

How Do I Write in This Strange Place?: The Treatment of Shame and Whiteness in Contemporary White South African Post-Apartheid Literature

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Summary

Post-apartheid literature is a genre that, in its aesthetic and political complexity, still largely eludes neat definition, but the discussions around its development are various. Many have suggested that the change in literary tradition from the apartheid era has not been very substantial at all. At the 2015 Franschoek Literary Festival, Thando Mqgolozana correctly identified that South Africa's literary sphere, from published writing to literary festivals, was not demographically representative, and still revolved around serving the interests of white South Africans. Literature is not the only part of post-apartheid South African society that ethically demands the decentring of historical whiteness, and white South Africans are grappling with this moral necessity in various ways. Because many white South Africans feel ashamed of the nation's racial inequalities, Samantha Vice argues, they are critically assessing their own ways of living and how they are part of the problem. This attitude is evident in much contemporary white South African literature. Here I aim to critically compare two post-apartheid novels by white South African authors: Ken Barris's *What Kind of Child* (2006) and Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning* (2002). I will interrogate their differing approaches to decentring whites, whiteness and whiteness, noting not only where they are useful, but also – and more specifically – how both these approaches inevitably fall back into an ingrained white centrality. This article, being a contribution to whiteness studies, also somewhat ironically re-centres whiteness despite its own criticisms. It accordingly aims to both practice and advocate a careful self-reflexivity that may be useful for white South African writing going forward. These analyses will be grounded within existential discussions regarding whiteness and whiteness, and national post-apartheid rebuilding and development.

Opsomming

Post-apartheid literatuur is 'n genre wat nog steeds sy voete kry, maar die besprekings rondom die ontwikkeling daarvan is uiteenlopend. Baie het voorgestel dat die verandering in die literêre tradisie van die apartheidsera nie baie groot was nie. Tydens die Franschoek-literêrefees in 2015, het Thando Mqgolozana korrek geïdentifiseer dat Suid-Afrika se literêre sfeer nie demografies verteenwoordigend was nie, en steeds

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daarom gedraai het om die belange van blanke Suid-Afrikaners te dien. Literatuur is nie die enigste segment van die na-apartheid Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing wat die desentrering van historiese witheid eties vereis nie, en wit Suid-Afrikaners worstel op verskeie maniere met hierdie morele noodsaaklikheid. Samantha Vice beweer dat, aangesien baie Suid-Afrikaners skaam voel oor die land se rasse-ongelykhede, hulle hul eie lewenswyses, en hoe hul deel van die probleem is, krities beoordeel. Hierdie houding blyk uit baie kontemporêre wit Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde. Hier beoog ek om twee post-apartheid romans deur wit Suid-Afrikaanse skrywers krities te vergelyk: Ken Barris se *What Kind of Child* en Justin Cartwright se *White Lightning*. Ek sal hul verskillende benaderings tot witmense, witheid en witlikheid ondersoek, en spesifiek daarop let dat albei hierdie benaderings onvermydelik terugval op hierdie ingewortelde wit sentraliteit. Hierdie ontledings sal gegrond wees op eksistensiële besprekings oor witheid en witlikheid, en nasionale herstel en ontwikkeling na Apartheid.

In a panel discussion titled “Writer’s Rage” at the 2015 Franschoek Literary Festival, Thando Mgqolozana declared that he was cutting ties with South Africa’s “white literary system” (Malecówna 2015a). Mgqolozana argued that South African literature, as an institution, received white writers and writing more favourably, for many reasons. These include ongoing racially-determined financial inequalities not permitting black audiences to buy as much literature as whites, the societal marginalisation of African languages, and the fact that bookstores and literary festivals are mostly located in predominantly white areas (Malecówna 2015b). The post-apartheid nation, and its literary industry, are still evidently plagued by ongoing racial inequalities, and so aspiring towards Mgqolozana’s vision of a decolonised literary system should be morally encouraged. However, the requirement for a literary system that is demographically representative calls into question the involvement of white South African writers. In her widely discussed essay, “How Do I Live in this Strange Place?” (2010), Samantha Vice argues that white South Africans are unavoidably encumbered by an inherent, problematic whiteness – a term coined by feminist scholar Marilyn Frye in 1992 to refer to the (sub/un)conscious articulation of and predisposition for whiteness. Paul Taylor adds that racial privilege allows the whitely individual to “leav[e] their perspectives and practices unexcavated and unmarked, and [to ignore] the perspectival nature of their perspectives” (2004: 230), giving whiteness a cyclical inescapability. This ingrained whiteness, Vice suggests, results in white South Africans’ attempts to participate in public and political national discourse improperly overwhelming black voices and interests. Because socially ingrained whiteness more often than not prevents whites from negotiating with things in a way that is not white-centred, Vice argues that “white South Africans cannot unproblematically see themselves as fitting into or contributing much to the post-Apartheid narrative”, since white participation in national discourse must always inevitably be problematic, even immoral (2010: 332). Advocating, then, an ethical response of silence, Vice’s article poses interesting questions about, as well as has important implications

for, the ethical position and reparative efficacy of contemporary white South African writing.

An apparent irony arises in Vice's article: by virtue of being written and published, it is itself an act of un-silence. Her choice to do this suggests that there is, for Vice, some potential value to articulating her discomfort with her whiteness, despite advocating silence. It is this irony that forms the foundation of this paper's inquiry of the representations and workings of whiteness, whiteness and white shame in two contemporary novels by South-African writers: Ken Barris's *What Kind of Child* (2006), and Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning* (2002). The former frames its whitely protagonist negatively, and appears critical of his inability to engage with his whiteness. The white protagonist of the latter finds himself apparently unable to contribute to post-apartheid nation-building, and the text concludes with him emigrating to the United Kingdom. Both novels are written from deeply and earnestly reflecting on white South African existentialism through the positionality of the narrative voice. Such self-reflexive writing also serves to encourage/initiate the reader's similar reflection on their own position.

Despite advocating the value of self-reflexive post-apartheid white writing, I will show that both these novels are vulnerable to the detrimental influence of whiteness, ostensibly because they are written from a white-centred, whitely framework. Taking this into account, however, I will argue for the social and moral value of self-reflexive white writing for the post-apartheid moment and the South African literary establishment. Similarly to the risk that critical whiteness studies in academic institutions "compete[s] for resources and attention with the fields, programs, and departments of, for example, African-American studies and Chicano studies" (Taylor 2004: 228), I acknowledge that to publish more white writing in South Africa would seem to only contribute to the "white literary system", and further marginalise writing from other racial groups. I recognise the irony that this paper itself contributes more academic attention to white South African writing. However, I aim to provide some conclusions to how white writers – including myself with this article – can positively involve themselves in the decolonisation of the country's academy and literary industry.

What Kind of Child

Published in 2006, Ken Barris's *What Kind of Child* follows two protagonists living in post-apartheid Cape Town. The first, Luke Turner, is the product of the rape of his single white mother by a black housebreaker. The novel suggests that it is his shame at his coloured complexion that informs his curious desire to have his body covered indiscriminately in tattoos by an elderly tattoo artist, Bernal Díaz Castillo. The narrative also follows Malibongwe Joyini, a young boy who is likewise a product of rape; his young

black mother, Xoliswa, was brutally taken advantage of by a white policeman working for the apartheid government. As a result of his mother's death through the apparent contraction of AIDS, Malibongwe starts living and begging on the streets in order to provide for himself. He develops a glue addiction, and becomes partially blind before he is hit by a car and dies in the streets of Cape Town, becoming "embedded" (Barris 2006: 217) in the city's grand infrastructure.

The narrative structure of the novel establishes a comparative connection between the two protagonists. They are both young coloured males living in Cape Town and they are both children of rape. This accords with the novel's title, which refers to a passage from J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999). After his daughter is brutally raped, David Lurie ponders, "What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine?" (Coetzee 1999: 199). Similarly to the two rapes in *Disgrace*, the two rapes in the novel harken to what Lucy Graham (2012) recognises as two separate but related traditions of representing rape in South African literature: one of "black peril", and the other, somewhat in response to the first, of "white peril" (2015: 6). The former harkens back especially to white social hysteria around the turn of the twentieth century, although Graham finds examples from earlier, and involves "sensationalised accounts of white women being raped by black men" (2012: 4). The latter tend to present black women being sexually abused by white men under colonial rule, drawing attention to institutionalised suffering as a result of racial and gender inequality. Both traditions point, for Lucy, to a historic disgust with "miscegenation", and a "phobic inability to think of interracial sex in any other than violent and abusive terms" (2012: 7). Graham argues that post-apartheid representations of rape in literature have largely – or at least, far more often than before – bought in less to the historical horrification of interracial rape narratives. This has been done in various ways, from rather highlighting instances of intraracial rape – which in fact occur more commonly in South Africa (Graham 2012: 4; Hirschowitz, Worku & Orkin 2000: 37) – and representing male rape, to complicating the "perilousness" of rape narratives (Graham 2012: 132-191). *Disgrace* itself complicates how rape is commonly understood, by drawing attention to David Lurie's implicit biases about what rape means. He uses the word "rape" (Coetzee 1999: 157) to describe the rape of his daughter by three black housebreakers, but despite acknowledging that his sexual encounters with Melanie were "undesired to the core" by her, he calls it "[n]ot rape, not quite that" (Coetzee 1999: 25).

Barris's novel would seem to complicate the question that it takes as its title by formally comparing its two protagonists. The narrative focusses primarily on Luke; Luke's scenes are narrated from his first-person perspective, while Malibongwe's scenes are delivered in the third person. Bianca Rapp (2013), in her thesis on representations of rape in post-apartheid literature, notes that

this narrative distinction between the characters points to their different socio-economic circumstances, and the fact that a whitely voice is offered greater social and public recognition than the subaltern's, who does not even speak for himself, but is spoken for by the third-person narrator. Rapp attributes this comparison in particular to their mothers' apartheid-framed ethnic backgrounds, which "play an essential role with regard to the course of their lives" (2013: 42). Luke's mother, Caitlin, is the daughter of a university professor, is educated, and works at a publishing house in Cape Town. She and Luke live comfortably while Malibongwe's mother, "suffers from the disadvantage of being black and female during apartheid" (Rapp 2013: 42). She is denied access to work after Malibongwe is born, and is entirely financially dependent on a man named Griffiths, with whom she has a reluctant sexual relationship in return for a place to stay and food to eat for herself and her child. Thus, despite both protagonists being coloured in ethnicity, both being the products of rape, and both being brought up by single mothers, the trajectories of their lives are vastly different because of historical racial consequences. This has the effect of reframing rape not just as a gender issue, but as an intersectional one.

This forms part of the novel's particular complication of the notion of race. Rapp argues that despite his privileged positionality, Luke has developed a discomfort with his own skin colour, because it is different to the people predominantly surrounding him while growing up (2013: 34). She further suggests that, despite "emphasis[ing] the importance of the pale skin colour of his lovers, he is not capable of perceiving the colour of his own skin" (2013: 34). Luke's shame at the colour of his skin is a recognition of the fallacy of non-racial discourse, what Howard Winant would call neoconservative colour-blindness (2006: 102-103), because his coloured skin does not do justice to his own self-image. It is useful here to engage with Paul Taylor's description of whiteness:

So whiteness is a property of individuals – a social location of structural privilege; it is a generic sensibility, perspective, or mind-set, and sometimes one that remains resolutely unaware of its distinctiveness; and it is a discourse, or a system of meanings that is dialectically co-constitutive with individual sensibilities.

(Taylor 2004: 230-231)

It is fair to say that Luke has this property, and so saying that he portrays whiteness and/or whiteness would be fair, despite his skin not actually being "white". This should not be read as a position akin to Walter Benn Michaels's argument that race is a "mistake" of history, meaning that race holds no actual grounds as a "social fact", and so neoconservative colour-blindness should be encouraged. Rather, the fact that Luke cannot simply choose to be white, and thus avoid that shame, disproves Michaels's theorisation of race. Rather, Barris presents a character that intertwines the biological indeterminacy of

race categorisation with the “social fact” of race, that it is “embedded in economic life, language, art, taste, and mores” in a way that is “obstinately resistant to the sort of dismissal that Michaels proposes” (Winant 104-105). Luke is thus burdened with both the white shame of his privileged background in an unequal society, as well as his own skin colour.

His reaction to this dual shame is to try and hide his skin colour even from himself, and to ignore race entirely. This renders his relationship with Diaz, the tattooist, significant. As a personification of colonial history, having lived over five hundred years, and partaken in the Spanish colonisation of Mexico, Diaz represents a history of conquest, assertions of unequal power, and the colonial project at large. It is this history that Diaz decides to tattoo onto Luke’s body. That Luke allows this positions him as a willing canvas of the grand historical narrative. Luke’s first tattoo is of a caged man who resembles him, which suggests that he becomes imprisoned by – and in – the grand narrative of history which is inscribed on his body. This act of using one’s own body for creative expression indicates some individual agency in terms of self-representation. Luke is able to choose to allow History – as capitalised to refer to history’s grand narrative in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) – to inscribe itself upon him because of the agency that his privilege gives him. This agency is not uncomplicated; his choice to do this is a way of expressing the severe helplessness Luke feels, trapped in his own skin. His agency is nonetheless evident.

Malibongwe’s circumstances, by contrast, deny him the same agency. His life is typically presented as a struggle for the preservation of his own body. For example, during the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, Malibongwe’s mother does not vote because she is struggling to find medical care for her sick son (Barris 2006: 122-123). Later, he must give the little money he makes from begging to his friend, Khayaletu, because the older boy will beat him up if he does not (Barris 2006: 154-155). Because Malibongwe must prioritise bodily necessity over public and political agency, his body is controlled by external factors.

Both protagonists are entrapped within History, but Luke’s privileged situation of birth grants him the power of choice over the implicative forces thereof. He chooses to allow the grand historical narrative to determine his life anyway. This makes Luke condemnable for not being cognisant of his privilege. The novel is a criticism of the ignorance – or “ignore-ance”, as Melissa Steyn describes it (2005: 129) – of those South Africans who are not cognisant of their privilege, and actively seek to null its negative social effects. It is a call for this minority to use their historically-prescribed agency to challenge historically-prescribed fate, rather than just allowing for inequality and privilege, as it does with Luke by using him as History’s canvas.

This formulaic juxtaposition creates a focal imbalance that, despite the success of the self-reflexivity of the novel, allows whiteness to still control

the narrative. This can be seen most prominently in the only scene of the novel where Luke and Malibongwe interact. On the day that Malibongwe and his friend Khayaletu start begging outside the Company Gardens, they are approached by Luke:

The man stops when he sees the child begging [...]. He reaches absent-mindedly into his pocket, then withdraws his hands. His face [...] clouds over. He seems to struggle with himself, as if trying to make a decision. Then he comes forward and leans down to Malibongwe's level, his expression intent and troubled.

"You shouldn't be doing this," he says. "You should be at school. I can see you're just starting off."

In his life in the city, Malibongwe has picked up better English than his mother; he understands the man well enough. He looks uneasily at Khaya, but his friend offers no lead, turning away stonily.

"There are places you can go to, do you know that? You can find help there. You can go to the Homestead, in Somerset Road – you know where that is?"

Malibongwe shakes his head, looking down at his feet. But he doesn't really feel ashamed. He senses that the man needs him to feel ashamed. Acting ashamed, he thinks, is the fastest way to get rid of the man.

It seems to work; the man straightens up. "'I was going to give you money, but I've decided not to', he says. 'Do you understand why?'"

Malibongwe shakes his head again, playing along. The man can read the undertone of mockery, but shrugs it off.

"Because", he says, "I'm not going to reward your lifestyle. I'm not going to encourage it."

Now Malibongwe really doesn't know what he is talking about.

"Go back to school, kid", the man says. He turns, and limps away. Khaya and Malibongwe glance at each other sidelong, sharp, hostile humour lurking in their eyes.

When Malibongwe gets home that evening, he is well fed and has some small change in his pocket. It has been a satisfying day; an unusual day, one nicked by the sharp edge of freedom.

(Barris 2006: 152-153)

This scene is suggestively self-reflexive for several reasons. Firstly, in terms of the narrative structure of the scene, it should be noted that it is not narrated from Luke's perspective, but in the third-person focalised narration that is used throughout the novel to deliver Malibongwe's scenes. It is thus deliberately skewed towards Malibongwe's point of view of Luke's privileged position, providing an external observation of the privileged subject – a reflection of him. Secondly, the emphasis on choice here reveals the extent to which Luke's autonomy exceeds Malibongwe's. Luke makes a considered decision about whether or not to give Malibongwe money, eventually deciding not to, so as not to "reward [Malibongwe's] lifestyle", evincing his belief that the child has chosen to be a beggar. Malibongwe is perplexed by this suggestion, since his is a harsh and undesirable lifestyle necessitated by

circumstance, in which begging is ironically “nicked by the sharp edge of freedom”. Luke’s apparent thoughtlessness here is akin to what Charles Mills calls an “epistemology of ignorance”, a “particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions” that results in whites ironically being “unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (1997: 18). This can only happen because there is no consequence for the privileged white himself for practicing this false consciousness. Mills argues that to live in this “racial fantasyland”, this “consensual illusion”, is possible because there is no personal consequence of not doing so for one with privilege (1997: 18). The unspoken power granted to Luke by his privilege allows him the ability to dictate the choices that the disempowered Malibongwe should make, again emphasising the disparity in the agency of the two characters. The text positions Malibongwe as the subaltern without agency, robbed of choice by History, while Luke’s thoughtless response/actions toward him highlight a toxic whiteness so ingrained that it is normative, hence providing the reader with a valuable instance of worthwhile white self-reflexivity.

Furthermore, the idea that Malibongwe acts ashamed because he senses that Luke “needs him to feel ashamed”, suggests that Luke’s shame is projected onto Malibongwe. But because the third-person perspective in this is closely aligned with Malibongwe’s perspective, the reader recognises the fallacy of the privileged subject’s self-exemption from shame. Malibongwe’s performance of shame thus functions to illuminate and interrogate this shame as whiteness, and working in the service of whiteness. Since this is a performance, this would suggest a level of agency comparative to Luke’s. However, Malibongwe acts to provide Luke’s “need” for his shame. Luke, on the other hand, does not act to provide Malibongwe’s financial need. To positively react to his white shame – by recognising that he should act to improve the South African social situation – would be positive. However, Luke opts to transfer his shame onto Malibongwe, and so not to interrogate his own shame, and to act positively as a result of this. There is a subtle game of power on the go in this scene. The two characters respond to each other’s needs differently, despite the fact that both have the means to supply the other’s needs. Luke decides not to do so because, in the way he understands the situation, to do so would be to approve of a beggarly lifestyle, which is disagreeable by whiteness standards. This is what Marilyn Frye means when she argues that whiteness functions whenever the privileged subject makes value-driven judgments (1992: 151-157). She argues that this normative ideology is the assumption and practice of white superiority because of a whiteness intolerance/ignorance of other ways of being, since “[a]ny serious moral or political challenge to a whiteness person must be a direct threat to her or his very being” (Frye 1992: 157). Malibongwe, in contrast, does perform as Luke needs him to because it serves to “get rid of” Luke. Malibongwe needs to get rid of the privileged protagonist because the agency Luke implies

Malibongwe to have is insulting in light of the painful absence of agency that plagues his existence.

However, the text itself is guilty of being similarly insensitive to subaltern reality. In her influential essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Gayatri Spivak concludes that Western academics cannot speak adequately for the subalterns that have been silenced by the forces of colonial history, since their only access to those lived experiences is through language, a socially determined symbolic medium of generalising singular experiences for the sake of others’ understanding. For example, to describe one’s positive relations with another as “love” is to homogenise that relationship as it compares to all other relationships described as relationships of “love”. Because of this dependence on language rather than experience, logocentric assumptions are used to complete the understanding of subaltern experience, because of the external point of view of the Western academic attempting to relate the experience of the silenced other.

The text does seem aware of Spivak’s argument, since it advocates for the privileged to use their privilege to assist the subaltern in developing her own voice against the marginalising consequences of the grand narrative of history. Mike Marais’s reading suggests that *What Kind of Child* advocates for those with privilege to “try to make history accommodate the other that it seeks constantly to exclude, to render homeless” (2014: 92). Marais explains that “through seeking to change history in such a way that the subaltern is enfranchised, has a voice, and is therefore no longer subaltern but the creator of their own destiny (and so a god of sorts), the individual speaks without simply being spoken through by history” (2014: 92). The narrative constantly attempts to evoke empathy for Malibongwe’s lack of agency and voice by presenting him as a pathetic character, but this empathy comes across as pity, which reinforces the divide of superiority and/or privilege between the reader and the subaltern. Malibongwe does not beg by choice, but to keep himself alive. He does not go to school because he needs to use the time to beg in order to sustain himself. He is helpless to avoid his hardships, as they are a consequence of his subalternity. By then simultaneously problematising Luke’s ignorant subjection to the historically prescribed narrative, the text can be seen to criticise white centrality, and encourage a more inclusive system of sharing lived experience, as Marais (2014) suggests the text advocates.

However consider that, in the above scene, the subaltern character acts merely to aid an exhibition of white shame, thereby reducing the subaltern to a peripheral existence, as an accessory to white centrality. In trying to write the subaltern, the text ironically erases the subaltern presence, reduced as it is to cursory interactions with non-subaltern characters. The attempt to write (for) the subaltern continues to subject the subaltern to voicelessness while re-centring a whitely perspective. This is further emphasised by the novel’s disproportionate empathy with the complexity of Luke’s identity, and his encounters with his own shame. While the first person narration allows for an

interesting, complex and engaging existential consideration of Luke's character, Malibongwe becomes a caricature of the street child, and his chapters engage more with his hardships and living conditions than his actual subjectivity. While his racial identity is certainly complicated, Luke's whiteness seems to be the only real reason for an emphasised empathetic engagement by the narrative voice. I do not mean to suggest that this is an accidental narrative preference for the whitely character on the part of the author; it could very well be argued, as Bianca Rapp does, that this is a technique to deliberately emphasise the inequality of representation that privilege affords whitely individuals. However, the text is then simply using a subaltern character to make a further point about whiteness, thereby re-centring the whitely and re-marginalising the marginalised.

The text's failure at the very project it aims to advocate, suggests the complex, unconscious power of whiteness and the subtle and uncanny ways in which whiteness asserts its dominance. The solipsism of critical whiteness studies, and literary attempts to decentre whiteness, are their reversion to white centrality in order to make their point. This has resulted in the prevalence of what Howard Winant calls "new abolitionism", a white racial project focussed on eradicating whiteness in individuals and society, because of the understanding that it is a "strictly negative category" (2001: 106). Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning* (2002), and similar white-emigration texts, follow a similar – and similarly imperfect – philosophical response to the problems of whiteness, white privilege and white shame.

White Lightning

White Lightning is also a self-reflexive text, this time structured around a white South African expatriate. While Barris's text presents the problem of whiteness as something that requires social realignment in order to resolve, and aims to realign a white-centred, apartheid-structured racial society into something more demographically representative, Cartwright's text is far more pessimistic. The novel suggests that the identification of oneself as a white South African – or, indeed, a white African – is complicated and, finally, illusory.

White Lightning's protagonist, James Kronk, is a man whose life in England has collapsed. Having lost his wife, his son, and the woman with whom he has become obsessed, he returns to his birthplace, South Africa, to attend to his terminally ill mother. She is the last person with whom he has any real relationship, and her impending and eventual death fills him with an emptiness, as he struggles to find purpose in his life. With no other prospects, and no reason to return to England, James buys a small, rundown farm with his inheritance. On the farm, he appears to develop a genuinely intimate relationship with a caged baboon named Piet, a representation of the natural

world and original inhabitancy of the land. He develops a frigid romance with a single mother, Valerie, and becomes the custodian of a poor black family, taking especial care of a young boy named Zwelakhe, who is HIV positive, and whom he regularly takes to the nearby hospital. In these ways, James starts to reconstruct a life for himself predicated on a (re)claimed African identity.

This is illusory, however, as is evidenced in the anonymous destruction of the bee farm he establishes to sustain his livelihood, the discovery and practice of kaolinite mining on his land, which renders his farm unworkable, and Piet's violent and fatal attack on Zwelakhe. These utterly non-Romantic events mean that the novel takes the form of a writing back to perhaps the most prolific genre of all South African white writing, the pastoral *plaasroman*, or farm novel. James's existential journey of misguided self-discovery culminates in him shooting the baboon in the head, selling what remains of the farm, and returning to England, where he takes up a job as a motorcycle messenger.

White Lightning is written entirely in the first-person. This means that the white protagonist is not externally or reflectively implicated for his problematic actions, as in Luke and Malibongwe's lone interaction. Rather, by narrating his own story, any implications of the protagonist as problematical are self-implications on James's own part. For instance, when walking through a Coloured settlement, he narrates:

These brown people who stop or loiter or wander along eating are not attractive people. They have faces that have been knocked about by life. Of course, I know that this is a cultural judgment, but I am not here to weigh and consider or to make allowances for history and deprivation and injustice. There are plenty of people better equipped than me for that. Coming back to my fatherland this late in the day, I have no wish to add my voice to the chorus of analysis and judgment. Anyway, my own life has not qualified me to pass grand judgment.

(Cartwright 2002: 57)

In this extract, the white protagonist is implicated as a problematic entity in the nation's development. James recognises that making cultural judgments based on ethnic observations is wrong. He also adopts a dissenting tone with respect to "the chorus of analysis and judgment" – a description which espouses the group of privileged voices that overwhelm South African public, political and discursive spaces – and is critical of the validity of his own voice because of what he considers to have so far been a failed life. This exemplifies the narrative's use of the first-person to make the white subject self-reflexive through self-implication in the problematically dominant whiteness of the post-apartheid nation.

However, there are many problematical aspects to the excerpt that James does not incriminate himself in, but in which the reader implicates the

protagonist through accessing his internal subjectivity. His apparent self-effacement – in his realisation of his own problematic whiteness and for his dismissal of an expedient political correctness – is the shirking of his responsibility for and responsiveness to his immediate environment and South Africa's larger socio-political/societal problems. The insinuation of self-reflexivity, countered by his wilful ignorance, suggests a whitely way of negotiating the post-apartheid situation, and by extension his own white shame. While he shows an awareness of historical deprivation and injustice, he chooses to maintain the status quo. In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls suggests that justice can only effectively be achieved if one's subjective perspective is eliminated from the equation, because fairness is determined objectively, or from what he terms a "veil of ignorance" (1997: 118). James's disregard for suffering and the effects of his actions, simply because it does not affect him in his privileged position, exemplifies a whitely rationale that exacerbates societal injustice.

Thus the narrative voice structurally presents much of the novel's self-reflexive elements as something realised not by James, but by the engaged reader. The narration of his relationship with Piet creates a similar disjuncture between James's perception of himself, and the reader's. While James narrates his relationship with the baboon as something ethereally profound, the reader cannot help but feel it to be rather foolish. It is couched in Romanticism that James projects onto the relationship, and so acts to further the anti-pastoral discourse of the text, and thereby to embody a historically self-reflexive white writing. For example, the "pharaohic indifference" (Cartwright 2002: 184) James identifies in Piet's lack of visible reaction to the change in scenery along one of their drives is really the indifference of an animal's primitive inability to make such "value-laden" human judgments. The baboon's unwillingness to leave his cage without his chain around his neck (Cartwright 2002: 166) tarnishes, for James, their trusting friendship, but to the reader more probably signifies its abuse-driven Pavlovian conditioning. His romantic naiveté is further highlighted in the film script he devises, which tells the story of a policeman and a baboon working together to combat high-level crime. His vision of it as a profound story of loving, devoted, and tangible friendship is contrasted with the reality of it being a laughable buddy-cop movie about a primate police officer. This recalls and is linked to his father's unpublished writings on baboons which are revealed to merely be some arbitrary observations about baboons made by some other unsuccessful researcher, inflated with emotionally-driven and unverifiable assumptions on the part of his father about the way baboons relate to humans, and to each other.

Piet's symbolism extends beyond being useful for presenting James's Romantic naiveté. Laura Pechey argues that Cartwright uses the image of the baboon as the "original inhabitant" (2006: 42) of the land, and so James's friendship with Piet comes to signify James's sense of attachment to and

attempted (re)clamation of his own African identity. Noting that Piet is symbolically contrasted, as an original inhabitant, with the rest of the characters, Pechey argues that Cartwright puts forward “an image which supports a view of all men, including the indigenous peoples, as colonisers of nature” (2006: 42), so that James’s relationship with Piet is underwritten by an imperialism that he tries to revoke in the first place. He becomes aware of his delusion near the end of the novel, when he narrates: “I said to Ulla I thought I was achieving a communion with the landscape, but I didn’t really know what that could mean” (Cartwright 2002: 216).

While Pechey maintains that James’s anthropomorphic reductionism of Piet problematically elides any real engagement by the white author with the contentious issue of land ownership in the country in order to “refract their own historiographical revisionism” (2006: 42), this does not necessarily seem to be Cartwright’s position. Significantly, James finds living in South Africa and owning South African land to be irreconcilable, eventually being literally chased into the ocean by a group of black South Africans after Zwelakhe’s death. He eventually moves back to London despite the minimal prospects he faces there. The novel’s plot essentially revolves around a white man’s illusory and unsuccessful journey to (re)claim a lost African identity. However, the sense of estrangement he feels in England as well means that he is unable to find *any* sense of belonging or identity. His exclusion from both of these national identities renders him a “soutpiel”, a term first used by Valerie to describe James and then by James himself, and that becomes not so much descriptive of a man who is able to identify himself as both an African and a European, but rather indicates that he cannot identify himself as either. James thereby succumbs to an archetypal existential crisis, which he simply describes as “this anxiety of being in the wrong place” (Cartwright 2002: 44), which forms the foundation of the novel’s self-reflexive enquiry.

James’s reflections on his life and its locations leave him without any location at all. Most notably, for the purposes of my argument, he cannot find this belonging in South Africa, because it is too strange to him. He cannot reconcile the confrontation with the problem of white centrality for the white subject in post-apartheid South Africa, and so must leave the country and resume his British residency, even though his life there is similarly insubstantial. James perceives the white South African existential condition to be not so much an issue of white centrality as an issue of the notion of white African-ness entirely. James therefore cynically concludes that whites have no claim to their post-apartheid South African identity, and so should not participate in the public, political sphere, and perhaps even leave the country.

The suggestion that nothing positive can come from white engagement with the new nation’s public and political arena is unsatisfactory though, and the distance the narrative establishes between the protagonist and the reader, as shown, reinforces this. The white person’s role in these areas should be carefully active, and not ignorantly passive, because the former option

contributes positively to both the nation and the individual's projects of self-improvement. This oversight – on the part of both the text and Samantha Vice's conclusion of white withdrawal from the South African political and public arenas – is due to both an over-estimation of the conclusivity of whiteness, and an underestimation of the white subject's capacity for positive self-reformation. Vice's essay hinges on the argument that whiteness is ingrained in white subjects to the point that it is unavoidable in all white thought. Because of this, she argues, white involvement in the country's political and public arenas will always be tainted with problematic whiteness, and so be harmful to the non-white citizens' engagements with these spaces. Eusebius McKaiser (2011) responds to Vice's essay by questioning just how unavoidable ingrained whiteness really is. He says that white political involvement can be positive if the white person learns to live both carefully and in constant reflexive self-awareness of the way they may be tinged by whiteness, in order to avoid imparting whiteness upon the South African public (2011: 458). He goes on to argue that this way of being in the South African political, public realm is preferable to silence because it avoids, perhaps entirely, the criticisms of Vice's conclusions as being detrimental to the project of national reformation (2011: 459). Among these he includes the moral duties we have beyond our racial identities, the self-interest of whites in their private and professional realms when these are impacted upon unfairly by the political, and the necessity for black-white relations to be improved within the public, political space (2011: 459-60). All three of these will be forfeited by the withdrawal of whites from this space. Howard Winant gives a similar example in his argument against white abolitionist silence, suggesting that "without denying one's white identity, one can certainly oppose and interrupt racist activity or speech" (2001: 108).

Winant here has highlighted a significant problem with new abolitionist ideological responses to whiteness, that they are grounded in an "over-determined political and cultural meaning" for whiteness (2001: 107). "Like any other complex of beliefs and practices, "whiteness" is embedded in a highly articulated social structure and system of significations", and abolishing it, he argues, "seems quite utopian, almost Sorelian" (2001: 107). To abolish whiteness would be to eradicate the concept of race itself, and so reverts back to neoconservative colour-blindness, problematic because of its ignore-ance of race-related social, economic and political inequalities. This, for Winant, is "an outcome as undesirable as it is impossible" (2001: 107). Winant advocates, rather, for the "deconstruction" of whiteness (2001: 107). This involves "rethinking and changing ideas about white identity and reorienting the practices consequent upon these ideas" (2001: 107). White literature can and should play this role within the new South African literary formation. White writers should certainly be encouraged to continue contributing to the country's body of post-apartheid literature, because the absence of white writing in the South African literary landscape would be detrimental

to a project of deconstructing whiteness that is essential to the formation of any ideal, interracial South African future. This deconstruction depends on writing in a rigorously self-reflexive way in order to be beneficial, rather than detrimental.

This is not to say, necessarily, that Cartwright's conclusion of emigration is self-reflexively incorrect, or that his text has no worth for the white person's project of positive self-reflexivity. Similarly to Jeremy Wanderer's (2011) argument defending Samantha Vice's essay, to read Cartwright's conclusion as advocatory is imprecise. Rather, it is fairer to read the text as a form of confessional writing. James's constant – and oftentimes intense – self-reflexivity in the novel leads him to find that South Africa cannot home him, no matter how desperately he would like it to. His confession is that he feels he cannot overcome the barriers disrupting his attempts to find residency in his fatherland, and so he leaves for Europe, where he feels his residency is less problematic, and perhaps even more authentic, despite its mundanity. This points to a certain segregationist mentality in the white subject, and certain other elements of whiteness that need to be engaged with and deconstructed in order for a cooperative interracial nation to result. The confessional nature of the novel is then, clearly, somewhat beneficial to the project of deconstructing whiteness. Because self-reflexive writing is so self-involved, and requires one to be so critical of oneself, it is almost always inevitably confessional in nature, as can be seen in the conclusions that Vice's, Barris's and Cartwright's texts arrive at. The nature of these conclusions is different, but their confessional – not necessarily advocatory – thread is what joins them all together.

Self-reflexive writing clearly has value to any beyond those who write it. While confessional writers do not advocate their position to others, the intense process of self-interrogation undertaken advocates for similar responses and self-interrogations within their readers, which makes confessional writing ostensibly valuable beyond the personal. White South Africans should be finding alternative ways to disrupt white dominance of South African public, political, and social spaces, other than removing themselves from these spaces entirely, or speaking on behalf of marginalised citizens, even when done in good faith.

The same can be said for the South African literary industry. White writers should contribute to it by writing in a way that stimulates the self-reflexive improvement of their fellows. They should desist from assumptively writing on behalf of blacks, and should rather make a concerted effort to increase the proportion of literature published by black writers, and in African languages. As Spivak (1988) shows us, a non-privileged voice cannot sincerely be framed within privilege. However, using one's privilege to offer a voice to the subjugated other is an effective method of benefitting the post-apartheid nation, by re-scripting history's grand narrative. Paul Taylor reminds us that democracy "is a mode of conjoint life that we can profitably liken to a

conversation. [...] We do not find our voices especially well in silence; we do better with the assistance of collaborators, joint inquirers, and fellow citizens” (2004: 240). Political participation, after all, “means expressing oneself, expressing *one’s self*; and this is a process not so much of delivering oneself as a fully formed set of propositions, but of discovering, shaping, and cultivating the bundle of interests, beliefs, desires, and so on that constitutes the self” (2004: 231). To choose silence and/or abolitionism is simply not compliant with the democratic ideals of equality and freedom.

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