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**REGARDING THE OTHER:
POSTCOLONIAL VIOLATIONS
AND ETHICAL RESISTANCE IN
MARGARET ATWOOD'S *BODILY
HARM***

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The sky calls for a gaze other than that of a vision that is already an aiming and proceeds from need and to the pursuit of things. It calls for eyes purified of covetousness, a gaze other than that of the hunter with all his ruse, awaiting the capture.

—Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*

Never one to mince his words, Terry Eagleton opens his now infamous review of Gayatri Spivak's *Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*, "In the Gaudy Supermarket," in typically irreverent fashion: "There must exist somewhere a secret handbook for post-colonial critics, the first rule of which reads: 'Begin by rejecting the whole notion of post-colonialism'" (3). Though his provocative quip probably reveals more about the reviewer than about the subject matter under review, Eagleton does strike at what is indeed a widespread phenomenon in current postcolonial criticism. Ken Gelder, for example, in a review article of three diverse introductions to postcolonial theory dating

from the late 1990s,¹ observes that, unlike the pioneering *The Empire Writes Back*, which arrived with a tone of jubilation and celebration of the field in 1989, more recent postcolonial critics are anxious to include disclaimers that clearly signal their critical position vis-à-vis the field they (re)present: "Instead of enchantment and belief, the authors of these three new primers on postcolonial theory are mostly skeptical of the field they help to constitute. The only relation one can have with postcolonial theory, they suggest, is a critical one" (82).

In a similar fashion, Donald R. Wehrs opens his 2004 article, "Sartre's Legacy in Postcolonial Theory," with a statement that echoes Eagleton's in sentiment, if not in tone, when he observes that it "has become commonplace within postcolonial studies to lament the colonizing propensities of postcolonial studies." It appears that postcolonial critics (not to mention critics of postcolonialism), now regard the "post" of postcolonialism as an all-too-fragile boundary from the embarrassments witnessed under the reign of its predecessor, the "colonial," and respond to this concern with incessant self-critique. Postcolonial studies as a field is therefore now at a point where it is apparently characterized by no other quality more than what Wehrs calls a "guilty conscience" (761), a persistent anxiety that its potential complicity with the very thing it opposes might call into question its own *raison d'être*.

Given the pervasiveness of such a "guilty consciousness" in postcolonial criticism, it is perhaps surprising that postcolonialism's (potential) alliance with ethics and, specifically, the ethical promise that Emmanuel Levinas sees in such a guilty conscience, has not been given more attention. In fact, considering not just this recent wave of self-critique but also colonialism's long and woeful history of physical and epistemic violence, one would think that ethics would be postcolonialism's principal concern. Curiously enough, however, although the necessity of an ethical redress of colonial structures is hard to dispute, and although literary studies more generally has experienced an "ethical turn,"² there has been little sustained analysis of the intersection between ethics and postcolonialism to date.³ Why is there not a similar "ethical turn" in postcolonial scholarship? This is perhaps all the more surprising given that both ethics and postcolonialism share an interest in the figure of "the other." However—and here, I suggest, the problem lies—the postcolonial other appears incompatible with the ethical other⁴ insofar as both "others" conceptually pull in conflicting directions. Where the postcolonial other invokes a certain ontological closure of politicized identity categories, the ethical other demands an opening up⁵ of such categories and pushes us beyond essence. A Levinasian ethics then perhaps puts postcolonialism's founding premises too radically into question—pro-

duces too guilty a conscience—for postcolonialism to be tempted to "turn ethical" any time soon.

Among the few critics to have begun to explore the potential of Levinasian ethics for postcolonial criticism is Donald Wehrs. In the article referenced above, for example, he credits Levinas with an important role in redefining postcolonial criticism. Wehrs rests his argument on the suggestion that the problem of an ongoing complicity with colonial structures is linked to the pervasive legacy of Jean-Paul Sartre in postcolonial theory. One result of that legacy, for him, is the unabated privileging of Western methodologies and the "theoretical indifference to non-Western historicities" that Wehrs perceives in the work of a wide range of postcolonial critics such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Edward Said or Homi Bhabha (771). Consequently it is "only by breaking with its Sartrean legacy [that] postcolonial theory [can] nurture a literary criticism that takes seriously non-Western historicity, agency, and rationality" (781), and it is to Sartre's contemporary Emmanuel Levinas that Wehrs attributes this all-important break. Despite "his own indifference to non-Western cultures and occasional lapses into Eurocentrism," Levinas, he suggests, creates an ethical opening for non-Western cultures through his critique of totalizing thought: "Levinas's association of philosophical totalization with colonizing cognition helps us appreciate how diverse pluralisms shaping non-Western cultures may be ethical in their conservation of the Other's alterity" (772). As such, Wehrs proceeds to argue, "Levinasian thought revises postcolonial theory so as to allow non-Western historiography to inform postcolonial literary criticism" (773).

I recall Wehrs's argument at considerable length here because it offers some useful cornerstones for my own discussion. In an extended (very extended) sense I regard my own argument in this essay as a critical response to Wehrs, for while I both applaud his impulse to make Levinas productive for postcolonialism and believe that a judicious engagement with Sartrean thought can indeed fundamentally shift the terms of the postcolonial debate, I am uneasy about the relative ease with which he instrumentalizes Levinasian philosophy for the purposes of validating non-Western historiography within a postcolonial framework. Wehrs, I suggest, all too quickly and enthusiastically puts Levinas to work for a postcolonial politics and as such misses, or does not take seriously enough, the ethical interruption to politics that is (offered by) Levinasian philosophy. Thus, rather than insisting that it is the non-Western other that comes to fill the space cleared in the almost obsessive self-questioning of postcolonial criticism—which seems to me altogether counter to Levinas's own insistence on the nonphenomenality and irreducible singularity of the

other's face—I would like to dwell a little longer on this moment of questioning, of self-critique, to ask more insistently both what exactly is called into question here and what ethical promises the moment of questioning might hold.

In this essay, then, I want to examine how such an ethical interruption of the postcolonial paradigm might play out in literature. I situate this analysis in the context of a settler colony, and specifically that of settler writing, because of all the different postcolonial contexts it is this one that has struggled most with the problem of complicity and, by extension, that of a guilty conscience. The text on which I base my analysis, Margaret Atwood's 1981 novel *Bodily Harm*, has been selected both because its beleaguered postcolonial status—Helen Tiffin, for example, charges the novel with not sufficiently acknowledging "the 'voice' of the Other" (130)—makes it all the more central in the line of argument I am pursuing here and because it fictionalizes precisely the kind of Levinasian interruption of Sartre's legacy in postcolonial contexts that Donald Wehrs finds so enabling. Unlike Wehrs, however, I am not so much interested in the critique of dialectical totality but in the way in which Sartre's influential notion of the gaze or the look (*le regard*) is reflected back and challenged by a different kind of look in the novel: the ethical regard for the other person. In this interest, I am responding to what Martin Jay in a recent interview has called "the real task" for contemporary critics of visual culture: "Perhaps the real task these days is . . . to probe the ways in which the sense of 'looking after' someone is just as much a possibility as 'looking at' them in *le regard*, and 'watching out for someone' is an ethical alternative to controlling surveillance" ("Visual" 89).

Atwood, I suggest, presents us with a protagonist, journalist Rennie Wilford, who in the course of the novel learns to adopt just such a different mode of *regard*, thus concluding at the end: "What she sees has not changed; only the way she sees it" (300). While Rennie, for the main part of the novel, is caught in a mirror maze of violating gazes, the end promises an ethical interruption to these endlessly reduplicating gazes insofar as Rennie learns to exchange what Levinas, in the epigraph I have chosen for this essay, calls the violent "gaze of the hunter"—of which Rennie is as much a victim as a perpetrator—for an ethical regard for the other person that finds expression in the immediacy of touch—the caress—and that is a mark of "love without concupiscence" (Levinas, *Entre* 227).⁶

My intention with this discussion is not simply to draw an analogy between Atwood and Levinas. Neither is it just to apply Levinasian ethics to *Bodily Harm* and so add to the available body of readings the novel has provoked. While my argument will undoubtedly produce

these (and other) results, I want it to go a step further and suggest that this novel brings us face to face with postcolonialism's "other other" and so ultimately demands an ethical redress of postcolonial violations involuntarily committed in the name of politics and representation.

***Bodily Harm*—A Postcolonial Novel?**

Bodily Harm occupies an interesting position in Margaret Atwood's oeuvre as a whole. While Marilyn Patton, in her 1992 essay on the novel, presages that *Bodily Harm* is the novel "which may be remembered in the long run as one of [Atwood's] major achievements" inasmuch as it demarcates "a distinct shift in her fiction from comedy-of-manners and psychological plots to a much more overtly political fiction" (150–51), this prophesy just does not seem to want to come true. In fact, whereas the novel was discussed in a number of full-length articles during the 1980s and the 1990s, some of the more recent book-length studies on Margaret Atwood barely even mention the novel, with one going as far as justifying its exclusion by suggesting that *Bodily Harm* represents an "anomaly" because it is "the only novel in Atwood's oeuvre that places its emphasis squarely on Canadian international relations and postcolonial concerns" (Cooke 113).⁷

Ironically, however, if the novel's "postcolonial concerns" might render it marginal within Atwood's overall oeuvre, it has not exactly been embraced as a canonical postcolonial text either, making it a further "anomaly" in the very context in which it purportedly belongs. A recent collection of essays responding to the question, *Is Canada Postcolonial?*, for example, strangely enough lists almost as many entries on "Germany" (four) as on "Atwood" (seven)—and this despite the fact that the volume is sub-headed *Unsettling Canadian Literature*.⁸

And yet it is not as if the novel had been completely ignored by postcolonial critics; the problem is more that postcolonial critics have struggled with what they perceive as *Bodily Harm*'s extremely fraught sense of postcoloniality. In this context, Helen Tiffin and Diana Brydon have offered us a noteworthy exchange.⁹ I have already mentioned Helen Tiffin's concern that the novel does not adequately acknowledge "the 'voice' of the Other," which for her means that the novel does not "adapt sufficiently the traditional aesthetics and forms of a basically monocultural tradition to cross-cultural material" and, in thus remaining complicit with a colonial mindset, is not "politically radical" enough (125, 130). Diana Brydon agrees with Tiffin that what a postcolonial perspective on the novel reveals is "Canadians'

complicity in colonization, in the genocide and marginalization of the country's indigenous inhabitants as well as in their own domination by foreign economic and cultural interests" ("Beyond" 52); however, she believes the novel is ultimately "more complicated than Tiffin suggests" ("Atwood's" 96), because "although *Bodily Harm* fails to present indigenous voices to balance Rennie's, it does throw into question her automatic assumption 'that the threatening Other is always a terrorist,' and it shows her the falsity of her smug belief in her own innocence" (101).

Tiffin's and Brydon's hesitation around calling *Bodily Harm* postcolonial because of its (purported) complicity with colonialism is of course indicative of a more general trend in postcolonial studies, where settler subjectivities are commonly associated with an exacerbated sense of complicity because of their divided allegiances. As simultaneously colonizer (vis-à-vis a native population they have displaced) and colonized (vis-à-vis a distant colonial homeland they cannot call home), settler subjects are regarded as split and ambivalent—a perception that not uncommonly leads to a sense of not being "properly postcolonial" or only contentiously so. In other words, within the wider context of postcolonial studies settler subjectivities are often rendered peripheral to the "real" postcolonial nations and their concerns (i.e. India, Africa etc.).

What I want to suggest, here, however, is that this assessment of settler subjectivity as marginal to the "postcolonial proper" needs to be revised in light of postcolonialism's recent affliction with a guilty conscience. If to be postcolonial now means to have a "guilty conscience," then settler subjectivities in fact emerge as postcolonialism's most privileged example: no one else on the postcolonial spectrum is accustomed to negotiating a guilty conscience more than they are. As such, I contend, settler subjectivities are supplements—in Jacques Derrida's sense—to the postcolonial, and as supplements, they reveal that what appears to be merely incidental is in fact essential. In other words, my argument here is that settler subjectivity's bad conscience or, more specifically, *Bodily Harm's* bad conscience over its own complicity with colonial paradigms, in fact leads us to a concern that is of fundamental—if unacknowledged—significance to postcolonial studies. Diana Brydon seems to have a sense of that centrality when she concludes her reading of the novel by pointing out that "*Bodily Harm* is neither counterdiscursive nor cross-cultural, but it locates some gaps in the apparently seamless web of white cultural discourse. This is the kind of novel that challenges postcolonial critics to refine their terminologies and rethink their methods" ("Atwood's" 112).

In other words, I am arguing that *Bodily Harm* has been largely overlooked (or dismissed) within postcolonial contexts because the novel does not do the kind of things postcolonial critics have come to associate with, and expect from, "postcolonial literature" (that is, be either counterdiscursive or cross-cultural). Rather than regarding this as a weakness of the novel, however, I want to suggest that precisely because it sits uncomfortably in the field, it has the power to reveal postcolonialism's blind spots—it is the kind of novel that makes us think differently about postcolonialism and ask different questions of it. As such, I suggest, the novel pushes against the very boundaries of the field and opens it out to ethical concerns.

The Gaze of the Hunter (I): The Violating Look

As if the novel's epigraph from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* was not enough to signal the significance of the gaze in *Bodily Harm*, the novel opens with a scenario that is a defamiliarized yet still recognizable rendition of the very situation Sartre uses to introduce this concept in *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre's famous Peeping Tom is made to feel self-conscious and ashamed of himself when he overhears footsteps coming up the stairs and is caught in the act of peeping through a keyhole. This outside view to which he suddenly becomes exposed fixes him in a certain mode of being: he becomes caught in a mode of "being-for-others" (Sartre 358), an object in the other's field of vision. Atwood constructs a parallel situation when she opens the novel with a stalker—a "faceless stranger" with a rope (Atwood 41)—who breaks into Rennie's apartment and is interrupted in his activities when he is overheard by a neighbor, who calls the police. However, instead of presenting the stalker as feeling guilty in having been "caught" (Sartre 354), Atwood twists the situation by presenting policemen who are trying to induce a guilty conscience in Rennie rather than the stalker: "He wanted it to be my fault" (Atwood 15). This twist allows Atwood to produce two effects simultaneously: one, it alerts us right at the outset of *Bodily Harm* to the fact that Sartre's idea of the gaze functions as a structuring device in the novel; and two, it signals that it is, initially at least, a male gaze she is interested in, for it is ultimately the Peeping Tom that—through the help of the police men—succeeds in objectifying the female subject he observes, as opposed to him becoming the object of the third party's censoring gaze.

In its structuring function, the gaze holds together and interweaves the two main storylines and settings of the novel: on the one hand, there is Rennie's Puritan upbringing in Griswold and her adult life as a lifestyle journalist in Toronto, where she has not only

just survived a cancer scare and partial mastectomy but also broken free from her sadomasochistic relationship with product designer Jake, and on the other, there is her working holiday in the Caribbean islands of St. Antoine and neighboring Ste. Agathe, which turns out to be anything but the "Fun in the Sun" she had hoped for (16). The juncture between these two storylines is established in the opening line of the novel, "This is how I got here, says Rennie" (11), with "this" referring to her past life in Canada, and "here" referring to the present and the prison cell she is forced to share with Lora on Ste. Agathe during a political uprising that is a direct result of a country struggling to negotiate its independence in the aftermath of British colonization. Thus conjoining both storylines in the opening sentence, the novel signals that the "this" of Rennie's past in Canada and the "here" of her present on Ste. Agathe hold implicit parallels. Rennie's cancer, for example, is echoed in the political corruption she witnesses on the islands; similarly, the "pretend" rape scenes with Jake and the pornographic images Rennie is exposed to as a journalist in Canada are mirrored in the experience of actual sexual violence on Ste. Agathe. Most importantly, this opening sentence, placed as it is between the John Berger epigraph and the stalker incident that follows immediately after, signals that these parallels revolve around the gaze as a lynchpin: a male gaze of which Rennie is the object in Canada is replicated in the neocolonial gaze of the tourist that Rennie brings to the islands.

Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of the gaze, as he develops it in *Being and Nothingness*, is sufficiently well known for me not to have to recall it in detail here. Broadly construed, Sartre's gaze is a translation of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic into "the register of sight" (Jay 287). Importantly, this translation passes through the notorious "creative 'strong reading'" Alexandre Kojève brought to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Yar 58). In an influential lecture series that was audited by an entire generation of French intellectuals—Jean-Paul Sartre among them—Kojève is said to have "bequeathed to his listeners a *terrorist conception of history*" (Descombes 14) insofar as he overemphasized the master/slave dialectic over the mutual recognition that Hegel's self-consciousness attains at the end. For Hegel, the master/slave situation is a temporary resolution of the struggle for recognition, a battle between two consciousnesses who are both attempting to translate their self-certainty (their subjective understanding of the world and themselves) into truth (the objective validation of their self-certainty). This battle leads to the master/slave situation, where one self-consciousness has temporarily succeeded in validating their truth. As master, this self-consciousness now has the power to force the other (the slave) to accept the master's version of the world as true—and this includes accepting the truth of its status as slave, or

object. The slave is consequently forced to live powerlessly in a world that is "world[ed]," to use Gayatri Spivak's apposite term here (1), by someone else. In other words, viewed through the Kojèvean lens, the Hegelian master/slave situation replicates, to a certain extent, the Cartesian subject/object split that inaugurated a philosophy of reflection that rendered the world "into a giant mirror" of the self-founding and all-knowing subject (Gandhi, *Postcolonial* 35).¹⁰

Sartre appropriates this gloomy Kojèvean vision—down to the very terminology—for his own purposes when he insists that "we can consider ourselves as 'slaves' insofar as we appear to the Other" (358). Becoming the "object" of the other's look, and thus turning from being-for-itself to being-for-others, therefore means undergoing the experience of violation: "I read in the other's watchful look . . . the gun pointed at me" (354). Clearly the "gun" needs to be taken metaphorically here, for the violence experienced is epistemic rather than physical. However, this does not detract from the fact that what characterizes Sartre's conception of the gaze more than anything else is, as Robert Bernasconi observes, conflict: "At the heart of Sartre's discussion of Being-for-others is the idea of conflict. It is a question of whether I will hold the Other in my gaze or whether I will be held in the Other's gaze" (203).

Rennie's life in Canada (the "this" signaled in the novel's first sentence), and specifically the relationship between Rennie and Jake, is an obvious instance of such a violent understanding of the gaze, for in Jake's hands and under his gaze Rennie is turned from a "being-for-itself" into a "being-for-others," from a subject to an object. This sense of herself as an object finds its culmination (or rather Rennie recognizes it for what it is) after the stalker incident. This incident makes explicit what was only implicit before: "She had been seen, too intimately, her face blurred and distorted, damaged, owned in some way she couldn't define" (39–40). It is at that point that she becomes aware of the fact that she is a *target* in someone's gaze, that the "gun" that, for Sartre, is the other's gaze is pointed at her:

The first thing she did after the policemen had gone was to get the lock fixed. Then she had safety catches put on the windows. Still, she couldn't shake the feeling that she was being watched, even when she was in a room by herself, with the curtains closed. She had the sense that someone had been in her apartment while she was out, not disarranging anything, but just looking into her cupboards, her refrigerator, studying her. The rooms smelled different after she'd been out. *She began to see herself from the outside, as if she was a moving target in someone else's binoculars.* (40, emphasis added)

The language employed here reveals that this is vision at its most violent—it is the "gaze of the hunter" that Levinas (and Atwood) so abhor.

The Gaze of the Hunter (II): The Threat of the Real

At this point of maximum reduction to object status—not accidentally placed at the opening of the novel—Rennie decides that she needs to take a holiday and so remove herself from what appears to be a one-way track to enslavement. Having gained awareness that she has become, in John Berger's terms, "a sight" (47), she sees her escape in attaining invisibility, the invisibility of a stranger in a strange land: "The difference between this and home isn't so much that she knows nobody as that nobody knows her. In a way she's invisible. In a way she's safe" (Atwood 39).

Crucially, and this is again in keeping with Sartre's philosophy, invisibility (that is to say subjectivity) is gained not by radically reinterpreting—as Levinas will—the encounter between the two self-consciousnesses and side-stepping both the struggle for recognition and the master/slave situation with its barely contained violence. Instead, invisibility is gained by turning the violent gaze around and claiming the "gun" for oneself, that is, by becoming complicit with the violations carried out by the gaze.

If the focus on the male gaze in the "this" part of the novel—focusing on Rennie's past—reveals Atwood's feminist concerns in *Bodily Harm*, and as such most clearly demarcates the novel's continuity with her previous work, the "here" part—centered on her present on Ste. Agathe and St. Antoine—introduces the shift towards postcolonial concerns noted above.¹¹ By extension, given the context of settler postcoloniality from within which Atwood is working, this doubling of the gaze also points to the peculiar doubling of identity—as both colonized and colonizer—that is so typical of settler subjectivity. Thus, while the "this" part of the novel (Rennie's past in Canada) reveals Rennie as colonized victim of the gaze, the "here" part of the novel (her present on Ste. Agathe) shows her as complicit colonizer. As such, the "here" part, set on St. Antoine and Ste. Agathe, is of particular importance for the kind of analysis I am pursuing here, for it shows Rennie as replicating the violent gaze of which she herself is a victim in the "this" part. Thus Rennie arrives on the island of St. Antoine armed with her notebooks, her travel guide, and her camera, ready to compose a glossy image of "Fun in the Sun" that—like Jake's fantasy images of her—bears little resemblance to the political turmoil that is right in front of her. Seeing is here an act of violent construction, or superimposition, rather than a simple taking in of what her eyes

show her. In other words, the "here" part of the novel portrays Rennie as complicit Orientalist who is unable to perceive another culture other than through her own cultural lens.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said does not use the term "the gaze," but he also draws on metaphors of sight and vision when he refers to the stock Western narratives about the Orient—"the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation"—as "the lenses through which the Orient is experienced" (58). Said calls these lenses the "textual attitude," which inserts itself between experiencing subject and experienced object as mediating representations. These mediating representations—be they texts or images—translate what is alien into familiar terms, thus buffering what might be an unsettling or threatening confrontation with the real cultural other. In fact, Said emphasizes that one of the situations that provokes a "textual attitude" is precisely such an experience of threat: "One [situation] is when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant. In such a case one has recourse not only to what in one's previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has read about it." Given that "something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant" is commonly encountered in foreign countries, it is not surprising that he singles out travel books—or, for that matter, travel pieces of the type Rennie is writing—as a situation that "make[s] the textual attitude likely to prevail . . . precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seems to threaten one's equanimity." If the power of the "textual attitude" is to contain the threat of cultural difference, Said's observation that it "seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human" does not come as much of a surprise (93).

Bodily Harm offers numerous illustrations of this particular failing. Thus Rennie repeatedly attempts to insulate herself against the threat of too much reality by invoking print material. There is frequent mention of the wish for a book, for example, in situations when she is trying to avoid contact with the locals.¹² Similarly, when Rennie first meets Lora, she longs for a means to break off their conversation: "She wishes she had a book; then she could pretend to read" (86). Books (or other print material) here and elsewhere serve as a shield with which the real¹³ can be warded off. This idea is accentuated even more in Lora and Rennie's joint incarceration, where books as well as TV and the idea of the Holiday Inn are invoked as remedies for the nauseating "reality" they are confronted with (269). In other words, in times of encountering the real and feeling the threat of that encounter, Rennie reverts back to the "textual attitude" in an

attempt to reassert her power over what Hegel calls the "truth of self-certainty" (104).

The most significant example of this kind is provided by Rennie's encounter with the wordless old man in the street:

He makes his right hand into a fist, then points to her, still smiling. Rennie smiles back at him. She doesn't understand what he wants. He repeats the gesture, he's deaf or dumb or perhaps drunk. Rennie feels very suddenly as if she's stepped across a line and found herself on Mars.

He runs the fingers of his right hand together, he's getting impatient, he holds out his hand, and now she knows, it's begging. She opens her purse and gropes for the change purse. It's worth a few cents to be rid of him.

But he frowns, this isn't what he wants. He repeats his series of gestures, faster now, and Rennie feels bewildered and threatened. (73–74)

Rennie is here confronted with a cultural difference that exceeds her own modes of understanding and therefore translates it into images of cultural difference she knows from other places: "now she knows, it's begging." However, when the ready-made image fails to match up with reality, the real becomes a threat.

What is obvious in all these examples is that the image of the exotic holiday island is preferable to the real experience; the image is safe whereas the reality potentially is not. There are numerous examples in the novel that speak to the same underlying pattern of a safe surface (or image) and a threatening reality beneath, the most obvious perhaps being Rennie's cancer underneath an apparently normal exterior and the (metaphorically related) political corruption on the islands underneath the glossy tourist brochure. What is at work in all these examples is a privileging of representation over the real. In fact, it is an attempt to create the real discursively so that representation might provide the lens through which the real is viewed, thus stalling its threat; as we have seen in Sartre's account of the gaze, the gaze puts "the gun" into the hands of the viewer. Hence Rennie's insistence throughout her stay on the islands that she is somehow "exempt" because she is a tourist (203). As a tourist, she is a "spectator, a voyeur" (125), which in Sartrean terms means that she is invulnerable because she holds "the gun" in her hands.

What is important, then, about the doubled gaze in the novel—male gaze and tourist gaze—is that it reveals its operation from two opposed perspectives, illustrating that while the gaze might violate its object, it also protects the viewer from an unsettling (or even

threatening) encounter with the real because it allows the subject to assert its own "truth of self-certainty." The Sartrean gaze affords full epistemic control to the viewing subject, thus sealing it off against an alterity (a real otherness) that could shatter its grip on the world. To use an image from the novel, the gaze functions like a "blow-dryer for [the] hands," which promises "protection against disease" (16). While the "disease" here is most immediately Rennie's cancer, in a wider sense it is the real, or what Liz Guild calls the "traumatic dimension of being," which lies under the surface of symbolic structures (54). It is clear in the novel that such an encounter with the real is to be avoided at all costs; whenever the real asserts itself, characters are shaken in their certainties and attempt to reestablish the protective layers of their familiar representational structures that shield them from the trauma that lies beneath.

I now want to turn to what is probably the most extreme example of this particular pattern in the novel: the threat of real sexual violence underneath safe pornographic representations. I suggest that this example, in its very extremity, reveals not just the power of the gaze but also its limits. In other words, this example takes us right to the edge of symbolization from where we are forced to face the trauma of the real. As such, I argue, it functions as the very point where complicity with the Sartrean "look" tips over into an ethical regard.

Thus when Rennie watches some pornographic film clips for an article on "pornography as an art form" that she is writing for a magazine not accidentally called *Visor*, she initially—following the pattern established in the novel—reads these clips purely as representations that "couldn't possibly be real" (210). Rennie remains untouched by these films because they are so formulaic—representations endlessly recycled as representations—that in a sense they have lost touch with anything "real." This, however, changes in the next instance:

This is our grand finale, the policeman said. The picture showed a woman's pelvis, just the pelvis and the tops of the thighs. The woman was black. The legs were slightly apart; the usual hair, *the usual swollen pinkish purple showed between them*; nothing was moving. Then something small and grey *and wet* appeared, poking out from between the legs. It was a head of a rat. Rennie felt that a large gap had appeared in what she'd been used to thinking of as reality. What if this is normal, she thought, and we just haven't been told yet? (210, emphasis added)

To this extremely graphic display of sexual violation, Rennie has no immunity; she responds with a visceral reaction: "Rennie didn't make it out of the room. She threw up on the policeman's shoes" (210).

What is interesting here is that in this final print version Atwood introduced a couple of changes, or rather additions, to earlier drafts of this section.¹⁴ These additions increase the detail in the formulaic pornographic representation so as to tear a "large gap" into what Rennie (and the reader) had "been used to thinking of as reality" and to evoke, from within that gap, a sense of something real beyond representation. These additions, I suggest, puncture the safe image constructed by the gaze and give us a sense of something real that resists its power. What makes this example so particularly interesting, then, is that it reveals Atwood's deliberate attempt to increase the sense of a real beyond representation. As such, I suggest, she not only lays a fundamental challenge to Sartrean-derived theories that allow the gaze to construct an all-encompassing reality, or, in Hegelian terms, a "truth of self-certainty;" she also reinterprets, as I will illustrate below, the power inherent in the real, regarding it not just as a threat but also as the place of ethics.

Resisting the Gaze of the Hunter

To understand how such a challenge might be possible, we need to revisit the idea of the gaze, for it is only such a changed conception of the gaze that allows us to imagine a relationship between viewer and viewed without the dictatorship of a "gun"—a relationship, that is fundamentally different from the master/slave dynamic that still underpins Sartre's theory of the gaze. Jacques Lacan offers such a changed conception, where we cannot assume that the gaze is all-powerful, that nothing escapes or resists it. In Lacan's conception, the viewer fails to construct reality in an all-encompassing way; instead, the real gazes back and captures the viewer. Lacan famously introduces his theory of the gaze with a discussion of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533). The painting, as is well known, depicts two lavishly dressed male figures surrounded by "a series of objects that represent in the painting of the period the symbols of *vanitas*" (Lacan 88). All of this is clearly on display and as such easily consumable by a viewer. Resisting such easy consumption, however, is an anamorphic object that can only be seen—that is to say recognized—when the viewer, having turned away from the painting, casts a lateral glance back. As such, the object functions as the viewer's blind spot or, in David Vilaseca's words, "like a 'blot' or 'stain' blurring the transparency of the viewed image." Drawing on Slavoj Žižek, Vilaseca concludes that it therefore serves "as a reminder that the subject 'can never see properly, can never include in the totality of [his or her] field of vision, the point in the object from which it gazes back at [him or her]'" (76).¹⁵

Significantly, the lateral glance eventually reveals the blind spot in the viewer's field of vision to be a skull. As a *memento mori*, the skull serves as a "reflection on the ultimate futility of the worldly goods, art objects and scientific instruments that lavishly fill the rest of the picture" (Vilaseca 76). What all of this builds up to is Lacan's ultimate argument that, rather than empowering the viewer by affirming their freedom and the "truth of their self-certainty," as in Sartre's theory of the gaze, the viewed object here looks back and undermines the viewer's power. Thus Lacan suggests that "at the heart of the period in which the subject emerged . . . Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated" (88). In other words, rather than affirming the viewer by submitting to their powerful gaze as a passive object—as Sartre would have it—Holbein's painting functions as a "trap for the gaze" (89), with the result that it is the viewer, not the object, who is "caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision" (92). Rather than controlling its scopic field, the viewing subject is "annihilated" insofar as it is brought face to face with the limits of its own representational power, that is, the real in the form of the skull. The skull—death—cannot be controlled. In a quasi-Heideggerian move, Lacan (via Holbein) reminds us that as human beings we are beings towards death. Death is the ultimate traumatic reality that resists all symbolization, and as embodied beings we are tied to the materiality of existence and as such inevitably face our own finitude.

Ethical Regard: The Look of Love

What brings about such a Lacanian interruption of the smooth operation of the Sartrean gaze in the novel is a scenario that seems to spring straight from the pages of Emmanuel Levinas's *Otherwise Than Being*: Rennie is taken "hostage" (Atwood 258, 295) and forced to share the intimacy of a prison cell with her fellow inmate Lora. Without the protection of her habitual distancing gaze—she has lost both her mirror and her camera—Rennie is brought into visceral proximity with the vulnerability of another human being when she has to witness the violations of Lora, who is not only raped but also brutally beaten and left for dead. In her utter "abandonment, [her] defenselessness and [her] mortality" (Levinas, *Entre* 227), Lora is reduced to "the face of a stranger" (Atwood 298)—a face that calls Rennie into question and to responsibility. It is at this point, when Rennie realizes that no one will step up on her behalf, that there is not "someone in authority" (276)—no "supervisor" (276), no "doctor" (296), and no other "someone" (297)—to come to the rescue, that she herself assumes what Levinas calls "responsibility for the other,

or love without concupiscence" (*Is It Righteous* 205). In a gesture evoking the biblical *hineni*—a gesture repeatedly cited by Levinas as an exemplary act of assuming of ethical responsibility: "*here I am*" (*God* 188)—Rennie does "the hardest thing she's ever done" and responds with the look of love, that is, ethical regard (299).

Let me unpack this scenario slightly to reveal its ethical significance. Though Rennie arrives on St. Antoine equipped with all the writerly equivalents of the Sartrean gun, ready to shoot and capture island life, we find that her gaze is in fact turned around and captivates her—literally imprisons her in a cell. Whereas she had wanted to control the narrative of St. Antoine, the narrative begins to structure her and she ends up telling her own story, rather than that of the island: "This is how I got here." The most explicit clue that the gaze is turned around and the real is now gazing on her is found in her final encounter with the old man. Hearing a commotion down in the courtyard, Rennie is reluctant to look out the window of her prison cell for fear of being seen:

"Come on," says Lora. She bends, holds out her cupped hands.

"I don't think we should look," says Rennie. "They might see us." (288)

Still in Sartrean mode, Rennie fears that being seen would mean losing her (imaginary) power to control her "reality." Significantly, her gaze is indeed returned; however, as I will argue below, this return is what sets in motion a different kind of regard for the other in the novel:

"Pull him up," says the man in charge, and they do. They continue along the line, the hurt man's face is on a level with Rennie's own, blood pours down it, she knows who it is, the deaf and dumb man, who has a voice but no words, he can see her, she's been exposed, it's panic, he wants her to do something, pleading, *Oh please*. (290)¹⁶

What is important about this return of the gaze is that Rennie is here constituted as a potential agent. Unlike Sartre's and Berger's theories of the gaze, which associate being looked at with being reduced to an object, this gaze does not reduce but enables. In other words, this gaze, the gaze returned from the real, produces agency, the agency we find in Emmanuel Levinas's particular sense of subjectivity.

As I noted in the introduction, subjectivity, for Levinas, begins with a calling into question of the self or, more specifically, the self's self-certainty—the "truth" of its own reality. In *Bodily Harm*, a similar breakdown of Rennie's "reality" occurs after she has been seen by the old man:

"Let me down," says Rennie. The best they can do is avoid calling attention to themselves. She leans against the wall, she's shaking. It's indecent,¹⁷ it's not done with ketchup, nothing is inconceivable here, no rats in the vagina but only because they haven't thought of it yet, they're still amateurs. . . . She has been turned inside out, there's no longer a *here* and a *there*. Rennie understands for the first time that this is not necessarily a place she will get out of, ever. She is not exempt. Nobody is exempt from anything. (290)

Having been "turned inside out" means that what Rennie earlier describes as "her real fear" has in fact come true at that point: "Her real fear, irrational but a fear, is that the [cancer] scar will come undone in the water, split open like a faulty zipper, and she will turn inside out" (80). However, this kind of "opening up"—of her skin, or protective outer layer, as much as her sense of self and reality—and making herself vulnerable to the real, the "traumatic dimension of being," is akin to becoming an ethical subject, and as such also brings about her own salvation.

Subjectivity as Sensibility and Exposure

It is once again Rennie's encounter with the old man that best exemplifies what is at stake here. We have already seen that the encounter exceeds Rennie's reality and therefore appears as a threat. However, when it is revealed what the old man actually meant, we realize that the threat is in fact a gift:

"He only wants to shake your hand, he thinks it's good luck."

Indeed the man is now holding out his hand, fingers spread.

"Why on earth?" says Rennie. She's a little calmer now but no cooler. "I'm hardly good luck."

"Not for him," says Paul. "For you."

Now Rennie feels both rude and uncharitable: he's only been trying to give her something. Reluctantly she puts her hand into the outstretched hand of the old man. He clamps his fingers around hers and holds on for an instant. Then he lets her go, smiles at her again with his collapsing mouth, and turns away into the crowd.

Rennie feels rescued. (75)

What becomes obvious here is that the threat of the real—that which exceeds Rennie's representational grasp—is a gift so great that it has

the power to save her. Facing her real fear ultimately means relinquishing the "gun" at the heart of a conflictual sociality that produces those safe distinctions (between here and there, viewer and viewed, inside and outside, etc.) that Rennie is so anxious to guard. Giving up the illusionary sense of control over her life (and death), Rennie "feels rescued." This sets up an alternative interpretative pattern for the novel for it is now no longer the gaze, with its shielding function, but the real that provides safety. In other words, it is not the discursively mediated but the immediate contact with the real that leads to safety.

Such immediate contact with the real, the beyond of representation, must be nonrepresentational itself, that is, it must be a corporeal contact. In this sense not only the title of the novel but also the symbolism of hands and touching—often commented on but never quite read in these terms—that takes on new significance. That the gift of the real is explicitly linked to the touching of hands we have already seen in the encounter with the old man: all he wanted to do was shake Rennie's hand to bring her luck, and once he does, she feels safe. A further important example that explicitly links a sense of salvation both to being opened, or exposed, to the real as well as to sensibility, is found in the scene just prior to Paul and Rennie's love-making:

He doesn't touch her. She undoes the buttons on the blouse, he's watching. He notes the scar, the missing piece, the place where death kissed her lightly, a preliminary kiss. He doesn't look away or down, he's seen people a lot deader than her.

"I was lucky," she says.

He reaches out his hands and Rennie can't remember ever having been touched before. Nobody lives forever, who said you could? This much will have to do, this much is enough. She's open now, she's been opened, she's being drawn back down, she enters her body again and there's a moment of pain, incarnation, this may be only the body's desperation, a flareup, a last clutch at the world before the long slide into final illness and death; but meanwhile she's solid after all, she's still here on the earth, she's grateful, he's touching her, she can still be touched. (203–04)

There are several points of interest in this rather literal re-incarnation scene. First, the scene is clearly constructed to contrast with Jake and Rennie's sexual encounters. Thus, even though Paul is watching her, his is not a male gaze, for unlike Jake, Paul is not a "packager"; he has no intention of turning Rennie into a "package" (103). Further, unlike Jake, who cannot bring himself to look at Rennie's mutilated

body after her operation, Paul does not avert his eyes when he sees the touch of the real on her. And most importantly of all, he not only looks at her but touches her, making him the one who "opened" her and who "gave her back her body" (248). For Rennie, coming back into her body is ambivalent. It is associated with "pain" and "final illness and death" but also with being "solid," with being alive and being able to be touched. In other words, the body bears the hallmarks of the real: it is what makes us vulnerable and exposes us to our inevitable death, but it is also, and this is the novel's ultimate concern, what allows for corporeal proximity to another human being and so offers ethical resistance to, and saves us from, our involuntary complicity with a violent economy of representational gazes.

Me, I am a Hostage

The novel's final "hostage situation" dramatizes this concern and thereby makes its ethical appeal overt. The emphasis throughout this section is on hands and touching, thus signaling its departure from the Sartrean gaze that informs large sections of the narrative. What is called for here is a reaching out to and touching the other rather than seeing and constructing the other as an image, that is, an understanding of *le regard* in its ethical sense.¹⁸

The call for Rennie to remember a "forgotten sociality" (*Entre* 163), a sociality that is based not on a conflictual but an ethical understanding of *le regard*, comes right after Lora has been brutally beaten up, sexually violated, and left for dead. What is demanded of her at that point is the proximity of touch: "Rennie kneels on the wet floor and touches the hand, which feels cold. After a moment she takes hold of it with both of her hands. She can't tell from holding this hand whether or not Lora is breathing, whether or not her heart is still moving. How can she bring her back to life?" Lora has at that stage been reduced to "the face of a stranger" (298), a phrase that, in its distorted echo of the "faceless stranger" who breaks into Rennie's apartment, simultaneously evokes the violent and the ethical understanding of *le regard* in the novel and introduces the important shift from one to the other. In a nightmare just before the beating, Rennie dreams of "the man with the rope" but cannot see his face: "The face keeps changing, eluding her, he might as well be invisible, she can't see him, this is what is so terrifying, he isn't really there, he is only a shadow, anonymous, familiar, with silver eyes that twin and reflect her own" (287). The eyes of the other are here covered up by sunglasses in which Rennie only sees her own reflection. What this passage alerts us to, then, is that up to that point, Rennie has been complicit with a violent form of sociality that is based on reflection,

where the other simply mirrors the self. When Rennie therefore realizes, only a few pages later, that "there's no such thing as a faceless stranger" (299) and that in attending to Laura she is attending to "the face of a stranger" (298), this signals a fundamental shift away from a form of sociality where the face of the other in its absolute otherness from the self cannot be seen because it is always already reduced to what Levinas would call the self's intentionality.

A phenomenological concept—Edmund Husserl is his direct interlocutor here, though it would not be misplaced to read in Sartre a further addressee—intentionality equates with the perceiving consciousness "aiming at and embracing, or perceiving, all alterity under its thematizing gaze" (*Entre* 159). Intentionality, for him, is therefore ultimately an "egology" that it ends up reducing "the Other to the Same" (161). As "egological gathering," intentionality does not allow us to see the face of the other as anything other than our own reflection—we always see "silver eyes that twin and reflect [our] own" (Atwood 287) where we should see the eyes of the other, looking back and thus resisting what Levinas calls the "imperialism of the same" (*Totality* 39). The face of the other, and that specifically means the eyes of the other, offers ethical resistance to the violence of the gaze. Thus Cathryn Vasseleu observes:

In contrast to the violence of the gaze, the face confounds any intentionality in the nakedness of its look. For Levinas, the eyes interrupt the formal unity of the face as a phenomenon. In their absolute nakedness, the eyes of the other exceed my own vision. I will never see directly what the other sees, I will never see with their eyes. In looking back at me with a singularity inconvertible to my own consciousness, the openness of the face is an expression of welcome while demanding a response that calls the totality and security of my own position into question. Delivering a frustrating twist to the Hegelian opposition of warring consciousnesses, the face of the other has a defenceless vulnerability which commands me to offer my regard. (92)

Inasmuch as the eyes of the other "exceed my own vision," they function much like Holbein's skull did for Lacan: they have the power to "look back" from a point outside the viewer's field of vision and as such "annihilate" the subject by bringing it face to face with the limits of its own representational power, that is, the real as the traumatic dimension of being that resists all symbolization.

This resistance is an ethical resistance insofar as the face of the other is linked to "the real" not just in the sense that it returns and interrupts a violent gaze; it is also linked to physical suffering and

ultimately death. The face of the other exposes itself as "nakedness, destitution, passivity, and pure vulnerability," which is why Levinas calls the face of the other a pure nakedness that "is an exposure unto death." In other words, what "shows" in the face of the other is "the very *mortality* of the other human being" (*Entre* 167). Facing this mortality of the other person concerns—*regards*—the "I" and as such brings with it "the obligation not to let the other man face death alone" ("Bad" 38). This, for Levinas, is our ultimate ethical responsibility. Letting the other die alone, for him, means becoming "an accomplice in his death" (Kearney 61).

The appropriate ethical response for Levinas lies in a simple "here I am" (*me voici*), that is, an acceptance of one's "assignation." However, while it might appear simple, this acceptance has profound implications for our understanding of subjectivity. As the accusative case in the French *me voici* indicates, the Levinasian self responds to the other before it speaks for itself. "The self," he says, "is through and through a hostage," and it is only "through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon, proximity" (*Otherwise* 117). Importantly, this sense of self is "bound to corporeity." Thus he says, "Under assignation, the pronoun 'I' [*je*] is in the accusative: it signifies *here I am*. . . . 'Here I am' [*me voici*] is . . . not to be confused with the gift of fine words. . . . The *here I am* signifies a being bound to giving with hands full, a being bound to corporeity; the body is the very condition of giving, with all that giving costs (*God* 188). Ethical subjectivity, in other words, is only possible when it is tied to sensibility, to the real that continuously affects the self and calls it into question by reminding it of its limits.

Thus Rennie can only offer ethical regard once she has been "opened" and "given back her body." As a "hostage," she faces Lora's mortality and, when there is no other "someone" to take responsibility for Lora, she responds to the ethical obligation not to let the other die alone with a *me voici*: "She moves the sticky hair away from the face, which isn't a face anymore, it's a bruise, blood is still oozing from the cuts. . . there's nothing she can even wipe this face off with, all the cloth in this room is filthy, septic, except her hands, she could lick this face, clean it off with her tongue, that would be the best, that's what animals did (298). This touch, then, as an expression of ethical regard, is Rennie's gift to Lora—just as the old man's touch was his gift to Rennie:

She's holding Lora's left hand, between both of her own, perfectly still, nothing is moving, and yet she knows she is pulling on the hand, as hard as she can, there's an invisible hole in the air, Lora is on the other side of it and she has to pull her through, she's gritting her teeth with the effort, she

can hear herself, a moaning, it must be her own voice, this is a gift, this is the hardest thing she's ever done. (299)

This gift stands outside all exchange economies: nothing is expected back in return; it is an expression of pure regard for the other.

The ethical relationship of regard, for Levinas, therefore ultimately represents "a backwards movement of intentionality." This backward movement also contains "a sort of violence," but it is violence directed against the self: "a trauma at the heart of my-self [*moi-même*], a claiming of this Same by the Other" (*God* 187). Ethical subjectivity is a subjectivity that is "open." It is exposed to the real and as such always at risk of being wounded or traumatized. Thus Simon Critchley goes so far as to say that the "Levinasian subject is a traumatized self," quickly adding, "But, this is a *good thing*. It is only because the subject is unconsciously constituted through the trauma of contact with the real that we might have the audacity to speak of goodness, transcendence, compassion, etc. . . . Without trauma, there would be no ethics in Levinas's particular sense of the word" ("Original" 101).

Without trauma, that is, without "an affective disposition towards alterity" that exposes the self to bodily harm ("Original" 100), there would be no guilty conscience about an endlessly perpetuated violence carried out in the name of representation and *le regard*.

Postcolonialism in Question: Responding to One's Right to Be

In his discussion of *The Location of Culture*, David Vilaseca argues that Homi Bhabha's insistence on the "'postcolonial' *within* modernity," that is, the postcolonial as blind spot and irritant in the narrative of modernity, "closely resembles the function of the 'gaze' as noted by Lacan in his criticism of the modern subject of self-reflection":

[D]rawing on Lacan's pictorial example once again, one can say that the direct consequence of Bhabha's argument in *The Location of Culture* is that one could, or indeed should, consider the 'postcolonial' as the 'anamorphic skull' or '*memento mori*' in the picture of *all* modernist discourses—that is, as the 'blind spot' from whose place those discourses of modernity which allegedly 'include' and 'represent' (post)colonial signs and identities are in fact always already inhabited, 'gazed at,' crucially split and dislocated by them. (78)

In other words, the postcolonial functions as the traumatic and disruptive force of the Lacanian real within the discourse of modernity. This is a point well made and one we are already quite familiar with in discussions around postcolonialism. What we are perhaps less familiar with is a reflection on what might be excluded from postcolonialism's own field of vision. What is postcolonialism's blind spot or *memento mori*? Appropriating Vilaseca's words for my own purposes here, I would like to argue that we could, or indeed should, consider the "ethical" as the "anamorphic skull" or "*memento mori*" in the picture of all postcolonial discourses.

If we understand the ethical as postcolonialism's blind spot, then it is perhaps less surprising that *Bodily Harm* has not been greeted with more enthusiasm by postcolonial critics. Charged with not sufficiently acknowledging "the 'voice' of the Other" and therefore not being "politically radical enough," the novel has been criticized for its complicity with a colonial mindset. In this critique, however, it has been overlooked that what emerges from the edges of this complicity is a decidedly ethical vision. Postcolonial critics are suspicious of *Bodily Harm* because they are nervous about what they regard as the novel's bad politics. However, their exclusive focus on questions of politics makes them blind to ethics, and so they cannot see that what might be bad politics is in fact good ethics. What this novel does, better than most, is dramatize both the complicity that is responsible for postcolonialism's "guilty conscience" and the "calling into question" of this complicity that might result from it.

A "good" postcolonial politics, a politics that "acknowledges the 'voice' of the other" and is "counterdiscursive [o]r cross-cultural," is a politics of representation that, like Said's "textual attitude," keeps us safe—safe in the knowledge that we are doing good for the other. This is a postcolonialism with a good conscience. For Levinas, however, such a good conscience is an offence: "The offense done to others by the 'good conscience' of being is already an offense to the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, who, from the faces of others, look at/regard the I" (*Entre* 168).

With all the epistemic violence of the Sartrean *regard*, a postcolonialism with a "good conscience" projects a certain prefabricated agenda onto the singularity of the actual cultural phenomenon it analyses, in this case, a literary text; it does not allow the literary text to "look back"—it does not allow itself to be affected, to be called into question, to have its own disciplinary boundaries unsettled.

Donald Wehrs is right, therefore, when he laments the lingering legacy of Jean-Paul Sartre in postcolonial studies and offers Emmanuel Levinas's work as a point of ethical interruption and resistance. However, his immediate "adequation" of Levinas's thought for yet

another political means, that is, "to allow non-Western historiography to inform postcolonial literary theory" (773), instantly defuses the radical potential Levinas's thought offers for calling the field into question. Thus all too quickly reestablishing postcolonialism's "good conscience," the ethical power of a "bad conscience" is missed. "Bad conscience," for Levinas, is "without the protective mask of the character beholding himself in the mirror of the world, reassured and posing" ("Bad" 37). Bad conscience, in that sense, is associated with the "backwards movement of intentionality" (*God* 187), that is, not with being safe but being-in-question. Importantly, being-in-question does not cancel out subjectivity; instead, it means "to have to speak, to have to say 'I,' to be in the first person, to be precisely me; but, then, in the affirmation of the ego's being, to have to respond to its right to be." Importantly, responding to the right to be means responding "in fear for the Other (*Autrui*):" "My 'in the world,' my 'place in the sun,' my at homeness; have they not been the usurpation of the places belonging to the other man already oppressed and starved by me? Fear of all that my existing, *despite its intentional and conscious innocence*, can accomplish of violence and murder" ("Bad" 38, emphasis added).

This last line, in particular, points to the complicity with which a postcolonial settler subject finds itself confronted: not being guilty in the sense of having intentionally committed a crime and yet complicit with the violence done against the other. The novel, then, appears as Rennie's—the settler subject's—response to its "right to be." Asked by Lora to "[t]ell someone what happened" (282), Rennie responds to her right to be by telling her story: "this is how I got here." The novel as a whole, then, is a response to the settler subject's right to be, offered "in fear for the Other" whose place it has usurped. By drawing on both the violent and the ethical meanings of *le regard* to show postcolonial complicity and ethical interruption, Atwood offers an exemplary dramatization of a bad conscience.

The novel thus indeed "challenges postcolonial critics to refine their terminologies and rethink their methods" (Brydon, "Atwood's" 112), for it forces us to recognize the limits of representation and acknowledge the (potentially traumatic) real materiality of our existence—with death as inevitable end—as the space of ethical resistance. By revealing postcolonialism's blind spot and insisting that the path to ethical subjectivity must lead through an encounter with the real beyond representation, *Bodily Harm*, I contend, can do for the field of postcolonial studies what Derrida famously suggested the thought of Emmanuel Levinas could do for Western philosophy: it "can make us tremble" (82). That this may well have been precisely the impact Atwood wanted the novel to have is certainly suggested

by this quote from Pablo Neruda's "The Heroes,"¹⁹ which, as Mariyn Patton suggests (167), was one of the alternative epigraphs Atwood considered for *Bodily Harm*: "This story is horrifying; if you have suffered from it, forgive me, but I'm not sorry."

Notes

1. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*; Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*; and Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*.
2. Lawrence Buell, for example, notes that questions of ethics have become significant in literary studies in his introduction to a 1999 *PMLA* special issue on ethics. Among the many examples documenting such an "ethical turn" are Adamson, Freadman, and Parker's collection; Davis and Womack's reader; as well as works by Robert Eaglestone, Andrew Gibson, and Adam Zachary Newton.
3. A notable exception to this general trend is offered in the works of Leela Gandhi and Rosalyn Diprose. See particularly Gandhi's *Affective Communities* and Diprose's "Bearing Witness to Cultural Difference, with Apology to Levinas" and "Here I Am by the Grace of the Other and Politics Is in *Disgrace*."
4. I refer to ethics in a very specifically Levinasian sense and do not extend the claims I am about to make to other approaches captured under the "ethics" label. Thus Levinasian ethics does *not* refer to a moral code or ethical norms; what it instead entails is perhaps best explained by Simon Critchley, who suggests that a Levinasian ethics assumes an "other" who exceeds my conceptual grasp and therefore calls into question my self-certainty: "The other person stands in a relation to me that exceeds my cognitive powers, placing me in question and calling me to justify myself" ("Deconstruction" 32).
5. Levinasian ethics is directly associated with concepts that describe an opening up of the self to the other. Thus Levinas explicitly links his understanding of ethics as a "putting into question of the self" to ideas such as "hospitality" or "welcome" when he says: "The putting into question of the self is precisely a welcome to the absolute other" ("Transcendence and Height" 17).
6. I am by no means the first to point out the significance of vision and touch, surface and depth, in *Bodily Harm*; a number of critics have picked up on these contrasting metaphors and read the novel as a kind of bildungsroman that presents Rennie's journey from surface to depth—from a mode of being dominated by sight to one characterised by touch. However, this shift or "journey" has not yet been discussed in any detail—to my knowledge at least—with reference to a specifically Sartrean notion of the gaze. Neither has it been read

as a challenge to the very idea of (visual and textual) representation from the point of view of (Levinasian) ethics. For critics exploring the significance of vision and touch in the novel, see, for example, David Lucking, Ildikó de Papp Carrington, Dorothy Jones, Lorna Irvine, Rowland Smith, Roberta Rubenstein, Sharon R. Wilson ("Turning"), and Barbara Hill Rigney.

7. Other recent examples of critics' apparent reluctance to give more than just a brief reference to the novel include the edited collections by Carol Ann Howells, *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, a title which (on the back cover) proclaims to be "comprehensive," and Sharon R. Wilson, *Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations: Recent Poetry and Fiction*, which focuses on "her work of the eighties and nineties" but only mentions *Bodily Harm* in passing (xii).
8. The volume also notes that Margaret Atwood is one of the most frequently recurring names on course lists for "Canadian Women Writers" in Canada. Course lists for "Postcolonial Literatures," on the other hand, feature an "old" and a "new" canon—neither of which contains the name Margaret Atwood (Moss 130).
9. See Diana Brydon's "Caribbean Revolution and Literary Convention" and "Atwood's Postcolonial Imagination: Rereading *Bodily Harm*" as well as Helen Tiffin's "'Everyone is in Politics': Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* and Blanche D'Alpuget's *Turtle Beach*. Part II: Voice and Form."
10. It is important to note that the apparent replication of the Cartesian subject/object split results directly from the Kojèvean reading and the significance this reading attributes to the master/slave situation, rather than from Hegel himself. For Hegel, the master/slave situation is inherently unstable and so only ever momentarily solidifies into something that might resemble the Cartesian subject/object split. It is precisely because the "mirroring relationship" is ultimately unsatisfactory for attaining the mutual recognition that is a prerequisite for the truth of self-certainty, that the master/slave relationship is dialectically *aufgehoben*, that is, elevated and simultaneously dissolved and "kept safe."
11. Given that the novel was published in 1981, at the tail end of the feminist identity politics era, it is not hard to guess that it is a kind of response to increasing attacks on the feminist movement from women of color during the 1970s, attacks which highlighted the movement's blindness to cultural differences. With their exclusive focus on questions of gender, so the charge ran, the predominantly white feminists at the forefront of that movement did not reflect on the many different ways of embodying that gender. Thus elevating the white female subject to a privileged unmarked category, feminists became involuntarily complicit with their white male counterparts, whose privilege they otherwise contested.
12. Thus, when she first encounters Dr. Minnow on the plane, for example, we read:

Rennie is becoming irritated with him. She looks at the pocket in the seatback in front of her, hoping there's something she can pretend to read, an airline magazine, barfbag mags as they're known in the trade, but there's nothing in it but the card illustrating emergency procedures. On the 707 to Barbados she had a thriller she bought at the airport, but she finished it and left it on the plane. A mistake: now she's bookless. (29)

13. I use "the real" in a generalized Lacanian sense here as that which resists symbolisation but nonetheless makes itself felt as an "absent presence," a disturbance, within the order of representation. I will return to this point more fully below.
14. I here rely on Marilyn Patton's research into the manuscript material. See particularly 167–170. Following Patton, I have emphasized the additions.
15. Vilaseca is quoting from Žižek 114.
16. An earlier instance of this return of the gaze is found in the scene in which Rennie observes policemen beating up the old man and the old man looks up and sees her: "She's been seen, she's being seen with utter thoroughness, she won't be forgotten" (146).
17. The word choice is significant here. Being "decent" in Griswold was associated with being dressed, that is, in Berger's terms, with being "nude" rather than "naked," or rather, being within representation (Berger 54). What Rennie perceives here is "indecent"; it is the real beyond representation.
18. In this respect, Rennie's recurring nightmare about her grandmother's "lost hands" is important, for it shows her that rather than backing away, as she did in the actual childhood incident, she should have "pu[t] out her hands" (115). That she did not do so at the time, and that in her nightmare it is "her hands she's looking for" (116), suggests that Rennie internalizes her childhood lesson of "how to look at things without touching them" (54) all too well and effectively, like her grandmother, loses her hands, that is, loses her ability to connect with people as a sentient being.
19. Despite my best efforts I have been unable to track down a poem (or any other piece of writing) of that title by Pablo Neruda. Atwood might have misremembered the title or phrasing, or used her own translation here, making it difficult to ascertain exactly which original Neruda piece she is referring to. Irrespective of these difficulties in locating its origin, the epigraph is a powerful alternative signpost for the novel.

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