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The Master's Narrative: Resisting the Essentializing Gaze in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*

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ABSTRACT: Racist, sexist, and cultural essentialisms deny people subjectivity, and some post-9/11 literature suggest methods for resistance. In Ian McEwan's best-selling novel *Saturday*, white protagonist Henry Perowne may initially seem more likely to uphold rather than resist class, gender, and racial stereotypes. However, Perowne's objectification of three of the novel's nonwhite characters demonstrates how essentialisms reinforce the "master narratives" of financial wealth, professional success, and family bliss, and, in an unexpected twist, indicates how such pervasive stereotypes might be undermined.

Keywords: Ian McEwan, post-9/11, racism, subjectivity

Post-9/11 media reports often stereotype nonwhites and discourage traditionally marginalized peoples from constructing their own identities. Questions of subjectivity are particularly important in this environment; many critics, theorists, and authors agree that subjectivity must replace objectivity and that people must recognize the differences within and between marginalized groups. Racist, sexist, and cultural essentialisms deny people subjectivity, and some post-9/11 literature suggest methods for resistance. Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, a best-selling novel that outlines a single day in the life of white protag-

onist Henry Perowne, may initially seem more likely to uphold rather than resist class, gender, and racial stereotypes. However, Perowne's objectification of three of the novel's nonwhite characters demonstrates how essentialisms reinforce the "master narratives" of financial wealth, professional success, and family bliss, and, in an unexpected twist, indicates how such pervasive stereotypes might be undermined.

Postcolonial and postmodern critics including Edward Said, bell hooks, and Paul Gilroy write of the need to recognize nonwhite people's subjectivities. However, if societies are dominated by ideologies and practices that marginalize "minority" groups, essentialisms become unavoidable and difficult to resist. Stereotypes perpetuate a race and gender hierarchy in which upper-class white males are privileged over people of color, women, and lower classes. The assertion of essentialized peoples' subjectivity does not always force those who uphold master narratives to question their prejudicial beliefs, but it may initiate the process of destabilizing this hierarchy.

Although some individuals passively accept stereotypes, many people exercise social, political, and personal agency to assert stereotypes' inadequacies and to begin forming distinct identities. One method of escaping definition involves consciously embodying stereotypical qualities. This practice involves the risk of being considered an example of essential traits, but it may also demonstrate how ridiculous and reductive essentialisms can be. Alternately, or in combination with this technique, individuals may perform roles that are unexpected of them, thereby undermining the "master narratives" that dictate the roles society expects them to perform.

Social master narratives govern the characters in McEwan's *Saturday*, a novel whose white protagonist easily essentializes two nonwhite characters but is ultimately frustrated by an adolescent Nigerian girl. In an interview with David Lynn, McEwan claims that *Saturday* is directly linked to "a world that is public, shared, recognizable, real" (39). McEwan's statement not only reflects on his novel's treatment of British reactions to the post-9/11 invasion of Iraq or on facts that he describes as "checkable in your newspaper" (39). It also addresses the unfamiliar characters whose perspectives seem to threaten Henry Perowne. *Saturday*'s focus on a white upper-middle class man almost inevitably marginalizes any character who is nonwhite, nonmale, and nonwealthy. Even so, such characters repeatedly invade Perowne's fortress-like consciousness. Perowne craves certainty and needs the knowledge and logic that assist him through neurosurgery to generally inform his life. He not only subscribes to, but thrives on the social master narratives that essentialize other characters and position Perowne as the novel's dominant white male.

In constructing a consciousness that shapes the world to fit his own expectations, Perowne reduces nonwhite characters to racial Others. Readers may not expect such sentiments from an educated man living in 2003 Britain, particularly if Said is correct in suggesting that

> [a]s the twentieth century moves to a close, there has been a gathering awareness nearly everywhere of the lines *between* cultures, the divisions and differences that not only allow us to discriminated one culture from another, but also enable us to see the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote. (15)

However, the early-twentieth-century Perowne does not dwell on the way people construct ideas of culture or race, but incorporates nonwhite, non-British characters' experiences into his own worldview. Miri Taleb, who suffers torture under Saddam Hussein's regime, becomes no more than an essentialized version of an Iraqi victim in need of Western aid when he is subjected to Perowne's gaze. Perowne also patronizes Rodney Browne, his Guyanan colleague,[1] and thereby demonstrates the pressure exerted on nonwhite British characters to assimilate to the white norms Perowne epitomizes.

In contrast, neurology patient Andrea Chapman's construction by and responses to Perowne critique his essentializing gaze while demonstrating how essentialisms can be deliberately deployed to subvert racism and sexism. hooks' work on African American subjectivity suggests that Andrea's ability to resist essentialism is crucial to developing subjectivity, as "when black folks [and, arguably, other stereotyped groups] critique essentialism, we are empowered to recognize multiple experiences of black identity that are the lived conditions which make diverse cultural productions possible" (*Yearning* 29). Andrea is unique among the novel's nonwhite characters in her refusal to submit to stereotypes imposed onto her by Perowne, doctor Jay Strauss, and her family members. Adolescence, as a time in which individuals generally assert their subjectivity and resist conforming to expectations, facilitates Andrea's defence against Perowne's gaze. Her chameleon-like ability to reshape her identity asserts that marginalized people can create subjectivities despite white male dominance and hostile post-9/11 sentiments. Andrea is best considered from two perspectives: through Perowne's gaze and the effects of his personal "master narrative" on this young black woman, and through Andrea's own gaze, a perspective that demonstrates not only her yearning for subjectivity, but her ability to subvert the reader's, if not Perowne's, faith in essential truths.

Perowne's treatment of nonwhite characters demonstrates that cross-cultural empathy is reduced or eliminated when people cling to white-dominated structures—Perowne's "master narratives." Although Perowne is not a white supremacist in the conventional sense, he practices and perpetuates white social and professional dominance, behaviors that combine with his confidence in essentialisms to threaten nonwhite characters' subjectivities. In order to construct a secure sense of self, Perowne attempts to deny and/or control alternate experiences. This attitude is evident early in the novel when Perowne reflects on his encounters with Miri Taleb. The narrator reveals that, after Miri is unjustly

arrested, he "and his companions heard the screaming from their cells, and waited to be called. Beatings, electrocution, anal rape, near-drowning, thrashing the soles of the feet. Everyone, from top officials to street sweepers, lived in a state of anxiety; constant fear" (McEwan 64). Miri's imprisonment and torture justifiably trouble Perowne, but he appropriates Miri's experience in order to reduce his own political anxieties.

McEwan's speaker claims that since Perowne began working with Miri, "saw his torture scars and listened to his stories, Perowne has had ambivalent or confused and shifting ideas" concerning the invasion of Iraq (62). Superficially, this claim may indicate Perowne's sensitivity to issues surrounding religion, race, and culture, and even demonstrate Perowne's willingness to challenge Paul Gilroy's claim that "[o]ld, modern notions of racial difference appear to be quietly active within the calculus that assigns differential value to lives lost according to their locations and supposed racial origins or considers that some human bodies are more easily and appropriately humiliated, imprisoned, shackled, starved, and destroyed than others" (11). However, while Perowne does not seem to believe that Iraqis, or at least innocent Iraqis, deserve the human rights he enjoys as a white Brit, he still essentializes Miri as an unhinged torture victim in need of protection. Miri is described as "a man of slight, almost girlish build, with a nervous laugh, a whinnying giggle" (McEwan 62), and as he tells Perowne of the cells in which he and two dozen other men are crammed, Miri "giggle[s] mirthlessly" (63). This representation feminizes Miri and calls his mental health into question. By aligning Miri with women and the mentally ill, two groups who are commonly denied subjectivity, Perowne diminishes Miri's own subjectivity. As a British citizen and as Miri's doctor, Perowne positions himself as protector over a patient who requires British intervention when he cannot save himself. Perowne actually demonstrates little empathy in the novel, for what seems like empathy for Miri's suffering merely serves Perowne's purpose of constructing his own subjectivity. He refuses to believe that the subject can be decentered, and instead forms a personal "master narrative" in his unyielding consciousness.

Perowne further objectifies Miri when he Others the Iraqi patient in order to ease his political conscience. Miri's story interests Perowne[2] because it justifies his pro-war opinions, and Perowne essentializes Miri in order to feel complicit in a humanitarian effort. By assuming that Miri's story is common to all Iraqis and that Western invasion could eliminate government-sanctioned torture, Perowne denies Miri, and all Iraqis, individual subjectivities. Miri cannot construct his own subjectivity, and is ultimately reduced to the essentialized identity that Perowne assigns him.

Considering Perowne's constant consumption of essentializing discourses, it is hardly surprising that he perpetuates racist essentialisms. He fixates on radio, television, and Internet news reports; these media ignore facts in order to create dramatic fictions, as when the burning Russian cargo plane Perowne sees in the

morning is later rumored to be piloted by "radical Islamists" who "set fire to their own plane in the cause of jihad" (McEwan 151). Perowne's faith in essentializing media not only causes him to fear Iraqis as terrorists, but to perceive them as utterly knowable in the role of marginalized victim.

Perowne again essentializes Middle Eastern people when he observes three London women wearing burkhas. Even though his distaste for the burkhas themselves is "visceral" (McEwan 124), he appears to empathize with the women, and is repulsed by their obligation "to walk around so entirely obliterated" (124), but Perowne does not understand his own role in obliterating these women's subjectivity. Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace suggests that Perowne lives in a cosmopolitan city, but because he is

> [l]imited in imagination, [and] committed to a rationalism that blocks his empathy and impedes his vision, Henry fails to become truly cosmopolitan. As a character, he experiences a moment of revelation, and he has no power to enlighten the reader. Instead, he remains stuck in a nearly pathological self-absorption. (479)

Just as he uses Miri's experience to soothe his political consciousness, Perowne uses his reaction to the women's "obliteration" to briefly feel self-righteous. The burkha-clad women symbolize the repression that Perowne hopes the invasion will end; these sentiments may be admirable, but mere symbols cannot create their own subjectivity. Perowne perpetuates the media-reinforced stereotypes of Iraqi women as needing Western intervention, and thereby assigns the women even less individuality than he permits Miri. His final thought of the women is not for their oppression, as Perowne asks, "What should he care about burkhas?" (McEwan 124), in irritation that the women/symbols have disrupted his comfort.

While many of *Saturday*'s racist discourses center on Iraqi and Muslim characters, Perowne also extends his essentializing gaze to the novel's black characters. Because Perowne does not critique essentialisms, he cannot recognize multiplicities among nonwhite characters. Perowne seems to view the novel's black characters only in these terms of their social "whiteness" or "blackness." Rather than assuming his own identity, Rodney Browne, like Miri, is subjected to Perowne's essentialisms. However, while Miri is presented as a nonwhite Other in need of British benevolence, Rodney more closely resembles a colonial mimic man being groomed in the image of the successful Brit—in Perowne's image. Perowne does have a practical responsibility to his year-two registrar, but his conduct toward Rodney resembles that of a patient father toward his child. Through Perowne's gaze, Rodney appears to be the stereotypical "white man's black man": assimilationist, white-identified, and indebted to Perowne's generous patronage. The speaker notes that Rodney "has a friendly, intelligent face, and the word is that women adore him and he puts himself about. Perowne suspects he'll turn out well" (249). Perowne subjects Rodney to a master narra-

tive centered on financial success and sexual promise and, in doing so, reiterates stereotypical physical characteristics of black men.

Rodney is strictly relegated to the role of Perowne's apprentice and is repeatedly "permitted" to assist during surgery; as Rodney and Perowne finish Baxter's operation, "[b]ecause he's pleased with him, and wants him to feel better about the evening, Perowne lets his registrar take the lead" (McEwan 255). Perowne's fatherly attitude might be touching if he had not earlier typecast Rodney as a virile black man who is privileged to work under a neurosurgical master. Perowne's domination over Rodney reinforces race-based standards of British success, and he exemplifies hooks' argument that

> [e]ven if perceived "authorities" writing about a group to which they do not belong and/or over which they wield power, are progressive, caring, and right-on in every way, as long as their authority is constituted by either the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experience they seek to address or the dismissal of those voices as unimportant, the subject-object dichotomy is maintained and domination is reinforced. (*Talking Back* 43)

Rodney seems little more than a prize whom Perowne admires for his assimilation into a white male-dominated profession. Rather than accepting Perowne's critiques of Rodney's skills and ambitions, which actually resist racist stereotypes of black people as lazy, unskilled, and unintelligent, readers might take issue with Perowne's willingness to take responsibility for Rodney's success. Rodney becomes a mere object that reflects Perowne's generosity and skill, and is little more than a Perowne-clone that supports his supervisor's perspectives.

Perowne epitomizes the medical institution's white dominance, and his pleasure with Rodney's progress suggests that Perowne's mentoring has the desired effect of assimilating his registrar into this system. However, Rodney is described as "occasionally and touchingly homesick for Guyana where he has ambitions to set up a head injury unit one day" (McEwan 249). By positioning Rodney's desire to establish a clinic as "homesickness" rather than altruism, Perowne positions Rodney as a person who could be a Brit, but who chooses not to be. Rodney's desire to return to Guyana prevents him from ever completely assimilating into the British medical institution that Perowne upholds. By relegating Rodney to the status of almost-British, Perowne practices the relatively invisible racism that Gilroy highlights when he writes,

> Class-bound Britons have always found it easier to discover the problems of racial nationalism in the fascinating shaven-headed forms of the neo-Nazi, young and fit, than in the anonymous pin-striped indifference of those who might profess their commitment to race hierarchy in public after dark but whose actions institutionalize it nonetheless. (136)

Perowne's attitude toward Rodney perpetuates the institutionalized racism Gilroy identifies. Rather than being indifferent, Perowne seems concerned with main-

taining his privileged place within the status quo. Therefore, he essentializes Rodney as a black man who is "almost the same, but not white" (Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man" 124)—at least not as white as Perowne, who sits atop the race hierarchy.

From Perowne's perspective, Rodney's desire to establish a practice in Guyana makes him worthy of pity rather than praise. Gilroy's analysis of contemporary British culture suggests that

> [a]uthoritarian modes of belonging to the national collective supply the norm, and with the constraints and strengths of national identity and the national state system plainly visible, anyone who objects to the conduct of their government is likely to be identified as an enemy within and bluntly advised to go and live elsewhere. (26)

Rodney is not perceived as a "threat" to the nation as an Iraqi Brit might be, or even as an antiwar supporter might be (McEwan 190), but Perowne seems to sadly accept Rodney's desire to return to Guyana as marking his inability to perfectly adhere to Perowne's version of British standards. From Perowne's perspective, Rodney cannot hope to achieve the status and success Perowne enjoys largely because he is a black man within a white-dominated society and profession. Instead, Rodney will be British-trained before returning to his homeland and will neither assimilate into nor threaten British institutions.

While, as Stuart Hall writes, "You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject" (166), Perowne does seem to consider Rodney to be a stereotypically "good" black subject (or, in this case, black object). This version of Rodney, like Perowne's version of Miri, illustrates the essentializing gaze that consumes nearly all of *Saturday*'s nonwhite characters. Only Andrea Chapman eludes and subverts this gaze. When readers are first introduced to Andrea, a patient who needs a benign tumor removed from her brain, she is represented as a stereotypical black adolescent. The speaker reveals,

> Andrea Chapman was a problem patient, a problem niece [. . .] Something in her that village life in rural north Nigeria kept buttoned down was released once she started at her local Brixton comprehensive. She took to the music, the clothes, the talk, the values—the street. She had attitude, the vicar confided while his wife was trying to settle Andrea on the ward. His niece took drugs, got drunk, shoplifted, bunked off school, hated authority, and "swore like a merchant seaman." Could it be the tumor was pressing down on some part of her brain? (9–10)

Andrea is suspicious and confrontational; she "affected to talk like a rapper on MTV" (10) and, as such, is perceived as a threat to herself and her family.

The only redeeming qualities Perowne perceives in Andrea are physical; readers might be disturbingly reminded of slave narratives' descriptions of the

body-as-object when reading that Perowne "admired her spirit, and the fierce dark eyes, the perfect teeth, and the clean pink tongue lashing itself around the words it formed" (McEwan 10). Andrea seems to be "on the outside of the discourse looking in" (hooks, *Yearning* 24), and the people engaged in discourses around her—Perowne, Dr. Jay Strauss, her uncle, and her aunt—are determined to erase Andrea's rebellious behavior. These characters' descriptions of and attitudes toward Andrea "are larded with familiar tropes of native violence, irrationality, and exotic attractiveness, as well as the chance for education, empowerment, and progress through the inculcation of western ideals" (Parry 213). Andrea creates fear and frustration when she refuses to adhere to these preconceptions of how she should behave: namely, as a demure African woman within her black host family and within a British patriarchy.

When Andrea attempts to create her own subjectivity by adopting forms of dress, speech, and culture that her family and doctors disapprove of and cannot understand, they refuse to acknowledge Andrea's behavior as reflecting her yearning for a self that eludes and resists master narratives. This lack of understanding impedes Andrea's self-definition, but does not deter her rebellious search for a black subjectivity that accepts and exemplifies the diversity within black communities. While many aspects of Andrea's quest are self-destructive—clubbing is never a safe activity for a fourteen-year-old girl—her behaviors demonstrate Andrea's desire to construct a self that opposes her family's version of acceptability in terms of her age and her gender, and which also opposes versions of "acceptable," assimilationist blackness. Andrea does not dismiss the concept of subjectivity, but broadens its definition. She feels that identity formation is possible, but that her identity should oppose sterilized, artificial sameness.

Ironically, Andrea's rebellion could potentially objectify her rather than affirm her subjectivity. Andrea moves from the stereotype of a submissive African girl to that of a sexualized, aggressive urban black bitch. She might avoid negatively essentializing herself by intentionally deploying essentialisms, a strategy which, as Diane Fuss suggests, creates agency. Fuss argues that

> "[f]alling into" or "lapsing into" [essentialism] implies that essentialism is inherently reactionary—inevitably and inescapably a problem or a mistake. "Deploying" or "activating," on the other hand, implies that essentialism may have some strategic or interventionary value. (20)

Andrea does not "deploy" essentialisms against Perowne by aligning herself with other black characters. Although she focuses her "crush" on Rodney, Andrea does not assume that she and Rodney have a great deal in common simply because of their race or their shared immigration experience. She rejects the concept that she is "essentially" anything, and instead performs multiple essentialisms to avoid being permanently categorized. Andrea's performances illustrate that essences are based on the political and cultural contexts that surround subjects (Fuss 20). Rather than suggesting that she is naturally a

passive, antagonistic, or starry-eyed teenager, Andrea's multiple identities reflect on the values that inform Perowne's consciousness and which attempt to restrict or deny her subjectivity.

Andrea's apparent disconnection from a wider black community might reflect her adolescent self-centredness, but it also demonstrates Andrea's desire to construct herself as an individual subject rather than part of a commonly essentialized group, even if these groups purposely adopt essentialisms to advance social and political aims. Fuss claims that Gayatri Spivak's

> simultaneous critique and *endorsement* of Subaltern Studies' essentialism suggests that humanism can be activated in the service of the subaltern; in other words, when put into practice by the dispossessed themselves, essentialism can be powerfully displacing and disruptive. (31–32)

But Fuss wonders at what point this move ceases "to be provisional and becomes permanent" (32). Andrea can only create her subjectivity by resisting the urge to relax into stereotype and to adhere to Perowne's desire to "fix" her behavior and her identity.

Although Andrea risks assuming identities that are so narrowly focused they become stereotypes, she begins the process of forming her own subjectivity by disrupting Perowne's self-constructed master narrative. Perowne cannot explain Andrea's behavior at the novel's conclusion because he cannot relate it to his having removed her brain tumor. She "abandons" her "hard street talk" and willingly, warmly, communicates with Perowne (McEwan 259). Andrea's surgery does not likely trigger this change. Her over-performance of "normal" adolescent behavior, such as drawing hearts over her *i*'s and developing a crush on a handsome doctor, suggests that Andrea *chooses* to change. In doing so, Andrea demonstrates that the roles she is expected to perform are mere stereotypes and that Perowne's master narrative cannot and does not recognize her as a nonessentialized black woman.

Andrea's aspirations, whether real or symbolic, insert her into Perowne's world even as her behavior eludes his definition. hooks identifies this practice as dangerous when she writes, "When black people enter social contexts that remain unchanged, unaltered, in no way stripped of the framework of white supremacy, we are pressured to assimilate. We are rewarded for assimilation" (*Talking Back* 114). Perowne's attitude toward Rodney outlines the rewards provided for adhering to Perowne's norms. Conversely, Andrea's family scorns her love for rap music and her "delinquent" behavior, which does not cohere with their preconceptions of Andrea. hooks' argument in *Talking Back* suggests that, if Andrea ultimately decides to pursue neurosurgery, or even just to pursue Rodney, she risks being viewed as rejecting "black culture" and assimilating to Perowne's standards.

If Perowne's descriptions of Rodney contain hints of racism, his descriptions of Andrea are blatantly stereotypical and formed by racist concepts. He sees

Andrea as “an African queen” (McEwan 259), as a subject so essentialized it has been objectified. Andrea, however, eludes such easy definition. When Perowne, believing Andrea has written the true cause for her changed behavior in her notebook, asks her, “‘What do you like to write about?,’” she replies, “‘It’s a secret.’ But her eyes are bright, and her lips part as if she’s about to speak. Then she changes her mind and clamps them shut and with a mischievous look stares past him at the ceiling. She’s dying to tell” (259). Perowne believes himself privy to, even entitled to, Andrea’s private knowledge, but neither her girlish giggles nor her spontaneous desire to become a neurosurgeon are the straightforward teenaged fancies Perowne perceives them to be.

Hall writes that, for black Britons, “[t]he struggle to come into representation was predicated on a critique of the degree of fetishization, objectification, and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the black subject” (164). By performing various stereotypically “black” qualities, Andrea effectively critiques these racist practices. When an identity is ascribed to her, Andrea does not respond as expected; when hailed as a quiet Nigerian, Andrea responds as a hostile British teenager.[3] When her family and doctors then hail Andrea as a troubled teen, she again denies them the ability to pin down her subjectivity by continuing to perform unexpected, constantly shifting roles.

Andrea’s family cannot understand her fluid identity and hopes that, by physically manipulating her brain, Perowne can adjust her behavior and secure a permanent version of their niece. As Molly Clark Hillard notes, surgery allows Perowne to physically manipulate the boundary challenging teen:

> Andrea Chapman, notorious for her “nights in the clubs,” is “placed in a sitting position, with her head-clamp bolted to a frame in front of her,” and her exposed tentorium becomes “a pale delicate structure of beauty, like the little whirl of a veiled dancer” ([McEwan] 9). Perowne at once stills her disruptively dancing body and imposes upon it a more elegant, restrained form of dance. (196)

Perowne appropriates dance, one symbol of Andrea’s defiance, in hopes that her behavior, including her dancing, can be subdued.

After her surgery, Andrea seems changed for the better, and although Perowne cannot scientifically account for her changes, he appears happy that Andrea at least resembles a well-behaved adolescent, complete with pink notebook and mooning romance (McEwan 259–60). This new role may cause Andrea to appear increasingly willing to assimilate into British society and conform to adults’ expectations, but Andrea effectively practices a form of passive resistance. She performs a role that her family and the medical community can accept, but which remains inexplicable and, therefore, a tool for dissenting against and potentially subverting strict master narratives like Perowne’s.

Although Andrea’s adolescence helps her to move between various identities, it provides her with little power compared to the adults surrounding her. There-

fore, as an adolescent girl with limited agency, Andrea likely subverts Perowne's essentializing gaze only to serve her own needs, and not to fight wider social oppression. hooks warns that

> [w]hile today's youth are eager to live in a world where racism does not exist, they do not want to do the political work of changing themselves or society. That world entails confronting pain and hostility [. . .] They are constantly told that the only peace and happiness they can have will come to them through rugged individualism, through a focus on meeting self-centred needs. In a world where pathological narcissism is the order of the day, it is difficult to arouse collective concern for challenging racism or any form of domination. ("Me-Me Class" 81)

hooks' comments are overly general, and may even essentialize young people, but Andrea typifies the adolescent desires for instant gratification that hooks outlines. Her decision to take drugs, drink, and commit crimes may be read as suggesting that Andrea may not only perform the role of aggressive teenager desire to escape others' definitions of her, but that she may attempt to find happiness by assimilating into this particular stratum of British society. Andrea's "change" at the novel's conclusion may merely reflect her understanding that class status and material wealth are better attained by attaching herself to Rodney and by aspiring to a profession herself. If a culture where access to credit transcends race and class to create a world in which "there is no need of social awareness, for radical protest" (hooks, "Me-Me Class" 82), then Andrea's identity shifting reflects adolescent selfishness that may never mature. Regardless, her ability to defy Perowne's master narrative demonstrates the possibility of creating a centered subject in a postmodern society, and illustrates how people who are concerned with discourses around race and gender might deploy subversive essentialisms to create their own subjectivities.

Even if Andrea acts only to further her own aims, her refusal to be objectified and essentialized by Perowne has implications beyond her personal subjectivity. By switching between stereotypical personas, Andrea inhabits a marginal space; stereotypes generally deny subjectivity by locking people into specific behaviors and ascribing them static attributes, but Andrea's fluidity resists this objectivity. The space Andrea inhabits is similar to the liminal spaces between cultures that Homi Bhabha defines as providing "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood [. . .] that initiate new signs of identity" ("Introduction" 2). Andrea seems to care little for the social consequences that Bhabha outlines, yet her movement between cultural and racist stereotypes prevents her from developing an easily classified identity. She depends on her marginality, without which her subjectivity will be constructed by her family, by Perowne, or by British society in general.

Andrea's diverse experiences support Tracey Reynolds' assertion that "[t]he 'authenticized' and 'valorized' black women's experience is based on notions

of suffering, dysfunction and marginalization and black women are constructed fixed into particular positions of oppression where they have no agency" (600). However, Andrea also confirms Reynolds' argument that "black women are active agents, not passive victims in defining their social worlds" (600). Regardless that she likely changes her behavior only for personal gain and not to address wider social concerns, Andrea's construction of her individual subjectivity highlights the flaws in Perowne's master narrative. The home invasion overtly demonstrates that Perowne's consciousness is permeable, but Andrea's defiance of the medical knowledge that serves as Perowne's touchstone throughout the novel shows that subjectivity cannot be rigid, or ever considered complete.

Lee Siegel's claim that "*Saturday* is not a political book" (34) ignores the novel's explorations of race, gender, and reductive essentialisms. Andrea's behavior at the novel's conclusion suggests that resistance is possible—that subjects need not disappear, but can resist essentialisms and emphasize differences. Unfortunately for Andrea Chapman, fourteen-year-old girls have little political agency. Andrea is, however, a member of a diasporic family and of an increasingly transnational generation whose "collective bonding" assumes international dimensions. By beginning to imagine a black subjectivity that resists master narratives, Andrea begins a process that may initiate tangible and positive change: a process of recognizing difference rather than closing consciousness and of ensuring that critical voices are not merely yearned for, but are finally articulated.

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NOTES

1. Although Rodney's race is not explicit, Perowne's descriptions of Rodney's birthplace and physical characteristics strongly suggest that Rodney is black.
2. And, as Justin Lewis suggests, the public. He observes that "our analysis of the [British] television coverage during the war revealed little analysis of Iraqi attitudes. What we found instead was a constant stream of sidelong glimpses of Iraqi public opinion" (303) in which "enthusiastic Iraqi responses outnumber[ed] less enthusiastic accounts by seven to one" (304).
3. See Judith Butler's analysis of interpellation's effects on subjectivity.

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