A Homo Calculator at Large: Reading the Late Work of Foucault in the Light of Ivan Vladislavić's "Villa Toscana"

Susan van Zyl

Summary

This essay takes the form of a reading of Foucault's late work on the subject and power, particularly that concerned with the technologies of self, and the implications this work has for an understanding of the relationship between questions of government and those of self-government in modernity. Focusing on the figure of Jeff Budlender, central character of the opening story of Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*, the essay explores how, from the point at which the state engages in biopolitics – that is, systematically invests in a technology of individuals – forms of government cease to translate spontaneously into practices of self-government. The result, expressed at the level of the individual, is, I argue, the often uneasy attempt to orientate the self to the individual self while at the same time taking cognisance of that self's position in the social entity as a whole. This conflicting position is, I suggest, vividly revealed in Vladislavić's account of the inner life of Budlender, demographer and statistician, as he attempts to make sense of South Africa, himself, and even the woman he loves in ways that alternate between brief concerns with the individual followed by more lasting preoccupations with the group, finally doing justice to neither.

Opsomming

Hierdie essay is in die vorm van 'n lesing van Foucault se latere werk oor die onderwerp van mag, veral die mag wat betrekking het op die tegnologieë van die self, en die implikasies wat hierdie werk inhou vir 'n begrip van die verhouding tussen regerings- en selfregeringskwessies in moderniteit. Deur te fokus op die figuur Jeff Budlender (sentrale karakter van die openingsverhaal van Ivan Vladislavić se *The Exploded View*), ondersoek die essay hoe – van die punt waar die staat biopolitiek begin toepas (d.i., stelselmatig in 'n tegnologie van individue belê) – regeringsvorme ophou om spontaan in selfregeringspraktyke omgesit te word. Ek voer aan dat die resultaat, uitgedruk op die vlak van die individu, die dikwels ongemaklike poging is om die self ten opsigte van die individuele self te oriënteer, terwyl daar terselfdertyd kennis geneem word van dié self se posisie in die sosiale entiteit as geheel. Voorts voer ek aan dat hierdie konflikbelaaide posisie tekenend onthul word deur Vladislavić se relaas van die innerlike lewe van Budlender, die demograaf en statistikus, na gelang hy poog om Suid-Afrika, homself, en selfs die vrou wat hy liefhet te verstaan op maniere wat kortstondige bemoeiing met die individu afwissel met meer blywende ingesteldheid op die groep, sodat daar uiteindelik nie reg geskied aan een van die twee nie.

One of the characteristic features of the extraordinary, mostly short and less formal pieces published in the eighties is the way Foucault locates the particular theme he is exploring in each case within the wider trajectory of his work, particularly that concerning the subject and power and describes himself as engaged in "a genealogy of the modern subject as an historical and cultural reality" (Foucault [1981]1994: 177).

Up until that point, he states, he had conducted this genealogical enquiry from two vantage points; the first he describes as general, the second as practical. The first or general route is best represented by *The Order of Things* ([1966]1970), which is concerned with how scientific knowledge from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century had attempted to explain human life, labour and language by means of overarching common logics and criteria. The second route, taken in *Madness and Civilization* ([1961]1965), *The Birth of the Clinic* ([1963]1973), and *Discipline and Punish* ([1975]1977), focuses on the ways in which a set of technologies (ranging from institutions to discourses) produces particular subjects simultaneously as objects of knowledge and of domination.

In characterising the direction taken in his later work, Foucault speaks of the importance of adding a fourth cluster of techniques to the three outlined by Habermas: those of production (concerning the transformation and manipulation of things), those of signification (that permit one to use sign systems) and, most important here, of domination (those that direct the conduct of individuals by way of imposing certain aims and objectives upon them). The fourth cluster, which comprises what Foucault describes as technologies of the self, include those that

> permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power.
>
> (Foucault [1982]1994: 177)

Foucault's substantial engagement with technologies of this kind begins with those that arise in the Greco-Roman period and continues to include those associated with Christian spirituality in the fourth and fifth centuries. These technologies encompass a variety of practices of both body and soul, ranging from diets, exercises, letters and diaries to an elaborated set of ascetic and confessional rituals. While Foucault's genealogies locate these technologies of the self (as he had earlier done with those of domination) in specific contexts and periods, it is nevertheless possible to say that as his

genealogy of the modern self unfolds, it is associated with different types of "external" power which can, to some extent at least,[1] be periodised; those he describes as sovereign, pastoral, disciplinary, and biopolitical power. (Foucault comes to describe a key component of that group of technologies covered by the term "governmentality".)[2]

Against this background, the reading of Foucault in the light of a contemporary South African novel undertaken here, concerns the relationships between the techniques of domination outlined in his earlier works, especially in *Discipline and Punish* ([1975]1977) and those of the technologies of the self explored in the second and third volume of *The History of Sexuality*[3] and in what are sometimes called the "Christian fragments". It concerns, in other words, questions of the relationship between forms of government,[4] exercised from the outside by some over others, and those of self-government, reflexive practices exercised by subjects upon themselves.

Foucault's Powers: Between "Government" and Self-Government ?

Foucault's turn to the technologies of the self manifests itself in a concern with the early history and development of what he calls pastoral power. In "Pastoral Power and Political Reason" ([1979]1999) and "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self" ([1980]1999) he explores this form of power as one orientated towards individuals, driven by defined ethical imperatives and intended to rule them in a continuous and permanent way. While Christianity clearly gave a particular shape to pastoral influence, as Foucault demonstrates, its characteristic ideals and technologies have

---

1. The question of sequence is made more complex by the fact that sovereign power has very different forms in the Greco-Roman period and in the Middle Ages and pastoral power has always run parallel to it.

2. See 4 below.

3. *The Use of Pleasure* ([1984]1986) and *The Care of the Self* ([1984]1988).

4. The term "governmentality" is used by Foucault to refer to a cluster of tactics characteristic of centralised power in modernity, typically encompassing economics, biopolitics, and political economy (Foucault 1978). The term "government" is used here more widely to refer to any form of more or less centralised power coming from the outside as opposed to that operated by the self upon itself.

much in common both in form and focus with the earlier technologies of self in Hellenistic culture outlined in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*.[5] In all cases, the technologies of pastoral power emphasise the regular measuring of acts and words accompanied by an equally regular apportioning of "praise and blame" (Foucault quoting Seneca) to each soul that has submitted itself to its own examination (Foucault [1980]1999: 164).[6]

   The best way, perhaps, to capture the extent to which pastoral power, in its later or fully developed Christian form, implicates questions of the technologies of self, is by way of exploring what Foucault sees as its central metaphor – that of the relation between the shepherd and his flock. It is not enough for the pastor to know and care for the state of the flock; the state of each of his sheep must be known and attended to. In fact it could be said that a flock exceeds a herd precisely because the pastor has inculcated in each member (of a flock) procedures of self-examination and self-reflection which, coupled with those of confession, provide the pastor with access to each soul, its secret sins as well as its progress and proximity to the ideal (Foucault [1979]1999: 137-138).

   In emphasising the twin technologies of self-examination, accompanied by the schedules which guide and bind them, and the confessional filter through which each individual must pass, Foucault's account of pastoral power makes it clear that in this modality, technologies of government and self-government are intimately connected; that the one necessarily operates via the other. What is important here, however, is that this individualising power appears to be antagonistic towards the evolution of the centralising powers of the State that operated alongside it, requiring an often "uneasy adjustment" between the political power wielded over legal subjects by the king and the pastoral power wielded over live individuals by the shepherd (Foucault [1975]2003: 141).

   Extending the reach of the question of how forms of power (as government or domination) relate both to each other and to forms of self-government, involves going back to Foucault's earlier work, to *Discipline and Punish* ([1975]1977) in particular. As is conveyed with extraordinary force in the opening pages of the text, the move from a society of punishment (of sovereign power) to that of discipline which Foucault charts,

---

5.   See *The Uses of Pleasure* ([1984]1986) and *The Care of the Self* ([1984] 1988).

6.   See Carrette (1999: 164) Introduction to *Religion and Culture*. Carrette quotes the phrase "praise and blame" as one used by Foucault quoting Seneca.

may be encapsulated as that from a form of power exercised violently upon the body from above and after the (punishable) event, to one that operates via the self, and is (hopefully) then echoed from within it.

While the focus of Foucault's attention in *Discipline and Punish* ([1975]1977) is obviously upon the set of techniques associated with the processes of rehabilitation characteristic of the prison in particular, the work as a whole refers to a number of normalising practices in the prison which are derivates of, or echoed in, hospitals, army camps and schools, suggesting that these processes are in key respects exemplary of the technologies associated with the disciplinary power more widely. This range of institutions suggests that the techniques of discipline or "means of correct training"[7] are responsible not only for the rehabilitation of criminals but, most markedly in the case of schools, for the production of particular kinds of ordered policed, but finally self-policing subjects.

Cast in the light of Foucault's subsequent work on pastoral power, it is clear then that in the case of disciplinary power, too, techniques of domination are expressed in, or emerge as, technologies of self. The move Foucault traces in *Discipline and Punish* ([1975]1977*),* and revisits in different terms in "Governmentality" ([1978]1994), from the spectacular (in the original sense of the term) authority of the sovereign to the micro politics of discipline is accompanied by normalising techniques of self-regulation reminiscent of those associated with the conscience as it is mobilised by pastoral power. Foucault himself makes an explicit connection between confessional practices essential to pastoral power and the expert interventions of disciplinary power in coupling the advisory interventions of the pastor to those of a series of secular, expert successors: to the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst or sexologist, to the early church, and to pedagogical, medical or psychiatric institutions ([1975]2003: 177, [1984] 1994: 282). In fact it has now become almost a commonplace to say that today the analyst's couch is a secular addition to the space of the confessional; and to suggest, with Foucault in mind, that to miss the extent to which modern power necessarily routes itself via the individual is to mistake what is essential to it or to the democratic enterprise at least.

Although Foucault himself would caution against the idea that the care of the self always has, or always should be, seen as a practice of freedom,[8] it is now often argued that liberal democracies increasingly depend on a number of indirect mechanisms through which the conduct, desires and decisions of

---

7. See Chapter 2 of Part 2 of *Discipline and Punish* ([1975]1977).

8. See "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" ([1984] 1994: 284-285).

citizens may be aligned with those of the state by way of a strategic deployment of exactly this idea of personal liberty.[9] In doing so, the democratic state must, therefore, attempt to produce self-policing subjects who "co-operate" with external modes of power by way of what might well be the "illusion" of individual choice.

To come at this point from yet another direction involves recalling that many consider Foucault's most significant contribution to contemporary understandings of power to stem from his critique of the model of power as repressive, and his emphasis on its productive modalities. If it is correct to connect repressive power to technologies of domination (or government), and productive power to those of self (or self-government),[10] there is much at stake in demonstrating that the subject has been, and remains, the privileged site for modern power. The question, for Foucault, then becomes that of demonstrating that, as earlier forms of power are modified or give way to newer technologies of domination, each new (repressive) modality continues to manifest itself in (productive) technologies of self. In other words, and in practical terms, if both pastoral and disciplinary power (albeit not quite so obviously) take visible routes via individuals and manifest themselves there in a number of often proscribed and legible technologies of self, the same should be true of the powers that follow or accompany them.

Foucault himself draws attention to this question against the background of the emergence of biopolitics, or the entrance into the political field at the end of the eighteenth century of the discovery of population as an object of scientific investigation which, most important for this account, brought with it a major technical requirement – that of statistical analysis.[11]

In *Society Must Be Defended* ([1975]2004), Foucault reflects on the history of the technologies of self that have been objects of his analysis in the light of this discovery. He distinguishes between the first set as those related to the body and as inherently individualising and the second as "massifying" and no longer directed to man as individual but to "man-as-species" or race (Foucault ([1976]2004: 242). In a later work significantly entitled "The Political Technology of Individuals" ([1982]1994), Foucault explicitly describes the first variety as technologies of self and the second as

---

9.   See Nikolas Rose: *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (1998).

10.   See for example Part 2 of Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, where the critique of the repressive hypothesis is followed by sections entitled "The Incitement to Discourse" and "The Perverse Implantation".

11.   See "Truth and Power" ([1976]1994) and in more detail, *Society Must Be Defended* ([1975]2004).

the political technologies of individuals, and points out that what interests him at that point concerns how, by means of the latter, "we have been led to recognise ourselves as a society, as part of a social entity, as part of a nation or a state" (Foucault [1982]1994: 404).

With this distinction in mind, this essay seeks to demonstrate, by way of an analysis of a contemporary South African novel, something that Foucault himself touched on only relatively briefly in his late work. Focusing on the figure of Jeff Budlender, the central character of the opening story of Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*, it explores how, from the point at which the state systematically invests in a technology of individuals, forms of government cease to translate spontaneously into practices of self-government. By way of an analysis of Budlender's attempt to internalise the biopolitical point of view, the essay sets out to reveal how difficult it is for the contemporary subject to simultaneously orientate the self to the self as an individual while maintaining the sense of that position in relation to the social entity as a whole (Foucault [1982]1994: 410).

Budlender's Way: Questions of Number, Questions of Race

One of the most striking features of the inner life of Jeff Budlender, first hero of Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View,* is his preoccupation with numbers – not just numbers, in fact, but numerical calculations, statistics and especially percentages. It is not that Budlender is preoccupied with numbers in what might be called the personal and specific sense; the phone numbers of friends, the street numbers of where they live, the numbers of people that one might be intending to invite to a party. None of the numbers, which occur with such an insistent rhythm in his consciousness, are those that individualise. On the contrary: they are the kinds of numbers that, crucially, as we will see, make people part of a population or group or locate them in a series. Budlender's mental processes significantly include not merely enumeration or arithmetic; they are concerned essentially with statistics.

As he journeys endlessly, a demographer at large, across the sprawling peri-urban spaces outside Johannesburg, Jeff Budlender, emerges – even in love – as a contemporary version of that traditional distractedness and "profoundly abstract being" that Foucault identifies as the mode of existence of the scientists in Jules Verne's novels. Budlender is, in this, much of what Foucault himself describes as the "homo calculator", one now at large in a world very different from that occupied by Verne's physicists and astronomers, one in which a preoccupation with numbers is directed to

the small, social spaces that surround him rather than to the vast tracks of physical space that Verne's characters attempt to chart (Foucault [1966] 1984: 141-142).

Our first meetings with Budlender establish much that remains central to him and with him to the analysis undertaken here. Describing him and a friend chatting in a pub doing what amounts to a crash course in ethnography, Vladislavić writes,

> Since he had been made aware of the characteristics – a particular curl to the hair or shade to the skin, the angle of a cheekbone or jawline, the ridge of a lip, the slant of an eye, the size of an ear – it seemed to him that there were Nigerians everywhere. He had started to see Mozambicans too, and Somalis. It was the opposite of the old stereotype: they all looked different to him. Foreigners on every side. Could the aliens have outstripped the indigenes? Was it possible? There were no reliable statistics.
>
> (Vladislavić 2004: 5)

Budlender, we see at once, has the archetypal biopolitical cast of mind, one that places him snugly in that small army of experts employed by modern states to count, re-count and classify their citizens wielding the census as one of its indispensable tools (Foucault [1976]1994: 117-118). And this is what Budlender is in fact doing. He is not just any statistician but one employed as a demographer involved in post-apartheid South Africa's first non-racial census, one engaged in some faintly disturbing version of the kind of taxonomic enterprise that is based on the physical characteristics of race associated with apartheid.

Nor is it insignificant that Budlender should take the specific biopolitical route that he does, and display the characteristic contemporary South African anxiety around questions of immigrants and their nationalities. The anxiety concerning whether the "aliens have outstripped the indigenes" is intimately connected with the absence of reliable statistics. It is an absence that calls for complaint not just from Budlender but also from his state bosses who find this particular gap in their biopolitical calculations especially alarming (Vladislavić 2004: 5).

Considered in the light of Appadurai's argument in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), the origins of the reader's discomfort at the direction that Budlender's particular biopolitical preoccupations take at this point, becomes clear. In a chapter entitled "Number in the Colonial Imagination", Appadurai draws attention to the particular force attributed to the systematic counting and grouping of bodies in the colonial states in India, Asia and Africa (1996: 115). His account reveals that Orientalism (in the wide sense of the term) was, and perhaps remains, characterised by the weight it places upon the technologies that

264

Foucault associates with biopolitics. The colonisers, he suggests, displayed an especially vivid involvement with the biopolitical enterprise, driven perhaps by the anxiety associated with attempting to control the large tracts of often unmapped territory that they wished not just to call, but to make, their own.

It is therefore not accidental that part of the analytic purchase that this particular novel has on Foucault's work on power more widely, should stem from its location in post-apartheid South Africa, where that especially insidious version of the science of population deployed by the architects and functionaries of apartheid is still too close for comfort. Being privy to conversations and thoughts of this kind is likely to produce in the South African reader, not serious condemnation (Budlender is not the kind of man to lure very strong emotions), but certainly some sense of disquiet, at the continuation in another form of a set of techniques of domination practised with particular force in the colonies.

However, if Vladislavić's text seems to relate in significant ways to Foucault's work on biopolitics – that of race in particular – it also resonates with aspects of his work more familiarly associated with the technologies of disciplinary power.

In an extraordinary episode which takes place at the Star Stop, a fast-food restaurant constructed as a flyover across the highway to Pretoria, we see Budlender setting himself up in what could be described as a spontaneous appropriation of a panopticon manqué. The Star Stop is after all described by Vladislavić himself as "a perch made for a statistician: he was suspended above the great demographic flow, like a boy on a bridge dangling a hook and line, waiting for the rush hour to thicken" (2004: 15).

Before safely occupying his observation post, however, Budlender prepares the site by setting out his briefcase and map as if to legitimate his habitual way of responding to the world as a form of work; he seems to know at some level that doing demography on the world below is not the usual way of being in the uncharted, ordinary social world that is a highway shop (Vladislavić 2004: 15). Map in hand we see him become, as it were, a foreigner in his own country.

As Budlender's charting of the traffic below moves from numbers by colour, to counting roof racks, trailers and spoilers, his thoughts turn to the question of old cars and new cars, to the dynamic play between poverty and wealth in the "new" South Africa. And, crucially, as spoiler moves to spoilt (Vladislavić has a genius for conveying the wordplay at the heart of free association), Budlender is faced with a dilemma: what counts as an old car or a new one and for whom?

> Were the roads full of old cars or new cars? There was a lesson in this, which only a statistician seemed capable of learning. As soon as you took account of what people were saying, you lost track of what was actually happening.
>
> (Vladislavić 2004: 16)

The moment the individual perspective, coupled with what people actually say, is taken into account, the stabilising statistical procedures that dominate Budlender's psychic life fail and questions of quality return, as they so often do, to frustrate the quantitative researcher.

Having placed himself on the statistically driven biopolitical highroad, Budlender soon returns, intentionally at first, to the position in which individual vehicles dissolve back into the blur that is the stream of traffic; that blur that does not admit of counting.

> Just as he lost track now, wilfully, allowing the individual vehicles to dissolve back into a stream, his thoughts drifted to the last quarter sales in the motor industry, greenhouse emission, following distances, fatalities.
>
> (Vladislavić 2004: 16)

But this blurring and drifting is not something that Budlender can sustain; his thoughts take numerical form once more, the "homo calculator" returns, and with him the numbered world in which he, ironically, is most at home.

A Biopolitician in Love

As novelists know, there is no finer way to explore what is essential to character than the trial (or cure, for that matter), by love. What sets Vladislavić apart, however, is the extraordinary way in which he threads work – that other great test of character – through the love interest of his hero and captures the uncanny effects of experiencing a consciousness continuously crossed by two very different logics yet, in the end, lured by the one most alien to love. The scene is set early on when Budlender attempts, in his inimitably orderly way, to order his memories of the woman he now loves.

> Afterwards, when it came to ordering his experience under the heading Villa Toscana, he tried to remember his first impressions of her. They were not features so much as sensations or moods, drifting through him lightly, like steam. Contradictory qualities, softness and angularity, dark italic curls on her temples, the shadowed edge of a wall, her coming and going through the bright bars of sunlight cast down by a pergola that a scrawny bougainvillea had yet to cover. And, as he drove away, the chemical scent of her shampoo.
>
> (Vladislavić 2004: 10-11)

While the stream of memories and impressions of Iris includes all the specific and contradictory ingredients that add up to the mysterious experience of falling in love, Budlender is no poet, has no "negative capability", no capacity to "dwell in contradiction".[12] At the very moment of "falling", one when all sense of proportion is lost, Budlender briefly measures the world by means of his own (personal) body. But in that very instant, he moves away from the personal, treating himself not as that particular flesh and blood thing that he has every right to call his own, but opportunistically, as some makeshift measuring stick, transforming the particular features of her particular house into one which is, or should be, governed by municipal regulations;

> measuring the distance between his outstretched fingertips and the ceiling. At least a metre. Probably, there were municipal regulations. Why did it seem so low?

> (Vladislavić 2004: 12)

This dynamic interplay between love and work, the "free" particular and the category covered by a rule, often seen as an inversion of the wilful and what is "unwilled", is encapsulated in the episode in which Budlender's beloved Iris du Plooy appears on his television screen with another continuity announcer. Iris and her colleague are speaking two different languages; she appears to be speaking Afrikaans, while he speaks either Zulu or Sotho. In a situation that implicates the milder features of an obsessive, voyeuristic love, Budlender once more turns the occasion into one in which the classic South African demographic themes of race, language, and ethnic group reappear. Experiencing something as close to jealousy or disapproval as Budlender can come, he begins musing in familiar mode:

> It was possible, Budlender supposed, that the announcer – if he were not in fact Nigerian – might understand Afrikaans quite well. But surely she did not understand a word he was saying? It is a fact that no more than 2 per cent of white South Africans speak an African language. Twenty-two per cent of the population speak Zulu as a first language. Nine per cent speak English.

> (Vladislavić 2004: 25)

Yet, familiar as the reader may now be with Budlender's fundamentally biopolitical cast of mind, there is still something unnerving about experiencing it in such close connection with his feelings and judgements; things that taken together define the individual as an individual, constituting

---

12. The phrases are those of Keats referring to the special, what he calls chameleon-like, capacities of the poet.

by means of particular shades and mixes, equally particular characters and personalities. But if thoughts of this kind are (merely) unnerving, things move towards the disturbing when Budlender, sleepless in love, starts counting – not the proverbial sheep – but his own most intimate experiences.

> He calculated, in these early hours, that he had been in love no more that half a dozen times in his thirty-seven years, including a teenage infatuation that had never progressed beyond a fever of hopelessly embarrassed desire. What proportion did this represent of all the women in his life, including those he had slept with, with whom he might have fallen in love? It was a pointless question – the terms were too vague, the variables too numerous – and yet it had, nonetheless, a perfectly adequate answer. A negligible proportion. Negligible, the unhappiest of statistical terms.
>
> (Vladislavić 2004: 32-33)

Significantly Budlender sees the question as pointless, not wrong, and implies that the task should be set aside for purely technical, rather than ethical or even personal reasons; and yet, almost immediately, we find his thoughts returning to the individual features and flaws that lure lovers, those that give the beloved particular appeal: the tiny boot-shaped scar which reminds him of Italy leads him to the idea of inviting her to an Italian restaurant because he was somehow sure that she, this particular woman, loved Italian food, especially seafood (Vladislavić 2004: 33).

But the alternating rhythms return once again, and when in the grips of a sleeplessness induced by unsatisfied love, he calculates himself back into the outside world, measuring himself by means of almost every conceivable variable including

> the levels of pollutants in the atmosphere, the radiation from microwave, the radiation from the eight cellphone calls he had made that day, the possibilities for accidents raised by the 300kms he would travel the next day to see Constantinou, Masemola and distant Dijkstra, limitations on injuries produced by the wearing of a seat belt, the risks of heart disease, the hedging of that risk by eating polyunsaturated margarine, by walking up stairs even when there were lifts, by going to the gym, by eating red meat no more than twice a week and so on –

until finally,

with his "spirits raising and falling" with all these considerations, the thought came and went that "he had just 28 per cent of his life to live, if he was fortunate enough to be an average man".

(Vladislavić 2004: 33-34)

This passage, more especially in so far as the first phrase relates to the final sentence, is fundamental to what I am arguing here. Budlender's preoccupations with questions of health and the body, of diet and exercise, are strongly reminiscent of those technologies of self that Foucault explores in *The Use of Pleasure* ([1984]1986) and *The Care of the Self* ([1984]1988). The style of his preoccupations is, however, noticeably different from those encountered in the letters on similar topics written by boy lovers to their mentors reproduced in Foucault's texts. Budlender's thoughts are character-ised by absences as significant as what is present in such an unfamiliar form. Budlender locates the stream of his thoughts in a world captured by statistical probabilities, framing them by way of a type of rational calculus rather than an individual practice, and in doing so does not for one single moment engage in anything resembling the "moral problematisation" of pleasure (or risk)[13] so fundamental to the exercises of the Greco-Roman period described by Foucault.

What we experience in Budlender then amounts to more than a quirky form of workaholism. With characteristic irony and lightness of touch, Vladislavić creates in him someone whose self-reflections instantiate the ways in which massification and individualisation alternate and slip past each other, unable to heed the call for their constant correlation.

The sense of the oddness of his way of thinking is strikingly foregrounded and reinforced at the point at which the more natural rising and falling of his spirits gives way to a sense of himself not as an individual but as an object of actuarial science, someone who had twenty-eight per cent of his life to live if he were "an average man". There is in Budlender a noticeable absence of that essentially moral project, one geared towards transforming the self that Foucault associates with pastoral power (Foucault [1982]1994: 177).

Vladislavić understands that there is a fundamental tension between the demographer, the one who clusters and groups and generalises, who occupies the outside view and the lover, the one who experiences the beloved as unique, specific and unclassifiable (the loved one is she who can never be counted).

The terms Budlender uses are revealing. While the reader is likely to experience his activity to be perverse, even vulgar, Budlender himself

---

13.   See Part 1 of *The Use of Pleasure* ([1984]1986: 35-93).

moves smoothly into his habitual position, not merely of counting and charting that supposedly most uncountable part of one's experience, but immediately thereafter views himself as a statistic, returns to the demographer's aerial view, calculating that he has only twenty-eight per cent of his life left to live if, that is, he is "fortunate enough to be an average man" (Vladislavić 2004: 34).

> Afterwards, when it came to ordering his experience under the heading Villa Toscana, he tried to remember his first impressions of her. They were not features so much as sensations or moods, drifting through him lightly, like steam. Contradictory qualities, softness and angularity, dark italic curls on her temples, the shadowed edge of a wall, her coming and going through the bright bars of sunlight cast down by a pergola that a scrawny bougainvillea had yet to cover. And, as he drove away, the chemical scent of her shampoo.
>
> (Vladislavić 2004: 10-11)

The dominant feature of Budlender's memory of Iris is of a stream of impressions embodying all the beauties and contradictory qualities that constitute the force of her particular attraction. He remembers, in ways that all lovers share, the light and shade, the sensations and moods that belong to the always mysterious experience that can only be described in popular terms as love at first sight. And later when in Iris's living room he remembers losing all sense of proportion and thinking that he would have to stoop, raises his hand above his head.

> As if measuring the distance between his outstretched fingertips and the ceiling. At least a metre. Probably, there were municipal regulations. Why did it seem so low?
>
> (Vladislavić 2004: 12)

At the very moment at which all sense of proportion is, supposedly naturally, lost Budlender measures the world by means of his own body, but then moves at once to treating himself not as that particular flesh and blood thing he has every right to call his own, but opportunistically as some makeshift measuring stick, while at the same time the particular features of Iris's house become those that are (or should be in his municipal mind) governed by municipal regulations.

From Technologies of the Self to the "Political Technology of Individuals"; or, from the Pastor to the "Police"?

Much that is central to the aspect of Foucault's work that it has been possible to explore with the help of Ivan Vladislavić turns on the distinction between technologies of the self and the political technology of individuals. Foucault begins his important late essay dealing with the political technology of individuals, using the general phrase "the technologies of the self", but subsequently implies that the two cannot be equated (Foucault [1982]1988: 404). He notes that while some ancient Greek themes do recur, what he calls the "marginalized integration" of individuals in the modern state is not obtained "by the form of ethical community characteristic of the Greek city" (Foucault [1982]1988: 409).

Instead, he explains this integration of individuals into the emerging modern state by way of the figure of the "police", understood not as it would be in English, but by way of what the French and German terms would suggest as those concerned with

> men's coexistence in a territory, their relationship to property, what they produce, and what is exchanged in the market and so on. It also considers how they live, the diseases and accidents that came before them. In a word, what the police see to is alive, active, and productive man.
>
> (Foucault [1982]1988: 412)

In other words, the police, in the sense used above, are integral to the biopolitical project. In seeing the world and, crucially, himself in these terms, Budlender is a loyal member of the contemporary expressions of the "police force". What makes Budlender, as a character, particularly revealing, is the nature and extent of his membership of the force, his having become a "policeman", by internalising the biopolitical gaze so extensively that he directs it not only to individual people but, more important still, to himself. Budlender, as subject, regularly subjects himself and his small world not to the individualising, ethical imperatives of the pastor, but for the most part to the calculating procedures of the bio-politician.

But while this is interesting enough, analysing Foucault's late work on power with the help of Vladislavić's Budlender makes it possible to do more than identify the strength of his biopolitical affiliations. "Villa Toscana" (Vladislavić 2004) also allows us to reflect differently on the constant correlation of an increasing individualism and the reinforcement of totality which Foucault sees as the main characteristic of contemporary political rationality ([1982]1988: 417). By way of powers available to

271

fiction alone, it is possible to experience the strange effects produced by Budlender's attempt to keep himself afloat on waters driven by two very different currents. In responding as readers to Vladislavić's presentation of the movements of Budlender's consciousness with a combination of disquiet and some disapproval, the novel gives us access not only to the direction Budlender takes, but also to our intuitive sense that the current that he finally follows is not the one followed by the majority; nor is it one of which we would instinctively approve.

Conclusion: Questions of Method, or that Place Where Our Sympathies Lie

Reading works of literature by means of theoretical concepts generated outside of the field of literary studies has become so established a practice that it appears not to require reflection at all. It is difficult to imagine what form some of the most significant contemporary works of literary theory and criticism would have taken without the use of terms and concepts provided by, for example, Freud, Lacan, Derrida or Bourdieu. In all these cases, it is clear that the theoretical material is there to ground or enrich the analysis, be this of a particular work or of an aspect of literariness itself.

The analysis undertaken here, however, is of a different form: the literary text has been used to illuminate a body of historical or theoretical works rather than the other way round. While an aspect of Vladislavić's own text has, hopefully, been illuminated and its quality affirmed in the process, what is of interest here derives from this particular narrative's capacity to reveal an aspect of Foucault's project that could not, I suggest, be revealed by way of commentary alone. What has been attempted here is something which is closer, in form at least, to what Foucault himself does when he uses literary works as diagnostic in *The Order of Things* ([1966]1970).[14]

There is, of course, the danger of hubris in suggesting that what is being done here resembles something Foucault himself does with the works of Cervantes and de Sade in *The Order of Things*. Nevertheless, the idea that a fictional text can be used in the interests of epistemic truth is derived from Foucault. In almost the same way as Foucault argues that *Justine* and *Juliette* occupy a threshold position at the beginning of modernity which resembles the one that Don Quixote occupies at the point of transition between the Renaissance world and the Classical Age, this analysis suggests that in "Villa Toscana", Vadislavić has illuminated in detail something essential to the possible forms by which the modern self is produced.

---

14.   See the introduction to this edition.

Vladislavić's "homo calculator at large" reveals something about the dynamics and limits set to forms of power, not in their capacity to produce objects of knowledge, but in their capacity to reproduce themselves at the level of the subject, a capacity in turn central to maintaining the delicate balance between government and self-government upon which democracies depend.

It is possible by way of an analysis of this kind to support, if not by way of philosophical argument, but as a result of what can only be called "readerly" intuition, the extent to which the pastoral-disciplinary matrix in the archive of Western self-formations still has the upper hand. What the fictional text makes possible, particularly one written in and about internal space, is the power that literature has to reveal where our sympathies lie and in doing so is able to outline the places where we can most easily recognise ourselves. The sympathies mobilised and disengaged in the reading of "Villa Toscana" remind us that the pastoral-disciplinary matrix with its emphasis on the technologies of self originating in the family and the ethics of normalising individuality it generates, still has priority in determining the form of the Western subject in modernity.

There is no question but that Foucault has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of the genealogy of the modern subject, not least because he places practices of self-government at the heart of those of government. But Foucault's is – intentionally of course – neither a psychological nor an ontological perspective. Nevertheless, coming as he does at questions of the constitution of the self by way of genealogy rather than the philosophy of consciousness[15] has, for all its extraordinary results, also exacted a price. For as long as the history of individuals necessarily involves not just a history of subjects but requires, with every individual and every generation, a history of how subjectivity itself comes into being, Foucault's account will need to be supplemented, contradicted or qualified by those of fiction or, perhaps, psychoanalysis.

References

Appadurai, Arjun
    1996   *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Modernity.* London &
               Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Carrette, Jeremy (ed.)
    1999   Prologue to a Confession of the Flesh. In: *Religion and Culture:
               Michel Foucault.* New York: Routledge, pp. 1-47.

---

15.   See the opening paragraph of this essay.

Foucault, Michel

[1961]1965 *Madness and Civilization*: *A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, translated by R. Howard. London: Tavistock.

[1966]1970 *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* London: Tavistock.

[1963]1973 *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, translated by A. Sheridan. London: Tavistock.

[1975]1977 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by A. Sheridan. London: Penguin.

[1976]1978 *An Introduction: The History of Sexuality.* Vol. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

[1976]1981 *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

[1966]1984 Behind the Fable. In: Faubion, J (ed.) *Aesthetics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984.* Vol. 2, translated by R. Hurley et al. London: Penguin, pp. 137-145.

[1984]1986 *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 2, translated by R. Hurley. London: Penguin.

[1984]1988 *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 3, translated by R. Hurley. London: Allen Lane, Penguin.

[1976]1994 Truth and Power. In: Faubion, J. (ed.) *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Vol. 3, translated by R. Hurley et al. London: Penguin, pp. 111-133.

[1978]1994 Governmentality. In: Faubion, J. (ed.) *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984.* Vol. 3, translated by R. Hurley et al. London: Penguin, pp.201-222.

[1981]1994 Sexuality and Solitude. In: Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Vol. 1, translated by R. Hurley et al. London: Penguin, pp.175-184.

[1982]1994 Technologies of the Self. In: Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Vol. 1, translated by R. Hurley et al. London: Penguin, pp. 223-251.

[1984]1994 The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom. In: Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984,* Vol. 1, translated by R. Hurley et al. London: Penguin, pp. 281-301.

[1982]1994 The Political Technology of Individuals. In: Faubion, J. (ed.) *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-198.,* Vol. 3, translated by R. Hurley et al. London: Penguin, pp. 403-417.

[1979]1999 Pastoral Power and Political Reason. In: Carrette, J. (ed.) *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge, pp. 135-152.

[1980]1999 About the Beginning of Hermeneutics of the Self. In: Carrette, J. (ed.) *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge, pp. 158-181.

[1975]2003 19 February. In: *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975*, translated by G. Burchell. New York: Picador, pp. 167-199.

[1976]2004 *Society Must Be Defended*, translated by D. Macey. London: Penguin.

Rose, Nikolas
    1996   *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
Vladislavić, Ivan
    2004   *The Exploded View*. Johannesburg: Random House.