

Beyond Generic Hybridity

Nalo Hopkinson and the Politics of Science Fiction

It has become commonplace to encounter the term “hybrid” in scholarly discussions of Nalo Hopkinson’s fiction. Critics widely broadcast Hopkinson as a writer whose work can be read through the context of hybridized genres. The genres that critics have seen as merged within Hopkinson’s writing fall largely within the “speculative fiction” umbrella term: science fiction, fantasy, magic realism, fabulist fiction, and dystopian and utopian literatures. Generally, the merging scholars that articulate is reasonable; Hopkinson is a prolific writer, and her numerous short stories and novels have conceivably run the gamut of genres, such that her oeuvre indeed combines various literary forms. Yet, confronting each of her works individually, we see that this understandable focus on generic hybridity has some politically charged consequences, and that there are troubling, if subtle, assumptions undergirding the way scholarship has regarded Hopkinson’s writing. Such scholarship generally refuses to see her texts as residing squarely in the realm of science fiction, and reads them instead as hybrid forms of science fiction. This generic classification requires interrogation because many of Hopkinson’s works, in fact, include much content that would situate the texts comfortably within the science fiction genre. That this content is frequently passed over in scholarly dialogues suggests the presence of underlying assumptions about the kind of textual universe that is considered viably science fiction. In an effort to elucidate these politics of genre, I will first describe my understanding of generic hybridity and address what the concept seems to afford in the context of science fiction. I will then explain how previous scholars have centralized

generic hybridity in reading Hopkinson's works. I argue that the consequences of this centralization, this hesitancy to view Hopkinson's writing as science fiction, are that such canonization judgments ultimately keep science fiction from becoming more epistemologically varied; this means that, for example, white, Western worldviews continue to predominate ideologically in science fiction even while texts featuring other worldviews could just as easily be welcomed according to the genre's conventional criteria. I will then focus on Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998)—redressing the significance of its overlooked technoscientific components—and argue that the novel's heart transplant storyline can be read as a commentary on the politics of genre I scrutinize in this study. Lastly, I will address the proposals of other scholars who seek to relieve these fraught politics through new genres, and will counter that any productive transformation might best occur within the form and title of science fiction.

Hybridity has long been a central, though much-debated, concept in postcolonial studies. Hybridity has been seen, at times, as a productive rejection of essentialist notions of identity and of binary logic in the context of colonizer-colonized relations. It has likewise been theorized as an embracing of the politically resistant possibilities of living in the realm of "both/and"—living in the "'in-between' spaces" (1) and "the interstices" (2), as Homi K. Bhabha names them. However, there has also been skepticism about the term, with scholars such as Robert J. C. Young cautioning that postcolonial theory should not rely on a term whose origins lie in racist discourses that hinge on, for example, latent colonial desires for miscegenation. While the definitions and types of hybridity (cultural, racial, linguistic, literary, etc.) vary vastly across disciplines and according to scholar, my use of the concept here is strictly tied to genre. Thus, I use "generic hybridity" to describe texts that are seen to blend elements of two or more literary/artistic genres. This generic hybridity can either produce a new genre or subgenre—as in Lee Skallerup's articulation of magical dystopias, which blend magical elements with dystopian literature—or it may just recognize that a work culls elements from multiple genres, without the subsequent claim that a new genre manifests from that mixing.

Thinking about genre through hybridity admittedly seems appropriate within the nexus of science fiction and postcolonial scholarship. After all, as scholars have demonstrated, science fiction's historical reliance on Western notions of reason and knowledge have "divided the genre into a fantastic continuum that . . . excludes fantasy, women, and people of color" (Barr xv).

The very terminology of the genre—*science fiction*—professes authoritatively that the futures imagined within it are legitimate, rational, provable. This focus on legitimacy is upheld by many scholars—Darko Suvin, for example, whose perspective will be explored later in this paper—but also, frequently, by writers themselves, such as popular Canadian science fiction author Robert J. Sawyer. Sawyer announces that “[b]y ‘science fiction,’ [he] mean[s] the real thing: stories that *reasonably* extrapolate from *known* science; stories that might *plausibly* happen” (12, emphasis mine). The generic confines writers and scholars establish demonstrate how science fiction can shape the conceptual boundaries of the future by structurally designating which futures are scientific or plausible. Jessica Langer suggests that Canadian science fiction, in particular, has “erased . . . from its possible futures” (*Postcolonialism* 45) those minority communities and writers who do not fit Westernized generic criteria. This erasure points to why using concepts of generic hybridity to study the ways writers move through the boundaries of the genre does seem to make sense. As Langer tells us, “[r]adical hybridity” can pave the way for “radical inclusion” (*Postcolonialism* 126).

It is no surprise, then, given the affordances of hybridity, that many have relied on it as a means to articulate perspectives on the writings of Jamaica-born, Toronto-based Nalo Hopkinson. A scan of some titles on Hopkinson’s work quickly demonstrates the conceptual sway of hybridity on discussions of genre in her fiction: Gordon Collier’s “Spaceship Creole: Nalo Hopkinson, Canadian-Caribbean Fabulist Fiction, and Linguistic/Cultural Syncretism”; Jessica Langer’s “The Shapes of Dystopia: Boundaries, Hybridity and the Politics of Power”; Ruby S. Ramraj’s “Nalo Hopkinson: Transcending Genre Boundaries”; Catherine Ramsdell’s “Nalo Hopkinson and the Reinvention of Science Fiction”; and Lee Skallerup’s “Re-Evaluating Suvin: *Brown Girl in the Ring* as Effective Magical Dystopia.” The articles themselves mirror the focus on generic hybridity signalled by their titles. For Skallerup, this hybridity manifests through the ways *Brown Girl* “challenges the perceived norms of both dystopia and science fiction” (67) and “explores and questions the relationship between utopia and dystopia” (73), though the critic suggests the novel generally “fall[s] more readily into the category magic realism” (69). Collier expresses that *Brown Girl* is “a racy generic amalgam of dystopia, futuristic technology, supernatural horror and witchcraft, generational romance, mythic quest story, and trickster tale” (444), and he praises Hopkinson’s “clever syncretization of the generic features of science fiction and dystopia with the operational fabric of Caribbean folk culture” in *Brown*

Girl and *Midnight Robber* (2000) (455). Langer, meanwhile, is one of the few critics who admits that “[r]eading Hopkinson’s text as science fiction,” more conventionally speaking, “is appropriate” (“The Shapes” 174); even still, in her subsequently published *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011), Langer summarizes that “[i]n a sense, all postcolonial science fiction—indeed, all postcolonial cultural production—is about hybridity” (125). Ramraj labels *Brown Girl* as first “fantasy and horror” (135), and then as part of “the science fiction genre” (136), suggesting that she is hesitant to locate Hopkinson’s writing within one genre. On the same note, Ramsdell finds Hopkinson’s writing “hard to classify,” a combination of “[s]cience fiction, fantasy and postcolonial Caribbean-Canadian literature” (155).

As we can see, Hopkinson’s texts are frequently interpreted by scholars as *hybridizing* science fiction rather than *contributing to* or politically and radically *forming part of* science fiction.¹ Her works are rarely treated as fully realized, entirely admissible contributions to science fiction, conventionally understood, and this treatment has consequences. As Sherryl Vint notes, “the act of labeling certain texts ‘science fiction,’ and hence shaping the genre to particular forms and ends, is also an act that produces the genre’s communities of practice” (7). In other words, generic classification can shape the actual readerships that engage with bodies of texts. This classification process also influences the formation of what Brian Attebery and Veronica Hollinger call the “sf megatext”: “a kind of continually expanding archive of shared images, situations, plots, characters, settings, and themes generated across a multiplicity of media” (vii). The political dimension of the sf megatext seems to be what critics let into it and what they exclude from it via processes of canonization; the danger of the megatext is that it will simply become another space in which Western notions of science and knowledge will dominate, hindering the ability of science fiction texts that do not share the same epistemological foundation to take up space within and thus form the archive, thereby barring those texts from shaping readerships, as Vint would add. That Hopkinson’s work is most frequently considered only within the “science fiction *and . . .*” category, as if naming her texts simply “science fiction” might be unjustifiable, means that the ideological transformations her writing could foster within the megatext do not manifest. Another problem is that because few scholars use specific or theoretically contextualized articulations of hybridity to discuss genre and Hopkinson’s fiction, the claims about Hopkinson’s generic hybridity run the risk of being a bit broad and perhaps even superficial; it is easy to call a

text generically hybrid when we are working with a de-contextualized usage of the term because almost any entity—genre, body, community—can be seen as “composed of . . . diverse elements” (“Hybrid” n. pag.). There is also the danger that reducing complex works to the signifier hybrid ascribes to them an easy narrative, particularly in terms of interpreting works through patterns of genre. My critique thus urges that Hopkinson scholarship be reframed. We need to widen the focus on hybridity and recover the *science fiction* from Hopkinson’s work.

Hopkinson’s first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, is set in a near-future world wildly different and yet, at times, eerily indistinguishable from our own. The novel follows the life of Ti-Jeanne, a young Afro-Caribbean Canadian woman, newly a mother, who is gifted with capital-S “Sight,” the ability to see spiritual visions. She lives in the Burn, what is left of downtown Toronto after the city’s economic collapse and the resulting Riots have spurred a white flight that leaves Toronto’s disordered core to the multicultural underprivileged. Ti-Jeanne lives with her grandmother, Gros-Jeanne or “Mami,” who is a Caribbean “seer woman” (36) who “serve[s] the spirits and . . . heal[s] the living” through mixed Afro-Caribbean spiritual rituals (59). The lives of Ti-Jeanne and Gros-Jeanne are complicated by Tony, Ti-Jeanne’s ex-boyfriend and the father of her child, whose involvement with the novel’s central antagonist propels the plot. Rudy, the villain, is the head druglord and ruler of the Burn. He holds significant power over the personal and professional dealings of many citizens in Hopkinson’s core Toronto. Like Gros-Jeanne, who is incidentally his former wife, Rudy has spiritual command, though he uses it for self-interested purposes rather than for healing.

Brown Girl is marketed as fantasy, according to the back cover of the 2012 Grand Central edition, and is read by scholars as generically hybrid. Yet, the novel includes numerous elements that locate it quite straightforwardly within the traditional bounds of science fiction. These elements primarily take the form of what leading science fiction scholar Darko Suvin has famously called “*novums*.” In Suvin’s articulation, a *novum* is “an important deviation from the author’s norm of reality” (36). In science fiction, *novums* typically take the shape of new objects, events, practices, or social structures. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. explains them, they are “the radically new inventions, discoveries, or social relations around which otherwise familiar fictional elements are reorganized in a cogent, historically plausible way” (47). Traditionally, the presence of *novums* is the core criterion guiding whether a text is given entry into the canon of science fiction. For Suvin, “the validation of the [*novum*]

by scientifically methodical cognition into which the reader is inexorably led is the *sufficient* condition for SF” (37). Skallerup has called for a re-evaluation of Suvin’s core concepts in light of the fact that many texts which would before rely on technological *novums* or “defamiliarizers” might now use “magical aspects . . . [to] defamiliarize[] the reader” (71). Thus, Skallerup shows, Suvin’s insistence on valid “scientifically methodical cognition” might not make as much sense when applied to emergent science fiction from recent decades.

While Hopkinson is persistently included in the category of speculative writers who do not fit the mould of science fiction traditionally conceived, a closer look reveals that Suvin’s concepts actually hold true within much of her writing. We need not re-evaluate Suvin, to borrow Skallerup’s language, in order for science fiction to accommodate Hopkinson’s work; there is enough within *Brown Girl*, for example, for the text to situate *itself* within science fiction’s bounds. Thus, while Sharon DeGraw claims that Hopkinson “revises the technological and scientific focus of traditional science fiction,” and while she perceives, in *Brown Girl*, that “[t]echnology is largely elided” (193), the novel is actually populated by references to technoscientific *novums* that draw it securely into the corpus of science fiction. These *novums* are obscured in scholarly readings because of the collective overemphasis on the novel’s generic hybridity and the claims of scholars who see *Brown Girl* as fundamentally magical in nature.

Perhaps the most important of the novel’s technoscientific *novums* is the “Porcine Organ Harvest Program [that] has revolutionized human transplant technology” (2). This program, an extrapolation from real-world health sciences, facilitates the transplanting of pig organs into human bodies for medical purposes.² Other technological *novums* include the “synapse cordons” that Rudy’s underlings use: they are described as “baseball-sized lump[s] of what look[s] like modelling clay” that send “a stake sprouting a good eight feet high from each lump of clay,” causing “branchlike filaments [to] explod[e] from the triangle of stakes” (114). Rudy’s group also uses “dazers,” which recall current-day “tasers,” but are here “the portable equivalent to the synapse cordon[s]” (116). When Ti-Jeanne and Tony visit the Strip, we are given more glimpses of the technological advancements of the novel-world. For instance, there are “Deeplight ads glow[ing] at the doors to virtually every establishment: moving 3-D illusions that [are] hyped-up, glossy lies about the pleasures to be found inside” (176). There are “copter limos that [bus] people in from the ‘burbs to the rooftops of the Strip” (176). We also learn that the Eaton Centre has been secured by

“coded security fence[s]” and, the narrative explains, “[i]f your biocode wasn’t in the mall’s data banks, you got an electric jolt rather than admittance” (178). Further, a group of children Ti-Jeanne encounters are able to create “the illusion of a battalion of feral children” (183) through a “jury-rigged electronic box, about the size of a loaf of bread, held together with patchy layers of masking and electric tape” (185) and a “Deeplight projector hooked up on the subway tracks” (186).

I include this list of *novums* to illuminate the dark spot (i.e. technology) in previous scholarship on *Brown Girl* and to make explicit those technoscientific elements that have been neglected. *Brown Girl* clearly imagines a world that is *saturated* by technoscientific artifacts. The tech references, in some cases, are admittedly minor, and these *novums* often become the more procedural means by which the plot moves forward rather than the focus of the story (in contrast to the novel’s most significant *novum*, which is the futuristic spatial relations governing Toronto’s core and suburban areas). I argue, however, that the degree to which the novel focuses on the technoscientific development in the world seems plausible given that the society depicted does not appear to be far off in the future and given that the novel focuses on the Burn, an underprivileged community wherein more advanced technoscientific materials would likely not be available.

Critics’ hesitance to confront the novel’s technologies might stem from the fact that the book certainly *critiques* technological advancement at the same time that it introduces science fiction technologies, and that critique may lead readers away from thinking about the *novums* as important science fiction elements in their own right. Indeed, Hopkinson’s world aligns tech with the villains and the privileged elite. Through its references to, on one hand, the Eaton Centre’s identity-checking code bank and the elegant copter limos that descend onto rooftops from the ‘burbs, and on the other hand, the comparatively makeshift electronic box the street children use for defence, the reader understands that while this is a highly technological world, the high-level tech is accessed primarily by those with the money and power to do so—namely, those in the ‘burbs, with whom the reader does not become very familiar. Readers thus need to reconcile that Hopkinson critiques the current and future state of technology use at the same time that she inserts her work, quite deliberately, into a body of fiction that centralizes technoscientific development. This reconciliation is about moving away from how the novel performs genre *hybridly* and wondering about the ways it performs genre *conventionally*.

I also provide the catalogue of *novums* in order to consider that the tendency *not* to tackle these technological elements in published scholarship on *Brown Girl* perhaps emerges from collective underlying assumptions about the kind of Caribbean Canadian world Hopkinson (re)presents. Critic Sarah Wood wisely reminds us that “in the Caribbean worldview it would be more surprising, more implausible, to imagine a world where the living and dead, humans and gods did not coexist than one where they did” (325). Yet for those who hail from the white Western secular mode of thinking, a world in which spirituality and science logically coexist can be difficult to envision, as such thinking often conceives of the two as mutually exclusive. In scholarship, Caribbean folklore seems to be interpreted as one of two distinct sides in the generic hybridization, when in fact, as Hopkinson herself remarks in an interview, “[f]olklore, old tales, old ballads . . . a lot of them are fantastical in nature, or they imagine the future, or they imagine . . . how we got here. They are the sort of original literature that you see nowadays in science fiction and fantasy” (“Nalo Hopkinson” n. pag.). In other words, critics presuppose a natural separation between these Caribbean elements and science fiction traditionally conceived, which leads them to see Hopkinson’s fiction as hybridizing two very different traditions. Yet, as Hopkinson notes in the excerpt above, Caribbean folklore can be seen as making the same speculative moves that science fiction does, even if the two might do so from different epistemological grounds.

There is also, of course, the possibility that the technoscientific aspects of Hopkinson’s novel are legitimately minor enough *not* to elicit scholarly discussion. This paper thus seeks to show how those aspects are vital to an alternative, politicized reading of the novel’s genre. But the paper’s goal is also to wonder about the implications of this gap in the discussion, and of this focus on Hopkinson’s supposed generic hybridity, particularly within a reading climate that has long and comfortably categorized texts that incorporate Judeo-Christian belief systems within the bounds of science fiction.³ Unlike those works, fiction that features non-white belief systems is often considered too far down on the “fantastic continuum” (Barr xv) to be justly labelled science fiction. Yet crucially, as Langer points out, if we consider elements of these belief systems against elements of classic science fiction, the unsurprising conclusion is that the former is indeed no less plausible than the latter: “Indigenous culture, including faith in indigenous divinities, makes as little sense within a purely Western scientific context as does belief in various other SF tropes such as faster-than-light travel”

(*Postcolonialism* 137). There is some glitch in the matrix of genre that sees faster-than-light travel, UFOs, and alien presence as phenomena that satisfy the validity criterion of science fiction while, say, spiritual command—such as that which *Brown Girl's* Rudy and Gros-Jeanne have—is regarded as too impossible to belong to fiction bearing science's authoritative name. Clearly, as Langer writes, “indigenous and other colonized systems of knowledge are not only valid but are, at times, more scientifically sound than is Western scientific thought” (*Postcolonialism* 9). If epistemological soundness and validity are the necessary preconditions for science fiction, then texts that feature, say, Caribbean systems of thought and belief no doubt meet the traditional criteria. Perhaps there is a kind of ideological justice in reading these works squarely as science fiction.

Moreover, if science fiction is widely recognized as the realm of the possible, and fantasy is the realm of the impossible, then I have to wonder why so many critics fail to see Hopkinson's work as anything but a hybrid of the two (and/or of other related genres). Hopkinson herself provides a hesitant and disheartening explanation; when asked, on the CBC radio show Q, “Why is it so hard for some people to imagine black people in the future?,” Hopkinson replies: “It's because I think there's still this notion that we're not smart enough,” adding that this difficulty to imagine black futures derives from the underlying assumption that black communities do not have the “technology or intellect” for the kinds of futures science fiction constructs (n. pag.). Hopkinson has previously lamented the lack of characters of colour in speculative fiction in an essay from 2007, observing that, frequently, the only non-white characters allowed entry are aliens, monsters, and the like (“Maybe” 101). The title of this piece, “Maybe They're Phasing Us In: Re-Mapping Fantasy Tropes in the Face of Gender, Race, and Sexuality,” recounts what Hopkinson's brother suggests when they discuss this predicament: “Maybe they're phasing us in” (101). The idea he expresses is clear: black bodies, black epistemologies, are often only allowed to exist under the cover of alienness in science fiction. Importantly, it is not science fiction itself that creates this condition; as a genre, its canonization practices depend on creators, consumers, and critics. Thus, if, as Hopkinson and her brother say, black individuals are not seen, within the genre, as *plausible* future bodies and with knowledges extrapolated from the current world, this is only a product of critical and creative practices that disallow those from the label of science fiction. That science fiction is phasing in black identities—that black identities are being incorporated

into the genre in stages—can thus be seen in the way works are categorized/canonized. Generic hybridity, in this sense, could function as one structural manifestation of this phasing in; the end goal may be just—the incorporation of black subjectivities and epistemologies into science fiction—but one has to wonder why they need to be phased in through the discourse of generic hybridity, why they cannot be wholly present in science fiction from the outset, as much a shaping force as the more fully “accepted” content in the canon.

Brown Girl itself invites readers to regard it as science fiction, especially within my allegorical reading of the novel, which perceives the novel’s setting as a concretization of the fraught politics of genre. The relationship between Hopkinson’s segregated inner-city Toronto, largely made up of destitute minority groups, and the privileged, presumably white-dominated outcity can be read as a metaphor for the relationship between science fiction, traditionally conceived, and the body of texts that have historically been excluded from it based on, for example, Suvin’s monopolizing conception of the genre. In this allegory, the suburbs correspond to Suvin’s style of exclusionary science fiction, through which white, Western epistemologies have historically dominated, and the Burn corresponds to the minority science fiction texts (accurately paralleled by the Burn’s multiculturalism) that do not adhere to these same epistemological fundamentals and are therefore rarely treated as science fiction proper.

In this reading of the novel, the heart transplant storyline becomes particularly important, as it features a body part from the Burn—a place historically sectioned off from the suburbs—being incorporated into a body from the suburbs. At the outset of the novel, the reader learns that the premier of Ontario, Uttley, is in poor health and requires a heart transplant (3). A representative from the Angel of Mercy transplant hospital approaches Rudy to find “a viable human heart” for transplant into Uttley’s body (1). Rudy eventually tasks Tony with finding the heart, instructing him to “[f]ind somebody the right size, the same blood type, healthy, and arrange for them to be in a condition to donate their heart” (30). Rudy’s demand leads to the act of Tony terminally injuring Gros-Jeanne and calling in the Angel of Mercy workers to deliver her heart to Uttley, whose body, after some complications, ultimately accepts the new organ.

I propose that we read this transplant plot as a narrativization of the potential power in reading *Brown Girl* as science fiction—in the act of minority texts and writers taking up space in the body of science fiction. I see, for example, Uttley’s declining health as a symbol of the ill health of the

genre *without* texts such as Hopkinson's included within it; when we refuse to read such texts as science fiction, how can the genre survive, remain vital? That Uttley requires a *heart* transplant of all things suggests, in my reading, that science fiction needs texts such as *Brown Girl* to sustain the heartbeat of the genre. In many ways, the "transplant" process is in the hands of scholars and readers: we need to read these works as science fiction in order for the texts to productively and radically occupy the body of the genre. This occupation promises to be neither smooth nor without its own problems; when Uttley's doctors are "fighting to establish a symbiosis between their patient's body and its new heart" during the surgery, their efforts literalize the conceptual struggle going on between science fiction (represented by Uttley's body) and all those who have been excluded from it (represented by the heart from the multicultural inner city) (236). This is a struggle that manifests subtly, for example, in the critical tendency to sidestep *Brown Girl*'s legitimate presence in the science fiction canon. When Uttley recounts that she "*realized that she was being invaded in some way, taken over,*" and that the transplanted heart "*leapt and battered against her chest,*" her words suggest the ideological friction involved in reorienting ourselves to set aside the potentials of generic hybridity and to activate alternative, political possibilities by contrarily having these texts occupy space within a single genre—a genre from which they might previously have been excluded (236).

Allegorically, the result of the heart transplant is that when a piece of the generic body is taken over, the whole body begins to work anew, and in that there is a kind of transformation-from-within. Uttley's body accepts the new heart, and the implication is that she has been psychologically changed: "*Bit by bit, she was losing the ability to control her own body. The heart was taking it over*" (237). Uttley knows that now "*she [will] no longer be herself*" (237). Michelle Reid explains that these lines "indicate[] a fundamental alteration, not a fortification. The fact that her brain cells were 'given up one by one' implies a submission and takeover" (311). Indeed, in line with this takeover, *Brown Girl* seeks to *take up space* in the established body of science fiction—to form and reform that body from within, rather than to foster new hybrid bodies alongside it. For Reid, Uttley's "loss of consciousness into total 'blackness' suggests a revolutionary act of resistance by Gros-Jeanne's heart, perhaps making the word 'blackness' racially-charged" (311). This reading works within my interpretation of the transplant, too, as it suggests that a transformative force of blackness—hitherto denied the power of physical occupation—is revitalizing the genre.

The transplant occasions a figurative change of heart in Uttley. She uncharacteristically decides to “rejuvenate Toronto” (239), “offer interest-free loans to small enterprises” in the Burn (240), and restructure the organ donation program to make it more conscionable (239). Apparently, Mami’s spirit has infused Uttley’s conscience and refigured the premier’s moral compass. Critics have read this moment through the perspective of hybridity and syncretism. Skallerup writes that when Uttley “gets Gros-Jeanne’s heart, she is transformed. She becomes a reflection of how Gros-Jeanne lived her life practicing cultural hybridity” (81). Neal Baker perceives that “Uttley’s urban plan [of rejuvenation] parallels the ‘intertwined’ yet ‘distinct’ streams in her blood, promising a syncretic metropolis that will join divisions between the suburbs—primarily white—and the multicultural inner city” (221). Reid agrees that “the ‘intertwined’ streams of blood indicate a more equal partnership based on a hybrid combination,” rather than simply “an act of possession” (311).

In my reading, the heart becomes an enduring *intrusion* in Uttley’s body; because it is a whole, corporeal artifact with tangible boundaries that mark inside from outside, the heart represents not so much a blending, but instead the imposition of an independent force, with its own agency, within Uttley’s body. If we think of this within the allegory I propose, this force becomes *Brown Girl* itself, a text with genre-shaping agency, and one that intrudes upon, ultimately *forms*, and thus determines the body of science fiction, as opposed to creating new hybrid bodies. Notably, this reading assigns more power to both the heart, or more precisely the spirit it carries, and the text. Readings that see Uttley’s change as a moment of hybridity mute the independence of the new force (the heart/Gros-Jeanne’s spirit and the novel), thereby suggesting its future discontinuation, because hybridity as a concept carries the anxiety that each individual component could be diluted in new hybrid forms. Moreover, these interpretations do not seem to account for the fact that Uttley’s moral transformation is unwanted—her body and mind fight it until the moment Gros-Jeanne’s spirit takes over (236-37)—and thus the heart transplant speaks to a loophole in the system by which the oppressed can turn body occupation (literary/generic, allegorically) into a source of transformative, decolonizing power.

Readers never know the results of Uttley’s figurative change of heart, as we are unable to see her plans manifest within the scope of the novel. Reid views this as “optimistic but ambiguous,” writing that “it remains to be seen how the localised endeavours will map out across the whole city” (312). In the allegory I describe, this ambiguity suggests that while *Brown Girl*

may, indeed, be newly shaping part of science fiction's body, the results of this effort are undetermined. The generic transformations catalyzed by the political act of reading *Brown Girl* as science fiction may not unfold in an altogether smooth and positive way; there is bound to be friction, just as Uttley is bound to put up a fight against the entity now forming part of her. This friction is foreshadowed earlier, as the entire transplant is made possible by the forced removal of Gros-Jeanne's heart. That this removal is violent and unwanted highlights, in my allegorical reading, the conflict involved in the fraught politics of genre: it is not that science fiction has worked to forcibly cull the heart of previously excluded writing for its own use, but that when these works are finally seen as constitutive of science fiction's body, this process of recognition and reorientation creates as much friction as it does rejuvenation. If the transplant were presented only as easy and desired by all sides, it would not work allegorically because it would not authentically represent the epistemological and politicized disputes undergirding science fiction and surrounding genres.

Indeed, it is this very politicized generic matrix that has compelled some scholars to declare alternative genres, subgenres, and entirely different nomenclatures for types of speculative writing that are based in more than just the white, Western mode of scientific thinking. Mark Dery puts forth the term "Afro-Futurism" to describe "[s]peculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century techno-culture" (8). Madhu Dubey suggests we consider "black anti-science fiction" as a foil to traditional science fiction: in this subgenre, "Afro-diasporic systems of knowledge and belief . . . are consistently shown to confound and triumph over scientific reason" (34). "The descriptor 'speculative fiction,'" too, Langer reminds us, "has often been assigned to works that are cross-genre," and thus has been used for those minority texts that do not neatly fit into the Western scientific bend fortified by some science fiction scholars and writers (*Postcolonialism* 9). Yet, Langer wisely points out, "the 'science' part of science fiction is essential in a discussion of postcolonial SF," and so speculative fiction comes up a bit short as a prospective space for science fiction's outlaws (9). Speculative fiction, theorized differently depending on author or critic—Margaret Atwood notably suggests that it should include "things that really could happen" (*In Other Worlds* 6)—could be that space if it were not for the fact that there would still be a separate or subsidiary dedicated science fiction genre, and such a partitioning of science from speculation maintains the same

hierarchical structure that claims real-world validity for one set of narratives while relegating other sets to mere fantasy and conjecture. Together, these proposals for new nomenclatures constitute an effort to create distinct literary communities that are inclusive, and yet this attempted inclusion threatens to repeat a separatist instinct inherited in sectioning off alternative genres.

Having considered some alternatives, I return to “science fiction” as the title that could be powerfully claimed in order to recuperate hitherto-obscured narratives and ideologies. One reason for this is that the genre nominally attributes a scientific-cultural currency or power to the epistemologies circulated within, which matters because including or excluding texts under the banner of “science” can vitally (re)form what readers see as valid or sound epistemologies within the context of science fiction. This is especially important given the sometimes arbitrary reasons why a text which could viably be called science fiction is categorized into other genres. Hopkinson has addressed this in response to the question “Why don’t people of colour write speculative fiction?”: “We do, but it’s unlikely that you’ll find it on the sf shelves in your bookstores . . . [because it] end[s] up on the shelves for black authors, not in the sf section” (“Dark Ink” n. pag.). As long as we relegate narratives by minority writers to other categories not bearing the authoritative-sounding “science” qualifier, or as long as we consider these narratives only a hybrid form of science fiction, even if they meet the genre’s usual requirements, we will continue to uphold the internalized hierarchies that see non-Western epistemologies and knowledges as primarily magical and thus not valid or rational in their own right. Also, to treat differently those works that include decolonizing spiritual elements is to discount, in the name of plausibility, an entire body of writing by communities whose present *and* future realities are religiously and spiritually embedded in what the secular Western world deems magical and thus beyond the realm of science fiction.

It seems appropriate to end this paper by considering how Hopkinson situates her own writing within these wider politics of genre. In publications and interviews, Hopkinson most often regards her work as science fiction, and she finds herself having to defend this self-fashioning:

[W]hen people ask me why a black Caribbean woman is writing science fiction, or why I’m not angry at having my work ‘labelled’ as science fiction—a label I myself chose—or what science fiction has to do with the realities of black and Caribbean and female lives, I find myself thinking something along the lines of ain’tlawomanthisiswhatsciencefictionlookslikemysciencefictionincludesme. (“The Profession” 5-6)

Hopkinson constructs herself as “writ[ing] within a particularly northern tradition of speculative and fantastical fiction” in which “the speculative and fantastical elements of a story must be ‘real’” (*Whispers* xii). She expresses a deep and enduring connection to science fiction: “science fiction as a literature probably helped to save my life. . . . So even when I’m critical of it, I’m very happy that it’s here” (Johnston 215). In these quotes and elsewhere, Hopkinson points to one of the central ideas this paper has sought to draw out, which is that there is some measure of power in adhering to the label of science fiction. There is power in choosing or claiming science fiction as one’s own. There is power in occupying space within a genre, for there lies the chance to transform it from within.

NOTES

- 1 There is one notable exception here: Ramsdell, like myself, sees that “scientific discovery is crucial to the plot of” *Brown Girl* (156), and she acknowledges the “numerous traditional science fiction elements” in the text (167). Still, Ramsdell returns to the conclusion that Hopkinson’s texts do not contribute to science fiction so much as they “subvert the genre” and “blend[]” the “more traditional tenets of science fiction . . . with various mythologies and magics” (170). The diction here—subversion, blending—echoes the interpretive patterns I take issue with, ones that persistently see Hopkinson as resisting or hybridizing science fiction rather than occupying the space of science fiction herself.
- 2 This pig-to-human organ replacement system anticipates the “pigeon project” in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003), a novel that is more widely accepted as science fiction, albeit for various reasons and not simply for the pigeon development. In Atwood’s novel, the “goal of the pigeon project [is] to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host—organs that [will] transplant smoothly and avoid rejection” (27). We might imagine that the “Porcine Organ Harvest Program” in *Brown Girl* operates similarly to Atwood’s pigeon project.
- 3 See Jo Walton’s “Religious Science Fiction” blog post (and proceeding comments section) for examples.

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