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## It's All About the Body: Zombification and the Male Gaze in *Oryx and Crake* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*

**José V. Alegría-Hernández**

ORCID: 0000-0003-2952-3262

*University of La Laguna, Spain*

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### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to analyse the commodification of women of colour in two dystopian Canadian novels: *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), by Nalo Hopkinson, and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), by Margaret Atwood. I argue that the women in these stories are subjected to similar patriarchal strategies of control. Namely, I suggest they are zombified through the male gaze, or in other words, they are regarded as ambulatory bodies by their societies. This draws attention to the Canadian government's neoliberal policies that often belie neocolonial undertones in their usage of the bodies of women of colour. In addition to this, I will focus on the characters' ability to resist this totalising and zombifying gaze through different means. Here I posit that Hopkinson presents a world that emphasises commonality among women and, therefore, her characters are more successful in dismantling patriarchal structures. In opposition to this, I argue that Atwood's novel isolates Oryx which makes her unable to achieve structural change, and therefore she chooses to become an elusive figure as a form of protest.

### Keywords

Commodification; Exoticisation; Male gaze; Neocolonialism; Race, Zombification.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* both deal with a post-apocalyptic future caused by human interference with the natural world, and scientific and technological advancements. However, these novels are quite distinct in the ways in which they address their subject matters. For instance, the world of *Oryx and Crake* presents us with a posthuman and postfeminist dystopia characterised by lack of female agency (Tolan 282). In addition to this definition, I propose that it is also post-racial, presenting the reader with a seemingly colour-blind society that obscures discourse around race, but where racial prejudice, at least in the form of exoticisation, is still prevalent. Conversely, *Brown Girl* highlights racial differences by focussing on the struggles of a Black, migrant family living in a desolate Toronto, centring the action around "the battle between a mythical and mystical Caribbean culture and the demands of a postindustrial, postcolonial, and here posturban society" (Wood 317).

Both authors openly discuss, and critique matters of sexism and gender in their writing, which clearly impacts their respective narratives and how these frame womanhood. In fact, both texts are concerned with the commodification of women and their bodies. Moreover, there is a further similarity in that the main commodified women in these stories are non-white. In Atwood's novel this woman is Oryx, who hails from an unidentified East Asian country. Hopkinson, on her part, deals with a family of Caribbean-Canadian women, Ti-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne and Mami Gros-Jeanne. These women are all characterised by the way in which they are turned into commodities in the text, but more importantly, by the ways in which they rebel against sexist and colonial systems of oppression, which take the form of the male gaze and zombification. In this paper I will analyse the commodification they are subjected to, as well as their efforts to liberate themselves from racial and patriarchal shackles. I will argue that Oryx's rebellion is ultimately unsuccessful because she is forced to work individually, and within the norms of an already established, highly oppressive, system. On the other hand, this essay will demonstrate that Hopkinson's characters are far more effective, since they work to dismantle said system through a collective effort.

The commodification that these women are subjected to comes from the zombifying effect of the gaze as a sexist strategy of control. The (male) gaze can be defined as "a phallogocentric apparatus that frames and perceives the image of *woman*" (May-Ron 261, emphasis in original). In this regard, it deals with the textual representation of women and their bodies. My contention is that the male gaze 'zombifies' women by reducing them to ambulatory bodies, and in so doing constructs them as subjects without agency to perpetuate the idea of the subservience of women of colour: "to be a body without a mind is to be subhuman, animal; to be a human without agency is to be a prisoner, a slave"

(Lauro and Embry 90). This is not to say, however, that to be zombified through the gaze inherently erases women's agency. As previously stated, the mechanisms of the gaze function within the realm of textual representation. In this case, the subject remains capable of exerting their agency, but critically, she is seen as zombie by the patriarchal system.

This conflict between agency and lack thereof is instrumental to understanding the duality of the figure of the zombie, as Lauro and Embry have put it:

There is the Haitian *zombi*, a body raised from the dead to labor in the fields, but with deep associations of having played a role in the Haitian Revolution (thus, simultaneously resonant with the categories of slave and slave rebellion); and there is also the *zombie*, the American importation of the monster, which in cinematic incarnation has morphed into a convenient boogeyman representing various social concerns. The *zombie* can also be a metaphoric state claimed for oneself or imposed on someone else. (87)

Both stories engage in this duplexity, particularly as it pertains to the zombie as an enslaved person or a rebel. I am also concerned with this idea of the zombie as a state that can be claimed or imposed. Throughout *Oryx and Crake* and *Brown Girl* the zombie is a state that is being forced upon women through the gaze. Paradoxically, however, in so doing the oppressors often end up becoming the zombies themselves in certain ways. After all, the zombie is often associated with "powerlessness - be it in the powerlessness of the oppressed or the mindlessness of the privileged" (Romdhani 77). Or, in other words, the zombie can represent an oppressed group or, in its ingestion of meat, become a metaphor for how the privileged consume wealth.

The utilisation of the figure of the zombie in this analysis comes from its intrinsic connection with the history of colonisation and slavery, as McAlister argues:

The zombie came to being (as it were) in the plantation society of colonial Saint-Domingue ... its figure, its story, its mythology, are at once part of the mystical arts that have developed since that time *and* compose a form of mythmaking that effects the mystification of slavery and ongoing political repression. That is, the zombie represents, responds to, and mystifies fear of slavery, collusion with it, and rebellion against it. (65, emphasis in original)

While I do not wish to divorce the figure of the zombie from the cultural context in which it emerged, namely as an Afro Caribbean response to slavery, I believe that it can prove useful in understanding the forms of oppression that other non-white women are subjected to, especially in regard to Asian women and in

the context of sexual exploitation. In other words, the notion of the zombie can also be applied to Oryx, who throughout the story is often highly exoticised in sexual terms and who is forced to become a sex worker from a young age.

As previously mentioned, the zombie is particularly connected to the history of colonisation and slavery suffered by Black people across the Americas and Africa. Thus, its usage in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is pivotal to Hopkinson's denunciation of the asymmetry of the mosaic of cultures (Reid). In the world of *Brown Girl*, disputes within the Canadian government lead to the submersion of the economy in downtown Toronto, known as the 'Burn,' which prompts an exodus of the upper classes, industries and police forces to the outskirts of the city, known as the suburbs or 'Burbs': "those who stayed were the ones who couldn't or wouldn't leave. The street people. The poor people. The ones who couldn't see the writing on the wall, or who were too stubborn to give up their homes" (Hopkinson "Prologue"). As a result, the citizens of the Burn are left to fend for themselves in a power vacuum, prompting the rise of mafias, the most powerful of which is led by Rudy, a kingpin who uses vodou to exert control over the people of the Burn and who turns out to be Ti-Jeanne's biological grandfather. Given the clear class differences between the Burbs and the Burn, downtown Toronto in this story can be equated with the pleeblands of *Oryx and Crake*. However, while in the latter story there is no mention of the racial demographics of the pleeblands, in the former it is made patently clear that Burn citizens are predominantly from immigrant and non-white backgrounds.

This adds a racial level to the exploitation of Toronto in the story, as it highlights the utilisation of people of colour by the upper classes in the pursuit of political gain. McCormack argues that: "Those living in the downtown area are reduced to bodies; the population is a wealth of biological resources for the extension of other lives" (255). This is exemplified in premier Uttley's decision to receive a heart transplant from a human 'donor' rather than a pig, as is usually the case in this world: "human organ transplant should be about people helping people, not about preying on helpless creatures" (Hopkinson "Prologue"). The irony here lies in the fact that they enlist the help of Rudy to obtain this heart, which clearly shows that they do not care if the person it belongs to donates it willingly. Not only that, but they are essentially making the rights of people of colour secondary to those of animals. Thus, they belie their view of the citizens of the Burn as zombies, reducing them to nothing more than body parts to be utilised, lending truth to McCormack's assertion "That these people are less than human, outside the laws that protect the whiter, richer humans in the suburbs, links the narration of this Caribbean family's life in Canada to the history of racialised segregation based on a system of enforced slave labour" (254). The dehumanisation of the people of the Burn in the eyes of the upper classes serves to highlight how Uttley, and by extension the

Canadian government, enforces Thanatopolitical control over people of colour in order to revamp the state (Turner 241), which harkens back to the idea of the zombie as a slave.

Interestingly enough, this leads us back to the aforementioned notion that in the Anglo American/Canadian context the zombie can be used as a metaphor for consumption; under this light, taking away parts of the body can be analogous to resource extraction of the land (given that these are the only true resources left in the Burn), which clearly highlights the history of Western colonisation in the Caribbean. Moreover, it draws attention to Canadian neocolonial practices through its immigration system which 'consumes' the skilled work forces of developing nations in order to revert its dwindling fertility rates and maintain its exponential economic growth: "In this way, the countries with the fewest specialised professionals and workers in the world finance from their meagre local resources their best human elements, for the benefit of countries, which are already developed" (Bourdreau 6). Thus, the Canadian government engages in the consumption of non-white immigrant bodies to sustain itself through the creation of migratory pathways based on the fields within which they have a deficit of professionals. However, as happens in the Burn, these people are commodified and promptly forgotten once the government has made use of them, as is evidenced in the historical erasure of women of colour "whose bodies are racialized as non-White and who are thus outside the narrative of desirable Canadian citizen" (Kelly and Wossen-Taffesse 169). As such, Uttley, the other politicians of the Burbs and Rudy are the true zombies in the story as they long to consume (absorb) human flesh in order to survive and/or maintain their political power.

Of Rudy's involvement Romdhani argues that it "draw[s] attention to the role that some black people themselves have played and continue to play in black oppression" (81). Although this is certainly an element worth bearing in mind, my reading departs from it. I argue that the fact that the person whose heart is taken is a woman, Mami Gros-Jeanne specifically, confers a much deeper, intersectional layer to this issue. As Jackson argues: "Blackness is not imperviousness to a politics of sex-gender but a site of its profound intensification" (85). Thus, it becomes not only racial objectification, but gender-based objectification as well, after all "In *Brown Girl* zombification of both the living and the dead is only ever performed on women" (Wood 323). In fact, given that Mami Gros-Jeanne was originally married to Rudy, who was physically abusive towards her, her death can be seen as Rudy's ultimate assertion of patriarchal control over her. Thus, he proves his 'power' over her by deciding on the conditions and time of her very death. This also ultimately applies to Oryx's predicament in *Oryx and Crake* as she is eventually murdered by Crake in order to further the development of his plans. As such, both stories clearly take on elements

of patriarchal violence wherein men exert ultimate power over the lives, and therefore deaths, of women who are seen as mere tools in their own struggles for authority.

Although the circumstances around it are completely different, Oryx shares with Mami Gros-Jeanne the fact that she is seen as a zombie, an ambulatory body that can be used by the upper classes. The main difference here being that Oryx's body is seen as a wholesale resource, rather than divided into body parts. As such, she is sold as a commodity to an older man who utilises her, alongside other children, as beggars, essentially turning them into a cheap labour force, which clearly draws on the imagery of the zombie as slave labour. After that, she is made to offer her sexual services to tourists only to later extort them and, eventually, she is passed from hand to hand as a sex worker. Thus, in the eyes of these men she is transformed into an instrument for their sexual pleasure, nothing more than a commodity. Similarly, when Jimmy references this time in her life, he constructs her as a defenceless individual on account of her being a child, and becomes outraged at her village's custom of selling children for subsistence which he labels "an asshole custom" (Atwood "Oryx"), in spite of Oryx's understanding that it was a custom that emerged from necessity "Oh Jimmy, you would like it better maybe if we all starved to death?" (Atwood "Oryx").

Oryx's objectification is trifold, as a child, as a woman, and as an Asian person. This is particularly prominent in the fact that the men she is made to offer her services to are, overwhelmingly, sex tourists who exoticise her: "it [the website] claimed to show real sex tourists, filmed while doing things they'd be put in jail for back in their home countries" (Atwood "HottTotts"). The connection here between the exploitation of women of colour and tourism highlights how the orientalist gaze echoes many characteristics of the male gaze (Drichel 27). This sort of tourism is also relevant to *Brown Girl*, where it is mentioned that the Strip, a neighbourhood that is characterised by its night life, was "fuelled by outcity money. It was where people from the 'burbs came to feel decadent" (Hopkinson ch. 9). Through Ti-Jeanne's description of the Strip, it is clear to the reader that it shares many similarities with exoticised views of foreign countries, particularly in the East, as evidenced by the mention of the mythical city of Shangri-la: "If you believed them, Shangri-la lay beyond each door, in the form of fragrant, compliant women and men, drinks that shamed the nectar of the gods, and music that would transport you to ecstasy" (Hopkinson ch. 9). This creates a very clear correlation to the exoticisation that Oryx is subjected to by Jimmy who "fetishises Oryx, both for her beauty, and for her alien otherness" (Tolan 289), as seen by his description of her: "Oryx was so delicate. Filigree he would think, picturing her bones inside her small body. She had a triangular face... skin of the palest yellow, smooth and translucent, like old, expensive

porcelain" (Atwood "Oryx"). In both cases the mentions of 'passiveness' or compliancy further create the narrative that these women are objects for men to control, as evidenced in Jimmy's desire to own Oryx: "he wanted to touch Oryx, worship her, open her up like a beautifully wrapped package" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). The mention of her as a gift that needs to be unwrapped highlights her status in his mind as a mere object of desire, wherein unwrapping signifies owning her sexually but more incisively uncovering her life story "he'd tortured himself with painful knowledge: every white-hot factoid he could collect he'd shove up under his fingernails. The more it hurt, the more—he was convinced—he loved her" (Atwood "Pixieland Jazz"). Thus, he attempts to transgress the boundaries of the skin and own her psyche by fusing the real Oryx with the zombified, powerless idea of her he has constructed.

Critically, Jimmy puts Oryx into a Cinderella-like position of total submission to the men who abused her in order to satisfy his own fantasy of rescuing her, while ignoring the ways in which she has managed to obtain power on her own terms (May-Ron 264). This obsession with rewriting Oryx's life in a pursuit to 'rescue' her stems from Jimmy's white saviour complex; Yu holds that the objects of the complex, the 'rescues' are generally "nonwhite people from developing nations and people of color in developed nations who are characterized by negative stereotypes—including their inability to self-help" (2). Therefore, Jimmy's interest in pushing Oryx into a defenceless position comes from the fact that, were he to acknowledge her agency and resilience, he would not be able to satisfy his own fantasy.

This need to 'save' Oryx stems from her personality putting Jimmy's world view into question, as he is unable to comprehend Oryx's lack of self-pity at her own situation. This is in stark contrast to Jimmy's utilisation of his own childhood trauma, on account of his absentee mother, to victimise himself and manipulate other women: "They knew about his scandalous mother, of course, these women. Ill winds blow far and find a ready welcome ... Soon the women would be consoling him, and he'd roll around in their sympathy, soak in it, massage himself with it" (Atwood "Applied Rhetoric"). In other words, he weaponizes his familial tragedy to zombify women, since he reduces them to bodies from which he can derive a form of emotional or sexual labour. While the end goals are different, this is remarkably similar to how Uttley sees the citizens of the Burn, not as actual human beings, but rather bodies whose usefulness lies only in whatever resources they may hold for the upper classes. This strategy of control, however, is unsuccessful on Oryx: "Only Oryx had not been impressed by this dire, feathered mother of his ... She was not unfeeling: on the contrary. But she refused to feel what he wanted her to feel. Was that the hook—that he could never get from her what the others had given him so freely? Was that her secret?" ("Applied Rhetoric"). This puts his obsession with Oryx under a new

light, as it evidences that what he attempts to do, under the guise of 'saving her' is to zombify her, making her act in the ways he sees fit, and it is her refusal to reduce herself to only a body that he can utilise that further makes him want to dominate her.

This attempt at submitting Oryx takes on the form of his manipulating her feelings, as seen in the fact that he harasses her about her past in order to elicit a reaction from her due to his refusal to believe that she was never angry at her situation: "He couldn't leave her alone about her earlier life ... Perhaps he was digging for her anger, but he never found it. Either it was buried too deeply, or it wasn't there at all. But he couldn't believe that. She wasn't a masochist, she was no saint" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). Once again Jimmy is creating his own Oryx by rejecting the information given to him by the true one. Thus, he prioritises his own subjectivity and is so doing truncates his desire of ownership over her, as the version of Oryx he forms in his mind does not correspond with the real one.

Atwood makes the reader aware that, similarly to Jimmy, we are only capable of collecting slivers of information about Oryx. Additionally, given Jimmy's unreliable narration, much of what we have access to might be fabricated or skewed by his subjectivity, he reflects on this himself when he says: "There was Crake's story about her, and Jimmy's story about her as well, a more romantic version; and then there was her own story about herself, which was different from both, and not very romantic at all" (Atwood "Oryx"), to this we could also add the barrage of interpretations of Oryx that come from the readers as well, making her an even more elusive figure to the point of almost becoming inexistent, given how diluted her true personality might be. This seems to reflect Spivak's assertion that "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak 61).

Oryx's diluted personality may be seen as akin to her being silenced, which would also reflect Spivak's view that "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (281). However, while she may not have a 'voice' as such, the text seems to highlight Oryx's personality in her ability to enthrall Jimmy with her storytelling, which, in the way it seems to draw on from evening to evening, as "Oryx continued, later that night, or some other night" (Atwood "Birdcall"), references Scheherazade's role in the *Arabian Nights*. In this way, Atwood emphasises Oryx's intelligence while simultaneously infantilising Jimmy, whose outrage at her stories heavily resembles temper tantrums: "he'd marched his outrage off to Crake. He'd whammed the furniture: those were his furniture-whamming days" (Atwood "Oryx"). This is heavily juxtaposed with

Oryx's poise when telling these stories while doing mundane things like doing her nails: "she was painting her nails now ... peach-coloured, to match the flowered wrapper she was wearing ... Later on she would do her toes" (Atwood "Pixieland Jazz").

Oryx's link to Scheherazade also lies in the fact that her stories might also be fictional: "Sometimes he suspected her of improvising, just to humour him; sometimes he felt that her entire past—everything she'd told him—was his own invention" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). I would thus argue that Jimmy's recreation of her story is analogous to translation, which, as has been pointed out by Behnam et al, recreates Hegel's master-slave dialectic:

Using literature and translation of the literary works of the east, the westerners have tried to gain dominance over the minds of the Easterners, thus keeping the more dangerous form of the master-slave relationship going ... Moreover, throughout the history, translation has been employed as a mighty tool for colonization and depriving the colonized from having a voice of their own. (566)

In other words, Jimmy's inability to control Oryx, to zombify her as he has done to other women in the past, is what further attracts him to her specifically. However, since he cannot bear not to control her, he 'recreates' her through his own subjectivity, his gaze. Although paradoxically, this idealised Oryx of his cannot exist without an actual recognition of the true Oryx, which is the reason why these glimpses of her true self escape through interstices of his narration.

Rudy similarly recreates and imposes his own narrative onto the women in the story, thus attempting to turn his gaze into a reality. This can be seen when he drugs Ti-Jeanne and attempts to turn her into a duppy, a malevolent spirit that he creates by separating the soul of his victims from their bodies. The ritual for making a duppy necessitates that the soul of the victim be given willingly, for which he finds a work around by drugging them to make them more susceptible to manipulation. In the case of Ti-Jeanne specifically, he entices her with the idea of the freedom she has longed for throughout the story. In order for this to work, he fabricates a story about both her mother and grandmother: "'I go tell you a little something, Ti-Jeanne.'... 'Is your mother sheself ask me to put she duppy in the bowl.' ... 'Your grandmother did putting visions in she head, trying to control she. Trying to make Mi-Jeanne stay with she'" (Hopkinson ch. 12). The fact that he invokes the figures of these dead women, who cannot give their own account, in order to manipulate Ti-Jeanne speaks to how, for him, they are but commodities in his quest for power and their stories are liable to being rewritten. Furthermore, not only are they commodities but, once again, when faced with the impossibility of controlling their bodies he resorts to making up his own version of their stories, like Jimmy does.

As previously mentioned, the strategy that Oryx utilises to escape the gaze is, predominantly, to thwart it by becoming an elusive figure, as May-Ron postulates: "Atwood paradoxically constructs Oryx as an exceedingly exploited, defenseless individual and, at the same time, as an ultraclever heroine whose ingenuity draws on the very conditions of her subjugation" (265). Indeed, despite living under a racist and patriarchal system that commodifies her body, Oryx draws a certain degree of pleasure from reappropriating it as an object and using it to either obtain better conditions for herself, such as being taught English, or to inflict damage on her oppressors. This is seen in the epiphany she has as a child: "it made her feel strong to know that the men thought she was helpless but she was not. It was they who were helpless, they who would soon have to stammer apologies in their silly accents and hop around on one foot in their luxurious hotel rooms, trapped in their own pant legs" (Atwood "Roses"). The mention of their "silly accents" further highlights the foreignness, and subsequently, the racial difference between herself and these men. Although in this case, she completely subverts the hierarchical structure that has historically positioned white men as all-powerful and Asian women as helpless and subservient. In so doing, she is dismantling the male gaze that reduces her to an object by controlling the narrative around these men and, therefore, making her subjectivity the prevalent one in these interactions.

This form of subversion within the repressive constraints of a patriarchal system is also explored by Hopkinson, in this case in the form of the duppy Rudy creates out of Ti-Jeanne's mom, Mi-Jeanne. For Mi-Jeanne her subjugation seems near total, as Rudy can order her to do his bidding through vodou, and thus, uses her as a weapon against his enemies and as a channel through which to obtain eternal youth. However, thanks to Ti-Jeanne's ingenuity, the duppy learns to stall for time: "instead of pouncing on her, it lowered itself to the ground and licked up the drops of blood, one by one. Rudy loudly ordered it to finish the job, but it kept licking, one drop at a time. It was obeying him, but at its own speed. Ti-Jeanne had shown it that trick" (Hopkinson ch. 10). This form of disobedience keeps Mi-Jeanne from total zombification, or in other words, from being totally powerless before the patriarchal control of Rudy's vodou.

Nonetheless, the difference between these heroines lies in that Mi-Jeanne's stalling for time is a temporary strategy, and she is later liberated by her daughter, whereas in the case of Oryx it is the only tool at her disposal, since the story does not allow her to find a sense of 'sisterhood' in the way that the characters in *Brown Girl* develop. Most probably this stems from the class (and very likely racial) differences between her and the rest of Crake's Maddaddam workers who come from similarly wealthy backgrounds, having grown up in the compounds. As such, Oryx is left in a position where she can only work to ensure

her own survival and that of the Crakers, a new species of bioengineered humans that Crake, Jimmy's childhood friend, has created to survive the coming apocalypse. There is a level of connection between Oryx as their 'teacher' and the Crakers, and in fact, they present an opportunity for her to rebel against Crake's desires by surreptitiously planting the seeds of what would later germinate into the Crakers' religion: "'today they asked who made them' ... 'and I told them the truth. I said it was Crake ... I told them he was very clever and good'" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). However, despite this connection they develop, the differences between the two species and the fact that the Crakers are still learning about the world at large means that they are not at an equal level and Oryx cannot truly find companionship with them. Conversely, in the case of Hopkinson's characters, they can work together to oppose Rudy and are more concerned with the well-being of the other women in the story, especially since they share familial connections. As Reid points out: "centralisation and unity is highlighted in Hopkinson's novel. The novel's title evokes the many ideas of inclusion and exclusion associated with being 'in the ring.'" (Reid).

Hence, I would assert that through commonality the women in *Brown Girl in the Ring* can obtain wholesale liberation and structural change, which in a way serves as a reappropriation of the zombie as slave rebellion (in this case rebelling against the very condition of 'zombie' that men and the government have imposed on them). This is evidenced in the fact that it is only thanks to Ti-Jeanne's experience of the suffering that Rudy caused her grandmother and mother that she manages to rebel against his ritual magic. She realises that his promise of freedom is only a façade and that, ultimately, would bind her to the wishes of a man, as she says to the Jab-Jab: "I can't keep giving my will into other people hands no more, ain't? I have to decide what I want to do for myself" (Hopkinson ch. 12). This realisation for herself is coupled with a stronger sense of connection with her grandmother, as it is only through her teachings that she can summon the spirits to the human world and oppose Rudy: "She remembered her grandmother's words: *The centre pole is the bridge between the worlds...* What were the names Mami had told her? 'Shango!' she called in her mind. 'Ogun! Osain!'" (Hopkinson ch. 12 emphasis in original). Her utilising the CN tower as a conduit to reach the world of the dead is also quite subversive in nature, as she is essentially weaponizing a symbol that, throughout the novel, has represented Rudy's oppression; an imposing and clearly phallic symbol that overlooks the Toronto skyline and that, in a demonstration of hubris, he has turned into his offices. Furthermore, the CN tower has another equally powerful meaning, as it also is a reminder of the part of Canada that has forsaken the residents of the Burn. Therefore, Ti-Jeanne being able to reappropriate it and connect it with her Caribbean roots serves to highlight her healing from the identity struggle that had previously led to her renouncing her

Caribbean heritage, thus showing her growth as a person as well as making her culture more conspicuous to the Canadian landscape, rather than a small fragment of a mosaic that is predominantly white.

In addition to this, as has been noted by Lauro and Embry, "the zombie metaphor also reveals to us our own enslavement to our finite and fragile bodies" (90). Therefore, Ti-Jeanne, in her connection to the spirit world, manages to further shed the body that others utilise to zombify her. This is in stark contrast to Rudy, whose constant consumption of human blood through the duppy only further links him to his body. As such, his quest for immortality is inherently flawed, as it always necessitates that he maintain himself through others' blood. Thus, while attempting to transform the women in the story into zombies, he ironically, becomes the zombie himself. This is further exemplified in the fact that his duppy-making technique subverts the usual view of the zombie: "[the zombie] only symbolically defies mortality, and woefully at that: even the zombie's survival of death is anticelebratory, for it remains trapped in a corpse body" (Lauro and Embry 97). However, the duppy is not trapped in its body, but rather pulled away from it, becoming an 'embodied soul.' By contrast, Rudy is the one who remains trapped in a body so aged that he essentially constitutes a walking corpse, try as he might to hide it through his magic.

In comparison to this, Oryx does not truly manage to break free from the gaze. A clear instance of this can be seen when Crake and Jimmy first find her as a child on a porn website, and she looks directly into the camera: "she looked over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer—right into Jimmy's eyes, into the secret person inside him. / see you, that look said" (Atwood "HottTotts" emphasis in original). This scene symbolises a subversion of the male gaze, turning it towards Jimmy and making him feel vulnerable, or as May-Ron puts it: "such a scene changes Oryx's position within the power structure in which she participates; the gaze, she proves, can be a two-way street" (May-Ron 271). This analysis, however, overlooks the fact that immediately afterwards Crake screenshots and prints the image for him and Jimmy to keep. Therefore, even her subversive look is turned into an exotic commodity for two white men to draw pleasure from, devoid of its original, meaningful impact insofar as it is captured. This is seen in Jimmy's description of it as his property: "He still had that paper printout, folded up, hidden deep... His own private thing: his own guilt, his own shame, his own desire" (Atwood "Extinctathon"). In this way, the story grimly highlights how, in spite of her work to subvert the gaze, men will still reduce her to a simple body.

The commodification of her body exceeds this printout. In fact, Crake also utilises her as a super spreader of the virus he has concocted, as she realises later on: "it was in those pills I was giving away, the ones I was selling. It's all the same cities, I went there. Those pills were supposed to help people!" (Atwood

"Airlock"). Thus, her body is utilised, though in this case not in sexual terms, as a way for the men in the story to reach their goals. Ironically for this analysis, her becoming a super spreader of a highly infectious and deadly virus is quite in consonance with the representation of zombie outbreaks in most American pop culture examples, rather than the slave analogy of its Caribbean origins. This could be seen as a further example of the zombification of Oryx who becomes patient zero of the Anglo American/Canadian bastardised form of the zombie apocalypse. Furthermore, it also highlights how the bodies of women of colour have historically been seen as disposable by Western medicine which has led to many women being experimented on against their consent.

In summary, Oryx never manages to truly break free from patriarchal oppression, in spite of her conditions seeming better as Crake's worker. Or in the words of Tolan: "[Oryx's] multiplicity seemingly signals freedom, but cannot disguise the fact that each of Oryx's identities is defined and limited by capitalist power structures: either as a sex worker or as the employee of a multinational corporation" (290). In this regard, it can be said that the freedom she seems to possess while working under Crake is not that dissimilar to the idea of freedom Rudy offers to Ti-Jeanne. As we can see, this freedom-within-subjugation condition is ultimately a façade that only serves to further marginalise and utilise women of colour. This is something that Oryx, while not aware of the extent to which she is being utilised, seems to be cognizant of as can be seen in a conversation she has with Jimmy about their sexual encounters:

"Why do you think he is bad?" said Oryx. "He never did anything with me that you don't do. Not nearly so many things!"

"I don't do them against your will," said Jimmy. "Anyway you're grown up now." Oryx laughed. "What is my will?" she said. (Atwood "Pixieland Jazz")

Even the form of the narrative seems to highlight Oryx's ultimate powerlessness, after all, "Despite the centring of Oryx's history in the novel, the fact nevertheless remains that her voice is only heard via Jimmy's intermediary recollections" (Tolan 289). Moving further beyond this I would assert that, as said before in regard to Spivak's ideas, Oryx is completely left without voice, her narrative is so constructed, and she as an object so uninscribed with meaning, that she is left open for the reader to impose on her whichever role they decide. Additionally, the reader is also made complicit in her objectification, as May-Ron argues: "Oryx's look into the camera seems to be aware not only of Jimmy and Crake (and all other fictional viewers) but also of Atwood's readers. It implicates the readers in the same voyeurism of which Jimmy and Crake are guilty" (271). This could be argued to help the critically-minded reader to engage with their own objectifying gaze, however, it can also lead to a reification of the gaze the character is attempting to escape.

In contrast, in *Brown Girl in the Ring* the literary genre “frequently changes—from science fiction, to magical realism, to folktales” (Romdhani 72), thus truncating the reader’s own gaze. Of Hopkinson’s usage of fantasy and science fiction elements Sarah Wood claims: “her amalgamation of the Western space with a Caribbean imaginary disrupts the epistemological framework usually associated with this rigid generic definition of science fiction” (325). As such, the text itself becomes an elusive figure, rather than a singular character, as is the case with *Oryx*. In this way, both *Oryx and Crake* and *Brown Girl* utilise the same strategy to thwart the gaze. However, by centring its utilisation to the whole text rather than a single character *Brown Girl* once again emphasises commonality while *Oryx and Crake* isolates its heroine.

Thus, *Oryx*’s story ends exactly where it began, with myriad questions as to who she is, but no real change in her position as a commodity, be it for Jimmy to lust over or for the Crakers to revere as a goddess. In contraposition, *Brown Girl in the Ring* finishes with the promise of change, thanks to Mi-Jeanne’s, and Toronto’s, liberation from Rudy’s power. However, unlike the previous power vacuum, this one is hopeful insofar as the spirit of Mami Gros-Jeanne takes over the body and mind of the premier, instigating her to bring about change to the Burn. Thus, the story once again breaks with the zombification of the women as it emphasises Mami Gros-Jeanne’s mental fortitude which heavily contrasts the idea of the incognizant zombie. In this way, Hopkinson reveals that in spite of the commodification Black women are subjected to, they ultimately are the owners of their bodies and minds. Mami Gros-Jeanne’s heart might beat elsewhere, but it remains imbued with her spirit and linked to her family and this is what allows her, even after death, to keep fighting for structural change and better conditions for women of colour.

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