

**Animals, Animality, and Violence:
Reading Across Species in J. M. Coetzee's Writing**

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the writings of Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee in order to explore pressing issues that have emerged in literary, philosophical, and theoretical approaches to animal studies. These include animals as disputed objects in claims to territorial, national, and cultural belonging; and the use of animality to manage cultural difference and mobilize identity-based violence. I investigate the roles that hierarchical discourses of species, and the rhetorics of animality that mobilize them, play in cultural and social inscription, cross-cultural conflict, and cultures of violence in the writing of J.M. Coetzee. My dissertation provides historical, material, and cultural context and specificity to the entanglements of race, gender, and culture with the rhetoric and hermeneutics of species, by demonstrating how colonial, Enlightenment, and traditional humanist thought mobilizes speciesism for the cultural work of violence. Intervening in assumptions about the irreconcilability of animal- and human-endorsing approaches to animal studies, I demonstrate that human and non-human animals alike are mutually implicated in conceptual economies that employ animality as a trope; and in the material logistics that mobilize discourses that surround nonhuman animals to do violence to human and nonhuman animals. Coetzee embeds questions about what nonhuman animals mean, or more precisely are made to mean, firmly within the broader politics of interpreting and recognizing alterity, regardless of species, while asking how animals might have a place—in our worlds, in our thought, and in our interventionist strategies—as more than means to human ends. Coetzee’s fictional and critical engagements with nonhuman animals, I argue, comprise a major reassessment of the codes of, and

struggles concerning, human and nonhuman animal correspondence and difference. Highlighting the complex interrelations between the cross-cultural violence that mobilizes the rhetoric of species and its attendant violations of nonhuman animal life, Coetzee challenges speciesist schemata that give nonhuman animals symbolic and material currency by imagining how we might read across species differently, in ways that affirm, rather than master, nonhuman animal life.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Chapter One: “Introduction”	1
Chapter Two: “Race, Animality, and Ecological Imperialism in <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i> ”	30
Chapter Three: “The Nonhuman Politics of Race and Sex in <i>Disgrace</i> ”	85
Chapter Four: “Cultures of Masculinity, Violence, and Dominion: Re-negotiating Belonging Across Species Lines in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life</i> ”	138
Chapter Five: “‘[T]he Dog is Not the Sign’: Interpretation, Figuration, and Alterity in <i>The Master of Petersburg</i> ”	180
Chapter Six: “The Hermeneutics of Species: Reading, Violence, and Affect in <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> ”	212
Conclusion	237
Works Cited	243

Chapter One:

Introduction

J. M. Coetzee is an internationally acclaimed author and Nobel Laureate whose critical, fictional, and autobiographical writings comprise a profound, and unflinching, investigation into identity, subjectivity, and difference, and the discourses and cultures that shape, and are shaped by them. Since the publication of his first novel, *Dusklands*, in 1974, Coetzee has probed the positions of self and other in relation to the dominant discourses and cultures of the subject, and has raised pressing questions about relationships and responsibilities to others, both human and nonhuman, in light of the cultures of violence that limit, and structure, modes of identification and care.

In his approaches to the discourses of species and the cultures of violence that give them representational force, Coetzee embeds questions about what nonhuman animals mean, or more precisely are made to mean, firmly within the broader politics of interpreting and recognizing alterity, regardless of species, while asking how animals might have a place (in our worlds, in our thought, and in our interventionist strategies) as more than means to human ends. Coetzee's fictional and critical engagements with nonhuman animals comprise a major reassessment of the codes of, and struggles concerning, human and nonhuman animal correspondence and difference, demonstrating how readily the presiding assumptions of speciesist thought have furnished self-other dialectics and girded identity-based violence—violence that targets certain identifiable groups. Drawing out the complex interrelations between the cross-cultural violence that mobilize the rhetorics of species and the violations

of nonhuman animal life, Coetzee challenges the speciesist schemata that gives nonhuman animals symbolic and material currency by imagining how we might read across species differently, in ways that recognize, rather than master, nonhuman animal life.

This thesis approaches animals and animality in J. M. Coetzee's writing from a new perspective, revisiting key sites of human and nonhuman animal relations and exchanges, alliances and risks, across Coetzee's corpus through a trans-species lens. I investigate the roles that hierarchical discourses of species, and the rhetorics of animality that mobilize them, play in cultural and social inscription, cross-cultural conflict, and cultures of violence in Coetzee's writings, and contend that when animal signification is grounded in the conditions of violence in which nonhuman animals are possessed, consumed, imperiled, and slaughtered, the signifying mechanisms of the human and nonhuman species distinction are reformulated. Coetzee's writings generate a thoroughgoing challenge to the ways in which nonhuman animals have been made to speak to the ground of the human, its anthropocentric matrix of identification and exclusion, and its codes of recognition. This, Coetzee makes plain, is a history of violence that has readily worked to interpellate a subjectivity and identity for dominant cultures of the human and mobilize violence against its others.¹ In these imperiled species matters, humans and nonhumans are mutually at risk, and so too are trans-species modes of kinship, identification, and advocacy. If we seek to challenge the values, knowledges, and violence of speciesism and those discourses of animality that are deeply entangled with them, we need to expand the horizons of our advocacy, and critical interventions, across species lines.

I trace how difference and equivalence is read through the register of species at the centre of my analysis of identity, cross-cultural conflict, and violence, contending that animalizing violence strategically deploys deeply-rooted networks of human temporal, topological, and historical stratification, while relying on the binary model of the human and nonhuman animal species distinction as an analogue for self-other dialectics. I give historical, material, and cultural context and specificity to the entanglements of race, gender, culture, and desire with the rhetorics and hermeneutics of species by demonstrating how speciesism was mobilized for the cultural work of violence in colonial, Enlightenment, and traditional, humanist thought.² I then interrogate how the formulation and articulation of the rational, gendered, propertied, interpreting, and/or inviolable subject is spoken through the idiom of species and consolidated through violence against nonhuman, animal bodies. I argue that Coetzee's interventionist project situates what nonhuman animals mean in their lives "under us," thereby subjecting to scrutiny the attempts, on the part of his protagonists, to mobilize nonhuman animals to speak for a world in which they have no place (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 74).

My methodological approach is simple, as I sketch out how discourses of animality are invoked in processes of social and cultural inscription in Coetzee's works, and then ask how this relates to, and is modified by, the material economies of human and nonhuman animal relations. However, the epistemological implications I draw become more complex as they bear on the linguistic, philosophical, and political dictates of human and nonhuman animal equivalence—what I term the hermeneutics of species. Coetzee's fictional and hybrid fictional/autobiographical writings generate an invaluable challenge to the hierarchies

of species, the strategies of dominion and cultural coding that they generate, and the violence against human and nonhuman animals that they shape and by which they are themselves shaped. These writings generate a timely intervention into the prevailing codes of reading equivalence and difference across species lines to consolidate the dominant cultures of the self, and manifest the groundwork for Coetzee's call to reformulate the generic modes, means, and ends of reading across species lines.

Animality

I begin with the assumption that animality is, and has been, in large part a discourse about difference within and for the human subject, its hierarchies, values, and their associated exclusionary violence. After all, while "animality" is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the state or fact of being an animal" (or the "animal nature") ("Animality," def. 1), it is a discourse that tends to have *little to do with the properties and modes of being of nonhuman animals themselves*. The definition of animality accrues its meaning as a foil, or borderline, for the traits and capabilities of the human subject; it designates "[t]he qualities and characteristics of an animal *as opposed to* distinctively human qualities"; it is "[c]ontrasted with *humanity*" ("Animality," def. 2, emphasis added). How and what animality is made to mean becomes locatable within the domain of the human subject, when it is a property "*in humans*": "physical, instinctive behaviour or character" ("Animality," def. 2, emphasis added). Animality, as such, is both product and prosthetic of the discourse defining the humanist subject, and the lineage and history that it speaks to is a human one.

Animality has proved to be a highly ductile discourse for deploying complex and intersecting binaries that circle back, repeatedly, to the principles and codes of the humanist subject and its exclusionary violence. As Leela Gandhi reminds us, both the “literary humanism of sixteenth-century Florence and the scientific humanism of eighteenth-century Europe” propounded a “categorical valorization of the human subject” (29). In the proclamations of the French Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot, for example, nonhuman animal signification is contiguous with the anthropocentric bias of humanism itself. For Diderot, the human “is the single place from which we must begin and to which we must refer everything. ... It is the presence of man which makes the existence of beings meaningful” (qtd. in Gay 162; qtd. in Gandhi 29). The valences of “meaningful” (which is both the capacity to “convey[] meaning” [“Meaningful,” def. 2] and to give that meaning “import,” or “recognizable ... purpose” [“Meaningful,” def. 1b]) are all too clear: the presence of nonhuman beings makes the existence of ‘man’ meaningful; the presence of ‘man’ makes animals *mean*.

Discourses of animality tend to transport the essentialist assumptions about the inhuman as the locus of the body and its drives to speak to the hierarchical domain of humanist culture. Animality has been a crucial means to furnish what Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield term “the distribution of power hierarchies along gender and ethnic lines” in the “evaluation of some people as more or less central (and other more or less marginal) to the human project” (96; qtd. in Castricano 6). Discourses of animality often invoke the borderline, or site, of human and nonhuman animal species distinction in order to deploy a network of human historical, temporal, and topological hierarchies. While these discourses

of (human) animality may appear, at first glance, to evoke the porousness or troubling of species difference—even as they are mobilized to do violence to social others by marking them as animals (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 7)—it tends to be the case that animalizing discourse depends on both speciesism and the negative value of the nonhuman animal as a hollowed emblem that can readily be employed to assign the limits of membership in human social groups.³ Here, poststructuralist interventions into colonial discourse by postcolonial scholarship offer fruitful terminology for my project. After all, animalizing discourses marshal what Peter Hulme aptly refers to as “that system of signifying practices whose work is to *produce and naturalize* the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilise those power structures” for the “management” of “cross-cultural relationships” (2; qtd. in Slemon 6).

By translating the figure of the nonhuman animal into analogical and allegorical planes of *human* signification, animality readily speaks to the developmental imperatives of the human subject and its disciplinary manoeuvres. Discipline over and against putative animal drives—those ostensibly heteronormative, reproductive, and aggressive directives of the unmitigated body and its biological impulses—have played a formative role in the hierarchical categorization of human behaviors and groups. As Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan argue in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, “traditional western *continuations* of the human as the ‘not-animal’ (and, by implication, the ‘not-savage’) have had major, and often catastrophic repercussions not just for animals themselves but for all those the west now considers human but were formerly designed, represented and treated as animal” (19, emphasis added). Once we take seriously the dependence of discourses of animality on the

fixity of species difference and the homogenizing abstraction of nonhuman animal being, we are better equipped to recognize that these discourses tend to employ a logic of trans-species mutability and the porousness of species boundaries while simultaneously and effectively denying this very logic.

Animality has repeatedly functioned as a supplement to the *management* of contiguities between self and other, colonizer and colonized, and subject and object, because of the ready availability of the human and nonhuman animal species distinction as an analogical supplement to a series of multiplying binaries at the borderline between culture and nature. We are familiar by now with the central binaries marshaled into the human and nonhuman animal species boundary: agency/biological determinism; reason/non-reason; knowing subject/knowable object; mind/body. We can begin to see how these distinctions breed and multiply, intersect and disperse, if we follow their tracks through representations of animalizing thought and its effects. As the chapters to follow demonstrate, nonhuman animal figures have been made to speak to the distinctions between sanctioned and criminal violence; cultured desire and base sex; consumable objects and consuming subjects; and colonial subjects and their others. On these analogical planes, nonhuman animal essences are employed and infiltrated into a number of discourses that fix the limits of identification; construct the subject of racial, colonial, gendered, and sexual difference; and generate the targets of identity-based violence.

In the face of this troubling lineage of animalizing thought, the question that I address is whether—and how—the associative potentials of human and nonhuman analogies can be stripped of the reverberating violence generated under the humanist discourse of

species. This project is intimately linked to populating the discourses of animality with the heterogeneous and complex experiences, situated histories, and material subjections of nonhuman animal lives systematically occluded by rhetoric of animality. I seek to broach nonhuman animals in ways that might not so readily speak to the social, political, and metaphysical codes that construct the subjectivity of humanism, mobilize identity-based violence, and ground what Stephen Slemon terms the “figural system of ‘othering’” (7) in the semiotics of speciesism. This calls for modes of analysis that confront the humanist codes of recognition alongside a materialist critique of the forms of consumption and violence that attend those codes. After all, the capacity of nonhuman animals to signify in and for the human depends upon displacing and disguising not just nonhuman animals themselves, but the material conditions of their lives “under us” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 74). How might this material and discursive violence be made to signify what animals mean in essentialist discourses?⁴

As Cary Wolfe argues decisively in *Animal Rites*, citing Derrida’s *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, the “effective power of the discourse of species when applied to social others of whatever sort relies, then, on a prior taking for granted of the *institution* of speciesism—that is, of the ethical acceptability of the systematic ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of animals based solely on their species” (7). Wolfe’s contention draws our attention to the ways in which discourses of species mediate the “relatively mobile and ductile systems of language and signification” and those “highly specific modes and practices of materialization in the social sphere” (6). In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida argues that these material and rhetorical systems of violence functionalize

nonhuman animals in the service of “the putative *human* well-being of man,” and have generated the unprecedented subjection of nonhuman animals over the course of the last two centuries (25, emphasis added). If animality studies is going to take up Wolfe’s call to “think with renewed rigor about the animal” (9) and its availability as a trope to undergird violence, we ought to begin by turning to the forms and contexts of violence to which we subject nonhuman animals themselves. To do so is to begin to open up the discursive *and* material violence that is readily transcoded when humans are subject to animalizing violence.

By grounding the ways in which nonhuman animals are used to speak to an all-too-human stratification in the processes by which nonhuman animals themselves are imperiled, slaughtered, fragmented, and consumed, we can begin to see that the metaphorical currency of animality is firmly embedded in the material currencies of nonhuman animal life produced by violence and the animal capital that they generate. Discourses of human animality both deploy and reify a quotidian violence against nonhuman animals, while writing that violence out of the record of what animals *mean*. When discourses of animality do violence to social and cultural others, they animate and legitimize not only a particular concept of animals (as analogical supplements to the self-other nexus of the humanist subject, for example); they also undergird institutions of speciesist violence. This violence is grounded in the production, consumption, and dominion over, animal bodies. Recognizing the ways in which material and figurative institutions of speciesism not only intersect, but also mobilize each other, is a means to trouble the overlapping investments in power that they deploy—power not only to articulate what nonhuman animals mean, but how their

bodies are managed, possessed, consumed, and disposed of. It is incumbent on us, as critics, to ground our critiques of what Stephen Slemon terms those “forms of cross-cultural management” (6) that animalizing discourses readily supplement, in the biopolitical management, and rendering, of nonhuman animals themselves.

Animal Matters

While leading ecofeminist and animals and animality scholars such as Cary Wolfe and Val Plumwood have argued forcefully that the exploitation of nonhuman animals depends on a speciesist discourse that is used, in Wolfe’s words, “to countenance violence against the social other” (*Animal Rites* 8), there are lingering tensions in trans-disciplinary approaches to animality over the subjects, or objects, in whose names we undertake our social, political, and critical interventions. For Wolfe, “the ethical and philosophical urgency of confronting the institution of speciesism and crafting a posthumanist theory of the subject *has nothing to do with whether you like animals*” even though “[w]e all, human and nonhuman alike, have a stake in the discourse and institution of speciesism” (7). However, Wolfe surmises that “It is crucial to pay critical attention to the discourse of animality quite irrespective of the issue of how nonhuman animals are treated ... because the discourse of animality has historically served as a crucial strategy in the oppression of *humans* by other humans” (*Zoontologies* xx; qtd. in DeKoven and Lundblad 4), even though Wolfe contends that the “consequences of that discourse, in *institutional* terms, fall overwhelmingly on nonhuman animals” (*Zoontologies* xx; qtd. in DeKoven and Lundblad 5). Michael Lundblad locates an imperative, in recent work in animal studies, “to claim

advocacy for nonhuman animals” that is not shared by animality scholarship (497), since “animality studies ... emphasizes the history of animality in relation to human cultural studies, without an explicit call for nonhuman advocacy” (500).⁵ What’s more, animal-affirming scholarship is so often charged with failing to take seriously our duties to be socially and ethically responsive to the ongoing oppression of marginalized human groups. However, we ought to resist a model of scholarship, the allegiances and interventions of which are so tidily locatable on either side of the human and nonhuman animal species distinction. Resisting the pitfalls of speciesist models of advocacy is particularly important in animality studies, where beings are imperiled across species lines, and segregating theoretical and/or philosophical approaches that focus on human animality from animal-affirming approaches, that view the former as anathematic to pro-animal activism and thought, has often segregated our critical, and intellectual, allegiances.

In *The Postmodern Animal*, Steve Baker uses the terminology of the philosopher Kate Soper to distinguish between “animal-endorsing” approaches to art (which “will tend to endorse animal life itself and may therefore align itself with the work of conservationists or animal advocacy”) and “animal-sceptical” perspectives (which are “likely to be sceptical ... of culture’s means of constructing and classifying the animal in order to make it meaningful to the human”) (9; qtd. in Head 75). This institutional division has contributed to a tendency to neglect relations between the conceptual economies that employ animality as a human trope, and the material logistics that take up discourses of animality to violate animal and human bodies. Methodologically, this thesis challenges entrenched assumptions about the irreconcilability of nonhuman animal- and human-affirming approaches to cultural logics of

nonhuman animal signification by demonstrating that human and nonhuman animals are mutually (albeit disproportionately) implicated in, and vulnerable to, discourses of nonhuman animals and the forms of violent consumption and disavowal that often attend upon them. If we want to trouble the anthropocentric limits of how animals have been made to mean in the hermeneutics of species, it follows that we must also attend to the horizons of the modes, means, and ends of our interventionist strategies. This requires, to employ Derrida's apt term, that we "reanimalize[]" critical approaches to animality with a creaturely (as in creature-affirming) hermeneutics (*The Animal* 35).

As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin contend, despite "recent advances of eco/environmental criticism, English studies in general, and postcolonial studies more particularly, have yet to re-situate the species boundary and environmental concerns at the centre of their enquiries; yet the need to examine these interfaces between nature and culture, animal and human, is urgent and never more pertinent than it is today" (6). I follow Huggan and Tiffin in their assertion that "postcolonial criticism [and]... eco/environmental criticism" are best understood as "particular *ways of reading*" which are both affective and analytical (13), and can be put in conversation in ways that recognize the entanglements of human and nonhuman species and their habitats. Huggan and Tiffin remind us that moving forward requires new disciplinary and methodological alliances: "What the postcolonial/ecocritical alliance brings out, above all, is the need for a broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and environment – one that requires attention, in turn, to the cultural politics of representation" (12).

Trans-disciplinary animality scholarship stands to be enriched by a materialist critique of trans-species violence that is just as attuned to the politics of representation and recognition. Postcolonial theory has generated invaluable interventionist and interpretative strategies that work to locate and imagine alternatives for encountering and understanding cultural difference non-violently. It has also offered an invaluable theoretical challenge to the production of knowledge and identity in cross-cultural encounters. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, takes as its focus connections between literature and the environment; it encompasses a broad range of materialist and cultural critiques that are often attuned to the material and representational intersections of nature and culture. As the editors of a special issue on ecocriticism in *New Literary History* announce, “[e]cocriticism ... claims as its hermeneutic horizon nothing short of the literal horizon itself, the finite environment that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also to natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them” (Tucker 505; qtd. in Love 1).

This dissertation engages with the intersecting critical lenses of animals and animality studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, and theories of violence in order to place the nonhuman animal at the centre of existing analyses of self and other, alternative modes of community formation and identification, and subjectivity formation in cross-cultural relationships. At the same time, I draw from the insights of poststructuralism and gender theory as they come to bear on our imagined and material interactions with nonhuman animals. This is the necessary starting point, I demonstrate, for generating a critical reading and interpretative strategy attuned to, and capable of troubling, trans-species violence. I turn to human and nonhuman animals alike, our shared habitats and risks, and our mutual

implications in imagining other modes of identification and coexistence. In so doing, I add my voice to a project in which J. M. Coetzee has long been engaged throughout his fictional and critical corpus.

Reading Species Across Coetzee's Writings

In *Ethics and Animals*, Lori Gruen contends that we are now in the “‘second wave’ of animal ethics,” as the animal rights movement of the nineteen-seventies has burgeoned into the interdisciplinary academic field of animal studies (xiii). Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* and his hybrid critical and fictional texts *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello* have become influential texts for research engaged with nonhuman animals in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. Theoretical and critical scholarship on nonhuman animals in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, *Elizabeth Costello*, and *The Lives of Animals* has multiplied over the course of the last decade. For this reason, we might hazard the assertion that we are now in the ‘second wave’ of Coetzee criticism, where critical approaches to Coetzee’s oeuvre have increasingly taken into consideration the roles of nonhuman animals therein.

For Marianne DeKoven, “Coetzee has let us know, in *The Lives of Animals* and in the expanded version of it, *Elizabeth Costello*, that animals have become central to his ethical vision as a novelist” (“Going to the Dogs” 847). Kari Weil observes that J. M. Coetzee’s writing “has wrestled with questions of animals and of death for at least the last decade” (“Killing them Softly” 90). Elleke Boehmer argues that in the novels including and preceding *Disgrace*, Coetzee “proposes animals as the essential third term in the reconciliation of human self and human other” (141). For Don Randall, nonhuman animals

are not an “organizing concern” for Coetzee; nonetheless, Coetzee’s “new kind of animal-inhabited fiction recognizes that the animal is a primordial presence in the structuring of human politics” (213).

Critics who approach Coetzee’s writing from outside of the critical lens of animals and animality studies have nonetheless acknowledged an epistemic critique of the humanist lineage of the subject in Coetzee’s engagements with nonhuman animal life in *Disgrace*, *The Lives of Animals*, and *Elizabeth Costello*. In his insightful analysis of race in *Disgrace*, for example, David Attwell contends that Coetzee challenges the epistemological certainties of humanism and demonstrates that the “only grounds available, inevitably, are simply ontological, in the terms offered by the conditions which humanity shares with all the earth’s creatures: the fact of a biological existence” (“Race in *Disgrace*” 339). Derek Attridge locates a remonstrance to humanism at the centre of Coetzee’s inquiries into nonhuman beings: “the heart of the matter, the full and profound registering of animal existence that Coetzee is using his own art to evoke, constitutes, like art, a fierce challenge to that culture” (*J. M. Coetzee* 114). Rosemary Jolly argues that *Disgrace* and *The Lives of Animals* generate a timely “reevaluation of our long-standing anxiety over who is considered within the parameters of the human” (154), and affirms that Coetzee’s fiction “investigates the fact that our representation of animals is the locus of a language through which human beings measure their ethical worth as humans” (151). For Rita Barnard, Coetzee’s approach to nonhuman animals in *Disgrace* “gestures toward strenuous new ethical obligations” (23).

This scholarship has recognized that at least some of Coetzee’s writings generate a challenge to the dominant cultural, intellectual, and political fields of the humanist subject,

and has suggested that Coetzee's representations of nonhuman animals are in service of that goal. At the same time, in the vast majority of criticism on Coetzee's writings other than *Elizabeth Costello*, *The Lives of Animals*, and *Disgrace*, nonhuman animals have tended to be marginal, rather than central, concerns. There are, to date, no critical monographs on nonhuman animals and/or discourses of animality in Coetzee's writings on texts other than *Elizabeth Costello*, and Coetzee's critics have yet to account for the myriad roles that hierarchical rhetorics of species, and speciesist violence, have played in the cross-cultural conflicts, identity politics, and cultures of violence represented in Coetzee's writings since the publication of his first novel, *Dusklands*, in 1974. What is more, critical approaches to nonhuman animals in Coetzee's writings have tended, at times, to functionalize Coetzee's literary engagement with nonhuman animals in service of an abidingly anthropocentric critical agenda, making nonhuman animals matter primarily as vessels of revelation, means to (human) corporeal being, or avenues to revise (and reinscribe) the subject.

Louis Tremaine recognizes that nonhuman animals have played a part in nearly all of Coetzee's fictional works. However, while Tremaine does not overlook the corporeal being of animals in Coetzee's writings, he does functionalize nonhuman animal suffering as a means to an existential revelation for Coetzee's protagonists and, it follows, his critical analysis. For Tremaine, *The Master of Petersburg* demonstrates that there is "something useful to be learned about human living and dying by attention to animal living and dying" (593), suggesting that utilitarian knowledge can be gleaned from nonhuman animal suffering as soon as it is transported across the human and non-human animal species boundary, where it is rendered meaningful for and about humans. For Tremaine, Elizabeth Costello's care

about the lives of nonhuman animals is “genuine,” and yet “the insight these passages hold for a reader of Coetzee’s novels bears more importantly on human experience, on the human condition of ‘embodiedness’” (598). Tremaine concludes that Coetzee’s protagonists shift from complicity in the suffering of others to “suffering itself,” and thereby experience “the shame of both at once” (600).

By failing to take nonhuman animals seriously as beings whose suffering is relevant, and by appropriating violence against animals as generative of a redemptive human abjection, Tremaine privileges being subjected to violence as the means to recognizing nonhuman animal suffering while rendering the latter insubstantial. Some of the animal-endorsing scholarship on Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, as I demonstrate in Chapter Three, evinces a similar short-sightedness by instrumentalizing *human* trauma, alienation, disgrace, and/or victimization as the means to recognizing trans-species equivalence and/or nonhuman animals as such.

Animality, in these discussions, has at times been approached as a recuperative locus of trans-species equivalence in which, in Pamela Cooper’s words, the protagonist finds “an abjection that reflects his own” (35). For Chris Danta, “Coetzee’s novels constantly show humans and animals exchanging identities. One of the important ways in which the animal functions in Coetzee is as a catalyst for metamorphic desire” (133-34). For Don Randall, “animality” in Coetzee’s fiction “marks the point of our most intense participation in an expansive, much-more-than-human world of living beings” (213). Tom Herron recognizes the overlaps in racialization and discourses of animality in *Disgrace* but nonetheless affirms that David’s sympathetic turn to nonhuman animal life is a form of “becoming animal”

(489). In this criticism, discourses of animality are too often conflated with the affirmation that humans are animals and/or embodied beings, and species difference, which Coetzee fundamentally affirms in *Elizabeth Costello*, collapses. The majority of Coetzee's critics has yet to take seriously Coetzee's profound intervention into how, and to what ends, we read across species lines, and the implications that it might have for critical scholarship on nonhuman animals.

Reading Otherwise

This thesis follows the nonhuman tracks across a range of Coetzee's writings. I begin by situating the cultural and symbolic logics of animalizing discourses in the dubious entanglements of race, sex, culture, and species in the philosophical and intellectual discourses of Enlightenment. Coetzee's novels tell us much about how these intellectual legacies have shaped the human and nonhuman animal species barrier and contributed to its representational power. Through an analysis of Coetzee's novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, I demonstrate how the speciesist logics that have accrued in the human and nonhuman animal species distinction have been strategically employed to furnish racist self-other dialectics, consolidate the subjectivities of colonial, neocolonial, and humanist cultures, and undergird identity-based violence. I then ask how these legacies of speciesism recur in the regulatory mechanisms and violence of ecological imperialism and nonhuman animal consumption industries, placing the government of the binary model of species difference in conversation with contests and conflicts over the management and possession of animal capital. This enables me to draw out the material and representational

stakes at the heart of Coetzee's major reassessment of the binary model of species difference.

I then turn to two texts by Coetzee that have rarely been the objects of nonhuman animal-centric and/or affirming scholarship: Coetzee's semi-autobiographical work, *Boyhood*, and his fictional inhabiting of the historical Fyodor Dostoevsky in *The Master of Petersburg*. In my analysis of *Boyhood*, I shift the direction of my analytic framework, asking how violence against nonhuman animals, and the relegation of nonhuman animals to saleable commodities, frames the articulation and consolidation of the inviolable masculine subject and forecloses non-hierarchical and non-violent forms of imagining trans-species relations. I approach the politics of gendered, familial, and place-based belonging as overlain with the historical entanglements of nonhuman animals and property, and locate in Coetzee's semi-autobiographical novel a turn to the historically contingent relationships between nonhuman animals and their habitats as the starting point for a revisionary approach to thinking trans-species mutuality.

Waiting for the Barbarians, *Disgrace*, and *Boyhood* demonstrate the ethical pitfalls and failures of approaching cultural and species difference through the dualistic register of species discourse, and dramatize processes whereby the central characters bear witness to institutions of speciesist violence. However, Coetzee does not privilege encountering imperiled human and/or nonhuman others as a ready means to recognize cultural and/or species difference nonviolently. Expanding upon my critical examinations of trans-species encounters in *Disgrace* and *Boyhood*, I turn to Coetzee's novel *The Master of Petersburg*, which offers a fruitful entry point for linking the perils of reading across species lines with

the attendant politics of encountering alterity non-violently, regardless of species, and raises questions that are pertinent to contemporary strains of posthumanist theory and criticism that have privileged trans-species encounters as a means to reformulate the exclusionary logics of humanist and/or speciesist thought. *The Master of Petersburg* exerts pressure upon the forms of reading, thinking, and consuming human and nonhuman others through processes of abstraction and analogical de-substantiation to support the transcendent subjectivity of the interpreting subject, and dramatizes the interpretative aporias that *Elizabeth Costello* works to redress. I conclude by affirming that Elizabeth Costello's interventionist reading practices decentre the interpreting, and transcendent, human as the locus of meaning and value by modeling how difference might be read across species lines in ways that expand the pathological limits of affect that inhere in the hierarchical hermeneutics of species.

Understanding the implications of Costello's call to reanimalize the linguistic, philosophical, and literary grounds of nonhuman animals and the principles of trans-species equivalence, requires taking stock of what animals have been made to mean in the legacies of speciesism in the first place. For this reason, I begin my dissertation with an analysis of race, animality, and ecological imperialism in Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. I demonstrate the roles that distance from, and dominion over, nonhuman animals played in the definition of the rational, autonomous, subject of Cartesian philosophy and the subjugation of peoples of African descent. I contend that the fixity of the human and nonhuman species distinction is strategically, and allegorically, deployed to reinforce a temporal, hierarchical, and topological stratification of the human; to fix the limits of sympathetic identification; and to mobilize violence against human and nonhuman others.

Provisional rhetorics of animality are particularly effective, I contend, because they marshal the configurations of power and dominion at work in the human and nonhuman animal species distinction in order to furnish the identity of ruling culture and furnish cross-cultural violence. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the hierarchical discourse of species, and the ability of the colonial power to construct nonhuman animals and animalized humans (or humans who are marginalized and/or objectified through rhetorics of animality) as objects of knowledge, is enmeshed in the capacity to determine the fate of indigenous ecological resources, particularly nonhuman ones.

Through a postcolonial ecocritical analysis, I situate the impending barbarian insurrection in *Waiting for the Barbarians*—that fantasy of cataclysmic violence through which the colonial army justifies its means and ends—as an anticipated indigenous resource rebellion in the accelerating conditions of precariousness wrought by ecological violence. The catastrophe that is ‘brought home’ to the colonial outpost is precisely that its citizens and soldiers are vulnerable to the conditions of subsistence, violability, and hunger wrought by the ecological violence of empire. When the protagonist-narrator, a colonial magistrate, recognizes that the “*telos*” (the “[e]nd, purpose, ultimate object or aim” [“Telos”]) of empire has produced an accelerating and increasingly visible ecological devastation, he proffers another temporal order: Nature. The cyclic time of wild, nonhuman animals offers a fantasy of ecologically embedded, and sustainable, colonial inhabitation and uncontaminated time. However, the material and symbolic currencies of nonhuman animals are intransigently situated in, and contaminated by, the ecological violence of empire. This makes the

magistrate's attempt to appropriate nature and nonhuman animals as the last symbolic resources of empire recognizable as speciesist violence.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, and ask how the binary model of the human and nonhuman animal species distinction has been overlain with the distinction between base and cultured desire. Expanding upon my analysis of racialized animality in Chapter Two, I examine the speciesist rhetorics of desire in Enlightenment thought, and their entanglements with the emergent discourse of race. The central character's animalizing rhetorics distinguish between the cultured field of amatory desire and the embodiment of sex along the lines of race and species. I turn to the Homi Bhabha's notion of the stereotype of colonial discourse to draw out how sex has functioned as a powerful prosthetic of the stereotype of black animality. This stands to give a much needed context to the discourses of animality in the novel—discourses which are used by David Lurie, the focal character, to 'solve' the 'problem' of his own desire, culpability, and sexual violence.

David's animalizing discourse is brought into relief, in part, by situating the meanings of the symbols that he employs in volatile investments in property in the historical and political context of newly post-apartheid South Africa, as well as the vulnerabilities of animals that are enmeshed in conflicts over land. With these conflicts in mind, I explore David's investments in two sheep bound for slaughter, and argue that the bodies of nonhuman animals matter to David only once they are disentangled from ownership, while asking what we might make of David's use of the rhetorics of racialized animality to frame his animal 'turn.' David's unfinished opera, I contend, is a valuable corrective to the overlapping binaries of culture and nature, human and nonhuman, through which desire and

race are filtered in the novel, supplanting them with a much more inclusive vision of trans-species equivalence.

In Chapter Four, I consider Coetzee's semi-autobiographical text *Boyhood*, which chronicles the experiences of an adolescent boy, John, negotiating the interfaces and conflicts between English and Afrikaans cultures in the Cape province of nineteen-fifties South Africa. *Boyhood* is a text that gives prominence to the trans-species affinities of an adolescent boy in contexts in which violence against animals is a key symbolic and material resource for grounding membership in human communities. By situating self-inquiry in experiences of cross-species relationality, Coetzee demonstrates the crucial role that nonhuman animals play in John's negotiations with, and desires for, forms of cultural, gendered, and national belonging. I argue that *Boyhood* creates crucial affinities between John and the figurative and actual animals that populate the text, while making evident the limited capacity of a child to reconcile his affinities to the animal realm with the conceptual and material violence to which they are repeatedly subjected. Acting as a focalizing observer, John bears witness to what Coetzee's character, Elizabeth Costello, describes as those "places of death all around us, the places of slaughter to which, in a huge communal effort, we close our hearts" (*Elizabeth Costello*, 80). Through this avowal, Coetzee's text privileges witnessing, or thinking, slaughter through the phenomenological modes of affect as a crucial means of destabilizing the self-justifying mechanisms of speciesist violence—a claim upon which *Elizabeth Costello* expands considerably.

As I demonstrate, *Boyhood* generates alternative avenues of cross-species identification (rather than dominion) as the starting point for generating non-violent modes

of identification and belonging—modes that turn to nonhuman animals as means to think beyond the limits of property, and propertied claims to place. It requires, in the first place, thinking across species in ways that are not structured, and delimited, by property. By disentangling identification from property, and nonhuman animals from their status as capital, the possibilities for transitory and non-exclusive modes of belonging for human and nonhuman animals alike begin to open up. This mode of thinking with, and advocating for, nonhuman animals offers a fruitful alternative to those codes of recognition that interpellate the nonhuman for the subjectivity of humanist culture, a topic to which I turn in my penultimate chapter.

In Chapter Five, I draw my discussion of what animals mean, and are made to mean, into a broader trans-species analysis of the politics of recognition and self-inscription in cross-cultural and cross-species encounters. I focus on Coetzee's ninth novel, *The Master of Petersburg*, and its fictional re-imagining of Fyodor Dostoevsky on his return to Petersburg, Russia in 1869 following the death of his stepson, Pavel. I demonstrate that the novel probes the pitfalls of modes of appropriative reading that subsume the particular, local, and literal plane of meaning into a reflection on the sovereign, interpreting, subject—a topic that implicates human and nonhuman animals alike in unexpected ways. Dostoevsky's self-reflexive mourning readily functionalizes his deceased stepson as an abstraction to ground and substantiate Dostoevsky's meditations on himself. This capacity for abstraction is a pillar of the humanist subject's cultural transcendence over the nonhuman in the persistent nature/culture divide. How precisely does the abstraction of the human and/or nonhuman other consolidate the transcendence of the rational, interpreting subject of humanism? How,

in Cary Wolfe's terms, do these modes of reading and recognizing difference dramatized in the novel approach the nonhuman animal as "a privileged site for exploring the philosophical challenges of difference and otherness more generally" (*Animal Rites* 3)?

To answer these questions, I turn to the philosophical claims of the Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel, who calls for notions of co-presence and relationality in self-other relationships, summarizing his philosophical project as an "obstinate and untiring battle against the spirit of abstraction" (*Man Against* 1). In order to resist the appropriation, instrumentalization, and abstraction of the other (in the face of the other), Marcel contends, we must be open to, and present before, the other, such that we can commune with the other (rather than the idea of the other)—a form of communion that is linked to the other's capacity to give an account of him or herself in language. What happens, I ask, when the others to which we turn have been condemned, in Derrida's words, "to muteness"? (*The Animal* 19). I explore the processes of figuration and abstraction that attend upon the arrival of a particular, situated, and mimetic nonhuman animal on the literary landscape in Dostoevsky's speciesist focalization. Intervening in the anthropocentric horizons of recognizing animal alterity, I argue, calls on us to re-examine how readily we can recognize difference across species lines without abstracting, objectifying, or functionalizing it for the self. Challenging the anthropocentric limits of what animals mean necessitates troubling the principles of correspondence through which we think across species lines—an intervention that is at the heart of Coetzee's hybrid critical-fictional text, *Elizabeth Costello*.

I conclude with an analysis of *Elizabeth Costello*, an indispensable work in Coetzee's major reassessment of the norms through which difference and equivalence is read across

species lines and the hierarchical discourses and institutions of speciesism. I approach the host of human and nonhuman analogies that Costello deploys, and the interventionist interpretative practices that she employs, as a meditation on the social, political, and generic norms of reading across species lines—the hermeneutics of species. What does a nonhuman animal-affirming hermeneutics look like? How might a reading practice attuned to the violence of speciesism interpret nonhuman animals differently? Does this necessitate humbling and/or revising the symbiotic relationship between what humans are and how humans know others, especially nonhuman animal others?

Elizabeth Costello impugns the kinds of readings that have functionalized nonhuman animals as means to reflect human meaning, transcendence, and subjectivization. Reading through the register of affect, rather than analogical modes of comparison, I argue, is a means to encounter nonhuman animal difference without making it speak to, and for, humans. By supplanting the human as the vantage point of trans-species equivalence with forms of comparison that speak for nonhuman animals and their histories, Costello overwrites the anthropocentric loci of signification and value. When animals matter as we read across species, we can learn much about the violence that stems from ““embracing the status of man”” (*Elizabeth Costello* 103).

Reading sympathetically across species generates an affective phenomenology that can bear witness to and avow violence, regardless of species. It is an interpretative mode, in other words, capable of making evident, and supplanting, the human “*telos*”—the *about which*—of animal signification. Once nonhuman animals matter, I contend, the cornerstones of what nonhuman animals mean, and are made to mean, shift.

Reading for nonhuman animals in the fullest sense(s) can enable us to “share at times the being of another” (*Elizabeth Costello* 79)—a project that stands to enrich how we encounter difference, regardless of species, without the call for resemblance and sameness. These affective modes of reading and receptiveness call on us to de-centre the rational humanist subject as the locus of value, meaning, and ends. Reading sympathetically beyond ourselves, I argue, is an interventionist project that challenges the history I address throughout my thesis—a history of violence that has taken up the nonhuman animal other, in ‘its’ assumed and increasingly physical absentia, as a trope, appellation, and fantasy for ourselves. It is imperative for us to read across species in ways that believe in, and yet do not master, witness, and yet do not interpellate, difference.

Endnotes

- 1 The term “interpellation” was popularized by the French philosopher, Louis Althusser, in the essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation).” According to Althusser, interpellation, or hailing, is the mechanism by which individuals recognize themselves as, and are constituted as, subjects through ideology, which mediates the relations between individuals and ideological power apparatuses. Althusser employs an example of a police officer shouting ““Hey, you there!”” at an individual on the street. By turning towards the officer, the individual recognizes that he/she was hailed as a subject, and therefore becomes a subject (174).
- 2 Aaron Gross argues in “Introduction and Overview: Animal Others and Animal Studies” that critical investigations of nonhuman animals are “both a theme and a hermeneutic lens,” and contends that the essays that comprise the anthology *Species Matters* can be viewed “as diverse disciplines gathering around the theme of animals (a work in animal studies) or a multifaceted, critical ‘animal hermeneutics’ engaging concerns specific to multiple disciplines” (5).
- 3 Here I depart, for example, from D.B.D. Asker, who argues in *Aspects of Metamorphosis: Fictional Representations of the Becoming Human*, that literary representations of human metamorphoses into nonhuman animals in literature ranging from Japanese Medieval literature to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* “dissolve[] species boundaries” (6) which are already “porous in social fact” (8).
- 4 Recent scholarship in animality in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences has only just begun to give due cultural and historical context to how, and to what ends, nonhuman animals have been made to “participate in the construction of such human categories as the body, race, gender, sexuality, morality and ethics” through the rhetorics of animality (Chudhuri 104). In their introduction to *Species Matters*, Marianne DeKoven and Michael Lundblad affirm the timeliness of an intersectional analysis that “can explore questions of animality in relation to constructions of human race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability” (3), and seek to generate links between humane advocacy and cultural theory in animals and animality scholarship. However, the predominant approach to animality in the few monographs devoted to the topic under the banners of literary and/or cultural studies have given little, if any, attention to nonhuman animals themselves, and have, at times, approached animality as a redemptive neo-primitivism.

For example, Carrie Rohman’s *Stalking the Subject* focuses on literary modernism and its responses to the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin and the psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud. Rohman’s study traces “the displacement of, confrontation with, and recuperation of various animalities across the period” which “reentrench, unsettle, and even invert a humanist relation to this nonhuman other” (12). Christopher Peterson’s *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality* focuses on race and sexuality in discourses of animality, and contends that racism is “predicated . . . on a fundamental disavowal of human animality” (7) and homophobic bestializations of same-sex desire “deny the animality inherent in *all* sexuality” (8). Peterson critiques Rohman’s notion of redemptive animality by arguing that it relies on marginalizing the human and does not adequately tackle a human “dialectic of acknowledgement and refusal” of human animality (9). Peterson considers writings by authors such as Philip Roth in order to affirm that “the human [is] fundamentally haunted by the bestial traces it disavows . . . that no ritual of purification can finally remove” (19). Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*, in Peterson’s view, dramatizes the educative process whereby David Lurie approaches an apprehension of the animality of (his) sex and recognizes that it is not “calculable, predictable, and tamable” (20), echoing the troubling logic that David employs and that I scrutinize in Chapter Three.

For other monographs on animality in literary studies, see also *Animality in British Romanticism: The Aesthetics of Species* by Peter Heymans and *Aspects of Metamorphosis: Fictional Representations of the Becoming Human* by D.B.D. Asker. Recent book-length publications which give some attention to discourses of animality in literary and cultural texts include Cary Wolfe’s *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory* and *What Is Posthumanism?*; Rosemary Jolly’s *Cultured Violence: Narrative, Social Suffering, and Engendering Human Rights in Contemporary South Africa*; *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* by Anat Pick; and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*.

For monographs on animality from disciplines outside of literary studies, see Gustav Jahoda's *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture* and Mark S. Roberts' informative study, *The Mark of the Beast*.

Book-length philosophical engagements with animality that focus on the contributions of a single philosopher include Leonard Lawlor's *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*; Nietzsche's *Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics, and the Animality of the Human Being* by Vanessa Lemm; and a collection of essays titled *Demerageries: Thinking (of) Animals after Derrida* edited by Anne Emmanuelle Berger and Marta Segarra.

- 5 Michael Lundblad and Marianne DeKoven challenge this bias in their introduction to *Species Matters: Humane Advocacy and Cultural Theory*, recognizing a resistance "in the academy to linking advocacy for animals with advocacy for various human groups" (1), while nonetheless asserting that "the question of the animal does not necessarily need to be tied to explicit advocacy for better treatment of actual animals" (2).

Chapter Two:

Race, Animality, and Ecological Imperialism in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

What role has the spectre of the animal played in the self-other nexus of colonial violence? How is this informed by conquests of, and contests over, nonhuman animals themselves? In what ways has violence against nonhuman animals furnished the material and allegorical violence of colonialism? This chapter will turn to the literal and figurative bestiary of animals that populates J. M. Coetzee's prize-winning novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, to demonstrate the pivotal roles nonhuman animals play, and are made to play, in the cross-cultural conflicts and violence of the novel. How do these conflicts bear upon speciesist discourses of animality—discourses that furnish the dialectic of self and other, civilized and savage, subject and object? I begin with the premise that these discourses of animality, rather than imperiling or rendering porous the human and nonhuman species divide, reinforce that very division. The availability of this borderline, or site, for mobilizing othering discourses and rendering non-criminal the forms of violence to which nonhuman animals are subjected, suggests that the stakes and perils of imagining human and nonhuman animal mutuality are firmly embedded in conflicts over, and against, nonhuman animals themselves.

How have discourses of animality deployed deeply-rooted allegorical networks of particularly human temporal, topological, and historical logics to violate humans and nonhumans alike? Turning to the place and function of 'the animal' in the embattled time, space, and history of an imperiled colonial outpost, I unpack the signifying mechanisms of

animalization that fix the limits of sympathetic identification, construct the object of cultural difference, and mobilize violence. I then demonstrate that what animals mean in this context is informed by the place of consumable nonhuman animal matter in accelerating conflicts over the production, cultivation, and devastation of food resources. Situating the schemata and resources of animality, and the allegorical codes animality mobilizes, in both the violent materialities of speciesism and the slow violence of ecological imperialism, I ask what roles nonhuman animals play in the territorial claims and conflicts of colonial violence. What are the stakes in the capture, consumption, and disposal of nonhuman animal resources in ecological imperialism; and what kinds of ecological aftermath are produced? How is the capacity of the colonial power to construct both aboriginals and nonhuman animals as objects of knowledge to furnish colonial power and colonial identity reflected in, if not informed by, the capacity to determine the fate of agricultural and nonhuman animal resources?

Waiting for the Barbarians chronicles the late stages of a colonial outpost in a frontier town under the aegis of a paranoid colonial army of the Civil Guard, which has declared a state of emergency in the face of a putative, impending barbarian invasion. The novel is focalized through the experiences of an elder magistrate, and citizen of the colonial frontier, who witnesses the discontinuities between the civilizing aims of the colonial episteme and the violence of the colonial army when the men of the Third Bureau of the Civil Guard imprison, interrogate, torture (and, on occasion, murder) the nomadic aboriginals (the so-called ‘barbarians’) and the resident fisherfolk population. The magistrate takes it upon himself to minister to a tortured and partially blinded barbarian

woman whose father was animalized, tortured, and killed. As the magistrate seeks to approach her from a place of empathy, sympathy, or desire, he has trouble imagining (and representing, in the account he tasks himself with generating) the barbarian woman outside of the evaluative inscription inaugurated by the term barbarian (or “dark barbarian” [9] in the nightmares of the colonial front)—a nightmare that is repeatedly articulated through the animalization of difference.

Waiting for the Barbarians stages, engages with, and distances itself from the grammar of bestial difference that emerges from the epistemological legacy of the Enlightenment project, while demonstrating how the dialectic of self and other, civilized and savage, has often been articulated through speciesist thought. The privileged rational and autonomous subject of Cartesian philosophy, Coetzee’s novel suggests, relies on the subordination of, and domination over, animals and their common correlative: the cultural and racial other. Demonstrating that this dialectic of self and other—of human and less-than or not human—requires the maintenance of a crucial distance, the novel asks what kinds of proximity and care across species lines threaten human candidacy, and the rational, autonomous, subject of Cartesian philosophy.

Animality and Race in the Enlightenment Episteme

The taxonomy of racial difference produced by Enlightenment philosophical and scientific discourse located the privileged Cartesian subject at the pinnacle of a developmental (and implicitly temporal) scale of intellectual and cultural teleology, while situating African people near the bottom.¹ This discourse of developmental humanness has

often been articulated through distance from the animal and animalistic, with animals exemplifying the bottom rung, functioning, as Descartes infamously claimed in *Meditations*, as mere automatons (127). Consequently, black corporeality often functions in Enlightenment philosophy and science as a signifier for animal bestiality—a subject to which I turn in my analysis of *Disgrace* and desire in the following chapter.² Discourses of animality were a potent prosthetic of Enlightenment racism, which often conflated the properties of the (fully) human with the (white) European subject while asserting that peoples of African descent had yet to graduate into the culture of the human. A key component of hierarchical schema of the emerging discourse of race was the assumption that races could only historically come to maturity through *dominion* over nature and nonhuman animals.

Georg Hegel's essay, "Geographical Basis of World History," from his *Lectures of the Philosophy of World History* (1822-28) is a particularly instructive example of the systematic occlusion of Africa from the domain of culture, history, and perfectibility in ways that prepare the ground for the animalization of the population of an entire continent. According to Hegel, Africa is a continent in which "the principle of cultural backwardness ... predominates"; a continent "enclosed within itself" (122) with "inhabitants living in barbarism and savagery" (124). Conflating historical time with the growth of the perfectible human subject, Hegel surmises that Africa is "the land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history" (124). The absence of (self-conscious) historical time is positioned as coeval with a lack of African agency; in the absence of "aim[s]," "state[s]," and religion, "there is no subjectivity, but merely a series of subjects who destroy one

another” (126), no knowledge of the division between self and other (127), and no self-consciousness (128). Having systematically framed Africa as a continent lacking the attributes and properties of the (European) human subject, Hegel asserts that to comprehend the African, we must look beyond the principles and dictates of the human (127):

Thus, man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made a distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of his development: he is dominated by passion, and is nothing more than a savage. All our observations of African man show him as living in a state of savagery and barbarism, and he remains in this state to the present day. *The Negro is an example of animal man [N]othing consonant with humanity is to be found in his character. For this very reason, we cannot properly feel ourselves into his nature, no more than into that of a dog* The spirit should not remain permanently in such a state, however, but must abandon this primitive condition. *This primitive state of nature is in fact a state of animality.* (127-28, emphasis added)

The animality of Africans renders them, in Hegel’s dizzying logic, part of the category “man” and yet not the “human,” intransigently allied with nature and thereby exempt from the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic community of “humanity.” Neither fully human nor animal, the animalized African proves difficult to contemplate, and impossible to sympathize with. Primitivism, atavism, and animal lack multiply at the borderline between nature and

culture, and refusing to define themselves in opposition to nature, Hegel informs us, Africans are subsumed into it.

Intervening in the tendency to relegate this intellectual legacy to the finite past, critics and philosophers such as Cary Wolfe, Kay Anderson, Michael Lundblad, Helen Tiffin, and Étienne Balibar have decisively critiqued the continued use of animality to articulate, and manage, racial difference.³ In “Animal Writes: Ethics, Experiments and Peter Goldsworthy’s Wish,” Tiffin notes that interpretation of evolutionary theory in terms of time was used to affirm the atavism of the supposedly “primitive” races and to frame such atavism as both animal and as a pervasive threat to the civilized, European subject:

Closer to (other) animals and the wild than to their colonial rulers, [‘primitive’ races] must eventually evolve away from their “animal” instincts to aspire to the ranks of the civilised (European) human. But fears of atavism, particularly at the turn of the [twentieth] century, played on the notion that the animal/savage might not be entirely eradicated from the (European) human after all. Lurking within the apparently civilised might lie the coiled snake of atavistic reversion, one potentially catalysed by contact with the wild and untamed. (par. 4)

Here Tiffin echoes Balibar’s argument, in “Racism and Nationalism,” that “the systematic ‘bestialization’ of individuals and racialized human groups” is “the means specific to theoretical racism for conceptualizing human historicity” (57). The use of a single evolving world history to conceptualize the relationship between humanity and animality renders the latter available for the “‘secret’, the discovery of which it endlessly rehearses” of “a

humanity eternally leaving animality behind and eternally threatened with falling into the grasp of animality” (57). The secret—which is simultaneously a threat—of animality relies, in the first place, on what animality, as a discourse, mobilizes: namely, a rich and dubious allegorical structure of human stratification that has often been articulated through racial variance.⁴

I borrow a definition of allegory proffered by Stephen Slemon in his article “Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing,” in which Slemon investigates the allegorical structures that frame a statue (a monument to Arthur Phillip) that was central to the spectacle of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897:

In its simplest form, allegory ... is a trope that in saying one thing is also saying some ‘other’ thing; it is the doubling of some previous or anterior code by a sign, or by a semiotic system, that also signifies a more immediate or ‘literal’ meaning. Allegory thus marks a bifurcation or division in the directionality of the interpretive process ... (4)

If allegory bifurcates the reading process between the literal and the allegorical levels that it simultaneously deploys, it offers a fruitful starting point for unpacking what animality signifies: how it effectively deploys networks of human temporal, topological, and historical logics in its articulation and mobilization of the species distinction between human and nonhuman animals. On a literal level, discourses of animality evoke a porousness, if not a troubling, of the binary structure of the human and nonhuman animal species boundary, even as the mutability of that species distinction is taken up to dehumanize certain cultural practices and groups. On the allegorical plane, however, animality deploys the putative

porosity of the human-animal distinction in a uniquely human drama of becoming—one that relies on the fixity of the figure of ‘the animal’ to articulate what Slemon terms “the deeply rooted codes of civilisation” (4).

In other words, animality is a discourse (and a discursive strategy) that suggests, on one level, the interrelations, or at least continuities, between human and (actual, rather than figural or emblematic) nonhuman animals; yet it depends, on the allegorical plane, on the systematic occlusion of nonhuman animals from civilization, culture, history, and the domain of the subject (to name but a handful of exclusions). These exclusions render animalizing discourses available to subjugate human groups culturally and to articulate the putative failure of some humans to conform to the imperatives and traits of the properly human subject. Animality as a discourse has proven to be an effective tactic for grounding varying degrees of membership in the community of the human since, as Richard Terdiman reminds us in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, discourse is “a complex of signs and practices which organises social existence and social reproduction” in order to “give differential substance to membership in a social group or class” by managing “an internal sense of belonging to the groups [and] an outward sense of otherness” (54; qtd. in Slemon 6). As a signifying mechanism, animality effectively manages cultural difference through the rhetorics of species in ways contiguous with Gayatri Spivak’s notion of othering (Slemon 7), projecting what is occluded from the domain of the subject onto the “‘vacant’ or ‘uninscribed’ territory of the [animal] other” (7).

The temporal and hierarchical (not to mention topological) scale of the human is articulated through developmental notions of civilization, growth, agency, and perfectibility

within the domain of the human subject itself. As Kay Anderson observes, “the archetypal Human ... historically defined in the Western culture process carried not only an oppositional (Human versus Animal), but also a hierarchical and temporal logic” (309). Discipline over and against putative ‘animal’ appetites has played a strong role in articulating what constituted the fully human subject in the West. At the same time, the availability of this discourse to codify and institutionalize the hierarchical categorization of human behaviours and groups depends upon the fixity of human and nonhuman animal difference. Animalizing rhetoric has long been mobilized to dehumanize particular human cultural practices and groups while simultaneously failing to take the logic that it mounts seriously: namely, that the discursive conflation of some human groups and disparaged nonhuman animal groups, or inclusion in the dubious category of ‘the animal,’ neither seeks to, nor effectively manages to, collapse differences between all/some nonhuman animals and human beings. This, Coetzee demonstrates, is in part why animality has been such a powerful discursive mechanism in the exercise of power over humans and nonhumans alike.

In Coetzee’s novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, discourses of animality are mobilized when Colonel Joll’s army is confronted with the cultural differences of the aboriginal prisoners that they have arbitrarily detained. In the metonymic and homogenizing figure of ‘the animal,’ the distinct populations of the local, resident population and nomadic ‘barbarians’ coalesce.⁵ Despite the magistrate’s assertion to Colonel Joll, that these two communities are notably distinct, they are “herded” together by the colonial army and “stand in a hopeless little knot in the corner of the yard, nomads and fisherfolk together, sick,

famished, damaged, terrified” (27). The alterity of the imprisoned aboriginals is interpreted by the citizens of the colonial front through the rhetoric of “animal shamelessness” (21). The magistrate tells us that “a woman spits masticated bread into her palm and feeds her baby. I motion for more bread. We stand watching them eat as though they are strange animals” (19). The passage demonstrates the availability of the category of ‘the animal’ to stand metonymically for visible signs of cultural difference, as well as the availability of animals as spectacles for visual consumption. The animalization of the imprisoned aboriginals fixes their availability (and assumed, mistaken homogeneity) as a spectacle of difference (even as it is articulated in provisional terms through the simile) and delimits the possibility for sympathy on the part of the colonial front (a topic I shall expand upon shortly). Once the citizens of the colony “lose sympathy with them” (18), “the kitchen staff refuse them utensils and begin to toss them their food from the doorway as if they were indeed animals” (19). *As if they were animals.*

The use of the subjunctive mood produces an unreal condition grammatically, generating a condition of improbability that is echoed in the subordinating conjunction “as if.” As with the sentence “We stand watching them eat *as though* they are strange animals” (19, emphasis added), the use of the subordinating conjunction introduces a strategically provisional utterance—one that makes a distinct comparison (between the imprisoned aboriginals and nonhuman animals), while simultaneously expressing the improbability or potential falsity of that comparison. I frame the rhetorical manoeuvre of provisional animality as strategic precisely because it effectively calls upon (and relies upon) the

configurations of power and dominion operating at the human and nonhuman animal species boundary in order to violate subjugated humans.

In the animalizing discourses of Enlightenment thought that I have cited, strategically provisional discourses of animality are employed to codify peoples of African descent as deficiently, but nonetheless, human. At the same time, nonhuman animals are used to suggest that the humanness of peoples of African descent might not withstand empirical scrutiny. Consider, for example, David Hume's assertion in "Of National Characters," that "In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, *like a parrot* who speaks a few words plainly (33, emphasis added).⁶ In *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, Johann Gottfried von Herder contends that the (supposed) sensuality and exaggerated physicality of the African race bring it "nearer to the brute" (72), although from a "distance," the African face "resembl[es] ... that of an ape" (77). In the essay "Varieties of the Human Species" in *Animal Kingdom*, Georges Cuvier similarly contends that the physiognomies of the African face "evidently approximate it to the monkey tribe" (105). The peoples of African descent 'resemble' and 'approximate' the inhuman animal; what is less explicitly stated, but so often intimated, is the racist presupposition that the humanness of Africans might in fact be the product of mimicry, like a parrot miming speech.⁷

In Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, provisional discourses of human animality maintain, if not police, the human and nonhuman animal species boundary (humans are not actually animals, they suggest) while nonetheless taking up the fixity of "the animal" to render static the limits of sympathetic identification and construct the aborigines as

spectacular objects of colonial power.⁸ The magistrate's provisional use of animalizing discourse mobilizes a denigrating discourse of animality with a gestural critique of the conflation of humans and animals that it purports to name. As with the magistrate's attempts to speak from 'outside' the colonial episteme, these strategically provisional utterances can be situated within his troubled attempt to articulate his distance from the violence of the colonial regime. However, the magistrate's use of the collective pronoun "we" crucially implicates him in a grammar of speciesist difference that is furnished through the availability of the spectre of what Derrida calls "the wholly other they *call* 'animal'" (*The Animal* 13) for assigning the limits of colonial membership.

Troubling Intimacies

The magistrate's efforts to disentangle himself from the value-laden grammar of difference implicit in dominant discourses of animality is troubled by the system of representation that animality animates—what Liz Gross (in "Speculum Feminarum") describes as "the objectifying gaze of knowledge" (qtd. in Slemon 5), which constructs animals, cultures, and spaces into what Edward Said decisively terms "units of knowledge" (qtd. in Slemon 5). It produces what Slemon describes as "a subjective construction of Self" (5); in the construction of the subject over and against objects of knowledge, nonhuman animals and animalized subjects are fixed against "an already given matrix of identification and learning"; one that "erects itself upon the foundations of received tradition – the 'codes of recognition' embedded in the metaphysical, social, and political systems of Western

culture – and is made to figure in a system designed primarily to interpellate a subjectivity for the colonising culture itself” (5).

The identity of the colonial front is furnished over and against the allegorical conflation of nonhuman animals and objects of knowledge within what Slemon calls an “already given system of textualised identification or codified knowledge” (7)—namely the system of othering. Cary Wolfe, in his influential work *Animal Rites*, generates a useful framework for approaching those instances in which racialized and speciesist discourses overlap: “[T]he use of ‘animality’ as a crucial supplement to the discourse of racism is only effective so long as the distinction between human and nonhuman is assumed to be unproblematically coterminous with the distinction between subject and object” (167).

Waiting for the Barbarians demonstrates that the allegorical conflation of animals and objects proves to be a powerful discursive tool for furnishing Cartesian colonial identity and mobilizing colonial violence. This fantasy of partition, Coetzee suggests, depends upon the fixity of what is rendered other to colonial candidacy (spaces, bodies, and beings) as reflexive objects.

The barbarian woman’s torture at the hands of the colonial regime renders her, for the magistrate, “no longer fully human, sister to all of us” (Coetzee, *Waiting* 88). As a consequence of this violence, the magistrate begins to probe her body—rendered object—with the feigned objectivity of the Enlightenment philosopher and scientist. He claims to touch between her naked thighs “incuriously” (32). Like the magistrate’s superior, Colonel Joll, he is searching for truths, but unlike Joll, the magistrate is attempting to ascertain the identity of the colonial regime through ‘analyses’ of the marks on the other’s body with his

hermeneutic gaze. As Rosemary Jolly makes abundantly clear in her book *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing*, the “magistrate’s fascination for the ‘barbarian girl’ stems from her body as the site of torture, rather than any desire for the ‘girl’ herself” (127)—both “Joll and the magistrate ... turn the ‘girl’ into an other whose person ... is irrelevant to them” (128). The barbarian woman’s (perceived) object status enables the magistrate to apprehend himself through these encounters.⁹ Despite repeated instances of physical proximity between the magistrate and the woman, she remains, for the magistrate, “that other one” (Coetzee, *Waiting* 82); the magistrate is repeatedly incapable of remembering her face in her absence. Conceptualizing the barbarian woman’s body as a surface and surface only, the magistrate claims, “I stretch out to touch her hair, her face It is like caressing an urn or a ball, something which is all surface” (52). Her body is “incomplete”; it is a “dummy of straw and leather” (50).

In their private encounters, the magistrate repeatedly visually consumes, touches, and contemplates the available and subjected barbarian body. With her partial blindness, the result of her torture, the barbarian woman can see only peripherally. Consequently, to look at the magistrate requires that she avert her face, since it is “masked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only [the magistrate’s] doubled image cast back at [him]” (47). The image reflected in the woman’s eyes is, for the magistrate, one of his total disembodiment. The description of her eyes as “insect” suggests that her gaze is worthless and therefore cannot produce shame in the magistrate when his bare (animal) body is subjected to her gaze. He comes to forget his own corporeality in these exchanges, claiming, “As for me, under her blind gaze, in the close warmth of this

room, I can undress without embarrassment, baring my thin shanks, my slack genitals, my paunch, my flabby old man's breast, the turkey-skin of my throat. I find myself moving about unthinkingly in this nakedness" (33). The magistrate assumes the position of the Cartesian knower described by Descartes in *Meditations*. As Susan Bordo states in *The Flight to Objectivity*, "assured of his own transparency, [the Cartesian subject] can relate with [assumed] absolute neutrality to the objects he surveys, unfettered by the perspectival nature of embodied vision. He has become, quite literally, 'objective'" (61). The magistrate's disembodied gaze—what Gross terms the "objectifying gaze of knowledge" (qtd. in Slemon 5)—constructs the barbarian into a unit of colonial knowledge. In Slemon's terms this is done not "to effect genuine understanding, but rather to effect a subjective construction of Self" (5). It is a construction that relies on both the fixity and difference of that which is assumed to be the (abjected) object.

The ability of the magistrate to maintain this position of disembodied transcendence is premised on a necessary distance. Coetzee engages with the field of visual discourse that dominated the Enlightenment project, but suggests, crucially, that this privileged gaze is predicated on an ostensibly objective, unemotional, and non-physical relationship to the objects, nonhuman animals, or persons under view. To transgress this affective boundary is to trouble the distinction between subject and object, magistrate and 'barbarian,' and human and animal. The visceral threat that the animalized body poses to the magistrate in the novel is first demonstrated in his private encounters with the barbarian woman. When the detached cleansing of the barbarian woman's largely inert body assumes the gestural expression of affection and becomes "caressing," the indifference of his gaze and her status

as an object is threatened. Whether desire or sympathy motivates the magistrate's "caressing" gesture, it nonetheless proves incompatible with the gulf between subject and object, human and animal, for which the colonial front calls. The barbarian woman's relegation to the overlapping categories of animal and object—as exclusively a body—enables the magistrate's relational humanness. Sympathetic attachment suggests a relationship of mutuality—one incompatible with the way in which the knowing subject furnishes its subjectivity over and against the (often animalized) alterity of an other.

On numerous occasions in the novel, the magistrate's physical and/or emotional proximity to the barbarian woman (his 'caresses') leads to the temporary obliteration of his consciousness: "But more often in the very act of caressing her I am overcome with sleep as if poleaxed, fall into oblivion sprawled upon her body, and wake an hour or two later dizzy, confused, thirsty. These dreamless spells are like death to me, or enchantment, blank, outside time" (33). This oblivion echoes the inaugural scene (and nightmare) of Descartes' *Meditations* in an inverted form. Incapable of distinguishing waking life from dreaming, Descartes posits as a remedy the reliable truths of mathematics: "For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides" (98). From this emerges Descartes' rationalist methodology and the Cartesian subject. Coetzee takes up this Cartesian process of dream anxiety transformed into rational certainty; however, he suggests that sympathetic or erotic attachment to the object of knowledge, here the barbarian woman, poses a threat of irrational dissolution. In his state of oblivion after cross-cultural intimacy, the magistrate is transported back into the first stage of Descartes'

Meditations—into the dream-state—that produces a dread of irrationality and confusion, and away from the objective capacity of the Cartesian *cogito*.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate often envisions scenes of cross-cultural identification (beyond the limits of colonial power) through nightmares of regression that threaten to render him into an animal object. The barbarian woman's status as an object girds the magistrate's rational consciousness and the identity of the colonizing culture itself. As David Attwell reminds us, the "Empire's images of the barbarians are wholly contingent on its own need for self-realization" (*J.M. Coetzee* 71). Sympathetic attachment assumes a relationship of mutuality—one incompatible with the way in which Cartesian philosophy directs the desire to know human interiority toward the body of an other.

Animal Bodies, Colonial Desires

The magistrate's bi-weekly paid encounters with a sex-trade worker, who is a citizen of the colonial front, constitute an instructive foil to his ambivalent exchanges with the barbarian woman. While this sex-trade worker remains nameless (like the barbarian woman), her presence in the novel nonetheless occasions the magistrate's explicit naturalization of (colonial) desire between citizens of the colonial front, often through discourses of species. We can assume that this paid intercourse does not stand to advance the reproductive futurity of the empire, nor the interpersonal bonds of the magistrate and his prostitute. Nonetheless, the magistrate asserts, "nothing seems more natural than to seat her on the bed and begin to undress her" (Coetzee, *Waiting* 45). The act of undressing the sex-trade worker recalls the magistrate's repeated rituals of undressing and anointing the body of

the barbarian woman—a practice which is positioned, by the magistrate, as being as alien to the magistrate’s own conscious reasoning as the barbarian woman herself. Eager to expunge, if not simply deny, a desire that transcends the bounds of colonial candidacy, the magistrate asserts of the barbarian woman (rendered object), “I feel no desire to enter this stocky little body” (32).

Transgressing the self-other nexus of the colonial episteme is positioned as not simply unnatural, but destructive of the fruits of agricultural cultivation of the colonial settlement. Within this locus, the idea of penetrating the barbarian woman is likened by the magistrate to “acid in milk, ashes in honey, chalk in bread” (36). These pairings suggest that for the magistrate, entering the body of the nomadic, aboriginal subject threatens to destroy the products of sedimentary, colonial agriculture itself. This perspective grounds the conflicts over the production and cultivation of food resources in colonial agricultural production in the bodies of colonizing and colonized subjects—a subject to which I will return later in this chapter.

The limits of colonially sanctioned desire are often articulated through discourses marking the difference between consumable, or domesticated animals on the one hand, and consuming, that is, wild animals, on the other, rendering the locus of permissible desire contiguous with the geographical limits of the colonial settlement.¹⁰ The barbarian woman’s relegation to the status of an (in-consumable) object is mirrored in her association with nonhuman animals and animal parts that can’t successfully be contained, or consumed, by the colonizers. Early in the novel the magistrate purchases a silver fox-cub from a trapper, but soon discovers that the fox cowers under the furniture and cannot be housetrained.

Before long the magistrate's private quarters reek of fox droppings and he "wait[s] for it to grow big enough to be disposed of" (37). The magistrate tells the barbarian woman, "People will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms, a fox and a girl" (37)—an association that works to support the ideology that the barbarian woman, like the fox, cannot readily be tamed (or cultivated) into a consumable, colonial, resource.

It may well be the case that, when the magistrate offers to return the tortured barbarian woman to her community, he seeks to remove her from the locus of their intimacies because those intimacies threaten to trouble the distinctions between colonized and colonizer, subject and object, human and animal that animated the magistrate's interest and furnished his relational humanity in the first place. Whatever the case may be, the conflation of colonial candidacy and sanctioned desire is affirmed through the fact that the magistrate's implied failure ("[p]eople will say I keep two wild animals in my room, a fox and a girl" [37]) is in keeping the ostensibly wild barbarian woman in the domestic space of the magistrate's bedroom—the very locus of the magistrate's colonially sanctioned desire, where wild bodies do not belong. In contrast, the magistrate mobilizes analogies of domesticated (or readily domesticatable) birds to encode his paid intercourse with a citizen of the colonial settlement with a system of meaning operating within the homology of empire.

The magistrate first aligns himself with a bird when his discomfort in the face of the barbarian woman leads them to lie in silence. The magistrate justifies his silence by musing, "What bird has the heart to sing in a thicket of thorns?" (44). Metaphorically conflated with a bush or tree and its sharp and pointed structures in which the bird (and its song) is

imperiled, the barbarian woman becomes the space in which the domesticated nonhuman animal resources of empire are at risk. It bears mentioning that birds were often used as symbols for subjects of the British empire during the nineteenth-century (the numerous comparisons of both Jane Eyre and Rochester to birds in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is instructive). Not surprisingly, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the sex-trade worker of the colonial front (and her "trim body") is, like the magistrate, associated with birds. Her movements during intercourse are described as "bird-like flurries" over and against the "alien body" of "the other one" (45). In the face of a nightmarish portrait of the barbarian woman that the magistrate paints in his fantasy of her obliteration, the magistrate "shudder[s] with revulsion in the arms of [his] little bird-woman" (45). Whether it is affective disgust (over the barbarian woman) or sexual climax (over the sex worker), or a mixture of both, is pointedly ambiguous.

This repeated association establishes a correlation between the magistrate and his nameless sexual partner with the colonial identity of the colonial front. The use of domesticated and wild animal homologies to articulate modes of sanctioned and transgressive desire relies on a related, spatial logic: the appropriate subject of colonial desire is fixed within the domestic space of the colony (as an always already domestic, and consumable, resource); the barbarian woman belongs 'out there' in the wilderness. Thus the use of the figure of the bird to sanction the magistrate's colonial desire and the figure of the fox to mount its troubling limit does *not* destabilize the animal and nonhuman animal boundary which, as I have argued, furnishes the subject-object dialectic so crucial to the limits of colonially sanctioned desire in the novel. Rather, it denotes an allegorical

distinction between civilized and/or cultured subjects and wild objects at the literal boundary of empire. Transgressing the spatial and affective limits of the colonial frontier is often articulated through discourses of animalization. Outside of the bounds of the colonial frontier, the threat of animality, in Balibar's terms, is heightened; the distinction between humanity and animality is structurally affirmed through dominion over nonhuman animal bodies.

'No Longer a Morning's Hunting'

When Colonel Joll is first introduced in the novel, he boasts about the "last great drive he rode in" (1). Whether he is discussing a recreational hunt or an episode in the colonial army's campaign against the aboriginals is left noticeably unclear. Working to strengthen his homosocial colonial bond with the magistrate, Joll describes how "thousands of deer, pigs, bears, were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot ('Which was a pity')" (1). Joll's regrets center on not being able to appropriate and hoard his slaughtered bounty and not, clearly, on the unnecessary killing of the local nonhuman animal population and its deleterious effects on the aboriginal populations. When the magistrate responds by describing the migration of "great flocks of geese and ducks that descend on the lake every year" and the "native ways of trapping them," Joll seeks to assert his relational mastery (over and against both the aboriginal community and nonhuman animals) through another anecdote about "a huge antelope he shot" (1). These familiar boasts aim to consolidate Joll's mastery of the nonhuman animal realm, while employing domination over nonhuman animals to generate, and strengthen, homosocial and imperial

bonds. Not long afterwards, the magistrate hears two soldiers “roasting whole sheep, a gift from the ‘excellency’” (13). Like the colonial army, the magistrate also strengthens his relationship with the sex-trade worker of the colonial front through consumable nonhuman animals, bringing her a jar of smoked fish-roe (49).

There are notable affinities between Joll’s proud slaughter and the magistrate’s own aims as a hunter in the novel. However, the magistrate’s inability to sustain the speciesist distinction between human subjects and animal objects beyond the bounds of the colonial front troubles his capacity to furnish his colonial identity through the unnecessary slaughter of nonhuman animals. As with his intimacies with the barbarian woman, intimations of sympathetic identification with a human or animal other disrupt the availability of the latter to prop up his relational power. In both instances of contact, the objectifying gaze of the magistrate is burdened with the logic of the power that gaze yields to construct the readily consumable object—a logic that is exposed when the constructed objects (both aboriginal and nonhuman animal) cease to be available to affirm the subjectivity of the colonizing culture.

In his recreational hunt, the magistrate dons a deceased bear’s skin and emphasizes his animalized senses, claiming “My eyes are sharp, my hearing is keen, I sniff the air like a hound, I feel a pure exhilaration” (42). This putative self-animalization (into the very nonhuman animal prosthetic of the recreational hunt—the hound dog) coincides with the magistrate’s foray beyond the bounds of the colonial frontier, as he penetrates various border markers of the outpost, including “the reeds” and the place where the “line of marshgrass ends” (42). This masculinist drama of ‘going wild’ (or ‘going native’) through the

magistrate's penetration into the habitat outside of the colonial settlement echoes his self-animalization as an innate hunter: both seek to consolidate his masculinist human identity by affirming his transcendence and mastery over the bodies and habitat of nonhuman animals.¹¹ As with his attempts to penetrate the barbarian woman's body with his hermeneutic gaze, the magistrate's subjective construction of self depends upon the availability of 'inhuman objects' to furnish his relational subjectivity. While the barbarian woman was incapable of returning his exploitative gaze, a ram that the magistrate plans to hunt is not, and the magistrate is noticeably troubled by his recognition of the ram's returned look.

This scene at once points to Derrida's assertion, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, that the gaze of the nonhuman animal functions to assert the particularity of that animal while at the same time unseating the primacy of the human at whom it gazes (12). *Waiting for the Barbarians* makes itself available to this interpretative framework, and yet it bears noting that the magistrate's description and perception of the ram do not appear to change in that instant of shared gazes. Nonetheless, once the ram and the magistrate "gaze at each other," he is burdened by "an obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of [his] consciousness" (Coetzee, *Waiting* 42). "My pulse does not quicken," he tells himself; "evidently it is not important to me that the ram die" (42). The magistrate's objectifying gaze is directed inward, echoing Derrida's assertion that the "bottomless gaze" of the nonhuman animal other demonstrates "quite simply the naked truth of every gaze, when that truth *allows me to see and be seen* through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other" (*The Animal* 12). The suspended gaze of the ram redirects the magistrate's "gaze inward" (Coetzee, *Waiting* 42). The virile and vital hunter, whose "occasional hunting and

hawking, ... desultory womanizing, exercises of manhood” have “concealed from [him] how soft [his] body has grown” (65) is suddenly an “old hunter” (42). The hunt is “robbed ... of its savour” and the magistrate is burdened with “the sense that this has become no longer a morning’s hunt but an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim” (42). The ritualized display of imperial masculinity through the recreational slaughter of nonhuman animals is called into question, as is the hunter as exemplar of the masculine subject.¹²

The magistrate’s inability to consolidate his masculinist persona through the killing of the ram stems, in part, from the resignification of nonhuman animal death. While the novel does not dramatize, or give lyrical dimension to, the ram’s (potential) death, the inclusion of the adjective “proud,” and the added temporalization of death as a violent process (“bleed to death”), have transformative effects on what recreational hunting means for the magistrate. When the magistrate returns to the barbarian woman, he tells her ““Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms”” (43). What he means, of course, is that the “obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of [his] consciousness” (42) (the perspective of the nonhuman animal other) has destabilized his capacity to be the bearer of the hunt’s meaning. Losing interpretative mastery and apprehending the other’s responsiveness are intertwined, and have implications, in the novel, for the magistrate’s relationship to the barbarian woman. When the power of the gaze is turned back on the magistrate by the ram, it occurs to him, shortly thereafter, to ask the barbarian woman (back in his room), ““Are you here in bed with me because it is what you want?”” (43). Taking on

the perspective of the ram (and the ram's desire to live) draws the magistrate to consider the barbarian woman's desire.

As the novel makes abundantly clear, the dependence of the self-other nexus of the colonizing culture on objectified human and nonhuman animals means the magistrate must overcome these cross-cultural and cross-species identifications (or, at the very least, intimations of sympathy) in order to secure his full subjectivity and colonial candidacy.¹³ As I have demonstrated above, this is informed by a Cartesian program which, in Susan Bordo's words, "has as its ideal the rendering *impossible* of any such continuity between subject and object"—the "mind must be cleansed of all its 'sympathies' toward the objects it tries to understand. It must cultivate absolute detachment" (103-04). In Chapter Six of this thesis, I turn to *Elizabeth Costello* in order to consider how sympathetic modes of identification might trouble this subject-object dialectic.

Becoming Animalized

The magistrate recognizes, rather belatedly, that the barbarian woman is not merely his object and "the old man's slut" (69) but rather, a "witty, attractive young woman" (69), while escorting her to her barbarian community and witnessing her interactions with, if not desirability to, the soldier of the colonial front. Escaping the colonial frontier occasions the burgeoning capacity for the magistrate to affirm the barbarian woman's vivacious humanity and for forms of intimacy that proved impossible "in months of living in the same rooms" (76). How such a transgression positions the magistrate alongside the citizens of the colonial frontier is first intimated through his implicit transformation from a consumer of animal

bodies to a consumable animal object beyond the limits of the colonial outpost. When a horse dies during their perilous trek, and the soldiers ask to “slaughter it for food,” the magistrate abstains, and thinks “Let me not hinder them from imagining it is my throat they cut, my bowels they tear out, my bones they crack. Perhaps they will be friendlier afterwards” (81). It is only upon returning to the colonial frontier that the magistrate will learn, by force, what the barbarian woman already knows all too well: namely, what kinds of violence attend the transformation of human subjects into inhuman others—“a pile of blood, bone and meat” (93).

After the magistrate returns from his journey to deliver the barbarian woman to her people, news of his intimacies with her has circulated. Whether it is for his physical transgression into the bounds of the other’s body, or for a perceived emotional transgression (in recognizing the barbarian woman’s humanity and evincing sympathy), the consequences are clear: the magistrate is marooned from the collective identity of the colonial regime and, subsequently, from human candidacy. This dialectic of empire and its nonhuman other is established elsewhere in the novel when two apparent deserters of empire (their cause of death is, in fact, suspect) are found frozen to death thirty miles from the colonial frontier. The lieutenant, reluctant to retrieve the bodies, tells the magistrate that “[t]hirty miles there and thirty miles back in this weather; a great deal for men who are no longer men, don’t you think?” (58). In the very spaces where the various indigenous subjects were imprisoned and tortured, the magistrate will learn much about what happens to men who are, but are not, men, through speciesist violence.

Not surprisingly, animal homologies proliferate around the ‘fallen’ magistrate. Like the fisherfolk and barbarian prisoners, who are rendered into spectacles of nonhuman animal alterity, the magistrate lives “like a starved beast at the back door, kept alive perhaps only as evidence of the animal that skulks within every barbarian-lover” (36).¹⁴ In the colonial episteme’s speciesist rhetoric, sympathetic attachment with a colonized subject (rendered object) makes the magistrate pervious to animalization. The overlapping categories of object and animal that furnished the magistrate’s interpretations (and exploitation) of the barbarian woman come to define the magistrate himself, who is made to know what it means “to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well” (126).

The system of representation that the citizens of the colony mobilized to conflate colonized peoples and nonhuman animals to furnish the construction of the colonial identity is grounded in the conditions of embodied being (and embodied vulnerability) associated with nonhuman animals. The magistrate’s “subjection” to the “rudimentary needs of [his] body” (126)—the systematic transformation of him from a citizen of empire into a “filthy creature”—is articulated through, and supported by, the quotidian existence of consumable animals themselves. It is, after all, living the conditions of “bestial life” that turns the magistrate “into a beast” (87) and not, it bears emphasizing, sympathetic attachment to the barbarian woman as such. In this sense, Coetzee intervenes in the spurious logic of speciesist racism that I addressed in length above, wherein identification with colonized others leads to a triumphant return of the dominant (colonial and Cartesian) subject’s dormant, and racialized, animality. The magistrate’s animality is produced through the

violence of the colonial army. The schemata and resources of animalizing violence are indelibly situated, across Coetzee's corpus, in the institutions of speciesist violence.

Speciesist Violence

Cary Wolfe, following Jacques Derrida, argues that “The effectiveness of the discourse of species, when applied to social others of whatever sort, relies, then—as Derrida has forcefully argued in his recent work—on a prior taking for granted of the institution of speciesism: It relies, that is, on the taken-for-granted ethical acceptability of the systematic killing of nonhuman others solely on the basis of their species” (*Animal Rites* 7). *Waiting for the Barbarians* demonstrates as much through the experiences of the barbarian woman's father, who is tortured and ostensibly murdered by the soldiers of the Third Bureau in an act of violence that is later refashioned into a non-criminal one because of the father's apparent animality. According to the soldiers' reports, “Her father had *annihilated himself*, he was a *dead man*. He threw himself upon his interrogators, if there is any truth in their story, and clawed at them *like a wild animal* until he was clubbed down” (Coetzee, *Waiting* 88, emphasis added). Of course, the presence of the simile suggests that the torturers strategically employ the discourse of animality to render their murderous act non-criminal. As with the use of provisional analogies to indicate the unreality or improbability of collapsing the divide between humans and animals elsewhere in the novel, this double articulation mobilizes discursive animality in order, in part, to import forms of violence that are enacted on nonhuman animals into inter-human conflict. The provisional character of this discourse functions to appropriate a violent economy to which actual animals

themselves are subject, while leaving intact the fundamental anthropocentric bias that distinguishes subject from object, human from animal.

Wolfe and Derrida's contention, that the animalization of "social others" relies on the assumption of the ethical viability of killing animals, can therefore be expanded upon through a consideration of the forms of systematic violence, both murderous and not, to which animals are subject. After all, the men of the colonial frontier aim to decriminalize their murder of the barbarian woman's father by animalizing him. However, this apparent need for a rhetoric of rationalization stands in contrast to their shameless violence towards both the magistrate and the imprisoned aboriginal people, who have been systematically animalized—a shamelessness which speaks to the non-criminality of their act for the members of the colonial front. As the fantasy of cataclysmic cross-cultural violence mounts (that always-impending barbarian invasion), so too does the speciesist violence enacted by the members of the Civil Guard. What happens to the aboriginal captives of Colonel Joll's offensive expedition tells us much about the entanglements of discourses of species and speciesist violence.¹⁵

Not only are the prisoners caged in the open air in a zoo-like spectacle; they are also subject to spectacular violence in what the magistrate describes as "[t]he circus" (Coetzee, *Waiting* 113): They are tied together, naked, through a "simple loop of wire" that "runs through the flesh of each man's hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks" because "[i]t makes them meek as lambs" (113). Coetzee situates the symbolic and fabular association of lambs with docility in the material conditions of lambs' lives "under us" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 74), suggesting instead that such meekness is produced through

subjection to violence. In other words, Coetzee invokes the figurative role of lambs' docility in the Christian Bible but situates it in the very materiality of the violence through which that docility is produced.¹⁶

The novel situates the discursive violence of animalizing discourse, and the allegorical codes that it deploys (whether temporal, topological, or other), in the human institutions of animal consumption and violence enacted upon nonhuman animals. In other words, in the ready subjection of nonhuman animal lives into institutions of human consumption and violence, the rhetorics of animality find both their schemata and its resources for violence. In Coetzee's rendering, both discursive animalization and physical torture are informed by the fate of nonhuman animals in industrialized meat and dairy farming processes. In a horrific scene of violence, the torturers of the colonial settlement attach a piece of wire that runs through each man's hands and face to a pole and lower the pole, forcing the prisoners to assume the gestural position of a quadruped animal—they must kneel down with their faces bent towards the ground, touching the pole (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 113). As the soldier boasts, this makes them “think of nothing but how to keep very still” (113). This becoming-animal through violence is echoed shortly thereafter in a mock-branding scene when Colonel Joll writes “ENEMY” with charcoal on the backs of four of these men, only to “beat them till their backs are washed clean” (115). This forms an implicit invocation of the process whereby cows are rendered into units of consumable property: a notion that is supported by the “new and ravening appetite” (115) that the spectacle of animal violence engenders in the citizens of the colonial front as they eagerly consume the spectacle of violence.

By mobilizing animality in conjunction with speciesism, the men of the colony's Third Bureau of the Civil Guard are able to execute institutionally and socially decriminalized acts of violence, variations of which have been acted out on nonhuman animals themselves throughout the novel. This produces a legally sanctioned violence not unlike that which Coetzee attributes to the torture chamber in his discussion of *Waiting for the Barbarians* with David Attwell in *Doubling the Point*:

[R]elations in the torture room provide a metaphor bare and extreme, for relations between authoritarianism and its victims. In the torture room unlimited force is exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purpose, if not of destroying him, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him. (363)

By grounding the discourse of animality in the material conditions of nonhuman animal subjection (even as they are broadly conceived), rather than the allegorical plane of an all-too-human teleology, the novel begins to probe the very human and nonhuman animal species boundary that is crucial, as I have demonstrated, to the capacity of discourses of animality to dehumanize and do violence. When the magistrate is subjected to the life of a beast through imprisonment, torture, and dehumanization, he engages in modes of cross-species identification that are anchored in the lives of nonhuman animals themselves.

Although the magistrate's physical and discursive relegation to the status of abject animal makes him particularly vulnerable (and subject) to violence, it also occasions intimations of the magistrate's becoming-animal. In fact, the magistrate's imprisonment inaugurates a host of behavioural descriptions that suggest that he has, in some sense at least,

been “touched with the contagion and turned into a creature” (89). He “swoop[s] and circle[s]” (89); lies on his mat and “prick[s]” his “ears” (96); “[s]cuttl[es] from hole to hole like a mouse” (110) as he “daily become[s] more like a beast” (93). Furthermore, the magistrate’s inhabiting of beastly life occasions his capacity, limited though it is, to experience affinities with nonhuman animals themselves. Of a dog that has been missing for some time, he reassures a boy, “[i]t is spring, you know, it is the mating season: dogs go visiting, they stay away for days, then they come back without telling you where they have been. You mustn’t be worried, he will come back” (94). The basis of cross-species affinity is situated in the trans-species imperatives of sexual desire (through the invocation of animality), suggesting that the magistrate’s journey to the barbarian territory was motivated principally by sex. However, as the novel progresses, the magistrate’s cross-species identifications are increasingly embedded in the lives of dogs on the frontier. Becoming subject to the conditions of precariousness and dependence of dog life (and death) in particular—having no way to die “except like a dog in a corner” (128) and slipping into the barracks at the “whistle that calls the dogs” to “wheedle out of the maids some leftovers from the soldiers’ supper” (139)—is the condition, in the novel, for troubling the speciesist distinction between human and nonhuman animals and the species violence it effectively mobilizes.

The discursive economy of animality in the novel, like the conditions of exceptionalism that inform the legal illegality of state-sanctioned torture, is shaped, as Coetzee demonstrates, by the production and consumption of nonhuman animal capital. In Coetzee’s rendering, acts of humiliation and torture make explicit a violence that is already

at work in the cultural order and violent materialities of speciesism. The spectacular violence to which the animalized body is subject is girded in Coetzee's novel by what Rob Nixon has incisively termed the "slow violence" of ecological imperialism. The intensification of animalizing violence is reinforced by accelerating violence wrought on nonhuman animal resources. To situate how 'the animal' is mobilized to do violence, it will help if we turn our attention to the ecological harm wrought on nonhuman animals and their habitats, and the trans-species perils of ecological violence.

Ecological Imperialism and the Perils of Consumption

Animality proves to be a potent discourse for othering in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in part because it effectively evokes and appropriates the precarious lives of nonhuman animals themselves, not only as malleable metaphors for a vernacular of cultural lack, but also as the very raw materials upon which the longevity and health of humans in the novel depends. Nonhuman animal bodies are part of the consumable resources around which territorial claims in the novel revolve, and the availability and surplus of nonhuman animal bodies is directly linked to the sustainability and perceived strength of the colonial power. Attending to the stakes and politics that surround the capture, consumption, and disposal of nonhuman animal resources, and the frontier's agricultural yields, this chapter now turns to the place and function of consumable matter in the ecological imperialism of the colonial power, and to the human and nonhuman animals who are left to live in the ecological aftermath of the colonial occupation. The capacity of the colonial power to construct both aboriginals and nonhuman animals as objects of knowledge to reflect both colonial power

and colonial identity is deeply entangled with the ability to determine the fate of indigenous ecological resources, animal and otherwise.

The fate of the wild nonhuman animal population that the nomadic peoples rely upon as a source of survival is evident in the novel, just as the fragility of the indigenous populations (both nomadic and settled), in the face of the obliteration of the nomadic nonhuman animal populations, becomes abundantly clear. Because of the slow and unsustainable violence of the colonial outpost on the ecological habitat, which has worked assiduously to make the land uninhabitable for the nomadic indigenes, the human and nonhuman inhabitants are at risk:

[A decade ago] there were antelope and hares in such numbers that watchmen with dogs had to patrol the fields by night to protect the young wheat. But under pressure from the settlement, particularly from dogs running wild and hunting in packs, the antelope have retreated eastward and northward to the lower reaches of the river and the far shore. Now the hunter must be prepared to ride at least an hour before he can begin his stalk. (42)

Having systematically diminished the wild nonhuman animal population during their occupation of over one hundred years, the colonial army aims to engage in an offensive against the 'barbarians' to force them into the mountains and further away from the frontier. However, as the magistrate asserts, the so-called 'barbarians' are nomads who migrate between the lowlands and the uplands annually in order to give adequate grazing ground to their flocks. The colonial front's attempts at territorial expansion (supported by the rhetoric of the always impending barbarian invasion) is systematically working to destroy the

territory that sustains not only the nomadic human and nonhuman animal populations, but the capacity for a migratory mode of inhabiting the environment. As the magistrate observes, the nomadic aboriginals are “the people being pushed off the plains into the mountains by the spread of Empire” (78).

Conflicts over nonhuman animal resources play a decisive role in the broader territorial displacements, appropriations, and violence of the novel. Just as the animalization of the indigenous populations generated the ostensible legality of animalizing violence, so too do (manufactured) suspicions around the re-appropriation (or putative theft) of the colonizer’s consumable nonhuman animal and agricultural resources. The first indigenous prisoners (fisherfolk) whom the reader encounters in the novel have been arrested on suspicion of raiding a food stock of the colonial settlement. The magistrate informs Colonel Joll that “normally we would not have any barbarians at all to show you. This so-called banditry does not amount to much. They steal a few sheep or cut out a pack-animal from a train. Sometimes we raid them in return. They are mainly destitute tribes people with tiny flocks of their own living along the river” (4). A young boy is subject to torture and disfigurement in order to extort a confession that he and two other ‘barbarians’ stole sheep and horses; assuming that an indigenous resource rebellion is impending, the colonial army murder the boy’s uncle during the torture sessions. The implication of this ready decimation and displacement of the indigenous peoples for the purpose of controlling food resources is intimated when the magistrate observes that, in the imprisoned aboriginal fishing population, the only children are a baby and a young boy (20), and the baby does not survive the imprisonment. The capture and hoarding of nonhuman animal capital on the part of the

colonial citizens, and the attempts of the indigenous populations to obtain enough food resources to survive, are part of the unspoken condition around which the fantasy of a barbarian insurrection revolves.

Furthermore, the novel demonstrates that nonhuman animal matter sustains the aboriginal population not only as a source of food, but as the only available means of exchange for food. According to the magistrate, nomadic barbarian populations visit the colonial settlement in the winter, exchanging “wool, skins, felts and leatherwork for cotton goods, tea, sugar, beans, flour” because the magistrate forbade the use of money in their commercial exchanges (40). This policy has helped to forcibly compound the dependence of the indigenous populations on nonhuman animal capital for their quality of life and means of existence while limiting their capacities to become consuming subjects, rather than consumed objects, through processes of commercial exchange. Nonhuman animal matter is crucial to the indigenous communities’ capacities for self-determination and independence in the face of a colonial regime rapidly appropriating, consuming, and destroying their resources and territories. The possession of nonhuman animal capital, and sanctioned claims to that capital, function as one of the primary sources of power both in the novel, and in the forms of ecological colonialism that the novel critiques. The novel mounts a distinction between the consumption of nonhuman animals for survival, and the spectacular display of the capacity to produce and destroy surplus nonhuman animal capital on the part of the colonial elite. The resulting threat of an indigenous resource rebellion (which Joll imagines is written on the prehistoric poplar slips unearthed by the magistrate), as well as the paranoia around the innate violence of the indigenes, is situated in the contest over how to exhaust or

obliterate nonhuman animal life, producing, in Judith Butler's terms, uneven conditions of precariousness as a result of the accelerated destruction of the life-sustaining habitat and its nonhuman inhabitants.¹⁷

Becoming Consumable

The spectacular (and, one might argue, sensational) violence of the torture of imprisoned aboriginals by Colonel Joll and the army of the Third Bureau has received a wealth of critical attention to date. Yet, as the novel makes clear, there are quieter, less spectacular, and more difficult to locate forms of (ecological) violence that place that habitat and its human and nonhuman inhabitants at risk—forms of violence that accelerate as the fantasy of barbarous violence between the soldiers and officials of the Third Bureau and the nomadic indigenous populations mounts. In the face of accelerating ecological violence perpetuated by the colonial regime (and reflected in rebellious manoeuvres on the part of the hunted barbarian populations), the sustainability of food resources is imperiled, and nonhuman animals are disproportionately vulnerable.

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon generates a critical vocabulary for the temporalities of slow, and often invisible, forms of environmental destruction that disproportionately harm the habitats and resources of the poor of the global South. For Nixon, recognizing slow violence has the potential to broaden our associated recognition of the casualties of environmental destruction: “The representational bias against slow violence has, furthermore, a critically dangerous impact on what counts as a casualty in the first place. Casualties of slow violence—human and environmental—are the casualties

most likely not to be seen, not to be counted. Casualties of slow violence become light-weight, disposable casualties” (13). In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the disposable nonhuman casualties of the slow agricultural and environmental violence of the colonial regime—violence perpetuated in the interests of rendering impossible means of ecological inhabitation not sanctioned by the colonial power—litter the novel.

As the fantasy of violent attack from the nomadic population mounts among the army and the citizens of the frontier, so too do the forms of ecological violence. In what the magistrate believes to be an attempt to clear the riverbank of fauna, or “cover for the barbarians,” the army sets fire to the brush surrounding the river, generating a wildfire that burns for at least five days, destroying reeds, poplars, and the nonhuman animal inhabitants of the riverside: “Animals that are quick enough – antelope, hare, cat – escape; swarms of birds fly out in terror; everything else is consumed” (89). The magistrate registers the implications of this destruction for the future sustenance of flora and fauna—as the wind eats away at the soil, the desert will advance: “Thus the expeditionary force against the barbarians prepares for its campaign, ravaging the earth, wasting our patrimony” (90). The magistrate’s lingering belief in the entitlement of the colonial power to the outlying territory frames his recognition of this territory as a casualty of the violent campaign. What he does not register, here, is what is abundantly clear in the novel: the immense precariousness of the members of the colonial front in the face of limited freshwater and consumable flora and fauna outside of the bounds of the colonial settlement, as well as the related precariousness of the citizens of the agricultural colonial settlement to the scarcity of agricultural resources. As one colonial guard asserts, ““You can’t live on the fruit of the land out here, can you?”

I've never seen such dead country” (109). It is not just the ostensible patrimonial rights, or the territories that they claim, which are at risk—it is the conditions of sustenance themselves.

When the embankment protecting the wheat fields is damaged, and the crops are flooded, the ‘barbarians’ are blamed. The magistrate thinks, “at any moment [the farmers’] work can be brought to nothing by a few men armed with spades! How can we win such a war? What is the use of textbook military operations, sweeps and punitive raids into the enemy’s heartland, when we can be bled to death at home?” (109-10). The agricultural food resources of the colonial outpost become the locus of war; the wheat fields are rendered the violable body of the colonial power. Just as the magistrate’s occlusion from colonial citizenship is articulated through his becoming a consumable, rather than consuming, body, so too is the embattled colonial outpost figured as becoming a rapidly appropriable and consumable resource. When the magistrate imagines that the expeditionary force has been recalled to defend the homeland, he envisions the colony rendered into a fruit tree, as the frontier towns have been left “for the barbarians to pick like fruit” (142). The members of the Civil Guard similarly propose that the barbarian threat renders the colonial body consumable, telling the frontier settlement’s herbalist that the ““barbarians will fry your balls and eat them”” (164). While the largely invisible thousand-mile frontier becomes the setting of a privileged scene of (imagined and rhetorically manufactured) armed catastrophe (where the soldiers are apparently “busy dealing out heavy blows” [135]), the frontier food sources become the locus of violence and vulnerability—of an increasingly visible contest for life-

sustaining resources that is less spectacular than the manufactured conflict of the colonial power.

‘What is There to Hold Them Once the Feasting Stops?’

The visions and fantasies of an impending barbarian rebellion (read: resource rebellion) and the spectacular offensive violence of the army of the Third Bureau of the Civil Guard promise to provide a climactic, historical triumph of imperial violence—a *telos* that, like the barbarian insurrection, fails to materialize. This suspended violence is, however, the backdrop of an increasingly visible conflict around consumable resources between the citizens of the colonial front and the rapidly deserting colonial army. In the face of the impending desertion of the last remaining soldiers of the Civil Guard, the frontier’s citizens actively court the voracious consumption of remaining food and food preparation resources by the soldiers:

When they were first quartered on the town these soldiers, strangers to our ways, conscripts from all over the empire, were welcomed coolly. ... But after the barbarians made their appearance on our doorstep that attitude changed. Now that they seem to be all that stands between us and destruction, these foreign soldiers are anxiously courted. A committee of citizens makes a weekly levy to hold a feast for them, roasting whole sheep on spits, laying out gallons of rum. The girls of the town are theirs for the taking. They are welcome to whatever they want as long as they will stay and guard our lives.

... With the granary nearly empty and the main force vanished like smoke,
what is there to hold them once the feasting stops? (143-44)

The female citizens of the settlement, the kitchenware, and the nonhuman food resources are the cost of ongoing military protection—the nightmare of being rendered a consumable body for the rebellious consumption of the nomadic aboriginals is ironically realized as the colonial settlement must render its citizens and declining resources available as “fruits” for “foraging” (155) for the insatiable appetites of the army of the Civil Guard. Just as the magistrate was forcibly made to know what it means to be bestialized through inhabiting the conditions of vulnerability to which nonhuman animals are subject, so too do the citizens of the colonial settlement and their food resources become the very raw materials required to sustain the military force. However, the surplus of these life-sustaining resources is directly linked, as I have argued above, to the futurity of the colonial settlement.

As the vulnerability of the citizens of the colony to the contests around food resources becomes visible, so too do the contests around, and conquests of, consumable nonhuman animal resources that have quietly permeated the novel throughout. The “lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy” (148)—that the colonized territory is always ready to yield up an abundance of inexhaustible consumable matter—becomes indelibly situated in the self-destructive “time of history” of Empire and its ecological violence (146). The self-appointed jurisdiction of the colonial power to define the legal capture, possession, consumption, and disposal of nonhuman animals in the name of a law ““greater than any of us”” (152), as the magistrate once tells a young peasant accused of stealing chickens from

another colonial outpost, becomes increasingly recognizable as the discriminatory distribution of imperiled subsistence.

The catastrophe which is brought home to the citizens and soldiers of the colonial settlement is that they, too, are subject to conditions of precariousness, subsistence, and interdependence which are rapidly being imperiled by the destructive and consumptive ecological violence of imperial history. The largely concealed destruction of nonhuman lives and their ecological habitats becomes irredeemably perceptible in the peril of the colonial settlement as the domesticated, nonhuman animal and agricultural resources of settled colonial culture—“sheep” (144), “stocks of food,” “poultry and even pigs,” “seed grain,” (154), “a cock and a hen,” “a flock of a dozen sheep” (155), and “every single horse” (160)—are forcibly hoarded, co-opted, and consumed by the deserting Civil Guard. The message that the magistrate mouths to Colonel Joll, recently returned from his offensive expedition, that ““The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves”” (160), is brought home as the latent ecological violence and the conditions of precariousness that they compound impinge upon the colonial citizens.

To ‘Live in Time like Fish in Water, like Birds in Air’

The catastrophic *telos* of the historical time of empire is grounded in the unsustainable, and slow, destructive violence of ecological colonialism. The fantasy of catastrophic violence is superseded by the immediate temporality of environmental consumption and destruction. In the face of this accelerating and increasingly visible violence, and seeking a way to imagine new and more sustainable modes of ecological

inhabitation, the magistrate proffers another temporal order through the cyclic time of nature and the vision of non-violent ecological embeddedness that it readily conjures up:

What has made it impossible for us to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air, like children? It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. (146)

It is a vision which seeks to supplant the teleological march of colonial domination with a fantasy of organic, ecological circularity; to substitute the subjection of colonizing and colonized subjects to “the history that Empire imposes on its subjects” (169) with their harmonious integration into the cycles of the seasons, the arrivals and departures of migratory beings—in short, a de-historicized, and perhaps even paradisiacal temporality and mode of being that is, for the magistrate, implicitly nonhuman. It is a fantasy, one might add, of ceaselessly renewable ecological plenitude and paradisiacal innocence. To live “like children” is, as the magistrate asserts, to “never doubt that the great old trees in whose shade they play will stand forever” (146). And yet, one is forced to ask, what are the alternatives to the magistrate’s fantasy? Or, rather more pointedly, what material and allegorical human temporalities does this cyclical time seek to supplant?

If the colonial episteme renders any sympathy or continuity between the colonial power and its others (both human and nonhuman) impossible, it simultaneously forecloses forms of mutual cohabitation that recognize, and give value to, the knowledge of the

nomadic and agrarian aboriginal populations about sustainable ecological consumption and inhabitation. After the magistrate is marooned from the identity (and protection) of the colonial front, the fisherfolk temporarily help to feed and house him, even as the fish on which they sustain themselves are rapidly diminishing. And yet, the potentiality of joining the fisherfolk and taking on their “peaceful way to make a living” (145) through marriage and co-habitation at the waterfront inaugurates a vision of dehumanizing death—one that threatens to render him into a readily consumable object for the barbarian nomads:

I am not unaware of what such daydreams signify, dreams of becoming an unthinking savage, of taking the cold road back to the capital, of groping my way out to the ruins in the desert, of returning to the confinement of my cell, of seeking out the barbarians and offering myself to them to use as they wish. Without exception they are dreams of ends: dreams not of how to live but of how to die. (146)

The mere possibility of cross-cultural co-habitation is articulated through an inverted teleology of the magistrate’s experience of being exiled from colonial candidacy. If there is an intimation, even, of a cyclical mode of human ecological inhabitation on the part of the fisherfolk, it is supplanted by the magistrate’s own experience of the time of history of Empire. The magistrate is transported, in this troubling vision, to the moment of contact with the nomadic aboriginals—the culminating event of the cross-cultural exchange that marked the magistrate, for the citizens of the colonial settlement and Colonel Joll’s army, as other and readily subject to violence. In the magistrate’s perspective, the cyclic temporality of indigenous ecological inhabitation is forcibly shot through with the *telos* of colonial

civilization; living with (or like) agrarian aborigines is articulated through notions of atavism and savagery. The idea of wild, nonhuman animals, on the other hand, and their modes and places of being (“fish in water ... birds in air” [146]) offer the putative promise of organic, ecological circularity outside of the time of empire and the ecological destruction that it has wrought.

This vision of harmonious integration (and naturalized occupation) is, however, contaminated throughout by the inexorable historical reality of the destruction of the ecological habitat and its nonhuman inhabitants—one that the novel foregrounds through literal and allegorical images of toxic or destructive submersion. When the magistrate imagines the fault-lines of becoming a fisherfolk in the colonial episteme, and envisions fish-like ecological inhabitation, he happens to be “[c]alf-deep in the soothing water” (146) of the nearby lake. This lake, the locus of a fantasy of dehistoricized natural time, is shot through with the material and symbolic residue of ecological devastation. Not only does the lake grow increasingly brackish and less amenable to freshwater fish habitation and human consumption every year; it is also the site of accelerating inter-human conflicts around consumable cultivated and wild food resources, including the repeated devastation of the fisherfolk’s habitat on its shoreline and their means of subsistence, the burning of the brush surrounding the river that feeds into the lake, and the destruction of the embankment that protected the colonial settlement’s fields from flooding. This particularly fraught site is the locus of accelerated conditions of human and nonhuman vulnerability. Alight with a fantasy of fish-like embedded-ness, and yet knee-deep in troubled waters, the magistrate generates an ideal of ecologically-embedded transcendence.

This context pointedly recalls other instances of partial or full submersion elsewhere in the novel, in which citizens of the colonial power, their life-sustaining resources, and nonhuman wildlife, are at risk. The first of these submersions occurs during the magistrate's excursion to deliver the barbarian woman to her community, when the party is forced to traverse the former bed of the now largely extinct lake—a "terrain . . . more desolate than anything [they] have seen," where "nothing grows" (65). The party cannot access freshwater drinking sources, they are burdened with diarrhea, and the wildfowl that they encounter (and consume) in the early days of the journey rapidly disappear. Because of rising mineral contents in the lake, the fishermen find "carp floating belly-up in the shallows" and the "perch are no more to be seen" (64). The freshwater is rapidly becoming brackish ooze, and both a horse and the man who leads it sink "chest-deep in foul green slime" (65). Before long, one of the pack-horses can no longer stand, and the magistrate kills it, wondering "Will we live to regret this blood spent so lavishly on the sand?" (67). The very literal bleeding of the domesticated horse as a result of being driven through putatively uninhabitable lake-bed recalls the magistrate's claim, after observing the flooding of the settlement's fields, that the settlement can all-too-easily be "bled to death at home" (110).

In other words, the lake—the imagined locus of the magistrate's vision of a timeless and renewable form of nonhuman ecological inhabitation—is situated in the ecological resource wars of the colonial power and their accelerating violence. This vexed and embattled site is damaged by the slow violence of environmental harm—one that is made locatable, in part, through slow (sluggishly flowing) waters (mud and slime). When the magistrate takes stock of the damaged wheat fields, which have been flooded by the brackish

lake water, he is, after all, partially submerged, as “[w]arm ochre mud squelches between [his] toes” (109).

Like the colonial episteme, the water is already infected with the ecological destruction wrought in and by the time of imperial history. The allegorical and material temporality of “the time of history” is immersed, in Coetzee’s rendering, in the material and imaginative infection of ecological devastation, just as what it means to be, or become, an animal is indelibly situated, in the novel, in institutions of speciesist violence. Ecological violence and the manufactured catastrophes of the empirical history coalesce in the magistrate’s longing for a regenerating, cyclic time of nonhuman animals:

Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. One thought alone preoccupies the *submerged mind of Empire*: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies. It is cunning and ruthless, it sends its blood hounds everywhere. By night it feeds on images of disaster: the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation. A mad vision yet a virulent one: I *wading in the ooze*, am no less *infected* with it than the faithful Colonel Joll as he tracks the enemies of Empire through the boundless desert (146, emphasis added)

Through the trope of submersion in toxic or infected waters, the temporality of empirical history is allegorically bifurcated. On one level, the ideology is infected with the teleology of violence that both requires, and pursues, its enemies; on another, it is situated in a more immediate or literal locus of infection: the lake. As the fantasy of confrontational violence mounts in proportion to the accelerating ecological violence of the Empire, the links between

the teleology of empire and the catastrophe of environmental harm become all too clear. The futurity of power in its last gasps (“preoccupie[d]” with “how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era” [146]) is doomed by the historical materiality of resource scarcity and the threat of a potential resource rebellion on the part of the indigenous populations. Wild, nonhuman animals promise, for the magistrate, the last allegorical vestige of uncontaminated time.

Tasked, it seems, with authoring a record of the settlement in the face of its destruction, the self-appointed “last-magistrate” (168) supplants the violence of the imperial outpost, co-opting a nonhuman animal temporal order. Through this notion of the cyclic time of nonhuman animals, the agricultural practices of the settlement are conflated with the de-historicized temporal order of Nature: “‘No one who paid a visit to this oasis,’ I write, ‘failed to be struck by the charm of life here. We lived in the time of the seasons, of the harvests, of the migrations of the waterbirds. We lived with nothing between us and the stars. ... This was paradise on earth’” (169). In this re-writing, which the magistrate pointedly recognizes as a lie, not only are the nonhuman animals and habitat conflated with the privileged inhuman temporality of Nature, “‘outside history’” (169), but the agricultural practices of the settlement as well. The looming scene of cross-cultural violence is translated into a pleasant scene of eco-tourism, in which the settlement becomes a place that transient visitors (the indigenous populations) might “‘pa[y] a visit’” to learn the eternal virtues of agricultural cultivation (169). The inviolable dependence of the settlement on agricultural cultivation and plenitude for their survival will be transferred to the nomadic population who, after tasting some colonial bread and jam, “‘will find that they are able to

live without the skills of men who know how to rear the pacific grains, without the arts of women who know how to use the benign fruits” (169). Outside of history, the casualties of the temporalities of ecological violence are always deferred; empire is eternally renewable, essentially fecund; and the attritional lethality of environmental destruction and the accelerated harm of its human and nonhuman inhabitants is occluded. The frontier becomes the locus of the boundless promise and plenitude of the imagined wilderness; the settlement becomes the source of the privileged knowledge, and means, of harnessing it.

In the objectifying and consumptive violence of the colonial occupation, ecological habitats and the bodies of the inhabitants that depend upon them, are readily functionalized into objects of colonial entitlement. The magistrate’s efforts to co-opt ecological time to substantiate the agricultural practices of the colonial outpost rests on decoupling nature from the history of environmental devastation wrought by the colony’s militant campaigns, unsustainable agricultural practices, and resource appropriations. Nature is perceived to be a fecund imaginative resource of empire, insofar as the reality of the local populations (both human and nonhuman) who depend upon it for survival, as well as the damages wrought by colonial occupation, can be physically and rhetorically disguised. The paradisiacal lie about the colony’s ahistorical and/or natural occupation depends, after all, on effacing the environmental dispossession (and, at times, displacement) of the local populations, the consumptive violence of the colonial occupation, and their historical outcomes. However, *Waiting for the Barbarians* supplants this erasure by making that violence irredeemably perceptible.

Asking what roles nonhuman animals have played in the time, space, and history of the colonial outpost in Coetzee's novel has called on me, in this chapter, to attend to the casualties of colonial consumption, domination, and violence *across species lines*. As Coetzee's novel makes clear, the dialectics of self and other, subject and object, human and nonhuman that are often embedded in the human and nonhuman animal species boundary can readily be utilized to construct colonial identity and mobilize colonial violence. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, this speciesist division is deployed to articulate the social and spatial limits of sympathetic identification; and to construct the object of cultural difference at the symbolic and geographical boundaries of empire. These are some of the legacies of those speciesist trajectories of Enlightenment thought, which often asserted, as Hegel did, that social, cultural, and racial maturation depended on the dominion over nature, nonhuman animals, and those human groups deemed even remotely contiguous with them. The rational faculty, Descartes proclaimed, enables and calls on 'us' to be "masters and possessors of nature" (78). The dependence of the rational Cartesian subject on this subordination of, and domination over, nature, nonhuman animals, and their less-than human correlates, renders cross-species and cross-cultural identification perilous. Species is just one register through which the colonial episteme's nightmares of intellectual, racial, and/or cultural regression is filtered.

Coetzee intervenes in this tenacious legacy by situating the dereliction and obliteration of cultural others in the accelerating conflicts over the production, cultivation, and devastation of the natural habitat and its inhabitants. So often in the novel, cross-cultural affinity is imagined by members of the colonial episteme as a threat to sedimentary,

colonial agriculture, and horrific violence is done to those perceived to have re-appropriated the colonial outpost's food hoard. In the rhetoric of impending barbarian violence, those less cataclysmic forms of ecological violence that permeate the novel are displaced, as are its human and nonhuman casualties. And yet Coetzee makes this violence abundantly perceptible. The elite capture and hoarding of nonhuman animals and their habitats situates the fantasy of barbarian violence and undergirds the rhetoric of bestial difference. What nonhuman animals mean, in the context of an embattled colonial outpost in its last gasps, is effectively enmeshed with those increasingly visible contests around life-sustaining food resources, and the self-appointed patrimonial right, on the part of the colonial power, to feast until the feasting stops. When the human and nonhuman casualties of ecological imperialism and its slow violence become perceptible, so too do those forms of violence that readily co-opt Nature and nonhuman animals as the symbolic resources of empire.

In the chapter that follows, I turn to Coetzee's *Disgrace*—a novel, like *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in which nonhuman animals prove to be ductile symbols for substantiating the identity and cultural supremacy of the focalizing narrator. Expanding upon my analysis of species and race in this chapter, I approach discourses of animality in relation to speciesist rhetorics of desire, revisiting Enlightenment philosophy to draw out the entanglements of discourses of race, sex, and animality, that are strategically employed to furnish distinctions between the cultured fields of amatory love and unmitigated sexual desire. How has the fixity of the human and nonhuman animal species distinction been deployed to project the imperatives of desire on the body of the other and to other the desiring body? What happens to the rhetorics of animal sex that inscribe the bodies of human and nonhuman others when

they are situated in the historical and political conflicts over nonhuman animal capital?

Finally, how might troubling the distinctions between immanent and transcendent sexual

desire come to bear on the dialectic of culturally transcendent subjects and animal objects?

Endnotes

- 1 In his essay, “Of National Characters” (1748, 1754), for example, David Hume asserts, in a footnote, that the natural inferiority of peoples of African descent demonstrates the hierarchical *design* of race:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. . . . Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people without education will start up amongst us and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, *like a parrot* who speaks a few words plainly. (33, emphasis added)

In his chapter “On National Characteristics” in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Immanuel Kant classified nations according to their capacities for aesthetic and moral affect, placing Germans at the top of his hierarchy and Africans at the bottom. Citing (and giving authority to) Hume’s footnote in “Of National Characters” (above), Kant asserts that ‘the African’ “has no feeling that rises above the trifling . . . even though [as Hume asserts] among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world” (55). For Kant, “So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color” (55). The symbiotic relationship between blackness and intellectual lack for Kant is made abundantly clear in his anecdote about a carpenter: “this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (57). For a discussion of the hierarchical classification of humans in Enlightenment thought, see the Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze’s “Introduction” to *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*.

- 2 Johann Gottfried von Herder, in *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, asserts a need to “lay aside our proud prejudices” about Africa, while nonetheless suggesting that the inhabitants of Nubia and the interior regions of Africa, though diverse, still share in their “great sensuality, endurance, and an approach to the extreme in figure, which brings it nearer to the brute” (72). This overwhelming sensuality is made readable in the African body through animalized morphologies:

With this oleaginous organization to sensual pleasure, the profile, and the whole frame of the body, must alter. . . . [T]he face would have at a distance the resemblance of that of an ape. . . . [T]he whole body . . . is formed . . . for sensual animal enjoyment That finer intellect, which the creature, whose breast swells with boiling passions beneath this burning sun, must necessarily be refused, was countervailed by a structure altogether incompatible with it. (77)

In the essay “Varieties of the Human Species” in *Animal Kingdom* (1797), Georges Cuvier claims that the “Negro race” is inferior to the Caucasian in culture, beauty, and intelligence: “The projection of the lower parts of the face, and the thick lips, evidently approximate it to the monkey tribe; the hordes of which it consists have always remained in the most complete state of utter barbarism” (105). With the indefinite pronoun (“it”), the species to which barbarism is attributed becomes pointedly ambiguous.

- 3 For an analysis of the racialized rhetoric of animality, particularly through notions of savagery and vulgarity, see Kay Anderson’s “‘The Beast Within’: Race, Humanity, and Animality.”
- 4 As Teresa Dovey points out in the opening sentence of her article “*Waiting for the Barbarians*: Allegory of Allegories,” “Much of the critical discussion on *Waiting for the Barbarians* focuses on its status as allegory” (138). In the mid- to late-nineties, this was certainly the case. While I address allegory with reference to animalizing discourses, I do not take up the topic of the novel as allegorical, nor the attendant politics of the novel’s setting and time-frame, in part because of the weighty critical corpus on this topic. For particularly influential essays on this topic, see Derek Attridge’s “Against Allegory: Waiting for the Barbarians, Life & Times of Michael K” in *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Bill Ashcroft’s “Irony, Allegory and Empire: *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *In the Heart of the Country*”; and Teresa Dovey’s “*Waiting for the Barbarians*: Allegory of Allegories.”

- 5 For a critique of the violence inherent in the broad term, “the animal,” see Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*.
- 6 In *Discourse on Method*, René Descartes takes up the example of a speaking parrot in order to affirm his thesis that animals are incapable of using speech and are therefore of a different order than humans. Were this not the case, Descartes surmises, the speech of “the most perfect monkey or parrot of its species” would resemble “the most stupid child, or at least a child with a disturbed brain” (75). Hume’s use of the simile “like a parrot” (33) affirms the human and nonhuman species distinction, while taking up the notion of mimicry to suggest that neither parrots nor peoples of African descent can, in fact, be rational. Descartes’ example situates the talking parrot in the hierarchical order of the human subject (through a rhetoric of maturation). This intertextual reference indicates where Hume’s simile situates the learned African subject in the hierarchy of the human.
- Readers familiar with Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* will likely recall Charles Marlow’s patronizing gaze at an African fireman—that “improved specimen” (1916)—who is compared, with some circumvention, to a dog in human clothing: “He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs” (1916). Of course, the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of Africans in the category of the human is one of Marlow’s sources of immense dread: “No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. ... [W]hat thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly” (1916). For a seminal essay on this topic, see Chinua Achebe’s “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.”
- 7 For Homi K. Bhabha, “Mimicry” is a mode of colonial discourse which is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (*The Location of Culture* 86) and is one of the most “elusive and effective” (85) strategies of post-Enlightenment English colonial power and knowledge because it produces authorized subjects of otherness. It bears recalling that Bhabha introduces the notion of colonial mimicry as a product of the civilizing mission, which is propelled in part by the ideological distinction between, in Lord Rosebery’s words, “‘human and not wholly human’”—a distinction which is essential to the colonial strategy of regulation, reform, and discipline (qtd. in Bhabha 85). The use of provisional rhetorics of animality offer a cogent example of mimicry because they establish a similarity (human) while employing nonhuman animals to give differential substance and value to particular human groups within the hierarchical category of the human. However, as Bhabha argues, mimicry is also a menace for colonial power; while producing colonized subjects that are like, but unlike, colonial subjects, it simultaneously threatens the normative discourses of colonial superiority by producing “another knowledge” of the norms of colonial domination (86). In this case, the menace of Enlightenment discourses of human animality rests in what these discourses reveal, including the dependence of the fully human subject of colonial and Enlightenment discourse on the disavowal of, and distancing of, the animal.
- 8 See Jacques Derrida’s *The Beast and the Sovereign Vol. 1* on the ways in which animality has been formulated to speak to the primacy of human beings while occluding the relationality of humans and nonhumans. Cavalieri similarly contends, in *The Death of the Animal*, that animality is a normative, rather than descriptive, concept that is used to affirm the primacy of human beings (4).
- 9 In “Reading the Signs of History: *Waiting for the Barbarians*,” David Attwell makes a similar claim: “possession of this difference would consolidate the Magistrate’s subject-position” (78).
- 10 David Attwell likewise suggests, albeit in a different vein, that the capacity for domestication likewise informs the contrast between the two women: “the barbarian girl will simply not be delivered up to the Magistrate’s proings; her otherness cannot be domesticated. ... [T]he Magistrate’s desire in *Barbarians* brings in train all the dominating implications of the colonial episteme” (“Reading the Signs of History” 79).
- 11 It bears mentioning that it is not until the magistrate and the barbarian woman leave the colonial outpost that their bodily contact assumes the form of penetrative intercourse. While escaping the confines of the colonial settlement might be the necessary conditions for this sex, it nonetheless generates a disquieting correlation between penetrating the colonial other and penetrating the ‘wilderness.’

- 12 In Chapter Four, I expand upon this topic, as I examine the relations between masculinity and violence against nonhuman animals, including hunting, in depth.
- 13 Cary Wolfe draws a similar conclusion in his analysis of Ernest Hemingway's novel *Garden of Eden* (148).
- 14 The epithet barbarian-lover notably echoes the Afrikaans epithet "kaffir boetie." "Kaffir" was a term widely (mis)used by Dutch and British colonists to describe peoples of southern Africa. In apartheid-era South Africa, the term "kaffir boetie" (which translates to Kafir brother, or 'nigger lover') was used as a derogatory epithet for white South-Africans who sympathized with, or advocated for, black South Africans. The term "kaffir boetie" has animalistic connotations.
- 15 The topic of torture in *Waiting for the Barbarians* has received a wealth of critical attention to date. Some critics have approached this topic in relation to the well-publicized torture and murder of the anti-apartheid activist Stephen Bantu Biko while in police custody in 1977, three years before the publication of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. For critical analyses of torture in *Waiting for the Barbarians* in relation to Biko's murder, see for example "The Novelist and Torture: *Waiting for the Barbarians*" in *A Story of South Africa: J. M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context* by Susan Gallagher; "Against Allegory: *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K*" by Derek Attridge; "The Body in Ruins: Torture, Allegory, and Materiality in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*" by Russell Samolsky; and "The Allegorical Text and History: J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*" by Jean-Phillipe Wade.
- 16 See Jeremiah 11:19: "... for I was like a docile lamb led to slaughter."
- 17 See Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*.

Chapter Three:

The Nonhuman Politics of Race and Sex in *Disgrace*

While leading animals and animality scholars have argued that the exploitation of nonhuman animals depends on a speciesist discourse that is used, in Cary Wolfe's terms, "to countenance violence against the social other" (*Animal Rites* 10), questions remain about the role that nonhuman animals and animality are made to play in ongoing conceptualizations of intrinsic and/or biological human nature(s), particularly with respect to human sexuality. If nonhuman animals are marshaled into a binary code that situates human culture (and cultural transcendence) in opposition to brute animal instinct and/or unconscious sexual drives, what happens when we distinguish between those forms of animalization which Neel Ahuja (following Harriet Ritvo and Mary Louise Pratt) defines as "contextual comparisons between animals (as labourers, food, 'pests,' or 'wildlife') and the bodies or behaviours of racialized subjects" from discourses of animality that use comparisons to nonhuman animals to naturalize the imperatives and authority of white desire (557)? In other words, how might intersections between discourses of race and animality inform troubling distinctions between brute animality and normative conceptions of 'natural' (ostensibly heterosexual and morally sound) human sexuality in what Rosemary Jolly decisively terms the "*Non-sense of Animal Metaphors*" ("Going to the Dogs" 155)? Through an investigation of the imperatives of desire in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, I ask how animality is strategically attributed to racialized subjects in contradistinction to the ways in which the main character, David Lurie, conceives of his own sexual encounters in animalistic terms, but nevertheless *along the lines of culture*. By locating the stakes involved in the animalization of sexual desire, I probe the

human and nonhuman species boundary to ask what roles race has played in the distinctions between the animality of sex and the (assumed to be) cultured field of amatory love. This is a useful starting-point, in my view, for unpacking David's privileged turn to nonhuman animals themselves.

Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* is set in a volatile post-apartheid climate in South Africa and is focalized through David Lurie, a white, middle-aged, adjunct professor in the Communications department at Cape Town University. After committing sexual indiscretions with his student Melanie (culminating in rape), David resigns from his position as an instructor and goes to stay with his daughter, Lucy, on her smallholding on the Eastern Cape.¹ This locale is the setting of particularly fraught post-apartheid claims to property entitlement, the resulting tensions of which culminate in an attack on David and Lucy, the murder of Lucy's kennel dogs, and the rape of Lucy by one or more of two black men and one black teenager. These conflicts also inflect David's negotiations with Lucy's neighbour, and eventual co-priorieter, Petrus, as well as the nonhuman animals that David comes into contact with as the novel unfolds.

What roles do nonhuman animals play in these conflicts and how do these conflicts alter, decisively, what animals mean and can be made to mean? How might we begin to situate the speciesist discourse that depends upon fictionally fixed, nonhuman, animal essences to situate desire along the lines of race and species? These questions draw me back, inevitably, to the intersections between discourses of animality and animals themselves—intersections that are the locus of overlapping investments in power across Coetzee's writings. As Huggan and Tiffin contend, a materialist analysis of the historical relationships

between nonhuman animals, people, and place is a crucial supplement to the politics of representation (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 12), and a fruitful methodological starting point for a cross-species analysis of animality. In *Disgrace*, othering discourses, articulated through and alongside discourses of animal essences, become conceptually bound to contests and conflicts concerning the management, functionalization, and rendering-saleable of nonhuman animals themselves. Recognizing the representational and material stakes in nonhuman animals in *Disgrace*, I ask if the development of David's care across species lines is the product of cross-species contact, and what implications might be drawn from the fact that this ethical turn is articulated, at times, through speciesist and racist rhetorics of animality. The ethical crux of the novel, I contend, lies in David's unfinished operatic project, which proffers a vision of immanent transcendence across species lines. This opera is the starting-point for a timely intervention in the overlapping dialectics of culture and nature, human and nonhuman, through which sexual desire is filtered in *Disgrace*.

The Racialization of Animal Desire

Sexuality and desire often play decisive roles when distinctions between what is properly human and what is animalistic are given voice to; quotidian approaches to human sexuality are often filtered through assumptions about humans' biological animality. We are familiar by now with our so-called 'animal passions'—a concept that marshals essentialist assumptions about animals' reproductive biological determinism while situating human sexualities somewhere in the murky domain of "nature." The dominant narratives of the genre of popular wildlife documentaries have suggested as much. As Karla Armbruster

claims, “It is in portrayals of sexual behavior that these programmes come closest to linking humans with nonhuman nature. Our sexuality, our bodies and the imperatives of evolution, instinct and genetics are often constructed as forces that constrain the human and nonhuman equally” (228). Armbruster is apt to attribute to the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin a conflation of the sexual behavioural responses of humans and nonhumans.² As Michael Lundblad reminds us, the prevailing attributions of animals with the ostensible heterosexual and aggressive imperatives of the body were informed by the application of Freudian psychoanalysis to Darwinian theory at the turn of the twentieth century (498-99).³ The confluence of Darwinian and psychoanalytic approaches to human development contributed to what Lundblad describes as the translation of “Darwinist constructions of ‘real’ animals into ‘animal instincts’ within the human psyche” (498), in which the animality of human and nonhuman animals alike is framed, in Lundblad’s terms, as a “supposedly essential biological instinct[] for heterosexuality in the name of reproduction” (499).⁴

Thus, sexual behavior is, as Armbruster suggests, a crucial component of trenchant assumptions about the imperatives of animality across species lines. However, the animality scholarship of critics such as Carrie Rohman, and Akira Lippit, for example, has evinced a tendency to trace the genealogies of animalizing discourses back to Darwin and Freud, neglecting, at times, to consider how intersections between discourses of race and animality in Enlightenment thought have shaped the roles that sex is made to play in the human and nonhuman species distinction. This chapter will demonstrate that variations in constraint, or more pointedly, the *capacity* for restraint, particularly with respect to the sexual imperatives of the body, have long been crucial to the articulation and management of what it means to

be properly human. Working against the assumption that the human and nonhuman animal species distinction is rendered particularly porous by notions of our mutual sexual impulses, I contend that sex has in fact acted as a powerful prosthetic of othering discourses—particularly racist ones—that have mobilized the species boundary in order to assert that selected groups of human beings are too mired in animalized sexual impulses to be properly human.

This association proved particularly potent for the writings on race and cross-cultural anthropology during the Enlightenment episteme—ideations that often managed human variance by associating some bodily morphologies and geographical regions—pre-eminently Africa—with base sensualities, in part through the availability of nonhuman animal sex as a basis of comparison. Johann Gottfried von Herder, for example, in his *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-91), asserts that Negroes are undoubtedly human with the proviso that the African body is nonetheless organized for “sensual animal enjoyment,” rendering it incompatible with that “finer intellect” which “must necessarily be refused . . . by a structure altogether incompatible with it” (77). Thomas Jefferson likewise contends, in 1787, that blacks “are more ardent after their female; but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation”—a love that is “ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination” (98).

These Enlightenment proclamations are instructive examples of the ways that racism and speciesism intersect, at times, as the human and nonhuman animal species boundary is mobilized to consolidate the binary distinction between morally sanctioned and/or cultured desire and animalistic sensuality. Jefferson’s description of a love that “kindles the sense”

rather than the “imagination” points to the ways in which the nature/culture distinction was used alongside assumptions about race and sexuality in order to suggest that European desire is generative of, and situated within, transcendent culture in contradistinction to the strategic conception of racialized desire as ostensibly human but nonetheless mired in animal natures. What sexuality animates, and how sexual desire is ‘mitigated,’ for Jefferson, is implicit: black sexuality is an “eager desire” that sets fire to the senses. This unmitigated sex is positioned against an implicitly regulated, domesticated, feminized, and white (European) sex that is “tender” and “delicate” precisely because its domain is the mind, rather than the body. The former animates the body; the latter, a European (amatory) cultural heritage that is metonymically gestured towards through Jefferson’s notion of the “kindle[d] imagination” (98).

In “On National Characteristics” in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Immanuel Kant similarly claims that cultured sex is the exclusive property of Europeans, who have succeeded in uniting sexual impulse with morality such that “sensuous enjoyment” has value: “[T]he European alone has found the secret of decorating with so many flowers the sensual charm of a mighty inclination and of interlacing it with so much morality that he has not only extremely elevated its agreeableness but has also made it very decorous” (56). In Kant’s rendering, the enculturation of desire is articulated through the language of decorative textile arts. Kant’s circumlocution, through this decorative metaphor, works to show that his European desire has been demonstrably “elevated” (56) and his sensuality harnessed.⁵ The implicit metaphor evokes imagery of raw materials (such as natural fibres and flowers) being manipulated (or cultivated) to generate a cultural

product.⁶ It bears recalling that for Hegel, harnessing nature for human ends—and thereby distinguishing humans from nature—plays a decisive role in the education of desire:

For in so far as man is primarily a creature of the senses, it is imperative that, in his sensuous connection with nature, he should be able to attain freedom by means of internal reflection. But where nature is too powerful, his liberation becomes more difficult. . . . It is therefore essential that man's connection with nature should not be too powerful in the first place. . . . Man uses nature for his own ends; but where nature is too powerful, it does not allow itself to be used as a means. (111-12)

As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, Hegel's definition of "Man," and the agency of that (implicitly white, European) subject, rests upon the dominion, co-optation, and functionalization of nature. Nature, sense, and sensuality are conflated at the bottom of a single pedigree of human maturation, leading Hegel to contend that in "Africa proper, man has not progressed beyond a merely sensuous existence, and has found it absolutely impossible to develop any further" (122). Marshalling the sexual imperatives of animality and the emergent discourse of race, Hegel surmises that "*the Negro is an example of animal man*" (127).

If the essentialist imperatives of sexual desire threatened to trouble the distinctions between humans and animals, whites and blacks, the articulation of such desire through the representational tropes of the amatory traditions (whether literary, philosophical, mythological, and/or aesthetic) has generated a discursive strategy. *Disgrace* tells us much about the ways in which 'cultured' expressions of desire can readily be made to reanimate

the human and nonhuman animal species distinction by giving both (human) desire, and the subject of that desire, cultural transcendence. Drawing race into these entanglements of bodies and desires at the site of the human and nonhuman animal species boundary can tell us much about both the fictions and functions of ‘cultured’ and ‘base’ sex in the nature/culture binary distinction governing the concept of human/nonhuman animal species difference. This exercise requires us to turn a critical eye on how sex is deployed at the margins of the human subject to reinscribe those margins. How does the animality of sex render bodily desire, to take up Jolly’s terms, “profoundly unintelligible *within* the parameters of our extant discourses of that which is human as opposed to that which is animal?” (“Going to the Dogs” 154). How have discourses of amatory love been strategically employed to project the sexual imperatives of the body onto the other?

Cultured Desire

In *Disgrace*, the attack on David, Lucy, and Lucy’s kennel dogs by three intruders on Lucy’s smallholding on the Eastern Cape leads David to generate particularly unsettling discourses on the ‘animal’ imperatives of black sex—discourses which are complicated, throughout, by David’s tendency to articulate his own sexual desires in animalistic ways. There are, nonetheless, notable differences in these two visions of the imperatives of desire that merit our scrutiny. After all, whereas David positions the black intruders as agents of their animal impulses, David situates his own desire in a European amatory cultural heritage. His framing of sexuality suggests that what is putatively animalistic is at once natural and biological and, simultaneously, alien to him. The distinctions I am drawing come into focus

if we turn our eye to the ways sex is positioned along species lines to define the boundaries of the human subject through speciesist discourses of mitigated, and unmitigated, desire. For David Lurie, the animality of his sex is articulated through temporary forays across species lines in ways that affirm, rather than imperil, the parameters of the human subject, and his membership in the cultured domain of the human.

Coetzee demonstrates the ways in which animality can readily be utilized to render desire as outside of the bounds of the self-willing, rational, human subject at the same moment that such desire is naturalized as a trans-historical and trans-species imperative. This animalization of sexual desire (as both stemming from, and yet distanced from, the human subject) is articulated cogently by the magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, who frames his purchased intercourse with a sex trade worker through a discourse of his limited agency in the face of the imperatives of “erotic reverie” (48):

Desire seemed to bring with it a pathos of distance and separation which it was futile to deny. ... Sometimes my sex seemed to me another being entirely, a stupid animal living parasitically upon me, swelling and dwindling according to autonomous appetites, anchored to my flesh with claws I could not detach. Why do I have to carry you about from woman to woman, I asked: simply because you were born without legs? Would it make any difference to you if you were rooted in a cat or a dog instead of in me? (49)

The magistrate’s address to, and rendering of, his own sexuality (and his sexual organs) as a parasitic animal—indeed, his expulsion of his embodied desire—insinuates a popular conceptual paradigm of the authority of biological sex and reproductive drives over and

against the self-willed agent.⁷ Because the capacity for restraint has acted as a powerful node of the human and nonhuman animal species boundary, the magistrate's rendering of his desire as both animal and as other appropriates the discourses of animals as biologically-determined and constrained automata to undermine his agency and exonerate him from the full burden of responsibility for, and identification with, his sexual acts.⁸ This interpretation nonetheless marks his heterosexual and, in this context, exploitative, desire as natural expressions of "sensual enchantment" (49). At the same time, there is a notably provisional character to the magistrate's utterance—only *sometimes* does his penis take him for a walk, and it is not, properly speaking, animal, although it *seems to be*. This provisional mobilization of animal sex proves to be a central tactic of David's conception of his sexuality, and sexual acts, in *Disgrace*.

David's understanding of his sexuality can be described, in Randy Malamud's terms, as a form of crossing the "borderline between 'culture' and 'nature' in order to broach animals," while simultaneously relying on that species distinction to reanimate the human/nonhuman animal species distinction (5). The particular animals that David employs to frame his sexual acts have overt phallic and predatory symbolism (Herron, 476), naturalizing his exploitative and heterosexual sex acts while coding them as natural expressions of masculine desire. David imagines that the purchased sex that he has weekly with a sex-trade worker named Soraya "must be ... rather like the copulation of snakes" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 2-3). Similarly, David's sexual assault of his student, Melanie, is conceived of in related, although more predatory, terms: "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die

within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck” (25). However, while David appropriates the discourse of animality (and, subsequently non-culpability) to frame his sexual acts, he nonetheless tends to do so in provisional terms. The use of similes in both homologies marshals ‘the animal’ as a linguistic signifier of humans’ (bestial) sexuality in a double articulation that simultaneously assumes the unreality of this analogy. It is largely only while imagining the thoughts of others, such as the Isaacses (Melanie’s parents) who must, he contends, view him as a “viper” (38), and the committee member Farodia Rasool, who, David imagines, must see him a “shark among the helpless little fishies” (53) that the distinction, or simile, collapses into metaphor. In other words, David’s association of his own sexuality with animality is a discursive gesture that merely *appears* to collapse the human-animal divide, while fundamentally not only relying upon it, but reifying it. This provisional rhetoric is notably absent from his descriptions of the youngest of the three black intruders, Pollux, whom he names directly as animal (131, 160, 202, 206, 208, 217)—a subject which I will turn to later in this chapter.

Despite David’s efforts, however, the discourses of biological determinism and racialized animality threaten to contaminate each other, showcasing the parallels between David’s rape of Melanie and the rape of his daughter, Lucy, that the novel explores effectively. David marshals the language of biological determinism (and, subsequently, male virility) through nonhuman animal essence, while at the same time engaging in an interpretative act that gives that desire—when and because it is his—cultural transcendence. This suggests that David has, as he announces in the first sentence of the novel, “to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (1).

David ultimately codes both his desire and his sexual acts on a continuum of white male cultural expression by framing the imperatives of his desire in the field of European literary, mythological, and musical discourse on amatory passion.⁹ Through locating, reading, and interpreting his sexual impulses, David positions himself as an ostensibly neutral observer and interpreter—indeed, a Cartesian one—of his objectified (and projected) sexual passions.¹⁰ David’s sexual appetite, to employ Huggan and Tiffin’s terms from *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, is “filtered through the various, but invariably European, literary/artistic fantasies by which his overheated urban imagination is fed” (108). After intercourse with the sex-trade worker Soraya, for example, he thinks of Emma Bovary marveling, after an adulterous encounter, at having tasted “*the bliss the poets speak of*” (6), suggesting that, in David’s fantasy, Soraya might also be reveling in David’s ‘poetic’ sex. When David sees Soroya with her two sons at Captain Dorego’s Fish Inn shortly thereafter, David stalks the restaurant window, imagining himself as the Greek god of love in the timeless urban metropolis: “He has always been a man of the city, at home amid a flux of bodies where eros stalks and glances flash like arrows” (6). Of course, as the novel makes abundantly clear, David is past his sexual prime, and “glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him” (7). In the face of his declining “magnetism” (7), David works assiduously to ennoble his sexual desire as “immortal longing” (209), as a result of its articulation through a long history of European amatory poetry, opera, art, and classical mythology—a tradition whose invocation ultimately functions to give transcendental value to David’s desire (and sexual acts) by situating them in the ‘cultured’ “field of love” (65).

However, David's attempt to 'court' his young student with citations of Shakespeare and the sounds of Mozart is pointedly outmoded and out of place, as are the various allusions and direct citations of Byron, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Flaubert, Villon, Verdi, Hardy, Goethe, Virgil, and Dante (often in Latin or French) that permeate the novel.¹¹ Attempting to coerce Melanie into having sex with him by contending that her beauty obliges her to be dispossessed of her will, David cites Shakespeare's sonnet—"From fairest creatures we desire increase" (16)—but recognizes that he has merely estranged the young student by doing so. Melanie is far more interested in contemporary literature by Adrienne Rich, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker (13) than Shakespeare's amatory sonnet, that would render David the cultured courtier and Melanie "the world's fresh ornament" ("From fairest creatures" line 9)—in Jolly's terms, property "to be interrogated, owned, exploited" ("Going to the Dogs" 160). Melanie's classmates respond with as little interest to David's lecture on Lord Byron's poem "Lara" and its meditations on Lucifer's "strange perversity of thought" ("Lara" Canto XVIII line 28) and "fiery passions that had pour'd their wrath" (Canto XVIII 15).

David seeks to legitimize his sexual urges by reading them in, and into, the realms of European culture and, at times, theological destiny, while nonetheless articulating their inevitability. "My case rests on the rights of desire," David tells his daughter Lucy—"On the god who makes even the small birds quiver" (*Disgrace* 89). This self-mythologizing discourse works to make David the (ultimately inadequate) bearer and guardian of a European cultural tradition that David asserts himself into as the self-penned "guardian of the culture-hoard" (16). At the same time, as with David's recourse to animal *likeness*, the

ongoing invocations of cultured desire function to position David as a subject to, rather than agent in command of, his sexual desires.

David's invocation of rights discourse in his conversation with Lucy ("the rights of desire") works to supplant the domain of institutionally permissible actions within the university (and the law) with the (cultured) imperatives of desire, working to position (his) sexual impulses as the preeminent moral (if not judicial) authority. In other words, David's predatory acts are positioned, in his own musings, as the products of his natural (male) sexual entitlement, and are given both theological and natural authority over Melanie's desire (or lack of desire) and right not to be raped.¹² Situating the imperatives of desire within the authority of pagan deities is part of David's attempt to assert his right to enforce the authority of his sex, while nonetheless positioning himself as the object, rather than subject, of that authority. And yet, as David imagines uttering this self-exonerating discourse, the vision of his sexual intercourse with Melanie becomes more dubious still, as Melanie ceases to be a recognizable subject:

He sees himself in the girl's flat, in her bedroom, with the rain pouring down outside and the heater in the corner giving off a smell of paraffin, kneeling over her, peeling off her clothes, while her arms flop like the arms of a dead person. *I was a servant of Eros:* that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? *It was a god who acted through me.* What vanity! Yet not a lie, not entirely. (89)¹³

The vision that sustains David's discourse of non-culpability requires the near, if not full, obliteration of Melanie's subjectivity (and capacity for resistance).¹⁴ The fact that the sexual

intercourse that David frames through such self-exonerating discourses is either purchased from, or forced upon, his sexual partners, is instructive. David's sexual liaisons with Dawn and Bev, two married, consenting, and interested middle-aged women, are certainly not articulated as religious or cultural imperatives, but rather as acts of charity on David's part. The hesitation that marks David's assertion of being acted upon, rather than being a self-willing subject, in the citation above is also instructive. David claims to doubt the legitimacy of his own discourse of non-culpability, even as he strategically vocalizes it.

The fact that this discourse of non-culpability relies on the nearly-dead, and objectified, status of Melanie generates an uncomfortable echo with Lucy's conflation, elsewhere in the novel, of rape with murder: "When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood—doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?" (158). Lucy's statement, troubling though it might be, offers a much needed feminist perspective on David's point of view, foregrounding the kinds of power that David exercises over his student Melanie in his evocations of his powerlessness in the face of transhistorical erotic imperatives, and creating crucial links between David's and the three black intruders' actions.¹⁵ Lucy's response also exerts pressure on the place and function of women as love objects in the traditional genres of amatory love that David so often evokes—a topic to which I return in my analysis of David's opera later in this chapter.

David supplants this dubious rhetoric of theological and cultured justification with the so-called justice of nature by invoking a story of their neighbour's dog from Lucy's

childhood in Kenilworth (89). He deploys notions of animality to ground claims about the imperatives of trans-species male sexual desire, while nonetheless articulating his distance from the nonhuman realm. The memory, and basis of comparison, involves a male golden retriever dog who “would get excited and unmanageable” in the presence of a “bitch” (90), inciting his caretakers to abuse him. David asserts, “[n]o animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts” (90). Lucy is quick to situate David’s claim about the imperatives of animal desire in the gendered assumptions that are unspoken by David, asking, ““So males must be allowed to follow their instincts unchecked? Is that the moral?”” (90). David responds to Lucy’s interventionist interpretation with an inverted logic through the universalizing conflation of sexual impulse and nature: ““What was ignoble about the Kenilworth spectacle was that the poor dog had begun to hate its own nature”” (90). The invocation of dogs as universal symbols of the so-called ““rights of desire”” (89)—rights that are positioned before or beyond legal, social, or moral strictures—is part of David’s self-positioning, to borrow Cary Wolfe’s terms from another context, as the “bearer of cultural identity” (*Animal Rites* 138) whose “heteronormative sexuality” is nonetheless “grounded in the very order of nature” (146). The parable takes up essentialist tenets about nonhuman animal natures, while leaving the distinction between David and the nonhuman animal realm intact. The moral of the story is not, after all, about the challenges that male desire poses to the human and nonhuman animal species distinction (as Lucy’s statement about human and nonhuman males would suggest). What’s more, the dog is not, accordingly, a metaphor for David, but is made to stand in as an exemplar of the perils of controlling sexual impulses.

Nonetheless, the parable works to transfer the imperatives of nature *across* species lines through the transferability of animality itself.

Animality enables David to appropriate the discourse of natural (heterosexual, male) desire; and to call into question the forms of rehabilitation associated with human restraint. Speaking to his lawyer, who instructs David to make a bargain to resolve the university tribunal, David retorts, ““To fix me? To cure me? To cure me of inappropriate desires?”” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 43). The animalization of desire informs the conflation of restraint with neutering, echoing the projection of male desire onto the male sexual organs evinced in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. As a result of this projection, the human and nonhuman animal species boundary remains intact. In other words, what is being asserted, paradoxically, is David’s humanness, despite his putative mobilization of the biological sexual (and heterosexual) imperatives of animal nature.

The dual mobilization of cultured desire and animal sex works to furnish David’s affinities with his privileged man of culture, Lord Byron, whom David imagines was also a sometime rapist: “Among the legions of countesses and kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape” (160). David’s desire, in other words, is articulated through a register of white male cultural transcendence in which, as Pamela Cooper claims, “sensuality [is] configured beyond the body” (34) and the putatively embodied animal realm.¹⁶ In contrast, David tends to position the black attackers as being, in fact, animals. This is deeply troubling, not the least because these metaphors gird David’s fantasy about the brutality and inherent violence of black, male sexuality.

Jackal Boys and Bestial Sex: The Stereotype of Black Animality

David's anger over the attack on the smallholding leads him to conclude that the three black men "were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself," with seed that was "driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine" (199). Insofar as there is a notable overlap between David's representation of the biological imperative of desire in both his and the intruders' sexual assaults, that correlation is strategically undermined by David's ongoing positioning of the black men as agents of "their violent pleasures" (199).¹⁷ David positions his desire (and semen) as a natural and trans-historical mythologized 'force' to which he *is subject*, imagining his sexual acts as merely temporary forays, across species lines, into biological determinism: "What does [Ryan, Melanie's boyfriend] know of the force that drives the utmost strangers into each other's arms, making them kin, kind, beyond all prudence? *Omnis gens quaecumque se in se perficere vult*. The seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman's body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven" (194). The distinction that David sets up rests on affective motives (love versus hate); however, by foregrounding the differences between active and passive perfective grammatical tenses of "to drive," Coetzee highlights the distinction that David is mobilizing between agents and subjects of desire. Disassociating himself from the active will of "the seed of generation" (194) (and, by extension, the reproductive imperatives of the heteronormative body), which is communicated through the present participle (driving) and the more active, adjectival use of driven (motivated), David frames himself as subject to,

rather than a subject of, the biological imperatives of ‘nature,’ broadly conceptualized. In contrast, when David thinks of the three black men “driving away” with “their penises, their weapons, tucked warm and satisfied between their legs – *purring* is the word that comes to him” he imagines them as agents of an inherently violent and inhuman desire (159). In other words, David collapses the imperatives of sexual instincts (through the metonymic sexual organs) with the black men themselves, articulating a familiar and overdetermined paradigm of black Africans’ inherent “sensuous arbitrariness” (as Hegel asserted) (142). By employing a punitive discourse that asserts that the black intruders are agents of their ‘animal natures,’ David mobilizes notions of biological sexuality alongside active agency while subtly collapsing both with the black attackers themselves—a gesture not unlike his ongoing claims that they were, in fact, animals.

David’s recourse to animal metaphors to collapse the distinction between the black men and animals mounts an overdetermined stereotype that assimilates the speciesist abjection of nonhuman animals into processes of racialization. David himself implicitly acknowledges this stereotype: when Lucy claims that the three men “‘spur[red] each other on ... [l]ike dogs in a pack,’” David replies, “‘If they had been white you wouldn’t talk about them in this way’” (*Disgrace* 159). David’s statement tells us much about his own discursive violence. In Shukin’s terms, the conflation of nonhuman animal nature with the black intruders functions as the “racist prosthetics” of the “power to animalize ‘the other,’ a power that applies in the first instance to the animal itself” (*Animal Capital* 10). David’s mobilization of black animality works to inscribe both the particular animals that David references, and the attackers who are signified by those references, as markers of the

unmitigated sexual imperatives of animality. In this sense, as David Attwell reminds us, the novel “absorbs race into other, arguably more encompassing categories of historical and ethical meaning” (331). Through David Lurie’s focalization, race is absorbed into discourses that mobilize the malleability and “universal appeal” (Shukin, 6) of animal essences to generate the stereotype of (racialized) animality.

As Homi K. Bhabha incisively claims in “The Other Question ... The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” the stereotypes of colonial discourse depend upon “the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (18)—a fixity that is all too available in the notion of animality itself. Discourses of racialized animality rely, after all, on the presumed stasis of animal signification in order to ground the racial category of blackness. Bhabha notes black animality as a potent example of the stereotype: [T]he stereotype, which is a major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated ... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (18)

The condition of the iteration (and reiteration) of the stereotype, in the absence of evidence, produces “the force of ambivalence” (18) which gives the stereotype “probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed” (18). Recognizing this ambivalence is crucial to determining how ambivalence is productive, that is, how it produces the object of discourse (19). In the historical intersection of discourses of race and animality that have worked assiduously to mark people of African descent in particular as animals, this ambivalence has

been a key discursive tactic. This is precisely because the conflation of racialized subjects and animal objects has functioned as a discourse of power that has rarely sought earnestly to trouble the speciesist lineage of human and nonhuman animal difference. The conflation of human groups and generalized animals to violate the former depends, for its effect, on the assumption of the non-interrelation of both species (or of the European subject and the animal object) in the first place, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two. Racialized animality belies the assumption that the animal status of black cannot be, in Bhabha's words, either "empirically proven or logically construed" (18)—the repeated articulation of this racist rhetoric gives the lie to its putative (f)actuality.

In *Disgrace*, David most frequently animalizes the youngest of the three attackers, Pollux, who is described as having "piggish eyes" (92), as being "a jackal" (202, 208, 217), a "*filthy swine*" (206), and a "dog" (131, 160).¹⁸ This flippant, but nonetheless pervasive, recourse to animal metaphors may appear to demonstrate, as Richard Twine notes, that the "human/animal boundary is conveniently shifted within certain contexts to allow the considerable cultural symbolics that the West has constructed in relation to animality to be applied to animalized humans" (38). However, the stereotype of black animality exploits the putative mutability of this boundary in contexts in which, as Bhabha reminds us, the very relationality of human and nonhuman animals tends to be neither "empirically proven [n]or logically construed" ("The Other Question" 18). What is more, the availability of animality to articulate and manage cultural difference depends upon the homogenizing category of "the animal" to mobilize speciesist violence.

In Shukin's terms, the "abstract and universal appeal of *animal* ... fetishistically repel[s] recognition" of 'the animal' as a signifier with "historically contingent" "meanings and matter" (14). By situating animal signifiers in historically specific conflicts over nonhuman animals themselves, Coetzee critically destabilizes the fixity of 'the animal' as a means to ground what Bhabha terms "the ideological construction of otherness" ("The Other Question" 18) in discourses of race and species that normally do the cultural work of violence. This tactic, as I highlight throughout this thesis, is essential to Coetzee's interventionist approach in animalizing violence. In *Disgrace*, David's animalizing discourse is put in relief by the very meanings of the symbols that he employs—meanings that are indubitably informed by the status and role of dogs in the historical and political context of post-apartheid South Africa. The competing stakes and investments in what dogs mean in this context not only crucially inflect their meanings, but also trouble David's attempts to be the primary, if not sole, arbiter of their symbolic content. We can learn much if we turn our eyes to David's investments in nonhuman animals themselves.

Situating Dogs

By calling the black attackers dogs, David is clearly attempting to assert their inherent animality, which is framed as necessarily violent, predatory, and overtly sexualized. However, this broad symbolic rendering is situated, in *Disgrace*, by dogs' functional (and functionalized) role in post-apartheid South Africa—"a country," Coetzee writes, "where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man" (*Disgrace* 110). Lucy Graham asserts that "in South Africa, guard dogs have been synonymous with the protection of the

propertied classes, and thus dogs have generally acted in the interests of white power” (““Yes, I am giving him up”” 8; qtd. in Black 295). Not surprisingly, most of the dogs in *Disgrace*, like those in Lucy’s kennel, are watchdogs: “Dobermanns, German Shepherds, ridgebacks, bull terriers, Rottweilers” (61)—breeds selectively bred in southern Africa as violent extensions of, and defenders of, white property. As Marianne DeKoven points out, the very presence of these guard dogs at Lucy’s kennel speaks to historically shifting land entitlements in the wake of the racist policy of apartheid: “When dogs first appear, they are caged, temporarily out-of-service guard dogs: agents of the enforcement of apartheid whose services are now only sporadically required” (“Going to the Dogs” 850-51). It becomes clear, when Lucy tells David not to worry about her on her smallholding early in the novel because “[d]ogs still mean something” (“The more dogs, the more deterrence”) (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 60), that the stakes in what dogs ‘mean’ in this context are not only high, but historically and contextually entangled in contests and conflict over property entitlement. The metonymical relationship of dogs to property (“they are part of the furniture, part of the alarm system,” Lucy claims [78]) and their metaphorical conflation with guns (by Lucy) renders them (and Lucy) particularly vulnerable in conflicts over property rights in the newly post-apartheid context of South Africa.

When the three male attackers kill the kennel dogs, one of the implications traced throughout the novel, particularly by Lucy herself, is that they are attacking not only Lucy’s claim to her smallholding, but the violent apparati (here, dogs) that function to support neo-colonial claims to that property, destabilizing the future economic sustainability of Lucy’s land ownership. After all, the burgeoning economic viability of Lucy’s stay on the

smallholding (not to mention her landowning status) is reflected by the quantity of dogs and boarding kennels on the property. When Lucy shows David her boarding kennels, David notes, “On his last visit there had been only one pen. Now there are five, solidly built, with concrete bases, galvanized poles and struts, and heavy-gauge mesh” (61). Since, as Lucy asserts, “more dogs” means “more deterrence” (60), the implementation of resilient materials for the kennel works structurally to fix Lucy’s property entitlement, and the protection of that property, through the guard dogs themselves.

For this reason, David’s attempt to assert essentialist claims about black violence vis-à-vis the symbol of the dog is undermined by the fact that, in this context, what dogs mean is inflected by their role as prosthetics of post-colonists’ territorial claims—a knowledge that Lucy, David, and the attackers seem to share. This knowledge is precipitated by the central role that the dogs play in the violent incident on the small-holding. When the tallest of the three intruders murders the largest of the German shepherds first—a dog that was “slavering with rage” and snapped at the man (95)—the implication is clear: by killing the largest and most ferocious of the prosthetics of white neo-colonial property claims, the men are targeting the literal and symbolic currency of the dogs as legally viable weapons to mark, and maintain, white property entitlement in the newly post-apartheid Cape. The fact that the three intruders use Lucy’s rifle to do so (or so it is implied)—a rifle metaphorically conflated with the symbolic deterrence of the dogs themselves—suggests as much. David goes on to envision the rhetoric of their motives in animalizing terms: “While the men, for their part, drank up her fear, reveled in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror. *Call your dogs!* they said to her. *Go on, call your dogs! No dogs? Then let us show*

you dogs!” (160). David’s assumption, that the intruders frame their own violence through those troubling discourses of black animality, crucially misses the point that the novel makes all too clear by situating the signification of dogs in their functional role of property protection in post-apartheid South Africa.

The Dog-Man

This historically specific containment, functionalization, and relegation of dogs to the status of property destabilizes David’s recourse to the homogenizing and fixed category of ‘the animal’ to ground essentialist human traits along the lines of race and species. Place and time (namely, the functional role of guard dogs in post-apartheid South Africa) situate the dogs’ symbolic content, and intervene in David’s attempt to be the bearer of their meaning in order to articulate a stereotype of Black animality and affirm his humanness. *Disgrace* further troubles David’s interpretative authority, and focalizing perspective, by giving voice to Petrus’s valuable counter-discourses about his relationship to figurative and actual nonhuman animals.

Petrus, the co-proprietor of the smallholding and Lucy’s former assistant, shares with Lucy the responsibility of looking after the kennel dogs and managing the garden. When David and Petrus first meet, Petrus gives David “a broad smile” and states, “‘I am the gardener and the dog-man.’ He reflects for a moment. ‘The dog-man,’ he repeats, savouring the phrase” (64). The ambivalence expressed by Petrus, as well as the implicit pleasure he experiences in articulating it, opens up a range of possible interpretations. The joke, which appears to be lost on David, invokes literal and metaphorical currencies of (dog) sense while

relying, for its effect, on their very incompatibility. Petrus is the so-called ‘dog-man’ because he is the man who helps to take care of the dogs. His duties assisting in the care and management of the dogs stem from his previous role as Lucy’s assistant, suggesting that this role contains and communicates a relation of power that is, nonetheless, shifting. When David asks how he might help on the property, Lucy encourages him to “help with the dogs” because “Petrus is busy establishing his own lands” (76). Therefore, the basis of the joke appears to rest on the all-too-obvious distinction between the literal currency of Petrus’s role as a dog caretaker and the historical conflation of blacks with animals through discourses of animality.

DeKoven likewise contends that the logic of the joke depends on Petrus’s play with simultaneous definitions of what dogs mean. However, for DeKoven, the irony of Petrus’s pleasure rests on recognition of the limitations of David’s understanding of Petrus’s flourishing self-determination, where dogs stand in for that power. For DeKoven, Petrus “both assumes the coopted power of the guard dogs and at the same time identifies himself with dogs as agents of change in Coetzee’s complex, thwarted, devastated, overwhelmingly violent but not utterly hopeless ethical universe” (“Going to the Dogs” 852). While I agree that dogs are significantly entangled, in *Disgrace*, with historical change, I am wary of attributing to the dogs on the eastern Cape property a power that is not theirs and agency in the very contests over property that render them not only vulnerable, but disposable. Petrus’s joke, in my view, mobilizes the stereotype of black animality while rendering it laughable.

Petrus's ambivalent pleasure in the overdetermined phrase, 'dog-man,' recalls Bhabha's assertion that the ambiguity of the stereotype stems from its implausibility and excess. Petrus disturbs the authority of this representational trope by mimicking it, troubling the fixity of racialized animality with an abiding uncertainty. If, as I have argued, the place and function of dogs in the novel crucially situates their metaphorical currency, then so too do the historical contingencies of Petrus's relationship to Lucy's dogs ground the valences of status as the so-called 'dog-man,.' Petrus knows what David appears to miss: the ready conflation of African subjects with de-historicized animality is not only overdetermined—it is simply passé. By mimicking this discourse, Petrus's statement recalls Bhabha's widely influential concept of colonial mimicry, in which both the ideologies of the colonizer's superiority and the rhetoric of the reforming colonial missions are "threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (*The Location of Culture*, 123). In this instance, however, it is Petrus's dual invocation of black animality and the "excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence*" of the stereotype that ruptures, and transforms, the discourse (123).

As with Petrus's articulation and implicit critique of the racist epithet "boy," Petrus's ironic deployment of "dog-man" is the basis of his displacing rhetoric. Petrus claims that he will not need to hire a skilled labourer to dig trenches: "That I can do by myself. That is not such a skill job, that is just a job for a boy. For digging you just have to be a boy.' Petrus speaks the word with real amusement. Once he was a boy, now he is no longer. Now he can play at being one" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 152). As with Petrus's invocation of "dog-man," the verbal irony both relies upon, and affirms, the distinction that it mounts (once a boy, but not

a boy now). Later in the novel, when Lucy gives Petrus's young wife a bedspread to celebrate Petrus's land acquisition, Petrus claims that Lucy is their "benefactor" (129), evincing a similar, but more nuanced, use of verbal irony in which the conflicting meanings are subtly, rather than overtly, qualified: the surface statement affirms that Lucy has endowed Petrus with a gift, but the ironic counter-meaning evokes the shifting status of the propertied white minority in post-apartheid South Africa. Petrus and his wife's future tenure on the farm will have little to do, Petrus implies, with Lucy's patronage and beneficence. David recognizes that Petrus's ironic statement is "double-edged," attributing Petrus's implicit critique to the shortcomings of English as a medium of communication in Africa (129): "Yet can Petrus be blamed? The language he draws on with such aplomb is, if he only knew it, tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites" (129). David's reproof is part of the structural irony exhibited across *Disgrace*, which calls upon the reader to recognize David's distorted perspective and lack of insight about his stereotypical animalizing discourses, which are determinately "tired" (129), mired in David's self interest, and implicitly negated throughout the novel.

Petrus's recourse to verbal irony in his description of his roles (dog-man, boy) and Lucy's (benefactor) in relation to the smallholding, on the other hand, calls for a re-evaluation of both the apartheid logic that these titles qualify and the white South African entitlements that they metonymically affirm. David may not recognize that Petrus's recourse to irony knowingly "eat[s] away at" the vestiges of apartheid-era oppression communicated by these fraught titles (each of which refers, directly or obliquely, to aspects of Petrus and Lucy's power dynamic that result from their legal rights to property). The reader, however,

is called upon to be credulous of David's distorted perspective, which Petrus ironically mimics.

New dispensations of property have a crucial impact on what Petrus is (and is not), and they similarly influence the politics of representation—it is Petrus who asserts, and redefines, the duties and identity categories that stem from his care for the dogs on the property. After the attack on the small-holding, David must come to terms with his inability to accuse and dismiss Petrus on unfounded assumptions about his culpability in, or knowledge of, the attack:

In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one's temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place. But though Petrus is paid a wage, Petrus is no longer, strictly speaking, hired help. It is hard to say what Petrus is, strictly speaking. The word that seems to serve best, however, is *neighbour*. Petrus is a neighbour who at present happens to sell his labour, because that is what suits him. He sells his labour under contract, unwritten contract, and that contract makes no provision for dismissal on grounds of suspicion. It is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it. (116-17)

Petrus's acquisition of one and a half hectares of the land not only troubles David's colonialist power fantasy; it also crucially troubles David's representational power as the one who names, and so delimits, Petrus's role on, and relationship to, that property. In the novel, this is linked to Petrus's capacity to define his duties with respect to Lucy's dogs. Petrus's

autonomy is tied to the capacity to speak (and to speak back to) his ostensible proximity with nonhuman animal essence. These are the very conditions under which Petrus, rather than David, comes to assert, “‘No more dogs. I am not any more the dog-man,’ which Lucy chooses to accept as a joke; so all, it appears, is well” (129).

Petrus’s assertion that he is no longer “‘the dog-man’” (129) manifests what Tiffin and Huggan frame as David and Lucy’s “self-educative process [that] requires the acceptance of a radical shift in power” as a result of “some of the old colonial myths of patriarchal authority and territorial entitlement now having been usurped by a new, post-apartheid generation of semi-independent black farmers keen to establish a managerial role of shared property, and keener still to acquire, control and distribute property of their own” (108). Petrus, who was once also (in David’s words) the “dig-man, the carry-man, the water-man” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 151), can define the conditions of the sale of his labour, and can refuse to tend to the dogs that are bred and borrowed as metonyms of white territorial entitlement. This necessary territorial redistribution impedes David’s attempt to be the arbiter of the dogs’ symbolic content; ultimately, the absorption of real dogs into conflicts about property shifts the viability and stakes of David’s mobilization of transhistorical animal essence. Just as *Disgrace* “contains and sublimates race, by drawing it into larger patterns of historical and ethical interpretation,” as Attwell argues (“Race in *Disgrace*” 340), so too does it draw animality into the historical and ethical contexts of nonhuman animals themselves. As *Disgrace* situates discourses of animality in the stakes and politics of nonhuman animal capital, the power to animalize humans becomes entrenched in the capacity to determine the fate of actual nonhuman animals. Turning to the stakes in property

that are at play in the management and ownership of nonhuman animal capital is essential to situating David's growing affinities with nonhuman animals. To trace this turn, I begin by establishing the speciesist logic with which he begins.

'A Different Order of Creation'

David's proclamations about nonhuman animals early in the novel echo by now familiar speciesist claims about the inferiority of animal difference. His statements comprise what might be described as what Randy Malamud terms "an ecologically perverse hubris" (for which Genesis 1:26-28 is the foundational text) that positions nonhuman animals as consumable entities created for the sole benefit of humans and their appetites (3). When Bev Shaw, a friend of Lucy's and the primary volunteer caregiver in a local animal clinic, asks David if he likes nonhuman animals, he responds with the dictum, "I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 81). David ironically conflates consuming and caring for nonhuman animals through the register of individual taste—a standpoint that conceives of living and dead animals alike as conglomerates of readily edible parts. This viewpoint rehashes an approach to nonhuman animals that John Berger attributes to post-industrial societies, where "they are treated as raw material" and "processed like manufactured commodities" (11). When Lucy tells David that animals' needs are simply not on the list of South Africa's priorities, David responds that he finds it "hard to whip up an interest in the subject" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 73). How ironic for a man who repeatedly uses nonhuman animal figures to articulate and naturalize the supposedly immortal longings that young, 'exotic,' female bodies have whipped up in him. In the presence of animal-welfare

activists, David states, he itches “to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat” (73). Melanie, it seems, elicited similar longings.

When Lucy squarely affiliates herself with Bev and her volunteer animal advocacy, she does so with recognition of the conditions of violence into which nonhuman animals are born. “I don’t want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us,” she tells David (74). This is the most explicit criticism of nonhuman animal subjugation voiced so far in the novel—a perspective that both recognizes and calls into question the historically specific conditions (“under us”) of nonhuman animal subjection (74). For David, Lucy’s perspective is patently misguided: “As for animals, by all means let us be kind to them. But let us not lose perspective. We are of a different order of creation from the animals. Not higher, necessarily, just different. So if we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we feel guilty or fear retribution” (74).¹⁹

The speciesism of David’s instrumentalizing perspective is abundantly clear. What leads to David’s change in perspective, on the other hand, is undoubtedly more complicated. In what follows, I do not seek to functionalize trans-species contact as sources of David’s conceptual turn to a less exploitative standpoint in relation to nonhuman animals. As I will contend in Chapter Six, *The Master of Petersburg* demonstrates that human and nonhuman animal contact can have little bearing upon speciesist thought. In what follows, I approach a particularly fraught example of trans-species encounter in *Disgrace* in a way that departs from critics such as Elizabeth Anker, Kari Weil, Josephine Donovan, and Marianne Dekoven, who frame David’s responses to two sheep that Petrus brings home to slaughter as part of a continuum of David’s overarching, and ethical, turn to nonhuman animals. Anker,

for example, argues that David's approach to Petrus's livestock evinces his overarching affinities with, accountability before, and ethical obligations towards, nonhuman animals (253-54). Whereas Anker conflates David's "attachment to the sheep and the dead dogs" (254), I see them as vastly different. To understand the distinction, I will demonstrate, necessitates recognizing the struggles for power that occur on and about animal bodies in the novel—struggles that both inform and shape David's care for nonhuman animals.

'Sheep Do Not Own Themselves, Do Not Own Their Lives'

After securing his one and a half acres thanks to a Land Affairs grant, Petrus acquires building materials that will be used to furnish his share of the property and build a home. He also brings home two young sheep: "From the back of the lorry the two men unload cartons, creosoted poles, sheets of galvanized iron, a roll of plastic piping, and finally, with much noise and commotion, two half grown sheep, which Petrus tethers to a fence-post" (113). Just as the linguistic currency and actual fate of Lucy's dogs is situated in tensions over property—tensions exacerbated by their contextual conflation (and functionalization) of dogs as metonyms for a declining culture of apartheid property security—so too are Petrus's sheep conflated with Petrus's property. As property, they become contested objects of particularly fraught transitions in land entitlement, suggesting that David's attention to the two beings bound for slaughter has little to do with a blossoming sympathetic identification with the sheep themselves.²⁰ By attending to the investments in property that frame David's turn to the nonhuman realm, and the sheep's metonymic role as disputed objects of property

rights, we can begin to situate the politics of, and stakes in, David's attention to the conditions of violence to which the sheep are subject.

It bears emphasizing that David articulates respect for Petrus's knowledge of the farm, the marks of his experience and success as a "peasant, a *paysan*, a man of the country" (117), and his capacities and aims as a farmer. David also recognizes Petrus's desire to acquire enough property to domesticate farm animals ("or enough of it to run a herd on" [117]). Nonetheless, David's discomfort over Petrus's familial (or community) responsibilities to Pollux, as well as his much broader reckoning with post-apartheid property redistribution, make David's attitudes towards Petrus's property acquisition, and the party to celebrate that acquisition, notably ambivalent. Petrus's two sheep, purchased as meat for the party, become particularly fraught symbols of Petrus's success.

David first approaches Petrus about the sheep because their "bleating, steady and monotonous, has begun to annoy him" (123). His request to Petrus to move the sheep to a patch of grass that they can graze (so that he might hear them less, it seems) is met with Petrus's refusal: "'They are for the party,' says Petrus. 'On Saturday I will slaughter them for the party. You and Lucy must come'" (123). Petrus asserts his ability to define the function of the two animals (as consumable objects) and the conditions (or location) of their last days on the smallholding—an authority that David promptly rejects an hour later, when Petrus is absent, moving the sheep to the dam-side (123). If the bleating of the sheep reminds David of their vulnerability and hunger, and occasions sympathy or empathy for them, this is curiously absent in Coetzee's rendering. Echoing the quotidian proclamations on the natural fate of nonhuman animals to be reproduced as objects for human consumption

and sacrifice that he utters throughout the novel, David evinces no discomfort with their status as living meat: “Twins, in all likelihood, destined since birth for the butcher’s knife. Well, nothing remarkable in that. When did a sheep last die of old age? Sheep do not own themselves, do not own their lives. They exist to be used, every last ounce of them, their flesh to be eaten, their bones to be crushed and fed to poultry” (123). Whether this statement represents David’s perspective or his indirect reportage of Petrus’s presumed stance remains ambiguous. Either way, David does not give voice to an affective resistance to the fragmentation and functionalization of the twin sheep as raw matter. Their status as human property is naturalized, and so too is their utter homogeneity as pre-ordained consumable species. Nothing distinguishes the two domesticated sheep: “They are black-faced Persian, alike in size, in markings, even in their movements” (123). David’s discomfort, then, has little to do with what happens to the sheep and has much to do with the “way [Petrus] does things” (124)—“[c]ountry ways” (125).

David tells Lucy, “I’m not sure I like the way he does things – bringing the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with people who are going to eat them” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 124). While Lucy situates Petrus’s practice in both the rural setting of the smallholding and in Africa itself, David asserts that “[he] has other words: indifference, hardheartedness. If the country can pass judgment on the city, then the city can pass judgment on the country too” (125). David’s condemnation of Petrus’s actions (and, implicitly, his capacity to determine the fate of his nonhuman animal property) is articulated through politically charged polemical terminology (including “slavery” [126]), and yet is grounded in the unspoken deployments of urban modernity as the locale of particularly

modern and sound approaches to consumable animal bodies.²¹ And yet it is clear that David's self-appointed status as the bearer of urban modernity, capable of sanctioning forms of domesticated animal ownership, has no practical basis for action. David admits that he has no idea what he himself would do with the sheep "once he has bought them out of slavery" (126).

In a characteristically Coetzeean turn, the narrative draws our attention to the limits of David's self-knowledge about his motives and investments in Petrus's nonhuman animal capital in David's articulations of care. *Disgrace* pushes readers to probe beyond David's perspective and attend to the gaps in his language and self-knowledge: "A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him" (126). He is "disturbed" but "can't say why" (127)—an ambivalence that by no means shifts his attitudes about the homogeneity and non-criminal slaughter and consumption of nonhuman animals themselves, but may come to bear upon the reader's. After all, the investments in, and tensions over, power that the sheep animate revolve around objectified nonhuman animal capital—objects which might as well be dead as alive. As David asserts, "Which among them get to live, which get to die, is not, as far as I am concerned, worth agonizing over" (127). While the death of the sheep leads him to question if mourning is an appropriate affective response to their unnecessary deaths, the inquiry only leads him to conclude, with certainty, that they live "too close to Petrus" (127).

David's hesitations about eating the slaughtered sheep at the party to celebrate Petrus's land acquisition appear to stem from David's resistance to acceding to Petrus's capacity to determine the conditions of the management and production of nonhuman animal capital. If David's investments in the fate of these sheep are framed by his investments in property entitlements (rather than the entitlement of the two sheep to life), what might his incentives be for seeing to the honourable disposal of deceased dogs in the novel? What makes the bodies of nonhuman animals matter? The answers are locatable, in part, in the events that draw David to witness the conditions of vulnerability and slaughter wrought by the historical and material realities of animal fecundity. The perils, rather than rights, of animal desire start to be evident to David.

Bodies that Matter

After the Animal Welfare League shuts down due to a lack of funding, Lucy's friend Bev Shaw manages an animal welfare clinic on the old premises of the League. The lack of funding stems, according to Lucy, from "the list of the nation's priorities" in which "animals come nowhere" (73). As a result, the clinic's primary function is euthanasia for the plethora of suffering and injured, aged, and functionally valueless domesticated animals (namely cats and dogs), many of whom arrive at the clinic because of "their own fertility. There are simply too many of them" (142). On Sunday afternoons, Bev closes the clinic door and they euthanize the so-called "superfluous canines" (142)—a superfluity that stems not only from their sheer number, but from their inability to be functionalized as property. As David notes, the host of impoverished people who come to the dump to find marketable objects find no

use-value (or means of sustainability) in the dead dogs disposed of there “because the parts of a dead dog can neither be sold nor be eaten” (145). While the status of the dogs as objects without value as saleable capital renders them superfluous and disposable, it also conditions David’s investment in their honourable disposal. Conferring ethical value on nonhuman animal matter that is outside the realm of human economic incentives propels those subtle shifts in David’s perspectives on the kinds of value accorded to nonhuman animal lives.²²

Perhaps as a result of witnessing Bev’s unconditional care for the experience and needs of individual nonhuman animals at the moment of death, David seeks to mitigate the degree of dishonour conferred upon the nonhuman animal remains. At first this involves not disposing of the dogs’ dead bodies at the dump on the weekend, where they will become one of a host of refuse objects and waste. However, after discovering that the incinerator staff “beat the bags with the back of their shovels before loading them, to break the rigid limbs,” David takes on the burden himself, placing each nonhuman animal individually on the feeder trolley and cranking the mechanism until the animal remains have burned (144-45). And yet David is struck by his inability to situate, or articulate, his motives, postulating, finally, a rather narcissistic investment: “Why has he taken on this job? ... For himself For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing” (146).

David and critics alike question the functional value of his care for nonhuman animal remains, since, as David muses, “There must be other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world, or to an idea of the world” (146).²³ Might the discourse of utility be intertwined, in some sense at least, with the putative value of capital? In other words, is this

practice generative and if so, of what? To answer this question, we ought first to unpack what generates this care for nonhuman animal corpses and how, to return to a previous concern of this chapter, it is inflected by the discursive intersection of sex and animality.

The nonhuman animals abandoned or woefully given away to the animal welfare clinic are discarded primarily, as I have established above, because of “their own fertility” (142), generating a wealth of nonhuman animal lives in conditions which (ostensibly, at least) cannot sustain them. Their suffering bodies, which Coetzee catalogues with some care, become the historically and contextually embedded remains of that very animal fecundity that David associates, throughout the novel, with essentialist animality. The malleable trope of animal desire so crucial to David’s self-exonerating discourses is situated in the very real conditions of overabundance and death that David encounters in the clinic. As Attwell asserts, “[t]he euthanasia given to the dogs, followed by the incineration of their corpses, is a fulfillment of the metonymic chain of immolations mentioned earlier, linking desire to destruction” (“Race in *Disgrace*” 339). David’s attention to the so-called rights of (animalized) desire (a right to discard any ethical attention to the forms of destruction it produces) is subsumed, to a certain extent at least, in a recognition of biopolitical imperatives governing *nonhuman animal lives* in that context. In other words, the multiplying remains of discarded nonhuman animal lives are a visible measure of what stems from the imperatives of biological reproduction that are conflated with nonhuman animal essence. Conferring value on the remains of these nonhuman animal lives troubles his thoroughgoing indifference to nonhuman animals, as well as their ready mobilization for discourses of human animality.

David's description of the deceased nonhuman animals as corpses instantiates their value as bodies that matter—a term distinct from the categorization of nonhuman animal remains as carcasses. This value intersects with the capacity of these bodies to be dishonoured. David uses the language of burial rites—a vocabulary preserved primarily for humans (and, at times, pets)—and recognizes both the integrity and violability of animal bodies. This underscores subtle changes in David's perspective about nonhuman animal death. Once invoking a rhetoric of fatalism (and nonhuman animals' supposed affirmation of their pre-ordained status as beings bound for death and human consumption or use), David recognizes the capacity for nonhuman animal disgrace in the conditions of dying: "They flatten their ears, they droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying; locking their legs, they have to be pulled or pushed or carried over the threshold. ... [N]one will look straight at the needle in Bev's hand, which they somehow know is going to harm them terribly" (*Disgrace* 143). In other words, David sees death from the vantage of the nonhuman animal and confers upon the animal the capacity to recognize, know, and resist both death and the instrument (or needle) that delivers it.²⁴ This works against a humanist tradition in Western philosophy that has readily and repeatedly denied knowledge of mortality to nonhuman animals. The Genevan philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's speciesist assertion that "an animal will never know what it is to die" since only humans can attain "knowledge of death and its terrors," is representative (qtd. in Weil, *Thinking Animals* 101-02); so too is Martin Heidegger's claim that humans can experience "death as death" while "[a]nimals cannot," and simply "perish" (qtd. in Weil, "Killing them Softly" 89-90).²⁵ David's capacity to recognize the dogs' anticipation of and resistance to death, outside of the

functionalization of that death for human investments, occasions not only a recognition of the dishonour of that death (a recognition that is crucial, after all, to David's mobilization of the distinction between carcasses and corpses)—it also leads to his willingness to be the recipient of the dogs' kisses (despite his distaste for being licked), since the animals' subjection to euthanasia gives their wishes priority, in David's view. This is the very view that makes their bodies matter—one that is, nonetheless, articulated through an unsettling discourse of racialization.

Troubling Abjection

Petrus's assertion, that he is “not any more the dog-man,” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 129) is part of his self-distancing move from dual economies of sense—Petrus's literal duty to care for Lucy's kennel dogs, and Petrus's putative proximity to the nonhuman realm through discourses of racialized animality. David re-mobilizes this fraught title after tending to the nonhuman animal remains to inscribe himself: “Well, now he has become a dog-man: a dog undertaker; a dog psychopomp; a *harijan*” (146). David's self-appointment as a “psychopomp,” the “mythical conductor or guide of souls to the place of the dead” (“Psychopomp”), reanimates David's self-mythologizing discourse while adding a crucial corrective: mythology here does not prop up the rhetoric of cultured desire through notions of animality; rather, here it functions to confer souls on animals. Thus David implicitly challenges the Cartesian claim that he parroted earlier in the novel when he told Lucy that “The Church Fathers had a long debate about them, and decided they don't have proper souls Their souls are tied to their bodies and die with them” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 78).

However, David's claim that he is a harijan, or Indian Untouchable, relies on the implicit conflation of these animal bodies with human waste in order to position himself as an abject, and putatively racialized, subject. After all, untouchables (or Dalits) are a mixed population of south Asians who were (and are) discriminated against as a result of their positioning at the bottom of the caste system (one that was legally abolished with the Indian constitution). Born into a condition of untouchability, this group was forcibly assigned occupations that involved attending to the waste (bodily and other) of members of the higher castes. Consequently, they were (and continue to be) perceived as polluted and polluting bodies—as untouchable.

David construes himself as the bearer of racialized abjection through his willed role as the caretaker of deceased nonhuman animal bodies—a gesture that reanimates the racialization of animality and appropriates Petrus's ironic articulation and implicit critique of that title without recognizing the stereotype that Petrus's articulation crucially challenged. David's appropriation of the epithet problematically assumes the convergence of, or alliance between, both deployments and the struggles they gesture towards—struggles that Coetzee situates not only in historical intersections of racism and discourses of animal essence, but in responsibilities and relationships to nonhuman animal bodies as well.²⁶

My aim is in part to question the framework that assumes that David must experience the conditions of abjection and vulnerability to which nonhuman animals in the novel are subject in order to generate affinities with, and ethical behaviour towards, nonhuman animals themselves, by drawing attention to the ongoing confluence in *Disgrace* of race and abjection at material and figurative sites of trans-species contact.²⁷ What's more, I am eager

to recognize the serious challenges that the novel poses to mutual deployment of discourses of race and animality in the articulation of the opposition between human culture (and culturally transcendent desire) and brute animal instincts. Finally, my analysis resists privileging David's subjection to violence as the basis for his recognition of, and care for, embodied nonhuman animals. My concern with an ethical standpoint towards nonhuman animals that depends upon the subjection of humans to the conditions of violence and/or abjection in which nonhuman animals are harmed or slaughtered, is precisely that such a becoming-ethical might depend on the very institutions of violence that such a standpoint purports to challenge.

David's affective turn to, and burgeoning care for, nonhuman animals is not, as David hints, an implicitly racialized form of becoming, nor does it rely upon, or generate, David's loss of power. Rather, the novel impugns the institutions and rhetoric of speciesism which violate marginalized human and nonhuman groups, in part by challenging those foundational distinctions between cultured subjects and represented objects at the intersections of human and nonhuman animal species. David's revised opera, and the incorporation of one discarded animal's voice into the operatic refrains, poses serious challenges to the occlusion of animals from the domain of culture in the pervasive nature/culture divide, and the availability of animal essences to furnish that speciesist history. Through David's opera, Coetzee challenges the appropriation of cultural transcendence by humans that the nature/culture binary has long fortified, subjecting the use of animality to articulate and manage distinctions between cultured and base desire to scrutiny and proffering less exclusionary forms of figurative animal language.

To 'Bring a Dog Into the Piece'

Originally conceived, David's opera was to centre on Byron and his young and conventionally desirable mistress Teresa Guiccioli. With its operatic attention to the passions, and Lurie's intention to borrow "melodies" and, perhaps "ideas too" from "the masters" (183), Lurie's conventional opera would have, in David's view, secured his immortality as both the bearer and producer of a male cultural transcendence since, as he tells Lucy, "One wants to leave something behind. Or at least a man wants to leave something behind" (63). This patriarchal (not to mention speciesist) assumption of an implicitly gendered imperative for cultural immortality is familiar by now. The opera promises to putatively immortalize David's status as a cultural producer and as a cultured subject. What's more, by giving cultural permanence to Byron's (albeit diminishing) sexual desire and extramarital affair through its dramatization in the opera, David works to co-opt Byron's emblematic status as one of the greats of European literature writ large while ennobling Byron's extramarital affair and, it follows, David's own sexual liaisons. When David returns to the opera on the smallholding, "[s]natches are already imprinted on his mind of the lovers in duet, the vocal lines, soprano and tenor, coiling wordlessly around and past each other like serpents" (121). Of course, David has not only troped his desire as serpentine throughout *Disgrace*—he has also used metaphorical snakes to describe his weekly intercourse with the sex-trade worker Soraya (3). In the wordless interplay of vocal melodies of David's opera as it was originally conceived, David would reproduce, and substantiate the cultural value of, the wordless interplay of Byron's "balked passion" (180) and, implicitly, his own. This "chamber-play about love and death" was all too ready to

functionalize both nonhuman animals and Byron's young lover, Teresa ("Byron's bitch-mate") to this end (142).

However, David's extended stay on the smallholding and his work at the animal shelter, in which his "whole being is gripped" (143), lead him to re-conceptualize his artwork: he will 'give voice' to Teresa rather than Byron, Teresa will be a middle-aged woman rather than a young emblem of male desire, and the score will be composed on the "odd little seven-stringed banjo" that Lurie purchased in KwaMashu (184). What's more, it will be Teresa—who guards her "sole remaining claim to immortality" (181)—rather than Byron, who will be the central character. Finding it "in his heart to love this plain, ordinary woman" (182), David gives voice to Teresa, who gives voice to Byron—" [t]he halt helping the lame" (183). Turning to the woman (a woman) who seeks cultural transcendence through her experience of sexual passion and yet is denied that version of immortality by virtue of her gender and positioning as (one of many of) the women of *Byron's* cultured desire has, in my view, implications which come to bear not only on the opera, and on the value of Byron's amatory pleasures, but on the relationship of both to David's conceptualization of his own, ostensibly mythological and cultured, sexual longings—longings which, as a result of the process of composition, become humbly situated, demythologized, and even ridiculous.

Once David recognizes that the ostensibly elevated musical score, borrowed from the canon of European classical melodies, is unsuited to the tone and subject-matter of his opera, he abandons the rich tonality of the piano and takes up the toy banjo purchased for Lucy in KwaMashu. Before long, the "silly plink-plonk of the toy banjo" (184) becomes a musical

expression of Teresa's voice: "The lush arias he had dreamed of giving her he quietly abandons; from there it is but a short step to putting the instrument into her hands"—she uses it to "accompan[y] herself in her lyric flights" (184). Teresa's longings for recognition and transcendence, and embodied love, rather than trans-historical erotic desire as such, become synonymous with the banjo itself—an instrument that originated in Africa and tends to be associated with country and folk music traditions and not, of course, the Western classical music tradition. By associating himself with neither Teresa nor Byron, but the music itself, David situates himself and his erotic desires not as transcendent, but as that which longs for, and yet cannot obtain, transcendence:

It is not the erotic that is calling to him after all, nor the elegiac, but the comic. He is in the opera neither as Teresa nor as Byron nor even as some blending of the two: he is held in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reined back, like a fish on a line. (185)

In David's revised operatic vision, the self-aggrandizing discourse that he assumed to code his desire and sexual acts as continuations of a white, male, European literary, mythological, and musical discourse is supplanted by a more inclusive, and humble, vision. Even Byron himself is forced to acknowledge, in David's operatic revision, the shortcomings of this self-ennobling and learned articulation: "*Out of the poets I learned to love*, chants Byron in his cracked monotone, nine syllables on C natural; *but life, I found* (descending chromatically to F), *is another story*. *Plink-plunk-plonk* go the strings of the Banjo" (185). Not surprisingly, humbling the cultured field of male, amatory love (and entitlement) through which David's

desires were filtered—a tradition, as I demonstrated, whose invocation worked to give trans-historical value to David’s erotic wants—inflects what animals are made to mean.

The mobilization of fish as a simile for both a straining after transcendence and a resilient immanence (“the voice that strains to soar ... like a fish on a line” [185]) destabilizes the functionalization of animals in the nature/culture divide as containers of trans-species biological imperatives and antonyms of cultured subjects. David’s conflation of base sexuality and animality throughout the novel invokes the de-realized figure of the animal while, as I contended, reanimating the human and nonhuman animal species distinction; however, David’s opera begins to trouble both by making animals (and women) agents, rather than objects, of culture. When David conflates Teresa, a “woman in love, wallowing in love” with “a cat on a roof, howling” (185), he is not functionalizing either (both) as antonyms (and objects) of his privileged, and cultured, desire; rather, he is privileging both as agents capable of voicing a longing that destabilizes the distinction between culture and nature; honourable desire and dishonourable instinct.

David asserts that he “must listen to Teresa” because she is “past honour”—“she plays the banjo in front of the servants and does not care if they smirk. She has immortal longings, and sings her longings” (209). Giving voice to Teresa and the “sad, swooping curve of Teresa’s plea” (213) is the precondition of David’s capacity to recognize and give voice to an injured male dog with no value as human capital and bound for euthanasia at the kennel, who takes a liking to David’s banjo playing and “smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too, or howling” as David hums Teresa’s melody (215). As a result of this dog’s manifest interest, David wonders, “Would he dare to do that: bring a dog into the

piece, allow it to loose its own lament to the heavens between the strophes of lovelorn Teresa's? Why not?" (215).

Teresa and the dog alike both express an immanent longing for love—a revision that supplants the speciesist distinction between base desire and cultured amatory passion that has propped up discourses of speciesism and race across the novel. As I have argued, David had framed his desire and sexual exploitation (of Melanie and Soraya) as a continuation of a cultured field of white male desire canonized in mythological, literary, and musical discourses on amatory passion, while projecting the (ostensibly bodily) imperatives of sexual desire on animals, animalized humans, and the implicit animal imperatives of his sexual organs. Insofar as this distinction relies upon trans-historical discourses of animality and their conflation, on David's part, with the trans-species imperatives of nature, so too does it rely on a hierarchy of value that has long privileged the cultured domains of the human over and against what has systematically been occluded from that domain—namely, nonhuman animals themselves.

By troubling the distinctions between immanent and transcendent sexual and/or amatory desire, Coetzee is by no means collapsing the interminable differences between human and nonhuman animals. Rather, as Coetzee demonstrates, the cultures and economies of animal sex need to be rethought in order to destabilize their availability for self-legitimation or, conversely, violent disavowals. *Disgrace* challenges the availability of essentialist discourses around animal sex to be mobilized as a powerful prosthetic of othering discourses (including racialized animality) by demonstrating, and calling into question, the place and function of culture in the human and nonhuman animal species

divide. Both Teresa and the dog are agents, rather than objects, of culture—beings mutually constituted by, and capable of voicing, immortal longings. The transvaluation of amatory longings into a longing for a transcendence in the face of its impossibility affirms what Lucy had known from the start: “there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals” (74).

Endnotes

- 1 David's sexual intercourse with his student, Melanie, has been the subject of competing interpretations (of, one might argue, the definition of rape). The controversy centres on whether or not David Lurie's sexual assault of Melanie should, in fact, be described as rape, despite the fact that in the scene in question, David "thrusts himself upon" Melanie (24), Melanie says "No" (25), and David commits a sexual assault that he describes as "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25). As readers, we are not given direct access to Melanie's perspective on, or description of, the event. Critics such as Rosemary Jolly, Marianne DeKoven, Noam Gal, Molly Travis, and Lucy Graham ("Reading the Unspeakable") have asserted that David's sexual violation of Melanie is, in fact rape. In "Little Enough, Less Than Little: Nothing': Ethics, Engagement, and Change in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee," Mike Marais approaches the assault as an Orphic encounter: "[T]he Orphic terms in which the description is couched indicate that the scene must be read as Lurie's attempt to possess the Other, to assert control over her. However, as the mythological allusions also suggest, she has always already escaped this attempted possession" (175). While Marais does, however, go on to describe the sexual violation as "rape" (175), he also describes it as a "seduction" (174). Rosemary Jolly provides a valuable critique of Marais's conflation of Melanie and Eurydice in her essay "'Going to the Dogs': 'Humanity' in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, *The Lives of Animals* and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission." For Jolly, Marais ignores Melanie's corporeality, reproducing Lurie's own tendency to rationalize his rape as the "triumph of the metaphysical" (162).
- 2 In *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin contends that sexual selection (which, for Darwin, results from the struggle of males to possess females [88]) is a substantial element of evolutionary development for humans, nonhuman animals, and plants alike (80-116). In the chapter "Natural Selection," Darwin asks, "Can the principle of selection, which we have seen is so potent in the hands of man, apply in nature?" and concludes that "we shall see that it can act most effectually" (80).
- 3 For further discussions of the use of Darwin's evolutionary theory in Sigmund Freud's writings on nonhuman animals, see Carrie Rohman's *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (21-28), as well as Akira Mizuta Lippit's essay "Magnetic Animal: Derrida, Wildlife, Animetaphor" (1111-12) and monograph *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (164).
- 4 For a discussion of the heterosexual framing of the biological imperatives of nonhuman animals, see Myra Hird's "Animal Trans" in *Queering the Non/Human*.
- 5 In the sentences that follows, Kant's tone notably shifts: "The inhabitant of the Orient is of a very false taste in this respect. Since he has no concept of the morally beautiful which can be united with this impulse, he loses even the worth of the sensuous enjoyment, and his harem is a constant source of unrest. He thrives on all sorts of amorous grotesqueries ..." (56-57). Here, Kant uses words with fewer syllables, dispenses with metaphorical referees to the arts, and appears in this respect to be disuniting Oriental sex from aesthetic elevation in the form *and* content of his claims.
- 6 The definition of "Culture" provided in *New Keywords* draws out its etymological roots in horticultural cultivation, providing a useful context for Kant's conflation of encultured desire with the cultivation of natural matter: "With its most immediate roots in L *cultura*, referring to the processes of cultivation, caring, or tending, culture implied growth and improvement. This was evident in early horticultural usage where it could refer to both the process of tending for plants and animals ("Such a ... plot of his Eden ... gratefully crown his Culture ... with chaplets of flowers" [Boyle, 1665-9]) and the result of such husbandry ('The earth ... by ... dyligent labour ... ys brought to maruelous culture and fertylite' [Starkey, 1538]). ... This might refer to physical development through the training of the body, as in Hobbes's observation that among the Lacedaemonians, 'especially in the culture of their bodies, the nobility observed the most equality with the commons' (1628). Or it might refer to the cultivation of intellectual or spiritual attributes. 'The education of Children,' Hobbes claimed, comprised 'a Culture of their minds' (1991 [1651])" (Muecke, 64-65).
- 7 In *Disgrace*, David conflates his sexual desire and sexual organs in similar ways when he imagines that he would retire from the 'game' of womanizing by castrating himself: "A simple enough operation, surely; they do it to animals every day, and animals survive well enough, if one ignores a certain residue of sadness. ... A man on a chair snipping away at himself: an ugly sight, but no more ugly, from a certain point of view, than the same man exercising himself on the body of a woman" (9).

- 8 The notion of nonhuman animals as mechanized automatons was famously articulated by René Descartes in part five of *Discourse on Method*.
- 9 Pamela Cooper, in her essay “Metamorphosis and Sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of *Disgrace*,” similarly contends that David “situates both sexual desire and social transformation in the epistemological framework of the Western intellectual tradition: the novel’s many references to literary works and myth activate this framework” (22). For Cooper, David’s sense of sexual entitlement is conditioned by his mastery of “the symbolism of desire and otherness entrenched within the Anglo-European aesthetic tradition” (25). For a summary of Rosemary Jolly’s contention that Lurie interprets his rape of Melanie through a metaphysical lens, see endnote 1 of this chapter.
- 10 For example, when David’s thoughts return to Melanie, Coetzee writes, “again it runs through him: a light shudder of voluptuousness. He is aware of Lucy observing him. He does not appear to be able to conceal it. Interesting” (78).
- 11 As Cooper argues, David “entices her with Italian food and Shakespeare, and the unspoken contract of seduction is held entirely within the rules of Western representation” (25).
- 12 André Brink’s novel *The Rights of Desire* borrows its title from David’s claim. Brink’s narrator asks himself, “If I claim desire as my right ... does not my right to desire invoke the right of the other to refuse me? And does that not make a mockery of ‘right,’ as much as of ‘desire’? The most I can claim for desire is the right to be frustrated, to be denied” (154).
- 13 For Cooper, it is the conventions of Western amatory poetry that enable David to elide Melanie’s subjectivity and absolve himself of responsibility for his sexual assault (25).
- 14 The distinction between this vision and his second sexual encounter with Melanie is, of course, negligible. When David rapes Melanie, her limbs are crumpled “like a marionette’s” and her cry “‘No’” went unheeded since “nothing” could “stop him” (25).
- 15 DeKoven similarly contends that Lucy describes rape in “terms that deliberately recall Lurie’s rape of Melanie” (158).
- 16 Cooper contends that “Coetzee elucidates ‘immortal longing,’ which he earlier traced in the Clarissa lecture, as a reaching for transcendence implicit within sexual desire (191). In the refulgent image of Eros’s ejaculating wings, the mutual articulation of body and spirit-of animal passion and immortal longing-is enabled by Coetzee’s appropriation of myth as a structure of perception” (30). However, I depart from Cooper in my attention to race and my claim that the trope of transcendent desire is conferred upon David, but denied to the three black attackers.
- 17 In contrast, Cooper approaches David’s perspective of the rape and attack as a loss of agency, wherein the intruders are a “vehicle of forces beyond their control” with “evolutionary processes working through their bodies” (29).
- 18 Lucy similarly claims that the three attackers “spur each other on ... [l]ike dogs in a pack” (159).
- 19 Don Randall likewise notes that David’s stance is pointedly “tired,” but suggests that David’s statement is not “merely knee-jerkish” and “intellectually lazy” because it echoes apartheid logic and the “policy of ‘separate development’” (215). While Randall is apt to point out that David’s perspective “has been used, in oppressive, violating ways, against human beings” (particularly in South Africa), Randall eschews the speciesism of David’s claim, and problematically implies that the measure of David’s ethical failure in uttering this statement is locatable in the human, rather than nonhuman, casualties that David’s logic has historically produced.
- 20 For DeKoven, “Cattle too, or at least animals born and raised to be human food (two Persian sheep, to be precise), will come under the protection, such as it is, of Lurie’s empathetic grief” (857). In “Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Attridge also includes David’s attitudes towards Petrus’s sheep in the examples of David’s developing affinities with, and care for, nonhuman animals. While Attridge contends that David’s “altered relation to animals is ... evinced by his response to the two sheep,” Attridge is careful to distinguish David’s attitude towards the sheep from “the emotional pull experienced by the animal lover or the ethical demand acknowledged by the upholder of animal rights” (176); David’s response, Attridge contends, “can’t be termed an ethical response, nor is it really an affective reaction; it’s an impulse more obscure if no less commanding than these” (186).
- 21 David’s disdainful attitudes about rural South Africa are hinted at throughout the novel. For example, he conflates leaving the farm with returning to civilization (151). What’s more, he describes Lucy’s mother

and himself alike as “cityfolk, intellectuals” in contrast to Lucy, who is termed a “throwback” and “settler” (61).

- 22 In “Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Attridge similarly argues that “the most telling and fully-realized exemplification of [David’s] new attitude [towards nonhuman animals] is his handling of the dogs that have to be killed” (*J.M. Coetzee* 184).
- 23 Elleke Boehmer pointedly describes David’s act of attending to the honourable disposal of the dogs as “useless” (141). Derek Attridge, in “Age of Bronze, State of Grace,” in contrast, recognizes both David’s care for the dog remains and his opera as ways of “undertak[ing] a life of toil in the service of others” (*J. M. Coetzee* 181) that are given value in the novel, even though neither generate an explicit course of action nor evince “a practical commitment to improving the world” (187).
- 24 In “The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Sue Kossew locates a change in David’s perspective as a result of his experience of euthanasia at the animal clinic. For Kossew, the measure of this transformation is David’s “recognition . . . of the existence of animal soul” (158). Kari Weil likewise contends that in *Disgrace*, “the look of the animal he we kill provokes, however disturbingly, a transforming moment in the life of the main protagonist, David Lurie” (“Killing them Softly” 90). In contrast to my argument, Weil locates the origins of this shift in David’s relationship with Petrus’s sheep (93).
- 25 Coetzee also dramatizes a nonhuman animal’s awareness of death, and the central character’s recognition of that knowledge, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. When one of the pack horses stops eating during the Magistrate’s foray beyond the frontier outpost, and the Magistrate’s party plan to kill the horse, the Magistrate observes, “I can swear that the beast knows what is to happen. At the sight of the knife its eyes roll” (67). Chris Danta, in his essay “The Melancholy Ape: Coetzee’s Fables of Animal Finitude” likewise argues that Coetzee “extends the thought of death – or the awareness of mortality – to other animals besides the human” (131). Louis Tremaine contends that across Coetzee’s fiction, there is an “unmistakable and ever more insistent pattern . . . of incorporating animals as narrative elements associated with suffering and death and, especially, with the question of the foreknowledge of impending death” (595).
- 26 Some critics have approached David’s use of the title “dog-man” for himself as a measure of the transformation of his conceptual approaches to nonhuman animals, giving limited or no attention to Petrus’s use and critique of the term. Sue Kossew, for example, argues that David’s self-appointed title demonstrates that he has taken over the role of stewardship from Petrus and become “the guardian of their final right to die a dignified death” (160). In “Killing Them Softly: Animal Death, Linguistic Disability, and the Struggle for Ethics,” Kari Weil conflates David’s self-appointment as the “dog-man” with his recognition of his “creatureliness” and, it follows, a sense of commonality with nonhuman animals through the notion of trans-species animality. Weil’s approach risks inferring that Petrus, by asserting that he is *no longer* the “dog-man” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 129), has failed to “take[] heed of his own creatureliness” (Weil 94). For Donovan, David realizes that his commitment to dead animals has marked him as “‘a dog-man . . . a harijan,’ an outcast, a pariah” (par. 26).

I agree with Tom Herron’s assertion that “David’s conflation of black men and animals complicates an understanding of his becoming animal” (489). However, Herron still assumes that David is engaged in a process of “becoming animal,” and Herron does not complicate his celebration of David’s ostensible “becoming animal” (489) through an analysis of race, turning cursorily to race and animality in his final paragraph, only to proclaim that this renders David’s sympathies for nonhuman animals “so astonishing” (489).

- 27 A number of critics have conflated David’s designation of himself as a “dog-man” with his abjection. Cooper, for example, asserts, “Literally going to the dogs, Lurie finds among the least desired, least privileged, most neglected of the country’s inhabitants an abjection that reflects his own” (35). Don Randall assumes that David’s subjection to “atrocious” and his experience of “despair” are the two conditions of his “change of heart” toward nonhuman animals, where an “eco-ethical” stance has a “traumatic origin” (216). Elleke Boehmer recognizes Petrus’s explicit critique of the term “dog-man” (141), while nonetheless conflating David’s “final abjected position” with David’s appropriation of the title (139) and “abjective identification with the animal other” (143): “He becomes by degrees almost literally the underling, the underdog, the ‘untouchable’ or *harijan* as he himself says” (141). Chris Danta makes a notably similar argument that both the nonhuman animals subject to slaughter and David become

untouchables in the novel; “Here, then, is why his protagonist feels he must accompany the euthanized dogs ...: It is finally by touching their ‘untouchable’ corpses that the socially disgraced Lurie enters fully into the ‘disgrace of dying’ with these dogs” (133-34). Finally, Donovan contends that David’s ethical “conversion” is precipitated by “being victimized” (par. 23); by taking on duties of caring for the animals’ remains, David becomes even more of an “outcast, a pariah”—a “dog-man” (par. 26).

Chapter Four:

Cultures of Masculinity, Violence, and Dominion: Re-negotiating ‘Belonging’ Across Species Lines in J. M. Coetzee’s *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*

Boyhood, which was first published in 1997, is the first in a series of three loosely autobiographical texts, and it was followed by the publication of *Youth* in 2002 and *Summertime* in 2009. It describes the experience of a boy from the age of ten to thirteen in the apartheid era Cape Province, South Africa, and because many of the historical details of the text directly reflect those of J. M. Coetzee’s youth in that region, it has been approached as an autobiographical account. However, as Dominic Head asserts, *Boyhood* occupies “the border between fiction and autobiography” (3); and the text’s focalization through third-person voice and its use of present tense throughout create notable affinities between *Boyhood* and much of Coetzee’s fictional corpus. What’s more, *Boyhood* is a work that addresses themes taken up across Coetzee’s fiction, particularly through the foregrounding of issues of identity formation; relationships to and responsibilities for the other (both human and nonhuman); and the political, historical, and linguistic contexts and constraints on place-based senses of belonging. As such, it is a text that invites analysis that moves beyond the critical frameworks that often accompany autobiographical works—frameworks that can have a tendency to focus on the work’s relative truth-value; the relationship between the protagonist and the author; and/or the writing narrator’s relationship to the written narrator. Approaching *Boyhood* not as a confession on the part of the author, nor as a meditation on confession as such, this chapter works to intervene in the horizon of critical approaches to

Boyhood by resisting the assumption that *Boyhood*'s status as a largely autobiographical text creates a demand for biographically-centred (and, by implication, anthropocentric) criticism —what Philippe Lejeune terms an “autobiographical pact” between the author and the reader (29).

Lejeune's *Autobiographical Pact* emphasizes the narrated autobiographical subject's relationship to the author and the narrative's status as truth. Lejeune asserts that this pact determines the mode of interpretation of the autobiography, and critical essays and reviews of *Boyhood* often indirectly affirm his claim (29).¹ It seems only fitting to cite Coetzee's oft-quoted assertion, from *Doubling the Point*, that “[a]ll autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography” (391; qtd. in Lenta 159), and to assert that *Boyhood*'s categorization as autobiography is largely inconsequential to its nuanced treatment of a child's negotiations with cultures of violence, masculinity, and nonhuman animal harm in the context of 1950's apartheid-era South Africa. As Derek Attridge claims in *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, *Boyhood*'s literariness urges us to approach the text as more than just historical testimony:

The truth that *Boyhood* offers, then, is first and foremost that of testimony: a vivid account of what it was like to grow up as a white male in the 1950s in South Africa as the Nationalist government set about institutionalizing its particular brand of racism and entrenching the power of Afrikanerdom, an account ... about one highly unusual child, at the interface of English and Afrikaans cultures, in the specific location of the Western Cape, undergoing the trials of a father's declining economic status and a family permanently

damaged by the upheavals of the Second World War. But *Boyhood* is a literary as well as a documentary work, and to the extent that it is the former, its object is not the conveyance of historical truth. (155)

Boyhood takes on the perspective of a child in order to address pressing questions about relationships and responsibilities to others, both human *and* nonhuman, and the constitutive foreclosures that limit, and structure, modes of identification and care. It is a literary mode that structures self inquiry by foregrounding relationality—particularly the focalizing persona, John's, perceived (and desired) relation to nonhuman animals—a relationship which informs, in various senses, John's negotiations with, and desires for, forms of cultural, gendered, and national belonging. *Boyhood* creates indelible affinities between John and the figurative and actual nonhuman animals that populate the text, while also gesturing to the limited capacity of a child to reconcile his connections to nonhuman animals with the conceptual and material violence to which nonhuman animals are subject. Bearing witness to these conditions of violence and subjection, as well as to the catastrophic indifference on the part of the adults to nonhuman animals themselves, the text foregrounds violence and precariousness as central to both human-animal alliances and exploitations, grounding what animals are made to mean in the complex interrelations between human and nonhuman animals.

Through a sustained examination of the forms of identification available to John as an English-speaking white South African male of Afrikaans lineage, *Boyhood* asks what kinds of violence attend the assimilation of the subject into the overdetermined and normative identity categories associated with John's position. Further, the narrative explores

the extent to which cultures of violence bear directly on the subject's participation in available models of identity and identification.² Coetzee's rendering of identity politics attends to the various ways in which violence against nonhuman animals functions to shore-up human identity, and masculine identity in particular. In a context in which nonhuman animals function as key symbolic and material sources for grounding and naturalizing claims about gender and property, John formulates alternative means of thinking through his and his family's affinities with, rather than dominion over, nonhuman animals—modes that suggest mutual injurability and risk, as well as non-propertyed forms of ecological embeddedness. It is a notion of relationality that generates key avenues for John to negotiate his ties to South Africa, and the Coetzee family farm in particular, without asserting a primary or exclusionary claim to land. Formulating non-violent modes of identification with nonhuman animals proves to be a key tactic in reformulating John's sense of identification with, and belonging to, the region in the Cape Province known as the Karoo.

Bearing Witness, Baring Tense

Coetzee's use of third-person voice and present-tense narration has been considered by various critics, whose focus has primarily been the implications and impacts of this form of vocalization on autobiography as a genre and the confessional mode (see, for example, Derek Attridge's "Confessing in the Third Person"; Margaret Lenta's "Autrebiography"; and Pieter Vermeulen's "Wordsworth's Disgrace"). While each attributes different degrees of significance to this narrative mode, they echo each other in their suggestion that the point of view and tense function to distance the writing subject (J. M. Coetzee) from the written one

(the child, John Coetzee), rendering the latter more available for scrutiny by both the author and the reader. Attridge, echoing the overarching argument of his text *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, asserts that this type of focalization makes ethical and interpretative demands on its readers:

[T]he use of the present tense both heightens the immediacy of the narrated events and denies the text any retrospection, any place from which the writer can reflect on and express regret about (or approval of) the acts and attitudes described. In other words, Coetzee achieves the same effect that we find in his works of fiction: the reader is refused the comfort of a metanarrative level or perspective from which authorial judgments (here, judgments on his earlier self) could be made. If anyone is to take responsibility for judgments on the boy of *Boyhood*, it is the *reader*, and the reader is thus implicated in the ethical web spun by the work. (143)

Indeed, this mode of narration, combined with Coetzee's use of the present tense, limits didacticism and determinate models of ethical or responsible action, and is, therefore, very much in line with Coetzee's novels. John bears witness to, and condemns the forms of, subjection, commodification, and violence to which nonhuman animals are subject.

Nonetheless, John's implicit inability to reconcile his aversion to these violent practices within the broader economy of nonhuman animal instrumentalization and consumption in which he is imbricated calls on the reader, as Attridge asserts, to reflect on the gaps between ethics and practice. *Boyhood* places a growing discomfort with quotidian violence against nonhuman animals in the mind of a precocious child who has a limited capacity for self-

knowledge and agency. It therefore indirectly poses to its reader the questions of what courses of action might be undertaken by those who have fuller capacities for reflection, judgment, and action in the face of the ubiquitous violence enacted on nonhuman animal bodies in the production of consumable animal objects.

The narrative mode of *Boyhood*—its third-person voice with present-tense narration—gives immediacy to young John’s experiences and relationships with others, as the critics have noted; this includes nonhuman animal others. It is a mode that helps to foreground the subject’s relationship and responsibilities to others, rather than the writing subject’s relationship to the written self. In this respect Coetzee largely avoids focusing his narrative on what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson describe, in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, as “methods of self-examination, introspection, and remembering encoded in [the genre of autobiography] through generic conventions” (71). Instead, Coetzee employs a narrative voice that is better positioned to emphasize the experiential consciousness of the written, rather than writing, autobiographical subject, shifting emphasis from the writing subject’s relationship to the written one and towards the latter’s relationship to others. It is, as such, a mode that structures self-inquiry by foregrounding, as Smith and Watson contend, “the different kinds of textual others through which an ‘I’ narrates the formation or modification of self-consciousness” (64-65). Smith and Watson further distinguish between “contingent others” who “populate the text as actors in the narrator’s script of meaning” and “significant others” whose “stories are deeply implicated in the narrator’s and through whom the narrator understands his or her own self-formation” (65). While John’s family, teachers, peers, and the specific locale of nineteen-

fifties South Africa, function as ‘significant others’ in *Boyhood*, so too do nonhuman animals. The present-tense third-person narration enables Coetzee to give primacy to the experiences of nonhuman animals in the novel while connecting them to John’s own experience—a primacy that is mirrored by the text’s opening scene.

Boyhood begins by describing John and his family’s housing estate in Worcester, South Africa, and follows with an account of his mother’s attempts to restore the laying capacity of their three hens, who have been installed in a poultry-run in the Coetzee family yard and “are supposed to lay eggs for them” (1). Poor drainage and accumulated rainwater have led the hens to “develop gross swellings on their legs, like elephant-skin” (1). As a result, the hens are “[s]ickly and cross” and “cease to lay” (1). Neglecting to consider how the hen’s well-being influences their production of eggs, John’s aunt insists that the hens will lay again only if the “horny shells under their tongues” are cut out (1), and John bears witness to his mother’s mutilating act:

One after another his mother takes the hens between her knees, pressing on their jowls till they open their beaks, and with the point of a paring-knife picks at their tongues. The hens shriek and struggle, their eyes bulging. He shudders and turns away. He thinks of his mother slapping stewing-steak down on the kitchen counter and cutting it into cubes; he thinks of her bloody fingers. (1-2)

This passage supports Attridge’s claim that the text’s narrative mode “heightens the immediacy of the narrated events and denies the text any retrospection” (*J.M. Coetzee* 143). However, the primacy is given to the experiencing consciousness of both the hens and young

John, while John's mother's attitudes towards the hens, and to the conditions of poverty that have made feeding her family challenging, are largely inaccessible to the reader. The opening sentence of the vignette articulates an instrumentalist conception of nonhuman animals as ordained producers of raw foodstuff for humans (the hens "are supposed to lay eggs for them") (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 1)—a perspective from which the narrative immediately departs. Even though her actions structure the paragraph, it is, in fact, the experience of the hens that is given narrative force through Coetzee's description of their state of health and emotion ("sickly and cross") (1), and through the privileging of their struggle to resist the violence imposed upon them. Furthermore, John's bodily aversion to the scene of violence creates direct affinities between himself and the hens.

The verbs associated with bodily resistance link the ineffectual resistance of the birds with John's own futile act of aversion as he "shudders and turns away" (2). This inarticulate, but visceral, manifestation of repulsion suggests a feeling of disgust—one that can be situated in Sianne Ngai's postulations in *Ugly Feelings* that minor and politically ambiguous affects (such as disgust) are symptomatic of a "situation of restricted agency" and "social powerlessness" (2). John, we can presume, is not in a position to stop this act of violence, and indications of limited agency and affective aversion create affinities, linguistically and through point-of-view, between himself and the hens—affinities that are further reinforced through his association of cutting hens with cutting steak.

The associative link John establishes between cutting live hens' bodies to produce higher egg yields and cutting the bodies of cows in the paragraph cited above affirms Attridge's assertion that *Boyhood* creates an "ethical web" in which the reader (and not John,

per se) is ultimately implicated (*J. M. Coetzee* 143). John's association is weighted with implications, namely because it inadvertently links the privileged experiencing consciousness (here, sentient hens) with meat—food matter that is systematically disassociated from the nonhuman animal from which it is taken. The correlation functions, therefore, to reinstate what Carol Adams has decisively termed the 'absent referent' in her seminal study, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist Vegetarian Critical Theory*:

Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. The "absent referent" is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to keep our "meat" separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, to keep the "moo" or "cluck" or "baa" away from the meat, to keep *something* from being seen as having been *someone*. (14)

Not only does John's thought process function to imbue meat with its absent referent—it also creates direct links between his mother's culpability as a perpetrator of violence against the hens and her culpability as a consumer of meat. John's implicit castigations might fail to recognize his mother's need to feed the family with the limited financial and consumable resources available to them, just as it might also neglect to consider John's own culpabilities as a consumer of the very eggs that his mother is after. While John's lack of sympathy for his mother is unremarkable given his age and characterization throughout the novel, his tendency to conflate the violability of the living and dead bodies of human and nonhuman animals alike, on the other hand, is notable. When John "thinks of her bloody fingers"

(Coetzee, *Boyhood* 2), these final two words punctuate the scene, generating an oblique reference to *Macbeth* and the murderous crime to which the spotted hands point.

As with David Lurie in *Disgrace*, John's role as a critical witness to quotidian violence against nonhuman animals necessarily positions the reader alongside him. Extending Carol Adams's claims about the absent animal *being* that is lost behind the lexicon of meat, *Boyhood* positions the forms of violence (including the biopolitics of reproductive management) to which domesticated nonhuman animals are regularly subject as a crucial aspect of what meat signifies. John's association of the mutation of the bodies of living hens with his mother's incisions into stewing-steak gives notable attention to verbs of physical manipulation ("slapping stewing-steak down on the kitchen counter and cutting it into cubes" [2]) while sounding out that mutilation through the repetitive stress of the alliteration. This attention to the casual penetration of animal matter suggests that, in John's view, meat is violable—a perspective that echoes David's in *Disgrace* when he takes it upon himself to administer to the deceased nonhuman animal bodies in the incinerator. The notion of violability that both texts proffer troubles the distinction between bodies that matter and bodies that don't, or, to employ Coetzee's terms from *Diary of a Bad Year*, between a "carcass (animal)" and a "corpse (human)" (63). In Michel Foucault's words, John's gaze is a notable affront to the distinction between derealized animal matter and "the dead body" which is a "trace of [an] existence in the world" ("Of Other Spaces" 25).

John's view has notable affinities with what Coetzee describes as a way of seeing dead animal matter with "an estranged eye" (following Viktor Shklovsky) in his novel *Diary of a Bad Year*:

To most of us, what we see when we watch cooking programmes on television looks perfectly normal: kitchen utensils on the one hand, items of food on the other, on their way to being transformed into cooked food. But to someone unused to eating meat, the spectacle must be highly unnatural. For among the fruit and vegetables and oils and herbs and spices lie chunks of flesh hacked mere days ago from the body of some creature killed purposefully and with violence. Animal flesh looks much the same as human flesh (why should it not?). So, to the eye unused to carnivore cuisine, the inference does not come automatically (“naturally”) that the flesh on display is cut from a carcass (animal) rather than from a corpse (human). (63)

Coetzee privileges this perspectival estrangement from the status-quo, because the viewer sees the kitchen as “a place where, after the murders, the bodies of the dead are brought to be done up (disguised) before they are devoured” (63). From John’s vantage-point, steak becomes the “bod[y] of the dead” (63) and the discursive and aesthetic transformation of animals into consumable matter in the domestic kitchen is denaturalized. Coetzee makes the violence towards domesticated animals and those animals themselves visible within the domestic domain (namely the kitchen) of food preparation and consumption.

John’s implicitly politicized gaze—a gaze that has yet to be estranged from nonhuman animal lives—generates the ethical dimensions of his role as a witness in the context of his limited agency as a child. This role is later re-enacted on the Voëlfontein farm in the recounting of the weekly sheep slaughter. As with the scene of the hen’s mutilation, the account details the actions of Ros and Freek who perform the slaughter, but the drama of

the scene, as well as its ethical force, stems from the focus on the nonhuman animals' affect and resistance:

Every Friday a sheep is slaughtered for the people of the farm. He goes along with Ros and Uncle Son to pick out the one that is to die; then he stands by and watches as, in the slaughtering-place behind the shed, out of sight of the house, Freek holds down the legs while Ros, with his harmless-looking little pocket-knife, cuts its throat, and then both men hold tight as the animal kicks and struggles and coughs while its lifeblood gushes out. (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 98)

While the sheep's description as "the one that is to die" gives the event a providential (and, by implication, sanctioned) tone, the infinitive "to die" nonetheless focuses the action not on human experience (as "the one that will be eaten" does) but rather on the experience of the nonhuman animal (98). Similarly, the dying itself, rather than the act of killing an object, is given linguistic primacy through the cluster of short one and two syllable onomatopoeic verbs ("kicks and struggles and coughs") (98) that echo the repetitive struggling body movements of the dying animal.

The disquieting combination of violence on the part of Ros and Freek (who "split," "tug" and "squeeze[]" the sheep's body open and apart) (98) and the fundamental normality, or non-event, of the slaughter and its telling, mirror the catastrophic indifference of the culture at large to the conditions of violence to which nonhuman animals are continually subject as they are rendered into consumable objects. While young John doesn't "think [himself] into the being of another" (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 80), to employ Elizabeth

Costello's term, he does 'think himself' as a mutually objectified and violable body during the implicit substitution of his own body for the sheep's, as he observes that "all the things that a sheep has inside it ... he has inside him too" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 98). In the face of the marked indifference on the part of the adult actors, like Ros, who cut, castrate, and kill sheep "pitilessly" (99), John bears witness to what Elizabeth Costello calls "the places of death all around us, the places of slaughter to which, in a huge communal effort, we close our hearts" (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 80). *Boyhood* resists such affective foreclosures by giving authority to a child who has yet to be fully subsumed into a culture of indifference—a boy who has the capacity to think himself into the trans-species animal realm through affinities of the body and the body's vulnerability to violence. The text's ethical intervention stems in part from the ways in which it mobilizes John's point of view to frame how the reader witnesses the normative violence to which nonhuman animals are subject.

"There is no way of talking about what he has seen" John muses, indicating his sense of the unspeakability of his affective resistance in the face of such violence and his functional role as focalizing witness (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 98).³ John asks his mother why they "have to cut off the lambs' tails?" (99). His mother tells him that "otherwise the blowflies would breed under their tails" (99). However, as Coetzee writes, "They are both pretending; both of them know what the question is really about" (99). The question ostensibly points to Ros and Freek's castration practices, rather than tail shortening, but it also gestures outside of those particularities and towards the biopolitical management of nonhuman animal reproduction and the violation of nonhuman animal bodies. The implicit, and unspoken, objection is gestured towards, but it is not voiced by either of the two

characters, generating a critical subtext to the equivocal question. Coetzee employs a comparable strategy in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, when the magistrate claims that the savour of his recreational hunting is troubled by some “irritating and uncanny feeling” in which “events are not themselves but stand for other things” (Coetzee, *Waiting* 43). Most readers will surmise that those “other things” (43) refer to the magistrate’s recognition, earlier in the scene, that the hunting venture has become “no longer a morning’s hunting but an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim” (42). Similarly, John’s question evokes a range of other questions and interpretations—ones about the ends and means used to justify the harm and consumption of nonhuman animals—justifications that the text sometimes proffers, although in ways that are rarely convincing. In the face of the poverty of what John says, or is permitted to say, the text gives authority to bearing witness to, and thinking through, slaughter, as a crucial means of destabilizing the self-justifying mechanisms of nonhuman animal agriculture’s violent practices. If John is subsumed, in some sense at least, into the ‘adult’ cultures of speciesism and indifference, the text itself is not.

While John is positioned as a witness to violent economies of nonhuman animal harm, it bears emphasizing that Coetzee does not privilege modes of bearing-witness as transformative in their own right, nor does he conflate recognizing affinities in human and nonhuman animal bodies with a transformation of speciesist thought. Despite John’s affective aversion, he is, to employ John Berger’s words, “*looking at something that has been rendered absolutely marginal*” (24) from a vantage point that is likely also informed by Uncle Son’s objectifying gaze, whose “knowledge of sheep” is of the relative instrumental

value (“not only what kind of wool it will give, but what each part of its body will taste like”) of each of their consumable parts (“ribs for grilling” and “haunches for roasting”) (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 101). In an effort to turn away from the conditions of violence that structure the production and meaning of meat—from his intimate knowledge of the “places of slaughter” to which “we close our hearts” (*Elizabeth Costello* 80)—John actively tries to avoid raw meat and butchers’ shops, turning “his eyes away from the hearts in the display case” (101). In what seems a pointed attempt to disentangle meat from nonhuman animal life and death, John asserts that “He himself likes meat” (101) and looks forward to a daily mid-day feast which features “a great platter of mutton with gravy to pour over it” and no living, nonhuman animal referent, in sight (101).

The ethical force of Coetzee’s visceral rendering of nonhuman animal resistance and the ways in which John, and subsequently the reader, bear witness to their subjection to violence stands in marked contrast to John’s subsequent attempts to justify to himself the economy of nonhuman animal harm and consumption. As Jacques Derrida argues, “men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves; in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence” (*The Animal* 26). In an attempt, perhaps, to reconcile what he has seen and the connections that he has made with his everyday practices of consumption, John reassures himself that the sheep “know it all, down to the finest detail, and yet they submit. They have calculated the price and are prepared to pay it—the price of being on earth, the price of being alive” (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 102). This imaginative projection rests on an assumption that sheep hold the inverse of the familiar justifying mechanism that the end (meat) justifies the means

(violence).⁴ While John might be adopting the reassuring fictions more common among adult meat eaters, it remains the case that John's self-exonerating manoeuvre cannot overwrite *Boyhood's* visceral rendering of casual violence, the indelible resisting agency of the nonhuman animals, and the detailed rendering of the processes of slaughter. That Elizabeth Costello privileges reading about and/or bearing witness to such conditions of slaughter for coming to terms with the horror of nonhuman animals in the face of their death speaks to *Boyhood's* formation of a sustained criticism of nonhuman animal harm that exceeds the ideations of its focalizing perspective, John:

‘If I do not convince you, that is because my words, here, lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness, the unabstracted, unintellectual nature, of that animal being. That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language; and if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner.’ (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 111)

John's assimilation into the culture of meat consumption delimits certain forms of consumption-based resistance and/or response in the face of what he has witnessed. John does not attempt to restrict his meat eating, and Coetzee does not frame vegetarian and/or vegan food practices as the sole, or preeminent, ethical response to bearing witness to, and resisting, violence against nonhuman animals. However, John's perspectival estrangement from normative ways of seeing meat, and his capacity to see affinities between his body and those of nonhuman animals as mutually violable, puts pressure on the roles that speciesist violence play in the identity politics of the novel. While *Waiting for the Barbarians* and

Disgrace make violent economies of animal harm perceptible over the course of the novel, and thereby situate the cultural work of speciesist violence in the institutions of violence imperilling animal lives, *Boyhood* opens with that violence, and the narrator, John's, perspectival estrangement from it. The roles that violence against human and nonhuman animals play in consolidating the gendered subjectivity of the dominant culture, and the reliance of that cultural work of violence on entanglements between discourses of gender and the hierarchy of species, is the subject to which I will subsequently turn.

Cultures of Masculinity and Violence

While *Boyhood* dramatizes John's initiation and attempted incorporation into various communities (whether nonhuman animal, Afrikaner, and/or adult), it foregrounds the centrality of masculinity in available models of identity and identification. In particular, *Boyhood* demonstrates that subjecting others to violence functions as a central means of initiation into a culture of masculinity—one that is often consolidated and reified through violence against nonhuman animals. Thus Coetzee foregrounds the roles that violence plays in reflecting and solidifying masculine agency and mastery, where nonhuman animals function as key symbolic and material resources for grounding and naturalizing claims about gender. However, John's assimilation in *Boyhood* is undercut by his perceived relations with nonhuman animals as the starting point of various articulations of belonging and displacement. In other words, John envisions a relation to place through the nonhuman animal realm, rather than through mastery over it—a perspective that stands in marked

contrast to the role of nonhuman animals as reflexive objects against which masculine domination and self-sufficiency is often articulated in the text.

John's childhood takes place in a time of burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism and assimilationist policies, with clearly demarcated categories of racial, ethnic, religious, and national identity available for identification and belonging. While John is subject to implicit demands to demonstrate his membership in, and continuity with, the available identity categories (particularly at school), the dominant culture of masculinity generates significant pressures to assimilate and identify with it on young John. Furthermore, *Boyhood* demonstrates that in this particular context and milieu, being both subject to, and an agent of, violence, functions as a key means of incorporation into the broader subject category of manhood. As Coetzee highlights, the culturally determined and finite category of masculinity is shored up through the ready availability of symbolic and physical nonhuman animals for human violence.

Masculine identity in *Boyhood's* representation of nineteen-fifties South Africa is tentatively achieved through bodily and emotional forbearance in what can be considered rites of passage through subjection to violence. However, Coetzee's intervention in discourses of masculinity is locatable, in part, in the text's direct association of what Judith Butler describes in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* as disavowals of "injurability" (178) with a denial of relation to, or dependence upon, others.⁵ John does not only attribute his failure to enter the cultural domain of masculine subjectivity to his failure to be subject to violence both at home and at school. It is also a more intimate and interpretative failure: John surmises that being the victim of ritualized and public displays of violence would not

be a source of masculine forbearance, but rather, a source of “shame” (6). Even though “What happens at school is that boys are flogged. It happens every day,” John had yet to be flogged himself. Coetzee writes, “As for himself, he has no desire to be beaten by Miss Oosthuizen or anyone else. The very idea of being beaten makes him squirm with shame. There is nothing he will not do to save himself from it. In this respect he is unnatural and knows it” (*Boyhood* 6). Such aversions to bodily harm (which Coetzee ironically denaturalizes), as well as John’s recognition of his own vulnerability, are perceived as constitutive failures in the process of initiation. The terms of normal boyhood, in this context and milieu, are intimately tied to being subject to violence:

[I]f, somehow, he can be rushed through the beating before he has had time to turn to stone and resist, if the violation of his body can be achieved quickly, by force, he will be able to come out on the other side a normal boy, able to join easily in discussion of the teachers and their canes and the various grades and flavours of pain they inflict. (7)

Coetzee speaks to what Butler has decisively described as the normative domain of recognition for the emergence of the gendered subject. To employ Butler’s terminology, John can come to occupy the “site of the [masculine] subject” only through the subordination of his self into the category “male”—a process of normative violence that can generate material violence (*Bodies That Matter* 9).⁶ This process of foreclosure ostensibly promises to secure the self-sufficiency, ability, and non-injurability associated with masculine identity—one that is continually threatened in *Boyhood* by John’s intimate dependence upon, rather than violent subjection to, his mother.

For this reason, John is “angry with his mother for turning him into something unnatural, something that needs to be protected if it is to continue to live” (8). Such vulnerability and interdependence limits his participation in the homosocial bond of his male family members, who talk about their subjection to violence during their school days with “a note of nostalgia and pleasurable fear,” re-affirming their membership in the culture of masculinity through the repeated articulation of their initiation into that culture of violence (9). As for John, “He has never been beaten and is deeply ashamed of it. He cannot talk about canes in the easy, knowing way of these men. He has a sense that he is damaged” (9). John’s “unnatural” proximity to the apparently feminine realms of vulnerability, inter-subjective dependence, and affect threaten to foreclose, or at least taint, his attempted assimilation into the domains of masculinity. His resistance to being assimilated into cultures of violence, and his ongoing identification with his mother, are symbolically re-articulated through the nonhuman animal realm. Not surprisingly, masculinity in the text is conflated with the inherently violent nature of some nonhuman animals, but is manifested, demonstrated, and enforced, by doing harm to nonhuman animal bodies.

John echoes familiar discourses that associate masculinity with the biologically determined violence of the male sex and seek to affirm that associative link through postulations about the inherent violence of nonhuman animals themselves. At the same time, these attempts to make nonhuman animals speak to gender’s naturalness are undermined in *Boyhood* through John’s use of animal homologies to symbolize his rejection of the terms of masculine assimilation. Coetzee details the one instance in which John’s father commits a violent act against his son, as John’s mother “let his father loose on him,

like a dog from a chain ('I've reached the limit, I can't stand it any more!'), and his father's eyes glared blue and angry as he shook him and cuffed him" (79). The implicit naturalization of John's father's violent impulses through his animalization echo associations made elsewhere in the text, particularly in John's generalizing criticism of overlapping cultures of dominance in both masculine and Afrikaner realms when he claims that Afrikaners share "a surliness, an intransigence, and, not far behind it, a threat of physical force (he thinks of them as rhinoceroses, huge, lumbering, strong-sinewed, thudding against each other as they pass) that he does not share and in fact shrinks from" (125).

John's repulsion by these available group identities is articulated, in part, through his appropriation of animality as a discourse in a way that rejects and undermines that explicitly naturalized coupling of the male sex with masculine violence. Not only does John describe himself (at school) as "a lamb, meek and mild" (13)—he also takes on the rat as his token rodent of violent impulses, surmising that, were his father to punish him with physical violence, he would become "possessed like a rat in a corner, hurling about, snapping with its poisonous fangs, too dangerous to be touched" (13). The ironies are self-evident, given that John's totem animal does not pose a threat of offensive violence, but merely defensive self-hurling (which is to say nothing of its size), and it is the rat's presumed status as contaminated with contagious diseases that generates its threat of violence, rather than its capacity for violence and/or strength as such. If this marks a conceptual 'failure' on John's part, so too do John's affinities with nonhuman animals themselves.

John is wary of his first male teacher, Mr. Gouws, simply because he is "wary of something that breathes from all men: a restlessness, a roughness barely curbed, a bit of

pleasure in cruelty” (131-32). While John imagines men as embodiments of violence incarnate, he also inadvertently positions dominion over nonhuman animals as a crucial means of expressing and shoring-up masculine identity—one that often places John, with his explicit and implicit affinities with the nonhuman animal realm, as an outsider. When two Afrikaner boys drag him to the far side of the school grounds to intimidate him, John describes the larger of the two boys as “one of those idiots or near-idiots who can break your fingers or crush your windpipe as easily as they wring a bird’s neck and smile placidly while they are doing it” (113). The description of such violence as ‘easy’ points not only to physical capacity, but to affect as well: what matters is the boys’ affective carelessness. The boy’s capacity for emotionally detached violence against nonhuman animals affirms his assimilation into the masculine domain, whereas John’s implicit affinity (both in the grammar of the sentence and in the text at large) with the historically feminine symbol of the bird undermines his manly candidacy, just as his sense of affinity with nonhuman animals throughout the text often alienates him from the cultures of masculinity available to him, even though John is, at times, capable of cruelty himself when he conspires with his father.⁷

Masculinity’s consolidation through repeated acts of violence against nonhuman animals has its affective correlative in indifference to the suffering of those animals. In other words, masculine dominion is achieved, in part, through violence and affirmed in the cognitive dominion (through a lack of care, lest it take the form of pleasure, as hinted at above), depending as it does on distancing the masculine subject from the conceptual and material conditions of subjection, relationality, and vulnerability that many nonhuman animals have been forcibly made to occupy in human cultures. Thus when John seeks to

substantiate his emergence as a masculine subject and his participation in homosocial male culture (with his two friends Greenberg and Goldstein), he does so by generating a seemingly false story of his own emergence as a subject—his first memory:

He is leaning out of the window of their flat in Johannesburg. Dusk is falling. Out of the distance a car comes racing down the street. A dog, a small spotted dog, runs in front of it. The car hits the dog: its wheels go right over the dog's middle. With its hind legs paralysed, the dog drags itself away, squealing with pain. No doubt it will die; but at this point he is snatched away from the window. It is a magnificent first memory, trumping anything that poor Goldstein can dredge up. But is it true? Why was he leaning out of the window watching an empty street? Did he really see the car hit the dog, or did he just hear a dog howling, and run to the window? Is it possible that he saw nothing but a dog dragging its hindquarters and made up the car and driver and the rest of the story? (30)

The dog's availability for, and subjection to, spectacular violence, as well as John's apparent indifference to the dog's suffering, function to consolidate John's relational masculinity, self-sufficiency, and implicit non-injurability. While John is neither the perpetrator nor the victim of violence in this scene, his position in it nonetheless echoes the sovereign subject described by Judith Butler in *Frames of War*: "Such a sovereign position not only denies its own constitutive injurability, but tries to relocate injurability in the other as an effect of doing injury to that other and exposing that other as, by definition, injurable" (178). For Butler, the violent act is "a way of relocating the capacity to be violated (always) elsewhere"

(178). John's seemingly self-generated story of origin, as well as its contexts and modes of reception, suggest that telling violence can serve a similar masculinist agenda to that entailed in enacting violence—both can function, in Butler's words, to "secure an impossible effect of mastery, inviolability, and impermeability" (178) in order to deny conditions of "precariousness and interdependency" (179). Of course, John's second and third so-called first memories (I gesture to the temporality of the text's unfolding rather than John's life) affirm the latter and deny the former.

In John's fabricated, or embellished, memory of the dog's accident, the conditions of sovereignty described by Butler are met: not only is John alone, he's unharmed. As with the brief scene in *Boyhood* in which Freek bludgeons a snake, there is no attendant reflection, care, or concern on the part of the witness to spectacularized violence. John is the privileged holder of the ostensibly disembodied gaze, surveying the Johannesburg streets and the casual violence they engender. His infancy and his dependence on his mother—in short, his identity as a child—are rhetorically glossed over. In contrast, the first memory that follows in *Boyhood* is laden with realistic detail and is one that "he trusts more fully but would never repeat, certainly not to Greenberg and Goldstein, who would trumpet it around the school and turn him into a laughing-stock" (30). In it, John is with his mother, and he is burdened with infantilizing trappings such as matching "red woollen leggings and a woollen cap with a bobble" (30-31). It is a quotidian story in which John lets a candy wrapper loose from a bus window (with his mother's permission, no less), but one that he nonetheless revisits in his memory because of his overt concern, and care, for "the scrap of paper, alone in all that vastness" (30). This care, even as it is directed towards an inanimate object, is foreclosed by

the available cultures of masculinity; similarly, his “very first memory,” “earlier than the scrap of paper” of his mother’s “white breasts” (35) threatens to locate his origin in a condition of vulnerability, dependence, and infancy.

In the dual process of self-articulation and assimilation—of subjectivization and subordination—John gives an account of his emergence as a masculine subject by effectively negating the aspects of his genealogy that do not accord with the self-sovereign male subject. However, as Butler asserts across her corpus, the subject is always in excess of the terms of identity available to it. Coetzee’s text suggests, as Butler argues in *The Psychic Life of Power*, that becoming, in this sense, a “continuous, visible, and located” (masculine) subject fails to cancel out the “inassimilable remainder, a melancholia” that exceeds the bounds of the terms available for recognition (29). While Coetzee clearly outlines the assimilationist pressures encoded in cultural constructions of masculinity, he also troubles them by demonstrating the reliance of such forms of masculinity on repeated and ritualized displays of male dominance over the nonhuman animal realm, in part through the privileged positioning of the hunter as a prototype of masculinity. In this respect, *Boyhood* echoes and expands upon Coetzee’s critique, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, of hunting as a means to articulate, and affirm, the identity of the dominant culture through masculinist violence against nonhuman animals.

Boyhood repeatedly locates hunting within the male domain (“hunting” is grouped with “all the other manly things” [37]), and effectively demonstrates that the separate spheres of the sexes are most policed around sites of nonhuman animal slaughter and bodily processing—in *Boyhood*, women cannot hunt and most women are not allowed to walk

around in the *veld*. The implication is that masculinist dominion over animals through violence consolidates binaries of species and gender alike by feminizing affective and embodied connections to nonhuman animals. However, in *Boyhood*, the capacity for John's male family members and hired help to fortify the naturalized masculine attributes of endurance, strength, courage, and self-sufficiency through the act of hunting are repeatedly undermined by the reality of their obscene dependence on human technologies of violence and their lack of skill in attempting to assert their 'natural' dominion over the nonhuman animal kingdom. John's uncle, for example, owns a Lee-Enfield .303 gun that "fires a shell too large for any of the game (once his father shot a hare with it and nothing was left over but bloody scraps)" (87). While John is aware that the aim of the hunt is to kill violently and wantonly—"to slay" the animals (88)—the representations of hunting in the text all portray a series of vanishing aims and embarrassing accomplishments, generating an overarching criticism of recreational hunting without dramatizing, or giving voice to, any particular characters' resistance to it.

John's male family members aim to hunt "the fabled paauw," or South Africa's large game bird, also known as the Kori Bustard—a species that is vulnerable to extinction, rarely sighted, and "protected by a fine of fifty pounds for shooting them" (88). They settle for hunting for Korhaan, or Bush-Bustard—a smaller member of the Otididae bird family, and one that is easier to sight, but similarly slow (the word "Bustard" originates from the Latin words "*Avis Tarda*" or "slow bird"). Despite John's father's desultory method of placing his gun on the window of the Studebaker, and regardless of the fact that the Bustards rarely take flight but "simply trot faster" (89), he never hits one. Their only successful means of

hunting “is shameful and not to be boasted about” (89), and involves a shock tactic of driving their vehicle across lucerne fields in the dark, switching on the headlights, and shooting shocked bucks.

Although John experiences a sense of vitality (and, implicitly, homosocial bonding) through the hunt, he nonetheless calls into question the stories his family tell themselves to justify the means of their recreational killing: “They tell themselves it is acceptable to hunt in this way because the buck are a pest, eating lucerne that should go to the sheep. But when he sees how tiny the dead buck is, no larger than a poodle, he knows the argument is hollow. They hunt by night because they are not good enough to shoot anything by day” (89). While the men seek, ostensibly, to fortify their masculine qualities of endurance, fortitude, and strength, by exercising these qualities over and against the nonhuman animal realm, their practices are weighted, in Coetzee’s representation, with their troubling laziness, abundant failures, and small and/or infant prey.⁸ As with John’s formulated account of his emergence as a subject by way of the suffering of the injured dog, what is valued is not the success of hunting itself (even a scared hare is a measure of “good hunt”), but its availability for articulating and reinforcing the masculinity of hunters, since “[t]hat is enough of a story to tell the rest of the family” (88). This focus on the iteration and reiteration of masculine violence against nonhuman animals as a means to homosocial or familial bonding, rather than on violence as such, implicitly calls this masculinist violence into question. While John mounts a critique of means, rather than ends, of his male family members’ practices, *Boyhood* associates narrating a fantasy of bearing witness to a dog being run over and constructing a story of the day’s hunt as comparable means to articulate, and consolidate, the

speaker's masculinity, inviolability, and mastery. The iteration of violence to affirm family or community bonds, and the manifest ridiculousness of the kinds of violence that are taken up to fortify that very masculinity, bring that violence under scrutiny.

While John relishes these hunting outings, this pleasure is attributed to a sense of ecological embeddedness in the natural landscape (“the landscape enclosing them, the beloved landscape of ochre and grey and fawn and olive-green”) and his family's place in that landscape (“the sound of their feet tramping the grey river sand”) (88). It is a pleasure that does not stem directly from dominion over, and violence against, nonhuman animals themselves.

Belonging, Nonhuman Animals, and Property

While relationships of domination, commodification, and exploitation structure most human and nonhuman animal relationships in the text—modes that work to foreclose forms of animal-human alliances and identifications—nonhuman animals nonetheless provide John with alternative avenues for identification and community membership through which to imagine his relationship to the land in the context of the history of racist, dispossessing land policies in apartheid-era South Africa. Through direct and indirect comparisons of himself, and those close to him, to wild nonhuman animals and insects, John formulates notions of belonging to place (namely, the Voëlfontein farm) that transcend propertied claims to, and divisions of, place—what the editors of *Land, Memory, Reconstruction, and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa* term “hegemonic assumptions about the authority of the model of private landownership that until now has permeated South African

law and dominated the political debate” (“Introduction” 5). The Voëlfontein farm enables John to feel that he is part of something “greater than any of them” (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 96)—something much more firmly tied to a nonhuman animal-affirming ecological ethic than to justifications of land rights that are premised on privileging land development and agricultural labour over rights based on prior occupation, including occupation by genuine hunter-gatherers and migrant pastoralists. John imagines modes of cross-species identification that are associated with embeddedness in the landscape—modes of belonging that work to transcend racist property laws and nonhuman animals’ functional role as extensions of that property in contexts of agricultural commercialization.

In her thoughtful analysis of *Boyhood* titled “The Pastoral Promise and the Political Imperative: The *Plaasroman* Tradition in an Era of Land Reform,” Jennifer Wenzel discusses *Boyhood*’s engagement with histories of land possession and dispossession as negotiations with Afrikaner identity, locating a “willingness on Coetzee’s part to embrace, and yet qualify, the continuing cultural tradition of Afrikaner love for the land that he has criticized in his earlier work” (105).⁹ For Wenzel, John’s conceptualization of his relation to the Voëlfontein farm is “an embrace and a reconfiguration of Afrikaner identity” because John seeks to root himself in the past through the farm, despite “his rejection of even a desire for a relationship to the farm constituted through private, landed property” (108). Wenzel consequently positions John’s stance as a departure from “conventional Afrikaner relationships to land” and Afrikaner conceptions of “what it means to live on the land” (111) as a result of John’s overt rejection of propertied claims to the land as a whole. Focusing on the text as embodying Coetzee’s own process of reconciliation with Afrikaner identity,

Wenzel contends that the text takes up aspects of the Afrikaans “pastoral promise” embodied in the *plaasroman* tradition, or the Afrikaans pastoral farm novel which became a prominent genre of Afrikaans fiction in the nineteen-twenties and -thirties.¹⁰

While Wenzel’s analysis of the text is largely convincing, her analysis of John’s desires for belonging, in the context of place, as restricted to a reconciliation of Afrikaner notions of land ownership and belonging, might in fact belie John’s expressions throughout the text of being markedly alienated from, and by, his Afrikaner family lineage and the Afrikaner culture of his peers. While John can by no means voluntarily disassociate himself from his Afrikaner lineage, he nonetheless attempts to negotiate means of being and belonging that are less directly entangled with the demarcated racial, ethnic, and gendered identity categories that are available to him and the assimilationist pressures that are detailed throughout *Boyhood*. Wenzel’s contention, for example, that John’s desire to live in the Karoo “outside of the constraints of family life” can be read as a “childhood version of the Afrikaner’s desire for a separate Afrikaner ‘homeland’” (110), risks drawing John’s re-negotiations of the relationships between property and belonging, and what Wenzel rightly locates as John’s sense of connectedness to the place “outside of the line of direct inheritance,” (111) into apartheid ideology which sought to naturalize white stewardship over, and claims to, land, in order to justify the enormous scale of state-sponsored forced removals and black land dispossession. John is careful, after all, to distinguish between notions of place-based identification (“*I belong to the farm*”) and conceptual and/or legal rights to possession (“*The farm belongs to me*”) (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 96), which are not unlike his attempts to disentangle himself from his familial ties while nonetheless seeking to be

embedded in the Voëlfontein family farm. Both speak to his desire to belong to the rural landscape of the Voëlfontein farm outside of property rights—rights of belonging that are indelibly tied to the race-based privilege that John, as a white South African, nonetheless benefits from.

Wenzel makes an important assertion about John's relationship to propertied land claims by affirming John's rejection of forms of belonging to place constituted through landed property (108). For Wenzel, this "sets him radically apart ... from grown-up, capitalist common sense" (108). But what happens if we approach John's attempts to disentangle property rights from forms of belonging, not as the naiveté of a child, but as a valid intervention into hegemonic discourses over the land rights of white South Africans? After all, John's sense of rootedness in the Voëlfontein farm as "the place on earth he has defined, imagined, constructed as his place of origin" (*Doubling* 393-94) is disarticulated from both familial and racial claims to that property, enabling multiple and competing claims of identification with, and belonging to the farm to co-exist without giving primacy to his own claims to belong to the place.¹¹ Outa Jaap, one member of a long line of servants/hirelings whose tenure on the Voëlfontein farm predated the Coetzees', is described as "part of the farm"; even though John's "grandfather may have been its purchaser and legal owner, Outa Jaap came with it, knew more about it, about sheep, veld, weather, than the newcomer would ever know. That was why Outa Jaap had to be deferred to" (*Boyhood* 84). Denied land ownership as a result of the legalized land theft of the Land Act of 1913, Jaap would of course be incapable of purchasing or leasing land outside of small 'native reserves.' John's gesture of recognition bolsters the authority of black South Africans'

rights to land restitution, while simultaneously working to intervene in the pre-eminence of propertied claims to belonging which gain authority in discourses over land rights.¹²

While an analysis of the competing cultural and political claims to the Voëlfontein farm is outside of the scope of this study, the relationship between cross-species identification and the effects of property are not. Coetzee's critical disentanglement of forms of identification from ownership rights opens up sites of human-animal identification outside of nonhuman animals' function as saleable commodities—identifications that are intimately linked to John's sense of what it means to belong to the farm. Coetzee suggests that rendering nonhuman animals into property functions to foreclose capacities for imagining human and nonhuman animal relationality and mutuality. Rather than privileging labour upon, or labour with, domesticated nonhuman animals as means of substantiating ownership over, and identification with, land (or of articulating a lineage of familial stewardship), Coetzee mounts an alternative: through direct and indirect self-alignments with wild nonhuman animals and insects, John imagines transitory and non-exclusive modes of belonging—ones that do not rely upon exclusive ownership rights or the domestication and commodification of nonhuman animals.

I have demonstrated that *Boyhood* creates associations between the relegations of nonhuman animals to consumable and saleable property and their subjection to forms of violence. The text proffers a compendium of quotidian violence against domesticated nonhuman animals in their slaughter and transformation into consumable objects, positioning John as a witness to the transformation of sentient beings into mutilated, shorn, castrated, clipped, and slaughtered sheep parts; wild beasts into de-realized mutton; and an

injured dog into a spectacle of violence. Through these representations, Coetzee's text raises important questions about how the relegation of domesticated nonhuman animals to objects of property delimits human beings' perceived relationship to them. After all, as I have noted, despite witnessing the mutilation and slaughter of sheep in the process of rendering them into saleable parts, and John's imaginative objectification of his own body as an object of slaughter, he nonetheless imagines that those sheep support the dictates of capitalist nonhuman animal consumption since, to revisit a citation considered above, they "have calculated the price and are prepared to pay it—the price of being on earth, the price of being alive" (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 102). In other words, John's perception is critically structured by the modes and contexts in which meeting, and thinking, nonhuman animals takes place—contexts in which nonhuman animals are always already subordinated to what Nicole Shukin terms in *Animal Capital* as "the specific cultural logics and material logistics that have produced animals as 'forms of capital'" (7). The commodification, sale, and consumption of domesticated nonhuman animals relies, after all, on what Wolfe terms the logic and institutions of speciesism, "a logical or linguistic structure that marginalizes and objectifies the other solely based on species, but also a whole network of material practices that reproduce that logic as a materialized *institution* and rely on it for legitimation" (*Animal Rites* 101). Meeting nonhuman animals within these 'materialized institutions' can function to naturalize, and so reproduce, their speciesist logic (as is the case with John's approach to sheep), effectively foreclosing non-hierarchical forms of identification and care. Coetzee makes a related claim, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, in *Disgrace*, as David Lurie's affinities with non-human animals bound for slaughter is at least somewhat

contingent upon their non-saleability as commodities. For similar reasons, wild nonhuman animals and insects that do not have easily saleable bodies, and human owners, provide a fruitful avenue for identification in *Boyhood* for John outside of what Shukin describes as the “historical entanglements of ‘animal’ and ‘capital’”—entanglements from which domestic pet economies, on the other hand, are not immune (7).

While it could be argued, as Cary Wolfe has (echoing Deluze and Guattari), that pets occupy a unique place in the human imaginary as the privileged exception to what Derrida locates as nonhuman animals’ availability for “non-criminal putting to death” (qtd. in Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 6), Coetzee nonetheless demonstrates that pets’ entanglements in competing human claims to other forms of property (namely, land entitlement) render them vulnerable to violence, particularly in the context of conflicted entitlements to land in apartheid-era South Africa, as the fate of the kennel dogs in *Disgrace* makes clear. Thus, even though the pets of *Boyhood* all occupy an individuated and privileged place as domestic property, echoing Deluze and Guattari’s characterization of pets as “individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, ‘my’ cat, ‘my’ dog” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 240-41; qtd. in Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 153), they nonetheless succumb to death as a result of their imbrications in, and subjections to, capitalist economies that render land and nonhuman animals alike into human property. John’s mother’s dog Kim, idealized though he is, dies after consuming poisonous meat that the farmers have left for jackals in an effort to protect their animal capital (here sheep). Similarly, John’s family dog, Cossack, fails to respect property lines and roams freely across and onto neighbourhood properties, “trampling gardens, chasing chickens,” until he is finally murdered when he eats the ground

glass that “someone has put out for him” (Coetzee, *Boyhood* 50). John asserts that “[h]e does not want them to have another dog, not if this is how they must die” (50). The apartheid logic that sought to naturalize and enshrine state-sanctioned (white) property rights contributed to the vulnerability of nonhuman animals in competing interpretations of, and mobilizations of, those property rights. *Boyhood* indicates that despite the privileged position that domesticated pets occupied (and continue to occupy) for many white South Africans, they too were vulnerable because of their status as private property. It is, perhaps, for this reason that John’s attempts to articulate his sense of belonging to the farm outside of economic, familial, or Afrikaner ownership is articulated through nonhuman animal homologies that are not structured, and delimited, by property.

John’s deep sense of love for the Voëlfontein farm is rooted not only in a thorough pleasure in the natural landscape but also in his implicit respect for the wild nonhuman animals and insects that assert their place in that landscape. John “loves every stone of it, every bush, every blade of grass, loves the birds that give it its name, birds that as dusk falls gather in their thousands in the trees around the fountain, calling to each other, murmuring, ruffling their feathers, settling for the night” (80). What John privileges, and what informs the text’s broader endorsements overall, is not the generation of, and trafficking in, nonhuman animal remains, but rather the capacity of the farm to function as a site of *animal belonging*—particularly for those nonhuman animals, such as birds (other than the Bustards), who are able to live with decency, agency, and freedom within that space. It is a space, in other words, in which some wild nonhuman animals have the capacity to assert their primacy of belonging outside of what Derrida calls the “sacrificial economy” (qtd. in Wolfe, *Animal*

Rites 70) to which humans subject them. It is a primacy of belonging that supersedes what Coetzee describes in *White Writing* as human claims to “Inherited ownership of the farm” in the *plaasroman* genre which represents “the work of hands on a particular patch of earth” in order to “inscribe[] it as the property of its occupiers by right” (5). *Boyhood* represents these processes of farm labour, but does not associate them with rights to ownership, noting first and foremost that such rights belong indisputably to the natives, who “Not only ... come with the land, the land comes with them, is theirs, has always been” (61). Nonetheless, it is the nonhuman realm that asserts its ultimate claim upon the land in *Boyhood*, and through the example of the Bloemhof farm, suggests that such a claim must inevitably outlast historically contingent disputes over that land on the part of humans.

Every year John undertakes a pilgrimage to the family’s first farmhouse at Bloemhof. Presumably, the years of unsustainable farming practices have resulted in its inhospitable condition. The fountains have dried up, and of the garden and orchard that were once there, there is now no trace. However, a lone palm tree survives, and has become the location for a resilient nest of bees:

In the stem of this tree bees have made a nest, fierce little black bees. The trunk is blackened with the smoke of fires that people have lit over the years in order to rob the bees of their honey; yet the bees stay on, gathering nectar who knows where in this dry, grey landscape.

He would like the bees to recognize that he, when he visits, comes with clean hands, not to steal from them but to greet them, to pay his respects. But as he nears the palm-tree they begin to buzz angrily; outriders swoop upon

him, warning him away; once he has even to flee, running ignominiously across the veld with the swarm behind him, zigzagging and waving his arms, thankful there is no one to see him and laugh. (97-98)

Despite the fact that these bees pursue their own ends over and against human wants, and despite their attempts to be as inhospitable to humans as possible, John nonetheless respects their resilience. They have survived human efforts to render them into producers of consumable goods for humans (honey), they assert the primacy of their belonging, and the text's representation of their occupation gives credence to their claim.

Insofar as the bees represent a sustainable means of being embedded in, and belonging to, the desert, they point to wild animals and insects as models of a mode of being, and subsequently a means of identification, for John to the farmland. John seeks to mimic the bees' capacity for survival in the desert by limiting his water consumption, since "It will stand him in good stead, he hopes, if he is ever lost in the veld. He wants to be a creature of the desert, this desert, like a lizard" (83). While his survivalist fantasy can be read as a rite of preparation for trekking—the ultimate idiom of Afrikaner possession of the land—it nonetheless reflects an effort on John's part to decouple the politics of land ownership from place-based identity. It is a gesture which he extends to his family members and their own forms of identification with the Karoo, imagining that although the Karoo "is Freek's country, his home" the Coetzees are nonetheless "like swallows, seasonal, here today, gone tomorrow, or even like sparrows, chirping, light-footed, short-lived" (87). In John's fantasy, it is through their connection to the vibrant and wild nonhuman realm that the Coetzees, and John, are once again "rooted in the past" and given "substance" (22)—one that generates a

model of non-exclusive ecological inhabitation and identification. The relationships of nonhuman animals to the land offer the most viable means of conceptualizing farms as “places of freedom, of life” (22) and establish a conceptual starting point for a notion of placedness that does not rely on the commodification of nonhuman animals, the labour of migrant workers, and racist policies of land dispossession and forced displacement.

By approaching the politics of inhabitation, identification, and belonging as both informed and overlaid by, but not identical to, available models of cross-species identification, this chapter has worked to locate *Boyhood*'s important, but oft-ignored, engagement with nonhuman animals and their habitats, as well as Coetzee's intervention into the conceptual and institutional foreclosures that limit, and structure, avenues for identification and care. *Boyhood* is a work that emphasizes the ways in which human and nonhuman animal relations are truncated by the functionalization of nonhuman animals as consumable and saleable objects—a position which renders them available for, and vulnerable to, conceptual and material violence. While available forms of familial, gendered, and place-based identity are continually re-articulated and acted out over and against nonhuman animal bodies, particularly through the subjection of these animals to bodily harm and commodification, *Boyhood* establishes cross-species identification outside of capitalist modes of nonhuman animal consumption as the starting point of non-violent forms of ecological inhabitation, community identity, and place-based belonging. Not only does *Boyhood* position an animal-affirming ethic at the heart of human identity politics and South African land reform policies—it also points to cross-species identification as a starting point for rethinking the material institutions that inform, and seek to justify, human-animal

hierarchies. It is a text that bears witness to the myriad forms of violence to which nonhuman animals are subject in the articulation and consolidation of human identity categories, and the justifying rhetorics and violence of animal agriculture industries, foregrounding the availability of symbolic and material nonhuman animals alike to reflect and solidify human mastery. *Boyhood* intervenes in these forms of epistemic violence, privileging animal-human alliances and identifications as the starting point of less exploitative means of belonging to gender, community, and place. These trans-species identifications supplant, and thereby challenge, ways of relating to nonhuman animals that are informed by speciesist violence.

Boyhood effectively demonstrates that violence against animals, and articulating and/or rehearsing that violence, has acted as a means to both endorse and consolidate the bounds of cultural, gendered, and national belonging. *Boyhood*, like Coetzee's novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, effectively mounts its critique of this instrumentalist violence by bearing witness to the harm of nonhuman animals in ways that denaturalize, and give context to, the rhetorics of what "the animal" signifies. The narratives of *Disgrace*, *Boyhood*, and *Waiting for the Barbarians* affirm that recognizing and/or witnessing speciesist violence that has for so long now informed what nonhuman animals mean in and for the human subject, is indispensable to building non-violent routes for trans-species identification and intervening in the cultural work of speciesist violence. Coetzee gives tangible shape to the institutions of speciesist violence that Wolfe reminds us legitimate the logics and rhetorics of speciesism (*Animal Rites* 101), challenging the forms of violence that are often taken for granted when humans think, or read, across species lines.

In the chapter that follows, I link the politics and pitfalls of reading across species with the issue of encountering otherness, regardless of species. Attridge asserts that Coetzee's novels "can be read as a continued, strenuous enterprise in acknowledging alterity" (*J. M. Coetzee* 12). Attridge reminds us that figures of otherness in Coetzee's writings make demands not only upon the reader, but also on "these familiar discourses"—whether traditional humanist, Romantic, or Enlightenment—"which thereby come under pressure to abandon their universalizing pretensions and to recognize their historical origins and contingent existence" (13). While Attridge addresses the subordination of nonhuman animals in his book, he does not include nonhuman animals in his examples of those "figures of alterity" that appear across Coetzee's corpus, "usually as members of a subordinated group perceived from the point of view of a dominant 'first-world' culture" (12). In the following chapter, I aim to demonstrate that the inequalities of speciesism are conjoined, in Coetzee's works, with racial, gendered, and class inequalities that Coetzee stages in his writings and presents, in Attridge's terms, as barriers not simply to "an easy understanding of large numbers of [Coetzee's] fellow humans" (13), but to an understanding of beings of alterity regardless of species. Turning to Coetzee's novel *Master of Petersburg*, and the politics of reading otherness regardless of species, I argue that acknowledging the demands and challenges of alterity, whether human or nonhuman, requires challenging the abstraction of otherness in the cultures, knowledges, and languages of the sovereign authorial and interpretative subject of traditional humanism. How does the otherness of human and nonhuman animals alike make "demands on us" when "entering into dialogue with us ... is ruled out in advance"? (Attwell 13). My hypothesis is that encountering these figures of

otherness is not privileged by Coetzee as a ready means to recognizing, or establishing dialogue with, alterity. Rather, Coetzee puts pressure on the forms of *reading, thinking,* and *articulating* difference that subsume particular agents (regardless of species) into an affirmation of the sovereign and interpretative subject of the dominant culture(s), and the representative of that culture's mediations on him/herself. *Master of Petersburg* reveals much about the pitfalls of reading difference to substantiate the knowledge and identity of the humanist subject, just as *Waiting for the Barbarians, Disgrace,* and *Boyhood* stage how nonhuman animals and colonized or racialized others have been mobilized to affirm the identity of the colonial power, the cultured identity of the desiring subject of the dominant culture, or the mastery and inviolability of the masculine subject. Locating Coetzee's thoroughgoing challenge to the ethical failures of reading otherness to substantiate the subjectivity of the ruling culture in Chapter Five, I prepare the ground for my analysis of *Elizabeth Costello* in my concluding chapter, and my hypothesis that Costello's meditations on how and to what ends we read nonhuman alterity has ramifications not only for how we acknowledge alterity, but for how we might re-frame what it means to be human, as a result of reformulating the discourses and hierarchies of species.

Endnotes

- 1 Margaret Lenta, as well as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, take up Lejeune's notion of the interpretative pact that accompanies autobiographical texts. While both Lenta's essay and Smith and Watson's book assert the validity of Lejeune's claim, Lenta nonetheless calls into question whether or not such a pact is applicable in the case of both *Boyhood* and *Youth* (159).
- 2 For an invaluable postcolonial analysis of cultures of violence and gender in contemporary South Africa, see Rosemary Jolly's *Cultures of Violence: Narrative, Social Suffering, and Engendering Human Rights in Contemporary South Africa*.
- 3 I borrow the term "unspeakability" from Judith Butler's text *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Butler uses the term to denote utterances that are rendered by state ratification and unspoken communal consensus as being outside of the domain of the publicly speakable (77). Butler's focus, in *Excitable Speech*, is hate speech discourse.
- 4 John's statement about sheep also echoes the disturbing aphorism 'like a sheep to slaughter' that was used in various contexts to characterize the insufficient resistance of Jews during the Holocaust—an allusion that ought to effectively dismantle the logic of the sheep's willingness to die as the toll for living.
- 5 In *Frames of War*, Butler's focus is state-sanctioned violence and war, and she does not discuss masculinity as an identity category in her discussion of injurability.
- 6 While Butler associates the domain of culturally legible expressions of gender identity with "normative violence" (*Gender Trouble*, xxi), her attention to violence in her early texts on gender (*Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*) focus on the violence that attends the subject's failure to be recognizable as a (gendered) subject.
- 7 John "rages" at his mother (13), for example, and conspires with his father by jeering at his mother for purchasing and learning to ride a bicycle, and for having a "desire of her own" (4). He also recalls turning the handle of a grinding machine after his brother put his hand in it, and his brother's finger had to be amputated (119). However, John expressed clear remorse for his violence against his brother and mother alike, indicating that while he is capable of occasional acts of sadistic violence, he either does not identify with them, or aims to disassociate himself from them.
- 8 Coetzee examines the topic of idleness in European discourses on the Cape in his article "Idleness in South Africa" in the collection of essays titled *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Coetzee contends that in the nineteenth-century, the precolonial "regime of idleness" (28) ostensibly dominating the Cape was thought to have been transferred to white colonial settlers, and the Boers of the frontier in particular, who apparently became "afflicted with this lapse into sloth" (29). The implication, for *Boyhood*, is that the lazy hunting tactics of John's family members might "betray the colonizing mission, since in order to justify its conquests colonialism had to demonstrate that the colonist is a better steward of the earth than the native" (*White Writing* 31). Their recreational hunts might aim to fortify their attributes of neo-colonial masculine identity through the conquest of the habitat and its nonhuman inhabitants; however, their lazy tactic signals their failure to do so.
- 9 Wenzel's re-reading of *Boyhood* is less an engagement with the *plaasroman* genre itself than a way to understand Afrikaner conceptions of land that, according to Wenzel, Coetzee seeks to recuperate and reformulate in *Boyhood*.
- 10 Coetzee discusses the Sought African pastoral—the *plaasroman* tradition—in the "Introduction" to his collection of essays titled *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Coetzee argues that European imperialism justified its colonization of Africa through the ideology of inheritance through labour and the notion that "those deserve to inherit the earth who make best use of it" (3). The South African pastoral therefore occludes black labour upon the land, and portrays the labour of white settlers upon the land in order to affirm an ideology of colonial entitlement to that land (5).
- 11 *Doubling the Point* contains a short passage that details Coetzee's life as a boy in South Africa, and is largely considered the starting point of Coetzee's autobiographical fiction, *Boyhood* (393-94).
- 12 In their essay "Giving Land Back or Righting Wrongs?: Comparative Issues in the Study of Land Restitution," Derick Fay and Deborah James argue that "the notion of property gains currency" in "land restitution" (51).

Chapter Five:

‘[T]he Dog is Not the Sign’: Interpretation, Figuration, and Alterity in *The Master of Petersburg*

All is allegory, says my Philip. Each creature is key to all other creatures. A dog sitting in a patch of sun licking itself, says he, is at one moment a dog and at the next a vessel of revelation.

--J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

J. M. Coetzee’s novel, *The Master of Petersburg*, like a number of his fictional works, dramatizes processes of authorship through characters who are themselves engaged in authorial acts.¹ The novel takes a fictional re-imagining of Fyodor Dostoevsky in his late middle age for its central character, focusing on Dostoevsky’s return to Petersburg, Russia, after the mysterious death of his step-son, Pavel, in late 1869. Pavel’s death, we are led to believe, was caused by a group of young revolutionary nihilists led by Sergei Nechaev, but might just as easily have been a suicide. The real Sergei Nechaev is cited as the historical source for Dostoevsky’s own meditation on Nechaevism in his novel *Devils*—a novel on which critics have focused as one of Coetzee’s main sources of inspiration. This is one of a host of literary allusions in *The Master of Petersburg* to texts that are directly or indirectly concerned with the relations between authorial power, interpretative mastery, and the processes and pitfalls of writing. For this reason, it is not surprising that critics of *The Master of Petersburg* have been predominantly concerned with its representation of

authorship; less attention, however, has been given to the representation of reading and interpretation within the novel.² Reading practices prove to be particularly important in the context of a novel in which the power of the authorial act is likened to a form of failed, or failing, interpretative mastery—one that is subsumed by the author, Dostoevsky's, subjection to interpretations, meanings, and motives which are not his own. The novel is, perhaps more pointedly, a sustained meditation on the limitations of a particular mode of appropriative reading that subsumes the particular, local, and literal plane of signification for a reflection of the sovereign authorial and interpretative subject. Dostoevsky's brand of pervasive and self-reflexive mourning in *The Master of Petersburg* functions as one of the motifs of such inward turns. Mourning is framed in the novel as a myopia through which the mourned subject becomes an object, and one readily available for the mourning subject's meditations on him/herself.

However, mourning is merely one manifestation of the “signifying consciousness,” to employ Roland Barthes's terms from *Mythologies*, which “can reason” about its object “while discounting their substance”—a substance, Barthes warns, “which [then] asserts itself” (par. 5). Barthes's implicit claim, that abstract signification can occur at the expense of concrete substance, is apt in the context of *The Master of Petersburg*, in which such concrete substance proves to be a key symbolic resource for the instantiation of the reasoning authorial subject, the fictional Dostoevsky, in his pursuit of interpretative and paternal authority. The fictional Dostoevsky stands in as an example of the anthropocentric pitfalls of the abstracting consciousness—he is, after all, a man deeply ensconced in “ways of seeing” that point, in most instances, back to Dostoevsky himself. This form of

“mastery,” provisional though it might be, is a familiar one; it has functioned as a pillar of the humanist subject’s capacity for cultural transcendence over the apparently lower nonhuman animal realm: the capacity for abstraction. Here it is fitting to recall Jacques Derrida’s assertion that what has been deemed ““proper to man”” and denied to the nonhuman, is an infinite number of “concepts, beginning with the concept of a concept” (*The Animal* 5). However, Coetzee’s novel poses questions about the relations between the instrumentalization of the other through objectification and forms of abstraction that render others, both human and nonhuman, into concepts, figures, and/or metaphors for the interpreting subject, suggesting uncomfortable affinities between the derealisation of the other and the consolidation of the reasoning subject’s vaunted, but narcissistic, self-image as a rational, interpreting subject.

Of course, nonhuman animals have often been dematerialized and abstracted to reflect the enculturation of the subject, in part through the mobilization of rhetorics of animality that I addressed in Chapters One to Three. In the Western philosophical tradition, the human and nonhuman animal species boundary has been overlain with a binary of interpreting (rational) subjects and interpreted objects. These are some of the issues at play in the notion of mastery in Coetzee’s novel, where mastery, as critics have surmised, is intimately tied to authorship. What critics have not tended to register in their approaches to the novel, however, are the roles that nonhuman animals play in Coetzee’s meditations on authority and interpretation. In what follows, I aim to demonstrate that nonhuman animals function as a key register of the price paid for the transcendence of the rational, interpreting subject through processes of interpretation and abstraction, which rely on distancing and

rendering consumable human and nonhuman others. To employ Cary Wolfe's terms, the novel's attention to representational acts foregrounds "the problem of the animal other [as] a privileged site for exploring the philosophical challenges of difference and otherness more generally" (*Animal Rites* 3) by embedding questions about what nonhuman animals mean, are made to mean, firmly within the broader politics of interpreting alterity, particularly authorial appropriation, instrumentalization, and dematerialization of difference. *The Master of Petersburg* works against what Rosemary Jolly locates as a reluctance, on the part of intellectuals, "to look at the relationships between the making and reading of fiction and the making and reading of ourselves as subjects" (*Cultured Violence* 6), and inhabits these relationships, albeit in unsavory ways, to locate the pitfalls of appropriating one plane of signification (the other's difference) as an infinite source of symbolic meaning for the self.

In this chapter, I approach *The Master of Petersburg* as an indispensable text in Coetzee's ongoing engagement with trans-species politics of recognition and alterity—how and to what ends we read alterity across species lines—and a valuable companion to Coetzee's hybrid critical and fictional text *Elizabeth Costello*, which I turn to in my fifth and final chapter. Both works ask how reading and interpretative acts might recognize and make space for an other (and the nonhuman other in particular) as something besides an abstraction or projection that reflects and affirms the dominant discourses of the (human) subject. The kinds of readings that *Elizabeth Costello* thematizes and models offer valuable alternatives to the ethical pitfalls of Dostoevsky's reading practices in *Master of Petersburg*, and Dostoevsky's failures to commune with human and nonhuman others in the absence of dialogue. In this sense, *The Master of Petersburg* prepares the ground for *Elizabeth*

Costello, raising timely questions about the potentials and pitfalls of trans-species contact as a means to make the claims of nonhuman others upon the ruling culture felt. Through Dostoevsky's focalization, the novel asks, what happens to the phenomenological potential Levinas associates with the face-to-face encounter, if the face and/or eyes of nonhuman animals are not seen to communicate nonhuman animal cognition and/or presence? This, Coetzee demonstrates, poses considerable challenges to the forms of communion that might be possible in human and nonhuman animal contact zones, and renders those particular, and situated, nonhuman animals vulnerable to abstractions and figurations that affirm the transcendent subjectivity of the interpreting, human, subject.

In Coetzee's writings, questions about how and to what ends we encounter and recognize nonhuman animal difference are entangled with, and often illuminated by, how we register and interpret alterity, regardless of species. This is certainly the case in *The Master of Petersburg*—a novel that establishes clear ties between Dostoevsky's interpretation of, and response to, the so-called "mute" nonhuman animals of the novel and the silence of his deceased son. In what follows, I contend that Dostoevsky's attempts to commune with his deceased step-son Pavel, as well as Dostoevsky's failure to register the response of a dog, mutually expose the limitations of Dostoevsky's abstracting consciousness. I consider these interpretative failures in light of the philosophical contributions of the existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel, who summed up his intellectual project as an "obstinate and untiring battle against the spirit of abstraction" (*Man Against Mass Society* 1), privileging a notion of "creative fidelity" which substitutes the disposability of the other with notions of co-presence and communion (*Creative Fidelity*), and draw upon Levinas's

phenomenological account of ethical responsiveness before the other. In the face of the nonhuman animal and in the absence of human dialogue, however, Marcel's and Levinas's phenomenologies, and Dostoevsky's recognition of alterity, falters.³

Intervening in the pitfalls of consumable figurations as they are dramatized across the novel, I turn to the privileged human and nonhuman animal contact site in the writing of Jacques Derrida, who has seized human and nonhuman animal encounters as means to put pressure upon, if not radically disrupt, the abstracted roles that nonhuman animals have been made to occupy in traditional philosophical and humanist discourses of the West. I seek to draw out the processes of figuration that can attend 'real' nonhuman animals' emergence on literary landscapes, and to consider if and how such figuration renders these animals consumable for what Helen Tiffin, during a keynote address, described as the "obdurately anthropocentric form" of the novel, which has tended to focus on the human psyche and its dramas of development.⁴ Drawing out the ramifications of consumable figuration staged in *The Master of Petersburg* is an effective entry point into my final chapter, which asserts that *Elizabeth Costello* shows us how we might read across species in ways that affirm, rather than appropriate, nonhuman animal life.

Encountering Pavel

Coetzee's approach to authority, authorship, and appropriative abstraction in *The Master of Petersburg* has affinities with the tenets of the Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel (a strange bedfellow, perhaps, although not so strange given the historical Dostoevsky's forays into Christian existentialism). Marcel called for a fundamentally

relational approach to identity—one attainable through forms of communion with, and presence before, the other, resisting notions of alienation more prominent in the self-other dialectics of existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre. Espousing an epistemology similar to that of his contemporary, Martin Buber, Marcel situates authentic relationships with, and recognition of, the other as a means to concrete self-knowledge, claiming “I communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with the other person, i.e. when he becomes thou [rather than an it, or object] for me” (*Creative Fidelity* 34).

Marcel’s notion of communion is proffered as a corrective to a utilitarian and objectifying knowledge of the other, since “objectification ... implies a dialogue between me and myself,” and is only possible if “I detach myself from this living relation in order to examine it” (36). The latter, for Marcel, is a form of knowledge grounded in self interest, and functions as a relationship with an abstraction of the other, rather than with the particular, situated, other:

The other as other exists for me only in so far as he is other, only exists for me in so far as I am open to him, in so far as he is a Thou. But I am only open to him in so far as I cease to form a circle with myself, inside which I somehow place the other, or rather his idea; for inside this circle the other becomes the idea of the other, and the idea of the other is no longer the other qua the other, but the other qua related to me; and in this condition he is uprooted and taken to bits, or at least in process of being taken to bits. (*Being and Having* 107)

Rendering the other into a figure, a generic ‘he’ rather than a ‘thou’ is, for Marcel, the “spirit of abstraction” (*Against Mass Society*, 1). Marcel’s philosophical claims provide an effective framework for approaching Dostoevsky’s mourning and longing to restore Pavel to life—a sustained, psychic drama around the resuscitation of a child that occupies Dostoevsky throughout *The Master of Petersburg*.

While the setting of *The Master of Petersburg* is late nineteenth-century Russia, Athena Andreadis is right to contend that “Although there is a strong flavor of place, it is almost as if the entire book forms and tumbles inside Dostoevsky’s roiling thoughts” (par. 6). These thoughts are centered, at the novel’s outset, on Dostoevsky’s overwhelming grief. Drawn to Petersburg belatedly after the funeral of his step-son, Pavel, Dostoevsky figures himself as Pavel’s preeminent paternal figure, tasked with retrieving, defining, and commemorating the identity of Pavel as *his* son. The dialectic of father and son for Dostoevsky necessitates that Pavel occupy the abstracted role of son (to Dostoevsky and Dostoevsky alone) unproblematically and without a reciprocal gaze. This is the condition whereby Dostoevsky can assert preeminent paternal authority, telling Pavel’s landlady, Anna, “I am his mother and his father, I am everything to him, and more” (Coetzee, *Master of Petersburg* 16).⁵

The authority of the father is an interpretative one, and one that is repeatedly linked to authorship. Bristling with the pride of the progenitor, Dostoevsky asserts his capacity to author Pavel, telling Anna (who has, in fact, been living with Pavel for some time) “But now let me tell you about Pavel” (74). His capacity to sustain this paternal authority as constitutive of his own self-image is tied to his capacity to be the primary, if not sole, bearer

and interpreter of an abstracted image of Pavel. However, this authority is undermined, in the first part, by Pavel's apparent loyalty to other paternal figures—namely his biological father and the young revolutionary leader Nechaev, who confronts Dostoevsky's capacity to represent Pavel with a foil to Dostoevsky's paternal authorship, asserting "Very well, *let me tell you* about your son" (103, emphasis added). Dostoevsky resists seeing that the son that he "abandoned" (5) was in fact bristling with unremarkable contempt against his stepfather and ensconced in a spirit of revolutionary nihilism in late nineteenth-century Russia on the brink of revolution. Instead, Dostoevsky recasts his own mourning and longings along mythical lines, "uproot[ing]" Pavel, in Marcel's terms, from the particular historical, political, and contextual specificities of Pavel's life (*Being and Having* 107). Retrieving Pavel's ghost, the ghost of Pavel abstracted, idealized, and a son to Dostoevsky alone, is figured as an Orphic descent into the oceanic realms of Dostoevsky's own psyche, so that he might retrieve his son from "inside him" (Coetzee, *Master of Petersburg* 52). The image of Pavel that he guards, it turns out, is a metaphysical abstraction—a "sign" (83), "a shade, violet upon grey, an echo" (153). Through this interpretative act, Dostoevsky attempts to make a "lost angel" (220-21) out of his rebellious young son-in-law, and himself, as Pavel's diary scornfully contends, "the father forgiving the prodigal son" (218).

Dostoevsky positions himself as the privileged bearer of Pavel's phantasmagoric spirit, assuming the role of the chosen one tasked with resurrecting his step-son: "Poet, lyre-player, enchanter, lord of resurrection, that is what I am called to be" (Coetzee, *Master of Petersburg* 152). Envisioning the retrieval of a metaphysical abstraction of Pavel—of "A boy ... in arrested metamorphosis, in purgatorial form" (53)—through imagery of psychic

recession, and creating direct links between this and the authorial act, Dostoevsky positions himself as the Greek prophet Orpheus, archetype of the artist. Orpheus is of course best known as the mourning husband who travelled to the underworld and charmed Hades and Persephone with his mournful songs, convincing them to allow his deceased wife Eurydice to return to life. The only condition was that Orpheus should proceed ahead of Eurydice and not look back until she reached earth. Failing, and turning to her, Orpheus neglected the terms of their agreement and Eurydice was lost forever.

As with many of Coetzee's literary allusions, this mythical source text is itself the subject of contested interpretations. *The Master of Petersburg* gestures towards Plato's less than celebratory interpretation of Orpheus, wherein the gods distrust Orpheus's devotion and love, and show him "an apparition only of her whom he sought, but herself they would not give up," since Orpheus "showed no spirit; he was only a harp-player, and did not dare like Alcestis to die for love" (par. 49). Dostoevsky himself asserts, in *The Master of Petersburg*, that "Poetry might bring back his son" (17), but the novel's closing paragraphs associate that form of authorship and the Pavel 'resurrected,' or constructed there, in a disturbing light. Throughout the novel, the apparition that Dostoevsky eagerly pursues is not the fabrication of the gods, it seems, but a figure of Pavel placed, in Marcel's terms, within "a circle with[in]" Dostoevsky (*Being and Having* 107). Despite the notable differences between Marcel's and Emmanuel Levinas's approach to alterity, the Coetzee character, Dostoevsky's, fabrication proves incompatible with the forms of contact, or exchange, privileged by both epistemologies.

The motif of mourning as internal descent is figured as an Orphic call to Pavel, as Dostoevsky silently “forms his lips over his son’s name, three times, four times” imagining “Orpheus walking backwards step by step, whispering the dead woman’s name, coaxing her out of the entrails of hell” (Coetzee, *Master of Petersburg* 5). This is an attempt at communion, in Marcel’s terms, but one that emerges more prominently as a dialogue with Dostoevsky himself, as he finds that, in his longings, “he cannot distinguish Pavel from himself. They are the same person; and that person is no more or less than a thought” (21). Dostoevsky’s attempts to encounter Pavel repeatedly fail in Levinas’s terms, in part because of Dostoevsky’s inability to conjure, and sustain, Pavel’s face. For Levinas, the phenomenological face-to-face encounter is the basis of ethics; it instills a responsibility for the other that is premised on recognitions of difference. Failing to see this difference—a difference that confronts him through the resurfacing image of Nechaev’s scarred and youthful face (not to mention Pavel’s words)—is met, by Dostoevsky, with an imagined moment of face-to-face contact:

Not oblivion but the moment before oblivion, when I come panting up to you at the rim of the well and we look upon each other for a last time, knowing we are alive, sharing this one life, our only life. All that I am left to grasp for: the moment of the gaze, salutation and farewell in one, past all arguing, past all pleading: ‘Hello, old friend. Goodbye, old friend.’ Dry eyes. Tears turned to crystals.

I hold your head between my hands. I kiss your brow. I kiss your lips.

The rule: one look, one only; no glancing back. But I look back.

You stand at the wellside, the wind in your hair, not a soul but a body rarefied, raised to its first, second, third, fourth, fifth, essence, gazing upon me with crystal eyes, smiling with golden lips.

Forever I look back. Forever I am absorbed in your gaze. A field of crystal points, dancing, winking, and I am one of them. Stars in the sky, and fires on the plain answering them. (53-54)

Dostoevsky's lyrical rendering of this impossible moment of contact relies on a rarefied figure of Pavel—one that requires substituting the actual Pavel with multiplying planes of metaphysical signification and abstraction. The description of Pavel's body as "rarefied" works towards an exalted transcendence of Pavel, but it also suggests an increasingly esoteric distance from Pavel himself and the historical determinants of Pavel's identity and difference. The likening of Pavel's facial sense organs (eyes and lips) with precious metal and crystalline solids performs an idealization through artistic petrification. The issue is precisely that such an imagined meeting, even as it centres on the organs of human communication, nonetheless fails to encounter the alterity of Pavel himself. Without the revelation of Pavel's unique face, rather than an idealized face-as-such, the impact of the Levinasian encounter and its capacity to reveal Pavel's alterity to Dostoevsky—the locus of its ethical force—is diminished. Communing with the abstracted figure of Pavel generates an intra-, rather than inter-subjective, moment, diminishing the summons (if not abolishing it) that the face makes, even in the absence of language. It fails, in short, to disrupt Dostoevsky's self-communion, and to enable Pavel to participate in dialogue with Dostoevsky, even in death—something that is ineluctably associated with coming to terms

with the alterity of Pavel when he was alive. Faced with this failure, Dostoevsky privileges the intersubjective closeness that emerges from one of the (or perhaps the) most intimate forms of face-to-face contact: the kiss.

Dostoevsky's rendering of this moment of contact is found lacking, as I have been suggesting, because of Pavel's absence, both in his literal inability to be present, to participate, but also because of his figural abstraction. Dostoevsky later registers this failure while nonetheless privileging kissing as a form of communion, claiming "If my lips, tender as the fingertips of the blind, had been able to brush you just once, you would not have quit this existence bitter against me" (153). However, the inviolability of the imagined kiss to generate communion with the deceased Pavel himself, rather than his figuration as a deceased object, has already been foregrounded for us, as readers, in Dostoevsky's first dream. There, Dostoevsky finds himself immersed in water, confronted with Pavel's prone body, but unable to speak to him: "From his turtle-throat he gives a last cry, which seems to him more like a bark, and plunges toward the boy. He wants to kiss the face; but when he touches his hard lips to it, he is not sure he is not biting" (18). The success of the kiss's communion, it seems, is incumbent on the capacity to come into contact with something external to the self, rather than the exalted abstraction of the other. It requires, in other words, recognition of Pavel's inalienable alterity.

Pavel's object status (as both a figure and a corpse) renders these imagined moments of communion and artistic idealization a form of regress and withdrawal, rather than participation with, and/or recognition of, the other. In this sense, Dostoevsky's failed communion both echoes and departs from one potential source text: D.H. Lawrence's short

story “Odour of Chrysanthemums.” In Lawrence’s story, the encounter between the main character, Elizabeth Bates, and the body of her recently deceased husband, Walter Bates, generates a moment of lucid vision: the separation of the living from the dead, of Elizabeth from the corpse, leads her to recognize that she had, in fact, failed to recognize her husband’s alterity, subjectivity, and (in classic modernist fashion), alienation from her, when he was alive:

Elizabeth embraced the body of her husband, with cheek and lips. She seemed to be listening, inquiring, trying to get some connection. But she could not. She was driven away. He was impregnable. ... And she knew what a stranger he was to her. ... She looked at his face, and she turned her own face to the wall. For his look was other than hers, his way was not her way. She had denied him what he was—she saw it now. She had refused him as himself. ... [D]eath ... restored the truth. (2256-57)

Elizabeth’s epiphany is further articulated through the terminology of the subject-object dialectic: coming into contact with “this other being,” and recognizing that “*He* existed all the time,” Elizabeth asks “What was that I have been living with?” (2257). In Marcel’s existential philosophy, Elizabeth’s recognition of her husband as a subject (a *thou*), rather than an object, occasions authentic communication with, and knowledge of, the self.

In Coetzee’s novel, Pavel’s petrified abstraction is a projection; born(e) within the “circle with[in]” Dostoevsky (Marcel, *Being and Having* 107), it points back to Dostoevsky’s own grief. The prevailing enigma of the novel, and one to which I will turn shortly, is the relationship(s) between nonhuman animal alterity and Pavel’s otherness, the

kinds of summons they both produce, and the way that Coetzee frames, and troubles, Dostoevsky's responsiveness. For now, let it suffice to say that an encounter with a tethered dog, abandoned in the cold, leads Dostoevsky to momentarily entertain, and yet discard, the transformation in thought dramatized in Lawrence's short story. Abandoning the dog, Dostoevsky asserts, "As for Pavel, if he is to have nothing else, let him at least have his death to himself, let his death not be taken from him and turned into the occasion of his father's reformation" (81). Nonetheless, in the very next paragraph, Dostoevsky acknowledges, "Pavel's death does not belong to Pavel – that is just a trick of language. As long as he is here, Pavel's death is his death. Wherever he goes he bears Pavel with him, like a baby blue with cold" (81). The cold, and seemingly stillborn, baby is suggestively associated with the frigid dog unceremoniously abandoned by Dostoevsky shortly before, linking the alterity of, and appropriation of, both as Dostoevsky's objects. This raises questions about the kinds of reformation in thought that are, and are not, occasioned by contact (both real and imagined) with figures of otherness in the novel. As Attridge argues, Coetzee's novels so often represent figures of alterity who make demands on us, even as the possibility of "entering into dialogue with us ... is ruled out in advance" (*J. M. Coetzee* 13). However, inter-subjective communion with Pavel is at least tentatively achieved in the novel, but it is associated with language-based dialogue.

The Language of the Summons

Having failed to "acknowledge [Pavel] in truth" (238), Dostoevsky must confront the abstraction that he has erected as the pillar of his miasma of grief, and in so doing, let go of

the privileged image of himself as the exalted mourning and authoring father. Giving up the ghost of Pavel and making himself “confront the figure” (237) of his own abstraction is directly linked to “let[ting] the pen fall” so that the “figure across the table”—Pavel—can “take it up and write” (237), “loose in all his rage against the rule of the father” (239). In Marcel’s terms, Dostoevsky has to encounter and commune with Pavel, rather than his idea of him—an encounter that is largely based in language. Reading Pavel’s writing is the culminating event of Dostoevsky’s developing capacity to see Pavel and his reciprocal gaze (to register, in other words, Pavel’s response) and the actual conditions, and shortcomings, of their relationship.

A pivotal example of this communion is the memory of a chance encounter with Pavel two years before his death. In Dostoevsky’s recuperative rendering, Pavel arrived at home, drunk, without shoes, and, before the night was over, covered in his own vomit. Dostoevsky’s representation shifts the specific and local towards a transcendental abstraction: “Pavel tramping the cold streets after midnight in his socks. A lost angel, an imperfect angel, one of God’s castoffs. His feet the feet of a walker, a treader upon our great mother; of a peasant” (220-21). The repeated use of the indefinite article “a,” as well as the deployment of the progressive, rather than simple, tense (not to mention the absence of the verb ‘to be’) suggest an atemporal universality. This abstracting depersonalization is markedly distinct from Pavel’s unsympathetic portrait, according to which Pavel in fact encountered Dostoevsky in the street rather than at home, ““furtive (had he been with a whore?)”” (218), leading Pavel to feign drunkenness, and finally sleep, as Dostoevsky washed Pavel’s feet. ““All v. embarrassing”” Pavel concludes in his account, and asserts to

his mother the next morning that he must have his own lodgings (218-19). Confronted with Pavel's own written interpretation (an interpretation that Anna and the police magistrate, Maximov, attempt, without success, to guard from Dostoevsky and protect him from), Dostoevsky is forced to concede to Anna, "Unfortunately, that is not how Pavel remembered the night. In his account there is nothing about birds or angels. Nothing about parental care either. Parental love" (221). Being subsumed by Pavel's own interpretative and authorial acts proves central to Dostoevsky's ability to "acknowledge [Pavel] in truth" (238).

In a novel replete with imitations and "lugubrious disguise" (125), where the opacity of signs and language's representational value repeatedly come into question, and Dostoevsky repeatedly flounders "trying to read the signs" (69) and wonders "where are true words to be found?" (120), Pavel's word (in his diary and fiction alike) is often given notable truth-value. It is the basis, after all, of a series of "painful discoveries" (147) on Dostoevsky's part, which precipitate his (although ultimately failing) capacity to confront the figure of himself as *the* mourning father that he so furtively guards. It occasions Dostoevsky letting "his own rage loose too" (239) against Pavel's independence and recognizing his own disdain and paltry love for the step-son he in fact "abandoned" (151). Confronting the truth-value of Pavel's words—"the full truth" of his writing, which is "dullest of all" (152)—is the culmination point in the sustained dismantling of Dostoevsky's authorial mastery as Pavel's preeminent father. However, this capacity for recognition fails when Dostoevsky encounters, and kisses, a particularized (mimetic) dog. I shall now

explore Dostoevsky's violent abnegation, and its implications for trans-species communion as a means to recognize nonhuman alterity.

Realizing Figures

When Hughes the poet stands before the jaguar cage, he looks at an individual jaguar and is possessed by that individual jaguar life. It has to be that way. Jaguars in general, the subspecies jaguar, the idea of a jaguar, will fail to move him because we cannot experience abstractions.

--J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

The need to address consumable figurations is particularly pressing in the case of nonhuman animals, who have for too long now been hollowed into emblems of anthropocentric dramas and, in the case of a fabular tradition, petrified images of isolatable human values. In keeping with my methodology throughout this dissertation, I will begin by visiting the rhetorical sites of the animal in *The Master of Petersburg*, in order to consider the biases to which the apparition of the animal has been made to speak in a philosophical tradition in which Dostoevsky's perspective is demonstrably ensconced. Dostoevsky's claims throughout the novel about what the animal *means* are instructive, insofar as they echo some of the salient pronouncements on nonhuman animal lack in the Western philosophical tradition. Allow me to take stock of the familiar rhetorical sites of nonhuman animals as they appear in the novel—sites that appropriate the supine malleability of the

animal and render it available to speak to a world in which nonhuman animals themselves have little place.

I use the homogenizing term ‘the animal’ to suggest that Dostoevsky’s deployments and appropriations of nonhuman animals entail a linguistic violence, and one that Derrida locates within the name “the animal” (*The Animal* 23). In Marie-Louise Mallet’s words, for Derrida, “the violence done to animals begins ... with this pseudo-concept of ‘the animal,’ with the use of this word in the singular, as though all animals from the earthworm to the chimpanzee constituted a homogenous set to which ‘(the hu)man’ would be radically opposed” (“Foreword” to *The Animal*, x). In Coetzee’s novel, the linguistic function of the animal as an abstraction for the human has its correlative in the homogenization of nonhuman animals as lack. Their principle deprivation is a conceptual one: making “the animal a *theorem*, something seen and not seeing” (Derrida, *The Animal* 14), entails denying nonhuman animals the capacity not only to be bearers of a returned gaze; it involves disavowing the interpretative and communicative element of that gaze.⁶ In other words, insofar as a nonhuman animal can see, it is assumed that that animal cannot have access to the entity, or concept, that it views.⁷ From this follows a disavowal of nonhuman animals’ knowledge of principal human abstractions, including time, mortality, and transcendence. It is therefore instructive that while Dostoevsky valorizes himself as a metaphysical author figure capable of authoring Pavel’s transcendent figuration, Dostoevsky inscribes dogs as “blind and deaf and stupid and immovable” (52) and nonhuman animals more broadly as “without shame, without memory” (10). It comes as little surprise when Dostoevsky indirectly recalls Aristotle’s familiar assertion that “the life of the lower animals is defined

by the capacity of sensation, of man as the capacity for sensation plus thought” (qtd. in Thomson 279) when he bemoans, “let me be the thinking animal,” in his efforts to save Pavel from the knowledge of his impending death (Coetzee, *Master of Petersburg* 21).

Focalized through Dostoevsky’s point-of-view, figurative nonhuman animals in the novel are faithful to the discourses of speciesism. Dostoevsky takes up a fabular “faithful ox” (Coetzee, *Master of Petersburg* 53), for example, as a metaphor for the human heart: “Heart, the faithful ox that keeps the millwheel turning, that casts up not so much as a glance of puzzlement when the axe is raised on high, but takes the blow and folds at the knees and expires” (53). The ox, it seems, is allegiant to both a philosophical tradition that has denied it the capacity to read the sign of its own impending death, and the institutions of speciesism that have rendered the ox both a labourer in, and consumable object of, agribusiness.

In *The Master of Petersburg*, these assumptions about nonhuman animal lack are made locatable in the gazes of nonhuman animals. When Dostoevsky meets two young girls through Nechaev, both are described as consuming bread with “eyes blank and vacant ... [l]ike animals, he thinks: they know where it comes from and do not care” (191). Depriving the visual sense organs of their capacity to communicate nonhuman animal presence and responsiveness raises troubling questions about the anticipated moment of human and nonhuman animal contact in the novel, particularly in light of the privileged role that the gaze of nonhuman animals has occupied as of late in critical and philosophical approaches to trans-species encounters.

Trans-Species Contact

The cries of a dying dog

are to be blotted out

as best I can.

René Char

you are a poet who believes

in the power of beauty

to right all wrongs

I believe it also.

With invention and courage

we shall surpass

the pitiful dumb beasts,

let all men believe it,

as you have taught me also

to believe it.

--William Carlos Williams, "To a Dog Injured in the Street," lines 1-11

If we extend the horizon of Marcel's critique of abstraction to consider nonhuman animals, it has affinities with critiques of linguistic derealisations and/or dematerializations of nonhuman animals espoused by scholars such as Jacques Derrida and Una Chaudhuri. What is more, Marcel's call for inter-, rather than intra-subjective exchange as a means to commune with, rather than appropriate, the other, bears some resemblances to a line of

thought pursued by philosophers such as Derrida and Donna Haraway, who have seized human and nonhuman animal encounters to challenge the anthropocentric consumptions of nonhuman animals in the rhetoric and practices of speciesism as source material for the human. In this widely influential line of argumentation, the gaze of the nonhuman animal has become an emblem of that animal's ineffable testimony and response to the violation and consumption of animal life.

In *When Species Meet*, for example, Haraway likens the physicality of human and nonhuman animal contact to a perceptual shock. When species meet, Haraway contends, hierarchical order of human and nonhuman being so crucial to speciesist thought can be disrupted (235); the contact zone has the potential to be the site of mutual recognition, response, and co-presence (236). Derrida privileges an encounter with a companion cat to radically disrupt the inhuman limits of the human: "the gaze called 'animal' offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself" (*The Animal* 12). Under this dislocating gaze, Derrida (and the subjectivity of humanist thought) is naked. And if the title of John Berger's oft-cited essay mounts questions about the means and ends of trans-species encounters ("Why Look at Animals?"), the answer is similarly locatable in the power of the nonhuman animal's gaze to generate a conceptual turn. When "man" is "being seen by the animal," that gaze has the thoroughgoing power to disrupt the anthropocentric limits of the so-called animal in "man" (5). For Berger, the gaze of the nonhuman animal exposes the secret "of the animal's likeness with, and unlikeness from

man”—“secrets ... about animals as an intercession between man and his origin” (6). Once ‘man’ “intercepted an animal’s look,” these secrets were “recognised” (6). In Chaudhuri’s analysis of Berger’s article, the implications of Berger’s scene of recognition are substantial: “Animals can no longer perform the vital function for which human beings had long prized them: their ability to foster in us a kind of self-consciousness that is impossible to attain within the human species itself” (107).

In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Derrida grounds his critique of the abstracted animal in a privileged anecdote about a particular and literal cat, insisting on its truth value: “I must immediately make it clear, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn’t the *figure* of a cat. It doesn’t silently enter the bedroom as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse our myths and religions, literature and fables” (6). Engaging an elaborate series of negations, Derrida works to wrest this cat from a history of semiotic and symbolic over-determination, demonstrating how difficult it can be to point, with the language available to us in philosophical and critical discourses, to nonhuman animals themselves. The basis of his cat’s “unsubstitutable singularity”—its status as “*this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, into this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked” is, for Derrida, its “refus[al] to be conceptualized” (9). The cat’s presence, it would seem, has a pre-emptive interpretative authority—one capable of *refusing* abstract signification and disowning ‘the human’ of what is “proper to man”: “concepts” (5).

In *Animal Capital*, Shukin calls into question the distinction between literal and figurative nonhuman animal presence in Derrida’s text. Shukin contends that Derrida’s

attempts to privilege the particular, real, cat are undermined, because Derrida “remains transfixed with animals as first metaphors for *différance* as an uncanny force undermining ontological discourses in the West” (37). The “real cat,” Shukin contends, is in fact “transubstantiated, despite [Derrida’s] protestations, into one figure in a line of suspenseful figures emptied of historical substance” (37). Of course, Derrida is careful to assert that this so-called real cat is not an “ambassador” for the “immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race,” nor is it “the exemplar of a species called ‘cat’” (*The Animal* 9), just as he works to do “all [he] can do to prevent” the moment of contact from “being presented as a primal scene: this deranged theatrics of the *wholly other they call ‘animal’*” (Shukin 11). Nonetheless, for Derrida, these naked encounters have apocalyptic consequences, inscribing the real (or, more properly, metonymic) cat as an exemplar of “beasts of the Apocalypse” (*The Animal* 12). Despite my affinities with Derrida’s philosophical critiques of animal figures and animality, I am left with some abiding concerns.

The apocalyptic freight conferred on particularized, and situated, nonhuman animals in trans-species meetings is often linked to human becoming (becoming naked, becoming ethical, becoming a child ready for the apocalyptic challenge to the humanist subject). The transformative potential of these encounters depends, more often than not, on recognizing and registering a noncompliance that ostensibly inheres in the summons of the gaze: the refusal of a nonhuman animal to signify as something other than him/herself. *The Master of Petersburg* suggests, however, that the deconstructive potential of nonhuman animals’ response might be contingent on an assumption of an animal’s eyes or lips as a ready vehicle

for trans-species dialogue or communion, whereby the nonhuman animal readily testifies to, and makes demands upon, the subject upon which the nonhuman animal gazes. Once the animal sees, Derrida asserts, and once the power of the gaze is “theoretically registered,” the nonhuman animal ceases to be a “*theorem*” (14). Why, then, does the fictional Dostoevsky fail to recognize, and register, the alterity and ethical demands of nonhuman animals in *The Master of Petersburg*?

This question I am posing is focalized in *The Master of Petersburg* when Dostoevsky, who is, in fact, an expert in deploying figurative nonhuman animals, is confronted with a real, and injured, dog on a chain in an exchange that is at the heart of the novel. The contact with the nonhuman animal itself comes as a relief in a novel which is awash with nonhuman animal analogies, most of which function to appropriate animals as symbolic source material for Dostoevsky’s mediations on himself. The fate of nonhuman animals in these linguistic functionalizations is clear when Dostoevsky asserts, earlier in the novel, that his grief is “like a dog that has taken up residence with him, a big grey dog, blind and deaf and stupid and immovable. When he sleeps, the dog sleeps; when he wakes, the dog wakes; when he leaves the house, the dog shambles behind him” (52). As with Winston Churchill’s well known comparison of depression with a little black dog, both the vehicle (“man’s” best friend) and the tenor (grief) of the metaphor are allegiant to Dostoevsky’s plight.

Caught in this miasma of self-obsession, and intent on finding a sign from his dead step-son, Pavel, Dostoevsky mistakes the wailing of an injured dog in the street for his own name. Certainly it is no coincidence that the figure of the suffering animal is not easily

locatable in a particular, historical, place and time, and Dostoevsky is left searching right and left, back and forth, before he determines the location of the dog. In an amusing metafictional moment, Dostoevsky encounters the actual dog “tethered to a drainpipe by a slim chain” in an alley where human waste is carried (80). Like David Lurie in *Disgrace*, Dostoevsky receives a host of licks from the desperate canine. However, unlike David, Dostoevsky turns away and neglects the dog. As the dog howls after him in the snow, Dostoevsky bemoans, “Why me? ... Why should I bear all the world’s burdens?” (81). Certainly, this refusal of care is an ethical failure on Dostoevsky’s part, who “suspects he will not save the dog, not this night or even the next night, if there is to be a next night. He is waiting for a sign, and he is betting (there is no grander word he dare use) that the dog is not the sign, is not a sign at all, is just a dog among many dogs howling in the night” (83). He is waiting on a sign of (or from) the deceased Pavel, but the word accrues another valence: the dog, it suggests, is the real sort.

As we know, Dostoevsky is interested in nonhuman animals as symbolic registers of his *own* plight—the dog, he asserts, is “*a thing* that does not concern him” (80, emphasis added). Nonetheless, an expectation exists that this coming into contact with the undeniable presence of the suffering nonhuman animal who looks at, and kisses, Dostoevsky, might generate, in Derrida’s terms, an apocalyptic shift—one capable of disrupting the allegorical plane of nonhuman animal signification with the literal; one that makes undeniable *demands* on the human subject. Derrida asserts, “No one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness” (even though “[s]ome will still try”), since in the face of the “*undeniability* of this response (yes, they

suffer, like us who suffer for them and with them), before this response that precedes all other questions, both ground and cornerstone of the problematic shift” (*The Animal* 28). What then are we to make of Dostoevsky’s fundamental indifference in the face not only of the “rank terror” and “forlorn howls” (Coetzee, *Master of Petersburg* 81) of this needy nonhuman animal, but of its intimacies of contact—namely, the kiss? Surely most readers recall Dostoevsky’s own parable to the young Finnish revolutionary and follower of Nechaev about a beggar tasked to “dispose of an old, blind dog” who errs when he “strokes the dog to calm it, and murmurs a word or two, and as he does so feels a current of feeling begin to flow, so that from that instant onward he and the dog are no longer strangers, and what should have been a mere job of work has turned into the blackest betrayal” such that the dog’s yelp of surprise at being killed “haunts him for days afterwards” (98) because even “a mere dog can do that” (99).

The answer is locatable, it seems, in the intersections between figurative and literal economies of sense, and the fact that Dostoevsky has not confronted the figure of the dog that he has ceaselessly employed as a malleable trope to speak to the excesses of his bodily desires, since around “the figure” there is a “field of indifference tremendous in its force” (238). It is, after all, a novel in which the word “figure” appears twenty-one times, with connotations (“appearance” [“Figure,” def. 1b]; “object of mental contemplation” [“Figure,” def. 6]; “image;” “likeness” [“Figure,” def. 9a]; “phantasm” [“Figure,” def. 9b]; “part enacted” [“Figure,” def. 11a]; “emblem;” “type” [“Figure,” def. 12]; “metaphor” [“Figure,” def. 21a]) that are applicable to Pavel and nonhuman animals both. Such a confrontation proves to be a key component of enabling both to manifest presence to Dostoevsky, and yet

it proves to be no simple task: “Confronting it is like descending into the waters of the Nile and coming face to face with something huge and cold and grey that may once have been born of woman but with the passing of ages has retreated into stone, that does not belong in this world, that will baffle and overwhelm all his powers of conception” (240).

Face-to-face with a suffering nonhuman animal, Dostoevsky questions the distinction between literal and figurative planes of signification, resisting the urge to try “by cunning to distinguish things that are things from things that are signs,” and quickly appropriating the dog into a drama of his own as he claims to be “at his wits end, like a dog on a chain that breaks the teeth that gnaw it” (83). The grammatical positioning of the “chain” as the subject of the sentence gives the chain’s action (of breaking), rather than the animal’s experience (of teeth breaking), priority as the basis of comparison (83). What is rhetorically occluded, in this figure of speech, and in Dostoevsky’s interpretative failure, is the suffering of the nonhuman animal, even as it is taken up as a simile for Dostoevsky’s psychological plight. Just as the dog is chained to Dostoevsky, Dostoevsky is “manacled to [himself]” (82).

Abstracting the nonhuman animals’ suffering, he warns himself that “the dog on the chain, the second dog, is nothing in itself, is not an illumination, merely an animal likeness” (83). Coetzee’s trick here depends on another injured grey dog that Dostoevsky encountered on a ferry ride to Yelagin Island, where Pavel is buried. In other words, readers *do not know* if the second dog to which he refers is the dog on a chain in the street, readily abandoned, or the “like a dog” (83), that is subsequently described as a mere “illumination” (83). The distinction between the two begins to crumble. This crumbling stems not from the

representational loophole—namely, the logic that both actual dogs and figurative dogs, as they appear in literature, are abstracted representations of the real thing. Rather, both the *idea* of the chained animal (“like a dog on a chain that breaks the teeth” [83]) and the actual dog coalesce as “nothing ... not an illumination, merely an animal likeness!” (83). In Dostoevsky’s poverty of thought, the dog only becomes substantial “in itself,” or present before Dostoevsky, to the extent that he/she is transubstantiated into a means for Dostoevsky’s own spiritual and/or intellectual enlightenment.

In Derrida’s terms, “everything goes on as though this troubling experience [of the nonhuman animals’ responsiveness] hadn’t been theoretically registered, supposing that it had been experienced at all” (*The Animal* 14). Dispossessing a particular, and suffering, nonhuman animal of the capacity for responsiveness and presence, Dostoevsky readily “discount[s]” the dog’s “substance,” rendering nonhuman animal presence into source material for his own “signifying consciousness” (Barthes, *Mythologies* par. 5). Unlike David Lurie of *Disgrace*, whose engagements with dying and singing dogs humble his self-legitimizing visions of cultural authority and transcendence—or the magistrate of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, whose face-to-face contact with a ram destabilizes his ability to be the arbiter of the meanings and value in his recreational hunt—Dostoevsky’s trans-species contact does little to ameliorate his pervasive self-legitimations, mythologizations, and striving after transcendence, indicating that he has yet to confront, or be confronted with, the contingencies of his own interpretative and authorial power and the speciesist biases upon which his own transcendence clearly depends. In other words, Dostoevsky’s failure is both

ethical and interpretative, and models a speciesist mode of reading across the human and nonhuman animal species barrier that is systematically challenged in *Elizabeth Costello*.

I want to conclude with something other than a probably dead dog and a ceaselessly self-obsessed Dostoevsky, for your sake and mine. I am faced with questions about this dog in the street. Through Dostoevsky's focalization, Coetzee blurs the distinction between figurative and literal economies of nonhuman animal sense, demonstrating that both can be (and have been) made available to reflect forms of human transcendence and/or becoming, particularly in "obdurately anthropocentric" contexts, to evoke Tiffin again. If we acknowledge this figure—the real, apocalyptic, beast—as distinct, in ways, from more fleshed out forms of nonhuman animal representations (which might, for example, make a central character out of a nonhuman animal, give that animal agency, or give representational force to his/her pain), should we resist it? Can the figure of the nonhuman animal disrupt or render visible the ongoing violence to which we subject nonhuman animals, even as a figural abstraction of the animal's need, suffering, or dependence? My sense is that the two-dimensional abstraction of the dog in the street, chained and wounded, is still gazing at me, making demands on me, addressing me, even though Dostoevsky, and the narrative of *The Master of Petersburg*, turn away. Perhaps this figure of the real nonhuman animal, flat though it may be, can still gaze from the pages and make naked the attempt, as Derrida claims, "to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence" against animals (*The Animal* 26). As Coetzee demonstrates in *Elizabeth Costello*, this recognition is compelled by modes of reading across species in which, in the

words of John Simons from *Animal Rights*, “nonhuman perspectives also have their place”
(171-72).

Endnotes

- 1 Coetzee also dramatizes processes of authorship in his novels *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, and *Diary of a Bad Year*.
- 2 For criticism on *Master of Petersburg* that addresses the fictional Dostoevsky's authorship, see for example Dominic Head's *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*; "Coetzee's Estrangements" by David Attwell; "Death and the Space of the Response to the Other in J. M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*" and "'Little Enough, Less Than Little: Nothing': Ethics, Engagement, and Change in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee" by Michael Marais; "'Redemption' or 'Delegitimization'? The Artist on Trial in *The Master of Petersburg*" by Patrick Hayes; and "Coetzee's Artists; Coetzee's Art" by Derek Attridge.
- 3 For examinations of Levinasian ethics in light of nonhuman animals, see for example Rosemary Jolly's *Cultured Violence*; Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1*; *Animal Rites* by Cary Wolfe; *Zoographies* by Matthew Calarco; *The Animal Part* by Mark Payne; *Animal Alterity* by Sherryl Vint; as well as "On Being 'The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany': Dwelling with Animals after Levinas" by David Clark.
- 4 Keynote address at the Association for the Study of Literature & Environment Conference held in Bloomington, IN, in June of 2011, the theme of which was "Species, space, and the Imagination of the Global."
- 5 In *Subversive Intent*, Susan Suleiman frames such "fantasies of self-engenderment" through authorship in modern writing (and masculine writing in particular) as the "ultimate masculine fantasy" (71), because they abrogate female reproductive value to the masculinist imperative.
- 6 For an invaluable intervention into the forms of responsiveness denied to nonhuman animals in the Western philosophical tradition, see Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.
- 7 This argument was famously made by Martin Heidegger in his 1929-1930 seminar *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, in which Heidegger describes animals as "poor in the world" and man as "world-forming" (196), and takes up an example of a lizard on a rock to contend that the lizard does not have access to the *concept* of the entity, or rock. For examples of criticism of Heidegger's claim, see Wolfe's chapter "In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion" in *Animal Rites*; "Being with Animals: Reconsidering Heidegger's Animal Ontology" by Brett Buchanan; *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art* by Ron Broglio; and Taylor Carman's *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in Being and Time*.

Chapter Six:

The Hermeneutics of Species: Reading, Violence, and Affect in *Elizabeth Costello*

As far back as he can see he has been ill at ease with language that lays down the law, that is not provisional, that does not as one of its habitual motions glance back skeptically at its premises.

–J. M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*

J. M. Coetzee's hybrid critical/fictional text *Elizabeth Costello* has by now been widely recognized as one of the most influential works in contemporary approaches to nonhuman animals for animal-affirming research in the humanities and social sciences.¹ The forms of cross-species identification, affiliation, and projection dramatized and subject to investigation in *Elizabeth Costello* are manifold, and yet are united by the text's overarching engagement with the relationships between trans-species correspondences and the hermeneutics of reading, thinking, and approaching, non-human life.

Elizabeth Costello is the culminating text to date in Coetzee's thoroughgoing investigations into the hermeneutics of species across his fictional and critical corpus. In employing the spacious terms 'hermeneutics of species,' I seek to acknowledge the ways in which investigations into discourses of species, speciesist violence, and trans-species relations, are linked, in Coetzee's corpus, with the politics of reading across species lines. How we read nonhuman life, and how we might read differently, to state the matter simply,

is central to Costello's investigations, and interventionist reading practices, in *Elizabeth Costello*.

As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, nonhuman animals have been mobilized as figures, ideas, tropes, objects, and abstractions, to supplement the social, political, and metaphysical codes of the normative transcendent, white, colonial, and/or masculine subject; to undergird identity-based violence; and to speak to a developmental and temporal vision of human intellectual and cultural teleology through the semiotics of species. In this lineage of appropriation, nonhuman animals have served as analogues for the range of experiences, modes of being, and ways of knowing disavowed by the properly rational, enculturated, and disembodied subjects of Enlightenment, colonial, and humanist thought. The discourses and institutions of speciesist violence that attend, and furnish, the borderline between human and nonhuman animals tend to be taken for granted, and accepted, in Wolfe's terms (*Animal Rites* 7), in the analogical logics of what nonhuman animals are made to mean. Animality is a prescient example since, as I argued in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, it is in large part a form of discursive violence that establishes analogical parallels between nonhuman animals and individual humans or human groups, while eliding the fundamental material relations of human and nonhuman animals (especially cross-species violence). Once this violence becomes a recognizable determinant of what and how nonhuman animals signify, forms of reading, and thinking, across species lines, have the potential to be restructured.

The timely questions that *Elizabeth Costello* poses are manifold, and I have pursued them throughout this project: how, in the absence of the literal and visceral violence that is occluded in human/nonhuman animal analogies, might the English language be made to

reverberate with it? How might these grounds of human and nonhuman animal analogies be populated with the lives of nonhuman animals “under us” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 74)? Is humbling the intellectual and interpretative authority of the human, and the speciesist vision of humanity as the exclusive property of the human, necessary for developing other modes of relations and affinities with nonhuman animals? As Coetzee demonstrates, these lines of inquiry, and the hermeneutics they stand to generate, are essential to “revis[ing] the figure” (*Elizabeth Costello* 13) of the animal so that nonhuman animals’ various modes of being, irreducible differences, and subjection to violence, might transform trans-species relations, and be made to signify, or mean, in literal, rather than analogical, ways.

Recognizing how Costello arrives at a creaturely hermeneutic, and the kinds of analogical interpretations that she stages and critiques in *Elizabeth Costello*, is essential to drawing out Coetzee’s inestimable intervention into the prevailing anthropocentric hermeneutics of species. The eponymous Costello interrogates reading and interpretative modes that subsume nonhuman animals into a range of analogical meanings and interpretative outcomes that speak for, and to, the dictates of instrumental reason, the moral and intellectual perfectibility of the human, and distinctions between interpretative subjects and interpreted objects that have overlain the human and nonhuman animal species binary. Costello targets anthropocentric interpretative practices that have often been endemic to critical analyses of nonhuman animals in the literary sub-genres of allegory (including parables, fables, and exemplums) by establishing a principle of non-correspondence between human and nonhuman animals as the starting point of a revitalized, and creature-endorsing, reading practice. Affirming species difference forestalls the temptation to subsume the

nonhuman animals that Costello encounters in the narratives of Franz Kafka, Jonathan Swift, and Homer into a uniquely human drama of becoming that would position Costello and her audience as subjects of knowledge and nonhuman animals as means to, and objects of, that knowledge. Through sympathetic forms of identification, Costello deploys a creaturely hermeneutic that re-routes the pedagogical and moral imperatives of the sub-genres of allegory and the analogical readings they can engender by making them speak to and for, rather than with, nonhuman animals and their histories. What Costello pursues, and thereby models, is an affective, rather than analogical, hermeneutic, capable of avowing both species difference and nonhuman life.

Creaturely Hermeneutics

This is the situation in which I appear before you. I am not, I hope, abusing the privilege of this platform to make idle, nihilistic jokes about what I am, ape or woman, and what you are, my auditors. That is not the point of the story, say I, who am, however, in no position to dictate what the point of the story is.

--J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “analogy” generates a “[c]orrespondence between two things,” a “parallelism,” or “equivalence” (“Analogy,” def. 4b), while in the context of linguistics, the term can denote the potentially normative dictates for the forms of parallelism that analogies establish: “[c]onformity of words or language to a regular or consistent pattern” (“Analogy,” def. 6a). Furthermore, while “analogy” has “a set

of rules ... intended to govern its use,” it elides the conditions of their emergence, mobilization, and re-articulation (“Analogy,” def. 6a): in linguistics, an analogy results from “a process in which linguistic forms arise or are adapted on the basis of regularities in the forms of parallel examples already in existence, omitting the formative steps through which these models originally arose” (“Analogy,” def. 6b). Thus the correspondence upon which analogy depends is “govern[ed]”; it “conforms” to a set of examples that are not only already given, but further naturalized through their repetition.

While the philosophical dictates of reason and logic depend on the use of analogical correspondences “as a basis for reasoning” (“Analogy,” def. 7a), the principles and codes of this analogical thought are linked to the preexisting examples of equivalence, or “parallel cases” (“Analogy,” def. 7b). The principles of correspondence in the fraught sites of human and nonhuman animal analogies are abundantly human, and have tended to mobilize and yet disguise a speciesist stratagem that appropriates a notion of trans-species relationality in order to define, valorize, and substantiate, dominant cultures of the human subject.

Discourses of animality are a prescient example, namely because, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, they suggest a kind of porosity in the human and nonhuman animal species distinction, while relying on the taken-for-granted fixity, rather than mutability, of this species hierarchy as an analogical model for a *human* self-other dialectic.

In the domain of literature, human and nonhuman animal analogies have often been deployed for a “variety of literary *genres* [that] may be classified as a species of allegory”—fable, parable, and exemplum—which “all narrate one coherent set of circumstances which are intended to signify a second order of correlated meanings” (Abrams and Harpham,

Glossary 8). Like allegory, which critics including Derek Attridge, Dominic Head, and David Attwell have located as a form of reading that is both staged and interrogated in Coetzee's fiction, analogical reading and reasoning is dramatized in *Elizabeth Costello* and becomes, as Don Randall observes, "a matter of explicit, focused critique" (217).² Coetzee's timely investigation into the discourses, forms, and genres of analogy ranges across aesthetic and disciplinary bounds, and has notable bearing on the analogical discourses of analytic philosophy, the prevalent use of human and nonhuman animal analogies as a basis for argumentation in animal rights movements, and one of the most controversial analogical comparisons in philosophy and animal rights alike: the comparison of Nazi death camps and industrialized animal slaughter facilities. My aim, in this section, is to ascertain the distinctions that Costello establishes between affective and analogical modes of comparison as they come to bear on literary hermeneutics, the modes of reading they engender, and how those modes exert pressure upon the kinds of literature that employ, and/or foster, analogical approaches to nonhuman animal life, and the speciesist hermeneutics that they have engendered.

In the first chapter of *Elizabeth Costello*, titled "Realism," Costello takes up a familiar figure, Red Peter, the central character, and ape, of Franz Kafka's short story "A Report to an Academy" who is tasked with giving a lecture to an educated audience. In Costello's summary of Kafka's story, Red Peter is not simply speaking; he is being examined, tested, asked to show his knowledge of, and ability to mimic, human speech and the codes of instrumental reason (the "manners and conventions") that he gives voice to (18). Intervening in the potential presumption, on the part of Costello's audience, that Red

Peter is an analogy for Costello herself, Costello immediately denies that she is equivalent to Red Peter: ““Why am I reminding you of Kafka’s story? Am I going to pretend I am the ape, torn away from my natural surroundings, forced to perform in front of a gathering of critical strangers? I hope not. I am one of you, I am not of a different species”” (18). Even as the ostensible realism of Kafka’s short story comes into question, and the distinctions on which it depends in this context crumble (for, as Costello asserts, the ape might just as easily be a human, his auditors apes), the principle of non-correspondence does not. For Costello, eliding species difference is an interpretative appropriation that amounts to making ““idle, nihilistic jokes about what I am”” with all-too-human limits (19); a mode of reading wherein the animal protagonist becomes as pliable as the human and nonhuman species boundary it is transported across, and Red Peter is subsumed, through analogy, into a drama locatable in the domain of the human subject whereby, in being made to speak ““what I am”” and ““what you are,”” Red Peter actually props up ““who we [are]”” (19).

If the point of the story is *not* that Red Peter is Costello, and the platform of Costello’s utterance should not, she reminds us, be conflated with the literal platform of Red Peter’s utterances nor the fictional platform of the story itself, then what, we’re pushed to ask, *does* Red Peter stand for in Costello’s interpretative manoeuvre? Or in what ways does Coetzee trouble the notion of the animal standing-for in the first place? And what are we to make of Costello’s seemingly contradictory statement, two years later, that on the occasion of this speech she ““felt a little like Red Peter”” and that, ““[now] that feeling is even stronger”” (62)?

Costello draws attention to the crucial distinction between affective and analogical modes of comparison by implicitly distinguishing between the modes of reading they engender. Costello's reading is distinct, she implies, from those who "read Kafka's story of the ape who performs before human beings as an allegory of Kafka the Jew performing for Gentiles" (62). Nor is Costello, as she asserts, using the rhetorical device of irony, which would establish a discordance between the utterance (there is an affective link, here, between Red Peter and I) and her intended meaning (in fact there is not): "I want to say at the outset that that was not how my remark - the remark that I feel like Red Peter - was intended. I did not intend it ironically. It means what it says. I say what I mean. I am an old woman. I do not have the time any longer to say things I do not mean" (62).

By establishing an affective correlative with Red Peter, Costello supplants the anthropocentric interpretative tendency that I have associated above with (speciesist forms of) analogical thought, in which the nonhuman animal-cum-figure stands for principally human "parallel examples already in existence" ("Analogy," def. 6b). Costello similarly intervenes in the assumption that, by turning to the anthropomorphized and fabular beast, Red Peter, she is reproducing the generic expectations of the beast fable, in which an anthropomorphized nonhuman animal speaks to, and for, another (human) plane of meaning and value.³

In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Derrida cautions against the anthropocentric limits of the fabular beast and its "infinite appropriation": "We know the history of fabulization and how it remains an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always a discourse *of* man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for

and in man” (37). In *The Beast and the Sovereign: Volume I*, Derrida elucidates the pedagogical imperatives of the fable and the ways in which it positions the fabulist as a subject of knowledge and the nonhuman animal being as the object of, or means to, that knowledge:

[A] fable is ... a fiction supposed to give us something to be known, a fiction supposed to *make know* [*faire savoir*], *make so as to know*, in a double sense: (1) in the sense of bringing some knowledge to the awareness of the other, to inform the other, to share with the other, <make> the other know, and (2) in the sense of ‘making like’ knowledge [*‘faire’ savoir*], i.e. giving the impression of knowing, giving the effect of knowledge, resembling knowing where there isn’t any knowing: ... the knowing is a pretend knowing, a false knowing. ... [The fable is] a story indissociable from a moral, the putting of living beings, animals or humans, on stage, a supposedly instructive, informative, pedagogical, edifying, story, fictive, put up, artificial, even invented from whole cloth, but destined to educate, to teach, to *make known*, to share a knowledge, to bring to knowledge. (35)

This placement of living beings on the stage of human intellectual mastery through fabular codes is a form of functionalization that requires denying nonhuman animals the knowledges that they paradoxically affirm. Meaning and morality come into effect when nonhuman animals cease to signify as themselves.

It bears returning to Slemon’s definition of allegory here, since the beast fable—a sub-genre of allegory—similarly calls for the “bifurcation or division in the directionality of

the interpretive process” that Slemon associates with allegory (4). This bifurcation depends on the ahistorical (and derealized) fixity of the figure or object as one readily transportable to a second level where it can signify as something other than itself. For Derrida, a fable is “without historical knowledge” (*The Beast* 34)—a trait that Derrida also attributes to zoological analogies in his discussion of Sigmund Freud (31), which Derrida terms “zooanthropological *analogies*” (30). According to Derrida, these analogies “have no history and no future”; the nonhuman animals they depend upon are arrested, stabilized, and rendered static as ahistorical signs (31). It follows that supplanting this ahistorical fixity of the fabular and analogical animal with his/her own history has the potential to put pressure upon the capacity of the analogical animal to function as a rarefied object that affirms a teleology of human history, knowledge, and origin. This is part of what Elizabeth Costello frames as “a literal cast of mind” (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 76)—a perspective, and interpretative practice, that shifts the *about which* of nonhuman animals’ presence in narrative from a human plane of signification and value to an explicitly inhuman one. These are the implications of assuming, as Costello does, that when “Kafka writes about an ape” he is “talking in the first place about an ape” (76), generating a reading practice that shifts the directionality of the interpretative process and the locus of meaning. The “first place” of Kafka’s story becomes the locus of equivalence, signification, and meaning, to which Red Peter points: not back to Kafka, or to Costello, or Coetzee’s readership, but to a historical animal.

Costello locates these “origins of Red Peter” (71) in Sultan, one of a host of apes captured in the African ape trade and subjected to a series of scientific experiments on the

mental capacities of apes performed by the Prussian Academy of Sciences on the island of Tenerife in the nineteen-tens. Wolfgang Kohler, one of the academy's scientists, published a monograph entitled *The Mentality of Apes* in nineteen-seventeen, the same year in which Kafka's story "Report to an Academy" was published. While Costello points out that like Red Peter, Kohler's apes were captured in the African ape trade and "underwent a period of training intended to humanize them" (72), Costello is not particularly concerned with proving that Kafka did, indeed, read Kohler's book and that Red Peter was, in fact, modeled on Sultan. In this way, Coetzee forestalls the interpretative paradigm that privileges the invocation and incorporation of a veritably real animal (grounded in historical fact) as the ready means to supplant the place and function of animals as textual figurations. Rather, inhabiting Sultan through sympathetic forms of identification, and deploying a creaturely hermeneutic, shifts the plane of signification and value of Kafka's short story to the nonhuman realm, bringing under scrutiny not only what Wolfe calls the "'moral perfectionism' of the distinctly human" (*Animal Rites* 23), but the anthropocentric principles and codes of human and nonhuman animal equivalence as well. The lessons of Kafka's narrative (I gesture back to the description of chapters as "lessons" in *Elizabeth Costello*) disclose the forms of violence that attend making human and nonhuman animals legible within, and contiguous with, our extant visions of the rational, sovereign, and disembodied human subject. For Costello, Kafka's story "deals with that cost: we learn what it consists in through the ironies and silences of the story" (*Elizabeth Costello* 72).

Thus, if Kafka's story retains the pedagogical and moral imperatives of the fabular genre, Costello turns the anthropocentric values of that genre on their head. The educative

process of humanization that Kohler's Sultan (and, it follows, Kafka's Red Peter) undergoes reveals the abyssal limit of instrumental reason as a basis for measuring cross-species equivalence. The violence inherent in the process of assimilation that Sultan undergoes is given narrative scope through Costello's sympathetic dramatization of Sultan's experience. It follows that the violence of this process of instrumental rationalization, to which both Sultan and Red Peter are subjected, generates the correspondence between them and the lessons that their experiences manifest. As Sultan is "driven to think" in measurably rational ways (73), he is strategically dispossessed of other forms of knowledge ("complicated thought" [72]; "ethics and metaphysics" [74]) so that he might reflect the ascendancy of "man's mind" (73) with his "lower, practical, instrumental reason" and legibility as an "organism with an appetite that needs to be satisfied" (73)—an emblem of "apedom" (74).

I am not suggesting that the source text, that is, the narrative of Sultan and his history, disrupts the anthropocentric dictates of beast fables because Sultan signals the arrival of the real, particular, and historical, animal on the literary landscape. Likewise, my aim is not to position Sultan as pre-eminently natural, and naturally historical, being capable of disrupting those forms of analogical logic in which nonhuman animals readily point to, and buttress, their human counterparts. I do not wish to functionalize nonhuman animals' substance as a ready sign of the ascendancy of the material world over and against the semiological plane. Rather, my contention is that, by supplanting the anthropocentric horizon of the locus of equivalence with a nonhuman animal—making the fabular tale speak

first and foremost to a nonhuman equivalent, and *his/her* history—Costello disrupts Red Peter’s availability for analogical figuration.

The moral of Kafka’s story does not come into effect once its drama is translated into the realm of human significance. Instead, it is made to show (through Costello’s interpretative manoeuvres) the kinds of violence that attend such a translation, or transfer, of nonhuman animals into ‘suitably’ human equivalents through the faculty of instrumental reason. The knowledge that Red Peter, Sultan, and some readers will take away is the toll of “‘embracing the status of man’” (103) as the basis of cross-species equivalence. Kelly Oliver might be said to follow *Elizabeth Costello*, in this regard, in her calls for “‘philosophy’s animals’” to witness “the ways in which the various animal examples, animal metaphors, and animal studies that populate the history of Western philosophy bear the burden of instructing and supporting the conceptions of man, human, and kinship central to that thought” (271). Yet in Coetzee’s critical re-writing of Jonathan Swift’s fable “Gulliver’s Travels,” the pedagogical function of the narrative and the interpretative community of that narrative are re-routed, such that the fable speaks to *and* for, rather than with, nonhuman animals.

Costello’s revisionary approach to Jonathan Swift’s fable subjects the fabular genre and its anthropocentric horizons to scrutiny, making a genre that tends to speak to an ineluctably human plane of significance and value expose its attendant violence. Giving voice to the histories of expeditionary, colonial, and speciesist violence that are tidily tucked away in Swift’s fable reformulates its pedagogical function:

‘The question I ask is: What if Gulliver and an armed expedition were to land, shoot a few Yahoos when they become threatening, and then shoot and eat a horse, for food? What would that do to Swift’s somewhat too neat, somewhat too disembodied, somewhat too unhistorical fable? It would certainly give the Houyhnhnms a rude shock, making it clear that there is a third category besides gods and beasts, namely, man, of whom their ex-client Gulliver is one; furthermore, that if the horses stand for reason, then man stands for physical force.’ (102)

Costello approaches Swift’s narrative as an allegory of ideas in which “the literal characters represent concepts” through the “*personification* of abstract entities such as virtues, vices, states of mind, modes of life, and types of character” (Abrams and Harpham, *Glossary* 8). What happens to the meaning of “man,” Coetzee asks, if “man” is rendered static as a personified emblem of its own violence? Supplanting the ahistorical fixity of the fabular tale with its historical gaps, and ironically subjecting humans and horses alike to the analogical logic of allegorical narrative, “man” signifies violence and *horses* signify reason in allegory’s “second order of correlated meanings” (8).

As with Costello’s interpretation of Red Peter, the nonhuman characters of Swift’s fable are recipients of, rather than objects of, or means to, the fable’s lesson. What “man stands for” is “ma[de] clear” to the Houyhnhnms (*Elizabeth Costello* 102) in the revised fictional plane. Costello’s creaturely hermeneutic (which, of course, intermingles with authorship) retains the pedagogical function of the fable, while integrating nonhuman animals into the interpretative community to which the fable speaks. To revisit Derrida’s

claim, fables “bring[] some knowledge to the awareness of the other, to inform the other, to share with the other” and the Houyhnhnms are included in those others (*The Beast* 35).

Pushing “Swift’s fable to its limits” entails “recogniz[ing] that, in history, embracing the status of man has entailed slaughtering and enslaving a race of divine or else divinely created beings” (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 103) and making that meaning inherent in the fable itself, without an analogical interpretation. The fictionalized horses are not the ductile property of human, rational, mastery, in part because they are not transported to a second plane of (human) meaning through an analogical transfer (even though Costello toys with this interpretative gesture). Affirming species difference forestalls this temptation: “we are not horses, we do not have their clear, rational, naked beauty; on the contrary, we are subequine primates, otherwise known as man” (103). Costello’s interventionist readings of both Kafka and Swift’s narratives are incumbent upon this difference. Thus, while Graham Huggan is certainly correct to assert that Costello “diverts the anthropocentric axioms of beast fable away from their usual targets” (“Greening’ Postcolonialism” 709), he misapprehends Costello’s interventionist reading practice when he concludes that Costello is “[t]ransformed into another of her own long-suffering animals” as “she becomes, not Red Peter himself but the idea of Red Peter” (713).

Through the phenomenological register of affect, rather than through analogical equivalence, Costello feels like, and yet is not like, Red Peter:

‘Red Peter was not an investigator of primate behaviours but a branded, marked, wounded animal presenting himself as speaking testimony to a gathering of scholars. I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal

exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak.’ (70-71)

Coetzee is not simply supplanting the anthropocentric dictates of cross-species correspondence with an egalitarian vision of wounded embodiment. Neither is Costello merely “wounded” by her knowledge of “what we do to animals,” as Cora Diamond contends (3), although that knowledge, and the malaise it produces, resounds across the text. While wounding is crucial to the equivalence that Costello mounts, what precisely such wounding might mean, and to what extent both Costello and Red Peter share the same wound, is left notably indeterminate, and this is part of its ethical force. In the indefinite significations of wounding, those losses that the history of Sultan and the narrative of Red Peter gave shape to, and that the text bodies forth through the voices and testimonies of its human and inhuman characters, coalesce—namely what is disavowed, foreclosed, and forgotten, when the sovereign, rational, and disembodied human subject remains the pinnacle against which we measure beings and their common ground, regardless of species.

The Poetics of Inhabitation

Once we begin to take animals seriously (Derrida, *The Animal* 27), Coetzee suggests, the very cornerstones of what animals mean, and are made to mean, shift. Following the inhuman tracks in *Elizabeth Costello* exposes the tactics and outcomes of a creaturely hermeneutic capable of approaching nonhumans as more than “a *theorem*, something seen and not seeing” (*The Animal* 14) in and for the human subject. Pursuing this interpretative practice and its capacity to shift the *about which* of animal presence from the human planes

of signification has required a creature-centric hermeneutics which, as I have demonstrated, Costello models repeatedly in *Elizabeth Costello*.

Attending to nonhuman animals as the cornerstone of a revitalized hermeneutics exposes the nonhuman stakes in the distinction between affective and analogical modes of comparison by distinguishing between the modes of reading and thinking that they engender. *Elizabeth Costello* discloses the abysmal limits of instrumental reason as means to read across species lines, suggesting that instrumental reason is endemic to a speciesist hermeneutics that requires making nonhuman animals something other than themselves in order to make them meaningful in and for the subject. While animal-centric modes of reading exert notable pressures on the limits of our capacities to, in Costello's words, "share at times the being of" nonhuman animals (79), the implications of sympathy as a phenomenological form of relating to others, regardless of species, come to bear on the conceptual dividing lines between self and other, subject and object, regardless of species.

Costello takes up the affective noun, 'horrors,' to speak of the forms and contexts of violence in which human and nonhuman "lives and deaths" are waged (63) in industrial animal slaughter facilities and the Nazi death camps. Costello likewise uses the term to frame the failure to sympathetically imagine the experience of the victims of the Holocaust as a related violence:

The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else. They said, 'It is they in those cattle cars rattling past.' They did not say, 'How would it be if it were I in that cattle car?' They did not say, 'It is I who am in that cattle car.' They said, 'It must be the dead

who are being burned today, making the air stink and falling in ash on my cabbages.’ They did not say, ‘How would it be if I were burning?’ They did not say, ‘I am burning, I am falling in ash.’ (79)

By dramatizing and giving voice to the foreclosure of sympathy, and the refusal, on the part of those Nazis who took part in the systematic annihilation of Jews during the Holocaust, to recognize the being-ness, rather than object status, of other human beings bound to die in death camps, Costello evokes sympathy while opening up the question of its normative, pathological, limits. The failure, on the part of the Nazis, to exercise a capacity to “‘imagine themselves as someone else’” exposes the subject-object dialectic that sympathy can trouble, since, as Costello asserts, sympathy “has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object, the ‘another’, as we see at once when we think of the object not as a bat (‘Can I share the being of a bat’) but as another human being” (79). Turning to this familiar, if not privileged, site of ethical failure in human history, and its capacity to evoke pathos, is a means to open up the immense question of the speciesist biases in the normative horizons of the sympathetic imagination and our capacity to “‘know what it is to be anything but one of ourselves’” (76).

If the phenomenological register of affect has the potential to establish affective correspondences between beings outside of the *telos* of humanism (human identity and its model of subjectivity), it needs, Costello suggests, to do so without the demand for sameness, correspondence, and resemblance. Costello intervenes in the speciesist bias represented by Thomas Nagel’s contention that we cannot think ourselves into the being of a bat, demonstrating that the limits of the sympathetic faculty are overlain with a speciesist

hierarchy: “So we have set up a continuum that stretches from the Martian at one end to the bat to the dog to the ape ... to the human being ... at the other; and at each step as we move along the continuum from bat to man, Nagel says, the answer to the question ‘What is it like for X to be X?’ becomes easier to give” (76). Sympathy, Costello warns us, demands that we press our modes of reading and identification beyond the hermeneutics of species: “Despite Thomas Nagel, who is probably a good man, despite Thomas Aquinas and René Descartes, with whom I have more difficulty in sympathizing, there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination” (79-80).

The fictional Costello locates the evidence of the boundlessness of the sympathetic faculty in her own (fictional) literary accomplishment of inhabiting, and giving voice to the existence of another in her rewriting of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* from the perspective of Marion Bloom (80). However, *Elizabeth Costello* is a record of abundant sympathetic engagement—through Costello, the text itself inhabits the existence of a host of real and imagined beings, both alive and dead (Hughes’ jaguar, Kafka’s Red Peter, Kohler’s Sultan, Molly Bloom, Jewish humans, a corpse, and so forth). This “record of an engagement” (96), of inhabitation, is an affective mode of reading and receptiveness that is indelibly linked to decentring the rational, human, self as the locus of value, meaning, and ends (as the about which to which the other is called to speak). It is a potential, and capacity, that Coetzee attributes, in particular, to the genre of poetry and the poets who do not “try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal” (96).

Intervening in the analogical dictates of nonhuman animal signification, wherein the animal and particular animals alike readily stand in for human principles, values, and ends, has the potential not to affirm instrumental reason but to push it (as the fable and analogy have been pushed) to its inhuman limits. It is a lesson, in other words, generated through the loss, troubling, or suspension of the power and capability of what Derrida terms the *logos*, a power linked to having faculties and capacities that have been denied nonhuman animals: “logocentrism is first of all a thesis regarding the animal, the animal deprived of the *logos*, deprived of the *can-have-the-logos*: this is the thesis, position, or presupposition maintained from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, Levinas, and Lacan” (*The Animal* 27). Costello contends that she has this language at hand (particularly those discourses of reason) and knows the place (or absence) of the nonhuman animal in it: “The universe is built upon reason. . . . And the fact that animals, lacking reason, cannot understand the universe but have simply to follow its rules blindly, proves that, unlike man, they are part of it but not part of its being: that man is godlike, animals thinglike” (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 66). As Coetzee remind us in his “Foreward” to *Second Nature: The Inner Lives of Animals*, instrumental reason has for too long now shaped the discourses of species and its speciesist limits:

Ever since Aristotle’s time we have made the possession of intelligence—intelligence of the kind that enables one to construct intricate machines or ingenious philosophical theories—the crucial test, the test that distinguishes higher from lower, man from beast. Yet why should the crucial test not be a quite different one: for instance, the possession of a faculty that enables a

being to find its way home over long distances? Is the explanation perhaps that the latter is one that *Homo sapiens* would find it hard to pass? (xi-xii)

Instrumental reason is “the last common ground that” Costello has with a philosopher who postulates on the incapability of the veal calf to “grasp” “meaning” and “concepts” (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 111), affirming that this is what “sets [her] apart from the veal calf” (112). The affective modes of sympathetic cross-species inhabitation are crucially tied to depriving the human of rational dominion.

If Sultan needed to be strategically dispossessed of all but instrumental reason so that he could act as a ready foil to the ascendancy of ““man’s mind”” (73), it follows that in order to approach those embodied, and immanent, modes of being denied by the fixity of the Cartesian cogito (Derrida, *The Beast* 125) and the dictates of reason, we ought to humble the manners of being, and the logocentrism, of rational dominion. The implication that Costello makes, and that Coetzee affirms across his fiction, is that approaching others, whether human or inhuman, in non-violent ways, calls for a suspension of the capability to know and master the other as a reflexive instrument and object that substantiates the fictions of the self. In *Elizabeth Costello*, probing the limits of human interpretative mastery and understanding is linked, by Costello, with the capacity to encounter figures of alterity in ways that do not purport to make them meaningful, or consumable, in and for the interpreting subject.

Turning to Ted Hughes’ two jaguar poems (“The Jaguar” and “Second Glance at a Jaguar”), Costello contends that sympathetic inhabitation leaves “the man, the poet, entranced and horrified and overwhelmed, his powers of understanding pushed beyond their

limit” (95). By “bodying forth the jaguar,” Costello argues, “Hughes shows us that we too can embody animals. . . . When we read the jaguar poem, when we recollect it afterwards in tranquillity, we are for a brief while the jaguar. He ripples within us, he takes over our body, he is us” (97-98).⁴ In this affective mode of composition and interpretation, in which ‘us’ becomes ‘him,’ a certain interpretative violence is foreclosed. In other words, sympathetic thought is a crucial corrective to the forms of analogical reasoning that would take the other (in absentia) as an appellation, figure, trope, fable, and fantasy, that refers to someone or something (and a telos) other than itself. If sympathetic thought can make the other “ripple[] within us” and we are “take[n] over” (98) by that “individual . . . life” rather than its “abstraction[]” (98), then it is associated, in Coetzee’s text, with that “literal cast of mind” (76) and the interpretative modes it generates—modes that believe in, and yet do not know (and may never know); that bear witness to and yet do not interpellate—difference.

As Costello returns to Homer’s *Odyssey* and its imperiled and sacrificial ram with this ‘literal cast,’ as the ram is “alive though right now it is dying” and is not “just an idea,” the ram’s bleeding and the violence that generates it becomes visible, locatable, and significant in that first plane of meaning—the ram’s (211). If this blood has a figurative dimension, if it accumulates symbolic value, that value is reanimalized, and becomes the sign of a dual violence: the material violence upon the body of the ram and the violence of the symbolic economy that would make that sacrificial blood the means of human epiphany, knowledge, and communication in order that it can mean in the first place. If the “sum of [Costello’s] faith” is “the vision of the ram and what happens to the ram” (211), then it is a vision capable of avowing this violence and giving it voice, such that the “the vision of the

ram” (not as the object of a gaze, but as a being capable of gazing back) guides the interpretative process and generates “what” the narrative “say[s]” (211). Because the ram is *not* a symbol, and because the ram is *not*, for Costello, “a mere bag of blood, to be cut open and poured from” (211), the narrative testifies to a violence that Costello refuses to appropriate, and yet is affectively *moved* by. The literal sacrifice of the ram in the narrative is interminably linked to a speciesist hermeneutic that would undertake a related, interpretative, sacrifice. Bodying forth the ram, and the “unabstracted, unintellectual nature” of its physical wounding, brings its “living ... being” to the page, modeling a creaturely hermeneutics capable of avowing an embodied, and imperiled, other that signifies as such (112).

‘To the Frogs Themselves’

In thinking the means and ends of animal presence as interminably linked to the hermeneutics of species, Coetzee calls on his readers to reformulate the speciesist politics of recognition. When we encounter nonhuman animal others, to take up Haraway’s terms, “[w]ords and bodies commingle promiscuously” (“In the Promising Grip” 17). Those scenes of horror in the “transnational animal-industrial complex” (23) and the beings bred, fragmented, bled, and rendered consumable in them, have been systematically rendered invisible. So too, Coetzee reminds us, have those presiding modes of interpretative erasure that have functionalized nonhuman others as figures, analogues, symbols, and means, to gird the language of the self. These are the places where species meet; where the forms of cross-species equivalence are written and rewritten; where the speciesist heritage of species stands

to be recognized. Reanimalizing animal presence, in the fullest sense, depends upon re-routing the teleology of their presence across rhetorical, literary, philosophical, and judicio-political sites, through a creaturely hermeneutics.

Believing in nonhuman species, taking them seriously, taking into our ocular perception and its strategies of rational dominion the signs of those “electric [modes of] being” (111) that take us beyond ourselves—these, Coetzee suggests, are the starting points for making animals matter in that fuller sense (to be bodied forth, to signify, beyond us), making space for them to be meaningful not through an anthropocentric transference but as the locus of import, value, and ends that we might not fully apprehend but can nevertheless avow. As the bellows of the Australian frogs sound out in the final lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*, and as Costello inhabits that exuberant enlivening (from hibernation), she asks, ““Where do they suddenly arrive from, these thousands of frogs?”” recognizing that ““the answer is, they are always there”” (216). Turning away from the stage of the human subject and its dramas of becoming, and approaching the frogs from a vantage point of and for “the frogs themselves” forecloses the signifying violence of allegorical appropriation: ““the life cycle of the frog may sound allegorical, but to the frogs themselves it is no allegory, it is the thing itself, the only thing”” (217). This thing, this only thing, matters, in that full and burgeoning sense of the term, which encompasses not just the materiality of frogs, and their being, but its import.

Endnotes

- 1 The text reproduces two Tanner Lectures on Human Values titled “The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Lives of Animals” that Coetzee gave in 1997 that were subsequently published in 1999 as *The Lives of Animals*, accompanied by responses from Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and Barbara Smuts. *Elizabeth Costello* also includes a chapter titled “What is Realism?” that Coetzee had delivered at the Ben Belitt Lecture at Bennington College in 1996. *Elizabeth Costello* also incorporates a lecture titled “The Novel in Africa,” that Coetzee gave in 1998 at the University of California, as well as “The Humanities in Africa,” which Coetzee read at the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung in Munich in 2001. For a detailed account of the publication, alteration, and performance history of the chapters of Elizabeth Costello, see Derek Attridge’s epilogue to *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* titled “A Writer’s Life.”
- 2 For a list of critical essays on allegory in J. M. Coetzee’s writings, see endnote 4 in Chapter Two of this dissertation.
- 3 M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham define a fable, or apologue, as a short narrative “that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principle of human behavior; usually, at its conclusion, either the narrator or one of the characters states the moral in the form of an *epigram*. Most common is the beast fable, in which animals talk and act like the human types they represent” (8).
- 4 The tranquil reflection is an allusion to William Wordsworth’s influential “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*.

Conclusion

This thesis has drawn out the myriad ways through which the binary model of the human and nonhuman animal species distinction, and the values that inhere in that distinction, are infiltrated into cross-cultural conflicts, processes of cultural and social inscription, and cultures of violence. Through an interventionist, and intersectional, analysis, I have targeted the ways in which some of the presiding assumptions about human and nonhuman animal correspondence and difference have been shaped by the rhetoric of speciesism, while placing cultures of speciesist violence firmly in conversation with conflicts over, and against, nonhuman animals themselves. This two-pronged approach has enabled me to situate the representational politics of what animals are made to mean for processes of social inscription and animalizing violence in conversation with competing investments in the consumption, appropriation, and possession of animal matter. The discursive category of ‘the animal’ has been mobilized to suit the means and ends of power—a power that critiques such as mine render increasingly legible in contexts in which the drive, rather than merely the ability, to possess, consume, and destroy nonhuman animal matter and animal habitats, is at stake.

Asking how the semiotics of species were strategically mobilized to speak to a hierarchical scale of human developmental and temporal stratification in the taxonomies of racial difference produced by Enlightenment philosophical and scientific discourse has been a fruitful methodological starting point for this project. Revisiting some of the tactics of speciesist violence used for the Enlightenment project through postcolonial, eco-critical, and

animal studies lenses has enabled the delineation of how the human and nonhuman animal species distinction was effectively invoked to speak to deeply rooted codes of human stratification evidenced in distinctions between dominion over, and subsumption into, the imperatives of ‘nature,’ broadly conceived. Descartes’s call for the rational and autonomous subject of Enlightenment reason to be “master and possessors of nature” (78) belies the belief that only through these forms of dominion do subjects become “master[s] and possessors” of themselves. This intellectual legacy informs the strategies of dominion that are set in motion when animal traits are attributed to social and cultural others, as well as the range of experiences, cross-cultural affinities, and ways of knowing disavowed by rational, disembodied, and ‘cultured’ subjects. Analysing discourses of animality alongside these extant visions of the human, I expand upon the timely scholarship being undertaken on race and animality by scholars such as Helen Tiffin, Michael Lundblad, Kay Anderson, and Cary Wolfe. I demonstrate that the use of a single evolving world history to conceptualize the relationship between humanity and animality was, and continues to be, informed by the epistemological legacies of the Enlightenment project, in which the hierarchy of species was repeatedly, and dubiously, overlain with a hierarchical pedigree of racial variance.

Thinking otherwise, that is, imagining alternative modes through which trans-species correspondence, alliances, and entanglements can be thought, has called on me first to take stock of these historical, material, and cultural contexts that have shaped reading across species lines. The lines of inquiry I have pursued across this thesis have deliberately eschewed questions about what human and (some) nonhuman animals have in common, focussing instead on the strategies with which transpecies difference and/or equivalence

have been strategically set into motion to give nonhuman animals symbolic and material currency. As Elizabeth Costello reminds us, “[t]he question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common—reason, self-consciousness, a soul—with other animals? (With the corollary that, if we do not, then we are entitled to treat them as we like, imprisoning them, killing them, dishonouring their corpses)” (79). Rather, I have asked, how might nonhuman animal alterity be affirmed without subsuming and homogenizing their differences into the inscription and affirmation of dominant cultures that sustain inherently violent visions of the human?

In Coetzee’s profound and penetrating investigation into the politics of recognizing and representing cultural difference non-violently, the demands to recognize cross-cultural and cross-species alterity intertwine. When the fictional Elizabeth C, Lady Chandos, writes to Francis Bacon in the final pages of *Elizabeth Costello*, she speaks at once for herself and for nonhuman animals when she voices a profound and desperate plea to be affirmed. She speaks out against an interpretative violence that would render her meaningful only as a vessel and means of her husband Phillip’s interpretative mastery and revelatory gaze—a plea that indelibly sounds out the less audible cries of those vessels of revelation in *The Master of Petersburg*, Pavel and the injured, and beseeching, dog on a chain. “All is allegory,” Elizabeth C’s husband Philip asserts, “A dog sitting in a patch of sun licking itself, says he, is at one moment a dog and at the next a vessel of revelation” (229). Elizabeth voices a longing to refute Philip, to affirm that “*We are not made for revelation*” (229), likening being rendered into her husband’s “shadow” (230) to her own, figurative, drowning as a means, rather than end in and of (her/the) self, of her husband’s revelatory ascendance. Yet,

Lady Chandos asserts, “sometimes I too creep through” (230), affirming that, in the face of her instrumentalization as a vessel for Philip’s becomings, her substance, and difference—her unsubstitutable singularity—can assert itself. The letter calls upon Bacon to recognize her as such, and calls upon the reader to do the same.

In the face of a presiding speciesist hermeneutic that makes nonhuman animals meaningful as vessels, metaphors, symbols, and tropes for anthropocentric dramas of human becoming, Coetzee asks how reading and interpretative acts might affirm and make space for nonhuman others. *Elizabeth Costello*—a vital text in Coetzee’s unflinching meditations on the means and modes through which cultural and species difference is interpreted and inscribed—dramatizes and subjects to scrutiny forms of cross-species identification, projection, and interpretative consumption in ways that have notable import for the rapidly expanding field of literary animal studies, by modelling a revitalized, and non-violent, hermeneutics of assertion. An animal-affirming reading practice, Coetzee suggests, requires reassessing the values to which and for which critical reading practices are undertaken, and the species of beings in whose names we undertake them. As *Elizabeth Costello* demonstrates, how we encounter nonhuman animals in literary and cultural texts—those ways of reading that animal studies has the potential to reformulate—are crucially entangled with how difference and equivalence are read across species lines.

Coetzee’s rich and penetrating challenges to the hermeneutics of species, and how they have girded hierarchic politics of difference, opens up possibilities for coalitionist approaches to nonhuman animals in scholarship in the humanities and social sciences: ones capable of recognizing that humans and nonhuman animals alike are implicated in the

boundaries and discourses of species, and how we think, write, and speak across them. Coetzee's fictional, autobiographical, and critical writings demonstrate that reassessing the cultural, material, and intellectual legacies that have shaped the human and nonhuman animal species distinction is of vital importance to generating possibilities for living with and affirming difference non-violently, regardless of species. I hope that this dissertation has drawn out the immense contribution that Coetzee's approaches to the politics of representation and interpretation might make to the ways of reading and critical lenses being shaped in the trans-disciplinary field of animal studies. I also hope that this project might serve as a springboard for scholars engaged in research on nonhuman animals, and discourses of animality, in the humanities and social sciences alike, who seek to extend the reach of their critical interventions, advocacies, and interpretative modes across species lines.

In this project I have attempted, in some sense, to be the critical double of Elizabeth C, Lady Chandos, emulating her plea to become visible in the materiality of my, and my fellow human and non-human animals', animal being. To some degree, this is always already an impossible project, as the rationality of Enlightenment reason can be said to find its apotheosis in the genre of the contemporary PhD thesis. Notwithstanding this likely contradiction between my plea and its interpellation in language inextricably inherited from that of the Philips and fictional Dostoevskys of this world, I position my reader—if I have succeeded at all in my attempts—as potential Bacons, from whom I seek my own visibility as an animal being. The fact that “Bacon” is both the perilous probability of an animal's non-being and simultaneously the potentially, but not by any means sure, empowering

affirmation of my attempt both to think animality and be an animal otherwise is, as I understand it, the unavoidable stakes my, and allied writers' pleas, risk in framing our desires in accordance with those of J. M. Coetzee's Elizabeth C, Lady Chandos.

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