

mediated by a kind of gaze that turns what it gazes at—and what it puts on display—into “an image out of focus”:

However you look at these animals, even if the animal is up against the bars, less than a foot from you, looking outwards in the public direction, *you are looking at something that has been rendered absolutely marginal*; and all the concentration you can muster will never be enough to centralise it. Why is this?

Within limits, the animals are free, but both they themselves, and their spectators, presume on their close confinement. The visibility through the glass, the spaces between the bars, or the empty air above the moat, are not what they seem—if they were, then everything would be changed. Thus visibility, space, air, have been reduced to tokens.

The animals . . . become utterly dependent upon their keepers. Consequently most of their responses have been changed. What was central to their interest has been replaced by a passive waiting for a series of arbitrary outside interventions. The events they perceive occurring around them have become . . . illusory. . . . At the same time this very isolation (usually) guarantees their longevity as specimens and facilitates their taxonomic arrangement.

(22–23; emphasis in the original)

All sites of enforced marginalization such as “ghettos, shanty towns, madhouses, concentration camps,” Berger concludes, have something in common with zoos (24).

This discussion of animals in zoos offers a disturbingly apt parallel to the topic of this book: the politics of ethnicity in the context of capitalist liberalism.² Would it be far-fetched to see in what Berger has said about caged animals—those that are on the verge of disappearance but are nonetheless preserved artificially so as to serve the civic purposes of public education—a suggestive affinity with the predicament in which those who are labeled ethnic find themselves in white capitalist societies? What is particularly memorable about Berger’s account is its visual emphasis, its understanding that marginalized existence is a relation of visibility, that is, a relation of the coded manners in which one is being imaged. However

well intentioned a newly arrived onlooker may be and however much concentration she may wish to give to those inside the cage, something will, under these circumstances, always seem out of focus. This chapter will be an attempt to elaborate and historicize this condition of out-focusedness.

To begin my elaboration, I will turn again to Fredric Jameson, this time to the much maligned and attacked point that Jameson has made about third-world literature.

In the terms of the discussions I have been offering in this book, Jameson’s controversial essay “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital”³ stands as a fine example of the unavoidable pitfalls of cross-ethnic representation. It is important to reiterate the fact that Jameson begins his essay with a conscious and generously intended attempt to articulate the radical difference presented by literary works produced outside the dominant cultural contexts of the capitalist first-world. He distinguishes his own approach methodologically from “the strategy of trying to prove that these texts are as ‘great’ as those of the canon itself” and opts, instead, to pay close attention to the ways in which they differ from such a canon. “Nothing is to be gained by passing over in silence the radical difference of non-canonical texts” (65), he writes, and he goes on to emphasize this point throughout his essay. As a reader interested in writing, he is, understandably, concerned primarily with how the unequal material conditions—economic, political, cultural—between the first and third worlds affect the reading process (66) and thus with how discussions of third-world literature might offer “a remarkable opportunity to rethink our humanities curriculum in a new way—to re-examine the shambles and ruins of all our older ‘great books,’ ‘humanities,’ ‘freshman-introductory’ and ‘core course’ type traditions” (67).

In trying to chart the third-world difference, Jameson, by necessity, falls back on stereotyping, namely, by observing that whereas first-world literature and culture have been produced with the assumption (accepted in the West) of an incommensurable split between the private and public realms, in the third world, life and writing are “based on the principles of community interdependence” (86)—that is, the private and public are still commensurable—indeed, inseparable—realms of signification. This stereotypical divide between the first and third worlds is what enables him then to make the much debated and criticized state-