* (63)

Mer falls to her knees and begs Lasirèn to take her into the sea with her. Lasirèn denies Mer's request, and tells her, "Mer, for all that you have my name, if you jump into the sea right now, I will throw you right back" (64). Lasirèn tells Mer that she must stay and fix whatever is not right on land. Of course Mer is confused by this mandate, and Lasirèn explains "the sea roads...they're drying up" (64). Mer, in her disoriented state, misunderstands this as the sea itself is drying up, and says so to Lasirèn, who needs to explain further:

> 'not this sea! Stupid child!' Her tail slapped, sent up a fountain, exploding and drenching me. 'The sea in the minds of my Ginen. The sea roads, the salt roads. And

> the sweet ones, too; the rivers. Can't follow them to their sources any more. I land up in the same foul, stagnant swamp every time. You must fix it, Mer.' (65)

This is an important passage because not only is it a powerful encounter with the supernatural, but also because it aligns the sea roads with memory. As time passes and more and more of the Ginen die, are grossly dehumanized by slavery, and generations of mixed-race children begin to be born, Lasirèn charges Mer with the enormous task of remembering and recovery. Sadly, Mer waits to long to align herself with Makandal, and her long-established distrust of him and her open chastising of his violent ways are what lead to the misunderstanding of her intentions. This results in Makandal's removing her tongue. Mer is silenced, but Ezili is not.

Moving backwards in time, Ezili next inhabits the body of Thais, the Nubian sex slave who was sold by her parents to a tavern-owner in Alexandria some time before 345 C.E. Thais, or Meritet by the middle of her narrative, is the least developed of three storystreams. This seems consistent with Lasirèn's proclamation that the sea roads in the minds of the Ginen are drying up. Meritet would be the most removed from modern memories since she lived many years before both Jeanne and Mer, whose lives were less than 100 years apart. On the surface, it appears that the purpose of Meritet's narrative is to explain how she accidentally became St. Mary of Egypt. The story even posits that the priest responsible for witnessing the miracles that lead to her beatification completely misinterprets what happens right in front of him. Meritet's journey takes the suffering and exploitation of African women back in time far further than a popular audience would normally understand it to encompass. The primary purpose of her narrative seems to be to make this historical connection and to document the extraordinary and sometimes supernatural acts required of African women to live through that suffering and exploitation. Thais/Meritet also enables Hopkinson to establish an African origin for all the

manifestations of Ezili, and Àjẹ́, and make them a world wide phenomena. A few pages from the end of the novel, the voices of Ezili and Meritet are closely intertwined. Meritet is dying in the desert, but Ezili is finally understanding her place in a pantheon of forces:

> ***'I don't fight this fight alone, do I? I can be water and anger and beauty and love, but there is also iron and fire, warfare and thunder and storm.'***
>
> **'*and sickness,*' says the smallpox one.**
>
> **'*And family,*' says our cousin in his battered hat.**
>
> **'*And death, and change,*' says one I didn't see before, for he never keeps still.**
>
> **'*There's healing, and mothering, and age.*'**
>
> **'*And youth,*' say a pair of beautiful twin children, brown arms about each other.**
>
> **'*There's infinity,*' hiss the snake and egg.**
>
> **We are all here, all the powers of the Ginen lives for all the centuries that they have been in existence, and we all fight. We change when change is needed. We are a little different in each place that the Ginen have come to rest, and any one of is already many powers. No cancer can fell us all, no blight cover us completely.** (387)

The fight Ezili is fighting as Fréda, Dantor, and Lasirenn is obviously against the very real exploitation and suffering of African women and their descendants. It is also against forgetting, or the drying up of the sea roads in this case. One mode of "fighting" is "remembering" with language and storytelling, expressed as articulations of resistance to dominant forces in both content and form. The novel *The Salt Roads* is, as a work of speculative, "historical fiction" is

one of those resistances. It is a resistance articulated in language and forms that complicate not only women's subjectivities, but also the modes in which they are expressed[30].

Resisting forgetfulness and the havoc it can wreak upon family and society is the point of departure for Hopkinson's fourth novel, *The New Moon's Arms*. *The New Moon's Arms* does away with nearly all Fantastic "hesitation" in its main character and audience, but does record a tension in humanity, those who accept magic and those who do not. Chastity Theresa Lambkin, the main character, is a middle aged woman beginning menopause. If anyone needs a life-altering encounter with Lasirèn at the bottom of the sea, it is Chastity. She is an unlikable character who lets her daughter know what a burden she was, and she is also boorishly intolerant toward Michael, her daughter's father, for being gay. Chastity has spent a lifetime embracing bitterness, sucking salt for no good reason, after her failed teenage attempt to "make" Michael straight by convincing him to "try" his first sexual experience with her, his best childhood friend. Their experiment results in Ifeoma, the daughter for whom Chastity was kicked out of her home and forever estranged from her father. A lifetime of bitterness and estrangement make Chastity alienated from both her family and community. She has no intent to change, though, and for most of the novel she continues to create divides with her sharp tongue. She even changes her name to Calamity because she knows what a cantankerous, difficult person she is. Middle age, however, and the supernatural power it reinvigorates in Calamity by way of hot flashes and itchy hands intervenes. The conclusion of the novel and Calamity's path to reconciliation with her family are brought about by an encounter with Lasirèn.

By the time Hopkinson writes *The New Moon's Arms*, her voice and narrative strategies are becoming more refined and certain. Having dealt with the Ifá pantheon in *Brown Girl*, and

[30] Ramsdell also points out that Hopkinson effectively resists notions of what constitutes "science" in Science Fiction Writing. She argues, effectively, that *The Salt Roads* is, in fact, Science Fiction.

Èṣù specifically in *Midnight Robber*, *The Salt Roads* focused on the development of supernatural paradigms more removed from the continent. *The New Moon's Arms* goes a step further. It invokes Lasirèn but approaches her from multiple cultural traditions, calling her Uhamiri, an Ibo goddess of a lake, and Momi Wata, a more generalized term for all female water spirits in the New World, a conceptualization that includes Yemọja, Ezili, and Lasiren, among others. At the same she insists on a more diverse view of water spirits, Hopkinson is also focused on a very specific aspect of Àjẹ́, the water spirit who inhabits the "back of the mirror" in the depths of the ocean, and pulls humans down into it, sometimes releasing them and sometimes keeping them forever.

As a child, Chastity/Calamity was a "finder." She had an uncanny ability to find lost items, and was known for this even at school, where she "found" lost items for her classmates. After her mother disappears under somewhat mysterious circumstances, and her father is suspected of murdering her, Chastity/Calamity stops "finding" out of fear of finding her mother's dead body. About the time her mother disappears and she stops finding, she begins seducing Michael. Just as she begins to become an adult, she loses her supernatural abilities. As the novel opens, Chastity/Calamity is at her father's funeral, invoking the transitional time and space between life and death as a setting in which anything can happen. It is no accident that Chastity/Calamity's supernatural abilities are reawakened at her father's funeral and at her first menopausal hot flashes. Hopkinson is careful to address what Todorov would label the "syntactic" aspect of good structure. Setting and characterization line up to support Chastity/Calamity's return to spiritual empowerment., following the spatial and temporal relations that make up the logic of Todorov's syntactic, or composition. Hopkinson also adds a cultural element to composition though, for to understand the significance of Chastity/Calamity's

strange positioning in transitional spaces is to understand an African way of apprehending human existence in the universe. In *Myth, Literature, and the African World,* Wole Soyinka describes a "numinous temper of the fourth area of existence which we have labeled the abyss of transition" (26). Although Soyinka uses a male òrìṣà (Ògún) to theorize transition between the areas of existence, his description of the area of transition is helpful here:

> Commonly recognized in most African metaphysics are the three worlds we have already discussed: the world of the ancestor, the living, and the unborn. Less understood or explored is the fourth space, the dark continuum of transition where occurs the inter-transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality. It houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will. (26)

Washington explains in *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts*, that while women of any age can have Àjẹ́, "elderly women, endowed with wisdom that is tempered by life's vicissitudes, are considered the most evolved, balanced, and powerful...the post menopausal era does not signify obsolescence; instead, when life-bearing ends, spiritual magnification begins" (15-16). On the threshold of both the living and the dead at her father's funeral, and in her own body at the onset of menopause, Chastity/Calamity is also at the threshold of this spiritually empowered state of Àjẹ́, old age. *The New Moon's Arms* is not so ambitious as to take Chastity/Calamity across the abyss, but her age and the recent death of her father show her complex relationship to the areas of the ancestor and the living. In the realm of the living, Chastity/Calamity is agbalaagba obinrin, an elder. Washington explains the particular way that agbalaagba obinrin Àjẹ́ manifest transition: "With the acquisition of the beard of old age, an Agbalaagba Obirin acquires not masculine aspects but dual spiritual-material mobility. She is *abaara meji*, one with two bodies, and *oloju meji*, one with two faces: Her spirit becomes a force equal to or greater than her

physical being" (16). Todorov's idea of "multiplication of personality" in themes of the Fantastic is already contained within "Yoruba cultural hermeneutics," and more specifically within Àjẹ́. Calamity's problem, though, is that she does not know what to do with her spiritual magnification. She is also part of a collective forgetting, a drying up of the sea roads, that Hopkinson attempts to correct in all her novels. At a critical point near the end of the novel, when Calamity needs to call on the "powers of our mothers" to save her own life and the life of her foster son, Calamity shouts in frustration: "I don't know how to do this!" (294). Calamity doesn't know how to cope with any of the "pasts" that inform the realm of the living, and this ignorance has to be remedied by the sacred encounter with Lasirèn, who also initiates Calamity in the "powers of our mothers" of the Ìyàmi Òṣòròngà, in this case, a unified notion of past, present, and future (Washington 20-2).

Calamity is no willing initiate, however. In her usual coarse way, Chastity/Calamity resists the old age. She snaps at anyone who calls her mother or grandmother in any form. She also does not want to be called by her childhood name, Chastity. She takes a lover home from her father's funeral, Gene. Gene Meeks is a friend and former student of her father. She also tries to secure another lover, Hector. He is a younger man, and a marine biologist studying the migration of Cayaba's seal population. The seal migration is unusual. The seals prove to be some kind of Mediterranean species with no discoverable reason to have migrated to this fictional Caribbean archipelago. Their presence in the fictional Cayaba archipelago is one of several storylines with an initial "deficient causality" (Todorov 110). Hector is also secretly investigating the environmental damage being done to the ocean and the seals by a large, American salt plant that is illegally disposing of its waste. Calamity also "finds" a second chance at mothering, fostering a young boy she names Agway after she finds him washed up on

the beach near her father's house. Calamity's positioning on thresholds is important to understanding how her finding magic works both for and against her, ultimately sending her to the ocean and her encounter with Àjẹ́ in the form Lasirèn (or Uhamiri, or Momi Wata).

Chastity/Calamity's road to the ocean begins, of course with the hot flash and itchy hands that precede the not-so-spontaneous materialization of objects from her past. A plate, a pin, a toy truck, children's books, a grove of cashew trees, and her father's duffel bag all return to her from another time and place in her life. Inside the duffel bag is a well-preserved seal skin, which cause Calamity anxiety because she thinks her father may have intended to illegally hunt seals and that this may have caused a rift between him and her mother, leading to her mother's disappearance. The objects were all lost to the sea when a hurricane destroyed her father's home on another island. The most important return though, is the young boy Agway. The night after her father's funeral, Calamity goes to the beach with a bottle of booze and her self-loathing for having just had "funeral sex" with Gene. In a drunken state, Calamity spends the night on the beach and has a hot flash in the middle of a thunderstorm. Both Calamity and the universe are in altered states of consciousness, so it is no surprise that the alcohol combined with the "power surge" combined with the strong thunderstorm cause the ocean to cough up a person. The circumstances of the boy's appearance are odd. As Calamity sets sight on him for the first time, she is suffering a hangover and a bad night's sleep from the storm, alcohol, and grief. Her first perceptions are that "there was a thing washed up on the sand, not too far from my rock. It was completely covered in seaweed, except for a brown hand poking through" (60). After running toward the pile of seaweed, Calamity observes, "It was a boy, a little brown boy. He looked about two, maybe three years old. His clothing had been torn off by the sea, and his hair was a mess: shells and sand matted in it. And was long so like a girls'" (61). Long hair with shells

woven in it is one of the characteristics of the mermaid water spirits, which some scholars and practitioners think was "derived from carved figures on the bows of the ships of European traders and slavers" (McCarthy-Brown 223-4). The strange boy on the beach also has webbed fingers and toes. Eventually, he proves to be one of a "race" of water spirits, or mermaids. Calamity later notices velcro-like patches on both his knees, and she learns, too late, that these are to hold his legs together so he can move them like a large tail or fin. Calamity's ability to conjure the boy from the ocean speaks to her spiritual ability and to the history of the water spirits. McCarthy-Brown suggests that the loa "Lasyrenn may have roots that connect, like nerves, to the deepest and most painful parts of the loss of homeland and the trauma of slavery...she also reconnects people to Africa and its wisdom" (224). The appearance of the mer-boy forces the reader and Calamity to a new understanding of how the past intrudes upon the present. For Calamity, he is a second chance at motherhood, to unmake the mistakes she made with Ifeoma. For the reader, a rather magical but historically based tale emerges about the origins of the race of merpeople.

Like Hopkinson's other novels, the primary narrative is interrupted by a secondary narrative. In *The New Moon's Arms*, the primary and secondary narratives do not collapse upon one another in the same way they do in the first three novels. In the first half of *The New Moon's Arms*, the secondary narrative consists of flashbacks to Calamity's childhood. The italicized, secondary narrative recounts Chastity/Calamity's encounter with a young, blue, mermaid girl that Calamity has chalked up to a concussion she got from falling off a rocky outcropping into the ocean that same day. It also gives background details about Chastity's experiences with Michael, his shy coming—out to her and their sexual encounter. Details about Chastity's father and their former home on another island in the same archipelago are also revealed. About half

way through the novel, though, after Calamity has found the boy washed up on the beach, assured him medical care, and taken him in as a foster child, a story from further in the past emerges. Using the paradigm of Granny-Nanny,[31] Hopkinson ties the relatively recent past of Calamity and her day with the blue mermaid girl to a more distant and traumatic past, the Atlantic Slave Trade. This past and the story Hopkinson weaves about it compensate the deficient causality of the unexplainable seal migration, and metonymically the migration of Africans to Cayaba.

The compensating story about the origins of Cayaba's seals and merpeople centers on a shape shifter story, one of last remnants of Todorov's Fantastic to be found in this text. A woman, captured in Africa and travelling aboard a slave ship witnesses a slave jump overboard and apparently turn into a seal:

> Then the person dove down into the water. The dada-haired lady had only a brief glimpse of its body slipping bent as a sickle forward into the sea. It was cylindrical, curved, and fate with good food. Sea cow? Seal? At home, the older people sometimes talked about sea cows who lived in the coastal waters, how you shouldn't look directly at them, lest they drag you down to the depths with them for your presumption...Momi Wata, thought the dada-hair lady respectfully to the thing she'd seen, beg you please take a message to Uhamiri for me. Tell her we need her help here... (257)

Uhamiri/Granny/Blue Devil Girl/Momi Wata/Lasirèn (Àjẹ́) bring the Dada-haired lady a thunderstorm. Lightning hits the slave ship and it begins to burn, sink, and break apart. The sailors are panicked and trying to save themselves, but still manage to find their guns and attempt to shoot and kill the slaves on board before they all go down. The Dada hair lady does not yet

[31] See Karla Lewis-Gottleib's full-length study "*The Mother of Us All": A History of Queen Nanny Leader of the Windward Jamaican Maroons.*

see that Uhamiri and the water spirits have answered her prayer, but in the commotion brought about by the storm, the strike, and the fire, she "felt wetness between her thighs, and a cramping of her womb. Her monthly blood had returned. She grinned fiercely. 'She heard me,' she said to her shipmates, who were too terrified to pay her mind" (304). The blood is the first part of her sacrifice to the water spirits, for she also describes the condition of barrenness that is the price all devotees of water spirits must pay, and later, she will combine the reproductive blood with her life's blood. As the ship continues to sink, the chaos increases. She continues to speak/pray and her sacrifice of menstrual blood also increases: "She was a sluice, and power surged through her. She tried to guide it as it flowed. It was like holding back the seas with a winnowing basket, but the dada-hair lady shaped her power as best she might. It was the strongest flow she'd ever felt, frightening in its force" (315). The simile used here indicates a blood/ocean comparison, and the phrase "power surge" links her directly with Calamity, experiencing power surges on another side of the reproductive cycle. All of this travels back to the "womb of origins" in Oduduwa's container: the "womb or pot" (Washington 16 and 26). The Dada-haired lady and the "bossman" lock eyes just as the ship is going under the sea. She thinks: "If she were a Momi Wata, he'd be foolish to stare at her like that" (315). She stands her ground as all the others are falling to the decks and sliding off them and announces, "We are leaving now!" (315). Though she speaks Igbo, the slaves and the gods understand. As the Dada-haired lady continues to stand her ground, making sure all the captured Africans escape, she observes as they slip willingly into the ocean:

> The people were changing! That startled her. But the ocean strength of blood would not be held back...The people's arms flattened out into flexible flippers. The shackles slipped off their wrists. The two women who had been chained to her flopped away, free, but the

> dada-hair lady remained unchanged and shackled. The little boy in her arms was transforming, though. He lifted one hand and spread his fingers to investigate the webbing that had now extended between them. (316)

The dada hair lady takes longer to transform, as she stays to confront the captain and provide protection for the captured as they enter the ocean. She shouts directions to her shipmates, and is the last to begin the sea cow/seal/mermaid transformation. Just as she starts to change, a "white sailor" sees her fall to the deck, and he "went even whiter as he saw her alter" (317). He pulls out a gun as the dada hair lady flops toward the water. He doesn't draw in time, but the captain does. Just as she spills her half transformed body over the side of the ship, he shoots her in the foot. By the time she hits the water, that foot has become "flipper":

> With a belching roar, she splashed into the water, and down. She looked. A thread of blood followed her down, trailing from her flipper. The captain had shot a hole clean through it. The frightening wound and the salty sting of the sea searing it made the dada-hair lady gasp. She took in water, coughed it out again, flailed with her new front limbs. Blood. She had to be giving blood to the earth in order to find a thing lost. But now she gave her blood to the sea. She had asked Uhamiri to bring them home. The gods almost never gave you exactly what you'd asked for. (318)

The immediate thing the dada hair lady has lost is the little boy she was looking after on the ship, but she recovers him quickly. As the new creatures swim away from the sinking ship, she learns to use her new limbs and feels "the gift," the gift of child-bearing leave her forever, for "she had used all her blood power to bring the people home. They were bahari now. The sea was where they would live" (318). The dada-hair lady's double—sided sacrifice of menstrual and life's blood creates an ocean—for—blood metonymy. As Chastity/Calamity's story lines up with the

dada hair lady's, the extension of blood into ocean goes back in the other direction: to get "right" with her family and community, Calamity will connect with blood history in the ocean.

After fostering Agway, the washed up merchild, Calamity develops a sincere empathy for him. She eventually understands his separation from his family and decides to act, even if she doesn't know exactly what to do to help him. Though she was never truly in doubt about his origins, she thought his parents were dead (two adult mermaid bodies were recovered by the Coast Guard) and did not know how she might go about returning him to an extended family. On another unusual night, when "jumbie"[32] fog coats the island and the sea, Calamity takes Agway in her old boat and travels out into the same area where she found him. She attempts to call the water spirit, but feels as if she fails when the race of merpeople does not appear right away. After Agway jumps into the ocean and Calamity follows him, she encounters the merpeople and has what could be described as a "Lasirèn" experience. Just as Calamity tires and is about to drown, she is rescued and pushed back into her boat. She witnesses Agway reuniting with his mother, and this produces a profound emotional response in Calamity. At the same time she learns Agway's real name, Chiaboutu[33], she also gains knowledge, learning the answer to the mystery of the unexplained seal migration. Each of the merpeople have a sealskin suit that they can take on/off when needed. This can be read as an embodiment of the abaara meji; it is Àjẹ́ manifesting itself in its "two bodies, one astral, one terrestrial" (Washington 35). In both Africa and the Diaspora, particularly in America, the doubled body, the astral and the terrestrial, comes to represent flight. The "flying African" is a commonly understood device, and Washington notes that "historical studies are replete with testimonies about flying Africans" (86). Washington argues that "physical flight reminded Africans of liberation's many paths," and that

[32] spirit
[33] his nickname is ChiChi, repeating the name of Chichibud, the bird-like spirit guide in *Midnight Robber*.

"astral travel in African America parallels that in Africa." There are two basic kinds of astral travelers. One kind are the disembodied wanderers, whose physical bodies have died before their time, thus their astral forms are condemned to roam and usually remain close to the place of their earthly death so as to bring about justice for their community. Another kind are the living Àjẹ́, or those who have the ability to "step out of their skins and go riding." Most flights are conducted for purposes of escape or retribution (Washington 86-8). What Hopkinson does in *The New Moon's Arms* is simply relocate this flight to the ocean by way of the dada hair lady whose flight/jump from the slave ship lands in the ocean and becomes swimming. The merpeople and the seals prove to be one and the same. At the zooquarium, the keeper has been mystified by the changing numbers of seals in the pen. At the end of the novel, he and his boss see that ALL the seals are gone, but have left a note, which says: "BACK SOON" (321).

The seaflights of the merpeople and Calamity contain both the escape and retribution themes. As the water spirits come to rescue the slaves on the sinking ship, they escape both slavery and death. Retribution in *The New Moon's Arms* takes the form of rebalancing. Calamity's swim—flight folds the abaara meji idea into the ocean, or Lasirèn idea. Calamity's flight explains the presence of the seals, and brings her knowledge and experience that helps her to mend her relationships with her family. One of the powerful abilities Calamity gains from her ocean flight is mastery over speaking, for she has learned to "hold" her tongue and think before speaking so that her sharp barbs are not misunderstood and taken offensively by her family. When Calamity returns home following her sea flight/Lasirèn encounter, she trips over her father's duffel bag, which is now in a place she did not leave it. The seal skin that was inside the bag is missing. In the room there is a broken window and the plastic she used to cover it is torn, making a hole, and she thinks it is: "big enough for a person to pass through it" (322). Calamity

lets out a whoop of joy in this moment, begins talking directly to the jumbies, or spirits, and makes a small request that next time they bring her some lobster. What have they brought her this time in an empty duffel bag and missing seal skin? An answer to her mother's disappearance.

The presence of the seals as shape shifters preserves some small connection to the Fantastic as Todorov defined it, as do the multiplication of personality they represent. The carefully constructed structure of elements that underpins the appearance of the supernatural also adheres to the proscriptions of the genre. Only the slightest bit of the essential characteristic of "hesitation" is preserved. Calamity has only one true moment of hesitation near the end of the novel, in a conversation with Gene. Gene confesses that when he rescued her from the beach following Agway's plunge into the ocean, he thought he saw shapes moving under the water. She responds to him "a part of me been wondering if I didn't just make it all up" (314). That hardly qualifies as hesitation, and the reader who really embraces the themes of the memory, trauma, and rupture of the slave trade probably ought to come down on the side of believing the magic, or the marvelous, just as Calamity does. Hopkinson is careful though, for she puts hesitation into the narrative itself in the form of the two "master narratives" going on between those who accept the magic and those who don't. This is best expressed in the Doctor who attends to Agway, and was a childhood friend (and then enemy) for Calamity. The Doctor accepts Calamity's suggestion that Agway is one of the legendary race of merpeople who inhabit the waters around Cayaba, but she also keeps her knowledge to herself, and advises Calamity to do the same if they want to keep Agway in their care. The Doctor points out to Calamity that the "scientific" community in which she operates would never accept the existence of another race

and their denial of it directly affects them[34]. She tells Calamity, "the thing is, it's a lovely idea that he's some kind of marine human[35], but if the wrong people hear you going on about it, all of us stand to lose. You, me, Samuel. I could be forbidden from practicing medicine. You could lose Agway" (279). This same tension is expressed in the Saline Plant story line, in which a large American corporation is building a salt plant on the shores of the island and polluting the sea. The contamination of the sea threatens the merpeople and by extension the history and memory they represent. The salt plant also invokes economic concerns. Calamity's daughter works for a political candidate trying to block or renegotiate the deal, because she recognizes not only the environmental threat, but also the threat to local salt farms and the future impoverishment of those who go to work at the plant for low wages and no ownership. The Doctor and the Salt Plant point to the dominant narratives that still control destinies on Cayaba and in the Caribbean in general.

Midnight Robber, *The Salt Roads*, and *The New Moon's Arms* demonstrate a rising influence of Àjẹ́ and its transformative power. Hopkinson continues to transform the legacy of diaspora female characters by demanding a culturally and historically informed space in which they can articulate power and complexity. In the Gatesian spirit of "acts of formal revision" that can be "loving acts of bonding rather than ritual slayings at Eshu's crossroads," Hopkinson engages traditions on all sides of the Atlantic, significantly transforming modes of the Fantastic at the same time she preserves history and reinvents myth and legend. Inviting "Yoruba cultural hermeneutics," Hopkinson's work imposes the burden and the gift of participation on her

[34] This is an important turn away from "science fiction" that Hopkinson makes in *The Salt Roads.* Catherine Ramsdell begins to observe this turn in her essay "Nalo Hopkinson and the Reinvention of Science Fiction" where she writes that "the science fiction elements are much easier to see in Hopkinson's first two novels."
[35] See Catherine Ramsdell's excellent analysis of the kinds of science that are privileged in Science Fiction writing titled "Nalo Hopkinson and the Reinvention of Science Fiction" in *Beyond the Canebrakes: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada*.

audiences. The uninitiated reader may gain some pleasure from the "enchantment" of her "mainstream magical realism" works[36], but will miss out on an understanding of their formal elements as well as the knowledge of History and culture that illuminates the magic and the meaning in them. Hopkinson's Ifántastic invokes the Yoruba powers of Èṣù and Àjẹ́, using its figuration as well as its discursive modes, specifically its ability to interrogate itself, to signify on the Fantastic. It uses the operations of the Fantastic to replace psychoanalytical interpretation with a cultural and historical one. In this way, her novels provide an excellent opportunity to align multiple theories in the way Henry Louis Gates suggests:

> Because of the experience of diaspora, the fragments that contain the traces of a coherent system of order must be reassembled. These fragments embody aspects of a theory of critical principles around which the discrete texts of the tradition configure, in the critic's reading of the textual past. To reassemble fragments, is to engage in an act of speculation, to attempt to weave a fiction of origins and subgeneration. It is to render the implicit as explicit, and at times to imagine the whole from the part...(xxiv)

Hopkinson's novels also invoke a knowledge that reflects Àjẹ́, for they are

> informed by a consciousness of what must be passed on to future generations; *the telling of the tale is paramount to the survival of the culture.* Like their African sister-storytellers, these writers create oral literature in their written works. They (re)assemble the fragmented sounds of their foremothers' voices, rendering explicit the implicit memory of African orature. (Willentz qtd in Washington 3)

---

[36] See reviews by Jennifer Howard in The Washington Post and Publishers Weekly Review at powells.com - these labels, as Washington points out, demonstrate the continued tendency of reviewers and critics to ignore the "presence of Africa" in diaspora literature (2). Toni Morrison has also spoken about the label, saying she is indifferent to it and that it "covered up what was going on" and that "for literary historians and literary critics [it] just seemed to be a convenient way to skip again what was the truth in the art of certain writers" see *Conversations with Toni Morrison* Ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie pub. 1994

The novels suggest, and as I hope to have shown, elucidate, a different way of approaching similar texts. Though there are many authors and works that could be read under a rubric of an Ifántastic, the ones I examine in the following two chapters are Edwidge Danticat's most recent novel, *Claire of the Sea Light* and Esmeralda Ribeiro's short stories "A procura de uma borboleta preta" and "Guarde Segredo."

CHAPTER 5

PLAYING WONN AND SWALLOWING FROGS: NARRATING FROM THE TRANSITIONAL GULF IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S CLAIRE OF THE SEA LIGHT

"Remember... you're sitting on beach. You're listening to these girls singing wonn..."

When Edwidge Danticat visited the Margaret Mitchell house in Atlanta, Georgia on December 5, 2013 as part of the book tour promoting her new novel *Claire of the Sea Light,* she must have repeated this phrase, or one very similar to it, about ten times. Remember, beach, listening, and wonn were key words in her message that stormy, rainy evening, which also happened to be the day Nelson Mandela died. As Mandela joined the ancestors that day, Danticat emphasized precisely the narrative time, space, membership, and arrangement that informs this novel as well as Mandela's transitional state of being between the living and the dead.

Claire of the Sea Light, published in September of 2013, is a text that seems to be perpetually on the edge. Blending genres, voices, metaphysics and politics, it is a work that demands much of its audiences without ever exhausting them. Danticat is much celebrated and well-known for an economy of prose that somehow, paradoxically, also manages to invoke multiple layers of meanings. *Claire of the Sea Light* is no exception. Its superb narration easily occupies the transitional gulf, a fact of the text that, if you believe in the magic of books, might constitute a supernatural achievement on the part of the author.

Though it is unconventional to read Danticat as "Fantastic," to place this novel in the Fantastical moment of "hesitation" and to acknowledge the significance of Àjẹ́ in it reveals that

its narrative does its best to sustain the hesitation and create an entire identity from that set of conditions. In *Claire of the Sea Light*, Danticat's directive to "remember" alludes to the ancestors and a unity of time. The beach, and the other significant landmarks in the topography of the book suggest a unity of space, in which separation between the physical and the metaphysical does not exist. "Listening" implies a membership of reading and community in which there is a polyvocality that includes the audience, characters, author, ancestors, and deities. The wonn, which is a ring game similar to "Ring Around the Rosey" and "Brown Girl in the Ring," represents that specific kind of polyvocality, metonymizing it and the book's narrative structure in a way that can be effectively understood as grounded in the discursive practices of Ifá.

Claire of the Sea Light begins with the death of a fisherman, Caleb, who is struck down by a freak wave. From this initial plot event, Danticat establishes a proximity of life and death that calls into question any ideas of their separation. Immediately following Caleb's death, Danticat establishes that it is Claire's seventh birthday, and that Claire herself is the product of a death: her mother's. The audience also learns very quickly that the mayor of Ville Rose, the fictional Haitian city where all the action takes place, is also the town's undertaker, and that Claire's mother, also named Claire, worked for him. Her job was to dress the dead. As the narrative moves backwards in time, recalling each of Claire's birthdays, the audience also learns that other important deaths have occurred on Claire's birthdays, most notably, the death of Madame Gaëlle's daughter. Madame Gaëlle is a fabric vendor who has lost not only her daughter in a horrific traffic accident, but also her husband in a retributive political shooting that took place at the radio station where he worked. She is a family friend, and nursed Claire the night she was born, ensuring her survival following the death of her mother. These living and

dead relationships among Claire and her connections are crucial in the development of the storylines, and all of them emerge in the opening section. Nozias, Claire's father, has been trying to give Claire to Madame Gaëlle for years, so that he can leave to pursue a better life, and Claire can live a better life with Madame Gaëlle. As the book unfolds, multiple narratives emerge, with each of the main characters' voices forming an individual story that is also linked in multiple ways to Claire and to the other voices that comprise the text. The voices are united by family, friendship, working, sexual, and even abusive relationships among the characters. There is no voice that is not connected to all the other voices.

The proximity of life and death is a recurring condition in Danticat's work. It is an important part of her short story, "Nineteen Thirty Seven," and she discusses it in *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work,* as a defining condition of Haiti, both in a physical and metaphysical sense. *Create Dangerously* is an essay-memoir book in which Danticat attempts to account for her influences and creative process. She recounts the brutal executions of young men under the Duvalier regime as one of many examples of how easily life and death infuse Haiti with a distinct reality, and also compares the art and (now dead) artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Hector Hyppolite to suggest how one's cultural ghosts inform one's aesthetics. In doing this, she addresses both the physical realities of life (and death) in Haiti and the metaphysical ways that Haitians, Haitian immigrants, second, third and fourth generation Haitian immigrants, and those inspired by Haiti deal with those realities. Her attention to the sociological, political, religious, and artistic values of "real" Haiti and "imaginary" Haiti are remarkable. She concludes her comparison of Basquiat and Hyppolite with a statement on creativity that also applies to her work:

> Haiti, like Puerto Rico and the continent of Africa, we obviously both in Basquiat's consciousness and in his DNA, but they were not there by themselves. Basquiat did not belong to any fixed collective. He freely borrowed from and floated among many cultural and geographic traditions. Like many other culturally mixed, first-or second-generation Americans, his collectivity was fluid. He was symbiotic and syncretic in the same way that Hector Hyppolite's Vodou paintings were, mixing European Catholicism and African religious rites and adapting them to a world made new by the artist's vision or, in both Hyppolite's and Basquiat's case, visions. (133)

The notion of fluid collective suits Danticat's position as a Haitian immigrant in America, and it allows for articulation between the individual and collective voices that make up the narration in *Claire of the Sea Light.*

Ultimately, *Claire of the Sea Light* is not exclusively, or even primarily, Claire's story, as she is absent for most of the narrative. On the night that Madame Gaëlle finally agrees to take her, Claire disappears from the beach. Her voice does not return to the narrative until the conclusion of the book. Her return to her connections is only suggested at the closing, in which she imagines that the return would make a good wonn song. The final sentence of the book still leaves room for change: "Before becoming Madame Gaëlle's daughter, she had to go home, just one last time" (237). Though the outcome seems confirmed in Claire's mind, both Nozias and Gaëlle have experienced a rather shocking event. As they sit on the beach observing the wake for Caleb, the fisherman drowned by the freak wave, the ocean coughs up a nearly drowned Maxime Ardin, Jr. Max is the son of Claire's schoolmaster, a snobbish but powerful man in Ville Rose. Max Sr, a friend of Gaëlle, is responsible for hiring the henchmen who took retribution for the murder of Gaëlle's husband. Those men mistakenly kill Max Jr.'s lover, Ben.

Max Jr is also guilty of raping a housemaid, an offense which got him exiled to Miami for a few years, even though it was intended to impress his father. When Max Jr returns to Haiti, the former maid confronts him with his son, and then takes the child far away after exposing Max Jr.'s crime on the local radio show. Max heads to the sea for a swim, and whether this is meant to be a relaxing activity after a tough day or an attempted suicide is not made explicit in the text. Regardless of Max Jr.'s intentions, he nearly drowns. The sea, however, decides to spit him back out, alive, on the same day the Caleb perishes and Gaëlle decides to take Claire into her life.

The first time I read Danticat, I was struck, and frustrated, by a sensation similar to the one Georgine Bess Montgomery describes in *The Spirit and the Word: A Theory of Spirituality in Africana Literary Criticism.* Montgomery describes her feeling of incredulity in interpreting texts: "With my newly acquired knowledge of Ifá, I was amazed that I was interpreting these texts so differently" (2). Though none of Danticat's works are part of Montgomery's study, I experienced a similar feeling of critical alienation when researching Danticat's work and discussing it with colleagues. Despite the acknowledgement of vodou influence in Danticat's works in articles like "Ezili and the Subversion of the Holy Virgin in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory"* by Todd Martin and "In the Spirit of Erzulie: Vodou and the Reimagining of Haitian Womanhood in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*," by Maha Marouan, the popular and critical tendency has been to read her work more sociologically. This played out in her presentation at the Margaret Mitchell House, where audience responses focused on real issues in Haiti that are treated in the text. The restavek child labor system was a popular topic, as was the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. One eager reader even went so far as to say "I read your books to learn about Haiti," a declaration that Danticat graciously thanked her for, but kindly

admonished, recommending that "if you really want to know about Haiti, you really need to read a lot more than my books."

Themes involving race, class, gender, displacement, oppression, and migration in both Haiti and the United States are staples in Danticat's works. Since she so often deals with historical events, like The Parsley Massacre, the brutality of the Duvalier regime, and the "boat people" migration from Haiti to Miami, it is difficult to resist reading her books with careful attention to the history, politics, and sociology that so obviously inform them. It probably did not help that the first piece I read was the short story "Nineteen Thirty Seven," a deeply spiritual mother-daughter story that involves àjẹ́ to debunk the mystery of a crying Madonna statue. With my knowledge of Ifá, Vodou, Candomblé, Santeria, Obeah, and "Conjure," I could not help but read that story as saturated with ajé and clearly remaking the Madonna into Ezili, subsequently connecting that statue to the imprisoned and dying mother. The mother's imprisonment under an oppressive regime was secondary to me. On one level, I had entered a "concord of sensibilities" with Montgomery, who correctly declares "my understanding of Ifá provided me a significantly different and substantively more meaningful way of interpreting the symbols and ideas embedded in the texts whose meanings had until that time remained obscure" (2). On another level, though, I had to part ways with *The Spirit and the Word*, for the entire project uses Ifá as a "paradigm" which "examines ways in which the Orisa, the ancestors, colors, numbers, conjurers, conjuring, divination, initiation, ritual, magic are manifested in Caribbean and African American literary texts and demonstrates how to identify and decode signs and symbols central to Ifá located in the texts" (4). Montgomery decides not to examine any kind of rhetoric or signifyin(g) strategies, and keeps her study focused on the concrete cultural artifacts to be

located and "decoded." Montgomery also makes an Echeruo—like[37] argument for the continuity of an orally passed-down tradition, in which knowledge of African culture and the memory of the slave trade are the exclusive province of those who are genetically connected to what she calls the "deepwell" of knowledge. While continuity is an attractive idea, and does certainly exist in the creative works of Hopkinson, Danticat, and Ribeiro, my position is that the continuity is not one of secrets passed down through family connections of "real people." If there is a critical value to the Ifá system, it is not merely as an encyclopedia of " ancestors, colors, numbers, conjurers, conjuring, divination, initiation, ritual, magic." The value in the system is its rhetorical strategies, specifically its complex arrangement, ability to adapt new information, and to speak to itself.

In my analysis of *The Salt Roads* and *The New Moon's Arms*, I tried to establish a link between Hopkinson's layered narrative structures, the transitional gulf, and the sea. While those novels progress toward that association, *Claire of the Sea Light* begins there. In other words, the book opens with a content and form that establish a supernatural moment, or a collapse of boundaries between physical and metaphysical, real and unreal, space and time, as the narrative point of departure.

There are several factors in the beginning of *Claire of the Sea Light* that indicate a transitional space. The first is Claire herself. There are many details that develop her strange state of being, but most telling is the assessment of her community:

> To most people, Claire Limyè Lanmè was a revenan, a child who had entered the world just as her mother was leaving it. And if these types of children are not closely watched,

[37] See Michael J.C. Echeruo's essay "An African Diaspora: The Ontological Project" in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* Eds. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui, in which Echeruo plainly states that the right of return (in other words, to invoke Africa) is the "inalienable right" of those who have a "lineage," and that "retrospective capacity makes brothers and sisters of all who are *authorized*, or who claim the right to claim connection to the lineage."

> they can easily follow their mothers into the other world. The only way to save them is to immediately sever them from the place where they were born, even for a short while. Otherwise they will spend too much time chasing a shadow they can never reach. (16)

More than a ghost, a revenan is an interesting migration and transformation of the abiku phenomenon, so famously used to narrate the series of births and deaths of a nation in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*.[38] Like an abiku, Claire is physically positioned in the earthly realm, but is still closely connected to the metaphysical place of the ancestors, the unborn, and the gods (Soyinka 2). The death of Caleb, taking place on the first page of the book and in the sea, but within sight of the beach, also helps to evoke the transition space. Caleb's wake is also carefully constructed to place the reader and Claire there. After an extensive search for Caleb by the local fishermen, night begins to fall and they have to return to shore. It is dusk, in between night and day, and a "full and dazzling" moon rising. The fishermen "made a bonfire" and "every once in a while one of the fishermen would throw a handful of rock salt in the fire to make sparks, hoping to draw Caleb's spirit out of the sea" (28). The wake, dusk, fire, sparks, and kleren[39] make for an altered state of being. The attempt to draw Caleb's spirit almost works, but it is Maxime Ardin Jr. who emerges from the sea, not Caleb. In between the sparking of the rock salt thrown into the fire and the emergence of Max Jr. from the sea, the whole 200—plus pages of narration takes place. While the wake happens, Nozias also observes "his daughter holding hands in a circle with five other girls, spinning one another in a dizzying game called the wonn" (28). The circle and the "dizzying" aspect of the wonn game give it a special significance in these conditions. It evokes the trance-state of ritual practice in Ifá and Ifá-derived religions like

---

[38] For a discussion of the use of the Abiku metaphor in Okri's *The Famished Road*, see Bill Hemminger's essay, "The Way of the Spirit" in *Research in African Literatures.* For the sociological explanation of abiku in Yoruba society, see Fadipe's *The Sociology of the Yoruba.* Douglas McCabe's "Histories of Errancy: Oral Yoruba Àbíkú Texts and Soyinka's 'Abiku'" is also helpful in understanding the phenomenon and its use in figuration.

[39] Molasses moonshine

vodou, santeria, and candomblé. The trance is when a devotee is occupied, or "ridden" by a spirit[40], and Gros-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne were in *Brown Girl in the Ring.* This makes the beach a place of metaphysical transition, and a symbol for the transitional gulf. It is a specially infused place that unifies the earthly and the "other" realm. Soyinka likens the "other" world to the chthonic realm in *Myth, Literature and the African World,* and describes the "fourth area of existence" as the "abyss of transition" (26). The three other realms are the living (earthly), the unborn, and the ancestors. The unborn and the ancestors occupy the "other" or chthonic space, but in between are important journeys across the "abyss of transition."

The wonn game is important not only because it invokes trance, but also because its organization suggests a special kind of polyvocality. If *Claire of the Sea Light* is a polyvocal text that narrates a selected group of stories of Claire's immediate connections, even if she does not personally know the character in the story, then the wonn suggests that the four other girls playing also have an infinite number of stories connected to them. The enclosure of the wonn circle and the ability of the individual girls to move in an out of the circle, sometimes playing at the center and sometimes in the ring around the center is the container for creation for this particular grouping of stories. A ring game like wonn also gives Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* its title and forms its narrative model, with many of the chapters inscribed with lyrics to various ring games and suggesting that the movements of the games are the same as the movements of the narratives. Like *Midnight Robber, The Salt Roads, The New Moon's Arms,* and *Claire of the Sea Light, Brown Girl* also encompasses multiple narrative strands, separate plotlines eventually developed into a connected whole.

Danticat has emphasized in interviews and along the book tour that the wonn is what describes the narrative structure of *Claire of the Sea Light.* Though the complexity of narrative

[40] See Chapter IV: "Possession" in Métraux's work *Voodoo in Haiti*.

structure and the entanglement of connections between characters present a challenge, the patterns are detectable. A wonn game taking place on a beach representing the transitional gulf must bring Yemoja, the mother of fish, and orisa of the sea to mind. Yemọja's Àjẹ́ becomes apparent in her amazing dances, and five dancing girls on the beach are manifestations of both Yemọja and Àjẹ́. More importantly though, the invocation of Yemọja is a reminder of her role as a master diviner and the divination process itself, which I described in Chapter 2, using the studies and analysis of Ifá of William Bascom and Wande Abimbola.

As Claire and her friends move in an out of a magical, performative circle on the beach on the night of Caleb's wake and Maxime Jr.'s rescue from drowning in the sea, Danticat constructs an intricately connected series of narratives that examine the public and private lives of all types of Haitian characters. While those narratives unfold, Claire herself is missing, and at the closing of the book, the reader learns that Claire has made her way to the Anthère Lighthouse, another important place in the geography of Ville Rose.

The lighthouse is a place as metaphysically infused as the beach is. It sits atop the mountain that overlooks Ville Rose, and though it is "abandoned," it still acts as a site of connection between characters and the earthly realm and the metaphysical world of the ancestors and the unborn. It is like Hopkinson's CN Tower in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, which is a magnification of the sacred center tree in the *palais* (mausoleum) where Gros-Jeanne invoked the spirits in a trance that helped her protect Ti-Jeanne and Tony as they tried to escape Rudy and The Burn. As Rogan has already pointed out, the important moment of learning for Ti-Jeanne comes when she realizes that "the center pole is the bridge between worlds" (Hopkinson qtd in Rogan 92). This connection enables Ti-Jeanne to defeat Rudy, for it is the "road" on which the spirits traverse the gulf and come to her assistance. Rogan argues that this is a "moment of

translation," when Ti-Jeanne brings the mythical past of Africa to an urbanized future through a "building that once held the promise of urban economic growth and expansion" (92-3). The translation enables Ti-Jeanne and her community to morph from "victims of ruthless expansionism" to a state of "militant intervention" by way of the spirits (93). Though I make a similar point in my discussion of Ti-Jeanne's heroic role in her community, it is also appropriate to emphasize the importance of the ring game in structuring a polyvocal narrative, especially when placing *Claire of the Sea Light* in comparison to *Brown Girl.* The Anthère Lighthouse is also a "bridge between worlds." When Nozias and his wife, the elder Claire, discuss a name for their baby, they are gazing at the lighthouse, and it is described as abandoned, yet still a place of safety and refuge:

> Its stone tower was usually abandoned, but every once in a while, some young people, on a quest for adventure, would make their way to the steel door at its base, climb up the tower's winding staircase, and shine flashlights from its gallery, as if to duplicate its broken lamp. Tonight, it seemed, was one of those nights. Wiping the salt water from her face, Claire watched the flickering lights from the Anthère lighthouse, and then leaned toward Nozias..." (34)

This passage, taking place immediately following a swim in the sea, connects both Claires to the sea, and the sky by way of the binding agent of salt. The lighthouse points toward the sky and is associated with lights of various kinds, an important foreshadowing of the final chapter, "Claire de la lune," in which the younger Claire comes to be associated with a cosmic whole, changing from "sea light" to Claire of "the moon." Like the beach, the mountain and the lighthouse are important parts of all the narratives in *Claire of the Sea Light*. Danticat systematically connects it to each of the major voices, whether it is by placing the character on the mountain, near the

building, or explaining how a character's ancestors designed, built, or painted the building. It is even a place for the young Maxime Jr. to meet his friend and lover, Ben, before Max is exiled to Miami, apparently for the offense of raping a housemaid, but possibly because his father discovers he is gay.

The lighthouse eventually helps Claire to evoke mother's spirit from the sea. Claire briefly but seriously thinks about retreating higher into the mountains, a place she knows from her schooling was home to the maroons. As she contemplates a life of maroonage and how she will live with the spirits of the maroons already inhabiting the mountain, Maxime Jr. is emerging from the sea, and Claire experiences her mother's breath, for

> A warm burst of air brushed past her, rising, it seemed, at that very moment, from the sea. It reminded her of a sensation she sometimes had, of feeling another presence around her: of noticing only one branch of a tree stir while the rest remained still, of hearing the thump of invisible feet landing on the ground, of seeing an extra shadow circling while she was playing wonn. (235)

The transitional gulf is bridged in many ways in this passage. In addition to the return of Claire's mother by way of the wind and Maxime's survival thanks to an advantageous tide, Claire's contemplation of maroonage brings the past to the present. Claire's use of comparison, specifically the simile, to collapse the notion of linear time, also puts the memory of the slave trade into literary form when Claire thinks, "Like the fugitives in Madame Louise's stories—les marons—she would hide inside what was left of Mòn Initil" (233). Danticat also cleverly connects Claire's knowledge of the maroons to storytelling, an experience Claire had because of her father's emphasis on education. Madame Louise is the long time lover of Maxime Sr., the schoolmaster, and she is also the host of the radio show on which Max Jr.'s crime of raping the

housemaid is exposed. In the same way that Hopkinson connected Tan-Tan's abuse in *Midnight Robber* to the Slave Trade by using figurative language, Danticat emphasizes the conditions of plantation slavery and the sacrifices of escaping that system by allowing Claire to explore her own consideration of self-exile through the concept of maroonage, an act of thinking and language that she would not have been capable of without Madame Lousie's guest storytelling visits to Claire's school. Claire's education, though taking place in a rather conventional schoolhouse, includes the practice of oral storytelling, and Danticat takes cares to "inscribe the oral into the written" by way of Madame Louise, a personification of the "talking book" (Gates 122-32).

Escape and freedom and their various manifestations are also concerns shared by both Hopkinson and Danticat. Tan Tan's escape to the douen bush and the Dada hair lady's escape by flying into the sea are similar to the theme of migrations that Danticat deals with in *Claire of the Sea Light.* Just before Claire contemplates a condition similar to maroonage near the end of the book, Madame Gaëlle has made the second of two important pacts with herself. Both pacts are commitments to Ville Rose rather than to escape or migration. As Claire is escaping toward the lighthouse, Gaëlle is looking up at it from her home. She is on her way to the beach for Caleb's wake, and she observes the lights moving inside the lighthouse. Following this is an extended passage in which her connections to the lighthouse are described. Her grandfather had been an engineer, and he designed and helped build the lighthouse, which is so sturdy that despite years of neglect, it still stands strong. It is ugly and its main lantern is broken, but the young people who gather there have inadvertently provided light for the building with their many flashlights and small lamps. As Gaelle observes this, she is contemplating Caleb's death (and all the deaths that have affected her) and she dons a "long silver satin evening gown," one of several instances

in which she is likened to a fish, and therefore to Yemọja. As she continues her preparations for the evening, Gaëlle reflects more, thinking:

> she should fix the lighthouse. She should have it repaired and equipped with modern gadgets, a solar panel or something that would make it operate on its own. Placing her empty plate on the nightstand by her bed, she decided that she would offer a lighthouse, restored, to the town as a gift and would officially reopen it with a massive celebration. (151)

Gaëlle does not desire freedom from Ville Rose, despite all the loss she has suffered with the tragic and meaningless deaths of her husband and daughter. The lighthouse reminds her of a commitment she made to Ville Rose, and by extension, to Haiti, earlier in the book. That commitment was NOT to become "dyaspora," one of the many who have disappeared from the city and country in search of a better life elsewhere, or one of another "dyaspora" group who travel between Haiti and their adopted countries. Though Gaëlle immediately tries to forget her pact to restore the lighthouse, thinking "already she was trying to forget her vow to repair the lighthouse. How do you even choose what to mend when so much has already been destroyed? How could she think, she asked herself, that she could revive or save anything?" her activities that evening suggest that she is on a mission to move forward (151). Most importantly, she goes to the beach, approaches Claire during the wonn, and tells her about the relationship she had with her mother. This fills a gap in knowledge for Claire and bonds the two through language and memory in addition to the breastmilk Gaëlle provided on the night of Claire's birth. It is with this new knowledge of her mother that Claire ascends the mountain, contemplates maroonage, approaches the lighthouse and reinvigorates the spirits that drive her home.

Gaëlle's commitment to the lighthouse is an extension of her commitment NOT to be "dyaspora." This happens in an odd circumstance when, pregnant with her daughter, a younger Gaëlle becomes obsessed with dying frogs. As Gaëlle's daughter grows inside her, deteriorating environmental conditions caused by overfarming and land development set off a mass extinction of frogs. Gaëlle associates the deaths of the frogs with a possible threat to her unborn baby. A sonogram, which Gaëlle did not want to do, mistakenly shows that the baby has cyst growing in her chest and spine. The baby is not expected to live until birth, and if it does, Gaëlle's doctors expect it to die soon after. Gaëlle carries the baby to term anyway, and in a scene that parallels the decision between Claire's mother and Nozias about Claire's "sea light" name, Gaëlle has a similar conversation with her husband. She wants the baby to be named Rose, after her ancestor, Sò Rose, who

> was the free colored woman, the wealthy affranchie, who'd founded the town after Pauline Bonaparte had left. Sò Rose herself had been named by her slave mother and French father after Saint Rose de Lima, the patroness of the southern region. Gaëlle wanted to tell her husband that, whether their child was dead or alive, maimed or perfect, she would always love her. She loved that this child would connect them through time and that she would be born during their very first year of marriage. (54-5)

Like Claire, Gaëlle's daughter Rose, who does not have a cyst after all, and is born perfectly healthy, is connected to slavery in Haiti. Gaëlle emphasizes the significance of the name to Laurent, her husband, when he complains that Rose is a "common" name, insisting, "A saint, a heroine, and a town. There's no shame in a name like that" (55). Gaëlle is haunted by fears of death during her pregnancy. She fears not only the death of the child, but also her own death and Laurent's. The day following the sonogram and the naming of the child, Gaëlle takes another

one of her many walks outside to observe the frogs. She acknowledges her unconventional obsession with them, because "she vowed that each morning's brief hunt would be her last" yet "she couldn't stop, so much had she convinced herself that the frogs needed her and she them" (43). On this particular day, Gaëlle finds a dead frog and spontaneously decides to swallow it:

> Without thinking, she wiped a warm mist from her face and stuffed the koki into her mouth. The frog stank of mold and decay and was slippery as it landed on her tongue. And though the koki was dead, she imagined it struggling as she pushed back her head and allowed it to reach her throat. (58-9)

Gaëlle's consumption of the frog shares an overwhelming similarity to Tan Tan's consumption of the frog in the Daddy-Tree of the douen when they help her escape retributive justice after she murders her father in self defense. Tan Tan must swallow the frog as a show of respect to the douen who are sheltering her, for the frog is a delicacy, and her consuming it demonstrates that she now knows and will keep douen secrets. When Tan Tan swallows the frog she is reminded of the tastes of her father and the abuse she suffered from him, and I as argued in the previous chapter, that abuse is connected to the trauma of Atlantic Slave Trade by way of the dimension veils and metaphors of containment. Gaëlle has already connected her daughter to slavery by way of her name, and her consumption of the frog has immediate consequences, "here they were, she thought, drawing the thought out in her mind. Two types of animals were now inside of her, in peril: her daughter, Rose, and now this frog. Let them fight it out and see who will win" (59). Gaëlle's pact with her baby and the frog binds her to Ville Rose in a way she does not think through until the closing action of the book. In this moment, Gaëlle gains some strength from the frog, and she is able to eat better that day than she had in weeks prior to her swallowing the frog. Since her daughter is born the next day, and she is healthy, it would seem that the frog

invigorated Rose and that she won the battle. However, on the same day that Rose is born, her father dies. This makes Rose a different type of revenant. Instead of losing her mother in childbirth in the conventional way of revenant, Rose loses her father. Rose herself only lives for eight years, until she is killed in the traffic accident, perhaps following her father across the transitional gulf into the realm of the ancestors in the way that revenant children sometimes do.

Just as Gaëlle's consumption of the frog begins a battle between her unborn daughter's spirit and the frog's spirit, it also inaugurates a battle in Gaëlle's mind. She often considers running away, just as Claire's father does, to make a better life, or, as the characters in the book often say, "Pou chèche lavi, to look for a better life" (7). Gaëlle finally and completely decides that she cannot be "dyaspora" on the night of Caleb's wake, her acceptance of Claire, and Claire's disappearance and return. She thinks of all the difficulties of migration and return, and thinks,

> Non, none of that was for her. Her ancestors on both sides were buried at the town cemetery, among the town's oldest families. She could not be dyaspora. She liked her ghosts nearby. She could never live in a foreign land, then return only a few times a year. She could not risk dying and being buried in a cold place. She would always be here, she thought, like the boulder that stopped her feet when at last she reached the little girls. (159-60)

Gaëlle's commitment to stay, not to be "dyaspora," finally in the form of an utterance, even if only in Gaëlle's mind, puts her in contrast with Max Sr. As the only two characters who truly possess the financial means to migrate, they are on opposite sides of a commitment to Ville Rose. While Gaëlle eventually commits to nurturing the living in the same that Gros-Jeanne does in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Max Sr. has a more mercenary approach. He is content to pilfer

what few resources his neighbors have in the form of expensive school fees and dubious connections to organized crime, and controls his son's life with forced migrations between Miami and Haiti. While Gaëlle seeks to enrich the community, including the ancestors, Max Sr. seems capable only of exploiting it for his own glorification. Gaëlle's pacts with herself, Ville Rose, the environment, and the cosmos lead her to Claire that night, when she finally speaks to her about the friendship she enjoyed with her mother. As she approaches the girls on the beach, she thinks,

> It would have sounded odd—people have been accused of sorcery for less—if she told someone how much she wanted to take all those little girls home, set them up in the many empty rooms in her house, and, whenever she was sad, ask them to play with her. There were many days when she wanted to grab a little girl and hold her in her arms, just to inhale her smell. (158)

Gaëlle's experiences and decisions prove to be the center pole of the narrative, and her experiences, activities, and decisions are the activating force (Àjé) on the beach and in the gulf. Because Gaëlle invigorates the gulf, the gaps between the ancestors, the unborn, and the living become smaller, if only temporarily. This drives Claire away from the beach, but up the mountain toward the lighthouse, where her thoughts, molded by the intricate connections of communities across time and space also bring the metaphysical to bear in the form of her mother's breath on the sea wind, and Max Jr.'s near drowned body from the sea.

The proximity of the living and the dead in *Claire of the Sea Light* establishes more than just a statement of physical reality in Haiti. While the history and contemporary social conditions of Haiti make this a valid way to read and interpret Danticat's intentions, her complexly woven narrative demands a analytical tool that matches its intricate rhetorical

maneuvers. I have suggested that the beach and the lighthouse are symbols of the transitional gulf, and that the narration emerges from that state or realm. While Wole Soyinka and Benedict Ibitokun analyze the traverse of the gulf under the archetype of Ògún and the rhetorical strategies of Ijala, the funeral dirges of Yoruba hunters, and "the supreme lyrical form of Yoruba poetic art," in *Myth, Literature and the African World* and *African Drama and the Yoruba World View*, respectively, I believe that Theresa Washington would apply the paradigm of Àjẹ́, and specifically the orisa Ọya. Both Soyinka and Ibitokun endeavor to describe the fourth plane or realm of existence, and both of their descriptions are useful. Soyinka, whom I quoted in the previous chapter, explains

> the numinous temper of the fourth area of existence which we have labeled the abyss of transition. Commonly recognized in most African metaphysics are the three worlds we have already discussed: the world of the ancestor, the living and the unborn. Less understood or explored is the fourth space, the dark continuum of transition where occurs the inter-transmutation of essense-ideal and materiality. It houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will. (26)

Ibitokun, writing after Soyinka and very much in response to him, also offers an explanation. Ibitokun however, brings the realms closer to one another by explaining how the living interact with the gods and the ancestors:

> the fourth plane of existence is 'the natural home of the unseen deities.' In a terrestrial-based culture like the Yoruba, gods and mortals freely interact. The former have to sustain their divinity by humanizing with the latter. Yoruba religion does not admit of the culture of 'remoteness' whereby the gods sit supine in their celestial abodes and find it degrading to move nearer to the living. Should they do so, they will starve and lose

> their divine essence. The existence of deities, at least in human terms, depends on their being worshipped by mortals. They do not worship themselves; the living worship them. Though a Yoruba holds them in awe, he nevertheless jeers at their dependence on him. Proverbially he vaunts his human superiority over the divine, Bí ò sénìyàn ìmàlé ò sí (if humanity were not, the gods would not be) (22)

Ibitokun later calls more specific attention to Soyinka's emphasis on the "difference between the real and the symbolic" to show that the way the living articulate the gulf is symbolically. Ibitokun quotes two important phrases in Soyinka to underscore the importance of figuration and rhetoric, arguing that in his "treatment of Ògún as the first wayfarer of the 'transitional gulf', Soyinka makes it clear that the human protagonist, the god-surrogate or the votary cannot but engage in '... uttering visions *symbolic* of the transitional gulf', or '... indulge in *symbolic* transaction to recover his totality of being'" (23). Ultimately, Ibitokun concludes that "the gulf referred to by Soyinka can only be bridged imaginatively" and that "the symbolic (imaginative) bridging, therefore, guarantees the constant restoration and re-creation of being (23). Ibitokun's intentions are to interrogate why, in a "cosmic totality" in which people live "contemporaneously in all four areas of existence" there is still a preoccupation and unease with death in African drama (23-5). Soyinka and Ibitokun's use of the Ògún model, which naturally privileges a male perspective, creates an unbalance in the critical canon. Both critics ground their argument for the primacy of Ògún in the fact that he was the first and only one to traverse the gulf. Interestingly, they both also betray that privileging of Ògún when they describe, mythologically, the source of his ability to make the trip. Ibitokun writes, "From the earthwomb, Ògún sighted and dug an iron ore which he later forged into a cutlass and, at the head of the other deities, used this artefact to cut a path and throw up a bridge of transition and fraternization between men and deities"

(23). Soyinka, relying on the same myth, writes, "Armed with the first technical instrument which he had forged from the ore of mountain-wombs, he cleared the primordial jungle, plunged through the abyss and called on the others to follow" (29).

The source of the Ògúnian cutlass is of course, the womb of Àjẹ́. It is only with the power and partnership of the womb of origins that Ògún is empowered to make his journey, and while Soyinka describes the cutlass and Ògún's mythological adventures as the key piece of technology that established Ògún as the paradigm of "dissolution and re-integration," Ògún would not have the power to destroy and create without the activating and sustaining forces of ajé. Neither Soyinka or Ibitokun mentions that later in the mythology of Ògún, he is married to Ọya, for whom he makes an identical staff of disintegration at her request. Ọya is calculating, and she takes the staff with her when she leaves Ògún for a new husband, Ṣàngó. This is where Washington picks up the myth to explain Ọya's embodiment of the idea of transformation. The ex-spouses battle each other, and both are disintegrated into multiple pieces (Ògún into seven pieces, and Ọya into nine). Neither one wins the battle; rather, each is disintegrated and reintegrated in a transformative experience. When they are resurrected from their multiple pieces, the number of pieces becomes the number of "roads" of worship, prescribing diversity and multiplicity for their devotees in accessing them (Washington 48-50). Washington also emphasizes the importance of narration in the transformative process. The power of narration to bring about transformation is the province of Ọya because of her role in Ṣàngó's apotheosis. When Ṣàngó hangs himself from an iroko tree in shame and disgrace, it is Ọya's storytelling and insisting that "the king did not hang," that effectively re-integrates his dis-integrated body and spirit into a single narrative of apotheosis. Ọya's powers to affect narration are grounded in the relationship between ọ̀rọ̀ and Àjẹ́, the "word" and the force that gives the word meaning.

Yoruba playwright and critic Femi Osofisan was onto something in *Playing Dangerously: Drama at the Frontier of Terror in a 'Postcolonial' State,* in which he explains that "in response to Soyinka's Ògún model ... I have substituted the *Opon Ifa* paradigm, in which you have a dialectical fusion of the Èṣù-Ọ̀rúnmìlà principles" (616). The Opon-Ifa is the Yoruba divination tray, and all the paraphernalia and activity that accompanies the activity of divination[41]. Osofisan, like Abimbola and Bascomb, emphasizes the total act of divination and the participatory role played by the client as well as the diviner. Osofisan explains, "Ọ̀rúnmìlà is the winnowing spirit which distills wisdom from chaos, prophecy from uncertainty, harmony from disjunction. Allied with Èṣù, the relationship leads dialectically to the doors of knowledge, justice, and compassion, the three principles exactly which my plays promote" (616). In substituting the Opon-Ifa process for the Ògún model, Osofisan makes room for the possibility of Àjẹ́. Because he describes Ọ̀rúnmìlà as the "winnowing spirit," the door is open for a female aspect of that spirit. Yemọja, master diviner thanks to Ọ̀rúnmìlà's instruction during their marriage, presides over this particular possibility. The partnership with Èṣù is also important in the divination process. In addition to holding a prominent place on divination trays, Èṣù is, according to Osofisan, representative of "the principle of free choice and of revolution - the god who, with his prominent phallus, promiscuously incarnates the place of doubt and disjunction, but also of justice and accommodation" (616). It is the Èṣù principle that allows Osofisan to freely borrow from the "multiple matrix of a tradition inherited from western, Asian, and indigenous African sources" in way similar to what Danticat describes in her comparison of Basquiat and Hyppolite, in which floating and freely borrowing were important creative modes.

[41] For an excellent description of divination trays and their aesthetics, see Rowland Abiodun's "Understanding Yoruba Art and Aesthetics: The Concept of Ase"

Of course Èṣù's "prominent phallus" figures prominently in the Anthère lighthouse, both in name and in its phallic image. More importantly, though, the text establishes that the mountain and the lighthouse are places of negotiation between living and the ancestors and the sea and the sky. When Gaëlle and Claire are closely connected to the lighthouse, it penetrates the other realms and has the ability, through that contact, to reinvigorate, or create, new life.

In her review of *Claire of the Sea Light*, Deborah Sontag describes Gaëlle's story thread as "Fantastical." Gaëlle's decision to swallow the frog informs this description of the book, and Sontag suggests that the appeal of the text is its ability to speak to the specific and the universal through Gaëlle and Ville Rose in general. Though Sontag cannot, of course, in the short space of a review, analyze all the Fantastical elements of the book, she does correctly characterize Gaëlle as the most spiritually empowered individual. She writes that "over time, such Fantastical particulars serve to enrich her image as a woman assailed by love, loss, and loneliness." While this is true, a sustained analysis can show that Gaëlle also transforms that state into a more hopeful direction, choosing to take Claire, and silencing some of the ghosts of her past during that decision making process.

All of this talk about intricate narrative structure and topography in this book is an effort to show that its "storystreams," to use Nalo Hopkinson's term for connected narrative strands, emerge from transitional gulfs. Even reviews that offer commonplace interpretation of *Claire of the Sea Light*, like calling it a "story of love and loss in Haiti," are forced to acknowledge that many "lives teeter on the brink" and that Danticat is a virtuoso at "mining the verge" of that brink (Shamsie n.p.) While Kamila Shamsie offers the "emotional and dramatic possibilities" as the seductive quality of the work, it seems that its literary merit resides elsewhere.

To read this book from the perspective of what I have called the Ifántastic, a providential reading of Todorov is required. In *Myth, Literature and the African World,* Soyinka demonstrates no affiliation to Western concepts of psychology and "fantasy." He takes apart George Thomson's *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama* to make the distinction between an individual's psychological, mythic, "inner world," and the inner, or "fantasy" world of a community. The community's inner world, for Soyinka, is "both the psychic sub-structure and temporal subsidence, the cumulative history and empirical observations of the community" (35). Soyinka deplores the term "fantasy," writing that

> the definition of this inner world as 'fantasy' betrays a Eurocentric conditioning or alienation...the communicant effect on the audience which is the choric vessel and earthing mechanism for the venturer is not a regression into 'the subconscious world of fantasy'...fantasy is individual and incommunicable - at least, not until after the event, and only by graphic or verbal means. To describe a *collective* inner world as fantasy is not intelligible. (33-4)

Soyinka also eschews a Jungian definition of archetype in favor of his own. Criticizing Jung's archetype's as decontextualized, Soyinka also points out an important inconsistency in Jung's argument: the differentiation between the primitive and civilized minds' treatment of the archetype at the same time "he pays lip-service to the universality of a collective unconscious" (35). Soyinka's archetype is highly contextualized and dynamic, changing over time and actively participating in a complex process of "mythopoeia" (34-6). The complexity of the process involves the possibilities for multiple modes of archetypal production and transmission. Ritual, music, language and literatures, performance, sculpture, and dance, are all part of Soyinka's archetype and his definition of tragedy. His rejection of fantasy, based on Western

attitudes of racism, is based solely on a psychological definition. That definition relies heavily on Western concepts of the human mind from Freud and Jung, and Soyinka is wise to point out how this works against the creation of useful approaches to analyzing African Literature and Drama. Todorov's "Fantastic" is different than Thomson's "fantasy," at least as Soyinka has understood it. Todorov's Fantastic, while also invoking Freud, is ultimately a rhetoric which can be applied piecemeal, if necessary, giving primacy to the elements of a working text, the verbal, syntactic, and semantic. By emphasizing the formal elements of language and literature, Todorov has made it possible to excise the Freudian emphasis on schematizing the "inner world" of the Western individual from his conception of the Fantastic. Psychoanalysis then becomes a culturally specific way of apprehending the Fantastic which can be replaced with another, different culturally specific way of understanding the genre/mode.

One of the problems with Todorov's definition of the Fantastic rests in its core element: hesitation. Todorov requires moments of hesitation that require either-or reasoning. The reader or character must choose between the real or the unreal - a distinction that is not always present in an African or diaspora cultural context.

Claire of the Sea Light is an ideal text for exploring and explaining one way this can work. In revising Todorov and placing Danticat's narrative in the transitional gulf, I again invoke Èṣù, in the same sense Gates defines him:

> If Ifa, then, is our metaphor for the text itself, then Esu is our metaphor for the uncertainties of explication, for the open-endedness of every literary text. Whereas Ifa represents closure, Esu rules the process of disclosure, a process that is never-ending, that is dominated by multiplicity. Esu is discourse upon a text; it is the process of interpretation that he rules. (21)

Reading *Claire of the Sea Light* with both Ifá and the Fantastic in mind demands revision of the Fantastic. If the text is taken as analogous to the opon-ifa, or divination tray, its patterns are more easily detectable. The possibilities for exponential multiplication of stories and connections suggested by the girls' movements in and out of the wonn circle, for example. If the narrative does emerge from the transitional gulf as I have suggested, then it seems that Danticat has effectively expanded Todorov's "hesitation," collapsing the boundary between real and unreal, and sustaining the moment of hesitation for nearly the entire length of the text. The either/or choice between real and unreal becomes irrelevant in both Hopkinson and Danticat, for the distinction ultimately doesn't exist; rather, there are "realms" for the living, the ancestors, and the unborn. Though the realms are different by nature, they exist simultaneously.

To apply Todorov's prescriptions for the verbal, syntactic, and semantic aspects of a text also requires some revision. Because of the contemporaneous existence of living, ancestors, and unborn, the division between real and unreal that would be marked with imperfect tense and modal verbs is not as important in Danticat and Hopkinson as it was among Todorov's objects of study. The transitional gulfs between those existences are marked differently. Shared images, gods, and ritual practice demonstrate characters' interactions with the physical and metaphysical realms. In the verbal category, the texts that I am arguing are Ifántastic require attention to polysemy. As Yai points out in "In Praise of Metonymy," polysemy is a primary mode of understanding in Yoruba worldview, and it is also a verbal technique invoked by the authors under study here. The point of view, also discussed in the category of the verbal, obviously emerges from a marginalized perspective. In this case, women in and of the African diaspora. Polyvocality is of utmost importance in the syntactic category. This has more to do with the structures of Ifá than with the formal definitions of Fantastic, but the relations among the logical,

temporal, and spatial "truths" of a text that Todorov insists upon as making up the working gears of a text, are also articulated in the Ifá corpus. Significantly, the authors under study here apply a tight narrative organizing principle of family to control the possibilities for polyvocality. The family structure, while not conventional in a Western sense, for it includes extended family and adopted family, does provide a culturally specific method for containing the number and quality of voices that inform a text. The works of Hopkinson and Danticat, and as I hope to show in the following chapter, Ribeiro, demonstrate a more restrictive container for polyvocality than does a text like Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*, for example. The semantic category still articulates themes, in much the same way that Todorov suggests. In the works of the authors under study here, however, there is a more pronounced metafictional quality than in the objects of Todorov's study. Gates' definition of formal revision within the culturally specific literary tradition seems to have had a significant influence on these contemporary writers. However, these writers also, like Danticat identified with Basquiat, float freely among cultural traditions for sources of creative inspiration. In the works under study, though, the diversity of cultural influences is ultimately integrated and unified under the container of Ifá. Themes of the self and the other dominate these works as well, though not in the sexually oriented and phallocentric way Todorov identified. The self and the other are understood and articulated under the commonly identified categories of race, class, and gender. The complicating factor in these texts, however, is that they do not merely "write back"[42] to empire or dominant culture. Both Hopkinson and Danticat interrogate new and inherited forms of knowledge and being. Rather than taking overtly political positions, each author engages in transformations and interrogations

[42] I am referring here to the concept of Post Colonialism explored in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* and *The Empire Writes Back* both edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin.

that are primarily literary. The intended effect of those transformations may be political or social, but the work takes place within the texts.

In *Claire of the Sea Light*, the astute reader recognizes a multi-layered and dimensional process of dis and re-integration. That works across multiple contexts, including rhetorical strategies, the treatment of individual and the collective, the past, present, and future, family relations, physical and metaphysical concepts, and real-world social problems plaguing "real" Haiti, like the restavek system. By invoking and using the supernatural as integral part of her text, Danticat tends to the literary more than the social or political. This makes sense given her immigrant status and residence in the United States. When *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was released, Haitians criticized her and the work for not representing "true" Haiti, and since that experience, Danticat has been careful to draw the distinctions between the real and the imaginary, a fact that she readily states, as she did several times during her visit to the Margaret Mitchell House, and that audiences can still be blind to.

Becoming more literary and less political has also been the goal of a group of Afro-Brazilian writers known as the Quilombhoje. In *Writing Identity: The Politics of Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literature*, Emanuelle Oliveira traces the origins and history of this group and the challenges of writing black identity into a Brazilian canon beset with what she calls "the racial identity quagmire." The attempt to write a black Brazilian identity in Brazil differs in subtle ways from other locations of the diaspora. The works of Esmeralda Ribeiro, two of which I will take up in the following chapter, are an important part of the Afro-Brazilian literary tradition, but as I argue, also articulate with a more transnational, or Atlantic continuum of female writers who engage Fantastic modes and the Ifá corpus.

CHAPTER 6

READING IN YORUBA: THE IFANTASTIC AT WORK IN ESMERALDA RIBEIRO'S SHORT STORIES

"Negro poeta, negra escritora? Mestre de capoeira, vá lá, mas mestre de letras? Literatura é arte séria, para gente branca e instruída, com tempo disponível, argumenta-se. Não é proeza para ser improvisada por trabalhador pobre, ainda mais de cor negra."

In 2001, Niyi Afolabi's "Beyond the Curtains: Unveiling Afro-Brazilian Women Writers" introduced an international audience of Africana scholars to the fervent movement in Afro Brazilian writing that calls for a new way of seeing Brazil's racial past and present. This movement, particularly among Afro Brazilian[43] women, has been facilitated, directly and indirectly, by a group of professional writers called the Quilombhoje, the most recent and successful attempt at a professional, collective gathering of Afro-Brazilian writers and intellectuals aiming to be part of a larger "black movement" in Brazil. According to Emmanuelle Oliveira's 2008 study of the Quilombhoje, the goal of this group is "constructing collective identities to allow marginalized groups to resist cultural and political domination" and more specifically, to reverse a history of "dominant ideologies that excluded the production of positive reference related to blacks" (4-5). Oliveira's study is a significant contribution to the influence of "blackness" and "Africa" in the Brazilian canon, and an important insider's look into the establishment, development, and professionalization of the Quilombhoje. In 2005, the

[43] Anani Dzidzienyo has documented the preference amongst Afro Brazilian "political and social activitsts" for the term Afro-descendente, which denotes, in this context, both political activity and the genetic relationships that Echuero and Sterling insist upon. See "Abdias do Nascimento as Metaphor" in *The Afro-Brazilian Mond: Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literary and Cultural Criticism.*

publication of *Mulheres Escrevendo*, or in English: *Women Righting* gave international access and readability to Afro-Brazilian women authors who participate regularly in the creative activities of the Quilombhoje, and also introduced some writers who are not regularly part of that project. The collection of eight short stories is a follow-up project to *Enfim Nós* (*Finally Us*) a collection of poetry published in 1995, and takes the next steps in liberating and recovering identity from a literary history in which, "dating from the era of slavery, the Afro-Brazilian woman has been portrayed as a slave, domestic servant, black mammy, and at best, a 'mulatta,' a sexual object whose function is to satisfy the perverse pleasures of the master without any hesitation" (Afolabi 117). The first story in this bilingual collection, is Esmeralda Ribeiro's "A procura de uma borboleta preta," or, "In Search of a Black Butterfly," a story which fulfills Afolabi's assertion that the Afro Brazilian woman, who is often "fulfilling the roles of mother, lover, provider, spokesperson, encourager, nourisher, …becomes fragmented in an effort to assert her individuality in the midst of social conventions and racial stereotypes" (117). Those social conventions and racial stereotypes had, for several decades, prevented any significant recognition, much less financial compensation for Afro-Brazilian writers. To create under those circumstances required an extraordinary level of commitment, and perhaps even missionary-style sacrifice on the part of women on the margins and, as Afolabi suggests, already fragmented by the circumstance of their very existence.

Oliveira's study, especially Chapter Five on "Quilombhoje Women's Writings: The Politics of Race and Gender," does an admirable job of analyzing both "A procura de uma borboleta preta" and "Guarde Segredo." Oliveira notes the Fantastical elements of each story and even references Todorov (195-206). Since that work is already completed, it is not necessary to summarize it here. Oliveira concludes that Fantastical elements are used in both

stories to articulate subjectivities; the black butterfly is "a metaphor of Leila's sexual freedom, her *jouissance*, or orgasmic pleasure" and that the supression of the narrator's name in "Guarde Segredo" is the unconscious "rejection of society's whitening process," which is of course carried out in biological, miscegenized reproduction (203 and 200). While these statements are quite correct and crucial to the development of the authentic black female subjectivity that the Quilombhoje and Afro-Brazilian critics desire, Oliveira intentionally limits their significance to the national context of Brazil. I would like to argue that Ribeiro's works articulate just as well in an international, or Atlantic context, especially when their analysis is set in the context of the structure of Ifá and compared with writers like Hopkinson and Danticat. Ribeiro's use of the Ifá paradigm is obvious in her poetry, in which she often names specific orixa and ritual practices and artifacts. It is less apparent in her short stories, in which the influence of Ifá is often embedded in rhetorical strategies and coded references to the accoutrements specific to the orixas. In maintaining the trope of the womb as metaphor for creation[44], Riberio can clearly be placed alongside Hopkinson and Danticat, who also emphasize the importance of the "womb of origins" of Àjẹ́ (Washington 26). In revising that trope to articulate Afro-Brazilian female subjectivity, Ribeiro signifies on the Ifá corpus and on Gates' theory of tropological revision and intertextuality as the defining features of canon formation in the African American literary tradition.

"Borboleta preta" demonstrates fragmentation by way of a complex narrative voice. The story is told almost exclusively in dialogue by three separate narrators, effectively enfolding a polyvocal, oral utterance into the written in a "speakerly text" way. The search for the butterfly

[44] Ribeiro's use of images of the womb has been well-noted by Cheryl Sterling, who analyzes Ribeiro's "experiments in language and structure" in poetic form, where the shape of the poem on the page is "like an inverted triangle, a figural pubis on the page" (58). See "Blackness Re-visited and Re-visioned" in *The Afro-Brazilian Mind: Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literary and Cultural Criticism* Eds. Afolabi, Barbosa, and Ribeiro.

is undertaken by all three narrators, and it is the primary concern of the story. The story also addresses "the metaphor of the 'absent protagonist'" expressed in Afolabi's article in that the "Search" becomes a literary one by way of the mystical butterflies, who ultimately are the still fleeting and unrealized authentic subjectivities for which Afro Brazilian women writers search. This search though, can also be understood through a Yoruba World view, and a reading conducted through a Yoruba religious and historical framework, reveals the complex forces of Àjẹ́ and the "winnowed" force of Xangô, Yoruba God of fire, thunder, lightning, and justice.

Xangô's unique place in the Yoruba pantheon makes him the guiding force behind this story as well the entire collection in *Mulheres Escrevendo*. Xangô's justice is not always blind or democratic, and he also is a fragmented figure, having a history as mortal and orixa, and manifesting a complex articulation of gender and social relations in his worship, but in Ribeiro's story, the complex and paradoxical forces associated with Xangô are community-forming and revolutionary.

The story itself covers fewer than ten pages, and the narrative is constructed in the form of a recounted telephone conversation. An operator at a crisis center overhears the pleas made by Leila to Baby, asking her to help find her black butterfly. The operator then relates the story, secretly, to the reading audience. The depth of the friendship between Leila and Baby is somewhat uncertain, as Baby tells Leila "Friend? I've never known that much about your life" (29). Leila's pleas are the result of the loss of her black butterfly, who is described as the child Leila is carrying: "When I went to the doctor …found out I was carrying a butterfly inside of me. I've never told anyone although I was happy. It would be a beautiful butterfly like the boys" (29). Following the conversation, the operator and the reader learn that the butterfly was lost one night in a violent confrontation between Leila and her neighbors. After Leila was seen by a

neighbor's child while she was riding a Ferris wheel with her French ancestry, soldier lover, the community suddenly appears and both she and her lover are violently attacked. The neighbor boy is the child of a man who had threatened Leila previously. He does not like that she has a "foreign" lover and promises other neighbors to "find a way to fuck {her}" (35). When Leila comes down from the Ferris Wheel after the child has revealed her presence in a public place with a soldier with French ancestry lover, the community begins to attack Leila and Jean, throwing rocks at the couple. Leila manages to escape, but is taken to the hospital with blood running down her legs. She is told by a doctor that her butterfly had miscarried, and he did not know where it went. Eventually the "operator" loses the connection and is no longer able to hear the conversation between Baby and Leila. Part of the operator's daily routine is to go to the amusement park every morning, following her night shift at the crisis center, but in the closing scene of the story, she tells her readers: "I've slept poorly since that day. That conversation, I don't know, moved me" (39). Her experience in the park in the mornings is forever changed by the conversation because she observes: "how many girl-butterflies there are sleeping on the rocks" and she wonders: "what kind of future they will have when they become women" (39).

The Ferris Wheel that Leila rides with Jean, where they become a bit too publicly intimate and aroused for the tolerance-level of the public, signifies Àjẹ́. In addition to rising from the ground to the sky, effectively connecting the realm of the living with the sky in the same way the mountain and lighthouse do in *Claire of the Sea Light*, it creates an image of the sixteen roads of Àjẹ́, a structural and metaphorical device for the possibilities of textual and biological reproductions. Figure 1 in Chapter 2, a reproduction of Washington's illustration of the interrelated domains of Àjẹ́, looks much like Leila's Ferris Wheel might look. The Ferris Wheel does more than announce Àjẹ́, however. It connects the realms of the living and the

ancestors and the unborn in a way similar to Soyinka and Ibitokun's transitional gulfs, which I elaborated in the previous chapter. Leila is not going to die, but the scene on the Ferris Wheel activates the hatred and intolerance of Leila's community, and this incites the violence which ultimately aborts her "black butterfly" baby. Leila's pregnancy and miscarriage are interesting use of the idea of the transitional gulf, placing the female body in the gulf without making it embark on the journey to the ancestors. As I tried to argue in the previous chapter, the sustained and now unconventional occupation of the transitional gulf expands the idea of Todorov's "hesitation" and adds another choice to the either-or formulation of real and unreal required for the Fantastic.

The centrality of the womb of origins is obvious in the plot of the story. The theme articulates from the integration taking place in Leila's womb, and the subsequent disintegration that happens during the miscarriage. Re-integration comes about when the gossip-y, eavesdropping narrator takes her daily trip to the park and "reads" the presence of black butterflies resting on a rock face in an entirely new way. As both Afolabi and Oliveira point out, the many young butterflies on the rock represent the future subjectivities of black female characters in Brazilian literature. Because the social and political context of those subjectivities is not yet conducive to their positive construction, Ribeiro leaves them in a kind of Fantastic "limbo," ready and waiting to come into existence, but frustrated by the particulars that limit that existence. At the same time, Ribeiro "uses Fantastic elements to establish a new and marginal order, which emphasizes a different kind of rationale: the female experience. An alternative female knowledge, more connected to creation and procreation, is the focus of Ribeiro's short stories" (Oliveira 195). Recognizing Àjẹ́ and the influence of Ifá in the construction and

articulation of the Fantastical elements can foster a more comprehensive reading and interpretation of these short stories.

The sixteen roads of Àjẹ́ and Ribeiro's Ferris wheel open avenues for creation and interpretation. The particulars of the narration, meaning the fragmented point of view, polyvocal narrative, and the "spoken" nature of the written text point toward another Atlantic quality in the narrative. In choosing to place a contemporary, oral mode of storytelling and transmission into the text, Ribeiro creates and modifies what Henry Louis Gates might call the "speakerly text" (xxv-xxvi). "Borboleta preta" falls short of the free indirect discourse that Gates praises in Hurston's work. However, Ribeiro's choice to write what is by definition an oral utterance is obviously an effort to contain the oral in the written, the first requirement of the "speakerly." While the African American tradition celebrates the use of the vernacular as the sign of both orality and difference, the speakerly in Ribeiro's short story takes the form of what a contemporary reader easily recognizes as an oral mode: talking on the telephone. Oliveira spends a good portion of her study documenting the move of the Quilombhoje and Riberio particularly toward more formal, aesthetic considerations in their creative works. This move is intentional, meant to lessen what was perceived as the threatening tones of the more politically motivated, revolutionary works that marked the earlier years of black movements in Brazil (101-131). Oliveira documents the reinterpretation of the modernist and concretismo movements in Brazil that are made by members of the Quilmbhoje, but it seems that Ribeiro may also be aware of a wider practice of diaspora happening in the United States and the Caribbean. Invoking the structures and tools of Ifá becomes a path toward the liberation through the acquisition of cultural capital, but the cultural capital is not exclusively Brazilian[45]. In fact, the aborted baby,

[45] Oliveira also documents the ways in which the writers of the Quilombhoje have attempted to gain access to cultural capital. See Chapter Three: Quilombhoje Authors and the Brazilian Canon.

which would have been another mulatta, is killed off by Ribeiro, denying the community another woman to prey upon. Oliveira's argument about the construction of black female subjectivities in Brazil rests upon a situation in which "identity emerges when symbolic and social orders articulate to form the subject" (6). I would suggest that the social order Ribeiro perceives is not ready for a black female subjectivity, and that her invocation of Ifá principles is an effort to "work the spirit" of the symbolic order in such a way as to impose change upon the social order.

One way to change the social order is to articulate a different set of figurations and values than the dominant culture. This is precisely what the combination of the Fantastic elements and the use of Ifá can do for Ribeiro. The dream-state is one of the aspects of the Fantastic that Oliveira does not emphasize in her analysis, but there are a few clues in "Borboleta preta" that may indicate that Leila was dreaming this episode. The time of the phone call is 11pm. Baby is about to take a shower and wait for Tiago to return home. Her alarm clock is playing music, and she comments on the need to turn it off: "Wait a minute, Leila, I have to turn off my radio-alarm clock. It must be broken since it only works with music" (35). All three women seem to be on the night-shift, since at 11pm, Baby's alarm clock has just sounded and the night-operator has just begun her work. Leila's general disorientation and rapid narration of events throughout the story reads like she is trying to recount a dream that was so vivid she must share it with someone else in order to bring herself back to reality, and when she tells the story, the sudden appearance of the entire stone-throwing neighborhood at the amusement park also indicates a dream-like quality: "I closed my eyes. When I opened them, the park had been taken over by my neighbors" (33). A dream asks for interpretation. What conditions of society determine Leila's dream? What events contribute to the subconscious formation of the symbols at work in the dream and

the narrative? What is the nature of the fear expressed in the dream and what does it mean to have that fear overheard, hijacked, and relocated into storytelling by another narrative voice?

Yoruba philosophy and oral tradition can construct a useful methodology through which to explore these questions. The winnowing spirit contained in the divination process of Ifá and the interpretive role of the diviner offer an interesting way to approach Leila's dream and the collection of figuration and rhetorical strategies that emerge from it. As I suggested earlier, the loss of the "baby" and the delayed realization of authentic black female identity represented in the butterflies resting on the rock in the conclusion of the story can be read as an enactment of literary justice under a rubric of the orixa Xangô.

Xangô's presence is Brazil is dynamic and well documented, yet his presence is left unnamed in Ribeiro's story. However, he still emerges from the language of Leila's dream in a collection of rather ordinary images and symbols accumulated during the recounting of the story. These symbols, and potentially the concepts behind them, are ultimately passed to the operator, whose life is forever changed by Leila's narration. Scholars of history, religion, and art have pointed to the mobility and inclusive nature of the Yoruba World View as the principle characteristic that enabled it to survive and flourish through the middle passage and in the New World, but since my concern here is literary, I point to Wole Soyinka, who describes this tendency toward accommodation as follows:

> …an attitude of philosophic accommodation, is constantly demonstrated in the attributes accorded most African deities, attributes which deny the existence of impurities or 'foreign' matter, in the god's digestive system. Experiences which, until the event, lie outside the tribe's cognition are absorbed through the god's agency, are converted into yet another piece of the social armoury in its struggle for existence, and enter the lore of

> the tribe. This principle creates for society a non-doctrinaire mould of constant awareness, one which stays outside the monopolistic orbit of the priesthood, outside any claims to Gnostic secrets by special cults. Interpretation, as it does universally, rests mostly in the hands of such intermediaries, but rarely with the dogmatic finality of Christianity or Islam. The principle function is to reinforce by observances, rituals, and mytho-historical recitals the existing consciousness of cosmic entanglement in the community, and to arbitrate in the sometimes difficult application of such truths to domestic and community undertakings. (54)

It is from this kind of inclusive and accommodating perspective that I wish to approach Leila and eventually the operator in Ribeiro's story, for they are engaged in precisely the cosmic and communal entanglement mentioned above, and the outcome is still uncertain. It is through this act of "ritual bonding" that Ribeiro writes Africa into her short stories and acquires the international or Atlantic cultural capital that makes it appropriate to read her against authors like Hopkinson and Danticat, and critics like Henry Louis Gates. Like "Guarde Segredo," "Borboleta preta" takes up the undesirable task of retributive justice, carrying out the violent destruction of negative representations: the mulatta in "Borbolate preta" and the dominant ideology of whiteness represented in the character of Cassi Jones in "Guarde Segredo."

Both "Borboleta preta" and "Guarde segredo" call upon the principles of justice. In"Borboleta preta," the justice is delayed, for the butterflies at the end of the story are representations, not characters. However, in the same way that Ọya narrates Xangô's apotheosis, Ribeiro is narrating an emergence of identities. Through the imagery and symbols of Xangô, Ribeiro uses narration to invoke the retributive forces of Xangô. Visually, Xangô is easily identified. The Yoruba God of Thunder, lightning, fire, justice, and electricity, he is always

associated with the color red, and is often portrayed wielding his double-headed ax. It can be more difficult to identify him in literature, as his signifiers are sometimes rather ordinary and can easily be associated with unrelated concepts. In "A procura de uma borboleta preta," a specific set of signs limits the possibilities for interpretation. Leila's wearing of the color red and the blood flowing down her legs is combined with the subject of the butterfly, and a recurring presence of stones. Taken as single occurrences, none of these colors or objects would be enough to defend Sango's presence in the story, but taken together they can only point to Xangô and all the intricacies associated with him. Given the position of this story as first in the collection and that fact that it is transparently a metafiction governing all the stories that follow, a Yoruba reading of this story effectively situates Xangô as the orixa of Afro-Brazilian literature and gender discourse.

When Leila describes her date with Jean, she tells Baby that she "was wearing jeans and a red blouse, red sandals with high heels, a red pocketbook, and also a red bandana to tie my braids" (31). Later, in describing the attack, Leila tells Baby: "I was taken straight to the hospital because there were clots of blood running down my legs" (33). The prominence of the color red certainly is a potential signifier for Xangô, and it is also associated exclusively with Leila. Leila is also the character most physically engaged in the search for the black butterfly. The butterfly is also a potential sign pointing to Xangô's presence, as his double headed ax has a butterfly shape, as do the thunderstones used in his worship in Bahia:

> the balancing of twin bolts of meteoric fire on the head of the devotee is also meant to convey a promise of moral vengeance. This powerful dual metaphor spread to the far corners of the Atlantic Yoruba world. It appears with particular strength in Bahia, where in the late nineteenth century the butterflylike shape of the thunderstones balanced on the

> represented worshipper's head revealed influence from Ketu, where thunder axes frequently are shaped this way. (Thompson 87)

The butterfly, as the main symbol of question in Ribeiro's story, can be interpreted through Yoruba inspired Afro Brazilian religious art as an allusion to Xangô and therefore all the forces associated with him. Though Leila describes the butterfly as her unborn child, (she is literally "pregnant" with a black butterfly) a reading assisted by a Yoruba set of signifiers and images can begin to penetrate the possible function of the butterfly. If Leila, in her dream, subconsciously associates the butterfly with Xangô, then she has been pregnant with justice. The search for the black butterfly then, is not only a quest for a miscarried child and the subjectivity she represents, but also for miscarried justice and the potential for a more positive future after the justice is carried out . Leila wears red and "loses" her black butterfly on the same evening. By alluding to Xangô and all his power, Leila's subconscious operates in an appeal to Xangô and his forces. In *Myth, Literature, and the African World,* Soyinka explains: "…in what primary sense a deity is thought upon in a community of worshippers, the affective ends towards which he is most readily invoked. In Xangô's case, it is as the agency of lightning, lightning in turn being the cosmic instrument of a swift, retributive justice" (8).

Also operating in Leila's subconscious is the recurring presence of stones. Leila first encounters the stones rather unremarkably when she arrives at the amusement park and has to remove her red sandals because the "ground at the park is all gravel" (31). While Leila and Jean ride the Ferris wheel, she notices that the Ferris wheel operator is distracted by "butterflies perching on the rocks" (31). Later, when the neighbor child sees her and the community appears to judge her, Leila and Jean are assaulted with stones and are severely injured. This scene defies interpretation or understanding by the operator, who says to herself: "…I think I've read about a

similar case… if I am not mistaken, it happened in Somalia…I told myself" (35). The operator, who doesn't want to believe Leila's story, endeavors to distance the conversation from her memory. Even in the opening lines of the story, operator tells us: "in my line of work, we must keep a certain distance from other people's lives" (27). She nearly apologizes for telling story, saying "I would never tell this story but for its gravity" (27). However, the operator becomes a part of Leila's and Baby's story, because she describes the experience as changing "the direction of my life" (27). Finally, the operator, who goes to the park every morning following her shift at the Crisis Center, has a new way of seeing after she overhears this story. She sits in the park, "observing how many girl-butterflies are sleeping on the rocks" (39). She develops a concern for the butterflies, wondering "what kind of future will they have when they become women" (39). This final scene is the second one in which butterflies and rocks appear together.

If interpreting the butterfly as a signifying shape for Xangô seems to take much of a leap of faith, one can build a stronger association with Xangô through the story by looking at Xangô's relationship to stones. This requires looking deep into Xangô's history and discovering some of the many myths that establish his divine status and explain how he came to be associated with fire, thunder, and lightning. First, how did Xangô become an orixa? There are too many stories associated with Xangô's deification to review here, including the famous: "Oba ko so" recorded by Yoruba oral history for years and eventually dramatized by Duro Ladipo in the 1960's. A popular and concise version of the myth states that one day when he was still King in Oyo, Xangô:

> was recklessly experimenting with a leaf that had the power to bring down lightning from the skies and inadvertently caused the roof of the palace of Oyo to be set afire by lightning. In the blaze his wife and children were killed. Half crazed with grief and guilt,

> Sango went to a spot outside his royal capital and hanged himself from the branches of an ayan tree. He thus suffered the consequences of playing arrogantly with God's fire, and became lightning itself. (Thompson 85)

His connection to stones derives from his somewhat esoteric relationship to Jakuta:

> Mythologically, Sango is a dynamic personality whose name is recorded in any literature concerning the Yoruba. It is believed that Sango is not strictly of Yoruba origin, introduced from the Niger territory north of Old Oyo. The derivation of the orisa is obscure. Jakuta, a common epithet, is spoken of as a separate deity by some, but this is generally not accepted. The probability is that Jakuta is the ancient name for the Yoruba solar deity, and when Sango was deified he was identified with the orisa who had been formerly called Jakuta. (Welch 39)

Though Welch never goes on to explain why it is probable that Jakuta was a solar deity, his understanding of Xangô's origin establishes Xangô as an outsider. He also suggests that at some point, an ancient syncretization with another God occurred, foreshadowing Ṣango's many syncretizations with Catholic saints in the New World. Welch also points out that most people consider Xangô and Jakuta to be the same orixa. Strengthening this position is William Bascom, who writes:

> Shango lives in the sky and hurls thunderstones to the earth, killing those who offend him or setting their houses on fire. Because of this he is called Jakuta, one who fights (ja) with stones (okuta). His thunderstones are prehistoric stone celts, ground like those of the European Neolithic period. When farmers find these stone axes in the field they take them to Shango's worshippers, who keep them at his shrines as the symbols through which Shango is fed… (4)

Here we can begin to establish Xangô's connection to stones. They are his tools of punishment, as well as spiritual symbols used in his worship. Bascom also introduces the beginnings of Xangô's role as administrator of justice. This idea may have gained power in the New World, especially in Bahia, the most likely setting for Ribeiro's story. Xangô's power is expressed in stones, as explained by Thompson:

> the power of Sango streaks down in meteorites and thunderstones, stones both symbolic and real. The ashe of Shango is found within a stone, the flaming stone that only he and his brave followers know how to balance unsupported on their heads. Flaming stones have become a metaphoric burden… the balancing of twin bolts of meteoric fire on the head of the devotee is also meant to convey a promise of moral vengeance. This powerful dual metaphor spread to the far corners of the Atlantic Yoruba world. It appears with particular strength in Bahia, where in the late nineteenth century the butterflylike shape of the thunderstones balanced on the represented worshipper's head revealed influence from Ketu, where thunder axes frequently are shaped this way. (86-7)

Thompson refers here to the common practice in Brazil of representing Xangô and/or his worshippers in sculpture with a butterfly-like shape atop his head. This shape, according to Thompson, makes concrete in art the force of the stones, which are flaming, bolts, or meteoric in nature. In this way, the butterfly in "A Procura de uma borboleta preta" becomes an even more powerful symbol. It embodies not only the double-headed ax of Xangô, but also the "bolts of meteoric fire." By naming this shape "butterfly," as Ribeiro does in both symbol and title in her story, she enlivens the image, making a living, breathing force. The visual qualities of the oşhe Şango, the dance staff used in worship, are creatively transposed into literature.

Yet something is out of place. Leila is nearly killed with stones. Her community appears suddenly out of shadows to exact punishment upon her. The stones they throw kill her black butterfly, and cause her to suffer. When she asks for help in searching for the butterfly, she cannot get it. Why does Xangô not protect Leila? In this scene, Ribeiro effectively invokes Xangô's passionate nature, revealing his ability to act outside of reason. This is an important departure from previous treatments of Xangô in Brazilian literature in which well meaning and well informed white authors attempted to recreate Xangô as a rational figure. Examples of this are Jorge Amado's *Tent of Miracles* and Zora Seljan's *The Story of Oxala*. If indeed Leila is relating a dream to her friend Baby, then it is likely that she expresses fear in that dream of having somehow offended Xangô and incurring his displeasure. Leila worries, as does Baby, about the relationship with the soldier-with-French-ancestry: "We couldn't hold hands on the streets because we were afraid people would stare at us…" (31). Baby also worries about appearances: "Has anyone seen you, Leila?" (33). While this is more than likely not a direct offense to Xangô, Leila's relationship is an offense to her community. When Maria Helena Lima writes of Ribeiro's story in the introduction to the collection, she describes a common thread that unites all the works in the collection: "for if there is a commonality of spirit in these stories, it lies in their creation of a space in which the socially prescribed myth of a Brazilian 'racial democracy' is questioned, problematized, and subverted" (22). This is precisely the tension that Leila tries to untangle in her dream. Is it an offense to date a soldier-with-French-ancestry? Does she create or undermine the ideal of racial democracy by creating mixed race children? The community that hurls stones at Leila and Jean does enact a retributive justice, even if it is a racist retribution. The action of the community may also be merely a reflection of Leila's own worries. While it would be simple to see this as a perversion of Xangô's forces, it is

more complex to see the community mastering, for a moment, a morally neutral force. This force can be mastered again and employed by others who wish to exact vengeance.

This remastering of Xangô's force is eventually accomplished by the formation of a new community: one comprised of women, and one deeply concerned with the fate of female black butterflies. The women who take part in the telephone conversation, as speakers or listeners, are sharing a set of signifiers, even if they do not know it. In the same way that Oya narrates Xangô's apotheosis in "Oba ko so/The King Did not Hang," the voices of this story resurrect the identity of the baby, and all the future black butterflies by way of narration. These shared signifiers point to Xangô, but they can also be supported with an examination of the form of the story the story takes. By situating the story as a telephone conversation, Ribeiro privileges the oral mode. The entire story is composed of dialogue, with only a few short lines that reflect the editorializing of the Operator: "…what an absurd story I'm thinking…Leila calls Baby telling her about a Black Butterfly that flew from her womb…" and later: "why doesn't Leila bang the phone in this bitch's face…great friend she is…if Baby really wanted to help her, she would have put her coat on and gone straight to the amusement park" (29 and 37). The Operator however, is really in conversation with the reader, addressing him or her as "you": "**You'd** better call me Operator" (27) The oral mode of history and storytelling kept Xangô's stories alive for centuries before they were written first by Europeans and then by Nigerians. The oral mode also sustained Xangô through the middle passage and the experience of slavery in the many countries of the New World where Yoruba people were made to work and live. The women also meet in Xangô's realm. As Ṣoyinka points out in *Myth Literature and the African World*, the Yoruba World View is generally accommodating in its nature and practice: "this accommodative nature, which does not, however, contradict or pollute their true essences, is what makes Xangô capable

of extending his territory of lightning to embrace electricity in the affective consciousness of his followers"(54). To accommodate even further, one can infer that Xangô is also to be found in any force that needs wires or cables. This would make him the orixa of cable television, the internet, and also of telephones. Indeed, in emphasizing Xangô's flashing quality, Thompson writes that "the Yoruba realize a vision of his spirit in poetry charged with flashing images" and quotes a poem collected by Pierre Verger which contains a line stating that Xangô "makes a detour in telegraphic wire" (85).

Understanding the butterfly shape at work in Ribeiro's story as a literary manifestation of the forces of Xangô also uncovers significant connections between "A procura de uma borboleta preta" and other stories in the collection. Orixa appear or are referred to in at least two other stories, "Foram Sete/Lucky Seven" and "Abajur/Nightlamp." In these stories, the orixa act as forces of justice and as protectors. The inspiration for a young woman to kill the man who molested her sister in "Lucky Seven" comes as a thunderbolt, another of Xangô's manifestations, and in "Nightlamp" the guardian is a protector of secrets, like a benevolent orixa. Establishing these connections reveals that Riberio's story can also be read as metafiction that introduces the stories that follow. This fleeting female community then, in both "A procura de uma borboleta preta" and the collection as a whole, is formed through Xangô, whether or not any of the community members are consciously aware of it. This process can also be seen as a possible way that African and specifically Yoruba influences and philosophical stances become occluded in New World settings. The butterflies also become embodiments of the black female literary identities that have yet to be realized in Brazilian literature. In the final scenes of Ribeiro's story, the Operator reveals how much she has been affected because of her involvement in this conversation. She says that she has not slept well since that night, and: "I sit there, observing

how many girl-butterflies there are sleeping on the rocks" (39). This observation leaves the reader with the powerful assemblage of Xangô's signifiers, and it is also something new, a sight the Operator would not have thought important or even noticed prior to her meeting Leila and Baby on the telephone. In the Operator's New World, as well as the audience's, there is an increased awareness of the fate of the butterflies, and the orişa are present, their forces at work, guiding a course of literary action. Within the story itself, then, there is a forward-looking formula for changing the symbolic order of Brazilian literatures. The invocation of the Ifa paradigm and its objects accumulates "cultural capital" in a more global context than Oliveira has provided in the *Writing Identity* study. If indeed "identity emerges when symbolic and social orders articulate to form the subject" then Ribeiro's project seems to be to re-align both those orders so that a constructive space for Black, Brazilian, female identity can emerge (6).

Realigning a symbolic order with the purpose of affecting the social order is clearly the domain of culture and Art. As Rebelo facetiously mocks in the epigraph to this chapter, the cultural and racial bias present in Brazil has led to the marginalization, if not outright rejection, of the Literary production of Afro Brazilians. Literature is indeed "serious" Art, and as Oliveria documents in her study of the Quilombhoje, the members of this group took an active turn away from the overtly political and toward more aesthetic considerations. Esmeralda Ribeiro's literary production, while limited to one novel, several short stories, and fewer than fifty published poems, demonstrates an aesthetic inspiration that is grounded in the Yoruba cosmological system of Ifá. Invoking such a system is already a political act. If creating and deploying authentic "black" subjectivities is Ribeiro's goal, then it seems advantageous to reject dominant European paradigms such as psychoanalysis in favor of a more Afro-centric methodology. Ribeiro's use of the Fantastic, even as Oliveira has discussed it, is more grounded in the structural components of

texts than it is in the cultural practices of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis has not always worked well in political, social, or cultural struggles of Africans or Diasporans, and would not do much to change the interpretive practices of a critical tradition dominated by it[46]. The cultural and racial bias noted above has manifested itself in a body of critical work that emphasizes sociological context and political motivation in a way that leads to the definition of Quilombhoje works as reactionary and downright angry. There is literary currency in these kinds of interpretations, for the identification and naming of social and literary justice as Violence categorizes them as "threatening" on many levels, and perpetuates their marginalization, keeping them from major publishing houses, out of university classrooms, and outside of the literary canon. But it is my contention that the work of Ribeiro clearly defies a sociological "read," inviting her audience to analyze them not literally, but literarily.

Any reader aspiring to analyze Ribeiro's works for their literary qualities should be rendered powerless when attempting to read from an inherited Eurocentric perspective. Examining her work as specifically Brazilian or feminist is also limited in the scope of understanding one can create, as I have suggested above. However, a reading informed by a Diasporic perspective, taking into account the origins of the Ifá system as well as the transformations it has experienced in the Diaspora, makes way for new and more useful roads of investigation into Ribeiro's works.

The Yoruba people and their system of religion are rapidly becoming a transnational paradigm for the African Diaspora. There is no other linguistic, religious, national, or ethnic group so discussed, explicated and analyzed in the Diaspora. In Brazil, the Yoruba are also a paradigm of African identity. This has a multi-layered historical basis and the acculturation of

[46] I am thinking here of works like Fanon's "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" in *La damne de la terre* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions*, which both show how the "science" of psychology was turned against Africans and Black peoples.

black people to a Yoruba identity is the major process under discussion in Luis Nicolau Parés's article "The Nagôization Process in Bahian Candomblé" published in 2004 in *The Yoruba Diaspora In the Atlantic World*, a collection of historical essays that closely examine the influence of Yoruba culture in the diaspora. This influence, as the works of Esmeralda Ribeiro show, extends beyond the spheres of religion, music, and dance into the realm of literature. To my knowledge, there is no full length study about the influence of the Yoruba in the literature of Brazil or Latin America, and it may be that the overwhelming presence of the postcolonial discourse and the need to cast all black and brown literature as "minority" and in the terms of critics like Said, Spivak, and Bhaba has created a blindness to the Yoruba foundations of Afro-Brazilian literature.

There are several central ideas on which I wish to focus: Gates's notion of a literary tradition as a process of revisions and Washington's extended discussion of Òrò and Àjé and the "word" and the power of the word. Ribeiro is not an American writer and should not be treated as one, or measured solely against Gates' Esu paradigm. Rather, I hope to suggest that Gates's more general ideas of signifying and revision can be extended beyond the geography and particular contexts of the African American tradition and can thus be used, with limitations, to include Riberio's literature in the diaspora, where it belongs. Similarly, in my use of Washington's work, I hope to show that her emphasis on more abstract and philosophical concepts actually produces the more open theory – and that her book has more room to include Latin American writers under the Yoruba concepts she explains. My interests here are not in anthropologies or cultural artifacts, but literary questions: modes of representation, rhetorical strategy, and philosophical and aesthetic values. Gates' work is specifically about language and rhetorical strategy. Even though he uses a Yoruba figure, Esu, as the unifying embodiment of

textuality and interpretation, his analysis of the African-American tradition does not (rightly) try to make any connection to Yoruba concepts of religion or philosophy. For Gates, Esu is a useful figure in the sense that he brings order and a mythological foundation to the fact that Black literature has, since its inception, developed internal mechanisms for defining itself. In fact, the tools of literary self-definition are the key features of Gates' study. Even though Gates uses a Yoruba model as an organizing principle for his work, it is specifically attached to the act of literary criticism. *The Signifying Monkey* does not examine the place of Ifá and Yoruba mythology in literature of the Diaspora. This is where Washington's work becomes significant in examining Ribeiro. While Ribeiro demonstrates the revisionist quality of Gates's model, she does not employ the vernacular as the sign of difference. She does, however, show signs of the relationship between Òrò and Àjé that Washington develops in her study. Washington's study is less concerned with the vernacular as formal element of literary production and more concerned with using Yoruba ideas and modes of articulation that encompass process of creation.

Riberio's short story "Guarde Segredo" effectively rewrites the title character in Lima Barreto's novella *Clara dos anjos*. Riberio's story provides ample connections to Barreto's work, employing his ghost as a character in the story, repeating the name of his protagonist: Cassi Jones, and revising certain plot elements. In "Guarde Segredo," like *Clara dos anjos*, a young woman of black or mixed racial heritage enters a relationship with a charismatic white young man. The female characters in both stories are abused by the mother of young Cassi Jones, the charismatic white man, but the outcomes differ. While Lima Barreto's Clara is left abused, pregnant, victimized and voiceless, Ribeiro's unnamed female protagonist takes control of her destiny. She returns the verbal abuse and spitting of Cassi's mother, and eventually stabs Cassi to death, runs away from her Grandmother's house, and takes up residence in a city far

away, where she writes a letter to the new occupant of her grandmother's house, who asked what had happened there. In doing this, the narrator shows a striking similarity to Tan-Tan in *Midnight Robber*, who also resorts to violent self-defense via stabbing, must hide from society, and suppresses her name.

Ultimately, explication of the core plot in "Guarde Segredo" shows that Ribeiro has "written back" to Lima Barreto, and has added just one new, interesting plot twist: the young, victimized woman fights back and kills off the victimizer. The truly interesting and innovative features of the story are the machinations of Vovó Olivia, the narrator's grandmother, and the ghost of Lima Barreto, which need to be understood in the context of the Ifá paradigm. The elements of the supernatural and metaphors of literary production reveal the dual purpose of Ribeiro's literary creation: "working the spirit" of the symbolic order in order to affect the social order. The most superficial reading of the story shows that it works on a social level. The narrator's family is black, poor, and marginalized. They have problems with each other – the mother and Vovó Olivia are always fighting – and the young narrator is forced to live with her grandmother when the family is evicted from their apartment[47]. Yet to read this story as a mere statement of female black identity in Brazil is to miss Ribeiro's creative process and therefore her point.

"Guarde Segredo" operates on a primarily literary level. Vovó Olivia's aloof and mysterious personality and the appearance of Lima Barreto as a ghost are strong indications that the story is not meant to be taken literally. Barreto, a mixed race Brazilian writer, returns, under the guidance of Vovó Olivia to rewrite *Clara dos anjos*, but ends up tearing the new ending, the death of Cassi, into pieces: "Bravo! Esse era o outra final que eu queria para o cafajeste do Cassi

[47] See Dawn Duke's excellent analysis of the short story in her article "How She Strikes Back: Images of Female Strength in Esmeralda Ribeiro's Writing" in *The Afro-Brazilian Mind: Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literary and Cultural Criticism* Eds. Afolabi, Barbosa, and Ribeiro.

Jones. O escritor tirou da máquina o papel, rasgou em pedacinhos e jogou no lixo. Olhou para Vovó e disse: 'Obrigado. Eternamente obrigado" (71). This joyous expression, uttered by Barreto's ghost, has several important functions. The first is that it renames Cassi as "cafajeste": swine, and puts the manuscript, written by Barreto, "no lixo": into the trash. This reverses the figure of the privileged white man, making him swine and trash, previously the position of Clara in Barreto's first writing of the story. The second is that Barreto's ghost tears the "papel" from the typewriter and takes pleasure in destroying it. Within this action are two more important features. The removal of the "papel" from the machine has double meaning. Not only is Barreto removing the paper, but he is removing the "roles" of both Cassi Jones and the male author who tries and fails to represent female identity in literature. By tearing up the manuscript, Barreto's ghost steps aside as the authority, and makes room for Ribeiro's narrator to take control of her own narration and engage in "rhetorical self-definition." The narrative control of the female protagonist of Ribeiro's story is evidenced in the epistolary structure of the story and the use of the first person point of view. The fact that her name is suppressed is not a statement of unlawfulness or evasion of capture/justice. Rather, it suggests that the narrator represents more than just the individual, and that the symbolic and social revolutions that are happening may just be "off the radar" of the dominant culture.

Ribeiro's revisionist strategy invites comparisons to Gates's definition of a literary "tradition" as revision. On the most basic level, Gates writes that literary relationships form the basis for the development of a literature that can be theorized:

> It should be clear, even from a cursory familiarity with the texts of the Afro-American tradition, that black writers read and critique the texts of other black writers as an act of

> rhetorical self-definition. Our literary tradition exists because of these chartable formal relationships, relationships of Signifyin(g). (122)

It appears obvious that "Guarde Segredo" fulfills the most cursory requirements of Gates's model. Clearly Ribeiro has read Lima Barreto, another black writer. What becomes more complex is "rhetorical self-definition" and the development of Signifyin(g) relationships. The most important characteristic of signifying is the use of the black vernacular as a mode of representation. The vernacular, Gates writes, as a sign of difference or the "blackness of the tongue" must be rendered in rhetorical modes. This develops through the Trope of the Talking Book into The Speakerly text, ideas that consume entire chapters of Gates's study. There is little doubt that "Guarde Segredo" is an attempt at "rhetorical self-definition." What is less certain is whether the critic can establish a signifying relationship between Ribeiro and Barreto without the vernacular or the Speakerly text, which is defined by Gates as a "text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed 'to emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the illusion of oral narration'"(181). Essentially, the question to be resolved is: can the author signify without the vernacular? Ribeiro is cautious about alternate forms of Portuguese language. She writes that formal techniques and themes must be clear, notably in her essay "A Escritora negra e o seu ato de escrever participando," in which she argues against literary projects that take apart the formal logic of the Portuguese language because these texts have limited audiences and are difficult to understand, thus undermining their ability to be engaged in the political process (64-5). However, she still engages in revisionist processes, demonstrating what Gates defines as the core of Black literary development.

According to Gates, the way to achieve rhetorical self-definition is through "tropological revision." The revision is accomplished in the process of Signifyin(g), which employs the use of the vernacular in order "to privilege the representation of the black speaking voice." "Guarde Segredo" intends to privilege a black speaking voice, but that voice is clearly female. Ribeiro's tropological revision, while lacking the vernacular, does make room for what Gates calls the "speaking subject," a concept defined as the process that moves the black character or writer from "silent object" to "speaking subject," and insisting on black subjectivity. In order to establish Riberio's short story as a tropological revision, it is necessary to define her characters as tropes.

Vovó Olivia, Lima Barreto, and the narrator of "Guarde Segredo" are embodiments of stages in the process of literary creation. "Trope," simply defined as a figure of speech, conventionally takes the form of one of the four "master tropes": metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony. In the case of "Guarde Segredo" characters are metaphors. Vovó Olivia, Lima Barreto, and the narrator give human characteristics to ideas: inanimate and abstract. Vovó Olivia and Lima Barreto are personifications of Òrò and Àjé, and the narrator eventually emerges as a representative of black female subjectivity.

Framing the process of literary creation in the Yoruba concepts of Òrò and Àjé reflects the deeply metaphysical and philosophical qualities of Ribeiro's work. The concept of Àjé, explicated by Theresa Washington, is complex. Defining Àjé requires an encompassing of all spheres of existence, and is difficult work. The concept can probably never be fully explained, but Washington gives the following overview:

> In addition to being a cosmic force that originates with Great Mother Deities, Àjé is a naturally occurring property of select human beings. Women of Àjé have many

> significant attributes and roles in society. They are bestowed with spiritual vision, divine authority, power of the word, as àṣẹ, the power to bring desires and ideas into being. As "children" of Imole, the Mother of Earth, they control agricultural fertility and plant life. Holistic healing is an important aspect of Àjé, and its wielders use their incomparable knowledge and ownership of flora and fauna to create nourishment, healing elixirs, and poisons. Àjé also enact spiritual communication through divination and Òrò, the power of the word. Most important, Awon Iya Wa are teachers whose gifts, lessons, trials, and punishments compel their communities to seek higher levels of spiritual evolution and redirect misguided destiny, direction or power (14).

To cast this in literary terms, Washington refers to the common translation of Oduduwa, the name of the founder of the Yoruba people, as "oracular utterance created existence." This translation emphasizes the power of the word, Òrò, and thus literary creation. As Washington explains, the powers of Òrò and Àjé are "inextricably linked" and function together. She uses Awo Fatunmbi's explanation of these creative powers: "Both Àjé and Òrò are found at the Iroko tree. Òrò is the manifestation of the power of the word. Àjé is the force that gives the power of the word the intensity needed to effect change" (Fatunmbi qtd in Washington 17). Washington also situates the entirety of the creative process in this way, writing that Àjé "is not merely the biological act of giving birth but the entire concept of *creating*…orature and literature of Àjé elucidate its elusive being and constantly revise and codify its ever-shifting forms through culturally, artistically, and politically relevant art befitting Oduduwa" (17). The shifting quality and level of paradox and complexity associated with Òrò and Àjé make them difficult analytical tools to wield, but the emphasis on process and partnership in the creative process is echoed in the critical work that Ribeiro writes. Ribeiro describes the development of the Afro-Brazilian

tradition as a process of searches: “É certo que estamos sempre num processo de incansáveis buscas...” (Escritora Negra 62). She also seeks a departure from what she views as literary choas via a self-determined critical disourse and a gender partnership: “Diante desta produção escrita imagino-me dentro de uma floresta cheia de pontos de interrogação, perguntando-me se existe alguma saída para o nosso caos literário...A saída desta parca intelectualidade é a ***aquisição de conhecimento, através de uma profunda reflexão sobre o nosso trabalho***, conjuntamente com outras escritoras” (65 emphasis mine). Ribeiro also advcates a gender partnership that echoes Washington’s discussion of the functioning of Oro and Aje: “É necessário que a união de esforços, entre mulher e homen negro escritores, reforce cada vez mais a luta para que os dois intervenham no processo de participação política e formem uma nova consciência nacional” (65).

Evidence of this partnership is found in “Guarde Segredo” in the characters Vovó Olivia and Lima Barreto. Each character displays supernatural characteristics and they are each associated with images of creation and change. Barreto is the “word,” having already estabilshed his place in a recognizable canon, while Olivia “works the spirit” of that word with ajé, the complex and layed “force” behind the word. Vovó Olivia manifests in two states of being, a physical one and a metaphysical one: “De repente uma mulher surgiu lá na esquina. A minha alegria foi logo embora. Parecia, mas não era vovó Olívia. Tinha a mesma cor, o rosto igualmente sem nenhuma ruga. Magra e baixinha, e cabelos de algodão…” and “Vovó se encontava numa total absorção. Ficou assim por minutos, meia hora, não sei. O corpo estava ali sem alma…”(66 and 70). Vovo Olivia is responsible for moving the creative pieces of “Guarde Segredo” into place. She takes in the granddaughter, and conjures Lima Barreto. More than a ghost, Vovó Olivia is master of the creative process. She embodies and activates Àjé as the

force that gives the word (of Barreto) power. Olivia is the owner of the house, which is locked up and mysterious, and the magical garden where Barreto takes physical form. Olivia doesn't create the word directly, she enables it. Vovó Olivia is also associated with the sewing of a bedspread which the narrator never sees in its finished state: "Vovo Olivia costurava uma colcha de retalhos. Costurava ponto por ponto. Não tenho certeza, pois nunca vi a colcha pronta…Porém, quando olhei lá dentro, no lugar de vovo costurando sobre a mesinha, vi o mesmo homen do quadro e que brincava comigo. Ele datilografava alguma coisa apressadamente" (68). Quilting together pieces of a story is a common metaphor for the process of writing. Ribeiro uses it here to emphasize an unfinished quality. The bedspread also enforces the connection between Barreto and Vovó, because Barreto's presence is always accompanied by Olivia's sewing.

Lima Barreto also appears in at least two states. He is a complex figure to analyze because of the historical connection that Ribeiro is making by using his ghost as a character. As far as the text is concerned, Barreto's presence has to be enabled by Olivia's Àjé force. He appears in a painting, but takes form, initially, in the backyard of the house: Brincava sozinha. Sozinha, não. Um homem sempre aparacia pra gente brincar. Como surgia, também sumia, de repente. Parecíamos velhos conhecidos. Quem é ele?" (68) He is not named until the narrator recognizes him as her backyard playmate and asks Olivia about him: "olhei pra cima e lá estava, bem no alto da parede, um pequeno quadro. Apesar de empoeirado, reconheci os mesmos cabelos, rosto e terno daquele homem das brincadeiras no quintal...Quem é o homem do quadro, vovo? – perguntei. Ele foi uma pessoa muito importante para mim. Seu nome era Lima Barreto" (68). The narrator has read the initials L.B. inscribed under the painting, but it is Olivia

who completes those words and names Lima Barreto.[48] The narrator also enforces the connection between Olivia and Barreto, remarking: "Talvez fosse impressão, porém ela tinha no rosto o mesmo sorriso daquele homem" (68). Barreto can be understood as the embodiment of Òrò. His name is recognizable, and he enjoys official status as one of Brazil's educated and accomplished "mulatto" writers. His work, because it was published, has literary currency as "official" in the same way that Òrò enjoys institutional status because it is male. Barreto is also the only character the reader witnesses engaging in the act of writing. His initial appearance in the garden connects him to that magical place, where he plays with the narrator and also manifests in a cycle of creation and destruction: "Um homem sempre aparecia pra gente brincar. Como surgia, também sumia, de repente" (68). The backyard is also the place where the tree that hides the murder weapon lives. This tree, suggestive of the Iroko tree where one finds Òrò and Àjé simultaneously, hides the narrator's secret as well as Olivia secret. Its leaves react when interacting with humans, and it gives shelter to the weapon that would put the narrator on trial.

As far as rhetorical strategy (trope) is concerned, Ribeiro's strategy is to explore the process of making literature by using characters, one of literature's products, as textual devices meant to be read figuratively. But Vovó Olivia and a revised Lima Barreto can only constitute a partial Signifyin(g) relationship. In addition to the absence of the vernacular, the revision of Clara that takes place Ribeiro's narrator isn't really a tropological revision. At best, Barreto's Clara is just a flat character, not really a rhetorical strategy. Even though Ribeiro's narrator is statement of black female (and Brazilian) subjectivity, the emergence of this voice, while significant, does not complete the signifying process. It is lacking the antecedent.

---

[48] Gates discusses portraits as would-be tropes: against the mortality of their subjects and "commanding of their viewers symbolic 'libations'" (156) This is an extension of the trope of the "talking book," so important in African American literature, and Ribeiro seems to be troping the trope here. Another way of reading this is the concept of "aworan," developed by Lawal in his essay: "Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art."

Interestingly, the narrator of "Guarde Segredo" does accomplish another goal Gates discusses in Signifying Monkey: the movement of the black voice from silent object (Barreto's Clara) to speaking subject (Ribeiro's narrator). There is a curious detail in "Guarde Segredo" that enables a strong comparison to Gates's analysis and to the works of African-American literature that he analyzes: the removal of a gold necklace from Cassi Jones's dead body: "Foram tantas facadas!... Parei quando caiu aos meus pés. Também arranquei de seu pescoço um cordão de ouro" (71). Within the text of the story, this detail is extraneous. There is no mention of Cassi's gold necklace before or after the above passage. It may appear simply to indicate Cassi's privileged social class, but his position at the narrator's feet (and dead at her hand) constitutes another reversal of images. The narrator is the master and Cassi Jones is a dead slave. Additionally, the chain is a very specific detail that Gates explores at length in "The Trope of the Talking Book" chapter of *Signifying Monkey*. The development of the chain as textual device cuts across more than a black cultural heritage. There are three main writers who use the chain as a literary device, and Signify upon it: Gronnisaw, Marrant, and Cugoano. Each of these men wrote capture and slave narratives and were among the earliest African-American writers. The gold chain always appears as an object of exchange, and signifies something different in each text where it appears (see Table 1).

Table 1 The Roles of Gold

Author	Gold Chain as signifier	Ethnicities
Gronnisaw	Sign of African heritage – willfully traded by captured African for knowledge of white man's God and a European identity	African/European (Dutch)
Marrant	A black voice controls Cherokee King by commanding the King to put on or remove the "ultimate sign of authority, his golden ornaments" (Gates 146)	Native American: Cherokee, African-American
Cugoano	Chain as "perverted booty gained by the immoral use of European words" (151). The context is a contract between Spaniards and Inca. Inca King buys his life with Inca gold, but Spaniards take the gold and execute the King anyway	Native American: Inca, European: Spanish, African-American

Source: *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* 127-52.

Within the African-American tradition, Gates demonstrates a multicultural context for this special signifier. Gold works in many ways, literally and figuratively.

Given the historical significance of Gold in Africa and in Brazil, perhaps Ribeiro is adding a specifically Brazilian context to the gold chain torn from Cassi Jones's neck. It is unlikely that Ribeiro would intend the narrator's taking back of the gold to be a sign of an African heritage, as in Gronnisaw's text. Since Brazil mined its own gold deposits with Native American and African slaves, it seems more likely that the narrator is taking back the wealth that Slave labor produced for the Portuguese crown and the Brazil's elite. The narrator, recreated from a Brazilian literary origin via the partnered force of Òrò and Àjé, renames the white master

"swine" and "trash," forces him to fall at her feet, and repossesses his immorally acquired wealth as a symbol of black historical presence in Brazil. This constitutes a significant step in both rhetorical self-definition and the revision process, perhaps beginning to form an international, shared "text of blackness":

> Shared modes of figuration result only when writers read each other's texts and seize upon topoi and tropes to revise in their own texts. This form of revision is a process of grounding and has served to create curious formal lines of continuity between the texts that together comprise the shared text of blackness, the discrete chapters of which scholars are still establishing. (128-9)

Here we find a commentary that need not be restricted to the African-American tradition. I wish to exploit Gates' more general critical tools to facilitate a more Diasporic literary conversation. Current models of the diaspora are focused exclusively on literature written in English, and have consequently left out entire Black traditions in Portuguese, French, and Spanish. The absence of these traditions in the formation of Diaspora criticism and theory undermines the usefulness and longevity of those theories. I hope then to have taken first steps in forming three key ideas: 1. that the theories of the Diaspora need not be rejected outright, rather, that they can be mined for ideas that can be applied throughout the Diaspora. Additionally, that these theories be stretched, expanded or revised when their rubrics are too narrow to include other traditions developing in the Diaspora. 2. to suggest the value of Ifá, the Yoruba philosophical and religious tradition from which the theories of Gates and Washington are derived, as a critical tool for analyzing Diaspora literature, and 3. Most importantly, to demonstrate that a writer like Ribeiro deserves more critical attention than she currently receives in Brazil, and that she belongs in any literary conversation about the Diaspora or Brazil.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

"One can always find a German who behaves very differently from 'the Germans...' Culture is learned, and it can therefore be unlearned; sometimes a new culture can then be relearned. Germans are either made or not made; in any case they are not born...Concepts are a little bit like workers: in order to measure their real value, one has to know what they can do, not where they come from"

Tzvetan Todorov in "'Race,' Writing and Culture"

The "Fantastic" has always been a literary way of speculating about "the other." Who exactly that "other" is changes with author and audience, each of whom bring complex sets of values, motivations, and knowledges to the creations and readings of texts. In using and transforming the Fantastic, Nalo Hopkinson, Edwidge Danticat, and Esmeralda Ribeiro have drawn readers' and critics' attention to possibilities of otherness that extend beyond the conventional, core categories of race, class, and gender. While these categories are certainly still at work in their novels and short stories, the roles of time, space, and culture should also be considered. The treatment of the supernatural and its role in forming narrative and figuration, and fashioning subjectivity suggests that relationships of self and other can be highly creative assemblages that cannot always be accounted for.

Articulating the unknown and embracing mystery are as much functions of culture as they are of the Fantastic. Near the conclusion of Alan Parker's film *The Commitments*, after artistic differences and in-fighting cause the band to break up, Jimmy Rabbite interviews

himself, a skill he has had to develop because no "real" journalists or music critics ever bother with him. During this self-interview, Jimmy responds to a question about the future of the band with lyrics from "A Whiter Shade of Pale," saying, "we skipped the light Fantastic, turned cartwheels across the floor, we were feeling kind of seasick, but the crowd screamed out for more..." The imagined interviewer's response is "That's very profound, Jimmy. What does it mean?" Jimmy looks at himself in a mirror and answers that question: "I'm f*ucked if I know..." and the credits begin to roll. At the same time that Jimmy re-asserts the mystery of transformation, and rejects "meaning," he also articulates his experience with modes of appropriation. Jimmy ironically translates meaning in his recitation of lyrics from "Whiter Shade of Pale," humorously referencing the whiteness of his Dublin band against the blackness of the soul music it performs, and suggesting a connection to the song's complex origins and history. "Whiter Shade of Pale" is well known for its mystery and its diverse inspirations. Both of those qualities have made it one of the most "covered" songs in history. The song's origins in the melodies of Bach, its references to Chaucer's "Miller's Tale," borrowings from Percy Sledge's *When a Man Loves a Woman*, release in England and in America, and legal battles over authorship are just a few of its complexities. The song is an appropriate capstone for a based-on-a-novel film that celebrates both the transformative power of art and the intricate process of creating it.

Despite Jimmy's claim that he doesn't know what skipping the light Fantastic means, the band's journey and Jimmy's narration/interpretation of it are full of meanings. The band's marketing materials proclaim that they are the "saviors of soul," a tagline that suggests several meanings. While Jimmy's goal is save soul music and the soul of Dublin, the individual members of the band ultimately save their individual souls through creative, artistic expressions.

Their lives are different because of their experiences with the band. Saving their souls in this way also flies in the face of their Catholic heritage, for saving souls ought to be the province of the church. Most importantly, the cultural contact made through American soul music also creates possibilities for accessing other modes of expression. The film dramatizes several interesting ways that American soul leads individuals to other ways of being. The saxophone player becomes interested in American Jazz, one of the backup singers tries American Country music, and the whole band becomes very punk-like when they break into a garage to steal the Mr. Chippy van so that they can travel to a distant gig.

In combining the Fantastic with Ifá, a term which I have used as my own synecdoche for Yoruba culture in Nigeria and throughout the diaspora, and applying that combination to an analysis of a very small group of texts, I can conclude that these writers signify upon multiple traditions at once, and this multiplicity opens space for complex identities and diverse tools of criticism. Engaging multiple narrative traditions also creates a certain diverse and global cultural capital, which expands readership and exposure to many different critical traditions. I think the invocation of the supernatural in these works alludes to the inexplicability of creativity and appropriation at the same time it invites analysis by perhaps unlikely combinations of analytical tools. Even while we acknowledge the mystery of artistic creations, there are several tendencies in the works of these women that can be documented.

One tendency that the texts under study here share is an extension of motherhood as a metaphor for creativity. As Theresa Washington's *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts* shows, the Ifá tradition is ideally suited to provide structures of interpretation for this kind of figuration. Additionally, it introduces the symbol of the container/pot/womb and lends those objects meaning from a culturally coded perspective. I hope to have suggested the text as an iteration of

the container/pot/womb, a place where creation takes place. An important extension of motherhood as metaphor for creativity is the family. Family relations, whether they are genetic or behavioral, are an extension of the primary container, the womb. All of the texts under study here make use of the genetic or behavioral family connection as a structure within which to narrate a particular kind of polyvocality. It is in this sense that I would consider the family to be an extended metaphor for Yai's proposition of infinite metonymy. This is particularly evident in the "science" fiction of Nalo Hopkinson, which is the science of biology and genetic connections rather than the science computer engineering. Ribeiro's short stories also suggest family relations among fellow writers (the resurrection of Barreto) and the representations of female characters. Both stories under study here treat the negative representations of the "mulatta" and their literary legacies as ancestors that must be re-narrated. Danticat also favors familial connections, but extends them even further, to the country of Haiti. By placing her narration in the transitional gulf, Danticat creates an image of Haiti, albeit an imagined one, that characterizes it as a nation caught in perpetual transitions.

Though I have suggested the efficacy of Ifá as critical tool most especially in Brazil, where asserting a "Black" identity might be best served by wielding a "Black" critical tool, it is more important to assess Ifá's possibilities as a "universal" tool for understanding how language can work. When Todorov writes that "concepts are a little bit like workers: in order to measure their real value, one has to know what they can do, not where they come from," he calls into question the habit of locating authenticity in the epidermis of the author, critic, or reader. The structure of the corpus, based on male/female partnership and the genetic connections created in children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc., is quite suitable for articulating not only "pure" genetic connections, but distant or miscegenized ones as well. The family is a useful container

for articulating human relations in general. The family has an "increasing" power just as the structures that contain the Ifá corpus do.

The Fantastic seems to help these authors build a road between traditions. The choice between real and unreal, upon which the genre rests, and the hesitation that occupies the space and time between those two options, is the site of negotiation for Hopkinson, Danticat, and Ribeiro. It is within the hesitation and the either-or fallacy that most of the transformation of the genre takes place. These authors make use of themes of the Fantastic: relations between self/other, point of view, collapse of the distinction between matter and mind, and unconventional use of time and space, to reform it to suit their needs. One of the important roles that culture plays in transforming the Fantastic is that it questions the distinction between real and unreal, understanding it through the realms of the living, ancestors, and unborn, or eliminating it entirely through the "Oduduwa" concept: oracular utterance creates existence (Washington 17).

Polyvocality and tensions between the narrations of different characters or a collective voice are also a space for the Fantastic to occur. The effect of disintegration and reintegration, which resonates in the family structure and in the history of the slave trade and slavery, is articulated in what Washington names "polyvocal grand verbalization in which the self is the literature and the literature is the self" (21). In terms of identity, subjectivity, narrative pattern, and modes of figuration, this suggests multiplicity.

It was really Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light* that solidified the connections among texts that I have analyzed here. In addition to the operations of the Fantastic and the cultural-spiritual element of all these texts, I have found Todorov's structural approach to text to be useful and instructive. Without the categories of the verbal, the syntactic, and the semantic, I

would not have been able to think through the connections between genre and culture (whether appropriated or not). In the chapter on *Claire of the Sea Light*, I concluded with some general comparisons between Hopkinson and Danticat that extend to Ribeiro as well. I wrote that

> in the verbal category, the texts that I am arguing are Ifá-ntastic require attention to polysemy. As Yai points out in "In Praise of Metonymy," polysemy is a primary mode of understanding in Yoruba worldview, and it is also a verbal technique invoked by the authors under study here. The point of view, also discussed in the category of the verbal, obviously emerges from a marginalized perspective. In this case, women in and of the African diaspora. Polyvocality is of utmost importance in the syntactic category. This has more to do with the structures of Ifá than with the formal definitions of Fantastic, but the relations among the logical, temporal, and spatial "truths" of a text that Todorov insists upon as making up the working gears of a text, are also articulated in the Ifá corpus. Significantly, the authors under study here apply a tight narrative organizing principle of family to control the possibilities for polyvocality. The semantic category still articulates themes, in much the same way that Todorov suggests. In the works of the authors under study here, however, there is a more pronounced meta-fictional quality than in the objects of Todorov's study. Gates' definition of formal revision within the culturally specific literary tradition seems to have had a significant influence on these contemporary writers. However, these writers also, like Danticat identified with Basquiat, float freely among cultural traditions for sources of creative inspiration. In the works under study, though, the diversity of cultural influences is ultimately integrated and unified under the container of Ifá. Themes of the self and the other dominate these works as well, though not in the sexually oriented and phallocentric way Todorov

> identified. The self and the other are understood and articulated under the commonly identified categories of race, class, and gender. Hopkinson, Danticat, and Ribeiro use text to interrogate new and inherited forms of knowledge and being. Rather than taking overtly political positions, each author engages in transformations and interrogations that are primarily literary. The intended effect of those transformations may be political or social, but the work takes place within the texts.

As Todorov argues in his essay "'Race,' Writing and Culture," to favor rhetoric or analysis that "depends on the color of the thinker's skin" is to "practice the very racialism one was supposed to be combatting" (177). It is his contention that critical paradigms ought to aspire to universality – even if they never achieve it, and to create a body of text, fictional and critical that will ultimately facilitate "the comprehension of otherness" through texts. In privileging narrative structures, rhetoric, and figuration I hope to have followed his recommendations; however, I hope also to have shown that metonymies, which Yai suggests are the way art happens, require some cultural background in order to work. The implied understanding that drives metonymy requires knowledge of the thought processes that produced it, and that knowledge can be acquired in many ways. Even Henry Louis Gates writes that:

> Shared modes of figuration result only when writers read each other's texts and seize upon topoi and tropes to revise in their own texts. This form of revision is a process of grounding and has served to create curious formal lines of continuity between the texts that together comprise the shared text of blackness, the discrete chapters of which scholars are still establishing. (128-9)

Hopkinson, Danticat, and Ribeiro aren't practitioners of Ifá, nor are they speakers of Yoruba language. In at least the case of Hopkinson, her use of Èṣù and other Ifá-derived strategies has

been called "appropriation," and not in a favorable way.[49] Regardless of appropriation's status as authentic or inauthentic, the point is that authors who aren't practitioners of the language, culture, or religion are making use of Ifá and its structures. To consider how the appropriation happens and how Ifá articulates itself once appropriated is to open the possibilities of interpretation and identity that I suggested above.

An extended examination of the use of Ifá is obviously in order. The "formal lines of continuity" that Gates identifies are still being negotiated, and what constitutes continuity is clearly up for debate. While Echuero, Montgomery, and Sterling advocate the "ontological fact of blackness" and the "deepwell" of knowledge that one is supposed to have access to by birth, other scholars take the position not of biological, epidermal continuity, but continuity of narratives. Proper attention to narrative will bear out the ontology and social science; however, over-emphasis on the ontology and social science neglects the formal strategies and literary qualities of narrative. As Karen McCarthy Brown has suggested, Ifá practice in the form of vodou has a model for appropriation: the composite figure of Lasirèn. The legitimization of appropriation within the paradigm itself supports the notion that appropriation is one of the roads to liberation. Many critical articles on diaspora literature note the influence of Yoruba culture. The abiku and ibeji phenomena (infant mortality and twins) have formed the structures of novels and critical analysis. The Ogun paradigm, famously elaborated as a model for tragedy by Soyinka, has also been used to analyze African American works like *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. As I suggested earlier, though, the value of Ifa is not as a mere repository for cultural artifacts to be picked up and put down as needed. The corpus displays a complex and highly structured organization, and has the ability to contain paradoxes and meta-discourses within those structures. It is that totality and rhetorical self-definition that lends Ifá its literary qualities,

[49] Personal email communication between me and Afolabi in 2010.

which deserve to be tested for their use in understanding and analyzing literatures outside the extremely narrow scope I apply here.

First and foremost, the works of Jorge Amado deserve re-examination. If we are to give his novels, especially *Tenda dos milagres* a "failing" grade, it ought to be on literary grounds and not epidermal ones. The works of Octavia Butler could also be better understood through the lens of the Ifá tradition, which would lend a good bit of depth and understanding to novels like Wild Seed, in which Doro and Ayanwu are embodiments of oro and aje in ways similar to Olivia and Barreto in "Guarde Segredo." Doro and Ayanwu also articulate the difference between "serving the spirits" and "working the dead" that Mami Gros-Jeanne and Rudy embody in *Brown Girl in the Ring.* The works of Toni Morrison could also be analyzed from this perspective, and several scholars have already begun to do this. Analyses of both *Sula* and *Beloved* have utilized Yoruba culture to increase understanding of the texts and lend meaning to them. Several years ago, at annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association, Olakunle George criticized the over-use of the Èṣù paradigm by simply replying to Heather Russell's presentation with the comment "you know, not everything is Èṣù..." The natural extension of the Èṣù model is to begin to look at ways other orișa are deployed as strategies of figuration and rhetoric, and opening the field to include multiple "national" literatures will increase the roads of interpretation faster and more pluralistically than restricting analyses to one or two countries. It seems to also be beneficial to place texts within their national traditions AND outside of them, especially in the cases of Hopkinson, Danticat, and Ribeiro. Ribeiro is the only writer studied here who can (possibly) claim a single nationality. Even her "Brazilian-ness" is complicated by Brazil's particular mix of peoples, languages and cultures. Both Hopkinson and Danticat have made use of childhood experiences in the Caribbean, but live their adult lives in Canada and the

United States. Though the African-American tradition is eager to claim them both, it does not quite have enough critical capital to fully explicate their works. Instead, the opon-Ifa paradigm that Femi Osofisan posits may provide a rich interpretive tool. The opon-Ifa, as Osofisan treats it, is both an artistic object and a dynamic tool of communication and interpretation. Developing and using this paradigm would keep critics busy for years to come.

What is needed is collection, perhaps initially in the form of a bibliography, of primary and critical texts that use and/or apply the Ifá paradigm. That collection ought to address an Atlantic World, acknowledging all sides framing the middle passage, and the middle passage itself. The collection ought to also follow the developments of Ifá structures, practices, and objects as they have developed in the New World, and should highlight moments in which those structures, practices, and objects have created meaningful artistic, social, or political change in their respective national contexts. As I suggested in the chapter on Ribeiro, changing the dominant social order is the real critical and cultural capital of the Ifá paradigm. This collection, unreal and Fantastical at this moment, could be a significant contribution to literary and interdisciplinary studies.

REFERENCES

Abimbola, Wande. *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus.* Ibadan. Oxford University Press Nigeria. 1976.

Abiodun, Rowland. "African Aesthetics" *Journal of Aesthetic Education.* Vol 35. No 4. (Winter 2001). 15-35. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 feb 2008.

--- "Àṣẹ: Verbalizing and Visualizing Creative Power through Art." *Journal of Religion in Africa.* 24.4 (1994): 309-22. *JSTOR.* Web. 2 feb 2008.

--- "Hidden Power: Ọ̀ṣun, the Seventeenth Odù." *Ọ̀ṣun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas*. Eds. Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2001. 10-33. Print.

---"Understanding Yoruba Art and Aesthetics: The Concept of Àṣẹ ." *African Arts,* 27.3 (1994): 68-78. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 22 feb. 2008.

Afolabi, Niyi. "Beyond the Curtains: Unveiling Afro-Brazilian Women Writers." *Research in African Literatures*. 32:4 Winter 2001, 117-35.

Apter, Andrew. "On African Origins: Creolization and *Connaissance* in Haitian Vodou." *American Ethnologist.* 29(2) 233-60 2002.

Ashcroft, Bill. Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back.* London: Routledge. 1989. Print.

--- *The Post Colonial Studies Reader.* London: Routledge. 1995. Print.

Aspley, Keith. "Pierre Mabille: Un Compagnon du Surréalisme." *Modern Language Review.* 79.4 (1984): 946-947. *Academic Search Complete.* Web. 24 jan. 2014.

Badejo, Deirdre. *Ọ̀ṣun Ṣẹ̀ẹ̀gẹ̀sí: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power, and Femininity*. Trenton. Africa World Press. 1996. Print.

Barreto, Lima *Clara dos anjos.*

Bascomb, William. *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1969.

Bascom, William. *Shango in the New World*. Austin: Occasional Publication African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972.

Bascomb, William *Communication Between Gods and Men*

Beier, Ulli. *Yoruba Myths*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1980.

Brogan, Kathleen. *Cultural Haunting*: *Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature.* Charlottesville. University Press of Virginia. 1998.

Brown, Karen McCarthy. "Ezili." *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1991. 220-57.

Byrne, David. *Ilé Aiyé: The House of Life.* DVD. 1989. Plexifilm.

Collier, Gordon. "Spaceship Creole: Nalo Hopkinson, Canadian-Caribbean Fabulist Fiction, and and Linguistic/Cultural Syncretism." *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean.* Eds. Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischmann. Matatu: Journal of African Culture and Society, #27-27: Editions Rodopi: Amsterdam, New York: 2003. 443-456.

Christophe, Marc A. "Rainbow over Water: Haitain Art, Vodou Aestheticism, and Philosophy." *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, and Reality*. Eds. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 2006. 84-102.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Claire of the Sea Light*. Knopf. New York 2013

Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously The Immigrant Artist at Work.* Princeton University Press, Princeton 2010

Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions.* Seattle: Seal Press, 1989. Print.

Dayan, Joan. "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti." *Research in African Literatures.* Vol. 25 No. 2 1994. 5-31.

Deren, Maya. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti.* London. Documentext. 1953. Print.

Drewal, Henry and Margaret Thompson. *Gẹlẹdẹ: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press. 1983. Print.

Duke, Dawn. "How She Strikes Back: Images of Female Strength in Esmeralda Riberio's Writing" *The Afro-Brazilian Mind: Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literary and Cultural Criticism.* Eds. Niyi Afolabi, Marcio Barbosa, and Esmeralda Ribeiro. Trenton. Africa World Press. 2007. print. 99-120.

Dzidzienyo, Anani. "Abdias do Nascimento as Metaphor." *The Afro-Brazilian Mind: Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literary and Cultural Criticism.* Eds. Niyi Afolabi, Marcio Barbosa, and Esmeralda Ribeiro. Trenton. Africa World Press. 2007. print. 99-120.

Echeruo, Michael J.C., "An African Diaspora: The Ontological Project" *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* Eds. Isidore Okpewho, Caole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 1999. 3-18.

Enteen, Jillana. "'On the Receiving End of the Colonization': Nalo Hopkinson's 'Nansi Web." *Science Fiction Studies* Vol 34. 2007 262-82. *JSTOR.* 31 jan 2014.

Falola, Toyin. "Esu: The God Without Boundaries." *Esu: Yoruba God, Power, and The Imaginative Frontiers.* Durham. Carolina Academic Press. 2013. 3-37.

Fadipẹ, N.A. *The Sociology of the Yoruba.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970. Print.

Fanon, Franz. "Colonial War and Mental Disorders." *The Wretched of the Earth.* Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 1968. Print.

Farris, Robert Thompson. "Black Saints Go Marching In." *Flash of the Spirit.* New York: Random House, 1983. 3-99.

Freedman, Carl. *Critical Theory and Science Fiction.* Middletown. Wesleyan University Press. 2000.

Gadsby, Meredith M. *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival.* Columbia. University of Missouri Press. 2006. Print.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1988. Print.

Gottlieb, Karla Lewis. *"The Mother of Us All": A History of Queen Nanny Leader of the Windward Jamaican Moroons.* Trenton. Africa World Press. 2000. Print.

Hemminger, Bill. "The Way of the Spirit." *Research in African Literatures.* 32.1 (2001): 66-82. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 7 nov 2004.

Hopkison, Nalo. *Brown Girl in the Ring.* New York. Aspect. 1998.

--- *Midnight Robber.*

--- *The Salt Roads.*

--- *The New Moon's Arms.*

Houlberg, Marilyn. "Sirens and Snakes: Water Spirits in the Arts of Haitian Vodou." *African Arts.* 29.2 (1996): 30-5. *JSTOR.* Web. 4 sept. 2008.

Ibitokun, B.M. *African Drama and the Yoruba World View.* Ibadan. Ibadan University Press. 1995.

Idowu, E. Bolaje. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief.* London: Longman's. 1970. Print.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion.* London. Routledge. 1981.

Johnson, Samuel. *A History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1921

Law, Robin. *The Oyo Empire, c.1600-c.1836: a West African imperialism in the era of the Altantic slave trade*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Lawal, Babatunde. "Àwòrán: Representing the Self and its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art" *The Art Bulletin*. 83.3 (2001): 498-526. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 mar 2014.

--- *Gelede...*

Lima, Maria Helena. "Introduction." *Mulheres Escrevendo: Uma Antologia Bilingüe de Escritoras Afro-Brasileiras Contemporâneas*. Eds. Miriam Alves and Maria Helena Lima. London: Mango Publishing, 2005. 17-23.

Marouan, Maha. "In the Spirit of Erzulie: Vodou and the Reimagining of Haitian Womanhood in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory." Witches, Goddesses, and Angry Spirits.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press. Print. 37-70.

Martin, W. Todd. "Ezili and the Subversion of the Holy Virgin in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*." *Literature and Belief.* 27.1 (2007): 29-40. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 14 feb 2014.

Matory, J. Lorand. "Is There Gender in Yorùbá Culture?" *Òrìṣà Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture.* Madison. The University of Wisconsin Press. 2008. Print. 513-58.

McCabe, Douglas. "Histories of Errancy: Oral Yoruba Àbíkú Texts And Soyinka's 'Abiku'."

Research in African Literatures. 33.1 (2002): 45-74. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 9 nov. 2004.

McCarthy-Brown, Karen. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley. University of California Press. 1991.

McGregory, Jerrilyn. "Nalo Hopkinson's Approach to Speculative Fiction." *Femspec.* Vol 6 Iss 1 2005. n.p. *Highbeam Research* 28 jan 2014. web.

Métraux, Alfred. *Voodo in Haiti*. New York: Schoken Books. 1959.

Michel, Claudine, Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, and Marlène Racine-Toussaint. "From the Horses' Mouths: Women's Words/Women's Worlds." *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, and Reality.* Eds. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 2006. 84-102. print.

Montgomery, Georgene Bess. *The Spirit and the Word: A Theory of Spirituality in Africana Literary Criticism.* Trenton. Africa World Press. 2008. print.

Murphy, Laura T. *Metaphor and the Slave Trade in West African Literature.* Athens, Ohio University Press. 2012. Kindle Edition.

Ogunbile, David. "Ẹẹ́rìndínlógún: The Seeing Eyes of the Sacred Shells and Stones." *Ọ̀ṣun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas*. Eds. Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2001. 189-212. Print.

Okri, Ben. *The Famished Road.* New York. Anchor Books. 1991. print.

Oliveira, Emanuelle. *Writing Identity: The Politics of Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literature.* West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University Press. 2008. print.

Osofisan, Femi. "Formal Strategies and Social Commentary in His Plays." *Modern African*

Drama. Ed. Biodun Jeyifo. New York. Norton. 2002. 615-18. print.

Oyewumi, Oyeronkẹ. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses.* Minneapolis. Then University of Minnesota Press. 1997. Print.

Parés, Luis Nicolau. "The Nagôization Process in Bahian Candomblé." *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World.* Eds. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs. Bloomington. Inidiana University Press. 2004. 185-208. Print.

Ramraj, Ruby S. "Nalo Hopkinson: Transcending Genre Boundaries." *Beyond the Canebrakes: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada.* Africa World Press Trenton, 2008. 135-53.

Ramsdell, Catherine. "Nalo Hopkinson and the Reinvention of Science Fiction." *Beyond the Canebrakes: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada.* Africa World Press Trenton, 2008. 155-72..

Rebelo, Aldo. "Preface." *Cadernos Negros: Os melhores contos*. São Paulo: Quilombhoje. 1998.

Ribeiro, Esmeralda. "A procura de uma Borboleta Preta." *Mulheres Escrevendo: Uma Antologia Bilingüe de Escritoras Afro-Brasileiras Contemporâneas*. Eds. Miriam Alves and Maria Helena Lima. London: Mango Publishing, 2005. 26-39.

---. "A Escritora negra e o seu ato de escrever participando." *Criação crioula, Nu elefante branco*. São Paulo, 1987.

---. "Guarde Segredo." *Cadernos Negros: Os melhores contos.* São Paulo: Quilombhoje. 1998.

Rogan, Alcena Madeline Davis. "Tananarive Due and Nalo Hopkinson Revisit the Reproduction of Mothering: Legacies of the Past and Strategies for the Future." *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory.* Ed. Marlene Barr. Columbus. Ohio State University Press. 2008. 75-99.

Russell, Heather. *Legba's Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic.* Athens. The University of Georgia Press. 2009. print.

Shamsie, Kamila. *Claire of the Sea Light by Edwidge Danticat - Review*. theguardian.com 27 dec 2013. web. 14 feb 2014.

Sontag, Deborah. "Island Magic" (review) New York Times aug 30, 2013. web. 30 sept 2013

Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Sterling, Cheryl. "Blackness Re-Visited and Re-Visioned in the Works of the Black Arts Movement and *Quilombhoje*." *The Afro-Braziilan Mind: Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literary and Cultural Criticism.* Eds. Niyi Afolabi, Marcio Barbosa, and Esmeralda Ribeiro. Trenton. Africa World Press. 2007. print. 45-67.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.* Ithaca. Cornell University Press. Trans. Richard Howard. 1970. print.

Tutuola, Amos. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts.* New York. Grove Press. 1954. print.

Washington, Theresa N. *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Ajé in Africana Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2005. print.

Welch, David B. *Voice of Thunder, Eyes of Fire: In Search of Shango in the New World*. Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing, 2001. print.

Yai, Olabiyi. "In Praise of Metonymy: The Concepts of 'Tradition' And 'Creativity' in the Transmission of Yoruba Artistry Over Time and Space." *Research in African Literatures.* 24.4 (1993): 29-37. *MLA International Bibliography.* Web. 11 mar 2007.