Andrea Shaw Nevins, *Working Juju: Representations of the Caribbean Fantastic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019) 170 pp.

Reviewed by **Miguel Gualdrón Ramírez**, Oxford College of Emory University

In *Working Juju*, Andrea Shaw Nevins offers a multidisciplinary and multimedia analysis of works of cultural production that, in some way, manifest a concern with the broad notion of "the fantastic" in the Caribbean. Remaining faithful to the polysemy of the term *Juju*, as it relates to forms of religious beliefs and practices of magic across continents and in different times of history, Shaw Nevins's approach to the fantastic encompasses a wide variety of genres such as novels, songs, films, history books, and journalistic writing. Yet it limits its scope to works in English and is trained mostly on cultural productions having to do with Jamaica and Haiti. Even though this linguistic and geographical constraint could narrow too much the scope of an investigation that promises to be about the "Caribbean fantastic," the wide variety of media considered as objects of the analysis actually broadens this focus to give us an impressive range of practices, voices, approaches, and textures to consider. This interdisciplinary consideration of the fantastic is doubtless one of the strengths of the book; plus, the author's methodology suggests that the investigative work could lead to many other places and languages. How would this project look like in a multilingual, geographically extensive form? Is it possible to conceive of a "Caribbean fantastic," taking the region as a unity of analysis, even if complex and multifocal?

Working Juju, in its regional commitment, does not address these overarching questions. Yet perhaps focusing on Shaw Nevins's conception of the "fantastic," rather than what she means by the "Caribbean," could yield some preliminary responses. Shaw Nevins provides readers with a concise, explicit formulation of what the fantastic means as an "umbrella term" for an often too diverse set of genres and media. Shaw Nevins borrows this definition from Tzvetan Todorov: "In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world" (qtd. in 21). For Todorov (and it's really the main premise of Shaw Nevins's book), the Caribbean fantastic presupposes a world already rid of any manifestation that cannot be explained by familiar appearances, rules, and categories. And this is the world characterized as "our world," following Shaw Nevins's acknowledgment that the notion of "fantastic" itself assumes forms of Western epistemologies as the standard to which the manifestations here considered are then opposed (20).

The author thus adopts Todorov's definition of the fantastic over other candidates that are of Caribbean and Latin American origin, specifically the ideas of "Magical Realism"

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and its particular formulation by Alejo Carpentier as "the marvelous American reality" (*lo real maravilloso Americano*). As Shaw Nevins explains, the latter would be a good candidate in particular because Carpentier's development of the notion directly came from his visit to Haiti in 1943 and would ultimately initiate his reflections on the Haitian revolution in his novel, *The Kingdom of this World* (1949). Yet, as Shaw Nevins explains, magical realism is now almost exclusively associated with a Latin American literary tradition that obscures the particular emphasis on the Caribbean that this study wants to retain.

Yet there is a more important, implicit argument against embracing magical realism as the central notion of *Working Juju*, one already indicated by adopting Todorov's definition and his emphasis on "our world, the one we know." To describe Caribbean or Latin American reality as magical is to postulate an already entirely different world, one that could not be disrupted by the appearances of these supernatural beings and events. Instead, that world exists because of them, with them, in them—not an entirely Western world, but also not one removed from the West. In this other world, Todorov's "fantastic" is not fantastic anymore, but magically real. Perhaps even real without condition. This conceptual decision to choose the "fantastic" over the "marvelous real" determines the reflective path of *Working Juju*, at least in its first half; the goal is to focus on how these uncanny apparitions distort and unsettle a world presupposed as existing without them.

Shaw Nevins's first two chapters follow this intention faithfully. In the first chapter, she reads eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British nonfiction texts on the Caribbean that studies its space and the religious practices of its peoples, Obeah in particular, from an entirely exterior perspective. Following Todorov's definition, the emphasis is not on how the fantastic in the Caribbean could enact, from within, a disruption of the plantation and colonial order. Rather, the analysis convincingly denounces how the colonial perspectives exemplified in these British texts ultimately blame the alleged brutality of the Obeah on the inherent character of the enslaved, not on the vicious system of the plantation. Even though the figures of Mackandal and Boukman in Haiti, and Tacky in Jamaica, are briefly discussed in this chapter, they serve more as the complement of what the British texts are claiming, that is, that there is an enormous, terrible power in Obeah that needs to be controlled, and not on the real power of resistance of these historical figures and their actions (29–30).

The second chapter deals with a similar conception of the fantastic, this time from the perspective of racist and colonized portrayals of Caribbean characters in Hollywood films. The aim here is to achieve an "unmasking of these thinly veiled monsters [which] seems to reveal levels of anxiety about Caribbean bodies and indeed the region" (77; see also 47). Thus, the aim seems to be to undo the fantastic, to denounce it as a colonized

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way of looking at the Caribbean. From all sort of sources (classic films about Caribbean zombies, action movies, and even pseudo-comedies like *Pirates of the Caribbean*), Shaw Nevins convincingly shows a guiding thread in Hollywood's construction of monstrosity as *the* Caribbean character, and she does so by emphasizing the inseparability of the category of gender in this construction. This unmasking is done on "behalf of the Caribbean," further emphasizing that the author, in this first part of the study, takes the fantastic as a foreign, racist, and sexist category imposed in the region (47).

This external perspective on the Caribbean fantastic is transformed in the second half of the book without any warning. Chapters 3, 4, and the conclusion have a very different approach, one that starts deconstructing the externality inherited from Todorov's definition. Instead of assuming a normal state of being that is elsewhere, the third chapter, for example, focuses on what the popularity of haunting stories in Jamaica says about this particular place, its cultural identity, its history, etc.: "These stories of hauntings reveal what life after death seems to imply about life before death" (84). Thus, the fantastic disruption is now a disruption of the Caribbean itself, one that nevertheless informs what the Caribbean is. Shaw Nevins refuses, for example, to consider some highly popular stories of haunting because they seem to be fabricated with particular interests in mind that are not those of the inhabitants. This refusal shows then a commitment to a different strategy of analysis of the Caribbean fantastic: not anymore the fantastic for someone else, external (British interpretations of Obeah, US images of Caribbean zombies), but how Jamaicans envision themselves as haunted by their own ghosts. And this is where the most interesting analysis of the book takes place, one that finally advocates "the importance of keeping in mind Caribbean and African approaches to death, the spirit world, and ancestors" (85). The analysis of the fantastic in this second sense is also now interestingly mixed in the author's reading of the political climate of Jamaica, its struggle for independence, the poverty, marginalization, and socioeconomic anxieties of its people, as well as racism and colonial legacies.

One could ask, then, if the concept of the fantastic is the correct one to approach the Caribbean in the second part or whether hauntings and science fiction (as Tobias Buckell suggests in the interview with the author included as an appendix) are not disruptive of a familiar world but constitute "familiarity" itself. Shaw Nevins seems to acknowledge this shift, in her conclusion, where the aim of *Working Juju* is no longer to offer an external view of the fantastic but to show that "the deployment of the fantastic from within the region often operates as a counternarrative to artifacts from out of the region," like the works discussed in the first chapter (130). As I see the development of the argument, this premise could be a much more interesting aim for the project from the outset, focusing, for example, more on the thought-provoking visual art from Caribbean artists briefly discussed in the Conclusion to show how they reconfigure an autochthonous,

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revolutionary deployment of the (marvelous) real Caribbean fantastic. In this sense, the fantastic would disrupt a normalized colonial conception and reality that is not anymore "our world, the one we know," but *their world*, the one they have tried to impose on us.

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