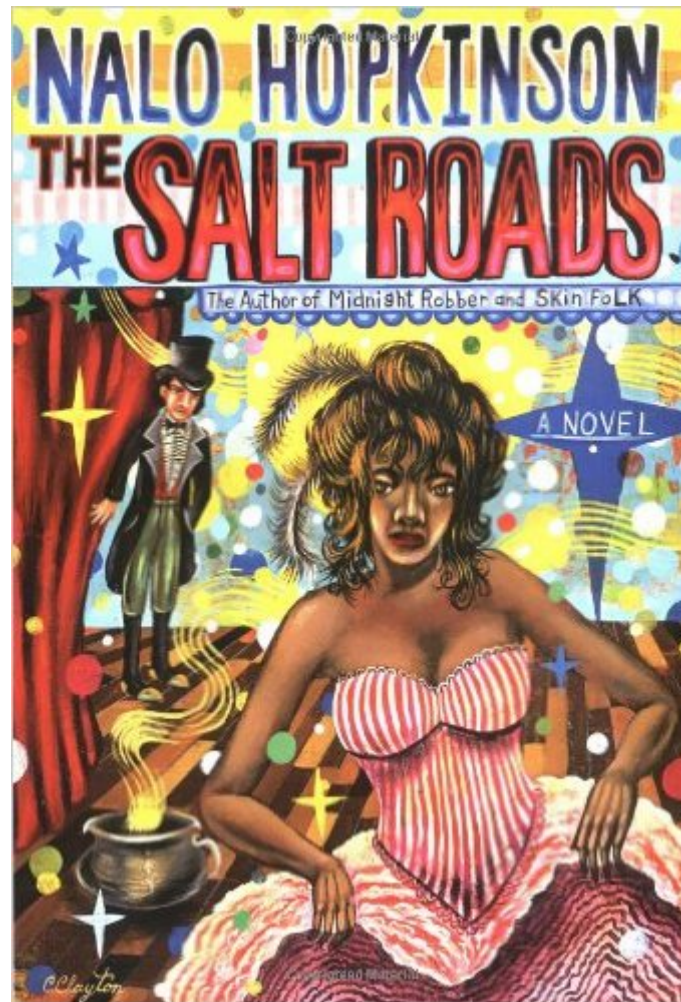


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# The Salt Roads



## Synopsis

- Hopkinson made her debut with "Brown Girl in the Ring (Aspect, 1998), receiving the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. Now, with a body of work that invokes comparison to such writers as Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat, she is poised to claim her place in the mainstream spotlight.- "Skin Folk (Aspect 12/01), the author's previous book, won the World Fantasy Award for Best Collection, was named Recommended Fiction for 21102 by "Black Issues Book Review, and was named a "New York Times Best Book of the Year.- "Midnight Robber (Aspect, 2000), a "New York Times Recommended Book of Summer 2000, received Honorable Mention for the Casa de las Americas Prize, and was a finalist for the Nebula Award for Best Novel, the Hugo Award, and the Philip K Dick Award.- The author's unique style of magical realism will attract the same audiences that catapulted Toni Morrison's "Beloved and Edwidge Danticat's "Breath, Eyes, Memory (Random House, 1998) to bestsellerdom.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* centers on the spirit, Ezili's (a goddess of love and seduction) emergence in three women throughout time. The reader gets a glimpse of her in Mer, a lesbian slave woman healer, in the early 1800's on the Caribbean island of St. Domingue (Haiti) during a burial of a stillborn child. The second appearance is in the 1880's within Jeanne, a mulatto Parisian dancer and mistress to a white poet whose purse strings are controlled by his domineering mother. The third woman, Meritet, is a prostitute in an ancient (340's A.D.) Egyptian brothel. Although these women exist during different time periods, Ezili seems to emerge, exist, and influence each woman

simultaneously. With Jeanne, she appears in dreams, and wants to live, act, and breathe through her until Jeanne is physically scarred and disabled from the ravages of a sexually transmitted disease. Mer receives her awakening during a riverside burial ceremony of a stillborn child and Meritet has an instance of self-awareness that allows her to experience the independence of Ezili. Aside from the Ezili storyline, each main character has her fair share of drama, heartbreak, and intrigue. Each are a victim of circumstance; in worlds that were cruel to the black woman. Mer deals with the harsh reality of plantation life and the impending slave revolt that secured Haiti its freedom from colonial rule. The author expertly embeds regional history and folklore into Mer's story. An aging Jeanne struggles with securing her future as a courtesan in a world in which her skin color places her at a disadvantage and Meritet journeys from whoredom to sainthood. This book is full of symbolism (the incorporation of the value, taste, and healing power of salt, etc. throughout the novel is superb). It also has a mystical and esoteric feel to it; the stories are heart wrenching and the characters are memorable. The author embellished a bit at times with the transcendental themes causing lapses that were very vague and abstract; however for those who enjoy heavy, lyrical prose and surreal themes, it is worth picking up. Overall, it is a wonderfully imagined story that dabbles with the supernatural and issues of self-worth, survival, and redemption. Reviewed by PhyllisAPOOO BookClub, The Nubian Circle Book Club

This book struck me as well-researched, and the characters are sharp and clear and differentiated from each other. The focus is on female characters, specifically black females, but there are plenty of male characters who are also well drawn and interesting. Some of the characters are slaves, some are prostitutes, one is an exotic dancer. All are in bad situations and must make ongoing lousy decisions about their poor quality of life. I felt bad for these women, that their lives sucked so bad, and I wanted them to climb above their situations and get into better circumstances. Didn't happen, though. Even the gods who are dedicated to these women experience misery, loss, and failures. There are no winners, only various degrees of losers. This became a bit hard to take, especially in the last eighty pages or so, when the heat is on, and if anyone is going to succeed at life, it's now or never. What bothered me about these stories is that I know the book is true to the lives of literally millions of women throughout history. By the time I finished the book I felt literally angry about the poor lives of the women and the fact that their men for the most part cannot help them much. Everyone in this book is crushed by social and economic realities that are larger than they are, and no one escapes. Some of the characters die, some of them experience temporary relief but then go right back into the meat grinder, and all end up beaten and defeated by their

lives. For a long time I didn't like the fact that there isn't really a plot to this book, but by the end I decided it was a character study rather than a plot. Pick half a dozen women in history and follow the trajectories of their lives and show them smashed by the poor quality of their possibilities, and give women in modern times reason to be grateful that those days are long past us. In a weird way this is a feel-good novel; we can see how bad prior generations had it, and revel in the expanded opportunities for women of color today. I am a middle-aged white guy, so this was new territory for me, and I'm glad I took the journey. I certainly HOPE women of color have it better today than these women had it back then. I am inclined to try another book by his same author, hopefully something with a different story structure and story arc. I recommend this book to other white guys; it'll be an eye-opener, unless you read a lot of this kind of thing. Thanks, Nalo, for an unforgettable journey with interesting characters.

This "Salt Roads" of this historical/magical realist novel are the trails of sweat, tears, and blood that course through women's lives. Separate narratives intertwine here, each wrought with the precision and lyricism of a short story, but together they produce a true novel of compelling scope. The settings range from Baudelaire's Paris to the cane fields of French-ruled Haiti, from early Christian Alexandria to the present day. The threads of slavery, childbirth, love affairs, and accidental sainthood are by turns comic, angry, and earthily sensual. Rich with historical detail and human intimacies, the book sometimes pulls back to a goddess-like view, contemplating the slow changes that have transformed women's lives over the centuries--but never losing its light, witty touch. In short, a very big novel with many finely crafted and exquisite parts.

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