

“Zombies Go to Toronto: Zombifying Shame in Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring*”

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Abstract

Caribbean-Canadian Nalo Hopkinson’s speculative fiction novel *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) is set in a near future dystopian Toronto and contains many African and Caribbean supernatural and folkloric characters. This article focuses on the zombie, which traditionally functions as a symbol of powerlessness, and argues that Hopkinson’s book expands the relations of power that this figure is commonly employed to probe. More specifically, the essay suggests that, in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the zombie symbolizes black people’s history of oppression, exploitation, and demonization. Furthermore, through reading the novel alongside emotion discourse and Vodou psychology, the article contends that the zombie in Hopkinson’s book can be understood as being symbolic of the consequential shame that members of the African-Caribbean diaspora may experience from a legacy of oppression, which, significantly, includes internalizing a white Western perception of their African and Caribbean cultural inheritance.

Caribbean-Canadian Nalo Hopkinson’s work of speculative fiction *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) contains many supernatural and folkloric beings that derive from Africa. In this novel the literary genre frequently changes—from science fiction, to magical realism, to folktales—and symbols and their meanings appear to be constantly shifting, which may render the text somewhat fragmented and confusing. However, I will argue that the figure of the zombie, which is rarely overtly mentioned in the book, draws together all the elements that make up the novel, enabling a reading that encompasses the brutal history and emotional legacy that African people have experienced from the transatlantic slave trade via the Caribbean and North America to present-day Toronto, while at the same time revealing ways to emotionally heal this trauma for the African-Caribbean diaspora.

Some of the text’s folkloric figures are the focus of a previous article on *Brown Girl* by Giselle Liza Anatol. Principally, her article investigates the soucouyant, a female Caribbean vampire, and examines the ways that folk discourses, due to being predominantly patriarchal, “undermine women’s sense of independence and power” (35). This particular feminist approach leads Anatol to conclude that the novel fails to fully humanize folkloric “bad women”—that is, the soucouyant and La Diabliesse, another figure—and that, as a consequence, “certain mores and archetypes remain intact” (35). Anatol’s somewhat derogatory assessment arises, I suggest, because she does not position the zombie as the most dominant and significant figure in the novel and does not mention that most characters, including the soucouyant, La Diabliesse, and even men, can be read as zombies. Anatol also asserts that “the strict black versus white, Caribbean versus European struggle of earlier independence and black nationalist movements no longer applies to Hopkinson’s futuristic Canadian landscape” (36). In contrast, my assertion is that, when zombies become the lens through which the novel is read, the relations of power explored in the narrative cannot be restricted to patriarchy and gender; moreover, I will argue that the “black versus white . . . struggle” is still relevant because zombies in this book specifically symbolize the long history of oppression and exploitation of people from the African diaspora.

Typically, zombies are figures from folklore in Africa and the Caribbean, they are part of Vodou cults in Haiti, cannibals in science fiction in North America and Europe, and are also invoked in common parlance to describe a being or a system that is controlled by another or is mindless—e.g., zombie capitalism or consumerism. Metaphorically the term is further used in Vodou and in some theories of violence, such as by American psychiatrist James Gilligan, to refer to the effects and affects of trauma, which is said to result in “zombification.” *Brown Girl* incorporates all of these uses, as I will show, and also includes an African figure who is the zombie’s opposite, Legbara, a spirit in Yoruba and some Caribbean religions. In Hopkinson’s novel, healing and preventing zombification is shown to be crucial for the wellbeing of the African-Caribbean diaspora, a state that can only be achieved through reclaiming, and reconnecting with, their African cultural heritage. To understand the complexity of this idea, and how Legbara symbolizes it in the story, I will explore the concept of *ashe*, which is both an Afrocentric epistemology and the Haitian Vodou concept of collective power. Significantly, both notions are rooted in community and an African ancestral spirituality and are thus incompatible with Western ideologies of individualism.

For the novel’s protagonist, Ti-Jeanne, who is a third generation Caribbean-Canadian woman living in Toronto, Western ideologies of individualism seem desirable. This is because she mistakenly believes that rejecting her African heritage and assimilating into white Canadian culture is the means through which she can assert her autonomy and selfhood: “She had to leave this place as soon as she could, get away from the balm-yard and Mami and Rudy and all these beings she couldn’t see who were trying to control her life” (123). However, as the novel later reveals, the emotional cost for the African-Caribbean diaspora of denying one’s African heritage in favor of assimilating into the colonizer’s culture is shame—or, as I will argue, a zombifying shame. All zombies, wherever and whenever they appear across cultures, lack autonomy and the ability to think clearly and feel complex emotions. It is for this reason that they can be used as metaphors to describe the experience of enduring extreme shame. Shame, as a negative evaluation of the whole self (Lewis 75), is a debilitating condition that controls and inhibits the functioning of clear thought, positive emotions, self-esteem and self-respect, and the ability to maintain good relationships with others. In the case of the novel’s Caribbean-Canadian characters, this situation includes being alienated from African-derived cultures.

The Vodou concept of *ashe* is helpful for understanding Ti-Jeanne’s much needed connection with African-derived culture and with other people within her community. As Vodou *Houngan* (priest) Ross Heaven explains, *ashe* relates to a personal power that is interwoven with a communal power (91). This is gained and maintained by serving the spirits, by good relations with one’s ancestors and the living community, and by a close connection with nature (105). He argues that the Vodou view of power is unlike its Western incarnation because the Vodou notion is about empowerment of self *and* others (91). Heaven maintains that to experience what he calls psychological or spiritual attack and the loss of *ashe* may result in zombification (230). According to him, one’s *ashe* is often first taken away unintentionally by “the people who love us most: our parents” (95). As Heaven further explains, “We may even attract [people taking away our *ashe*] by repeating the patterns of our past and seeking out the same sort of people with whom to begin relationships; people we know, at some level, are destined to hurt us once again” (95). He argues that when our behavior is determined by another (parents, a loved one, or a colonizer) and is against our own will, it is up to the individual whether this is perceived as a “curse or a sacred challenge” (96): something to be fought or accepted. If one submits to be willed by another, it can lead to zombification (96). In Hopkinson’s novel, the threat for Ti-Jeanne is not only assimilation into Canadian white culture, but also a physical threat later from her baby’s father and, at the

end of the novel, a spiritual attack from Rudy, the man who turns out to be her grandfather and who literally tries to turn her into a zombie.

Heaven’s explanation of zombification resonates with both Jamaican writer Erna Brodber’s use of the word in her novel *Myal* and with James Gilligan’s research into shame and violence. Zombification and spirit theft in *Myal* symbolize the internalization of colonial values: the colonizers had “[t]aken [African-Jamaicans’] knowledge of their original and natural world away from them and left them empty shells—duppies, zombies, living deads capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out” (107). In a similar way, *Brown Girl’s* Ti-Jeanne has absorbed white Canadian values and views Caribbean culture as inferior and frightening, thus, in my argument, making her a zombie because she is ashamed of her Caribbean cultural inheritance.

Extreme shame includes the deadening of other emotions—what can be called zombifying emotions. Gilligan elucidates, “when self-love is sufficiently diminished, one feels shame. But it may be somewhat paradoxical to refer to shame as a ‘feeling,’ for while shame is initially painful, constant shaming leads to a deadening of feeling, an absence of feeling” (47). He maintains that, although one may be able to feel rage, emotional numbness includes the loss of the capacity to experience love for self and others, guilt, and fear (113–14). This loss, according to psychologist Phil Mollon, also “signals a lack of empathy” for self and others (20). Pathological shame occurs, Gilligan posits, through extreme formative “physical violence, neglect, abandonment, rejection, sexual exploitation and violation” (44). Gilligan further uses the term “zombified existence” to explain how pathological shame can impede other emotions (40).

Gilligan’s metaphor of zombification for pathological shame also resonates with Heaven’s explanation of spiritual attack in Vodou. Heaven maintains that, although a person may experience an attack to any part of their soul when another seeks power by appropriating their *ashe*, it is the *ti bon ange*—the part closest to the physical world—that is particularly vulnerable (184–85). Like Gilligan, he argues that shame can lead to zombification (230). Furthermore, zombification arising from trauma can also result in the *ti bon ange* leaving the body and existing in the middle world with spirits such as the *jab jab* (230), who is a personal or nature spirit in Vodou and a devil spirit in Caribbean folklore. This is precisely what happens to Ti-Jeanne in the last part of *Brown Girl* because she feels shame, experiences trauma, and is detached from her community and ancestors.

Ti-Jeanne’s initial shame derives from her childhood. She feels hurt and rejected by her mother who abandoned her. She knows that her mother had a vision that she had shared

with her own mother, Gros-Jeanne, that they quarreled, and that this led to her mother running away. In addition, “[Ti-Jeanne’s] mother and grandmother had raised her with the strap” (33). Her memories of physical abuse recur throughout the novel and her home is also one where love is never expressed. An additional source of feelings of powerlessness and shame is her yet unnamed baby boy. She did not want the child and being reminded of this by her grandmother causes her to feel shame (49). Baby, as the little boy is referred to, is a burden and a curse, and she blames him for breaking up her relationship with Tony, the child’s drug-addicted father: “It hadn’t been Ti-Jeanne’s decision to leave Tony; it was Baby’s. . . . Resentment battled with the urge to care for the baby. . . . Finally she went back to her grandmother” (42–43). Baby is perceived as a threat to Ti-Jeanne’s autonomy and living again with Gros-Jeanne is yet another source of shame and, in her view, a sign of her powerlessness. She longs for a “normal” life in Toronto’s suburbs and an individualistic Western form of power. She is dismissive of her grandmother Gros-Jeanne’s herbal medicine and frightened of spirituality and folklore, believing that the way to power lies in disconnecting herself from her family, community, ancestors, and culture.

Her detachment from an Afrocentric heritage is also epistemological. In the context of the novel, *ashe*, I will argue, relates to the ability to read narratives through an Afrocentric lens. This can be applied to both Ti-Jeanne and the reader, as the construction of reality—or realities—in the novel is complex. The entire story is set in a near future, dystopian Toronto. Following riots, the Canadian government has abandoned the inner city, called the Burn, which is now a lawless zone ruled by the Caribbean crime lord Rudy and is mainly populated by poor whites, Caribbean-Canadians, Eastern Europeans, and figures from Caribbean folklore. In terms of literary genres, the story unfolding in the Burn adheres to magical realism and folktales, as well as having African and Caribbean religions interwoven into the plot. White Canada, located in the rest of Ontario and Toronto’s suburbs, which also includes the government and its dealings with the Burn, is depicted using the genre of science fiction, with Hopkinson employing its traditional motif of colonization. Both geographical spaces and all the literary genres used in the novel include zombies. The type of zombie featured is dependent on the theme explored and the genre in which it is found. For example, Haitian zombies are only found in the magical realism that constructs the narrative of the Burn, whereas zombies deriving from America that are metaphorically used to depict white Canadian colonization, cultural appropriation, and consumerism are written in science fiction, which will be explored in greater depth later on. The reader and Ti-Jeanne are initially unaware of how this world is constructed. In fact, Ti-Jeanne is hostile toward seeing the

realities of her world, as she dismisses anything strange, is disparaging of her grandmother's belief in African and African-Caribbean spirits, and, as mentioned above, wishes to live a supposedly "normal" life. Her idea of a normal life can be equated with a realist novel. This is problematic because this is not how reality/ies in the story is/are constructed. In addition, Ti-Jeanne has to learn to perceive her world because it becomes necessary for her to fight the zombie-maker Rudy and, as I will argue, because, as is later revealed, she too is already a zombie who is in danger of becoming a more extreme type of one like her mother, Mi-Jeanne. This danger exists because Ti-Jeanne cannot and will not read the narratives she inhabits, as she dismisses and is ashamed of her Caribbean heritage and family.

In her book *Legba's Crossing*, Heather Russell develops a critical framework for reading narrative structures in African American and African-Caribbean literatures, which is useful for understanding *Brown Girl*, as she uses the African figure of Legba and the concept of *ashe*. Papa Legbara, a spirit from Vodou and Yoruba cosmology, is a character in *Brown Girl* and, like the zombie, is also a liminal figure. Legbara is the spirit of the crossroads, standing between the material and spiritual worlds. As the Prince of Cemeteries he carries the newly born into the world and the dead back to Guinea Land, the African ancestral spiritual home. In her work, Russell argues that, for black writers, "Breaking [the] traditional and canonical social contracts, becomes integral to the liberating, revolutionary poetics of form engendered by African Atlantic narratology" (2). She contends that these literatures often possess the *ashe* aesthetic (12). Russell asserts that *ashe* in art is achieved when "creation is held to have transcended all prescribed boundaries," including "generic constructs," "[E]urocentric epistemology" (10–11), and at the level of "theme" it is for "sociopolitical, ideological purposes" (12). In Yoruba cosmology *ashe* is a divine essence and Legbara has the power to make it available to man (10). To achieve *ashe* one must recognize truth and falsehood in communication and discern what significant communication is (10). This is, as Russell explains, the pathway to "divine purpose and human meaning" (10). In *Brown Girl*, the character Ti-Jeanne is not only uninterested in communicating with her spirit father, the character Legbara, but she also fails to recognize him when he appears in another form because she accepts reality at face value and does not look for meaning, especially one that would conflict with her realist perception of the world.

Russell argues that *ashe* is a credo and that it is also the role of the literary critic to "apprehend the ideology of form," thus transcending the "borders and boundaries of fixed constructs regarding knowledge, interpretation, and apprehension" (11). Ti-Jeanne's task during the novel, I contend, is to become like a literary critic, a reader of narratives—of

dreams, visions, folktales, and people’s lives, including her own. In order to read these narratives she must transcend the boundaries of what she takes to be reality and knowledge, which includes accepting and understanding that “reality” does not resemble realist fiction, and learn to see a different—fantastic and magical—reality that can only be apprehended through empathy. An example of this is her inability to recognize her mother when she meets her as a bag lady on the street and sees her in a dream as half soucouyant and half La Diabliesse; she also fails to feel for her mother when discovering that she has become a blood-drinking spirit under Rudy’s control. It is only through a magical experience of being others that she eventually learns to see and to empathize.

Learning to read and interpret symbols and meanings in the novel is also the task of the reader. One of these tasks, I contend, is to recognize zombies and understand their role. To do this it is necessary to analyze the history of zombies and how different types relate to specific current and past forms of exploitation. As already mentioned, zombies are associated with powerlessness—be it the powerlessness of the oppressed or the mindlessness of the privileged—and in the novel they also function as metaphors for the continuing struggles that black people have faced since the transatlantic slave trade and still encounter today. This age-old subjugation also includes the ways in which African-Caribbean culture, including the zombie, has been demonized and appropriated for entertainment by the West at the expense of Caribbean people in the twentieth century. Starting with the American zombie and following it back to Africa, I will explain how different types of zombies function in the novel.

The best-known zombies in the Western world come from American George Romero’s films. Cory James Rushton and Christopher Moreman, in their introduction to *Race, Oppression and the Zombie*, note that Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) recasts them as “cannibalistic ghouls who replicate themselves through infection” (1) and that Romero’s *Dawn of Dead* (1978) “again re-cast[s] the zombie, [but] now as a symbol for mindless consumerism, thereby establishing zombie narratives as a potential location for critiques of late capitalism” (1). This form of zombie in Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl* is evoked in the ways in which inner-city Toronto is consumed by its white suburbs and the government.

In *Consuming the Caribbean*, sociologist Mimi Sheller examines another colonialist and capitalist function of the zombie. She employs bell hooks’s and Sara Ahmed’s work on the commodification and appropriation of otherness—“eating others”—to explore how figures in Caribbean folklore can and often do symbolize the Western consumption of the Caribbean. She argues that,

From the founding myths of European “discovery,” to the blood-sugar *topos* of the abolitionists, and finally to the popular folk cultures of the Caribbean in their responses to capitalist exploitation, stories of the literal dismembering and eating of others have circulated for centuries in the Caribbean. (143)

Sheller reminds us that it is the cannibal that first defined this region in the European imagination (148). Accounts of Caribs eating their enemies functioned to demonize and “other” a people in order to justify their extermination. In reality, as she points out, it was the colonizers who engaged in eating others by, for example, exterminating indigenous people to take their land and by using slave and indentured labor (148). As well as examining the cannibal metaphor, Sheller also looks at the zombie and the vampire as separate figures and how they have merged. This approach is significant, as it signals the commonalities, and even the blurring of differences, between these beings, especially in relation to the European and US consumption of the Caribbean. Sheller argues that moving between these figures enables the questioning of “symbolic forms of commodity consumption” and “the actual material relations through which bodies in one place unethically touch bodies in another place” (147–48). She explains that the Haitian zombie was appropriated by Hollywood—which was a form of cultural cannibalism—in order to demonize Haitians. Joan Dayan, quoted by Sheller, argues that the Hollywood “film *White Zombie* (1932) and books like William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929) and John Huston [sic] Craige’s *Black Bagdad* (1933) helped to justify the ‘civilizing’ presence of the marines in ‘barbaric’ Haiti” during the US occupation (145). In this way, Romero’s ironic—whether intentional or not—later invention of the cannibalistic zombie can be read as literally embodying and thus symbolizing the cultural appropriation of the very figure that was used to characterize the people from whom the figure was taken.

The zombie as a literal and figurative cannibal is represented in *Brown Girl* through the relationship between Toronto’s suburbs, whose Premier is Catherine Uttley, and inner-city Toronto, called the Burn, which is run by Rudy. The people from the suburbs (shortened to the ‘burbs in the novel) view those from the Burn as frightening dangerous criminals whose culture is exciting and exotic and, more significantly, whose culture can be consumed. People from the Burn cannot cross into the ‘burbs because the army guards the borders to prevent them, but the ‘burbs people can cross into the Burn to cannibalize its inhabitants. Those from the suburbs are cannibal-zombie hybrids that eat the other—for example, they cross into Yonge Street, the red light district, to “feel decadent” (176). As Michelle Reid notes, “Despite the apparent segregation, an interdependent relationship still exists between the Burn and the

'burbs. However, the fact that this interdependence is fuelled by 'outcity money' and decadence indicates that this relationship is based on corruption" (309). I would add to this that this corruption can be associated with a form of mindless cannibalistic capitalism, albeit an illegal one, and that the sexual exploitation that is also involved in this transaction in the novel is another form of zombie cannibalism that calls to mind the sexual commodification of others involved in colonialism:

Deeplight ads glowed at the doors to virtually every establishment: moving 3-D illusions that were hyped-up, glossy lies about the pleasures to be found inside. 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 176)

Sheller notes that in the Caribbean what began with the "commercialisation of slave women's sexuality" has evolved into the sex tourism of today (163). "The sexualisation of young 'exotic' bodies, male and female," she argues, "has become a standard toll of Caribbean tourist promotion, from hotel brochures to magazine advertising and guidebooks" (164). In this way, the Burn is symbolic of the way that white Westerners view the Caribbean and diasporic Caribbean spaces: places that exist to satiate non-Caribbean appetites for exotic decadence.

Drugs are also part of this decadence. As Sheller explains,

Another kind of demonisation of Caribbean people occurs around the movements of drugs from the Caribbean into Europe and North America, and associated migration of violence. . . . Imagery of the Jamaican "Yardie" gangster in Britain and the "war on drugs" in North America exploits the image of the Caribbean as a lawless zone of disorder in need of global policing, legitimising greater external control over the movements of its "infectious" people. (169-70)

In Hopkinson's novel, Rudy, as a Caribbean crime boss and drug lord, represents to white Canada the threat of "Caribbean" criminality and drug-related illnesses entering and infecting their space and bodies. It is important to note that infection is how Romero's zombies are created; zombies bite people and this reproduces the species. In this way, people from the 'burbs fear becoming zombies through infection, while simultaneously, in zombie-like

behavior, cannibalizing those infectious people. This is reminiscent of the way in which the Caribbean, and Haiti in particular, has historically been demonized by Europeans and Americans. Sheller notes that in the sixteenth century “Europeans insisted that syphilis originated in Haiti,” in the 1920s *National Geographic* wrote that eighty-seven percent of Haitians “were infected with contagious diseases,” and in the 1990s the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention claimed “that HIV/AIDS may have originated in Haiti” (168). This last claim, Sheller asserts, ignored the evidence that suggested that HIV there had most likely arisen from sexual relations between American tourists and Haitians (168); Americans, viewing Haiti as a “sex tourist destination,” were in fact the ones responsible for introducing HIV into the country (169). In *Brown Girl*, the Burn is, as already suggested, symbolic of the Caribbean, and Rudy controls this sex and drug tourist destination from the CN Tower, which is a tourist attraction and a communications and observation tower and, like all modern tall and famous buildings, a symbol of power. The novel pointedly notes that the tower is “needle shape[d]” (191), linking it to the specific drug that Rudy deals, which is injected. The zombie metaphor further explains the implied association between injection and infection, which could also allude to diseases such as HIV. Because the drug Rudy deals is called buff, which is created from a combination of “[b]ufo toad” extracts that are used in Haiti, according to the novel, to create the Haitian form of zombies, and crack cocaine (210–11), zombies are also a metaphor for addiction itself—i.e., the mindless compulsive behavior of addicts.

The 'burbs also cannibalize the Burn in a way that adheres to science fiction. The story begins when Catherine Uttley’s employee, Douglas Bains, arrives in the Burn to illegally purchase a heart for the dying Uttley from Rudy. Uttley will not accept a pig’s heart because politically she finds it “immoral”: “human organ transplant should be about people helping people, not about preying on helpless creatures” (3). However, to harvest a human heart will require murdering a human being—one who is not addicted to buff. In other words, the cannibalistic zombie Uttley needs a human heart rather than a zombie’s heart. This is why Rudy choosing Gros-Jeanne, Ti-Jeanne’s grandmother, as the donor is thematically significant. Not only does she not take buff, but she is also a healer who serves the Vodou lwa (spirits). She is the embodiment of affirmative African-Caribbean culture and is thus the perfect choice for a heart. I read this transplant as an extreme form of cultural cannibalization by white Canada. Gros-Jeanne is, in sum, a Vodou practitioner who is to be consumed in the same way that Vodou was consumed by Hollywood.

Nathaniel Samuel Murrell terms what Hollywood did to Vodou “the zombification of Vodou” (82). Vodou’s origins, Murrell explains, lie in Dahomey (59), and even before it

traveled to the Americas it had adopted “Yoruba deities” (70). Once in the Americas, he asserts, Vodou was influenced by the beliefs and practices of “Lemba, Kongo, and other African peoples” and also incorporated “Taino and Roman Catholic practices” (70). He posits that “[a]fter the Americans left Haiti in 1934, the demonizing of Vodou accelerated in grotesque zombie movies” (82).

Murrell suggests that Vodou still

remains the most publicized and notoriously stereotyped of Afro-Caribbean religions. This notoriety results from Vodou’s status as the most despised religion in the Americas. . . . Just mention the word “Vodou” and the American mind conjures up any number of sensational images. (57)

The images he lists that are pertinent to *Brown Girl* are “gross sacrifices of humans,” “zombies,” “blood-sucking vampires, and African cannibalism” (57). The novel reverses these stereotypes by making them only applicable to those who do not serve the lwa, such as the colonizing white Canadian cannibalistic zombie-vampires, colonized zombies like Ti-Jeanne, zombie-vampires like Ti-Jeanne’s mother (who are ashamed of their cultural background and turn their backs on the lwa), or cannibalistic zombies like Rudy who sacrifice their own people and attempt to make the lwa serve them. In this way, *Brown Girl* positions Vodou practitioners who serve the lwa and zombies as mutually incompatible; therefore, a zombie is someone disconnected from African culture and the community.

All the “sensational images” that I have just listed are applicable to the character Mi-Jeanne, Ti-Jeanne’s mother and Gros-Jeanne’s daughter, who, I will argue, is a zombie. What is significant and unusual about Hopkinson’s use of the figure for this character is that Mi-Jeanne embodies multiple types of zombies—thus she incorporates multiple ways in which the African diaspora has historically been brutally subjugated. Prior to the story’s timeframe, we learn that Rudy has separated Mi-Jeanne’s body and spirit, which adheres to both Haitian and African zombie-making processes. Haitian zombies and one form of African zombies are ostensibly physical types: they are zombies in a human form. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert point out that there are various ways in which these zombies can be created. The best-known is when a soul is captured and a person is raised from the dead to do the sorcerer’s bidding (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 128). The second is when drugs are used to make a person appear dead, they are given an antidote to reverse part of the effects, but the person will then be traumatized and easy to manipulate (Ibid. 128). The third is

associated with cults deriving from Vodou. In Vodou, as Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert elucidate, the soul is made up of the *ti bon ange* and the *gros bon ange*. The *ti bon ange* is associated with “the consciousness that allows for self-reflection and self-criticism” and the *gros bon ange* is associated with “the psyche, the source of memory, intelligence, and personhood” (Ibid. 118). In Vodou, when a lwa possesses a person—which is referred to as being “ridden” by the lwa—the *gros bon ange* is “separated” from the rest of the person “to allow the spirit to enter in its place” (Ibid. 118). However, when someone is zombified, they continue, “the sorcerer seizes the victim’s *ti bon ange*—the component of the soul where personality, character, and volition reside—leaving behind an empty vessel subject to the commands of the bokor (sorcerer)” (129). In *Brown Girl*, using sorcery, Rudy splits Mi-Jeanne in two. Her body, known as the bag lady, Crazy Betty, walks the streets of downtown Toronto.

The reader is first introduced to Crazy Betty when Ti-Jeanne encounters her in the street while running errands for her grandmother. As mentioned above, Ti-Jeanne does not recognize that Crazy Betty is her mother; moreover, she believes that her mother went mad and ran away. Ti-Jeanne notices that Crazy Betty is missing what other people have: “at least the men [Rudy’s drug-addicted zombie henchmen] had *something* behind their eyes, some spark of humanity” (17). This comparison positions Crazy Betty as a more extreme type of zombie than those who take buff. Crazy Betty, unlike a Haitian zombie, is not controlled by anyone, thus making her a mutated Haitian zombie. Rather, it is the non-physical part of her that is controlled by Rudy. This resonates with a type of zombie that is only found in Africa. According to Rushton and Moreman, the word zombie in Africa refers to a “wide range of monsters,” but it is the *zombie astral* that refers to a “disembodied spirit,” i.e., a “captured soul” that is “often held in a jar for future and nefarious use” (3). Rushton and Moreman explain that this figure “has not translated into the Western imagination” (3). Hopkinson’s novel, however, does translate the *zombie astral* into both Western and Caribbean imaginations, as she brings this African being to Toronto and then Caribbeanizes it by calling it a duppy (a Caribbean spirit) and by also making it a soucouyant, aiding an understanding of the brutal history that the African-Caribbean diaspora have encountered since they were transported from Africa. A soucouyant is a Caribbean vampire who appears as an old woman in the daytime and at night sheds her skin and flies through the air as a fireball to suck people’s blood, usually that of children and babies. She can be killed by rubbing salt into her discarded skin after she transforms because the salt will make her unable to return in the daytime.

The use of the African zombie problematizes the white oppressor/African oppressed dichotomy, and, by making this being a hybrid, Hopkinson appears to draw attention to the role that some black people themselves have played and continue to play in black oppression. In the novel, Rudy captures Mi-Jeanne’s soul in a calabash bowl and forces it to do his bidding. Mi-Jeanne is described as a fireball who drinks the blood of Rudy’s victims (101); she is a *duppy-soucouyant* with an insatiable thirst for blood. In my reading, this element is significant because, by creating a hybrid zombie blood-sucker, the novel also invokes American zombies, such as those in George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*: mindless cannibals with an insatiable hunger for human flesh that symbolize the capitalist consumer. The *soucouyant*’s insatiable thirst for blood also mirrors Rudy’s insatiable hunger for power and wealth, calling to mind Karl Marx’s use of the vampire. As Ilkka Mäyrä suggests,

As a metaphor, the vampire has been fertile in many discussions of modern society and individuality. Perhaps the most famous case is Karl Marx’s use of the vampire as a metaphor for the inhuman qualities of capitalism: “Capital is dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.” (170–71)

Rudy and those he trades with, through his *soucouyant-zombie*, literally suck the blood of the people in the Burn. His trade in drugs and human organs is run by capitalist commerce with the suburbs and fed by people from the Burn.

Defeating Rudy is Ti-Jeanne’s task and, to use the language of Vodou, “sacred challenge” in the novel. To do this, as I suggested earlier, it is necessary for her to maintain and acquire *ashe*, which can only be done through a collective form of power—we-self power—and learning to interpret the different narratives and genres that make up her world, so that she can see the complexity of reality and empathize with others. Her need to do this, and the need for the novel’s reader to also begin to understand the narrative and its genres in a way that looks beyond realist conventions and Western epistemologies and cosmologies, are emphasized by two events near the beginning of the story, both of which test Ti-Jeanne’s and the reader’s ability to “read.” I will discuss these events in detail in order to show the ways in which Ti-Jeanne initially understands them and contrast this with the way in which she could have interpreted them if she had been “reading” them from an Afrocentric perspective.

The first event occurs when she encounters blind Crazy Betty in the street. Betty calls out to her, “What you doin’ with my baby? You can’t make a child pretty so! You did never

want he!” Ti-Jeanne is described as going “cold” at these words due to her “old fear of madness” (17). In her analysis of *Brown Girl*, Giselle Liza Anatol interprets Ti-Jeanne’s failure to recognize her mother as being caused by a fear of reality (37). However, I suggest that Ti-Jeanne’s failure to recognize her mother is not only due to a fear of becoming mad like her, but also that the “cold” feeling she experiences can be read as shame—because shame, as a lack of feeling, is experienced as cold, a shame that Ti-Jeanne is unwilling to face. Betty’s words invoke shame because they accuse her of never wanting Baby. It is shame that inhibits Ti-Jeanne from recognizing that Betty is her mother and from attempting to understand or empathize with this stranger.

The second event is a vision, which Anatol reads as only incorporating La Diabliesse (39), whom she interprets as an anti-maternal figure (41). La Diabliesse in Caribbean folklore is an old devil woman with one goat foot who can inflict both death and madness. The figure that Ti-Jeanne sees is clearly identified in the novel as a hybrid soucouyant-La Diabliesse (Hopkinson 44), as she arrives as a “fireball,” turns into an “old woman,” and has “*flesh red and wet and oozing all over, like she ain’t have no skin*” and “*two cleft hooves she have for legs*” (44). The fact that this figure is a hybrid could have alerted Ti-Jeanne to the fact that this vision should be read as more than a folktale. This hybrid figure tries to suck Baby’s blood, and Ti-Jeanne places her body between it and Baby. The Jab-Jab arrives and pours rice on the floor, which the soucouyant, in keeping with folklore tradition, has to pick up and count. The Jab-Jab then tells Ti-Jeanne to open the curtains, at which point the soucouyant turns to ash. Ti-Jeanne resists trying to read this vision and when she describes it to Gros-Jeanne, she changes what she actually saw, saying the figure wore an “old-fashioned dress” (48) and had “one good foot and one hoof like a goat,” although she does not conceal the fact that it had “teeth pointy like shark teeth” (48). Gros-Jeanne recognizes La Diabliesse from Ti-Jeanne’s description, but fails to see that she was also a soucouyant, which raises the question why. The first reason they might do this is because the soucouyant traditionally poses more danger to babies, whereas La Diabliesse poses more of a danger to men who may be seduced by her. This would indicate that neither woman can bear to consider Baby to be at risk. The second is that both women, especially Ti-Jeanne, have difficulty acknowledging or accepting the existence of hybridity. The first possibility seems to be more plausible where Gros-Jeanne is concerned, as her feelings for Baby are uncomplicated, whereas Ti-Jeanne’s feelings for the child are conflicted. Moreover, the second possibility seems implausible where Gros-Jeanne is concerned because there is nothing in the novel to suggest that she has a Manichean view of the world. Ti-Jeanne, on the other hand, is a hybrid human-zombie who does not recognize

herself as such and denies the complexity of people and reality because she wants to assimilate into the simplicity of the white Canadian self-delusion.

Whatever the reasons for the women's failure to recognize that the figure in the dream is hybrid, their focus on La Diabliesse leads Gros-Jeanne to predict that someone close to Ti-Jeanne has "some business he can't handle" (51). What is more, by failing to see that the vision is not simply something from folklore, they both fail to realize that the Jab-Jab is in fact Legbara. Thus, neither of them recognizes the significance of the soucouyant *and* the Jab-Jab. The reader later discovers that the soucouyant is Ti-Jeanne's mother. This vision can thus be read as Legbara's attempt to communicate with Ti-Jeanne—to help her recognize her mother, to warn her of danger, and to provide help when her life is at risk. However, Ti-Jeanne is unwilling and unable to recognize the significance of this.

Yet, Ti-Jeanne is given another chance to connect with Legbara later on. The part of the dream that predicts that someone is in trouble is revealed to be true when Tony arrives at their house and asks them to help because Rudy has enlisted him to get Gros-Jeanne's heart for Uttley's transplant. The dream, nevertheless, did not indicate whether or not Ti-Jeanne should help and the need to make a choice results in an argument between the two women. What is significant about Ti-Jeanne's choice is that either decision risks her losing more *ashe*. It is "indignation" and a "cold anger" that give Ti-Jeanne the strength to threaten to leave a tearful and lonely Gros-Jeanne in order to help Tony. Through assisting Tony, Ti-Jeanne feels she is asserting herself, which could be interpreted as *ashe* because she is helping another and not being controlled, but it also drains her *ashe* because she is being drawn back into a destructive relationship, one that, unbeknownst to her, repeats her grandmother's abusive relationship with her grandfather, who is later revealed to be Rudy.

Nevertheless, it is because of her desire to help Tony that Ti-Jeanne reluctantly agrees to participate in a Vodou ritual with her grandmother. This entails connecting with her guardian spirit, Legbara. This is the first time that she acknowledges her African-Caribbean heritage and community, including the spirits. However, Ti-Jeanne rejects Legbara's assertion that it is her duty to fight Rudy because she has no wish to serve the spirits, the living, or the dead and desires to "be free" (105) from every aspect of her heritage.

Ti-Jeanne cannot be free from her heritage and it is the spirits who ultimately protect her from her real danger, namely Rudy's attempts to first kill her and then turn her into a more extreme form of a zombie. The first help she gets is from her mother, who warns her that Tony has been forced to kill her. Her mother communicates this by entering Crazy Betty's body to reunite "[b]ody and mind" (157), which allows her to speak. Mi-Jeanne becomes both

the uncontrolled zombie Crazy Betty and the duppy-soucouyant-zombie under Rudy's control. This is symbolically significant because it unites Africa with the Caribbean and it is in this form that she tries to help her daughter.

Furthermore, it is also important that, unlike other types of zombies, Hopkinson's soucouyant-zombie figure feels emotions:

Regret, hunger, remorse, and anger had merged into one howling need. When it killed, or each time it was fed blood, the essences of terror, pain, blood, and death appeased the hunger for a little while . . . it knew . . . that it would once have abhorred its own actions . . . fuelled by guilt, the hunger and fury would rage again. . . . It hated the man who kept it bound, neither alive nor dead. (155–56)

Heaven explains that the Vodou concept of the self positions one's emotional part next to the soul and the cognitive part between the emotions and the body (175–76). This elevates emotions above mind and body and also means that emotional harm can lead to spiritual harm. As previously mentioned, Heaven argues that guilt and shame evoked by one's own immoral acts or others' actions can lead to zombification and that the experience of trauma can also result in the spirit leaving the body and existing in the middle world with spirits such as the *jab jab* (230). This is the world that Mi-Jeanne, as a duppy-soucouyant-zombie, inhabits. She is a zombie in that she has to do Rudy's bidding and in the sense that she feels shame, rage, and hate.

However, as previously suggested, her zombification is not absolute because she attempts to help her daughter, contrary to Rudy's wishes, and she is able to feel a certain amount of empathy; in other words, she demonstrates an ability to read other people's narratives. This is shown after Tony kills Gros-Jeanne and gives her body to the medical services and Mi-Jeanne, still in her body, explains to her daughter that Tony is under orders from Rudy to kill Ti-Jeanne. Ti-Jeanne reacts in anger to this information, whereas Mi-Jeanne, unlike her daughter, is able to empathize with Tony: "If you did have to see what Tony watch Rudy do . . . you would do anything he tell you" (161). Mi-Jeanne asks Ti-Jeanne to break Rudy's calabash bowl to free her soul, but Ti-Jeanne is also unable to empathize with her mother and interprets her request as an attempt to control her: "Mami want me to turn bush doctor; Tony want me to dead; you want me to save your wicked soul. What I go help you for? After you abandon me from small?" (162). Thus, Ti-Jeanne, feeling unloved,

rejected, and controlled by others, refuses to empathize with and care for anyone else. In this way, Ti-Jeanne's shame/zombification is more extreme than her mother's.

Only for her own self-preservation does Ti-Jeanne set out to defeat Rudy in his tower and "[i]ntuitively" shoot the duppy bowl, freeing her mother from her "prison" (204). In contrast, Mi-Jeanne cares about her daughter. She only attacks her because, as a zombie, she cannot help but obey Rudy's orders; in reality, she feels "anguish" doing so (202) and, like the soucouyant in Ti-Jeanne's vision, licks each drop of blood "at [her] own speed" (203) to delay the attack and help her daughter.

It is Ti-Jeanne's desire to escape her responsibilities and emotions that makes her vulnerable to being indoctrinated into voluntarily agreeing to be turned into a duppy-soucouyant-zombie. What Ti-Jeanne does not know, however, is that, contrary to her own expectation of bodily and emotional freedom that she thinks this process will give her, it will force her to understand others. The process of zombification begins with Rudy capturing her and injecting her with herbs and buff that "lower[s] your emotional resistance, make you more suggestible" (211) because suggestibility is necessary for "*indoctrination*" (212). The word "*indoctrination*" arguably evokes the mental colonization of Caribbean people under the colonial education system. What is perhaps significant about this is that it clearly identifies the deadening of emotions that make a person resistant to surrendering their autonomy as part of this process. Emotional colonization is necessary for successful mental colonization. Indeed, Rudy tells Ti-Jeanne that her spirit has to agree in order for zombification to work, which corresponds with Heaven's assertion that *ashe* cannot be taken without consent (95). To force Ti-Jeanne's spirit into agreeing to the process, Rudy lures her with the promise of power. He tells her that her mother had agreed to be a duppy because Gros-Jeanne was "trying to control she" (214). He also tells Ti-Jeanne that, as a duppy, Mi-Jeanne had power: "blows couldn't lick she, love couldn't leave she, heart couldn't hurt she. She coulda go wherever she want . . . she didn't want the pains of the body no more" (215). These words are effective because Ti-Jeanne is desperate for power and freedom from her body and emotions. For Ti-Jeanne, her emotions reside in her body. Rudy also makes her feel guilty because he tells her that she killed her mother. Emotional pain and trauma cause her to float out of her body over the CN Tower, resembling Heaven's description of trauma and zombification according to Vodou, as previously mentioned.

Once outside her body, Ti-Jeanne encounters the Jab-Jab. In this spiritual middle world Ti-Jeanne recollects the physical violence she suffered at the hands of Gros-Jeanne. The Jab-Jab agrees that Gros-Jeanne was a hard woman, but tells her that she was serving the

spirits, unlike Rudy, who is trying to “make the spirits serve *he*” (219). The Jab-Jab then makes her live the experiences of others, which is an extreme form of empathy. She becomes Gros-Jeanne being beaten by Rudy and watched by Mi-Jeanne. She then becomes Mi-Jeanne’s duppy-soucouyant-zombie and feels her hunger for blood and experiences Rudy telling her to kill Gros-Jeanne’s lover. She then is Tony, full of buff helplessly watching Rudy flay alive his living zombie Melba (220). This experience of being others, as supreme empathy, not only provides Ti-Jeanne with knowledge of others, but also helps heal her shame because empathy and shame are not mutually compatible. She knows that Gros-Jeanne’s violence was not meant to harm, she knows the horror of what Tony saw, and she also knows that being Rudy’s duppy-soucouyant-zombie will not numb her emotions or give her freedom or power. In fact, being this figure would be a form of zombification far worse than anything she has ever experienced. She begins to realize that true power is a we-self power. It is *ashe* that is needed to overcome her family’s legacy of violence, shame, and rejection. Caring and empathizing with others is a source of power and knowledge rather than a sign of powerlessness.

Connecting with others also involves all her ancestors, including her African ones. Through remembering Gros-Jeanne’s words, “*The centre pole is the bridge between the worlds,*” she realizes that the CN Tower is also the spirit tree that connects the dead below to “the heavens,” the “oldest ancestors” (221). Thus she calls on the Iwa and the spirits of the dead, including spirits from Yoruba cosmology, such as Shakpana and Oya, and together they defeat Rudy. As Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert explain, Oya traveled to the Americas to become a Santeria deity in Cuba (24). This is significant because, once again, Hopkinson’s novel blends traditions from Africa and the Americas, which emphasizes the importance and continuing presence of African cultures for the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the African-Caribbean diaspora. As one type of zombie in the novel derives from Africa, deities directly from the continent are needed to defeat Rudy because he is employing African magic. Rudy can be read as symbolizing those Africans—in Africa and the Caribbean—who collaborated with the European enslavers. This also corresponds with Erna Brodber’s use of the zombie in *Myal*: “Hoodoo men, voodoo men, wizards and priests. Gave them our sound, then sold their own souls. . . . They split man from his self. A working zombie” (66–67). *Myal*’s Willie and Dan, who are African spirits residing in the bodies of two of the book’s Jamaican characters, remember that Africans and the enslaved colluded with white Europeans to subjugate those who were taken to the Americas. Both *Myal* and *Brown Girl* attempt to

imaginatively heal this painful betrayal through including African spirits in the battle against mental and emotional colonization.

The battle against cultural appropriation is symbolized through the process of the heart transplant. At first the transplant does not work because Gros-Jeanne’s heart rejects Uttley’s body. This, of course, is a medical reversal, as it is usually the body that should reject the heart. Thus, initially zombification and cultural appropriation do not work: Gros-Jeanne, and by extension Caribbean culture, reject being eaten by others. During the transplant Uttley experiences changes:

She had realised that she was being invaded in some way, taken over . . . Bit by bit, she was losing the ability to control her own body. The heart was taking it over. Uttley became alarmed, had tried talking to the alien organ. “Please,” she said. “This is my body. You can’t take it away from me.” But the creeping numbness spread up her neck. She was now completely paralyzed. . . . And then she was aware again. Her dream body and brain were hers once more, but with a difference. The heart—her heart—was dancing joyfully between her ribs . . . two distinct streams, intertwined. . . . She was healed, a new woman now. “Stupidness,” she said, chiding herself for her unnecessary fears. (236–37)

As this passage suggests, it is Gros-Jeanne’s heart that is invading Uttley. If this passage is read as the heart of Caribbean culture invading white Canada, it could be interpreted as colonization in reverse. To read it using the cannibal-zombie metaphor, on the other hand, would mean that the zombie heart is infecting Canada and its body politic. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the actual events that enable the transplant, and the transplant itself, rather suggest that the heart remains what is being consumed by the cannibalistic zombie. The powerlessness and numbness Uttley feels is similar to that which the characters Ti-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne, and Tony experience at the hands of Rudy when they are zombies. However, unlike these zombies, Uttley regains her autonomy, but she does undergo a character alteration, which is described as being healed in the emotional sense as well as the physical one. Uttley’s heart experiences joy at this transformation. The mention of “*the heart—her heart*” indicates that it is both Gros-Jeanne’s heart *and* Uttley’s heart that experience it. Thus, this heart symbolically intertwines the two women. The word “stupidness” that Uttley says to herself is in Gros-Jeanne’s idiom, demonstrating the extent to which Gros-Jeanne is influencing her. Furthermore, after the operation Uttley becomes more ethical in making

political decisions because aspects of Gros-Jeanne's personality have become part of her and, significantly, these aspects are associated with community, empathy, and a desire to heal others: "Uttley knew that it hadn't been her strong point, trying to figure out why people acted the way they did. But lying on her ass in that bed for so long had given her time to think" (238). The novel does not exaggerate this process or idealize Uttley's transformation, but it does suggest a slight change in the way that she makes decisions:

Had she become so different since her operation? Was she losing her edge? No, couldn't be. "Don't get your panties in a twist, man. Stupidness." . . . "It's called 'enlightened self-interest,' right? Solves the Virus Epsilon problem, and makes me look good, too." (239)

Uttley's new policy allows human organ transplantation only if the person has not signed an "opt-out card" (238). Ostensibly, this appears to be progress, as it theoretically gives people authority over their own bodies.

The transplant metaphor is important for deciphering the meaning of the novel as a whole. Michelle Reid suggests an "optimistic" interpretation of this metaphor when it is read as a model for Canadian multiculturalism even though, as she says, we do not know how "the localised endeavours will map out across the whole city" (321):

[Uttley] is possessed by Gros-Jeanne's spirit, which dominates the way in which her body and brain unite into a sense of self. Yet, the "intertwined" streams of blood indicate a more equal partnership based on a hybrid combination. These different, simultaneous interpretations indicate that Gros-Jeanne's heart is not incorporated to provide a superficial vibrancy or simplistic, multicultural variety. Just as the body comprises a complex map of veins, arteries, and capillaries carrying blood to all extremities, so the necessary relationship between the Canadian state and immigrant minorities must be fully connected and far reaching if the health of the state is to be maintained. (Ibid. 311)

In contrast, I propose that the zombie metaphor that runs through the novel does not suggest anything more positive than a case of superficial multiculturalism for white Canada, as even though Uttley experiences positive changes by being colonized/infected by Gros-Jeanne's heart, Gros-Jeanne is also eaten by Uttley: she is killed and her heart is stolen and consumed.

The inclusion of the themes of cultural cannibalization, colonial conquest, and zombification problematizes reading this particular narrative in a way that could offer positive, yet difficult, solutions for *all* Canadians. It is problematic to read it as endorsing cultural appropriation and it is impossible, in light of the zombie-cannibal metaphor that I have examined, to imagine how it would be possible to force white Canadians into respecting and accepting an ethnic minority’s decision to “opt-out” of their culture being consumed; in other words, stopping white Canadians from commodifying, exoticizing, and demonizing ethnic minorities’ cultures.

Ti-Jeanne’s narrative, in contrast, does end on a positive note because she accepts her Caribbean culture and combats the forces that have zombified her. Discovering that Mi-Jeanne has survived, Ti-Jeanne begins to listen to her mother’s narrative even though she finds it painful, as it involves listening to why Mi-Jeanne rejected her:

When Daddy find out I was making baby . . . is like he cut me dead. I used to be he doux-doux darling, he little girl, but not after that. And after you born, you eat up my whole life. It was “baby need this, baby need that.” I couldn’t take it. I sorry to admit it to you, Ti-Jeanne, but I couldn’t take it. (242)

Mi-Jeanne was rejected by her father and made to feel ashamed of her sexuality. She then experienced motherhood as being consumed—“you eat up my whole life”—and losing her autonomy. Thus, she was zombified by shame and rejection, and motherhood became an experience that felt like being attacked by a cannibalistic zombie—her baby—and also becoming a zombie (losing her autonomy). Listening to Mi-Jeanne evokes shame and understanding in Ti-Jeanne: “Shame made Ti-Jeanne’s face hot. It was too close to the bone. She knew what her mother had been feeling” (242). Ti-Jeanne’s experience of shame in this situation more closely relates to embarrassment—this emotion is “hot”—than it does to a pathological zombifying shame, which is physiologically experienced as “cold.” This shows her progress at overcoming shame and her growing ability to empathize. Ti-Jeanne’s ability to understand her mother’s experience is because it is a near repetition of her own relationship with Baby; the difference between them is Ti-Jeanne’s loss of Tony because of her child rather than her father.

Through beginning to heal the generational roots of her shame and the shame of rejecting Baby, Ti-Jeanne is able to begin to build a relationship with the boy. Furthermore, through accepting her role as a healer in the community she becomes the “brown girl” of the

novel's title, encircled by a community made up of the living, the dead, and the spirits, which also empowers her to finally transcend the repetitive patterns of shame that were controlling her life and making her a zombie.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Ti-Jeanne's narrative establishes that reclaiming African- and Caribbean-derived religions and practices are affirmative for the African-Caribbean diaspora because they can help prevent and heal emotional zombification. In contrast, Uttley's narrative cannot be read as optimistic for Canada's multiculturalism, as an unethical consumption of a minority's culture harms the people from whom it is stolen, especially when it is used to subjugate them. This also applies to the misuse of religion and culture by Caribbean people collaborating to subjugate their own people for personal gain. The novel itself could be interpreted as a protest to "opt-out" of cultural consumption and commodification, as it reclaims ownership of the zombie in all its transformations by defining what specifically these mean in relation to people of the African diaspora: the ways in which black people and cultures have been "eaten" and zombified since the transatlantic slave trade.

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