

GOING TO THE DOGS IN *DISGRACE*

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When read as a coherent narrative of personal salvation, rather than as a characteristically undecidable, ethically ambiguous post-modern novel, J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* clarifies into an argument for the necessary co-presence of middle-aged women and nonhuman animals, in the context of the tectonic shifts in the structures of racist colonialism, as possible agents or at least figures of positive change.¹ David Lurie's salvation narrative locates the possibility of hope in the alliance of middle-aged women, who function for the purpose of this ethical narrative as shamanic figures, with nonhuman animals. *Disgrace* can therefore be read as part of a burgeoning popular, literary, and academic set of discourses locating the possibility of hope or of the persistence of the humane in this woman-animal allegiance over the seemingly terminally destructive power of global capital, of which neoliberal neocolonialism is a key element.² Nowhere else in his *oeuvre* is Coetzee so ethically decisive. This fact accounts, at least in part, I would argue, for this novel's wide readership and popular acclaim. In this essay, I will offer a close reading of the novel, made possible by the new feminist animality studies, that reveals Coetzee's bleak but coherently salvific narrative.

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.³ Much of *Elizabeth Costello* can be, and has been, used to understand *Disgrace*, even without reference to Costello's controversial, deliberately troubling comparison of contemporary factory-farm practices, involving the torture and mass slaughter of animals, to the Holocaust.⁴ For example, in discussing the philosopher Thomas Nagel's assertion that we can never enter the consciousness of a bat, Elizabeth Costello says "To be a living bat is to be full of being; being fully a bat is like being fully human, which is also to be full of being. . . . To be full of being is to live as a body-soul. . . . To be alive is to be a living soul. An animal—and we are all animals—is an embodied soul. This is precisely what Descartes saw and, for his own reasons, chose to deny."⁵ David Lurie, the protagonist of *Disgrace*, begins with this Cartesian view of animals; the reversal of

his view—the end of his own Cartesian denial of what René Descartes saw—constitutes the central ethical narrative of the novel.

Furthering her anti-Cartesian argument, Costello tests the assertion that “They [other animals] have no consciousnesses [a proposition Costello does not believe but entertains for the purpose of argument] *therefore*. Therefore what? Therefore we are free to use them for our own ends? Therefore we are free to kill them? Why? What is so special about the form of consciousness we recognize that makes killing a bearer of it a crime while killing an animal goes unpunished?” (90). Crucially, she has said that her vegetarianism (Coetzee is a vegetarian) “comes out of a desire to save my soul.”⁶ It is no coincidence, this essay will argue, that Elizabeth Costello is a woman in late middle age.⁷ In *Disgrace*, the transformation of David Lurie comes about in response to his attempts to “save his soul,” in Costello’s formulation. This narrative of successful salvation is coherent and fairly straightforward. For Coetzee, this salvation can be effected only by means of Lurie’s embrace of what might be called Buddheo-Christian renunciation, framed in terms of his unfolding connections, in the context of the undoing of South African racist stereotype and colonial social and political structures, with middle-aged women in conjunction with dogs.⁸

Criticism of *Disgrace* has revealed the connection between race and sexuality in Lurie’s erotic life in the opening section of the novel.⁹ The beginning of the novel describes the comfortable arrangement Lurie has with the prostitute Soraya, a dark-skinned woman who comes from “Discreet Escorts” stable of “Exotics” (7). Lurie believes, as the much-discussed opening sentence tells us, that, “[f]or a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (1). One important piece of information this packed sentence gives us is that Lurie himself is middle-aged. The implications of this fact seem to be connected primarily to the failure of his previous erotic/domestic relations with women: the fact that sex, for him, is a “problem” might have something to do with his failure to link sexuality to love (his divorced status is connected to the problem of sex), and that it is perhaps only “to his mind” that he has “solved [this] problem rather well.” When Lurie happens to see Soraya with her actual family, this arrangement disintegrates: Soraya wants to keep her real life entirely separate from the fantasy sex life (Lurie’s, and his culture’s, male- and white-dominant fantasy) into which she enters in exchange for Lurie’s money. Lurie, however, is torn between accommodation to the limits of this fantasy life and a desire for something more real for himself: some reconnection of sex with love.

The fact of Lurie's (middle-)age also connects importantly to his own sexual status:

The company of women made of him a lover of women and, to an extent, a womanizer. With his height, his good bones, his olive skin, his flowing hair, he could always count on a degree of magnetism. If he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look, he could rely on that. That was how he lived; for years, for decades, that was the backbone of his life.

Then one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost. If he wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her; often, in one way or another, to buy her. (7)

In the absence of the sexual appeal around which he had constructed his erotic life, Lurie becomes a sexual predator. "Predator" might seem too strong a word, but it is important to understand Coetzee's careful paralleling of Lurie with his daughter Lucy's rapists. These rapists also force him to come to terms with the end of the masculine powers of his youth and early middle age, and therefore to an understanding of his saving connection to women of his own age. Through that connection, which makes possible his connection with dogs, Lurie becomes a different kind of "ghost": not someone whom erotic glances of younger women "slid over, past, through" (that condition still obtains of course but it becomes irrelevant); rather, someone who lives fully within the limits of his actual life and in the face, and light, of his own death.¹⁰

The end of his arrangement with Soraya reveals to Lurie the inadequacy to his desire of the erotic situation he has fallen into. As is often the case with Coetzee's protagonists, this revelation leads not to some more reasonable, realistic approach to the problem, but rather to a more desperate measure: his affair with his undergraduate student, Melanie Isaacs. Despite Lurie's rationalizations to the contrary, there is no question, in the ethical structure of the novel, about the wrongness of this affair. Whether or not one accepts the argument, widely discussed, sometimes in contentious terms, in criticism of the novel, that he actually rapes her, and despite Coetzee's ironic treatment of Lurie's interrogation and, in an ambiguous and highly controversial reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the demand that he express remorse, it is impossible not to see that Coetzee gives ample evidence that Lurie's sexual relationship with Melanie is unethical.¹¹ It is important to Lurie's sexual fantasy of Melanie that he shift her name in his mind to "Meláni: the dark one" (18). With both Soraya

and Melanie, Lurie enacts the classic racialization of the erotic object for white men in gender- and race-hierarchical cultures, and also the classic incestuous sexual-social structure of male-dominant cultures, in which older men seek and are able to obtain young women for sexual pleasure: both Soraya and Melanie are not only “dark,” they are also young enough to be Lurie’s daughters (with Melanie this fact is apparent; with Soraya, Coetzee makes it so: “Technically he is old enough to be her father” [1]).

Coetzee will leave none of these hierarchical relations of privilege intact. To put it in very crude terms, Lurie cannot run away from his problem. His resignation from his academic position, which he thinks will allow him to retain both his dignity and the moral high ground he believes he has staked out, and his flight to his daughter’s farm, a small freehold in the Eastern Cape, which he thinks will remove him entirely from the context that had trapped him, only raise the stakes by removing him from a situation in which his fantasies, self-deceptions and self-flattering delusions were not fundamentally challenged, and putting him in a situation in which his deepest emotions and commitments are engaged and profoundly tested.

Dogs do not appear in the novel until Lurie arrives at Lucy’s farm. Lucy’s character and circumstances, of course, are crucial to the novel, particularly her lesbianism and, diametrically opposite to Soraya’s and Melanie’s conventional sexual attractiveness to Lurie, her difference as a woman: not just the fact that she is his daughter (a fact that Coetzee will use to develop in much starker terms the incestuous implications of his relations with Soraya and Melanie), and not just her lesbianism (which Coetzee suggests might be a reaction against Lurie’s excessive involvement with her), but also her, perhaps premature, acquisition of a middle-aged female body, in contrast to Soraya’s and Melanie’s youthful slimness.¹² When Lurie first sees Lucy, “[f]or a moment he does not recognize her. A year has passed, and she has put on weight. Her hips and breasts are now (he searches for the best word) ample” (59).

The dogs’ entrance into the novel, crucially, coincides with Lucy’s: it is not just the ethical power of dogs that is the focus of my argument here, but the power in the novel of the linkage between dogs and middle-aged or otherwise non-eroticized women.¹³ This double entrance, of dogs and Lucy, also coincides with the end of Lurie’s comfortable but unstable regime of self-deception, the beginning of what I must call his journey to personal salvation. When dogs first appear, they are caged, temporarily out-of-service guard dogs: agents of the enforcement of apartheid whose services are now only sporadi-

cally required. Coetzee emphasizes, in his introduction of them, their purely functional status: they are no different from guns as modes of “deterrence.” Lucy herself equates dogs and rifles, when her father, just informed that Lucy’s lover Helen has been “back in Johannesburg since April,” asks her whether she is nervous living alone: “Lucy shrugs. ‘There are the dogs. Dogs still mean something. The more dogs, the more deterrence. . . . I have a rifle’ . . . Dogs and a gun” (60).

On Lurie’s initial tour of the farm, Coetzee emphasizes the increased importance of the dogs in Lucy’s life: “Then she shows him over the boarding kennels. 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. . . . The dogs are excited to see her: Dobermanns, German Shepherds, ridgebacks, bull terriers, Rottweilers. ‘Watchdogs, all of them,’ she says. ‘Working dogs, on short contracts: two weeks, one week, sometimes just a weekend’” (61). The emphasis on the threatening breeds of the dogs, and on the powerful construction of their pens, will make the ease of the invaders’ slaughter of them (as the cliché has it, like shooting fish in a barrel) all the more poignant, while at the same time signaling the crumbling of the violent security edifice of apartheid these dogs exist only to uphold.

The dogs, only needed for short periods of time, are rapidly becoming relics of an outmoded, superseded order, just as Lurie is. Coetzee devotes a few devastating paragraphs in the first chapter to Lurie’s academic status: “He earns his living at the Cape Technical University, formerly Cape Town University College. Once a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization, adjunct professor of communications” (3) (an oblique reference to Coetzee’s own academic history). His specialty is romantic poetry, particularly Wordsworth; it is in a morale-supporting once-a-year course on romantic poetry that he meets Melanie. He describes himself and his colleagues “from the old days” as “burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they are to perform; clerks in a post-religious age” (4). The political irony of this structural parallel between enlightenment humanism (Lurie’s lost life) and violently maintained white supremacy (the dogs’ disappearing *raison d’être*) is powerful. I do not think Coetzee wants to equate the two simplistically.¹⁴ Rather, he wants to use this historical-political conjuncture in which they are aligned with one another, an alignment that will offer some promise when simultaneously linked to the conjuncture of middle-aged women and dogs, as well as making clear the monumental devastation it has wrought and continues to wreak.

Lucy is in the ambiguous position of caring for these dogs for pay, recalling faintly Lurie's relationship with Soraya. When we first meet her, she is, almost by default, maintaining the traditional, defensive position of the white landowner in South Africa, even though her decision to stay on the farm alone, and her ambiguous, fairly egalitarian relationship with Petrus, show from the outset that her relation to her ownership of her farm as a white person has begun to shift in accord with the shifting political situation. Lurie's first encounter with Petrus is emblematic of his utter failure to understand the fact of this massive shift. When Lucy leaves them alone together for a moment after they are first introduced, Lurie says to Petrus, "to break the silence" by placing him within a traditional schema comprehensible to him, "You look after the dogs." Petrus replies: "I look after the dogs and I work in the garden. Yes.' Petrus gives a broad smile. 'I am the gardener and the dog-man.' He reflects for a moment. 'The dog-man,' he repeats, savouring the phrase" (64). Petrus can see the irony of the situation, as is evident in his "broad smile" and his repetition and savoring of the phrase "dog-man," an irony to which Lurie is blind. It is significant that it is Petrus's relation to the dogs in particular that Lurie utterly fails to understand. He can only see Petrus by putting him in the old category of subservient black laborer. But as self-proclaimed "dog-man," Petrus does more than mock Lurie's failure of insight. He 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.

At the end of chapter 7, in which Lurie makes his flight to Lucy's farm, which she describes as his "refuge" (65), Lurie is awakened in the middle of his first night "by a flurry of barking. One dog in particular barks insistently, mechanically, without cease; the others join in, quiet down, then, loth to admit defeat, join in again" (67). Lucy tells him in the morning that "one gets used to it" (67). At this point in the novel, Lurie is as alienated from, and uncomprehending of, the dogs as he is of Petrus. To his perception, they behave either "mechanically," recalling Descartes' comparison of dogs to machines, or perversely ("loth to admit defeat"). However, just before this interrupted sleep, he has told Lucy the saga of his, as he sees it, persecution, comparing it to "Mao's China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology." Even to himself, after this self-explanation, "now that he hears it through another's ears, his whole tirade sounds melodramatic, excessive"—the perspective of "another" is of course crucial in Coetzee's ethical dynamic.¹⁵ Lucy

tells him he shouldn't be "so unbending" (66). The insistent barking of the one dog, and the others' refusal to admit defeat, very subtly echo Lurie's relation to his tale.

It is not long after this exchange—only a few pages—that we meet the crucial character Bev Shaw, and are introduced to her animal refuge (Lucy introduces her to Lurie by saying "Bev runs the animal refuge" [72]). The blunt, monosyllabic, common plainness of her name, in contrast to the "exotic" mellifluousness of "Soraya" and "Melanie" (the latter an echo of "mellifluous"), is telling and deliberate. Coetzee's initial description of Bev, as seen from Lurie's point of view, dwells on her appearance, and is negative almost to the point of parodic repulsiveness: "He has not taken to Bev Shaw, a dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck. He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive" (72). "Dumpy," "no neck" and "make no effort to be attractive" signify her exclusion from the realm of sexuality for Lurie. "Bustling" signifies that she is busy, useful in the world, emphasizing the importance of the fact that she "runs the animal refuge." Her "bustling" quality makes her unlike Soraya and Melanie, who exist to Lurie only as erotic objects. (It is most important that the action of the novel is initiated by Lurie accidentally seeing Soraya in a non-erotic context. When he revisits his old haunts, transformed, he sees Melanie acting a comic role in a play—an entirely different view of her from the one he had had initially, in which she is utterly passive and literally witless: he thinks of her, in contrast to his previous wives, as having no wit; telling, then, that she acts effectively in a comic role.) As a woman who defines herself primarily through her work rather than her attractiveness to men, Bev Shaw is like Lucy and her friends: "It is a resistance he has had to Lucy's friends before" (72). Her "black freckles" and "close-cropped, wiry hair" associate her, I would argue, with Africans, not in the exoticized manner of "Soraya" and "Meláni," but in the de-exoticized, de-eroticized new order which Lurie will come, through excruciating experience, to be able to see.

Even Lurie, at this point in the novel, perceives that his reaction to Bev Shaw is part of a phase of his life he should, and perhaps is about to, leave behind: "Nothing to be proud of [his resistance to Lucy's friends]: a prejudice that has settled in his mind, settled down. His mind has become a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go. He ought to chase them out, sweep the premises clean. But he does not care to do so, or does not care enough" (72). It is no coincidence, I would argue, that Coetzee uses the word "ref-

uge” as an ironic contrast both to the “refuge” Lucy is providing him at her farm, and also to what Lurie will find at Bev Shaw’s “animal refuge”—the Animal Welfare League.

“Animal lovers” like Bev Shaw and Lucy seem harmless, irrelevant and somewhat ridiculous to Lurie—his condescension is apparent in “[h]e has nothing against the animal lovers with whom Lucy has been mixed up as long as he can remember” (72) (but of course it is Lurie himself who at this point is, in the slang parlance, mixed up). Just as Soraya was removed from Lurie’s erotic fantasy world by the plain reality of her domestic life, her husband and children, Bev Shaw’s non-erotic status is emphasized by her husband: “There is not only Bev Shaw, there is Bill Shaw too, equally squat, drinking tea at the kitchen table, with a beet-red face and silver hair and a sweater with a floppy collar” (73). Bev might suggest Africans, but Bill suggests white European colonialists, with his “beet-red face and silver hair.” Lurie’s transformation will have to be much more complex than simply embracing or affirming, or even just acknowledging, black Africa.

In “there is not only Bev Shaw, there is Bill Shaw too,” we get the Shaws not as people but as objects, part of the tacky bourgeois furnishings of their house (the alliterative, monosyllabic “Bev and Bill” are also perhaps reminiscent of Beckett’s Nagg and Nell). “The house is just as he had imagined it would be: rubbishy furniture, a clutter of ornaments (porcelain shepherdesses, cowbells, an ostrich-feather flywhisk), the yammer of a radio, the cheeping of birds in cages, cats everywhere underfoot” (72–73). I cite this sentence because these details foreshadow crucial elements of the opera Lurie will be able to write once he is transformed. At this point in the novel, of course, the language of Lurie’s perception of the Shaws’ environment contains only negative connotation.

At the end of this chapter, Coetzee begins to address directly the issue of animal lives and rights that is so central to his vision. Lucy asks Lurie what he thinks of Bev and Bill Shaw. “I don’t want to be rude” is his first response, letting Lucy and the reader know how much contempt he feels. His next response, after saying, giving further evidence of his patronizing condescension, “It’s a subculture of its own, I’m sure,” is “Don’t they have children?” as if the care of animals were a poor substitute for the care of children. It will occur to Lurie soon after this that his own early involvement in Lucy—erotically tinged, as the reader can see—may have been inappropriate: “Has it been too much, [his] love? Has she found it a burden? Has it pressed down on her? [a wonderful formulation, suggesting and foreshadowing both

rape and Lurie's analysis of the meaning of rape] Has she given it a darker reading?" (76). In response to Lurie's blinkered snobbery, Lucy tells him not to "underestimate Bev . . . she does an enormous amount of good." Lurie responds to Lucy's earnest straightforwardness in a more engaged way: "It must be a losing battle." Lucy's response echoes Elizabeth Costello's point of view in *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*: "Yes, it is. There is no funding any longer. On the list of the nation's priorities, animals come nowhere.' 'She must get despondent. You too.' Yes. No. Does it matter? The animals she helps aren't despondent. They are greatly relieved."¹⁶ It is the old Lurie who responds to this powerful statement: "It's admirable what you do, what she does, but to me animal-welfare people are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat" (73). Lurie's casually arrogant, privileged cruelty here is a brutal foreshadow of his and Lucy's fate, and the fate of the dogs in Lucy's care. Lucy responds angrily and accurately, accusing him of feeling contempt for her life and wishing she were involved in "something better . . . painting still lives or teaching myself Russian . . . a higher life" (74). Lucy's irony here—the superseded uselessness she attributes to the sort of decorative, cultured feminine life of the educated upper middle class that Lurie does in fact value and wish for his daughter—is identical, I would argue, to Coetzee's irony. Lucy then articulates a central premise of the novel, a premise Lurie will have to suffer terribly in order to be able to see: "there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals. That's the example that people like Bev try to set. That's the example I try to follow. To share some of our human privilege with the beasts. 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" (74). Lurie demurs—"We are of a different order of creation from the animals" (74)—failing to understand Lucy because he has yet to have the experiences that will enable him to understand her.

It is interesting that Lucy contradicts herself in her version of Coetzee's vision: "this is the only life we have," and yet she does not "want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us." This contradiction, or open-ended uncertainty, I would argue, between "this is the only life we have" and the possibility of coming back "in another existence"—another life, another chance, a reincarnation, a life after death—is alive in the powerful conclusion of the novel.

Lurie agrees to volunteer in Bev's animal shelter, to please Lucy, though he does it with an ironic sneer, and then with self-righteous arrogance: "I'm dubious, Lucy. It sounds suspiciously like community service. . . . as long as I don't have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself. I'll do it on that basis" (77). Lucy, equally ironically though with much greater humor and generosity, says "So you are determined to go on being bad. Mad, bad, and dangerous to know. I promise, no one will ask you to change" (77). No one does ask him to change—events require it. It is after he agrees to volunteer at the animal shelter that a dog, for the first time, acquires individuality to him: "the old bulldog bitch," Katy. Her plain name, and Coetzee's description of her, link her clearly to de-eroticized, older women: "her old dugs hang slack" (78). He ignores the younger dogs "who are delighted to see him," and goes instead to Katy's cage. He enters the cage; Katy, in a wonderful gesture at once of recognition and of resignation, "raises her head, regards him, lets her head fall again." After tickling her behind the ears, his first gesture of affection toward an animal, and acknowledging her condition, which, crucially, he includes himself in—"Abandoned, are we?"—he lies down next to her on the "bare concrete" floor of her cage and falls asleep. "Above is the pale blue sky. His limbs relax" (78).¹⁷ This is the first moment of simple ease and comfort for Lurie in the novel. Lucy takes firm hold of the opening this moment provides her: "Poor old Katy, she's in mourning. No one wants her, and she knows it. The irony is, she must have offspring all over the district who would be happy to share their homes with her. But it's not in their power to invite her. They are part of the furniture, part of the alarm system. They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things" (78). These well-known lines, powerfully condensing the hideous status of the dogs as having homes like and with humans yet nonetheless being part of those homes' furniture or alarm systems, could be spoken by Elizabeth Costello, and by Coetzee himself.¹⁸ In response, Lurie pontificates about the "Church Fathers" who "had a long debate . . . and decided [animals] don't have proper souls . . . Their souls are tied to their bodies and die with them" (78). This remark, despite the sanctimonious obtuseness it reflects in Lurie, recalls the contradiction or undecidability in Lucy's statement about this being the only life we have, that we share with animals, as opposed to the possibility of coming back in another life.

It occurs to Lurie for the first time in this sequence that unwanted animals are "put down," and that this fact constitutes an enormous

ethical problem: “‘What will you do with her?’ he says. ‘With Katy? I’ll keep her, if it comes to that.’ ‘Don’t you ever put animals down?’ ‘No, I don’t. Bev does. It is a job no one else wants to do, so she has taken it upon herself. It cuts her up terribly. You underestimate her. She is a more interesting person than you think. Even in your own terms.’ His own terms: what are they? That dumpy little women with ugly voices deserve to be ignored?” (It is crucial for the novel’s culminating opera that Bev has an “ugly voice.”) The view of himself from Lucy’s vantage point is beginning to have a salutary effect. “A shadow of grief falls over him: for Katy, alone in her cage, for himself, for everyone” (79). This shadow of grief, because it includes not just himself (he already feels great self-pity) and the vague, responsibility-obliterating “everyone,” but Katy, a particular dog, is a beginning for Lurie. Nonetheless, because his transformation, since it is the substance of the novel, is gradual, he must still say “I’ll go and help Bev Shaw. Provided that I don’t have to call her Bev. It’s a silly name to go by. It reminds me of cattle” (79). 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.

Coetzee represents Lurie’s start as a helper at Bev’s animal shelter with subtle ambiguity. Lurie feels contempt for Bev’s injunction that, in handling injured, diseased, frightened animals, he “‘think comforting thoughts, think strong thoughts. They can smell what you are thinking.’ . . . They can smell what you are thinking: what nonsense! ‘There, there!’ he murmurs. . . . ‘Thank you, Mr Lurie. You have a good presence. I sense that you like animals.’ ‘Do I like animals? I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them.’ . . . She is pondering his words, whose tone she appears to have missed. ‘Yes, we eat up a lot of animals in this country,’ she says. ‘It doesn’t seem to do us much good. I’m not sure how we will justify it to them.’ . . . Justify it? When? At the Great Reckoning? He would be curious to hear more, but this is not the time” (81–82). Lurie’s “At the Great Reckoning” is of course ironic, even sarcastic, but “he would be curious to hear more.” This Great Reckoning is the possibility of another life, another chance, that Lucy has alluded to. Bev Shaw, of course, articulates Costello’s/Coetzee’s argument against eating animals.

This glimpse of Lurie’s sympathy for animals, a sympathy he still refuses to acknowledge but cannot help showing in his behavior, is interlarded with his most vicious, detailed account of Bev’s physical unattractiveness. Immediately after Lurie’s haughty, contemptuous remark that he must like at least some parts of animals because he eats

them, Coetzee inserts this free indirect observation: “Her hair is a mass of little curls. Does she make the curls herself, with tongs? Unlikely: it would take hours every day. They must grow that way. He has never seen such a *tessitura* from close by. The veins on her ears are visible as a filigree of red and purple. The veins of her nose too. And then a chin that comes straight out of her chest, like a pouter pigeon’s. As an ensemble, remarkably unattractive” (81–82). As someone he finds “remarkably unattractive,” Bev is the object of Lurie’s surprisingly close examination—he does not give such an extensively detailed description of anyone else’s physical appearance, except perhaps Lucy’s; he also finds Lucy’s “ample” body depressing and somewhat appalling. At some level he knows it is these middle-aged women’s bodies that he must understand. The ironic use of the word *tessitura* foreshadows the middle-aged Italian heroine of Lurie’s final, saving opera. The mass of little curls themselves reinforce Bev’s connection to Africans. Her chin “like a pouter pigeon’s” connects her to animals. The emphasis on her ears foreshadows the damage that will be done to Lurie’s. The visibility of her veins reminds us that we are all animal bodies. The fact that he finds this “ensemble” (not person or even body) “remarkably unattractive” is a measure both of how far he is from the insights he will achieve, and, in his fascination with what he finds disgusting (as in *Heart of Darkness*, “the fascination of the abomination”), his partial acknowledgment of its importance to him.¹⁹

The crucial episode in this chapter, one of the turning points in the novel, involves a goat with its scrotum wounded by dogs. The fact that this horrible, festering wound, “alive with white grubs waving their blind heads in the air” (82), is inflicted by wild dogs, is an important de-sentimentalization of dogs. A male goat, fatally wounded in its enormous, bulging scrotum and facing death, is a wonderful animal double for Lurie, almost overly “symbolic”: he is the old, oversexed/de-sexed “goat;” also the “scapegoat,” as Lucy later, ironically, calls him (91). After a remarkable scene of communion between Bev and the goat, in which she kneels down beside him, “nuzzles his throat, stroking the throat upward with her own hair,” (83), and the goat, having been thrashing about, becomes still, Bev, having seen that the goat is beyond saving, offers to “give him a quiet end” (83) for his owner. (The owner, to the reader’s dismay, refuses, and takes the goat away.)

Many details of this scene are noteworthy. Bev strokes and calms the goat with the racialized *tessitura* Lurie finds so grotesque. (Later, when Bev is tending Lurie’s wounds from the horrific invasion, he “recalls the goat in the clinic, wonders whether, submitting to her hands,

it felt the same peacefulness” [106].) Then, “to his own surprise,” he finds himself trying to comfort Bev by telling her that the goat perhaps understands his own death: “Perhaps he has already been through it. Born with foreknowledge, so to speak. This is Africa, after all. There have been goats here since the beginning of time. They don’t have to be told what steel is for, and fire. They know how death comes to a goat. They are born prepared” (83–84). It is only himself, however, that he is comforting. Bev disagrees with him: “I don’t think we are ready to die, any of us, not without being escorted” (84). Evidently Lurie is not ready to allow himself to feel what he feels about the goat’s plight. It reassures him to think that the goat comes pre-programmed to die; again, like a Cartesian machine. It is interesting that he associates this fatalistic, mechanistic view of goat-life with Africa—he is just as distanced from African life in general as he is from African animal life in particular. (In making this connection, however, he mentions Africa as a specific location, his own, for the first time.) Bev, however, insists that we and other animals are all in the same situation, unprepared to die unless we are “escorted.” This remark allows Lurie to see what Bev is really doing at the animal refuge:

Things are beginning to fall into place. He has a first inkling of the task this ugly little woman has set herself. This bleak building is a place not of healing—her doctoring is too amateurish for that—but of last resort. He recalls the story of—who was it? St. Hubert?—who gave refuge to a deer that clattered into his chapel, panting and distraught, fleeing the huntsmen’s dogs. Bev Shaw, not a veterinarian but a priestess, full of New Age mumbo jumbo, trying, absurdly, to lighten to load of Africa’s suffering beasts. Lucy thought he would find her interesting. But Lucy is wrong. Interesting is not the word. (84)

The language of scorn and contempt, though still pervasive, is being revealed clearly as defensive in this passage by Lurie’s “first inkling” of the “task” Bev Shaw has “set herself.” Despite his dismissive language about New Age mumbo jumbo (with “mumbo jumbo” serving a racist function as well), and his inability to avoid characterizing Bev as “ugly” and “little,” Lurie compares her to a saint (in a vignette that again both de-sentimentalizes dogs and marks Lurie’s disconnection from them), recognizes the hopeless ambitiousness of her task, recognizes her role as “priestess,” and finds himself unable to speak “the word” to describe Bev that would be more appropriate than “interesting.”

Before this chapter ends, Lurie is able to discuss Bev’s “task” with her. “You don’t mind?” he asks her. “I do mind. I mind deeply. I

wouldn't want someone doing it for me who didn't mind. Would you?' He is silent. Then: 'Do you know why my daughter sent me to you?' 'She told me you were in trouble.' 'Not just in trouble. In what I suppose one would call disgrace'" (85). This interchange, in which Lurie speaks directly, simply, without elaborate, angry, defensive irony, marks the inception of his recognition of his own gathering insight into the connection between his life and "the lives of animals," human and other, he is seeing around him in this "refuge."

The pivotal chapter 11, containing the invasion, the theft, the murder of the dogs, the beating and burning of Lurie, and the rape of Lucy, follows this scene. This jarringly violent episode, the focus of most criticism of the novel, in both senses of that term, is preceded by a noteworthy conversation between Lurie and Lucy. Lucy presses David (as she calls him) to give his own account of what happened with Melanie. He is reluctant to "trot out more of his intimacies" (89), but he complies. He bases his "case," as Lucy puts it, on "the rights of desire"—"*I was a servant of Eros*: that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery?" This statement recalls Lucy's about dogs "treating us like gods." This irony is compounded by the image that goes through Lurie's mind while he says this: he sees himself "peeling off [Melanie's] clothes while her arms flop like the arms of a dead person" (89). Coetzee is setting up the rape to come with fierce, almost unbearable irony. And Coetzee is not finished: the story Lurie tells, to illustrate his point, is about a male dog who was punished so viciously for trying to have sex with females that, when he was aroused, he turned against himself, "chas[ing] around the garden with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide" (90). Lucy pertinently asks whether the moral of the story is that males must be allowed to follow their instincts unchecked" (90).²⁰ Lurie denies this moral; rather, "the poor dog had begun to hate its own nature" (90). He also feels that, despite the fact that his "case" now sounds like "effrontery" to himself, like "vanity," yet it was "not a lie, not entirely. In the whole wretched business there was something generous that was doing its best to flower" (89). I would argue that Coetzee agrees—that, in the opera, the "something generous that was doing its best to flower" reemerges, in utterly changed form, in the aftermath of the repudiation of male sexuality as inherently always rape, a repudiation that Lurie arrives at as a result of the catastrophic events that immediately follow this conversation.

I will not dwell on those much-discussed events, except to claim that the shooting of the dogs is presented by Coetzee as the most hor-

rifying event in the present time of the invasion. Because the episode is narrated entirely from Lurie's point of view, we do not see Lucy's rape. We experience the attack on Lurie as he experiences it—with shocked detachment, confusion, and obsessive focus only on trying and failing to protect Lucy. The shooting of the dogs is immediately preceded by Lurie's insight into his status as a white representative at once of colonialism and of European enlightenment humanism: "He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa" (95). The dogs are shot viciously, brutally, and we get the detailed description:

Now the tall man appears from around the front, carrying the rifle. With practised ease he brings a cartridge up into the breech, thrusts the muzzle into the dogs' cage. The biggest of the German Shepherds, slaving with rage, snaps at it. There is a heavy report; blood and brains splatter the cage. For a moment the barking ceases. The man fires twice more. One dog, shot through the chest, dies at once; another, with a gaping throat-wound, sits down heavily, flattens its ears, following with its gaze the movements of this being who does not even bother to administer a *coup de grâce*. (95)

The tall man has been policed, threatened, perhaps attacked by such dogs in the past; we imagine him possibly taking his revenge, though nothing in Coetzee's narrative suggests that—it suggests the sort of mechanical behavior ("practiced ease" and the lack of mercy, or reaction of any kind, to the dying dog) that Lurie had associated with dogs themselves during his first night at the farm. These men are dehumanized to him, and to us, just as the dogs initially were. Nonetheless, the grotesque, horrific brutality of this scene is indelible, and sets the emotional and ethical tone for the rest of the novel. (A brief moment of the novel is narrated from the helpless, dying dog's point of view: "following with its gaze the movements of this being who does not even bother to administer a *coup de grâce*.") After this, for many reasons, Lurie cannot go on as he had been. The shooting of the dogs, I would argue, gives the reader the requisite emotional relation to this drastic shift.

Lurie's initial reaction to these events is utter despair. He feels as if he's bleeding to death, "his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop. . . . When that is finished, he will be like a fly-casing in a spiderweb, brittle to the touch, lighter than rice-chaff, ready to float away" (107). He thinks, "Lucy's future, his future, the future of the land as a whole [in which there is inevitable retributive brutality,

and where there are too many people, too many dogs, not enough to sustain their lives] it is all a matter of indifference, he wants to say; let it all go to the dogs, I do not care" (107). This "incredible lightness of being," however, along with "go[ing] to the dogs," become a pathway to an ethical and aesthetic rebirth for Lurie.

In the novel's new dispensation, Lurie is at last able to see that "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" (117). Petrus has become a human being to him, not the dog-man or the gardener but a complex reflection of and agent in his country's history, just as Lurie and Lucy are. The situation Lucy both finds herself in and eventually chooses after the invasion and rape, a situation possibly engineered and probably at least countenanced by Petrus (the youngest of the three men is of course part of Petrus's extended family), is one of complex adaptation by both whites and blacks to the current South African situation, mangled product of a history as horrific as any in the twentieth century. Lucy will have her mixed-race baby, the fruit of gang rape, and will stay on her farm but only as part of Petrus's extended family, along with one of her rapists; she will be able to stay as she wants to only because she will be under Petrus's protection, indeed one of his wives, but on her own terms. Petrus will own the land; Lucy will live, at his pleasure, in the "big house." Lurie will in a sense change places with Petrus: he can no longer be Lucy's protector. And, in Coetzee's ironic but also profound transformation of the term, it is Lurie who will become both a gardener and the "dog-man."

Lurie would like to hear Petrus's story; the English professor would like to hear it "preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost their articulations, their articulateness, their articulatedness. Like a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud, the language has stiffened. Pressed into the mould of English, Petrus's story would come out arthritic, bygone" (117). Lurie had compared his own "case" to that of a moral dinosaur, while still defending himself. Now, his sudden ability to perceive Petrus's life on its own terms corresponds with his great distancing from his former life as a spokesman and representative, however unconsciously, of the old racial-sexual-cultural-political order, signified here by English.

Objections to *Disgrace*, particularly those made by the ANC and others sympathetic to their point of view, that the black characters in the novel are negative stereotypes, reflecting white fears—the three

brutal rapists, in particular, and also Petrus as conniving, vengeful manipulator—certainly have justification. I would argue, however, that Petrus is an ambiguous character, with a story as complex, as elusive of the English in which Coetzee writes, as Lurie claims. Petrus is willing to allow Lucy to stay on the farm, to protect her, and to take her into his family. As Lucy says, her acceptance of what has happened to her is “the price one has to pay for staying on . . . they [the rapists] see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves” (158). The four black African men are, in their varying ways, agents not of “truth and reconciliation,” and not quite of vengeance, but rather of balancing the books. For Coetzee, this balancing involves a radical shift in the humanist/apartheid system of interlinked hierarchies of race, sexuality, gender and class. This shift requires Lurie to understand the parallels between himself and Lucy’s rapists as well as the links between himself and other animals, particularly dogs. It also requires him to add to that linkage de-eroticized middle-aged women.

During this interchange between Lurie and Lucy, just before Petrus’s celebration which is the event that leads to Lurie’s first departure from the farm, when Lucy finally does as much as she can to explain to Lurie what she sees as having happened to her, she says to him, “Hatred . . . when it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know” (158). Lucy goes on to describe rape as murder in terms that deliberately recall Lurie’s rape of Melanie: “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). Lurie has never before confronted the violence of his actions, a violence which the invasion is designed by Coetzee to reveal to Lurie. “Getting away with murder” shifts the ground from literal murder, of which Lurie of course is not guilty, to his failure to take responsibility for the truth of his behavior toward Melanie.

In response, Lurie first thinks of Byron, ostensibly the subject of the opera he is writing (failing to be able to write). “Among the legions of countesses and kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape.” And then, full acknowledgment: “Lucy’s intuition is right after all: he does understand; he can,

if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?" (160). The de-sexualized "ghost" of the novel's opening, "over, past and through" which women's erotic glances "slid[e]," can now inhabit the dominant position of the rapist, because he knows that position from his own experience. Crucially, he is leaving that part of himself—the blindly self-indulgent, self-justifying "servant of Eros," behind—the sexual predator, rather than the no-longer-sexually-attractive middle-aged man, has become the ghost of himself. The affirmative answer to the question of whether he has it in him to be the (middle-aged) woman will constitute one aspect of the salvific narrative.

On the way to leaving that former self behind, Lurie must suffer the utter humiliation of becoming physically ludicrous. He is at once Lear on the heath, reduced to tragic absurdity, and also a Beckettian clown: "His eye is healing surprisingly fast: after a mere week he is able to use it again. The burns are taking longer. He retains the skullcap and the bandage over his ear. The ear, uncovered, looks like a naked pink mollusk. . . . He is trying to get used to looking odd, worse than odd, repulsive—one of those sorry creatures whom children gawk at in the street"—he is repulsive, just as Bev Shaw had been to him. "The end of roving. Though the heart be still as loving and the moon be still as bright" (120). Immediately following this Byron reference, we hear again of his "Byron project," the opera about Byron and his lover Teresa Guiccioli at Ravenna that he has been telling himself he is writing. Now, "he must face the blank page, strike the first note, see what he is worth" (121). The opera will come, eventually, but not in the form he thinks it will take, and not at all in response to the gauntlet he lays down for himself here, which assumes the model of artist as god or hero, facing down the blank page, marking it, striking the first note, measuring his worth.

The next stage of Lurie's ethical progress in this plot of fall and redemption is his bond with the sheep Petrus is about to slaughter for the big celebration. Petrus tethers the sheep unnecessarily, making them suffer during their last days of life rather than letting them graze freely as they just as easily might do. Lurie sets them free to graze. (We remember, of course, his earlier, snide, arrogant, blinded remark about liking animals because he likes to eat parts of them.)

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. . . . He remembers Bev Shaw nuzzling the old billy-goat with the ravaged testicles, stroking him, comforting him, entering into his life. How does she get it right, this communion with animals? Some trick he does not have. One has to be a certain kind of person, perhaps, with fewer complications. . . . Do I have to change, he thinks? Do I have to become like Bev Shaw? (126)

The simple answer to his question is yes, he does have to change, he does have to become like Bev Shaw, though at this point he is still partially in the dark—she is not a person with “fewer complications.” But the fact that he can ask this question shows that he has already begun to change dramatically. Again, the crucial agent of this transformation is his simultaneous identification, within the context of the power shifts in race of post-apartheid politics, with de-eroticized and/or middle-aged women (not just Bev Shaw but also Lucy and, finally, Byron’s Teresa) and his profitless, just-for-its-own-sake communion with animals, particularly dogs, which will allow him to write a profitless, just-for-its-own-sake, non-heroic work of art.

Shortly following the above passage, Lurie asks Lucy if she wants to go for a walk with him. She says, “Thanks, but no. Take Katy” (127), Katy the elderly, unwanted “bitch.” When Lurie tries to return to his opera again, it is Byron’s “bitch-mate,” Teresa Guiccioli, whom he “aches to hear” (142). Teresa, in middle age, with Byron long dead, will become the opera’s protagonist and the central object of Lurie’s identification.

In the meantime, he has begun helping Bev Shaw in earnest, holding the dogs on Sundays as Bev administers the “lethal.” “To each, in what will be its last minutes, Bev gives her fullest attention, stroking it, talking to it, easing its passage” (142). Lurie does his best to commune with the dogs as Bev does, though “[i]f more often than not, the dog fails to be charmed, it is because of his presence: he gives off the wrong smell (*They can smell your thoughts*), the smell of shame. Nevertheless, he is the one who holds the dogs still as the needle finds the vein. . . . He had thought he would get used to it. But that is not what happens . . . he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop” (142–43). Lurie imagines that, despite the “silence and painlessness of the procedure, despite the good thoughts that Bev Shaw thinks and that he tries to think . . . the dogs in the yard smell what is going on inside. They flatten their ears, they droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying” (143).

The word “disgrace” is, of course, used repeatedly in this novel, with shifting meanings, as many readers have pointed out: Lurie describes himself as “in disgrace” once his journey to insight has begun; the invasion and its violence produce “disgrace;” now, “disgrace” is dying itself. Lurie’s crucial ethical action, along with apologizing to Melanie’s father, is to devise a way to preserve the dead dogs from this disgrace (I would argue that the crucial aspect of Lurie’s visit to the Isaacs is not the apology itself, or the reluctant but determined acceptance of it and him by the Isaacs family, which are necessary to their Christian morality, but rather Lurie’s recognition that he still feels illicit desire, this time for Melanie’s younger sister, but that he will never act on this desire again). The ethical center of the novel is the sequence in which Coetzee shows us Lurie escorting the dead dogs to the hospital incinerator very early on Monday mornings to make sure they are not dishonored; to make sure that the disgrace of dying, which we all suffer, is not compounded by having them left Sunday night “on the dump with the rest of the weekend’s scourings. . . . He is not prepared to inflict such dishonour upon them” (144). We are given the almost unbearable details of the events that led Lurie to this course of action:

On his first Monday he had left it to them [the hospital workmen] to do the incinerating. Rigor mortis had stiffened the corpses overnight. The dead legs caught in the bars of the trolley, and when the trolley came back from its trip to the furnace, the dog would as often as not come riding back too, blackened and grinning, smelling of singed fur, its plastic covering burnt away. After a while the workmen began to beat the bags with the backs of their shovels before loading them, to break the rigid limbs. It was then that he intervened and took over the job himself. (144–45)²¹

Earlier and earlier on Monday mornings, he “loads them [the dead dogs], one at a time, on to the feeder trolley, cranks the mechanism that hauls the trolley through the steel gate into the flames, pulls the lever to empty it of its contents, and cranks it back, while the workmen whose job this normally is stand by and watch” (144).

Coetzee’s thematic emphasis in this sequence falls on the practical valuelessness, the gratuitousness, and therefore the ethical purity, of Lurie’s self-imposed preservation of the dead dogs’ honor. He is doing nothing for the dogs themselves—they are dead. He is serving his own idea of the proper relation to the death of “body-souls full of being”—to the extent that he identifies with the dogs, which is now great, to

his own death. He is acting on his belief that there is another chance; that we should all, all of us animals, be escorted properly out of the life that has ended. He will take responsibility for these beings with souls whom no one else will take responsibility for. Recalling Father Time's suicide in *Jude the Obscure*—"The dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: *because we are too menny*"—he says he cannot be "the one for whom they are not too many," but he "is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves, once even Bev Shaw has washed her hands of them. A dog-man, Petrus once called himself. Well, now he has become a dog-man" (146).

Following in rapid succession upon this new phase of Lurie's life, he sleeps with Bev Shaw (the implications of this, in light of his initial disgust, are obvious), he has the excruciating interchange with Lucy in which he uses the word "rape" for the first time to describe what happened to her, she tells him that she sees her situation as one of a debt-payer, paying the "price one has to pay for staying on" (158), he realizes that he can imagine himself in the position of the rapists and then asks himself whether he "ha[s] it in him to be the woman" (160), and, more or less at Lucy's request, he leaves her farm.

He takes two journeys. The first is a mission of repentance, to the Isaacs' house. The second takes him back to Cape Town, to close out his old life for good. He sees Melanie perform in a comedy, where he is surprised by the wit and vitality he has imagined her (as his eroticized, passive, "dark" sexual object) as lacking, and he is harassed and threatened by her boyfriend, a thuggish man her own age, Lurie's foil. In Cape Town he confronts, literally, the destruction of his former life, first in his apartment devastated by theft and vandalism, by a "raiding party" that recalls the invasion of Lucy's farm ("No ordinary burglary. A raiding party moving in, cleaning out the site . . . war reparations; another incident in the great campaign of redistribution" [176]) and then in his office, now occupied by a young man in "Applied language studies . . . language learning" (179), as a hostile former female colleague tells him. Perhaps this young man will learn and teach a language in which Petrus's story can be told.

It is while he lives as a dog-man inhabiting this ravaged apartment, this site of war reparation and redistribution (the tectonic shifting of the interlocked hierarchies I have referred to above), that the saving opera comes to him. He has been stalled in his attempts to write it with Byron at its center and Teresa as Byron's young mistress:

first on Lucy's farm and now again here, the project has failed to engage the core of him. There is something misconceived about it, something that does not come from the heart. . . . He tries another track. Abandoning the pages of notes he has written, abandoning the pert, precocious newlywed with her captive English Milord, he tries to pick Teresa up in middle age. The new Teresa is a dumpy little widow installed in the Villa Gamba with her aged father, running the household. . . . Byron, in the new version, is long dead . . . Is this the heroine he has been seeking all the time? Will an older Teresa engage his heart as his heart is now? The passage of time has not treated Teresa kindly. With her heavy bust, her stocky trunk, her abbreviated legs, she looks more like a peasant, a *contadina*, than an aristocrat. The complexion that Byron once so admired has turned hectic. . . . Can he find it in his heart to love this plain, ordinary woman? Can he love her enough to write a music for her? If he cannot, what is left for him? (181–82)

Bev Shaw is powerfully present throughout this description of Teresa (“dumpy,” with “her heavy bust, her stocky trunk, her abbreviated legs”) and Lucy living with Lurie is also present in the “widow installed . . . with her aged father, running the household.” “Byron . . . long dead” suggests the death of Lurie’s disastrous Byronic persona. Lurie can indeed “love [Teresa] enough”; in fact, she sings to him in her own music, which he must write, instead of adapting existing music, “purloined songs” (183), as he had planned: astonishingly, in dribs and drabs, the music comes” (183). This is a great difference indeed from the heroic measuring of himself by marking the blank page. The difference between seeing “what is left for him” and seeing “what he is worth” measures precisely the distance Lurie has traveled.

He cannot use the piano to write this music—it is “too rounded, too physical, too rich” (184): too suggestive of a youthful erotic life. The piano is of course also one of the prime representatives of and figures for western humanistic culture itself. Rather, “from a crate full of old books and toys of Lucy’s, he recovers the odd little seven-stringed banjo that he bought for her on the streets of KwaMashu when she was a child” (184). It is with this African instrument, a relic of Lucy’s childhood, his relation to which he must redeem, that he can write Teresa’s music. The “silly plink-plonk of the toy banjo,” “to his surprise,” becomes “inseparable” from Teresa for Lurie (184), reminding us of the (then, to him) unpleasant noises he heard when he first visited the Shaws: the “yammer of a radio, the cheeping of birds in cages”; the tacky ornaments included “cowbells”; he described Bev’s voice, when he generalized her “dumpy, little” type, as “ugly.” “The lush

arias he had dreamed of giving [Teresa] he quietly abandons; from there it is but a short step to putting the instrument in her hands" (184). The "lush arias" correspond to the rich, rounded sound of the piano—neither is appropriate to the historical situation within and in relation to which Lurie composes. He puts the toy banjo, the means of creating art, into Teresa's hands: she has become not his muse but the embodiment of his own creative subjectivity. To whatever extent it remains to him to offer anything to the world, he can only do it as Teresa: by "becoming like Bev Shaw." Further, "It is not the erotic that is calling to him after all, nor the elegiac, but the comic" (184): he has embraced himself as absurd, ludicrous fool in skullcap and bandage; as dog-man. He is ready to see Melanie act successfully in a predictable South African comedy, "with deft timing" and "altogether more sure of herself than before" (191), and to be humiliated there by her young boyfriend.

During the performance of Melanie's comedy, which of course parallels the comedy his own opera has become, he thinks of his "disgrace," and remembers that the newspapers had jumped on his having said he had been "enriched" by his experience with Melanie. "*Enriched*: that was the word the newspapers picked on to jeer at. A stupid word to let slip, under the circumstances, yet now, at this moment, he would stand by it. By Melanie, by the girl in Touws River; by Rosalind, Bev Shaw, Soraya: by each of them he was enriched, and by the others too, even the least of them, even the failures. Like a flower blooming in his breast, his heart floods with thankfulness" (192). The servant of Eros has discovered at last what it was that was generously trying to flower: not the masculine prerogative always to act upon his desire, as Lucy had put it, but the gifts given to him over the course of his life by many women.

He returns to Lucy's farm, but only briefly—his rage at the young rapist makes it impossible for him to stay there. His parting conversation with Lucy drives home Coetzee's moral.²² Lucy has decided to give up the land to Petrus in return for his protection. Lurie says, "How humiliating." Lucy replies, "Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.' 'Like a dog.' 'Yes, like a dog'" (205).

Lurie returns to his work for the dead dogs, and rents a stuffy room. It is in the yard of the animal refuge that he is finally able to write his opera. It will have a dog in it—"Why not? Surely, in a work that will

never be performed, all things are permitted?” (215).²³ He becomes proficient at his work for the dogs as well as at his art, an art which is now, crucially, gratuitous, for-free, purged of egotism (“a work that will never be performed”). “He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love” (219). He claims that at the death of each dog, there is the smell of “the released soul” (219), directly refuting the “Church Fathers” he had previously cited, who teach that animals’ souls die with their bodies.

In our final view of Lucy, Lurie comes upon her as she works in her garden: she is “gardener,” just as Lurie is “dog-man.” Katy is comfortably at her side, and comes up to Lurie to sniff his boots. Lucy “looks, suddenly, the picture of health” (218; remember Lurie’s first view of Lucy as unpleasantly “ample”; in the aftermath of the rape, Coetzee makes many references to Lurie’s dismay at Lucy looking awful and having “let herself go” physically). Lucy invites him in for tea. “She makes the offer as if he were a visitor. Good. Visitorship, visitation: a new footing, a new start” (218).

Coetzee’s final stroke is to have Lurie deny himself the indulgence of giving his favorite dog, who must die, one more week of grace.²⁴ This is “one he has come to feel a particular fondness for. It is a young male with a withered left hindquarter which it drags behind it. . . . No visitor has shown an interest in adopting it. Its period of grace is almost over; soon it will have to submit to the needle” (214–15). This dog, like the injured goat, is Lurie’s animal double. It is he who inspires Lurie to think of including a dog in his opera: “The dog is fascinated by the sound of the banjo. When he strums the strings, the dog sits up, cocks its head, listens. When he hums Teresa’s line, and the humming begins to swell with feeling . . . the dog smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too, or howling. Would he dare to do that: bring a dog into the piece?” (215). Lucy will have her baby, whom she hopes she will learn to love, as Lurie has learned to love middle aged women and dogs. But, because his state of disgrace (the state of the world as Coetzee finds it) is incurable despite Lurie’s insights and his radical transformation, he can have nothing for himself, even just for a week—he must renounce everything but his services to dead and dying dogs, and also this gratuitous opera, in all that it has come to represent of his and the novel’s situation: the only locus of hope for him and, in addition to Lucy’s possible love for her baby, the only hope for/in the novel. Because Coetzee’s ethical stance—I have

called it Buddheo-Christian—focuses on renunciation, he must let this dog go. In the complex thematic structure of the novel, renunciation of erotic life for Lurie connects both to a generalized regime of renunciation and at the same time to identification with subjectivities (de-sexualized, middle-aged women, black Africans, other animals) previously scorned by him and barely recognizable to him as subjectivities at all. Only within this generalized regime of renunciation, for Coetzee, which, I would argue, is in fact the particular renunciation of power of the sexually, politically and culturally potent, dominant white male, can the violent upheaval in hierarchies of race that constitutes the contemporary history of South Africa occur in a hopeful way: can in fact occur, by means of the practices of art, in fruitful conjunction with shifts in hierarchies of gender and species. David Lurie has succeeded in becoming, through writing his opera, both a middle aged woman and a dancing, singing dog with a withered hindquarter, whose periods of grace is almost over: who is about to enter the state of disgrace, a state that Lurie has embraced in order to save, as Elizabeth Costello would say, his soul.

The young singing dog with a withered hindquarter is the last dog to be euthanized (sacrificed, sacrificially) on the novel's final (Christian) Sunday. The closing conversation of the novel takes place between Lurie and Bev. Bev says "I thought you would save him for another week . . . Are you giving him up?" "Yes, I am giving him up," (220). This is the last line of the novel. Coetzee ends this narrative of personal salvation by having Lurie echo to Bev the statement Lucy has made: that she intends to live with nothing, not nothing but, but nothing, like a dog.²⁵

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NOTES

¹ See J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (New York: Viking, 1999). Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number. *Disgrace* has become crucial to the new animal studies. See Cary Wolfe, "Introduction," in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008), 1–3.

² This connection has of course a very long history: it is part of the "female is to nature as male is to culture" equation, and the oppressive connection of woman-as-reproductive-body to nonhuman animals, against which feminists, most notably Simone de Beauvoir, have been writing and organizing for many decades. However, since the radical feminism of the second wave, and now in feminist animality studies, the connection between women and nonhuman animals is being reexamined in a more positive light. The positive aspects of this connection have in fact been clear, in the modern period, at least since Anna Sewall's monumentally popular and influential *Black Beauty* of 1877, credited with doing for cruelty to animals what *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

did for slavery. It is well known that most vegetarians and animal rescue workers are women (as Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan say in the introduction to their collection, “The great majority of activists in the nineteenth-century antivivisection and anticruelty movements were women, as today, it is estimated, 70 to 80 percent of animal rights movement adherents are women” [“Introduction,” in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Adams and Donovan (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1995), 5]). The most important academic theorist in the field is, of course, Donna Haraway; see especially her *Symians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), *Modest Witness@Second Millennium.Female-Man©_Meets_OncoMouse™* (New York: Routledge, 1997), and *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004). Jacques Derrida, in his highly influential essay “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” acknowledges in a parenthesis the greater likelihood that a female philosopher will have understood that “the animal” looks back at and addresses us: “Clearly all those (all those males but not all those females, and that difference is not insignificant here) whom I will later situate in order to back up my thesis, arranging them within the same configuration, for example Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan and Lévinas, belong to this quasi-epochal category. Their discourses are sound and profound, but everything goes on as if they themselves had never been looked at, and especially not naked, by an animal that addressed them” (trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 [2002]: 382–83). Some of the current and recent popular books on the subject include, at the higher end, Joanna Burger’s *The Parrot Who Owns Me*, Marjorie Garber’s *Dog Love*, Vicki Hearne’s *Adam’s Task*, Caroline Knapp’s *Pack of Two*, and Elizabeth Marshall Thomas’s *The Hidden Life of Dogs*. We also have the fruits of psychoanalyst-apostate Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson’s sentimental animal-book industry, comprising *Dogs Never Lie About Love: Reflections on the Emotional World of Dogs*, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*, *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon: The Emotional World of Farm Animals*, and *The Nine Emotional Lives of Cats: A Journey Into the Feline Heart*. Then we arrive at books such as *Hope Rising: Stories from the Ranch of Rescued Dreams* by Kim Meeder, which includes the following on its copyright page: “Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from: *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, Tyndale Publishers, Inc., 1996.” Interestingly, while the Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson phenomenon is a notable exception, most of these books are written by women (Melanie Sue Bowles, Dawn Bauman Brunke, Diana L. Guerrero, Kristin von Kreisler, Susan Chernak McElroy, Mary Lou Randour, Rita M. Reynolds, Niki Behriks Shanahan, Kim Sheridan, Sherry Hansen Steiger, and Cheryl Reneé Webb, just to mention some of the best known authors).

³ See Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York: Viking, 2003), and Coetzee, with Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger and Barbara Smuts, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Guttman (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999). Discussion of ethics, particularly Lévinasian ethics, constitutes a good deal of the most important work done on Coetzee. See especially Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004); Sue Kossew, “The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” *Research In African Literatures* 34 (2003): 155–62; Michael Marais, “‘Little Enough, Less than Little: Nothing’: Ethics, Engagement, and Change in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 46 (2000): 159–82, “The Possibility of Ethical Action: J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” *scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 7.1 (2002): 57–63, and “Very Morbid Phenomena: ‘Liberal Funk,’ the ‘Lucy-Syndrome’ and J.

M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 6.1 (2000): 32–38; James Meffan and Kim L. Worthington, "Ethics Before Politics: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," in *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*, ed. Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2001), 131–50; Jacqueline Rose, "Apathy and Accountability: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 21.4 (2002): 175–95; Charles Sarvan, "Disgrace: A Path to Grace?," *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma* 78 (2004): 26–29; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching," *diacritics* 32.3–4 (2004): 17–31.

Josephine Donovan's "'Miracles of Creation': Animals in J. M. Coetzee's Work" (*Michigan Quarterly Review* 43:1 [2004]: 78–93), on the centrality of animals to Coetzee's ethical vision, particularly in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Disgrace*, and *The Lives of Animals/Elizabeth Costello*, and Tom Herron's "The Dog Man: Becoming Animal in Coetzee's *Disgrace*" (*Twentieth-Century Literature* 51 [2005]: 467–90), make the same connection I am making here between David Lurie's relationship to dogs and the change in him that occurs during the course of the novel. However, neither Donovan nor Herron considers the simultaneous shift in Lurie's relationship to women that is central to my argument in this essay.

⁴For a book-length version of this argument, see Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002).

⁵Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 77–78. For a very different use of Thomas Nagel's argument, focusing on his willingness even to consider the question of bat consciousness, in a context in which so many scientists refuse the legitimacy of any such question, see Frans De Waal, *The Ape and the Sushi Master* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 76.

⁶Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 90, 89.

⁷Mrs. Curren in *Coetzee's Age of Iron*, an elderly woman, has a position in relation to the possibility of hope for South Africa, and in general, in that novel that is similar to the position of Elizabeth Costello and of middle-aged women in *Disgrace*. Mrs. Curren also has an important relationship with a stray dog and its owner, a homeless man who in some ways resembles both the black characters of *Disgrace* and also David Lurie himself in his final incarnation. On connections between *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace* as representations of Coetzee's ethical relation to South African politics, see Attridge, "Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34 (2000): 98–121. On Coetzee's fictional recreation of his own sensibility and subjectivity in the character of a woman in late middle age in *Elizabeth Costello*, see Judith Shulevitz, "Author Tour," review of *Elizabeth Costello*, *New York Times Book Review*, 26 October 2003, 15–16.

⁸"Buddheo-Christian" is not my own coinage—it is used to signify a broad, diverse, undefined set of affinities between the two religions. A Google search, for example, produced thirty-nine hits for websites that use the term "Buddheo-Christian," including those of artists, writers, and religious practitioners who describe themselves, or have been described, as "Buddheo-Christian." I refer here to the powerful ascetic traditions in both religions, involving renunciation of worldliness (Christianity) and of the illusion of material life (Buddhism's *Amaya*) in favor of spirituality and the promise of salvation in a future state (heaven; nirvana). On religious themes in *Disgrace*, particularly the theme of grace, and also for different arguments about the importance of the link between grace/disgrace, dogs and art, see Attridge, "Age of Bronze," Lucy Graham, "'Yes, I am Giving Him Up': Sacrificial Responsibility and Likeness with Dogs in J.

M. Coetzee's Recent Fiction," *scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 7.1 (2002): 4–15; and Sarvan.

⁹ See, especially, Louise Bethlehem, "Pliant/Compliant; Grace/Disgrace; Plaint/Complaint," *scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 7.1 (2002): 20–24; Gareth Cornwell, "Disgraceland: History and the Humanities in Frontier Country," *English in Africa* 32 (2003): 43–68, and "Realism, Rape, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43 (2002): 307–22; Rose; and Spivak.

¹⁰ See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995). His analysis of the crucial role of death in constructing an ethical subjectivity has been important to ethics-based Coetzee criticism. See Rita Barnard, "J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and the South African Pastoral," *Contemporary Literature* 44.2 (2003): 199–224.

¹¹ See David Atwell, "Review: Coetzee and Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27 (2001): 865–67; Barnard; Cornwell; Isidore Diala, "Nadine Gordimer, J. M. Coetzee, and Andre Brink: Guilt, Expiation, and the Reconciliation Process in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.5 (2001–2002): 50–68; Grant Farred, "Back to the Borderlines: Thinking Race Disgracefully," *scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 7.1 (2002): 16–19; Georgina Horrell, "J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: One Settler, One Bullet and the 'New South Africa,'" *scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 7.1 (2002): 25–32; Mefan and Worthington; Jane Poyner, "Truth and Reconciliation in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 7.1 (Spring 2000): 67–77; Rose; Sanders, Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The English Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2002); and Spivak for generally critical discussions of Coetzee's treatment of both Truth and Reconciliation and also general conditions of life in the "New South Africa." On Lurie's sexual relationship with Melanie, see Bethlehem; Cornwell, "Realism"; Donovan; Rose; and Spivak. Lurie himself, though he denies that he rapes Melanie, acknowledges that the sex, on one particular occasion at least, is "unwanted." Many would argue that any sexual relation between a professor and an unwilling, underage student is inherently rape.

¹² Lurie is of course a Wordsworth scholar; William Wordsworth's Lucy poems treat both incest and death. See Marais, "Very Morbid"; and Patrick Smith, "'I Wrote Books about Dead People': Art and History in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 34.5 (2004): 6–24.

¹³ The histories of mythic, spiritual linkages between post-menopausal women and nonhuman animals are vast and pervasive across world cultures. These linkages have become an important feature of the new animality studies. See, for example, *Animals and Women*, ed. Adams and Donovan. Popular culture is currently so full of representations of such linkages that it would be impossible to list them here, but as perhaps the most appropriate representative example, I would offer Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992).

¹⁴ See especially Spivak.

¹⁵ For readings of the texts based on arguments about ethics, see Attridge; Kosew; Marais; Meffin and Worthington; Rose; Sarvan; and Spivak.

¹⁶ Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 73.

¹⁷ See Attridge, "Age of Bronze," for an entirely different reading of this scene: he sees it as a ludicrous, pathetic loss, a foil to Lurie's "lying down with" Melanie.

¹⁸ “Gods” does not necessarily refer to masters or dominators for Coetzee. His invocation of Eros as his master in his initial explanation of his affair with Melanie is ironic, but Eros appears in a more positive light in *Elizabeth Costello*, and the force of Eros, I argue, is transformed into its more positive incarnation of unselfish love and life-affirmation late in the novel.

¹⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Owen Knowles (London: Penguin, 2007), 7.

²⁰ André Brink uses this passage ironically as the basis for the title of his novel, *The Rights of Desire* (New York: Harcourt, 2000); see Diala for an explication of the two novels together.

²¹ Attridge reads this scene differently in “Age of Bronze,” taking Coetzee’s account of the futility of Lurie’s relation to the dead dogs at face value.

²² Most readings of this novel assert its defiance of coherent theme or meaning; I find a thematic structure of powerful coherence. Coetzee’s use of abrupt shifts, reversals of expectation, multiply layered language and ambiguous, complex levels of meaning obscure the strongly limned outlines of this thematic structure.

²³ Lily Briscoe, in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), has a similar relation to her painting, yet for her the fact that her work will never be hung, never be seen by anyone, is a fact of women’s invisibility she must overcome in order to “have her vision”—to overcome Charles Tansley’s voice, ringing in her ear, telling her that women are incapable of painting or writing. For Coetzee, I argue, this fact has become the condition of ethical aesthetic practice, and therefore of Coetzee’s own compromised situation as a successful writer. He explores the implications of this ethical ambiguity in *Elizabeth Costello*.

²⁴ See Attridge, “Age of Iron,” for a powerful reading of grace in this novel.

²⁵ This of course also refers to the last sentence of Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (trans. Willa and Edwin Muir [New York: Modern Library, 1956]), in which Joseph K. is murdered ignominiously, “like a dog.”