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The Word for World is Story: Towards a Cognitive  
Theory of (Canadian) Syncretic Fantasy

by

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## Abstract

Unlike secondary world fantasy, such as that of J.R.R. Tolkien, what I call *syncretic fantasy* is typically set in a world that overlaps significantly with the contemporary "real" or *cognitive majoritarian* world in which we (i.e. most North Americans) profess to live our lives. In terms of popular publication, this subgenre has been recognized by fantasy publishers, readers, and critics since (at least) the mid 1980s, with Charles De Lint's bestselling *Moonheart* (1984) and subsequent "urban fantasies" standing as paradigmatic examples of the type. Where secondary world fantasy constructs its alternative worlds in relative isolation from conventional understandings of "reality," syncretic fantasy posits alternative realities that coexist, interpenetrate, and interact with the everyday real. In the texts examined in this dissertation, for example, Celtic bards and Native spirits appear in contemporary Ottawa (De Lint, *Moonheart*), vodoun practitioners and their patron spirits are depicted in a near-future Toronto (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl*), and non-human characters from Native traditions (such as Coyote and B'gwus) play active roles in shaping the lives of contemporary characters in Alberta (King, *Green Grass*) and British Columbia (Robinson, *Monkey Beach*).

In its explicit reconciliation of multiple (often cross-cultural) worldviews within a single narrative, syncretic fantasy explores the possibility that differing worldviews and the collision points between them may be negotiated not (only) as points of conflict but as opportunities for renovating and reconstructing these worldviews in new configurations. This process, in turn, echoes contemporary

models of syncretism as a cognitive process. These models describe *all* cultural worldviews as deeply syncretic, arguing that individuals always integrate (or *syncretize*) a variety of (sub)cultural worldviews into their own idiosyncratic understandings of both Self and "reality." By consistently representing the syncretic integration of multiple worldviews as an explicit element of its narrative structures, syncretic fantasy also models the potential for syncretically reintegrating heterogeneous, cognitive minoritarian identities, stories, and histories into the contemporary cognitive majoritarian world. These narratives—by virtue of their presentation as fantasy—do not present definitive *solutions* to the difficulties of cross-cultural interaction but rather envision the *possibility* of such resolutions within explicitly imaginary, story-centric frameworks.

Accordingly, this study undertakes several concurrent tasks: to seek out compatible critical frameworks for explaining the prototypical discursive strategies of fantasy and syncretic fantasy, to use these frameworks to construct a (tentative) cognitive model of syncretic fantasy, and to explore and extend this model in relation to particular literary texts. In the first case, I work outwards from existing fantasy criticism to demonstrate the underlying compatibilities between these critical frameworks and various contemporary models of cognition, story, and syncretism. In the second, I investigate how syncretic fantasy paradigmatically depicts—and thereby both models and implicitly postulates as *possible*—the (often cross-cultural) syncretic reconstruction of individual identities, stories, and histories in contemporary contexts. And in the last, I explore syncretic fantasy's utility as a critical heuristic for explaining these same

narrative processes in texts both "inside" and "outside" the genre of fantasy proper, processes that have thus far proven difficult to explain through existing non-fantasy-based critical frameworks. The central task of this dissertation, then, is not to develop a static definition of syncretic fantasy, but rather to explore the interpretive and cognitive possibilities uncovered by both elucidating the paradigmatic structures of syncretic fantasy and reading particular texts through the critical heuristic(s) implied by these paradigms.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: A Criticism of One's Own.....	1
Part I: Extending the Horizons of the Possible .....	13
(Re)Defining Fantasy.....	15
1.1 Fantasy as Fuzzy Set: Compatibility and/as Methodology .....	17
1.2 Fantasy Prototypes: A Critical Survey, with Modifications.....	36
1.3 On the Importance (and Function) of Story-Shaped Worlds.....	56
1.4 Fantasy as Metacognitive Frame .....	69
Syncretic Fantasy: Reimagining Cultural, Cognitive, and Literary Syncretism	75
2.1 Fantasy in the "Real" World? .....	76
2.2 On Recognizing Story-Shaped "Realities": Towards a Cross-Cultural Model.....	88
2.3 Syncretic World-Building: Cultural and Cognitive Syncretism.....	94
2.4 Reimagining Literary Syncretism.....	102
2.5 Syncretic Fantasy Defined.....	112
2.6 On the Role of Magic in Syncretic Fantasy.....	115
Part II: Constructing Contiguous Otherworlds .....	125
Charles De Lint: Establishing Syncretic Fantasy Prototypes and Paradigms.	128
Nalo Hopkinson: Syncretism as Paradigm .....	165
Comparisons: The Problem with Syncretic Essentialism(s).....	201
Part III: Syncretic Fantasy and Indigeneity .....	218
Thomas King: Syncretic Fantasy as Ritual Healing .....	223
Eden Robinson: Syncretic Fantasy as Self-Construction .....	250
Conclusion: Connections and Speculations .....	280
Connections: Healing Stories, Syncretic Identities.....	280
Speculations: Texts, Contexts, and Expansions.....	291
Works Cited .....	304

## Introduction: A Criticism of One's Own

In 1947, J. R. R. Tolkien defined "fantasy" not as a literary genre but as a central element of human cognition.<sup>1</sup> Of course, he didn't use those terms. Rather, Tolkien identifies fantasy as a "natural human activity" (56) linking human imaginative capacities to artistic expression through its "power of giving ideal creations the inner consistency of reality" (49). He further argues that fantasy "certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make" (56). Tolkien stops (just) short of suggesting that fantasy and story might be core constituent elements of all human reasoning, subjectivities, and subjective reality-constructions. However, in his discussion of the origin of "fairy-stories"—Tolkien's preferred term to describe the genre now more commonly known as fantasy—he does suggest that "[t]o ask what is the origin of stories (however qualified) is to ask what is the origin of language and of the mind" (25).

Since 1947, Tolkien's definition of fantasy as a cognitive practice has not as a rule been taken up by literary critics.<sup>2</sup> However, cognitive scientists such as Mark Turner and others have more recently argued that the ability to construct, reconstruct, and invent stories—whether of "real" or "imaginary" worlds—may

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien describes the development and eventual publication of his essay "On Fairy-Stories" in the preface to its later publication as a sub-section of his larger work "Tree and Leaf" (9).

<sup>2</sup> One of the few exceptions to this rule may be Kathryn Hume's *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, in which Hume argues that fantasy and mimesis represent twin poles in the production of all literature, whether that literature is primarily fantastic or realistic. Hume's formulation, while insightful, is not of central concern here, since she discusses fantasy not as a literary genre but rather as an underlying process that operates to some degree within all literature. This dissertation, by contrast, is more specifically concerned with the well-recognized—yet thus far in some ways vaguely or problematically defined—literary genre of fantasy.

indeed represent a crucial, central element of human cognition. That is, these researchers argue that human beings always construct their subjective understandings of reality upon an underlying foundation of stories and storytelling. This "cognitive perspective" suggests, among other things, that story-based realities and cognitive frameworks—what Peter Stockwell calls "discourse worlds"—may operate as a "mediating domain for [human] reality as well as projected fictions" (92-94). However, such a perspective also exposes what I will argue is one of the most persistent critical stumbling blocks to understanding the prototypical discursive mechanisms and strategies of fantasy: namely, the ongoing critical and colloquial understanding of fantasy as (by definition) depicting "impossible" or "unreal" worlds and stories.

The critical definition of literary fantasy—as Chapter One will explore in more detail—is neither self-evident nor simple; nonetheless, traditional secondary world fantasy has typically been critiqued on two (mutually contradictory) fronts. On the one hand, fantasy's depiction of explicitly imaginary and definitively "impossible" worlds and stories commonly leads to accusations of escapism and (a)political irrelevance. Mere escapism into an alternative reality—or so the implied argument goes—simply avoids confronting contemporary realities by providing an escape route into an idealized (usually conservative or apolitical) fantasyland. On the other hand, fantasy's construction of explicitly imaginary Otherworlds that nonetheless reproduce "the inner consistency of reality" is often critiqued as insufficiently subversive of the conventions of literary realism—themselves understood as (implicitly) reinforcing conservative, imperialist, and/or

mass-culture assumptions and ideologies—and once again, fantasy is reduced to conservative and/or apolitical irrelevance.<sup>3</sup>

In each case, much contemporary literary criticism appears ill-equipped to understand a literary genre that is *neither* realism *nor* a direct (aesthetic) reaction against it. As a result of such dismissals, the critical tools for understanding or even clearly defining fantasy remain significantly underdeveloped. Thus, one of the main critical tasks of this project will be to seek out and/or develop *compatible* critical frameworks that can explain how (and possibly why) fantasy and syncretic fantasy work in the ways that they do. As will be discussed in more detail throughout this study, this compatibility of critical frameworks is especially crucial in the particular case of fantasy. That is, I would argue that the critical and colloquial commonplace of dismissing fantasy as *escapist* or *naïve* may be rooted in the (typically invisible) persistence of *cognitive majoritarian* frameworks and understandings of "reality" itself, which are themselves precisely the sorts of frameworks that many cognitive scientists argue are most difficult to expose to the conscious mind.<sup>4</sup>

In such a context, fantasy's paradoxical construction of explicitly imaginary yet internally realistic worlds and stories can be reconfigured not as a problem but an opportunity, and a renovated fantasy criticism might be able to address gaps in existing critical frameworks designed to analyze more reality-

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Armit (196, 199), Brooke-Rose (qtd. in Attebery, *Strategies* 24-27), Jackson (qtd. in Attebery, *Strategies* 21), Mendlesohn (9, 13, 17, 152), and Olsen (18).

<sup>4</sup> As will be discussed in more detail below, I have adapted the terms "cognitive minoritarian" and "cognitive majoritarian" from Peter L. Berger's descriptions of certain "cognitive minority" perspectives in twentieth century American culture.

centric (i.e. realistic or anti-realistic) genres. What if, for example, such a renovated critical framework reimagined fantasy not as depicting *impossible* but *possible* worlds? That is, what if—in its depiction of explicitly imaginary worlds with differing physical laws and "realities" than our own—fantasy were understood as depending not on the objective *impossibility* of these worlds but rather on the subjective *possibility* of the worldviews necessitated by such alternative realities? Indeed, since fantasy's worlds are already explicitly subjective (i.e. imaginary), even the most traditional secondary world fantasy effectively sidesteps the twinned issues of *either* reinforcing *or* undermining (invisibly ideological) monolithic, monocultural, or homogeneous "objective" realities in favour of (re)enacting the subjective (re)construction of "reality" itself.

Such a reconfigured model of fantasy—which is, of course, the model that I advocate in this study—exposes a deep, underlying compatibility between fantasy and the story-centric models of human cognition discussed above. Moreover, such models also echo many fantasy authors' descriptions of the genre and how it operates—particularly in terms of the crucial role of *belief* in both the reading and writing of fantasy—descriptions that have rarely been incorporated into existing critical accounts of the genre. Within such a context, fantasy may be reimagined as precisely the sort of narrative that explicitly re-enacts—and implicitly explores—what several cognitive scientists identify as deeply (and necessarily) subjective, imaginative, and story-centric processes of human reality and identity construction. In short, fantasy may be understood not so much as depicting definitively impossible worlds but rather as extending the (cognitive)

horizons of the possible.

Within this renovated model of fantasy, what I call *syncretic fantasy* takes the implicitly subjectivized reality-construction of secondary world fantasy and makes that process more explicit by placing it in direct contact with the everyday, conventionally "real" world. Thus, where traditional fantasy constructs its alternative worlds in relative isolation from conventional, cognitive majoritarian reality, syncretic fantasy posits alternative realities that coexist, interpenetrate, and interact with the everyday real in which we (i.e. most North Americans) profess to live our lives. Celtic bards and Native spirits appear in contemporary Ottawa (De Lint, *Moonheart*), voodoo practitioners and their patron spirits are depicted in a near-future Toronto (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl*), and non-human characters from Native traditions (such as Coyote and B'gwus) play active roles in shaping the lives of contemporary characters in Alberta (King, *Green Grass*) and British Columbia (Robinson, *Monkey Beach*). Syncretic fantasy, in other words, explicitly addresses (and depicts) the collision-point between conventionally "imaginary" and "real" worlds. Furthermore, where multiple cultural worldviews collide, differing cultures (may) have differing understandings of what constitutes the "real" or the "possible." What one culture believes to be merely an imagined, theoretical possibility, another culture may take as a self-evident truth; likewise, what one culture understands as self-evident truth may be considered literally impossible by another. Nor can these collisions be disinvested from their material, political implications, since the dominant "reality" will always be that of the dominant (cognitive majoritarian) culture, while non-dominant (cognitive

minoritarian) cultural understandings of reality are more commonly demoted to merely "imaginary," "mythological," and ultimately "unreal" status.

Syncretic fantasy, in its explicit reconciliation of multiple (and often cross-cultural) worldviews within a single narrative, explores the possibility that differing worldviews and the collision points between them may be negotiated not (only) as points of conflict but as opportunities for renovating and reconstructing these worldviews in new configurations. Here again, this process echoes contemporary models of syncretism as a cognitive process in which cultural worldviews are understood to be heterogeneous, and individuals—even in relatively homogeneous cultural contexts—are understood as always integrating (or *syncretizing*) a variety of cultural and sub-cultural worldviews into their own idiosyncratic understandings of both Self and "reality." Thus, by modeling the syncretic integration of multiple worldviews as an explicit element of its prototypical narrative structures, syncretic fantasy also models the potential for syncretically reintegrating heterogeneous, cognitive minoritarian identities, stories, and histories into the contemporary cognitive majoritarian world. These narratives—by virtue of their presentation as fantasy—do not present definitive *solutions* to the difficulties of cross-cultural interaction but rather envision the *possibility* of such resolutions within explicitly imaginary, story-centric frameworks. For perhaps, as John Clute and Gary K. Wolfe put it, "at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mimetic tradition increasingly fails to fulfil the most conservative expectations of how we can understand the nature of the world" (900). And perhaps this failure itself exposes one of the reasons why we—as human,

storytelling animals—might desire such fantasies, not as a means of recuperating a singular, monocultural, and falsely objective sense of 'reality' but rather "to recuperate a sense that stories still exist. That we still can be told" (900).<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, this dissertation undertakes several concurrent tasks: to seek out compatible critical frameworks for explaining the prototypical discursive strategies of fantasy and syncretic fantasy, to use these frameworks to construct a (tentative) model of syncretic fantasy, and to explore and extend these critical models in relation to particular literary texts. In the first case, I will work outwards from existing fantasy criticism to demonstrate the underlying compatibilities between these critical frameworks and various contemporary models of cognition, story, and syncretism. In the second, I will investigate how syncretic fantasy paradigmatically depicts—and thereby both models and implicitly postulates as *possible*—the (often cross-cultural) syncretic reconstruction of individual identities, stories, and histories in contemporary contexts. And in the last, I will explore syncretic fantasy's utility as a critical heuristic for explaining these same narrative processes and strategies in texts both "inside" and "outside" the genre of fantasy proper, processes which have themselves proven difficult to explain through existing critical frameworks. The central task of this dissertation, then, is not to develop a static definition of syncretic fantasy, but rather to explore the interpretive and cognitive possibilities uncovered by both elucidating the paradigmatic structures of syncretic fantasy and

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<sup>5</sup> The edition of the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* cited throughout this study records the authors of this entry as John Clute and Gary Westfahl. However, as noted by Clute, this was a misprint, and this entry was actually written as a collaboration between John Clute and Gary K. Wolfe ("Errata" 458).

simultaneously reading particular texts through the critical heuristic(s) implied by these paradigms.

In many ways, the links between Canadian multiculturalism and Canadian syncretic fantasy are suggestively provocative, but exploring these links is not a central aspect of this dissertation. Thus, although (Canadian) syncretic fantasy's recurring tropes of cross-cultural interaction may provoke comparison to the history of Canadian multiculturalism, the following investigation will focus more narrowly on developing (and exploring the critical uses of) an account of syncretic fantasy prototypes and discursive strategies rather than postulating any specifically or uniquely *Canadian* aspects of Canadian syncretic fantasy. Certainly, all of the authors and texts explored here are Canadian, and productive links could be drawn between these cross-cultural narratives and the ongoing project of Canadian multiculturalism. However, rather than attempting to address them here, I will leave the connections between Canadian syncretic fantasy and Canadian multicultural identity-building as a (series of) provocative, open-ended question(s) to be addressed by future investigations.

The dissertation itself proceeds in three parts. "Extending the Horizons of the Possible" (Part I) stitches together several contemporary theories of fantasy, cognition, story, and syncretism to reevaluate the critical underpinnings of existing fantasy criticism. In so doing, this section develops a renovated model of "fantasy," a framework through which a clearer understanding of the critically problematic "syncretic fantasy" subgenre may then be constructed. Chapter One undoes the critical dependence of existing definitions of fantasy upon the

problematic real/unreal distinction, arguing that fantasy's prototypical structures are based not upon the assumed "impossibility" of its narrative worlds but rather upon the (always subjunctive and imagined) *possibility* of these worlds' existence. Building upon this renovated understanding of traditional secondary world fantasy, Chapter Two develops a working model of syncretic fantasy as both a subgenre and a critical heuristic. Introducing contemporary theories of syncretism as a process of both cognitive and cross-cultural world-building, this chapter argues that syncretic fantasy explicitly models the same cognitive processes of syncretic identity construction that contemporary (cognitive) theories of syncretism argue are notoriously difficult to apprehend on a conscious level. This chapter further explores how syncretic fantasy's blending of fantasy and "real" worlds prototypically depicts its protagonists' gradual cognitive integration (i.e. syncretism) of "cognitive minoritarian" perspectives with their former, cognitive majoritarian understandings of precisely what constitutes the "real."

"Constructing Contiguous Otherworlds" (Part II) examines the paradigmatic structures and strategies of syncretic fantasy in two texts: Charles De Lint's *Moonheart*, and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Chapter Three examines *Moonheart* as a prototypical syncretic fantasy in its explicit depiction of cross-cultural interaction between Celtic and First Nations magical traditions, histories, and stories, as well as in its construction of a magical Otherworld that is contiguous to—although not seamlessly integrated with—contemporary Ottawa. In direct contrast to Farah Mendlesohn's contention that this type of fantasy "embodies a denial of what history is" (14) or, alternatively,

"seem[s] as much a denial of history as a creation of it" (147), this chapter argues that De Lint's novel syncretically reconstructs Euro-Canadian history, depicting the necessary coming-to-terms of the novel's Euro-Canadian protagonists with their own historical complicity in the (ongoing) colonial subjugation and oppression of Canada's Native population. Chapter Four examines *Brown Girl in the Ring's* depiction of a Caribbean-inflected magical quest in a near-future downtown Toronto, where downtown Toronto itself has been transformed into a magical, contiguous Otherworld. This chapter explores the mechanisms of explicit cross-cultural and cognitive syncretism that lie at the heart of the Caribbean-Canadian protagonist's integration of her own cultural (and magical) traditions into her own experience and understanding of the contemporary world. Chapter Five, then, compares the differing effects of De Lint's syncretic recuperation of lost (or repressed) cross-cultural histories with Hopkinson's portrayal of cognitive syncretism and its transformational potential for cognitive minoritarian individuals and communities.

"Syncretic Fantasy and Indigeneity" (Part III) explores how the reading of certain (fantasy-like) texts through a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy can help to explain aspects of these texts that typically remain opaque to more conventional critical approaches. Specifically, this section explores applies a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy to two fantasy-like texts more commonly understood through critical frameworks of indigeneity: Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*. In each case, a critical framework of syncretic fantasy sidesteps (and reconfigures) the persistent

binary oppositions between Native and non-Native worldviews that (often) underlie existing critical approaches to these texts. Thus, Chapter Six examines the strong correspondences between what many critics identify as the distinctly Native characteristics of *Green Grass, Running Water* and the prototypical narrative structures of (syncretic) fantasy. Here, not only do the postulated "Native" elements of this novel echo the supposedly "Christian" (according to John Clute) structures of fantasy—thereby critically modeling the escape of "Native" tropes and stories from such culturally monolithic categorizations—the novel itself also depicts the escape of mythic Stories from their contemporary isolation in the category of "myth" and back into the "real" world. Chapter Seven examines the correspondences between syncretic fantasy prototypes and the dilemmas of contemporary Native identity-construction as portrayed in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*. Here, the novel's protagonist negotiates a variety of *both* "Native" *and* "non-Native" paradigms in the quest to syncretically (re)construct her own identity as a contemporary Haisla woman.

The first half of the conclusion, "Connections: Healing Stories, Syncretic Identities," takes a step back to compare the cumulative analyses of these four novels as syncretic fantasy, both in terms of their similarities and significant contrasts. For although all of these novels show strong (and overlapping) compatibilities with syncretic fantasy paradigms and discursive strategies, their broadly differing manifestations of these paradigms also provide further insights into the distinct perspectives of each novel. Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and De Lint's *Moonheart*, for example, both depict cross-cultural interaction between

Native and non-Native worldviews and spiritual paradigms, yet each novel emphasizes different aspects of this interaction with significantly differing results. Thus, the contrasts between these novels' differing manifestations of syncretic fantasy may prove as instructive (and as suggestively provocative) as their similarities. Finally, "Speculations: Texts, Contexts, and Expansions" proposes further directions for research on this topic, identifying several additional texts and contexts that could be investigated and (re)interpreted through a critical heuristic of (Canadian) syncretic fantasy.

## **Part I: Extending the Horizons of the Possible**

Although the central project of this study is to develop and explore a productive working theory of syncretic fantasy, this working theory will require certain clarifications of and revisions to existing theories of fantasy, the parent genre from which syncretic fantasy emerges. To this end, Chapter One surveys existing fantasy criticism—particularly Brian Attebery and John Clute's formulations of fantasy's prototypical structure and elements, but also with reference to additional perspectives—first, as a means of selectively extracting and (re)constructing a more general theory of fantasy than has yet been proposed, and second, as a means of revising certain critical commonplaces regarding the genre. This second portion of the investigation—along with an exploration of the links between existing fantasy criticism and cognitive theories of genre, story, and human cognition more generally—will set the stage for developing a critical theory of syncretic fantasy, which is the main project of Chapter Two.

In each case, fantasy—as a genre, a critical heuristic, and a set of discursive strategies—will be shown to be deeply compatible with contemporary theories of cognition (in the case of fantasy) and cognitive models of syncretism (in the case of syncretic fantasy). To this end, a clear theory of syncretic fantasy—both as a popular subgenre and a set of discursive strategies that may also appear in certain texts not usually considered as fantasy—will first require the development of a modified theory of fantasy, wherein fantasy is understood primarily not as portraying *impossible* worlds but as constructing plausible, even *possible* alternative "realities" or worldviews. Consequently, the correlations and

critical implications of these revised theories of fantasy and syncretic fantasy will be both explored and clarified for use (and extension) in the textual analyses contained in Parts II and III of this study.

## Chapter One

### (Re)Defining Fantasy

"Fantasy' – certainly when conceived as being in contrast to Realism – is a most extraordinarily porous term, and has been used to mop up vast deposits of story which this culture or that – and this era or that – deems unrealistic." (Clute, "Fantasy" 337)

In the English language, "fantasy" is indeed an "extraordinarily porous term," referring to everything from the expression of repressed desires to the representation or imagining of the self-evidently *unreal* to a simple synonym for *not-true*. Likewise, the literary genre of fantasy has been defined, re-defined, and counter-defined *ad nauseam*, until this process has led certain critics to consider its definition self-evident,<sup>6</sup> while others spend inordinate amounts of time (and text) in advocating their own definitions, sometimes to the point of explicitly erasing and/or opposing all differing ones. Definitional strategies have proliferated and multiplied across several decades and critical traditions, such that fantasy's generic characteristics have been extrapolated directly from particular (and idiosyncratic) selections of representative texts,<sup>7</sup> based upon previous (often specialized) definitions,<sup>8</sup> or asserted wholesale with little (if any) direct reference

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<sup>6</sup> See Manlove, Mathews, Michalson.

<sup>7</sup> See Rabkin in particular, with his assertion of Lewis Carroll's work as the most purely representative and paradigmatic work of fantasy.

<sup>8</sup> See Armitt, Brooke-Rose, Jackson, and Olsen, among others, all of whom base their definitions on Tzvetan Todorov's 1973 definition of the term, as well as each others' expansions of that work.

to critical precursors.<sup>9</sup> One of the most problematic consequences of these critically isolated and (often) mutually contradictory definitions of fantasy is not only the isolation of fantasy criticism from mainstream, non-fantasy critical frameworks but also the progressive fragmentation of fantasy criticism itself. When each critic postulates her or his own self-sufficient definition for the genre, the resultant definitional and terminological ambiguities effectively block the development of a coherent, clearly contextualized critical discourse (or set of discourses) through which to study fantasy. More importantly, these sorts of de-contextualized definitions—in the sense of lacking an explicit contextualization of each study's underlying critical terms, goals, and relationship to other studies' terms and goals—encourage a sort of literary provincialism *within* the study of fantasy. As a result, not only do different fantasy critics often adopt conflicting definitions of the genre, but critics studying clearly distinct and differing areas, types, and forms of the fantastic often argue with, dismiss, or denigrate those types, forms, and definitions of "fantasy" that fall outside of (and therefore into conflict with) their own definitions and areas of primary interest.

To counter this tendency in fantasy criticism, Section 1.1 of this chapter explicitly contextualizes my own methodology for the study of fantasy, drawing upon Brian Attebery's description of fantasy both as a (popular) literary genre and, more specifically, as a prototype-based "fuzzy set" (*Strategies*). Like Attebery, my underlying methodology could be summarized as a search for critical frameworks that are compatible with fantasy's structures and strategies, in

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<sup>9</sup> See Manlove, Mendlesohn, Michalson, and (Charlotte) Spivack, to name only a few.

the sense that these frameworks will be evaluated (and adopted) based upon their ability to explain how fantasy works, rather than functioning as critical rubrics for the evaluation of the genre. Following this methodology, Section 1.2 develops a more detailed critical framework for my own investigation of fantasy, again explicitly contextualizing this study's relationship to existing fantasy criticism. This critical framework stitches together—in some cases differing from and in others expanding upon—a variety of elements drawn from existing scholarly and critical definitions of fantasy. Based upon this renovated framework, I argue (in opposition to most fantasy criticism) that the imagined worlds of fantasy represent *possible* worlds rather than definitively *impossible* ones. The remainder of Sections 1.2 to 1.4, then, develop and pursue the implications of this consolidated (and revised) understanding of fantasy to explore the underlying worldviews or "metacognitive frames" implied by fantasy's prototypical structures.

### **1.1 Fantasy as Fuzzy Set: Compatibility and/as Methodology**

Fantasy criticism has a pervasive habit of making rather grandiose claims for the genre in the very vaguest of terms. Critics have variously claimed that "fantasy forms . . . the mainstream of Western literature from the classical era until the Renaissance" (Kratz 45), that its postmodern form represents "the literary equivalent of deconstructionism" (Olsen 117), and that fantasy may be characterized as the "literature of subversion" (Jackson), "the realism that our culture understands" (Olsen 14), or the literature of "liberation . . . [seeking] to liberate the feminine, the unconscious, the repressed, the past, the present, and the

future" (Mathews xii). Fantasy critics also often remind their readers that "fantasy literature does not enjoy the kind of critical attention or prestige that other literary genres, like the realistic novel do" (Michalson i), occasionally making this the basis of an entire book, as in the case of Karen Michalson's *Victorian Fantasy Literature*, which endeavours to uncover the "non-literary and non-aesthetic reasons" for fantasy's exclusion from the "traditional literary canon" (i). However, although many fantasy critics make similar claims regarding the broadly emancipatory effects of the genre, many of these same critics disagree on precisely what fantasy is, so that defining fantasy upon the basis of existing critical literature proves to be a non-trivial task.

Setting aside (for the moment) the question of what fantasy *is*, one key omission from all of the studies mentioned in the paragraph above is any explicit discussion of what it means to identify fantasy as a (popular) literary genre. For if fantasy is to be defined and studied as a literary genre, such definitions and studies would seem to presuppose some sort of agreement upon the terms underlying such investigations. However, no such underlying agreement exists, and the persistent lack of explicit critical/terminological contextualization in much fantasy criticism may very well be a part of what fuels ongoing debates over the proper definition of "fantasy," a point which I will discuss in more detail in Section 1.2. Crucially, none of the critics cited above are interested primarily in genre or theories of genre. Rather, they are more concerned with exploring the textual and structural dynamics of *this particular genre* and *these particular texts*, where the content represented by these italicized terms often varies from critic to

critic, depending on the study in question. In this sense, I am no exception, as I too am more interested in exploring the dynamics of the genre that I identify as fantasy—or rather, as specifically *syncretic fantasy*—than in defining *genre* itself as a critical term.

Nonetheless, although this study is not primarily about *genre*, it is about *a* genre, specifically the genre of *syncretic fantasy*, which I identify as a subgenre of fantasy. And investigating syncretic fantasy as a subgenre—or so I would argue, for the reasons noted above—requires some clarification of what I mean when I refer to the literary genre of fantasy. Since genre theory is not the primary focus of this study, I will not attempt to adopt or propose a comprehensive theory of genre, *per se*, but rather will base my own usage primarily upon Brian Attebery's unique (and relatively rare) examination of fantasy specifically *as a literary genre*. However, in doing so, I will also draw several suggestive parallels and tentative links between Attebery's theories of fantasy and contemporary genre theory. For while Attebery's definition of fantasy-as-genre does not explicitly reference genre theory, it is nonetheless based upon some of the same critical foundations (e.g. the modelling of distinctly "human categories" as prototype-driven "fuzzy sets") as certain contemporary cognitive-science-based understandings of *genre* itself. As well, Attebery's model anticipates and evokes strong parallels to several additional elements of contemporary genre theory. Thus, I will base my own investigations of fantasy-as-genre on Attebery's work, expanding his definition with explicit reference to contemporary genre theory in those areas where such theories contribute most productively to my own

investigations. Furthermore, by (selectively) noting these links to contemporary genre theory, my hope is to gesture towards the possibility of a more integrated understanding of fantasy-as-genre which could be developed with more extensive reference to genre theory, a task that lies beyond the necessarily limited scope of this particular study.

Furthermore, the choice to base my own critical investigations on Attebery's models rather than more contemporary or broader theories of genre represents more than a purely arbitrary matter of convenience, since the underlying *compatibility* of my selected critical frameworks with the structures and strategies of fantasy will be of crucial importance to the success of these investigations. As noted in the general introduction to this study, many well-established literary and critical theories seem to run into problems when confronted with a popular genre such as fantasy. Indeed, fantasy criticism has often been hobbled or distorted by the use of critical frameworks that seem incompatible with—or even antithetical to—the underlying structures of the genre itself. In some cases, for example, critics who plainly (and sometimes explicitly) disapprove of "genre" or "formula" fantasy have defined the genre in such a way as to reject popular fantasy as a potentially productive field of study, or even (in some cases) as a member of the category "fantasy" itself.<sup>10</sup> In other cases, even

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<sup>10</sup> In precisely this vein, critics such as Lucy Armit, Christine Brooke-Rose, and Rosemary Jackson tend to define fantasy based primarily upon Tzvetan Todorov's model of fantasy as an indefinite narrative "hesitation" between multiple interpretations of the text. Consequently, these critics often insist (or imply) that world-building fantasies such as C. S. Lewis's Narnia series or Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy fail to satisfy the (Todorovian) definition of fantasy and, furthermore, inevitably (re)produce conservative, ideologically repressive models of social organization. See Bechtel for further discussion of the various rejections and ejections of secondary world or "Tolkienian" fantasy from Todorovian definitions and canons of fantasy

more sympathetic critics such as C.N. Manlove have found themselves hobbled by the core assumptions of their selected critical frameworks in such a way that they have no choice other than to (albeit reluctantly) dismiss the genre's relevance on similarly ideological grounds.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, the choice of an incompatible critical framework may effectively force the conclusion that fantasy, as a genre, remains insufficiently transgressive, revolutionary, subversive, or even "realistic" to qualify as effectively "literary," since fantasy remains—by the standards of the selected critical approach—incapable of producing or portraying complex, ideologically and/or ethically nuanced narratives and perspectives. This recurring tendency on the part of critical approaches not specifically developed for use with popular or "genre" fantasy is precisely what leads me to assume as a methodological starting point that fantasy can (and often does) produce uniquely powerful and aesthetically nuanced literature. Like Attebery before me, I prefer to "assert that the task of literary theory is to provide a framework capable of accounting for the story's success on its own terms, rather than denying that its aims are achievable or worth the attempt" (Attebery, *Strategies* 17). Thus, throughout this study, I will deliberately select critical frameworks that seem to be *compatible* with fantasy and its structures, frameworks that can help to explain how fantasy achieves its effects and what, exactly, those effects might be. And in

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literature ("There and Back Again" 146).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Manlove's comments on the necessary "failure" of fantasy to produce convincing narratives for modern readers (259). In this case, Manlove argues from a realist aesthetic, and since fantasy fails to match the formal and aesthetic values of realism, Manlove finds fantasy—though enjoyable—ultimately unconvincing.

most cases, my method for seeking out (and developing) such compatible frameworks will entail a process of working outwards from existing fantasy criticism (such as Attebery's) to incorporate additional materials that can help to expand and/or modify these materials rather than working in opposition to them.

As a starting point for his investigations, Attebery draws a distinction between fantasy-as-formula and fantasy-as-mode. As he explains,

Fantasy is indeed, both formula and mode: in one incarnation a mass-produced supplier of wish fulfillment, and in the other a praise- and prize-worthy means of investigating the way we use fictions to construct reality itself. It is Italo Calvino and Jorge Luis Borges; it is also Piers Anthony and Robert E. Howard. But a term broad enough to include both *Conan the Barbarian* and *Cosmicomics* threatens to become meaningless. (1)

However, Attebery also warns against drawing strict boundaries between the mode and formula of fantasy, and in "looking for a middle ground between mode and formula" he concludes that "[t]his middle ground is the genre of fantasy" (10). Even at this early stage of the discussion, Attebery has already accomplished two significant critical tasks. First, he has distinguished the *genre* of fantasy from the broader *mode* of the fantastic, thus bracketing off his own critical work from that of Tzvetan Todorov's *Le Fantastique* and its inheritors, which (in Attebery's terms) consistently works across the *mode* of the fantastic.<sup>12</sup> Second, Attebery

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<sup>12</sup> Note that this distinction does *not* require any dismissal of or dispute with either the methodology or content of Todorovian fantasy criticism but simply defines Attebery's work (like mine) as a distinct and separate study of distinct and differing texts.

dispels the common perception that the entire "genre" of fantasy is uniquely, simplistically formulaic, or, indeed, that "formula" needs to be universally understood as a pejorative term. (Alternative understandings of "formula" fiction, specifically in terms of its potential as a form of *ritual* rather than *cliché*, will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six.) From this starting point, Attebery develops his own model of fantasy-as-genre with specific reference to fantasy literature, never attempting to universalize this definition to other genres. Nonetheless Attebery's model both anticipates and strikes powerful resonances within certain elements of contemporary genre theory, particularly those elements rooted in cognitive science.

Rather than exploring Attebery's definition in a point-by-point comparison with contemporary genre theory, I will here develop my own working definition of fantasy-as-genre. My own analysis will draw heavily upon both Attebery's and more contemporary, cognitive-science-based understandings of literary genre, particularly at the points where these frameworks overlap and complement one another. I take this approach not only because the former anticipates the latter—although it does in many ways—but because the common roots of these perspectives in cognitive theories of human perception and reasoning may, in turn, begin to demonstrate the underlying compatibility of what Peter Stockwell calls the "cognitive perspective" (92) with the study of fantasy in general and (eventually) syncretic fantasy in particular. Thus, drawing upon a deliberately selective variety of sources, I glean my own postulates of fantasy-as-genre, which may be summarized as follows:

- Fantasy is a prototype-based human category, a "fuzzy set."
- Fantasy prototypes are social, subjective constructs.
- Fantasy is (or can be) a way of reading, a critical heuristic.

In each case, these postulates will have implications for my later investigations of syncretic fantasy. And while the references to genre theory below are admittedly (and deliberately) selective, their often shared (cognitive) roots will continue to resonate throughout this study in a variety of additional fantasy-related critical frameworks, including cognitive theories of story, world-building, and syncretism.

**Fantasy is a prototype-based human category, a "fuzzy set."** As a popular genre, fantasy has certain central, prototypical characteristics and elements that may be more or less apparent within any given text. As John Clute puts it in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, explicitly referencing Brian Attebery's "description of fantasy as a 'fuzzy set,' it may be that fantasy is *inherently* best described and defined through prescriptive and explanatory example" ("Fantasy" 337, emphasis in original). Cognitive linguists such as Eve Sweetser (among others) have also suggested that literary genres may be understood as "human categories" or "fuzzy sets," which are defined not by strictly logical categories but by perceived similarities between any given element of the set and certain prototypically central examples of the category (i.e. the genre). Attebery was the first to postulate the genre of fantasy as just such a "fuzzy set," with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy providing the central, prototypical example. As Attebery explains with reference to existing fantasy criticism,

Virtually all the definitions [of fantasy] offered are descriptions after the fact; that is, the critic assembles a body of texts that seem to somehow fit the term and then describes the common feature or features. Literary theorists find this procedure messy, since neither the grouping nor the description is arrived at dialectically. *Yet in practice, this method of defining is true to the process of categorization within the human mind.* (*Strategies* 12, emphasis added)

Literary genres may be understood in this sense as particular instances of what Sweetser calls "real human categories" rather than logically structured Boolean sets with sharp, clear-cut boundaries. As Sweetser puts it, "experimental work has found that people reason from knowledge about central (prototypical) members of a category to infer things about more peripheral members, but not the other way around." Thus, "[u]nlike Boolean sets, human categories quite normally have central and less central members" (Sweetser).

This cognitive-science-based understanding of "human categories" is rooted in Lakoff and Johnson's *The Metaphors We Live By* (1980), precisely the work that Attebery references in explaining his own understanding of fantasy as a fuzzy set. As Attebery argues,

Genres may be approached as "fuzzy sets," meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but a center. As described by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, fuzzy set theory proposes that a category such as 'bird' consists of central, prototypical examples

like "robin," surrounded at a greater or lesser distance by more problematic instances such as "ostrich," "chicken," "penguin," and even "bat." (*Strategies* 12)

In other words, in this sort of model, for a genre to exist, it must first have certain central or prototypical members that produce (or reflect) a socially recognized cognitive category. This model works particularly well for a popular genre such as fantasy (in English), where central members of the genre are widely agreed upon as representative instances (e.g. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*), while less central members tend to generate dispute as to whether they should be identified as members of the genre at all. Furthermore, what Attebery calls "fuzzy set theory" and Sweetser identifies as a cognitive understanding of "real human categories" is echoed in (certain areas of) contemporary genre theory. John Frow, for example, identifies this sort of cognitive "classification by prototype" model of literary genre as a refinement of the "Wittgensteinian logic of 'family resemblances'" originally proposed by Alastair Fowler in his attempt to address the "fuzziness and open-endedness of the relation between texts and genres" (*Genre* 54).<sup>13</sup> Here, Frow draws an explicit link to cognitive science, noting that "[a] refinement of the theory of family resemblances is the account developed in cognitive psychology of classification by prototype: the postulate that we understand categories (such as *bird*) through a very concrete logic of typicality" (*Genre* 54).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Specifically, Frow cites Fowler's *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1982).

<sup>14</sup> Note, too, that Frow uses the same example as Attebery (that of *bird*), although he cites a

This cognitive model of genre-as-fuzzy-set has already been shown (by Attebery) to be compatible with fantasy's underlying structures and strategies. Moreover, in the case of syncretic fantasy, the investigation and exposure of recurring prototypical structures or discursive strategies shared by central texts of the genre (and subgenre) will allow me to investigate these same strategies where they appear in texts that may be less commonly recognized as fantasy, *per se*, yet which nonetheless share similar characteristics. That is, while certain texts may be prototypically identifiable as fantasy, others may be more or less fantasy-like, in the same way that a "bat" or an "ostrich" may both be understood as more or less bird-like. And while a "bat" may be more technically described as a rodent rather than a bird, bats too have wings, and the mechanisms of flight in bats may be quite similar to those of birds. The ability of a "flying" squirrel to glide, on the other hand, likely has less in common with a bat's capacity for flight than with the ability of a sparrow (for example) to launch itself into the air and fly upwards under its own power, even though both squirrels and bats are technically rodents, while sparrows emerge from an entirely different species and genetic heritage.

Likewise, the prototypical strategies of fantasy may also appear in other "species" of literature, as it were, and a fantasy-based understanding of these strategies may be of more assistance in understanding these strategies than an investigation rooted in critical terms based in other, apparently (or technically)

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different source, expanding as follows: "We take *a robin* or a sparrow to be more central to that category *than an ostrich* . . . Rather than having clear boundaries, essential components, and shared or uniform properties, classes defined by prototypes have a common core and then fade into fuzziness at the edges (Paltridge 1997: 53). This is to say that we classify easily at the level of prototypes, and with more difficulty . . . as we diverge from them" (54, emphasis added).

more closely related texts. My own investigation of syncretic fantasy, then, will also include an investigation of certain fantasy-like texts that—while not commonly recognized as "fantasy"—may nonetheless be illuminated by an investigation of their uses of narrative techniques, strategies, and elements that overlap significantly with fantasy's generic prototypes. Moreover, to extend the biological analogy above, one might note that however similar a bat and a sparrow may be, a rodent still cannot interbreed with a bird *without some sort of human intervention* (i.e. genetic engineering of some sort). However, the strategies of fantasy, having once entered the sphere of popular culture, may quite easily "interbreed" with those of other genres, and the reason for this is quite simple. Not only are fantasy prototypes always in flux, always in the process of being constructed, reconstructed, and reconfigured via collectively social, subjective, and (potentially) transformative processes, but these processes are *always* the result of human intervention, since these prototypes—in the model discussed below—literally only come into existence in the interaction between readers (or writers) and the texts that they use to construct the mental category of *fantasy* in the first place.

**Fantasy prototypes are social, subjective constructs.** Of course, describing fantasy as a prototype-structured "fuzzy set" begs the question: *Where do these prototypes come from?* The answer, quite simply, is that such prototypes come into existence through collective social processes at precisely the point when they become broadly recognized. And while this recognition may be gradual or sudden (and more or less enduring), the collective recognition of the

category itself is key to this process. Heinz Insu Fenkl argues that literary genres come into existence through an interactive process, whereby a particular text crystallizes—and, more crucially, is *recognized* by readers and writers as crystallizing—a particular set of generic conventions (Fenkl IV). Fenkl's description of this process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two; however, the key element to note here is that this is precisely the process to which Attebery refers in suggesting that "[i]n dealing with genre, it is our, or at least the writers', perception of genre that create the members for the set. Hence the importance of precursors" (*Strategies* 13). Thus, in the case of fantasy, Attebery argues that

with the publication and popular acceptance of Tolkien's version of the fantastic, a new coherence was given to the genre. . . . [W]hen *The Lord of the Rings* appeared, we had a core around which to group a number of storytellers who had hitherto been simply, as Northrop Frye suggests, 'other writers' belonging to no identified category or tradition.

Tolkien's form of fantasy, for readers in English, is our mental template, and will be until someone else achieves equal recognition with an alternative conception. (Attebery 14)

As a direct result of this process, then, "certain titles clearly occupy a more central place in people's conception of the genre," even while "there are . . . no clear boundaries between categories. Fantasy edges into science fiction; science fiction impinges on mainstream fiction; mainstream fiction overlaps with fantasy"

(Attebery 13). Note, too, that this model is explicitly culturally dependent. That is, Tolkien's version of fantasy forms a mental template *for readers in English*, a template which is not in any way "objective," but rather depends on a collective, continuing "recognition" of the template's ongoing prototypicality. J. K.

Rowling's Harry Potter series, for example, could conceivably supersede Tolkien's novels to form a new template for fantasy, although this does not (yet) seem to be the case, and in any case even Rowling's books owe many debts to the Tolkienian prototype.

Once again, the above framework resonates with certain aspects of contemporary genre theory. Nick Lacey's account of popular science fiction film and television, for example, identifies the crucial role of the audience in both recognizing and maintaining the extra-textual, socially collaborative construction of popular genres. According to Lacey, popular generic conventions take form through the continuous interaction of three main elements: the audience, the text, and the institution, where the "institution" refers to the myriad artists, editors, distributors, etc., who collectively shape the final form of the text as it is eventually delivered to the audience (133). In this sense, popular literary genres may be understood as abstract mental constructs (or schemata) that nonetheless produce physical, material effects in the form of actual, physical texts. Within such a model, fantasy—when used as a tool for literary critical analysis—may be much like mathematics as a tool for scientific analysis: abstract, imaginary, socially constructed (i.e. depending upon a shared discourse-community for its very existence), and potentially useful. Based upon this interdependence, my own

understanding of fantasy adopts the following assumptions. On the one hand, I assume that fantasy has comprehensible and recurring structures and strategies, which can be explored both in terms of *what they are* and *how they work*. On the other hand, I also assume that fantasy, as a popular genre, constitutes a collection of generically prototypical structures that may, in some cases, circulate and travel beyond the genre with which they are typically associated to appear in texts that might not be commonly identified as fantasy at all.

**Fantasy is (or can be) a way of reading, a critical heuristic.** That is, fantasy's prototypical structures and strategies may also appear in texts that are not commonly identified as members of the fantasy genre. Rather, these fantasy structures (or *discursive strategies*) may come unmoored from the genre of fantasy proper, such that they may appear in other genres as well. Furthermore, in such cases, fantasy may provide a powerful critical heuristic for understanding these shared discursive strategies in certain non-fantasy yet distinctly *fantasy-like* texts. This is precisely the critical approach that I will use to analyze the discursive strategies of fantasy and syncretic fantasy that appear in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*, and in each case, such re-readings will uncover certain key aspects of these texts that have either been overlooked or found difficult to explain by means of existing critical approaches to these novels. Again, as above, this strategy is not entirely new, since similar approaches have already been proposed in certain areas of contemporary genre criticism. Adena Rosmarin, for example, suggests that genre may be considered "a critic's tool or heuristic, a lens the critic uses to interpret

literary texts. [Thus,] the same text can be subject to different genre lenses without compromising that text's integrity" (qtd. and paraphrased in Bawarshi 345).<sup>15</sup> To take the very simplest of examples, a single novel such as Isaac Asimov's *The Caves of Steel*—a far-future murder mystery in which the protagonist, detective Elijah Bailey, and his assistant, the humanoid robot R. Daneel Olivaw, investigate the murder of an off-planet ambassador—may be clearly identifiable as *both* detective fiction *and* science fiction. In this case, a critical analysis of this text would likely yield differing insights depending on the critic's choice of generic prototypes through which to read the novel. Crucially, neither reading would (necessarily) invalidate the other, but each could provide unique insights into particular, genre-specific aspects of the text.

Thus, while the choice of a particular genre as a critical heuristic for analysis will inevitably structure the investigation as well as what that investigation yields, that choice need not be understood as implying an exhaustive, taxonomic, or exclusive characterization of the text under consideration. Rather, as Wai Chee Dimock suggests, genres may be understood as "open sets endlessly dissolved by their openness . . . resembling the database in being an unscripted effect of their membership and in being only a fraction of what they could be at any given moment" (1379). Referencing Katherine Hayles, Dimock expands this database metaphor to argue that genres are effectively user-generated, since they "have only an on-demand spatial occupancy. They can be brought forth or sent back as the user chooses, switched on or off, scaled up or

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<sup>15</sup> Bawarshi further notes that several other genre theorists (specifically, Cohen, Perloff, and Hirsch) have suggested similar perspectives since at least as early as 1985 (Bawarshi 345).

down. Each is one among several levels of resolution, with alternating features that can be read either as random detail or as salient pattern" (1379). In other words—and this is my hope in considering certain texts not normally perceived as "fantasy" through a critical framework of fantasy—the choice of a particular generic framework as a critical heuristic may yield genre-specific insights into the operations of the given text, insights which might be, if not impossible, at least more difficult to achieve through a different choice of critical frameworks. In particular, a renovated critical heuristic of (syncretic) fantasy—due to its typically under-studied (and often poorly understood) mechanisms—may provide insights into key aspects of certain fantasy-like texts that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

Collectively, the three postulates of fantasy-as-genre given above will inform my own exploration of the ways in which the generically conditioned worlds and worldviews of fantasy may be understood as (collectively) encompassing a particular *type* of worldview, what might be called a *metacognitive frame* for fantasy's prototypes of (generic) world-building. Attebery's exploration of fantasy-as-genre never explicitly addresses this point, although his analysis of fantasy's prototypical content, structures, and evoked reader-responses (14-16) certainly gestures in this direction.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, this methodology echoes the claims of several contemporary scholars that genres—be they literary or non-literary—tend to carry their own implicit sets of assumptions,

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Attebery's entire book could be understood as investigating various aspects of the underlying, implicit worldview(s) of the fantasy genre, and these explorations—as well as their links to fantasy's implicitly metacognitive underpinnings—will be discussed in more depth throughout this dissertation.

each of which encompasses a particular (implicit) worldview or reality-construction.<sup>17</sup> Anis Bawarshi, for example, argues not only that specific genres evoke particular sets of expectations both of and for readers but that this interaction between readerly and textual expectations effectively co-constitutes an entire (if generically delimited) world or worldview, a certain set of expectations about how the conceptual world containing both the reader and the text must operate (338-340).

Similarly, John Frow argues that the study of literary genre need not be a simple matter of identifying shared characteristics and placing texts into appropriate categories but rather should be centered around the identification of what sort of textual world a given text (in a given genre) implies, consequently provoking an examination (and critical evaluation) of what ends such an implicit worldview might serve. Specifically, Frow argues that "the notion of genre as "frames" or "fixes" on the world' implies the divisibility of the world and the formative power of these representational frames" (*Genre* 19), such that "genres actively generate and shape knowledge of the world" (*Genre* 2). Thus, Frow calls for a shift in genre-based criticism, such that "[r]ather than asking, What kind of thing is this text? we should be asking something like, What kind of world is brought into being here—what thematic topoi, with what modal inflection, from what situation of address, and structured by what formal categories?"

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<sup>17</sup> Critics who advocate this sort of approach include Jonathan Frow, whose work in this vein is discussed in some detail here, Anis Bawarshi, with his expansion of Foucault's "author function" to a more generalized "genre function" (338), Kate Hamburger, who argues that "each genre represents a particular reality, especially a temporal reality" (qtd. in Bawarshi 346), and Peter Stockwell, whose concept of "discourse worlds" will be discussed in more detail at several points throughout this dissertation.

("Reproducibles" 1633). As in the case of Bawarshi's suggestions above, Frow's implicitly cognitive-science-based understanding of genre as a metacognitive paradigm suggests that any given genre (and any text within that genre) co-constitutes or creates—in collaboration with the reader's consciousness and perception of that text and genre—an entire implicit worldview or textual world.<sup>18</sup>

In some cases, this implicit worldview may have to do with the central concerns of a literary genre, as in the case of detective fiction, which typically focuses on issues of order, rationality, and justice. Whether in its traditional or postmodern manifestations, detective fiction continually reflects this paradigmatic focus, in the former instance stressing the successful (re)production of a rational, ordered, just universe, in the latter focussing on the radical inaccessibility or impossibility of such (re)enforcement.<sup>19</sup> In the case of fantasy, these generically conditioned worlds are multiple and potentially infinite in scope, and the genre itself explicitly imagines alternative worlds rather than simply reflecting (or purporting to reflect) the dominant "reality" of the culture in which it exists.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, my intent in this study is to examine the mechanisms of generic and cultural world-building exposed by fantasy's prototypical structures, first in its traditional

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<sup>18</sup> Here, I use the term "metacognitive paradigm" to refer to Frow's (and others') understanding of genres as instantiating particular cognitive schemata, ways of cognitively organizing (and constructing) any real or imagined world. Within such a model, if specific genres instantiate particular cognitive paradigms (i.e. schemata), then *genre* itself may be understood as a metacognitive tool (or model) through which one might explore the mechanisms of a given genre's characteristic (cognitive) schema-production.

<sup>19</sup> See Stefano Tani's *The Doomed Detective* (41-42).

<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that fantasy necessarily or exclusively imagines subversive or ideologically liberatory worlds, since even the most wildly inventive fantasy world may be constructed along ideologically conventional, even conservative lines. However, regardless of the underlying ideology of the given fantasy novel or narrative, this ideology is *always* presented in the subjunctive mode of the imagined fantasy world, rather than mimicking the invisibly ideological framework of any given society's conception of "reality."

secondary world formulation, and then in what I have chosen to call "syncretic fantasy." With this in mind, the rest of this chapter will examine the generic world-building characteristics of fantasy, a genre which constructs discourse worlds that are (typically) perceived by readers as cognitive abstractions, rather than reflections of the "real" world in which they live.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2 Fantasy Prototypes: A Critical Survey, with Modifications

One key difficulty in defining fantasy is that there are already too many competing definitions, some scholarly, some colloquial, and some implicit, with yet others straddling the border(s) between all three. In this section, then, I will briefly survey existing characterizations of the genre by both scholars and writers of fantasy. My list of generic prototypes for fantasy will be drawn from this survey—often in agreement with what I call a "Tolkienian" approach to fantasy criticism, rather than a "Todorovian" one (a distinction discussed in more detail below)—but with one significant modification. Unlike most Tolkienian critics, I argue that fantasy is not about the portrayal of definitively impossible worlds or scenarios but is rather about the construction of possible worlds, even (and perhaps especially) when these possible worlds contradict conventional Western ideas of what constitutes "reality" or possibility itself.

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<sup>21</sup> The perception and characterization of fantasy as depicting "impossible" narratives is common to the point of constituting a broadly accepted premise of most fantasy criticism (see Attebery, Clute, Manlove, and others). As discussed below, even Tolkien argues that "creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it" (56). And although I will dispute the usual characterization of fantasy as portraying definitively *impossible* worlds, it does seem reasonable to assume that most fantasy readers do not perceive its narratives as *realistic* in the sense of being literally, physically possible in the everyday world.

One of the primary sources of the terminological confusion noted above is what Neil Cornwell calls "the 'Fantastic/Fantasy' disarray" (27). A survey of fantasy criticism over the past thirty years reveals a pertinent divide between two groups of critics, both of whom claim to be studying "fantasy" yet nonetheless study almost entirely mutually exclusive groups of texts and authors.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, I have identified these two traditions of fantasy criticism as the "Todorovian" and "Tolkienian" approaches to fantasy literature (Bechtel, "There and Back Again" 141). Todorovian critics root their study of fantasy in Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic*, which defines fantasy as

the hesitation between an "uncanny" (natural) and a "marvelous" (supernatural) explanation of narrative events. An evanescent genre, fantasy exists only so long as the narrative remains ambiguous as to the 'true' explanation of the portrayed events. If, for example, the text requires that "new laws of nature be entertained . . . [then] we enter the genre of the marvelous" (Todorov 41). If a text allows an explanation of events, however strange, within known natural laws, then that text embodies the 'uncanny.' (Bechtel, "There and Back Again" 143)

Todorovian critics such as Christine Brooke-Rose, Rosemary Jackson, and Lance Olsen tend to select their representative examples of fantasy in accordance with

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<sup>22</sup> One salient exception to this rule is J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which is invariably referenced by both groups of critics, simply because its popular and colloquial identification as "fantasy" is too prominent to be ignored. However, while one group of critics (Todorovians) references Tolkien primarily in order to dismiss his writing as unworthy of serious critical consideration (Bechtel, "There and Back Again" 145-146), the other group (Tolkienians) cites his work as the very paradigm of fantasy, the quintessential prototype of the genre (151-154).

these tenets, examining the works of Franz Kafka, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Thomas Pynchon (among others), texts that overtly thematize indeterminacy, dramatizing the loss or collapse of "objective" truth itself. In contrast, Tolkienian critics tend to base their definitions upon the prototypical model of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, loosely defining fantasy as encompassing precisely those texts that Todorovian critics would identify as examples of the "marvelous." In a Tolkienian context, fantasy is typically defined in congruence with C. N. Manlove's description of the genre as "fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms" (1). In other words, according to Tolkienian definitions, fantasy's depiction of the supernatural must remain irreducible to any rational, scientific, or "uncanny" explanation. Thus, Tolkienian critics tend to study texts in which the supernatural is explicitly portrayed as real within the confines of the text, typically examining works by Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Ursula K. Le Guin, and other so-called "genre" fantasy writers.

As Chantal Bourgault du Coudray points out, the conflict between these two definitions "has meant that scholars of the genre . . . have been obliged to offer increasingly turgid clarifications of precisely which texts will constitute their subject matter" (162). Moreover, this conflict remains far from resolved, as evidenced by Lucy Armitt's vehement and relatively recent (2005) rejection of what she calls "genre fantasy." From an implicitly Todorovian perspective, Armitt asserts that "fantasy narratives deal in the unknowable and, as such, offer up a

continual challenge to break moulds" (202), arguing that "the instant we decide upon a single reading . . . we leave the fantastic for 'genre fantasy' and place the text in a box" (196). However, my intent here is not to re-engage the ongoing turf wars between Todorovian and Tolkienian definitions of fantasy but rather to clarify my own usage of the term. Thus, accepting Brian Attebery's suggestion that this confusion is primarily "a product of diverging meanings for the word *fantastic* in French and English" (*Strategies* 20), I will simply point out that "fantasy," within the context of this study, refers primarily to Tolkienian rather than Todorovian definitions of the genre, since my own approach is distinctly Tolkienian in terms of its critical precursors and selection of fantasy texts. However, my own understanding of fantasy differs from much Tolkienian criticism (including Attebery's) on one key point, this being the usual understanding of fantasy as depicting definitively "impossible" narratives.<sup>23</sup>

Two characteristics of the genre remain consistent across the vast majority of fantasy criticism: the definition of fantasy as representing "impossible" worlds and the importance of constructing an internally consistent "reality" (or "secondary world") within the given fantasy text. The persistent critical tradition of defining fantasy as representing "impossible" worlds may be rooted in Tolkien's assertion that "creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact,

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<sup>23</sup> In light of the above discussion, I will use the term "fantasy" (rather than "Tolkienian fantasy") throughout this dissertation to refer to those texts that most Todorovian critics would identify as inhabiting "the marvelous." Additionally, in cases where it becomes necessary to distinguish fantasy that adheres to the Tolkienian tradition of placing its narratives in secondary worlds (with no direct connection to our own) from that which does not, I will refer to the Tolkienian or traditional formulation of the genre as "secondary world" fantasy.

but not a slavery to it" (56).<sup>24</sup> For Tolkien, the magical otherworld of *faerie*—particularly insofar as it remains definitively separated from everyday human realities—lies at the very heart of fantasy. Nonetheless, Tolkien is careful to avoid using the term *supernatural* in reference to the magical elements of fantasy, noting that "*supernatural* is a dangerous and difficult word in any of its senses, looser or stricter. But to fairies it can hardly be applied, unless *super* is taken merely as a superlative prefix" (12, emphasis in original). Typically, fantasy critics are less hesitant than Tolkien to identify the supernatural (or the "impossible") as the very essence of fantasy, as when Manlove defines fantasy as containing "a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural" (1), or Attebery states that fantasy's "essential content is the impossible, or . . . 'some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law'" (*Strategies* 14).

The second widely accepted characteristic of fantasy—the required internal consistency of the fantasy world—may be understood as deriving directly from Tolkien's suggestion that fantasy always occurs in a "secondary world," a world created within and by the fantasy text itself.<sup>25</sup> As Tolkien puts it, "what happens [in fantasy] is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you

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<sup>24</sup> Alternatively, both Tolkien's and critics' assertions that the "magic" of fantasy worlds should not be extrapolated to the "real" world may have more to do with the cognitive majoritarian understanding of "magic" as a definitively *unreal* category, a possibility which I will discuss in more detail below.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted, however, that many of Tolkien's premises and arguments regarding the importance of "secondary worlds" (and their proper structuring) in fantasy are prefigured by arguments originally presented in George MacDonald's essay on "The Fantastic Imagination," which was first published in 1893.

are, as it were, inside" (40-41). As noted above, the secondary worlds of fantasy are traditionally separated from the primary world of everyday "reality," and the two must not be confused either inside or outside of the text, except perhaps (according to Tolkien) in the one exceptional case of the Christian gospels.<sup>26</sup> However, from a more secular viewpoint, fantasy is traditionally defined as a "magical" or "impossible" narrative taking place in a secondary world that is entirely distinct from the everyday world in which we live, yet which is also entirely self-consistent (or "realistic") within the confines and (meta)physical laws of that secondary world. As Manlove puts it, fantasy writers "enlist their experience and invention into giving a total vision of reality transformed: that is, to make their fantastic worlds as real as our own" (12).

Brian Attebery and John Clute have proposed more detailed definitions of fantasy, not as strictly exhaustive enumerations of parts but rather as collections of recurring prototypical characteristics and structures within those texts most commonly perceived as fantasy. As discussed in Section 1.1, Attebery argues that Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy provides the central prototype of the genre (for readers in English). Attebery also suggests, in congruence with earlier definitions

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<sup>26</sup> Tolkien argues that, in this singularly exceptional case, "story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfilment of Creation" (71). Indeed, as will be discussed in more detail below, this statement—and others like it from explicitly Christian fantasists such as C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald, or (more recently) Madeleine L'Engle—may go a long way towards explaining some of the persistent critical embarrassment associated with the scholarly study of fantasy. Such an unapologetically Christian outlook—not to mention the apparent "belief" in magical or (in this case) divine elements within the "real" world—can easily be perceived as conservative, embarrassing, and even naïve when seen in the context of a modern secular Western culture that has, in C. N. Manlove's words, "isolated physics from metaphysics, reason from faith and nature from supernature" (259). Nonetheless, to elide (or deny) this element of the fantasy tradition would be to elide a central aspect of this study, which is an investigation of the explicit (re)construction of belief (and worldviews) both within and through fantasy literature.

of the genre, that fantasy typically builds internally consistent worlds apart from the everyday and invariably "makes use of the narrative and semiotic code we call magic" to construct these secondary narrative worlds (*Strategies* 73).<sup>27</sup> To this definition, Attebery adds the general observation that fantasy also follows a particular formula or structure and that "the characteristic structure of fantasy is comic. It begins with a problem and ends with a resolution" (15). Thus, a fantasy narrative must always have some form of happy ending, what Tolkien calls "eucatastrophe," the "sudden joyous 'turn' . . . which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well" (68).<sup>28</sup> As Attebery expands,

Death, despair, horror, and betrayal may enter into a fantasy, but they must not be the final word. Much fantasy does not have what we would call a 'happy ending.' Indeed, the fantasist often seems to start with the idea of such a resolution and then to qualify it, finding every hidden cost in the victory. . . . If it were otherwise, if, for instance, the Ring [in LoTR] were simply hidden again or fallen . . . into the hands of the enemy, then we would not have the structural completeness of fantasy, but the truncated story-forms of absurdism or horror. (*Strategies* 15)

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<sup>27</sup> Note here that Attebery is careful to frame magic as a textual "semiotic code," since, as will be discussed in more detail below, the term *magic* itself self-identifies—in the context of a Western, secular, cognitive majoritarian understanding of the "real"—as that which is definitively understood to be *unreal*.

<sup>28</sup> In his essay, Tolkien uses the term "fairy-story" to designate what is now more commonly known as "fantasy" (in the sense used in this dissertation). His use of the term "fantasy" is more specialized, referring specifically to "the achievement of expression, which gives . . . 'the inner consistency of reality' . . . [embracing] both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression" (49). However, for the purposes of clarity and consistency, I have chosen to treat Tolkien's use of "fairy-story" as synonymous with "fantasy."

Finally, the eucatastrophe of fantasy produces in the reader a sense of "wonder," which Attebery characterizes as an "alternative formulation of the idea of estrangement" (16). In contrast to the usual Brechtian understanding of this term, however, Attebery paraphrases Tolkien, suggesting that the estrangement of fantasy dispels "the illusion that the world has become trite or stale . . . . [R]ather than making familiar objects seem disconcerting or alien, [Tolkien] thought fantasy could restore them to the vividness with which he first saw them" (17). Thus, this restoration of vividness corresponds to the production of Tolkienian "wonder," which may itself be understood as the complementary counterpart of Brechtian estrangement.<sup>29</sup>

John Clute, like Attebery, agrees that fantasy narratives are (usually) set in Tolkien-style secondary worlds and follow a comic trajectory, so that "a fantasy text may be described as the story of an earned passage from BONDAGE . . . into the EUCATASTROPHE, where marriages may occur, just governance fertilize the barren LAND, and there is a HEALING" ("Fantasy" 338-9).<sup>30</sup> However, Clute expands upon Attebery's notion of a generalized comic form to propose a more detailed, four-stage structure that applies to all "full fantasy," these four stages being "Wrongness/autumn, Thinning/winter, Recognition/spring, and Healing or

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<sup>29</sup> Although Attebery proposes this parallel, he does not explicitly note the differences between these two forms of estrangement. Brechtian "estrangement" is commonly understood as "prevent[ing] the emotional involvement of the audience" (Abrams 47) through a sense of alienation, while Tolkienian "wonder" attempts to regenerate a "clear view . . . so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness" (Tolkien 60). Thus, while Brechtian estrangement alienates audiences from the normally invisible "real" of social and legislative conventions, Tolkienian wonder reacquaints audiences with the powerful (and wondrous) strangeness of *all* aspects (including the physical) of everyday reality.

<sup>30</sup> In quotations from *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, I have reproduced the precise typography of the source text, which uses SMALL CAPS to indicate terms that have their own entries within the encyclopedia.

Return/summer" ("Canary" 220). In Clute's formulation, Wrongness and Thinning correspond to Attebery's central "problem" of the fantasy text, Recognition designates the moment of eucatastrophe, and Healing refers to the prototypically required happy ending.<sup>31</sup> As Clute further notes, "of these [four elements], Recognition is central" ("Canary" 220), representing

[the] significant moment in full fantasy texts . . . when the characters begin to shed the amnesia that has been cloaking them, begin to understand that their sight had literally been *occluded* from the Real . . . they remember who they are; they remember the story that tells them; they see the Land whole, which itself begins to return to them. Everything is washed in the light of Recognition. ("Canary" 219, emphasis in original).

In other words—in agreement with both Tolkien and Attebery—Clute argues that the moment of Recognition (or eucatastrophe) is not simply one of the components of a fully realized fantasy text but may be a crucial component in distinguishing "full fantasy" from the "truncated story-forms of absurdism or horror" (Attebery, *Strategies* 15).

Clute and Attebery also both note that fantasy tends to be a particularly story-centric genre, so that "fantasy texts . . . can be characterized as always

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<sup>31</sup> Several of the writers and critics referenced throughout this dissertation, including John Clute, J. Edward Chamberlin, and J.R.R. Tolkien (among others), often idiosyncratically capitalize certain terms—such as Story, Wrongness, Thinning, Recognition, and Healing (Clute), Us and Them (Chamberlin), or Escape, Recovery, and Consolation (Tolkien)—to indicate that they are being used in a specialized or rhetorically weighted sense. Throughout this study, I have chosen to mimic this rhetorical strategy, particularly in those cases where my arguments may be clarified by an added emphasis on specialized uses of certain common yet central terms of these arguments, such as Story, Recognition, and (occasionally) World.

moving towards the unveiling of an irreducible substratum of story" (Clute and Wolfe 900). As Attebery points out, this story-centric focus tends to make even the least self-conscious of fantasy texts implicitly metafictional, in the sense that

naïve, no less than postmodernist, fantasies are capable of forcing the reader to reconsider the process of telling and reading stories. . . . [since] even the simplest of fantasies sets up an initial paradox on the order of 'everything I tell you is a lie, including this.' The blatancy of this untruth deconstructs the text before it begins . . . . Unlike more sophisticated genres, fantasy can be self-referential without being self-destructive; artificial without being arch.

(*Strategies* 53)

In other words, secondary world fantasy always highlights its own processes of narrative world-building as an inherent condition of its very existence and self-identification *as fantasy*. However, unlike realism—which also uses a particular set of stylistic conventions to construct an internally consistent narrative world—secondary world fantasy never purports to represent the “real” world, nor could it easily be mistaken for attempting to do so. As Tolkien suggests, most fantasy readers probably do not expect (or even desire) to encounter dragons in their everyday lives, nor are such readers likely to expect that they could travel to a place in the physical world where they would encounter such beings (Tolkien 44). However, the question of “reality” in fantasy is far from simple—even in the case of traditional secondary world fantasy—precisely because of the ways that fantasy, unlike most metafiction, can be "self-referential without being self-

destructive; artificial without being arch."

Unlike fantasy critics, who often argue that the genre is predicated upon its depiction of impossible worlds (e.g. Attebery, Manlove, Mathews), fantasy authors tend to emphasize the importance of *belief* in the fantasy narrative as a key element in the genre's proper functioning for both readers and writers. As implied above,<sup>32</sup> Tolkien himself argues that fantasy is not dependent on the portrayal of *false* or *impossible* worlds, nor does it depend upon "suspension of disbelief." Rather, the appreciative reading of fantasy, according to Tolkien, depends upon the reader's enchantment within a state of what he calls "Secondary Belief" (41). For him, suspension of disbelief does not properly describe the appreciative reading of fantasy, since such a "suspension" implies a default position of disbelief, which must then be quashed (or voluntarily suppressed) in the reading process. Rather, Tolkien argues that the "Secondary Belief" of an appreciative fantasy reader qualitatively differs from the suspension of disbelief, since, as he puts it,

[t]he moment disbelief [in the fantasy narrative] arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from the outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled) . . . . But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-

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<sup>32</sup> Recall, for example, Tolkien's characterization of "supernatural" as a "dangerous and difficult word in any of its senses," as well as his reluctance to use the term to describe fairies (12).

believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed. (42)

In other words, fantasy readers (and writers) must be capable of fully immersing themselves (however temporarily) in the secondary world of the text, not holding that world at a cognitive distance, but experiencing it on an immediate and visceral (if entirely and explicitly imaginary) level that Tolkien characterizes as "enchantment."<sup>33</sup> This sort of "enchantment" or "belief" may be secondary in the sense that the reader does not typically believe the depicted fantasy world to be literally real (or even necessarily possible), but it remains nonetheless distinctly more immediate and visceral than an abstract math problem or instantiation of a coldly intellectual "what-if" proposition.

Several fantasy authors describe the process of writing fantasy more as one of discovery than invention, and, much like Tolkien, these authors tend to emphasize the role of belief as a key element in this process. In this vein, Ursula K. Le Guin points out how in writing her Earthsea novels, "I didn't plan anything, I found it" ("Dreams" 185), and Andre Norton argues that "this is the truth; you cannot write fantasy unless you love it, unless you yourself can believe what you are telling" (157). According to many fantasy authors, belief is also a crucial aspect of reading fantasy, so much so that Lloyd Alexander argues that "you might define realism as fantasy pretending to be true; and fantasy as reality

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<sup>33</sup> Tolkien provides a primary world example of the distinctions between this sort of cognitive immersion or "secondary belief" and the "suspension of disbelief" by describing differing spectators' states of mind at a cricket match: "A real enthusiast for cricket is in the enchanted state: Secondary belief. I, when I watch a match, am on the lower level. I can achieve (more or less) willing suspension of disbelief, when I am held there and supported by some other motive that will keep away boredom: for instance, a wild, heraldic, preference for dark blue rather than light. This suspension of disbelief may thus be a somewhat tired, shabby, or sentimental state of mind" (41).

pretending to be a dream" (143). Alexander further suggests that the unique value of fantasy lies in its ability to foster a "capacity for belief" in the reader, expanding as follows: "I emphasize the word capacity because, in a sense, the capacity to value, to believe, is separate from the values or beliefs themselves" (146).<sup>34</sup> As Susan Cooper puts it, "fantasy goes one stage beyond realism; requiring complete intellectual surrender, it asks more of the reader, and at its best it may offer more" (281).

And finally, fantasy—according to its writers at least—may have something to do with truth, not in a simplistic, objective sense, but more of a distinctly *subjective*, human truth. Thus, Le Guin argues that "fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it's true" (*Language* 44), and Madeleine L'Engle echoes this sentiment, asserting that "fantasy is true. It is that which cannot be proved but which leads you to a larger truth. One that you couldn't get to otherwise" (33).<sup>35</sup> Fantasy authors such as those cited here argue that fantasy—although it may not describe "reality" in any literal sense—is deeply dependent on its depiction of "truth." Setting aside the question of literal possibility, then—if we take these authors seriously—fantasy may be more about the self-aware generation and exercise of *belief* (though secondary) and the invention of *possible* worlds (though

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander's proposition here anticipates J. Edward Chamberlin's suggestion (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two) that the explicit, conscious recognition of story-based belief within one's own culture produces a powerful tool for cross-cultural communication. As Chamberlin puts it, "We need to understand that it is in the act of believing in these stories and ceremonies rather than in the particular belief itself that we come together, and that this act of believing can provide the common ground across cultures that we long for" (224).

<sup>35</sup> While many of these statements could also be made of realistic fiction, fantasy's assertion of an explicitly *subjective* realism is effectively unavoidable, since the subjective realities of fantasy cannot be easily mistaken as congruent with what I call a "cognitive majoritarian" understanding of reality, as discussed in more detail below.

imaginary) than it is about the depiction of *impossible* worlds requiring the reader's *suspension of disbelief*.

This proposition of fantasy as prototypically rooted in "truth" or belief directly contradicts most accepted scholarly and colloquial definitions of the genre, but such an apparent contradiction may be more a symptom of Western biases and certainties regarding the "objectivity" of reality than a problem internal to fantasy itself. Take, for example, Amy Goldschlager's definition of the differences between science fiction and fantasy: for Goldschlager, science fiction is "a genre that extrapolates from current scientific trends," while fantasy is "a genre not based in reality presupposing that magic and mythical/supernatural creatures exist."<sup>36</sup> These brief definitions, written by an industry insider, represent one of the most commonly proposed distinctions between science fiction and fantasy, which may be paraphrased as follows: "science fiction" is based upon extrapolation from known scientific facts, and is therefore considered "possible" (if occasionally unlikely), while fantasy incorporates magic, which is by definition "impossible." Such a definition assumes, *a priori*, that the scientific rationalization of speculative worlds somehow grants the imagined worlds of science fiction a more privileged access to "reality" or "possibility" than would a foundation of alternative belief systems rooted in "magic" or mystical worldviews.

However, as Brian Attebery points out, this distinction has less to do with literal possibility than it does with the "megatext" of science. As he puts it,

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<sup>36</sup> Goldschlager is an employee of Avon Eos, a major science fiction and fantasy imprint, and these definitions are reprinted on *SF Site* by explicit permission from that publisher.

If there is any common thread among science fiction texts, it is their use of a particular language or discourse. . . . [S]cience serves as a megatext for each SF text. Science surrounds, supports and judges SF in much the same way the Bible grounds Christian devotional poetry. It does not matter much if specific scientific references within the story are bogus, so long as the discourse is able to call upon the megatext. (*Strategies* 107)

In other words, the popular and colloquial understanding of science as an "objective" measure of reality (what I call "scientism") easily infects even the perception of speculative or extrapolative "scientific" worldviews in fiction, to the point where even the wildest speculations—if rooted in a "scientific" discourse—may be considered as depicting *possible* worlds. Likewise, the omission of scientific (or pseudo-scientific) rationalization and language automatically results in the designation of such imagined worlds as *impossible*.

This simple opposition between "objective" (rational, scientific) versus "subjective" (irrational, magical) worldviews is, of course, a false one. Indeed, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two (as well as throughout the later chapters of this study), the various problems inherent in such distinctions become particularly apparent in the cross-cultural and cross-perspectival contexts of syncretic fantasy. However, if one abandons this false faith in the inherent "objectivity" of science and/or scientific discourse, it becomes apparent that fantasy—regardless of its explicit espousal of magical, spiritual, or otherwise non-scientific (or, more properly, a-scientific or alternative-scientific)

worldviews—may be understood as depicting *possible* worlds rather than *impossible* ones. Furthermore, aside from the metaphysical clarifications inherent in this reformulation (e.g. the removal of an "objective" knowledge of reality—or more specifically, of impossibility—as a required, if implicit, lynch-pin for any definition of fantasy), this reversal reopens the possibility of fantasy novels rooted in literal, living belief systems and worldviews such as contemporary witchcraft, occult practice, neo-paganism, or kabbalism. Indeed, Tanya Luhrman has noted that various fantasy novels have been used as instructional texts by modern day magic-practitioners (87-92), and certain fantasy authors, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley, are quite open in their real-world espousal of such worldviews.<sup>37</sup> Thus, if fantasy is redefined as depicting alternative possible worlds rather than impossible ones, not only does this allow the exclusion of authorial intention from the definition of fantasy,<sup>38</sup> but it also allows the inclusion of texts already identified as fantasy (e.g. *The Mists of Avalon*) within the genre, regardless of the author's personal belief (or disbelief) in the worldviews espoused within (or by) the text.

In this sense, fantasy might be more accurately described as representing worlds (and worldviews) rooted in what Peter L. Berger calls a "cognitive minority" viewpoint, as opposed to realism, which depicts "realistic" worlds

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<sup>37</sup> For example, in discussing her experience of writing *The Mists of Avalon*, a "revisionist . . . reconstructionist" rewriting of the Arthurian mythos, Bradley says, "I feel strongly that it has been a genuine religious experience. At about the time I began work on the Morgan le Fay story that later became MISTS, a religious search of many years culminated in my accepting ordination in one of the Gnostic Catholic churches as a priest. . . . As Morgan discovers the Goddess, exiled from Christian churches, silently reappearing in Saints and the veneration of Mary, so I think the worship of the female aspect of the deity was kept alive under that name all these centuries and is now surfacing again" ("Thoughts").

<sup>38</sup> Recall Attebery's suggestion that fantasy always, definitively portrays "some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law" (*Strategies* 14), which implicitly requires knowledge of an author's intent and beliefs to define a given work as "fantasy."

rooted in the more broadly accepted viewpoint of the surrounding culture's cognitive majority.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, fantasy depicts imagined worlds as real, but so does all fiction, and the particular genius of conventional realism lies in hiding (or at least de-emphasizing) this fact. In contrast to realism, fantasy makes the cognitive, discursive process of textual world-building more apparent by virtue of its explicit construction of realistic worlds and worldviews that nonetheless contradict the worldviews assumed to be "real" by the cognitive majority of the surrounding culture. In this context, cognitive theories of human reality-construction provide a particularly apt framework for explaining fantasy's world-building processes without any necessary recourse to an "objective" reality.

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, various cognitive scientists and scholars have argued human beings do not live (subjectively) in the "real" world at all, but rather actively (though typically subconsciously) construct the cognitive, cultural, and even physical worlds in which they consciously live their lives. Thus, as Peter Stockwell puts it, "the cognitive perspective alters our understanding of notions such as reference, truth and falsity, since these concepts must be understood in relation not to an objective reality but in relation to a mediating mental representation" (92). Within this framework, Stockwell argues that "it seems psychologically unlikely that we have developed different cognitive strategies for dealing with fictional worlds and non-fictional worlds"(92) and explains that as a result, the "cognitive perspective" takes as given the assumption that "the same cognitive mechanisms apply to literary reading as to all other

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<sup>39</sup> For Berger, the term "cognitive minority" refers to "a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society" (7).

interaction, and so we can understand a *discourse world* as the mediating domain for reality as well as projected fictions" (94, emphasis added). Framed in cognitive terms, then—and in congruence with the fantasy authors' perspectives noted above—fantasy may be understood as inviting its readers to collaborate in the cognitive process of *consciously* constructing and accepting an alternative worldview by learning to experience a narrative rooted in an (explicitly imaginary) alternative world. Thus, combining Berger and Stockwell's terms, this cognitive exercise requires learning to accept a *cognitive minoritarian discourse world* other than the one in which cognitive majoritarian readers normally live.

This adoption of cognitive science as a framework through which to understand fantasy literature not only helps to resolve the metaphysical difficulties noted above (e.g. the difficulty of distinguishing between "possible" versus "impossible" fictional worlds) but also integrates well with existing fantasy criticism. As discussed in Section 1.1, in defining fantasy as a "fuzzy set," Brian Attebery explicitly draws upon work that is now foundational in the embodied cognition field of cognitive science.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Attebery has also suggested that fantasy possesses "a unique ability to investigate the twofold process of constructing a self" (*Strategies* 86), a process he characterizes as *both* imaginary *and* real in the sense that every conscious construction or understanding of a "self" is, almost by definition, subjective. And fantasy, particularly in its most metafictional manifestations, tends to make this subjective process of identity-

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<sup>40</sup> Recall that Attebery explicitly acknowledges the source for his conception of fantasy as a "fuzzy set" as emerging from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, which has itself become a key text for the embodied cognition movement within the larger field of cognitive science.

construction an explicit element of its narrative structure. In this case, expanding Attebery's understanding of fantasy as dramatizing the subjective process of self-construction to propose fantasy as dramatizing the subjective (cognitive) processes of reality-construction seems little more than a logical extension of existing criticism. However, even such an apparently obvious and incremental extension has profound implications for the understanding of how fantasy operates and what (subjective) effects it may produce, model, or expose.

By modelling (and implicitly exposing) subjective processes of cognitive world-building as a central aspect of even its most conventional, traditional, and formulaic narratives, fantasy implicitly challenges the persistent, recurring myth of "objectivity" in Western culture and literature. However, rather than directly challenging subjective self-construction and realism via the portrayed collapse of realistic representation, fantasy models an *alternative* realism (or worldview) in which *alternative* selves may be constructed in explicit opposition to the putatively "real" or "objective" world of the cognitive majority. Fantasy, in this sense, is not about the deconstruction of belief, nor is it about estrangement in the usual Brechtian sense. Rather, fantasy models the self-conscious construction (and reconstruction) of belief, generating a multiplicity of potential (discourse) worlds, rather than a single "objective" one. Furthermore, the mechanics of these sorts of subjective, cognitive world-building processes are precisely what contemporary cognitive theories of perception and human consciousness attempt to explain. It seems hardly surprising, then, that such cognitive theories work well to explain fantasy, a genre which—structurally and implicitly—seems to share

many of the same assumptions about "reality" that cognitive science presents as explicit (and empirically researched) postulates underlying its more general study of human cognition.

Summarizing from the above discussion, *fantasy*—in the sense that I will be using it in this dissertation—may be described as having the following five prototypical characteristics. First, it conforms to a particular narrative structure, starting with a problem or "thinning" of the narrative world and concluding in a moment of "recognition" and "healing" (Attebery, Clute). Second, fantasy is *story-centric*, rather than *reality-centric* (Attebery, Clute and Wolfe). That is, even in its most naïve or unselfconscious forms, fantasy privileges storytelling over realism, thus becoming implicitly metafictional (Attebery). Third, fantasy—particularly in the reading and writing processes—may be understood as modelling the self-conscious exercise of belief, rather than the "suspension of disbelief" (Alexander, Cooper, L'Engle, Le Guin, Norton, Tolkien). Fourth, although fantasy may include "magical" or "mythical" elements, it may be more accurately understood as constructing *possible* worlds, rather than definitively or objectively *impossible* ones. Fifth and finally, fantasy provides an opportunity for readers to consciously engage with the cognitive practice of learning to accept alternative, cognitive minoritarian worldviews as (provisionally and imaginatively) "real." In terms of these five characteristics, further investigation of fantasy's story-centricity, in particular, exposes recurring correlations between fantasy's prototypical generic structures and contemporary (literary and cognitive) theories of story and storytelling. Specifically, several literary scholars and

cognitive scientists have argued that human consciousness itself—like fantasy—may be deeply story-centric. Thus, Section 1.3 will turn to a closer examination of the relationship between "story" and fantasy, exploring the ways in which contemporary literary and cognitive theories of *story* may further help to explain the genre's operations.

### 1.3 On the Importance (and Function) of Story-Shaped Worlds<sup>41</sup>

John Clute and Gary K. Wolfe, in examining the central role of *story* in fantasy, suggest that "20th-century criticism has not much concentrated on Story . . . instead tending to devalue genres and individual works in any genre which are deemed to depend too deeply upon 'primitive' devices such as storytelling" (900).<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, Clute and Wolfe also point out that fantasy contains "an irreducible substratum of Story," whereby the "fantasy text almost invariably conveys its sense of things by conducting its protagonists . . . to the end of their quest through sequences which hearers or readers understand as consecutive and essential moments in the telling of the tale" (900). As noted above, fantasy is not only a story-centric form but also tells a particular type of story. Thus, this section examines not only fantasy's proposed story-centricity but also the genre's modelling of a particular type of cognitive world-building *through story*, exploring the strong correlations between fantasy's modelling of story-centric

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<sup>41</sup> The phrase "story-shaped world" is borrowed from Brian Wicker's *The Story-Shaped World* (1975), a scholarly monograph on the role of story in fairy-tales, itself cited by both Attebery and Clute in their respective discussions of the role of story in fantasy.

<sup>42</sup> Clute and Wolfe define "story" quite simply as "any narrative which tells or implies a sequence of events, in any order which can be followed by hearers or readers, and which generates a sense that its meaning is conveyed through the actual telling . . . . A Story, in short, is a narrative discourse which is *told*" (899, emphasis in original).

realities with various contemporary theories of story and storytelling.

Scholars and writers such as Richard Kearney, Thomas King, and J. Edward Chamberlin have attempted to reclaim "story" as a viable critical term, rather than allowing it to be dismissed wholesale as a vague, retrograde, or ideologically oppressive concept. Such dismissals have a lengthy tradition, ranging from rejections of story based upon realist aesthetic assumptions (i.e. fiction should represent the world *realistically*, rather than distorting reality with the romantic conventions of *story*) to more contemporary theory-based rejections of story as a tool of ideological conditioning and/or false reality-creation. E.M. Forster, for example, famously laments the unfortunate presence of "story" in novels, characterizing it as a "tape-worm" and suggesting that "the more we disentangle it from the finer growths that it supports, the less we shall find to admire" (qtd. in Clute and Wolfe 900). Likewise, more contemporary theorists often prefer to jettison "story" entirely in light of what Kearney calls "the faddish [postmodernist] maxim that 'in narrative no one speaks', or worse, that language speaks only to itself" (5).<sup>43</sup> However, the scholars mentioned above argue that a critical understanding of story and storytelling's role in constructing human subjects, cultures, and consciousness(es) remains of crucial importance.

Specifically, these scholars argue that story and storytelling are key components

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<sup>43</sup> Here, Kearney points specifically to Roland Barthes' *Image, Music, Text* (1977) and Frederick Jameson's *The Prisonhouse of Language* (1981) as exemplars of this attitude, later expanding upon his brief characterization of anti-story theorists to observe that "as we enter the cyber-world of the third millennium where virtual reality and digital communications rule, we find many advocates of the apocalyptic view that we have reached the end not only of history, but of the story itself. / This attitude towards our new cyber and media culture is canvassed curiously by critics of both the left (Benjamin, Barthes, Baudrillard) and the right (Bloom, Steiner, Henri). Their bottom line is that we are entering a civilization of depthless simulation inimical to the art of storytelling" (10-11).

in the (re)construction of ethical subjects and actions (Kearney), the reappropriation of often-misunderstood or misrepresented cultural worldviews (King, *Truth*), and the potential for productive cross-cultural communication and understanding (Chamberlin).

Although each argues from a slightly differing perspective and framework, all three of these scholars argue that stories and storytelling represent crucial elements in the construction of both personal and collective identities. Furthermore, they argue that the preservation of such narrative-based identities—however problematic such identities may be in particular cases or instances—may provide a powerful tool for facilitating both cultural and personal survival, particularly the cultural and personal survival of groups and individuals who might otherwise find themselves marginalized (or erased) by the invisibly dominant stories of the surrounding "mainstream" (i.e. cognitive majoritarian) culture.<sup>44</sup> However, as will be discussed in more detail at several points throughout this dissertation, Chamberlin's crucial innovation in relation to these more general arguments is to suggest that making the story-based elements of a culture (particularly one's own culture) more consciously accessible *as story* (i.e.

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<sup>44</sup> None of these scholars specify precisely why they choose the term *story*—as opposed to *narrative*—to describe these necessities, but it may have something to do with what Clute and Wolfe describe as the understanding of story "as a narrative discourse which is *told*" (899, emphasis in original). Specifically, the term "story" carries a significantly different connotation than the broader category of "narrative." That is, *story* connotes a coherent, retellable, relatively accessible narrative, while *narrative* (connotatively) encompasses a broader range of potential techniques, including experimental and deliberately resistant, unretellable, or (to use Barthes' term) "illisible" texts (Abrams 285). For these theorists of Story, "lisible" texts remain important precisely because these are the sorts of texts that human beings most commonly and frequently use to create their own personal and collective identities. In other words, the erasure of "lisible" identities (through anti-story narratives, aesthetics, and theories) may in certain cases be tantamount to the erasure of (personal and collective) identity itself, which is—for each of these scholars, and for similar reasons in each case—an ethically problematic proposal.

rather than "fact") may provide one way of beginning to access the possibility of cross-cultural communication *without* erasing or homogenizing the differences between differing cultural worldviews and stories. (This framework will be particularly relevant to later discussions of syncretic fantasy, since the interaction—and combinatory, idiosyncratic fusion—of multiple, explicitly story-centric worldviews within a single text is a central prototype of the subgenre.) In other words, Chamberlin argues that the (always imperfect) translation of "facts" from one cultural worldview to another requires an awareness of and appreciation for the always-storied networks that effectively create or contextualize the "facts" of any given culture. Of particular note here is the compatibility of Chamberlin's explicitly story-centric model of cultural "realities" (or "facts") with fantasy's prototypical tendency towards constructing deeply story-centric "realities" as neither "real" nor "unreal" but *possible*.

Interestingly, the "embodied cognition" movement within cognitive science has drawn strikingly similar conclusions regarding the centrality of "story" to the construction of individual (as well as collective) human subjectivities and worldviews.<sup>45</sup> In *The Literary Mind* (1996), Mark Turner argues—in contrast to older approaches to the study of human cognition—that creative, metaphorical, and story-based reasoning may represent central and even foundational aspects of human thought processes. Turner argues that these modes

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<sup>45</sup> Central scholars of the "embodied cognition" movement include Antonio Damasio, Mark Johnson, George Lakoff, and Mark Turner (see Sweetser), as well as Claudia Brugman, Eve Sweetser, and Ronald Langacker (Turner, *Literary Mind* 16). Although a full examination of the movement lies well beyond the scope of this dissertation, a few representative texts would include Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Turner's *Reading Minds* (1991) and *The Literary Mind* (1996), Fauconnier and Turner's *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (2002), and Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics* (2002).

of thought are not peripheral in relation to more 'normative' cases of linear (or "logical") reasoning, but rather may be central to the development of more linear cognitive processes, typically invisible to the conscious mind yet underlying even the most basic acts of human perception. Thus, Turner contends that "[n]arrative imagining—story—is the fundamental instrument of rational thought. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally" (*Literary Mind* 4).

The embodied cognition approach (of which Turner is a proponent) argues that the basic schemata of human cognition draw upon the deeply embodied human experience and the physical mechanisms of human perception and that even these most basic mechanisms of perception are story-based. Thus, Turner contends that "[w]e understand our experience in this way because we are built evolutionarily to learn to distinguish objects and events and combine them in small spatial stories at human scale in a way that is useful for us, given that we have human bodies" (15). In such a framework, even the human perception of physical objects is understood as depending on stories, such that "[p]artition of the world into objects involves partitioning the world into small spatial stories because our recognition of objects depends on the characteristic stories in which they appear. We catch a ball, throw a rock, sit on a chair, pet a dog, take a drink from a glass of water" (17). And crucially, such theories of human cognition appear profoundly *compatible* with the story-centric underpinnings of the fantasy genre. In other words, such a perspective—entirely aside from its implications for

explaining the nature and structure of human "realities" more generally—may help to explain how (and possibly even why) fantasy's deeply story-centric realities operate in the ways that they do.

Both Brian Attebery and John Clute have noted not only that fantasy's story-centricity predisposes the genre towards the metafictional, but also that the metafiction of fantasy is of a distinctly different flavour and tenor than that of other genres. Brian Attebery points out, for example, that postmodernist metafiction, like fantasy, often "draw[s] freely on the storytelling arts that make reading a pleasure: adventure, mystery, suspense, and magic" (*Strategies* 49). However, unlike fantasy, postmodernist metafiction also "frequently issue[s] disclaimers about the seriousness of [its] enterprise, saying that [it is] merely playing with language and the signs that derive from it" (49).<sup>46</sup> By contrast, as much as it may explicitly recognize (and comment upon) its own existence as a told tale, the metafiction of fantasy typically issues no such disclaimers. Clute and Wolfe, for example, point out that "many fantasy texts are clearly and explicitly constructed so as to reveal the controlling presence of an underlying Story, and that the protagonists of many fantasy texts are explicitly aware that they are acting out a tale" (901). However, in the case of fantasy, this overt admission of the text's depicted events *as a tale told* is not used to undermine the verisimilitude of the depicted world. Rather, the storied-ness of the fantasy world becomes an integral part of its internal logic, so that overt indicators of the text's storied-ness

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, such assertions of ironic play in postmodernist metafiction may reflect a symptomatic preference for *narrative* over *story* (as discussed above), whereby postmodernist metafiction licenses whatever storytelling may occur in its narratives by explicitly and strategically undermining its own investment in such critically embarrassing and unfashionable activities.

(perhaps paradoxically) function more to validate the narrative depiction of the secondary world than to undermine it. And once again, this explicit use of story to construct (rather than deconstruct) fantasy's narrative worlds meshes well with embodied cognition theories of how human subjective "realities" themselves may be understood as deeply story-based constructs.

In fantasy, prophecies, ancient texts, and even the recognition of the characters within the text that they are playing certain roles in (pre)existing formulaic or archetypal stories all become a part of the depicted secondary world, the rules of fantasy's narrative formulae often (explicitly) becoming the rules of the imagined fantasy world. Thus, when *Battlestar Galactica*—which, I would argue, is as much fantasy as it is science fiction—explicitly incorporates the axiom "All this has happened before, and all of it will happen again" ("Sacred Scrolls") into its underlying mythology, this does *not* ironically undermine the internal verisimilitude of the depicted narrative, even though the entire television series itself is a remake of an older, less sophisticated series. This is just one example of how, as Attebery notes, "fantasy can be self-referential without being self-destructive; artificial without being arch" (*Strategies* 53), or—to put it differently—metafictive while still taking itself 'seriously.' Thus, Attebery argues that, unlike many postmodernists, fantasy writers do not use metafiction as a "clever ploy, a bone to distract watchdog critics" and tend to construct tales in which "story, not meaning, is primary" (49). Attebery cites Italo Calvino's "Myth in the Narrative" (1975) to explain this practice and further suggests that fantasy may be (less covertly) performing the very same task as much postmodernist

metafiction. Referencing Calvino, Attebery argues that in abandoning the use of metafiction-as-disclaimer, the fantasy author, like "the first storytellers [who] combined and recombined simple actions and familiar actors . . . with magic central to the process," can play combinatory games with magical narratives until "one of his [or her] innocent little stories explodes into a terrible revelation: a myth" (49). Thus, suggests Attebery, "postmodernism [or at least Calvino's version of it] justifies the practice of fantasists, who have always been willing to play with the inconsequential until it explodes into myth" (50).

Just as the postulated story-centric nature of consciousness in Turner's model does not *undermine* but instead *structures* human perceptions of material reality, so do fantasy's story-centric narratives structure (rather than undermine) the internal verisimilitude of fantasy's portrayed secondary worlds. Furthermore, this strategy works particularly well in fantasy, since the constructedness of fantasy's secondary worlds needs not be explicitly exposed or undermined in order to alienate the reader from an assumed *sensible* or *conventional* reality. Rather, the fantasy world is—almost by definition—already implicitly constructed as an imaginary one, and therefore a part of the enjoyment and/or expectation of reading fantasy may very well lie in learning the ground rules of this explicitly imaginary (yet internally consistent) secondary world. Note, however, that I do not here intend to recant my earlier description of fantasy as portraying possible rather than definitively impossible narratives and events. Rather, as discussed earlier, it would be more accurate to describe fantasy as constructing narrative worlds (and worldviews) that are not generally accepted by

the majority of the surrounding culture in which they appear. Recalling Peter L. Berger's term for this type of worldview, fantasy's narrative worlds always describe the viewpoint of a (hypothetical or real) "cognitive minority."<sup>47</sup>

As a direct result of this perspective, metafiction in fantasy tends to *both* expose *and* enact the mechanics of imaginary-world construction (through story and storytelling) *without* deconstructing itself to the point of collapse. In this sense, the key to understanding fantasy's unique story-centricity may lie precisely here, in the ways that it makes explicit the normally-invisible processes of narrative world-building—the very same processes that many cognitive scientists argue are notoriously difficult to expose to the conscious mind—not by *deconstructing* cognitive majority worldviews and "realities" but by deliberately and self-consciously *constructing* (imagined) cognitive minoritarian viewpoints. Certainly, fantasy worlds are constructed through narrative, but this seems a self-evident (and thoroughly transparent) aspect of the genre. Thus, in agreement with the author-perspectives discussed in Section 1.2,<sup>48</sup> fantasy may be understood as inviting (or providing an opportunity for) its readers to engage in the cognitive process of actively, collaboratively, and consciously co-constructing the explicitly alternative, imaginary secondary worlds that it portrays. In this way, fantasy

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<sup>47</sup> As Berger explains, "Whatever the situation may have been in the past, *today* the supernatural as a meaningful reality is absent or remote from the horizons of everyday life of large numbers, very probably of the majority, of people in modern societies . . . This means that those to whom the supernatural is still, or again, a meaningful reality find themselves in the status of a *cognitive minority* . . . By a cognitive minority I mean a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society. Put differently, a cognitive minority is a group formed around a body of deviant 'knowledge'" (7).

<sup>48</sup> Recall, for example, the perspectives of various fantasy authors—including Alexander (143-146), Cooper (281), L'Engle (33), Le Guin ("Dreams" 185, *Language* 44), Norton (157), and Tolkien (41-42)—on crucial role of "belief" in both the reading and writing of fantasy.

implicitly models the *conscious* process of learning to empathize with and/or understand the operations of a story-based cognitive (minoritarian) worldview that is explicitly *different from one's own*. Indeed, such a process parallels precisely the alternative model of estrangement that Attebery proposes for fantasy, what Tolkien describes as the "wonder" produced by successful fantasy texts.<sup>49</sup>

Recalling the prototypical list of fantasy characteristics proposed in Section 1.2, and in light of the discussions above, we may now examine these characteristics in conjunction with fantasy's unique use of metafiction—an aspect of what I am calling fantasy's story-centricity—to explore some of the metacognitive implications of fantasy's generic worldview(s). As discussed above, secondary world fantasy is always about an imaginary otherworld, and this depiction of cognitive minoritarian otherworlds challenges (cognitive majoritarian) fantasy readers to understand and empathize with a world that is "other" than their own familiar, everyday reality. (Indeed, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, this postulate applies even—and perhaps especially—in those cases where fantasy narratives are set in an apparently "real," cognitive majoritarian world.) In effective fantasy, encounters with the cognitive minoritarian "other" may (in such a model) produce not Brechtian alienation, but Tolkienian "wonder," a sense of the depicted narrative world and its inhabitants as full of wondrous possibilities and potential. Furthermore, as noted above, the cognitive otherworlds of fantasy, in their implicitly and/or explicitly metafictional

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<sup>49</sup> Recall Attebery's discussion of estrangement as an alternative formulation of Tolkienian "wonder" (*Strategies* 15-17).

tendencies, invite and encourage fantasy readers to *recognize* that the worlds thus depicted are story-based, rather than reality-based, and that alternative possible worlds may be actively constructed through the processes of storytelling.

Finally, the so-called "formula" of full fantasy requires a happy ending or a "healing," and this requirement—or so I will argue—is central to the metacognitive framing (or worldview) produced by the genre's unique story-centricity. As noted in the general introduction to this dissertation, Clute and Wolfe suggest that

at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mimetic tradition increasingly fails to fulfil the most conservative expectations of how we can understand the nature of the world. . . . [Thus,] [i]t could be that the late-century success of fantasy (and other genres of the fantastic) is partly due to these circumstances; and that we listen to stories at the *fin de millennium* in order to recuperate a sense that stories still exist. That we still can be told. (900).

However, in the above speculation, I would argue that Clute and Wolfe have neglected a crucial element of fantasy's story-centric appeal, since this appeal may lie not only in the possibility of constructing a storied, internally coherent existence but in the specific possibility (and plausibility) of constructing healing stories. The required happy ending of full fantasy has been interpreted variously by several critics as naïve, simplistic, conservative, liberal-humanist, and even imperialist.<sup>50</sup> Often, these critiques are linked to the purportedly Christian-

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Brooke-Rose (qtd. in Attebery, *Strategies* 24-27), Jackson (qtd. in Attebery,

centered worldview of fantasy, a position typically supported with reference to J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis's explicit advocacy of fantasy as a means of promoting and/or reinvigorating specifically Christian understandings of the numinous.<sup>51</sup>

Even Clute has noted that, in formulating his structural definition of the genre, he "wanted to remove fantasy as a whole from any bondage to a particular set of characters or Matter; and [he] wanted—*this proved unsuccessful*—to make fantasy into something unChristian" ("Grail" 332, emphasis added). However, the flaw in this characterization of fantasy's healing narratives as inherently Christian (or inevitably naïve) is two-fold. First, Christianity is not the only extant ideology (either real or imaginary) that posits teleologically happy endings to human-centric narratives, nor are all forms of healing or "happy ending" narrowly or necessarily teleological in the sense of positing final, eternal, and statically utopian conclusions. Second, and more crucially, this characterization of fantasy narratives (in general) as monolithic and norm-generating does not take into account the implicitly metafictional and story-centric character of narratives that are set in explicitly imaginary secondary worlds. In short, one story of an imaginary alternative reality does not, logically speaking, invalidate the potential of other stories to portray differing alternative realities. Nor does one narrative solution to the problem of the "happy ending" in such an imagined world reduce or invalidate

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*Strategies* 21), Armitt (199), and Mendlesohn (9, 17).

<sup>51</sup> Tolkien and Lewis's thoughts on this topic resonate with both earlier and later commentaries by other explicitly Christian fantasists. See, for example, George MacDonald's "The Fantastic Imagination" (1893) and Madeleine L'Engle's "Searching for Truth Through Fantasy" (1998), where both of these authors explicitly espouse (differing) Christian viewpoints which they then link to their own understandings of the genre and how it operates.

the possibility of differing solutions. Some fantasies may indeed (re)produce Christian, conservative, naïve, or even imperialist worldviews, but this does not mean that fantasy *as a whole* must inevitably reproduce these tendencies. Thus, while one fantasy novel may posit the divine right of kings and restoration of Christian moral structures as a way of (re)producing healing narrative possibilities, another might posit new, non-Christian, pagan, hybrid, or entirely invented forms and possibilities for narrative healing.

To put it differently, although Clute's prototypical structure of fantasy (i.e. the narrative progression from Wrongness and Thinning to Recognition and Healing) may be compatible with Christian archetypes, it is not *exclusively* compatible with these archetypes, and this compatibility does not in any way preclude the possibility of non-Christian, anti-Christian, or even secular-humanist instantiations of the structure. Consider, for example, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, which explicitly portrays (and implicitly advocates) the hybridization of Christian and pagan goddess-centered traditions, Ursula K. Le Guin's Taoist-influenced *Earthsea* novels (Mathews 138), and William Morris's *The Well at the World's End* (1896), which "transfers spiritual impulses from the religious to the secular dimension," thereby "updat[ing] archetypes from ancient quest in literature to practical humanistic, social, and political idealism" (Mathews 48-49). Indeed, one could even argue—as I will in Chapter 6—that Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, which is framed in terms of an arguably *anti-Christian* expression of indigenous North-American belief systems, may nonetheless be understood as sharing several prototypical strategies and structures

with both fantasy and syncretic fantasy. All of these fantasies follow Clute's prototypical structure of full fantasy, yet none of them are simplistically—or even primarily—Christian-centric. So if this structure is not inherently or necessarily "Christian," the question remains: How may such structures be characterized or understood more generally, and what are their (cognitive) implications?

#### **1.4 Fantasy as Metacognitive Frame**

Framed in the cognitive terms that seem particularly compatible with the study of fantasy, and summarizing from above, fantasy's prototypical characteristics may be understood as (collectively) producing two main metacognitive results for the genre. First, in its prototypical story-centricity, fantasy provides an opportunity for cognitive practice in imagining (and provisionally accepting) explicitly story-based, cognitive minoritarian, and alternative realities *as possible*. Second, in its prototypical structure, fantasy dares to imagine that "happy endings" and healing narratives can be—in the context of the fantasy world, at least—*both possible and plausible*. And in each case, these cognitive practices structure what I am here calling the generic "metacognitive frame" of fantasy in such a way as to invite fantasy readers to (provisionally, subjunctively) reimagine "reality" itself—as well as the role of a particular "self" in that "reality"—as a profoundly story-based, cognitive, and (consequently) reimaginable/rewritable/ retellable framework.

In the first case, secondary world fantasy produces its narratives in an implicitly subjunctive mode precisely by virtue of setting these narratives in

explicitly story-centric secondary worlds. Thus, fantasy invites its readers to, in Attebery's terms, accept new "megatexts" of reality<sup>52</sup>—what Peter Stockwell would call "discourse worlds"—thereby exposing the possibility (and potential plausibility) of alternative worldviews set in literally alternative worlds. This subjunctive mode may be more or less explicit in any given fantasy text, but it will always be present to some degree by virtue of the text's identification as "fantasy." Granted, not all readers will be inclined to accept such an invitation—which is precisely what leads Attebery to observe that "the ability or inability to read fantasy with pleasure divides educated readers nearly as sharply as does gender" (*Strategies* ix), such that "we now have book reviewers and teachers of literature who boast of being unable to read fantasy" (xi)—but the invitation itself is always, implicitly present. As a result, fantasy's implicitly subjunctive storytelling—along with the cognitive exercise of secondary belief in fantasy's secondary worlds—challenges its readers to confront (and surmount) what J. Edward Chamberlin calls the challenge of "believe it and not" that he contends lies at the heart of all stories.

As Chamberlin puts it, "'believe it and not'—rather than 'believe it or not'—is the challenge of every metaphor, of every myth, of every religion, of every community. When we forget that challenge, myth degenerates into ideology, religion into dogma, and communities into conflict" (34). Furthermore, fantasy's subjunctive mode precludes the option of forgetting (or ignoring) this

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<sup>52</sup> Recall Attebery's discussion of the "megatext" of science as a grounding discourse for science fiction, where it "surrounds, supports and judges SF in much the same way the Bible grounds Christian devotional poetry" (*Strategies* 107).

challenge indefinitely, since the reification of fantasy as "real" would require a denial of the fantasy text's identification *as fantasy* in the first place. Fantasy, then, is *metacognitive* in the sense that its secondary worlds, narratives, and realities are implicitly recognized as imaginary, cognitive constructs.

Furthermore, this underlying metacognitive sensibility in turn helps to explain why the cognitive theories of perception and reality-construction (as covertly imaginary, story-based, subjective processes) discussed earlier in this chapter work so well to explain how (and possibly why) fantasy works.

In the second case, fantasy provides its readers an opportunity to imagine (and thereby cognitively engage with) not only alternative worlds and worldviews, but to imagine a particular *type* of constructed world, worlds in which "happy endings" or "healing" are not only possible but required. In other words, fantasy insists that healing and happy endings are both possible and plausible conclusions for *some* stories (i.e. these ones) in *some* version of reality. Again, not all readers will necessarily be interested in (or open to) cognitively engaging with such narrative formulae and structures, and this observation too fits well with fantasy authors' recurring emphasis on the importance of the reader's active participation in the (co)construction of fantasy's narrative worlds.<sup>53</sup> As Lloyd Alexander argues, this characteristic structure assumes (and thereby creates) the possibility of both *belief* and *hope* in the context of the fantasy world, however subjunctive, tenuous, or explicitly imaginary such possibilities may be.

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<sup>53</sup> Recall, for example, Tolkien's distinction between "suspension of disbelief" and "enchantment" as representing, respectively, failed versus successful readerly engagements with fantasy's imagined worlds (Tolkien 41-42).

Indeed, for Alexander, this sense of possibility or "hope" represents the primary cognitive utility of fantasy for its readers. As he puts it, the generalized "capacity for belief" may engender "the ability to hope," since "having once been caught up in a great dream, we can always dream again—and hope the dream will come true" (147). Thus, Alexander argues that "[h]ope is the essential thread in the fabric of all fantasies, an Ariadne's thread to guide us out of the labyrinth, the last treasure in Pandora's box. If we say, 'While there's life, there's hope,' we can also say, 'While there's hope, there's life'" (148).

Notably, Alexander also makes a distinction between passive "wishful thinking" and active "hopeful dreaming," characterizing fantasy as encouraging the latter (147-148). Note, however, that fantasy does not (and indeed cannot) *force* its readers to accept any of these premises or draw these conclusions. Nonetheless, it can (and does) provide an *opportunity* for readers to engage with its texts in this way. Fantasy does not assert that healing, happy endings are inevitable or universal but rather provides cognitive practice in imagining the *possibility* of positive, healing conclusions to distinctly human narratives, and this sense of possibility itself may produce a cognitive incentive for fantasy readers to re-imagine the *possibility* of such healing, hopeful narratives in the real, everyday world. Again, this potential of fantasy to function as a call-to-action in the real world echoes the assertions of several fantasy authors. Tolkien, for example, addresses the oft-postulated 'escapism' of fantasy by arguing that fantasy models "the Escape of the Prisoner," rather than "the Flight of the Deserter," suggesting that the derogatory labelling of fantasy as 'escapist' "stick[s] [the] label of scorn

not only on to Desertion, but on to real Escape, and what are often its companions, Disgust, Anger, Condemnation, and Revolt" (61). The underlying implication here is that this resulting sense of "Disgust, Anger, [and] Condemnation" towards things-as-they-are may in turn predispose fantasy readers towards taking concrete action intended to address (i.e. "Escape" from or "Revolt" against) certain oppressive "realities" of the everyday world.<sup>54</sup>

The unique potential of fantasy, then, lies in its cognitive construction of alternative, story-based worldviews, worldviews that may in turn lead readers—through the cognitive practice of engaging with such structures and narratives—towards the *possibility* of imagining some form of (cognitive, narrative) healing in the context of the "real" world as well. This sort of story-based cognitive reconstruction of the "real" world and the narratives that are (or may be) possible within it may very well be what Thomas King intends to refer to in saying that "in the novel, as in life, whether he"—a character on the verge of committing suicide—"lives or dies depends on which story he believes" (*Truth* 118). And although King is speaking of a Native character in a particular novel, this observation could apply equally well to anyone. This choice of which story to believe is in some senses the choice between continued existence of the self (in the hopes of a potential healing resolution to that self's narrative) versus the certainty that continued existence will lead only to further misery and alienation.

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<sup>54</sup> See Lewis (61) and L'Engle (33) for similar assertions regarding fantasy's (potential) ability to stir a deep desire for action aimed towards changing the "real" world. Note, too, that this (potential) provocation of the fantasy reader echoes much the same goal—that of provoking an audience to social action in/against the so-called "real" world—implicit in a Brechtian formulation of "estrangement."

In such a context, fantasy answers Hamlet's famous question in the subjunctive mode, implicitly asserting it *is* better to be than not, since only in continued being can one's own personal narrative continue to progress towards the potential (though far from inevitable) resolution of a healing or "happy" ending. The metacognitive framework of fantasy, then, could be expressed as a pair of questions: What if happy endings were possible? And if so, what might that look like? Or, to put it in slightly different terms, just as Thomas King asks, "how would we manage a universe in which the attempt to destroy evil is seen as a form of insanity?" (*Truth* 110), fantasy asks "how would we act in (or manage) a universe in which happy endings were possible?" Fantasy habitually, implicitly asks these questions in the subjunctive mode and then proceeds to answer such questions not with logic, but with stories.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> As Brian Wicker puts it, "The story does not contain the answer, it is the answer" (qtd. in Clute, "Fantasy" 338).

## Chapter Two

### Syncretic Fantasy: Reimagining Cultural, Cognitive, and Literary

#### Syncretism<sup>56</sup>

Having argued that even the most traditional secondary world fantasy is not about "impossible" worlds but is rather about the construction of alternative possible ones, this chapter examines what happens when fantasy narratives are no longer isolated in a secondary world but instead combine elements of the everyday "real" world with prototypical fantasy frameworks and content. In its most common form—and setting aside all scare quotes for just a moment—syncretic fantasy is what I call that type of fantasy narrative which combines real-world elements and settings with fantastic or magical characters and events.<sup>57</sup> This type of fantasy infuses the everyday world with mythic, magical elements, such as voodoo loa, European and non-European gods, First Nation tricksters, Celtic fairies, and so on. Using observations drawn from selected theories of storytelling, syncretism, and cognitive science, I argue that the explicit conflict between fantasy's overtly story-centric or "impossible" narratives and its purportedly real-world elements is precisely what allows syncretic fantasy to model the exposure of human cognitive world-building processes. In doing so,

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<sup>56</sup> Portions of this chapter have been previously published in *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (Bechtel, "The Word for World").

<sup>57</sup> Note that the term "magic," like the term "real," should always be understood (in the context of this study) as appearing in implied scare quotes. As will be discussed in more detail below, since the cognitive category of "magic" itself often depends upon an implicitly "objective" knowledge of the real/unreal distinction, and since this study lays claim to no such direct, objective knowledge of the real, the term *magic* will always be used here with some degree of scepticism. Nonetheless, in the interests of compact expression, I will (for the most part) omit the scare-quotes, since such proliferations could easily distract from my central arguments.

syncretic fantasy echoes several contemporary theories of story and syncretism, which argue that these sorts of constant processes of cognitive, story-centric world-building may be understood as underlying all human understandings and perceptions of the real world itself.

Thus, regardless of whether or not one accepts these theories as accurate models of human consciousness in the "real" world itself, such theories provide a deeply compatible framework through which to explain how these processes operate in (and are mirrored by) the prototypical structures and strategies of syncretic fantasy. One might say, rather, that syncretic fantasy and the models of human cognition discussed below implicitly co-endorse one another in their expression of certain shared assumptions. Within such a context, I will use these cognitive theories to provide a hermeneutic model for understanding the mechanisms of syncretic fantasy. And in this context, I will argue that, by juxtaposing (and combining) *real* and *imaginary* elements in a single "self-coherent" fantasy narrative (Clute, "Fantasy" 338), syncretic fantasy invites readers to consciously confront the mental processes of cognitive world building, processes that are—in the models proposed by contemporary cognitive science—notoriously difficult to expose to the conscious mind.

## **2.1 Fantasy in the "Real" World?**

Unlike secondary world fantasy, syncretic fantasy is typically set in a world that overlaps significantly with the contemporary or "real" world in which most members of "Western" culture believe themselves to live. In terms of

popular genre publication and mass-market distribution, this subgenre has been recognized by publishers, readers, and critics of fantasy since (at least) the mid 1980s, with Charles De Lint's bestselling *Moonheart* (1984) and subsequent "urban fantasies" standing as paradigmatic examples of the type. In market terms, this type of real-world fantasy is now most commonly referred to as "contemporary fantasy,"<sup>58</sup> and prototypical representatives of the subgenre would include Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2001), R.A. MacAvoy's *Tea with the Black Dragon* (1983), John Crowley's *Little, Big* (1981), and Megan Lindholm's *Wizard of the Pigeons* (1986). Closer to home, Canadian representative examples (all of which have been marketed specifically as fantasy) would include not only most of Charles De Lint's novels and story-collections, but also several of Tanya Huff's novels and series,<sup>59</sup> Sean Stewart's *Resurrection Man* (1995), Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), and Guy Gavriel Kay's *Ysabel* (2007), among others.

Although the subgenre itself has been recognized in the SF publishing industry as a distinct sub-category of fantasy for some time, there seems to have been some confusion as to what to call it.<sup>60</sup> Terms used by fantasy writers,

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<sup>58</sup> Strategically perhaps, as a marketing category that facilitates an intuitive understanding of the term for a non-specialized reading and book-buying public, this shift in terminology broadens the subgenre to allow the inclusion of novels not necessarily set in urban spaces.

<sup>59</sup> Specifically, Huff's novels *Gate of Darkness*, *Circle of Light* (1989) and *The Enchantment Emporium* (2009), as well as her *Keeper's Chronicles* (1998-2003) and *Smoke and Shadows* (2004-2006) series all fit comfortably into this subgenre. By contrast, Huff's *Blood Books* series (1991-2006)—in its blending of horror and fantasy tropes, and with more emphasis on the former than the latter—could also be understood in relation the subgenre's central prototypes, but perhaps at slightly more of a distance.

<sup>60</sup> Note that I intend to use the term "SF" here (and throughout this dissertation) as an umbrella term to refer to the broader field of what has often been called "speculative fiction." In Canadian usage, as in the *Tesseracts* anthologies of Canadian speculative fiction or SF Canada (a Canadian SF writers association), "speculative fiction" typically refers to the popular "speculative" genres of

publishers, and readers to refer to this sort of fiction have ranged from "low fantasy" (Murphy, Watson) to "urban fantasy" (Belkom, Hartwell) to—most commonly in today's usage—"contemporary fantasy" (Clute and Kaveney). In a 1995 article, Charles de Lint refers to his own work as "magic realism" ("Considering" 115, 119-121), although he has more recently adopted the term "mythic fiction," a term he coined in collaboration with fantasy editor and author Terri Windling (De Lint, "Charles" 73). Sean Stewart acknowledges this same terminological uncertainty in discussing his own work, suggesting that "'[m]agic realism' is a difficult term. I rather think that it *ought* to describe books like *Resurrection Man*, but in fact it is used to label things by Marquez which it seems to me partake heavily of fable, which is the very antithesis of realism. Go figure" (Irvine 265, emphasis in original). This persistent terminological uncertainty may reflect what Heinz Insu Fenkl describes as the transition-point between an "interstitial" form and a more established, recognized (sub)genre, complete with its own distinct, prototypical identifying characteristics.

According to Fenkl—and in congruence with the various aspects of fantasy-as-genre discussed in Section 1.1—popular generic prototypes such as those of fantasy or syncretic fantasy are never invented wholesale, but rather come into existence as social formations at the point when a given set of previously unrecognized generic conventions crystallize around a particular work

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science fiction, fantasy, and horror, although (in some cases) it has also been used to refer to the broader field of all non-realistic literature. In those cases where I mean to refer specifically to genres of "science fiction" or "fantasy," I will use the full terms rather than abbreviations. Critics and writers outside of Canada have not universally adopted this terminology; however, rather than peppering this text with recurring footnotes to clarify each instance of the term, I will trust the reader to infer from context those points where the quoted criticism uses "SF" to refer specifically to "science fiction."

(or works) that is (or are) widely recognized and acknowledged as exemplifying these newly coined (and now-recognizable) conventions. In Fenkl's terminology, a given work of art remains "interstitial" just so long as it remains unplaceable within a single, accepted, and broadly recognized generic framework.<sup>61</sup> As he puts it, "[i]nterstitial works are . . . self-negating. That is, if they become successful to the degree that they engender imitations or tributes to themselves, or, if they spark a movement which results in like-minded works, then they are no longer truly interstitial, having spawned their own genre, subgenre, or even form" (IV). In the case of syncretic fantasy, Charles De Lint's *Moonheart* provides a good example of precisely this process, initially having been considered a unique breakthrough work and leading De Lint to be dubbed (if temporarily) the "father of urban fantasy" (Belkom 42). And although the terms of reference have since changed, perhaps this moniker remains accurate in the sense that De Lint's bestseller status crystallized (i.e. publicized and popularized) a particular set of subgeneric conventions in a way that attracted substantial recognition, readership, and imitations within the fantasy genre.

Fenkl suggests that "[o]nce [a] sub-genre exists and is identifiable by various consistent characteristics, it is possible to begin tracing the history of the form" (IV). Thus, he expands, "the interstitial work has the potential to create a retroactive historical trajectory. Further, if this historical trajectory is prominent

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<sup>61</sup> For Fenkl, an "interstitial" work of art is one which falls into the interstices between recognized generic frameworks. That is, an "interstitial" work combines multiple generic frameworks into a single expression and therefore cannot be easily identified as a member of a single, well-recognized genre. Dr. Fenkl is the former Director of the Interstitial Studies Institute at the State University of New York, New Palz, and the essay quoted here appears on the website of the Interstitial Arts Foundation, a "not-for-profit organization dedicated to the celebration, study, and promotion of Interstitial Art" (Interstitial Arts).

enough, the work that sparked its discovery (or creation) then may become a representative—though not necessarily the first—work in a newly-identified genre or subgenre whose parameters the work has helped illuminate" (Fenkl IV). In this sense, De Lint's success could be understood as "inventing" the broader recognition of this subgeneric category and conventions, which in turn provided a means of identifying, post-hoc, certain books that had previously been identifiable only as unlike-most-fantasy.<sup>62</sup> Just as David Ketterer suggests that the 1984 publication of De Lint's *Moonheart* heralded the "international arrival" of Canadian fantasy on the world stage (*Canadian* 117-20), so did this novel's popularity herald the cognitive arrival (or recognition) of a "new" subgenre of fantasy through which to identify previously uncategorizable novels such as John Crowley's *Little, Big* (1981) or R.A. MacAvoy's *Tea with the Black Dragon* (1983). Indeed, this retroactively invented subgeneric tradition and history is precisely what allows De Lint to suggest that "[i]n a certain sense I guess I helped popularize contemporary fantasy, but back as far as the beginning of the century, James Branch Cabell was [already] doing that with his Jurgen books" ("Mythic" 73).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Recall for comparison Attebery's comments regarding Tolkien's crystallization of popular fantasy prototypes, such that "when *The Lord of the Rings* appeared, we had a core around which to group a number of storytellers who had hitherto been simply, as Northrop Frye suggests, 'other writers' belonging to no identified category or tradition" (*Strategies* 14).

<sup>63</sup> This sort of retroactively recognized (or invented) historical trajectory also provides the basis from which David G. Hartwell, a senior editor at Tor/Forge Books, can argue that "[u]rban fantasy appeared to readers in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s as the true center of fantasy fiction, and was generally called the *Unknown* tradition" ("Making" 4). That is, Hartwell effectively identifies the *Unknown* tradition as an *avant la lettre* version of what later came to be called "urban fantasy." Consequently, Hartwell's extension of this tradition both forwards and backwards in time allows him to rewrite the discourse surrounding De Lint's popularity in the 80's, such that De Lint has no longer *invented* the subgenre but rather "*reinvigorated* the urban fantasy tradition in the early 1980s, and that strain has evolved in the 1980s and '90s" (4, emphasis added). And finally, based

Nonetheless, although the popular recognition of this subgenre's existence has been well-established for some time, a general uncertainty as to what to call it persists. As mentioned above, De Lint now prefers to call his work "mythic fiction," while the SF industry standard has moved towards the general acceptance of the term "contemporary fantasy," identified in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* as setting "the mundanity of the present day in clear opposition to the fantasy premise" (Clute and Kaveney 225). Additional critical and colloquial descriptors of the subgenre include "indigenous" (Attebery, *Strategies*), "low" (Watson), and even simply "new" (Steven) fantasy. The scholarship produced under many of these rubrics has produced valuable insights into the subgenre (to which I will return), but the terms themselves each have significant drawbacks. "Urban fantasy" seems too restrictive, not only because of its implicit restriction to solely urban settings but also due to Clute's significant redefinition of the term.<sup>64</sup> Terms such as "new" or "contemporary" fantasy seem inherently ephemeral (and therefore problematic) in the sense that today's "new" or "contemporary" fantasy will be neither "new" nor "contemporary" ten or twenty

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upon this (reinvented) historical trajectory, Hartwell extends this trajectory up to the present, concluding that "[u]rban fantasy has enjoyed an especially rapid growth since the turn of the millennium in novel form" (4).

<sup>64</sup> Clute's redefinition of this term, like Hartwell's, retroactively identifies (or rather, postulates) a longstanding *avant la lettre* tradition of "urban fantasy," in this case arguing that "urban fantasies derive primarily from the \**Edifice*; and edifices only came into true literary existence with \**The Castle of Otranto* (1765)" ("City" 22, italics in original). Upon this basis, Clute traces the history of urban fantasy—which for him is closely intertwined with the gothic tradition—from 1765 up to the present day ("City" 22-25). An urban fantasy, then, must be substantially "about" the particular city in which it is set, and which may, in some exceptional cases, "be located in a secondary world" ("Urban" 975). Furthermore, for Clute, this city must be "iconic," such that "mundane cities whose potential stories have not been conspicuously embodied in texts by more than one writer—an example of this would be the Ottawa created by Charles De Lint—may hover at the edge of availability, but have not yet been used sufficiently to be *recognized* as iconic" ("City" 19, emphasis in original).

or a hundred years from now, nor does it seem entirely appropriate to refer to works dating from twenty (or more) years ago as "contemporary."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Attebery's term "indigenous" fantasy—although explicitly designed to refer to "fantasy that is, like an indigenous species, adapted to and reflective of its native environment" (*Strategies* 129)—evokes a potential association with First Nations literature, which could be misleading, since such an association is not a part of Attebery's definition. "Low fantasy," by contrast, has the advantage of drawing links to an existing, recognized subcategory of fantasy (i.e. "high fantasy") and may in many cases carry some usefully connotative weight as a description of the often differing linguistic registers between these two subgenres. However, as Attebery notes, this formulation also "implies a [negative] value judgement" (129) with which neither he nor I concur.

Still, in spite of my reservations regarding the terms themselves, much valuable critical work has been conducted under these rubrics, and I intend to use (and modify) elements drawn from several of these approaches in constructing my own model of syncretic fantasy. Brian Attebery, for example, defines "indigenous fantasy" as fantasy that "paradoxically attempt[s] to reattach the wonder-generating mechanisms of fantasy to realistic-seeming settings and situations" (128), suggesting that one of the subgenre's central characteristics is the "mythic fusion of magic and everyday life" (133). I am particularly interested in this reattachment of wonder to the everyday—as was Tolkien, albeit through differing

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<sup>65</sup> Indeed, De Lint cites precisely this difficulty as one of the main reasons behind his preference for the term "mythic fiction" to describe his own work ("Mythic" 73).

techniques and narrative strategies<sup>66</sup>—as a subgeneric prototype. Indeed, as will be discussed in more detail below (in Section 2.6), the reintroduction of "magic" into the everyday may very well be one of the most prototypically significant characteristics of syncretic fantasy. However, Attebery also argues that "indigenous fantasy shows that fiction and life are . . . *separate* but complementary" (141, emphasis added), suggesting that fiction and life (or, alternatively, Story and History) are clearly *separable* as well as complementary categories. In contrast, I will argue that although these categories may indeed be complementary, they can also be extremely difficult to disentangle from one another, particularly in the cross-cultural contexts that recur in many syncretic fantasy narratives. Furthermore, the models of story and syncretism that I will show—throughout this chapter and elsewhere—to be particularly useful in exploring and explaining the prototypical (cognitive) mechanisms of syncretic fantasy tend to dispute this sort of too-easy separation of the everyday world (i.e. History or "reality") from the story-centric mechanisms through which particular cultures, individuals, and communities constantly construct (and reconstruct) the "realities" in which they live.

Attebery also observes that most indigenous fantasy protagonists are "in some way marginal, not among those who are authorized to make judgements about what is real or appropriate" (137). Another way of putting this, recalling

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<sup>66</sup> Recall that for Tolkien, the juxtaposition of the fantastic with the everyday is a key element of what he calls *Recovery*, so that, as he puts it, "fairy-stories deal largely, or (the better ones) mainly, with simple or fundamental things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting" (60). Thus, he argues, fantasy may teach us to "look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves" (58).

Peter L. Berger's term, would be to say that these protagonists occupy *cognitive minoritarian* positions in relation to the surrounding cognitive majoritarian culture(s) in which they live. For Attebery, this positioning has to do with the plausibility of the indigenous fantasy narrative, bypassing the reader's own (implicitly cognitive majoritarian) sense of what may plausibly be portrayed as "possible" by producing "a perspective close enough to *common sense* to allow for a sense of continuity with the reader's world, but at the same time open to impossible events and miraculous expectations" (137, emphasis added). Thus, in Attebery's model, the primary utility of this plausibility-bypass is to allow cognitive majoritarian readers to participate—with a minimum of cognitive dissonance—in the imaginary (i.e. cognitive minoritarian) narratives of indigenous fantasy. However, I would extend this reasoning to argue that if the point of view character is plausible, and if the character's perceived reality is *also* plausible, then the reader's exposure to (and cognitive participation in) the construction and narration of such an alternative worldview may—potentially at least—have more profound cognitive effects than simply allowing that reader to temporarily participate in an otherwise implausible narrative.

Attebery's use of the term *common sense* seems particularly telling here, since I will argue that one of the key functions of syncretic fantasy may be—to some degree, at least—to invite its readers to learn to escape precisely such "commonsense" (i.e. cognitive majoritarian) assumptions and worldviews. Rather, syncretic fantasy narratives, like fantasy narratives more generally, challenge their readers to empathize with and experience a cognitive minoritarian worldview that

can (subjectively) take them "outside" of the normal, everyday world. However, unlike secondary world fantasy, syncretic fantasy also depends upon some "sense of continuity with the reader's world" (Attebery, *Strategies* 137) in such a way that it models, within its narratives, a mental space in which cognitive majoritarian worldview(s) and "realities"—as much as cognitive minoritarian ones—can be exposed and understood as subjective narrative constructs. This is not to say that syncretic fantasy readers will (necessarily) believe in the literal reality of the magic portrayed in syncretic fantasy texts, but it does seem plausible that this sort of cognitive participation in alternative, cognitive minoritarian worldviews—in explicit *contrast to* and simultaneous *contiguity with* more conventional, cognitive majoritarian ones—might help readers to imagine the *possibility* of such alternative worldviews as (potentially) valid in the extra-textual world as well. Moreover, syncretic fantasy does not simply model such cognitive minoritarian viewpoints as *possible*. Rather, it consistently models these viewpoints (in the context of these narratives, at least) not only as plausible but as *more* valid than the usual cognitive majoritarian ones.

Greer Watson points out that the explicit mixing of "real" and "imaginary" elements in what she calls "low fantasy" typically produces a conscious struggle on the part of the low fantasy protagonist to decide what is real (or not) within the world of the story. According to Watson, this struggle always leads to the protagonist's eventual validation and adoption of a new worldview, specifically the acceptance of and coming to terms with living in a magical world. As Watson puts it,

the rational primary-world world-view is shared initially by the protagonist and the other characters in the story, but not by the third-person narrator, who is omniscient and knows better. The protagonist is soon enlightened, but most people are not. . . .

[Thus,] the reader is quickly made aware that the primary-world rules are illusory, even though they are held to be true by most of the people in the world of the story. (171)

Watson does not argue that the reconfiguration of reality within the bounds of these fantasy narratives will have any effect on the reader's perception of reality outside of the text (i.e. in the extra-textual or "primary" world), and her primary project in this article is to draw a clear distinction between the genres of "low fantasy" and "magical realism" (which will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.6). Nonetheless, this prototypical narrative arc of syncretic fantasy explicitly models (through depiction) the process of consciously coming to terms with (and accepting) worldviews that explicitly differ from those of the prevailing cognitive majority. Furthermore, in congruence with fantasy's more general prototypical arc—which concludes with some form of Healing—this acceptance of a cognitive minoritarian worldview does not hinge on the rejection of one worldview in favour of another but rather on the eventual *reconciliation* of the multiple worldviews depicted within the syncretic fantasy text.

In this sense, Watson's description of "low" fantasy's prototypical structure meshes well with Clute and Kaveney's description of "contemporary fantasy." According to Clute and Kaveney, "contemporary fantasy" is precisely that

subgenre of fantasy which explicitly depicts the collision of the contemporary world with a world of magic and spirits, such that it "always sets up dichotomies of values and tries to reconcile them" (225). Indeed, this *reconciliation* of multiple worldviews will be another key element in my own formulation of syncretic fantasy, since the term "syncretism" itself denotes the fusion of elements from multiple worldviews into a single, internally cohesive perspective. In this sense, syncretic fantasy models the potential rapprochement (or, in Clute's terms, Healing) of the rift between multiple, differing worldviews and cultural contexts. However, although cross-cultural tropes and elements are quite common across the genre, not all syncretic fantasy directly depicts the syncretism of multiple cultural worldviews. More generally, then, it might be more accurate to argue that syncretic fantasy portrays the reconciliation of multiple worlds and worldviews within a single narrative, often within a single character. Moreover (as discussed in Section 2.6), the inclusion of *magic* as a key element of syncretic fantasy's internally validated worldviews is precisely that aspect of the subgenre which ensures its endorsement of specifically cognitive minoritarian worldviews. And finally—if one considers the extra-textual, everyday world of the syncretic fantasy reader as one of the subjective worlds that the syncretic fantasy text must on some level reconcile with its portrayed cognitive minoritarian worldviews—syncretic fantasy's depiction of cognitive minoritarian worlds that nonetheless remain contiguous with the reader's own also models the (potential) Recognition that "reality" itself may in some ways be best understood as a deeply subjective, culturally contingent, and story-based construct.

## 2.2 On Recognizing Story-Shaped "Realities": Towards a Cross-Cultural Model

As discussed in the previous chapter, fantasy has typically been conceived of as portraying impossible narratives in isolated otherworlds, and as noted above "contemporary fantasy" is conventionally understood as mixing the "impossible" elements of fantasy with the "possible" elements of realism. However, John Clute has proposed another type of fantasy—one which he does not name—that exposes (or Recognizes) the storied-ness of the real world, such that "at their deepest, genre stories, magically and perhaps mysteriously liberated by the formularies they adhere to, are capable of achieving something like a literal gaze at the given" ("Canary" 220). According to Clute, this type of fantasy builds upon a recognition (what Clute calls Recognition II) that the real world is always already made up of stories. Thus, this type of tale Recognizes itself as telling a story which is the world, such that "the melodramatic gaze of the fantastic . . . [becomes], in the end, a gaze at the world itself, as it writhes beneath us" (220). And this, I would argue, is precisely the model of Recognition that syncretic fantasy adopts and dramatizes in its prototypical structures and strategies. Such a model may seem counterintuitive in a literal sense, since a binary approach to "reality"—in which some stories are understood as "real" (or realistic), while others are perceived as "unreal" (or unrealistic)—would suggest that in order for some stories to be "true," others must be "untrue."<sup>67</sup> However, as J. Edward Chamberlin argues, such

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<sup>67</sup> Recall, for example, C. N. Manlove's suggestion that the main reason modern fantasists cannot

distinctions and divisions become far from self-evident when considered in cross-cultural contexts.

In developing his models of intra- and cross-cultural storytelling, Chamberlin argues that differing and apparently contradictory stories of reality may be simultaneously true *in different ways*. As a starting point, Chamberlin observes that one of the most persistent stories across cultures is the recurring tale of "the civilized and the barbaric, Us and Them, Somebodies and Nobodies" (10), whereby a civilized "Us" is assumed to have a privileged and accurate grasp on reality, while the cultural beliefs of an uncivilized, barbaric "Them" are understood, by default, to be deluded, superstitious, or mistaken. For Chamberlin, one way of defusing this ultimately destructive dichotomy may be to Recognize that differing understandings of reality (both within and between cultures) are always licensed by reference to culturally conventional and accepted story-based "truths." As Chamberlin puts it,

Every imaginative tradition has allegiances both to the facts of experience, which in a sense are a part of us, and to the formalities of expression, which are separate from us.

. . . Two truths? Perhaps; but instead of two truths we might say two stories, which together help us chart the convergence of reality and the imagination, showing us how the conventions of storytelling or painting or science or religion are best understood

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convincingly bridge the natural/supernatural gap for contemporary readers is that the modern secular consciousness has "isolated physics from metaphysics, reason from faith and nature from supernature" (259).

not in isolation but by seeing where they meet others, and in the world, in ceremonies of belief—ceremonies underwritten by the kind of faith John Polanyi talks about when he says that it is the incredible belief that there exists a grand design underlying the physical world which makes scientists dedicate their lives to science. (222)

In particular, Chamberlin's distinction between riddles and charms illuminates the potential role of stories and storytelling (in all cultures) to reshape the "real" world, a distinction that easily accommodates Clute's postulated *Recognition II* as one expression of what Chamberlin might call a literary charm. Riddles and charms, Chamberlin suggests, set up a tension between language and the world, so that "either language or the world has to give" (180). In this tug of war, riddles operate in such a way that "language gives," while in the case of charms, "the world gives, if only a little bit" (180). Charms, then, "collapse the distinction between imagination and reality" (175), and in this context, what I call syncretic fantasy may be understood as a charm (or ritual) that reaffirms the power of language and Story to reinvent the world(s) in which we live. Thus, such fantasies of the real world may model ways of re-imagining the real/unreal binary so as to "give us the confidence to reject the choice between words and the world" (Chamberlin 240) and to Recognize that "choosing between [Us and Them] is like choosing between reality and the imagination, or between being marooned on an island and drowning in the sea. Deadly, and ultimately a delusion" (239).

Returning to fantasy criticism and selectively synthesizing elements of

existing scholarship not only provides a surprisingly coherent overview of the subgenre that I call "syncretic fantasy" but also reveals the prototypical structures of this subgenre to be deeply compatible with Chamberlin's theories of story. To summarize briefly, syncretic fantasy retains all of the story-centric characteristics of "full fantasy" with the following significant additions. As suggested by Attebery, syncretic fantasy portrays events from the viewpoint of what he calls "marginal" participants in society—what I call "cognitive minority" members and Chamberlin would identify as the "Them" of an Us/Them binary<sup>68</sup>—and uses these perspectives to depict the subjectively plausible interpenetration of "real" and "magical" worlds (and worldviews) within a single narrative. Moreover, in syncretic fantasy, members of the cognitive minoritarian "Them" of this binary are typically placed in the *protagonist* position, such that theirs is the central perspective of the narrative. Furthermore, as in Watson's description, syncretic fantasy's portrayal of this collision between cognitive majoritarian and cognitive minoritarian viewpoints explicitly vindicates—and, I would argue, implicitly advocates—the adoption of cognitive minoritarian perspectives (or stories), which in turn modify the protagonists' understanding of "reality" itself. In this tendency, as pointed out by Clute and Kaveney, syncretic fantasy models the *reconciliation* of multiple worldviews within a single (multivalent, story-centric) world. Thus, syncretic fantasy models the subjective, narrative reconstruction of *reality* itself, inviting readers to Recognize (Clute's "Recognition II") that the world itself may

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<sup>68</sup> Cognitive minoritarian characters would include, for example, members of "other" cultures, people who believe in magic, the mentally ill, children, or other "marginal" members of the depicted society.

be (and may always have been) constructed through the mechanisms of story and storytelling. As in Chamberlin's model, syncretic fantasy portrays reality as story-centric, rooted in complex networks of culturally-sanctioned (and culture-specific) stories, such that the world can always be literally re-told (and thereby re-created) through the self-aware understanding and use of (cross)cultural stories and storytelling.

Thus, syncretic fantasy paradigmatically blurs the usual comfortably-assumed boundary between the "possible" narratives of realism and the "impossible" narratives of fantasy. Realism, like fantasy, consists of a specific set of textual conventions and readerly expectations: each builds a narrative world that the reader accepts as real (within the boundaries of the text), and the main difference between the two is the degree of overlap between the represented textual world and any given reader's understanding of the "real"—which is, itself, a culturally determined narrative construct. In this context, realism becomes nothing more than a specialized, sanctioned type of fantasy that constructs a "reality" which the cognitive majority of the dominant culture is willing to accept. Nonetheless, in discussing fantasy-as-genre, and setting aside all recourse to an objective knowledge of "reality," the distinctions described above are entirely sufficient for distinguishing between fantasy and realism, since the key (implicit) recognition built into the model described above is that the *genre* of fantasy (whether syncretic or otherwise) always depends on the cultural context of its reception. Thus, a work which would be understood as fantasy in one culture might not be understood as such in a differing culture, since the *perception* of

fantasy-as-genre (always within a specific cultural and social matrix) is precisely what constitutes the genre's existence in the first place.

Furthermore, syncretic fantasy occupies a unique position in this network of cultural and social contexts, specifically due to its story-centric mixture and *reconciliation* of cognitive majoritarian and minoritarian viewpoints within a single narrative. Syncretic fantasy is not always written from a Eurocentric perspective (although this is by far the most common approach), but it is almost always structured in such a way as to facilitate its comprehensibility within a Eurocentric (or paradigmatically "Western") worldview. That is, syncretic fantasy is typically tailored for consumption *by* a Eurocentric audience, challenging audience members to learn to accept (at least temporarily) cognitive minoritarian incursions and modifications to their usual cognitive majoritarian worldviews. And although these incursions and modifications do not always originate in specifically non-Western cultural viewpoints, such non-Western viewpoints *always* represent cognitive minoritarian positions within the context of a cognitive majoritarian, Eurocentric culture. To date, fantasy criticism—with the possible exception of Clute's "Recognition II"—has stopped short of suggesting fantasy's story-centricity may represent not a turning-away-from objective "reality" but rather a turning-towards idiosyncratic, subjective (sub)cultural realities, encompassing a direct engagement with story-based, cognitive models of reality-construction itself. However, contemporary theories of cross-cultural (and cognitive) syncretism present frameworks through which to address precisely such possibilities, and, as will be discussed in more detail below, these

frameworks appear deeply compatible with the prototypical structures of syncretic fantasy.

### **2.3 Syncretic World-Building: Cultural and Cognitive Syncretism**

An investigation of contemporary scholarship on syncretism uncovers a curious network of connections between cross-cultural communication, cognitive science, stories and storytelling, and—ultimately—cross-cultural and syncretic fantasy. Traditionally, the term syncretism has been used to describe cross-cultural fusions of multiple religious belief systems, particularly in terms of the syncretic Afro-Caribbean religions of Vodoun, Santeria, and Orisha worship. More recently, however, this usage has been criticized for its production of an implicitly hierarchical relationship between *pure* or *original* religions and their mixed or blended offspring. In this context, scholars of religion consistently argue that there may be no such thing as a characteristically syncretic religion, since there is not and never has been any such thing as a pure culture or religion from which uniquely hybrid or blended syncretic religions are then formed.<sup>69</sup> Rather, these scholars argue that all religions are syncretic, since no religion develops in a (cross)cultural vacuum, and all cultures typically interact with other cultures, constantly exchanging both goods and ideas in the course of these interactions.

Certain scholars reimagine syncretism as a cognitive process that occurs first at the level of the individual, arguing that individuals, like groups, constantly reconstruct their own cultures and belief systems by idiosyncratically blending

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<sup>69</sup> See Benavides, Droge, Martin ("Syncretism, Historicism"), and Leopold and Jensen ("General Introduction").

multiple cognitive and cultural frameworks into their own (idiosyncratic) understandings of the "real" world in which they live.<sup>70</sup> According to these models, syncretism may be best understood as an ongoing cognitive process within all religions (and cultures), rather than an adjective describing uniquely "syncretic" belief systems in contrast to (implicitly) non-syncretic ones. In its most general sense, then, syncretism may be understood as referring to the cognitive fusion of diverse worldviews into a single, idiosyncratic yet coherent viewpoint. Interestingly, this understanding of syncretism is vulnerable to precisely the same sorts of criticisms as my description of "fantasy" above, where I described realism as a specialized form of fantasy that the cognitive majority of a given culture is predisposed towards accepting as "real" or "possible." However, much as the category of fantasy retains its meaning in the specific cultural context of its reception—which requires no recourse to a purportedly "objective" knowledge of reality—so does syncretism retain its meaning as the description of an ongoing *cognitive process*, rather than as an "objective" categorization applying to certain religions and not others. Thus, although syncretism is no longer understood (in these models) as a unique characteristic of specific religio-cultural formations (and not others), these scholars nonetheless argue that it can provide a powerful heuristic for investigating the processes that continually and dynamically re-create all religions, cultures, and worldviews.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Martin ("To Use 'Syncretism'") and Leopold and Jensen ("General Introduction").

<sup>71</sup> Note, too, that this sort of heuristic approach echoes my own contention that a clearer understanding of syncretic fantasy prototypes and mechanisms may provide a powerful critical heuristic for investigating certain texts that, while not prototypically recognized as "fantasy" *per se*, nonetheless use fantasy-like narrative structures and/or strategies in the construction of their

Luther H. Martin, for example, argues that syncretism reflects a characteristically human cognitive process of active world-building ("To Use 'Syncretism'"). According to Martin, human beings don't reproduce or even synthesize cultural worldviews. Rather, each individual formulates his or her own structuring of "reality" as a functional accommodation of two factors: (1) the available cognitive bits—or memes<sup>72</sup>—that the individual gleans from the surrounding culture (or cultures), and (2) the individual mind's cognitive predispositions, which are typically a function of worldviews formed in early childhood (394-97). Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen link this cognitive understanding of syncretism to the more general cognitive model of "conceptual blending." For Leopold and Jensen, conceptual blending—the human capacity to blend multiple cognitive frameworks into novel and productive understandings of "reality"—may very well represent the underlying cognitive mechanism of syncretism. Thus, they argue that "[t]he pattern for a syncretistic formation is similar to how we think in general—at least if we trust scholars in cognitive science, Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier, who are spokesmen for a theory that proposes that our way of thinking is based on the blending of different mental spaces" ("General Introduction" 9).

As noted in Chapter One, Mark Turner has long been an advocate of the embodied cognition movement within cognitive science, especially in terms of its close links to literature and the central importance of "story" in its modelling of

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own internal realities.

<sup>72</sup> Martin borrows the concept of cognitive memes from Richard Dawkins' study of *The Selfish Gene* (1989).

human cognitive processes. More recently, in collaboration with Gilles Fauconnier, Turner has proposed "conceptual blending" as one of the key underlying mechanisms that human beings use to actively and continually (re)construct the cognitive realities in which they live. As Peter Stockwell succinctly summarizes, conceptual blending

involves a mapping between two [mental] spaces . . . . Specific features which emerge from this mapping then form a new space, the blend. Conceptual blends are the mechanism by which we can hold the properties of two spaces together, such as in metaphorical or allegorical thinking, scientific or political analogy, comparisons and imaginary domains involving characters from disparate areas. (97-98)

Echoing Martin's (implicitly) cognitive model of syncretism, Fauconnier and Turner argue that human beings do not interact directly with unmediated reality, but rather filter their interactions with the world through a constant process of blending multiple cognitive inputs and frameworks into ad hoc conceptual blending networks. In turn, these networks make sense of the world by combining several disparate inputs into functional conceptual blends that can frame the world in terms that human minds can easily understand and manipulate. Fauconnier and Turner characterize this state as "living in the blend" (389-96), the blend itself being a patchwork, unconsciously-synthesized fusion of multiple cognitive constructs drawn from a broad collection of culturally conventional mental schemata. In this model—as is conventional in embodied cognition models—

individual human perceptions are understood as always being filtered (on a pre-conscious level) through a series of mental schemata. These mental schemata (along with the perceptions arising from them) are then "blended" to create the individual's conscious, subjective perception of any given "reality," regardless of whether that "reality" is proximal, physical, and immediate, or more abstract, hypothetical, and distant.

Significantly, one of the key mechanisms in this blending process is to "come up with a story" (312) that can frame a given collection of cognitive inputs, and again, the underlying compatibility between syncretic fantasy's prototypically story-centric structures and this cognitive understanding of syncretism presents one compelling argument for using this theory to explain the subgenre's characteristic mechanisms. (That is, regardless of whether or not one accepts Fauconnier and Turner's theories as an accurate modelling of human consciousness *in general*, they nonetheless provide a compellingly compatible model for explaining how syncretic fantasy works.) Maintaining consistency with Turner's earlier theories of story, mind, and cognition, Fauconnier and Turner's model of conceptual blending—what I will call a cognitive understanding of syncretism, or "cognitive syncretism" for short—contends that stories (and storytelling) remain one of the key cognitive tools that human beings use to construct the subjective realities in which they live.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Fauconnier

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<sup>73</sup> Note, as well, that I will treat Fauconnier and Turner's "conceptual blending" as synonymous with my own coining of the term "syncretic blending." Since Fauconnier and Turner often shorten their own usage to simply "blending," and since I am coining the term "syncretic blending" in the first place—in order to maintain my focus on cognitive aspects and understandings of syncretism rather than getting sidetracked into lengthy explanations of the mechanics of conceptual blending

and Turner also contend—again in congruence with existing models of embodied cognition—that the mechanics of these cognitive processes can be extremely difficult to expose to the conscious mind, since, "even after training, the mind seems to have only feeble abilities to represent to itself consciously what the unconscious mind does easily" (18).

Fauconnier and Turner attribute the difficulty of perceiving everyday conceptual blends to a process that they call *cognitive entrenchment*, an unconsciously synthesized mental shorthand that tends to conceal

the imaginative construction of a [conceptual blending] network. In retrospect, the [conceptual] mappings often look like obvious matches, as if they were given immediately by the [mental] spaces themselves. . . . [I]t is similar to thinking that the perception of a cup is directly caused by the objective existence of the cup, without any imaginative construal. The achieved full integration network [i.e. the perception of the cup] is the imaginative product, which we are disposed . . . to see as directly caused by preexisting 'objective givens.' But constructing both the input spaces and the connections between them is often a highly creative act. (105)

In these sorts of models, the most basic processes of human perception and cognitive world-building are understood as happening on a pre-conscious (and therefore invisible) level, which is precisely why intuitive or "common sense" explanations of human cognition often turn out to be quite mistaken. This, then, is

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itself—I feel that this usage is justified. It does, however, represent a modification to Fauconnier and Turner's terminology.

precisely what leads Fauconnier and Turner to explain that their models of (syncretic) conceptual blending rest upon the assumption that

[l]ike biology, culture and learning give us entrenched integrations that we can manipulate directly. *In both cases, once we have the integration it is hard or impossible to escape it.* We construe the physical, mental, and social worlds we live in by virtue of the integrations [i.e. syncretic blends] we achieve through biology and culture. There is no other way for us to apprehend the world.

Blending is not something we do in addition to living in the world; it is our means of living in the world. (390, emphasis added)

Note, however, that Fauconnier and Turner do not argue that specific, biologically or culturally entrenched blends are necessarily inescapable. Rather, in this model although the *process of blending* lies at the very root of human cognition, specific blends may always be reconfigured via the very same processes that created them in the first place.

Stepping back from the level of the individual to that of the collective, Fauconnier and Turner argue that over time successful conceptual blends tend to become culturally entrenched, allowing their results in turn to be combined recursively into newly creative blends. In this sense, each culturally conventional blend depends upon those that came before, so that conceptual blending becomes an ongoing, recursive, culturally transmissible, and (thereby) culturally dependent process. As Fauconnier and Turner put it,

the brain can be thought of as a bubble chamber of mental space:

New mental spaces are formed all the time out of old ones. We surmise that the brain is constantly constructing very many blends, and that only some of them are selected out for further development and application. Even fewer become available to consciousness. A 'culture,' which includes a large collection of brains, is an even larger bubble chamber for evolving candidate blends, testing them, discarding or cultivating them, and promoting and disseminating some of them. (321)

This process of cognitive entrenchment, then, is precisely the point where the link between cognitive and cultural syncretism becomes both apparent and functional. The point at which an individual, idiosyncratically syncretic construct becomes transmissible through the medium of culture (or story) represents the moment when that construct begins to radiate outwards to be used, reused, and—eventually, in some cases—to enter the invisibly syncretic, cognitive majoritarian body of knowledge that a given culture accepts as "real."

Adapting the above model's observations to the terminology of "story" discussed earlier, culturally conventional (or cognitively entrenched) blends may be understood as being rooted in underlying culture-specific stories, the available network of which forms the conventional worldview (or cognitive heritage) of any given culture. This, too, is where fantasy-as-genre can re-enter the conversation, since fantasy is rooted in the explicitly story-centric contradiction of the cognitive majoritarian stories (or entrenched conceptual blends) that a given culture accepts as "real." Returning to specifically *syncretic* fantasy, then, what

are the implications of a literary genre which is itself overtly story-centric in its depiction (and reconciliation) of explicitly cognitive minoritarian realities alongside (and with) more cognitive majoritarian ones? More to the point, how can the cognitive understanding of syncretism explored above provide further insight into syncretic fantasy? In the context of the models discussed above, one might ask how syncretic fantasy may both model and expose these (postulated) unconscious processes of cognitive syncretism for apprehension by the conscious mind. These are precisely the sorts of questions that a reworked model of literary syncretism may help to address.

#### **2.4 Reimagining Literary Syncretism**

Although scholars of religion have discarded the use of syncretism as an adjective to describe uniquely blended belief systems, literary criticism still tends to discuss syncretism primarily in those cases where a work of literature emerges from a cultural background that is recognized as characteristically syncretic. In terms of the novels investigated in this dissertation, for example, Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* is the only one regularly referred to as syncretic or reflective of a particularly syncretic sensibility.<sup>74</sup> In this case, the characterization of Hopkinson's work as uniquely syncretic reflects the persistent characterization of Caribbean cultures as syncretic due to their national

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<sup>74</sup> Of the criticism that I have personally surveyed, four out of ten articles on Hopkinson (Baker; Collier; Reid, "Crossing"; Wood) use the term syncretism to discuss her work, while by contrast, only one out of thirteen articles (Wyle) uses this term in relation to Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, and no articles at all discuss "syncretism" in the other novels examined within this dissertation, although several discuss border-crossing, tricksters, cross-cultural hybridity, multiculturalism, and so on.

origins/histories and the stereotypically syncretic religions (e.g. Vodoun, Orisha-worship, etc.) that originated in these settings. (As discussed in Chapter Four, Hopkinson embraces the language of syncretism in describing her own work while nonetheless pointedly rejecting the common assumption that non-Caribbean cultures remain devoid of such structures.<sup>75</sup>) However, in congruence with the contemporary theories of syncretism discussed above, the syncretism of "syncretic fantasy" need not be understood solely (or restrictively) as cross-cultural. The goal of this section, then, will be to develop a more general cognitive understanding of syncretism in literature, one which can better help to explore (and explain) the narrative strategies of syncretic fantasy.

The key to such a revised approach, in this context, will be to focus on syncretism as a *process depicted in* literature rather than a *descriptor of* particular literary works. Thus, for example, rather than discussing syncretism in the sense of exploring a novel's blending of aesthetic and formal strategies drawn from a variety of (differing) cultural traditions,<sup>76</sup> I will tend to focus more on the narrative (and explicitly storied) depiction of syncretic processes within the texts under consideration. Here again, as in Chapter One's discussion of fantasy as depicting possible as opposed to impossible worlds, Peter Stockwell's model of *discourse worlds* will be particularly useful in developing a more flexible understanding of syncretic fantasy, how it works, and what significantly

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<sup>75</sup> As Hopkinson puts it, "[W]hen someone says to me, 'Oh, I like your culture, because we white people don't have that,' I think, 'Oh, give me a break! Do your damn reading!'" ("Nalo" 77)

<sup>76</sup> Herb Wyile, for example, takes precisely this approach in discussing the formal and aesthetic syncretism of *Green Grass, Running Water*, and his analysis is both cogent and insightful. However, this is not the approach to discussing syncretism in literature that I will be taking, since I am more interested in the *depiction* of syncretism and syncretic processes within the internal discourse worlds of these novels.

differentiates it from other, less overtly syncretic genres and subgenres.

Furthermore, since this concept will be more integral to exploring the mechanisms of syncretic fantasy than it was in explaining those of secondary world fantasy, I will here examine Stockwell's model in more detail.

Stockwell constructs his own understanding of discourse worlds based upon an underlying foundation of *possible worlds* theory. Possible worlds theory was developed by philosophers of language primarily as "a means of calculating the truth-value of a sentence" (Stockwell 92), an almost mathematical framework focussed on analyzing the logical consistency (or lack thereof) of world-building and propositional "truth" within a given text. However, as Stockwell explains, "a possible world . . . is not the same rich everyday world we experience around us. . . . It is a formal logical set, not a cognitive array of knowledge" (92). Discourse worlds, by contrast, "can be understood as dynamic readerly *interactions with possible worlds*" (92, emphasis added). Thus, where possible worlds have to do with the contextual evaluation of truth-statements within a text, discourse worlds are not so much about logical truth as they are about the ways in which readers may come to believe (however provisionally) in the world portrayed within a text. Of particular note here is how well this model fits with Tolkien's understanding of the role of "secondary belief" in fantasy (as discussed in Chapter One), as well as other fantasy authors' characterizations of the role of "belief" and subjective (rather than objective) "truth" in the reading and writing of (secondary world) fantasy.<sup>77</sup> In Stockwell's model, a discourse world—much like a "secondary

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Alexander (143-146), Cooper (281), L'Engle (33), Le Guin ("Dreams" 185,

world"—may be characterized as "the imaginary world which is conjured up by the reading of a text, and which is used to understand and keep track of events and elements in that world" (94).

In the context of syncretism and syncretic fantasy, Stockwell's model also provides a crucial link between cognitive understandings of "reality" and the textual construction of imaginary worlds. As noted earlier, Stockwell's model—in accordance with its roots in "cognitive poetics"<sup>78</sup>—is based upon the assumption "that the same cognitive mechanisms apply to literary reading as to all other interaction, and so *we can understand a discourse world as the mediating domain for reality as well as projected fictions*" (94, emphasis added). Much as in earlier discussions of Clute's "Recognition II," this lack of differentiation between "real" and "fictional" worlds may seem counterintuitive, yet Stockwell argues that "it seems psychologically unlikely that we have developed different cognitive strategies for dealing with fictional worlds and non-fictional worlds" (92). More importantly, whether or not one accepts Stockwell's underlying assumptions, this model works well with both the prototypical structures of syncretic fantasy and a cognitive (rather than solely cultural) understanding of syncretism. In the case of

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*Language* 44), Norton (157), and Tolkien (42).

<sup>78</sup> Stockwell advocates (and adopts) a "cognitive poetic" approach to the study of literature, wherein the findings in cognitive science are used as a basis for developing cognitive interpretations of literature, literary works, and the reading process more generally. As an emerging field of study, it would be difficult to summarize the precise range and boundaries of cognitive poetics, partly because these definitions have yet to be codified in any broadly agreed upon form. However, notable precursors in this field include Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we Live By* (1980), as well as Johnson's *Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (1987), Turner's *Reading Minds: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science* (1991) and *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language* (1996), and Tsur's *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (1992). Note that for the most part these works emerge from the embodied cognition movement referenced earlier, which is why many of them overlap with the core texts of that movement.

syncretic fantasy, which blends cognitive majoritarian and cognitive minoritarian worldviews in a single narrative, such a model removes the need to identify these worldviews in terms of their relative proximity to (or distance from) a postulated "objective" extra-textual reality. Rather, the cognitive majoritarian perspective within syncretic fantasy texts may be identified as congruent with the extra-textual, cognitive majoritarian *discourse world* of the surrounding, dominant culture. Likewise, the cognitive minoritarian perspective—which is invariably affirmed as "real" within the text (Watson)—may be identified not as contradicting "reality," but as rooted in a different discourse world than that of the (extra-textual) surrounding cognitive majoritarian culture.

Furthermore, Stockwell's model easily accommodates cognitive models of syncretism in the sense that the cognitive processes of syncretism in syncretic fantasy novels may be understood in terms of their blending (or reconciling) of multiple *discourse worlds* within a single narrative. In this case, a *discourse world* may be "cultural" in the sense of being rooted in a particular set of cultural discourses, but it may also be subcultural, idiosyncratic, individualized, heterogeneous, or even entirely imaginary, with no need for a "real-world" correlative at all. That is, in Stockwell's model, discourse worlds may just as easily vary from individual to individual (or text to text) as they do from culture to culture. And just as Chapter One used the concept of cognitive majoritarian versus cognitive minoritarian discourse worlds to remove any necessary recourse to "reality" from existing definitions of fantasy, this same concept here removes the necessity of recourse to "culture" as the sole source for the various discursive

"worldviews" (i.e. discourse worlds) that may appear within a given text. Additionally, in this model, multiple discourse worlds may themselves be nested within the larger discourse world of the text itself or (recursively and even repeatedly) blended via the cognitive *processes* of syncretism depicted *within* the text.

As discussed above, one key difficulty in uncovering and examining syncretic *processes*—as opposed to identifying (stereotypically) syncretic cultures—is the difficulty of recognizing these cognitive processes in the construction of one's own culture, consciousness, or "reality." In cognitive models of syncretism, this difficulty is characterized as the result of cognitive entrenchment, leading Fauconnier and Turner to argue that "blending is always at work in any human thought or action but is often hard to see. The meanings we take most for granted are those where the complexity is best hidden" (25). In other words, although cognitive scientists argue that these sorts of syncretic cognitive processes are central to cognition itself, they also argue that the very centrality of these (unconscious) processes is precisely what makes them difficult to expose to the conscious mind. Indeed, in such models, one of the main differences between "real" and "imaginary" worlds is that humans tend to recognize the latter as imagined (i.e. cognitive, story-based, abstract constructs), while the largely-imagined basis of the former typically remains entirely unrecognized and therefore effectively invisible.

Here again, this model works well to help explain (or at least describe) the structures of syncretic fantasy. Recall that syncretic fantasy's prototypical

structure starts with the depiction of a conflict between multiple, apparently incompatible worldviews. This conflict itself, then, is precisely what exposes these worldviews as *discourse worlds*, each depending upon their own underlying, cognitively entrenched, yet differing assumptions regarding the structure and content of "reality" itself. More importantly, this conflict of discourse worlds leads not the exposure of an irreconcilable difference between these worldviews but rather to an eventual *reconciliation* (i.e. blending) of these worldviews to form a new, syncretized worldview. Here, the *process* of this depicted reconciliation between differing worldviews is precisely what exposes the mechanisms (and processes) of cognitive syncretism as operating within the discourse world of the text. In this sense, syncretism in literature may be reimagined, not as a solely (cross)cultural phenomenon but as a *narrative process*. And the exploration of syncretic processes within a given text can focus on the narrative's depiction of these syncretic processes *within the discourse world* constructed by the text itself.<sup>79</sup> Extending this line of reasoning, a further exploration of cognitive models of syncretism exposes yet further interlinked compatibilities between syncretic fantasy, cognitive syncretism, and the methodologies typically used to uncover syncretic blending processes.

Although the underlying goal of cognitive scientists studying the

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<sup>79</sup> Of course, there is no necessary reason that such a hypothetically meta-syncretic text would have to be *fantasy*, per se. These (cognitive) processes of syncretism could just as easily be examined, for example, in a strictly realistic novel of cross-cultural contact, wherein a protagonist from one culture learned to understand (and integrate) the worldview of another culture into his or her own understanding of how the world worked in terms of various socio-cultural frameworks, such as those of justice, morality, spirituality, or kinship. The sole requirement, in this case, would be that the syncretic processes themselves be—as in syncretic fantasy—depicted and foregrounded *as narrative processes* within the discourse world of the text itself.

mechanisms of syncretic blending is to explain the most everyday, pervasive, and (typically) imperceptible examples of these mechanisms, the apparently "strange" or "exotic" example often plays a crucial role in exposing these processes to the conscious mind for further analysis. In discussing their own methodology, Fauconnier and Turner explain that

blends can be either fantastic or not, but when they are fantastic, they may stand out. . . . [U]nnoticed blends are much more common than noticeable or fantastic ones. In fact, it takes some work to find an example whose blending is immediately apparent. Why do we begin with so many exotic-looking examples? Because we have to make the phenomenon of blending visible before we can begin to analyze its operation. . . . Indeed, it is quite reasonable that we do not become aware of a general, pervasive process until we see a case that looks exceptional. (Fauconnier and Turner 50-51)

Thus, just as apparently "exotic" or "fantastic" examples of syncretic blending are precisely those examples that best expose the hard-to-uncover processes of more everyday cognition, so may the most prototypically "exotic" or "fantastic" examples of literary syncretism be the most effective in exposing more generally cognitive processes of syncretism that may be much less visible in more "everyday" (i.e. realistic) literary contexts.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The perception of a "green cup," for example, may appear to be a simple, objective observation, requiring no imaginative construal at all. However, the normally invisible conceptual blending of colour and object becomes immediately apparent in Tolkien's example of "the green sun," which,

Summarizing from above, syncretic fantasy may be understood as explicitly blending cognitive majoritarian (or "realistic") discourse worlds with cognitive minoritarian (or "fantastic") ones to produce a single, unified narrative, thereby constructing a newly syncretized, explicitly (re)constructed discourse world (i.e. worldview) within the text. Crucially, syncretic fantasy models this process not only by telling stories, but by telling stories that are self-consciously and explicitly at odds with conventional, cognitive majoritarian constructions of reality. Thus, in congruence with cognitive science methodologies of using strange (or "exotic") cognitive constructs to expose the normally pre-conscious but nonetheless deeply imaginative, story-based processes of human cognition and world-building, syncretic fantasy depicts its protagonists' struggles to create new discourse worlds that incorporate elements from *both* the "real" world *and* "imaginary" ones, thereby modelling the (difficult) exposure of the "real" world as yet another discourse world that can be re-told, reconstructed, and modified through the mechanisms of story. And finally, recalling Clute's suggestion that this sort of fantasy may produce a "literal gaze at the given," the model given here appends the caveat that even such a "literal gaze" requires a conscious observer to do the gazing, and that such "given" aspects of the "real" world can never escape their roots in the specific framework of an observer's personal and cultural assumptions. In such a model, then, any "literal gaze at the given" must be understood as a literal gaze at the given *assumptions of a particular individual*

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as he puts it, "[a]nyone inheriting the fantastic device of the human language can say" (51). The latter is a fantastic blend, while the former is a more common one; however, as in Stockwell's model of discourse worlds, the same cognitive and linguistic processes (of imaginative construal) produce both the "real" and the "imaginary" cases.

*within a particular culture*, such assumptions being precisely what the explicitly exotic world-(re)building—or, rather, re-blending—narratives of syncretic fantasy tend to expose.

Thus, these types of explicitly syncretic stories—in their explicit reconciliation of cognitive minoritarian discourse worlds with cognitive majoritarian ones—may help to expose the fallacy of assuming that only certain cultures and worldviews are syncretic by guiding the reader through the narrative reconstruction of a no-longer-entirely-stable cultural "reality." This is not to imply that the recognition of discourse worlds necessarily entails their exposure as "unreal," or that such worlds should not be "believed." Indeed, syncretic fantasy—like all fantasy—deeply depends upon the mechanisms of subjective (if secondary and subjunctive) belief in order to construct its imagined worlds, worldviews, and narratives. Rather, such a re-subjectivizing Recognition of all worlds as *discourse worlds*—mirroring the cognitive theories of syncretism (and story) discussed above—models the crucial role of belief itself as an operative and shared element of all human storytelling, as well as all personal and collective world-building. This, then, is precisely the approach that J. Edward Chamberlin advocates in suggesting that "[w]e need to understand that it is *in the act of believing* in these stories and ceremonies"—an act that he argues is deeply embedded in all cultures rather than only some—"rather than in the particular belief itself that we come together, and that this act of believing can provide the common ground across cultures that we long for" (224, emphasis added).

## 2.5 Syncretic Fantasy Defined

In literary contexts, syncretic fantasy may be understood most generally as modelling the syncretic blending—or, to use Clute and Kaveney's term, "reconciliation"—of multiple discourse worlds (specifically, of cognitive majoritarian and minoritarian ones) within a single narrative, often within the consciousness of a single character. That is, the *syncretism* of syncretic fantasy models the cognitive sense of syncretism discussed above, which is often but need not always be congruent with more commonly recognized cross-cultural manifestations of this process. Furthermore, the common quest structure of fantasy—that of a series of obstacles confronted and overcome—provides an ideal framework through which to depict cognitive minoritarian protagonists' struggles to produce and maintain syncretically blended self and world-constructions that can simultaneously incorporate *and* differ from the surrounding dominant culture's cognitive majoritarian worldview. And finally, by making this syncretic blending process an explicit element of the depicted narrative, syncretic fantasy negotiates the space between the Real (out there) and the Imaginary (all in the mind) by explicitly re-imagining the various interconnections and co-creations of the two. Rather than simply deconstructing or exposing the imaginary, this strategy imagines the story-based reconstruction of the subject, not as a falsely stable or unified self, but as a product of the (necessarily) imaginary process of perceiving—and thereby re-creating—the world.

Fuelled and conditioned by fantasy's prototypical generic structures—that is, by the requirement that every fantasy must conclude with a happy ending

(Attebery) or a "healing" (Clute)—syncretic fantasy protagonists typically embrace the story-centric subjectivity of their worlds, consciously choosing to story themselves into worlds where the "healing" or "happy ending" of fantasy is, if not inevitable, at least possible. And this—or so I am trying to argue—may be one of the central functions of syncretic fantasy, this potentially empowering reconciliation of the Self with the Self, the fusion (or syncretism) of the real and the imaginary in the (sub)culturally relative, yet entirely if subjectively real (re)construction and selection of the world (and the Self) that one chooses to inhabit. Not only do syncretic fantasy novels depict this struggle, but they can—at their best—model the exposure of what cognitive scientists describe as a normally unconscious (or pre-conscious) process to the conscious mind, thereby making such constructions and reconstructions more imaginable in the everyday world. For within such explicitly cognitive models—precisely those models that cognitive scientists argue structure the "real" world itself—the reality that one chooses to inhabit becomes an explicit, conscious choice, rather than a passive acceptance of externally determined, unconsciously accepted, and invisibly perpetuated (cognitive majoritarian) stories of "reality."

Syncretic fantasy, then, preserves all of the generic characteristics of fantasy, but unlike secondary world fantasy, it also explicitly emphasizes the proximity and relationship of these elements to cognitive majoritarian worldviews and "realities." Summarizing from above, syncretic fantasy may be understood as adding four prototypical elements to those of more traditional secondary world fantasy. First, syncretic fantasy explicitly includes elements of the cognitive

majoritarian "real" world as a key aspect of its narratives. Most commonly—though not always—this inclusion takes the form of setting these stories in the historical past, present, or near future in such a way as to syncretically blend magical or mythical worldviews (or *discourse worlds*) with more cognitive majoritarian elements of the "real" world (Attebery, Clute, Watson). Second, syncretic fantasy typically portrays cognitive minoritarian perspectives and worldviews struggling for existence, survival, and/or acceptance within cognitive majoritarian world(s), and this struggle is a central element of the narrative's primary conflict. Third, the central conflict between cognitive minoritarian and cognitive majoritarian worldviews in syncretic fantasy tends to be resolved not in the "victory" or "defeat" of one world or worldview over or by another, but in the reconciliation (i.e. syncretism) of multiple worldviews (Clute and Kaveney). Fourth, and finally, syncretic fantasy reconfigures the cognitive majoritarian "real" world by implicitly postulating its existence as one of many possible "discourse worlds" (Stockwell), thereby modelling (and dramatizing) the exposure of the cognitive *processes* of syncretic world-building. Thus, syncretic fantasy both portrays and models what John Clute calls "Recognition II"—the recognition that the real world itself may be deeply narrative and story-based—in such a way as to rewrite, retell, or re-story the "real" world and thereby imagine the story-based healing of both subjective and literal understandings of "reality" itself.

## 2.6 On the Role of Magic in Syncretic Fantasy

As discussed earlier, the model of syncretic fantasy developed above is based upon a search for *compatible* frameworks through which to explore the subgenre's prototypical structures and strategies. However, this series of apparently "natural" affinities between fantasy criticism, syncretism, and cognitive science does not mean that other frameworks could not be used in the investigation of what I call "syncretic fantasy" texts. Indeed, of the four texts examined in this study, only two (*Moonheart* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*) are typically identified as fantasy novels, while the other two (*Green Grass, Running Water* and *Monkey Beach*) are more commonly read through critical frameworks of indigeneity. Below, I will argue that all four of these texts share certain prototypical discursive strategies with syncretic fantasy, but such arguments are not intended to dispute the utility of alternative critical frameworks—such as postcolonialism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, indigenous literary nationalism, or magical realism—for investigating these texts. Nonetheless, I would argue that these might not be the most productive critical frameworks for an *initial* approach this subgenre (or its prototypical strategies), since their lack of readily apparent compatibility with syncretic fantasy structures could lead to a too-easy dismissal of the subgenre's most interesting potentials. Of the potential generic and/or critical frameworks mentioned above, magical realism in particular shares substantial overlaps with syncretic fantasy, such that a closer examination of the similarities and differences between the two may help to define more precisely what I mean by the term syncretic fantasy itself. Furthermore, such

comparisons will also help to illuminate the crucially differing roles of "magic" in each of these frameworks.

Both magical realism and syncretic fantasy construct "new" or "alternative" worlds that combine magic and mythological elements with more conventionally Eurocentric forms of literary realism. Additionally, both genres—in their common mixture of multiple cultural perspectives within a single narrative—could easily be characterized as (in some senses) "syncretic." However, two key elements clearly differentiate these genres from one another. First, magical realism does not (necessarily or generically) adhere to either Clute or Attebery's prototypical structures of fantasy. That is, magical realism follows no prototypical narrative arc from Wrongness to Thinning to Recognition to a final moment of Healing (or reconciliation). Certainly, a magical realist narrative *could* incorporate these narrative structures, but the structures themselves would most likely have a negligible effect on the work's recognition (or lack thereof) as a work of magical realism. Thus, magical realism is not (necessarily) "fantasy" in the sense that I am using that word, since magical realism is identified (or perceived) through a different set of generic prototypes.<sup>81</sup> Second, and more significantly, syncretic fantasy explicitly dramatizes the *process* of syncretically reconstructing cognitive majoritarian (Western) "realities" while magical realism—as a widely acknowledged aspect of the genre—does not dramatize this process but rather portrays the alternative reality of a magical realist worldview

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<sup>81</sup> See Christopher Warnes for one of the most effectively non-prescriptive (and flexible) formal descriptions of magical realism—as a global, international, formally and aesthetically well-defined, yet ideologically heterogeneous genre—that I have thus far encountered.

(or discourse world) as a pre-established internal condition of its portrayed textual world(s).<sup>82</sup>

Greer Watson's formal distinction between magical realism and what she calls "low fantasy"—which I call syncretic fantasy—builds upon Amaryll Chanady's explanation of the structural differences between magical realism and Todorov's definition of "the fantastic."<sup>83</sup> To summarize briefly, "fantastic" narratives encourage an interpretive hesitation as to the reality of apparently magical events within the text, a hesitation which is never fully resolved for either the characters or the reader. Magical realist narratives, by contrast, indicate no such interpretive hesitation, with characters accepting magical events as entirely unremarkable within the textual world. In syncretic fantasy, however, the interpretive hesitation (or lack thereof) is more complex. While certain characters can and do question the "reality" of the portrayed magical events, the story itself (particularly those characters with whom the reader is encouraged to sympathize) implicitly validates the reality of magic in the story world. As Watson puts it, "the reader is . . . made aware that the primary-world rules are illusory, even though they are held to be true by most people in the world of the story" (171).<sup>84</sup> Thus,

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<sup>82</sup> As Greer Watson notes, for example, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "An Old Man With Enormous Wings" is "told by an omniscient third-person narrator, with no indication of any doubt in the verity of events. . . . Significantly, the reported correspondence does not suggest any doubt in the wings themselves. At no point does either the narrator or any character suggest that they might be a fraud" (168).

<sup>83</sup> Although Watson calls this genre "low fantasy," rather than proliferating terms indefinitely, and in the interests of consistency, I will treat "low fantasy" as synonymous with "syncretic fantasy" in the discussion below, since the latter term is the one that I use throughout this study.

<sup>84</sup> Here, Watson uses the term "primary world" consistently with J.R.R. Tolkien's usage in his essay "On Fairy Stories," in which "primary world" refers to the extra-textual, everyday reality of the reader, while "secondary world" refers to the non-ordinary, magical world portrayed within a fantasy text. There is, however, an interesting slippage here, whereby the "primary world" of the syncretic fantasy text matches the (assumed) extra-textual, cognitive majoritarian understanding of

while an individual character may question his or her own sanity upon witnessing magical events, the syncretic fantasy narrative typically (eventually) vindicates those characters who learn to accept living in a magical world, while those who cannot tend to be portrayed as close-minded or at best misguided. Indeed, this learning process reflects the already-noted tendency of syncretic fantasy towards depicting (and thereby exposing) the cognitive *processes* of syncretism within its narratives.

Adapting these observations to Berger's terminology, Watson's description of the syncretic fantasy reader's point of view is revealed as precisely analogous to the adoption of a cognitive minority understanding of the primary-world "reality," whereby syncretic fantasy invites the reader to adopt—however temporarily or subjunctively—a cognitive minoritarian worldview *in direct contrast to* a cognitive majoritarian one. Magical realism, by contrast, rejects the adoption of a cognitive minoritarian stance by rejecting the (implicitly cognitive minoritarian) acknowledgement that magic is not a "normal" part of the portrayed textual world. The various reasons for magical realism's rejection of such a cognitive minoritarian stance are numerous and have been explored in great detail by several scholars and writers,<sup>85</sup> but the key difference remains. Syncretic fantasy explicitly *portrays* the adoption of a cognitive minoritarian worldview

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reality as non-magical yet most emphatically does *not* match the portrayed *reality* of the text's discourse world, which validates the existence of magic as real within the world of the text.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Alejandro Carpentier's essay "On the Marvellous Real in America" (1949), in which, as Christopher Warnes puts it, "Carpentier argued that Latin America was inherently marvellous, and that it was only through the exercise of faith that outsiders would be able to access *lo real maravilloso Americano* (the marvellous American real)" (5). See also the opening two sections of Warnes' article for concise summaries of a variety of critical viewpoints on the topic (1-8).

while magical realism does not. Rather, magical realism portrays an alternative realism in opposition to (or subversion of) Eurocentric realism (and realities) while syncretic fantasy portrays the collision, conflict, and struggle to negotiate some form of accommodation between multiple, conflicting worldviews and (sub)cultural understandings of "reality." Nonetheless, magical realism need not be understood solely in opposition to syncretic fantasy, since these genres present similar challenges (through differing aesthetic strategies) to Eurocentric readers. That is, where magical realism challenges Eurocentric readers to accept the direct presentation of alternative worldviews and "magical" elements within its texts, syncretic fantasy dramatizes the *process* of (provisionally) learning to accept and (potentially) understand such cognitive minoritarian worldviews in a Eurocentric context.

In one sense, the shared perspective between both of these genres is that "magic" is treated as real within the discourse world of the text. However, in another sense, it would be equally accurate to say that—in their respective discourse worlds—magical realism (implicitly) asserts that *there is no such thing as magic* while syncretic fantasy insists that *magic is real*. The key difference here is that magical realism asserts its own *realism* by portraying "magic" as a commonplace, undisputed aspect of natural, everyday *reality*. In this sense, magical realism adopts a cognitive majoritarian stance, one which implicitly rejects the categorical identification of "magic" itself as a Eurocentric construct that denies (or disputes) the underlying *reality* of so-called "magical" events. Syncretic fantasy, on the other hand, embraces a cognitive minoritarian stance

precisely at the point where it implicitly acknowledges that—in the context of a Western culture that has "isolated physics from metaphysics, reason from faith and nature from supernature" (Manlove 259)—magic is not only strange but is more generally understood (by the surrounding culture) as that which is by definition *unreal*. In short, and in this context, the role of magic in syncretic fantasy is quite simple: the portrayal of magic as *both* real *and* in conflict with cognitive majoritarian understandings of "reality" is precisely that aspect of the narrative which ensures the explicit identification of syncretic fantasy's internal perspectives (or *discourse worlds*) as cognitive minoritarian.

Interestingly, syncretic fantasy's depiction of a literal belief in magic as cognitive minoritarian<sup>86</sup> requires no disavowal of magic's potential for existence in the "real" (i.e. extra-textual) world. Rather, syncretic fantasy's prototypical structure first highlights the conflict between "magical" and "non-magical" worldviews and then proceeds to confound and (con)fuse the simplistic opposition of the two by depicting the eventual *reconciliation* (or syncretism) of these viewpoints. Magic, then, is never asserted to be literally unreal, since the cognitive categorization of "magic" *as such*—much like that of "science"—may be (and is in these texts) modelled as an idiosyncratic and culturally dependent construct. This modelling in turn helps to explain the recurring cross-cultural elements of syncretic fantasy narratives, since this sort of structure implicitly encourages (and models) such recognitions. Indeed, Grace Dillon's exploration of "indigenous scientific literacies"—as will be discussed in Chapter Four—presents

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<sup>86</sup> That is, as per Watson's analysis, the majority of people in the syncretic fantasy text's portrayed discourse world typically do not believe that "magic" is real.

one good case for undermining this too-easy distinction (i.e. between magic and science) in the case of Hopkinson's work in particular. More importantly, however, this structure highlights the cognitive *processes* of syncretism in syncretic fantasy's discourse worlds, and in this sense, the syncretism of "magical" (i.e. cognitive minoritarian) and "non-magical" (i.e. cognitive majoritarian) worldviews is of central importance to the ways that syncretic fantasy reimagines and reinvents the category of the "real" itself.

Stepping back for a moment to look at fantasy in a more general sense, the role of "magic" in fantasy texts may be reduced to a (deceptively) simple reversal of the cognitive majoritarian understanding of magic as *by definition* unreal. That is, traditional secondary world fantasy portrays magic as precisely that which is *more real* than anything else. This tendency, for example, is what Tolkien is referring to when he insists that in fantasy "one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away" (18). Likewise, this portrayal of magic as *real* is what leads John Clute to explain that in fantasy "what we see is what we get," such that the fantasy story—including and even *especially* in terms of its magical elements—is not a metaphor for anything other than itself, and "the only way to understand that tale is to understand that everything told in it turns out, in the end, to be literally the case" ("Canary Fever" 217). In the discourse worlds of syncretic fantasy, however, this postulated *reality* of magic is directly and explicitly contrasted with the surrounding cognitive majoritarian culture's disbelief in magic's existence—a disbelief which, in turn, is portrayed as incorrect within the discourse world of the

story. Indeed, given such a context, it seems hardly surprising that First Nation writers such as Thomas King and Eden Robinson might find the prototypical discursive strategies of syncretic fantasy productive as means of addressing the persistent (cognitive majoritarian) denial of contemporary indigenous perspectives and identities as unreal, inauthentic, or simply invisible.

Moreover, syncretic fantasy *highlights the conflicts* between differing worldviews (or discourse worlds) in such a way as to first expose and then necessitate—in congruence with fantasy's prototypical requirement of Healing—the syncretic fantasy protagonists' eventual *reconciliation* (i.e. syncretic blending) of cognitive minoritarian "magic" and cognitive majoritarian "reality." Thus, the explicit syncretic blending of "magical" and "non-magical" worldviews (by syncretic fantasy protagonists) is precisely what models and exposes the normally unconscious *processes* of cognitive syncretism. That is, these protagonists' process of learning to reconcile the explicitly conflicting worldviews depicted in syncretic fantasy parallels the very same processes postulated by contemporary story-centric and embodied cognition models of human reality-construction. Moreover, in the novels studied in the following chapters, the exposure and eventual integration of magical beliefs, worldviews, and stories of "reality" always involve the revelation of previously hidden, repressed, or literally "occult" (in the sense of occluded) knowledge, whether that of hidden worlds (in the case of De Lint's *Otherworld*), hidden personal or collective histories (in the case of De Lint and Hopkinson's protagonists), hidden stories (in the case of King's old Indians), or hidden beings (in the case of Robinson's sasquatch and other spirits).

And in each case these formerly hidden aspects of cognitive minoritarian consciousness and/or identity construction are typically exposed (and integrated) via their connection to various "magical" aspects of the portrayed discourse worlds.

This exposure of hidden (cognitive) processes via the depiction of "exotic" or "strange" examples—in this case via the depiction of "magic" in the "real" world—once again fits perfectly within the methodological frameworks of contemporary cognitive science. As discussed above, cognitive science commonly postulates that since the (unconscious) cognitive processes of perception and reality-construction are difficult to expose to the conscious mind, one of the best ways of accomplishing this exposure is to examine "strange" or "exotic" examples of these same cognitive processes.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, the depiction of magic-as-real represents precisely this sort of strangeness in the context of a cognitive majoritarian culture that perceives magic to be *by definition* unreal. And—in such cognitive models, at least—this juxtaposition (and reversal) is precisely what exposes the (potential) constructedness of the real/unreal boundary itself. Thus, the unique treatment of magic in these narratives facilitates the modelling of human cognition and cognitive processes as congruent with the very same structures and processes postulated by the various theorists of story, syncretism, and cognition discussed earlier in this chapter. At its best, syncretic fantasy may model ways in which this process could be accomplished both self-consciously and ethically, not only as a process of healing personal, individual worlds and

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<sup>87</sup> Recall Fauconnier and Turner (50-51).

selves but also with the potential to address larger moments of cultural and cross-cultural crisis. Accordingly, the next five chapters will explore and extend the critical model of syncretic fantasy proposed above in direct relation to the four primary texts of this study.

## Part II: Constructing Contiguous Otherworlds

Charles de Lint's *Moonheart* (1984) and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) both emerged directly from the speculative fiction tradition, De Lint's novel being published by Tom Doherty Associates, a prominent fantasy publisher, and Hopkinson's winning the Warner Aspect first novel contest, an explicitly SF-oriented competition. Both exemplify the prototypes of (Canadian) syncretic fantasy, being set in contemporary or near-contemporary Canadian cities, and each could easily be characterized as "contemporary" or "urban" fantasy. Additionally, each of these novels features prominently cross-cultural mythic and magical elements appearing in the "real" world, in De Lint's case incorporating elements from First Nations, Celtic, and even Norse traditions, in Hopkinson's including Romany, First Nations, and (most prominently) Caribbean traditions. In each case, conspicuously marginal protagonists emerging from conspicuously marginal communities—in De Lint, an idiosyncratic collection of artists, musicians, and eccentrics; in Hopkinson, an entire economically and legislatively marginalized community—struggle to both believe in and syncretically integrate a suddenly-magical, cognitive minoritarian worldview that has overturned their previous understandings of reality itself. Each novel features a central quest narrative, concluding with a "happy ending" that reconciles conflicting magical, non-magical, and cross-cultural elements by conducting its protagonist(s) to a point of personal healing via syncretic integration of the same magical (cognitive minoritarian) worldviews that initially disrupted their personal worlds.

Yet even given these strong similarities, these novels address issues of cross-cultural interaction, Canadian colonial history, and syncretic world-(re)building with markedly differing emphases. In extra-textual contexts, as well, these novels fall at different points in syncretic fantasy's subgeneric history. De Lint's novel appeared at a time when syncretic fantasy paradigms were not yet well recognized, and in many ways *Moonheart* established some of the key prototypes of the subgenre. Hopkinson's novel, by contrast, appeared fourteen years later, once the subgenre had been well-established and recognized for its dramatic publishing successes, of which *Brown Girl in the Ring* was one. The next three chapters, then, will first examine the prototypically syncretic elements of each of these novels, establishing and exploring their differing manifestations of the syncretic fantasy paradigm as well as the markedly differing critical responses that they have provoked. Based upon both the similarities and differences between the expressions of narrative "healing" portrayed within each of these novels, I argue that even though these books are written from markedly differing (sub)cultural perspectives, both clearly enact the prototypical subgeneric structures of syncretic fantasy. I further argue on this basis that one of the key underlying (structural) imperatives of syncretic fantasy is, first, the exposure and, second, the (re)construction of belief in the formerly hidden (or repressed) cognitive minoritarian or "alternative" realities, histories, and selves that these novels portray.

In particular, I examine the ways that both of these novels explicitly dramatize syncretic cognitive processes at both the cross-cultural and more

personal (i.e. idiosyncratic) level. Both De Lint and Hopkinson's novels reimagine the (cognitive majoritarian) "real" world in such a way as to rewrite both personal and cultural histories within that world, ultimately depicting the syncretic reintegration and reconstruction of alternative (cognitive minoritarian) personal and cultural selves and identities. Furthermore, in direct contrast to Farah Mendlesohn's contention that both "portal-quest" and "intrusion" fantasy—the two categories that in her models of fantasy best fit these novels—are deeply ahistorical, even anti-historical forms, I argue that syncretic fantasy reinvents history by first exposing and then syncretically reconstructing its mythic, story-based roots. Indeed, the reconstructed selves and worldviews of these novels—perhaps due to the explicitly dramatized processes of their own (re)invented stories, histories, and selves—not only survive the ongoing interaction with the surrounding cognitive majoritarian culture and "real" world, but may even begin to challenge and re-envision some of the (assumed) underpinnings of that culture (and "reality") itself.

## Chapter Three

### Charles De Lint: Establishing Syncretic Fantasy Prototypes and Paradigms

Upon its publication in 1984, Charles De Lint's second novel, *Moonheart*, immediately garnered significant attention within the fantasy genre, with one reviewer calling it "one of the best fantasies based on Native American Lore ever written" (Levy 11) and the 1985 International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts awarding De Lint the inaugural William L. Crawford Award for Best New Fantasy Author (Ketterer 118). However, it was only over the course of several years that writers, reviewers, and critics consistently began referring to this novel as "a milestone of modern fantasy writing" (Speller 197) and De Lint himself as "one of Canada's masters of fantasy" (Easton 138) or, alternatively, a "master of contemporary fantasy" (Ketterer 118, Israel 14). By the 1990s, it was commonplace for critics to identify De Lint as "unquestionably the most prolific and the most honored Canadian author of fantasy" (Ketterer 117) or "the most significant, and almost certainly the most prolific, Canadian fantasy author" (Clute, "De Lint" 293). Now, well over two decades since *Moonheart's* first publication, De Lint's reputation as a "pioneer of modern fantasy" ("de Lint, Charles") reverberates to the point where commentators routinely suggest that ". . . de Lint didn't create the contemporary fantasy . . . he certainly defined it" (Huff "Rising Stars" 26), that De Lint "created a new sub-genre for himself" (Belkom 40), or that "Charles De Lint may very well be the creator of what we call 'urban fantasy'" ("Moonheart: Love and Grit").

As discussed in Chapter Two, De Lint was not the first author to publish urban or contemporary fantasy. However, *Moonheart* was—and continues to be—the first novel to garner such ongoing recognition specifically for its prototype-crystallizing influence upon the "invention" of the subgenre itself. Something about this cross-cultural, contemporary urban fantasy adventure has (retroactively) caught and held the attention of North American fantasy readers, writers, and publishers to the point where David Ketterer identifies De Lint's novel as one of the three major 1984 publications to herald the "International Arrival of Canadian Fantasy" (Ketterer 100-120).<sup>88</sup> Since *Moonheart*, De Lint has continued to produce novels and stories that explicitly combine contemporary and magical elements within their narratives, although since the 1992 publication of *Spiritwalk* (a belated sequel to *Moonheart*), he has set most of his urban fantasy novels in the imagined city of Newford, which he describes as having been "built up over the years, containing elements of real cities in it. Ottawa. Toronto. London, England. New York. Chicago. L.A." (Timonin). In short, *Moonheart's* initial publication—combined with De Lint's subsequent market success and prolific publication record (currently totalling over 70 books)—effectively established the subgeneric prototype for what is now most commonly identified as "contemporary fantasy," which I call syncretic fantasy.

As discussed in more detail below, *Moonheart* embodies all of the

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<sup>88</sup> Ketterer identifies Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* and Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Summer Tree* as the other two 1984 novels that captured significant international acclaim for Canadian fantasy. Indeed, Ketterer further suggests that 1984 and 1985 represent a key moment of arrival for Canadian speculative fiction in general, since both William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) "put Canadian SF on the international map" during this period (121).

prototypical syncretic fantasy elements postulated in Chapter Two, following a collection of cognitive minoritarian characters through the process of first encountering and then learning to accept a magical worldview that ultimately supersedes their previous cognitive majoritarian understandings of "reality" itself. Crucially, these characters' liminal (i.e. cognitive minoritarian) positioning in relation to the broader (cognitive majoritarian) culture by which they are surrounded is a part of what facilitates their abilities to incorporate a variety (cross)cultural materials into their own syncretically (re)constructed worlds and worldviews. The cast of human characters incorporates a bewildering array of Native, non-Native, and Celtic characters, including a former biker, a collection of artists, musicians, and eccentrics in contemporary Ottawa, an RCMP Special Inspector, two ancient Celtic bards (Taliesin and Thomas Hengwr), a pre-Columbian Viking (Hagan Hrolf-ge), and the Native *rathe'wen'a* (Drummers of the Bear). The cast of non-human, magical characters is similarly diverse, including Native spirits and "manitous" such as the *quin'on'a*, both Celtic and Native "Forest Lords," and an invented Native trickster figure named Pukwudji (190). The full plot of the novel is sprawling and multiplex, including numerous sub-plots and sub-protagonists, but the main story follows two primary protagonists (Sara Kendell and Kieran O'Connor), both of whom—true to the prototype and due to their emergence from and inhabitation of already-marginal, cognitive minoritarian worlds and worldviews—are socially liminal in differing ways.

Sara Kendell, orphaned at the age of six, is heir to a multimillion dollar

fortune and has been raised by her eccentric (and also independently wealthy) uncle Jamie in the liminal (sub)culture of Tamson House, the ancestral home built by her great-grandfather that now hosts a rotating collection of eccentrics, artists, and outsiders taking refuge from the "world outside." As Jamie explains to Sara, "They come for the same reason that you and I and the regulars stay. To get away from the world outside for a while. . . . They're like us, Sairey. Different from the norm. And, as this is a place where difference is the norm, they can relax. There's no need to try and fit in because everything fits in here" (29). In other words, the house represents a heterogeneous, implicitly cognitive minoritarian subculture, a refuge from the outside cognitive majoritarian world in which "difference is the norm." Due to their inherited wealth, neither Sara nor Jamie need to work for a living and consequently pursue whatever interests happen to catch their attention, Sara writing stories while running the Merry Dancers Old Book and Antique Emporium and Jamie pursuing his studies in what he calls "Arcanology—the study of secrets" (30). Kieran, by contrast, is an impoverished ex-con turned musician and bard's apprentice. Like Sara, he was separated from his parents at a young age, but unlike her he had no safety net, grew up as a ward of the state, dropped out of high school, and eventually became a petty criminal, landing in jail on minor drug trafficking and break-and-entry charges. Thus, Kieran too has grown up in a series of socially liminal, cognitive minoritarian (sub)cultures, including the social welfare system, the criminal underworld, and the loose-knit community of itinerant buskers and musicians with whom he has played.

In each case, these characters' socially marginal status (whether directly or

indirectly) is precisely what facilitates their initial introduction into an alternative world of magic and mystery, and this introduction, in turn, is what provokes (and necessitates) the various processes of syncretism depicted in this novel. In one sense, as Attebery suggests, these characters' liminal positions in relation to more "mainstream" society may make their adoption of such cognitive minoritarian perspectives as a literal belief in magic more plausible for cognitive majoritarian readers. On the other hand, in terms of the novel's plot, the socially liminal positioning of these protagonists is precisely what leads them into contact with the magical conflicts that eventually become defining aspects of their personal, syncretically reconstructed magical identities. Kieran, for example, is rescued from both jail and his apparently dead-end life by Thomas Hengwr's offer of an apprenticeship in what he calls the Way, the practice of Celtic, bardic magic. By contrast, Sara's first encounter with magic is both more abrupt and less structured, but it likewise arrives through the auspices of her socially marginal position. In her case, while working at the junk shop, she finds a strange collection of objects (a ring, a painting, a bone disc, and a medicine bag) buried in an old box, and these objects in turn prompt a series of strange, otherworldly dreams and visions.

The novel opens when Thomas Hengwr vanishes and Kieran returns to Ottawa to find his missing mentor at the same time that Sara finds her collection of strange objects. Investigating the origins of the bone disc, which figures prominently in her dreams and matches a set belonging to Thomas Hengwr, Sara seeks out Kieran. Upon their first meeting, both are drawn into the "Otherworld" by the magical *quin'on'a* (or manitou) as a means of protecting them from a

sorcerous attack by Hengwr's enemy *Mal'ek'a*, known to the quin'on'a as "the-Dread-That-Walks-Nameless" (156). Almost immediately, Sara and Kieran find themselves on opposite sides of what appears to be an ancient conflict between Thomas Hengwr and his rival Taliesin. Kieran believes that the evil Mal'ek'a is in fact Taliesin, twisted and driven by a centuries-old desire for vengeance upon Hengwr. Sara, however, finds herself unable to accept this explanation, having already "timewalked" through the Otherworld to meet Taliesin in person (in the past), where she formed an instant and powerful bond with the harper (109-113). From this point onward, the two narratives split and run in parallel as Kieran and Sara pursue their own personal quests: Kieran's to hunt down and confront Mal'ek'a, and Sara's to "grow horns" by learning magic from Taliesin. However, neither of these quests is quite what it seems, each becoming a journey of self-discovery in which both characters must repeatedly revise their own senses of self and personal (and family) history. Together, these intertwined quests lead to the ultimately collaborative (and almost-incidental) result of defeating Mal'ek'a, whose hidden identity also turns out to be intimately connected with both Kieran and Sara's respective, syncretically revised, and transformatively reconstructed histories.

The full plot of *Moonheart*—which cumulatively constructs an intricate, almost fractally recursive pattern of mirrorings, symmetries, and repetitions across several characters, sub-narratives, and time-frames—is complex enough to defy synopsis and far too sprawling and multi-threaded to examine in detail here. Rather, the following investigation focuses on three sub-generically prototypical

aspects of this novel: the struggle of various contemporary characters to come to terms with living in a revealed-as-magical world; the presence and portrayal of prominent cross-cultural and syncretic narrative elements; and the prototypically required healing and reconciliation of these elements in the novel's conclusion. In each of these aspects, the various elements of syncretism explored in the previous chapter play a crucial role. The processes of cognitive syncretism are, for example, exposed by the various characters' struggles to believe in the reality of magic. Or, to put it differently, the introduction of *real* magic into these characters' worlds is precisely what provokes and necessitates their ongoing cognitive struggles to syncretically integrate an understanding of magic-as-real into their formerly cognitive majoritarian understandings of "reality." Similarly, cultural syncretism manifests in these characters' cross-cultural interactions and (eventual) mobility across formerly impassable cultural boundaries. And the syncretic (re)blending of Story and History—specifically, the revelation of previously hidden Stories (and Histories) of self, other, and "reality"—ultimately plays a crucial role in facilitating the novel's prototypically healing resolution.

In the first instance, all of the initially non-magical characters struggle to come to terms with literal reality of the magical Otherworld in which they find themselves, explicitly necessitating (and thereby exposing) these characters' struggles to cognitively (and syncretically) reconstruct the very "reality" in which they now live. In Sara's case, this struggle manifests as a recurring feeling that she must be dreaming her entire experience of the Otherworld. Thus, when Sara first awakens in the Otherworld, she repeatedly slips into the assumption that that she

must be "dreaming again," even after recognising that "the forest was too real to be a dream" and reasoning that "she had to accept that, somehow, she'd been transported to it, though for what reason still remained a mystery" (109). For much of the novel, Sara vacillates between these two possibilities, so that when she meets Taliesin for the second time, she tells him that "this is just a dream [. . .] My dream, you see?" (123). Even later, after having consciously accepted the reality of the Otherworld and deliberately time-travelled into the past to learn more magic, she confesses a continuing difficulty in differentiating dreams from reality. "It's hard to explain," she says, "It's just that I seem to have trouble working out what's really happening and what's a dream. Dreams become real, or cause things to happen in the real world, but I'm not even sure what the real world is anymore" (283). In each instance, Sara again convinces herself that the Otherworld is real, yet her lack of certainty in these conclusions resurfaces repeatedly, particularly at moments of stress or conflict. And crucially, this uncertainty—itsself directly provoked by the introduction of magic into Sara's "real" world—echoes precisely the same sorts of difficulties that the cognitive science models discussed in previous chapters associate with exposing the typically unconscious (syncretic) mechanisms of perception and reality-construction to the conscious mind.

Nor is Sara alone in her recurring uncertainty, since virtually every other (initially) non-magical character within the novel—including Kieran, Jamie, Blue, special investigator Tucker, and superintendent Madison—finds that he or she cannot easily believe in this suddenly-magical world, even when confronted with

the entirely physical reality of its existence. One prominent rhetorical result of this struggle to believe in an "impossible" reality is that all of these characters repeatedly and explicitly reflect (or comment) upon the "impossibility" of their current situations. Blue, for example, observes (as focalized through the third-person narrator) that "It was impossible, but with the proof laid out in front of them, it couldn't be denied. Tamson House had been transported to some other dimension—to Thomas Hengwr's Otherworld" (309). According to Farah Mendlesohn, in terms of her own postulated models of fantasy, both "portal-quest" and "intrusion" fantasies typically exhibit this type of recurring rhetorical structure, which she argues is the result of the protagonists' typically naive (and unforgivably passive) approach to the constructed fantasy world. For Mendlesohn, "portal-quest" fantasy—that form of fantasy which she identifies as most directly enacting the prototypical structures of Clute's "full fantasy" (Mendlesohn 17)—denies "polysemic discourse" in its structurally mandated assumption that "there can only be one understanding of the world, an understanding that validates the quest" (13). Certainly, *Moonheart* reproduces all of the narrative conventions of Mendlesohn's portal-quest fantasy: it tells the story of a prophesied heroine plucked from her apparently mundane circumstances and introduced to an exotic, magical otherworld that is itself depicted as chaotic and wondrously strange yet ultimately in need of the healing that only she, the prophesied saviour, can provide.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Mendlesohn defines the portal-quest fantasy as follows: "When we think of portal fantasies, we commonly assume that the portal is from 'our' world to the fantastic, but the portal fantasy is about entry, transition, and negotiation. Much quest fantasy, for all that it builds the full secondary

However, *Moonheart* does not fit comfortably into Mendlesohn's taxonomy, and the disjunction between this text and Mendlesohn's model may provide—by way of contrast—some key insights into its subgeneric dynamics. In Mendlesohn's taxonomy, for example, *Moonheart* cannot be a portal-quest fantasy, since she characterizes the "portal" of this type fantasy as uni-directional, such that, "crucially, the fantastic is *on the other side* and does not 'leak'" (xix, emphasis in original). Since magic does indeed enter contemporary Ottawa through various portals, this novel should fall into Mendlesohn's category of "intrusive fantasy," wherein "the world is ruptured by [an] intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (115). This categorization fits perfectly if Mal'ek'a is reconfigured as an intrusion that must be "defeated" and magic itself is seen as an intrusion that must be "negotiated with" or "controlled." Mendlesohn further notes that "the trajectory of the intrusion fantasy is from *denial* to *acceptance* . . . . For all that the intrusion fantasy appears—usually—to be a 'this world' fantasy, the narrative leads always toward the acceptance of the fantastic, by the reader if not the protagonist" (115). Nonetheless, in Mendlesohn's model, intrusion fantasies must not be confused with portal-quest ones, since "[w]here the portal-quest fantasy is a fantasy of the world Re-made or Healing, the intrusion fantasy is a fantasy of entropy and resistance to entropy" (81). In other words, unlike portal-

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world, fits better with the portal fantasy. Characteristically in quest fantasy the protagonist goes from a mundane life—in which the fantastic, if she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown (or at least unavailable to the protagonist)—into direct contact with the fantastic, through which she transitions, to the point of negotiation with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm" (xix-xx).

quest fantasy, intrusive fantasy tends *not* to follow Clute's framework of full fantasy, which (as noted above) *Moonheart* most certainly does. Under Mendlesohn's rubric, then, *Moonheart* could be characterized with equal validity as either a leaky portal fantasy or, alternatively, an intrusive quest fantasy. However, no such categories exist in Mendlesohn's model.<sup>90</sup>

In truth, *Moonheart* is neither portal-quest nor intrusive fantasy, but lies somewhere between the two, more akin to Attebery's "indigenous fantasy" or Clute and Kaveney's "contemporary fantasy." And here, a comparison between these critical rubrics may prove useful in both exposing the underpinnings of syncretic fantasy and developing critical approaches more appropriate for its analysis. Since Chapter Two has already explored the distinctions (and overlaps) between my own approach and those of Attebery and Clute, I will focus primarily on Mendlesohn's articulation of the relationship between "fantasy" and "history." Based on her model, Mendlesohn characterizes both portal-quest and intrusive fantasy as inherently history-denying forms. Portal-quest fantasy, for example, "embodies a denial of what history is. In quest and portal fantasies, history is inarguable, it is 'the past.' In making the past 'storyable,' the rhetorical demands of the portal-quest fantasy deny the notion of 'history as argument' which is pervasive among modern historians" (Mendlesohn 14). Mendlesohn says much the same of intrusion fantasies—which she describes as "almost all American"—

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<sup>90</sup> To be fair, I should note that Mendlesohn explicitly claims that her proposed taxonomy is intended to function as a starting point for exploring the rhetoric of fantasy rather than a comprehensive model encompassing all possible types, forms, or variations. As she puts it, "It is not my intention here to argue that there is only one possible taxonomic understanding of the genre. The purpose of the book is not to offer a classification per se but to consider the genre in ways that open up new questions. It is a tool kit, not a color chart" (xv).

arguing that "these types of fantasy seem as much a denial of history as a creation of it," since "[r]epeatedly we can see that the American indigenous fantasy draws on European folklore, not the legends of the indigenes" (147).<sup>91</sup>

Although Mendlesohn's evaluation of portal-quest and intrusive fantasy diverges significantly from Attebery's analysis of "indigenous fantasy," one of the shared elements of both is the clear maintenance (through assertion) of "the gulf between story and history, our two ways of organizing time and placing ourselves within it" (Attebery, *Strategies* 129). Attebery doesn't go so far as to challenge the ideological underpinnings of the subgenre, but he does characterize indigenous fantasy as "an inherently problematic form" (129), since its attempts to re-blend story and history require the author to "conceal or bridge the built-in conceptual gap . . . [that] reflects our different ways of knowing and responding to the world" (129).<sup>92</sup> Attebery thus argues that indigenous fantasy attempts to recreate the modern equivalent of ancient myths, which he suggests originated in a "time when this division, between story and history, did not exist or seemed unimportant" (*Strategies* 130). In such a hypothetical ancient time, then, by "[c]ombining the familiar with the magical, which was also familiar, the tribal storyteller [could create] a mythic discourse" (131). Attebery's argument that syncretic fantasy attempts to re-blend history and story into contemporary mythologies is entirely correct. However, what both Attebery and Mendlesohn's

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<sup>91</sup> Mendlesohn does acknowledge that there may be certain exceptions to this rule, specifically acknowledging Alex Irvine's *A Scattering of Jades* as just such a "rare exception" (147).

<sup>92</sup> As noted earlier, this formulation echoes the implicit gap that Manlove refers to in describing Western culture as having "isolated physics from metaphysics, reason from faith and nature from supernature" (259).

models fail to acknowledge is that modern Western history *has always been* a particular type of story, effectively a subgenre of realistic fiction that was, somewhere along the way and perhaps mistakenly, granted the status of literal truth. Consequently, neither Mendlesohn nor Attebery address the possibility that this sort of syncretic reblending of Story and History may represent a productive opportunity rather than a "problem."

In both of these models, the validity of "myth"—and, by implication, "magic" and cognitive minoritarian "magical" worldviews—is terminologically banished to either ancient or non-Western cultures, implicitly denying the lived relevance (and continued truth) of these structures in contemporary (sub)cultures that do not subscribe to a Western "objective" understanding of history while simultaneously allowing contemporary Western cultures to continue (covertly) mythologizing their own stories of collective identity under the guise of history. Indeed, if the notion of "history-as-argument" is "pervasive among modern historians," as Mendlesohn suggests, the notion of history-as-story appears equally prominent—if occasionally controversial—among modern historiographers.<sup>93</sup> And if, as Attebery suggests, "[t]he most rigorously realistic fiction emulates history in all its muddle and sprawl" (129), one of the key characteristics of syncretic fantasy may be its explicit (re)blending—or syncretism—of story and history into "mythic" narratives that simultaneously expose and recreate the mythic underpinnings of all personal and collective

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<sup>93</sup> The most prominent example of this might be the well-known historiographic work of Hayden White, including such titles as *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987).

histories. In this sense, fantasies such as this, which explicitly highlight the processes of syncretic blending, do not *deny* history but rather make the subjective, story-based *processes* of history creation more visible by building their textual, historically rooted, explicitly imaginary "fantasies" upon these very same story-centric mechanisms. And in this way, while not directly rewriting the historical record, *Moonheart* nonetheless directly incorporates an acknowledged history of Euro-Canadian colonialism into its imagined narrative. Furthermore, in doing so, it may begin to bridge the assumed gap between "myth" and "history"—and between the cultures with which these categories are most persistently associated—by modelling the syncretic re-integration and *reconciliation* of these artificially (and typically covertly) separated categories.

*Moonheart's* explicit inclusion and exposure of a colonialist past in its remythologized and reimagined version of North American history not only challenges Mendlesohn's suggestion that portal-quest and intrusive fantasy are formally and ideologically anti-historical, it also provides a cogent counterexample with which to refute charges that these forms are, respectively, "essentially imperialist" (Mendlesohn 9) or "imperialist fantasies" (152). In Mendlesohn's model, the imperialist tendencies of the portal-quest fantasy manifest in the protagonist's quest itself, which imposes order upon a formerly chaotic land, symbolically re-enacting the ideological domination of the colonial subject. Intrusion fantasies, by contrast, model the flipside of this same process, where the magical "intrusion" plays the role of the imperial invader, and "the colonized land is the body and mind of the protagonist," who, in her eventual

acceptance of a magical world and worldview, ultimately "embrace[s] the aims of the invader" (152). However, since *Moonheart* incorporates structural elements of both portal-quest and intrusion fantasy, Mendlesohn's model seems to imply that the protagonist(s) of this novel must simultaneously play the role of *both* the colonizer *and* the colonized.

This apparent contradiction arises from the underlying assumption that all cross-cultural—or in this case literally cross-world—interaction must be modelled as a form of conflict where one side must win and the other lose, since, in Mendlesohn's words, "[i]t is a truism that fiction is about conflict" (17). Yet even in such a conflict-based model, domination or defeat are not the only available forms of resolution. Rather, cross-cultural, cross-world conflicts may also (at least potentially) conclude in some form of reconciliation. As noted in Chapter Two, Clute and Kaveney suggest that "CF [contemporary fantasy] always sets up dichotomies of values and tries to reconcile them . . . . Whether the outcome is choice between values or their reconciliation, the dominant mood of closure is almost always in some sense return" (225). The ways in which a particular contemporary fantasy might attempt to achieve this sort of reconciliation between differing worldviews, belief systems, or (discourse) worlds are quite literally infinite, but in *Moonheart* (as in other syncretic fantasies), the central model for reconciliation seems more akin to cross-cultural syncretism and collaboration than a binary choice between imperial domination or colonized submission. Appropriately, then, *Moonheart's* protagonists' struggles to syncretically reconstruct their own worldviews to incorporate alternative, cognitive

minoritarian understandings of "reality"—understandings that can accept a variety of perspectives drawn from multiple cultural and cognitive traditions—are precisely what expose their original (cognitive majoritarian) worldviews as *discourse worlds*, rather than "objective" understandings of reality.

In *Moonheart*, as in syncretic fantasy more generally, the initial collision of magical and non-magical worlds and worldviews typically prompts ongoing moments of disorientation for the novel's protagonist(s). Furthermore, since the prototypical narrative arc of syncretic fantasy leads towards the eventual acceptance of a new, cognitive minoritarian, magical reality (recall Watson), the most successful protagonists are those who can set aside their initial, reflexively sceptical responses to the Otherworld. This tendency towards acceptance is precisely what prompts Mendlesohn to argue that "fantasyland is constructed, in part, through the insistence on a received truth" (7), where the protagonist's repeated expressions of bewilderment provide an opportunity for the monosemic "history or analysis [that] is often provided by the storyteller who is drawn in the role of sage, magician or guide" (7). In portal-quest fantasy, the disoriented and confused protagonist typically accepts the "received truth" and guidance of these mentor figures, leading Mendlesohn to conclude that "the entire ideological edifice of the portal fantasy . . . assumes trust and constructs stupidity and passivity in the response of the protagonist in order to support that construction" (50).

In other words, for Mendlesohn, portal-quest fantasy protagonists are unforgivably passive in their dependence upon the moral, ideological, and

practical frameworks provided by these (implicitly colonialist) mentor figures who help to make sense of (or, in Clute's terms, "make storyable") the magical Otherworlds and stories in which the protagonists find themselves. According to Mendlesohn's analysis, then, these protagonists take an insufficiently adversarial and sceptical stance towards the various (Otherworldly) magical, historical, and cultural frameworks that they encounter. However, this adversarial model fails to account for the possibility of differing, multiple, or non-imperialist sources of "received" epistemological, ideological, and moral frameworks within these texts. What would happen, for example, if the "received" knowledge, history, or "truth" of the syncretic fantasy world originated from the *colonized* side of the colonized/colonizer boundary?

Given *Moonheart's* multiple, cross-cultural sources of "received knowledge," stories, and histories, the relative ignorance of its protagonists may model the attempt by members of one culture to learn from (rather than dismiss) the collective knowledge and wisdom of another. In such cross-cultural encounters, certain individuals may find it more or less difficult to set aside their own cultural assumptions in the process of learning new ones. Indeed, it seems unlikely that one could ever fully set aside one's own personal and cultural assumptions to learn an entirely new worldview from scratch. This is, in fact, precisely where the cognitive processes of syncretism come into play, since, as in Luther Martin's description of (cognitive) syncretism, any newly syncretized model of reality is here revealed as depending upon relating that new model to

one's own underlying cultural assumptions.<sup>94</sup> Nonetheless, all individuals drawn into such cross-cultural encounters will remain quite literally and entirely ignorant of this "new world" until they find some way to accept and integrate "received knowledge" (Mendlesohn 7) and cultural wisdom from mentors or guides within the given culture.

Thus, *Moonheart's* protagonists' expressions of wonderment and disorientation, along with their subsequent struggles first to believe in and then to understand the magical Otherworld in which they find themselves, serve a dual purpose. First, these explicitly dramatized struggles to believe portray *belief itself* as an active process rather than a passively receptive one, and this active reconstruction of belief (or "knowledge") itself echoes the cognitive models of syncretism discussed in Chapter Two. That is, even when confronted by the literal reality of the Otherworld, these characters must actively *learn* to believe in and syncretically integrate the entirely unfamiliar rules and structures of this alternative magical world into their own understandings of "reality." Second, and crucially, the persistent recurrence of this struggle to believe depicts the syncretic adoption, integration, and reconstruction of a modified world and worldview as a cognitive *process*, rather than a simple acceptance or refusal of "received knowledge."

As Tolkien argues, one of the key functions of fantasy may be to "clean

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<sup>94</sup> That is, syncretism and syncretic blending do not—and indeed *cannot*, in Luther Martin's model, as well as in Fauconnier and Turner's—operate in a blaze of pure, chaotic, unstructured creativity, but rather always recombine familiar concepts into new syncretic blends, which can in turn address novel situations or ideas. See Martin (394-397), Leopold and Jensen ("General Introduction" 9), and Fauconnier and Turner (18, 97-98, 105, 312, 321).

our windows; so that things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness" (59). For Tolkien, such triteness "is really the penalty of 'appropriation': the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. . . . [W]e laid hands on them, then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them" (59). As discussed in previous chapters, syncretic fantasy models human cognitive realities (i.e. discourse worlds) as quite literally more story-centric than reality-centric. Thus, in the cross-cultural contexts described above, syncretic fantasy tends to expose sophisticates who have fully internalized their own cultures' underlying stories of reality as (paradoxically) more cross-culturally naïve than even the most ignorant subjects upon encountering a story-based reality that differs significantly from their own. This paradoxical naïveté of sophistication and sophistication of naïveté (in such models of cross-cultural interaction) may, for example, help to explain why Sara, who has received no previous occult or magical training, finds it easier to learn and internalize the magic of the Otherworld than Kieran, who should ostensibly know more about such things due to his ongoing magical apprenticeship. That is, in this model, Sara's lack of existing assumptions (i.e. her naïveté) regarding magic and the Otherworld is precisely what allows her to more readily adopt new ways of thinking in an entirely unfamiliar context while Kieran, by contrast, must unlearn his own assumptions (i.e. his sophistication) before he can begin to accept the Otherworld, its inhabitants, and its histories on their own terms.

Unlike Sara, Kieran has received several years of Bardic training and upon his arrival in the Otherworld is already capable of performing magical feats, such as mentally coercing others to bend to his will (De Lint, *Moonheart* 48), exercising *deepsight*, which can operate as a de facto lie-detector (49), and producing *magefire* as a form of self-defence (95). Hengwr has taught him about the quin'on'a and the Otherworld, but Kieran has always assumed that these terms were "all so much rhetoric—platitudes couched in mythic terms. Jungian symbols that, while perhaps not real in themselves, were still capable of awakening answers in those who understood them" (303). Here, Kieran's experience both echoes and dramatizes Fauconnier and Turner's suggestion that "[l]ike biology, culture and learning give us entrenched [syncretic] integrations that we can manipulate directly. In both cases, *once we have the integration it is hard or impossible to escape it*" (190, emphasis added). Since Kieran believes he already knows the true shape of the (magical) world—in Fauconnier and Turner's terms, he already has an "entrenched integration" of what magic is and how it works—the discovery of his own relative ignorance becomes all the more disorienting.

As Kieran explains to Ha'kan'ta, "When I first apprenticed to Tom, I didn't know anything—about magic and that sort of thing. But when I began to learn [. . .] it opened up whole new horizons for me. [. . .] I thought I understood the limits and goals of what Tom was teaching me" (De Lint, *Moonheart* 232). In the Otherworld, however, Kieran is forced to "escape" his previous understanding of magic itself to recognize that, "*Nom de tout!* There's so much more than I was led to believe" (232). Thus, he discovers that new stories of "reality," like fantasy

itself, "may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds . . . , and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you" (Tolkien 60). Indeed, Kieran ultimately discovers that his bardic training has stunted his magical development since, as his totem explains, "it was not your Way, for all that you have accomplished with it. Your Way was the Way of the shaman. The magician's Way, though not its mage's aspect" (De Lint, *Moonheart* 241).

Kieran's shift from a bardic to a shamanic "Way" (*Moonheart's* generalized term for mystical training) illustrates two of the key structures that govern cross-cultural interaction within this text: cultural differentiation and cross-cultural mobility. On the one hand, Kieran's totem implies that bardic and shamanic traditions represent distinct, differing paths or "aspects" of magical instruction. Yet Kieran's discovery simultaneously undermines the association between these distinct traditions and their respective (essentialized) national, ethnic, and/or genetic origins. Thus, Kieran—whose last name O'Connor is symptomatically Irish—finds that in spite of his personal genetic and cultural heritage, his proper path is that of the (stereotypically Native) shaman, rather than that of the (stereotypically Celtic) bard. De Lint's novel does not directly syncretize these distinct mystic and cultural traditions themselves—rather, they are repeatedly and explicitly contrasted throughout the book—but neither does this novel imply that a particular genetic, ethnic, or "racial," heritage necessitates alignment with a single cultural tradition. Rather, various characters move fluidly

across these barriers, regardless of their "original" cultural heritage. Moreover, this fluidity and crossing of cultural barriers is almost invariably associated with various characters' syncretic mixing of—or, as in Kieran's case, switching of allegiances between—the various *magical* traditions depicted within the novel. In this tendency, then, the *magic itself*—specifically, the *learning of* and *collaboration between* differing magical traditions from differing cultures—seems intricately connected to the facilitation of these recurring cross-cultural interactions. This is not to say that the magic itself *is* syncretic in this novel. (Indeed, unlike the case of Hopkinson's *Brown Girl*, and as discussed in more detail below, it is not.) Rather, in *Moonheart*, magic is the mechanism that *provokes, necessitates, and occasionally facilitates* the various syncretic recognitions, collaborations, transformations, and cognitive processes that appear throughout the text.

Crucially, although Native and Celtic traditions are repeatedly characterized in contra-distinction to one another, these traditions are also depicted as complementary rather than oppositional, differing "aspects" or "paths" of an underlying, multifaceted Way. The Celtic spirit Gwydion, for example, has as much interest in defeating Mal'ek'a as the Native quin'on'a, although his methods differ from those of the novel's Native spirits.<sup>95</sup> Frequently, these differing strategies come into direct conflict, as when Pukwudji considers his reasons for interfering with Gwydion and Taliesin's plans to test Sara in the traditional bardic manner:

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<sup>95</sup> Gwydion is Taliesin's grandfather and spiritual mentor.

It made [Pukwudji] angry, this teaching through riddles and this taking two steps sideways for every one step forward. Tests and testing. What need was there for such? And bad enough it was that they did so in the first place, but worse, they did it to those they loved. What manner of craft-teaching was that? [. . .] *He would show them how craft-teaching was done amongst those who followed Grandmother Toad's sen'fer'sa—the something-in-movement. Openly, without secrets.* (De Lint, *Moonheart* 278-279, emphasis added)

Throughout the novel, various characters comment on the mutual unintelligibility of Native and Celtic traditions, as when May'is'hyr observes that "Taliesin is a strange man—strange to me, at least; the Way he follows is different from the Way of my own people" (284). Likewise, when an unnamed Native Forest Lord banishes Gwydion from North America at the end of the novel, he explains his reasoning as follows: "I do not like you, Gwydion. You take a simple thing and make of it a tangled web. You take a truth and hide it behind riddles. I think it is time you left my lands. Left them to return nevermore" (428).

Although this banishment could be read as implying that Celtic and Native traditions (and cultures) cannot co-exist in the same time and space, these traditions and cultures nonetheless collaborate at several points throughout the novel. And as noted above, these collaborations most often happen in specifically magical contexts. Sarah, for example, receives magical instruction from both sides of the Native/non-Native divide, specifically from the Celtic bard Taliesin

and the Native *honochen'o'keh* Pukwudji. Thus, Sara—herself of Celtic descent—incorporates instruction from both traditions into her own prophesied triumph over Mal'ek'a, ensuring that both traditions work in collaboration (through her syncretic blending of the two) to defeat the creature. Likewise, in spite of Gwydion's banishment, Taliesin (himself a magical, mythical figure) remains in contemporary Ottawa at the end of the novel, where he and Sara are advertised in an Ottawa newspaper as performing "music in the Celtic tradition" at a local club (440). This sort of syncretic, cross-cultural collaboration appears not only in the novel's present but also in the distant past. Thus, when Sara spends time with Taliesin in pre-Columbian Gaspésie, she finds him living with May'is'hyr, a woman of the (Native) *rathe'wen'a*, and her husband Hagan Hrolf-get, a Viking who was shipwrecked on the shores of the St. Lawrence. On the night of Sara's arrival, Taliesin and May'is'hyr have blended "drum-magic and harpspells" to call her to them (274), and later that evening Taliesin, Sarah, May'is'hyr, and Hagan play together, respectively, on harp, guitar, drum, and tin-flute (273).

Rewriting history to include this sort of retroactive cross-cultural syncretism not only undermines the myth of North America as a Columbian "new world" (by undermining the myth of Columbian first-contact) but also undermines implicitly racialized distinctions between Native and non-Native cultures. In the present day time stream, for example, Kieran's *rathe'wen'a* lover Ha'kan'ta is a direct descendent of May'is'hyr and Hagan, and her eye-colour—described as "a sudden blue against the deep coppery hue of her skin" (182)—functions as a recurring visual signifier of this mixed (biological) heritage. It would be easy to

dismiss this retroactive, imagined syncretism as either simplistic or fantastically implausible, yet it nonetheless recalls Luther Martin's contemporary understanding of cultural and individual identities as continually and irreducibly syncretic, always already incorporating a variety of (cross)cultural components and influences (Martin "To Use Syncretism"). In this sense, De Lint's rewritten version of history undermines the persistent myth of "pure" or isolated "original" cultures that become bowdlerized or mixed only through culturally belated (as opposed to ongoing and culturally constitutive) syncretic processes. Furthermore, it is precisely the depiction of magic-as-real (in *Moonheart's* discourse world) that facilitates this sort of rewriting of history, since this depiction is what destabilizes the stranglehold of history on "reality" by first destabilizing "reality" itself. In other words, the rewriting of history requires—at least in cognitive majoritarian frameworks that accept history as "real"—a two-stage process that begins with the rewriting (or syncretic reconfiguration) of "reality" itself.

Scholarly criticism on De Lint's work almost invariably addresses his ability to write these sorts of cross-cultural narratives—a recurring element in much of his work—without turning such narratives into acts of cultural appropriation. Most of these discussions focus on defending De Lint's work against (potential) charges of cultural appropriation in his representation of non-Western or marginal cultures in which he, a white male of European descent, does not directly participate. Thus, Laurence Steven argues that Canadian 'new fantasy' writers such as De Lint are "clearly aware of the dangers of cultural appropriation; they do assiduous research before writing, evidence of their concern to know of

what they speak" (59), while Christine Mains suggests that "the solution to the problem [of cultural appropriation] lies in the degree of cultural understanding exercised by the storyteller" (340). Indeed, these assertions echo De Lint's afterword to the 1995 edition of *Mulengro*, where he explicitly suggests that although "there blows a wind in certain literary quarters that frowns upon something called cultural appropriation," he "[doesn't] think that censoring the white authors is the answer" ("*Mulengro*").<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, given these recurring critical defences against *potential* accusations of cultural appropriation, no critics have levelled such accusations against De Lint. Rather, although the critics noted above spend considerable time addressing such issues, De Lint himself appears to have been the first to raise such concerns in his own afterword, a point to which I will return in Chapter Five.

Setting aside questions of cultural appropriation and representation, the destabilization—and, crucially, the transformation and reconstruction—of reality through the explicit use of stories and storytelling (i.e. metafiction) represents a key strategy of both syncretic fantasy in general and *Moonheart* in particular. However, as discussed in earlier chapters, the metafictional strategies of fantasy are of a distinctly different flavour than those of other, non-fantasy genres.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Far from being dismissive, De Lint recognizes that "it must be so frustrating to see your culture represented in somebody else's book—perhaps wrongly [. . .]—while your own work goes mostly unread." Nonetheless, anticipating Laurence's reasoning above, De Lint argues that "we can't limit our palette—that's the death of good writing. But we can make sure that we approach cultural and sexual differences with respect when we write about them. We have to do our research. If we can, we might even run the material by someone from that different culture—not to be politically correct, but for the sake of veracity. Nothing is worse than the uninformed author; all they do is spread stereotypes and often outright lies." ("*Mulengro*")

<sup>97</sup> Recall, for example, Attebery's comment that "[u]nlike more sophisticated genres, fantasy can be self-referential without being self-destructive; artificial without being arch" (*Strategies* 53).

Furthermore, where secondary world fantasy isolates its structurally implicit metafiction in a secondary world, syncretic fantasy's rapprochement with the cognitive majoritarian "real" typically combines with fantasy's persistent structural metafiction to turn the metafiction fantasy back on the "real" itself, reimagining the "real" as just one of many (possible) discourse worlds. Consequently, syncretic fantasy transforms the implicit metafiction of secondary world fantasy into what could be described as an explicit *metaphysics* of syncretic fantasy, which—echoing cognitive science models of discourse worlds, syncretic blending, and human perception—explicitly models (or imagines) all "realities" as more story-centric than objectively "real." Here again, syncretic fantasy's (re)configuration of magic-as-real—in both direct opposition to and contiguity with more cognitive majoritarian understandings of "reality"—not only reconfigures "reality" but also forces the simultaneous and explicit (and often metafictional) *recognition* of that reconfiguration, since cognitive majoritarian understandings of the real are explicitly depicted as the assumed "reality" of most of the characters in the story's discourse world. In De Lint's work, the resulting metaphysics of syncretic fantasy manifests most explicitly in the repeated recognition that the "real" world of the novel (and its characters) is always already constructed through the mechanisms of story.

As Robin Anne Reid notes, "[t]he 'Theory of Consensual Reality,' which states that things exist because people agree they exist, is an important thematic element" of De Lint's work (57), and this theory is explicitly reprised in many of his short stories and novels. Indeed, De Lint's fictionally portrayed metaphysics of

consensual reality is occasionally so persuasive that—in spite of his own repeated protestations to the contrary—"one of the most frequently asked questions on Charles de Lint's Web site is whether he has seen the other worlds he writes about, or really believes in them" (Steven 60). Although *Moonheart* does not explicitly formulate the tenets of consensual reality within its text, it does open with Sara's extended consideration of an analogy that she "once read somewhere," which suggests that

the tale of the world is like a tree. . . . [I]t encompassed the grand stories that caused some change in the world and were remembered in ensuing years as, if not histories, at least folktales and myths. By such reasoning, Winston Churchill could take his place in British folklore alongside the legendary Robin Hood; Merlin Ambrosius had as much validity as Martin Luther. The scope of their influence might differ, but they were all a part of the same tale. (9)

Although Sara cannot recall where she read this analogy, it directly echoes Tolkien's analogy of the "Tree of Tales" (25), as well as his more extended analogy of the "Cauldron of Story" (25-37), both of which blur categorical distinctions between "story" and "history" in support of his argument that "History often resembles 'Myth', because they are both ultimately of the same stuff" (35). More crucially, this novel-opening meditation metafictionally frames Sara's own narrative in terms of her entry into the collective world-story, so that "[y]ears later, she could pinpoint the exact moment that brought her into the tale. It was when she found the leather pouch with its curious contents in one of the

back storerooms of her uncle's secondhand shop" (9).

This sort of explicitly metafictional commentary appears throughout the novel, with various characters trying to make sense of their own otherwise-incomprehensible perceptions using terms and frameworks drawn from stories, fiction, and popular film. Once again, this use of familiar "fictional" narratives to make sense of the "real" world echoes Martin's model of syncretic blending as always mixing the familiar and unfamiliar elements from one's own experience (i.e. childhood experiences and new cognitive materials) as a means of creating new ways to make sense of the world. Thus, upon finding that he is being followed by the RCMP "Paranormal Research Branch," Kieran thinks to himself, "This was something out of a bestseller. It didn't have any place in real life," and the narrator explicitly comments that "Kieran found [this situation] hard to put into any sort of reasonable perspective" (66). Sara, likewise, repeatedly resorts to book and film references to frame her first-encounters with various aspects of the Otherworld, thinking that "maybe she should have taken up writing fantasy novels instead of the mystery she was working on" (113), identifying Taliesin as "a harper who supposedly wrote the druidical 'Battle of the Trees' that Robert Graves had based his book *The White Goddess* on" (113), and responding to Ha'kan'ta's first appearance by commenting, "I feel like I'm in a remake of *The Last of the Mohicans*" (187). Even Special Inspector Tucker expresses his escalating bewilderment by comparing the paranormal elements of his own investigation to "those hobbit books that he'd tried to read a few years back" (146), which would require him to "accept fairy tales as real" (216).

Unlike most non-fantasy metafiction, these recurring, explicit references to fictional narratives tend to reinforce rather than undermine the verisimilitude of *Moonheart's* depicted (magical) world. That is, the reality of the supernatural events depicted within the text's own discourse world is generally contrasted with the (implicitly assumed to be unreal) fictional narratives explicitly referenced by *Moonheart's* characters. Thus, Traupman explains that "I still find it . . . difficult to accept. I was willing to go along with telekinetics, telepathy, that sort of thing. But what we're faced with here I always thought of as just so much fiction" (311). Likewise, Jamie Tams ruminates that "It isn't as if we never had any clues. . . . When you think of all the folktales, of all the horrors and monsters that populate folklore. . . . God, perhaps it's all real" (311). In each case, these comparisons contrast the *reality* of the current situation (in the novel's discourse world) to the *unreality* of the referenced popular or fictional narratives. Thus, when Superintendent Madison and officers Collins and Jackson first encounter the humanoid *tragg'a* in contemporary Ottawa, the comparison between fictional and real events is drawn in explicitly contrastive terms, so that "[t]hey stared at the unnatural beings, unable to believe what they were seeing. It was one thing to be sitting in a theater and watching the wonders of modern special effects technology make the impossible real, but quite another to be confronted by these things in the middle of an Ottawa street" (375).

In each case, characters latch on to familiar (if imaginary) narratives in their attempts to contextualize the "impossible" events that they are actually witnessing *in the real world*, and in each case the result does not so much

undermine the story as reinforce a sense of story-centric realism. That is, this depiction of North American characters struggling to accept "impossible" or "magical" events as real acknowledges the entirely real conflict between cognitive majoritarian *definitions* of magic-as-unreal versus cognitive minoritarian *perceptions* of magic-as-real. Indeed, as discussed earlier in Section 2.6, this acknowledgement itself reflects one of the key differences between syncretic fantasy and magical realism, since magical realism typically depicts no such conflict or struggle within its internal discourse worlds. Nonetheless, within a North American cultural context, these depictions portray a "realistic" representation of how inhabitants of a Eurocentric, cognitive majoritarian discourse world *really might act* (or think) upon being confronted by such a radically transformed understanding of reality. Not only do these recurring metafictional passages and comparisons echo Peter Stockwell's cognitive model of discourse worlds as providing a "mediating domain for reality as well as fictional projections" (94), they also depict a direct engagement with cognitive scientists' (postulated) mechanisms of subjective reality-construction themselves. In this sense, then, the metaphysical underpinnings of syncretic fantasy's discourse worlds (e.g. the "real" world is a story, and stories create the "real" world) are precisely what prompt the depiction of the very same syncretic processes postulated by the models of cross-cultural and cognitive syncretism discussed in Chapter Two. Simultaneously, these depictions themselves model the *possibility* of re-imagining and reconstructing the "real" world itself through story-centric processes of fantasy, specifically through fantasy's prototypical

narrative structures of Recognition and Healing.

Christine Mains argues that De Lint's "Otherworld is a liminal space from which to gain . . . an interstitial perspective, in which to envision a community free from the constraints imposed by the divisions of Us and Them, of colonizer and colonized" (348). However, I would argue that *Moonheart's* central recognition, reconciliation, and healing lie not so much in the resolution of cross-cultural conflicts between Euro-Canadian and Native cultures as in the depicted Euro-Canadian recognition and integration of an often repressed Euro-Canadian history of colonialism. Thus, the key moment of recognition in this novel arrives not as a resolution of conflicts between Native and non-Native characters, but rather in the final identification (i.e. Recognition) and confrontation of Mal'ek'a. Throughout the novel, Mal'ek'a is the primary antagonist, terrorizing and killing Native and non-Native characters alike, and in the course of the final battle, two key historical omissions are both exposed and corrected: first, Jamie learns that "Mal'ek'a is Thomas Hengwr—separated from him these many long years but still one half of the druid's soul" (De Lint, *Moonheart* 416, emphasis in original); and second, Sara and Jamie discover that they and their family are Hengwr's direct descendents, that Mal'ek'a embodies "the evil of [their] ancestors given a life of its own" (416). Both pieces of information are crucial in winning the battle, since the former reveals Mal'ek'a's true name and gives the rathe'wen'a drummers a new power over the creature, while the latter informs Jamie that he must sacrifice himself to defeat the creature, since "only one related to it by blood can destroy it

forever" (416).<sup>98</sup> The literal Recognition and defeat of Mal'ek'a, however, seems almost incidental in comparison to the crucial self-recognition that it provokes for the novel's Euro-Canadian protagonists.

The knowledge of Mal'ek'a's origins forces the privileged, wealthy, and prototypically Euro-Canadian Tamsons to Recognize that they—who have thus far imagined themselves innocent bystanders to a many-sided conflict including Mal'ek'a, Hengwr, Taliesin, the quin'on'a, and the rathe'wen'a—are both historically complicit with and quite literally the inheritors of Mal'ek'a's ancient evil. In this sense, *Moonheart's* central conflict is not between Native and non-Native cultures at all but is rather the conflict between an ahistorical Euro-Canadian self-image (that of a peaceable, just, and even boringly polite nation) and the repressed history of European colonization and its impact upon North America's indigenous peoples. The crucial Reconciliation (and subsequent Healing) within the text, then, is the reconciliation and healing of the rift between this Euro-Canadian self-image and a repressed (yet ever-present) sense of Euro-Canadian historical culpability. Thus, the key Recognition (of Mal'ek'a) noted above both exposes and corrects a series of Euro-Canadian misunderstandings of the true history of the novel's central conflict. Kieran, who believed Mal'ek'a to be his mentor's enemy Taliesin, discovers that Thomas Hengwr was not only *complicit in* but even *responsible for* the creature's creation. Sara and Jamie, likewise (as noted above), find that they are the direct descendents and inheritors of this ancient evil. And in each case, this exposure of Mal'ek'a's origins

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<sup>98</sup> Mal'ek'a's true name is, of course, Thomas Hengwr's full name: "Tomasin Hengwr t'Hap" (418).

exposes—and forces a retroactive Recognition of—the Euro-Canadian responsibility for this centuries-long blight upon the lives of the novel's depicted Native characters and cultures.

Appropriately, perhaps, the Healing of this psychic rift in both *Moonheart* and (by extension) the collective Canadian psyche does not occur at the moment of Mal'ek'a's defeat, but later, and more quietly. After the final confrontation, Sara struggles to come to terms with her kinship to Mal'ek'a, believing that as the descendent of evil, she too must be evil on some deep, genetic level. At the moment of discovering her own heritage, she internalizes this sense of historical guilt, remembering "something about the sins of the fathers being reaped by their children" and concluding that "[s]he was doomed. By Mal'ek'a's blood, she was damned" (418). Later, she explains this sense of internalized, inescapable culpability to Ha'kan'ta, asserting that "[i]t . . . it's not over. You don't know. It . . . Mal'ek'a's blood . . . it's still in me. The evil is still here . . . in me" (423, ellipses in original). Ha'kan'ta tries to comfort Sara by asserting that "[t]here is no shame in sharing Mal'ek'a's blood. The shame would be in fleeing life. In giving truth to Mal'ek'a's lies" (423), but such external forgiveness proves inadequate. Sara has fulfilled her destiny as the prophesied heroine of this tale, yet she remains (psychically) damaged.

Ultimately, Sara's moment of Healing arrives in the form of a conversation with Grandmother Toad, a powerful Native spirit. Unlike Ha'kan'ta, Grandmother Toad does not grant absolution, but rather prods Sara to Recognize not only the darker side of her Celtic heritage, as personified in the figure of Mal'ek'a, but also

its more positive aspects, personified in the figure of Taliesin. In this encounter, Sara asks if she is doomed to suffer the same fate as her ancestor Hengwr/Mal'ek'a, since she shares "the same bloodline" (431). However, rather than offering comforting platitudes or specific advice, Grandmother Toad simply points out the crucial difference between Sara and Hengwr/Mal'ek'a, which is that "You [Sara] are not dead" (431). Further, Grandmother Toad redeems Taliesin's memory by explaining that he did not intentionally abandon Sara to face Mal'ek'a by herself, but rather "never knew" the extreme danger that "Mal'ek'a had grown to be" (432). Yet again, healing depends first on the exposure and second on the correction of former misunderstandings of the past (or History). And not until the moment when Sara actively summons Taliesin into the present does she discover that, "[f]or the first time since her ordeal, she wanted to live again" (436).

Only by recognizing the historical past of colonialism as an integral part of her own present can Sara—and, symbolically, Euro-Canadians—begin to re-invent a new Euro-Canadian cultural history that syncretically incorporates *both* the destructive legacy of Euro-colonialism *and* the potentially positive aspects of Euro-Canadian culture and heritage. Christine Mains argues that De Lint's *Otherworld* collapses "time and space, history and geography," allowing them to "intermingle in thematically intriguing ways" (341), and I would argue that this intermingling is precisely what empowers the (potential) reconciliation and reconfiguration of all of these elements into new myths of Canadian identity. Crucially, in Sara's case, this integrative Self-reconstruction requires *both* the acknowledgement of past wrongs *and* the active reconstruction of hope for a

better future. Mal'ek'a may have been literally and symbolically "cleansed from this world" (De Lint, *Moonheart* 423), but this symbolic cleansing also requires an ongoing Recognition of the past. Thus, Sara's process of recovery takes on a distinctly Jungian flavour, requiring the subjective integration of both the dark and light sides of her personal mythic and historical past (i.e. Mal'ek'a and Taliesin, respectively) to effect her eventual Healing.<sup>99</sup> More crucially, however, *this blending itself*—of multiple, conflicting aspects of the Self, as well as of History and Story—represents one key aspect of the characteristic *syncretism* of syncretic fantasy. And this syncretically reconstructive, story-centric healing of a formerly fractured Euro-Canadian historical consciousness may be precisely the process Mains refers to in characterizing De Lint's Otherworld (in several of his novels, including *Moonheart*) as encompassing "a chronotopic representation of the enduring moment of colonial encounter between the Old World and the New World, between European and Native American, between the forces of Story and History" (342).

One potentially productive use of syncretic fantasy, then, may lie in its ability to symbolically "heal"—or syncretically reconstruct—History through the mechanisms of Story. *Moonheart* points towards one particular healing possibility, that being the storied or "mythic" reconciliation and syncretic integration of two opposed versions of (Euro)Canadian history, but this need not be understood as the only—or even necessarily the best—example of such a

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<sup>99</sup> Several fantasy writers and critics—most notably Ursula Le Guin (see "Dreams Must Explain Themselves")—have suggested that fantasy's underlying structures are deeply Jungian. However, my intent here is not to make such an argument for fantasy-as- Jungian, but rather to describe what is happening in this particular narrative.

narrative. Indeed, De Lint's accomplishment of this task can (and perhaps should) be critiqued for its omission of contemporary, real-world Native perspectives upon this process of re-mythification. Nonetheless, the attempt itself remains a significant undertaking, representing an attempt not only to reunite a pair of grand, abstract, and often-opposed narratives (i.e. colonial history and Canadian identity), but also to particularize these abstractions to the level of a visceral, individualized narrative that (arguably) humanizes and individualizes these questions themselves. And in a fragmented, pluralized twenty-first century world, the story-centric strategies and structures of syncretic fantasy may allow such narratives (and possibilities) to be imagined neither as History nor as Story, but as creative, potentially productive, and ultimately Healing syncretic amalgamations of the two.

## Chapter Four

### Nalo Hopkinson: Syncretism as Paradigm

If De Lint's *Moonheart* uses the strategies of syncretic fantasy to reinvent Euro-Canadian myths of collective Canadian history and identity, then Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* may be understood as performing a similar task from a significantly less Eurocentric perspective. *Brown Girl*, Hopkinson's first novel, won several SF awards, including the inaugural Warner Aspect First Novel contest (1997), the Locus Award for best first novel (1999), and the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer [of science fiction or fantasy] (1999). Like *Moonheart*, this novel was generally acclaimed within the SF community, with her editors describing Hopkinson as a "unique new voice" (Mitchell qtd. in Morehouse 8) and SF critics like Gary K. Wolfe calling *Brown Girl* "something genuinely unique, a mix of near-future SF, Caribbean folklore (as transplanted to Canada), and graphic horror presented in a voice at once highly original and genre-savvy" (21). As in the case of De Lint's novel, SF critics initially weren't sure quite what to call this book. Was it science fiction, due to the near-future setting and futuristic technologies, or fantasy, due to the extensive use of Afro-Caribbean magic as a central element of the plot? Since *Brown Girl*, Hopkinson has capitalized on her initial success to build a career as a multiple award-winning author, editor, and anthologist of both fantasy and science fiction.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Although less prolific than De Lint, Hopkinson has published four more novels and one story collection since *Brown Girl*, and has edited (or co-edited) four anthologies of speculative fiction. Her awards include the 2001 World Fantasy Award and Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic (both for *Skin Folk*, a story collection), the 2004 Gaylactic Spectrum Award (for *The Salt Roads*, a novel), and a 2006 Aurora Award (for editing *Tesseracts 9*, the annual

In addition to her recognition within SF communities, and unlike De Lint's work, Hopkinson's writing has also inspired a growing body of associated scholarship, much of which explicitly identifies her work as characteristically “multicultural” (Baker, McGregory), “cross-cultural” (Rutledge, “Nalo”), “hybrid” (Reid, “Crossing”; Michlitsch), “creole” (Collier, Michlitsch), or “syncretic” (Collier, Baker, Nelson, Wood).<sup>101</sup> Most of this scholarship centres upon the identification of Hopkinson’s books as addressing characteristically “Caribbean”<sup>102</sup> or “black”<sup>103</sup> themes, which is perhaps unsurprising, since Hopkinson herself explicitly suggests that “[i]t’s very important to [her] to be a voice coming from one flavour of black experience, and Caribbean, and Canadian, and female, and fat, and from feminist and sex-positive politics” (Rutledge, “Speaking” 591). However, in the same interview, Hopkinson pointedly explains that “what I *write* doesn’t have those identities. I do” (591, emphasis in original).<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, Hopkinson’s constellation of personal identities consistently correlates with scholarly approaches to her work. De Lint, by contrast, claims none of these identities (except those of Canadian and possibly feminist), and his work is rarely identified as “syncretic” or “hybrid.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, in spite of the similarly cross-cultural fantasies presented in their respective novels,

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anthology of Canadian Speculative fiction, which she co-edited with Geoff Ryman).

<sup>101</sup> By contrast, De Lint's work has thus far inspired a total of four scholarly articles. (See Mains; Reid, “Charles”; Reid, “Urban”; and Steven.)

<sup>102</sup> See Collier, Reid (“Crossing”), Anatol, Wood, Baker, and Michlitsch.

<sup>103</sup> See Rutledge (“Nalo”) and Collier.

<sup>104</sup> In this particular instance, Hopkinson is voicing her objection to having her work (i.e. her writing) labelled as “black fantasy” (Rutledge, “Speaking” 589).

<sup>105</sup> The one exception to this rule is Christine Mains' article on De Lint's *Otherworld*, where she argues that “The *Otherworld* is a multicultural utopia, marked by hybridity of both setting and characters” (345).

Hopkinson's identity as a Caribbean-Canadian writer seems to have ensured that her work is much more consistently linked to cross-cultural syncretism (and its variations) than that of De Lint.

Nonetheless, the shared characteristics of syncretic fantasy are relatively easy to identify in these two novels: the re-introduction of magic into the cognitive majoritarian (i.e. "real") world, the struggle of contemporary characters to syncretically integrate "magic" into their own senses of self and the world, and the clear foregrounding of cross-cultural interaction and syncretism. Like *Moonheart*, *Brown Girl* follows Clute's prototypical structures of fantasy, opening with an initial sense of Wrongness and Thinning followed by an eventual Recognition that itself provokes the subsequent Healing of both the protagonist and her world. And finally, both stories follow the quest of a socially marginal protagonist who, in learning the formerly hidden story of her own origins and heritage, ultimately brings about the healing and syncretic reconciliation of formerly opposed (discourse) worlds. However, where *Moonheart* features two protagonists from differing socio-economic origins pursuing interdependent quests, *Brown Girl* tells the story of Ti-Jeanne, who even at the beginning of her story is already consciously negotiating the juncture between several differing worlds and worldviews.

Ti-Jeanne is a single mother living with her grandmother (Gros-Jeanne) in an area of Toronto known as the Burn. In this reimagined near-future Toronto, the Ontario government has effectively abandoned and cordoned off the inner city, which has become a self-contained and self-governing anarchy, dubbed "the

Burn” for its Sherbourne Street border.<sup>106</sup> Like *Moonheart*’s Tamson House, the Burn functions as a semi-autonomous, cognitive minoritarian society within the larger (cognitive majoritarian) world. However, unlike Tamson house, the Burn is not a utopian retreat for misfit artists and eccentrics but is rather a legislatively abandoned, economically depressed slum. As the narrator explains,

When Toronto's economic base collapsed, investors, commerce, and government withdrew into the suburb cities, leaving the rotten core to decay. Those who stayed were the ones who couldn't or wouldn't leave. The street people. The poor people. The ones who didn't see the writing on the wall, or were too stubborn to give up their homes. Or who saw the decline of authority as an opportunity.

(Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 4)

Now, the Burn is ruled by Rudy and his "posse," a criminal gang involved in prostitution, drug-dealing, and organ harvesting while the Burn's inhabitants squat in various semi-abandoned buildings and construct a de facto shadow economy of bartered goods and services amongst themselves. Although the culture most prominently featured in this novel is that of the Caribbean West Indies, the community of Burn-dwellers reflects the multicultural demographics of contemporary urban Toronto, including a broad array of Native, East Indian, Romany, Eastern European, and Caribbean characters.

In this diverse community, Gros-Jeanne has taken on the role of a medical practitioner, combining her formal nurse's training with her knowledge of

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<sup>106</sup> Technically, although this setting was near-future at the time of *Brown Girl*'s initial publication, this alternative near-future setting would now be in the past.

Caribbean "bush medicine" (37), the latter supplementing her cached store of more standard pharmaceutical treatments. Ti-Jeanne, recognizing that she needs her grandmother's help to raise her newborn child, lives with Gros-Jeanne and grudgingly adopts the role of apprentice to her grandmother's practice, a practice which she does not entirely trust. However, Ti-Jeanne's quest will require her not only to accept but also to learn and internalize her grandmother's practices—both material and magical—in the process of uncovering her own family history, syncretically integrating her own magical heritage and inheritance, and ultimately freeing the Burn from Rudy's despotic reign. And in the process of defeating Rudy, she will also heal and reconcile the various estranged elements of her own fragmented identity and family. Like Sara and Kieran in *Moonheart*, Ti-Jeanne's central struggle in *Brown Girl* is to integrate her own magical, cultural, and familial experiences and history into the context of a contemporary, predominantly non-magical (i.e. cognitive majoritarian) world. However, unlike Sarah and Kieran, Ti-Jeanne does not want to learn magic, and indeed actively resists any attempt on the part of her grandmother to teach her the details of the family's traditional Afro-Caribbean practices.<sup>107</sup>

Unlike De Lint's protagonists, Ti-Jeanne's struggle is not so much a struggle between belief and disbelief as it is a struggle to believe in the value and utility of her own cultural inheritance. Thus, where De Lint's Euro-Canadian

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<sup>107</sup> Several critics have commented on Ti-Jeanne's resistance to her grandmother's training, as well as the possible motives behind this resistance, succinctly characterized by Gregory Rutledge as Ti-Jeanne's "complete disdain of her family traditions" ("Nalo" 25). See also Baker (221), Dillon (32), Gregory (7), Michlitsch (22, 25, 26), Reid ("Crossing" 307-308), Rutledge ("Nalo" 27-28, 32), and Wood (319, 320-21).

characters are challenged to syncretically integrate (and come to terms with) the *negative* aspects of their own cultural inheritance, Ti-Jeanne's challenge is to re-learn and syncretically (re)integrate the *positive* aspects of hers. Additionally, Hopkinson's portrayal of syncretism and syncretic processes has a distinctly different flavour than De Lint's. Where De Lint constructs an ethos of cross-cultural co-acknowledgement and mobility across relatively distinct (and stable) boundaries between differing cultures, Hopkinson's novel maintains a tighter focus on the cognitive *processes* of syncretism, in particular in its depiction of a more syncretically integrated blending of multiple cultural traditions. And finally, the healing of *Brown Girl* turns upon a syncretic reconfiguration (or Recognition) of the past in opposition to Ti-Jeanne's initial negative self-perception, rather than reflecting De Lint's necessarily double-reversal, whereby his protagonists must first expose the negative aspects of their own cultural heritage before they can integrate these same negative aspects into their own renovated sense of self.

Over the course of the novel, a series of crises force Ti-Jeanne to accept her own cognitive minoritarian heritage—including her direct connection to the occult world of Caribbean spirits and magic—first as she struggles first to save her ex-boyfriend from the gang-boss Rudy and then later as she works to rectify the wrongs that Rudy has committed through his (mis)use of Caribbean magic. However, Ti-Jeanne actively resists identifying with the cognitive minoritarian aspects of her own heritage (particularly its magical aspects) in an attempt to define herself through more conventionally "modern" or "contemporary" frameworks. Initially, Ti-Jeanne's resistance takes two distinct forms: first, she is

suspicious of her grandmother's "bush-medicine" on the grounds that it is often unreliable or ineffective by comparison to more standard pharmaceutical treatments; and second, she viscerally fears the dark magic or "obeah" of her grandmother's spiritual practices. In the first case, Ti-Jeanne envisions her own reservations as entirely practical, since "[s]ometimes the plants Mami [Gros-Jeanne] used had lost their potency, or perhaps were just a weak strain. Too sometime-ish for Ti-Jeanne's taste" (13). Here, Ti-Jeanne's judgement hinges on the (implicit) assumption that modern Western medicine is superior to Gros-Jeanne's "bush medicine," leading Ti-Jeanne to characterize the latter as "that old-time nonsense" (37). This phrasing highlights the grounds of Ti-Jeanne's rejection, in that her grandmother's methods are characterized not only as sporadically effective but as ideologically retrograde or antithetical to a *contemporary* North American, Euro-Canadian, and (implicitly) cognitive majoritarian perspective.<sup>108</sup>

In the second case, Ti-Jeanne's fear of her grandmother's "obeah" is less rational and more rooted in fear than scepticism, since Gros-Jeanne's spiritual practices have frightened Ti-Jeanne ever since she was first exposed to them as a child.<sup>109</sup> As Ti-Jeanne recalls, "The one time Mami had persuaded her to attend a ritual in the palais, she had fled screaming from the sight of Bruk-Foot Sam writhing purposefully along the floor, tongue flickering in and out like a snake's"

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<sup>108</sup> Again, several critics note this aspect of Ti-Jeanne's resistance and its link to her dismissal of her grandmother's practices specifically as *old* or *outdated*. See Dillon (32), McGregory (7), Rutledge ("Nalo" 32), and Wood (319).

<sup>109</sup> In *Brown Girl*, the term "obeah" is used as a generic term to describe the negative side of Caribbean magic, although the (primarily Jamaican) practice of obeah in the contemporary material world—although secretive, like many forms of occult practice—cannot be characterized as exclusively focussed on so-called "dark" magic.

(82). Unlike the magically naïve characters in *Moonheart*, Ti-Jeanne has little difficulty believing that her grandmother has access to literal, otherworldly spiritual powers. Rather, she fears that these powers are dark, dangerous, and (in her own case) ultimately linked to a very real risk of insanity. Since childhood, Ti-Jeanne has been able to "see with more than sight. Sometimes she saw how people were going to die. . . . this one's body jerking in a spray of gunfire and blood, that one writhing as cramps turned her bowels to liquid. Never the peaceful deaths" (9). Not only has she always "hated the visions" (9), she also fears their implications for her mental health, recognizing the parallels to her mother's experience years before:

Ti-Jeanne's own mother had had a vision one day, back when the Riots were just starting . . . [She] had seemed to go mad in the days after that, complaining that she was hearing voices in her head. Maybe it was hereditary? Ti-Jeanne didn't want to go mad, too. Her mother had disappeared soon after the voices had started, run away into the craziness that Toronto had become. She had never come back. (20)

From the very outset of the novel, Ti-Jeanne straddles the boundary between the twinned fears that her visions (while entirely real) may ultimately drive her mad or, alternatively, that the visions themselves may represent a form of madness. And here, the labelling of "madness" itself—much like the "old-time nonsense" noted above—may in turn be recognized as a common tool for progressively devaluing and ultimately dismissing persistent cognitive minoritarian

(sub)cultural beliefs and perspectives from the cognitive majoritarian "real."

Due to her fears of madness, Ti-Jeanne perceives the escalation of her visions as a form of Wrongness and Thinning disrupting her own (determinedly cognitive majoritarian) personal narrative. In Clute's terms, "[t]he sense of wrongness, in fantasy, is a recognition that the world is—or is about to become—no longer right, that the world has been subject to, or soon will be subject to, a process of THINNING" ("Wrongness" 1038), where "Thinning is a loss of attention to the stories whose outcomes might save the heroes and the folk; it is a representation of the bondage of the mortally real" ("Thinning" 942). Thus, when Ti-Jeanne has her first vision of the novel, she "[freezes], not trusting her eyes any longer to pick reality from fantasy" (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 16), experiencing the vision as a literal Thinning of boundary between the "mortally real" and spirit realms, such that she feels "the gears slipping between the two worlds" (19). Ti-Jeanne misreads this moment as a loosening of her grasp upon the "real" world, while in fact it is precisely the opposite, an attempt by the "Jab-Jab" to recall her attention to precisely those "stories whose outcomes might save the heroes and the folk." However, due to her recurring and lingering fear of her grandmother's stories—the very stories that contain the knowledge she will need to accomplish her quest—Ti-Jeanne perceives the Jab-Jab as an enemy rather than an ally, a threat to both her own sanity and her child's safety. Thus, although Ti-Jeanne never (quite) questions the reality of her visions, she nonetheless hopes that perhaps if "she ignore[s] the second sight, it [will] go away" (20).

However, the Jab-Jab does not "go away," instead becoming the central

figure of Ti-Jeanne's recurring visions throughout the novel, a figure who will eventually be revealed as her patron spirit. The Jab-Jab's entry into the novel also reveals the underlying etymology of this being's name: "*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, italics in original). The term "Jab-Jab" is here revealed as an alternative transcription of the being's chanted *Diab'-Diab'*, which itself is clearly derived from the French, *Diable* (i.e. "Devil"). However, in many Afro-Caribbean traditions, the "devil" is understood not (solely) in the Judeo-Christian sense as the dedicated adversary of God but rather as one of the many aspects of Eshu (or Legba), lord of the crossroads between the material and spiritual realms. In some ways, this etymology may appear incidental, but the juxtaposition between the term "devil" in Euro-Canadian and Afro-Caribbean contexts seems emblematic of Ti-Jeanne's recurring difficulty in negotiating the juncture between these two (cultural) discourse worlds as well as symptomatic—at least at this point in the novel—of her preference for the former over the latter.

In spite of Ti-Jeanne's determination to ignore her visions, when Gros-Jeanne finds her crying in the emotional aftermath of a second one, Ti-Jeanne breaks down and confesses their existence to her grandmother. Even while confessing, Ti-Jeanne insists that she "don't want to know nothing 'bout obeah, oui" (47), prompting a both a correction and a warning from her grandmother. First, Gros-Jeanne chastises her granddaughter, pointing out that "Girl child, you

know better than to call it obeah. Stupidness. Is a gift from God Father. Is a good thing, not a evil thing" (47). Second, she points out the dangers of ignoring this gift, explaining to Ti-Jeanne that "if you don't learn how to use it, it will use you, just like it take your mother" (47). Here, Gros-Jeanne is effectively arguing that Ti-Jeanne needs to syncretically integrate this "gift" into her own sense of self (specifically *as a gift*), or else it will turn into precisely the sort of curse that Ti-Jeanne imagines it to be. On a rational level, Ti-Jeanne already believes that her grandmother "serves the spirits" rather than working dark magic, having earlier argued as much to Tony, the estranged father of her newborn child (36). Yet even as she seeks her grandmother's help, first to learn to deal with the visions and then more directly in requesting a ritual to help Tony escape Rudy's vengeance, she still viscerally fears her grandmother's Afro-Caribbean rituals and magic, as well as her own hereditary connection to the spirit world. And once again, Ti-Jeanne rejects the cognitive minoritarian viewpoint that would allow her to (re)imagine "magic" as something other than a threat.

Here, Ti-Jeanne's struggle to accept a new world (and worldview) reflects not so much a conflict between belief and disbelief as it does the struggle to integrate or reconcile multiple cognitive paradigms (i.e. discourse worlds) into her own sense of self and subjective experience of the world. And while she simultaneously dismisses and fears Gros-Jeanne's practices of Afro-Caribbean medicine and spirituality, her grandmother's seamless syncretic blending of multiple cultural traditions and practices is precisely the model that Ti-Jeanne must learn to emulate. Michelle Reid notes that Gros-Jeanne "freely mixes her

conventional nursing training with her knowledge of traditional Caribbean remedies. She is resourceful, [. . .] substitutes native Canadian plants for Caribbean ones that are not readily available [. . . and] also combines physical cures with spiritual medicine in her Vodoun rituals” (“Crossing” 305). Similarly and more pointedly, Neal Baker argues that in order for Ti-Jeanne to succeed in her quest, she “must learn to reconcile [the] spirit world with everyday reality . . . . That is, she needs to learn from a wise woman [Gros-Jeanne] whose life is an example of syncretism, who moves adroitly between the world of Vodoun spirits and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Canada” (221). In each case, Gros-Jeanne's practices acknowledge no clear distinction between “Western” and “non-Western” paradigms of medicine or spirituality—or, indeed, between medicine and spirituality themselves—and she does not hesitate to (syncretically) blend these traditions as seems most appropriate and useful in any given case. Grace Dillon—without using the term “syncretism”—identifies this sort of blending between material and spiritual worlds as a central aspect of what she calls “indigenous scientific literacies,” which she argues form a “key element of Hopkinson’s ceremonial worlds” (25).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Dillon borrows the term “ceremonial worlds” from Jim Cheney, who defines it as referring to the “worlds or stories within which we live, the worlds—myths if you like—that have the power to orient us in life” (qtd. in Dillon 23). In practice, Cheney’s usage of this term sounds strikingly similar to—perhaps even directly equivalent to—Peter Stockwell’s use of the term “discourse worlds” and J. Edward Chamberlin’s contention that all worlds and worldviews—whether scientific or otherwise—are rooted in networks of underlying cultural *stories*, rather than *facts*. Indeed, the secondary worlds of fantasy could be understood as precisely this sort of “ceremonial world.” Note, too, that Dillon’s integration of “science” and “ceremony” in a single, counterintuitive (from a cognitive majoritarian North American perspective) framework could itself be understood as enacting precisely the same sort of syncretic blending of cognitive minoritarian perspectives with cognitive majoritarian “reality” that I argue is modeled by syncretic fantasy’s characteristic blending of “magic” and “reality.”

According to Dillon, "Indigenous scientific literacies are those practices used by indigenous native peoples to manipulate the natural environment in order to improve existence in areas including medicine, agriculture, and sustainability" (25). More generally, she argues that "[t]he essence of indigenous scientific literacy, in contrast to western science, resides in [a] sense of spiritual interconnectedness among humans, plants, and animals" (26). Gros-Jeanne's blending of the spiritual and physical worlds, along with her blending of bush-medicine with Western pharmaceuticals, reflects precisely this sort of (syncretic) sustainable practice. As Dillon puts it, the Burn has been "abandoned by those wealthy enough to escape it; left without the comforts of western technologies, the remnants return to traditional indigenous farming and husbandry in order to survive. Grandmothers reclaim old memory and dispense 'bush medicine' because federal, provincial, and city aid no longer exists" (31). In other words, the Burn itself requires this sort of sustainable practice, and Gros-Jeanne is better equipped to deal with this requirement than most.

Nalo Hopkinson, like Dillon, also (implicitly) comments on the common—often false—differentiation between Western science and traditional non-Western practices, a differentiation often used to devalue traditional knowledge-systems as superstitious or non-scientific. As Hopkinson explains of what Ti-Jeanne (mistakenly) dismisses as Gros-Jeanne's "bush medicine,"

The herbal lore the grandmother uses to heal people is very powerful. At one point in Haiti, they were using herbal lore to poison the water. It was chemical warfare, and they closed Haiti

down. . . The Africans who were doing that called it "science."

You can't talk about one thing people do, and then sort of hie off from the belief systems, so I didn't see it as a blending of genres.

(Hopkinson, "Nalo" 76)

Hopkinson's comment on genre-blending here refers to an implied and recurring query as to whether she intentionally blended science fiction and fantasy in writing *Brown Girl*. Hopkinson's response, however, is to question the underlying distinctions between what Western and non-Western cultures define as *science* or *not-science* in the first place. And this questioning in turn parallels the distinctive role of "magic" in syncretic fantasy. That is, in reimagining "magic" as real, and in depicting the syncretic integration of a cognitive minoritarian belief in "magic" with cognitive majoritarian understandings of the "real," syncretic fantasy implicitly challenges the cognitive majoritarian categorization of "magic" as specifically that-which-is-not-real, in many cases revealing the dependency of such concepts and categories upon the (sub)cultural discourse worlds from which they characteristically emerge.

Unlike Dillon, most critics identify the recurring patterns of cross-cultural blending in Hopkinson's work as *hybrid* or *syncretic*, linking these patterns directly to Hopkinson's own (stereotypically) syncretic Caribbean cultural heritage. Thus, Gordon Collier argues that Hopkinson "gathers sci-fi elements and achieves cohesion not via a sci-fi vision but via a *Caribbean ethnocultural dynamic*" (453, emphasis added), with the result that "the vitality of Hopkinson's [first] two novels derives from a *clever syncretisation* of the generic features of

science fiction and dystopia *with the operational fabric of Caribbean folk culture*” (455, emphasis added). Likewise, Michelle Reid describes the Burn as being “based on a *Caribbean model of hybridity*” (“Crossing” 298, emphasis added), and Susan Wood argues that *Brown Girl* “vividly evokes *the syncretic culture of the Caribbean*” (317, emphasis added). Wood even goes so far as to argue that syncretism—which she identifies as “typically associated with the transformation and amalgamation of African belief systems and cultures into the New World context of the Caribbean”—“pervades the text and becomes emblematic of both its content and its structure” (317).

Hopkinson, too, draws this connection between Caribbean culture and recurring tropes of hybridity and syncretism in her work, noting that

I guess that fusion of genres is characteristic of my writing if only because I'm not very good at remembering to tell the genres apart. But too, when my work is coming from a Caribbean context, fusion fits very well; that's how we survived. We can't worship Shango on pain of death? Well, whaddya know; he just became conflated with a Catholic saint. Got at least four languages operating on this one island? Well, we'll just combine the four and call it Papiamentu. (Nelson 99)

However, Hopkinson also points out that Caribbean cultures are not *uniquely* hybrid or syncretic. Rather, as she puts it, “We’re *all* hybrid people, but I hear people who like to think that isn't so. Jewish communities understand that it is. . . . But when someone says to me, 'Oh, I like your culture, because we white people

don't have that,' I think, 'Oh, give me a break! Do your damn reading!'"

(Hopkinson, "Nalo" 77).

The critics mentioned above are entirely correct in identifying *Brown Girl* as both deeply syncretic and expressive of several specifically Caribbean syncretic traditions and practices. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, the (implicit) underlying assumption that Caribbean cultures and traditions are *uniquely* syncretic—while other cultures are not—is quite simply incorrect, not only in a general sense but also in the specific case of this novel. Hopkinson herself comments that "I do get wary of getting typecast," since "[t]he Caribbean still has this allure in this part of the world of being an 'exotic' tropical paradise" (Nelson 99). Granted, even the briefest list of cross-culturally syncretic religious and/or occult practices depicted within this novel is quite extensive, with most centering on Gros-Jeanne and her adopted position as priestess within the community of the Burn.<sup>111</sup> However, although this community is centred around the distinctly Caribbean-centric figure of Gros-Jeanne, its members are by no means universally drawn from Caribbean cultural backgrounds, nor are Caribbean cultural practices the only traditions informing this community's syncretic practices.

As Hopkinson notes, contemporary Toronto—like the Caribbean—also represents a profoundly multi-ethnic, multicultural, and (potentially) syncretic community. As she puts it,

Last I heard, Toronto was one of the most culturally diverse cities

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<sup>111</sup> For an extensive concordance of Caribbean folk-cultural elements incorporated within the text of *Brown Girl*, see Gordon Collier (447-448).

in the world. I tried to reflect some of what that's like to experience. Did you think that I used the Rom words because I speak Rom? It was all part of the research I had to do to write the novel, like the research on heart transplant operations, and details of the Toronto landmarks which I describe. (Rutledge, "Speaking in Tongues" 599)

Thus, in the multi-ethnic setting of the Burn, non-Caribbean characters such as "Romni Jenny and Frank Greyeyes" also actively engage in culturally syncretic practices, such as teaching Gros-Jeanne about Northern herbs she can use to replace tropical plants in her herbal remedies (141). Romni Jenny, a member of the "Romany people," also teaches Gros-Jeanne how to read the Tarot and even makes a special Caribbean-themed deck tailored to Gros-Jeanne's specifications (49-50). Likewise, "Frank Greyeyes," a First Nations member of Gros-Jeanne's congregation, opens a ceremony in Gros-Jeanne's palais by "[standing] up and [presenting] his pipe to the four directions, redolent with tobacco," prompting Ti-Jeanne to observe wryly that "Eshu would like that" (245).<sup>112</sup>

Like many of the critics mentioned above, Gretchen Michlitsch notes that Nalo Hopkinson "and her heroine share, in many respects, a culturally hybrid heritage," since Hopkinson herself "hails from a notably creole part of the world" (19). However, Michlitsch also carefully notes that *Brown Girl* "is not autobiographical," since "Hopkinson does not have children, has never breastfed, neither she nor her parents understood Orisha worship when they lived in the

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<sup>112</sup> Eshu, Ti-Jeanne's spirit father, is traditionally (in this novel) offered gifts of tobacco, candy, and white rum.

Caribbean, and (to the best of my knowledge) she has never been invisible” (19). Nonetheless, even though many—indeed most—of the traditions portrayed within this novel are drawn not from Hopkinson's personal experience but from extensive research, none of Hopkinson's critics feel any need to defend Hopkinson's extensive use of cross-cultural materials against (anticipated) charges of cultural appropriation. This lack of defensiveness stands in stark contrast to De Lint critics, who (as noted in the previous chapter) have a recurring habit of defending him against precisely such (nonexistent) charges. Of course, the key difference between these two cases is that Hopkinson is understood as coming from a (stereotypically) "syncretic" cultural background while De Lint is not—a distinction which itself reflects precisely the sort of covertly essentialized differentiation between hybrid and non-hybrid cultures that Hopkinson decries above (and which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five).

However, regardless of its cultural origins, Hopkinson's depiction of syncretism in *Brown Girl* is of a different order and type than De Lint's in *Moonheart*. That is, where *Moonheart* depicts syncretism as a series of cross-cultural interactions, *Brown Girl* depicts syncretism itself as an innovative, adaptive, and transformative cognitive process. Thus, not only do characters from differing cultural backgrounds syncretize multiple traditions to produce innovative cultural fusions, but Hopkinson's text also depicts innovation *through* syncretic ritual practice. Significantly, as well, this innovation is accomplished specifically through syncretic *magical* practices, where syncretism provides a means of renovating, modernizing, and adapting not only traditional magical

rituals but also (in the process) the identity of the magical practitioner his or her self.<sup>113</sup> Kristine Munk suggests that syncretically innovative magical rituals can provide “a virtual reality in which humans construct their own reality, reconstruct themselves and get a chance to examine the social roles that they play” (368).

Munk develops her thinking through examining adaptations and changes in the spiritual healing rituals of contemporary South Africa. As she explains, in this context, "The most popular healers are conscious of innovation and they will indeed introduce new ways to deal with modern ailments, but the efficacy and the potency of the magical concoctions and the rites they perform are always dependent on the rites and practices being representations of 'original' ritual forms" (364). Thus, for Munk *syncretism* describes not only combinations of cross-cultural materials but also the *process* of adapting ritual magic for use in contemporary contexts, the operative *fusion* in this case being the fusion of past and present cultural contexts in a single ritual practice. And this practice of *syncretism* (in the contemporary material world) again highlights the role of "magic" in the construction of syncretic fantasy's discourse worlds. That is, the inclusion or introduction of "magic" in these novels both *provokes* and *necessitates* the novels' depicted processes of syncretism, where syncretism may be understood as adapting, renovating, and reintegrating the cognitive minoritarian belief in and practice of "magic" (back) into contemporary cognitive

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<sup>113</sup> That is, where De Lint depicts *mobility across* cultural boundaries and the blending of (sub)cultural perspectives in protagonists who, nonetheless, remain (or end up) aligned with a particular, distinct cultural tradition, Hopkinson foregrounds the processes of reality (and self) construction as *explicitly* and *continually* syncretic. Thus, De Lint (unlike Hopkinson) depicts the syncretism of "magic" and "reality" but stops short of depicting sustained cross-cultural syncretism, preferring instead to depict differing cultural traditions as stable, distinct entities, rather than as the product of continually, syncretically reinvented *processes*.

majoritarian world.

As Munk explains, this sort of syncretic innovation depends on “the capacity of human beings to redirect their consciousness actively into the world *and thereby to make and unmake the realities of themselves*. . . . [since] reality is never something fixed. From this perspective, *ritual practice is not just a representation of meanings; rather it is the very dynamic of their constitution*” (368, emphasis added). Here, Munk’s description of ritual practice as constructing “a virtual reality” that in turn helps to (re)construct reality itself echoes Peter Stockwell’s description of discourse worlds as providing a “mediating domain for reality as well as projected fictions” (94).<sup>114</sup> And as before, both of these descriptions—whether or not one accepts the veracity of their assertions regarding the structure of “reality” itself—echo precisely the prototypical discursive strategies (and implicit assumptions) that structure the internal “realities” of syncretic fantasy. Munk further argues that since syncretism has “an enormous ability to contain paradoxes and contradictions” (370), syncretic practices can free ritual practitioners from the “horrible double bind situation formed by a lock of modern demands and traditional structures” (371). Thus, rather than being caught in an either/or choice between modern and traditional practices—which is precisely the case for Ti-Jeanne—the practitioner “becomes free to choose from diverse repertoires and to test different options in a virtual space” (371). In other words, the syncretic incorporation of modern tools and materials into traditional

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<sup>114</sup> Likewise, Munk’s descriptions of syncretic ritual practice also echo Cheney’s discussion of *ceremonial worlds* (above, via Dillon) and Fauconnier and Turner’s descriptions of “living in the blend” (389-96).

ritual practices becomes precisely the cognitive mechanism through which traditional (magical) belief systems may be syncretized with the contemporary (or "modern"), cognitive majoritarian world. And this syncretic process, in turn, is precisely what allows ritual practitioners such as Ti-Jeanne to reconstruct their own personal identities as full participants in *both* traditional *and* contemporary worlds and worldviews.

Ti-Jeanne's first deliberate, unassisted use of ritual magic enacts precisely the sort of syncretic ritual practice that Munk describes, whereby Ti-Jeanne syncretically reconstructs not only the ritual itself but also her own sense of identity and position within a newly (re)syncretized world and worldview. Preparing to confront Rudy, who she now knows to be her grandfather, Ti-Jeanne modifies Gros-Jeanne's original ritual, which was designed to hide Ti-Jeanne and Tony "halfway in Guinea Land" (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 95). In her reconstructed ritual, Ti-Jeanne syncretically renovates not only the ritual and its effects but also for the first time actively revises her sense of self to include her kinship to her spirit-father Legbara. Where Gros-Jeanne's ritual incorporated an intricate collection of materials, including a "small, clumsily moulded cement head," the lifeblood of a "sensé fowl," cornmeal shaped into "intricate designs," potatoes, "three bundles of herbs," a cigar, a drum, and a bowl of candies (89), Ti-Jeanne selectively replaces these elements from the available materials at hand, creatively reconfiguring certain elements while omitting others entirely. Thus, she replaces the chicken's lifeblood with the lifeblood of a freshly deceased youth,<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Although Ti-Jeanne did her best to save him, the boy has just died from wounds sustained in an

draws an image of Eshu in this blood (replacing the cement head), substitutes a borrowed cigarette and peppermints for her grandmother's cigar and candies, and omits the rum, cornmeal vevés, potatoes, herbs, and drum entirely (194-195). Like her grandmother, Ti-Jeanne offers the blood, smoke, and candies to her improvised Eshu effigy, but since she has no drum—nor the skills required to reproduce her grandmother's intricate drumbeat—"all she [can] do [is] call on Legbara, her own personal Eshu" (195).<sup>116</sup>

This last element in particular—the call upon "her own personal Eshu"—is crucial to Ti-Jeanne's syncretically revised version of her grandmother's ritual, since it represents a revision not only of the ritual but of Ti-Jeanne's sense of self. In this action, Ti-Jeanne "knew that she was acknowledging a bond between [herself and Legbara]," yet to her surprise "that felt safe and right, not the imposition on her that she had thought it would be" (195). Here, Ti-Jeanne syncretically revises her own identity to acknowledge and integrate her family's occult traditions and heritage into her own sense of self. Furthermore, within moments of this acceptance, Ti-Jeanne also takes on a syncretically revised role in relation to the original ritual, combining two roles originally played (separately) by Gros-Jeanne and the spirit "Prince of Cemetery." In the original ritual, Gros-Jeanne summoned the spirit, who in turn gave instructions for turning Ti-Jeanne and Tony invisible, specifying that Ti-Jeanne "must carry something she man give she. She must conceal it somewhere on she body. . . . So long as she carrying Tony gift on she, nobody go see he, either" (95). In the revised ritual, Ti-Jeanne

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earlier altercation with Rudy and his henchmen (182-189).

<sup>116</sup> Legbara (or Legba), King of the Cemetery, is one of Eshu's many aspects.

syncretically combines these roles, *both* summoning the spirit *and* specifying the parameters of the invisibility spell in asking her 'Papa' Legbara "to extend the invisibility to someone else. I carrying he gift in secret. Papa, I carrying Rudy blood in my veins" (196). Here again, Ti-Jeanne syncretically reconstructs both the original ritual and her sense of self—this time revising a literal rather than spiritual sense of kinship—explicitly accepting her blood-relation to Rudy (however unwelcome it may be) as a crucial part of her own identity.

As in the above example—and also as in *Moonheart*—the primary moments of Cluteian Recognition and Healing in *Brown Girl* hinge upon the exposure and syncretic integration of previously hidden personal, familial, and collective histories. Just as Kieran and Sara must Recognize and come to terms with the truth of their own heritage (and its destructive consequences for Native people), so must Ti-Jeanne Recognize—and syncretically integrate—her own personal and family history in order to confront and defeat Rudy, thereby allowing her to rectify (some of) the historical wrongs perpetrated by her grandfather. However, where Recognition in *Moonheart* is concentrated primarily at the end of the novel, *Brown Girl* could be characterized more as a cumulative series of Recognitions, each building upon the last. Thus, Ti-Jeanne gradually learns her own family history, including her grandmother's marriage to Rudy, the true story of her mother's departure and bi-partite fragmentation into a separated body (the woman she knows as "Crazy Betty") and spirit (Rudy's duppy servant), and her own identity as Rudy's granddaughter. Ti-Jeanne's syncretic Recognition of the initially threatening "Jab-Jab" as an aspect of her "spirit father" is similarly

gradual and personally transformative, allowing her to gradually accept own role as one who can bridge the gap between the spirit and material worlds, thereby defeating Rudy. This last self-recognition is crucial as Ti-Jeanne finally learns to syncretically integrate and use (rather than resist) the "gift" (rather than curse) of her own spiritual heritage, since, as Gros-Jeanne explained earlier, "if you don't learn how to use it, it will use you" (47). Ti-Jeanne's story, then, does not build towards a single revelatory moment but rather consists of a cumulative series of Recognitions—literally, a series of re-cognitions or reimaginings—that allow Ti-Jeanne to syncretically rebuild her own sense of self as growing out of, yet also differentiated from, her own newly revealed personal and family history.

Furthermore—in direct contrast to Mendlesohn's contention that this type of fantasy is rooted in the passive reception of history as static *truth* rather than a potentially "polysemic discourse" (13, 14)—Ti-Jeanne's various recognitions consist not of the passive reception of a singular historical *truth* but rather depend on the actively transformative acceptance *and* reconstruction of multiple and multifaceted *stories* of the past. Ti-Jeanne does not simply recognize the world-as-it-is but rather Recognizes aspects of the world in ways that enable her to syncretically *transform* that world and the ways she interacts with it. Thus, in the case of the revised invisibility spell discussed above, Ti-Jeanne's ability to modify the spell depends upon her own active re-framing of the very blood in her veins as a "gift in secret" from Rudy, rather than a curse (196).

Similarly, when Ti-Jeanne learns that her mother Mi-Jeanne's spirit is also Rudy's duppy, with no choice but to follow his orders, she recognizes and accepts

this truth but also turns it to her advantage. Reversing the polarity of recognition, Ti-Jeanne sees not only that Mi-Jeanne is Rudy's bound servant, but also that Rudy's bound servant is still her mother, who would prefer to keep Ti-Jeanne alive in spite of Rudy's incontrovertibly binding orders to the contrary. This counter-recognition helps Ti-Jeanne to uncover the loophole in Rudy's orders, which is that he didn't specify a time or place for the duppy to kill her and Tony. As Ti-Jeanne explains, "You could take we anywhere, kill we there, you still go be doing what Rudy tell you. Right, mummy? [. . .] You want me to . . . free you, ain't it? Find Rudy dead bowl and break it, so you don't have to kill no more? Well, take we there before you kill we. Take we to Rudy place" (165). In each case, Ti-Jeanne does not simply recognize the world, but also cognitively *transforms* it, and this ability to transform the world through syncretic, often counter-intuitive reframing is precisely what facilitates her success as the heroine of this story. Recalling earlier discussions of the differences between magical realism and syncretic fantasy, this transformation of "reality" from one configuration to another highlights one of the key differences between these forms. That is, where magical realism *assumes* its own (internal) realism by rejecting any explicit internal acknowledgement of the (Euro-centric, cognitive majoritarian) perception of magic-as-not-real, syncretic fantasy depicts the potential *transformation of* and *transition between* differing understandings of "reality" (or worldviews), thereby facilitating (and explicitly depicting) the syncretic (re)integration of "magical" worlds with contemporary "reality."

A "recognition," then, may literally transform the syncretic fantasy world

itself, drawing forth previously unrecognized aspects of its constitutive elements and allowing them to manifest, much as the Jab-Jab and Prince of Cemetery manifest as differing aspects of the spirit Eshu. Just as Ti-Jeanne's transformative recognition of her grandfather's blood as a "gift" she carries in secret helps her to turn Rudy invisible along with herself, her final defeat of Rudy also turns upon precisely this sort of syncretic, transformative recognition: Ti-Jeanne's recognition of the CN Tower as "the tallest centre pole in the world" (221). Held drugged and helpless by Rudy, who is in the process of turning her into a duppy (as he did her mother before her), Ti-Jeanne has a choice. She can either accept the powerful, emotionally unattached, and isolated role of the duppy, with the benefit that "[k]nife couldn't cut she, blows couldn't lick she, love couldn't leave she, heart couldn't hurt she" (215), or she can accept her deep connections to her family, community, and heritage, which will retain all of the vulnerability inherent in such connections. With the help of the Jab-Jab, who grants her a series of visions exposing the importance of these connections, along with the deep loneliness, isolation, and bondage of the duppy's existence, Ti-Jeanne chooses the latter (218-220).

Immediately following this crucial moment of choice (i.e. choosing a connected, networked identity rather than a disconnected, solipsistic one), Ti-Jeanne *re-cognizes* the CN Tower itself as just such an emblem of connection via a recollected fragment of her grandmother's spiritual instruction, the very instruction which she has previously rejected:

She remembered her grandmother's words: *The centre pole is the*

*bridge between the worlds.* Why had those words come to her right then?

Ti-Jeanne thought of the centre pole of the palais, reaching up into the air and down toward the ground. She thought of the building she was in. The CN Tower. And she understood what it was: 1,815 feet of the tallest centre pole in the world. [. . .] For like the spirit tree that the centre pole symbolized, the CN Tower dug roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived. The tower was their ladder into this world. (221, emphasis in original)

This is not a moment of passive recognition, in which Ti-Jeanne recognizes of the "true" or "original" purpose of the CN Tower. Rather, this is a moment of transformative, syncretic recognition, whereby Ti-Jeanne's very act of recognition transforms the meaning—and therefore the potential utility—of the tower itself.

As Michelle Reid explains,

this landmark provides a means of accessing Caribbean spirit worlds *if viewed the right way*. Ti-Jeanne uses the tower to ground her sense of spirituality. It conveys her sense of being connected to her heritage, whilst also being at home in Canada. Her use of the tower does not seem like an appropriation of an urban building, *so much as an appropriate use of the structure's potential*.

("Crossing" 310, emphasis added).<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Several critics conduct similar analyses of the CN Tower's symbolic and literal transformation

Here, Ti-Jeanne actively re-syncretizes the world, drawing new connections that allow her to transform the world without denying its contemporary, literal, and material existence. Thus, Ti-Jeanne adapts a prototypical emblem of contemporary Canadian modernity for use in the renovated yet traditionally rooted ritual in which she summons the eight African spirits, who in turn help her to defeat Rudy.

In each case, Ti-Jeanne's Recognitions lead to some form of healing, both in personal and communal settings, and in each case, this healing manifests as the rejoining or reconciliation of previously fragmented (or separated) selves, families, communities, and identities. Recognizing Crazy Betty and Rudy's duppy, respectively, as Mi-Jeanne's sundered material and spiritual halves not only empowers Ti-Jeanne to reunite with and heal her mother's literally fragmented self, but also gives her the opportunity to start rebuilding their lost relationship. Similarly, when Ti-Jeanne finally recognizes the Jab-Jab as an aspect of Eshu, not only does this help her to defeat Rudy, but it also allows Ti-Jeanne to heal a rift within herself, finally accepting her visions as gifts from the spirit world rather than threatening invasions. Nor is this healing solely personal or individualistic, since it takes the form of a receptivity to *connection* with the spirit world, allowing Ti-Jeanne to connect not only with her spirit father Eshu, but also with the other seven African spirits (itself an unprecedented feat) in the moment of Rudy's defeat. Thus, Ti-Jeanne's personal healing results directly from her reconnection to various truths of her own personal and family history.

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into an instrument of occult ritual in this scene, including Wood (324), McGregory (7), and Michlitsch (28).

Likewise, in a broader sense, the healing represented in *Brown Girl* is never solitary, but is rather (on some level) collective and community oriented. That is, Recognition and Healing in this novel are always fuelled by explicitly syncretic processes that privilege connection over disconnection, collaborative fusion over adversarial binaries of conquest and defeat. Even the climactic battle between Ti-Jeanne and Rudy is not so much one of good versus evil as it is one of connection versus disconnection. The underlying Wrongness of *Brown Girl* lies precisely in the alienation of the world from its proper story, which, as Clute notes, "can also mark a state of BONDAGE, the unnatural freezing of reality generated when a METAMORPHOSIS goes wrong or cannot happen" ("Wrongness" 1039). Rudy's deeds are self-centred and amoral to the point of psychopathy, but his primary crime is isolating both himself and others from the naturally cyclical, networked processes of both the physical and spiritual worlds. Rudy cuts himself off from the spirits, halts his own natural aging processes, takes lives before their time and for no purpose beyond the accumulation of personal power and wealth, and even cruelly separates his own daughter's soul from her body.

Appropriately, then, the moment of Rudy's defeat is also a moment of reconnection, reuniting Rudy with the spirits who in turn reconnect him to the rest of the natural and spiritual world—with, of course, disastrous consequences. Legbara and Gros-Jeanne's spirit<sup>118</sup> together force Rudy to confront the consequences of his own actions:

"Yes," said Legbara in his death-rattle voice, "is you send this one

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<sup>118</sup> Gros-Jeanne, at this point, has already died and therefore moved on to the spirit realm.

to me Master Sheldon. In fact, all of these my children." He stepped out of the elevator, followed by ghoul after ghoul, many of them children, all bearing the marks of Rudy's knife on their bodies. [. . .]

"No!" It was Rudy. "Oonuh can't touch me! *I move beyond where the powers could reach!*"

Mami turned to him, hands on her hips. [. . .] "You have to understand, Rudy. The powers deaf to you, is true. They won't come if you call. But is not you call them this time."

Rudy tried to flee [. . .] The ghouls silently blocked his way.

"No, master," said Legba. "You ain't going nowhere. *You try to give me all these deaths in exchange for your own, but I refuse the deal. I give them all back to you.*"

Rudy screamed *as the weight of every murder he had done fell on him.*

(Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 225-226, emphasis added)

Thus, Rudy is not defeated by strength of arms, or even (primarily) by trickery. Rather, he is defeated by being reconnected with the consequences of his own actions, the consequences of a long-delayed reunion with the very spirits from whom he cut himself off after first learning, then stealing and (mis)using their powers. Similarly, the vast majority of obstacles and conflicts in *Brown Girl* arise from some form of disconnection, from the fragmentation of Ti-Jeanne's blood

family to Ti-Jeanne's disconnection from her own spiritual heritage to the disconnection of the Burn itself from its surrounding municipalities, province, society, and nation. And in each case, the path to healing is also one of reconnection: reconnecting Rudy with the spirits; reconnecting Ti-Jeanne with her family, both physical and spiritual; and potentially, as a result of Premiere Uttley's optimistically bi-lateral plans, reconnecting the Burn itself with the outside world.

In the simplest, most concrete sense, Ti-Jeanne's defeat of Rudy will allow the Burn to continue developing as a community, rather than being controlled from the top down by a single dictatorial rule. This newly revitalized communalism—partly symptomatic of Ti-Jeanne's new sense of connection and partly the legacy of Gros-Jeanne's work in the community—surfaces prominently both on Ti-Jeanne's walk home from the CN Tower and in the preparations for Gros-Jeanne's memorial service. As she walks home through the market, Ti-Jeanne experiences a fresh sense of connection to her community, receiving several gifts in consolation for Gros-Jeanne's death, an already widely known fact although it happened only the night before. Thus, “[b]y the time she was out of the market, she was juggling a half pound of rabbit pemmican [. . .] a bottle of cranberry jelly, a carved gourd rattle ('for the baby'), and Mary's honey. Grief still darkened her thoughts, but the attentions of the market people had soothed her a little” (232). Likewise, in preparing for Gros-Jeanne's nine-day ceremony,<sup>119</sup> Ti-Jeanne finds that “the gifts [. . .] pouring in from Mami's past patients meant that [she] had not had to use too much of her winter stores. There had been rabbits

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<sup>119</sup> A nine-day ceremony is a traditional Caribbean memorial service for the dead.

from Paula and Pavel; wild rice from Frank Greyeyes; and priceless beyond words, a jug of deep red sorrel drink from old man Butler, he who depended on Mami's foot-itch paste every winter" (243). The ceremony itself includes members from all parts of the community, especially "Mami's flock, eager to teach Ti-Jeanne their rituals" (242), and even Tony attends, at which point Ti-Jeanne finds, "to her surprise" that she feels "no hatred, not really. Just pity. She couldn't forgive him yet, but maybe one day . . ." (246).<sup>120</sup>

Significantly, each aspect of healing in this novel is also deeply syncretic. The community of the Burn remains (as it has always been) deeply syncretic in both its material and spiritual practices. However, even outside of the Burn—as a direct result of Gros-Jeanne's heart being transplanted into Premiere Uttley's body—new, syncretic connections are also being drawn across the rift that has thus far separated the Burn from the rest of Ontario. When Premiere Uttley receives Gros-Jeanne's transplanted heart this process initiates a previously unseen level of syncretic collaboration and reconciliation, rather than conflict. Thus, although Gros-Jeanne's heart initially battles with Uttley for control of her body,<sup>121</sup> this conflict ends not in the victory of one party over the other, but in a syncretic fusion of Gros-Jeanne and Premiere Uttley. Once the battle has concluded, Premiere Uttley resurfaces to a vision of the new heart's integration into her body:

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<sup>120</sup> Tony, as per Rudy's instructions, earlier murdered Gros-Jeanne specifically for the purpose of harvesting her heart, which was then sold to a hospital for transplant into Premier Uttley, who remains (conveniently) unaware of any of these behind-the-scenes schemes and arrangements between Rudy and the hospital in question.

<sup>121</sup> Indeed, this battle could itself be read as a symbolic refusal of the economically disadvantaged to be literally harvested for the benefit of an economically privileged overclass.

Her dream body and brain were hers once more, but with a difference. The heart—her heart—was dancing joyfully between her ribs. When she looked down at herself, she could see the blood moving through her body to its beat. In every vein, every capillary: two distinct streams, intertwined. She had worried for nothing. She was healed, a new woman now. 'Stupidness,' she said, chiding herself for her unnecessary fears. (237)

This new, syncretized being is neither wholly Gros-Jeanne nor wholly Premiere Uttley but retains aspects of both in a transformed configuration, and this new context provides a fresh perspective for Premiere Uttley's downtown Toronto revitalization plans while at the same time providing an outlet for (and the power to take action upon) Gros-Jeanne's unique insights into the Burn community. As Reid notes,

When Uttley notices that her blood moves through her body to the controlling beat of the new heart, it suggests the transplant was an act of possession. She is possessed by Gros-Jeanne's spirit, which dominates the way in which her body and brain unite into a sense of self. Yet the 'intertwined' streams of blood indicate a more equal partnership based on a hybrid communication. ("Crossing" 311)

Thus, Uttley's new plan for revitalizing the Burn, according to Reid, "proposes a new form of interdependence between the Burn and the suburbs, with both sides hopefully being changed for the better. The Burn community offers a positive model for a new interdependent form of Canadian multiculturalism based on local

involvement and participation” (312).

Chantal Bourgault du Coudray argues that modelling the individual subject as a shifting network of connections to the surrounding world reflects an underlying, recurring structure of fantasy itself and that this model may in some cases "undermine the centrality of the [modernist] subject by evoking worlds in which the individual is an integral component of a greater whole" (168-169). As Bourgault du Coudray puts it, "fantasy narratives suggest that an acceptance of individuals' enthrallment to the cycles of nature can nurture a more spiritually fulfilling experience of existence," since these stories are frequently "characterized by a focus on circularity, a willing acceptance of embodiment, a recognition of the inevitable cycles of birth and death, a sense of connection with the natural world, and an emphasis on spirituality" (165).<sup>122</sup> In the particular case of Hopkinson's syncretic fantasy, I would broaden this notion of subjectivity as a series of connections to include connections to one's surrounding communities, whether those communities are formed upon cultural, sub-cultural, or geographical bases. In other words, and in this sense, syncretic fantasy also challenges formulations of the Western, individualist subject as isolated and separated from his or her interpersonal, physical, and communal environment by modelling the deep interconnectedness of all beings, thereby implying that such separations are always an illusion.

In such a model, consciousness becomes not an isolated, individualistic

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<sup>122</sup> Bourgault du Coudray also argues more generally that this potential of fantasy to frame a potent challenge to modernist models of subjectivity has been overlooked by contemporary critical models rooted in other speculative genres, such as Haraway's cyborg (from science fiction) or Halberstalm's gothic monstrosity (from horror).

phenomenon, but rather consists of a series of interconnections between individuals, communities, and components of a larger, interdependent, and syncretically blended whole, and this is precisely the sort of model presented in *Brown Girl* and other similarly syncretic fantasies. Gregory Rutledge and Michelle Reid both note that many of the central problems and conflicts of *Brown Girl* may be traced back to their roots in a "hyper-individualistic ethos" of Western capitalism (Rutledge 25; Reid, "Crossing" 303). As Reid puts it,

[t]he problems of such a hyper-individualistic ethos are demonstrated by a number of the protagonists in Hopkinson's novel, many of whom are feeling disenfranchised in Canadian society. For example, Rudy forms his criminal posse to combat his sense of powerlessness . . . . He turns to crime to satisfy his rapacious desire for personal wealth, which he sees as a means of securing his status (303).

However, *Brown Girl* challenges this Western, hyper-individualized subject by exposing the isolated, Westernized, and self-oriented individual—such as Rudy, or Ti-Jeanne at the beginning of the novel—as pathological and antisocial. Thus, as Susan Wood points out, "whereas Gros-Jeanne describes herself as 'serving the spirits' Rudy, the text tells us 'expects the spirits to serve he' (*BG* 219). . . . [Thus,] Rudy's satiation of his own individual desires results in an imbalance, a perversion of the relation maintained between the living and the dead, gods and humanity" (322).

In *Brown Girl*, only by "serving the spirits"—and also, by extension,

serving the members of one's community—can the healing of formerly atomized, isolated families, communities, cultures, and societies begin to occur.

Furthermore, *Brown Girl* depicts this process—the process of re-envisioning individuals as a nexus of constantly shifting connections within a network of communities (both spiritual and physical)—as an explicitly *syncretic process*.

Thus, I would argue that *Brown Girl* is not only a prototypical example of syncretic fantasy but could also be characterized as a *fantasy of syncretism*. Like *Moonheart*, *Brown Girl* depicts the syncretic blending of formerly isolated worldviews into a newly pluralistic yet integrated worldview capable of accommodating all of these elements in sustained conversation with one another.

However, unlike *Moonheart*, *Brown Girl* also depicts these blends as explicitly dependent on the cognitive, transformative, and ongoing *processes* of syncretism, processes which are themselves continually foregrounded throughout the novel.

Thus, the commonalities and contrasts between these two manifestations of syncretic fantasy will form the basis of the next chapter's investigations.

## Chapter Five

### Comparisons: The Problem with Syncretic Essentialism(s)

Charles De Lint's *Moonheart* and Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* clearly differ in several aspects, De Lint's being rooted a more Eurocentric perspective and Hopkinson's representing a more Afro-Caribbean one. However, my primary goal in this chapter is to explore these novels' shared expressions of syncretic fantasy prototypes. While De Lint and Hopkinson's texts manifest significantly different expressions of these prototypes, their differences demonstrate the broad flexibility of these strategies for addressing a variety of perspectives without departing from the subgeneric "formula" itself. The differences between these novels need not be understood as oppositional but may be read as complementary and co-illuminating, helping to explore the range of possibilities for expression within the subgenre while simultaneously challenging the persistent (false) distinction between those cultures that are (stereotypically) understood as syncretic versus those which are not. Indeed, this sort of search for complementarities reflects one of the recurring structures of syncretic fantasy itself, that being a subgeneric preference for recognition and reconciliation of difference rather than the escalation of conflict via the emphasis of exclusively oppositional binary comparisons.

Both of these novels clearly reflect both Clute's prototypical structures of full fantasy, as well as my own postulated structures of syncretic fantasy. In each case, Wrongness is indicated by a thinning of the protagonist's narrative world and (consequently) of the boundaries between material and spiritual worlds:

Sarah's disturbing, otherworldly dreams; Thomas Hengwr's disappearance; Ti-Jeanne's inexplicable, disorienting visions; and so on. Likewise, in each novel, the protagonists' central quest, a quest to Heal the world by Recognizing its underlying stories, shares a common structure and goals: first, to uncover and Recognize the protagonists' hidden pasts; and, second, to correct the errors and/or misdeeds perpetrated by the protagonists' ancestors and/or spiritual forbears. Both novels hinge upon a Recognition and syncretic reintegration of the past with the present, implicitly emphasizing the dangers of historical/cultural amnesia and the dissociation from one's own personal and cultural past(s). That is, in these novels the past and the present remain integrally interdependent, the healing of one requiring the acknowledgement, syncretic co-integration, and healing of both. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous two chapters, this modelled interdependence of past and present is paralleled by networked interdependencies of Story and History, Self and Community, and Self and Story. And in each case, the Healing of these interdependent relationships requires the syncretic reintegration, blending, and reconstruction of these formerly, colloquially opposed categories in such a way as to Recognize their underlying complementarities.

The interdependent relationships between past and present, history and story, self and community, and so on are also paralleled by these novels' depictions of an explicitly interdependent relationship between the spirit and material worlds.<sup>123</sup> Here, as above, the healing of both worlds depends upon, first,

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<sup>123</sup> Note, too, that this is precisely the sort of networked interdependency between spiritual and

the recognition of this interdependence and, second, the syncretic reintegration of these artificially (and mistakenly) separated worlds. In *Moonheart*, for example, the Otherworldly quin'on'a depend on the belief of mortal beings for their very existence, as when Ha'kan'ta explains to Kieran that "only the rathe'wen'a remember [the quin'on'a] and we grow very few in number. [. . .] They need belief. Without that belief, they wither" (De Lint 302).<sup>124</sup> Likewise, even the most powerful denizens of the spirit world require human assistance to carry out certain tasks, such that although Gwydion can destroy Mal'ek'a—and indeed already has several times—the creature will continue to return until it is defeated by its own human descendents (De Lint 428). Similarly, in *Brown Girl*, the eight African spirits remain dependent upon human agents to summon their influence into the material world. Thus, Eshu can manifest to Ti-Jeanne in visions and dreams, but he remains powerless to act directly in the material world until and unless she explicitly summons him. Likewise, Osain can exhort Gros-Jeanne to take action against Rudy, but he cannot compel her to do so without her consent, and Rudy is left free to consolidate his domination of the Burn until such time as she finally agrees to help her granddaughter defeat him.

In each case, this interdependence is bi-directional, since the magical power granted by otherworldly spirits to their acolytes in the material world may also be revoked at the spirits' discretion. Thus, in *Moonheart*, Kieran's totem

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material worlds discussed in Grace Dillon and Chantal Bougault du Coudray's respective models of "indigenous technological literacies" (Dillon 25-26) and fantasy-centric identity construction (Bougault du Coudray 165-169).

<sup>124</sup> Here, Ha'kan'ta's explanation also reminds Kieran of Thomas Hengwr's earlier, parallel assertion that, in a European context, the reality of "[e]lves, the gods of pagan pantheons, hobgoblins and boogiemens . . . was directly dependent on how much people believed in them" (302).

threatens to revoke its support if he ignores its guidance (241-243). Likewise, when the warrior Tep'fyl'in tries to kill Kieran in spite of his totem's direction to the contrary, the totem intervenes, informs the warrior that he has "forsaken [his] honor" and therefore "forsaken [his] right to live" (384), and then kills him (385). Similarly, in *Brown Girl*, Gros-Jeanne fears that her Papa Osain will not answer her call, since "[h]e and [she] had a falling out" (77), while Rudy—who has deliberately isolated himself from the spirits that taught him his powers—is ultimately undone by Ti-Jeanne's summoning of these same spirits into his presence (222-225). Thus, just as the past and present remain profoundly co-constitutive and interdependent within these novels, so do the spirit and material worlds depend on the other for mutual healing, support, and (co)existence. And once again, the processes of (cognitive) syncretism—here seen in the (re)blending of material and spiritual worlds, rather than solely in the blending of (cross)cultural materials—are precisely what facilitate the syncretic reintegration of these worlds into a single, blended reality.

In both novels, the protagonists' integration of these linked interdependencies requires the adoption of distinctly cognitive minoritarian perspectives, and these perspectives are (initially) developed within the confines of one or more Otherworlds: in the first case, De Lint's Tamson House and literal Otherworld; and in the second, Hopkinson's Burn. And though the contrasts between De Lint and Hopkinson's respective Otherworlds remain notable (as discussed below), their similarities expose one of syncretic fantasy's common strategies for rationalizing (and metaphorizing) its own relation to the world of the

reader. That is, both of these novels depict literal Otherworlds that—like the discourse worlds of the novels themselves—remain simultaneously both *apart from* and *contiguous to* the cognitive majoritarian "real." This, then, becomes the space in which a cognitive minoritarian belief in "magic" (and the spirit world) can be nurtured and develop in relative isolation from stiflingly ubiquitous cognitive majoritarian worldviews while nonetheless remaining situated in explicit physical and cognitive contiguity with the "outside" world.

Thus, in De Lint's contemporary Ottawa, Tamson House provides a safe haven for those artists and eccentrics who do not "fit in" with the surrounding, cognitive majoritarian culture (De Lint, *Moonheart* 29), while the spiritual Otherworld of *Moonheart* becomes the literalized extension of Tamson House's more metaphorical otherworldly tendencies.<sup>125</sup> Isolated from the material world, the Otherworld provides a space where the boundaries between past and present, as well as those between material and spiritual worlds literally break down to become fluid and mutable.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Hopkinson's Burn provides a space where a variety of cultural and cognitive perspectives can meet and interact in relative isolation from the outside, cognitive majoritarian world. However, the Burn combines the characteristics of both Tamson House and the Otherworld into a single space. Like Tamson House, the Burn is home to a wide variety of cognitive

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<sup>125</sup> Of course, by the end of the novel—as Clute notes is typically the case in fantasy ("Canary Fever" 217)—this apparently "metaphorical" Otherworldliness of Tamson house (in which it plays the role of a primarily *cognitive* otherworld) is revealed as more literal than it initially appears, since the house itself both literally houses the spirits of the Tamsons' forebears and functions as a literal bridge (or portal) between the material world of contemporary Ottawa and the magical Otherworld itself.

<sup>126</sup> Indeed, this fluidity is one of the central concepts underlying Christine Mains' description of De Lint's Otherworld as what she calls a Bakhtinian chronotope (Mains 341-348).

minoritarian misfits, outcasts from the surrounding cognitive majoritarian culture, and like De Lint's *Otherworld*, the Burn is also a place of productively deteriorating boundaries, where the spiritual and material worlds intermingle, as do cultural traditions from a variety of backgrounds. In this sense, all of these *Otherworlds* are spaces that facilitate the syncretic reconstruction of these various categories by first destabilizing the formerly solid boundaries between them.

Nonetheless, these novels' respective otherworlds express significantly differing flavours of both cultural and cognitive syncretism. The Burn, for example, is neither as utopian as *Tamson House* nor as materially inaccessible as the *Otherworld*. Rather, the Burn is populated primarily by the economically or culturally dispossessed (as opposed to a voluntarily isolated collection of artists and eccentrics), and where the *Otherworld* is accessible only through magical means, the Burn remains physically accessible to anyone who chooses to cross its entirely physical (if heavily guarded) borders. In this sense, the Burn depicts the syncretic blending of—rather than simply the encounter of and collaboration between—spiritual and material worlds in a single, geographical, physical space. Not only is the Burn literally situated in the material world, but the "outside" cognitive majoritarian world—although it generally tries to ignore the Burn's existence—remains both aware of its existence and quite capable of visiting for short periods of time, as in the case of the outcity tourists that Ti-Jeanne and Tony encounter on "the Strip" (176). Still, I would argue that the difference between De Lint and Hopkinson's respective *Otherworlds* is not so much a difference in kind as one of degree. And while Hopkinson's syncretic integrations tend to be both

more sustained and more proximal than De Lint's, both portray (cognitive and cultural) syncretic interactions as occurring primarily in cognitive minoritarian, physically and culturally liminal Otherworlds.

Likewise, a close comparison of De Lint and Hopkinson's respective portrayals of syncretic magical cultures (and practices) reveals certain striking similarities, similarities which in turn expose the fallacy of assuming that these authors' depictions of (syncretic) magical practices emerge simplistically or directly from their own "original" cultures. Based on existing criticism, which typically characterizes De Lint as a male Euro-Canadian author writing cross-cultural fantasy<sup>127</sup> and Hopkinson as a black, female, Caribbean-Canadian author drawing upon her own cultural heritage to produce Afrocentric imagined worlds,<sup>128</sup> one might expect that De Lint would write broadly pan-cultural or multicultural texts while Hopkinson would produce more culturally specific ones. However, a closer look at both *Moonheart* and *Brown Girl* reveals that their authors share surprisingly similar strategies for constructing the broadly pan-cultural magical and ritual traditions within these novels. In each case, these authors draw upon research rather than firsthand experience to furnish their depictions of ritual practice, and their novels pointedly depict similarities between multiple, distinct, and contemporary real-world spiritual (and/or "magical") practices and traditions rather than emphasizing localized, culture-specific differences. And in each case, these syncretically pan-cultural descriptions of magical and ritual practice apply most prominently not to "other" cultures but to

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<sup>127</sup> See Mains, Michelle Reid, Robyn Reid, and Steven.

<sup>128</sup> See Anatol, Collier, McGregory, Michlitsch, Nelson, Reid ("Crossing"), Rutledge, and Wood.

the author's own (stereotypically) "original" cultural tradition.

De Lint, for example, is an accomplished Celtic musician and folklorist,<sup>129</sup> yet the Celtic, bardic tradition in *Moonheart* is labelled as "the Way," a descriptor that echoes and evokes the terminology of a more Taoist tradition. Indeed, the similarities between Taoism and "the Way" are explicitly emphasized when Kieran reflects that the "Way wasn't much different from the teachings of Taoism or the writings of Thoreau" (De Lint, *Moonheart* 58). *Moonheart* also emphasizes the parallels between Native and European traditions and folklore, as when Kieran draws repeated parallels between the quin'on'a or "manitous" and Europe's long since vanished "elves" (117, 302), who were once, according to Hengwr, "very real" (302). Christine Mains further suggests that De Lint's work is infused "with the sensibilities of the neopagan movement and the beat of world music" (340), and both neopaganism and world music are notably pan-cultural, syncretic practices. De Lint explicitly identifies neo-paganism in particular as a source for his writing while simultaneously distancing himself from its practice, stating that, "I'm not a practicing Wiccan, but I've been reading and researching the subject for more than twenty-five years" ("Frequently"). However, discussions of De Lint's potential for cultural appropriation never refer to his depiction of Celtic and/or neo-pagan practices but always to his depiction of imagined Native cultures and characters—this in spite of the fact that Celtic and neo-pagan occult practitioners (unlike the invented quin'on'a, rathe'wen'a, or Pukwudji) demonstrably, physically

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<sup>129</sup> According to Charles de Lint's website, he has "been a professional musician for over 25 years" ("Charles de Lint: Biography"), and Terri Windling has described him as a "folk musician, folklore scholar, book reviewer, and visual artist" (qtd. in Eldridge).

exist in the contemporary material world.

Like De Lint, Hopkinson also syncretizes a broad cross-section of magical and religious traditions to produce the pan-Caribbean magical culture of *Brown Girl in the Ring*. As several critics note, the cultural practices in this novel "can no longer be identified solely with, say, St Lucia or Dominica or Haiti, Trinidad or Jamaica, but . . . partake of all of them" (Collier 445).<sup>130</sup> Accordingly, neither Gros-Jeanne's specific pre-Canadian origins nor the culture-specific origins of her broadly Caribbean magical practice are ever explicitly identified in the novel. Even when Gros-Jeanne describes the "African powers" to her granddaughter, she avoids identifying a particular spiritual tradition as her own, explicitly characterizing her own practice as reflecting a set of underlying, pan-culturally shared beliefs:

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*. [. . .] Each of we have a special one who is we father or mother, and no matter what we call it, whether Shango or Santeria or Voudun or what, *we all doing the same thing*. Serving the spirits. (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 126, emphasis added)

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<sup>130</sup> See also Anatol, Gregory, Michlitsch, and Wood, all of whom carefully label Gros-Jeanne's multi-faceted, multi-sourced religious practice as "African-diasporic" (Anatol 37), "Afro-Caribbean" (Gregory 5; Michlitsch 19), or simply "Caribbean" (Wood 318) rather than identifying a specific source tradition, such as Voudun, Santeria, or Orisha worship. Wood in particular notes that "Mami Gros-Jeanne describes her religion as a system which simultaneously eludes categories but is identifiable to all" (319).

Likewise, just as De Lint is not himself a neo-pagan or Native spiritual practitioner, neither is Hopkinson a practicing mambo, orisha priestess, or houngan (Michlitsch 19). Rather, just as in the case of De Lint's knowledge of neo-pagan and Native magical traditions, Hopkinson's own knowledge of Vodoun and Caribbean magical belief systems is drawn from research rather than personal experience.<sup>131</sup>

I make the above comparisons not to suggest that Hopkinson's syncretic narrative is somehow inauthentic in its pan-culturally fictionalized elements but rather as a means of highlighting the striking contrast in critical reception between De Lint and Hopkinson's work. That is, De Lint's syncretism is culturally unexpected—in the sense that Eurocentric cultures and cultural practices are not, in Canada, commonly understood as "syncretic"—and is therefore rarely (or more accurately, never) described as such. By contrast, as noted in Chapter Four, Hopkinson's syncretism seems to many critics an obviously and even uniquely Caribbean phenomenon which seems "natural" within the context of a Caribbean-influenced fantasy novel.<sup>132</sup> One could argue (correctly) that syncretism is a common Caribbean phenomenon, or that the Caribbean religions portrayed within Hopkinson's novel have a long and ongoing history of syncretism, making it

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<sup>131</sup> Hopkinson herself freely admits in interviews that her portrayal of Caribbean magic draws primarily on extensive research rather than direct interaction or experience with the practitioners of these religions. As she puts it, "Orisha worship was something I had grown up in the Caribbean knowing about, but from the outside. My parents made it seem like a version of Christianity, a more charismatic one, because that's what they thought it was" ("Nalo" 76). Thus, Hopkinson explains that in writing *Brown Girl* she learned about these traditions in the process of "doing more and more research into it," citing secondary sources such as *The Serpent and the Rainbow* by Canadian writer Wade Davis, who went to Haiti and did research into herbal medicine" (76). For similar assertions, see also Morehouse (8), Hopkinson ("Address" 103-104, 108), and Rutledge ("Speaking" 599).

<sup>132</sup> See, for example, Collier (453, 455), Reid ("Crossing" 298), and Wood (317).

entirely plausible to envision further syncretic practices being incorporated into these religions in contemporary, non-Caribbean contexts. However, the same arguments could be made in terms of De Lint's more Eurocentric syncretism.

As Mains points out, "Long before it became an imperializing force, the island of Britain endured successive waves of invasion, each new group of warriors and missionaries and settlers displacing those who came before" (344). As a direct result of these "successive waves of invasion," Europe in general and the British Isles in particular also have a long and ongoing history of cultural and religious syncretism, and neo-paganism represents just one of many contemporary Eurocentric yet syncretic religious traditions.<sup>133</sup> In light of these comparisons, it seems disingenuous at best to identify Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* as manifesting an *essentially* syncretic Caribbean cultural framework in opposition to De Lint's *Moonheart*, which depicts a more Eurocentric and therefore—for no reason other than its Eurocentrism—an *essentially* non-syncretic one. Rather, as noted in Chapter Two, contemporary scholars of syncretism tend to agree that there is no such thing as a non-syncretic culture. Thus, in light of such agreement, I would suggest that the identification of one culture as *essentially* more (or less) syncretic than another represents, quite simply, a failure (or perhaps repression) of cultural memory on the part of purportedly non-syncretic culture.

Nonetheless, where De Lint tends to use the mechanisms of syncretism to depict the possibility of individual mobility and collaboration across well-defined cultural boundaries and traditions, Hopkinson portrays a more sustained vision of

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<sup>133</sup> The most obvious of these Eurocentrically syncretic traditions, of course, would be Roman Catholicism.

syncretic and cross-cultural reconstruction of the world via persistent and proximal cross-cultural and cognitive blending. This distinction, then, is precisely what I mean to indicate by describing De Lint's novel as an example of generalized *syncretic fantasy* as opposed to Hopkinson's more tightly focussed *fantasy of syncretism*. That is, where De Lint's novel starts from a point of assumed separation, distinction, and cultural difference, Hopkinson's assumes a starting point of initial (and continued) proximity and cultural blending. This contrast appears repeatedly: between De Lint's (initially) clear separation of spirit and material worlds (into the Otherworld and contemporary Ottawa) and Hopkinson's equally clear fusion of the two (in the Burn); between De Lint's separation of science and magic (e.g. Hogue's "Paranormal Research Branch" and Jamie Tams' "arcanology") and Hopkinson's fusion of the two (in Gros-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne's syncretic medical practice); and between De Lint's depiction of distinct-yet-collaborative cultural traditions (e.g. Native and Celtic) versus Hopkinson's depiction of syncretic cross-cultural integration (e.g. of Native, Romany, and Caribbean traditions). Of these differences, the last is the most prominent. Thus, De Lint's novel maintains a clear separation between Native and non-Native cultural traditions, so that although individual characters can access syncretic mechanisms to communicate across cultural boundaries, the traditions themselves never blend or mix. Even Kieran's transition from bard to shaman entails not a *blending* of cultural traditions but a choice *between* distinct and differing practices, such that he must shift his allegiances from one to another. By contrast, Hopkinson's novel depicts not only cross-cultural dialogue and personal

(cognitive) syncretism but also the syncretic blending of cultural traditions themselves, as in the cases of Gros-Jeanne's Caribbean-themed tarot deck (*Brown Girl* 49-50) or Frank Greyeyes' offering of tobacco to the four directions at Gros-Jeanne's nine-day ceremony (245).

In each case, the differing depictions of cultural and cognitive syncretism within these two novels reflect differing manifestations of a shared impulse towards cross-cultural interaction, communication, and (eventual) reconciliation. Based upon the contrasts noted above, it once again becomes tempting to identify these differing perspectives as reflecting the generalized, monolithically imagined, and stereotypically "original" cultural perspectives of these novels' respective authors. In such a formulation, De Lint would be understood as a "white" author, a member of the dominant culture who must first deconstruct his own culturally assumed binaries and divisions (between magic and science, between Native and non-Native cultures, and so on) before then beginning to reconstruct a more integrated syncretic worldview. Hopkinson, by contrast—having emerged from the (stereotypically) "syncretic" culture of the Caribbean—could be expected to be more at ease with both cognitive and cross-cultural syncretism as familiar strategies that need not be invented but only integrated and accepted as valid and productive (rather than old-fashioned or "primitive") practices. However, these same observations need not be explained in terms of the hypothetically "original" cultural perspectives of these two authors but could rather be understood as emerging from the more heterogeneous specificities of each novel's regional, geographical, and (sub)cultural setting.

*Moonheart*, for example, is set in Ottawa, in a relatively prosperous (and predominantly Caucasian) neighbourhood of a relatively prosperous city at the legislative heart of the nation, and is therefore suffused with an (unsurprisingly) federalist, white, upper middle class perspective. Furthermore, in Ottawa in particular, federalist formulations of multiculturalism—including the theoretical importance of acknowledging and celebrating cultural distinctions and differences—could be expected to be very much the norm. *Brown Girl*, by contrast, is set in downtown Toronto, in an ethnically diverse and economically less privileged area that seems likely to have a much more immediate (and therefore less federalist) conception of multiculturalism. Rather, as Hopkinson puts it, "Last I heard, Toronto was one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. I tried to reflect some of what that's like to experience" (Rutledge 599). And in the context of this particular neighbourhood of contemporary downtown Toronto, ethnic (and religious) diversity may be more of a simple, immediate, and everyday fact of "what it's like to experience" living in the area than an abstract, federalist cultural policy.<sup>134</sup> This difference in settings, too, explains the contrast between the RCMP and national political and business figures of *Moonheart*, as opposed to the more Ontario-centric political history of the Burn presented at the outset of *Brown Girl* (10-12). Of course, rather than imputing these differences

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<sup>134</sup> In a parallel vein, Michelle Reid critiques Neal Baker's characterization of *Brown Girl* as depicting "federalist" syncretism on the grounds that *Brown Girl* espouses a much less hierarchical model of Canadian multiculturalism ("Crossing" 304-306). As Reid puts it, the community of the Burn "is reinforced by necessity, resourcefulness, and local participation, hence it provides a more 'grounded' alternative to the Canadian government's multicultural and federalist ideals" (306). Reid is correct in her assessment of Hopkinson's novel as, if anything, anti-federalist. However, Baker's model of "federalist" syncretism could be applied much more aptly to the case of *Moonheart*.

*either* to each novel's setting *or* each author's cultural background, they could be attributed to the commingling of each author's ethnic, personal, and sub-cultural background with the regional influence of these specific (and differing) urban Canadian settings.<sup>135</sup> And given these complex networks of differing contexts, it seems hardly surprising that De Lint and Hopkinson's novels produce differing models of (potential, imagined) cross-cultural syncretism, reconciliation, and healing.

Furthermore, whether these differences reflect broadly "cultural" or more narrowly "regional" perspectives (an ultimately unanswerable question), in each case they have more to do with the assumed loci of temporal and cultural power within the novels themselves than either of these factors. Both of these novels project a particular ethical and psychic struggle onto the screen of a particular (syncretic and magical) otherworld in order to create a space for confronting issues surrounding the ethical uses of power and power-distribution. And in this sense, these two novels seem more complementary than opposed, each dealing with the consequences of (and possible responses to) a particular cultural and historical power imbalance. Thus, from a Eurocentric, federalist perspective, De Lint's novel struggles to syncretically reintegrate—and thereby come to terms with—the (repressed) Euro-Canadian history of Canadian colonialism and the impact that it has had not only on First Nation traditions but also upon the collective Canadian psyche. If formulated as a question, *Moonheart* might be

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<sup>135</sup> Yet again, this formulation echoes Luther Martin's description of syncretic processes themselves as emerging from a combination of factors drawn from the individual's own cognitive predispositions and the available cognitive "memes" drawn from the surrounding culture (Martin 394-97).

characterized as asking, "How can the collective Canadian identity come to terms with (or integrate) its own repressed history of colonial oppression of Native peoples and cultures?" Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, by contrast, depicts the struggle to (re)establish—via syncretic (re)integration into the contemporary world—a non-Eurocentric sense of self and community in a cognitive majoritarian world dominated by Eurocentric value systems and assumptions. Thus, both of these authors struggle to (re)establish—or at least to re-imagine—the possibility of (re)developing and syncretically reintegrating *specific* cognitive minoritarian perspectives in the context of a Euro-Canadian, cultural majoritarian "reality" that has effectively erased (or repressed) these very perspectives.

More generally, De Lint and Hopkinson's novels demonstrate the (potential) use of syncretic fantasy's prototypical discursive strategies in re-establishing, reinventing, and syncretically reintegrating contemporary cognitive minoritarian identities, perspectives, and histories into the contemporary world. Specifically, these novels use the discursive strategies of syncretic fantasy to reconfigure a series of cognitive majoritarian categorical oppositions, including oppositions between past and present, story and history, self and community, and spirit and material worlds. In each case—in their depiction of magic (or spiritual) worlds and worldviews as real—these syncretic reblendings of formerly opposed categories hinge upon a reconfiguration of the real/unreal binary, which in turn facilitates the (eventual) reconstruction of all of the aforementioned categories. And given such a context, it seems hardly surprising that similarly syncretic strategies might appear in the work of certain Indigenous writers such as Thomas

King and Eden Robinson. That is, Indigenous writers could use such strategies as a means of reinventing and reincorporating Indigenous identities (and stories) into a contemporary, cognitive majoritarian, Euro-Canadian world that has in many ways erased, suppressed, or ignored the contemporary *reality* (and relevance) of precisely such perspectives. The next section, then, will explore the potential of syncretic fantasy as a critical heuristic for explaining precisely such mechanisms in the context of King and Robinson's work.

### Part III: Syncretic Fantasy and Indigeneity

One of the key challenges in studying indigenous literature(s) is negotiating the critical tension between potentially stereotypical representation and equally problematic erasure of Native identities and worldviews.<sup>136</sup> On the one hand, to identify a text as paradigmatically "Native" risks producing monolithic, static, or universalized conceptions of Native-ness. On the other, to ignore a text's Native underpinnings risks ignoring (or erasing) indigenous worldviews and storytelling paradigms that differ from the expected constructions of prototypically Western literary realism. Keeping this caveat always in mind, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* present provocative opportunities for negotiating this challenge by reading these novels through a critical heuristic rooted in the models of syncretic fantasy developed in the preceding chapters. Both of these novels are by indigenous authors and most commonly read through critical frameworks of indigeneity, yet at the same time they are also both in many ways fantasy-like, sharing several of syncretic fantasy's prototypical discursive structures and strategies. Both novels, for example, explicitly mix characters and events that would be normally be understood as "magical" with those more likely to be understood as "realistic" by the surrounding cognitive majoritarian, Eurocentric (Canadian) culture, and both implicitly recognize this disjunction between cognitive minoritarian and cognitive

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<sup>136</sup> In Part III, I will use the term "Native" primarily to refer to the abstract, conceptual (and often problematic) category of Native-ness, rather than the more common "indigenous peoples" or "indigeneity." This choice is intended to reflect a clear distinction (though not necessarily an opposition) between my own approach and that of "indigenous literary nationalism," as well as to avoid any potential confusion between this analysis and Brian Attebery's coining of the term "indigenous fantasy" for what I prefer to call syncretic fantasy.

majoritarian worldviews by depicting it within the novels' internal discourse worlds.

As will be discussed in more detail throughout Part III, the discursive strategies employed by these novels demonstrate recurring and multilayered compatibilities with the structures of syncretic fantasy. In this context, telling a fresh critical story of both through a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy will allow a closer investigation of these novels' respective strategies for syncretically reconstructing, redefining, and reinventing Native-ness itself as something other than a binary opposition between Native and non-Native identities. Such an investigation need not (and will not) erase or ignore the prominent Native aspects of these texts any more than these authors' indigeneity is erased by their own stated predilections for reading and/or being influenced by the (commonly identified as "Western") speculative genres of science fiction, horror, and/or fairy tales.<sup>137</sup> Rather, just as these authors cannot be solely or fully described in terms of their indigeneity, or in complete isolation from the (cognitive majoritarian) culture and environment which surrounds them, neither need their novels be understood as solely or restrictively Native in the sense that they cannot cross-

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<sup>137</sup> Both King and Robinson, for example, have written stories that could easily be understood as science fiction, such as King's "How Corporal Colin Sterling Saved Blossom, Alberta, and Most of the Rest of the World as Well," which depicts blue alien coyotes arriving in spaceships to take away all of the world's "Indians," and Robinson's "Terminal Avenue," which appeared in Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan's *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Furthermore, both of these authors have described their (respective) early fascinations with the speculative genres, as when King explains that "[w]hen I was a kid, I was partial to stories about other worlds and interplanetary travel" (*Truth 2*) or Robinson describes her younger self as "a big Stephen King fan," muses that she has "no idea how [she] ended up writing literary stuff, [since she] thought [she'd] be writing Stephen King rip-offs" (Berry 329), or says that she would "like to write some science fiction stuff" (333) and describes her first story collection as a series of "urban fairy tales" (337).

pollinate or draw upon narrative strategies rooted in (or shared with) stereotypically "non-Native" genres such as syncretic fantasy.<sup>138</sup>

In this sense, applying a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy to these novels not only has the potential to produce fresh interpretations of these texts but also may renovate assumed binary oppositions between "Western" and "non-Western" genres to reflect back onto fantasy criticism itself. If, for example, the structural paradigms of (syncretic) fantasy can be shown to be compatible with the structures of these two novels—as I argue they can—then this would challenge John Clute's understanding of fantasy itself as an inherently "Christian" form ("Grail" 332). Furthermore, the strategies of syncretic fantasy *in particular* may be seen as modelling—or, alternatively, as mirroring or mimicking—the position of contemporary indigenous cultures in relation to (Eurocentric) North American cognitive majoritarian culture. Since syncretic fantasy paradigmatically depicts the reconciliation of cognitive minoritarian worldviews with cognitive majoritarian understandings of "reality," this reconciliation itself may model (by depicting) the syncretic, imaginative reconstruction of a world in which Native and non-Native worldviews need not be understood solely in terms of their assumed (and often essentialized) opposition to one another. In this sense, the role of "magic" in syncretic fantasy may help to illustrate this parallel.

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<sup>138</sup> Indeed, as Brian Attebery has suggested, to banish (or omit) indigenous authors and/or characters from the speculative genres may be especially problematic in the sense that such omissions implicitly remove indigenous perspectives and characters from all imagined versions of the future (or present) itself. As Attebery puts it, discussing science fiction in particular, "[a]s the genre within which concepts of the future are formulated and negotiated, sf can imply, by omitting a particular group from its representations, that the days of that group are numbered. Silence, too, can be a form of control, and the sin of omission, in this case, worse than many possible sins of commission" ("Aboriginality" 385).

As discussed in previous chapters, magic's role in syncretic fantasy is relatively simple. That is, in the context of North American cognitive majoritarian culture, the depiction of magic-as-real is precisely that element of syncretic fantasy which distinguishes its cognitive minoritarian viewpoints as definitively and persistently *cognitive minoritarian*. Or, to put it differently, in a contemporary, cognitive majoritarian context, magic is that which self-identifies as "odd" or "strange" or "impossible." The *syncretism* of syncretic fantasy, however, is always about the blending (and reconciliation) of multiple worldviews, so that the blending of "magic" and the "real" in syncretic fantasy always depicts, first, an exposure of that which was previously hidden (i.e. the magic) and, second, the *integration* of that formerly hidden aspect of reality with the cognitive majoritarian real. In this sense, syncretic fantasy always depicts the reintegration of worldviews that have been *actively rejected from* the everyday, cognitive majoritarian world. And given a contemporary context of indigenous cultural perspectives that have been consistently erased, denied, or ignored in Eurocentric contexts, it seems hardly surprising that some indigenous writers might gravitate towards precisely these sorts of discursive strategies as a means of dramatizing, depicting, and asserting their ongoing personal and cultural *existence* in the contemporary world.

As also discussed in previous chapters, syncretic fantasy typically unsettles the cognitive majoritarian "real" as one strategy for depicting the syncretic reconstruction of a variety of (formerly) opposed categorical binaries, primarily those between the Real and Unreal, but also commonly including

others, such as those between Past and Present, Story and History, Spirit and Material worlds, and so on. And in each case, these syncretic reconstructions redefine, challenge, and reinvent the terms under consideration, first by explicitly acknowledging the *conflicts* between differing worldviews (or discourse worlds) and second by syncretically *reconciling* these multiple worldviews in(to) a single, contemporary discourse world (or Story). Thus, the next two chapters will examine these same mechanisms and strategies as they appear in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*.

In each case, these investigations will allow a closer examination of the problem of *authenticity* in both the perception and (re)construction of contemporary indigenous identities. In *Green Grass*, for example, I will examine the novel's syncretic reconfigurations of the Story versus Reality (or Story versus History) divide, focussing on the story-centric reconstruction (and subsequent Healing) of contemporary Native identities. In *Monkey Beach*, I will examine this novel's depiction of a protagonist who is confronted with an explicit conflict between her own perception of "magic" (or the spirit world) and the surrounding cognitive majoritarian culture's disbelief in such perceptions. And in each case, these novels' respective syncretic reinventions of "reality" will also be shown to facilitate the cognitive and/or cross-culturally syncretic reinvention, integration, and (sometimes partial) Healing of formerly hidden, networked, and heterogeneous indigenous identities.

## Chapter Six

### Thomas King: Syncretic Fantasy as Ritual Healing<sup>139</sup>

Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* is often conceived of as a type of resistance text, resisting Western paradigms and aesthetic structures through distinctively Native strategies such as the use of mythic and oral storytelling structures. Structurally, the novel encourages this sort of dualist reading by juxtaposing two distinct narrative streams within the text: a realistic, linear story of contemporary Blackfoot characters in an identifiably (cognitive majoritarian) real-world setting, and a series of four Native myths that initially appear unconnected to the realm of the everyday. While the realistic narrative deals with conventional problems such as a love triangle, career choices, and family dynamics in the Blackfoot community of Blossom, Alberta, the four mythic sub-narratives present a series of Native creation stories, each of which satirizes various Western mythical stories, including biblical tales (e.g. the Fall, the Flood, the Virgin Birth, and the Calming of the Waters) and Western-canonical literary texts (e.g. *Moby Dick*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and James Fenimore Cooper's Westerns). These mythic, non-realistic sections are overtly antagonistic towards their incorporated Western stories as when, for example, the Judeo-Christian GOD is portrayed as a dyslexic and delusional dog (1-2). In congruence with this overtly satirical approach to Western myths, many critical treatments of the novel address it as a particularly Native text expressing a distinctly Native

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<sup>139</sup> An earlier version of this chapter has been published in *The Journal of the Fantastic of the Arts* (Bechtel, "The Word for World").

worldview.<sup>140</sup> However, while such approaches have productively elaborated King's subversion of prototypically "Western" ideological and literary traditions,<sup>141</sup> they also construct strong contradistinctions between Native and non-Native texts. Native texts, in this framework, are identified as mythic, cyclical, communal, orally based, and expressive of particularly Native worldviews. Western texts, by contrast, are understood as realistic, linear, individualistic, primarily textual, and expressive of particularly Western worldviews. And although these critical approaches tend to be complimentary towards Native texts, they are also in some senses reductive.

In his Massey lectures, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, King points out that although stories can be both "wondrous" and liberatory, they also have the potential to "control our lives" (9) in restrictive and damaging ways. And if, as King suggests, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (*Truth* 2, 32, 62, 92, 122, 153), then we must take care in our use of critical paradigms, since the critical stories we tell are the very ones that will in turn tell us. With this caveat in mind, I want to retell the literary-critical story of *Green Grass, Running Water* through a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy. In this task, I will draw upon the subgenre's prototypical discursive strategies—strategies which are neither Native nor non-Native but nonetheless remain compatible with the structures of King's novel—as a filter for (re)reading this text. Recalling John

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<sup>140</sup> See, for example, Andrews ("Reading"), Collins, Daxell, Gómez-Vega, Korkka, Matchie and Larson, and Wylie, among others.

<sup>141</sup> I say "prototypically" in the sense that the Western tradition is far from homogeneous—as exposed, particularly, by the exploration of syncretic fantasy throughout this study—yet the term itself continues to be used. In this sense, the "Western tradition" or "Western culture" represents yet another artificially homogenized yet colloquially agreed upon, prototype-driven fuzzy set.

Clute's account of "full fantasy" as a four-stage storied progression from an initial state of "Wrongness" and "Thinning" to an eventual point of "Recognition" and "Healing" ("Grail" 333-4, "Canary" 220, "Beyond" 429-30), I will demonstrate how a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy can sidestep persistent critical binaries of Native versus non-Native stories (and identities) to produce a less restrictive both/and approach to King's text and recognize the potential power of Story to literally re-create the world(s) in which we live.

In concrete terms, this critical re-evaluation hinges upon a careful rereading and rapprochement of the "realistic" and "magical" (or "mythical") elements within this text, as well as an exploration of the connections between these elements, which existing critical readings tend to keep almost entirely separate. This critical rapprochement, in turn, will expose the interrelationships between (and syncretic blending of) these elements within the text, since the role of "magic" (and Story) in *Green Grass* echoes many of the discursive strategies of syncretic fantasy. Specifically, this text's exposure and subsequent syncretic reintegration of cognitive minoritarian perspectives (in this case Native stories) with the contemporary, cognitive majoritarian world is accomplished via processes that mirror those of the subgenre. This not to say that *Green Grass* can simply be "identified" as syncretic fantasy, since the novel also departs from certain subgeneric paradigms, again most significantly in terms of the role of "magic" in this text. That is, the text clearly indicates (as in any syncretic fantasy) both that the "magic" is real within the novel's discourse world and that the vast majority of the characters inhabiting the text's discourse world do not believe in

such things. However, as will be discussed in more detail below, the prototypically explicit syncretic integration of "magic" into the various protagonists' own worldviews remains almost entirely absent from this novel.

Recalling Greer Watson's model of "low fantasy," *Green Grass* might be seen as closer to magical realism than syncretic fantasy in the sense that the novel contains several elements that cognitive majoritarian "Western" cultures would typically identify as "magic," yet these elements are never explicitly recognized or described as such by any of the characters inhabiting this discourse world. As in magical realism, the cognitive minoritarian belief in magic modelled by this text refuses to self-identify as cognitive minoritarian (i.e. as "magic"), per-se, even though—unlike magical realism—"most of the people in the world of the story" clearly (and just as clearly incorrectly) do not believe in such things (Watson 171). For example, Coyote's and the old Indians' "magical" actions are never *explicitly* identified as falling into the "Western" cognitive category of *magic* in the first place. Thus, in some senses, this novel could be understood as containing no magic at all if one were to accept (or re-categorize) Coyote and the old Indians as *natural* rather than *supernatural* beings. However, such a refusal of an explicitly cognitive minoritarian stance—at least so far as magic is concerned—need not (necessarily) be understood as contradicting the structures of fantasy more generally. Recall, for comparison, Tolkien's refusal to identify fairies as supernatural, where he contends that "[s]upernatural is a dangerous and difficult word in any of its senses, looser or stricter. But to fairies it can hardly be applied, unless super is taken merely as a superlative prefix. For it is man who is, in

contrast to fairies, supernatural . . . whereas they are natural, far more natural than he" (12).<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, even though the text refuses to adopt the prototypically cognitive minoritarian stance of syncretic fantasy—in which magic would be *explicitly* described within the text as not-normally-understood-as-real—the various syncretic rapprochements of nature, supernature, history, and story nonetheless *implicitly* self-identify as cognitive minoritarian in the simplest of numerical senses. That is, the vast majority of the characters within this novel do not even notice that the "magical" elements of the narrative exist at all, and those times when they (almost) do, they are generally confused. And although this novel does not reflect *all* of the prototypical strategies of syncretic fantasy, it nonetheless depicts the cognitive syncretism of multiple, idiosyncratic, and heterogeneous cognitive minoritarian Stories (and Histories) of Native selves, identities and communities at the same time that it re-enacts several other (syncretic) fantasy prototypes, such as Clute's prototypical narrative structures of fantasy, the syncretic (re)blending of Story and Reality, and so on. More importantly for the current investigation, these various rapprochements also correlate with the exposure and syncretic reconfiguration of received "Western" Stories of—and categorical oppositions between—"White" versus "Native"

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<sup>142</sup> Indeed, and interestingly, Tolkien plays with the real/imaginary distinction even more directly in his description of "elves" as both imaginary and (nonetheless) embodying and explaining the underlying human *desire* for fantasy. As he puts it, "At the heart of many man-made stories of the elves lies . . . the desire for a living, realised sub-creative art . . . . Of this desire the elves, in their better (but still perilous) part, are largely made; and it is from them that we may learn what is the central desire and aspiration of human Fantasy—even if the elves are, all the more in so far as they are, only a product of Fantasy itself" (55). And this statement—or so it seems to me—comes quite close to evoking King's assertion that "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (*Truth* 2, 32, 62, 92, 122, 153).

identities.

King critics are generally wary of simplistic oppositions between "Indian" and "White" modes of being (and certainly don't use the terms "Indian" and "White," as King does), but their analyses nonetheless often hinge upon strong binary distinctions between Native and non-Native storytelling techniques. Thus, while Joanna Daxell argues that the novel advocates and models the potentially harmonious coexistence of Native and non-Native cultures, she also emphasizes the ways in which "Western tradition is juxtaposed to Native tradition" (99) and argues that "the repetitive nature of the [novel's] ritual formula . . . is very different from a Western linear way of relating to the world" (101). Similarly, although Thomas Matchie and Brett Larson spend some time exploring the cross-cultural valence of the trickster figure, they ultimately produce a list of four "tribal elements" (154) of King's novel that must be understood as distinct from Western narrative strategies, since "it is important . . . to distinguish generally between biblical and Native mythologies so that one can see how they contrast" (157).

In adopting such Native versus non-Native and Western versus non-Western binaries, these approaches elide one of the central dilemmas implicit in this novel, which is that the binary opposition of "Whites" versus "Indians" itself produces one of the main problems facing the Blackfoot characters within the text. Recalling King's discussion of Story above—which, as explored in more detail below, also echoes Clute's discussion of the role of Story in fantasy—these characters are continually caught up in a series of mistaken, harmful, and

externally imposed Stories that literally restrict and control their lives. Specifically, these mistaken stories convince several Blackfoot characters to define themselves as either "White" or "Indian" in the most reductive and stereotypical senses possible, primarily in congruence with the generic conventions of popular Westerns, the novels and movies of the (imaginary, largely ahistorical and mythologized) American Western frontier. This entrapment, too, echoes precisely the (covert) mythologizing of both History and Reality that I have already argued syncretic fantasy typically works to expose in its syncretic (re)construction of explicitly story-centric, cognitive minoritarian discourse worlds or "realities."

Lionel Red Dog, for example, is thirty-nine years old and stuck in a dead-end job selling electronics at Bill Bursum's Video Barn. He explicitly recognizes each of the "three mistakes" (*Green Grass* 25) that have led him to this point, and each of these mistakes is the result of Lionel's being caught up in the wrong story, a story of mistaken identity. First, when getting his tonsils out at the age of eight, Lionel is mistaken for a "ten year old white child" with a heart condition, is airlifted to Toronto, and narrowly avoids undergoing dangerous and unnecessary heart surgery (28-29). Years later, on a business trip to Salt Lake City while working for the Department of Indian Affairs, Lionel is mistaken for an American Indian Movement activist, gets caught up in a protest, is arrested, and consequently loses his Canadian government job (46-53). These stories of mistaken identity prove to be extraordinarily persistent, encumbering Lionel with (false) health and criminal records that keep him from getting both health

insurance and jobs and eventually force him into his third big mistake of taking his job at the Video Barn. By this point, Lionel has been repeatedly trapped in a series of mistaken Stories, a sort of story-based stasis from which he cannot escape.

Reading this situation through a critical lens of (syncretic) fantasy exposes Lionel's story-based entrapment as a "state of bondage, of REALITY-distorting constriction, [which] is normally signalled in fantasy by WRONGNESS, by a sense that the world as a whole has gone askew, that the story of things has been occluded. . . . that the world (and the stories that tell it) is about to undergo a dangerous and painful THINNING of texture, a fading away of beingness" (Clute, "Fantasy" 339). In this sense, the Story of Lionel's personal identity (i.e. his "beingness") has been "occluded" and overshadowed by these persistent stories of mistaken identity, and his world has consequently been thrown askew by the "reality distorting constriction" of their accumulated falsehoods. Moreover, this process has happened *invisibly*, due to the covert (and in this case, internalized) adoption of cognitive majoritarian "Western" mythologies as unproblematically *real* rather than the product of what J. Edward Chamberlin would identify as a network of culture-specific, validating *stories* of reality. However, at this point in his own Story, Lionel has not yet Recognized the story-centric (and reality-distorting) origins of his own ongoing misfortunes. That is, he recognizes some of his key "mistakes," but he does not (yet) seem to understand what they all have in common.

What Lionel does not realize is that all of these mistaken Stories may be

related to his first (and entirely un-Recognized) Big Mistake. At the age of six, before any of his other mistakes, Lionel adopted John Wayne as his primary role model, "not the actor, but the character . . . who saved stagecoaches and wagon trains from Indian attacks" (202). Lionel's father tries to dissuade him from this choice, pointing out that "we got a lot of famous men and women, too. Warriors, chiefs, councillors, diplomats, spiritual leaders, healers" (203), but young Lionel remains intractable. Here too, Lionel's initial bondage within mistaken and restrictive stories of reality—including his deliberate childhood choice to adopt the wrong story—echoes the sort of distortion that resulted from Ti-Jeanne's initial perception of the spirit world (in *Brown Girl*) as inherently dangerous and threatening, as well as her childhood decision to avoid all knowledge of her grandmother's occult practices. Nonetheless, although Lionel is Blackfoot (and therefore "Indian"), his choice of the prototypical "Cowboy" as a role model is not as poorly informed as it might initially seem. Elsewhere in the novel, after yet another Euro-colonial character has defined "Indians" as characteristically "inferior" to "Whites" (328), King asks (and answers) the following pointed question via a conversation between the mythical trickster Coyote and the novel's unnamed narrator: "'Who would want to be an Indian?' / 'Not me,' I says. / 'Not me either,' says Coyote" (329). And apparently, not Lionel either. For within a pre-existing story of Cowboys versus Indians, who would deliberately choose the losing side? Thus, quite reasonably, Lionel (like his uncle Eli before him) chooses to transform himself into what his aunt Norma characterizes as "a white man . . . as if they were something special" (30).

However, perhaps a part of the problem here is not that Lionel chose the wrong role within a particular story, but that he chose the wrong type of story—the wrong genre, as it were. That is, the genre of popular Westerns is precisely what restricts the matrix of available roles to *either* Cowboy *or* Indian. Fantasy, on the other hand, could—without the slightest generic distortion—easily accommodate the roles of "warriors, chiefs, councillors, diplomats, spiritual leaders, [or] healers," the very roles that Lionel's father recommends as viable (and implicitly preferable) Native role models. This comparison may appear facile and convenient, yet this is exactly sort of pre-existing generic compatibility that Daniel Heath Justice exploits in constructing his Native-centric epic fantasy trilogy, *The Way of Thorn and Thunder*. Not only does Justice's trilogy encompass all of the (potential) roles mentioned above, but it also explores fantasy analogies of several complex aspects of both historical and contemporary Native political, ethical, and personal struggles.<sup>143</sup> This is not to say that fantasy is the *only* generic framework that can allow for such roles, but neither is it a stretch to propose that it may be particularly amenable to such strategically rehabilitative and reconstructive portrayals. Furthermore, syncretic fantasy is precisely the subgenre of fantasy that tends to incorporate traditional secondary world fantasy tropes and elements into the *contemporary* (i.e. cognitive majoritarian, North American) world, the very world that Lionel inhabits.

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<sup>143</sup> As Justice's website puts it, "Much mainstream fantasy literature chronicles the . . . quest to bring 'civilization' to the howling wilderness" and the indigenous "savages" who live within it (Justice, *The Way*). However, Justice's trilogy uses epic fantasy to explore "another side to the story," in which indigenous people are not restricted to the simplistic roles of "Noble Savages" or "Ignoble Savages" (Justice, *The Way*) but are rather the protagonists of a quest to preserve and restore their own land, heritage, and traditions.

Nor is Lionel the only Blackfoot character held in stasis by his acceptance and internalization of simplistically oppositional, covertly mythologized White-versus-Indian stories. Where Lionel chooses the wrong Story (i.e. the role of a Hollywood cowboy), Charlie Looking Bear adopts a narrative of hard-nosed "realism" that deprives him of Story entirely. Believing own world to be not story-centric but "real," Charlie adopts and internalizes the same covert transformation of "Western" tropes (or mythologies) into "reality," if with a distinctly more cynical spin than Lionel. Thus, Charlie adopts a deliberate simulacrum of Indian-ness, cynically cashing in on his Indian identity to land himself a lucrative position as the figurehead Blackfoot lawyer in the case of *Stands Alone vs. Duplessis International Associates*. Duplessis International is fighting a legal battle against Eli Stands Alone (Lionel's uncle), who is protesting the construction of a hydroelectric dam on Blackfoot land, and the firm hired Charlie "because he was Blackfoot and Eli was Blackfoot and the combination played well in the newspapers" (99). Charlie knows, as Alberta puts it, that "the tribe isn't going to make a cent off that dam" (99).<sup>144</sup> However, he justifies keeping the job (to Alberta) by arguing that at this way at least some of the Blackfoot people (i.e. him) get to access some modicum of compensation from the company. Nonetheless, Charlie has no illusions (i.e. he is *realistic*) about his actual role in the case, since he "[doesn't] make the decisions, of course. . . . He [is] just the front, and he [knows] it" (99).

Additionally, neither Lionel nor Charlie represents the first generation

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<sup>144</sup> Alberta, a Blackfoot woman and a University professor, is dating both Lionel and Charlie, playing the two off against each other as a means of avoiding committing to either one.

within their respective families to adopt these sorts of restrictively binary stories and construct their own roles and identities within such restrictions. Rather, they are re-enacting the choices of their respective forebears, Lionel's uncle Eli and Charlie's father Portland. Eli, like Lionel, loves Westerns (in his case, novels rather than movies), and spends his life caught up in a series of White-versus-Indian stories, first trying to escape his "Indian" heritage by leaving the reserve to become an English professor<sup>145</sup> and later taking up the role of an individualist hero (a la John Wayne) in his romantic, solitary opposition to the Grand Baleen dam. Similarly, Portland, like his son Charlie, cynically cashes in on his "Indian" identity in the most superficial of ways, playing bit parts in Hollywood Westerns and thereby reproducing Hollywood stereotypes of Indian-ness. Thus, in similar ways, all four men find themselves trapped by the Stories that have come to dominate and define the "reality" of their worlds, defining themselves as either "Indian" or "not-Indian" in terms congruent with the—generically Western, cognitive majoritarian, and always already (if covertly) story-centric—popular imagination.

However, if stories can trap us, they can also liberate us, and it is always possible to tell a new story—or to retell an old one—in such a way as to escape those stories which are too statically (and restrictively) defined as "true." Indeed, when read through a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy, *Green Grass, Running*

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<sup>145</sup> In the figure of Eli, King may be slyly and self-referentially addressing the question of his own position as a "Native writer," since he too, when this novel was published, did not live on a reserve and in fact worked at the University of Guelph as a professor of Native Literature and Creative Writing. Indeed, King's "authenticity" as a Native writer has been questioned due to his own mixed cultural heritage, a point which will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

*Water*—with its explicit recognition that "there are no truths . . . only stories" (326)—may be understood as precisely the type of fantasy that Recognizes the world itself as a told tale and uses this Recognition as a strategy for directly re-telling (and liberating) the Story which is the World.<sup>146</sup> Nonetheless, King's novel does not appear particularly syncretic in the cross-cultural sense of that word. For although Jane Korkka argues that *Green Grass* "shows that cultural traditions can co-exist; no discourse need automatically be placed in a dominant position" (150), the novel as a whole—particularly in the four mythic sub-narratives—does not depict the peaceful co-existence of Native and non-Native cultures. Rather, each time "Indian" and "White" cultures collide in the mythic narratives, the "Indians" lose. Thus, while it could be argued that the novel itself is cross-culturally syncretic in its fusion of Native and non-Native narrative forms, the stories depicted within it are not.<sup>147</sup> However, this novel does depict the syncretism and reintegration of "magical" or "mythic" stories (and storytelling) with the "real" world, which *is* a prototypical characteristic of syncretic fantasy.<sup>148</sup>

Crucially, in those situations where cultures collide and interact, the gap between "imaginary" and "real" worlds becomes far more than a merely abstract metaphysical conundrum. Rather, as King puts it, "for those of us who are

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<sup>146</sup> Recall Clute's description of "Recognition II," whereby "the melodramatic gaze of the fantastic . . . [becomes], in the end, a gaze at the world itself, as it writhes beneath us" ("Canary" 220).

<sup>147</sup> Herb Wylie has argued precisely this point, exploring the potential for syncretism as implicit in the hybrid narrative structure of King's novel, and much of Wylie's reasoning resonates with my own in this chapter. However, where Wylie ultimately focuses on oppositions between Native and non-Native worldviews (arguing that a Native worldview is less inherently binaristic than a Western one), I have chosen to focus on cross-cultural parallels, particularly in terms of the self-consciously mythic storytelling structures of fantasy.

<sup>148</sup> In other words, as discussed earlier, the *syncretism* of syncretic fantasy need not be understood solely as the depicted fusion of multiple cultures but may also be understood as the process of explicitly, syncretically re-blending and fusing Story (or myth) with the "real" world.

Indians, this disjunction between reality and imagination is akin to life and death. For to be seen as 'real,' for people to 'imagine' us as Indians, we must be 'authentic'" (*Truth* 54). Indeed, this is precisely the problem that inheres in the cognitive majoritarian reification of one culture's (covertly mythological) stories as "real" while another culture's stories are dismissed as "myth." In this particular case, a problem arises when the perceived "authenticity" of a "real" Indian requires that authenticity's being licensed by externally imposed (and often mistaken) Stories, thus forcing those "Indians" who wish to be perceived as "authentic" to either conform to these external Stories of cognitive majoritarian "reality" or have their Indian-ness erased entirely. Indeed, King himself has faced repeated challenges to his own authenticity as a Native writer, since, as Korkka notes, "King's works appear highly hybridized, and so does the author himself: his background combines two European cultures and the Native American—not Native Canadian—Cherokee heritage, while his texts often evoke a Native Canadian Blackfoot setting" (144).<sup>149</sup>

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, this dilemma of authenticity appears at precisely the point where the imaginary Indian of popular culture is exposed as one half of the restrictive binary entrapping the Blackfoot characters of the realistic narrative.<sup>150</sup> Yet, as King suggests, perhaps "there are other ways of imagining the world, ways that do not depend so much on oppositions as they do on co-operations" (*Truth* 110), and perhaps his novel can be reimagined as

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<sup>149</sup> For my purposes, this question of King's "authenticity" simply highlights yet another level of syncretism implicit in his novel, namely that King's own identity and position as a writer become, in this context, explicitly syncretic, rather than restrictively or exclusively "Native."

<sup>150</sup> The other half of this binary is, of course, the mythic image of the cowboy.

articulating something other than the uni-dimensional resistance of a monolithic "Native" culture in the face of domination by a similarly monolithic "White" one. As discussed earlier, J. Edward Chamberlin's solution to this oppositional dilemma is not so much a matter of cooperation as one of explicit *recognition*. That is, Chamberlin argues that the best way to escape this dilemma is to recognize the story-based underpinnings of *all* cultural realities, prompting the further recognition that apparently contradictory stories of "reality" may be simultaneously true *in different ways*. Indeed, the four mythic sub-narratives of King's novel express just such a possibility in their representation of four differing yet apparently non-conflicting creation stories drawn from various indigenous source mythologies, all of which co-exist without any sense of competition over which one is the singularly or uniquely "true" story.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, this syncretic blending of pan-cultural materials drawn from the author's own "original" culture(s) echoes De Lint and Hopkinson's strategies of syncretically re-blending their own "original" cultural traditions as discussed earlier.

Although several critics have explored King's subversion of Western creation stories in great detail,<sup>152</sup> each of the novel's four mythic sub-narratives could also be read as a disrupted and arrested non-Western creation story. In each case, the story of a racially indeterminate female protagonist (respectively, First

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<sup>151</sup> According to Jane Flick, the protagonists of these narratives are drawn from a variety of indigenous traditions, including those of the Seneca (First Woman), the Navajo (Changing Woman, Thought Woman), and more generalized "North American Indian mythology" (Old Woman).

<sup>152</sup> At this point, such readings verge upon the level of critical commonplace in much King criticism, to the point where they are often referenced rather than developed as central arguments. For a few articles that focus on such readings at some length, see Andrews ("Reading"), Fee and Flick, Gomez-Vega, and Matchie and Larson.

Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman) is interrupted by a series of externally imposed Western-canonical stories and finally brought to a halt by the forceful redefinition (or misrecognition) of "woman" as "Indian" by armed colonial forces. The four Indian-defining utterances proceed as follows:

- "*Definitely Indians*, says one of the rangers, and the live rangers point their guns at First Woman and Ahdamn" (King, *Green Grass* 58, emphasis added).
- "Ishmael! says a short soldier with a greasy moustache. This isn't an Ishmael. *This is an Indian*" (188, emphasis added).
- "Good grief, says one of the soldiers with flowers in his hair, *another Indian*" (270, emphasis added).
- "Is that you Chingachgook? says a voice. Is that you, *my Indian friend?*" (326, emphasis added).

In every instance, the flow of the mythic story is brought to a halt by an externally imposed binary opposition between "Indians" and "Whites," and in each case a self-defined "White" character first articulates the Indian-versus-White binary within the given subnarrative. In this sense, these mythic narratives do not represent successful acts of subversion at all, but rather depict the literal disruption, arrest, and incarceration of one culture's stories by those of another. As Herb Wylie puts it, "each of the four [mythic sub-narratives] . . . attempts to explain the presence of the water through a creation story, which then goes wrong" when "figures from Western culture . . . attempt to appropriate these women within the terms of a Eurocentric Christian patriarchy" (114).

However, this externally imposed stasis proves impermanent as the protagonists of the four mythic narratives join forces, escape from their imprisonment in Fort Marion, and "keep walking until they get here" (*Green Grass* 350)—"here" being Blossom, Alberta. And while literally escaping from prison, these mythic protagonists also transform themselves into the four "old Indians" of the realistic narrative, escaping back into reality where they will once again attempt to "fix up the world" (104) by retelling its Story. Here, then, the discursive strategies that this novel shares with syncretic fantasy both empower and depict the literal escape (in the positive, Tolkienian sense)<sup>153</sup> of Story back into the World, as well as the escape of Story from simplistic binary oppositions of Native versus non-Native or Real versus not-Real. That is, framed in terms of syncretic fantasy, this aspect of the novel depicts the syncretism of formerly separated (cognitive) categories of Story and Reality, thereby modelling the syncretic reblending and reconstruction of the "real" itself. Furthermore, the implosion of the Native/non-Native binary—particularly in terms of this novel's overlap and/or compatibility with the "non-Native" discursive strategies of fantasy—forces a re-assessment of Clute's characterization of fantasy as a prototypically "Christian" form. That is, the compatibility of Clute's prototypical structures of fantasy with King's decidedly non-Christian (some might even say anti-Christian) text demonstrates by counter-example that Clute has indeed succeeded in critically decoupling his model of fantasy from its apparently

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<sup>153</sup> Recall Tolkien's argument that fantasy may model "the Escape of the Prisoner"—as opposed to "the Flight of the Deserter"—from a restrictive and impoverished reality (61)

Christian-centric roots.<sup>154</sup> Thus, a reading of King's text through (syncretic) fantasy not only exposes the text's escape from recurring (and potentially restrictive) Native/non-Native binaries but also allows fantasy itself to escape its commonly assumed association with uniquely Christian ideological frameworks.

As noted at several points throughout this dissertation, Clute and Wolfe (among others) argue that fantasy is a particularly story-centric and metafictional genre,<sup>155</sup> and related to fantasy's story-centric structure is its oft-cited tendency towards formulaic (and therefore potentially clichéd) narratives. Brian Attebery, in particular, both acknowledges and challenges this common perception in admitting that "formula fantasy can be very predictable indeed. . . . Yet to say that a book follows a formula is not to say that it is necessarily bad. A poor non-formulaic story may be far worse than a good performance of the formula" (*Strategies* 10). And in this context, perhaps one way of differentiating between clichéd and well-performed "formulaic" fantasy is to recognize that (some) formulae may be more akin to ritual than to tired cliché. With this in mind, Joanna Daxell's statement that "the repetitive nature of the [mythic] formula [in King's novel] points to the importance of the circular structure *in a Native worldview*" (101, emphasis added) resonates with Clute and Wolfe's suggestion that fantasies are also often told "in a way that permits endless retellings, endless permutations of the narrative's unbound motifs" (900). Here, the "Western" tradition of fantasy

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<sup>154</sup> Recall Clute's suggestion that, in formulating his structural definition of fantasy, he "wanted to remove fantasy as a whole from any bondage to a particular set of characters or Matter; and [he] wanted—*this proved unsuccessful*—to make fantasy into something unChristian" ("Grail" 332, emphasis added).

<sup>155</sup> Recall, for example, Clute and Wolfe's suggestion that "many fantasy texts are clearly and explicitly constructed so as to reveal the controlling presence of an underlying Story, and that the protagonists of many fantasy texts are explicitly aware that they are acting out a tale" (901).

appears to mirror, echo, or reproduce precisely the same structures of repetitive, circular, and ritual narrative that Daxell postulates as a distinctly "Native" element of King's novel.

Similarly, a comparison of Clute and Wolfe's account with Matchie and Larson's four "tribal elements" of *Green Grass, Running Water* reveals further correspondences between "Native" and "fantasy" elements within the novel. Thus, where Matchie and Larson identify the particularly "tribal elements" of King's novel as

(1) *a cyclic structure* to counter the linear one, (2) *oral tradition itself* where we hear these characters talking in often humorous but provocative ways, (3) *a trickster*, Coyote, who is lovable but fundamentally subversive, and (4) *Native myths or legends* which the mythic characters and Coyote advance to challenge typical biblical and American popular myths. (154, emphasis added)

Clute and Wolfe suggest that fantasy also

- (1) tends towards a cyclic, "infinitely retellable," or "ritual" structure,
- (2) draws heavily upon "underlying oral source[s],"
- (3) often includes various "underlier figures (the TRICKSTER, the WISE WOMAN)" as significant characters within the narrative, and
- (4) often "resembles myth" (900-901).

Finally, where Daxell identifies the four-part structure of King's novel as rooted in

Cherokee healing rituals, Clute's structural framework of "full fantasy" may also be understood as articulating a four-part literary healing ritual in which

the four parts are Wrongness/autumn, Thinning/winter, Recognition/spring, and Healing or Return/summer. Of these, Recognition is central. It is the moment at which all kinds of Thinning and amnesia begin to lift from the tale, when the protagonist discovers what story she is in, when the Land remembers its true name, and so forth. (Clute, "Canary" 220)<sup>156</sup>

Indeed, one could argue that syncretic fantasy, particularly in the moment of Recognition, is not only *about* stories, but also functions as a form of healing *for* stories that have been diverted from the path of their own proper telling. As in the case of Lionel, the healing of the novel's mythic stories hinges on their generic re-categorization (i.e. Recognition) and syncretic reconstruction as something other than cognitive majoritarian (and invisibly, continually reified) "Westerns." Thus, although the mythic stories of the "old Indians" are initially entrapped by the genre of popular Westerns, they nonetheless manage to escape back into the "real" world, where they become *both mythic and real at the same time*. And in this sense, the liberation and consequent healing of these stories could be understood as resulting from their ritual re-enactment and Recognition as (and through) the same discursive strategies that this novel shares with syncretic

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<sup>156</sup> This seasonal, fourfold structure echoes a variety of universalizing templates of human and/or literary experience (e.g. Northrop Frye, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp, etc.). However, unlike many of his precursors, Clute makes no argument for his framework's universal applicability to literature or the human psyche. Rather, Clute applies his structure more guardedly and specifically to that particular type of literature which is "fantasy," thus avoiding the pitfalls of monolithic or unwarrantedly universalized generalizations.

fantasy. This comparison is not intended to suggest that *Green Grass, Running Water* does *not* self-consciously draw upon the conventions of Cherokee ritual traditions but rather that King's text *also* and *simultaneously* (re)enacts the conventions and ritual structures of fantasy. In other words, recalling Chamberlin's distinction between riddles and charms, syncretic fantasy operates by the logic of a charm (or ritual), dramatizing the processes by which language itself (often through ritual storytelling) can quite literally change the world.<sup>157</sup>

When the old Indians enter the realistic narrative of Blossom, Alberta, they arrive as transformative Story personified, re-introducing the potential for healing and transformation into the realistic characters' static narratives of persistent blockages and disrupted flows (e.g. the blocked Grand Baleen project, blocked careers, blocked water, blocked identities, and blocked stories). As in syncretic fantasy, this re-introduction of Story into the World is no mere metaphor. Rather, Clute points out that in fantasy "the only way to understand [the] tale is to understand that everything told in it turns out, in the end, to be literally the case. . . . In the end, the fantastic is very simple: *What we see is what we get*" ("Canary" 217, emphasis in original). Appropriately then, and in congruence with syncretic fantasy prototypes, the old Indians' storytelling is not merely metaphorical or symbolic but literal, not a riddle but a charm. Thus, when the old Indians "fix" the John Wayne movie in Bill Bursum's video barn (so that

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<sup>157</sup> Recall Chamberlin's characterization of riddles and charms as setting up a tension between language and the world, such that "either language or the world has to give" (180) and charms "collapse the distinction between imagination and reality" (175). Thus, in Chamberlin's model, the successful operation of a story-based charm (which I am here equating with ritual) produces the result that "the world gives, if only a little bit" (180).

the "Indians" win), the video and all of its copies are literally changed (263-8, 299). Similarly, when they give Lionel a leather jacket that makes him look "a little like John Wayne" (242), this jacket may represent an analogue to John Wayne's in the "fixed" movie, but it is also a real jacket within the "realistic" narrative of Blossom Alberta, where it belongs to George Morningstar. And when Coyote dances and sings, the resulting rainstorm is followed by an equally real earthquake that quite literally destroys the Grand Baleen dam. In each case, this re-telling of the Story of the World provides more than mere commentary; these Stories literally change and (re)create the world anew.

However—as was noted earlier in this chapter—this syncretic integration of "magical" stories and storytelling into the "real" (i.e. cognitive majoritarian) world of the text does *not* include the explicit recognition and syncretic (re)integration of "magic" into the protagonists' respective worldviews. Thus, although Lionel participates directly in the old Indians' return to the cognitive majoritarian "real" world, he never cognitively integrates—or even for that matter notices—their underlying syncretic (or magical) nature as myth-become-real. And as a result, this novel is entirely missing the prototypically explicit struggle of syncretic fantasy protagonists to reconstruct "reality" in such a way as to incorporate a cognitive minoritarian belief in "magic" (or the spirit world) as *real*. Nonetheless, *Green Grass* shares (with some adjustments) the syncretic fantasy structures whereby, according to Watson, "the rational primary-world world-view is . . . not [shared] by the third-person narrator, who is omniscient and knows better. . . . [and] the reader is quickly made aware that the primary-world rules are

illusory, even though they are held to be true by most of the people in the world of the story" (171). That is, the first-person narrator of the novel's mythic segments, as well as the old Indians, as well as (presumably) the reader can all easily Recognize that the "magical" elements of the text are also portrayed as "real" within the text's discourse world. However, as noted above, this particular Recognition is not depicted as a key (or conscious) element of the protagonists' Storied, syncretic re-cognition of the World(s) in which they live. Rather, the key Recognitions for each of the texts' various protagonists—although they are the direct result of the old Indians and Coyote's "magical" actions—have more to do with the Recognition and syncretic reconstruction of their own identities in relation to the various (mistaken) Stories that have thus far more directly and restrictively structured their own lives and "realities."

Thus—once again in congruence with the prototypical discursive strategies of syncretic fantasy—the old Indians' (and Coyote's) retold stories provoke a moment of Recognition for each of the characters involved. Recall that, for Clute, Recognition is that

significant moment in full fantasy texts . . . when the characters in the drama begin to shed the amnesia that had been cloaking them, begin to understand that their sight had literally been *occluded* from the Real . . . they remember who they are; they remember the story that tells them; they see the Land whole, which itself begins to Return to them. ("Canary" 219, emphasis in original)

Thus Lionel, having worn his new jacket through Coyote's rainstorm, Recognizes

that the jacket (along with the role of John Wayne) is in fact restrictive and uncomfortable and returns it to the old Indians (318). Here, Lionel's experience with the jacket echoes Portland's earlier experience with his prosthetic nose, highlighting the ways in which neither the role of the Cowboy nor that of the Indian fits easily onto an actual human being. Where Lionel's jacket makes him look like a Hollywood cowboy (i.e. John Wayne), a Hollywood director once advised Portland that "he would have to wear a rubber nose" (129) if he wanted to play the role of an Indian chief, since his own nose simply wasn't "Indian" enough. However, just as Lionel feels "as if the jacket was suffocating him" and eventually discovers that it has "begun to smell . . . like old aftershave or rotting fruit" (318), so did Portland find earlier that he "couldn't breathe with the nose on," and that it "stunk, smelled like rotting potatoes" (130). Thus, where the role of the Cowboy proves restrictive for Lionel, the role of the Indian proves equally restrictive for Portland, and in each case the artificially imposed role literally stinks. Completing the circle, then, Charlie recognizes Portland as the triumphant Indian war chief in the "fixed" movie (in spite of the prosthetic nose) and witnesses his father's formerly blocked potential for heroism, a Recognition which in turn provokes Charlie to renew their broken relationship. And finally, in arguably the most profound (and literally earth-shaking) Recognition of all, Coyote's earthquake and rainstorm produce the moment at which "the Land itself remembers its true name" (Clute, "Fantasy" 220) and shrugs off the artificially imposed blockage of the Grand Baleen dam.

Each Recognition leads to some form of Healing, specifically the healing

of broken relationships and fragmented communities, whereby formerly isolated characters discover that they are in fact (and always have been) a part of a community or family. And again, these various Recognitions echo the prototypical structures of syncretic fantasy, modelling the syncretic reintegration of personal and family histories and relationships.<sup>158</sup> In Lionel's confrontation with George Morningstar, for example, Lionel joins his family in defending his sister and preserving the sacred tradition of the Sun Dance, supporting what Daxell identifies as "one of the novel's main ideas, that of Lionel coming to terms with his life in the Blackfoot community" (105). Thus, in the aftermath of the flood resulting from the Grand Baleen dam's destruction, Lionel's reunited family works together to rebuild his grandmother's destroyed cabin. Charlie, as noted above, renews his connection with his father, and—although the ultimate result of this action does not appear within the body of the novel—it seems plausible to speculate that the Healing of this broken relationship may in turn prompt Portland to Recognize (and therefore refuse) the restrictive role of the Hollywood Indian that has been suffocating him for so long.

In some ways, these moments of Healing may be seen as echoing the requisite "happy ending" of the full fantasy tale (Clute, "Fantasy" 339), yet at the same time, even the most formulaic fantasy is rarely concluded in any final sense. Rather, as Clute and Wolfe point out, "In 20th-century fantasy, a more conspicuously self-conscious attitude towards Story becomes evident," such that

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<sup>158</sup> Note, for example, that this Healing of broken relationships echoes several of Ti-Jeanne's key Recognitions in *Brown Girl*, which collectively facilitate her various Healing reconnections with her mother, the community of the Burn, and her own occult heritage in the form of her spirit-father Legba.

the protagonists may be "at first dismayed that their Story may have ended . . . and profoundly grateful when that Story begins again, and the CYCLE, blessedly, recommences" (901).<sup>159</sup> Appropriately, then—in the rebuilding of Levi's grandmother's cabin, and in the novel's closing passage, which re-starts yet another iteration of the mythic creation story that always starts, "in the beginning, there was . . . just the water" (1, 79, 88, 360)—King's novel Recognizes the need to continually return to the beginning, to the place where storytellers and audiences may once again re-imagine the Story which is the World.

In this sense, King's novel enacts most (if not quite all) of the prototypical discursive strategies of what I call syncretic fantasy, modelling a simultaneous *escape from* and *reconstruction of* culturally monolithic depictions and understandings "reality" itself. Such fantasies of the Real World model ways of re-imagining the real/unreal binary so as to "give us the confidence to reject the choice between words and the world" (Chamberlin 240) and to Recognize that "choosing between [Us and Them] is like choosing between reality and the imagination, or between being marooned on an island and drowning in the sea. Deadly, and ultimately a delusion" (239). And in this sense, a reading of *Green Grass, Running Water* through a critical heuristic syncretic fantasy not only reconfigures the persistent critical binary of Native versus non-Native texts but also exposes the potential of King's text in particular (and of syncretic fantasy in

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<sup>159</sup> Here, Clute and Wolfe refer specifically to E.R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*, which concludes in precisely this manner. The full quotation is as follows: "As it comes to a close, the heroes of E.R. EDDISON's *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922) are at first dismayed that their Story may have ended (even though they have triumphed), and profoundly grateful when that Story begins again, on the last page of the book, and the CYCLE, blessedly, recommences" (901). However, in the context of the full encyclopedia entry, this particular case should be understood as representative of a more general trend in twentieth century fantasy.

general) to articulate healing stories in a world starved for coherent and convincing narratives of hope. For perhaps we—Natives and non-Natives alike—require such fantasies of Healing "in order to recuperate a sense that stories still exist. That we still can be told" (Clute and Wolfe 900).

## Chapter Seven

### Eden Robinson: Syncretic Fantasy as Self-Construction

Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* tells the story of Lisamarie Michelle Hill, a Haisla woman from Kitimaat, BC struggling to come to terms with the realities of her life both on and off the reserve. These realities include various family tensions and traumas, the Haisla experience of European colonization, television soap operas, Elvis Presley fandom, and encounters with various otherworldly beings that only Lisa can see, such as ghosts, a tree spirit in the form of a miniature redheaded man, and B'gwus, the "wild man of the woods" (7) more commonly known as Sasquatch. Robinson's blend of realistic and otherworldly elements has led to some critical confusion around how to describe this novel in terms of genre, such that while one critic calls it a traditional quest with a "visionary ending" that celebrates "Native spiritual healing" (Castricano 147-148), others have called it a "glorious northern Gothic" (Thomas D9) or "contemporary gothic" (Cariou 36) novel. Such identifications can (and typically do) dramatically shift the ways in which this novel is summarized, synopsized, and interpreted. Indeed, *Monkey Beach* could be synopsized—entirely accurately—as a First Nations narrative, a work of contemporary realism, or a tale of magical apprenticeship.

The majority of scholarly responses to *Monkey Beach*, however, frame this novel primarily in terms of its Native-ness,<sup>160</sup> and many of these explicitly

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<sup>160</sup> See, for example, Andrews ("Native"), Appleford, Bowman-Broz, Castricano, Dobson, Howells, Hoy, and Lane.

acknowledge the difficulty of developing a critical framework that avoids the twinned risks of either essentializing or erasing Native identities in the process of analyzing this book.<sup>161</sup> To identify this novel as a Native Spiritual Quest, for example (Cariou, Castricano), risks reducing Native-ness itself to a restrictively and primarily "spiritual" identity. On the other hand, to label it a "Native Canadian gothic" (Andrews "Native") risks psychologizing, de-literalizing, or even denying the reality of the Haisla worldviews expressed within the text. Jodey Castricano, for example, argues that models rooted in contemporary theories of the Gothic evoke a deeply psychologized and distinctly Western (and therefore antithetically non-Haisla) understanding of the 'supernatural' or spirit world.<sup>162</sup> Thus, Castricano suggests that

[i]n contrast to this psychological model . . . in which the 'supernatural' is seen as an effect of 'psychological confusion' or an over-active imagination, *Monkey Beach* confronts the reader—in spite of the history of rationalisms—with the possibility of a spirit world and asks that we at least reflect upon the ontological, epistemological, and spiritual consequences of Western culture's materialist drive that has attempted to eradicate 'superstition' or 'mysticism' in the name of psychology (808).<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> See, for example, Appleford, Bowman-Broz, Dobson, Howells, and Hoy.

<sup>162</sup> Specifically, Castricano objects to Andrews' suggestions that Lisa's visions "[trace] the return of the repressed in a distinctly Native context" ("Native" 21) and that "*Monkey Beach* is a distinctly Gothic setting . . . populated by mysterious creatures whose existence in Lisa's mind reflects her psychological confusion about who she is" (19).

<sup>163</sup> Note, too, that this psychologised diagnosis of cognitive minoritarian belief systems (i.e. so-called "magical" ones) as suspect, superstitious, or phantasmal echoes the (Eurocentric) difficulties with these sorts of belief systems modelled in both *Moonheart* and *Brown Girl in the*

In this context, as Castricano puts it, "the challenge becomes how to talk about the cultural intersections of and clashes between certain European and First Nations epistemological, ontological, and spiritual paradigms" (811). Furthermore, given the persistence of these conflicting (or at least differing) paradigms, the most difficult part of this challenge may be to articulate these "intersections and clashes" without reducing cultural differences to a series of simplistically oppositional (and typically hierarchical) binaries.

Interestingly, those critics who most directly examine the central role of the spirit world in this novel (Andrews "Native," Castricano) are also the most outspoken in emphasizing the central role of Native-ness and distinctly Native worldviews within the text. This tendency is perhaps unsurprising, since (as discussed in Section 2.6 and elsewhere) the spirit world has long been excluded from cognitive majoritarian, Western conceptions of the secularized "real." However, the conflation of a real spirit world with an *essentially* Native worldview also runs the risk of assigning "magical" worldviews exclusively to Native cultures, and reading this novel through a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy provides one potentially productive way of addressing this persistent critical dilemma. First, since syncretic fantasy typically depicts the reconciliation of "real" and "spiritual" worlds through the processes of cognitive and cross-cultural syncretism, such a reading defuses the (potential) essentialism implicit in the common assumption that the mutual incomprehensibility of culturally

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*Ring*, as in Sara Kendall's struggle to accept the Otherworld as something other than a dream and Ti-Jeanne's struggle to accept her own visions as something other than a sign of incipient mental illness.

differing beliefs in the spirit world and/or "magic" must be (almost by definition) insurmountable. Furthermore, as I argue below, a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy helps to de-couple two distinct contexts of syncretism in this novel: the cultural (i.e. Native/non-Native) versus the cognitive (i.e. the ontological or real/unreal).

In this (re)reading, critical frameworks of syncretism and fantasy—as well as the combination of the two—each play a crucial role. Reading *Monkey Beach* through a critical heuristic of *syncretic* fantasy, for example, exposes and highlights the ways in which contemporary understandings of syncretism encompass the idiosyncratic re-construction of cultures and cultural worldviews at the level of the individual, rather than solely at the collective level of an entire "culture."<sup>164</sup> This exposure, in turn, accommodates the heterogeneity of Native (in this case, Haisla) identities and perspectives within this text, a heterogeneity that has thus far proven difficult to address within existing critical frameworks. Alternatively, reading this text through a lens of syncretic *fantasy* provokes a re-examination of its protagonists' syncretic reconfiguration (or Cluteian Reconciliation) of "real" versus "unreal" worlds and worldviews. Such a reading also exposes the degree to which this novel may be understood as sharing several discursive structures and strategies with *fantasy* rather than drawing solely upon Native frameworks of story and storytelling. Finally, joining these two concepts to read this novel through the lens of *syncretic fantasy* emphasizes the possibility of multiple sources for the spiritual and occult knowledge depicted within the

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<sup>164</sup> See Leopold and Jensen ("General Introduction"), Martin ("To Use 'Syncretism'"), and Munk, among others.

text, rather than solely Native ones. In each case, a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy loosens the potential restrictions of monolithic (or representative) Native-ness upon the text (and the characters within it) while simultaneously acknowledging the syncretic integration of multiple, idiosyncratic, and heterogeneous—yet nonetheless Haisla—traditions, identities, communities, and beliefs within this novel.

Lisa's family members, all of whom are Haisla, are also collectively and notably syncretic in terms of their individual identities. Thus, the family includes Christians (Uncle Geordie and Aunt Edith), non-Christians (Ma-ma-oo and Uncle Mick), Dynasty and Elvis fans (Ma-ma-oo and Uncle Mick, respectively), residential school survivors (Uncle Mick and Aunt Trudy), and secular materialists (Lisa's parents).<sup>165</sup> Likewise, varying elements of traditional Haisla knowledge are idiosyncratically (and unevenly) distributed across the family, so that Lisa's Uncle Mick, the former A.I.M. activist, can recognize certain "magical thing[s]" but doesn't know "how to handle them" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 99), while Lisa's Aunt Edith, a Christian, is also the only member of her generation who retains the knowledge of how to make oolichan grease, a traditional Haisla food (85). This heterogeneity of Haisla characters, as well as the idiosyncratic blending of Haisla and non-Haisla belief systems within each character's personal identity and worldview, may be a part of what leads Kit Dobson to suggest that

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<sup>165</sup> As Warren Cariou puts it, Lisa's parents appear "resolutely normal" and "seem determined that their children will fit into the conventional values of the non-Native world" (37). Thus, although Lisa's parents are never explicitly identified as subscribing to a particular belief system, their determined 'normalcy' implicitly aligns them with cognitive majoritarian North American culture, which is predominantly (and therefore invisibly) secular materialist.

this novel "resists representing Haisla life" (56). Dobson argues that "one result of this resistance to representation is a process of de-specification of Robinson's writing, a resistance to representing the intricacies of Haisla life that renders her work, perhaps, less culturally specific" (56).<sup>166</sup> This assessment may be correct, but only insofar as Dobson has omitted one crucial word: Robinson does not resist representing "the intricacies of Haisla life"—which would include precisely these sorts of realistically idiosyncratic variations between individual Haisla characters—but rather resists representing the intricacies of *traditional* Haisla life. In this case, however, *traditional* would have to be understood as referring specifically to what might be called orthodox Haisla spirituality, and *representation* would require detailed descriptions of *traditional* Haisla spirituality, beliefs, rituals, and stories.

By avoiding the detailed depiction of Haisla spiritual and ritual traditions as evenly distributed across a culturally homogeneous community, Robinson effectively portrays the complex, culturally heterogeneous intricacies of a contemporary Haisla community as comprising a collection of ideologically diverse (and therefore *non-representative*) Haisla characters. In doing so, not only does *Monkey Beach* avoid any implicitly prescriptive or representative description of what an "ideal" or "purely" traditional Haisla community (or identity) might look like, it also sidesteps the transgression of Haisla cultural restrictions around

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<sup>166</sup> Dobson is far from the only critic who notes (and addresses) this tendency in Robinson's work. Helen Hoy and Nora Bowman-Broz likewise argue that Robinson self-consciously resists writing *representative* Native stories or identities—even while including explicitly Native elements within her work—while Rob Appleford and Cynthia Sugars suggest that this resistance itself is one of the most powerful (and effective) aspects of Robinson's work.

the improper representation and transmission of sacred stories and rituals.<sup>167</sup> That is, Robinson must strike a delicate balance between *representation* and *transgression* of Haisla cultural and spiritual practices. As Dobson puts it,

There is a persistent "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation for a writer like Robinson: if she does act as a representative of her community, she can be damned for doing so—"someone will go fatwa" on her—but if she doesn't maintain her cultural specificity, her absorption into the colonial nation-state may take place through the process of voiding the resistant ethics and aesthetics that such specificity might be said to represent.

(56)<sup>168</sup>

Paradoxically, by avoiding certain aspects of collective representation (specifically, the direct representation of sacred Haisla stories), Robinson is able not only to avoid Haisla cultural injunctions against doing so, but also to more effectively represent the internal diversity of the Haisla community. In short, Robinson represents the Haisla community of *Monkey Beach* as deeply, heterogeneously, and idiosyncratically *syncretic*.

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<sup>167</sup> In talks and readings, Robinson often explains the specifically Haisla concept of story ownership and restrictions upon transmission of sacred Haisla knowledge. In her 2010 Kreisel lecture, for example, Robinson explained that certain Haisla stories and rituals are the property of particular families, and furthermore may only be told in the original Haisla, at specific times, places, and in particular contexts—none of which include novels written in English, which could be read by anyone, at any time, and in the wrong language ("Sasquatch"). This is why (as Dobson notes) Robinson *cannot* represent these materials without someone going "fatwa" on her.

<sup>168</sup> As Dobson explains, "The final unspeakability of Haisla life in English acts as a barrier to cross-cultural appropriation, an important limit on the novel's potential function as a sociological or ethnographic document. And with good reason: in [an] interview [with Suzanne Methot], Robinson states that she 'can't write about certain things . . . or someone will go fatwa' on her (Methot 12). While writing a novel about Haisla characters, Robinson encounters limits placed on her both by the spiritual world and her elders. These keep her from discussing certain elements of Haisla life" (Dobson 54).

Appropriately, none of the Haisla characters within this novel exists in a cultural vacuum, entirely isolated from the non-Haisla world. Furthermore, recalling Luther Martin's model of *syncretism* as an idiosyncratic cognitive process ("To Use 'Syncretism'"), any individual's personal worldview could be described as *inevitably* syncretic, whether or not that worldview is constructed within a culturally homogeneous environment.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, in such a context, the variations of material, ideological, and cultural belief-systems within Lisa's own family fit perfectly within Martin's model. Even Lisa's grandmother (Ma-ma-oo)—the family's storehouse of Haisla knowledge, history, and traditions—constantly and effortlessly negotiates multiple cultural (and cognitive) contexts in the course of her everyday life. Thus, within a mere three pages, Ma-ma-oo prepares traditional Haisla foods, compulsively talks back to the characters of her favourite television soap opera (who she says she knows aren't real, although she can see them), and teaches Lisa to speak to the dead (who she explains are entirely real and present, though they remain both invisible and inaudible) (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 77-80). Likewise, although Lisa's parents are openly skeptical of Ma-ma-oo's more traditional spiritual beliefs, both retain idiosyncratic fragments of traditional and ritual knowledge, as when Lisa's mother explains that she must "be polite and introduce [herself] to the water" of the Kitlope river—by ritually washing her face in it—so that she "can see it with

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<sup>169</sup> Of course, in contemporary models of syncretism, even the postulation of a culturally homogeneous environment is questionable, since all cultures must—and always have—interacted with other, surrounding cultures on some level, even if simply upon a basis of mutual antagonism, antipathy, or xenophobia. See, for example, Benavides, Droge, Martin ("Syncretism, Historicism"), and Leopold and Jensen ("General Introduction").

fresh eyes" (112).

Regardless of their idiosyncratically syncretic belief systems, all of Lisa's family members participate in certain traditional activities, such as travelling to Monkey Beach to gather cockles (10-17) or to the Kemano river for the oolichan run (89-123). All of these characters are from the Haisla village of Kitimaat, and all of them—in their own ways—are members of the Haisla community. On the oolichan run, various family members' differing belief systems come into conflict several times, as when Mick berates Uncle Geordie and Aunt Edith for saying grace (109-110) or Lisa's mother angrily dismisses her perception of the laughing ghosts, assuming that someone has been "telling [her] stories" (107). Yet at the same time, the entire venture is peppered with elements of specifically Haisla knowledge, traditions, and stories, not only in the case of the oolichan run itself, but also in the knowledge conveyed by Lisa's mother, such as the aforementioned instructions to "be polite and introduce yourself to the water " (112) or the story of the Stone Man (113-114). Lisa's family may not be universally "traditional" in the sense of fully embracing traditional Haisla spiritual beliefs, but *all* of them retain some degree of Haisla traditional knowledge, whether that entails a knowledge of family stories, of the spirit world, or of traditional food gathering and preparation. Thus, to suggest that Robinson's precise and detailed depictions of these aspects of the Hill family are less than specifically representative of "the intricacies of Haisla life" implies a prescriptive restriction on what may or may not qualify as constituting specifically or "authentically" Haisla knowledge. And to define Haisla identity primarily (or solely) in terms of traditional spiritual

beliefs would require defining certain Haisla people—specifically, those who no longer uphold or believe in the literal truth of these stories—as no longer *truly* Haisla.

In the context of *Monkey Beach*—and recalling King's observation that "to be seen as 'real,' for people to 'imagine' us as Indians, we must be 'authentic'" (Truth 54)—the above confusion hinges upon questions of authenticity, specifically the authenticity of the novel's representation of Haisla cultural practices. However, such disputed (or deliberately elided) authenticities are only a problem if they are considered a *required* element of the text. This sense of critical anxiety over the accurate representation of tribal practices may be linked to (some) current critical practices of Indigenous literary nationalism. Sam McKegney—himself an Indigenous literary nationalist—notes that one of the risks of literary nationalist criticism is that "literary nationalists [may] risk indicating not just what critics should do in the service of 'an ethical Native literary criticism' . . . but also what Indigenous creative writers ought to create" (30). As McKegney expands, "I worry about the inference that Indigenous texts that are themselves literary nationalist are the texts of primary value to Indigenous communities" (30). However, in Robinson's case, this becomes a twofold dilemma: not only does *Monkey Beach* resist representing certain sacred Haisla practices, stories, and beliefs (as universal) but it is also *required to do so* out of respect for those very same nation-specific practices. How, then, can this novel be evaluated in terms of an Indigeneity that it is both culturally and ethically obliged not to represent? Indeed, as noted above, Robinson's work has proven particularly

(and recurrently) difficult to evaluate through such approaches.

However, McKegney also suggests a way out of this sort of dilemma, arguing that "[r]especting Indigenous voices by *truly engaging with the cues to criticism embedded within the texts themselves* . . . is among the myriad ways of respecting and catalyzing Indigenous sovereignties" (31, emphasis added).

Interestingly, this phrasing echoes the impetus of my own attempt to develop a "collaborative" critical framework through which to address syncretic fantasy, that being the desire to respect these texts' generically conditioned goals and frameworks rather than applying a potentially ill-fitting framework at the risk of distorting (or denying) their fantasy-specific complexities. In the particular case of *Monkey Beach*, the novel's careful avoidance of homogenizing representations of Haisla culture may itself represent one of McKegney's embedded "cues to criticism" within this text. Furthermore, such cues manifest not only in the persistently idiosyncratic, character-specific syncretism of Native and non-Native worldviews but also in the explicit cognitive syncretism of spiritual and material worlds within the context of Lisa's own self-construction. Thus, where a critical investigation rooted primarily (or solely) in the text's indigeneity may risk producing a graduated hierarchy of "authentic" Haisla-ness, a critical heuristic of *syncretic fantasy* may—in this particular case—help to avoid such (implicit) hierarchies of authenticity.

Often, critics treat *Monkey Beach*'s blend of realistic and magical elements almost as if they have never before seen this sort of writing in Native (con)texts. Dobson, for example, suggests that "[t]his novel displays anxiety about how it

will be recognized as either a representative 'Native' text or as a more universal/Western novel aimed at a mainstream audience. And it encodes literary elements that allow it to be read in either register, resisting categorization—and in the process generating a fair bit of academic head-scratching" (56).<sup>170</sup> Yet the very strategies that present difficulties to reading *Monkey Beach* as a representative "Native" (or Haisla) text are precisely the discursive strategies that this novel shares with syncretic fantasy. As discussed earlier, fantasy's underlying quest structure—that of a series of obstacles confronted and overcome—provides one ideal framework through which to depict the struggle of a cognitive minoritarian protagonist (such as Lisa) to produce and maintain a cognitive minoritarian self- and world-construction that can both incorporate and differ from the surrounding cognitive majoritarian culture. That is, given the heterogeneity of the surrounding Haisla community, Lisa cannot simply *assume* her own Haisla identity as a stable or homogeneous cultural construct but must rather syncretically (*re*)*construct* her personal identity as a contemporary Haisla woman. Moreover, to successfully accomplish this task, Lisa must reinvent herself in a way that allows her to escape the role of an entirely assimilated subject of the dominant culture while simultaneously recognizing that there may well be no such thing as a "pure" (i.e. homogeneous) Haisla culture for her to

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<sup>170</sup> While I would identify this anxiety more as a product of various critics' "academic head-scratching" than an element inhering in the novel itself, this sense of curious category-confusion is nonetheless strikingly similar to initial genre-based responses to Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, where critics like Gary K. Wolfe couldn't quite decide whether the novel was best described as science fiction, fantasy, or horror (Wolfe 21).

return to.<sup>171</sup>

Lisa's progression from skepticism to belief in her own perceptions of the spirit world represents yet another embedded cue to criticism, echoing as it does Greer Watson's description of syncretic fantasy's prototypical narrative arc.<sup>172</sup> That is, in *Monkey Beach*, most of Robinson's characters—including Lisa herself—remain explicitly and persistently skeptical of Lisa's otherworldly visions and visitations. Reading through a heuristic of syncretic fantasy, this conflict between Lisa's perceptions and those of the majority of people around her is exposed as reenacting one of the subgenre's central paradigms, that being the struggle of the protagonist to come to terms with (or syncretically integrate) her perception of a cognitive minoritarian "magical" world that no one else believes to be real. In Cluteian terms, this disjunction represents a manifestation of both Wrongness and Thinning, the sense that something is clearly Wrong with Lisa's world as her formerly stable understanding of reality grows increasingly uncertain or Thin. The central question raised by this conflict—and one to which Lisa has no simple answer—is precisely where that Wrongness is rooted, in Lisa or in the world around her. According to the cognitive majoritarian world (a world of which Lisa is no longer a part) the answer is obvious. If she is perceiving spirits and otherworldly beings as real, then there must be something Wrong with her, and Lisa's magical, otherworldly perceptions are consequently pathologized and diagnosed (by the cognitive majoritarian world) as a form of mental illness. Thus,

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<sup>171</sup> Indeed, as noted at several points above, contemporary models of syncretism would argue that there is no such thing as a "pure" or "non-syncretic" culture at all.

<sup>172</sup> See Watson (171).

in *Monkey Beach*, as in syncretic fantasy, perceptions of the spirit world (or "magic") *as real* self-identify as cognitive minoritarian perspectives.

When Lisa first starts sleepwalking and seeing ghosts, her (cognitive minoritarian) grandmother expresses no surprise or skepticism, suggesting that "You don't have to be scared of things you don't understand. They're just ghosts" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 265). Lisa's (cognitive majoritarian) parents, on the other hand, assume that something must be Wrong for her to be seeing such things and therefore send her to a psychologist. During her session, Lisa witnesses an otherworldly apparition that only she can see, "its fingers [sunk] into [the psychologist's] arms, its legs wrapped around her waist as it clung to her like a baby" (272-3). Here, the text explicitly juxtaposes Lisa's perception of real ghosts with the psychological interpretation of such perceptions, as in the following exchange:

"Do you think," [Ms. Jenkins] asked me halfway through our first and last session, "that maybe these ghosts you dream about aren't really ghosts, but are your attempt to deal with death?"

"No," I said.

Her wide, blue eyes fixed on me. "Then you believe ghosts exist?"

"Yes," I said.

[The spirit] turned its bony head to study me. . . . The thing unwrapped its arms from Ms. Jenkins and drifted across the room, hovering over me. It hummed like a high tension wire. (273)

As Jodey Castricano suggests, "what we witness in this scene is . . . a powerful reminder that, in Western culture, there *really* is no contact with the dead or, for that matter, the spirit world" (804, emphasis in original). In other words, the cognitive majoritarian (i.e. "Western") perspective of the psychologist in particular and the medical profession in general simply cannot Recognize (or syncretize) the perceptions that Lisa and her grandmother understand as real.

Crucially, in this scene Lisa not only treats her perceptions of the spirit world as real but also learns precisely how (and why) she must recognize and manage other people's skepticism towards these cognitive minoritarian perceptions. That is, if she wishes to avoid pathologization, diagnosis, and institutionalization, she must tell those with power in the cognitive majoritarian world precisely what they want to hear. Ironically, the very spirit that Ms. Jenkins cannot perceive feeds Lisa the words she needs to escape the psychologist's office: "The thing bent its head, its lips near my ear. 'For attention, I guess.' . . . Words came out of my mouth, ones the thing knew Ms. Jenkins wanted to hear, but I was drowning. I yanked myself away, and the thing fled back to Ms. Jenkins. My heart trip-hammered" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 274). Here, Lisa (barely) escapes the spirit's influence,<sup>173</sup> but she also escapes the pathologized, dismissive diagnosis of her condition (as a delusion) by continuing to tell Ms. Jenkins precisely what she wants to hear: "Thank you," Lisa lies at the end of

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<sup>173</sup> Note that this particular spirit, although it may be useful in helping Lisa to escape detection, is far from benevolent. Rather, it is quite clearly characterized as dangerous and malevolent. Lisa evaluates the deep Wrongness of the creature later, at home: "I knew *it was wrong* to want the thing to feed on me again, I knew *it was bad*. But without it, the night was long and empty and endless" (275, emphasis added).

their conversation, "I feel a hundred times better" (274). This skepticism towards the spirit world is not solely limited to "Western" or non-Haisla characters, and Lisa remains acutely aware of this as well. To take the most obvious example, Lisa's Haisla parents are the ones who brought her to the psychologist in the first place, and they have consistently denied, dismissed, or (occasionally) mocked her otherworldly perceptions throughout the novel.

While Lisa has been experiencing these cognitive minoritarian perceptions all of her life, she has also learned that they are either implausible or socially unacceptable to discuss openly with most of the people around her, including the majority of her family. The novel opens, for example, with crows speaking to Lisa in Haisla after her brother's disappearance, telling her "*La'es*—Go down to the bottom of the ocean" (1). She begins to explain to her mother that "[t]hey said *la'es*. It's probably—" only to have her mother interrupt: "Clearly a sign, Lisa . . . that you need Prozac" (3, ellipses in original). Similarly, Lisa has also learned that she cannot share her visions with her father. As she puts it, "I would like to share my peculiar dreams with him. But when I bring them up, he looks at me like I've taken off my shirt and danced topless in front of him" (20). In this instance, tellingly, Lisa does not say that her father necessarily disbelieves her "peculiar dreams," only that he is extremely uncomfortable with hearing about them. Such dreams and visions—regardless of their underlying plausibility (or lack thereof)—constitute embarrassing transgressions against a contemporary, cognitive majoritarian understanding of "reality," explicit admissions of that which *should not be possible* in such a world, which is precisely why Lisa's "resolutely normal"

parents (Cariou 37) remain unwilling to acknowledge the possibility that they might be real. And this social phobia of exposure—in addition to the entirely practical fear of diagnosis and institutionalization—is precisely what Lisa, over the course of the novel, must (gradually) overcome in learning to accept her perceptions as literally real. Once again, this task reflects that of the protagonist in Watson's model of syncretic fantasy, in which "the reader"—and typically the protagonist as well—"is . . . made aware that the primary-world rules are illusory, even though they are held to be true by most people in the world of the story" (171).

Even after she has come to accept (some of) her visions as real, Lisa retains a complex skepticism towards her own perceptions. However, this skepticism itself (counterintuitively, perhaps) indicates an underlying certainty that although *some* of her perceptions may be illusory, others remain quite literally real, even if it is sometimes difficult for her to distinguish between the two. Thus, in evaluating her possibly-meaningful dreams about her missing brother Jimmy, Lisa muses that "[m]aybe dreaming about Jimmy standing on Monkey Beach is simply regret at missed opportunities. Maybe it means I'm feeling guilty about withholding secrets. It could be a death sending, but those usually happen when you're awake" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 17). Here, Lisa questions the status of this particular dream as a "death sending," but not the reality of death sendings in general. She even includes a rule of thumb reality test for such events, which is that they "usually happen when you're awake." Nor does she idealize her interactions with the spirit world, looking back with a mix of

condescension and nostalgia upon a younger self who "used to think that if [she] could talk to the spirit world, [she]'d get some answers" (17). Now, she mocks her younger self's naïve expectations: "Ha bloody ha. I wish the dead would just come out and say what they mean instead of being so passive-aggressive about the whole thing" (17). Thus, although Lisa may question the utility of her connection to the spirit world, she does not question the existence of the connection itself. However, this has not always been the case, and much of *Monkey Beach* details the long, convoluted, and difficult path that Lisa has travelled in the process of learning to syncretically integrate her own understanding of these perceptions as real, meaningful, and (occasionally) useful in a cognitive majoritarian world that would prefer to deny their existence entirely.

Throughout the novel, Lisa's gradual, syncretic integration of the spirit world into her own understanding of reality echoes the prototypical Cluteian structures of fantasy. Thus, Lisa progressively confronts the Wrongness and Thinning arising from the disjunction between her own perceptions and those of the people around her, eventually arriving at a point of Recognition, syncretic integration, and potential Healing where this disjunction is overcome. As a child, Lisa first encounters the "little, dark man with bright red hair" (19) who will continue to appear throughout her life. A sense of incipient Wrongness enters this experience when Lisa's mother dismisses the little man as a dream, although Lisa protests unselfconsciously that "he was here" (21). However, the Wrongness of this disjunction between her own perceptions and those of her mother is normalized over time as the little man's nocturnal visits gradually become, for

Lisa, "a version of the monster under the bed or the thing in the closet, a nightmare that faded with morning" (27). As Lisa explains: "The Winnie the Pooh stories end with Christopher Robin saying he's too old to play with Pooh Bear. Little Jackie Piper leaves Puff the Magic Dragon. Childhood ends and you grow up and all your imaginary friends disappear. I'd convinced myself that the little man was a dream brought on by eating dinner too late" (131-132). However, unlike a childhood nightmare or imaginary friend, the little man doesn't disappear with the onset of adulthood. Rather, as a young adult, Lisa realizes that, although "at the time, his arrivals and departures had no meaning," she now sees the "the pattern of the little man's visits" which "seems unwelcomely obvious" (27). The pattern is, indeed, quite simple, as the little man's appearance always heralds a death or a disaster of some sort, from Lisa's discovery of the dead dog in the ditch (19) to the tidal wave (21) to Uncle Mick's death (131-134) to the disappearance of her cat Alexis (222) to Ma-ma-oo's heart attack (234-235).

Although Lisa comes to recognize the little man as real on her own, only when Ma-ma-oo explains what he is (and where he comes from) does Lisa begin to understand (i.e. Recognize) his true identity, as well as the nature of her own abilities. While explaining why one must leave tobacco when harvesting *oxasuli*, Ma-ma-oo describes the "tree spirits" for whom the offering is left: "The chief trees—the biggest, strongest, oldest ones—had a spirit, a little man with red hair. Olden days, they'd lead medicine men to the best trees to make canoes" (152). Lisa nervously asks her grandmother what it would mean if someone saw such a little man, and her grandmother responds without surprise: "Ah, you have the gift,

then. Just like your mother" (153). Yet even as Ma-ma-oo confirms Lisa's "gift" of seeing into the spirit world, she cautions Lisa against experimenting with these abilities, pointing out that "there's good medicine and bad. Best not to deal with it at all if you don't know what you're doing. It's like *oxasuli*. Tricky stuff" (154).<sup>174</sup> Nonetheless, speaking *to* the dead—as Ma-ma-oo teaches Lisa to speak to her dead grandfather (78-80)—is plainly different from speaking *with* the dead, which would require a response from the spirit world. Thus, Ma-ma-oo continues to teach Lisa as many of the old Haisla stories and traditions as she can, telling her about the land of the dead (140-141), how to accept and syncretically integrate an implicitly cognitive minoritarian understanding of ghosts and spirits as a part of the natural world (78-80, 172-174), and so on. Yet in accord with her warning, Ma-ma-oo never teaches Lisa any rituals for communicating *interactively* with the spirit world. Instead, she disavows any direct knowledge of such practices, claiming that "[a]ll the people [who] knew the old ways are gone" (154). This statement, however, begs the question: If not from Ma-ma-oo, her family's storehouse of traditional Haisla spiritual knowledge, how does Lisa learn to communicate with the spirit world?<sup>175</sup>

Based upon textual evidence, the simplest possible answer to this question is that Lisa's techniques for contacting the spirit world are almost entirely self-

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<sup>174</sup> *Oxasuli* has both positive and negative aspects: it can keep away ghosts and bad spirits, alleviate arthritis, or kill a person who consumes the wrong dose (151-152). Thus, as Ma-ma-oo has explained earlier, *oxasuli* is "[p]owerful medicine. Very dangerous. It can kill you, you understand? You have to respect it" (151).

<sup>175</sup> Those critics who address the central role of the spirit world in this novel tend to assume that Lisa's knowledge of the spirit world emerges directly from Haisla traditions and, more specifically, from her grandmother. (See Castricano 802, 811; Andrews, "Native" 14.) Indeed, Rob Appleford is one of the few critics to have noted that "Even Ma-ma-oo, Lisa's mentor, gives her little concrete guidance" (92).

taught. Upon being denied occult instruction by her grandmother, Lisa persists in her determination to contact the dead. Thus, just as Lisa once taught herself to ride her bicycle through a combination of sheer determination and (potentially self-destructive) risk-taking (48-50), she decides that she will learn use these abilities, regardless of the associated risks. And in order to do so—as in Kristine Munk's description of syncretic magical practice—Lisa will have to syncretically (re)invent her own ritual, magical practice from a diverse patchwork of heterogeneous (cultural) sources. First, having "heard whispers" that Screwy Ruby—a local woman who wanders the village streets at night—"was a witch" (188), Lisa approaches her and asks to be taught the ways of witchcraft. However, like Ma-ma-oo (if rather less pleasantly), Ruby refuses, calling Lisa a "bad girl" and driving her away (189). Undeterred, upon discovering that her friend Pooch practices amateur voodoo and spirit-conjuring, Lisa borrows his *Voodoo for Beginners* book and tries a spell from the chapter entitled "To Communicate with the Restless Dead" (220-221). Her first two attempts fail, but her third produces a vision of the red-haired man, some crows, her cat Alexis, and her brother (221-222). And while Lisa misinterprets the vision, this is nonetheless one of only two points in the novel where she receives explicit instruction in occult practices, the second being the use of Pooch's Ouija board (230-232). Crucially, neither of these occult practices emerges from a traditional Haisla source, both having come from Lisa's friend Pooch, who seems to be an entirely self-taught, amateur occultist.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Pooch, like Lisa, is Haisla and is also familiar with stories of the Haisla people's legendarily powerful shamans—stories which their friend Cheese dismisses as canny and longstanding trickery on the part of the Haisla people to maintain their safety while surrounded by more

Nonetheless, regardless of their non-Haisla cultural origins, both rituals yield accurate (if misleading) results.<sup>177</sup>

Lisa, then, is not a passive recipient of her grandmother's traditional Haisla knowledge, but rather actively, syncretically (re)constructs her own understanding of the spirit world from a variety of sources, both Haisla and non-Haisla. This understanding of Lisa's syncretic self-construction as an occult practitioner not only explains the source of Lisa's specifically occult knowledge, but also helps to explain the origins of the novel's three third-person lessons in "Contacting the dead" (139, 179-180, 212).<sup>178</sup> Although these sections appear to represent Lisa's personal knowledge of the spirit world, the source of this knowledge remains entirely unexplained. However, the directive, instructional tone of these "lessons" echoes the (probable) instructional tone of Pooch's *Voodoo for Beginners* book, which Lisa has consulted at least once and possibly several times. And while this knowledge could theoretically emerge from unrecorded conversations between Lisa and her grandmother, none of the lessons contain any specifically Haisla cultural referents. Rather, the referents and metaphors given within the lessons seem almost determinedly non-specific (or at least non-Haisla) in terms of their cultural contexts, referring to "daydreams, prayers or obsessing" as forms of

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powerful and populous indigenous nations (219-221). However, the novel gives no indication that Pooch has received any more training in such practices than Lisa, aside from Pooch's ambiguous three word protestation of "My gran says—" (220), which Cheese cuts off by mocking the various voodoo trappings liberally strewn around his bedroom.

<sup>177</sup>In the first instance, Lisa assumes that the vision predicts harm to her brother, when in fact her cat Alexis is the one about to disappear. In the second instance, the Ouija board's two-word message (which at the time appears nonsensical) could be interpreted as correctly (if vaguely) exposing Josh's connection to child abuse, both as abused and as abuser: "Josh. Bed" (231).

<sup>178</sup>These lessons, respectively, begin with the phrases "Contacting the dead, lesson one" (139), "Contacting the dead, lesson two" (179), and "Contacting the dead, lesson three" (212).

"trances" (139), asserting the power of names and naming as "the fundamental principle of magic everywhere" (180), and describing the "trick of concentration" required to see ghosts as "very Zen" (212). As well, the repeated descriptions of a trance state as a point somewhere halfway between sleeping and waking (139, 212) echo Lisa's experience of falling asleep the first time she explicitly attempts to contact the dead through the methods outlined Pooch's book (221). And finally, given Ma-ma-oo's earlier explicit warning against Lisa's attempting to contact the spirit world through occult means, it seems far more likely that these lessons are drawn from Pooch's voodoo book rather than from Ma-ma-oo's spiritual instruction.

Nonetheless, the moment when Lisa explicitly rejects her one Haisla-specific connection to the spirit world is precisely the moment when, in Cluteian terms, the Thinning of her world begins to escalate. Having just been raped by Cheese, Lisa banishes the little red-haired man in retaliation for his not warning her of the impending attack (259). Immediately following this, the spirit world begins to impinge upon the material one more directly as Lisa begins to hear voices offering to "hurt him for you" in exchange for an offering of "meat" (261-262). In terms of syncretic fantasy, this represents a crisis of Thinning, in this case a moment when the material world's Wrongness becomes irrefutable and the formerly veiled disjunction between the spirit and material worlds becomes impossible for Lisa to ignore. She begins to see and hear ghosts everywhere and often finds herself sleepwalking and losing track of the difference between the

spirit and material worlds.<sup>179</sup> Lisa tries to ignore the suddenly-irrepressible spirit world, but when her grandmother dies without warning, she blames herself, reasoning that "If I had listened to my gift instead of ignoring it, I could have saved her" (294). This process of Thinning continues to escalate as Lisa escapes to Vancouver, where she lives on the inheritance from her grandmother and escapes into an endless stream of drunken parties (296-297). Finally, however, Lisa reaches a pivotal moment of Recognition, starting with a particularly intense morning-after lecture from her cousin Tab, who—as it turns out—is dead.

This extended moment of Recognition begins with Tab's lecture and progresses through a surreal mixture of visions, not-quite-coincidental encounters, and elliptical conversations to culminate in the moment when Lisa sees a b'gwus on the road home to Kitimaat (297-316). As Tab lectures Lisa, Lisa dismisses her cousin's angry recriminations as irrelevant until the moment that Tab's ghost explains how she "just got bumped off by a couple of boozehound rednecks," orders Lisa to "get [her] act together and go home," and then disappears "as if she had never been there" (301). Here, Lisa's Recognition begins with a deep ambivalence as she realizes that "[n]o matter which way I looked at it, I'd either pickled my brain or my brain was finally clear" (304). Remaining uncertain which of these conclusions is correct, Lisa tries to confirm her vision, which in turn leads to meeting her estranged friend Frank, who just happens to be driving back to Kitimaat for Pooch's funeral (304-312).<sup>180</sup> Thus, without ever having confirmed

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<sup>179</sup> This, too, is the moment mentioned above when Lisa's parents become concerned for her well-being and take her to see the psychologist, Ms. Jenkins (272-273).

<sup>180</sup> This is also when Lisa first discovers that Pooch has committed suicide (311), just as his father

Tab's death, Lisa finds herself following her cousin's orders and driving Frank's car back to Kitimaat when she sees a b'gwus on the road.

As usual, and in true cognitive minoritarian fashion, Lisa is the only one to see the b'gwus, and also as usual she chooses to tell no one about the sighting. However, she does comment—regardless of the lack of any proof or corroborating evidence—that "[a]s I drove away, I felt deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world" (315-316). This, then, this is precisely the moment when Lisa Recognizes, syncretically integrates, and begins to reconcile her otherworldly perceptions with her experience of the more conventionally "real" world. Here, as in the syncretic fantasy prototype (and unlike *Green Grass*), Healing hinges upon the syncretic (re)integration of the protagonist's cognitive minoritarian perceptions of "magic" into his or her understanding of what constitutes the "real" world. That is, unlike magical realism, syncretic fantasy typically (and explicitly) identifies such perceptions as unusual (i.e. "magical"), requiring the protagonist to syncretically reconcile such perceptions with more cognitive majoritarian understandings of "reality." Accordingly, in this case, not only does Lisa recognize the b'gwus as a "magical thing," but for the first time, she explicitly identifies this magical thing as "living in the world" rather than as a potential figment of her own imagination. By contrast, in earlier instances, Lisa has typically treated spirits and visions as real in the (often surreal) moment of their appearance, but she habitually retracts or loses this certainty once the moment passes. In this case, however, Lisa never

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did before him. Once again, as in the case of her grandmother, she confronts this death with no forewarning.

gives any indication of doubting her own perception. Rather, she simply chooses not to tell anyone.

Thus, Lisa's extended moment of Recognition—concluding with the b'gwus encounter—is also the moment when she achieves some degree of (personal) Healing as she finally begins to treat her own otherworldly perceptions as real rather than (potential) symptoms of her own insanity. Thus, when Frank tells Lisa that he saw Pooch the day that he shot himself, Lisa nonchalantly explains that "[t]hat's a death sending . . . It's nothing to worry about. He probably just wanted to say goodbye" (313). Furthermore, it seems particularly appropriate for a b'gwus-sighting to signal Lisa's reconciliation (or reintegration) of the spiritual and material aspects of her own syncretic worldview. The figure of the b'gwus represents a being caught between worlds—human and animal, traditional and contemporary, Haisla and non-Haisla—and this persistent liminality parallels Lisa's own position within the various worlds and cultures that she inhabits. Not only is Lisa, like the b'gwus, sometimes characterized as a "monster,"<sup>181</sup> but her own identity also spans both mass-culture and traditional frameworks.

As Rob Appleford notes, the b'gwus is both "a ubiquitous presence in West Coast First Nations mythology and a co-opted sign in settler culture," and *Monkey Beach* explicitly portrays both aspects of this figure, allowing "the reader to see the *b'gwus* as another example of popular culture" (i.e. the well known sasquatch or bigfoot image) while also depicting it as "associated with Haisla

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<sup>181</sup> Lisa earns this affectionate nickname from her uncle Mick, who—after Frank's mother has called Lisa a "monster" for biting her son in a fight—turns it into a compliment, telling her that "you are my favourite monster in the whole world" (67).

cultural values, spiritual power, and real terror" (88). Thus, the b'gwus appears in the novel both as an "image . . . used to sell beer . . . a laid-back kind of guy, lounging in mountaintops in patio chairs, cracking open a frosty one" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 317) and a figure in Ma-ma-oo's traditional "old stories" (211). The b'gwus, like Lisa, is both a culturally and cognitively syncretic being, spanning several cultural contexts while at the same time remaining one of the "magical things" that—in spite of the cognitive majoritarian erasure of "magic" from "reality"—nonetheless remains "living in the world," not only as an iconic figure but as a real, material being. And in Lisa's moment of Recognition described above, this parallel is further emphasized by her alternating use of both the traditional Haisla term (*b'gwus*) and the more colloquial, cognitive majoritarian one (*sasquatch*) to describe the figure she sees on the road (315).<sup>182</sup>

If there is a moment of prototypical Cluteian Healing in this novel, it lies in Lisa's successful reconciliation of her own syncretically reconstructed (Haisla) identity and worldview with the contemporary cognitive majoritarian world, a reconciliation that ultimately results in her own return and reintegration into the Haisla community of Kitimaat. However, this Healing remains partial in the sense that although Lisa's personal identity and worldview have been Healed to some degree, the larger communities of her family and village (and world) remain deeply wounded and fragmented. Thus, while Lisa's return to her family and community reflects what Clute and Kaveney call the "dominant mood of closure"

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<sup>182</sup> The specific usages in the scene are as follows, and appear within three lines of one another: "I peered into the trees, listening to the bushes snap as the *sasquatch* made his getaway. / 'What's wrong?' Frank muttered, rubbing his eyes. / For a moment, I considered sharing my *b'gwus* sighting with him. But then I decided that I didn't want to sound cracked" (315, emphasis added).

and "return" in syncretic fantasy (225), her brother Jimmy in particular remains damaged by his shattered dreams of Olympic glory as well as the revelation of his girlfriend's abuse at the hands of her uncle Josh. Indeed, the entire novel is framed by Jimmy's disappearance and (possible) death. In *Monkey Beach*, then, Healing is at best a personal triumph and does not necessarily guarantee the required "happy ending" one might expect in syncretic fantasy. Rather, where King's *Green Grass, Running Water* incorporates the structures of syncretic fantasy to depict the escape (and subsequent Healing) of Native identities and stories from externally imposed restrictions and stereotypes, *Monkey Beach* depicts the more individualized syncretic reintegration, reconciliation, and reconstruction of one woman's (Lisa's) Haisla identity within the contemporary, cognitive majoritarian world.

Furthermore, in *Monkey Beach* (again unlike *Green Grass*), this syncretism is *both cognitive and cross-cultural* in the sense of incorporating elements of both Native and non-Native worldviews into the syncretic (re)construction of a New World. Thus, Lisa's story is not only that of a young woman negotiating multiple and fragmented worldviews but is also that of a young woman actively and syncretically (re)creating a world (and worldview) in which she, as a "Haisla woman," can exist. Nonetheless, while Lisa's syncretic self-construction produces the potential for personal Healing, this potential remains ambiguous and unresolved at the novel's conclusion. Lisa, having gone to Monkey Beach in the course of searching for her missing brother, encounters instead a collection of spirits with whom she bargains for information as to

Jimmy's whereabouts. She gives them (her own) blood, and in return they grant her an inconclusive vision of Jimmy's having leapt into the sea from Josh's sinking seiner but still swimming, "executing the strokes he's trained all his life to perfect" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 370). Accusing the spirits of cheating her, Lisa tries to leave, falls into the water herself, and begins to drown but is saved by her brother—who may at this point be anything from a ghost to a vision to a hallucination—who shoves her back towards the surface (370-373). Swimming back to shore, she has an elaborate vision of the land of the dead, her Ma-ma-oo, and Mick, and she hears the dead singing as she lies collapsed on the beach, still half in and half out of the water as the novel ends (373-374).

In this sense, *Monkey Beach* stops just short of the paradigmatic resolution of fantasy's narrative arc in a moment of Healing, an irresolution which in turn reflects the tenuous nature of Lisa's own cognitive minoritarian self-construction. That is, Lisa may have syncretically reconciled her own perceptions and identity with the contemporary world around her, but this world remains a cognitive majoritarian one, and the struggle to maintain a cognitive minoritarian perspective within such a context may (in this context) never be fully resolved. Thus, in this case, the Tolkienian "escape of the prisoner" (Tolkien 61) from a restrictive and malformed "reality" remains ambiguous, tenuous, and held *in potentia*, rather than fully realized. Lisa may survive, rescued by the speedboat that she hears in the distance, or she may already have entered the land of the dead, which would explain the spirits of her own dead that she now sees onshore. And this ambiguity itself reflects just one way that Robinson's novel—while sharing many of the

paradigmatic strategies and structures of syncretic fantasy—also differs from and renovates these structures. Indeed, as noted above, while both King and Robinson's novels share many structural elements and strategies with syncretic fantasy, neither shares all of them, and this issue will be addressed in more detail in the conclusion of this study.

## **Conclusion: Connections and Speculations**

### **Connections: Healing Stories, Syncretic Identities**

Neither *Green Grass, Running Water* nor *Monkey Beach* was published as fantasy, nor have critics generally identified these novels as anything other than some form of Native literature, however qualified or "contingent" (Appleford) that identification may be. However, as seen in the preceding chapters, both of these novels prove strikingly amenable to a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy and share many of the prototypical characteristics, structures, and discursive strategies of the subgenre. Indeed, reading these novels through a lens of syncretic fantasy addresses some of the most persistent critical difficulties and elisions in their analysis, particularly in terms of the recurring ambivalence of Native identity-construction and the processes of (re)integrating magic, spirits, and mythic stories into the contemporary world. As noted above, such readings reflect back on conventional understandings of fantasy itself as an inherently "Christian" or "Western" genre, since neither of these novels is particularly Christian, in spite of their consistent reproduction of what John Clute has identified as its prototypically Christian underpinnings ("Grail" 332). Additionally, a detailed comparison of these two novels with Charles De Lint's *Moonheart* and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* reveals striking parallels in the content, structure, and discursive strategies of these four works.

Both *Moonheart* and *Green Grass, Running Water*, for example, depict the collision and syncretic reintegration of Story and History, which in turn leads to the escape of certain (Native) Stories back into the World and, more

specifically, to the revelation (and potential healing) of aspects of Canadian colonial history that have long been repressed, dismissed, or distorted in more cognitive majoritarian accounts. In *Moonheart*, the most privileged of the novel's Euro-Canadian protagonists (the Tamsons) are forced to confront their own ancestral culpability for a history of colonialism that is not confined solely to the past but has ongoing, concrete implications in the contemporary world. In this sense, then, *Moonheart* (like *Green Grass*) depicts the escape of Native stories (in this case repressed histories) back into the world. Furthermore—and again, much like the old Indians in *Green Grass*—this escape of Story back into the world is paralleled by two more literal crossings between the world of Story and the contemporary, cognitive majoritarian world: Taliesin's crossing over into Ottawa (a figure of Story escaping into the contemporary world) and Kieran's crossing into the Otherworld (a figure from the contemporary world escaping into the world of Story).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that all of the Native characters in *Moonheart* remain in an isolated Otherworld, entirely cut off from the contemporary, material, cognitive majoritarian world. Thus, in *Moonheart*, while European and Euro-Canadian characters such as Taliesin and Kieran may leave or enter the world of Story (i.e. the Otherworld) via Tamson House, and may even learn from Native mentors in that world, this boundary is (apparently) only physically permeable to non-Native characters. *Green Grass*, *Running Water*, by contrast, hinges on the escape of Native stories and characters from their former bondage to Western, cognitive majoritarian stereotypes and restrictions, which in

turn allows these stories and characters to escape back into the world. Thus, the four "old Indians" escape from the capture of their mythic stories by Western paradigms, and in turn begin to "fix up the world"—specifically, the Blackfoot community of Blossom, Alberta—by retelling its story. In this case, the narrative focus shifts from a Euro-Canadian to a more Native-centric perspective.

Nonetheless, as in De Lint's novel, the prototypical discursive strategies of syncretic fantasy again function both to *expose* and to *correct* formerly repressed or hidden stories of Native peoples and identities in (implicitly cognitive majoritarian) North American contexts.

In Cluteian terms and in both of these texts, the Wrongness and Thinning resulting from incomplete and/or distorted histories (or rather, Stories) of European colonization are first Recognized and then (at least partially) Healed in these novels' respective conclusions. In *Moonheart* this Healing is that of a fragmented Euro-Canadian history (and collective psyche) in the syncretic re-integration of Native perspectives, histories, and knowledge into the contemporary Euro-Canadian world. *Green Grass*, on the other hand, focuses more on the syncretic reintegration of Story and History than the syncretic blending of Native and non-Native perspectives and/or histories, but the result—again congruent with the prototypical strategies of (syncretic) fantasy—nonetheless produces moments of both Recognition and Healing for the novel's Blackfoot protagonists. Furthermore, in both novels this Healing does not signal the end of the story in question, but rather a resolution of this particular cycle, which in turn will lead to the possibility of new, ongoing, and cyclical stories of

Recognition and renewal. Thus, in *Moonheart*, Sara starts a new life with Taliesin in Ottawa, and Kieran begins a new life with Ha'kan'ta in the Otherworld.

Likewise, in *Green Grass*, Eli and his family rebuild his grandmother's cabin, Portland departs to find and reunite with his father, and the mythic story-cycle begins once again, as it always does, with the repetition of the phrase "in the beginning, there was . . . just the water" (1, 79, 88, 360).

*Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Monkey Beach*, by contrast, employ the discursive strategies of syncretic fantasy not (primarily) to uncover repressed histories but to dramatize the cognitive and cross-culturally syncretic re-construction, reinvention, and reintegration of cognitive minoritarian identities and magical/spiritual knowledge-systems in(to) the contemporary, cognitive majoritarian world. Specifically, these novels depict the re-construction of the protagonists' personal identities—and, consequently, the worlds in which they live—through explicitly syncretic cognitive *processes*. In each case, these protagonists first struggle against the internalized cognitive majoritarian conviction that their perceptions of the spirit world must represent a form of incipient insanity. Later, having integrated these otherworldly perceptions into their respective worldviews, these characters struggle to syncretically rebuild (or reinvent) the formerly repressed (or lost) cultural and sub-cultural knowledge that will allow them to use their unique abilities and perceptions to heal not only themselves, but the families, communities, and worlds in which they live.

Both of these protagonists (Ti-Jeanne and Lisa) live in a world where the traditional knowledge of their respective grandmothers has been largely repressed

or ignored, and their challenge is to re-construct their own identities as *both* partaking of traditional knowledge systems *and* participating in the contemporary, cognitive majoritarian world. In *Brown Girl*, Ti-Jeanne has internalized the "Western" dismissal of Gros-Jeanne's traditional knowledge in preference of more "modern" (i.e. Western) science and medicine. However, in the process of discovering her own (formerly hidden) family history, she syncretically reintegrates these elements of her heritage—overcoming her own deep fears of madness and "obeah" in the process—in order to confront her grandfather Rudy and bring healing not only to her family, but also to the larger community of the Burn. In *Monkey Beach*, the repression (or loss) of Haisla spiritual and occult knowledge is both less explicitly visible and more difficult to recover. Like Ti-Jeanne, Lisa struggles to recreate her own identity in a world that—in its manifestation of "impossible" spirits and occult perceptions—seems to have gone mad. However, with several members of her immediate family openly questioning (and pathologizing) her perceptions, Lisa has less direct support and guidance in confronting her otherworldly visions, and at several points she comes much closer than Ti-Jeanne to convincing herself that she has indeed lost her mind. Unlike Ti-Jeanne, Lisa has no access to a mentor who can teach her how to harness her personal connection to the spirit world, nor does Lisa's Ma-ma-oo play the socially recognized role of a spiritual leader in her community that Ti-Jeanne's Mami does in hers. Furthermore, although Lisa's Ma-ma-oo has some abstract knowledge of the spirit world, unlike Ti-Jeanne's Mami she does not share her granddaughter's abilities or have any training in how to use such abilities safely.

Thus, where Ti-Jeanne simply needs to syncretically *adapt* the magical rituals that she has already seen her grandmother perform, Lisa must syncretically *(re)invent* her own rituals and practices for contacting the spirit world, cobbling together a fragmentary patchwork of abstract, second hand knowledge from a variety of sources. And where Ti-Jeanne's Mami explicitly encourages her to learn the ways of the spirit world, Lisa's Ma-ma-oo explicitly discourages her from experimenting with her abilities. Lisa cannot simply *rediscover* the stories of her own heritage—since she knows them only in fragments and in the wrong language—rather, she must syncretically *reinvent* her own story and identity, effectively storying both herself and the blended spiritual/material world that only she perceives (back) into existence. This disjunction may help to explain why, by the conclusion of *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Ti-Jeanne's syncretic learning processes have expanded to influence even the world outside of the Burn, while *Monkey Beach* depicts no such optimistic, world-changing results. In *Brown Girl*, the processes of syncretic fantasy empower and depict the (potential) reintegration of formerly dismissed traditional (and occult) knowledge and practices into the contemporary world. *Monkey Beach* on the other hand, depicts no such syncretic reconstruction or transformation of the larger cognitive majoritarian world, and it seems it seems that the best Lisa can hope for is the personally syncretic (yet always partial) integration of her own perpetually cognitive minoritarian Recognition of the magical world she now inhabits into a largely unchanged external world.

Interestingly, too, the recurring critical confusion around *Monkey Beach's*

generic identification echoes the earlier, similar confusion around *Brown Girl's* genre.<sup>183</sup> And while both Hopkinson and Robinson have explicitly commented upon their respective genre-specific influences,<sup>184</sup> at least a part of this confusion may arise from these novels' portrayal of "monsters" and the consequent evocation of 'horror' or 'gothic' tropes. Both of these novels self-consciously play with the idea of the "monstrous" as a means of addressing the ways in which their underlying cultural frameworks have often been dubbed as such by disapproving, Eurocentric cultural traditions. This sort of correlation is precisely what leads Jennifer Andrews to suggest, in her discussion of *Monkey Beach* as a "Native Canadian gothic," that "Robinson's text writes back to a Canadian Gothic tradition in which Natives are marginalized, romanticized, or entirely absent, creating a space for Native cultural revitalization that forcefully critiques the traditional association of Aboriginals with what is monstrous" ("Native" 21-22).<sup>185</sup> However, I would press Andrews' argument further to point out that these novels' complication of *monstrosity* need not (and indeed should not) be understood as implying that the cultural and spiritual traditions portrayed in these novels do not *contain* "monsters" or the possibility of "evil" in the more classical, colloquial

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<sup>183</sup> That is, as noted earlier, where *Brown Girl* has been called "a racy amalgam of dystopia, futuristic technology, supernatural horror and witchcraft, generational romance, mythic quest story, and trickster tale" (Collier 444), *Monkey Beach* has been called everything from "Native Canadian gothic" (Andrews "Native") to a "dreamlike spiritual quest" (Cariou), and identified as generally "resisting categorization" in such a way as to provoke "a fair bit of academic head-scratching" (Dobson 56). For further comments on generic mixing in Hopkinson's work, see McGregory (3), Michlitsch (19), and Wolfe (qtd. in Michlitsch 18). Likewise, for further comments on the difficulty of pinning down Robinson's text to a single, simple category, see Bowman-Broz (137) and Cariou (36).

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, Rutledge (589) and Berry (329, 333, 337).

<sup>185</sup> Specifically, Andrews argues that "[m]onster,' through Lisamarie, becomes an empowering term, and 'the haunted wilderness' becomes a source of cultural knowledge" ("Native" 22).

senses of these words. Rather, although these protagonists' difficulty in distinguishing *between* the (actually) monstrous and (potentially) healing elements of their own cultural traditions lies primarily in their (internalized) cognitive majoritarian suspicion that these (magical, occult, and spiritual) traditions *themselves* may be monstrous or threatening, the escape from such monolithically reductive perspectives depends not upon the universal (i.e. monolithic) approval of *all* aspects of these traditions but upon a clearer understanding of the complex moral heterogeneities inherent in each one.

Indeed, one of the central challenges for both Ti-Jeanne and Lisa is precisely this: to distinguish between the truly "monstrous" (in the sense of dangerous) aspects of the spirit world and those with the potential to produce positive, healing effects. Thus, in both novels, what may initially appear to be a "monster" is never simply or simplistically monstrous. Rather, Ti-Jeanne's apparently monstrous Jab-Jab is eventually revealed as an aspect of Eshu, her "spirit father" (Hopkinson, *Brown Girl* 224-225), while Rudy's murderous duppy is also the enslaved spirit of Ti-Jeanne's lost mother, who helps her daughter (insofar as she can) to defeat Rudy. Similarly, Lisa herself is explicitly identified as a "monster," but affectionately so, and the figure of the b'gwus is characterized as *both* monstrous *and* a "magical thing" (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 316). This persistent heterogeneity of the spirit world is precisely what leads Lisa's grandmother to characterize it as containing both ghosts—which "you don't have to be scared of" (265)—and dangerous, unpredictable spirits who "think different from the living" (153), such that it's "[b]est not to deal with [the spirit world] at all

if you don't know what you're doing" (154). And this ambiguity—in which the spirit world is *neither* innately "good" *nor* characteristically "evil"—appears in both novels, so that the very same spirit worlds that contain ancestors, spirit guides, and healing ritual magic also incorporate Rudy's nefarious, unethical uses of "obeah" (*Brown Girl*) and various unpredictable and malevolent spirits demanding psychic and/or blood sacrifices (*Monkey Beach*).

In spite of these similarities, *Brown Girl* and *Monkey Beach* differ significantly in their expression of the "happy ending" associated with fantasy's prototypical structures. Thus, where *Brown Girl* provides an explicitly consolatory ending, in which Rudy is defeated and Ti-Jeanne has successfully (re)integrated her connection with the spirit world into her own role both within her family and the community of the Burn, the potential for healing in *Monkey Beach*'s closing scene is much more tenuous, uncertain, and open-ended. A reading of the closing scene as depicting Lisa's death, for example, would seem to cut off the final Healing associated with fantasy's prototypical structures, undermining "the structural completeness of fantasy" to resolve, instead, into what Attebery calls "the truncated story-forms of absurdism or horror" (*Strategies* 15). *Brown Girl* may blur genres by incorporating elements and tropes drawn from science fiction and horror, but the novel ultimately resolves towards the prototypical Healing conclusion of fantasy. *Monkey Beach*, by contrast, remains eternally unresolved, blurring horror and fantasy by hovering indefinitely in the ambiguous space between the two. This contrast implies that Lisa's self-construction and potential for healing are, at best, distinctly more tenuous than

those of Ti-Jeanne. Indeed, as noted above, this perception is reinforced by *Brown Girl's* optimistic depiction of the potential for change in the outside, cognitive majoritarian world (e.g. Uttley's literal change of heart), a possibility that remains entirely unrepresented in *Monkey Beach*. Nonetheless, even in the ambiguous final scene, the two possible conclusions to Lisa's narrative are that she may survive or that she may join her ancestors in the afterlife. And in either case, some sense of (partial) healing remains—whether in this life or the next. Consequently, in *Monkey Beach*, Lisa's personal journey concludes in healing, even though the larger question of whether or not such healing can also be syncretically (re)integrated into the outside (cognitive majoritarian) world remains ultimately unresolved.

In all four of these novels, then, syncretic fantasy depicts the (more or less successful) recuperation and syncretic reintegration of repressed, suppressed, or lost histories, stories, and worldviews into the contemporary cognitive majoritarian world. Additionally, all of these stories depict the reintegration of (cognitive minoritarian) "magic" and spiritual worlds into the material world, and this syncretic reintegration always produces some form of healing or corrective for lost Stories of history and identity (or certain elements thereof). As Clute and Kaveney note, in syncretic fantasy, "[w]hether the outcome is choice between values or their reconciliation, *the dominant mood of closure is almost always in some sense a return*" (225, emphasis added).<sup>186</sup> In the case of *Moonheart* and

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<sup>186</sup> Technically, Clute and Kaveney are describing what they call "contemporary fantasy," but here, as elsewhere, my own term of syncretic fantasy remains sufficiently congruent to treat the two as virtually synonymous.

*Green Grass, Running Water*, this return is that of Story (back) into the world. Here, the dominant mood is one of healing, encompassing a corrective for (and syncretic reintegration of) cultural Stories that have been repressed, entrapped, or otherwise deflected from the path of their proper telling.

*Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Monkey Beach*, on the other hand, depict the explicitly syncretic, cognitive and cross-cultural (re)invention of repressed, distorted, or (partially) lost cultural and personal identities, particularly in terms of their syncretically reconstructed connections to the "magical" or spiritual world. By the end of these novels, both Ti-Jeanne and Lisa have lost their taproot connections to the past and "original" traditions (i.e. their grandmothers), and therefore cannot simply reclaim or rediscover their lost stories and traditions. However, they do retain fragments and elements of these beliefs and traditions, from which—in conjunction with their own personal, direct connections to the spirit world—they can stitch together and syncretically reinvent their own contemporary identities and spiritual practices, which are neither "traditional" nor "contemporary," but a creatively syncretic blend of the two. This, then, is not so much a *return* as an explicitly syncretic *reinvention* of (partially) lost cultural traditions, worldviews, and practices. Nonetheless, in all four novels, these syncretic (re)constructions provide crucial tools for imagining the (potential) survival of cognitive minoritarian identities in a persistently cognitive majoritarian world.

### Speculations: Texts, Contexts, and Expansions

Although this dissertation has focussed primarily on cultural aspects of syncretic fantasy's cognitive and cross-cultural blending, the cognitive mechanisms of syncretism have a much broader potential scope than the solely "ethnic." Rather, syncretic fantasy also has a recurring tendency to address (through depiction) the potential fusion of subculturally differing and/or colloquially opposed categories of knowledge.<sup>187</sup> Similarly, although syncretic worldviews *may* emerge from the reconciliation of cognitive minoritarian ethnic or cultural perspectives with cognitive majoritarian ones, ethnic and cultural perspectives are not the *only* cognitive minoritarian viewpoints available for blending via literary and (sub)cultural syncretism. As noted at several points throughout this dissertation—although in the interests of clarity and concision, I have avoided using Fauconnier and Turner's terminology—syncretism may also be understood more broadly as encompassing the syncretic *conceptual blending* of formerly distinct (or incompatible) concepts and categories beyond the (solely) "cultural" and may also be used in the construction of entirely novel *intracultural* perspectives.<sup>188</sup> One such "novel" concept, for example, would be the "invention" of zero, whereby "the symbol 0 was [initially] used by the Alexandrian Greeks to denote the absence of a number, but the 'absence of a number' became a full number, able to participate in addition, subtraction, and multiplication, in the

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<sup>187</sup> By "colloquially opposed," I mean categories that are colloquially (i.e. commonly) opposed within mainstream, Eurocentric, cognitive majoritarian frameworks and worldviews.

<sup>188</sup> Recall, for example, Fauconnier and Turner's suggestion that a "culture" itself functions in many ways as a "bubble chamber for evolving candidate [conceptual] blends, testing them, discarding or cultivating them, and promoting and disseminating some of them" (321).

blends developed by Hindu mathematicians in the seventh century A.D" (Fauconnier and Turner 244). Indeed, Fauconnier and Turner argue that "the invention of zero is a signal case" of the role of conceptual blending in the history of mathematics (242).<sup>189</sup>

Furthermore, in Fauconnier and Turner's model, "[m]any blends are not only possible but also so compelling that they come to represent, mentally, a new reality, in culture, action, and science" (21). In this sense, for example, the invention and eventual acceptance of complex (or "imaginary") numbers as an uncontested aspect of contemporary mathematics may be understood (or revealed) as the result of a lengthy—and at times contentious—process of *intracultural* conceptual blending.<sup>190</sup> Here, the invention of new blends represents a non-trivial task, since "[f]inding a blend for which [a] culture has no previous recipe can involve considerable amounts of unconscious cognitive exploration" (73). Thus, even new intraculturally syncretic blends that seem (retroactively) intuitive often

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<sup>189</sup> Specifically, according to Fauconnier and Turner, "the history of the development of numbers is a history of reconstruing the number system so that we see 'gaps' in it that are themselves reconstrued as numbers on their own. The numbers 0, 1, 2, 3, . . . were reconstrued as having 'gaps' between them, and these gaps were reconstrued as fractions like one-half. The fractions were in turn reconstrued as having gaps between them, and these gaps were reconstrued as irrational and transcendental numbers. The same pattern holds for the invention of negative and complex numbers" (242, ellipses in original). Thus, Fauconnier and Turner argue that "[t]he history of mathematics shows that the concept of number has been repeatedly revised by creating blends in which we have two (or more) inputs—one with numbers of some kind, the other with elements of some kind" (242) and proceed to work through a more detailed exploration of these examples of conceptual blending throughout the history of mathematics (242-245), further noting that "once we have the blend and reify it, we can adopt the view that the previous conception of number was 'missing' several numbers that were 'there' but not yet 'discovered'" (244).

<sup>190</sup> In this case, complex numbers first appeared "in the formulas of sixteenth-century mathematicians who had correctly formulated operations on these numbers" (Fauconnier and Turner 270). However, "it took roughly three centuries for mathematicians to reach [the] point" at which the concept of complex numbers became "an object of conscious study in mathematics" (274). Furthermore, the original inventors of this concept "felt that such numbers were 'useless,' 'sophistic,' 'impossible,' and 'imaginary'" (270), while during the intervening three centuries before these numbers were accepted as "real," various prominent mathematicians, including Descartes, Leibniz, and Euler, dismissed them as "impossible," if nonetheless occasionally useful (270).

require a great deal of hidden cognitive labour to develop, while "using the formal prompts provided by culture to reconstruct such a blend once it has been found is much easier" (73). In this sense, syncretic fantasy—particularly in its modelling and exposure of syncretic blending processes—represents one forum in which authors (and readers) can *consciously* experiment with this sort of creative unpacking and re-blending of various cultural (and subcultural) elements into new configurations, thereby inventing, in Fauconnier and Turner's words, "a new reality."

To complete the full arc of this study, then, would require two further steps not included within the current scope of this dissertation: (1) an examination of non-ethnically-rooted yet nonetheless syncretic fantasy, and (2) a more in-depth examination of the links between cognitive theories of conceptual blending and the mechanisms of syncretic fantasy. In the first case, this would entail the examination of fantasy texts that syncretize subcultural (yet ethnically non-specific) perspectives with cognitive majoritarian ones, particularly queer-centric and occult-influenced syncretic fantasies.<sup>191</sup> In a Canadian context, for example, Tanya Huff's *The Magic Emporium*<sup>192</sup> and Candas Jane Dorsey's *Black Wine*<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> I say "particularly" simply because there are so many of these texts available for study. I will here provide just one prominent example of each, both of which could be supplemented by many, many more. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for example, incorporates recurring and prominent queer-centric tropes and structures, as Jes Battis argues in his extended critical study and exploration of "queer families" in this television series (*Blood Families* 6). Similarly—at least, according to its author—Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* draws upon actual, contemporary occult practices in its syncretic reimagining of the Arthurian mythos (Bradley "Thoughts").

<sup>192</sup> *The Magic Emporium* depicts an ancient not-quite-human family of occult beings for whom consensual incest is the norm of their (admittedly hidden and secret) subculture. To a lesser extent, Huff's *Gate of Darkness*, *Circle of Light* also incorporates scenarios of same-sex attraction, specifically highlighting—and explicitly dismissing as unnecessarily anxious—the discomfort of a nominally straight male character upon finding himself for the first (and only) time sexually attracted to another man.

would provide ideal texts through which to explore the dynamics of queer-centric syncretic fantasy, while Sean Stewart's *The Night Watch* and Dorsey's *Black Wine* challenge the magic/science dichotomy by depicting the (con)fusion of "magical" (or occult) perspectives with more conventionally "scientific" ones.<sup>194</sup> In the second case, exploring the links between conceptual blending and syncretic fantasy would require a closer examination of the mechanisms of conceptual blending and how certain syncretic fantasies reconfigure these normally unconscious processes as explicit elements of their plots, character-development, and world-building. Here again, Dorsey's *Black Wine* provides an ideal Canadian instance for study, with its explicit and sophisticated use of metafiction not to undermine the novel's internal verisimilitude but rather to both demonstrate and explore the underlying *uses* of fiction (and storytelling) in the syncretic (re)creation and psychic reintegration of the protagonist's formerly fragmented and persistently heterogeneous identities.<sup>195</sup>

Expanding outwards from the current project would also require a more explicit engagement with the fact that fantasy, as a popular genre, is always a moving target. That is, although this dissertation has discussed the prototypical

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<sup>193</sup> Dorsey's protagonist drifts through several relationships at different points of her quest (in several differing national, cultural, and class contexts), including a same-sex partnership, a heterosexual marriage, a group marriage, and several other configurations of sexual relationship, variously monogamous or non-monogamous, coercive or consensual. In many cases (though not all), these configurations are understood as "normal" by the cultures in which they occur, and the protagonist—via her own position of (cross)cultural transience—cannot help but be explicitly aware of these context-based differences.

<sup>194</sup> Indeed, one of the emerging tropes of newer, post-Buffy urban fantasy (discussed in more detail below), includes the common fusion or combination of science and magic in contemporary urban settings.

<sup>195</sup> Recall Attebery's comments on the specialized flavour of metafiction in fantasy, whereby "fantasy can be self-referential without being self-destructive; artificial without being arch" (*Strategies* 53).

characteristics of syncretic fantasy as a (relatively) stable construct, these prototypes do not represent abstract, immutable *laws* or *rules* of the subgenre, since shifts in popular consumption and readerly expectations may always produce corresponding shifts in the underlying subgeneric prototypes themselves.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, such a shift may be currently underway in the post-Buffy version of "urban fantasy,"<sup>197</sup> insofar as the term *urban fantasy* itself—which once referred to novels and stories similar to Charles De Lint's early work—appears to have shifted.<sup>198</sup> That is, urban fantasy may now refer not (only) to the prototypes explored in this dissertation but also to a fluid mix of tropes drawn from a variety of sources, such as the immensely popular "paranormal romance" subgenre as well as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* influenced television series.<sup>199</sup> This newer manifestation of urban fantasy typically features not the struggle of a magically naïve protagonist to come to terms with a previously hidden magical world but rather takes as its protagonists more jaded inhabitants of a magical underworld that coexists and overlaps with contemporary cognitive majoritarian "reality" while simultaneously remaining almost entirely hidden from the uninitiated (and therefore comparatively naïve) inhabitants of the cognitive majoritarian world.

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<sup>196</sup> Recall Attebery (13-14), Fenkl (IV), and Lacey (133).

<sup>197</sup> I use "post-Buffy" here as a convenient shorthand to refer to the time period following the airing of Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), a television series that has produced an immense and ongoing impact upon current conventions of (syncretic) fantasy readership, viewership, and storytelling.

<sup>198</sup> Recall Clute ("City" 19-25), De Lint ("Mythic" 73), and Hartwell (4).

<sup>199</sup> Recall, for example, David G. Hartwell's observation that "[u]rban fantasy has enjoyed an especially rapid growth since the turn of the millennium in novel form, especially in the subcategory of the paranormal romance. It is a major part of contemporary fantasy publishing today" (4).

In these stories, entire societies of werewolves, vampires, magicians, spirits, and so on exist in parallel with—and yet apart from—everyday society.<sup>200</sup> Similarly, paranormal detectives, "Occult Special Investigations" units,<sup>201</sup> and various other agents of occult law-enforcement abound in narratives that often draw heavily on the conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction. Thus, the sophisticated and cynical (i.e. hard-boiled) protagonists of these stories often evince a hard-nosed realism, where the *real* encompasses a world filled with magic and magical beings, and the hidden, occult aspects of this reality take on a role usually filled by the criminal underworld. This relatively new—or at least newly dominant in terms of sales and popularity—flavour of urban fantasy remains syncretic in the broad sense of blending magical (cognitive minoritarian) and non-magical (cognitive majoritarian) worlds into a single narrative, yet the central focus often differs significantly from the syncretic fantasy prototypes explored in this dissertation. Indeed, given the popularity of this new form, syncretic fantasy prototypes—like the term urban fantasy itself—may be in the process of shifting to a new paradigm. Alternatively, this new paradigm may represent a new subgenre entirely, well on its way to eclipsing the former one by virtue of its combination of extreme popularity and overlapping content.<sup>202</sup> Only time will tell how the genre as a whole may shift and reconfigure itself in

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<sup>200</sup> John Clute uses the term "wainscot societies" or simply "wainscots" to describe these sorts of "invisible or undetected societies living in the interstices of the dominant world" ("Wainscots" 991).

<sup>201</sup> This particular term is taken from Jes Battis's *OSI* novels, as discussed in more detail below.

<sup>202</sup> Recall Fenkl's observation that "if [texts] become successful to the degree that they engender imitations or tributes to themselves, or, if they spark a movement which results in like-minded works, then they are no longer truly interstitial, having spawned their own genre, subgenre, or even form" (IV).

response to these new subgeneric prototypes.

In the meantime, however, further research into the connections between the prototypes of syncretic fantasy explored above and the origins and mechanisms of these "new" paradigms of urban fantasy could provide further insights into the fantasy genre.<sup>203</sup> Canadian examples of this emerging paradigm abound, including Kelley Armstrong's *Otherworld* and *Darkness Rising* series;<sup>204</sup> Tanya Huff's *Blood Books* and *Smoke and Shadows* series, as well as some of her stand-alone novels,<sup>205</sup> and Jes Batts's *OSI* novels.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, a study of Tanya Huff's work in particular would be interesting in terms of its progression through (and inclusion of) several subgeneric paradigms,<sup>207</sup> ranging from the reflection of a De Lintian aesthetic<sup>208</sup> to a participation in the vampires-among-us tropes of the late 90s and early 2000s<sup>209</sup> to her current work in the post-Buffy vein of contemporary urban fantasy.<sup>210</sup> This "progression," however, is neither strictly chronological nor simply reflective of the trends of the time period in which any

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<sup>203</sup> I use the word "new" advisedly here, recalling Laurence Steven's use of "new fantasy" as a subgeneric identifier for De Lint's work—which, while not necessarily obsolete, nonetheless sounds slightly odd when used twenty-seven years after *Moonheart's* initial publication.

<sup>204</sup> Armstrong's *Otherworld* series consists of eleven books so far, from *Bitten* (2001) to *Waking the Witch* (2010), while her *Darkest Powers* YA series contains three (*The Summoning* 2008, *The Awakening* 2009, and *The Reckoning* 2010). New books in both of these series are slated for publication in 2011.

<sup>205</sup> Huff's *Blood Books* series consists of six books, from *Blood Price* (1991) to *Blood Bank* (1997), the *Smoke and Shadows* series of three (*Smoke and Shadows* 2004, *Smoke and Mirrors* 2005, *Smoke and Ashes* 2006), and *The Magic Emporium* was published in 2010, with a sequel expected in 2011.

<sup>206</sup> Here, *OSI* stands for *Occult Special Investigations*, a not-so-covert riff on the title of the popular *CSI* television series. Batts's series consists (so far) of three published novels, with one forthcoming: *Night Child* (2008), *A Flash of Hex* (2009), *Inhuman Resources* (2010), and *Infernal Affairs* (2011, forthcoming).

<sup>207</sup> It should be noted that I have not yet had the opportunity to read all of these novels, so the categorizations given below should be taken as tentative.

<sup>208</sup> See *Gate of Darkness*, *Circle of Light* (1989), and the *Keeper's Chronicles* series (1998-2001).

<sup>209</sup> See Huff's *Blood Books* (1991-1997), *Keeper's Chronicles* series (1998-2001), and *Smoke and Shadows* series (2004-2006).

<sup>210</sup> See *The Magic Emporium* (2010) and its forthcoming sequel.

given book or story was published. Rather, Huff's novels and stories draw upon several (often multiple) subgeneric tropes at various points in her publishing career, so that many of her stories could be read through multiple and/or blended subgeneric prototypes.

In broader terms, Canadian contexts for syncretic fantasy could be explored in several directions, ranging from author studies of prominent Canadian syncretic fantasists<sup>211</sup> to further explorations of Canadian fantasy-like texts through a critical heuristic of syncretic fantasy.<sup>212</sup> Similarly, in non-print media, Canadian television series such as *Blood Ties* (2007)<sup>213</sup> and *Sanctuary* (2007-present)<sup>214</sup> could be explored in terms of their own recurring tropes as well as in comparison to similar American series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *True Blood*, or *Supernatural*, to name only a few. Such investigations, in turn, could lead to the broader question of national traditions in syncretic fantasy, what these are, and how they might (or might not) differ across national boundaries. In this case, further studies could include broader bibliographic and historical surveys of the Canadian fantasy tradition, investigations of potential affinities between the broader Canadian fantasy tradition and syncretic fantasy in particular, and

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<sup>211</sup> Just a few possible examples would include Charles De Lint, Nalo Hopkinson, and Sean Stewart. Guy Gavriel Kay's secondary world and historical fantasies could also be considered as "syncretic" in many senses, especially when understood in relation to his more visibly syncretic contemporary fantasy novel, *Ysabel* (2007).

<sup>212</sup> *Green Grass*, *Running Water* and *Monkey Beach*, for example, are likely not the only Canadian literary novels that could benefit from such analysis, just as First Nations writers not the only ones publishing such fantasy-like novels through non-fantasy literary avenues. Although developing a comprehensive list would require further research, Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand* springs to mind as one potential example.

<sup>213</sup> *Blood Ties* was a relatively short-lived Canadian television series, created by Peter Mohan and based on Tanya Huff's *Blood Books*.

<sup>214</sup> *Sanctuary* was created by Damian Kindler, initially aired as a web series in 2007, and was later picked up and produced as a television series for the Syfy channel in 2008.

explorations of non-Canadian syncretic fantasy, whether in comparison to Canadian texts and traditions or as stand-alone critical studies.

In light of the above, the potential range of topics for further investigation of both Canadian and non-Canadian syncretic fantasy appears virtually limitless. However, my own work thus far has focussed—and will likely continue to focus—upon specifically Canadian instances and contexts of the subgenre for two main reasons. First, such a focus strategically limits a potentially limitless field of investigation, with the entirely practical result of generating a feasible scope for further research. Second, many Canadian texts—whether coincidentally or for reasons as yet unclear—seem to fit particularly well within a critical paradigm of syncretic fantasy. Nonetheless, my own primary interest lies in investigating the cognitive mechanisms and aesthetic manifestations of Canadian syncretic fantasy, where the question of these texts' Canadian-ness remains a secondary (though potentially interesting) concern. Thus, although the Canadian context of these investigations fairly begs comparison to Canadian histories of multiculturalism, regionalism, and the ongoing struggle to imagine a Canadian national identity,<sup>215</sup> I am (for now) content to leave such explicit investigations of Canadian-ness to those more critically inclined towards historical, national, and material criticism.

More generally, both as an aesthetic strategy and a critical heuristic, syncretic fantasy represents a unique response to the twinned problems of *representation* and *objectivity*. Neither naïvely representative (i.e. realistic) nor single-mindedly deconstructive (i.e. anti-realistic), this type of fantasy is about the

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<sup>215</sup> Indeed, the attempt to imagine (or create) such collective Canadian identities could itself be understood in several senses as a form of syncretic fantasy.

collapse *and subsequent reconstitution* of the "real" as a consciously recognized, storied, and explicitly subjectivized construct. Faced with the problem of a recurring and possibly ineradicable human non-objectivity (i.e. subjectivity), it seems to me that writers and critics have a choice between two possible responses. First, as in several threads of late 20<sup>th</sup> (and early 21<sup>st</sup>) century literature and critical thought, one can strive to defamiliarize, estrange, or otherwise eliminate the "illusion" of the (liberal) human(ist) subject, thereby attempting to embrace or instantiate some form of post-human, post-subjective engagement with *objective* reality. This, however, feels (to me) like an attempt to transcend human subjectivity itself, a goal which may or may not be a possible or desirable, although the critical and literary experiments resulting from the attempt have been (and continue to be) productively challenging and fascinating in their own right.<sup>216</sup> The second response would be to (provisionally) accept the "illusion" of the self as an inescapable and possibly even productive element of distinctly human realities—at least until and unless a productively non-psychotic post-human subject(ivity) arrives or is discovered.<sup>217</sup> The choice between these two responses, then, becomes a choice between attempting to manufacture and inhabit

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<sup>216</sup> Some of the potential difficulties and/or dangers implicit in this sort of attempt are aptly dramatized by Scott Bakker's *Neuropath* (2008). In this Canadian science fiction novel, all emotions and ego-driven, sentimental reasoning are neuro-surgically stripped away from human subjects to produce "neuropaths," human organisms no longer hampered by the ephemeral "illusions" of conventional morality, empathy, or even subjectivity. However, as a direct consequence of this process, these subjects become not only supremely effective covert operatives—unhampered by emotional responses or inhibitions of any kind—but also compulsive serial killers, textbook examples of the term "psychopath." Interestingly, Bakker's bestselling epic fantasy trilogy (*The Prince of Nothing*) features similar themes playing out through the (inverted) quest narrative of a similarly post-human, post-ethical, and possibly psychopathic protagonist.

<sup>217</sup> Note that these two responses need not be understood solely in opposition to one another. Rather, as in many of the discussions above, they may also be understood as *complementary* or simply *differing* options. Nonetheless, syncretic fantasy tends to embrace the latter option rather than the former.

a post-human subjectivity (effectively pursuing a myth of post-human transcendence) or choosing to recognize, understand, and (provisionally) accept the (current) cognitive limits of distinctly human subjectivities—which remain, nonetheless, diverse and potentially infinite in variation.<sup>218</sup>

Fantasy, as becomes apparent when viewed in this context, typically embraces the latter option. That is, fantasy is not content with simply deconstructing or pulling the world apart but consistently insists on putting the world back together again. Indeed, this sort of *putting back together* reflects the genre's prototypical narrative arc, the Cluteian urge towards Healing a broken or Thinned world. Syncretic fantasy, in particular, plays with the potentially infinite configurations of human consciousness (both individual and collective) to imagine explicitly subjunctive (i.e. what-if) possibilities for ethical yet heterogeneous networks of constructed subjectivities. That these narratives appear to strive towards specifically *ethical* subjectivities may be a result of pairing fantasy's prototypical urge towards Healing with syncretic fantasy's parallel urge towards reconciliation. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of syncretic fantasy's depicted worlds (and worldviews) is assured by the subgenre's consistent adoption and representation of cognitive minoritarian perspectives, which *by definition* require the concurrent presence of contrasting cognitive majoritarian counter-perspectives through which to define themselves. Such cognitive world-rebuilding

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<sup>218</sup> In such a model, the potential configurations of human subjectivity become a bounded yet infinite set in much the same sense as the mathematical sets of integers or rational numbers are both infinite (i.e. encompassing an infinite number of members) yet bounded (i.e. neither encompasses irrational or imaginary numbers). Similarly, any given language—such as, for example, Arabic, French, or English—could be understood as encompassing this sort of bounded infinite set, capable of infinitely generative (re)iteration, yet nonetheless bounded in the sense of excluding (certain portions of) other languages with differing grammars and lexicons.

experiments entail no guarantees of success, yet they do actively construct the *possibility* of (re)integrating such heterogeneous subjectivities into contemporary, cognitive majoritarian worlds and worldviews. And in this sense, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, syncretic fantasy implicitly recognizes the *possibility* that the subjective "realities" we inhabit may be deeply and even ineradicably story-centric (i.e. imaginary) while nonetheless twinning this recognition with the prototypical fantasy urge towards Healing the fractured (or Thinned) network of stories which is the world.

In such a context, objectivity may be a myth, but subjectivity is not, and an acceptance of this premise as an underlying assumption of syncretic fantasy may be precisely what allows for the subjective reconstruction of the Self (and Other) *as fantasy*. That is, syncretic fantasy consistently and explicitly dramatizes the reconstruction and syncretic reintegration of multiple, *cognitive minoritarian* Selves—that is, of *Others*, or the *Them* of a cognitive majoritarian Us/Them binary—through the mechanisms of fantasy and storytelling. As an implicit element of its prototypical discursive strategies, syncretic fantasy both models and echoes J. Edward Chamberlin's suggestion that "[w]e need to understand that it is in the act of believing in these stories and ceremonies rather than in the particular belief itself that we come together, and that this act of believing can provide the common ground across cultures that we long for" (224). In this sense, the explicit representation of both Other and Self (and reality) *as fantasy* (or as story) represents one of the central strategies of syncretic fantasy—a strategy which in turn reinvigorates the everyday by highlighting the wondrous strangeness that

suffuses not only these fantastic narratives but everyday "reality" itself.

Consequently, learning to accept and participate in the wondrous Otherness of syncretic fantasy may lead readers to Recognize that their own realities may also be the product of precisely such wondrous constructs, prone to revision, retelling, and reconfiguration through a potentially infinite variation of viewpoints and stories—stories which are themselves neither subjective nor objective, neither real nor unreal, but *possible*.

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