

**Being for the Other:  
Surveillance and Depictions of Race, Gender, and Animals in  
Contemporary South African Fiction**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the depiction, in contemporary South African fiction, of irresponsibility and responsibility in relation to the raced, gendered, and animal Other. Through a close analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison and Michel Foucault's study of this design, I establish the notion of disciplinary surveillance or panopticism. This I take to be a mode of power that seeks, by means of an invisible gaze, to render its subjects docile. In my readings of J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning*, and selected short stories from Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *The One That Got Away*, I demonstrate that oppressive authoritarian regimes are rooted in Benthamic principles of hyper-visibility and concealment. Disciplinary power, I contend, is effective precisely because it places an individual in a constant state of Being-for-Others, a term coined by Jean-Paul Sartre to describe the experience of objectification through another's look. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of black double consciousness frame my examination of, respectively, gender and racial oppression, while my discussion of animals appeals to Jacques Derrida's work on the non-human. I show how surveillance, in each of the selected texts, functions through a racist and/or sexist and/or speciesist gaze that facilitates violent, irresponsible relationships with the human and non-human Other. The texts under discussion, however, also depict ways in which the Other actively resists and subverts regimes of oppression, often by means of a counter gaze that compels the protagonist, or the reader, to take up responsibility for Others. Ultimately, my study concludes that the fictional works of Coetzee, Wicomb, and Cartwright offer an ethics of empathetic responsibility, which I term Being for the Other, in opposition to mechanisms of disciplinary surveillance that seek to oppress, conceal, and dominate.

For my Mother

Cheryl Laue

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## Introduction

Today, more than ever before, life must be characterized by a sense of Universal responsibility, not only nation to nation and human to human, but also human to other forms of life.

(The Dalai Lama, qtd. in Stiens)

In a country such as South Africa, where racialised structural inequalities still stand erect today, where patriarchy is knitted into the very social fabric, and where speciesism remains unquestioned and ignored almost entirely, the Dalai Lama's call for universal responsibility is particularly urgent. But what is responsibility and what does it entail? If we are to dismantle formations of prejudice that facilitate racism, sexism, and speciesism, and if we are to move beyond the cycles of violence against human and non-human Others, then what is needed is a sustained and ongoing examination of irresponsibility in order to reach towards a provisional, flexible, and practical understanding of responsibility. This thesis does not pretend to fulfil such an enormous project, but it is, I hope, a movement in that direction, and is therefore my response to the Dalai Lama's appeal through the medium of literary criticism.

Contemporary South African fiction, particularly the work of J. M. Coetzee, Zoë Wicomb, and Justin Cartwright, has explored extensively marginalised Others, specifically the racialised, gendered, and animal Other living under conditions of extreme oppression. It depicts irresponsible interactions with difference, and what it means, on an experiential and ontological level, to be Othered. This fiction, however, examines not only the unequal power dynamics that function through authoritarian regimes of surveillance, but also ways in which the Other resists such instruments of control. In this study, I aim to show how this literature exposes violent modes of domination and irresponsibility, on the one hand, and, on the other, provides valuable insight into practices of empathy, compassion, and responsibility. I have selected as my primary texts Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982), Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006), Cartwright's *White Lightning* (2002), and three short stories from Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) and *The One That Got Away* (2008).

My thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first of these, I lay down the theoretical foundations of my argument. Through a detailed critical analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison and Michel Foucault's deconstruction of his design, I arrive at the notion of disciplinary surveillance or panopticism. This I take to be a form of power that seeks to render its subjects docile, predictable, and usable through mechanisms of incessant and objectifying watching. My close reading of *Waiting* investigates panoptic power as it operates

on the body and mind of the Other. In the novel, Empire's structural and social organisation is deeply rooted in Benthamic principles of surveillance. Imperialist vision functions primarily as a means of examining, categorising, and knowing its subjects so as to control and subjugate them. I argue that the 'barbarian' girl is subjected to a mode of panopticism involving Colonel Joll's physical torture, in the form of an inscriptive gaze that marks her body, and the Magistrate's psychological torture, in the form of an interpretive gaze that marks her mind. Joll and the Magistrate are aligned as two parts of the same imperialist project, working together to inscribe on their subjects, and then interpret them within, the ideology of Empire. Though the 'barbarian' girl exhibits characteristics of the typically docile Panopticon inmate, she also resists her subjugation in certain small, but significant, ways. I maintain that she reappropriates her blind 'vision' and acts as the Magistrate's ethical guide, leading him towards a more responsible 'blind' way of seeing.

Having traced, in Coetzee's novel, the process of Othering in an unnamed frontier of an unspecified Empire, I turn to *Playing*, which depicts the racialised Other in post-apartheid South Africa. I present, in this second chapter, Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of Being-for-Others, that is, the experience of objectification through another person's gaze. My analysis of Wicomb's novel is grounded on, firstly, W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of black double consciousness (the raced experience of perceiving, through the white gaze, one's black body as deficient or inferior) and, secondly, my critique of Sartre's theory. By narrowing my focus to the white gaze and its effect on the black body, I examine more closely the process of racialised panopticism as it dominates the life of Helen, a 'coloured' play-white woman who, I claim, enters a societal panopticon of whiteness. Her daughter, Marion, after discovering her parents' secret, undertakes various psychological and physical journeys, which assist her ethical, emotional, and intellectual development.

The third chapter focuses on gender, inevitably influenced by race, in Wicomb's short fiction. Unlike the three novels examined in this thesis, all of which are focalised through a privileged protagonist, the three short stories are told from the perspective of a 'coloured' female. In "When the Train Comes", "Friends and *Goffels*", and "Mrs Pringle's Bed", the main characters are doubly oppressed as racial and gendered Others. The stories trace their socialisation in apartheid South Africa and attempted conformity to stereotypical white Western femininity. In my reading of these narratives, I employ Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity and Susan Bordo's feminist work on the female docile body to demonstrate how the protagonists are shaped and governed, often through a male gaze, by a socially sanctioned patriarchal panopticon. Each of the characters, however, refuses to remain

a passive, submissive female body. In examining Wicomb's characters' acts of protest against those who control them, I appeal to the concept of psychic excess, developed by Butler to describe a 'disrupted' sexual or gender identity performance. I argue that, in the stories, Frieda, Dot, and Mrs Pringle embrace moments of psychic excess in which they are unable or refuse to embody white heteronormative femininity, and thereby employ gender failure to their own subversive ends.

In the fourth chapter I introduce the non-human into my discussion, hitherto of the raced and gendered human. At this point I consider, in the context of Cartwright's *White Lightning*, irresponsibility and responsibility concerning both humans and animals. The non-human's vulnerability and subjective perspective, as well as his/her exploitation and domination, are comparable to the situation of the racialised and gendered Other. Butler's theory on the power of grief frames my contention that James Kronk's growing sense of responsibility for Others is inextricably informed by his state of mourning for a lost mother and son. Rather than attempting to resolve or deny his grief, he self-reflexively engages with the experience of mortality and suffering, a process that supports a re-examination of self in relation to the precarious lives of those around him. His ethical decisions, however, result in trauma and two deaths. I explain these disturbing closing events by appealing to Jacques Derrida's argument that acts of hospitality are always haunted by potential hostility.

The final section of my fourth chapter examines the inconsistencies of human attitudes towards animals. In hypothesising on how such contradictions operate, I establish my notion of 'seeing animals', developed from Derrida's work on the non-human and from recent posthumanist scholarship. The term refers both to animals as seeing subjects and to the ethical practice of seeing, or regarding, animals in this way. I argue that forms of surveillance, rooted in Bentham's Panopticon, also shape the lives of non-humans by concealing the seeing animal from sight and thereby support, as Derrida phrases it, the forgetting or misunderstanding of animal exploitation. In this view, ethical responsibility is partially dependent on metaphorically or physically *seeing* 'the animal', where the act of seeing implies a recognition of non-human subjectivity.

I conclude my study by rendering explicit its informing impulse, that is, the need for an ethics of empathetic responsibility, which I term Being for the Other. Through a comparison of the texts under discussion, I propose that the ethical and intellectual development of the Magistrate, Marion, and Kronk is facilitated and defined by an experience of Being for the Other, in which the character perceives the Other as a seeing, vulnerable, unknowable subject. That subject, initially removed and concealed from sight, is encountered

in all his/her visibility, often as a violated body or a face that demands accountability. In each of the texts, these intimate, life-altering interactions with marginalised beings cause the protagonist to reassess his/her relation to and responsibility for Others. Wicomb's short stories implicate the reader in a similar experience of empathetic responsibility. I suggest that, in the act of reading her short fiction, we undergo a weaker form of Being for the Other since we, like the novels' protagonists, are faced with, and must inhabit the perspective of, a marginalised Other.

The thrust of my argument is that the fictional work of Coetzee, Wicomb, and Cartwright offers an ethics of empathetic responsibility in opposition to mechanisms of surveillance that seek to oppress, conceal, and dominate. I have tried to capture, in my thesis title, the tension between two modes of looking that define a relation to the Other. Disciplinary surveillance or panopticism, on the one hand, subsumes the inscriptive look, the interpretive gaze, and the racist and/or sexist and/or speciesist gaze. On the other hand, my term Being for the Other includes ethical 'blind' vision, critical looking, and the empathetic gaze. The former, self-centred and destructive, is an irresponsible form of looking that seeks to know, to colonise, to dominate, to control; the latter, self-reflexive and creative, is a responsible form that imaginatively empathises with the Other while also recognising his/her unknowability, and, as such, allows that individual to create his/her own meaning. In disciplinary surveillance, the Other is an object of information, whereas Being for the Other involves treating him/her as a seeing subject with his/her own viewpoint on the world.

Empathetic responsibility, for the novels' fictional protagonists, is not an abstract, theoretical concept over which they deliberate from the comfort of their homes. In the context of *Waiting*, *Playing*, and *White Lightning*, responsibility is not a noun but a verb. It is a doing, an interacting with, a feeling with, a living with – a Being for the Other that irrevocably changes the lives of these characters. Confronted with a strange face, they are propelled into motion and destabilised, thrown outside themselves by a gaze from which there is no escape and through which there comes a call – in fact, a demand – for responsibility. In this state of empathetic responsibility, they are enslaved. They must give up their comfortable privileged complacency for another being, navigate danger and fear, risk their own life or the Other's life, undertake journeys into the unknown, and embrace the terror of uncertainty, vulnerability, mortality. To be responsible for Others is to face punishment, exile, self-alienation, and social exclusion, for, as this fiction shows, empathetic responsibility often involves opposing, at the heart of society, the Panopticon power structure itself.

# Chapter 1

## Surveillance and Unexpected Guidance: The Panoptic Empire of *Waiting for the Barbarians*

J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting*, set in the rural frontier town of an unnamed Empire, follows the first-person narrative of the middle-aged Magistrate. A well-intentioned yet initially complacent liberal, he begins questioning, and eventually revolting against, the imperialist system of which he is a part. After taking in a 'barbarian' girl left maimed by the interrogations of Colonel Joll – an emissary of the Third Bureau sent to investigate and quell a potential 'barbarian' uprising – the Magistrate is no longer able to ignore the atrocities perpetrated by Empire and finds himself confronted with a responsibility for the girl. He accompanies her on a journey back to her people only to find himself subjected to Empire's full punitive measures on his return. Of particular interest to me in the unfolding of this narrative is the way in which the Magistrate's imperialist worldview, and his interactions with the 'barbarian' Other, undergo a subtle ethical transformation.

In *Waiting*, the supreme imperialist eye reigns all-seeing and all-powerful. The violent potential of the authoritarian gaze manifests in motifs, throughout the novel, of sight/blindness, the seen/unseen, light/darkness, and the known/unknown. It seems to me that the structure and functioning of Coetzee's Empire bears extensive similarities to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison, in which eyes are the "prime organ" governing the "panoptic empire" by facilitating the process of surveillance, inscription, and domination (Miller 15). Eyes, for both Coetzee and Bentham, are the original point of tension between power and powerlessness, control and resistance, subjugation and rebellion. In my study of the novel, I have therefore employed the architectural design of Bentham's penitentiary, and Michel Foucault's analysis of it, as a lens through which to examine the relationship between the inscriptive look, the interpretative gaze, and the docile body. I argue that, in the frontier town where the Benthamic design orders the very social and physical structure of things, the Empire enacts on its subjects the literal and metaphorical process of panopticism.

Colonel Joll and the Magistrate employ, in differing ways, techniques of panopticism to control their subjects. On the one hand, Joll embodies a panoptic and inscriptive surveillance, first, in his unseen gaze that watches 'barbarians' and subjects of Empire, and secondly, in his torture of the 'barbarian' girl, which leaves her physically marked and disabled. The Magistrate, on the other hand, demonstrates a subtler, but no less damaging,

form of surveillance. Though his gaze leaves no wounds on the ‘barbarian’ girl’s body and he repeatedly tries to convince himself that his care of her is benevolent, his attempts to interpret the marks on her body harm her at a deeper, invisible, ontological level. By means of these modes of panopticism, the body of the Other is located and textualised in imperial discourse. In fact, Michael Valdez Moses contends that Coetzee, in his novel, “renders writing (inscription and interpretation) as a form of torture” insofar as “the Empire gives itself form by writing on its subjects” (120). This idea I take further in my claim that both Joll and the Magistrate play a part in this ‘textual torture’, the former by inscribing his interrogative gaze on the ‘barbarian’ girl’s body and the latter by subjecting her to a process of analysis and interpretation. The girl thus comes to exemplify the Foucauldian inmate *par excellence*. Left blind after Joll’s interrogations, she is quite literally seen without seeing, and thereby subjected to a perpetual surveillance which appropriates her gaze, forcing her to turn it inwards against herself.

During their time together, however, the girl is not without agential resistance and the Magistrate is not left unchanged. Her resistance to the panoptic gaze, defiance of imperialist language, and, most importantly, assertion of half-blindness as *her way of seeing*, is inextricably related to the Magistrate’s development towards an ethical vision. Taking up Maria J. López’s contention that the novel posits a “position of blindness [as] the right ethical stance” (103), I argue that the girl acts as the Magistrate’s unexpected guide towards an alternative and ethically ‘blind’ way of seeing. By the closing paragraph of the novel, in which the Magistrate witnesses a group of children constructing the face of a snowman, the meaning of eyes, sight, and blindness has gained a complex and multifaceted significance.

### **The Panopticon**

Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.

(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201)

Jeremy Bentham’s 1787 publication “Panopticon, or, The Inspection-House” declares that his architectural design for a penitentiary is a “new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example” (39). In elaborating on how his design effects such

control in penitentiary-houses, prisons, houses of industry, work-houses, poor-houses, manufactories, mad-houses, lazarettos, hospitals, and schools, he states:

[T]he more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose of the establishment have been attained. [. . .] [A]t every instant, seeing reason to believe [he is under inspection], and not being able to satisfy himself [sic] to the contrary, [the inmate] should *conceive* himself to be so. (40)

Bentham goes on to describe in minute detail the Panopticon's structural layout and organisation. The building is, first of all, circular. Around the inner circumference the cells are distributed vertically and horizontally, making up several floors. At the centre of the structure is a tower, the top of which is circumscribed by windows that look out onto all the cells on the peripheral ring. Importantly, by means of a complex construction of blinds and partitions placed at right angles, the inspector is able to see out the windows of the central tower but the prisoners cannot see inside it. In addition, each cell is blocked by an iron grating and fitted with lamps, so that the perpetual light "extend[s] to the night the security of the day" (41). From the position of their exposed cells, the prisoners are subjected to the gaze of the central tower twenty-four hours a day, and, being unable to see into the inspector's cabin, cannot know whether or not they are being watched at any given moment. It is this architectural structure that endows the Panopticon with its formidable power: since there is always the potential of being watched, given that the prisoner cannot see the inspector, *he/she must always act as if being watched*.

In his analysis and deconstruction of the Panopticon design in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault coins the word 'panopticism' to describe the functioning of power through constant surveillance. Discipline, he argues, is "the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise", which "coerces by means of observation" and in this way "explores [the body], breaks it down and rearranges it" (170, 171, 138). Panopticism incorporates all three of these elements, and, in this experience of constant surveillance, Foucault locates 'the power of mind over mind'. Subjection to an unseen and seemingly omniscient gaze, Bentham suggests, will eventually result in the internalisation of the interrogative and corrective gaze of the inspector, thereby regulating the prisoner's every movement from within. What was formerly external – the inspector's gaze – manifests in the prisoner's very being so that his/her own mind comes to exert power over itself. According to Foucault, the ultimate objective of the penitentiary was for the prisoner to

mediate and tailor his/her whole being through the inspector's gaze, even when outside the range of surveillance. The effect of panopticism, then, is ontological. The very being of the prisoner is manipulated and altered under the Godlike surveillance of the all-seeing eye.

A central function of panopticism, Foucault continues, is to render bodies docile. The notion of docility "joins the analysable body to the manipulable body" and, in short, refers to the legible body, which, in its legibility, is compliant and usable (136). Everything it does and everything done to it must serve a purpose and contribute to the system as a whole, for, as Jacques-Alain Miller points out, Bentham's design is founded on two essential ideas: utilitarianism, in which all parts are organised and utilised to serve the whole, and rationality (6-7). The first of these is inevitably dependent on the second because rendering objects or subjects usable requires that they initially be seen, examined, and made knowable through the scientific lens of reason. To this end, the Panopticon functions as

the temple of reason, a temple luminous and transparent in every sense: first, because there are no shadows and nowhere to hide: it is open to constant surveillance by the invisible eye; but also, because totalitarian mastery of the environment excludes anything irrational: no opacity can withstand logic. (7)

Creating docility requires intellectual and physical illumination through rationality. Foucault cites four ways in which panopticism works towards creating the docile, knowable body: first, through hierarchical observation; secondly, through normalising judgement; thirdly, by analysing the body and textualising it in a system of writing; and fourthly, by imposing a compulsory identity on the individual. To exploit the subject for his/her potential, he/she must be located, identified, minutely analysed for his/her characteristics (weaknesses, strengths, fears, desires), and classified. The all-seeing gaze seeks out the individual and, from the information collected, alters him/her. In this way, the body is primed for use.

With regard to the first technique of panopticism, the perpetual unreciprocated visibility of the inmate generates a form of hierarchical observation that not only establishes "a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally" (Foucault, *Discipline* 177). The Panopticon, then, ensures that everyone – the inmates as well as the inspector and sub-inspectors – are under a certain degree of surveillance so as to form a "network of gazes that supervise[] one another" (171). At the top of this hierarchy is the head inspector who watches over all the inhabitants of the Panopticon from the central tower. He/she is the one who, for the most part, does the "*seeing without being seen*" (Bentham 44). Under the head inspector's surveillance are the inmates and sub-

inspectors. As Bentham states in a section headed ‘Advantages of the Plan’, “the *under* keepers or inspectors, the servants and subordinates of every kind, will be under the same irresistible controul [sic] with respect to the *head* keeper or inspector, as the prisoners or other persons to be governed are with respect to *them*” (45). The sub-inspectors, positioned on the second rung of the hierarchy, are surveyed by the head inspector in the very act of watching the inmates. More than this, they inevitably keep an eye on one another, producing a lateral effect of power so that “the strictness of inspection is increased” (45).

Though there is truth in Miller’s remark that the Panopticon is “a machine that creates a semblance of God”, insofar as the central tower acts as an omniscient eye, it is important to note that the Godlike eye also undergoes a certain amount of surveillance (5). This is the ‘bottom to top’ feature of the prison in which the top inspector is watched by the public. Bentham insists that the Panopticon’s doors be “thrown wide open to the curious at large”, so that the public will act as “assistants [and] deputies, in so far as [the head inspector] is faithful, witnesses and judges, should he ever be unfaithful” (46). It is this ruthless hierarchical observation incorporating “supervisors perpetually supervised” that enables the sheer scale of power in the prison. As Foucault puts it, “a whole play of spaces, lines, screens, beams, degrees” act on the bodies of the inmates as well as the supervisors (*Discipline* 177). Through these means, individuals on all levels of the hierarchy are exposed to the vulnerability of potential surveillance.

Normalising judgement, a second means of producing the docile body, is inseparably linked to hierarchical observation. The unseen panoptic eye that observes from the top of the hierarchy is a ‘normal’ gaze that compares and analyses the inmates according to a standard. Foucault understands the normal as “the rule” or “the [standardized] model” which is “established as a principle of coercion” (178, 182, 184). Miguel Morey fleshes out the idea of the norm by defining it as that which

(1) conforms to habits; (2) conforms to a rational principle; (3) conforms to history or to tradition. [Thus . . .] we say that a thing is normal if it can be assimilated to the mean of other objects belonging to the same class. (119-20)

Norms, then, are social constructs shaped by habit, rationality, and tradition. Further, they are “obligatory”, which is to say, “ought statements”; they “tell us what we should do under certain circumstances” (Mitchell 216). At the core of Lawrence Mitchell’s discussion of norms is his claim that they are imbued with special power because they are often

internalised. He argues that “those who are subject to norms internalise them, and thus suffer some psychic cost as a result of norm violation” (197). Finally, both Morey and Mitchell locate norms at the point of the majority. Thus, the “numerical superiority” of the norm – which merely establishes a majority following – results in an assumed qualitative superiority; a norm is regarded as superior purely on the basis of its being followed by the largest number of people (Morey 120). Put differently, “norms stabilize when there are *enough people* who have internalised the norm to enforce it” (Mitchell 217, my emphasis).

Normalising judgement sets up a standard or norm and then goes about a complicated process of comparison and differentiation so as to “hierarchize[], homogenize[], exclude[]” and thereby “supervise[] every instant in the disciplinary institutions” (Foucault, *Discipline* 183). This aspect of surveillance makes it possible “to qualify, to classify and to punish” by ascertaining instances of “non-observance, that which does not measure up to the rule” (184, 178). The combination of hierarchical observation and normalising judgement intensifies and speeds up norm internalisation. As a result, the Panopticon minimises the need to impose norms through physical punishment, for once they are internalised the inmates come to enforce them on themselves.

A third means of producing the knowable docile body is by textualising the inmate. The complex system of analytical surveillance in which the inmate exists facilitates his/her positioning “in a network of writing” that examines, describes, dissects, and categorises him/her (189). No act, gesture, feature, or expression is beyond the notice and examination of the inspector, who reduces the inmate to a state of objectification so as to “maintain[] him in his individual features, in his particular evolution, in his aptitudes or abilities, under the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge” (190). This ‘permanent corpus of knowledge’ refers to the information collected, constructed, and measured against the inmate by the gaze of the central tower. It is, in brief, the subjective knowledge system that has acquired authority and power. As Miller points out, “[t]o write is to remove ambiguity”, and so, by establishing a corpus of written knowledge, the Panopticon attempts to assert “adequation, transparency, between signifier and signified” and render the world scientifically knowable (27). The central tower functions through this particular knowledge lens, treating the inmate as an “object of information, never a subject in communication” and, in this manner, fixing him/her into intelligibility by means of language (Foucault, *Discipline* 200). Importantly, the purpose of textualising and individualising the inmate in writing is not to create “a monument for future memory” but rather “a document for future use” (191). Here again the utilitarian

qualities of the Panopticon are unmistakable: the human being is written into language for *use* rather than for posterity.

Finally, the Foucauldian docile body is individualised and supplied with an obligatory identity. An inmate, in the Panopticon's binary classificatory system, is either "mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal", and, one might add, civilised/uncivilised (199). In order to expose him or her to visibility and 'light' – where illumination is interchangeable with knowledge – the prison ensures that "no uncertainty shall exist with regard to identities", and, in going about this project, imposes on all individuals "a name [ . . . ], a place, a number" (Miller 17). Interestingly, Miller posits the beggar as the individual who undermines identity categorisation:

The beggar is a man without a place, a vagrant, a man who cannot be accounted for, who resists calculation, floating, haunting the dark corners afforded him by a society that is not, unfortunately, uniformly panoptic. (17)

As a symbol of darkness, unknowable and ambiguous, the beggar is an individual who, in his/her association with ghosts and wandering, is mysterious, irrational, and beyond calculable understanding. For these reasons, the beggar is invisible in the sense that he/she is placeless and without a definite identity. If Foucault is right that "[v]isibility is a trap" (for visibility allows analysis, categorisation, and alteration), then the vagrant escapes the most dangerous trap of all through his/her invisibility (*Discipline* 200). By remaining obscure, he/she defies control and evades becoming an object of information and production. In order to restore authority to the Benthamic design, "such living logical errors" must be "incorporated into society" by being placed in panoptic workhouses (Miller 17). The beggar is literally and metaphorically brought into the light and positioned under the all-seeing gaze: he/she is located, analysed, identified, altered, controlled, and, most importantly, set to work. An important aspect in the creation of the docile body is thus to ensure that the individual is provided with a stable and inescapable identity.

I indicated earlier that the foundational principles of the Panopticon are rationality and utilitarianism. At the heart of Bentham's prison is the assumption that an individual can be analysed and known, and, further, that this knowledge can be employed through surveillance to correct and transform the prisoner so as to exploit his/her productive potential. As both Foucault and Miller show in their detailed analyses of its design, however, the Panopticon is more than a prison. For Miller, it is "a general principle of construction, the polyvalent

apparatus of surveillance, the universal optical machine of human groupings” (3). The Panopticon translates into panopticism, a principle of surveillance that extends into the heart of society, altering and controlling the actions of its subjects by means of inspection-internalisation.

The individual, during the course of this process, is subjected to four connected procedures: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, textualisation, and identification. Through these means, panopticism creates the docile body, that is, the individual who is under constant self-surveillance, easily manipulated and used, and devoid of unpredictable freedom. He/she is rendered all body, all surface, and therefore lacks qualities beyond or beneath that which is visible to the cold analytical eye. With such a system in place, it is easy to see how the complex humanity of an individual is supplanted by a calculable machine.

### **The Inscriptive Gaze of Colonel Joll**

In [discipline] the ‘subjects’ were presented as ‘objects’ to the observation of a power that was manifested only by its gaze. [. . . The inmates] felt its effects – in replica, as it were – on their bodies, which had become precisely legible and docile.

(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 188)

In her analysis of *Waiting*, López stages a complex interrelationship “between the desire for knowledge, possession, and vision” (94). Panopticism, in which vision operates to possess and utilise an individual through the acquisition of information, develops at the intersection of these three desires. Indeed, throughout the novel, Coetzee seems to suggest that visual illumination, knowing, and possessing are all connected processes that work together to produce the Foucauldian legible, docile body.

Given the connection between sight and domination, I propose the thesis that Colonel Joll – less human than a penetratingly interrogative gaze – embodies the Panopticon’s all-seeing central tower. Joll’s Panopticon-like character is evident first in his interactions with the Magistrate, and then later in his treatment of the ‘barbarian’ girl and prisoners. At the latter point, the inscriptive and transformative power of his gaze is at its most violent. My contention is that he represents in flesh the drive towards imperial power through a totalising panoptic vision that seeks to know, and inscribe itself on, its subjects. In fact, Coetzee represents the search for knowledge and the process of inscription as inseparable concepts.

The violence of *inscription* is depicted in Joll's search for *information*, that is, in the practice of torture where the 'barbarian' girl's body is literally marked under his hidden gaze. In his search for the 'truth', his "faceless gaze" transforms her body into "a field of perception" on which he engraves the language of Empire, rendering her legible and acquiescent to power (Foucault, *Discipline* 214).

It is therefore no coincidence that the novel begins with a depiction of the invisible gaze of Colonel Joll. As the Magistrate's opening reflection shows, the sunglasses that conceal Joll's ever-present eyes are an unusual, yet distinctly ominous, object of fascination:

I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind? I could understand if he wanted to hide blind eyes. But he is not blind. The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them. (Coetzee 1)

The glasses echo Bentham's design for the Panopticon's central tower, where blinds are positioned strategically so as to ensure the "*seeing* [of the head inspector] *without being seen*" (Bentham 44). In the same way that the overseer's panoptic gaze is obscured from view, so too are Joll's eyes, the bodily organs of surveillance, screened. Since he can see through the dark glasses, those in his presence will be uncertain of whether or not they are under his gaze. Accordingly, they are forced to act as if they are always under his gaze as it is "visible and unverifiable" (Foucault, *Discipline* 201).

The Magistrate immediately senses the disrupted dynamic of reciprocal vision and regards the glasses with hesitancy and puzzlement. If Joll were blind, he thinks, his glasses would be explicable. His subsequent remark that "he is not blind", however, suggests confusion about the use of glasses that are impenetrable from the outside but transparent from the inside. The dissociation of what Foucault terms the "see/being seen dyad" disconcerts the Magistrate for he senses, through his bewilderment, that the shielded glasses endow Joll with power (*Discipline* 202). Furthermore, the fact that Joll wears them indoors and endures the inconvenience of "pick[ing] his way uncertainly among the strange furniture" indicates that they function as more than protection "against the glare of the sun" (Coetzee 2, 1). Perhaps more accurately, they protect him against the gaze of those in his presence. Since the Magistrate cannot *see* him in his entirety, he is watched while Joll remains, in a certain sense, invisible.

Coetzee thus makes it clear from the start that, like the Panopticon, the Empire is constructed on a principle of hierarchical observation. Though the Magistrate is crucially part

of Empire and clearly a Foucauldian overseer of its subjects and the ‘barbarians’, he is positioned on the second rung of the hierarchy and so subjected to the gaze of Joll, who represents the head inspector.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the Colonel never removes his glasses in the Magistrate’s presence, staging instead “the paltry theatrical mystery of dark shields hiding healthy eyes” (Coetzee 4). Yet again, this description evokes the character of the head inspector, the Panoptic legislator, who, Bentham argues, should possess the quality of theatricality in order to maintain his/her subjects under command: “As puppets in the hands of the showman, so would men be in the hands of the legislator, who, to the science proper to his function, should add a well-informed attention to stage effect” (qtd. in Miller 15).

As head supervisor, emissary, and legislator of Empire, Joll takes on the performative aspect of his duty with fastidiousness. An interaction between him and the Magistrate at the beginning of the novel is particularly illustrative of his showmanship. While the Magistrate is working in his office, “Colonel Joll, wearing his dark eyeshades indoors, enters and sits down” with “an air of sternly controlled triumph” (Coetzee 23). In response to the Magistrate’s inquiry regarding the success of the interrogations, he “places his fingers tip to tip”, responds with the uninformative reply that they “have had some success” (23), and, when departing, “stands up, bows, turns, and leaves” (24). Similarly, the Warrant Officer who replaces Joll is described as an “actor” who tries to make an impression “somewhat too theatrically” (77, 82). Like the Colonel, he too has “clear [blue] eyes” that are protected “behind a mask” (77). Hidden behind the double protection of their glasses/‘mask’ and theatrical performance, both Joll and the Officer maintain their superior position in relation to the Magistrate, who feels himself constantly under the inspection of their invisible eyes.

The Magistrate’s positioning as under-inspector is further suggested by the careful examination he undergoes and his placement in a network of writing. He is, in other words, textualised in the language of Empire. After a futile attempt to dissuade Joll from embarking on a journey to capture ‘barbarian’ prisoners, for instance, the Magistrate remarks that he is “sure this conversation is noted down afterwards, with the comment that [he is] ‘unsound’” (11). The intuition that he is being analysed and classified as ‘unsound’ – that is, abnormal/insane/dangerous – is confirmed when he returns from his own journey into the desert. In his office, which has been appropriated by the Warrant Officer, he is presented with a number of “depositions” regarding his behaviour (83), which include “treasonously consorting with the enemy” (77), as well as “decisions [. . .] characterised by arbitrariness”,

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<sup>1</sup> The nature of the Magistrate’s gaze, and its transformation in the course of the novel, will be examined in later sections of this chapter.

“no regular system of accounting for moneys”, and “a liaison with a streetwoman” (83). It is at this point that the Magistrate realises how closely his every action has been watched, noted down, and carefully filed away.

Textualised thus in a series of accusations that locate him as ‘abnormal’, the Magistrate is dehumanised, which, in turn, legitimates his subsequent punishment and mistreatment. He is, in short, Othered and thereby reduced to a less-than-human status in order to justify the violence perpetrated against him.<sup>2</sup> In an episode of torture that powerfully inverts his humanness, he is made to wear the attire and perform the behaviour of the gendered and racialised Other. Towards the end of his imprisonment, the Warrant Officer clothes him in a dress, binds his wrists behind his back, and hauls him up by his hands into a tree so that he hangs airborne. As Judie Newman puts it, he is “[f]orcibly inverted, bellowing with pain, simultaneously an image of woman, animal, insect, ‘Other’” (136). More than this, though, she also points out that “his incoherent howls recall an etymological origin” of the word ‘barbarian’ (136), which traces back to the Greek “barbar”, a “reference to speech [. . .] compared with Latin *balbus*” meaning “stammering” (“Barbarous”, *OED*). The onlookers explicitly make this connection when they joke that the Magistrate “is calling his barbarian friends” (Coetzee 121). So as to maintain a semblance of order in Empire, it must be established for the public that an erring subject is not fully human *before* he/she is subjected to its punitive measures. The panoptic imperialist gaze, in this case embodied in Joll and the Warrant Officer, determines who qualifies as human and his/her subsequent treatment. Through textualising the Magistrate as mad and/or dangerous and/or abnormal and/or uncivilised, Empire justifies its violence against him.

At this point, I would like to return to the nature of Joll’s gaze, now in relation to the ‘barbarians’. Readers of the novel tend to focus on what they understand as the link between Joll and blindness. López, for instance, argues that “Joll is associated with darkness and blindness” (82), while Newman claims that Coetzee is “underlin[ing] the extent to which Empire cultivates and enforces blindness to alternative truths” (136). Philip Dickinson also contends that Joll’s ‘blind’ vision represents a “way of seeing” that “seeks to fix the colonised-as-object, as ‘barbarian’” (10). All three of these readings suggest Empire’s fundamental inability to *see* those beyond or different from itself and point out a ‘blindness’ to the humanness of the Other that results in his/her objectification and mistreatment. While

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<sup>2</sup> As Pamela Creed argues in her analysis of the 9/11-Iraq War, “dehumanising and humiliating the enemy Other [. . .] fuel[s] a cycle of reactive violence” (7). Similarly, the Magistrate is symbolically Othered and classified as enemy.

agreeing with this interpretation, I would like to approach the association between Joll and blindness from a different angle.

The Magistrate's question "Is he blind?" in the opening paragraph, together with his later remark to Joll that "[the prisoner] must think [he is] a blind man", sets up a relationship, first, between seeing and violence, and, second, between totalising vision and blindness (Coetzee 1, 3). From the very beginning of the novel, Coetzee foreshadows the blindness that Joll's vision, as the embodiment of surveillance, will inflict on the Other. The Magistrate has, ironically, got it wrong: it is not Joll who is blind, but his all-seeing gaze which, in attempting to illuminate his idea of truth, will cause blindness in another. At stake here is something akin to Bentham's panoptic effect, which is explained as follows by Foucault: the inmate "is seen, but he [sic] does not see" which "induce[s] in [him] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (*Discipline* 200, 201). By depriving the 'barbarian' girl of her vision, Joll ensures that, since she does not know whether or not she is being watched at any given moment, she is, in effect, under the perpetual surveillance of Empire. This interpretation foregrounds the violence of his gaze. I would suggest, then, that the question "Is he blind?" aligns Joll with blindness, and so alludes both to the conceptual 'blindness' inherent in his dealings with the 'barbarians' and the physical blindness caused by the brutality of his gaze.

The Magistrate immediately detects the violent quality of Joll's gaze during their first interaction with a 'barbarian' prisoner. When the prisoner is addressed, the Magistrate notes that he "stares over [his] shoulder, not at the guard but at Colonel Joll beside him" (Coetzee 3). Joll "does not smile" at the joke that the 'barbarian' boy must think he is blind, however, and the Magistrate goes on to reflect: "Before prisoners, it appears, one maintains a certain front" (3). Unable to see behind this 'front', the prisoner intuits a destabilised see/seen relationship and, sensing the subsequent shift in power to Joll's advantage, is rendered inarticulate. This is one possible explanation for the boy's distracted and fearful state. Joll's demeanour of unresponsive watchfulness and silence, an obviously intentional performance, is employed to objectify, intimidate, and threaten the prisoners. While he is willing to interact with the Magistrate on a relatively equal level, at least initially, he treats the 'barbarian', in a manner that recalls Foucault's description of the Panopticon inmate, as an object from which to garner information and not a subject with whom to communicate (*Discipline* 200). Soon afterwards, the two prisoners are subjected to Joll's questioning, in the course of which the old man dies and the boy is left mutilated. In the Colonel's hands, they are nothing more than things to analyse, extract information from, and bring under his control.

So, in the same way that Joll's representation resonates with some of the key tenets of panopticism, his gaze, like the panoptic eye, first penetrates and then inscribes itself on the Other. Through subjection to perpetual surveillance and internalisation of the all-seeing gaze, the Other is transformed into an intelligible, docile body. Coetzee represents this brutal process of panopticism in the act of torture through which inspection literally marks the individual, rendering him/her knowable and predictable. At this point it is worthwhile mentioning the etymology of 'inspect', which traces back to the Latin word *inspicere*, meaning to "look into, examine" ("Inspect", *Oxford*). This brings to light a parallel between panopticism and torture. The former is a metaphysical entering into the mind through surveillance so as to know and control the Other; the latter a physical entering into the body so as to analyse its response, manipulate it, and reach the so-called 'truth'.

Joll's description of torture indicates its relation to physical and panoptic penetration. In a discussion with the Magistrate, he argues that truth is uncovered through physical interrogation and that it is immediately recognisable in a "certain tone":

I am speaking of a situation in which I am *probing* for truth, in which I have to exert pressure to *find it*. First I get lies, you see – this is what happens – first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. *That is how you get to the truth.* (Coetzee 5, my emphasis)

His use of the verb "probing" evokes both the physicality of torture, that is, the corporeality of this examination technique, and the action of looking involved in the investigation. The nominal form of "probe" has another interesting association. A probe is defined as "a blunt-ended surgical instrument for exploring a wound or part of the body" ("Probe", *Oxford* def. 1), suggesting its investigative entry into the body to find the cause of injury. In the context of *Waiting*, the 'probe' must enter the body and unearth truth, which is portrayed as a thing. Truth is something to be found by looking and exerting physical pressure – or more accurately, pain – and, in this way, forcing the body to yield up its information. For Joll, then, "[p]ain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (5).

The language of "probing", "pressure", and, most importantly, "truth", gives value to pain. Torture, in this case, operates as a useful tool in service of Empire. As Miller puts it, "pain, like everything else, must serve a purpose. A [. . .] system must therefore be established that will include pain, give it meaning, a value – in short, put it to use" (10). If Empire, like the Panopticon, is to function as a coherent utilitarian system in which every action serves a purpose, pain must be imbued with meaning and exploited for its uses. So, for

example, the ‘barbarian’ boy’s and girl’s pain is appropriated, utilised to discover the ‘truth’ of the so-called barbarians’ intentions, and thereby quell an uprising. They become pure objects, functioning as bodies exploited for their potential usefulness. Consequently, their pain is divested of all human significance and treated as merely a tool, a means, a method.

Torture inscribes the language of imperialism on the body and, like panopticism, attempts to identify that which is different and/or unknown, in this case, the ‘barbarian’ Other. The very linguistic term ‘barbarian’ begins the process of inscription by marking the desert people as different and unrelated to the subjects of Empire. Hierarchical observation, in this instance, does not attempt to normalise the Other. In a manner that resonates with Foucault’s contention that, “if necessary”, discipline will “disqualify and invalidate” peoples’ humanity by “carry[ing] the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them”, *Waiting* shows how, in the panoptic machine, significant deviance from the normal entails severe consequences (*Discipline* 223, 172). Coetzee again links panopticism, in which the individual is internally marked and altered, to torture, in which he/she is externally or physically inscribed on and transformed into a predictable being. The ‘barbarian’ body is rendered “literary”, by which Elizabeth Grosz means “capable of bearing meanings and of being deciphered as a sign of prevention” (151). In his/her marked state, the Other stands as an example of what subjects of Empire *are not*, as well as a warning of what they *must not become*. Though the Magistrate is watched and textualised in a network of writing, his body is left, for the most part, untouched. Moses points out that the ‘barbarian’, by contrast, is treated as a “blank slip onto which Empire engraves itself” so as to maintain an idea of its own identity via the Otherness of ‘barbarianism’ (Moses 120).

Coetzee portrays three instances of inscription in the novel. First, the boy prisoner, who prefigures the ‘barbarian’ girl, is marked on his “belly and both groins” with “little scabs and bruises and cuts” after the “investigations” that Joll carries out on him (Coetzee 10, 9). Interestingly, the “little knife” that was allegedly used for the interrogation is reminiscent of a probe, which explores the body for information (10). In the guard’s pantomime description of the boy’s torture, he

spreads thumb and forefinger. Gripping his little knife of air he makes a curt thrust into the sleeping boy’s body and then turns the knife delicately, like a key, first left, then right. Then he withdraws it, his hand returns to his side, he stands waiting. (10)

All of these instruments – the probe, key, and knife – are associated with pain and used as tools to unlock the ‘truth’. Marked by incisions, the boy is positioned as Other, as less-than-human and therefore not worthy of concern. The doctor who is brought in to treat him reads the signs of his Otherness and, as a result, “does not ask how [he] sustained his injuries” (11). Empire, consistent with Foucault’s account of a panoptic society’s controlling utilitarian method, ensures that the boy is “reduced as a ‘political’ force” by means of his debilitating injuries, and “maximized as a useful force”, first through his pain, and then by acting as a guide to Joll (*Discipline* 223). Like a probe, key, or knife, he is rendered a purely functional object.

The ‘barbarian’ girl undergoes a similar process of inscription at the hands of Joll, though more violently. After being subjected to the interrogations of “that other cold man with the mask over his eyes”, her sight is appropriated and turned against her (Coetzee 135). By marking her with blindness, Joll renders her an inmate (in her own body) who is seen but cannot see, and, for this reason, her face develops “the look of something that knows itself watched” (34). Her gaze, in other words, turns inwards after the blinding. If the Magistrate is right that her last visual memory is of Joll’s masked eyes, then in all probability it is his gaze that she has internalised and through which she censors all her movements.<sup>3</sup> The relentless presence of his gaze is further suggested by the mark in the corner of her one eye, which the Magistrate likens to “a caterpillar [lying] there with its head under her eyelid, grazing” (31). Like the boy, her body comes into contact with a panoptic power that leaves her physically disabled. Joll’s ‘examination’ – a word which contextually conflates looking and torture – is in fact a form of panopticism that manifests visibly as marks on the girl’s skin.

The most explicit depiction of corporeal inscription takes place during the torture of several ‘barbarian’ prisoners. After bringing the men into the town square and lining them up before the crowd, Joll writes the word ENEMY in charcoal on each of their backs and then orders them to be whipped until the word is beaten off. As the scene unfolds, he is again portrayed as a screened, ‘unseen’ watching gaze (“his eyes [are as] shaded as ever” [105]), which analyses and then classifies the prisoners by writing on them their enemy status as ‘barbarian’ Other. Coetzee actualises, in this metaphorically brilliant portrayal of the body’s textualisation under the imperialist gaze, the abstract Foucauldian process of qualification, classification, and punishment. The ‘barbarians’, measured against the ‘normal’ subjects of

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<sup>3</sup> At one point in the novel, the Magistrate reflects, “Whom will that other girl with the blind face remember: me with my silk robe and my dim lights and my perfumes and oils and my unhappy pleasures, or that other cold man with the mask over his eyes who gave the orders and pondered the sounds of her intimate pain? Whose was the last face she saw plainly on this earth but the face behind the glowing iron?” (135).

Empire, are inevitably found lacking and located in the division of enemy. By having their differences categorised as subhuman, it is, according to imperialist logic, permissible to beat them. Through these Benthamic techniques of panopticism, Empire “produces its own conventional truth through its power to inscribe” and thereby “defines itself by literally marking off those who lie beyond its boundaries” (Moses 121).

Empire, then, produces the ‘barbarian’ docile body by means of panoptic mechanisms of examination, penetration, and inscription. All the prisoners subjected to interrogations begin to exhibit characteristics of docility. The ‘barbarian’ boy, for instance, is wholly compliant to Joll’s will after his ordeal and, according to the Magistrate, “will say whatever comes into his head to please [him]” (Coetzee 11). Similarly, the ‘barbarian’ girl is repeatedly depicted as yielding to the Magistrate’s demands. Early on, he describes how, during the ritual of washing, “her body yields when [he] nuzzle[s] [his] face into her belly or clasp[s] her feet between [his] thighs. She yields to everything” (30). In perhaps the most forced bodily act of docility, the prisoners, controlled and connected by a single wire threaded through their cheeks, submit to the soldier as he slowly tightens the wire and “bend further till finally they are kneeling with their faces touching the pole” (105). The ‘barbarian’ is never a subject to be spoken to, but rather an object to be violated, peered into, excavated, marked, interpreted, rendered compliant and put to use. If Joll does the work of violation and marking, however, it is the Magistrate who does the work of interpretation and utilisation.

### **The Magistrate’s Interpretive Gaze**

Everything in [the Panopticon] must therefore be weighed, compared, evaluated. Everything is to have a place. Everything must be argued out. Everything must have a clear and explicable meaning. Here, the world must be ordered from top to bottom. The discourse will overlook no single detail.

(Miller, “Jeremy Bentham’s Panoptic Device” 5)

If Moses is right that Coetzee, in his novel, portrays writing (the act of inscription and interpretation) as a form of torture, then both Colonel Joll, with his inscriptive gaze, and the Magistrate, with his interpretive gaze, are implicated in this ‘textual torture’ (120). In *Waiting*, inscription and interpretation are demonstrated to be similar and parallel processes of torture that, through a process of violation, examination, and marking, convey the “secret body of the other” into the linguistic framework of Empire and, in this manner, render it knowable and usable (Coetzee 43). As I suggested earlier, the Magistrate is positioned on the

second rung of the Panopticon's hierarchy, simultaneously inspector and inspected, and so is inextricably linked to the project of imperialism. While his is a subtler, more insinuating form of surveillance, it is no less powerful and no less damaging. In his desire to interpret and know the 'barbarian' girl's body, he in fact colonises the Other in a manner that is similar to Joll's invasion of her body through marking. Interpretation and comprehension, in this case, are akin to capture and possession. Hence, his desire to examine and find meaning in the girl's scars results in her psychological and emotional torture.

As under-inspector, the Magistrate plays a significant part in the panoptic Empire and is, initially at least, complacently complicit in its attitude towards the Other. His use of the term "barbarian", for instance, positions him as a subject of Empire distanced from and different to the nomad people of the desert. The language available to him, which he uses unquestioningly, sets up a division between *them* (the 'barbarian', with connotations of savagery, abnormality, danger), and *us* (the subject of Empire, suggesting civility, normality, harmlessness). By appealing to "Joll's binary construction [in which] Empire requires the construct of a barbarian race in order to define itself", he asserts his identity through a subtle but potent process of Othering (Fick 34). Moreover, he fulfils the role of under-inspector by keeping an eye on his subjects while screening himself from view, occupying, as López describes it, the "privileged position of spectator or observer" (84). When the fishing people are captured and imprisoned in his yard, for example, he watches the scene "from [his] window [. . .], *invisible* behind the glass" (Coetzee 19, my emphasis). Concealed in this way, he is a part of the unseen panoptic eye that regulates the movements of subjects and enemies of Empire alike.

An even more telling instance of the Magistrate's imperialist role is his intolerance of vagrancy in the frontier town. His function, as an inspector, is to keep order by watching and fixing his subjects in a network of data so that they remain identifiable and predictable. The beggar is a person who, as Miller notes, resists containment in the epistemic structure of the panoptic system (17). More than this, the vagrant refuses to operate as a usable tool for utilitarianism; he/she lives and works only for him/herself, wandering where he/she pleases. Like the vagrant, Newman points out,

[p]eople in a marginal state, placeless, left out of social patterning, become sources of danger because their status is indefinable, whether they are social outsiders, offenders against the bounded wholeness of the human body, or in some way positioned between the living and the dead. (129)

The 'barbarian' girl, who the Magistrate first encounters begging, is positioned from the start as an unknown and unknowable Other characterised by liminality and excess. As a female, a 'barbarian', and a deformed body often characterised in deathlike terms (her gaze is "rigid" with "dead centres" and her face is "blank" [Coetzee 26, 41, 42]), she exists as an enigmatic and indefinable mystery that the Magistrate must analyse, solve, and categorise in order to maintain the stability of Empire. He attempts to dispel the danger of this placeless, deformed body by two methods.

First, the Magistrate locates the 'barbarian' girl in a system of information and sets her to work. When he first encounters her begging at the barracks wall, his response is to call her into his office and subject her to a verbal examination, which aligns him with Joll and his interrogations. His methodical questions endeavour to contextualise her in a historical background ("Where do you come from?"), then ascertain her occupation ("Do you make a living by begging?"), and finally locate her place of residence ("Where do you live?") (26). In a system that treats everything obscure and unknown with suspicion, that seeks to analyse and identify all things and individuals, that uses its subjects as means to the Empire's ends, that ensures that "all chance [is] controlled, banished", the unpredictability of the vagrant is a danger and a threat (Miller 5). As an employee of Empire who must preserve imperialist ideology, the Magistrate instructs the girl as follows: "you should come and work here. You cannot beg in the streets. I cannot permit that. Also you must have a place of abode" (Coetzee 27). His demands, masked in benevolence, will ensure that she is watchable, traceable, and workable – in short, *able* for the utilisation of Empire.

The Magistrate's second method of defining the girl's body and rendering it bounded and 'whole' is by exploring and interpreting the marks left by Joll's interrogations. In order to complete the process begun by Joll, he must interpret the signs on her body. His efforts to read the girl's 'literary' – which is to say, marked – body is perhaps his most colonialist impulse, for in so doing he aims, as López describes it, "to see, to possess, and to know" her, which is akin, if not identical, to colonisation (85). In fact, Moses argues that the "power and skill of Empire, its art, lie in its capacity to generate and then interpret its own signs" (121). In *Waiting*, Joll does the work of generating signs and the Magistrate performs their interpretation, making them unmistakable collaborators in the 'barbarian' girl's torture.

Coetzee depicts the Magistrate's repeated attempts to comprehend the 'barbarian' girl in the form of commands and interrogative questions. "Show me what they have done to your feet," he demands during their second meeting, "let me see" (Coetzee 28). What follows is a

series of interactions between the two of them, almost all of which involve questions regarding her torture:

What did they do? (29);  
What did they do to you (31);  
Why don't you want to tell me? (31);  
What is this? (31);  
Tell me (32);  
Why do I want you here? (40);  
What do you feel towards the men who did this? (41)

And, later, regarding the day before her torture:

Where did you sit? Which way did you face?;  
On which side of your father were you sitting?;  
Did you see me? (48)

In this manner, he tries to construct a narrative around her scars and reach a kind of fixed truth or single interpretation of her torture. By searching for the meaning of her damaged body, he mediates her whole being through the language of Empire and situates her in a mass of words. Though it is never said whether he transcribes his findings, the effect of capture is the same. Like the inmate of the Panopticon, the girl too is rendered legible and objectified through language.

The Magistrate, using the vocabulary of a predator and teacher/doctor/lover, expresses the procedure of classification as a search or investigation. He describes himself as “prowl[ing]” around the girl, examining her (27, 43), and then as “an incompetent schoolmaster, fishing about with [his] *maieutic forceps* when [he] ought to be *filling* her with truth” (41, my emphasis). This moment distinctly echoes Joll’s interrogative method of *probing* and also anticipates the Magistrate’s later reference to the girl’s torturers as “doctors of pain” (47). The only difference here, though, is that while Joll conducts the search for and inscribing of truth, it is up to the Magistrate to ‘fill’ the girl – a word with a distinctly erotic ring – with his interpretation of the truth. His truth must be projected into and internalised by her. Like Joll, he too is “hunting [for her] secret” by attempting to compose the story behind her torture (43). And yet his interpretation of her experience will always be an incomplete narrative, pockmarked by silences. Further, his interpretive impulse constrains and imposes pressure on an “alien body”, the mysteries of whom he cannot know in their totality (42).

The resemblance between his treatment of the girl and Joll’s torture of her does not escape the Magistrate, nor does it escape critics of the novel. He realises, at a juncture as

early as his first meeting with her, that the “distance between [himself] and her torturers [. . .] is negligible”, a remark that critics have interpreted in a variety of ways (27). A. C. Fick suggests that the Magistrate’s “questioning and pursuit of [the ‘barbarian’ girl’s] mystery differs only in methodology from Joll” (33), while Philip Dickinson argues that the former aspires to “a comprehension that makes him the hunter, she the hunted – a version of the relationship between coloniser and colonised” (12). To interpret and comprehend is to seek to possess the Other’s meaning, and therefore to colonise the Other by dispossessing him/her of the ability to create his/her own meaning. Newman takes this idea further:

The parallelism between the woman’s body and the colonised land is also a parallel between body and story. While the girl remains mute, the narrator hunts for the truth of her story, examining the signs of torture on her body and repeatedly questioning her. (133)

With this argument in mind, I would like to draw my own parallel between the Foucauldian docile body, in which “the analysable body [is] joined [to] the manipulable body” (*Discipline* 136), and Moses’s idea of writing/narrative/story, which involves “inscription and interpretation” (120). For the docile body to be analysable, it must be inscribed upon, and to be manipulable, it must be interpretable. Analysis is dependent on inscription in the same way that manipulation is reliant on interpretation. Therefore, writing is an abstracted form of the docile body; the docile body is a corporeal form of writing. Both involve examination and manipulation, and both undergo reading and interpretation. Further, just as the story is created by the writer, so too is the docile body created by the panoptic eye. They are, in a word, productions. As Foucault emphatically declares: “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (*Discipline* 194). The truth for which Joll so eagerly seeks, and the Magistrate so keenly attempts to understand, is nothing but a creation of Empire – which makes it everything.

Of the critics who discuss the association between examination, interpretation, and torture, López comes closest to my own understanding. She contends that the Magistrate’s “position as observer is one of power, inevitably linked with the role of torturer”, but does not flesh out this idea (84). It seems to me that Coetzee links the Magistrate’s interpretive gaze to torture as a means of emphasising the harm caused by the process of panopticism. The girl’s experience at the hands of the Magistrate results in panopticism, a process whereby the prejudicial gaze is internalised by, and replicated in, the Other. The result is self-surveillance. As Foucault maintains, an individual “who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows

it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he [sic] makes them play spontaneously upon himself” (*Discipline* 203). The Magistrate’s realisation that he is Joll’s collaborator locates panopticism as a subtler form of torture. To frame it in the words of Foucault, the Magistrate’s gaze exercises on the body of the girl “a subtle coercion, [. . .] obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes” (137). During her stay with him, she begins to inscribe on herself the panoptic gaze of Empire.

There are a number of instances in the novel that depict the Magistrate’s interpretive gaze as damaging, coercive, and manipulative – that is, akin to torture. In a scene of particularly poignant irony, he keenly watches the girl undress, “hoping to capture in her movements a hint of an old free state”, and is disappointed to observe that, under his gaze, all her actions are “crabbed, defensive, trammelled” (Coetzee 34). His desire to witness an original free state in the girl by training an attentive eye on her has the opposite effect of imprisonment. Aware of her vulnerable visibility and the invisibility of the gazer, the girl’s movements are restricted and constrained under the Magistrate’s look. Indeed, his very method of analysis and “capture” negates the possibility of witnessing an “old free state”. As different forms of panopticism, Joll’s physical, and the Magistrate’s emotional, torture of the girl have the effect of control and subjugation. Since she has internalised their inscriptive and interpretive gazes, all her movements are tailored to the demands of Empire’s panoptic eye so that she moves “as though she were afraid of striking unseen obstacles” (34). This is a particularly remarkable description, for it illustrates accurately the effect of Foucauldian panopticism. Rendered literally blind to the eyes that surround her, the girl is always uncertain whether or not she is being watched and, as a result, begins to act *as if* she is always under an imperialist gaze. To live with the ever-present possibility of being watched is to be constrained to act in a way defined by the all-seeing gaze. This sets up ‘obstacles’ to her movements, for she has been situated in a structure delimited by Empire. Unable to escape this perpetual surveillance, her face, as previously noted, develops “the look of something that knows itself watched” (34). By this point, the effect of perpetual visibility manifests in the surveillance *of herself over herself*.

The Magistrate’s second realisation of his alliance with Joll occurs during a scene in which he is questioning, examining, and touching the girl. He imagines himself “hunt[ing] back and forth seeking entry” into the girl’s body, which drives him to ask the question: “Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret [. . .]?” (43). Immediately afterwards, in an epiphany that indicates his reservations about the system of which he is a part, he remarks:

“how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other” (43). His realisation that there is no way to access truth in or on the girl’s unknowable body, and that any attempt to do so is a mistake, evinces an awareness of the impossibility, futility, and error of his and Joll’s project. Despite this insight, however, he is unable to prevent his “gaze pressing in upon [the girl] with the weight of a body” (56).

Yet another of the Magistrate’s realisations of complicity comes in the form of an involuntary vision. His unspoken question to the girl, “What do I have to do to move you?”, is answered by “the image of a face masked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only [his] doubled image cast back at [him]” (44). This image faultlessly calls to mind panopticism. The panoptic gaze of the torturer, which is necessarily unreciprocated because it shields itself from view, throws the image of the subject back at him/her as Other and is internalised, resulting in a transformation at the centre of his/her being. The girl comes to see herself as being mediated through the eyes of Empire and is *moved*. If the word ‘move’ is understood as “provok[ing] a strong feeling” or that which causes “a change of state” – that is, an altering or changing of an individual by an experience – then the suggestion here is that the torturer is the one who has moved the girl (“Move”, *Oxford v. def. 7 and n. def. 2*). In this moment, the Magistrate understands that he must become torturer in order to move the girl. He realises “with a shift of horror” that he *is* in fact torturer, for in the vision of the masked face he recognises a manifestation of both Joll (“two black glassy insect eyes”) and himself (his “doubled reflection cast back at [him]”) (Coetzee 44). The vision captures, in a single image, the experience of both tortured and torturer.

There are points in the narrative, however, where the Magistrate vehemently denies complicity in the girl’s torture. This ambivalence is registered in moments of justification where he resists the idea of his involvement by asserting benevolence towards, and care for, the girl. In one such instance, he emphatically avows that

[t]here is nothing to link me with torturers, people who sit waiting like beetles in dark cellars. How can I believe that a bed is anything but a bed, a woman’s body anything but a site of joy? I must assert my distance from Colonel Joll. I will not suffer for his crimes! (44)

Interestingly, behind this denial of responsibility is the suggestion that his bed is equivalent to the torture chamber and that the girl’s body is a site of torture and pain. López makes a similar point when she argues that “[b]y presenting the apartment of the Magistrate – the place of the sexual encounter – as an uncanny double of the torture chamber, Coetzee draws a

parallel between the intimacy involved in the sexual act and the intimacy involved in the act of torture” (89). If this is true, it follows that the Magistrate is not suffering for Joll’s crimes but his own. He cannot but “cringe with shame” when he asks himself “whether, when [he] lay head to foot with her, fondling and kissing those broken ankles, [he] was not in [his] heart of hearts regretting that [he] could not engrave [himself] on her as deeply [as Joll]” (Coetzee 135). The irony of this indefinite, and perverted, desire is plain: the Magistrate *has* engraved himself on the girl, possibly more deeply than Joll, through his thorough examination of her scars. While the deformities caused by Joll’s gaze (his examination and inscription) are visible and external, the damage of the Magistrate’s gaze (his analysis and interpretation) is invisible and internal. The girl, then, undergoes a double torture: the one physical and the other emotional.

While in the care of the Magistrate, the ‘barbarian’ girl is herself aware of the repeated cycle of torture to which she is subjected. Significantly, in this regard, she indirectly makes the comparison during one of their few erotically intimate moments together when the Magistrate feels a “desire [. . .], usually so obscure, flicker into a shape [he] can recognise” (40). She responds to his sexually charged question – “And why do I want you here?” – with a description of her torture (40). “You are always asking me that question,” she says,

so now I will tell you. It was a fork, a kind of fork with only two teeth. [. . .] They said they would burn my eyes out, but they did not. The man brought it very close to my face and made me look at it. They held my eyelids open. [. . .] That was when the damage came. After that I could not see properly anymore. (41)

The Magistrate’s response to her reply – “I want to protest, but instead listen on, chilled” – suggests that he grasps the import of what she is saying (41). By providing him with an account of her torture in response to his question regarding his desire for her, she exposes the nature of his desire as a longing to interpret the history of scars inscribed on her by torturers and, most unsettlingly, a yearning as torturer to leave his own mark upon her. In her oblique way, the girl suggests that “[t]o arrive at an understanding of [her] scars is an act that symbolically matches the blinding she suffers at the hands of her torturers” (Dickinson 12).

In spite of these moments of denial and ambivalence, the Magistrate does come to acknowledge his complicity in the panoptic Empire. He undergoes a process of self-examination during which he listens, both to the girl and to his internal intuitions, and, as the novel progresses, at least aspires towards a more ethical way of seeing and interacting with

Otherness. In this process of self-investigation and ethical change, the blind ‘barbarian’ girl acts as his unexpected guide.

### The ‘Barbarian’ Girl as Ethical Guide

[T]he problem for the subject or the individual soul is to turn its gaze in upon itself, to recognise itself in what it is and, recognising itself in what it is, to recall the truths that issue from it and that it has been able to contemplate.

(Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* 285)

In *Acts of Visitation*, López puts forward an argument for the Magistrate’s ethical growth, contending that “if [he] does not achieve hermeneutic *illumination* or a final *insight*, the novel seems to suggest that this position of blindness constitutes the right ethical stance” which is “in contrast to the self-confident vision of the perverse agents of Empire” (103). While Joll maintains the delusion that he can understand the Other and extract truth from him/her – his inscriptive gaze remains static throughout the novel – the Magistrate comes to acknowledge the impenetrability and incomprehensibility of the Other.<sup>4</sup> For López, this new and ethical way of ‘seeing’ is “an admission of defeat, blindness, and ignorance” (103-104). Though she puts forward strong evidence for this argument, she does not show how the Magistrate moves toward this alternative vision, nor does she adequately explore the nature of a ‘blind’ vision. Picking up where she left off, or where she did not go, I suggest, with ironic emphasis, that the *blind* ‘barbarian’ girl acts as the Magistrate’s *guide*, directing him towards a more ethical and ‘blind’ way of seeing. In her interactions with him – her silences, movements, responses, and questions – the girl uses her literal blindness as a metaphor for an alternative vision for the Magistrate to emulate.

The girl’s blindness is, of course, not the same as Joll’s imperialist mode of perception, which “enforces blindness to alternative truths” (Newman 136) by ensuring that his subjects remain “blinded by the lies of Empire” (López 100). On the contrary, Coetzee depicts the ‘barbarian’ girl’s vision as a kind of looking without the telos of comprehension. During their first interaction, for instance, the Magistrate commands the girl to “look” at him, to which she responds: “I am looking. This is how I look” (Coetzee 26). Later, she explains

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<sup>4</sup> Though the reader is never provided with Joll’s perspective, his actions suggest the tenacity with which he clings to this delusion. After the first interrogations, for example, he replies to the Magistrate’s question regarding the success of his findings with the brief remark that “[they] have had some success” (23). In other words, he believes that he has been successful in finding the truth through torture. Moreover, his later inscription and torture of the prisoners in the square confirm that his views remain unchanged.

that she “can see out the sides of [her] eyes” (29) and that, immediately after the blinding, there “was a blur in the middle of everything [she] looked at”, that she “could only see around the edges” (41). Unlike Joll, she is not deceived by the illusory belief of *totally* understanding another. Her observation that there is “a blur in the middle of everything” acknowledges the unknown, hidden, or obscured fragments of an individual which exceed the visual faculty and thus points to an ethical looking that allows for spots of blindness. To believe otherwise is to foster a mentality that seeks to capture and colonise the Other, both physically and mentally. To literally “only see around the edges” signals a metaphorical counterpart: a modality of vision that does not pretend to see beyond the edges or outlines of a person, and so allows for the creation of his/her own depth.

In guiding the Magistrate towards this alternative vision, the girl also brings into question the adequacy of language in understanding the world. For Joll and, initially, the Magistrate, language is an effective instrument of domination. Both, in fact, evince the typical rationalist idea advocated by the Panopticon, namely that “[t]o write is to remove ambiguity” and “[t]o speak is to legislate” (Miller 28, 26). Joll locates ‘barbarians’ and subjects of Empire alike in a system of writing, and the Magistrate controls the ‘barbarian’ girl by way of questions and commands. Her use of gesture in place of speech draws attention to the deficiencies of language and, further, the absurdity of their unquestioning belief in it. Early in the narrative, having no words with which to describe to the Magistrate her mutilated state of being, “she holds up her forefinger, grips it, twists it” (Coetzee 27). Unaccustomed to gesture and still under the illusion that a combination of reason and language can explain his world, he has “no idea what the gesture means” (27). Soon afterwards, however, when she “rubs the air in front of her” in an attempt to explain her blindness, the Magistrate suggests the word “blur” (29). Though the girl accepts the word, the reader should distrust it, or at least treat it provisionally, for it is the Magistrate’s word and not hers. He is again attempting to know the girl and comprehend her by mediating her experience through an imperialist language.

Throughout their interactions, however, the girl resists the Magistrate’s interpretive impulse. Since she is able to communicate in the language of Empire, her silences express resistance, for, being voluntary, they “impl[y] agency, rather than inability” (Fick 34). It is therefore important to note that, as I argued in the previous section of this chapter, when she does finally give a detailed account of her torture, it is not on command but rather the product of a choice made at a critical moment with the intention of drawing a parallel between Joll and the Magistrate. Moreover, despite the fact that Joll has deprived the girl of her sight and

therefore also the power to see and create her own meaning, her eyes are depicted as a site of defiance. “I can see,” she asserts when the Magistrate alludes to her blindness, and later smiles and challenges him (“Do you think I cannot see?”) when he waves his hand in front of her face to test her reaction (Coetzee 26, 31). Most significantly, though, she “glare[s]” at him in response to his racist and sexist slur that “[p]eople will say [he] keep[s] two wild animals in [his] rooms, a fox and a girl” (35, 34).

These moments of resistance translate into a symbolic opposition to the Magistrate’s descriptive and restrictive gaze. With each of his efforts to conceptualise her, the girl’s silences and counter-gaze coagulate in images of blankness and impenetrability, especially his impression of her face. One vision in particular illustrates her resistance against his interpretive desire:

I have a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin. Blank, like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blank body beneath it, without aperture, without entry. [. . .] with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. (42-43)

The inscrutability of the girl is depicted as a thickness of skin that protects her against the Magistrate’s predation of meaning. Being without entry, she defies his efforts of ‘penetration’, an especially fitting word in its associations with sex, comprehension, colonisation, possession, and death. If López is right that “the Romantic aesthetic of vision and depth [is] intimately connected with the colonialist act of appropriating the land”, then the girl’s thick blankness is a shield against a violent imperialist vision that imposes depth and meaning with the intent of possession (103). In recognising her physical and symbolic resistance to his gaze, he comes to realise that “of [the girl] there is nothing [he] can say with certainty” (Coetzee 43).

Concurrent with the Magistrate’s interactions with the girl is a shift in the way in which he relates to himself, to her, and to others. His confrontation with her blindness as fact and metaphor, as well as her hesitancy towards language and her assertive resistance to his gaze, are all, it seems to me, fundamentally linked to the development of an ethical ‘blind’ vision. According to Foucault, an ethical existence requires a “care of the self” involving a “thoroughly permeated moral reflection” (*Ethics* 287, 284). If performed in the right way, self-examination and self-reflexivity will enable care for others because, he argues, “a person who [takes] proper care of himself [will], by the same token, be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others” (287). In *Waiting*, the Magistrate’s interactions

with the girl seem to catalyse in him this state of self-examination, which is, importantly, continuous. His internal musings are laden with questions concerning his intentions with the girl, his complicity in her torture, and his place in Empire (see Coetzee 27, 33-34, 43, 44, 56, 64-65, 78, 80, 84, 94-95, 100, 108). We, as readers, can in fact trace the ethical growth of the Magistrate, a trajectory that begins with a complacent narrator, preoccupied by mundane activities and interactions, who develops into an increasingly introspective man obsessed by his thoughts, until finally, towards the end of the narrative, his reflections are composed almost entirely of questions directed at himself (see 108, for instance). As I showed earlier, however, his internal conflict and self-questioning are most vividly portrayed in his repeated realisation that his treatment of the girl is akin to Joll's torture of her.

Arguably, then, the Magistrate "turn[s] [his] gaze in upon [himself]" and, in so doing, symbolically emulates the girl's blind vision (Foucault, *Ethics* 285). Undertaking the ethical project of self-examination necessarily entails that he acknowledge an uncertainty of self, a realisation that there are blind spots – hidden, mysterious, dark areas – in himself, and, by extension, in others. Put differently, if he maintained the belief that he knew himself with certainty, he would not have to question himself. Dickinson characterises his "ethical progress" as a Keatsian "emergent negative capability", a capacity that requires a negation, or blindness, of one's own perspective in order to enter into the perspective of another (11). Similarly, López observes that the Magistrate begins "to take into consideration the existence of other subject-positions, and see himself through the eyes of the other", an ability which, related to negative capability, demonstrates the development of his empathetic faculty (97).

These internal changes are evident in his approach towards others. One of the first shifts in his way of seeing occurs during an interaction with the girl. After describing her vision, which I discussed earlier, as a "blur", the Magistrate attempts to see the world from her perspective:

When she does not look at me I am a grey form moving about unpredictably on the periphery of her vision. When she looks at me I am a blur, a voice, a smell, a centre of energy that one day falls asleep washing her feet and the next day feeds her bean stew and the next day – she does not know. (Coetzee 29)

Momentarily, he is able to negate his own comprehending, totalising vision and enter into a mode of seeing that, being blurred, must accept an uncertainty and unpredictability in everything. He has, in a sense, applied and emulated the girl's point of view, which suggests a movement towards a new way of being. In another pivotal encounter with the girl, he

approaches her through touch rather than sight. Immediately after his vision of her “face filming over with skin”, he “shut[s] [his] eyes, and concentrate[s] wholly on *seeing* her through [his] *blind* fingertips” (42, 43, my emphasis). This is a particularly poignant image, and powerfully evokes his changing vision, for in this moment he imitates a gesture directly associated with blindness – indeed, a gesture he has probably witnessed in the girl.

The Magistrate’s growing empathy even extends to the Warrant Officer, a man who has had him locked up in the barracks without trial for fraternising with the enemy ‘barbarians’. In his cell after an interrogation, he remarks of the Officer: “I think about him a great deal [. . .], trying to understand his animosity, trying to see myself as he sees me” (84). Here, he explicitly attempts to inhabit the Warrant Officer’s position so as to better understand his hostility towards him, which, I would argue, is enabled by his previous empathetic moment with the girl.

In addition, the Magistrate begins to resist the panoptic Empire’s creation, through writing and speech, of certain truth. A particularly persuasive example of this is his response to Joll’s spectacular torture of the ‘barbarian’ prisoners in the square. Joll’s intention in writing the word ENEMY on their backs, it seems, is to remove any ambiguity about their status that the Magistrate may have caused by associating with them. His plea to the crowd that they “[l]ook at these men! [. . .] *Men!*” directly alludes to the ‘barbarian’ girl’s way of seeing (“This is how I look”), and is therefore an appeal for the crowd to *see* and *empathise* with the prisoners (107, 26). By insisting that they acknowledge a blurred vision and a degree of blindness to the nomad peoples’ internal beings and customs, he demonstrates that those whom Empire calls ‘barbarians’ are not unambiguously enemies. Moreover, his stress of the word *men* demands that the crowd see the prisoners as humans, as beings similar to themselves, and, further, as complex, sophisticated, feeling people who exceed the unequivocal analysis and classification of ENEMY. The Magistrate is, in effect, attempting to reverse Joll’s linguistic trick that legitimates violence. It is at this point that he experiences, for the first time, the necessary inadequacy of language and its inability to definitively explain the world or another being. Like the ‘barbarian’ girl who struggles to verbalise her blindness, “words fail [him]” (107).

While he is pleading for the people to “look” at the prisoners, he undergoes a near literal blinding, which is a pivotal moment in the development of his metaphorical ‘blind’ vision. After a soldier deals him a blow across the face, his first thought is: “I am blind!” (107). This, I would suggest, is one of Coetzee’s most overt indications of the Magistrate’s transformation, in that it symbolises both his new way of seeing and the pain of rejecting his

earlier totalising, rationalist vision. His alternative mode of ‘looking’ must accept – indeed, value and cherish – ambiguity, complexity, and the unknown. Later, for instance, when he is called in by Joll to translate the poplar slips, his false reading of them does not pretend to be a true description of their contents but rather acts as a fictitious narrative that points to the real atrocities perpetrated by Empire. Furthermore, his assertion that the slips contain allegories “that can be read in many ways” highlights multiplicity and ambiguity of meaning, and therefore the impossibility of imposing one interpretation on a text (112). So, for example, a single character might stand for “war” or “vengeance” or “justice” (112).

If I am right in the parallel I drew earlier between writing/narrative and the docile body – namely, that they are different forms of the same thing – then the Magistrate’s *allegorical* interpretation of the slips suggests a new mode of writing and, by extension, an alternative approach to the body. From the Magistrate’s altered perspective, the reading of writing is a mutually reciprocal process between reader and narrative that accommodates multiple interpretations of meaning. Similarly, interacting with the body of the Other is dialogical, allowing for the self-generation of manifold meaning as well as uncertainty and complexity. Writing, in this case, becomes literary, and the body becomes dynamic – an active and creative force. To engage an ethically ‘blind’ vision, in other words, is to realise that the enforcement of meaning, both on writing and the body, is not permissible. It is to accept a movement of constant change, and finally, a recognition that much remains unseen, just below the surface or beneath the edges and often out of reach.

## **Conclusion**

In my reading of *Waiting*, I have employed the design of Bentham’s Panopticon prison, and Foucault’s and Miller’s studies of it, as a means of examining the relationship between surveillance, power, and resistance in Coetzee’s authoritarian Empire. Colonel Joll, by this view, seems to symbolise an embodied version of the all-seeing and unseen gaze of the panoptic central tower. The manipulative power of his gaze is represented through the act of torture, which literally textualises the body by inscribing on it the signs of Empire and so rendering the ‘barbarian’ docile for use and disposal. If Joll’s gaze is inscriptive, then the Magistrate’s is interpretive. While the former writes, the latter reads. In his questioning and minute examination of the girl’s scars, the Magistrate attempts to understand and know her through imperial language. Marked and then interpreted in this way, she is inscribed with a

single (supposedly rational) meaning. Coetzee portrays both of these practices as comparable, if not identical, forms of torture that exemplify panopticism. The only difference between the two is that they target different regions of the body: the one is external and physical, the other internal and psychological.

The Magistrate, however, finds himself confronted with the physical reality of the 'barbarian' girl. Having no 'protection' from the Other in the form of dark glasses or masked eyes, he engages – sometimes eagerly, sometimes reluctantly – in a reciprocal relationship with her. Face to face with what Judith Butler would term her "bodily being", which is "most real, most pressing, most undeniable" (qtd. in López 107), he realises that her human complexity cannot be analysed and comprehended. During their time together, she acts as his unexpected guide towards an ethical 'blind' vision by resisting his totalising gaze and offering her own way of 'seeing' as an alternative. In fact, she bears out Foucault's observation that "[p]ower, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body" by utilising silences, gesture, and her eyes as means of defying the Magistrate's panoptic, interpretive gaze (*Power/Knowledge* 56). In this manner, she exerts her agency and offers guidance to the Magistrate on his journey of self-examination and ethical development.

The two final images of *Waiting* are therefore particularly fitting. Coming across a group of children building a snowman in the square, the Magistrate watches as they fill out the face "with pebbles for eyes, ears, nose and mouth" (Coetzee 155). Arguably, the snowman's 'blind' pebble eyes symbolically combine the 'barbarian' girl's literal, and the Magistrate's metaphorical, blind vision. The novel then ends on a note of indeterminacy with a closing image of uncertain journeying. The Magistrate, walking away from the aforementioned scene, reflects: "Like much else nowadays, I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who has lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere" (156). Adopting an ethical 'blind' vision requires a certain stupidity, an acknowledgement of the incomprehensibility and unknowability of others, and also a realisation that the journey toward metaphorical blindness is inevitably obscured by the ambiguity of that which lies beyond or behind the edges. To resist an imperialist vision is to adopt an alternative way of seeing that must confront and accept not only the unknown, but also the vulnerable journey toward the uncertain "nowhere".

## Chapter 2

### Entrapment and Liberation: Looking for Race in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*

In my previous chapter, I employed the theoretical framework of Bentham's Panopticon design, and Foucault's term panopticism, as a means of examining the subtle interplay between surveillance, power, and resistance in *Waiting*. I suggested that Coetzee's novel is deeply concerned with modes of perception and that the 'barbarian' girl, with her partial blindness, offers the Magistrate an alternative to Joll's imperialist, inscriptive way of seeing. Now turning to Zoë Wicomb's *Playing*, I concentrate on the notion of the gaze, or look, in the racialised context of South Africa.<sup>5</sup>

Wicomb's novel, set in newly post-apartheid Cape Town, tells the story of an apparently white Afrikaans woman's discovery of her 'coloured' heritage.<sup>6</sup> The owner of a successful travel agency, Marion comes across a photo of a torture victim, Patricia Williams, in a newspaper during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceedings. Haunted by "the eyes of the stranger [that] hold hers accusingly, calling her to account", she recognises in the face of Williams a resemblance to Tokkie, an old woman from her childhood whom she loved and remembers as a family servant (54). Marion, after questioning her father and finding him guarded about the real name and history of Tokkie, begins a somewhat reluctant investigation into the lives of her parents with the help of Brenda, her newly employed 'coloured' employee. These investigations lead to the discovery that Marion is in fact 'coloured' and that her parents – Helen and John – were play-whites, that is, people originally classified as 'coloured' who, during adjustments to the apartheid racial classificatory legislation, 'crossed-over' and adopted white identities.

I focus, in this chapter, on the Sartrean notion of Being-for-Others initiated by the Other person's look, and contend that this experience, depending on the nature of the look, has the potential to trigger either an inescapable alienation from self (in the case of Helen) or

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<sup>5</sup> The 'gaze' and the 'look' should be treated as interchangeable terms.

<sup>6</sup> Scare quotes have been used for the term 'coloured' – an identity category invented by the Nationalist Party during apartheid – to draw attention to its contested status. On this subject, Zoë Wicomb, in her important essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa", notes "the resurgence of the term *Coloured*, once more capitalized, without its old prefix of *so-called* and without disavowing scare quotes earned during the period of revolutionary struggle when it was replaced by the word *black*, [which] indicat[ed] both a rejection of apartheid nomenclature as well as inclusion in the national liberation movement" (93).

a development of self (in the case of Marion).<sup>7</sup> In arguing for these claims, I have teased out my own interpretation of Sartre's theory. My critical analysis of his work, attempting to put right – or at least adjust – his notion of an entirely pessimistic look, maintains that he oversimplifies the complexity of intersubjectivity. To remedy this lack, and for the purpose of this thesis, I distinguish between two potential forms of the look. The first, which I call the *prejudiced-look*, conforms to his typical conception of an objectifying and alienating gaze; the second, which I term the *critical-look*, also begins with self-alienation but has the potential to enable a constructive re-examination or affirmation of self. Appealing, in addition, to Frantz Fanon's and George Yancy's work on black double consciousness, I hope to shed new light on, and enable a closer reading of, the complex effects of panopticism.

In my examination of *Playing*, I treat Helen's overwhelming desire to 'become' white as an instantiation of the white prejudiced-look and its formidable power over the black body. Crossing-over, in this case, is an alienating and arduous process that involves the internalisation and mediation of the body through the white look. My contention here is that Helen's experience results in a perpetual state of Being-for-Others that, in effect, imprisons her in a panopticon of whiteness. Thrown into a state of double consciousness and estranged from her 'coloured' identity, she keeps vigilant watch over herself from the *outside*, as if seeing herself from the perspective of a white 'head-overseer'. This, I will show, has psychological and physical ramifications.

I then go on to discuss Marion's arguably constructive journey of self-estrangement, examination, and liberated growth, with the central claim that this process begins with, and is defined by, a Being-for-Others triggered by the critical-look. During the course of the novel, she undergoes three pivotal encounters with the look, each of which is crucial in developing her new conception of self. Appropriately, Marion's experiences in the mode of for-Others are in relation to three 'coloured' women: first, Patricia Williams, whose look calls her to "account"; secondly, Mrs Murray, who recognises in her a resemblance to Tokkie; and finally, Brenda, who wishes to write a novel based on Marion's family history. In all three instances, she is drawn outside herself, alienated from her luxurious cocooned existence, and, through physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional journeying, able to cultivate a more critically engaged and responsible consciousness. Via the critical-look, Marion is, in a sense, liberated from her previously stagnant and unquestioning existence. The hostility of the final

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<sup>7</sup> Sartre's concept of the Other (as in Being-for-Others) is distinct from the marginalised Other referred to in my previous chapter. The former refers to other persons, the latter to marginalised groups of people defined by their so-called difference from the Same (that is, the 'normal'). To distinguish between the two, I will refer to Sartre's Other as the Other person or Other people.

encounter between her and Brenda, however, points to the conflict at the heart of Being-for-Others, as well as the vulnerability, discomfort, and perhaps even cul-de-sac, of Marion's journey towards a revised selfhood.

### **Being-for-Others, Race, and Double-Consciousness**

Cabin'd, cribbed, confined, bound in; looked at by the Other, I am ashamed. [. . .] Captive, brought to self-awareness, I am created by my captor. I am what that someone sees [. . .]. Ashamed, I experience myself as object, and the Other who actively makes me that, the Other (human being), I experience as subject, the objectifier.

(Hyslop, "Sartre and Other Minds" 48)

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre establishes the foundation of his existential ontology by distinguishing between three states of being, which, taken together, define the ambiguity and anxiety of human existence in the world. The first and most basic of these modes of existence is object-being, which he terms the in-itself. To echo Sartre's terminology, Being-in-itself *is* what it is and *is not* what it is not. Object-being, in other words, is "self-identical" and "passive: it is uncreated and unchanging", meaning that it can be described and categorised by a careful examination of its outward and inner features (Dolezal 11). So, a door is a door because it is rectangular, has a keyhole, can be opened and closed, and so forth. It has no mode of existence beyond its *facticity* (physical characteristics) and is therefore "unconscious Being" (Barnes xxii).

The man who kneels at this door with his eye to the keyhole, however, is different. Though he has an outside, and so on one level exists in the mode of the in-itself, he cannot be defined by his bodily, object-like being. This is because, in addition to his facticity, he is constituted by an internal conscious being of future hopes and possibilities (which are, incidentally, under perpetual flux) that exceed definition. Sartre calls this the for-itself, and argues that, as a human existing in the mode of Being-for-itself, "[I] am what I am not and am not what I am" (353). The man, in other words, *is what he is not* insofar as he has not yet reached his full potential (he is made up of possibilities and aspirations yet to come) and *he is not what he is* insofar as his physical and internal being, at any one moment, cannot be said to define him (his inner potentiality undermines any definitive description of him). By virtue of these possibilities that give humans the freedom of conscious choice, the man "continually makes himself" (Barnes xxii). The for-itself thus transcends the in-itself. While Being-in-itself is pure facticity, Being-for-itself exists as transcendence or freedom.

In keeping with Sartre's famous example, the man kneeling at the keyhole – in the mode of Being-for-itself – is unaware of his act. Since he is alone, there is “no [external] self to inhabit [his] consciousness” and therefore nothing through which to mediate, qualify, and evaluate his actions (Sartre 347). Without an external perspective, he *is* “this jealousy; [he does] not *know* it” (348). The man, in other words, lives his acts and his possibilities without judgement. Suddenly, however, he hears footsteps in the passage and realises, or at least believes, that he is under observation. Just as suddenly, a transformation at the centre of his being takes place: under the Other person's (real or imagined) look, he experiences existential alienation. As Sartre puts it:

I grasp the Other's look at the very center of my *act* as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities. [. . .] I perceive that these possibilities which I *am* and which are the condition of my transcendence are given also to another, given as about to be transcended in turn by his own possibilities. The Other as a look is only that – my transcendence transcended. (352)

Given that the man at the keyhole “can not be an object for an object”, the Other person, who is the holder of the look, is thus “the *subject* who is revealed to [him] in that flight of [himself] towards *objectification*” (345, my emphasis). The look passes over his subjectivity, and, unable to penetrate the man's inner being (his for-itself), focuses on and evaluates his physical, outward being as if he were an object. Thrown in this way into sudden objectified self-awareness, the man is revealed to himself as pure facticity or object-being, stripped of his possibilities and concomitantly his transcendence. He witnesses his physical being through the eyes of the Other person as if he were an object, and is thereby cast from the mode of the for-itself (transcendent being) into the in-itself (objectified being).

Sartre calls this experience of objectification before the look Being-for-Others. For the man spying at the door, the existential state of for-Others is characterised by shame. Through the other person's look, he perceives himself “as a nature although that very nature escapes [him] and is unknowable” because he can never be sure how the other person interprets his actions and, for this reason, has no control over the qualities that are fixed to him (352). His shame is the shame of being an object for another. Accordingly, in order to regain his status as subject, he redirects the look at the Other person and so subjects him/her to objectification, which, in turn, is to do the same “violence to [his/her] subjectivity” (Barnes xxxix). And so the battle between looks continues as an unending movement between

objectification and recovered subjectivity, or, as Sartre dryly puts it, “I am referred from transfiguration to degradation and from degradation to transfiguration” (394).

As this brief outline shows, Sartre’s characterisation of intersubjectivity is, on the whole, pessimistic. He portrays interactions between individuals as a relentless confrontational conflict permeated by risk and danger.<sup>8</sup> A number of theorists have criticised this aspect of his work. Luna Dolezal, for instance, contends that “visibility should not be equated with vulnerability, as is done in Sartre’s schema” (24). In opposition to his view, she cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of his look as an “inhuman gaze” watching other people’s actions “as if they were an insect’s” (23) and concludes that “through visibility [. . .] self-reflective experiences such as recognition and affirmation can arise” (24). Similarly, Thomas Martin critiques Sartre’s narrow conception of inter-human relationships as a perpetual “threat of enslavement by the freedom of the other” (97), and goes on to suggest two positive aspects of Being-for-Others: “Being the object of the caring look of a loved one can be a source of comfort and security rather than alienation and degradation. Apart from this, being-for-others does grant the self some substance” (98). The intuition here is that the objectifying look cannot be the only form of inter-personal relation, and therefore that Sartre fails to account for other, potentially positive, forms of Being-for-Others.

I share the above critics’ views on this point. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that, aside from his disregard for positive interactions with Other people, Sartre’s generalisation of the look as inherently alienating ignores, or at least devalues, the experience of those who face extreme self-alienation through daily confrontation with the prejudiced gaze. Given Sartre’s serious failure to accommodate the (often irreparably damaging) look of marginalised experience, Fanon’s dismissal of his theory comes as no surprise. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he remarks in a brief footnote that

[t]hough Sartre’s speculations on the existence of the Other may be correct (to the extent, we must remember, to which *Being and Nothingness* describes an alienated consciousness), their application to black consciousness proves fallacious. That is because the white man is not only The Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary.

(106)

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<sup>8</sup> At one point in his account of Being-for-Others, Sartre argues that “in so far as I am the instrument of possibilities which are not my possibilities, whose pure presence beyond my being I can not even glimpse, and which deny my transcendence in order to constitute me as a means to an ends of which I am ignorant – I am *in danger*. This danger is not an accident but the permanent structure of my being-for the Other” (358).

According to Fanon, in the context of Black Consciousness, Sartre's notion of Being-for-Others falsifies black experience insofar as an encounter with the white gaze inevitably and necessarily results in an alienated black consciousness, given that whiteness is historically positioned as superior (the so-called 'master' race) and blackness as inferior (the so-called 'slave' race). Since all interactions between white and black are conditioned by the master/slave relationship prior to an encounter with the look, the white and black person are already positioned as subject and object respectively. To be white is to *have* the look already and therefore the power of looking. For the black subject, then, self-alienation, which often leads to self-hatred, is in fact the consequence of a white prejudiced gaze already located as master and transcendent subjectivity. Fanon points out that, for this reason, the (real or imagined) enslavement of black people exists *before* the effect of the look. As Martin remarks: "the oppressor ignores the freedom of the other by treating the other as some kind of object; for example, a racially determined (and inferior) being in the case of racism" (29).

As already noted, in response to critics' reservations regarding Sartre's narrow portrayal of inter-subjectivity, I have proposed a more comprehensive description of the gaze that distinguishes between a prejudiced-look and a critical-look. Before I examine these, however, I would like briefly to call attention to an important difference between Sartre's and Foucault's conceptions of self and subjectivity. I indicated in my first chapter that Foucault, on the one hand, envisions the self as influenced by and shaped through panoptic mechanisms of power. A person, in other words, cannot conceive of a self outside that which is constructed within discursive, societal, and cultural structures, and, for this reason, there is no such thing, for Foucault, as an inner or transcendent self beyond the reach of power. The subject cannot pre-exist discourse and so it is *inside* these discursive limits that he/she exerts agency.

Sartre, on the other hand, presupposes a transcendent self which is potentially re-apprehended in the mode of the for-itself. The conflict between looks is also a conflict between subjectivities, which is to say, a dialectic in which a subject asserts his/her agency by reciprocating the look. This does not mean that the for-itself remains unaltered by the impact of the for-Others, but, rather, that the experience of apprehending oneself through various perspectives enables, in turn, choice and agency in the state of Being-for-itself. If one is confronted with a gaze that 'returns' one's body as unrecognisable, it is because one has already experienced one's body as recognisable, otherwise no such comparison could have been made. A black subject, for instance, who is exposed to explicit racism for the first time will probably experience his/her body, through the white gaze, as alien, unfamiliar, and

inferior. If this is the case, then the aforementioned subject must have, at one point, experienced his/her body as familiar and recognisable. Therefore, a subject's for-itself, that is, his/her inner unrealised possibilities and potentiality, is developed through Being-for-Others, which allows a subject's freedom and choice-making in the world. This aspect of the self is, for Sartre, its transcendent dimension.

The following account, in which I discuss what I have termed the prejudiced-look and the critical-look, is, importantly, grounded in a Sartrean conception of selfhood. The former kind of look refers to a racist, and/or sexist, and/or homophobic gaze that comes with a preconceived set of stereotypes and judgements that are projected onto the Other. Not only are the Other's possibilities solidified by the look, but he/she also experiences a self (through another person's eyes) that is unrecognisable. The human "wish that others should confer upon [him/her] a being which [he/she] recognise[s]" is denied the Other (Sartre 351). The prejudiced-look imposes its own transcendence on an individual, and, as a result of its societally affirmed privileged (white, male, heterosexual) position, bars his/her re-apprehension of a transcendent self. Given its prior positioning as 'master' and transcendent consciousness by virtue of its normative characteristics, the Other cannot 'return' the look in the usual, Sartrean sense. Accordingly, there is no conflict between looks, only the oppressive (white, male, heterosexual) gaze that holds the marginalised individual in subjugation. Unable to return to the for-Itself, he/she is trapped in a mode of for-Others by the look *and* its prior 'master' position.

When Alec Hyslop remarks that "our very being has others at its centre", he alludes to the internalisation of, and mediation of ourselves through, the gaze (57). Those who are repeatedly exposed to the prejudiced-look internalise a gaze which negates rather than affirms the self, leading to a warped self-conception. Yancy, speaking from personal experience, submits that "the white gaze defines me, skewing my own way of seeing myself" (230). For the black consciousness subjected to the white gaze, all gestures, actions, utterances, ideas, and thoughts are mediated through this external prejudiced perspective. In refusing to allow the revelation of self, the prejudiced-look precludes, and invalidates, the realisation of the Other's own possibilities. In the context of Black Consciousness, thematising the look along these lines can function as a useful tool in the examination of the white racist gaze and its effect, internal and external, on the black Other.

The second type of gaze, which I have termed the critical-look, refers to an 'open-minded' looking that, rather than imposing its own predetermined beliefs on another, permits the revelation of self. This does not suggest a kind of blank look devoid of preconceived

ideas, but rather one willing to revise its views based on what is perceived. I therefore take the word ‘critical’ to mean the careful observation, analysis, and judgement of both faults and strengths in a person. Such a look has a positive valence in that it can result, for the one looked at, in self-understanding, affirmation, and beneficial growth. As such, it is a potentially valuable mode of Being-for-Others. Importantly, however, the critical-look is not necessarily pleasant. On the contrary, it still involves, by definition, uncomfortable objectification and self-alienation insofar as, under the other person’s gaze, an individual sees him/herself through an external perspective as an object. Unlike the prejudiced-look, though, it allows an individual to return the look and thereby enables the movement from the for-Others back to the for-itself, facilitating the cultivation of a comprehensive self-understanding. Intersubjectivity involving the critical-look, in other words, potentially allows a person to “realise fully all the structures of [his/her] being” (Sartre 303).

With the above distinction in mind, Sartre’s work on intersubjectivity can and does complement race theory. The experience of double consciousness, for instance, can be examined usefully as a symptom of the prejudiced-look. W. E. B. Du Bois, who first conceptualised the idea, describes double consciousness as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of [white] others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (qtd. in Yancy 235). Later black writers and philosophers, embracing Du Bois’s idea, have portrayed their (personal) experience of this internal division in starker, less retrained terms. For Fanon, like Du Bois, it is again “the white man’s eyes” (83) that “unmercifully imprison[]” him, so that he is forced to take himself “far off from [his] own presence, far indeed, and [make himself] an object” (85). Emphasising the violence of the experience, he asks: “What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?” (85). Similarly, Yancy describes the feeling of having his “dark body invaded by the white gaze”, and goes on to say that it is “during such moments that [his] body is given back to [him] in a ludicrous light, where [he] *live[s]* the meaning of his body as confiscated” (217, 218). In this sense, the prejudiced-look is similar to Colonel Joll’s inscriptive gaze insofar as it returns the black body as unrecognisably mutilated. For all three black philosophers, then, double consciousness is a Sartrean experience of Being-for-Others involving a violent objectification and self-alienation catalysed by the white look.

If Sartre is right that the Other person is “the indispensable mediator between myself and me”, then the black body, subjected to the prejudiced-look, must mediate itself through that white racist gaze (302). This causes a fracture at the centre of being. Put differently, the

black person, thrown into an outside white perspective by the look, witnesses him/herself as an unrecognisable object steeped in racial stereotypes, resulting in a disjuncture between the for-itself (how he/she sees him/herself) and the for-Others (how he/she is seen by [white] Other people). In Fanon's lyrical voice:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an *objective* examination, I discovered my blackness; and I was battered down with tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships.

(84-85, my emphasis)

Fanon's reference to a so-called 'objective' examination points to a world of institutionalised racism where whiteness is linked to the all-knowing, invisible, and objective gaze of normality. Mediated through this objectifying prejudiced-look, the black body is returned as an alien object, swathed in white racial prejudice and therefore unrecognisable to the black subject. Emphasising the disfigurement of this 'return', Fanon experiences "an amputation" of his inner being and Yancy sees his body in a "ludicrous light".

All three philosophers show the immense difficulty for the black subject of navigating a positive sense of self in a white social context. Given Sartre's theory of inter-subjectivity and Foucault's claim that we internalise the look and are created through it, race theorists have pointed out that, under the ubiquitous gaze of whiteness, the black Other is subjected to the degrading and potentially irreparable experience of seeing him/herself through a gaze that constructs him/her as intellectually and physically inferior, uncivilised, immoral, ugly, oversexed and so forth. The internalisation of the (white) Other person's look is, in effect, enslavement to the white 'master' gaze. Given that the mediator of black selfhood is racially prejudiced in a world governed by white racist ideology, black people "struggle to think of themselves as a *possibility*" (Yancy 219).

The shame of black experience in the mode of for-Others is therefore more than the shame of being an object. As Steve Martinot indicates, when Sartre refers to shame, he "means an existential shame rather than a moralistic shame", that is, the shame "of being stripped of one's autonomy as an object for another" (47). To be black under the white prejudiced-look, however, is not only to be an object, but also a *shameful* object. Black experience therefore involves being "an object 'as' something" – "a thing of moral reproach" (51). Through the white gaze, the black body sees itself as a morally and physically reprehensible object of condemnation. Shame of self, for the black person exposed to white

Other people, is in fact the acute existential and moralistic mortification of being “the slave [. . .] of [his/her] own appearance” (Fanon 87).

### **Helen and the White Other Person**

The internalisation of the white gaze creates a doubleness within the psyche of the Black, leading to a destructive process of superfluous self-surveillance and self-interrogation.

(Yancy, “Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body” 219)

In the above epigraph, Yancy brings together neatly the ideas of Sartre (the internalisation of the [white] Other person’s gaze), Du Bois (black double consciousness), and Foucault (self-surveillance and interrogation). These processes, encapsulated in the notion of racialised panopticism, are central themes of *Playing*. As Zoë Wicomb herself remarks in an interview with Manfred Loimeier on her (as yet) unpublished novel, “there must be an ontological crisis [for play-whites] that nobody can talk about, because officially they don’t exist” (2). Indeed, Helen’s transition from ‘coloured’ to white leads to an ontological crisis of double consciousness that proves both psychologically and physically fatal.

Primed, during her youth, by the “ambivalent” conception of ‘colouredness’ as “*not only not white, but less than white; not only not black, but better than black*”, and prompted by the ubiquitous affirmation of her so-called white features, Helen enters a psychological panopticon of whiteness in her desperation to realise a white identity (Erasmus, qtd. in Jacobs 2). *Playing*, or, more accurately, performing, under the centrally located and invisible white prejudiced-look, Helen exposes herself to a perpetual state of Being-for-Others. Accordingly, her experience of double consciousness – that is, the repeated ‘return’, through the white gaze, of her body as distorted or inadequate – is ceaseless. By the end of her life, double consciousness is no longer an occasional experience but a psychological and physical condition, manifesting first in the form of an imaginary friend (her double, or Other consciousness) and then in cancer. Her split consciousness and disintegrating body physically replicate the experience of double consciousness, and, in a profound statement on the nature of whiteness, represent the white gaze as a psychological and physical disease.

From childhood, Helen is exposed to a world that posits “black odiousness, inhumanity, and inferiority [as] a part of commonsense sociology” (Taylor 58). Her early years are defined by this white institutionalised culture that values whiteness above blackness. Helen’s mother Tokkie, for example, maintains with pride that “her mother’s sister

[. . .] was white as driven snow with *good* red hair”, and Mrs Murray, a ‘coloured’ woman whom Marion approaches during her investigations into her familial history, describes Tokkie as “[q]uite a dark-skinned woman, you know, although with *good* features and wavy kind of hair, but *nice and smooth*” (Wicomb, *Playing* 135, 94, my emphasis). In the ‘coloured’ community where Helen grows up, most of those around her have already internalised an ideology that “define[s] beauty per se in terms of white beauty, in terms of the physical features that white people are more likely to have” (Taylor 59). External features are thus judged as good, nice, or ugly depending on how closely they fit or diverge from stereotypically white features. Physical beauty, in other words, is evaluated according to the ‘ideal’ standard of whiteness.

As a result, Helen grows up in a culture that associates her near-white physical characteristics with beauty, value, progressiveness, and goodness. The unnamed narrator describes how Tokkie

doted on her pale-skinned, skinny girl [Helen] with rosy cheeks and tints of copper in her hair. She held the little girl on her knee to tilt her head so that she hung upside down like a ragdoll – to show others how, when the sunlight caught her hair at a certain angle, it glinted with reddish-gold lights, and how the roots held no tell-tale frizz. Those distant genes from Europe will out, and that child was the chosen one.

(Wicomb, *Playing* 132)

In a community indoctrinated into perceiving “black features [as] a problematic link to a ‘dark past’ and to uncivilised ways”, Helen represents the liberatory severing of this unwanted history (Taylor 59). Having been born with certain ‘white’ features (“reddish-gold lights”, “no tell-tale frizz”, “pale-skinned, skinny girl with rosy cheeks”), she is considered by her mother “the chosen one”, specially elected to free her genetic line from so-called ‘black odiousness’. Most disturbingly, though, Tokkie’s adoration of her child takes the form of exhibition. Her affection centres on the display of her Helen’s white features, and, since this is one of the few moments between mother and child depicted in the novel, the reader is left with the sense that she values and cherishes her daughter’s physical body above her internal being. John describes Helen’s beauty in almost the exact same terms as her mother (“She was fair skinned and rosy cheeked, with copper-coloured hair” [Wicomb, *Playing* 128]), as do Mrs Bates (“Helen, with her lovely copper hair, belonged in that set of socialites, the coloured elite” [129]) and Mrs Murray (“a real beauty, fair with long hair” [95]). In this early childhood moment and later descriptions of her, Helen is exposed to a Being-for-Others

that reduces her to pure facticity by focusing only on her physical, object-being. To be sure, in none of these accounts is there any reference to her personality or internal character.

Yancy's conception of 'inner eyes' behind the physical eyes is helpful here. In his analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Yancy describes 'inner eyes' as the internal perspective that "looks through the physical eyes", namely, "those white racist, epistemic perspectives [. . .] from which whites 'see' the world" (227). In a similar – but not identical – manner, the 'coloured' community, having internalised what Sue Kossew refers to as "the racist colonial discourses that link miscegenation and degeneration" (198), develop prejudiced 'inner eyes' informed by such an ideology. Interestingly, then, Helen's Being-for-Others is informed by an experience of her near-white body, through the 'inner eyes' of those who surround her, as "lovely" (Wicomb, *Playing* 128). Having internalised this conception of whiteness as progressive (and, by implication, blackness as regressive), she quickly comes to rationalise her adoption of a white identity as "forward looking" and something of which her mother would approve (132).

Helen's entry into the white world is also her unresisting admission into the panopticon of whiteness, involving a perceptible shift in consciousness affected by the white prejudiced-look. In order to achieve and claim a white identity, she must continuously assess her psychological and physical being through this omniscient and all-seeing gaze. I refer back to Bentham's prison because the Panopticon lends itself as a symbol to the intangible power – the ever-present and manipulative force – of the white prejudiced-look. Like the gaze emanating from the central tower, the white look is everywhere and penetrates into everything, eventually coming to regulate its subjects from within. Moreover, replicating the relationship between the prison's invisible head-inspector and the visible prisoners, the white gaze (invisible insofar as it is the privileged 'norm') holds the marginalised black Other in perpetual visibility (insofar as blackness is located as 'abnormal'). Finally, the structural layout of the prison tangibly represents the positioning of whiteness as centre and blackness as marginalised – that is, relegated to society's periphery and imprisoned there under constant inspection.

Wicomb's use of imagery in the novel establishes this sense of constant surveillance. As Kossew points out, for example, "the suburb's name [in which Helen and John live] – Observatory – draws attention to the idea of surveillance and control that is central to the notion of playing white" (203). In addition, it gestures towards the scrutinised space of the Panopticon prison, which Bentham also referred to as "The Inspection-House" (39). Helen's "reinvention" under this all-seeing gaze, like the prisoner's transformation before the central

tower, requires “vigilance and continual [self-]assessment” (Wicomb, *Playing* 131). The Benthamite self-regulatory mechanism that prisoners develop under the influence of the central tower is evident in the dramatic image of Helen’s invisible ‘friend’, an internalised white Other person through whom all her thoughts and actions are mediated. For Wicomb, then, the effect of panopticism is a kind of madness.

Light, however, is perhaps the most ubiquitous and multi-faceted symbol in *Playing*. On a surface level, it is associated with visibility by virtue of its ability to illuminate the unseen and render known the unknown. Hence the Panopticon, representative of the all-seeing gaze, obtains its power due to “the fact that people are known and *seen* in the *light* of an immediate, omnipresent and piercing gaze” (Vaz 37). Like the prison’s inmates who are made visible day and night by lamps fitted in each cell, Helen exists in a state of unceasing visibility under the beam of an invisible, unreciprocated gaze. If light represents the gaze, then it also signifies whiteness and, by implication, its opposite (that is, darkness) signifies blackness. By means of this symbolism, Wicomb implicitly points to the constructed dichotomies between purity/impurity, civilised/uncivilised, morality/immorality, and other such terms associated with what Kossew describes as “the binary of darkness and light inherent in colonial discourses of race and empire” (199). Wicomb shows how light, symbolising knowledge, rationality, morality, and whiteness, is closely linked to the so-called enlightening and civilising projects of colonialism, which sought to ‘bring the light of knowledge’ to ‘darkest Africa’.

The motif of light therefore also functions as a metaphor for the white prejudiced-look and its effect on the black body. The narrator of *Playing*, for instance, describes how Helen and John, entrapped “[i]n *the blinding light of whiteness*”, “walked exposed: pale, vulnerable geckos whose very skeletal systems showed through transparent flesh” (Wicomb 123, my emphasis). Uncannily, Yancy uses the exact same phrase in his analysis of *Invisible Man* when he argues that “the protagonist has had to contend with *the blinding light of whiteness*, its power to see, to gaze, to control. Here again, the protagonist cannot return the gaze, he is seen, but cannot see” (229, my emphasis). By using a metaphor that compares whiteness to a blinding light that, like an X-ray, exposes and controls, Wicomb and Yancy effectively describe the violence of black experience in a culture of institutionalised racism. The blinding effect of the white gaze underscores both its brutality and invisibility, and further, the way in which it imprisons the subject by rendering him/her an object and turning the gaze inwards. Just as the ‘barbarian’ girl is literally blinded by the interrogations of Colonel Joll, so too is

Helen 'blinded' by the white prejudiced-look to the extent that she is unable to return the gaze and regain her subjectivity.

Helen, positioned like this in a constant state of Being-for-Others, lives an existence permeated by existential and moral shame. This is because she is ashamed not only of her object state but also the "crime [. . .] of being coloured" (Dass 139). If Minesh Dass is right in arguing that Helen perceives 'colouredness' as a 'crime', then her social, linguistic, and psychological 'coloured' heritage renders her, to her mind, an object of moral condemnation. Having internalised the discourse of phrenology, which links external features to an internal inherent being, she associates moral purity with whiteness, or at least white features, and moral taint or impurity with blackness. In Fanon's succinct expression, "Sin is Negro as virtue is white" (106). And so, for Helen, "nice coloured people" are "those with at least good hair", where straight and smooth hair reads as "good" (Wicomb, *Playing* 228). Despite her predominantly 'white' features, she faces repeated self-alienation through a white objectifying external perspective, and is forced, as Sartre describes the experience, to "recognise that [she is] as the Other sees [her]" – an unrecognisable object of disgust (302). Helen, having been defined through the white gaze as a shameful, criminal object due to her 'coloured' past, makes the decision to 'become' white. This choice is framed by a desire for physical and moral purity. In order to 'cure' herself of 'coloured criminality', she must admit herself into a metaphorical prison: the panopticon of whiteness.

If shame, as Sartre puts it, is "in its primary structure shame *before somebody*" (302), then the fact that Helen "does not simply live *with* shame, she lives *in it*" indicates the persistent presence of a white Other person through which she mediates herself (Dass 139). She lives in a continual state of double consciousness, which involves, according to Yancy, "a fundamental slippage between one's own felt experience of the black body and how others (whites) understand, construct, experience, and see that 'same' black body" (226). At the "specialist trousseau shop" where she once worked, for example, the narrator describes how, when "a chic customer" spoke of "her future mother-in-law's vulgarity, her pride in plastic bouquets", Helen responded by "nodd[ing] in a flush of embarrassment" (Wicomb, *Playing* 6). Through the eyes of the "chic" white customer, her own use of plastic bouquets is judged as embarrassing, which causes her immediately to "call[] the company and have them removed" (6). Before she is subjected to the customer's gaze, however, she presumably regards plastic bouquets as a stylish addition to her domestic décor. Destabilised by the experience of seeing her taste, and therefore herself, as vulgar (which is to say, 'unwhite'), she is thrown into a frenzied panic that borders, for a moment, on madness: "And then

Helen's voice grew shrill and hysterical as she threatened to put the flowers in the dustbin that instant" (6).

Other instances of Helen's pervasive sense of shame recur throughout the novel. In one childhood memory, Marion recalls her mother's disproportionate humiliation and anger in response to her mermaid game: "When Helen came to, she swallowed her scream and spoke quietly, hissing with rage and disgust. What kind of child was she? Where had she come from? How could she behave like a disgusting native, rolling half naked in the grass?" (60). For Helen, Marion's behaviour – her nakedness and rolling about in the grass – associates her with the activities of "a disgusting native", with that expression's colonial connotations of ugliness, hypersexuality, and savagery, as opposed to the behaviour of a civilised, restrained, attractive European. Interestingly, her reprimand – "Where had she come from?" – is also a subconscious attempt to dissociate herself from Marion, who implicates Helen's own body as an object of shame since Marion is her child. This reaction resonates with Helen's earlier half-facetious remark claiming that mermaids are scarce because they are "[a]shamed [. . .], as they should be, of being neither one thing nor the other" (47). Her notion that mermaids are ashamed of their hybridity underscores the unease and shame she feels about her own so-called hybrid 'coloured' identity, located by apartheid discourse in the "ambiguous position of being neither black nor white" (Kosew 198). Like the half-human half-fish creatures hiding in the sea, she "hide[s] in the light" (Wicomb, *Playing* 124). Her "treacherous feet", however, are the most tangible, embarrassing reminder of her 'coloured' past (148). As a result of her barefoot childhood in Wuppertal, the soles of her feet routinely develop a thick protective layer and the narrator relates how "[t]o her shame, the skin, like any weed, grew more vigorously in spring" (148).

Most of the time, the white Other person's gaze is invisible to all but Helen, who is plagued by its spectre in everything she does and everywhere she goes. Indeed, its potential presence intrudes into her domestic and private life, as is suggested by the scene that follows Elsie's disastrous visit to their home in Observatory. After John's sister has left, Helen asks anxiously, in reference to her "vulgar" manners: "What if someone had been there to witness the display?", despite the fact that "[t]hey had no friends, no visitors" (167). For Helen, the potential watching presence of a white person is enough to bar Elsie from their home, in the same way that the potential gaze of the Panopticon's head-inspector is enough to alter prisoners' behaviour. The answer to John's unstated query – "who are these people who would mind [Elsie's] enthusiastic manners?" – is, it seems, white people, or, more accurately, the imagined white gaze that Helen has introduced into every facet of their life, both public

and private (167). Under the careful watch of an always-potentially-present white Other person, she judges herself and all those around her.

In addition to, and as a result of, this overpowering shame, Helen's incarceration in the metaphorical Panopticon alters her physical and psychological being. If whiteness, as Yancy contends, has the "status [of a] norm" (217), and Lawrence Mitchell is right that those who internalise norms "suffer some psychic cost as a result of norm violation" (197), then *to be black is to violate a fundamental norm at an immense psychic cost*.<sup>9</sup> It follows logically from this that the prejudiced-look of the panopticon of whiteness, which is a normalising gaze, not only has "the power to affect profoundly a person's concept of self" (Vaz 33), but also to "modify one's actions" (Dolezal 15). Helen's humiliation, then, is the shame of violating a norm that she has been taught to hold sacred. Through the normalising judgement of her 'prison', she shapes herself as closely as possible to the white norm so as to escape the shame she feels in the experience of double consciousness. Paradoxically, in an attempt to escape the reappréhension, through the white gaze, of her 'coloured' body as a distorted object, Helen undergoes physical modification – or, one might even say, disfigurement – by altering her body according to the 'normal'.

A rigorous and ongoing process of analysis, comparison, and evaluation informs Helen's manipulation of herself and her surroundings to fit white norms. Her "reinvention", to use her expression, entails changes to her identity, as well as stringent policing of her physical body, linguistic habits, social conduct, and domestic environment (Wicomb, *Playing* 131). Within days of arriving in Cape Town, she changes her surname to 'Charles', having realised that to "anglicise her name would rid it of the nasty possessive" of 'Karlse' (128). Concentrating next on her physical appearance, she applies "pinkish pancake make-up even on Sundays" and wears "Cutex vermilion" lipstick in an effort to make her skin look whiter (125, 124). To rid herself of the thick hide that grows on her feet, John scrapes away the skin with his pocketknife, a routine which Helen later complements "with daily scrubbing and grating" to ensure that her feet are like those of "a pampered white woman" (160, 161). When Marion is born, she shifts her attention to her accent and the study of English: "Polished and self-assured, her Afrikaans vowels grew rounder and drawn out as a lady's, and her English came along very nicely thanks to the SABC" (125). Moreover, in both social and private settings, she learns to sit "according to the instructions of her well-thumbed etiquette book, with her legs at an angle and crossed at the ankles" (139). This same book also teaches her

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<sup>9</sup> This further supports Dass's contention that Helen perceives 'colouredness' as a crime insofar as it violates the norm of whiteness.

that “one did not eat a banana from its half-peeled skin; that was what primitives and primates did” (139). Finally, with regard to her domestic environment, Helen is advised by Tokkie “on matters of décor and taste”, the latter having knowledge into ‘white’ practices of interior design through her employer Mrs Macdonald (133).

Even more disturbing than her physical changes, however, is her psychological transformation. As the following passage demonstrates, it soon becomes clear that Helen and John, after living for years in the racist world of Observatory, have internalised and adopted the white prejudiced-look:

If there were cold shivers when colleagues talked about hotnos or uppity coloureds, they did not tell each other, did not giggle about it in their bedroom, for that space had lost its privacy too; instead, they learned to use the vocabulary of the master race, were the first to note with distaste the traces of native origins in others. Ja nee, hottie se kind, the child would hear them say sometimes in rare conspiratorial moments. (124)

The irony here, of course, is that both Helen and John have “native origins”, and that Marion – in their white supremacist language – is “hottie se kind”. That they are able to use this racist language points to the success of the panoptic machine in replicating in them the racist ‘inner eyes’ of the white community through which they “‘see’ the world and violate black subjectivity” (Yancy 227). For this reason, Helen is able to adopt a language that separates and removes her from the ‘coloured’ community. She asserts, for example, that ‘coloured’ people are “always jolly, noisy; that is what made them impossible” and later coins the saying “Give them a pinkie and they’ll grab your whole hand”, which Marion remembers while she is thinking about Brenda, her ‘coloured’ employee (Wicomb, *Playing* 146, 17). Helen’s use of the us/them dichotomy Others all ‘non-white’ people, and, in so doing, pushes *them* to the periphery while simultaneously positioning herself as centre. Most tragically, though, in the interests of maintaining her white fictional world, Helen accepts her mother’s alleged offer to play the role of a ‘coloured’ servant in their Observatory home in order to see her daughter and grandchild. Tokkie, like her daughter, also plays by the Panopticon prison’s rules.

Throughout these passages, the reader is made manifestly aware that there is, as Yancy puts it, “nothing passive about the white gaze”, for its formidable power dominates the world of the black Other (220). Helen’s every word, gesture, decision, and thought is monitored by a white prejudiced-look, judged according to its norms, and pronounced either ‘decent’ or ‘vulgar’. Even Marion, her own child, is assessed before this invisible, all-seeing,

all-powerful gaze. Like Tokkie in relation to her, Helen is preoccupied with Marion's physical appearance and subjects her to a similar, perhaps worse, kind of objectification. Though Marion is born with typically 'white' physical features, Helen "fore[sees] further problems: the child's hair would grow into a mass of frizzy curls; she would be slow to learn, mentally retarded; she would become a kaffirboetie" (Wicomb, *Playing* 125). Her words here echo two central beliefs of what Paul C. Taylor calls 'thick' racialism: first, that the "kinky hair" of "black folks" is "ugly" and, secondly, that this physical difference is a "sign[] of deeper, typically intellectual" deficiency (Taylor 58).

Helen's belief in whiteness gains a religious dimension when she begins to conflate it with God. During the spiritual foot-cleansing ceremony, for instance, she asserts that "God had forgiven her. [. . .] she would finally be white as driven snow", and, further, that "[c]leansed and bathed in holiness, her very feet [were] tamed and certificated by God" (Wicomb, *Playing* 160, 161). Troublingly, this passage suggests that, for Helen, God *is* whiteness: thus He/whiteness forgives her for the 'sin' of 'coloured' origins and certifies the whiteness of her feet, which have been "tamed" through John's pedicures and Helen's scrubbing. To return to the passage in the paragraph above, Helen's fear that Marion might develop what she conceives of as 'native' (read 'abnormal' and 'criminal') characteristics is a fear before God, which is to say, fear before the god of whiteness. Through this (morally) faultless, (physically) flawless, omnipotent, all-seeing white gaze, she externally arbitrates herself and her world. If Marion does not measure up to its white standards, Helen anticipates with panic her failure before the white gaze of God. Moreover, in the same way that a Christian "posit[s] [his/her] being-an-object-for-God as more real than [his/her] for-itself", so as to "learn from outside what [he/she] must be", Helen lives her life from the outside, alienated from the potential self-definition of the for-Itself (Sartre 385). She exists in a state of for-Others before the centralised gaze of the Panopticon's tower, which, incidentally, Jacques-Alain Miller describes as "a machine that creates a semblance of God" (5).

Towards the end of her life, Helen enacts the condition of double consciousness in the literal splitting of self embodied by the emergence of an imaginary friend, who becomes her 'double':

She had a friend who asked helpful questions, a confidante whose role was to prompt, a real lady, not unlike Miss Fisher, whose questions she answered without uttering a sound. Helen was not going mad; she was not one of those sad, mad people who talk to themselves. She knew what she was doing, and thus the lady friend remained nameless. (Wicomb, *Playing* 149)

Helen's description of a "real lady" like Miss Fisher (a white acquaintance of hers) and her long-standing association of 'ladiness' with whiteness, quite clearly indicate a white imaginary "lady friend". The white gaze, internalised throughout her life, eventually manifests in an imagined presence that follows her everywhere and watches her every movement. In fact, the invisibility of her 'friend' points to the invisibility of the white gaze: as a nameless presence without identity, Helen's phantom companion evokes the shadowy, unknowable, Godlike figure of whiteness that is at once everywhere and nowhere. Moreover, that this internalised white Other person is imaginary suggests the invented or constructed dimension of whiteness and all its associations with normality, "beauty, order, innocence, purity, restraint, and nobility" (Yancy 217). Helen's eventual decline into madness is therefore a depiction of both the trauma induced by the white prejudiced-look and, more than this, the insanity of whiteness. Here Wicomb powerfully inverts its supposed 'normality', exposing what Yancy terms the "fundamentally symbolic" white body and performing, through Helen, a "demystification" of its privileged, 'superior' status (217).

If Helen's "self-willed and efficient death" is from cancer (Wicomb, *Playing* 4, 47), it is both a physical and psychological cancer. It is, in short, a symbol of "the power of mind over mind" in one of the apartheid Panopticon's most devoted subjects (Bentham 39). Eaten inside-out by its prejudiced-look, she becomes a husk of her previous self, living in a perpetual state of Being-for-Others that eventually generates a cancerous double, in the form of a white Other person, at the core of her being. Her final condition of madness and disease exposes the violence of whiteness, which, Yancy asserts, "strives for totalization" (238). Like the 'barbarian' girl in *Waiting*, Helen becomes the quintessential Foucauldian docile body, a mere doll whose movements are governed by the judgement and motions of the white gaze. Knowable, predictable, usable, she is supervised by its presence until her death.

### **Marion's Journey and Lessons on Selfhood**

Thus I can not confer on myself any quality without mediation or an objectifying power which is not my own power and which I can neither pretend nor forge. Of course this has been said before; it was said a long time ago that the Other teaches me who I am.

(Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 366)

Despite his pessimistic conception of the look, Sartre acknowledges that the mode of Being-for-Others is essential for developing a richer self-understanding and that, in spite of its features of objectification and alienation, the “for-itself refers to the for-Others” (303). Without the presence of Other people in our lives, we could not in fact experience the transcendence and free possibilities of the for-itself. This freedom, however, is dependent on a return to the self-defining for-itself by reciprocating the gaze and rendering the Other person an object. As I have attempted to show, this is not the case with Helen: once exposed to the prejudiced-look, she never again returns to the mode of for-itself. Given that the white gaze remains invisible, that it has the prior status of master and norm, that it becomes an inescapable presence, and that it is a prejudiced-look, Helen is unable to return to a state of freedom. Instead, she exists in a perpetual for-Others that destroys any possibility of personal growth.

Marion’s experience of Being-for-Others, however, forms a valuable counterpoint to her mother’s tragic narrative of psychological and physical enslavement to whiteness. In the epigraph to this section of the chapter, Sartre’s reference to the Other person who “teaches me who I am” is constructively ambiguous in that it evokes, probably unintentionally, both the Other person (in the typical Sartrean sense) and the marginalised Other. I quote it because Marion’s three self-defining experiences in the mode of for-Others are through the perspective of ‘coloured’ characters, that is, people who are ‘Other’ in the sense that they do not conform to the ‘Same’ or the norm of whiteness. In each of these moments, she experiences her self through the critical-look rather than the prejudiced-look, and, on returning to the for-itself, develops a deeper self-understanding. In short, I suggest that Patricia Williams, Mrs Murray, and Brenda Mackay teach Marion who she is. Or rather, they teach her the art of journeying, of moving outside herself, and so facilitate her liberation from a confined, narrow point of view.

While Helen’s childhood is a public display, Marion’s is cloistered. Treated as the final stage of her mother’s “project”, she is conceived as the ‘chosen one’ who will complete the transition from ‘coloured’ to white (Wicomb, *Playing* 125). Helen aims, in this endeavour, to ensure that her daughter grows up a “perfectly ordinary child who would take her whiteness, her privileges for granted” (125). If, as play-whites, she and John “cannot progress beyond vigilance”, Helen endeavours to make sure that her child is not “racked by fear and insecurity” for her ‘coloured’ heritage (152, 125). To the extent that Marion is – at the start of the novel – unaware of her whiteness and her privilege, her mother’s project is a success.

Kossew points out the way in which Wicomb establishes Marion's assumed white privilege by rendering her "characteristics of speech and attitude [as those] of a South African 'white madam'" (202). Her racialised prejudices, instilled in her since childhood, recur throughout the novel. For instance, she remembers Tokkie as "their girl" (despite her elderly age), refers to the woman who cleans her flat as "the girl", describes a window cleaner's expression as that of "a monkey", complains about the "opportunistic layabouts" that fill the streets, and is, in the beginning at least, suspicious of Brenda because of her 'colouredness' (Wicomb, *Playing* 31, 1, 26, 25, 16). Moreover, the opulence of Marion's domestic environment indicates her white privilege. One description of her flat centres on an account of her four-poster bed with its "cocoon of draped muslin" that is like "a bower for an egte fairy princess, who would lie for a hundred years in gauzed limbo" (2). This passage explicitly references J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, where the protagonist describes white South African children as "soul-stunted [. . .], spinning themselves tighter and tighter into their sleepy cocoons. [. . .] Their residence the *limbo* of the unborn" (6, my emphasis). In her intertextual nod to Coetzee, Wicomb underscores, first of all, the luxury, privilege, and unnecessary lavishness of Marion's 'white' lifestyle, and, secondly, the sheltered and isolated world of her youth, which has rendered her, as it were, soul-stunted and in limbo. Brought up in an environment of secrecy and lies, she is oblivious to, or perhaps in denial of, her own familial history and the oppression of her people.

Despite these markers of Marion's privilege, she lives in a state of anxious unease. Even before she encounters the face of Patricia Williams, the residual effects of a fearful and secluded childhood shape her daily life. She experiences "attacks" of claustrophobia as if "something buzzes in her ears" until "she seems to gag on metres of muslin, ensnared in the fabric that wraps itself round and round her into a shroud from which she struggles to escape" (Wicomb, *Playing* 2). In the context of the intertextual citation of Coetzee, the muslin here functions as a disturbing symbol of whiteness that cocoons and insulates Marion against the outside world, but, in so doing, also entraps, suffocates, and threatens to destroy her. By means of this symbol, Wicomb represents whiteness as a state of limbo, a kind of living death. As the novel progresses, the reader comes to the retrospective realisation that Marion's experience echoes her mother's, who also becomes entrapped by whiteness.

A further indication of Marion's unease is her fear of having people in her home. Like her mother, "she has no friends", and deliberately avoids inviting people to her luxury flat in Bloubergstrand (3). Her aversion in fact borders on phobia, as is suggested by her visceral response to Brenda's hypothetical 'visit':

Marion feels the panic rising systematically from her feet, as if she is slowly, stiffly being lowered into icy water that any moment will wash over her head without a sound. What can Brenda mean about coming to her house? No one has ever come to her flat. (71)

Her reaction recalls her own parents' neurosis about keeping their curtains closed (10). For Helen and John, who "could not have anyone come to the house until they acquired decent things", decency turned out to be "an endlessly deferred, unachievable goal", which meant that they never had any visitors (167). While her parents' terror of company is grounded in a fear of indecency, Marion's fear is indeterminate: "she couldn't be sure what her situation was" (72). Hers is an anxiety of others instilled in her and normalised since childhood, but also, perhaps, a subconscious awareness of a terrible secret at the heart of her family's history. It is only after she reassures herself that Brenda "would never drop in, would not be able to do so" that she is able to regain her composure (72).

It therefore makes sense that Marion's first encounter with the critical-look occurs not in the form of a physical person in her home, but through the medium of a photo. At first she resists the temptation to look at the newspaper photo of Patricia Williams, approaching it in a series of movements that suggest her trepidation of Other people. When she finds the *Cape Times* in the back office of her travel agency, she picks it up and glances at the front photo, even though she "doesn't usually bother with newspapers" (48). She casts it aside and then stares for a second time at the photo of the young woman whose "mouth reveals a quiver of outrage and indignation" (49). Finally, after again picking up the paper and throwing it down once more, she gathers it up and anxiously stuffs it into her bag.

When eventually she does look at the photo properly, Marion finds herself confronted by the critical-look of Williams and undergoes her first defining experience of Being-for-Others. For a moment she loses her subjectivity and becomes an object of the Other person's gaze:

The eyes of the stranger hold hers accusingly, calling her to account: for what, for the callous fold across her face? But no; it hisses a command to remember, remember, remember. . . Marion feels the room shrink around her. She is trapped in endless folds of muslin; the bed grows into the room, fills it, grows large as a ship in which she, bound in metres of muslin, flounders. (54)

Marion's bewildering sensation of a world destabilised by another's gaze bears comparison with Sartre's description of being looked at by the Other person:

I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me, for the Other's look embraces my being and correlatively the walls, the door, the keyhole. All these instrumental things [. . .] now turn toward the Other a face which on principle escapes me. [. . .] the world flows out of the world and I flow outside myself. (350)

In a sense, Williams has entered Marion's home and *looked* at her. No longer the possessor of the look, Marion is held and commanded by her "arresting" gaze and experiences the self-alienation of relinquishing her transcendence to another's subjectivity (Wicomb, *Playing* 49). Like Sartre's peeping-Tom at the keyhole, she is taken outside herself and sees the world from a new perspective, as belonging to another – Williams – who, in the context of the novel, is both the Sartrean and marginalised Other. Thus the familiar is turned alien, and, in the same way that "the Other's look embraces [the peeping-Tom's] being", "Marion feels the room shrink around her". Transcended by an external transcendence, her world diminishes as her possibilities drain away under the objectifying gaze of another. If, in addition, the muslin drapes are treated as an extended metaphor for whiteness, then arguably Marion's sensation of being bound in "endless folds of muslin" is a momentary empathetic awareness of Williams' entrapment in white apartheid South Africa, which had brought her so close to death. Her experience here, in other words, is reminiscent of Williams' torture. As Marion will later realise, both Williams and Helen, who turn out to be cousins, are (physical and psychological) torture victims of the apartheid regime.

When Marion escapes onto her balcony (that liminal "space both inside and out" [1]) after the encounter with Williams' look, a face suddenly looms up out of the darkness, floating on the sea. It is only when she goes back inside that "recognition beats like a wave against the picture window: Tokkie, it is Tokkie's face on the water" (55). Unconsciously following Williams' instructions to "remember", Marion has a sudden vision of Tokkie "lost in reverie", but the face that stares down at her, to the child Marion's dismay, "does not know her" (55). After returning to reality, she phones her father, driven by a need to find out Tokkie's identity. Noting the hesitation in his voice, however, she begins to sense the lies at the core of her childhood. Throughout this scene, Marion remains in the mode of for-Others. Her sudden return to the for-itself is marked by a reversion to deeply instilled prejudices. As she tries to pull herself together and "go over events in a rational manner", she reduces Williams to "a coloured woman who had been an ANC terrorist" (56).

Interestingly, for both Marion and the Magistrate of *Waiting*, it is the mutilated body of the Other that draws them outside their luxurious cocooned existence and jolts them into

an awareness of their complicity in a system of violence and domination. The shock of encountering the Other's gaze destabilises their immobile existence in the limbo of complacency and compels them to embark on journeys of self-scrutiny. Indeed, Williams' unspoken demand that Marion "remember" is an insistence that she journey into her subconscious, into suppressed memory. Abdulrazak Gurnah claims that it is "while [Marion] is journeying in a landscape where she leaves no mark [the UK] that she learns to travel in the mind" (274). I would argue that the opposite is true: it is only after journeying into the mind that Marion is able to consider a physical journey. In fact, her journey of remembering starts at the moment she is caught in Williams' gaze, which reminds her of Tokkie and triggers the memory of her.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding Marion's dismissal of Williams as a terrorist who has no connection to her, the face "detach[es] itself from the page and [takes] to persecuting her" (Wicomb, *Playing* 73). In an attempt to placate the persistent face that haunts her, she again approaches her father about Tokkie's name and deduces from his guarded responses that there is "something secret, something ugly, monstrous, at the heart of their paltry little family" (58). After abandoning all further efforts to obtain information from him, she turns to Brenda. On the strength of her employee's 'geleentheid', or opportunity to travel, to Clanwilliam, she approaches the Mackay family about Tokkie, who Marion believes may have lived in the district. A few weeks later Brenda reports that she has a lead: Mrs Murray, who remembers a woman called Tokkie, not from Clanwilliam but nearby Wuppertal. It is at Wuppertal, confronted by Mrs Murray's look of recognition, that Marion undergoes a second experience of Being-for-Others, irrevocably changing her conception of self and family. She is just about to depart from the Murray home, having concluded that she and her host have a different Tokkie in mind, when she is fatefully delayed by her swollen foot. A moment later, Mrs Murray, who has insisted on bathing the foot in mustard water, looks up at her from a kneeling position and suddenly "gasps loudly", her "eyes wide with recognition" (97). Bewildered, she exclaims that "from down here with [her] face tilted [Marion] look[s] the spitting image of Mrs Karelse", that is, Tokkie (97).

Thrown outside herself by Mrs Murray's look, Marion experiences her body, from an external perspective, as an unrecognisable object. Hence, she "tries to nod, but has a feeling that her head hasn't moved, that she has no control over it, that in fact it is not her own" (97).

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<sup>10</sup> Ironically, despite owning a travel agency, Marion has "an aversion to travel" though it is "not exactly a phobia" (40). Her aversion to physical journeying is also a resistance to psychological journeying (into her memory and history), and it is only by opening herself to the latter that she is able to embark on her overseas trip.

Her self, mediated through the Other's gaze, is apprehended in the form of an alien thing as if from a distance. For the second time, she senses a loss of control, a self-estrangement, and discovers her pure facticity, or object-being, in a world of strange objects. In the car with Brenda, still under the influence of the critical-look, she "hangs the head that hurts and yet does not belong to her, fixes her eyes on the black fabric of her trousers; she does not recognise her voice, does not recognise the linen-clad legs on which her eyes have come to rest" (99). Her experience, here, is typical of Sartrean *nausea*, that is, an encounter with "the 'taste of [her] facticity,' the revelation of [her] body to [her] and of the fact of [her] inescapable connection with Being-in-itself" (Barnes xx). In this moment of self-alienation, she views herself from an external perspective and perceives an unrecognisable thing – an object which both is and is not herself.

Thus, in the mode of for-Others, rather than by means of the spoken word, Marion discovers her 'coloured' heritage and the shame of her parents' crossing over. As Kossew notes, unlike her mother, hers "is not the shame of coloured identity but that of its denial" (204). Estranged from the person she thought she was, on returning to the for-itself, she begins to revise her self-conception and grapple with a new vocabulary with which to understand the world, especially in describing Tokkie. The woman she had once referred to as "their girl, Tokkie", she must now relearn to call "Grandmother, Grandma, Granny, Ouma, Mamma", words which are, by necessity, "naked and slippery with shame" (Wicomb, *Playing* 31, 107). Another notable change to her vocabulary is seen in her reference to the woman who cleans her flat by her name, "Maria", rather than "the girl" (178, 1).

Marion's experience of seeing herself through the eyes of a 'coloured' woman allows her to reflect on the meaning of whiteness and its privileges, which, before this moment, she had taken for granted. Her exploration of race begins during a visit to the library, where her investigations yield an abundance of implied, indirect information. Though there are no entries on play-whites and whiteness is apparently "not a category for investigation", her research on 'coloureds' generates "hundreds of entries" (120). In this particularly Foucauldian moment, Wicomb represents the textualisation of the Other in apartheid South Africa, where regulated subjects, under constant surveillance, were defined through written description and classification. Whiteness, being invisible – being the gaze behind the central tower, as it were – *cannot be* a category for investigation because *it is* the gaze. 'Colouredness', however, being Other and therefore visible – being metaphorically entrapped in a peripheral cage of light – is situated in a dense, fixed system of writing that involves, as I mentioned in my first chapter, its analysis, description, and categorisation. In this way,

Othered subjects are rendered known and predictable so as to maintain them in subjection. The library's classificatory system therefore enacts, as a metaphor and microcosm, the organisation of the apartheid regime. Marion's time in the library brings home the power of racial categories that held so much sway and meaning, in fact, that they produced a "country-shy couple who betrayed their families, who obliterated their histories, who stripped themselves of colour to be play-whites" (122).

Later in the novel is a chapter wholly dedicated to the meaning of whiteness. Given Marion's earlier research, especially on the classificatory acts of 1950 and 1962, this section, which begins with the question "What is whiteness?", may well be focalised from her perspective, or at least written as if through her (151). If this is the case, her observations that "[w]hiteness is without restrictions" and that it "has the fluidity of milk; its glow is far reaching" suggest a far more developed consciousness of whiteness than Marion possesses earlier in the novel (151). Her reflections here indicate a grasp of white privilege, which Samantha Vice defines as "the ease of moving about the world that comes with being white" (329). In this section, Marion's thoughts are of a starkly different nature to her earlier way of thinking, as is evident, for instance, in her remark regarding car guards that "[y]ou can't go anywhere nowadays without a flock of unsavoury people crowding around you, making demands, trying to make you feel guilty for being white and hardworking" (Wicomb, *Playing* 28). Marion's recognition that whiteness and blackness are socio-political constructs, and therefore "pot-bellied with meaning", allows her to see that race influences and irrevocably shapes human lives (106).

Marion's journey into the meaning of whiteness, which I call her intellectual journey, leads to other journeys, all of which are connected and influence one another. She travels, for instance, overseas, into the worlds of novels, and still deeper into her memory. Significantly, her inspiration to travel overseas, and Brenda's motivation to write, takes place in the glow of Outa Blinkoog's lantern, that is, in *coloured* rather than *blinding white* light. The difference between these kinds of light points to a crucial distinction between the two modes of 'looking'. The critical-look, on the one hand, enables self-reflection, personal development, and creativity, while the prejudiced-look, on the other, imposes its biases onto another without allowing for self-revelation, resulting in "stunted personal growth" (Horn 129). Like the coloured light of the lantern, the former reveals a person's qualities and inspires the creation of meaning, whereas the latter, like blinding white light, confiscates the Other's gaze and subjects him/her to externally imposed meaning.

While overseas Marion relearns to cry, and, in so doing, Gurnah argues that she undergoes a process of “grieving for both a loss and discovery of self” (274). This process of mourning and self-investigation allows the journey into her “coiling, looping memory”, where she relives her most suppressed and shameful memory: the betrayal of Annie Boshoff (Wicomb, *Playing* 195, 193). Finally, Marion’s journeys into the other worlds of novels further supplement her inner exploration by helping her grapple with her familial history and developing her sympathetic faculty. While reading *The Conservationist*, for example, she is overwhelmed by a sense of empathy for the characters. She cries “for the man who doesn’t know what’s up, for the boy who can’t speak to his father, for the absence of a mother, for her own ludicrous identification of the black farmhand with her father” (190). In allowing this process of character identification, she works toward a greater understanding of her history. It is through novels that she finally arrives at and confronts the most painful, uncomfortable, and destabilising question: “Is the [play-white] girl not, at some level, a version of herself? Of her mother?” (190).

*Playing* closes on a note of indeterminacy, as does *Waiting*, by depicting the conflict between subjectivities that characterises the mode of Being-for-Others. On the drive back to Bonteheuwel, soon after Marion’s return from the UK, the topic of Brenda’s writing arises. After describing how she came to visit John, Brenda declares that Marion’s “father’s story [is] the story [she] want[s] to write, the story that should be written” (217). Marion is enraged. Pulling off the road, she accuses Brenda of manipulating and exploiting her father for her own gain: “So in the guise of a do-gooder, you went back to prise more out of a lonely, senile old man who was grateful for your visits? Sis. How dare you! Why don’t you write your own fucking story?” (217). When Brenda replies that her own story is dreary, lacking in appeal, whereas John’s is captivating “with his pale skin as capital, ripe for investment”, Marion tells her to get out the car, declaring that she knows her father’s story (218). Before she leaves, however, Brenda retorts, “[a]ctually [. . .] I suspect you don’t” and “flicks at the lock before she shuts the door with a quiet click” (218).

It seems to me that Marion’s aggression is an expression of the vulnerability she feels under Brenda’s critical-look, and the fear, quite literally, of “being written in and by the Other’s freedom” (Sartre 351). If the look is about seeing oneself from an external perspective, then Brenda’s proposed story about Marion’s family history can be read as an instantiation of the look. Martinot’s conception of Being-for-Others in terms of writing and reading is particularly useful here. He argues that “[o]ne is written by the Other as the Other’s knowledge in the act of being read. And in reading the Other’s look, one is transformed from

being a writer of one's world to being part of the world written" (47). Marion's experience, then, is the anticipation of being transformed from active writer of her world and history – that is, a subject – into a passive reader of herself – that is, an object written by another. Under Brenda's judgement, which "is the transcendental act of a free being", Marion senses herself as a freedom transcended and stripped of its transcendence (Sartre 358). Her response ("Why don't you write your own fucking story?") is an attempt to divert Brenda's gaze away from her and so reassert her subjectivity. When she finds herself accused of ignorance regarding her father's story, she tries to escape further judgement by evicting Brenda from the car. Yet Brenda has the last word and, as it were, the last look. By negating Marion's knowledge of her father's history, she maintains her hold over the gaze, and is, in this sense, the victor of the battle of gazes.

Finally, I want to take further Andrew van der Vlies's contention that the above scene is an "invitation to consider the preceding narrative (or narration) as Brenda's", and that the "artful patterning" of the novel as a whole "support[s] a reading of Brenda as chief focaliser, if not author" (595). If we accept Brenda as narrator, I see no reason why we cannot, by extension, accept her as the fictional author of the novel. In other words, it seems conceivable that the novel which readers hold in their hands is *the final product of the story she hoped to write*. Just as we are invited to consider Brenda as 'author', so too we can imagine, in the fictional world of the novel, Marion picking up and reading the very same *Playing in the Light* that we hold in our hands. The book, in which Marion is quite literally written into objectification by Brenda's subjectivity, thus signifies the physical manifestation of the gaze. As readers, we are encouraged to engage directly with what it must be like for Marion, coming across the novel, to see herself through the eyes of another in the mode of Being-for-Others. Retrospectively, we can imagine the objectified 'return' or reapprehension of her body through the textual manifestation of the look in the form of the novel itself.

Wicomb's decision to end the novel on a note of conflict is both a refusal to provide readers with a clear resolution and a demand that we explore further, beyond the written scope of the book, its implications. In so doing, she points to the precarious state of South Africa – the fact that we are far from a 'resolved', reconciled country – and the instability of identities under pressure. The unexpected clash between two characters who have been tentatively attempting a friendship leaves us imagining a possible world beyond Wicomb's last word. Is Marion's hostility perhaps grounded in a desire to write her own story? Do Brenda and Marion resolve their disagreement? Is it possible that the former might have convinced the latter to collaborate in the writing of a novel based on Marion's familial

history? And, if so, does this signal Marion's most rigorous journey into her mind, a journey containing all the other journeys and the product of which readers hold in their hands? Or does their dispute remain unresolved, like the novel itself, signalling a kind of cul-de-sac, or dead end, of Marion's journey of self-reinvention? Is it possible that, despite all her travels – physical, emotional, intellectual and psychological – she has not changed much at all?

## Conclusion

In attempting to tease out the workings of panopticism at a micro-level, I have narrowed my focus to the gaze itself and, appealing to Sartre's conception of Being-for-Others, considered its ontological and physical effect on two characters from *Playing*, Helen and Marion.

Through a close analysis of intersubjectivity in the novel, my intention has been to show that, contrary to both Foucault's and Sartre's principally negative conceptions of the gaze, not all modes of looking are manipulative and degrading. In fact, Coetzee's and Wicomb's work problematises these theories, the former by depicting resistance through the blind gaze of the 'barbarian' girl and the latter by representing a more self-constructive Being-for-Others in the example of Marion. Though both writers remain acutely aware of the destructive and damaging influence of the look, they also explore its potential as a tool of protest against mechanisms of power or as a mutually constitutive, reciprocal experience.

In view of these writers' subversive revisions of human intersubjectivity, Martin Jay's criticism of Foucault merits special attention. Foucault, Jay argues, "focused so insistently on the dangers of panopticism that he remained blind to other micro-practices of everyday life that subvert its power" and, for this reason, resisted vision's "reciprocal, intersubjective, communicative function" which derives from "the mutual glance" (195). As Martin and Dolezal have pointed out, a very similar criticism can be levelled against Sartre, whose inordinate focus on the alienating and objectifying aspect of the gaze ignores its potential to augment human growth. In accounting for these inadequacies, I composed what I hope is a more nuanced conception of the Sartrean gaze by teasing out a distinction between the prejudiced-look and critical-look.

Helen's transition from 'coloured' to white fundamentally involves the gaze of Other people, both in the 'coloured' community where she grows up and in the white world of Observatory. In entering, without resistance, a kind of panopticon of whiteness, or, as Dass puts it, a "home" which by definition is "deprived of privacy and [in which] she is constantly

on show”, her existence is defined by a ubiquitous and invisible white prejudiced-look (139). The experience of Being-for-Others leads to an inescapable cycle of self-negation and self-censoring that affects changes to her physical appearance and psychological being. Her perpetual state of double consciousness, in which she experiences her ‘coloured’ body as unrecognisably ‘vulgar’, eventually manifests in an imagined Other person external to herself. It is through this white invisible ‘friend’ that she mediates her internal self. Caught in an eternal state of Being-for-Others and unable to return to the mode of the for-itself, Helen, by the end of her life, is stripped completely of transcendence. Wicomb portrays her slow disintegration and degradation in the form of mental disease (madness) and physical disease (cancer), which are presented as symptoms of the white gaze.

In my examination of Marion’s experience of Being-for-Others, I suggest that, through the critical-look, she is able to access and explore aspects of her internal being which have hitherto been hidden by the silence of her claustrophobic childhood. Wicomb, in her depiction of Marion’s development through the ‘looks’ of three coloured women, brings together the Sartrean Other and the marginalised Other. Marion’s encounters with Others allow her to overcome a physical and mental aversion to travel. By viewing herself through their eyes, she is able to work towards a greater understanding of herself, her parents, and the vicious effects of the apartheid regime.

During the course of the novel, both mother and daughter are “unmade and several times over reassembled”, and in this way ‘created’ physically and psychologically through the Other person’s look (Wicomb, *Playing* 175). While Helen’s rejection of her ‘colouredness’ translates into entrapment under a blinding white light in the panopticon of whiteness, Marion’s discovery of her ‘coloured’ heritage necessitates her entry into “an era of unremitting crossings”, which is portrayed in terms of liberation under the coloured light of inspiration (107). Her acknowledgement of the permeability of racial borderlines facilitates her various types of travels: her psychological journey into memory, her intellectual exploration of the meaning of whiteness, her literary excursion into novels, and her physical trips to Wuppertal and the UK (see Kossew). Through this constructive journeying, she becomes a more intellectually developed person with richer self-knowledge.

The conflict that ends the novel, though, suggests that there is no such thing as ‘self-discovery’ – there is no ultimate, absolute self which Marion has reached or could reach. Like the Magistrate’s, her journey is unending and continuous: it has no ultimate aim. And so the question of whether or not she does encounter herself through the ‘look’ of Brenda’s story remains unresolved. The closing passages of the novel, however, do point to the possibility,

and therefore the imagining, of this scenario. Marion's anger suggests a kind of existential anguish in the moment of Being-for-Others, the anticipatory angst of seeing herself and her familial history as an object of shame through the eyes of Brenda, and all other readers of the book.

## Chapter 3

### Beauty, Gender Failure, and Protest in Zoë Wicomb's Short Stories

Much of Zoë Wicomb's fiction and non-fiction writing explores the intersectional impact of race and gender on the socio-political lives of black and 'coloured' women in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> In "To Hear the Variety of Discourses", she calls for the need to "think of these categories [of race and gender] not as biological realities, but rather as social constructs created through language" (36). Her fiction vividly bears out the process of racial formation and gendering through institutionalised patriarchal structures. While the last chapter dealt with her portrayal of race in *Playing*, this chapter intends to flesh out the important role of gender in three short stories from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *The One That Got Away*.

Wicomb deals, for the most part, with the experience of 'coloured' women not only weighed down by racist constructions of blackness, but also constrained by the tight restrictions and demands of normative feminine identities. They struggle with the category of 'colouredness' while also learning to navigate a sense of agency and selfhood in a male-orientated world. As Nise Malange argues, black women in apartheid South Africa were – and often still are – subjected to "triple oppression, at the workplace, in organisations and in the domestic sphere" (qtd. in Wicomb, "To Hear the Variety of Discourses" 39). The physical and mental exhaustion of many of Wicomb's characters points to the crushing burden of this triple oppression. In certain cases, though, they manage to break out of their racial and gendered confinement. With a shift of emphasis from the white gaze to the male gaze (while still remaining aware of whiteness), I investigate Wicomb's depiction, in her short fiction, of female oppression and resistance in the public and domestic sphere.

Judith Butler's model of gender performativity and Susan Bordo's work on the socio-historical construction of women's bodies (both strongly influenced by Foucault), focus on the ways in which the female docile is body shaped, produced, and rendered usable by patriarchal power. The work of these theorists provides a useful framework with which to examine how 'coloured' women in Wicomb's fiction are influenced, moulded, and made to perform a certain 'ideal' femininity under the heteronormative male look (a gaze often also informed by white racism). This notion of 'ideal' femininity entails conformity to a particular type of beauty which, as I suggested in my previous chapter, is modelled on white features

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Wicomb's articles, "To Hear a Variety of Discourses" and "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa", as well as her interview with Eva Hunter in *Between the Lines II*.

and Western practices. Utilising Kant's (immensely problematic) definition of a beautiful person as he/she who most closely embodies the concept of human being (an idea which, as Noël Carroll persuasively shows, is often exploited to violent ends), I argue that where these characters are not able to conform to this aesthetic feminine ideal, their very humanity is brought into question. In "When the Train Comes" and "Friends and *Goffels*", the degrading and dehumanising effect of this experience is rendered with disturbing lucidity.

It seems to me, however, that Wicomb's characters' very refusal or failure to perform normative white femininity, and their concomitant failure to embody 'beauty' and therefore so-called humanity, opens up a space for resistance in which they are able to defy patriarchal control and assert their agency. They enact what Jay, as I mentioned at the end of my last chapter, calls the "micro-practices of everyday life that subvert [panoptic] power", and therefore undermine Foucault's and Sartre's limited conceptions of intersubjectivity (195). Appropriating Butler's terminology, I refer to these instances of opposition as moments of "psychic excess" in which there is a "disruption" or subversion of the heteronormative ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 315). Butler uses the term to describe the intrusion of the psyche – as distinct from the subject – into a subject's gender or sexuality performance, thereby showing up, through these moments of failure, the social construction and performativity of identity. While she employs the concept primarily in the context of sexuality, it is equally applicable to gender.

Women in all three short stories harness the subversive power of psychic excess. In "When the Train Comes", Frieda opposes both her father and the boy who directs his insulting look at her; Dot and Julie, in "Friends and *Goffels*", subvert and claim as their own the derogatory term used to define and exclude them; and, in "Mrs Pringle's Bed", the eponymous protagonist develops a type of agoraphobia, a particularly interesting condition when read alongside Bordo. Mrs Pringle in fact rejects both the public sphere and her housewifely role, seeking fulfilment instead in the politicised world of newspapers. In these ways, they redeploy psychic excess as a means of protesting against the restrictions of normative femininity. Unlike Helen, who yields herself wholeheartedly to the normalising white gaze, they resist the male look and concomitant docility. In so doing, they go some way towards redefining what it means to be a 'coloured' woman in South Africa.

## The Domesticated Female Body

Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity – a pursuit without terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion – female bodies have become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, “improvement”.

(Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* 166)

In my previous two chapters, I argued that the ‘barbarian’ girl and Helen are both representations of docility. By means of the inscriptive, manipulative, and invisible gaze of the societal Panopticon, their bodies are rendered intelligible and usable. Through torture, on the one hand, the ‘barbarian’ girl is defined by the imperialist gaze so as to ensure that her body signifies, quite literally on the surface of her skin, her so-called barbarian Otherness. On the other hand, Helen’s experience of inscription under the white gaze is far subtler, for it is through psychological internalisation of this surveillance that she imposes physical alterations on her own body. Both characters, however, embody externally imposed meaning. In addition to the imperialist and white prejudiced-look, their bodies are shaped under the ever-present influence of patriarchal masculinity. In *Waiting*, for instance, the gendered descriptions of Colonel Joll’s and the Magistrate’s ‘probing’, ‘penetrating’ gaze as they search for ‘truth’ associates them with typically masculine traits of violence, control, and reason. Similarly, in *Playing*, Helen’s obsession with white physical beauty, a preoccupation culturally imposed on women more than men, seems to develop out of the intersection between the white and male gaze. As I will show, Wicomb’s short stories investigate further this relationship between the female body and the male gaze by depicting the inscription of normative femininity at the level of constricted bodily movement and thought.

“When the Train Comes” opens with a reflection on the gendered dimension of women’s experience. The story is set on the platform of a rural train station where Frieda, the narrator, stands anxiously waiting with her father for the train to Cape Town. She is about to take up a position at the “prestigious” St Mary’s School, a previously all-white institution which is “now open to non-whites” (Wicomb 31). Having observed a rowdy group of boys nearby, she reflects on the power that the male look holds over the female body:

I am not the kind of girl whom boys look at. I have known this for a long time, but I still lower my head in public and peep through my lashes. Their eyes leap over me, a mere obstacle in a line of vision. I should be pleased; boys can use their eyes shamelessly to undress a

girl. That is what Sarie says. Sarie's hand automatically flutters to her throat to button up her orlon cardigan when boys talk to her. (21)

What interests me here is the protagonist's conception of gender in relation to a Foucauldian and Sartrean language of the gaze. As emerges in the very first sentence, Frieda is aware that girls are socially positioned as objects looked at by boys, who, in turn, are located as subjects of the look. Boys, in other words, already possess the gaze by virtue of their gender. The male prejudiced-look is thus located as the objectifying force that influences and creates the female body through the inscription and internalisation of feminine norms. Given her understanding of these processes, it is surprising that Frieda interprets Sarie's act of buttoning her cardigan as a trick to draw attention to her breasts. This explanation does not mesh with Sarie's earlier insight into the potential power of the male gaze to "undress a girl". Moreover, the fact that she buttons *up* her cardigan suggests that she is trying to protect her body from the gaze. It seems to me that, as a result of Frieda's overwhelming longing to be looked at, she misunderstands and so copies Sarie's act. In her desperation for affirmation and acceptance by the gaze, she projects onto her friend her own desires.

Despite Frieda's assertion that she evades or is ignored by the male gaze, her bodily gestures and responses are profoundly influenced by its presence. She "lower[s] [her] head in public and peep[s] through [her] lashes", for instance, and later describes herself as reddening and flushing, first in the presence of boys and then in front of her father (21, 31). In this manner, she restricts and regulates her movements before the male gaze so as to embody so-called feminine modesty. More interestingly, though, these acts of modesty recall the skewed relationship between head overseer and prisoners in the Panopticon. Like the inmates who cannot see the omnipotent gaze, Frieda, in the presence of men, has learned to 'blind' herself, so to speak, by looking down or away, and in so doing is rendered sightless and powerless. Furthermore, the subtle additional detail that she lowers her head "in public" evokes the historical gendering of space, where the public realm belongs to men and the private sphere to women.<sup>12</sup> When women happen to be in public and therefore outside their prescribed territory, they must act appropriately as submissive, inactive, docile bodies. Frieda, trained since childhood in gender power relations, acts accordingly by modestly lowering her gaze.

The quoted passage also shows how Sarie's movements are similarly altered "when boys talk to her". As I suggested earlier, Frieda's description of the way in which her friend's hand "automatically flutters to her throat" to button her cardigan in their presence is a reflex

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<sup>12</sup> See Virginia Held's excellent essay, "Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory".

reaction linked to Sarie's remark that "boys can use their eyes shamelessly to undress a girl". In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre relates modesty, and the anxiety of nakedness, to the fear of experiencing oneself as a pure object: "[m]odesty and in particular the fear of being surprised in a state of nakedness are only a symbolic specification of original shame; the body symbolises here our defenceless state as objects" (384). Sartre's notion of modesty is useful in the context of Wicomb's story, for it goes some way in explaining the characteristic association of modesty with 'ideal' femininity. In a culture governed by institutionalised sexism, where men are traditionally the *subjects* who gaze and women the *objects* gazed at, the latter must contend daily with the shaming experience of being 'stripped naked' under the male prejudice-look. Sartre's account of the fear of being seen naked thus fleshes out the implications of Sarie's remark. Her observation that boys use their eyes to "undress" girls indicates her insight into the power of the male gaze to strip a woman metaphorically of not only her clothes (by imagining her naked), but also her subjectivity and agency.

Women who are repeatedly subjected to this experience of 'nakedness' or objectification inevitably develop modest behaviour, especially in the public sphere where they are already disempowered. Frieda later experiences the humiliating power of the male look when the "tall boy with the wild hair turns to look at [her]" and she "feel[s] [her] body swelling out of the dress rent into vertical strips that fall at [her] feet" (Wicomb, "When the Train Comes" 27). Her modest response of looking down, far from being an inherent female trait, is in fact the shame of experiencing her body as a defenceless object under another's gaze, and this shame is then internalised and translated into a movement of docility. Through the boy's gaze, she is stripped of her human potential along with her subjectivity, for to be looked at as an object is also to be regarded as not fully human.

Ironically, neither modesty nor clothes shield women from the predatory male look. Frieda suggests as much when she uses the word "penetrate" to portray the imagined gaze of "Anglican boys", and, similarly, describes the boy's look as "probing", though his stare in fact turns out to be contemptuous (33). Both descriptions bring to mind the violence of Colonel Joll's and the Magistrate's inscriptive and interpretive ways of looking. Like Coetzee, Wicomb is dealing with an obscene mode of looking, where obscenity should be understood in Roger Scruton's sense of the word as the "eclipse of the person by his [sic] body" (48). The sexist male gaze, in other words, is also a pornographic gaze – an example of "the obscene gesture [. . .] that puts the body on display as pure body", thereby "destroying the experience of embodiment" (48).

Other instances of feminine docility are apparent in “Friends and *Goffels*” and “Mrs Pringle’s Bed”. When Dot and Julie, on the one hand, are subjected to Angus Geddes’s tirade on *goffels* (a derogatory word for ‘coloureds’ with ‘non-white’ features), they react by keeping “their eyes lowered” (Wicomb, “Friends and *Goffels*” 95). Mrs Pringle, on the other hand, dedicates her life to maternal domesticity by managing the home, raising her and her husband’s only child, knitting, shopping, and submitting herself to her husband’s “customary clipped advice” and “speeches” (“Mrs Pringle’s Bed” 53). She eventually comes to describe this existence as “a long life of hesitation and prevarication” (50). Even before marriage, her sole aim is to “navigate a respectable life”, which she attains by shaping herself to cultural norms of feminine ‘decency’ through a socially acceptable marriage (51). For the young Mrs Pringle, respectability is associated with a surname that distances itself from slave origins and a working-class background. Thus, despite the fact that “her heart lurched at [Herbert Kleintjies’s] kind, soft-spoken manner”, she chooses “Polly Pringle over Polly Kleintjies” for the reason that ‘Kleintjies’ “sounded too much like the nickname of a farm labourer” (51). Like Helen, who changes her surname and sacrifices her family for the sake of (white) decency, Mrs Pringle forfeits love for the sake of higher social standing. In the marriage itself, she takes on the role of the “silent uncomplaining woman”, which, Bordo argues, is an “ideal of patriarchal culture” (177). We learn, for instance, that she “had long since stopped asking [her husband] questions”, though there are reasons to suggest that he is having an affair (Wicomb, “Mrs Pringle’s Bed” 51).

Similarly, Frieda’s father prepares his daughter for what Bordo refers to as the domestic and maternal role of “chief emotional and physical nurturer” (171). On her fourteenth birthday, he quotes from the bible that “in pain [she] shall bring forth children”, as if Frieda’s central responsibility in life will be to reproduce (Wicomb, “When the Train Comes” 22). Even more disturbingly, though, he takes full control of her eating habits, and thereby, in Rob Gaylard’s words, “seeks to mould her into a dutiful, compliant daughter whose prime motivation is to please her father” and, when the time comes, her future husband (182). It is also possible that he is deliberately shaping her body into a rounded, ‘fat’ female figure. If this is the case, perhaps he has in mind for Frieda a body type akin to Bordo’s conception of “maternal femininity”, which, incidentally, “has been constructed over the past hundred years in the West” (208). That Frieda’s father does not realise she has “long since come to despise [her] size” is not surprising given the patriarchal arrangement of men as speakers and women as listeners – an arrangement related to the looking/looked-at organisation of male/female relationships (Wicomb, “When the Train Comes” 24).

Through the active, defining, penetrating male prejudiced-look, the passive, dutiful, compliant female comes into being. The women in these stories embody and signify – and are “undermined” and “betrayed” by – what Bordo describes as the docile body “regulated by the norms of cultural life”, at least for a time (165). Wicomb depicts, in the mundane day-to-day lives of ‘coloured’ women controlled and shaped by a patriarchal order instituted at every level of their lives, the power of normalising femininity as it is experienced under the objectifying, and often degrading, masculine gaze.

### **Gender Performativity**

Gender does not describe something that *is* (an essence), rather it refers to a process – a series of acts. In this sense, a gendered identity is made manifest only at the moment of its enactment.

(Lloyd, *Judith Butler* 42)

In her highly influential book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler destabilises the very foundations of feminism with her thesis that gender, far from being expressive of an internal psychic core, is in fact performative – a process of ‘acting out’ various semiotic articulations on and through the body:

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body [. . .]. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (173)

According to Butler, gender is not only an endless succession of repeated acts that create the illusion of a stable identity, but also the means through which binary sex is produced. Opposing the traditional feminist view which maintains that sex is “prior to discourse, and thus natural or pre-discursive”, she argues that both sex and gender are created and regulated through a heteronormative lens, where “men are opposed to women, masculinity to femininity, and heterosexuality to homosexuality” (Lloyd 32, 33). Following Foucault, she conceives of power – in this case, “the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” – as a disciplinary mechanism that produces and maintains continuity between sex, gender, and sexuality (*Gender Trouble* 173).

For Butler, then, gender is “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (179). In “When the Train Comes”, Frieda’s musings on her imitation leather bags, read alongside Butler, form a brilliant metaphor for gender performativity. As Frieda stands waiting on the platform, she remarks that her father had “insisted on new imitation leather bags and claimed that people judge by appearances” (Wicomb 27). Both the bags and gender are imitations, which is to say, copies. Their surface appearance – or performance – purports to be that which, internally, they are not and can never be. But while the bags copy a leather original, gender “*is a kind of imitation for which there is no ‘original’*” (Butler, “Imitation” 313). Since feminine and masculine heterosexuality does not signify an internal essence (being a surface repetition without end), it is “an impossible imitation of itself” and therefore “always and only an imitation of an imitation, a copy of a copy” (314). If one takes Frieda’s bags as a metaphor for gender, then there are no genuine leather bags, only fake leather productions that seek to approximate what Butler refers to as the “phantasmatic” ideal of an original that holds no ‘real’ existence (313).

Butler thus exposes so-called feminine qualities, such as compliancy, modesty, and domesticity, as mere reproductions manufactured in a normalising cultural and historical framework with tremendous power over individuals. Frieda’s docile female body is produced, as Bordo describes the process, “through the organization and regulation of [her] time, space, and movements” and, in this way, “trained, stamped, and impressed with the prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, [and] femininity” (166). The father figure in “When the Train Comes”, existing partly as a symbol of patriarchal control, regulates where she goes to school, whom she associates with (“don’t play with boys” [Wicomb 23]), what language she speaks (English, which is later ridiculed by the boy who greets her in “precise mocking English” [33]), and how much she eats (“Don’t leave anything on your plate” [24]). Through her father’s policing of her body in time and space, Frieda is rendered compliant to his demands and made to perform a version of obedient femininity. Indeed, the “habit of obedience is fed daily with second helpings of Mealie porridge” (24).

Similarly, the stereotypically feminine movements and practices of Dot, Julie, and Mrs Pringle – such as lowering the eyes, silence, domesticity, and the maternal ‘instinct’ – are revealed to be a sequence of enacted repetitions which, as Butler shows, have “no ontological status” (*Gender Trouble* 173). Defined by and juxtaposed against what Bordo terms the “‘masculine’ language” of “self-control, determination, cool, emotional discipline, [and] mastery”, femininity is constructed as uncontrollable, indecisive, hot-blooded, and

emotional (171). Rather than the expression of an internal gender core, feminine practices and movements are thus imposed from the outside via institutionalised patriarchal culture. This is not to say, however, that the performance of gender is in any way trivial or frivolous. As Butler points out, failure to enact one's gender 'correctly' has "punitive consequences" (*Gender Trouble* 178). Like Helen, whose ability to play white also exposes race to be performative and therefore without internal substance, Frieda, Dot, and Mrs Pringle begin to realise that the encoded repetition of femininity under the male gaze is "deadly serious" (Wicomb, *Playing* 123).

### **Beauty, Failed Femininity, and Dehumanisation**

[A]s a strategy of survival within a compulsory system, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right.

(Butler, *Gender Trouble* 178)

Thus far, I have looked at how Frieda, Dot, and Mrs Pringle do their gender 'right' by conforming to stereotypical femininity. Even more interesting in Wicomb's short stories, however, are the moments of gender failure. These instances, in which her characters are unable to or refuse to perform their prescribed femininity, subvert and expose as an illusion the idea of a coherent gender identity. But if, as Butler suggests in the above epigraph, performing one's gender 'properly' is partly what humanises individuals, then gender failure comes at the enormous cost of one's very humanity.

A facet of gender performativity that particularly interests me in Wicomb's work is feminine beauty. In his article "Ethnicity, Race, and Monstrosity: The Rhetorics of Horror and Humor", Carroll summarises Kant's conception of human beauty as follows: "We call a human beautiful [. . .] insofar as a person approaches being a perfect example of the category or concept of human being" (37). This definition of beauty links – or, even better, conflates – a person's physical features (his/her outward beauty) with an internal being (his/her inner humanness). The phrenological roots here are quite explicit. Given that one's internal humanity is signified by physical appearance, the failure to embody external beauty is also to fall short at representing the perfect human being. As Carroll maintains, "If human beauty is, at the limit, the perfect realization of the concept of human being, then nonbeauty is the imperfect or defective realization of that concept" (37). It follows that "nonbeauty", or

ugliness, indicates visibly on the surface of the skin a person's subhumanity, which is to say, *the nonbeautiful person is also nonhuman*. Frieda's father, it turns out, is right: people do "judge by appearances" (Wicomb, "When the Train Comes" 27).

Women feel the heaviest pressure to embody this Kantian notion of beauty. As Paul Taylor notes,

Since current social conditions make physical appearance central to the construction of womanhood and femininity and fairly peripheral to the construction of manhood and masculinity, talk about physical beauty more or less reduces to talk about womanhood, femininity, and women. (60)

Dot bears out this sentiment when she observes that "men were not called *goffels*", despite the fact that, like her and Julie, they have "frizzy hair and cheekbones" (Wicomb, "Friends and *Goffels*" 98). Similarly, Marijke Van Vuuren argues that "[m]en can improve their station through education, but girls do so through marriage – and for this prettiness is required" (3). To make the matter even more troubling, and I noted this in my previous chapter, Taylor shows how "a white-dominated culture has *racialized* beauty", meaning that beauty has come to be defined in terms of white features and characteristics (59). Obviously, the repercussions of Kant's theory for black people are enormous, since 'non-white' features bring into question not only their beauty, but also their humanness.<sup>13</sup> The 'coloured' or black woman unable to conform to white norms of beauty must continually struggle against the signification of her body (through a Western aesthetic) as ugly and therefore less than human. 'Non-white' women, for these reasons, feel most acutely the intersectional burden of race and gender.

The tyranny of this white norm and, further, its internalisation and perpetuation in 'coloured' communities, are central concerns in "When the Train Comes" and "Friends and *Goffels*". Indeed, the obsessive way in which Frieda, Dot, and Julie attend to their physical appearance attests to the influence that white femininity exerts over the black female body. Having realised, probably subconsciously, that their very humanity is at stake in their outward appearance, they go to great lengths to embody the normative ideal of white beauty. The most prevalent of these gendered performances is the attempted conformity to "the straight hair rule", which, as Taylor describes it, is informed by "the presumption [. . .] that straight hair is a necessary component of physical beauty" (59). Frieda, for instance,

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<sup>13</sup> Kant would have probably fully endorsed this kind of phrenological reasoning.

compares her curly hair to her mother's "straight and trouble-free" hair (Wicomb, "When the Train Comes" 26). By implication, her curls are trouble – that is, 'gender trouble', a threat to her femininity. Evidently aware of the ever-present danger that frizzy hair poses to her beauty, she spends long hours conforming to the straight hair rule. Consequently, when the boy at the station snatches away another girl's headscarf and teases her about her hair, the effect on Frieda, who sees it all from a distance, is instinctual and defensive: her "hand involuntarily flies to [her] own [hair]" (26). That the boy, with his "exuberant bush of fuzzy hair", is in a position to scornfully imply that the girl is hiding curls ("What do you want to cover up?"), reveals the extent to which beauty is gendered (26). Being male, he is exempt from the straight-hair rule. Moreover, situated as he is in a position of patriarchal power and having internalised the ideals of white feminine beauty, he enforces these regulative norms on women. It is again the male gaze that rules over the female body.

As if to reassure herself after this episode, Frieda goes on to describe in detail the procedure undertaken daily to avert the danger of frizzy 'trouble' hair:

I check my preparations: the wet hair wrapped over large rollers to separate the strands, dried then swirled around my head, secured overnight with a nylon stocking, dressed with vaseline to keep the strands smooth and straight and then pulled back tightly to stem any remaining tendency to curl. (26)

Her ritualised account of hair-straightening suggests the repetitiveness of gender enactment, the daily "stylization of the body", as Butler terms it, that must be carried out daily to ensure that her hair reads as beautiful (*Gender Trouble* 179). Her father, who acts as a patriarchal surveyor and regulator of gender norms, approves of this process. As Frieda remarks, "Father likes it [that is, her hair] pulled back. He says it is a mark of honesty to have the forehead and ears exposed" (Wicomb, "When the Train Comes" 26). Like the imitation leather bags that signify wealth, a person's appearance is treated as an indicator of his/her inner character. At risk in an untidy appearance, then, is the admirable human quality of honesty. Frieda's neat, straightened, pulled-back hairstyle therefore functions as an external sign, or "mark", of her virtuous humanness. Hair, in other words, has suddenly attained a moral dimension, where curly hair covering the ears and forehead indicates dishonesty and, by association, the subhuman. For this reason, Frieda, having been socialised into adopting these views, makes the anxious declaration that she "would not allow some unkempt youth to comment on her hair", which suggests an attempt to distance herself both from the girl (who either allows herself to be taunted or opens herself to taunting by leaving her hair unstraightened) and the

boy (whose “fuzzy” hair associates him with unkemptness). Through this process of exclusion, she separates herself off as honest, and therefore more human, by virtue of her straightened hair.

Dot and Julie in “Friends and *Goffels*”, however, are not as successful in portraying, on the surface of their bodies, white standards of beauty. With their dark skin, “short frizzy hair and flat noses with prominent cheekbones”, both fall short of ‘ideal’ femininity (Wicomb 95). Their gender failure is spotted on the first day of high school and they are ruthlessly persecuted for it by the class bully, Angus Geddes. From atop the teacher’s desk, he presents the following speech in front of the class:

Amongst them there were a pair of *goffels* who it seemed were to remain in the A class. Imagine, *goffels* in the English-medium Latin class! It was no doubt a mistake, and it was up to the *goffels* themselves to check if they did not in fact belong with the other *goffels* in the Afrikaans-medium woodwork and needlework class, otherwise there might have to be a *goffel* investigation. (94)

Ironically, at the end of this address advocating white standards of hegemony and racialised discrimination, he “thrust[s] a revolutionary fist in the air” and so performs the Black power salute – a gesture associated with freedom and revolution (95). By naming Dot and Julie *goffels*, he asserts his power over them. More than this, though, his comic depiction of the two girls renders them less than human. Carroll persuasively argues that “to represent a person [. . .] as nonbeautiful, or as ugly”, using, for instance, techniques of horror or humour, is to “portray them as in some way or ways imperfect instances of the concept of the human” (37), and thus “unworthy of the moral concern that befits a human person” (42). Angus employs just this technique in his ‘humorous’ speech, which brings “peals of laughter” from the rest of the class (Wicomb, “Friends and *Goffels*” 94). Using (weak) satire, he implies that the ‘non-white’ features of Dot and Julie indicate their intellectual deficiency, and therefore that they belong in the handwork and needlework class. Through humour, they are rendered unintelligent and comical beings undeserving of human dignity.

In this environment, the two friends quickly learn “the indexes of worth amongst coloureds”, the most crucial of which is that “good hair would always override other *disabilities*” (95, my emphasis). The portrayal of ‘non-white’ features as a disability recalls a haunting moment from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. The passage in question describes his “brother” (a fellow black man) coming across a “crippled veteran” who tells him: “Resign yourself to your color the way I got used to my stump; we’re both victims” (107). According

to the disabled veteran, blackness and physical disability are comparable states of being. His implied point is that black people do not possess all the required components of the *able* human body because they *lack* whiteness. By this logic, black people are incomplete whereas white people are whole. Therefore, on a bodily level, blackness renders a person not quite human. In his rejection, or rather protest against, the idea of blackness as a disability, Fanon declares that he will “refuse to accept that amputation” with all his “strength” (107). Though later Dot and Julie, in “Friends and *Goffels*”, similarly embrace their ‘non-white’ characteristics (at university they “sport[] unkempt Afros” [Wicomb 98]), they attempt to conform to these “indexes of worth” modelled on whiteness in their first year of high school. Indeed, both endure physical pain in the name of the straight-hair rule so as to embody, to a certain degree, their peers’ ideal of feminine beauty. Neither ever mentions, however, the “visible evidence of a hot comb that occasionally, accidentally, singed an earlobe or left a tell-tale scar on the forehead” (97). Though they are able to disguise their ‘frizzy’ hair in this way, their dark skin, “prominent cheekbones”, and “flat noses” remain unalterable.

Frieda’s father believes that he can change, or at least disguise, his daughter’s ‘disability’ – her protruding cheekbones – by ensuring it is concealed by fat. As I mentioned earlier, her eating habits, like her movements, fall under his jurisdiction entirely. At the dinner table, for instance, his “eyes flash a red light” when she has not eaten to his satisfaction, followed by the maxim never to leave anything on her plate or the command to eat a second helping (“When the Train Comes” 24). He reasons that, in order to avoid “cheekbones that jut out like a Hottentot’s”, she must “[f]ill them out until they’re shiny and plump as pumpkins” (24). In this manner, he conceals his ‘native’ roots by literally masking his daughter’s cheekbones in fat. Moreover, for Frieda’s father, corpulence also stands as “a symbol of bourgeois success, an outward manifestation of [his] accumulated wealth” (Bordo 191). Frieda’s plump body indicates to the rest of the world that they “are not paupers with nothing to eat” (Wicomb, “When the Train Comes” 24). Given this evidence, Denise Handlarski’s contention that Frieda’s father is “deliberately attempting to subdue her sexuality (or perceived sexual availability)” by making her fat, seems to me inaccurate (53). On the contrary, he is aiming to *increase* Frieda’s feminine beauty by making her body signify, by means of hidden cheekbones and a well-fed body, white characteristics and wealth. Food, in this case, is used as a disciplinary mechanism that regulates and shapes the female body according to the patriarchal figure’s ideal of femininity and beauty.

Either Frieda’s father does not realise that contemporary feminine norms value the slim female body above the shapely one, or, in his estimation, it is more important to conceal

the ‘taint’ of blackness. In her analysis of changing conceptions of femininity, Bordo shows how, by the beginning of the twentieth century, “excess body weight came to be seen as reflecting moral or personal inadequacy, or lack of will” (192). With increasing worth placed on the slim, athletic female body, obese women came to be perceived as “disturbing partly because they embody resistance to cultural norms [of beauty]” (203). As Frieda soon recognises, she has sacrificed slenderness in exchange for a ‘white-featured’ face and knows that boys “do not look at [her]” because she is “fat” (Wicomb, “When the Train Comes” 22). At the train station, she reflects on the loathing she feels of her overweight body, especially her breasts, which are “fat and, in spite of [her] uplift bra, flat as vetkoek” (22). This “anxiety over soft, protuberant body-parts”, Bordo argues, is related to the symbolic evocation of “helpless infancy and [. . .] maternal femininity” (208). In Frieda’s case, her rounded, soft figure signifies the threat of domesticity and the maternal, either by becoming a “madam’s” servant or falling pregnant (she and her friends vow that they will “never have babies”) (Wicomb, “When the Train Comes” 24, 28).

Like Dot and Julie, Frieda’s failure to enact slim femininity singles her out as a target of ridicule and hostility. She is treated as a kind of subhuman, comical figure by children, who call her “fatty fatty vetkoek”, and the boy at the station, who looks at her with “unmistakable contempt” (30, 33).<sup>14</sup> Since Frieda is about to embark on a journey into the public (as opposed to domestic) sphere, perhaps the reactions of “disgust and anxiety to [her] fleshy female parts” are in fact, as Bordo understands this tendency, a response to her symbolic “evocation[] of maternal power, newly threatening in an age when women are making their way into arenas traditionally reserved for men: law, business, higher education” (208).

### **Psychic Excess, Protest, and Re-Humanisation**

So what is this psychic excess, and what will constitute a subversive or *de*-instituting repetition?

(Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” 315)

In “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”, Butler contends that the psychic, or the unconscious, always exceeds a particular gender performance, and that it is this excess that enables, or sometimes results in, the subversion of gender and/or sexuality:

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<sup>14</sup> I indicated earlier that the boy’s disdain for Frieda also has to do with the fact that she speaks English and is going to a “white school”, as he puts it (34).

[T]he refusal to conflate the subject with the psyche marks the psychic as that which exceeds the domain of the conscious subject. [. . .] It is this excess which erupts within the intervals of those repeated gestures and acts that construct the apparent uniformity of heterosexual positionalities, indeed which compels the repetition itself, and which guarantees its perpetual failure. (315)

Gender (and sexuality), in other words, cannot be said to express an inner “psychic reality” since the psyche, as the unconscious and unknowable, is outside the control of the subject and, for this reason, the psychic has the potential to surpass, “exceed”, or intrude on any given gender performance (315). That the enactment of gender is a series of repetitions, Butler argues, proves that a given heteronormative identity is never “fully accomplished”, and, therefore, that a person’s inner psyche and external identity cannot be “self-identical” (315). As such, a gendered identity is by nature unstable. The subject attempts to subdue the “perpetual threat of disruption” by repetitively re-enacting “the same” so as to create the illusion of unity or coherence. Psychic excess, which is to say, moments of “occasional *discontinuity*” and “de-formity”, reveal gender performativity as just that – a performance that is “a politically tenuous construction” (179).

If gender is a politically loaded performance regulated by the disciplinary law of heteronormativity, then the subversion of unified gender has political ramifications. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler shows how drag destabilises “the distinction between inner and outer psychic space” and so “mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (174). Similarly, though less explicitly, the characters in each of Wicomb’s short stories expose and destabilise gender as a performance by subverting normative femininity. Rather than attempting to conceal psychic disruption of gender coherence, they embrace and employ these moments of discontinuity to their advantage. In effect, their acts of gender subversion are also a kind of protest against the restrictive heteronormative framework in which they are situated, and so are politically significant.

Frieda stages her protest, first, through the slight but important act of opposing her father’s will, and, secondly, by returning the boy’s gaze and reclaiming her body as a site of value. Her astute observation that feminine obedience is a “habit” rather than an inherent female trait, renders her resistance believable (Wicomb, “When the Train Comes” 24). Put differently, her intuitive sense that gender is a socialised and repetitive act comparable to a habit gives her leverage to break the habitual repetition of obedience. Thus, she “find[s] the courage to pretend that [her father’s command] is a question” and disobeys his order that she

“come with [him]” (31). It is as if, in the “interval between the acts” of subservience, the psychic exceeds and intrudes into Frieda’s coherent performance of gender, causing a disunity (Butler, “Imitation” 317). The fact that this act requires “courage” and causes her to “flush with the effort of it”, however, suggests that there is a degree of conscious intentionality behind it (Wicomb, “When the Train Comes” 31). Rather than censoring the ‘interference’ of psychic excess, she wilfully uses it as a means of resisting patriarchal control.

This minor gesture of opposition foreshadows Frieda’s much more deliberate and striking act of defiance against the boy. When the train does finally come and she is about to mount the steps, she

meet[s] the triumphant eyes of the tall boy standing by the whitewashed gate. Above the noise of a car screeching to a halt, the words roll off [her] tongue disdainfully:

Why you look and kyk gelyk,  
Am I miskien of gold gemake? (35)

The impotent anger that the boy’s taunting inspired in Frieda – her desire to “hurl” herself at him and “stab” his eyes – here translates into effective action against his misogynist look (34). Instead of lowering her gaze as she had done at the start of the story, she meets his eyes directly and so reverses the direction of the gaze (21). In so doing, she not only asserts her agency and subjectivity, but also affirms her humanity. Indeed, if the sexist male look is dehumanising insofar as it renders the Other an object, then Frieda’s return of the gaze is a reclamation of her human subjectivity. Furthermore, her subversive two-lined ditty redefines his gaze as one of longing and identifies herself as the coveted and valuable subject ‘made of gold’. By reducing his look to a childish gaze of desire, she strips it of its masculine, dehumanising power.

In a similar act of protest against white normative femininity, Dot in “Friends and *Goffels*” re-appropriates and embraces the word coined to exclude her and Julie. Initially, they avoid all reference to it, so that “not once, not for many months, did they say the word: *goffel*” (97). While it remains unsaid, however, the insult exerts its dehumanising power over them. Only towards the end of the year, in response to Julie’s question as to whether Dot’s mother knows “what the boys called them”, does she utter the word out loud for the first time:

Dot said no, that her mummy wasn't up to it, and then she said it out loud, splitting the word: her mummy did not know what a *gof-fel* was. They fell about laughing. They were *goffels*, and *goffels* wouldn't stoop to the dubious freedom of dressing up on the last day. (97)

Dot's self-confident announcement, in sharp contrast to her demure subservience during Geddes's speech, signals a moment of gender dis-unity, or psychic excess, in which the 'unfeminine' disrupts the 'feminine'. The series of reiterated actions which, up until this point, constituted her docile identity, is de-instituted by a subversive act of self-assertion and empowerment. She directly opposes Geddes's speech and positively redefines the derogatory term, thus declaring her and Julie's ownership over the meaning of '*goffel*'. By breaking the word in half, she quite literally destroys it as a mechanism of control, stripping it of its power by turning it into a comical and laughable expression. *Goffelhood*, previously a deprecating word for failed white femininity, becomes a 'condition' to be embraced, a dignified mode of being liberated from the confining strictures of standardised beauty. As I mentioned earlier, Dot, and Julie for a time, end up cherishing their frizzy hair by parading their unkempt Afros with pride at university.<sup>15</sup>

Of all the characters, however, Mrs Pringle's 'strike' against normative femininity is perhaps the most explicit and rebellious. Hers is a protest against the maternal, domestic life of imposed limitations, and she carries it out by means of agoraphobia – the fear or avoidance of public spaces. As Bordo notes, agoraphobia became common among women in the early 50s and 60s, a period characterised by the "reassertion of domesticity and dependency as the feminine ideal" (170). During this time, paradigmatic femininity was represented as "childlike, non-assertive, helpless without a man", and satisfied by a domestic and maternal world (170). Bordo argues that the agoraphobic takes this domestic conception of femininity to the extreme: she embodies in "hyperliteral form" her homebound position by refusing to move outside the domestic sphere (175). In Butlerian terms, she performs her feminine gender *too* well, to the point of immoderation, and, in this manner, exposes it as a performance. The agoraphobic, for Bordo, represents protest and retreat "in the same gesture" (174):

[I]f femininity is, as Susan Brownmiller has said, at its core a "tradition of imposed limitations", then an unwillingness to limit

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<sup>15</sup> After spending several years in Scotland, however, Julie returns changed: "But Julie was no *goffel*; Julie looked exactly like Naomi Campbell with long, sleek hair that bounced like a horse's tail, and a complexion that glowed deep honey" (98). Her transformation is particularly disturbing to Dot, who judges her friend as having yielded to white norms of feminine beauty.

oneself, even in the pursuit of femininity, breaks the rules. But, of course, in another sense the rules remain fully in place. (180)

While she protests her limitations by performing her domestic role to an unlimited degree, the agoraphobic also exemplifies the docile female body *par excellence* insofar as she plays by the regulations of femininity, albeit excessively. In the same way that the hysteric and the anorectic (to use other examples of Bordo's) embody cultural conceptions of ideal femininity followed to their extremes (emotional instability and slimness, respectively), the agoraphobic enacts in concentrated symbolic form the domestic, maternal woman who never leaves the house.

In Wicomb's story, symptoms of agoraphobia are suggested by Mrs Pringle's confused headspace and the language of sickness that Annie, the woman who works in the Pringle house, uses to describe her sudden transformation. Though she enters the spare bedroom decisively, Mrs Pringle "does not remember why she is there", and when she begins stripping off her clothes, Annie, watching through the window, observes that she "moves as if in a trance" ("Mrs Pringle's Bed" 47, 48). After offering her mistress tea, Annie remarks that her face is "strange", and, moreover, that "the woman appears not to see her" (49). From this point onwards, Mrs Pringle not only refuses to venture into public, but also avoids moving beyond the bounds of her bed, where she lies "like any invalid" (52). By rejecting the public sphere entirely, she goes on a "strike" against "the renunciations usually demanded of women", as Robert Seidenberg and Karen DeCrow put it (qtd. in Bordo 175).

Mrs Pringle's agoraphobia, however, is characterised more by protest than retreat. Apart from her strike against the male-centred public domain (by deliberately renouncing it and so consciously excluding herself), she also protests against her homebound confinement by abandoning all typically feminine domestic and maternal chores. Unlike the usual agoraphobic, who presumably continues to perform her gender-assigned activities at home, Mrs Pringle refuses to perform any of her gender roles. Or, more accurately, she loses interest in conforming to stereotypical femininity. She accepts indifferently that "someone [namely, Annie] seems to be taking charge of things" in the house (Wicomb, Mrs Pringle's Bed" 49); responds to the offer of being brought her knitting "as if she had never heard of such a thing" (52); admits that "even the old pleasures of shopping [had] lost their appeal" (54); refuses to "gossip" (54); and, finally, shows little interest in her daughter or her grandson (she merely "smiles healthily" at the newborn baby and admires his "Tom-inspired features" [54]). Through her peculiar form of agoraphobia involving the rejection of so-called feminine

responsibilities, Mrs Pringle destabilises what Bordo refers to as “the ideological moorings for a rigorously dualistic sexual division of labor” (171).

It seems to me that, during a moment of exhaustion in which she fails to perform her gender ‘right’, Mrs Pringle realises her subversive ability to “act decisively” by discovering gender’s core weakness – that it has no core (Wicomb, “Mrs Pringle’s Bed” 50). That gender is a “surface signification” without internal substance means that it is open to resistance through a refusal to repeat (Butler, “Imitation” 179). In other words, domestic femininity *does not have to be performed*. The intrusion of psychic excess is welcomed by Mrs Pringle. From the moment she gets into bed, she conceives of her decision as a conscious, and satisfying, refusal to conform to domestic womanhood. This is suggested by her sense of relief and the language of empowerment that is used in describing her “decisive” resolution as a choice of her own “at last free of doubt” (Wicomb, “Mrs Pringle’s Bed” 50). Further, unlike the agoraphobic who, according to Bordo, seeks to “cement dependency and attachment”, Mrs Pringle establishes her independence from her husband (176). She authoritatively names the spare bedroom “her room”, a statement which surprises or intimidates her husband to such a degree that he no longer subjects her to his “clipped advice” and speeches (Wicomb, “Mrs Pringle’s Bed” 53). Similarly, the bed itself becomes *hers* (55). Traditionally a symbol of reproduction and maternal activities, the bed is transformed into a site of defiance against the conventional notion of woman as “chief emotional and physical nurturer” (Bordo 171). Her bed, as a publically declared space of her own, is not entered by her husband, nor does she allow her grandson’s nappies to be changed on it (Wicomb, “Mrs Pringle’s Bed” 55).

Importantly, it is the simplicity and gender-neutral aspect of the spare room that appeals to Mrs Pringle in the first place. As she remarks, musing on her resolute decision, “That must have been the trigger: the bare surfaces; the solid, tucked-in, coverless three-quarter bed, with no untidy drape or indeterminate hanging; the cupboard clear of all *feminine clutter* – a place where one can start afresh” (50, my emphasis). For Mrs Pringle, femininity is associated with “clutter”, connoting claustrophobia, immobility, and burden. As an explicitly unfeminine environment, the spare room allows for a recovery of her independence and revived sense of selfhood. It provides her with a neutral space, liberated of feminine burdens, in which she can “start afresh” and explore new, unburdened beginnings.

In this domestic sphere, Mrs Pringle symbolically enters the public realm through the medium of newspapers. We learn that her “cover to cover” reading of newspapers, religiously brought to her each evening by her husband, “occup[y] many a waking hour” (53, 54).

Crucially, her engagement with her material is active and critical: “she considers editorials, takes sides on issues of local, national or international matters” and “discuss[es] politics” with Daisy, her daughter (54). These activities again separate her from the agoraphobic in ‘retreat’, since she actively participates in the public world beyond her domestic environment. From the comfort of her bed, she asserts her ability to think independently by taking part in discussions on public politics, a domain traditionally reserved for men. This interesting depiction of Mrs Pringle as a participant of “two worlds” – the “one that she encounters in newspapers” and the other “domestic world” of her room – cleverly blurs the boundaries between public and private and, further, draws attention to the historically entrenched dichotomies of public/private, male/female, masculine/feminine (54).

The disciplinary consequences of Mrs Pringle’s rebellion against gender norms are very real: in the end, after she has spent years in bed, her husband leaves her. And yet, it is his departure that signals the end of her strike against femininity and the masculine public sphere: “When the door clicks shut, she eases herself out of bed, stretches her stiff arms, and from the cupboard selects a bright blue skirt and a white shirt. Do these still fit her? She can hear Annie running her bath” (59). In these closing lines, Mrs Pringle’s self-assured emergence from the bed, as well as her confident choice of an outfit and imminent bath, suggests that she is preparing to venture into a public world beyond her room. She is momentarily poised – a revived, independent, and assertive woman – before a threshold of possibilities.

## **Conclusion**

For both Butler and Bordo, following in the wake of Foucault, the body is a text culturally constituted and made to signify within the disciplinary structures of patriarchal heteronormativity. Wicomb’s writing investigates, in the day-to-day lives of ‘coloured’ women, the docile female body as it is shaped to perform normative femininity through practices of obedience, adherence to white standards of beauty, and the execution of domestic and maternal roles.

All the protagonists, however, fail or refuse in certain fundamental ways to perform their gender ‘correctly’. Frieda, Dot, and Julie, on the one hand, are *unable* to embody certain norms of feminine beauty. They are judged against Kant’s notion of human beauty, which argues that the beautiful human is he/she who most closely conforms to the concept of human

being. Consequently, Frieda's obesity marks her out as unfeminine according to the slim standard of beauty, and therefore less than human. Similarly, the so-called black features of Dot and Julie, surveyed through a racialised Western aesthetic lens, render them imperfect women and thus defective instantiations of the human being. As such, all three of them are treated as objects of ridicule undeserving of human dignity and respect. Mrs Pringle, on the other hand, after an arduous life of conforming to the feminine ideal of a typical housewife, reaches a point at which she *refuses* to perform her assigned role of domesticity. In this, she too fails at her gender performance.

Each character, as a result of her failure to enact normative femininity, perceives gender as a construction and hence a repetitive performance which she need not necessarily repeat. Since gender norms, as Butler puts it, are "phantasmatic" and, in effect, "impossible to embody", the inevitable intrusion of the psyche into the feminine performance offers a potential 'way out' of debilitating conceptions of ideal femininity (*Gender Trouble* 179). Each of Wicomb's characters, in her own way, employs instances of psychic excess as a means of protest against patriarchal structures. Frieda's disobedience, it seems to me, is an act of opposition against a father figure who has governed her life. Even more subversively, she returns the boy's gaze and redefines her body in terms of value and worth. In a similar manner, Dot reappropriates the degrading term '*goffel*' by stripping it of its power and making it her own. Finally, Mrs Pringle climbs into her (appropriated) bed and refuses to emerge, and in this fashion stages a strike against all that she has been deprived of and made to do as an 'ideal' wife and mother.

For Wicomb's female characters, these acts of protest against the men who attempt to confine and restrict them within heteronormative femininity are also moments of recovery and reclamation. By refusing, like Fanon, to accept their 'non-white' features as a disability, by rejecting white standards of beauty and embracing *goffelhood*, by redefining their bodies as sites worthy of respect, and by actively taking part in the public sphere of politics, they reclaim their place in the world as beautiful, politically conscious agents. More than this, though, they recover their very humanity, and, in so doing, subvert and redefine the possibilities of 'coloured' women in South Africa.

## Chapter 4

### Powerful Mourning and the Animal Gaze in Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning*

Until now, my focus has been the human Other. I have examined, more specifically, how racialised and gendered identity formations are shaped, and also resisted, within the white and/or male heteronormative framework, often through an unstable power dynamic initiated by the gaze. Coetzee's *Waiting*, on the one hand, draws attention to the process of Othering as it operates through the inscriptive/interpretive look, while Wicomb's work, on the other, develops at the junction between race, gender, and the gaze. In this chapter, I introduce the non-human Other, that is, 'the animal',<sup>16</sup> as it is depicted in *White Lightning*. Justin Cartwright's novel, which explores interspecies relationships, foregrounds the intersectionality between the human and non-human Other, and thereby ushers the posthumanist question of 'the animal' into my discussion of the racialised and gendered human.

The disillusioned James Kronk, whose first-person narrative constitutes the majority of *White Lightning*, has returned to South Africa to spend time with his dying mother in a retirement village near Cape Town. His last days with her are permeated with reflections on the past: from a childhood in Cape Town and his father's desertion to his later years as a struggling film-maker in London and his son's death. During this time of mourning and self-reflection, Kronk develops a friendship with Piet, a baboon held in captivity on a nearby farm. Around the same time, he finds himself inextricably bound up in the lives of a Xhosa family from the seaside township. For Daisy and her children, he provides financial assistance and ensures that Zwelakhe, who is HIV-positive, receives medical attention. After his mother's death, he buys a farm near the retirement village with an inheritance from his father, where he relocates Daisy's family and builds Piet a large enclosure, hoping for a simple life in this rural idyllic setting. By the end of the novel, however, Kronk's dreams have collapsed and he returns to London, his first-person voice replaced, in the last chapter, by an anonymous third-person narrator.

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<sup>16</sup> Staying true to Derrida, I have used scare quotes for the term 'the animal' to draw attention to its contentious status. Like the imposed terms 'barbarian' and 'coloured', 'the animal' is a category that contains hidden violence and therefore must be put under pressure. As Marie-Louise Mallet maintains: "the violence done to the animal begins, [Derrida] says, with this pseudo-concept of 'the animal', with the use of this word in the singular, as though all animals from the earthworm to the chimpanzee constituted a homogeneous set to which '(the hu)man' would be radically opposed" (x).

In the course of this narrative, Kronk undergoes a perceptible shift in consciousness which alters his approach towards the Other. His early self-absorbed cynicism gives way to a sympathetic regard for others, crystallising in surprising relationships across species, race, and (to a lesser extent) gender. Using Judith Butler's theory on the power of grief in *Precarious Life*, I trace this emotional and moral transformation. Kronk's experience of mourning for his mother and son facilitates, I argue, his internal development by implicating him in, and rendering him responsible for, the immensely precarious lives of Daisy's family and Piet. Rather than attempting to resolve his grief, he treats it as a resource by redirecting it towards a recognition of the shared vulnerability of fellow humans and animals.

As Kronk discovers, however, identification with the Other is inevitably fraught with difficulties and his various relationships soon begin to collapse. I read the series of disasters that occur in the closing pages as an example of Derridean unconditional hospitality turned to hostility. Those acts towards the Other that Kronk initially believes to be a 'yes' of inclusion eventually manifest in a 'no' of exclusion, the violence of which Cartwright depicts in the terrible, and connected, deaths of Zwelakhe and Piet. It seems to me that the trauma of these events, and Kronk's recognition of his involvement in them, is related to the switch to third-person narration in the final chapter.

Finally, I examine the inconsistencies of trans-species relationships, the subject of which preoccupies many of Kronk's philosophical reflections on animals. In my analysis of how people sustain and rationalise contradictory attitudes towards non-humans, I turn to the notion of the animal gaze framed by Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Here, I propose that identification with an animal's vulnerability (to suffering and to death) is crucially dependent on *seeing* 'the animal' – that is to say, perceiving him/her as a seeing subject who has a point of view. Though Kronk provides interesting insight into modes of removing or shielding 'the animal' from the human gaze and thereby impeding the possibility of responsibility, he too displays inconsistency in his relationships with animals. In the end, the question that emerges from the novel is whether or not he is at all ethically different from his "fellow countrymen" (Cartwright 243).

## The Power of Mourning

Suffering can yield an experience of humility, of vulnerability, of impressionability and dependence, and these can become resources, if we do not ‘resolve’ them too quickly; they can move us beyond and against the vocation of the paranoid victim who regenerates infinitely the justifications for war.

(Butler, *Precarious Life* 150)

In *Precarious Life*, a philosophical critique of post-9/11 America and the War on Terror, Butler argues that if we are to move beyond the cyclical “justifications for war”, we must re-examine the role of grief in response to loss and, in so doing, approach it as a valuable political resource rather than an experience to be feared and briskly resolved. She contends that grief, as a state of dispossession, is “a way of being *for* another or *by virtue of* another” and therefore a mode of relation in which one is outside or “*beside oneself*” (24). As such, grieving – where we are, in a sense, outside the self and for another – can become a “resource for politics” by opening us to “a consideration of the vulnerability of others”, so as to “critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others” (30). Butler maintains that the attempt to repress or avoid grief through rapid, usually violent, resolution precludes identification with the Other by *unconsciously or consciously denying his/her vulnerability*. As she puts it, the “denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalised fantasy of mastery) can fuel the instruments of war” (29).

Reflecting on the tension between human interdependence and autonomy, Butler frames her notion of grief and shared physical vulnerability in the form of two questions:

Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference? (30)

Mourning, that “slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself”, is one possible means through which to recognise interdependence and, further, assume the responsibility for others that this insight entails (30). For Butler, then, by engaging with our exposure to grief we can tap into an ethical resource that facilitates a return “to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of

one another” (30). Allowing ourselves to be touched by grief, rather than seeking to resolve it through acts of hostility (as America has done), can yield hospitality towards the vulnerable Other. To do otherwise and attempt to secure ourselves against both grief and a sense of vulnerability is “to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way” (30).

Butler acknowledges that “[b]y insisting on a ‘common’ corporeal vulnerability”, she “may seem to be positing a new basis for humanism” (42). Her remark that she “consider[s] this differently”, however, distances her work from a humanist framework (43). This is because there is no guarantee that humanisation, through perceived vulnerability, will in fact take place since the recognition of vulnerability is dependent on “variable norms” (43). Butler’s point here is that, across cultures, different norms or standards govern the recognition or misrecognition of vulnerability, which means that what one person perceives as vulnerability may remain unrecognisable to another. As a result, there is “always the possibility that a vulnerability will not be recognised” and that humanisation, in turn, will not take place (43). Therefore, if recognition of shared vulnerability is dependent on norms, it cannot function as a basis from humanism.

More than this, though, Butler’s work seems to gesture beyond humanism towards a posthumanist concern for the common vulnerability of all sentient life. While her theory on mourning offers much-needed insight into the precariousness of certain human lives, especially those in the third world, I want to suggest that it can be coherently extended to ‘the animal’. Indeed, her reiterated assertion that vulnerability is a universal condition resonates with Jeremy Bentham’s claim that animals share with us the vulnerability to suffering. Butler’s theory on the power of mourning thus lends itself to an examination of shared vulnerability not only across race, gender, and class, but also across species.

The opening lines of *White Lightning* depict James Kronk in a state of mourning. He is “waiting for [his] mother to die”, not with “eagerness or curiosity or sadness [. . .] but with a fullness of heart, as though into that tricky organ a lot of history and deception and regret had flooded” (1). In response to her plea for him not to kiss her because she is “disgusting”, his “heart”, he says, “had broken” (2). Later, he admits that his “mind, overburdened by the onrushing event [of death, is] erratic”, and, similarly, that his thoughts are “disordered” though he has “made allowances for [himself] because death was creating advance eddies” (3, 5). These passages, which describe the restless anxiety brought about by his mother’s impending death, exemplify Butler’s notion of grief as the experience of undergoing “something outside one’s control and find[ing] that one is beside oneself, not at one with

oneself" (*Precarious Life* 28). The metaphors of fullness, flooding, burden, and advance eddies which Kronk uses to express his agitated mental state suggest that his bounded being, signifying autonomy and independence, has been breached and swamped, rendering him (to use Butler's terminology) "undone and open to becoming unbounded" (28). For this reason, he portrays his experience of grief in the language of destabilisation and excess, representing it as an external and intangible impact beyond his control.

Kronk is, in a sense, thrown outside himself and exposed, rendering him self-reflexively receptive and 'open' to his interdependent development among others. Speaking of our social formation and the imprint of other people that we all bear, Butler refers to "the primary others" that "not only live on in the fibre of the boundary that contains me [. . .], but also haunt the way I am" (28). In his state of mourning, Kronk is swamped by these others that breach and disturb the surface of his memory, demanding attention. When he first enters his mother's cottage, for instance, the "familiar scent", combined with the feeling and sight of her, probably activates his childhood memory of "the way she used to hold [him] between her knees and towel [him] after a bath" (Cartwright 40, 52). Faced with the imminent loss of a primary other, Kronk is undone by the sensory experience of his mother. In this undoing, he is overwhelmed by other recollections: the drowning of a childhood acquaintance, his father's desertion, his estranged relationship with his wife, Eleanor, and affair with Ulla, and the death of his son. These recollections, the reader comes to realise, constitute the "history" of "deception and regret" that results in his "fullness of heart". The opening lines of the novel thus foreshadow the retrospective account that follows.

Of the spectres from Kronk's past that revisit him through memory, the death of his son is perhaps the most traumatic. In fact, his recounting of Matt's death and the period that followed reveal his attempt to *resolve* his grief rather than taking on, as Butler puts it, "the task of mourning" (*Precarious Life* 19). When he finds out that his son has died, Kronk describes himself as "mute[,] [his] grief and [his] shame made [him] mute", and goes on to reflect that, afterwards, he and Eleanor "found it hard to speak ever again" and "could not be in the same room again" (Cartwright 56). He also cuts himself off from Ulla, so that he loses his "son and two women all on one day" (56). By detaching and isolating himself in this way, he tries to manage and resolve the grief that continually threatens to undo him. He raises his guard and so secures himself against perceiving, and identifying with, the vulnerability of others. Kronk's reaction to grief here is reminiscent of his mother's "doctored" photograph albums in which "[p]eople who upset her [were] cut out", as if the act of excision would resolve the grief that they had caused her or her family (48). One of those erased in this

manner is Sephos, the son of Kronk's friend's cook whose drowning he had witnessed. Both he and his mother, then, perform acts of self-separation and erasure in an effort to resolve their grief.

Kronk's approach to his mother's forthcoming death, however, is engaged and active. In stark contrast to his mute, disconnected state after his son died, he is energetically talkative with his dying mother. While sitting at her bedside, he often finds himself "talking in a quiet and warm voice, completely naturally, as if [he has] in the face of a death acquired some bardic qualities" (52). Here, he explicitly links his conversational impulse to his confrontation with death and mourning. This is an important dimension of grief, for communicating with others crucially facilitates recognition of and identification with shared corporeal vulnerability. This is also how I understand Butler's following contention regarding the ethical importance of articulating the claim of another's vulnerability:

[O]ur utterance enacts the very recognition of vulnerability and so shows the importance of recognition itself in sustaining vulnerability. We perform the recognition by making the claim, and that is surely a very good reason to make the claim. (*Precarious Life* 43)

The utterance which asserts the vulnerability of another, essential to the process of recognition, does not necessarily have to be spoken out loud. As I will show in the section that follows, this claim can occur internally and silently – as a thought or a question, for instance.

### **Recognising the Mortal Body**

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well.

(Butler, *Precarious Life* 25)

An important dimension of Kronk's recognition of shared corporeal vulnerability is his perception of the Other's mortality, that is, his/her exposure to death. This recognition is based on certain 'utterances' that avow another's defenceless state as a body, as an exposed being, as a precarious life teetering on the precipice of death. The reader is provided with access to the avowal, often conveyed in the form of a thought, in Kronk's first-person narrative. His state of mourning, which is also a mode of receptivity and communication,

leads him to the recognition of our collective vulnerability to death and, further, the related responsibility of hospitality towards the Other.

Kronk has not always been hospitable to those around him, as his recollections soon show. His dubious relationships with women in the past, especially his treatment of Eleanor, are characteristic of a man who, if not explicitly sexist, has preconceived ideas about the gendered roles of women. While he pursues a film career – and an affair with Ulla – in London, his wife is left at home to care for their son in the typical maternal and domestic role. His neglect of his family replicates his own father’s familial desertion for a writing career in the United States and an American wife. What is more, Kronk has no qualms about making generalised statements concerning women, as is evident from his remark: “I have contradictory ideas. Women have pointed this out to me, which I have come to understand is the role of women: to locate the magnetic pole in any relationship and steer for it” (Cartwright 2). Given the repeated breakdown of these relationships, his statement implies a supposedly universal, and destructive, female characteristic which contributes to a relationship’s collapse. By means of gender stereotyping, he shifts the blame of failure from himself to an intrinsic fault in women and their ‘role’.

It is only after Kronk’s return to South Africa that he begins rethinking himself in relation to women. During one of his extended reflections on the filming of *Suzi Crispin, Night Nurse* (a soft-porn movie that he directed), he remembers a scene involving naked women washing one another. This scene, which in retrospect deeply disturbs him, clearly represents a shift in moral consciousness.

A strange thing: these naked bodies, pretending to be nurses after hours, aroused in me a deep *fellow feeling*, which I have never quite lost, for the peculiarities, the strange topography and burdens, of female bodies. [. . .] No surprise that women were so different, but gathered here, naked, they were *defenceless* and *sexless*.

(69, my emphasis)

The group of naked women, far from arousing him erotically, in fact stimulate a “fellow feeling” of empathy. As defenceless and sexless naked bodies whose internal characters have been pornographically eclipsed, they evoke for Kronk a sense of shared human vulnerability. Even more interestingly, though, he associates them with death:

For me, this scene, designed to bring sex to our film, was deeply dispiriting: we are just bodies subsiding gently. The naked women soaping each other with extreme artificiality also produced in me

uninvited thoughts of death. And now I see that death and futility are linked. (69)

Objectification is here linked to an internal, psychic death. On a physical level too, the women's nakedness brings home to Kronk the real corporeal mortality of their bodies, whose unclothed exposure before the camera metaphorically translates into a physical vulnerability before death. Significantly, his thought process moves from a reflection on the mortality of *those* female bodies to a recognition of the shared mortality of *all* human bodies, as is suggested by the shift from the implied 'them' to the 'we' in "we are just bodies subsiding gently".

It is important to remember that Kronk views this memory from the perspective of the present. Looking back at the event, he re-remembers this group of women who were so different from him and yet also so similar, and who, like him, existed in a state of fragile mortal vulnerability. The above reflection must therefore be read as having been inflected with his present state of mourning. Indeed, immediately after the passage he admits that "it's easy as you look back to assign significance to moments or episodes of your life" (69). It seems unlikely that at the time of the event he would have reflected on it in the way that he does here. Rather, the state of grieving renders him receptive to the helplessness of these embodied women. His explicit claim of their mortality through the (silent) 'utterance' *enables* his recognition of shared vulnerability in gendered Others.

On the whole, this recognition does not translate in any interesting or healthy way into Kronk's relationship with Valerie, a woman whom he meets through his lawyer Anton Pennington. Their brief time together is fraught with tensions and deception. Kronk, on the one hand, is hesitant about making a long-term commitment to Valerie, while she, on the other, is intent on settling down with him. When he finds out that she has been having an affair with Pennington, their relationship breaks down completely. There is, however, a perceptible change to his relationship with Ulla, whom he meets again by chance in Cape Town. He is no longer obsessed by "her perfect tits" and her body (36), as he had been during their affair, but is rather captivated by her transformation from "something delicate to something durable", and even goes so far as to "allow [himself] to think how it might be to sleep for years next to this more substantial person" (36, 207). Much later, after Kronk returns to London, Ulla's request to meet up with him suggests the possibility of a long-term friendship or romantic relationship between them. This is by far his most healthy connection with a woman, and is partly facilitated, I would argue, by the act of mourning.

Cartwright's rendering of his protagonist's transformation in relation to the racialised Other is far more complex and dramatic, perhaps because race is a central theme of *White Lightning*. Kronk's early prejudiced perception of 'non-white' people, and the ambiguous tension between his racist thoughts and an awareness of this racism, is particularly interesting when read alongside his later generosity towards Daisy's family. His attitude towards 'coloured' people, for instance, is unapologetically racist. When he drives into a small nearby town soon after his return to South Africa, his first reaction is to remark that "[t]hese brown people who stop or loiter or wander along eating are not attractive people" and then, after acknowledging that "this is a cultural judgement", goes on to repeat that "[t]hese brown people, the Coloureds, are small and ugly" (57). In a similar vein, Kronk, having resolved to buy Roos's farm, observes:

In my father's book [*Animal Chatter*] black people play no part, except as amusing onlookers or helpers or servants. I can cope with trees, a piece of mountain, thick walls, mouldy thatch, a stream, some clapped-out farm machinery, but black people, children, are too much. They may be protected now. (82-83)

The apparent criticism in the first line, concerning the systematic socio-political exclusion of black people during his father's time, is strangely overshadowed, and even negated, by his language of Othering in the following lines. The implication here is that, once he owns the farm, he would rather not have to deal with the black and 'coloured' people who already live on the property. In short, he would prefer that they were moved off the land. Engaging in the common we/they dichotomy, he notes (in what seems to me a regretful tone) that "they may be protected" and reminds himself to "look at the situation carefully" (82).

As the narrative progresses, however, Kronk becomes increasingly attuned to and critical of the racism in not only fellow South Africans but also himself. Through his own experience of suffering, he comes to identify with the suffering, exploitation, and vulnerability of the racialised Other. As he notes wryly, reflecting on white privilege: "White people always have more. Somehow it is their birthright, along with the mineral rights" (89). Moreover, he begins, or at least makes an effort, to identify with raced experience, as is suggested by the way in which he wonders whether Daisy's daughter, Thandi, "ever has cosmic fears, living in a shack on the blasted sand dunes" (96). His speculations about Thandi's experience are defined by a realisation of her shared subjection to fear and suffering. The recognition of her vulnerability, I would argue, is achieved through the claim,

albeit thought and implied, that Thandi is susceptible to cosmic fears shared by all human beings.

Kronk's eventual involvement in the lives of Daisy and her family is finally prompted by an encounter with Zwelakhe, her HIV-positive nephew who is near death and therefore visibly mortal. In response to Valerie's opinion that he "shouldn't have become involved [in Daisy's situation]: it's never ending", Kronk reflects to himself: "You are involved and you can't avoid it" (173). His realisation of inescapable involvement in the lives of Others brings to mind Butler's description of grief and its power to "tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, *implicate us in lives that are not our own*, irreversibly, if not fatally" (*Precarious Life* 25, my emphasis). Kronk's entanglement in the lives of Daisy and her family turns out to be not only irreversible, but also fatal. Having acknowledged their suffering and vulnerability in the seaside township, he has a complete change of mind about black people staying on his farm and decides to relocate them to his newly bought property. By the end of the novel, we cannot fail to register the tragic irony in this decision which, although intended to 'save' Daisy's family from a hard life in the location, in fact brings about Zwelakhe's death.

While negotiating these precarious relationships across gender and race, Kronk meets Piet and a friendship begins to develop between them. At the foundation of this most radical inter-species relationship are his reflections on human mortality. Recognising his own mortality leads him to the source of his animality and, further, enables the experience of trans-species vulnerability to death and suffering. Posthumanist scholarship on animals, sensitive to the well-established association of mortality with animality, shows how the construction of the human as partly divine is related to an implicit denial of our relation to animals. As Christopher Peterson points out, "we deny our animality, in part, in order to imagine ourselves as immortal" (131). Accordingly, one might argue that we deny our mortality, in part, in order to imagine ourselves as more-than-animal and part-god, that is, as *human*. Acknowledging the vulnerability to death that humans share with animals might make us ethically reconsider our relation to the non-human. Recognising this common mortality, in other words, could function as a resource of hospitality with which to approach other species.

Derrida's highly influential work on non-humans puts forward such an argument. He contends that, through an apprehension of shared mortality and suffering (a 'non-power', he terms it), we might reach a sense of compassion for the animal Other. In his reading of Jeremy Bentham's famous assertion, which I mentioned earlier, that our treatment of animals

should hinge on whether they can *suffer* and not on whether they can speak or think, Derrida asks:

What of the vulnerability felt at the basis of this inability [that is, the capacity for suffering]? What is this nonpower at the heart of power? [. . .] Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, [. . .] the anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish. (28)

The terminology in this passage is strikingly similar to Butler's in *Precarious Life*. Her call for recognition of "'common' [human] corporeal vulnerability" and "the demands" of responsibility towards the Other that such a recognition entails, echoes Derrida's notion of thinking 'the animal' through shared mortality – a 'non-power' – which can enable an experience of compassion for the non-human Other (42, 27). In both cases, the conscious act of recognising or thinking the common condition of vulnerability (to suffering and death) is an ethical choice that can bring about identification with, and concern for, the mortal being. Moreover, Butler's concept of mourning as a political resource is related to Derrida's "anguish" since it is through the anguish of vulnerability that one might experience compassion. I would therefore think that, for Derrida, Butler's imagined community, in which living beings "are alike only in having this condition [of vulnerability] separately", can and must include the animal Other (27).

Recent theorists writing on posthumanism have explored further the points of connection between mortality, vulnerability, animality, and compassionate responsibility. Cary Wolfe, in his critique of the humanist preoccupation with rationality and self-reflexivity, argues that "Derrida fundamentally questions the structure of the 'auto-' [. . .] of humanist subjectivity by riveting our attention on the embodied finitude that we share with nonhuman animals" (570). Similarly, Peterson notes that posthumanism "emphasizes the vulnerability that humans share with animals: our exposure to others that makes all living beings available to both hospitality and violence" (127). Following these ideas to their logical end, Timothy Morton concludes, in his article on the subject, that "[t]reating nonhumans as people is a political choice that faces the vulnerability and responsibility towards other beings in which we are entangled" (84). For all these thinkers, the notion of shared trans-species vulnerability to death is central.

In *White Lighting*, Kronk's acceptance of human mortality triggers a realisation of his animality, which, in turn, enables him to perceive the vulnerability he shares with animals. Initially, however, he disingenuously longs for immortality. Anxious about his mother's approaching death, he wants to believe that some part of her being, and his, will remain immortal. He therefore turns to his father's books on collaborative animals, which appeal to the idea that "co-operative creatures" attain a form of immortality through their being "cells of a greater organism" (Cartwright 27). Influenced by this thesis, Kronk reflects as follows:

We are all immortal; life is just a phase during which our little star burns bright for a while. In this scenario my mother's star is about to dim. But I hope that in some way it is true that we continue to exist on a lesser (or maybe more exalted) plane, in incomprehensible ways.  
(27)

Importantly, human immortality takes the form of an individual's 'existence' on a different plane after death, while animal immortality involves a combined existence as a single organism, so that one animal's death is akin to the dying of a cell (which is easily replenished). Kronk's reflections involve a subtle distancing from the animal world, where 'the animal' is violently reduced to a generic category while the human is individualised and separated off as unique.

The absurdity of these initial speculations on immortality soon leads Kronk to admit that he "can't believe that [his mother], or her essence, will fly off to join the number of the stars" (41). His recognition of her mortality paves the way for an important turning point in the novel. After various pained reflections on the possibility of life after death, he proclaims that, like his mother's, his "life too will fade into the geological and physical facts, and [he doesn't] give a fuck" (53). If, as Peterson contends, to "avow our animality would be to pronounce without reservation our vulnerability and exposure to mortality", then Kronk's admission of mortality avows his animality (131). Appropriately, immediately after his rejection of the idea of immortality, "a baboon calls from the rock above", and though it seems like "a hoarse smoker's bark of alarm" he believes that "it contains a welcome" (Cartwright 53). In this dramatic foreshadowing of the inter-species friendship to come, Kronk's acceptance of his vulnerability to death is depicted as a symbolic welcoming into the world of animals.

Not long afterwards, Kronk comes across Piet in a small cage on the farm. Unlike the "moth-eaten peacock [and] the dirty clamorous ducks" in the previous paragraph (which are

classified as things to be “got rid of” along with “the breeze-block fire engine”), the “hunched and morose” baboon is described in detail:

It reaches through the bars towards me. Its hands are a dark blue, almost black, and delicately creased and folded, the joints of its fingers round and inflated. I have nothing to give it. It slumps and looks away, its reddish-yellow eyes like bumble bees under the high, sloping philosopher’s forehead. I learn that his name is Piet. (83)

Piet is individualised (he has a name) and humanised (he is “morose” and has the forehead of a philosopher), while the other animals remain generalised and anonymous. In all subsequent descriptions of him, Kronk also alters the object designation ‘it’ to the gendered pronoun ‘he’ and, in so doing, emphasises the baboon’s subjectivity and point of view. Moreover, the use of ‘he’ positions the baboon as a being ‘capable’ of suffering and death, since an ‘it’ cannot die in a grievable way while a ‘he’ can. In this manner, Piet becomes *someone*: a sentient individual who reaches through the bars of his enclosure and irreversibly implicates Kronk in his insufferable, caged, non-human life.

Kronk’s mourning, which I have argued has destabilised and taken him outside himself, renders him receptive to the baboon’s shared condition of embodiment and suffering. As his relationship with Piet grows, he reflects: “I think that different species must recognise that which is common” (105). Staying true to this obligation (in his interactions with Piet at least), he notes that the baboon’s “back feet are very human in shape” and recognises suffering in the way in which “he whimpers and turns his back to huddle miserably” (118, 117). He is also sensitive to Piet’s “anxiety as dark approaches”, and at one point describes the baboon as glancing at him “solicitously” (175, 154).

These humanising descriptions sometimes verge on anthropomorphism, which both Derrida and Peterson condemn, respectively, as a “taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication” (37) and “the erasure of animal alterity” (131). Most of the time, though, Kronk does manage to avoid, or at least resist, this impulse. His numerous questions about Piet, for instance, retain an uncertain and speculative approach towards the animal Other that resists reducing his complex alterity to self-assured knowledge. He is aware, in other words, that ‘baboon being’ remains largely beyond his comprehension. For this reason, Kronk often wonders about Piet. “I wonder,” he muses, “exactly what a baboon’s cosmology consists of”, and later: “I wonder how happy he is. Can he miss what he does not know?” (Cartwright 117, 120). Like the ‘barbarian’ girl to the Magistrate, Piet remains an inaccessible and impenetrable mystery to Kronk. He must allow these questions to remain unanswered and

unanswerable. If at times he falls into the trap of anthropomorphism, it is because, as Peterson points out, it is in fact impossible to avoid theorising “from a human perspective” (131).

Interestingly, Kronk’s identification with Piet’s experience sometimes blurs the (constructed) boundaries between human and animal. According to Morton, such destabilisation of the human/animal divide is a crucial dimension of ethical trans-species relationships, for it puts pressure on anthropocentrism and the ‘man’-made frontiers of the human. “Thinking genuine interdependence”, he argues, “involves dissolving the barrier between ‘over here’ and ‘over there’”, in which case, “society can no longer be defined as purely human” (75). Kronk twice troubles the boundary between the human and animal. Firstly, he remarks, on observing Piet’s reluctance to emerge from the cage, that “perhaps he, like [Kronk’s] mother, is agoraphobic after his years of captivity” (Cartwright 119). By explicitly connecting the domestication of women and animals, he comments on the similarities between gender and species exploitation. Further, his remark intimates that each informs and is dependent on the other, and therefore that both women and animals experience a common confinement under patriarchy.

At another point in the novel, he confuses the distinction between Piet and his son. While relating his day to his unresponsive mother, he “tell[s] her about walking on the mountainside with Matt”, though, in fact, his son has been dead for years and it is Piet who had accompanied him on his walk (105). Kronk, aware of this significant error, goes on to remark that, “[u]nder the circumstances, [he] see[s] no reason to be scrupulous with times and dates and characters” (150). Rather than relay the factual reality, he imaginatively recreates a version of events in which his dead son plays a part. By conflating Matt and Piet in this way, Kronk disregards as insignificant the differences between child and baboon, and instead draws attention to their shared characteristics of vulnerability, interdependence, and mortality. Grief has dissolved and rendered the constructed divisions – between human and animal, past and present, and life and death – meaningless, or at least trivial.

As the relationship between Kronk and Piet develops, an intimate trust grows between them. One such moment of intimacy, which stands out with special poignancy, is the embrace that they exchange on one of their walks on the mountainside:

Piet suddenly approaches me from behind and puts his arms around me. [. . .] Nothing happens, so I put my arms around him and we stand for a moment. We are *like relatives consoling each other after a*

*tragedy*; we are hugging in a very contemporary way. [. . .] Maybe Piet and I are consoling each other. (142-43, my emphasis)

Particularly interesting in this interaction is Kronk's language of mourning. The embrace is touched by grief, as if they are comforting one another after a terrible loss, and twice they are described as "consoling" each other. In this moment of mourning and mutually reciprocated identification, they undergo a symbolic transformation from human and animal to relatives who seek relief and comfort in each other's arms. Importantly, their figurative connection as *relatives* emphasises their similarities and their shared condition of vulnerability, without effacing the differences between them.

For Kronk, then, grief lies at the foundation of his and Piet's relationship. The embrace symbolises Butler's notion of mourning as a resource through which to identify with and 'console' the Other. Further, it functions as the Butlerian ethical utterance in gestural form. Kronk's recognition of Piet's vulnerability is performed through the physical embrace, an act premised on the awareness of another's precarious state. It is, finally, the quintessential bodily gesture of hospitality. For what is an embrace if not a physical, and immensely powerful, act of identification with another being's suffering and mortality?

### **Hostile Hospitality**

[D]espite our best intentions, we cannot know either now or in the future whether what we perceive as the lesser violence will have turned out to be "the lesser" or "the worse" violence.

(Peterson, "The Posthumanism to Come" 132)

By the end of the novel, both Zwelakhe and Piet are dead, and their deaths, it seems to me, are related to Kronk's acts of hospitality towards them. His ethical decisions of inclusion, first, to take care of Piet rather than have him euthanized and, secondly, to invite Daisy and her family to stay on his farm, eventually culminate in hostility and violence. In this unsettling turn of events, he seems to come face to face with the hostility that haunts hospitality, which, Derrida argues, constitutes all ethical relationships with alterity (see Peterson 132). Through his protagonist, Cartwright explores not only the unpredictability of hospitality and its potential to manifest in inhospitable ways, but also the manner in which hospitality towards some can result in hostility towards others.

According to Derrida, hospitality and hostility are entangled: the latter perpetually troubles and threatens the former. Since the full implications of an ethical choice are

unpredictable, one cannot know – beforehand or at a later stage – whether or not that decision will result in violence. Therefore a ‘yes’ of hospitality is always “haunted by an intrinsic threat” in the form of a ‘no’ of hostility, which means that ethical decisions are made in light of choosing the “lesser violence” rather than an illusory non-violence (qtd. in Peterson 132).

As Peterson explains:

Derrida thus displaces the opposition between violence and nonviolence by showing that ethical decisions are made in view of choosing the ‘lesser violence,’ even though what ultimately constitutes the lesser violence is never entirely knowable and thus always available to revision and reevaluation. (132)

Even if a choice may seem non-violent, it remains haunted by the potential to cause violence at some other point. By this view, one can never make a final judgement on an ethical decision because it remains unstable, ever-changing in its effect, and, as such, open to reassessment.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that, in the context of a novel in which events, actions, and consequences are framed by a beginning and end, readers can make a provisional assessment regarding the greater or lesser violence of a character’s actions. I say ‘provisional’ to allow room for differing, perhaps even conflicting, interpretations of these consequences. My point is that examining a fictional character’s decisions and their outcomes is altogether different from analysing an actual person’s choices, the effects of which may continue to influence the world indeterminately and so must remain permanently open to reassessment. Accordingly, I argue for a provisional assessment of Kronk’s ethical decisions of hospitality, which, by the end of the novel, seem to result in hostility, or the greater violence, towards the Other.

Not long after Daisy moves onto the farm, Kronk returns home one day to find “terrible amounts” of blood in Piet’s cage and the place deserted (Cartwright 231). It soon emerges that Zwelakhe got into, or was placed into, the cage and bled to death after his arm was torn off by the baboon. At this point, it is important to remember that, earlier in the novel, Kronk had ignored the local peoples’ fears about the child’s HIV virus. When Witbooi, the ‘coloured’ man who works for him, tells him that they “doesn’t [sic] want the Xhosa children here. They must go away. They doesn’t want to get sick also”, Kronk authoritatively retorts: “I don’t want to hear any more of this” (222). Rather than listening to the peoples’ concerns and dealing directly with the myths that surround HIV, he dismisses their fears as ridiculous and irrelevant. This brief exchange with Witbooi, disturbingly

inflected with the master/slave relationship, exposes a dimension of hostility to Kronk's hospitality. The 'yes' to Daisy's family is suddenly disrupted by a 'no' to the local people – which is to say, his inclusion of the former results in the exclusion and alienation of the latter. The hospitality that is extended to the Xhosa family, troubled here by a hostility towards the 'coloured' locals, eventually results in the child's death. As he tells the police, the most likely explanation for what happened is that Zwelakhe was forced into the cage with the baboon by those who feared his sickness (242).

In addition, Kronk does not seem to consult Daisy about whether she in fact *wants* to stay on the farm. If he does, he considers it an irrelevant detail to his narrative. The reader, either way, is left with the uncomfortable sense that he speaks, or rather decides, for Daisy, and, in so doing, seems to enact the racist patriarchal role of the all-knowing, benevolent white man. Thus, when he wonders, without ever asking their opinion, "if Zwelakhe and Daisy and Thandi think this place is beautiful", he makes the implicit and dangerous assumption that they see the farm as he does (205). Given his disregard for their perspective on this matter, the reader, in turn, is left wondering to what extent Daisy played a role, if at all, in the relocation of her family to an alien place. The absence of her voice casts a shadow of hostility over Kronk's hospitality. If she had no say in the move and would rather have stayed in the township she has always known, then what he perceives as an ethical act of inclusion in fact contains violence.

Cartwright leaves unanswered the questionable nature of both Zwelakhe's death and Daisy's part in her family's relocation to the farm. Either way, however, in each case, Kronk's intended hospitality manifests in hostility. Even if the child entered the cage willingly, Kronk's decision to bring him to the farm, albeit with good intent, and his refusal to address the peoples' concerns about the spread of HIV, implicates him in Zwelakhe's death. Under the circumstances, his act of inclusion turns violent towards both the 'coloured' and black racialised Other.

Kronk's relationship with Piet ends in a similarly violent, and more direct, act of hostility. Initially, he tries to save the baboon, who is to be 'destroyed' by a vet, by taking him to a baboon colony in the mountains and leaving him there. Half an hour later, though, he returns to find Piet on the side of the road, rejected by the colony and viciously mauled. Rather than leave his fate to a stranger, Kronk resolves to take the baboon's life himself, a scene which he describes in painful detail:

[Piet] walks towards me. One of his hind legs is dragging. He whimpers and puts his arms around me.

‘Poor boy. Come, Piet.’

I take Roos’s cattle gun from the car. Piet stands shivering as I shoot him on the blind side. I heave his beloved body with difficulty down the rocky slope towards the river. (243)

The poignant imagery of an embrace followed by killing captures in a single impression the transition of hospitality to hostility, inclusion to exclusion, tenderness to violence. For Kronk, this act of killing is, paradoxically, *the* ethical decision of hospitality towards Piet, the beloved. He kills him quickly and without his knowing to save him from the greater trauma of having to live with his injuries and then be ‘destroyed’ a few days later by a stranger. By shooting him, he believes he is choosing the lesser violence. Though his hospitality therefore contains no malicious hostility, it is, in its violence, hostile. Symbolically, this scene enacts Derrida’s argument that hospitality is haunted by, and can manifest in, ‘unintentional’ hostility and violence.

Immediately afterwards, Kronk narrates the final line of his first-person narrative. “If I could speak,” he says, suggesting his muteness, “I would say that I too, like so many of my countrymen, am a murderer, but the limits of my language have met the limits of my world” (243). This line is a direct allusion to Ludwig Wittgenstein, who famously proclaimed that the “*limits of my language* mean the limits of my world” (5.6). Said differently, our language – that is, our discourse, ideology, linguistic background – constrains, sets limits to, and influences our experience of the world and reality. In announcing the inability of language to describe the horror of his act, Kronk heralds the closure of his narrative. Further, the claim that the limits of his language have *met* the limits of his world implies his confrontation with and espousal of another Wittgensteinian proposition: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (7). The inconceivable trauma of Piet’s death, and his part in it, is for Kronk a loss beyond language, beyond the speakable. As such, he must remain silent, for language fails to encapsulate the unspeakability of his ordeal. His rejection of speech is confirmed by the last section of the novel, which switches to third-person narration.

Kronk’s last words also call to mind Butler’s claim that “there is a limit to discourse that establishes the limits of human intelligibility” (35). To exist outside the discursive limits of the intelligible, which are often regulated according to Western norms, is to live in a state of precariousness as an unintelligible and less-than-human being. It is for this reason, Butler argues, that some human lives remain ungrievable and, moreover, are denied vulnerability and human worth. Like Othered humans, ‘the animal’ is also situated outside the frames of

intelligibility and remains, for the most part, ungrievable. That Kronk calls himself (alongside “so many of [his] countrymen”) a murderer situates Piet in the realm of the intelligible, for to be murdered one must be someone. Moreover, his admission of murder is an acknowledgement of Piet’s shared vulnerability as an individual. Kronk’s use of this term to describe an act of violence against a non-human therefore destabilises the limits of the intelligible being by establishing the animal Other as a subject worthy of mourning.

### **Seeing Animals**

The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there.

(Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 29)

Having examined Kronk’s relationships with the human and non-human Other, I want to return to the gaze, now in relation to ‘the animal’. Drawing on Derrida’s notion of the seeing animal, that is, ‘the animal’ that has a point of view, I argue for an ethical responsibility towards the non-human that comes from perceiving him/her as a subject that sees. Therefore, turning the gaze away from or towards the non-human Other has moral implications. To properly *see* an animal, however, one must engage with “a gaze behind which there remains a bottomlessness, [. . .] uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret”, and from which there comes an “address, that this was their affair, their lookout” (Derrida 12, 14). The recognition that *this* specific viewpoint, like our own, can be at any moment effaced in an act of violence involves identification with an animal’s shared precariousness. In the non-human gaze that sees and is seen, then, there is an obligation of responsibility towards its bearer’s vulnerability to pain and death. My term ‘seeing animals’ thus refers both to ‘the animal’ that *sees with a view to seeing* and the human ethical obligation to *see*, that is, engage with, animals in this way.

Kronk’s friendship with Piet makes him particularly perceptive of trans-species interactions, especially the contradictions that plague human-animal relationships. As he soon comes to realise, while some animals are treated with respect, dignity, or care, others are treated as insensate commodities for consumption or insane beasts who threaten the order of things, with no logical explanation for this distribution of protection or violence. If identification with an animal’s vulnerability is dependent on seeing him/her, that is, perceiving an embodied point of view (and therefore a subject with which to identify), then it seems to me that these inconsistencies are located finally in the gaze. It is important to

reiterate that identification with the non-human Other does not necessarily come about by merely viewing an animal. It requires an additional dimension in which one perceives the animal as a looking subject with a point of view of its own. In fact, an animal does not need to be physically seen in order for this recognition to take place – one can imagine an animal’s vulnerability, for instance, from a distance. In order to sustain and maintain the exploitation of certain animals, therefore, structures are put in place which obscure or remove the animal from sight, either metaphorically or literally.

Perhaps one of the most effective, and literal, institutionalised mechanisms of animal concealment are those employed by the meat industry. Derrida is candid on this point:

No one can deny seriously any more, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves; in order to organise on a massive scale the *forgetting* or *misunderstanding* of this violence, which some would compare to the worst cases of genocide. (26, my emphasis)

Factory farming supports and sustains its consumers’ forgetting and misunderstanding by displacing the animal from the gaze, first, by situating itself on the periphery of society and, secondly, by packaging meat in a way that renders the animal it once was unrecognisable. In other words, it goes out of its way to thwart recognition of an animal’s vulnerability to suffering and to death. Sanitised and packaged, meat for the consumer bears no trace of its history, its origin, and, most importantly, denies the brutality that reduced it from embodied to pure body. To be consumable, meat must be familiar in its unfamiliarity as an animal.

Kronk touches on three particularly interesting, and common, structures of removing ‘the animal’ from sight. Of these, the first functions as a mode of forgetting. During one of his monologues to his mother concerning France and a display of fish he had encountered on a visit there, he observes: “You wouldn’t have liked it: the fish had their heads on, whiskers, button eyes, spines. [. . .] the French have no qualms: they will eat almost anything” (Cartwright 77). Soon afterwards, he also notes that his mother “won’t eat anything that appears to have some recognisable element of an animal in it” (78). These remarks reveal how she consciously follows precautions to ensure that the vulnerable animal, which perpetually threatens to expose itself, stays unseen so that it can remain forgotten. In order to overlook and forget the killed creature, she must quite literally avoid and turn her eyes away from the recognisably animal in meat. This is because to be confronted by a familiar body part is to have one’s complacency interrupted by a ‘gaze’ that avows itself as a once-living being now dead. It is to be exposed to death – that is, the mortality of ourselves and animals –

and presents the possibility of identification, which, of course, would threaten the comfort of forgetting.

The second structure that screens ‘the animal’ from the human gaze functions as a device of misunderstanding that, in the end, ameliorates the conscience of those who are vaguely aware of animal exploitation in the meat industry. This is the butcher’s shop that masquerades as a paradise, which Kronk critiques with sardonic irony. While visiting Roos at his butchery to discuss the sale of his farm, he contemplates how

[i]n London the trade of butchery has been separated from its etymological roots. Butchers’ shops disguise the reality with Astroturf displays and paper coronets on the lamb chops and organic fairytales. Here the reality – that something has to be butchered – was not disguised. (76)

In London, and most Westernised urban environments, both language and physical appearance are used to conceal the violence involved in the production of meat. The reality is, so to speak, sugar-coated. As Kronk notes, the word ‘butcher’ is dissociated from the brutality of butchery, which is then further obscured by the Astroturf displays and paper coronets that lend an aura of illusory tranquillity and, even worse, ‘dignity’ to the meat. Moreover, the fairytale, or sham, of organic and so-called ‘free-range’ meat adds to the overall misunderstanding of what in fact goes on in a butchery. In London, consumers can go about eating meat in a state of delusion, protected against any confrontation with the vulnerable animal.

That in Roos’s shop none of this is disguised lends testimony to a different kind of disconnection from ‘the animal’, that is, a third instantiation of not-seeing that looks at an animal but refuses to see him/her as a seeing subject. According to Derrida, to treat an animal as “something seen and not seeing” is to perpetrate a symbolic violence against him/her by reducing the individual animal to a “theorem”, that is, an object under analysis (14). In this sense, both the non-human and the human Other are alike in their historical exclusion from the mutually reciprocated gaze. Animals, like women and ‘non-Whites’, are often denied the ability “to see, with a view to seeing” (4). In fact, one might go so far as to argue that observing an animal with the belief that one remains, as it were, unseen, perpetuates the same exploitative relationship as the watching overseer presiding over the ‘unseeing’ prisoners in the Panopticon prison. The “genocide” (to use Derrida’s term) of animals, then, is linked to the fact that they are regarded as *things viewed* rather than *embodied points of view*. This symbolic violence enables, sustains, and translates into a cycle of physical violence, for the

refusal or inability to see seeing animals is inextricably linked to a denial of their vulnerability to suffering, which, in turn, makes them available for use or disposal. An animal might be physically seen, in other words, but remain to the observer an unseeing object unworthy of protection or care, which enables the violence of this mode of human-animal relations.

In *White Lighting*, many of the characters' perceptions of Piet, for instance, eclipse his individuality and point of view by describing him in terms of monstrosity and insanity, thereby preventing any possibility of identification. He is named or perceived, by various people, as "a violent lunatic", "a nuisance", "mad", and a "monster" (Cartwright 118, 151, 156, 166). The so-called civilised, rational human is distanced, in this manner, from the 'irrational' animal. To be sure, the language of Othering denies, with suspicious vehemence, any relation to the baboon animal. I say suspicious because, as Peterson points out, "the human obsession with documenting the numerous deficiencies that supposedly plague the lives of animals cannot fail to register – even if it ultimately disavows – the chiasmus between human and animal" (130). The repeated attempts to reinforce the human/non-human divide by asserting Piet's alleged animal lack in fact implicitly recognises his similarities to humans.

Through the mechanisms of forgetting and misunderstanding, which sustain a blindness towards certain animals, people are able to justify their inconsistent treatment of non-humans. They are capable of cultivating care and compassion for one animal while treating another, even if indirectly, as an objectified commodity or worthless body. Kronk is particularly perceptive to these modes of denial and justification. When he first meets Valerie trying to rescue a whale, for instance, he sceptically reflects on the fact that "[t]here are dead dogs and donkeys and cats and cattle on all the main roads, but this giant creature obviously merits special treatment" (Cartwright 97). This leads him to the observation that she "makes value judgements about animals. Baboons can be a nuisance [. . . whereas] [w]hales are noble and free spirits, despite a tendency to run aground" (151). Along this line of reasoning, Valerie rationalises her disparate treatment of animals by constructing one species as a pest and the other as majestic. Hence she argues that Piet should be 'put down' and whales must be saved for posterity, and perceives no inconsistency in this.

Nevertheless, Kronk is not free from his own prejudices, or value judgements, regarding animals. As I mentioned earlier, he considers Piet as meriting "special treatment" while dismissing the peacock and ducks as disposable things. In light of his criticism of Valerie, the reader cannot but fail to see the irony. Furthermore, notwithstanding his assertion

that humans must recognise that which is common in other species, he quite candidly indulges in various types of meat throughout the novel, the cruel production of which he is evidently aware. In addition to his speculations on butcheries, he describes the aftermath of a lobster dinner as “a war zone” and later refers to “sea creatures [. . .] cooked in cauldrons or grilled on spits” (201, 214). In both cases, his language draws attention to the violence of meat-eating. Similarly, though less graphically, after his return to London, he is described as “eating a chicken tikka sandwich”, and the unknown narrator is careful to note, with disconcerting specificity, that “[m]ore often he opts for a bacon roll” (245).

These acts of meat-eating constitute, I would argue, what Peterson calls the violence of “seemingly innocuous practices” of “social cohesion” (134). As he describes it,

[v]iolence takes many forms, from the most extreme acts of killing and mutilation to less theatrical modes of excluding both human and non-human animals, especially those seemingly innocuous practices of social cohesion and belonging whose violence should concern us especially because it is so seldom acknowledged. (134)

One such practice of social cohesion in South Africa is the tradition of braaing, which centres on the cooking and eating of meat. By unspoken convention, the men cook the meat around a fire while the women prepare salads. At such a braai hosted by his lawyer Pennington, Kronk observes that the women bring “immense bowls of salads of potatoes and avocado pears and feta” while the “men are in charge of the meat” and “stand around watching Pennington turn over sausages, and lamb chops done in his special marinade” (Cartwright 144). Importantly, the space around the fire is reserved for the men, who are brought together and bond over the meat. It is a highly gendered affair where meat is associated with strength and masculinity and vegetables with femininity and weakness (Pennington refers collectively to everything not meat as “the rabbit food” [144]). As a custom inflected with patriarchal and speciesist attitudes, the braai commits violence, albeit in different forms, against both women and animals. Kronk, aware and perhaps critical of this, remarks that the performance of braaing “would be easy to mock” but admits that he is in fact “grateful for this artless camaraderie, and [he] welcome[s] the familiar rituals” (144). At the very moment when he might have critiqued this “less theatrical” practice of non-human and human exclusionary exploitation, he is persuaded into silence by the gratification of inclusion in a masculinised group of meat-eating men.

Kronk thus fails to acknowledge his own complicity in the systemic violence against non-humans. In none of these instances does he self-consciously observe or critique the

palpable and uncomfortable contradictions at the heart of his relation to animals. Even more disturbing than the inconsistencies themselves, then, is the fact that he remains strangely unaware, even oblivious, of his own perpetuation of these contradictory attitudes, of which his ethical treatment of Piet and unethical treatment of farmed animals is an example. Given his keen ability to note inconsistency in other people, that he fails to detect it in himself renders him a particularly hypocritical narrator, or perhaps just an insensitive one. There is, however, something unarguably noteworthy about his connection with Piet. In this specific relationship, he perceives the animal Other as *someone*: a vulnerable being with his own perspective. Thus Kronk eventually “no longer allow[s] anyone to go and look at Piet” because, he says, he “can’t see him as an exhibit” (217). His refusal to keep the baboon as an exhibit is grounded in the knowledge that doing so would render him an object, that is, a thing viewed rather than a subject with a point of view. Out of respect for Piet’s unknowable baboon subjectivity – his cosmology and individual outlook on the world – Kronk cannot treat him as an object of display.

Yet even this friendship is overshadowed by certain prejudices common to humanism and speciesism. First, Kronk perpetuates the widespread characterisation of animals as incomplete versions of the human. Contemplating the affinity between humans and primates, he concludes that “maybe the reason we feel for monkeys and primates is that we see ourselves in them, but *without the full consciousness*. We see children, we see Calibans” (163, my emphasis). In his work on posthumanism and animal studies, Wolfe points out this trend that casts animals “as diminished or crippled versions of that fantasy figure called the human” (qtd. in Chute 136). In a similar vein, Derrida stresses the need to treat “the absence”, in animals, “of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than privation” (48). Though Kronk admirably attempts to forge a friendship with Piet and, to a degree, succeeds, he ultimately undermines its growth through such anthropocentric thinking. Even more worryingly, his species-biased remark recalls the portrayal of women and black people as incomplete versions of men and whites, respectively. He employs, in short, the same suspicious technique as sexism and racism, which justify domination and exploitation through self-designated superiority over another species/gender/race.

Secondly, he fails to transcend what Giorgio Agamben calls the “solipsistic logic” of humankind, which reasons that “man [sic] has no specific identity other than the *ability* to recognise himself . . . *Man is the animal that must recognise itself as human to be human*” (qtd. in Peterson 128). Humankind, in short, considers the defining characteristic of a human the ability to solipsistically recognise him/herself as human. Kronk echoes this line of

thinking when he characterises Piet's existence as inferior because of an apparent lack of self-awareness. As he puts it: "a baboon's life may be a lesser, more restricted life – I doubt for example that the sleeping Piet is pondering baboon consciousness – but I believe that my feelings for Piet and his for me are not entirely meaningless" (Cartwright 187). For Kronk, the value of a life is measured not according to a shared 'non-power' of vulnerability but rather against a *human* standard of consciousness. By his logic, the human, on the one hand, represents the fully-formed and whole consciousness, and therefore the superior being. 'The animal', on the other hand, remains generally "a lesser, more restricted life" because of its apparent lack of self-reflexivity, and is thus an inferior being. Beside the human norm of 'ideal' consciousness, an animal, by definition, could never qualify.

## **Conclusion**

Butler's model of ethical mourning and Derrida's notion of hospitality provide a useful framework with which to examine Kronk's emotional and moral transformation. Rather than attempting to resolve his grief, he lives through the slow and difficult process of mourning and, in so doing, begins to perceive the shared physical vulnerability of those who are furthest – which is to say, most different – from him. By harnessing the power of mourning and making the claim of another's vulnerable condition, he cultivates responsibility and compassion for the lives of the gendered, racialised, and animal Other. In the tragic deaths of Zwelakhe and Piet at the end of the novel, Cartwright seems to depict the inescapable possibility of violence that 'haunts' every ethical decision. While this violence is unintentional and something Kronk could not have predicted, it is, nevertheless, directly related to his choices, which are shadowed by, and eventually manifest in, hostility.

For all Kronk's ethical growth in relation to the marginalised Other, however, his responsibility towards animals does not extend beyond Piet. In analysing the inconsistent treatment of the non-human, I have turned to Derrida's notion of the seeing animal, that is, an animal who is someone with a unique and incomprehensible point of view on the world. Taking this point further, I claimed that the contradictions of human-animal relationships are finally located in the gaze or lack thereof. Human attitudes and actions towards animals, in other words, depend on whether or not a given animal is *seen as a seeing subject*. The refusal or inability to see animals in this way is inextricably connected to a denial of their

vulnerability, for if an animal has no perceived point of view then there is no possibility of identification. Derrida's attention to the seeing animal therefore does important ethical work.

*White Lightning* examines extensively the connection between seeing and responsibility, showing how some non-humans – the 'seen' animal, as it were – are treated as beings vulnerable to suffering, while others – the 'unseen' animal – are treated as insensate and usable bodies. The exploitation of animals (for food, clothing, sport, medicine, entertainment) is effective precisely because elaborate and institutionalised mechanisms remove the seeing animal from sight, rendering certain non-humans available for symbolic and physical violence. Even Kronk is enthralled by these devices of animal concealment, as is suggested by his avid and uncritical meat-eating throughout the novel. He sees Piet as a seeing subject but fails to see other animals in this way. While he professes to be "looking for" what he calls "some toppling of the mental hierarchies", he in fact reinforces the hierarchical positioning of the human above 'the animal' (187). Kronk seems unable to move beyond typically speciesist, humanistic viewpoints, which contribute to his inconsistent treatment of animals and, even more disconcertingly, his obliviousness to these contradictory approaches.

And yet, his closing admission that he is a murderer complicates Kronk's trans-species attitudes. The word is all the more significant in the context of a predominantly human-centred discourse in which animals are very seldom regarded as murdered and, to be properly understood, must be situated in a posthumanist theoretical framework. His remarkable acknowledgement that he has murdered an animal, if read as a confession of his complicity in the wider systematic exploitation of animals, suggests the possibility of further ethical growth and perhaps a re-evaluation of his relation to all animals. It is finally this *recognition* of his involvement in murder that decentres an anthropocentric ethics and sets apart Kronk's moral consciousness from that of his fellow countrymen.

## Conclusion

### Towards an Empathetic Ethics of Responsibility

In this thesis, I have been working towards an empathetic ethics of responsibility, which I now want to call Being for the Other. As a mode of relation, it grows out of the experience of Sartrean Being-for-Others, of apprehending oneself as an object, from a distance, through the gaze or look of another person. My term, however, is exactly opposite to Sartre's. 'Others' in his expression refers to other people, whereas 'the Other' in mine refers to marginalised beings, more specifically, the racialised, gendered, and animal Other. Far from an experience of objectification, Being for the Other is defined by a relation of empathy: it is the experience, triggered by a vulnerable Other's gaze, of seeing *with him/her as a subject*. Such an intersubjective ethics allows the Othered subject to bear his/her own meaning rather than being inscribed in a predetermined discourse. I aim to sketch, in this conclusion, the notion of Being for the Other as it functions in each of the texts under discussion, exploring its effect on not only the characters, but also the reader.

For all three novelists whose work I have examined, sight is a site of power for both oppressor and oppressed. The mechanisms of Benthamite surveillance depicted in their fiction are, in differing degrees and in a variety of ways, countered by the resistant gaze of the marginalised Other, who refuses total analysis, classification, and definition. Save Helen in *Playing*, who remains the quintessential docile body, other characters in the texts – for example, the 'barbarian' girl in *Waiting*, Patricia Williams in *Playing*, the women in Wicomb's short stories, and Piet in *White Lightning* – all resist the inscriptive prejudiced-look that seeks to understand, know, and control them. The novels are focalised through a privileged protagonist who represents the Same, or the norm, and depict that character's changing relationship with the Other. In contrast, Wicomb's short stories are told from the perspective of the racialised and gendered Other. My third chapter showed how the 'coloured' women in these narratives oppose systems of control by rebelling against those who seek to confine and restrict them. In their acts of protest and resistance, the female characters take up responsibility for themselves and their futures.

Leaving aside for now Wicomb's short fiction, I want to focus on the three novels, the protagonists of which reach, or rather are forced into, a position of empathetic responsibility for the Other. I have suggested that the Magistrate, Marion, and Kronk are initially irresponsible. They live in a deliberate state of ignorance by, firstly, shielding themselves

against the atrocities committed by regimes of oppression, and, secondly, avoiding recognition of their complicity in this violence. The Magistrate admits that, at the start of Joll's interrogations, he "stopped [his] ears to the noises coming from the hut by the granary" (Coetzee 9), and in fact reprimands himself for getting involved ("I ought never to have taken my lantern to see what was going on"), remembering the ease and complacency of "going hunting every morning," and "occupying" his "evenings in the classics" (21). The irresponsible act of blocking from hearing the sound of the so-called barbarians' suffering parallels the removal of factory-farmed animals from sight, enabling, as Derrida puts it, the forgetting or misunderstanding of non-human exploitation. A conscious decision is made, in both cases, to irresponsibly remain 'deaf' and 'blind' by literally obstructing the sound or visibility of violence.

In the two post-apartheid novels, a similar method of removal and concealment operates in relation to the racialised Other. Apartheid, as a system of exclusion and exploitation, facilitated whites' irresponsibility through the compartmentalised organisation of space and movement. 'Non-whites', forcibly removed and relocated, were positioned on the periphery of society, away from the complacent white gaze. This ensured that black people remained simultaneously invisible (unseen, for the most part, to the white public) and hyper-visible (meticulously monitored by means of the pass system, for instance). The physical displacement of black bodies generated, in my view, the psychological displacement of their suffering and humanity. Having been literally removed from the white public gaze, there was minimal possibility of identification with them.<sup>17</sup> In *Playing* and *White Lightning*, the protagonists' early expressions of privileged entitlement, such as Marion's refusal to feel guilty for "being white and hardworking" (Wicomb, *Playing* 28) and Kronk's reservations about black people living on his farm, are productions of the segregated environment in which they live, which supports this kind of irresponsible forgetting and misunderstanding of white privilege. Their remarks reveal the denial, probably grounded on a subconscious knowledge, of their complicity in oppression.

I argued, in my first chapter on *Waiting*, that the social and structural organisation of Coetzee's Empire adheres, in many ways, to the Panopticon design. It seems to me that the apartheid regime was similarly influenced and organised. Surveillance, seeking to subject, control, and maximise the productive potential of racialised Others, maintained its subjects'

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<sup>17</sup> My point here is that though white people did, of course, see black people, the exploitation and suffering that 'non-whites' encountered daily was, for the most part, hidden from view. Most whites did not want to know about or see black oppression and the physical structure of cities aided – and still aids today – this kind of deliberate ignorance, if you can call it that.

exposure before a potentially all-seeing gaze while ensuring, at the same time, that they were hidden from public view. There is a complex, paradoxical movement at work here where the Other is simultaneously watched and hidden, visible and invisible, known and unknown. Removing him/her from sight impedes identification (since there is minimal possibility of a public feeling responsibility for an absent subject) while maintaining him/her in a state of extreme visibility ensures control. Such removals function literally, such as in the restructuring of physical space, and metaphorically. Joll, in *Waiting*, achieves the latter during his public torture of the ‘barbarians’. By writing the word ENEMY on the prisoners, he positions them as inhuman and so displaces from view their humanness. The psychological ‘removal’ of their humanity allows him to subject the prisoners to appalling acts of torture in the town square, a location of extreme visibility. In pleading with the spectators to recognise the ‘barbarians’ as men, the Magistrate attempts to make *visible* the prisoners’ humanity so that the crowd might identify with them and oppose Joll’s brutality.

To enter, either physically or psychologically, these peripheral spaces screened from view is to trespass into forbidden territory, undermining mechanisms of concealment. In *Waiting*, *Playing*, and *White Lightning*, this process is an essential step in the three central characters’ cultivation of responsibility. The Magistrate takes his lantern to investigate the hut where the first interrogations take place, ignoring Joll’s implied instructions to keep away (“You would find it tedious. We have set procedures to go through” [Coetzee 4]); Marion looks at the photo of Patricia Williams, which marks her psychological entry into her secret past, and enters Bonteheuwel against Geoff’s wishes (“The townships are dangerous even in the daylight” [Wicomb, *Playing* 78]); and, though the vet warns Kronk, “Don’t go too far up that way [that is, near the shacks] by yourself”, he later enters the seaside township and, further, disregards the warning that “baboons bite” by entering Piet’s cage (Cartwright 94, 118). The characters in these novels discover, on these journeys across borderlines, the horror of Othered lives, which, up until this point, has been hidden from view. From this moment on, they can no longer remain in an irresponsible state of ignorance. As the Magistrate phrases it: “I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems no recovering” (Coetzee 21).

Having crossed into these hidden and policed domains, the protagonists of the three novels are faced with not only the tortured body of the Other but also the horrifying realisation that they are complicit in that being’s suffering. As I have already mentioned, the Magistrate and Marion encounter, respectively, the ‘barbarian’ girl and Patricia Williams, both torture victims, and are jolted into political and ethical awareness. While the Magistrate

must process the realisation that he is not so different from the girl's torturers, Marion becomes increasingly aware that "she bears the shame of the perpetrators; somehow she, who has never had anything to do with politics, has been branded by this business" (Wicomb, *Playing* 75). In a comparable manner, Kronk, after his encounter with Zwelakhe's HIV-ravaged body, realises that "[y]ou are involved and you can't avoid it" (Cartwright 173). The damaged body of the Other, as a surface inscribed upon and marked by history, implicates each of these characters in its suffering. In fact, the body becomes a source of fascination to both the Magistrate, who eventually asks himself whether it is the 'barbarian' girl he wants "or the traces of a history her body bears" (Coetzee 64), and Marion, who is captivated by "the face [that] retains the memory of these acts [of torture]" and the "ghost of the past" (Wicomb, *Playing* 55). But despite their efforts to read and interpret the body as a historical artefact, it remains a "mystery" (56) and "beyond comprehension" (Coetzee 42).

Whereas mechanisms of concealment facilitate the forgetting or misunderstanding of suffering, the state of mourning facilitates the remembering and recognition of the vulnerable Other. As I explained in my fourth chapter, Butler argues that mourning, if it is not quickly resolved, can be harnessed as a political resource to access and recognise the precariousness of other lives. Grief, in other words, can make visible the suffering and vulnerability of Others through a close reflection on one's own suffering. A critical engagement with mourning may therefore allow us to reach past psychological and physical barriers that prevent us from perceiving the Other and so enable us to see and identify with him/her as a subject for whom we are responsible.

I claimed that Kronk's grief for his dying mother and son activates his growing sense of responsibility towards the racialised, animal, and gendered Other. Marion's ethical growth, and the accountability she feels for Patricia Williams and Tokkie, is also facilitated by a state of mourning for a dead mother who, she realises, was absent to her even when alive. In both cases, the vulnerable experience of personal loss sensitises the characters to the precarious lives of those around them. In *Waiting*, the Magistrate expresses grief for the loss of peace in his town and the Colonel's vicious interrogations. "The joy has gone from my life", he says soon after Joll's arrival, finding that he is troubled and dismayed by the suffering in which, through his inaction, he is complicit (Coetzee 22). He, like Marion, must learn to cry. In the same torture chamber used for the 'barbarian' girl's interrogation, he "sob[s] from the heart like a child: [he] sit[s] in a corner against the wall and weep[s], the tears running from [his] eyes without stop" (109). Arguably, all three protagonists, destabilised and disillusioned,

experience a degree of mourning for the nations in which they once believed: the Magistrate for his Empire, and Marion and Kronk for the ‘new’ South Africa.

Facing the Other’s face is essential in the cultivation of empathy. The gaze, in particular, embodies an unspoken and unspeakable call for ethical responsibility, placing each protagonist under obligation to the Other. Met with the impenetrable “closed” face and eyes of the ‘barbarian’ girl, the Magistrate finds himself “in a measure enslaved to her” (Coetzee 42):

I am the same man I always was; but time has broken, something has fallen upon me from the sky, as random, from nowhere: this body in my bed, for which I am *responsible*, or so it seems, otherwise why do I keep it? (43, my emphasis)

His terminology of enslavement and enforced duty implies that, rather than having made a conscious choice, he has been compelled to take up responsibility for the girl. Marion also describes her sense of obligation towards Williams in terms of coercion. The face of the “demanding stranger” is “arresting”, confronting her “unforgivingly”, until Williams’ eyes “hold [Marion’s] accusingly, calling her to account” (Wicomb, *Playing* 74, 49, 62, 54). Pursued everywhere by this insistent face, she has no choice but to obey Williams’ “command to remember” (54). Kronk’s first interactions with Piet and Zwelakhe are portrayed in less forceful language, though he too is drawn to the face and gaze of the Other. He is enthralled by the baboon’s “reddish-yellow eyes like bumble bees under the high, sloping and distracted philosopher’s head” (Cartwright 83), and moved by the “dull” eyes of the “pathetically small” boy (132).

In *Waiting* and *White Lighting*, responsibility for the human Other intersects with responsibility towards the non-human. The texts’ complexity is located in this intersectionality and the way in which recognition of one informs and complements recognition of the other. My fourth chapter demonstrated how Kronk’s ethical development involves a recognition of both the human and animal Other. If we consider this process chronologically, the state of mourning first sensitises Kronk to Piet’s vulnerability, which, in turn, renders him receptive to human Others, such as Daisy’s family and Ulla. Similarly, the Magistrate’s encounter with a waterbuck marks an ethical turning point in the novel, altering for the better his relationship with the ‘barbarian’ girl. When, on one of his routine hunting trips, a waterbuck “turns his head and sees [him]”, the Magistrate finds himself immobilised and unable to shoot the animal (Coetzee 39). As they “gaze at each other”, he senses “an

obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of [his] consciousness” and “turn[s] [his] gaze inward”, realising that it is “no longer a morning’s hunting but an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim” (39-40). Here, the gun – a symbol of the speciesist prejudiced-look at its most destructive – functions in the hands of the human hunter as a device to survey, analyse, and destroy the non-human Other. The hunter, like the head overseer of the Panopticon, must remain invisible, while the hunted, like the prisoner, must remain hyper-visible. The shooting and killing of an animal marks him/her as a docile body, literally deprived of subjectivity through death. In this manner, the hunted is rendered pure object, a passive body to be utilised for food or décor.

At the crucial moment in this particular hunt, though, the Magistrate is seen by the waterbuck. Fascinatingly, he finds himself objectified by the animal look, which forces his own gaze inwards. This is the only instance of Being-for-Others catalysed by the non-human gaze in *Waiting* and *White Lightning*. The Magistrate reassesses, in that state of self-reflexivity, the hunt in relation to the buck who, by his hand, would “bleed[] to death on the ice”. Against his will, he is invaded by the non-human gaze and, in the same way that Kronk sees Piet, *sees* the buck as a seeing subject, and finds himself, begrudgingly, in a state of Being for the Other, or a relation of empathetic responsibility. As he tells the girl later: “Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms” (40). Having recognised hunting as violence against a vulnerable Other, it is “robbed” of its “savour” (39). Moreover, at this point the Magistrate is exposed to himself, for the second time, as an ally of Joll’s, whose hunting exploits once left behind “a mountain of carcasses” (1). If the Magistrate is to extricate himself from the Colonel’s inscriptive and destructive surveillance, he must put down the gun. To do otherwise is to oppress both the ‘barbarian’ girl and the waterbuck. Changed by this encounter with an animal, he soon afterwards recognises his obligatory responsibility and ‘enslavement’ to the girl, which is akin to his experience, under the waterbuck’s gaze, of not living his life on his own terms. His feeling of responsibility towards the buck, in other words, initiates his recognition of responsibility for the girl.

There is, however, always the possibility that the Other’s face and gaze will be ignored, the suffering body overlooked, responsibility disavowed, or mourning resolved in an act of violence. In each of the novels, something more is involved in the protagonist’s experience of empathetic responsibility. This additional element, I want to suggest, is the imaginative faculty: Being for the Other requires, at its foundation, a leap of the *imagination* into another’s perspective. By imagining oneself into the viewpoint of the Other, one can

momentarily glimpse, from that position of alterity, a different experience of the world. This is not to say that an imagined perspective *is* the experience of the Other, nor can it stand in for or replace his/her experience, but rather that it can act as a catalyst in bringing about responsibility. For this reason, the imaginative faculty is crucial in each protagonist's first encounter with the Other, in which he/she sees him or her as a seeing subject instead of an object.

I argued, in my second chapter, that the white muslin draped around Marion's bed symbolises whiteness. If this is the case, then her sensation of suffocating in metres of muslin, after encountering Williams' gaze, seems to signify an empathetic experience of the stranger's physical torture during apartheid. Momentarily, Marion feels the suffering of Williams *as if she were her*. In fact, she also subconsciously inhabits the subjectivities of Helen and Tokkie, who, I argued, were psychologically 'tortured' and controlled by whiteness. This moment is central because it depicts not only an experience of Being-for-Others (in which Marion sees herself as an object in another's gaze) but also Being for the Other (in which she sees the world from the Other's subject position). Her subconscious, in other words, imaginatively reconstructs the experience of physical torture and emotional asphyxiation under apartheid. Similarly, the Magistrate, in imagining the 'barbarian' girl's blurred vision, empathetically glimpses her experience of the world, and Kronk sympathetically considers Piet's point of view, as is suggested by his realisation that he cannot treat the baboon as an exhibit. Both of these instances involve an imaginative Being for the Other in which the world is perceived from the Other's viewpoint.

The imaginative projects in which the protagonists of all three novels are involved complement their empathetic development. Marion's critically engaged reading of novels while overseas aids the imaginative re-remembering of her familial history and expands her understanding of whiteness and raced experience. Located in the UK, she is afforded the space and physical distance needed to confront the painfully familiar South African narratives, and, by identifying with characters in these novels, inventively investigates her own origins. Apart from reading, Kronk also engages in his own creative writing. He studies his father's non-fictional work on collaborative animals and, throughout *White Lightning*, is writing a screenplay on a trans-species relationship – a project involving the imagination. Finally, the Magistrate's dreams, which constitute a considerable portion of the novel, absorb his interpretive and imaginative skills. My contention, in effect, is that all three characters spend time exercising their imaginative faculties, which, in turn, contributes to their empathetic ability to *be* for the Other.

In our reading of Wicomb's short stories, we are positioned similarly to the Magistrate, Marion, and Kronk. The stories offer us privileged access to the Other's perspective, from which we glimpse racialised and gendered experience under a patriarchal, racist regime that seeks to dominate, shape, and utilise Othered bodies. Thus, in the process of reading, we must, like the novels' protagonists, exercise our imaginative and empathetic faculties, for we are faced with the marginalised Other whose outlook we are compelled to inhabit. We simultaneously experience and are implicated in her suffering. For instance, we sense, through Frieda's eyes, the penetrating male sexist look, the overweight body, the patriarchal father; through Dot's eyes, racialised prejudice, the desire for whiteness, the anguish of exclusion; and through Mrs Pringle's eyes, the crush of domesticity, the performance of femininity, the isolation. In this manner, the stories, if read properly, can initiate an experience of Being for the Other – albeit in diluted form – in which we literally see the world through these 'coloured' women's eyes. If we cannot take up direct responsibility for the fictional Other, we can reassess our own privileged positions and take up responsibility for our complicity in structures of oppression and violence.

Ultimately, what I have been working towards in this study is a form of Being for the Other that involves an effort of the imagination in relation to another. A state of 'being for' is achieved when one *feels for* the Other in the profoundest sense, which is to say, momentarily one *is* the Other. It is the sensation or imaginative intuition of how it must be for that individual to live in the world, without effacing his/her experience with one's own and without endeavouring to know or comprehend it. To reach a sense of "Universal responsibility", as the Dalai Lama puts it, we must therefore put our empathetic imaginations to work in relation to Other nations, in relation to Other humans, and, crucially, in relation to Other forms of life.

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