

Task for *The Natural Way of Things*

Characterisation: Boncer

Boncer is constructed by the author as a vicious misogynistic bully, the sort of man who might easily feature in a newspaper report about a case of domestic violence or an attack on a woman. Even his name sounds close to the word 'bouncer' with which readers will associate images of male force and violence. The verbs associated with Boncer are largely action verbs ('yanking the lead'; 'jerks her along'; 'flings open' and so on) and his speech is tagged with verbs of command: he 'orders', 'shouts' and 'yells'. His speech is violent ('For fuck's sake, Princess') and he is contemptuous of the imprisoned women, describing them on page 47 in the most appalling of language ('the minister's little travel tramp' to describe Verla and so on.)

Boncer is physically unattractive ('pale and pock-marked'; 'greasy black hair') and at one point in the novel the character, Yolanda, describes him as 'a stupid ugly child, ugly and underfed'. The character thus borders on being a nightmare stereotype of the sort of man who hates women and wants to punish them. He has obviously been hired by Hardings to punish the women for what readers learn is their 'crime': of speaking out about their own sexual abuse at the hands of powerful men. However, this character does not fit neatly into a framework of binary oppositions. For example, even though he is a scourge for the women, he is ultimately also a victim of the power structure beyond the prison and comes to depend on Yolanda to provide food for the prison community.

The author does not give this character an interior life but ironically, as he is dying, he cries out in 'delirious whimpers' to be comforted by his mother, an interesting insight by the author into the psychology of this sort of man.