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Revisiting the Universal Significance of Mythologies: Barbara Kingsolver's Syncretic and Mythopoeic Short Story "Jump-Up Day"

Bénédicte Meillon

- 1 While placing Barbara Kingsolver's work within the Southern tradition, Lynn Marie Houston and Jennifer Warren argue: "Typically, Southern literature upholds the Christian tradition, renewing its meaning and importance in the contemporary lives of its characters, and depicts the standard white/black tensions that have plagued the South through the legacy of slavery and the Civil War. In contrast, Kingsolver's characters and plots often undermine the tenets of Christianity (although she continues the tradition of Southern writing by depicting the burden of this region's religiosity) and explore a larger global dimension to racial tension" (3). Focusing on Barbara Kingsolver's short story "Jump-Up Day," published in the 1989 collection *Homeland and Other Stories*, this paper shows how Barbara Kingsolver's multicultural rewriting of myths is indeed typically Southern in its concern for class and race divisions, as well as Christian religion. Kingsolver's dialogic story does on the one hand "undermine the tenets of Christianity," while on the other hand it offers a syncretic vision that reveals a different reading of Christian myths, made newly compatible with a global, transcultural and postmodernist perspective. Consequently, this paper sheds light on the mythopoeic dimension of Kingsolver's art of the short story, debunking creation stories as first and foremost, *created* stories, while paradoxically re-instilling new faith in the healing and creative powers of story-telling.
- 2 Set on the Island of St Lucia, "Jump-Up Day" tells the story of a lonely, semi-orphan little girl named Jericha, who struggles to make sense of the conflicting cultures and myths she is exposed to. As a white, Christian doctor's daughter partly raised by nuns,

she at first embodies the racial prejudice and ideology which have historically upheld white supremacy and colonization. Her progress throughout the story however confronts her with Otherness, as she learns from a black Obeah Man about Obeah religion. In the end, Jericha is guided by the Obeah Man through a kind of initiation rite which reads as a highly mythopoeic passage. Eventually, the narrative suggests that Jericha's epiphany might be dual. The revelation scene first points to the resurfacing of Jericha's traumatic loss of her mother, which, in turn, brings about images and actions obliquely suggesting healing. The symbolism in the ending may indeed read as a resolution of Jericha's problematical in-betweenness, reconciling myths previously perceived as antagonistic.

- 3 This essay establishes the dual demythologizing and re-mythologizing process at work in Kingsolver's fiction. I intend to demonstrate that under the pen of writers such as Kingsolver, the contemporary short story has evolved so as to reconnect with its roots in mythology.¹ Kingsolver's short stories in many ways perform what myths used to do, serving the four functions of mythology as laid down by American mythographer Joseph Campbell, i.e. its mystical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological functions (*Thou* 103). With these four functions in mind, I will first look at the magical and religious elements in Kingsolver's story "Jump-Up Day" in the light of magical realism. I will then venture a metatextual and psychoanalytical reading of the story, staging a return of the repressed leading to the final, enchanting revelation. Finally, I will focus on the role of the Obeah Man as a Caribbean Janus, whose voice functions, like the Roman God of passages, as mediator between black and white, life and death, Christianity and Obeah, magic and reality, dream and waking life, or myth and short story.

"Jump-Up Day" in the Light of Magical Realism

- 4 In her book dedicated to magical realism, Wendy Farris posits five defining features of the mode, which prove helpful in interpreting Kingsolver's story. Farris first insists on the "irreducible element of magic" inherent to the mode, requiring suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader (7). As Amaryll Chanady underlines in her earlier study of magical realism and the fantastic, the narrative voice in a magical realist text "abolishes the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural on the level of textual representation, and the reader, who recognizes the two conflicting logical codes on the semantic level, suspends his judgment of what is rational and what is irrational in the fictitious world" (25-26).
- 5 The reader's first encounter with magic in Kingsolver's text comes in direct speech, through the voice of the Obeah Man, a local medicine man: "Do you know the thing they call a jumby? [...] A jumby is a jump-up. Somebody called up from the dead. You call her up to do a job, and then you put her down again. But sometimes she is humbugging you and she won't go down again" (190). Later, the Obeah Man brings in more preternatural phenomena. Endowed with attributes of both sorcerer and shaman, he explains to Jericha that he has used the jump-up to make her father fall sick with bilharzia. He claims the woman was easy to call back from the dead because she was "a troubled soul" wishing for revenge upon a white man, as a result of having been used and abandoned by a white soldier (197). He explains that the jump-up has previously bled to death after ingesting a potion meant to provoke an abortion. But the Obeah

Man also flaunts healing powers. He sums up Obeah for Jericha: "This is what people call working science. [...] When they are sick, or the business is going bad. Or if a man wants some woman to look at him. [...] They come to me" (189).

- 6 Throughout the short story, the narrative voice refrains from interpreting or commenting upon the magic involved, neither clearly dismissing nor corroborating the Obeah Man's claims. Disbelief is embodied by the absent white doctor, whose disparaging words toward the locals are relayed first by the narrator ("her father called [Sebastian] an insufferably superstitious black" 185), then by the Obeah Man ("Telling people not to trust in my medicine. He said Black man's foolishness" 189).² As the guiding voice through the story is a heterodiegetic narrator using either zero or internal focalization through Jericha, the point of view shifts back and forth between omniscient and subjective. Thus, it is not quite clear what the narrative stance is as regards the *gri-gris*, magical powders, spells, and potions used by the Obeah Man. However, the story of the jumby and the Obeah Man's powers are corroborated by the latter's mother. In addition, the magic in the text reaches a summit in the initiation rite experienced by Jericha, by a moonless night in the middle of a jungle forest: "Light came into the clearing: stars, she thought at first, or silvery pieces of falling cloud, but the light was falling down from the tree into a white carpet that floated just above the ground. It moved like water, slowly. She felt it roll over her feet" (200). The synaesthesia at play moves the reader along this occult, shamanic trance-like ceremony which veers to an initiation flight, the floating white carpet metamorphosing into a form of flying carpet. The scene is described by the narrator in a matter-of-fact, detached style which seems to present the extraordinary as entirely ordinary which, according to Amaryll Chanady, is precisely what distinguishes magical realism from the fantastic: "She stooped at the base of the tree among its white, thorned wings and laid the egg in a nest of roots. The silk cotton under her feet was a cloud. There were mountains and harbors, women down there loading boats" (201).
- 7 This merging of sacred and profane, of life and death, and of the quotidian and magic, actually corresponds to a second characteristic of magical realism according to Farris, i.e. the merging of different realms. Besides, the narrative conflates moments of fancy with dreaming, and with the diegetic reality. Indeed Jericha first "[stands] on the low wall meant to prevent children from falling to their deaths, and [...spreads] her arms and [lets] herself fill with the belief that she [can] fly" (184). Jericha then at one point dreams of flying with the Obeah Man over the boats and women in the harbor, a scene which is thus repeated in the later ceremony under the kapok tree: "There were worlds under her feet, and over her head too—when they flew over the Pitons she had forgotten to look up" (201). Consequently, the borders between fancy, dreaming and reality are blurred, making it hard to delineate one from the other.
- 8 As Farris notes "a third quality of magical realism is that before categorizing the irreducible elements as irreducible, the reader may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of events, and hence experience some unsettling doubts" (17). In Kingsolver's story, the echoes between scenes with various relationships to the diegetic reality may open the door to several interpretations as regards the magic involved in the initiation. Does Jericha enter a different, liminal and sacred space, flying between worlds above and below, or is she merely experiencing some sort of hallucination, prompted by her fear, her sense of loss and alienation, and the ritual set up by the Obeah Man? The skeptical mind will surely lean toward an uncanny resolution of the

apparent magic, pointing to the alcohol the child has drunk, and to the anamorphic quality of the child's perception from the beginning.³ Moreover, the brilliant falling pieces of silvery cloud can in fact be explained by the reality of the majestic silk-cotton tree. Once ripe, the kapok fruit opens up and sheds a cotton-like, fluffy substance that falls to the ground. There is no doubt that Barbara Kingsolver the biologist, having herself spent part of her childhood on the island of St Lucia, has experienced the wonder induced by this otherworldly, yet natural phenomenon and has drawn on it when writing this story. This is one of the many instances in which the magic of story is yet grounded in realism. As Farris has pointed out, this is a fourth characteristic of the oxymoronic mode of magical realism, with its accumulation of material details and a strong presence of the phenomenal world. Pointedly, the issue of the shamanic powers of the Obeah Man is left unresolved in Kingsolver's story, open to various interpretations, which, once again, is typical of magical realism.

- 9 Finally, this story illustrates Farris's fifth observation, in that magical realism disrupts habitual notions of time, space and identity. In addition to the world of the jungle opening onto a different, cosmic dimension, the story activates a system of echoes and repetitions that engender a certain amount of confusion in terms of identities. The Obeah Man, for example, bears several appellations: the Jump-up, Benedict Jett, and the Obeah Man. He first appears on Jump-Up Day, taking part in the Carnival dances and is then "painted entirely white, his feet, body, hair, and eyelids all cracked and seamed with the thickness of whitewash" (186). On his second apparition, his face is "silver-black" and the dialogue between Jericha and Benedict evokes another jump-up, this time understood as a kind of zombie. To make matters more confusing, this jumbie is not without similarities with Jericha's dead mother, buried in the child's early infancy. As a result, when the ceremony involving Jericha culminates in her expressing her lack of interest in the jumbie, but, instead, her longing for her dead mother, a possible reading lies in seeing Benedict as a healer, helping the child confront the buried trauma of losing her mother.

Epiphany and Rebirth

- 10 Before delving further into the mythopoeic fabric of the short story at hand, I would like to cast light on a paradigmatic reading corroborated by the many, more or less oblique allusions to a form of revelation. First, the dormant volcano on the island of St Lucia provides a metaphor for the psyche, its "black water [boiling] up" pointing to the dark regions of the unconscious, and the sulfurous odor emanating from "something deep inside the earth and enormously important" reading as a symptom of repressed contents (183). The underground magma may be linked to the initial reference to Jericha's mother, "in the ground by the time she could walk on it" (182), an alienating dark spot in Jericha's background: "About the dead one who was her mother, Jericha knew nothing" (185). Furthermore, the jumbie serves as an embodiment of the absent mother's latent presence, and significantly, Jericha's mission consists in "[putting] her down" to "rest" (199). Agreeing with Paula Gunn Allen's far-reaching conception of motherhood, the story depicts Jericha's plight as going much further than not being able to remember her mother:

Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is a failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same

as being lost, isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life.
(Allen 209-10)

- 11 Throughout the story, the deeply buried trauma of losing her mother resurfaces, first projected onto the landscape through Jericha's gaze: "At any time, without expecting it, she might round a bend, and come onto the view of a pair of pointed mountains, the Pitons, plunging straight down like suicides into the aquamarine bay" (184). Jericha's sense of longing is here suggested by the image of a suicidal motherly breast, dysphorically plunging into oceanic depths. It triggers in Jericha the desire to fly towards the semiotically charged Pitons. This she does in her dreams where "the Jump-up did come back, always appearing in the sky and commanding her to take hold of the white-feathered streamers that trailed from his wings. They flew across the bay towards the Pitons, and whatever lay beyond them, toward a feeling of home" (187).
- 12 Another system of significant repetitions and echoes worked into the text draws an analogy between women and ants in Jericha's mind, suggesting her bitter repression of the severed link to her mother. Her anamorphic imagination transforms the black women she sees from afar, loading bananas in the harbor boats, so as to reveal a destructive impulse: "[They flew] so high over the harbor that there were no people below, no dark women loading boats, only columns of ants filing into the split skins of mangos that floated at the shoreline. Not people but ants, a thing you could step on and smash" (187). The ant leitmotif emerges again and is finally pulverized during the ceremony, suggesting Jericha's confrontation with her shadow: "Ants swarmed up out of the ground and covered her shoes and white legs. [...] When she touched them they turned to handful of black mud. It was only mud" (200). On top of suggesting Jericha's reconciliation with the Great Mother archetype, the revelation flight corrects her earlier visions in both waking life and dreams in a way erasing her previous color distinction. When the women working in the harbor were first described as "brown" (185), and then as "dark" (187), they finally appear to Jericha as essentially women: "There were mountains and harbors, women down there loading boats, women and not ants" (201).⁴
- 13 The text moreover contains a number of metatextual allusions, starting with the architextual reference to the epiphany which the modern short story tends to climax in: "She had seen the Jump-up on nearly every Epiphany holiday, but never at this time of evening [...]. In this light it seemed something else" (186). References to light and darkness are legion throughout the text, the most conspicuous one lying in the setting, thus implicitly referring to St Lucia, the patron saint of light. This imagery moreover works together with a network of symbols pointing to gestation and rebirth. Nine weeks elapse between the moment when Benedict first comes to Jericha and the moment when he appears again, starting the process of revealing Jericha to her shadow, gradually guiding her through her individuation process, to put it in Jungian terms. The symbolical value of number nine, potentially pointing to gestation time, is associated at the end of those nine weeks to additional images foreshadowing regeneration and pregnancy: "A rising moon hung over the mountains, higher already than the sun settling down like a roosting hen onto the sea" (187). Jericha meets the Obeah Man in the town of Laborie three times, until they depart from there for the final ceremony, in the jungle clearing. Conveniently, the town name, Laborie, may suggest birth labor via onomastics.

- 14 As hinted at before, Jericha's initiation rite superimposes multiple mother figures. First comes Benedict's mother, whose warm voice and laugh feel to Jericha "like arms around her;" then comes the jumby, who is textually present in the character's words, but whose character is never actualized *in presentia*, thus again in that sense a double for Jericha's missing mother; and finally, Jericha's long-dead mother herself resurfaces when the girl finally lets out her bottled up suffering, verbalizing her longing and "[choking] on childish sobs in her throat" (201). Moreover, Benedict points to a snake in the kapok tree and introduces the child to this African cosmic goddess: "You see the snake in the branches? That is Gro Maman. She lives there, in the branch. [...] Gro Maman isn't a snake. She's like a man, but stronger. She watches you all the time" (199). Thus replete with conflated maternal figures, the ceremony furthermore involves a rather suggestive hen's egg, offered Gro Maman as a "Good Friday egg." For the ceremony takes place on Good Friday, quite obviously calling onto the myth of Jesus's death and resurrection. Moreover, as Jericha takes the egg to the tree, the syntax becomes somewhat equivocal and destabilizing, because of pronominal shifting that potentially conflates Gro Maman with the jumby or Jericha's absent mother: "The hand on her shoulder moved her toward the tree, gently, and then let her go. With mud in her mouth, she looked up into the branches to find her shape, her eyes" (201).⁵ On closer reading, the parataxis at play in this oxymoronic passage implies that this symbolical offering is what triggers Jericha's initiation flight, liberating her from her buried trauma and allowing her to hatch anew: "She stooped at the base of the tree among its white, thorned wings and laid the egg in a nest of roots. The silk cotton under her feet was a cloud" (201). The ensuing cathartic effect of this healing ceremony is contained in the kinesics and proxemics at work in the description of Jericha and her companions returning from the jungle: "On the seat of the truck, she sat between Benedict and his *maman*, holding her sharp knees to her chest and crying without tears. She leaned on the bouncing softness of a shoulder, and then there was a soft arm around her, and then a lap" (201).
- 15 Kingsolver's short story thus relies on universal archetypes, as a result it lends itself to a Jungian reading, with Benedict acting as Jericha's *animus*, bringing her shadow into the light, and thus triggering a healing individuation process.⁶ For in spite of Jericha's initial resistance to the Obeah Man, insisting that she is "not sick" (189), Kingsolver's text suggests otherwise. Jericha's progression acquires universal significance as it depicts a postmodern affliction Joseph Campbell calls a "pathology of the symbol" (*Myths* 88). This pathology arises, Campbell claims, when literal interpretations of myths deprive archetypes from their releasing energy, or as Jung before him argued, turning archetypes into dead, fixed images no longer retaining any of their essential numinosity (167). This may well be the meaning hinted at by the local children's nickname for Jericha, whom they dub "Anansi the Spider." The protean nature of the Obeah Man endows his character with the attributes of the trickster, as suggested by the aposiopesis in Jericha's song, prolonged by the sudden apparition of Benedict: "Anansi he is a spider/Anansi he is a man/Anansi he..." (188). The truncated sentence is continued by the Obeah Man's character. Like the spider in the Ashanti folktale brought to the Caribbean from West Africa, with the hero of the legend celebrated for bringing God's stories to the earth, Benedict's character serves as mediator between the sacred and the profane.⁷ Interestingly, in some of the variants of Anansi the Spider stories, the hero desires to safeguard all the world's wisdom which he has acquired through God's stories. He therefore keeps all this universal wisdom in a pot, or

calabash, which he then attempts to hide at the top of a thorny silk cotton tree. Yet, Anansi fails and, breaking the pot, he lets out all the wisdom at the bottom of the tree.

Mythopoeia and the Modern Short Story: Benedict as Ferryman between Different Realms and Cultures

- 16 Resting on a multicultural setting and mythopoeic writing, the story in “Jump-Up Day” can only acquire its full significance when studied in the light of its intertextual network of references to myths from historically antagonized cultures. Setting the story on the island of St Lucia indeed proves a perfect medium to work a syncretic vision into the text, for the local Obeah tradition itself exists in the Caribbean islands as an alloy of various *mythèmes*—to borrow the French word coined by Levi-Strauss—and practices from Christian, African, Islamic, and even Hindu traditions. The multiculturalism of the island is first reflected in the hybrid language of the story, mixing English, French, Latin and Kwéyol—the local patois. The religious calendar moreover points to the dialogism encapsulated within the very title of the story, with the Jump-up Day carnival coalescing with the Catholic Epiphany holiday. Jericha’s character thus develops in between the local culture of former slaves brought to the island over time by French and English colonists, and her British, Christian upbringing. Her thoughts and actions initially invest her character with the legacy of a colonial ideology, deeming her culture superior to that of the locals. She indeed perpetuates scornful, racist stereotypes betrayed for instance by the way she at first rejects local customs and values, associating them with laziness, stupidity, and evil.⁸
- 17 Antagonized by her black peers at the orphanage run by English nuns, Jericha is brought into contact with the Obeah Man, whose character is constructed as a patchwork of signifiers drawn from a multiplicity of traditions. His Christian name, Benedict—meaning “he who is blessed”—, relates him to the Roman Church. He might even in that context evoke Pope Benedict XV, known for his pacifying influence worldwide at the end of the Great War and thus remembered as an emblem of reconciliation. Moreover, the objects associated with his character function as stage props forming an occult melting pot: *eau bénite*, *gri-gris*, powders, crushed leaves, alcohol, an egg, incense, Kwéyol and Latin incantations, and his staff, half-way between a cross and a fork.
- 18 Benedict’s last name, Jett, obviously underlines his skin color via antonomasia, as in “jet black.” As mentioned above, this complex character first appears painted white from head to toe, and then in his every day Obeah man dress: “In the near darkness, his face was silver black and Jericha now saw the two faces at once, white-painted and black” (188). Standing as a Caribbean version of two-headed Janus, Benedict Jett indeed plays the part of the mediator, just like the Roman God of passages. Often represented holding an emblematic staff and key, Janus is God of all doors and keys. Calling on the jumby, Benedict precisely acts as ferryman between the worlds of the living and the dead. His shamanic role moreover significantly endows him with the power to guide Jericha through an initiation rite at the crucial time between childhood and puberty. In addition, with Jericha first trying to pass for a boy in the Obeah Man’s eyes, the latter becomes a mediator between the feminine and masculine aspects of her character, or, as I have hinted at earlier, between her *animus* and herself. Let us note the striking echoes between Kingsolver’s Obeah man and the magi in Jung’s analysis of one of his

patient's dreams. Jung's patient dreams that he has become the disciple of a white magus dressed in black. As the latter has completed his teachings, he instructs his follower to look for the black magus who can help him progress further into his initiation. When the black magus appears, he is like the Obeah Man in Kingsolver's story dressed in white. He claims to have found the key to heaven, but wants the white magus' magic so he can use the key. According to Jung, this dream contains the problem of opposites, which, he underlines, has been solved in Tao philosophy in a different way than in Western concepts. Jung reads the characters appearing in this dream as collective, impersonal images, corresponding to the impersonal nature of religious issues. Contrary to the Christian perspective, both the dream and Kingsolver's story emphasize the relative notions of good and evil (Jung 131). Benedict is also in that sense the mediator between Jericha's consciousness and her unconscious, casting light on repressed contents of her psyche. Mostly, he plays the role of a transcultural mediator between black and white, between European and non-European philosophies, medicines, and myths, and between colonial and postcolonial ideologies.

- 19 Kingsolver's highly feminine writing furthermore stages the Obeah Man as a ferryman between the realms of the symbolic and the semiotic, as defined by Julia Kristeva. This move is suggested for instance by Jericha's shifting relationship to snakes throughout the story. Until the initiation scene, there are numerous fearful visions of snakes perceived through Jericha's eyes, which betray an internalized, Judeo-Christian symbol of the chthonian snake (188, 190, 196). A dialogue with Benedict however offers a different set of associations with the animal, endowing the snake with positive attributes. Gro Maman, the African Snake Goddess, no longer symbolizes the enticing animal responsible for Man's fall from the Garden of Eden, but cosmic energy in perpetual regeneration, offering access to the tree of life. Often living in the jungle, this potentially dangerous snake is quite heretically compared to Jesus for its ubiquity and omniscience (199), and for its capacity to grant redemption and peace. Thus, the ceremony under the silk-cotton tree reads as a syncretic re-writing of the Garden of Eden myth, cross-fertilizing Judeo-Christian and African mythologies.
- 20 Jericha at first embodies a Manichean outlook onto the world, inherited from her upbringing. Symptoms of her dualistic vision are strewn throughout the text, opposing black and white, good and bad, above and below. In line with Jungian theory—which is a recurrent and at times overt influence over Kingsolver's work—the snake here comes to represent not the tempting animal willing Eve to taste the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, but a state of primeval fusion with the Great Mother archetype. What Jericha's initiation flight indeed reveals has to do with reconciling opposites, endorsing an ecofeminist perspective of complementary entities rather than binary opposites: “There were worlds under her feet, and over her head too—when they flew over the Pitons, she had forgotten to look up. There is always something over your head and you're never on top nor on the bottom either, you're in the center” (201). Jericha's access to the Self, in Jungian terms, or the totality of being, and to her place at the heart of the world, embraces the myth of the expulsion from the garden. Kingsolver's story thus exposes how, taken literally, the myth of Genesis separates man from nature and, ultimately, from his own nature.
- 21 Furthermore, Jericha's name may read as an intertextual reference to the doomed city of Jericho in the Bible (Jos 6). The enwalled city indeed provides a metaphor for Jericha's alienation from her peers and from the nature around her, walled within what

Alan Watts refers to as the hallucination of the Ego, or the illusion of existing as a separate self “making contact through senses with a universe both alien and strange” (8). The protagonist’s name thus adumbrates the crumbling of the fortress of the Ego as represented by Jericha. Her final gesture intimates Jericha’s new awareness of her participation in nature. On Easter morning, before dawn, Jericha steals into the garden and secretly unties the goat meant for the feast, letting it run back into the jungle, and thus quite ironically turning the scape-goat into the goat that escapes. Whereas until then, she treated animals with crushing ruthlessness, she seems cured in the end from her previous incapacity to relate to any living entity. Consequently, this symbolical ending points to a newly acquired humility and compassion for the Other, but also to her liberation from an alienating mythology of domination and sin understood too literally.

- 22 The kapok tree then sheds on Jericha a numinous, semiotic light coming from the silk-cotton fruit, a knowledge which no longer brings the fall of man from the garden, but opens the doors to paradise here on earth. This earthly paradise may well be the meaning of the “nest of roots” at the bottom of the kapok tree. Literally brought down to earth, this nest reverses the traditional symbol of the nest as ultimate paradise, up high in the highest branches and thus held out of reach (Chevalier 689). For the story obliquely refers to the etymologies of the words Eden and Paradise as underlined by Joseph Campbell: “Eden, signifies in Hebrew ‘delight, a place of delight,’ and our own English word, Paradise, which is from the Persian, pairi-, ‘around’, daeza, ‘a wall’ means properly ‘a walled enclosure’” (*Myths* 26). Hence the double entendre at play in the clausula at the end of the section devoted to the ceremony, possibly referring to Jericha’s awakening to the garden within her: “She awakened when she was lifted out of the truck and carried [...] through the stone gate into the garden” (201).⁹ Therefore, the convent where Jericha is brought up by the Catholic nuns, separated from the surrounding jungle by a walled enclosure becomes a metaphor for the Western logos, which opposes and separates. Jericha’s epiphany thus goes far beyond confronting her personal shadow and her mother’s death. Bridging the gaps between a number of different realms, Kingsolver’s story paves the way for symbols to regain their transcending power, opening up the inward landscape of the soul, and beyond, opening the doors to a renewed awareness of one’s participation in the world.
- 23 Of course, some might express concern for Kingsolver’s appropriation of myths and practices belonging to subaltern cultures. Kingsolver might indeed be accused by some of ventriloquism, and her story “Jump-Up Day” as a matter of fact strikingly echoes what Michael Taussig deplores in his study of shamanism in relationship to colonialism: “The colonist’s relation to the shaman is not to give voice to the pinta [the magical healing picture] that the shaman passes on, but to use the shaman himself as an image and, in a way that merges the literal with the metaphoric, climb to heaven on his back” (Faris 156-57). I would here argue that not only Kingsolver’s transcultural text does give voice to the pinta passed on by the shaman, it moreover points in the process to how much more alive the mythologies of non-Western cultures are compared with those from a Judeo-Christian tradition. Meanwhile, trying to reconcile these myths with our own Western concepts and stories, her ecofeminist short story draws vanishing points into a truly post-colonial thought-system, no longer conceived in terms of dualisms and antagonisms but in terms of interrelatedness and complementarities. In addition, as underlined in many of the notes to this article, Kingsolver’s carnivalesque narrative, like most of her work, provides a rather clear

indictment of cultural imperialism, and may very well in many ways read as a postcolonial piece of fiction.¹⁰

- 24 Furthermore, the syncretic initiation rite at the heart of Kingsolver's story can be read in the light of the notion of liminality, in other words of a "transition between" different states or modes of being (Gennep 15). The concept was first introduced by ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* and later taken up by Victor Turner's anthropological studies, focusing on the universality of rites of passage across cultures. Bearing in mind the many crossings of boundaries encountered in Kingsolver's "Jump-Up Day," it appears that this short story substantiates Wendy Faris's approach of magical realism precisely as "a liminal mode": "Because magical and realistic narrative modes frequently come from different cultural traditions, their amalgamation makes magical realism a liminal mode, in the sense of Victor Turner's 'liminal entities,' which 'are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.' [...] Thus, magical realism partially reverses the process of cultural colonization" (29).

- 25 In this paper, I argued that Kingsolver's use of magical realism helps destabilize and challenge ordinary perceptions of the world. I went on to establish the epiphanic content of the story, having to do first, on the character's level, with an individual revelation and second, on a universal level, with a mythopoeic journey into the ever-shifting forms and power of symbols and archetypes. In her interview with David Gergen, Kingsolver explains: "I love what Joseph Campbell said about mythology. He said that our stories are what holds us together as a culture, and as long as they're true for us, they—we thrive. And when they cease to become true, we fall apart, and we have to reconstruct them or revitalize them. We have to come up with new myths." As Jung and Campbell have argued, today's disenchanted societies must pay a high price for their demythologizing. Having stripped the world of its mysticism, these writers claim, modern societies have simultaneously repressed deeply ingrained archetypes which help relate to the mysteries of existence.
- 26 Strengthening the underwater part of her icebergs—to take up Hemmingway's metaphor for the implicitness of the short story¹¹—Kingsolver very often uses mythopoeia in her short stories as keys to potential, paradigmatic readings. According to Campbell, the first function of traditional mythology is mystical; it consists in awakening the quotidian mind to the infinite mysteries of existence, or, in "aligning waking consciousness to the *mysterium tremendum* of this universe" (*Thou* 2-3). In "Jump-Up Day" as in most of her writing, one of Kingsolver's achievements lies in her reinstilling new life in archetypes and myths of various origins, reopening the doors of perception to the mysteries of the world. Whether resorting to magical realism, to a form of mystical realism,¹² or to a poetization of quotidian and scientific discourses, Kingsolver's work reactivates man's capacity for wonder and resacralizes or reenchants our relationship to the outside world. In line with what Lyotard has claimed of postmodernism, her multicultural, oxymoronic writing "wages war on totality" (82); weaving mythical threads in her transcultural narratives, her short stories recreate images endowed with new potency, within a postmodernist, postcolonial, polyvocal and global society. To quote Campbell again:

These images must point past all the meanings given, beyond all definitions and relationships, to that really ineffable mystery that is just existence, the being of ourselves and of our world. If we give that mystery an exact meaning we diminish the experience of its real depth. But when a poet carries the mind into a context of meanings and then pitches it past those, one knows the marvelous rapture that comes from going past all categories of definition. (*Thou* 8-9)

- 27 The second, cosmological function of mythology, Campbell argues, is to help interpret the world, “to present a consistent image of the order of the cosmos” (*Thou* 3). This Kingsolver achieves by bringing scientific as well as mythical, and psychoanalytical as well as historical discourses into her ecofeminist fiction. As a result, most of her stories point to the world perceived as a web of interrelated, complementary, and interdependent beings driven by a common, creative life force. Third, Campbell adds, a mythology strives “to validate and support a specific moral order, that order of the society out of which that mythology arose” (*Thou* 5). Writing in ways that affiliate her work with both postcolonial and ecofeminist trends, her work does serve this sociological function, promoting ethics respectful of Otherness, whether the Other might take the form of ethnic, class, or gender minorities, or of Nature. And, finally, Campbell establishes the fourth function of mythology as a psychological one, “[carrying] the individual through the various stages of life” (*Thou* 5). This clearly suits Kingsolver’s “Jump-Up Day” as well as all of her short stories, slicing crucial moments of change in the lives of her characters. For indeed, it seems that what Mircea Eliade observed about folktales and fairy tales has become true of short fiction like Kingsolver’s, which is both “readerly” and “writerly”:¹³

Folktales and fairy tales reiterate the exemplary initiation scenario with different means and on a different plane. It takes up and prolongs “the initiation” on an imaginary level. If it can entertain or provide escape, that is only for trivialized conscience, and mostly so for modern man’s conscience; at a deeper level, initiation scenarios retain their gravity and continue to transmit their message, triggering mutations in the psyche. Without realizing it, and while believing one is having fun or escaping, humankind in modern societies benefits from this imaginary initiation the tale brings about. (247 translation mine)

- 28 Calling on universal symbols and archetypes, Kingsolver’s mythopoeic and symbolically-laden short narrative, like most of her stories, becomes an athanor for an alchemical enterprise, aiming at revealing the quintessence of Being, as well as the infinite number of forms and meanings that can come forth from it. Fulfilling the functions partly of fairy tales, partly of mythology, her stories derive their moral value from their exemplary dimension: they cast ordinary people undergoing, for a great part, banal experiences; and yet, the visions and choices of these characters can eventually offer precious parables of how to make sense of one’s existence in postmodern times.
- 29 Out of all of Kingsolver’s stories, “Jump-Up Day” offers one of the best examples of the “spaces between” which Kingsolver’s fiction explores. In an essay where she dwells on her attraction to cultural difference, Kingsolver writes: “This is the dilemma upon whose horns I’ve built my house: I want to know, and to write, about the places where disparate points of view rub together—the spaces between. Not just between man and woman but also North and South; white and non-white; communal and individual; spiritual and carnal” (*Spaces* 154). Constantly crossing boundaries, Kingsolver’s short fiction destabilizes received ideas and conventional grids that tend to serve as lenses in our perception of the world. Making many of our rigid concepts seem as “meaningless

as locks on an open door," Kingsolver's short stories place most of her characters at a threshold, inviting her readers to envision "those doors not just open but gone, lying in the dirt, thrown off their hinges by the forces of accord in a house of open passage" (*Spaces* 156). Whether this liminality might be specific to the genre of the short story, as Clare Drewery argues in her study of the modernist short story, remains to be proved when dealing with multicultural writers such as Kingsolver. I can think of aspects of novels such as *Animal Dreams*, *The Poisonwood Bible* or *the Lacuna* which might question such a thesis, or magical realist novels by Linda Hogan such as *Solar Storms* or *People of the Whale* which also deserve to be studied from that angle. And yet, because Kingsolver's short stories definitely focus more closely on crucial thresholds, unusual modes of perception, and transitional moments in time, space and identity, it may very well be that Clare Drewery's thesis should indeed apply to Kingsolver's short fiction.

- 30 Finally, I believe that stories like Barbara Kingsolver's merit close attention, not only for how artfully they are crafted, but also for what they have to offer in terms of awareness. In twenty-first century societies that tend to be disenchanting with history, religion, and discourse altogether, which have consecrated the effacement of reality behind the hyperreal, and the fragmentation of the self, short stories of this kind still seek to make sense of the world and of one's existence within it. It still paves the way for a literature of hope. Story-telling, Kingsolver's transcultural work implies, offers liminal spaces and ever new territories in which to write and rewrite the discourses that we, as humans, have used since the dawn of civilization and throughout the world, to create and recreate ourselves as well as our environment.

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NOTES

1. The origins of the short story genre in myth is one of the aspects of the genre studied by short story specialist Charles E. May, who contends that "[in] their very shortness, short stories have remained close to the original source of narrative in myth, folktale, fable, and fairy tale" (xxvi).
2. Overruling these racist stereotypes, the sometimes intrusive and sarcastic narrative voice recurrently seems to side with the characters in the subaltern position. A first critique of British imperialism and arrogance is indeed perceived from the opening paragraph: "Also, [the nuns] reasoned, the father was not actually dead but only gone home to convalesce in England, where the hospitals were superior. (They called it 'the mainland,' though surely aware that England, too, is an island.) The good doctor had come here in the first place [...] to coax the disease out of the reluctant St. Lucians, and for his trouble he fell down trembling with it himself. In the opinion of informed observers, it was the cruel irony of God's will." (182) Counterbalancing the doctor's condescension as regards Obeah beliefs and practices, the narrative turns the tables on Catholic beliefs and rituals with quite a wry sense of irony: "[The evening service on Good Friday] was not an actual mass, she'd learned from Sister Armande, since Jesus was in Limbo until the resurrection on Sunday and therefore could not be called upon" (196). Read through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, the heteroglossia worked into the text thus participates in

the carnivalesque mode Kingsolver resorts to in order to invert the imperialist hierarchy between colonizers and colonized.

3. Indeed, Jericha drinks from a flask containing some mysterious alcoholic beverage, after which “[she feels] dizzy” (196). Subsequently, Jericha’s anamorphic eye once again defamiliarizes the world around her: “Ahead of them a small clearing was lit by the headlamps. When he turned them off, the distant trees jumped close and crowded around the truck like beggars” (197-98).

4. The first descriptions of the women in St Lucia contain an implicit indictment of colonialism. Indeed, the women’s activities, their physical descriptions and the verticality of their locations, from top to bottom, brushes a metonymical, impressionistic painting reflecting the hierarchy of colonial society and the exploitation by the colonists of both former slaves and natural resources: “There were the brightly-dressed foreign women, who moved through town with half-closed eyes and purses hung over their arms like bracelets, buying baskets woven with shells, or egrets carved from goats’ horns. White women, whose assured, honey-lazy voices revealed a kinship with the white mistresses of the hilltop villas, who snapped their fingers at servants and held ice in their mouths and watched their children on wide green lawns like cricket fields. [...] These rich ones and their opposites, the lean-armed brown women who loaded boats in the harbor, their hips swinging in wide arcs as the bananas piled high on their heads moved in a perfect straight line up the gang plank toward the ship’s dark, refrigerated hold.” (185)

The images of the “gangplanks” and “the ship’s dark, refrigerated hold” quite suggestively call to mind the actual history of the island of St Lucia as a former British and French colony, resting on triangular slave trade.

5. Pronominal shifting or “scrambling” is one of the many aspects of magical realist texts that Wendy Farris elaborates on in her analyses of various works, such as Julio Cortazar’s “Axolotl,” Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, or *That Voice* by Robert Pinget.

6. I am here using Jung’s theory of the individuation process as exposed in *Dialectique du Moi et de l’Inconscient*.

7. There are many variants of Anansi tales, yet the most well-known recounts how the spider Anansi managed to obtain the first stories ever told from the Sky-God, Nyame. In Caribbean culture, Anansi’s cunning strategies to defeat animals stronger than him symbolize slaves’ strategies of resistance and survival during and after the colonial era. Thus, Kingsolver’s recycling of this trickster character again provides another dimension to her story affiliating it with postcolonial literature.

8. Kingsolver’s narrative provides suggestive descriptions reversing those racist stereotypes, such as that of the white women with “honey-lazy” voices doing their shopping and engaged in leisurely activities, while the black women are being exploited as servants or as workers in the banana trade. The same division obliquely emerges from the paratactic description of the banana plantations juxtaposed with the recreational activities of plantation owners: “It was Sunday, but still there were men and women standing ankle-deep in the ditches between the banana rows, working for someone, hacking with their machetes. Beyond them the ocean glittered, dotted with boats” (192).

9. My reading here follows Joseph Campbell’s analysis of the Garden of Eden myth in *Myths We Live By*: “Taken as referring not to any geographical scene, but to a landscape of the soul, that Garden of Eden would have to be within us. Yet our conscious minds are unable to enter it and enjoy there the taste of eternal life, since we have already tasted of the knowledge of good and evil. That, in fact, must be the knowledge that has thrown us out of the garden, pitched us away from our own center, so that we now judge things in those terms and experience only good and evil instead of eternal life—which, since the enclosed garden is within us, must already be ours, even though unknown to our conscious personalities. That would seem to be the meaning of the myth when read not as prehistory but as referring to man’s inward spiritual state” (*Myths* 27).

10. I am aware that including Barbara Kingsolver's work into postcolonial literature may seem problematical. For more on the subject, see my comparative article on the representation of colonial Congo in Aimé Césaire and Barbara Kingsolver's work: "Aimé Césaire's *A Season in Congo* and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* in the light of Postcolonialism."

11. Ernest Hemingway has formulated a theory of the short story based on the metaphor of the iceberg: "I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show" (quoted in Bruccoli 125).

12. I might prefer to use the term "mystical realism" which not only seems more accurate when discussing Kingsolver's fiction, but is moreover less likely to sound Eurocentric when dealing with non-Western beliefs. For "mystical realism" addresses the representation of the mysteries of life in a way that may seem realistic to some, and unrealistic, or "magical" to others. With "mystical realism," the point is to represent and find sense in mystery, which therefore casts rational realism as something quite beside the point. I have already tackled related issues in an article dealing with Kingsolver's title story. "Homeland," reclaiming Cherokee stories, vision and beliefs (See Meillon, *Literary Resistance*).

13. In *S/Z* Roland Barthes coins the terms "readerly" (*lisible*) and "writerly" (*scriptible*) to differentiate respectively between books which are easy to read and to understand from those which require great reader participation (9-12).

ABSTRACTS

Cet article vise à démontrer comment la nouvelle transculturelle "Jump-Up Day" de Barbara Kingsolver renoue avec les origines mythiques du genre de la nouvelle. La nouvelle dialogique de Kingsolver donne à voir un syncrétisme à la lumière duquel se révèle une relecture des mythes chrétiens, rendus compatibles avec d'autres cultures et d'autres mythes. Je défends ici l'idée que l'écriture de Kingsolver articule un double mouvement, à la fois de démythologisation et, paradoxalement, de re-mythologisation. Dans un premier temps sont abordés les éléments magiques et religieux qui se prêtent à des lectures fantastique, étrange ou réaliste magique. C'est ensuite une interprétation psychanalytique qui est proposée, la nouvelle étant régie par un retour du refoulé qui culmine dans un moment de révélation enchanteur. Enfin, l'attention est portée au rôle joué par l'Obeah Man, véritable Janus Antillais, dont le personnage fonctionne, tel le dieu romain des passages, comme médiateur entre le blanc et le noir, la vie et la mort, le christianisme et l'Obeah, la magie et le réel, le rêve et la vie consciente, le mythe et la nouvelle. La nouvelle de Kingsolver est donc un récit de l'entre-deux, marqué par la liminalité. On peut en proposer une lecture éco-féministe, ou postcoloniale; finalement cette nouvelle de Barbara Kingsolver fait poindre une révélation numineuse et anti-dualiste, pouvant revêtir une dimension universelle.

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