Chapter V

‘What Have They to Do with Me?’: Representation of the Disabled and the Animal in Coetzee’s Fiction

Having explored the nuances of different categories of differentiation in his early novels, it is no surprise to find Coetzee, in his latter fiction, deliberating upon other states of marginality – like the state of disability and disfigurement, and also that of the non-human world. Effectively, Coetzee has widened the range of his interests to probe the ways in which human beings systemically marginalize the disabled and the animal. The awareness of the location of these marginalities is positioned as constant interests not only in his latter novels but throughout the corpus of his fiction. Coetzee also looks critically at how such discrimination works silently as adjunct to the processes of marginalization based on racial, gender categories. In this way Coetzee’s latter fiction can be related with the concerns of his earlier novels.

The interest in other modes of marginalization has been somewhat sharpened, after Coetzee’s move to Australia in 2002. When he initially moved to Australia, he had cited the South African government’s lenient attitude to crime in that country as a reason for the shift. In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel in Brick, Coetzee specified that Wachtel pose him no queries about “his own work, his life, or the political situation in South Africa”. This stipulation on the part of Coetzee makes Jane Poyner to reflect on the impossibility of scrutinizing Coetzee or his motives, as he declines to do a lot of things normally writers do: “he does not express a political stance with regard to South Africa in his literature; he does not answer questions after public lectures; he does not write realistic fiction; and now, after a recent move to Adelaide, Australia, Coetzee, one of South Africa’s most prominent writers, does not even live in South Africa”.

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Possibly, as a result of the collapse of apartheid and his subsequent move to Australia, the themes of fiction and modes of representation have changed substantially. Coetzee’s interest in the various zones of human experiences and processes of marginalization has remained intact and is explored unremittingly in his novels. What has changed is, that instead of the traditional tropes of race and gender, Coetzee is now, after his move to Australia, more attentive to other modes of marginalization. He seems to have realized during his stay in South Africa that due to his limitations of writing from South Africa with race and gender he is expected to be treated constantly by a South African writer. His move to a different continent would signify his move towards achieving artistic freedom. We have discussed in our earlier chapters how Coetzee believes in his vocation as an artist, and conceives of himself not as a mere chronicler of South African history in novel form. Our analysis of Coetzee’s novels that post-date *Disgrace* (1999) will reveal, that in them Coetzee has deliberately tried to open up other categories of the margin arising from disability and being born into the non-human category, that of the animal.

I

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said claimed that the work of postcolonial intellectuals “should be seen as sharing concerns with minority and ‘suppressed’ voices within the metropolis itself: feminists, African-American writers, intellectuals, artists, among others”.\(^3\) Omitted significantly from Said’s listing, is a deliberation of the lives of those with physical or mental disabilities. Despite being read primarily from the feminist and postcolonial perspectives, Coetzee’s novels recognize the existence of other categories of the margin, the mutilated, the disabled and the ugly, which results in “a marginalized status in contemporary society, one that is nearly always described in negative and offensive language”.\(^4\) Coetzee’s engagement with disability could be fuelled by the dearth in the body of theory that deals with disability:

We need a theory of disability. It should be a social and political theory, because disability is largely socially-constructed, but it has
to be more than that; any deep understanding of disability must include thinking about the ethical, psychological and epistemic issues of living with disability.\(^5\)

Disability is a deviation conspicuously defined by the non-disabled; it is a social condition imposed upon the suffering individual:

Disability is not a biological given; like gender, it is socially constructed from biological reality. Our culture idealizes the body and demands that we control it. Thus, although most people will be disabled at some time in their lives, the disabled are made “the other,” who symbolize failure of control and the threat of pain, limitation, dependency, and death.\(^6\)

This othering has been the norm, the practice from the days of antiquity with disability theorists claiming that:

Since Athenian times, men with disabilities, along with women, slaves and so on, have been either excluded by law from citizenship status, physically prevented from taking any active role in democratic societies or indirectly constrained by discriminatory and oppressive institutions and ideologies.\(^7\)

Susan Wendell, one of the prominent voices addressing the field of disability studies, talks particularly of the formation of a concept, that of the “negative body”, the body which is disabled, ailing or in pain.\(^8\) Likewise, this section of our chapter seeks to recognize Coetzee’s commitment to the cause of human welfare as he questions the society’s inattentiveness towards the diseased and the disabled and the outlook of the general masses towards the “negative body”. The “negative body” may be the result of a congenital disorder, an accident or due to the natural process of ageing. It is paramount for us to document the various factors contributing to the notion of disability and to distinguish between ‘impairment’, ‘disability’ and ‘handicap’. The United Nations provides the following definitions of and distinctions among impairment, disability and handicap:
Impairment: Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function. Disability: Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Handicap: A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors, for that individual.

Handicap is therefore a function of the relationship between disabled persons and their environment. It occurs when they encounter cultural, physical or social barriers which prevent their access to the various systems of society that are available to other citizens. Thus, handicap is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on an equal level with others.9

In the context of these definitions provided by the United Nations, Susan Wendell in her essay contends that, “by trying to define ‘impairment’ and ‘disability’ in physical terms and ‘handicap’ in cultural, physical and social terms, the U.N. document appears to be making a shaky distinction between the physical and the social aspects of disability.”10 However critics like Susan Whyte, Benedicte Ingstad and Ato Quayson see disability as both a cultural and physical problem. The Social Science Encyclopedia (2005) distinguishes between “impairment, the absence or defect of a limb, organ or bodily mechanism, disablement or disability, the reduction or loss of function or ability consequent upon impairment, and handicap, the disadvantage or constraint that follows from disability”11. Richard Jenkins provides us with another way of classifying disability:

[Disability] owes something to lay commonsense, distinguishing between people on the basis of a combination of life-course and aetiological categories. Here once again there are three categories: (i) those people whose impairment occurred or was diagnosed at birth or during early childhood, (ii) those whose impairment resulted from subsequent illness or injury, and (iii), the largest
portion of the disabled population, those whose impairment is part of the ‘normal’ ageing process. This is a crude scheme and allows for the possibility of considerable overlap between categories, particularly the last two.  

In Coetzee’s novels there are quite a few instances of people with disfigurements, impairments, resultant from accidents – some colonial in nature and some plain accidents – physical disabilities, and some handicaps too. In our analysis of Coetzee’s novels from the perspective of disability, I would be following the outline provided by Richard Jenkins.

One of the critics of Coetzee’s fictive art, Lars Engle, concludes in his essay “Outrageous Meaning in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee” that

The only physically healthy people in Coetzee novels are torturers, one might almost say; everyone else is sick, miserable, or slowly recovering from injuries. The hare lipped protagonist of The Life & Times of Michael K … is starving to death throughout, though he never quite dies. Coetzee’s characters are not at home in their bodies, but are fascinated by their processes and the stages of their coming apart. One is never far from the smell of rotting flesh or excrement, nor, in the extensive analyses of motive, from selfishness, will to power, and cowardice.  

Michael K, the eponymous hero of Life & Times of Michael K (1974), is the only character in Coetzee’s oeuvre who is born with a disfigurement. What we clearly do know is that he was born with a hare lip that sets him up as a deviant from the time of his birth, and from the beginning of the novel. In a post-Foucauldian world, we are all imbued with the idea that we can envisage normalcy only by conceiving of its opposite, deviance. Marvin B. Sussman observes this tendency where, “the impaired person is so defined because he deviates from what is considered normal or appropriate by himself or others. The identification of deviants is a process involving socially structured biases and vague, permissive stereotypes rather than precise, formalized standards” Therefore Michael K, with his “lip curled like a
snail’s foot, the left nostril gape”, with his evident disfigurement, stands to be relegated to a marginal position, an inferior position in the society.\textsuperscript{15} The physical disfigurement makes the midwife hide him for a moment from his mother. Nadine Gordimer succinctly describes Michael K’s disability in the following words:

he is marked out, from birth, by a hare lip indelibly described as curled like a snail’s foot … His deformity distorts his speech and his actual and self-images. He shrinks from the difficulty of communication through words and the repugnance he sees holding him off, in people’s eyes; thus he appears to be, and perhaps is, retarded.\textsuperscript{16}

Perceptive of the typical attitude of people towards the disabled in society, Michael K’s own mother, Anna K, is shown cringing from her son: “from the first, did not like the mouth that would not close and the living pink flesh it bared to her. She shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months”.\textsuperscript{17} The disabled child is repulsive to his mother, and the midwife admonishes her: “You should be happy, they bring luck to the household”.\textsuperscript{18}

Veneration towards the disabled abounds in African cosmologies. For example, in Yoruba myths, folktales and legends, the disabled are referred to as “Eni Orisa” (literally ‘people of Obatala’). It is believed that they are the closest allies of Obatala, the Yoruba God of creation.\textsuperscript{19} According to Wole Soyinka, the ‘chthonic realm’ is the space between humans and spirits which Ogun, the God of Iron, oversees in Yoruba mythology and is occupied by those whom the Yoruba consider as unfinished, imperfect beings, because they exist half-way between states.\textsuperscript{20} Interestingly, Coetzee’s fictional character, Elizabeth Costello too refers to the ‘chthonic’ realm inhabited by “the ones who stand with their feet planted in their native earth”.\textsuperscript{21} Helen Meekosha and Leanne Dowse in their article, “Enabling Citizenship: Gender, Disability and Citizenship in Australia”, further make the point how “disability is a culturally and historically determined phenomenon”.\textsuperscript{22} They cite the example of the Native American Navajo people,
who grant citizenship rights to their disabled and who see “disability as part of the self, not as a deficiency”.  

A few critics like Nadine Gordimer in 1998 and Liliana Sikorska in 2006, from their reading of the text where Coetzee describes Michael K as one with “disfigurement and … mind … not quick”, have commented that apart from his physical deformity, K could be suffering from some mental deficiency too. Sikorska’s allegation against Michael K rests: “Indeed, Michael K is rarely an agent in various events, more often things happen to him”. What we seek to establish instead is that, although K is physically disabled, he is mentally attentive. He is still able to negotiate his life through a war-ridden culture – a society turned into a ‘war zone’. By ignoring the civil war, Michael K is able to accomplish what others dare not do. While the able-bodied shudder at the ramifications of the war, Michael K is able to assert his incontrovertible right to be free, even if it requires him to become “the obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy”. Despite his apparent verbal clumsiness, Michael K proves to be positive, astute, relentless and inspired: “In the fading light he was lucky enough to bring down a turtle-dove with a stone as it came to roost in a thorn tree. He twisted its neck, cleaned it, roasted it on a skewer of wire, and ate it with the last can of beans”. Despite his disfigurement and ‘unquick mind’, he still seeks and finds employment. For instance, he once had a job as a night attendant at a public lavatory.

Michael K is doubly marginalized by race and deformity. At times, he is subjected to ridicule and physical violence. For instance, in the farm, soldiers stumble upon K’s solitary existence and question him about his involvement in guerilla activities. Unsatisfied with his answers they subject him to physical torture – “he was hit with a terrible blow in the pit of the stomach and fainted”. Therefore, in the character of Michael K, Coetzee gives us a glimpse into the life and times of a doubly marginalized individual, a Coloured and a deformed individual. The writer compels us to question the motive of the attack on Michael K. Was it purely to elicit an answer from a Coloured hiding away from the war, existing in isolation, or was it resultant of the sense of abhorrence that the ‘normal’
have towards the ‘deformed’? To complicate the reading, we can question the very motive of Michael K’s hiding in the first place. Is it merely a flight from war, or is it the flight of an individual scarred for life, from human civilization? Possibly, this sense of marginalization could arise out of a sense of isolation due to his ugliness.

Subsequently, Michael K chooses the garden as an alternative to the catastrophe of the war-ravaged society. He seeks to live in close proximity to nature, liberated from ethnic considerations and racial discord:

because enough men had gone off the war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children.³⁰

Coetzee in his Waiting for the Barbarians (1980) and Foe (1986), gives us two more characters who, though not born with any congenital deformities, are rendered into a state of disability from the attentions of the colonizing Western Empire. Though not given to bursts of outrage, as victims of state/colonial oppression can be, the readers are left in no doubt of their source of oppression. The barbarian girl in Waiting for the Barbarians is crippled from the attention that the Empire subjects her to and Friday, originally depicted as the slave of the European colonizer, Robinson Crusoe, in Coetzee’s novel Foe (which is a writing-back to Daniel Defoe’s novel), has his tongue cut-off, effectively to silence him absolutely. Coetzee gives us these two significant characters belonging to a differing culture, a different race and colour. That they belong to the margin opens them up for violation of their individual selves with the imperial/colonial forces colonizing their bodies through torture and usurpation. Our contention here is to analyze how the simplistic binary of the colonizer/colonized ignores, after the formation of the condition of deformity, the category of the disabled. In conventional readings, the colonized body has been that abjected outside against which the British body – civilized, civilizing, and normal – is constituted, at both a cultural and a more literal level. But if the colonized body constitutes the abjected
outside, how are we to read the disabled colonized body? How does it fit into this dialectic between the colonizer and the colonized and into the operation of the postcolonial world?

Although we have analyzed, in our earlier chapter on race, Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) as an allegory of the colonial situation, the barbarian girl’s blindness and crippled state raises further questions as to the various aspects of the margin simultaneously present in one individual. The barbarian girl is compelled to stay behind in the frontier town because the torture used during her interrogation has both her ankles broken and is partially blinded. The body of the barbarian girl becomes a colonized space to be owned, violated, used and eventually discarded. The body no longer stands for itself but becomes a site for colonial expansion. Coetzee, in the characters of the barbarian girl and later on Friday, presents to us two characters where actual physical disability is caused by colonialism; the body irrespective of the gender becomes synecdochic for the country under siege.

The barbarian girl is marginalized on multiple counts, due to her race, her gender and her deformity, her partial blindness coupled with her broken limb that forces her to limp, which then renders her into an ugly being, “she is ugly, ugly.” 31 Brian May contends in his essay:

> Whatever befell her prior to her encounter with The Empire, since then she has been tortured and maimed by its agents, abandoned by its enemies, her fellow nomads, and exploited by a man who is both its agent and its enemy, a guilt-ridden imperial Magistrate who has tried to decipher her, “obliterate” her, remember her, become her comrade, “make reparation”, and return her to her people. Yet, to all appearances, Coetzee’s barbarian girl leaves *Waiting for the Barbarians* just as she enters it, devoid of discernible history, not just anonymous, but anonymously piecemeal, a mere list of body parts, attitudes, and gestures that might belong to any “stocky girl
with a broad mouth and hair cut in a fringe across her forehead staring over [his] shoulder”.

After the violation, the disabled girl would struggle with the oppression of being a woman in a male-dominated society; the oppression of being a colonized in a Eurocentric world; the oppression of being a disabled in a society dominated by the able-bodied. As his affection for the barbarian girl increases, the Magistrate deeply regrets her fall from innocence at the hands of the, ironically called doctors of ‘pain’. The emissaries of the Empire know only to inflict pain on the barbarians and not relieve them from their suffering. He laments that he should “never have allowed the gates of the town to be opened to people who assert that there are higher considerations than those of decency.” Consequently, stare as he may into her dark, blinded eyes, the Magistrate sees in them only a reflection of himself. The Magistrate recognizes that he too is culpable because he knew that torture had taken place and made no effort to thwart it.

Till the end, the barbarian girl continues to be a mystery to the Magistrate. Frantically he seeks to envisage her appearance before her ordeal, but he can draw upon no memories of his own. She does little to aid, evidently failing to see any point in it. Once during a moment of closeness she rather protests, “You want to talk all the time.” Nor is she keen to describe how she was tortured. When at last she consents to say anything on the subject, her statements are pithy and obscure and end suddenly with the remark, “I am tired of talking.” One of the key issues that Coetzee seems to raise, is the failure of communication between the marginalized individuals and the oppressors. Isolation as a condition of marginality is instituted in the fictive world of Coetzee. We mark the inability or refusal on the part of the marginalized to share their unique and individual experiences. In the case of the barbarian girl, Coetzee highlights the trauma and the pain that is experienced by her much like rape.

For the Magistrate, the body of the ‘other’, seems beyond comprehension due to the fact that it is of a barbarian, a beggar, a girl (who is also menstruating, at one point of the novel), besides being a body that has been tortured and maimed.
Susan Wendell goes on to refer to the work of feminists, who have analyzed how the patriarchy looks at perfectly natural occurrences as that of menstruation and menopause and ascribes to it notions of filth or decay:

Careful study of the lives of disabled people will reveal how artificial the line is that we draw between the biological and the social. Feminists have already challenged this line in part by showing how processes such as child-birth, menstruation and menopause, which may be represented, treated, and therefore experienced as illnesses or disabilities, are socially constructed from biological reality.°

We provide this extract from Coetzee’s novel in question to sustain our point further:

The girl is bleeding, that time of the month has come for her. She cannot conceal it, she has no privacy, there is not the merest bush to hide behind. She is upset and the men are upset. It is the old story: a woman’s flux is bad luck, bad for the crops, bad for the hunt, bad for the horses. They grow sullen: they want her away from the horses, which cannot be, they do not want her to touch their food. Ashamed she keeps to herself all day and does not join us for the evening meal.

We notice how categories of marginalization operate upon the barbarian girl – she is racially oppressed, physically abused and shamed as a woman. Disability, womanhood and racial identity seem enmeshed within her existence.

In the novel Foe, which writes back to Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1719), Friday is also a possible victim of colonial subordination as he has his tongue cut off, and therefore rendered mute and speechless before the colonial enterprise. We realize here that Coetzee, by imaginatively re-creating a canonical text, attempts to bring forcefully to its readers’ attention the silences, the narratives that have been erased by the dominant discourses of the patriarchy, the colonizer
and the ableist. Othering is facilitated by physical and verbal difference, and
disability is made to be the marker of this marginalization. Our argument here is to
analyze how the simplistic binary of the colonizer/colonized is made complex by
the category of the disabled.

Disability theorists like Susan Whyte and Benedicte Ingstad have
distinguished between manifest physical disability and less manifest forms of
disability (for instance, deafness and insanity). Coetzee’s Friday with his mouth
closed looks ‘normal’ and even deceives Susan Barton into thinking of him as a
naturally reticent character, oblivious to the fact how the mutilation impacts greatly
on Friday’s speech functioning. The inaccessible silence of Coetzee’s Friday forces
our attention on to his masters, first Cruso, and then Barton. While Cruso does not
abuse Friday, he never seems to look upon him as more than a gatherer of wood, a
catcher of fish, one who can purr in a low tongue-less fashion, mimicking, “The
voice of man”, as Cruso says.38

The difference between Friday and his masters is manifested also, on
counts of race, class, and most importantly culture. He is a Black and possibly a
cannibal but Friday’s tale will on no account be known: he has had his tongue
taken out, and cannot even tell the story of the maiming. We learn very little about
Friday in Foe. Friday is reduced to the barest form of a man. We know nothing of
his past or his thoughts. He is an unmediated being, and his story is an unmediated
story. Friday’s loss of speech could be the sign of his repression; but it is also the
indicator of the silence, the absolute otherness by which he perplexes his
oppressors who can only imagine his story but cannot fathom it:

On the island I accepted that I should never learn how Friday lost
his tongue … But what we can accept in life we cannot accept in
history. To tell my story and be silent on Friday’s tongue is no
better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left
empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday’s secret is the tongue
he has lost!39
Barton makes strenuous but obviously unsuccessful attempts to teach Friday a language in which Friday may ‘speak’ or ‘tell’ his ‘story’. Then she assumes: “It is for us to descend into the mouth (since we speak in figures). It is for us to open Friday’s mouth and hear what it holds: silence, perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a seashell held to the ear”. This mutilation induced by the colonizer creates Friday as a sub-human individual – a text/silence that is again and again sought to be re-read by Susan Barton.

There are also attempts to associate certain historical epochs with the conditions of disabled people. Coetzee is also in the habit of using disease as a metaphor for social ills, ills like apartheid if we may specify. An allegorical reading of the novel, Life & Times of Michael K (1974) may enable us to read in the character of the protagonist a representation of the nation’s (South Africa’s) warped political system. Similarly Friday’s silence in Foe due to his tonguelessness can be read as a sign of the unspeakable and holistic damage internalized by Blacks under racist, bigoted conditions. We have Vercueil in Age of Iron (1990) who, we are told, draws a disability-pension because of his deformed right hand:

He held out his right hand. Thumb and forefinger stood out; the other three fingers curled into the palm. “I can’t move them,” he said.

We gazed at his hand, at the three crooked fingers with their dirty nails. Not what I would call a work-callused hand.

“Was it an accident?”

He nodded; the kind of nod that committed him to nothing.

Vercueil too can be said to be representing the deformed and stunted growth of Africans under White colonial rule. But it is cancer, which, as a familiar disease, signifies anything that is endemic and destructive in society, such as poverty, injustice, or racism. It is cancer that afflicts the White woman narrator of one of the novels set in South Africa, Age of Iron. Elizabeth Curren, a professor of Classics,
almost near death from rapidly advancing cancer, draws the analogy between her
disease and the diseased society quite clearly:

You know I am sick. Do you know what is wrong with me? I have
cancer. I have cancer from the accumulation of shame I have
endured in my life. That is how cancer comes about: from self-
loathing the body turns malignant and begins to eat away at itself.\textsuperscript{42}

The shame referred to here is the shame of the knowledge of apartheid and the
complicity that she shares with other respectable liberal Whites in apartheid
inflicted South Africa. \textit{Age of Iron} makes more or less overt allusions to the
closing and riotous stages of apartheid, what is recognized as the State of
Emergency. Elizabeth’s exploiting of the rhetorical device of the metaphor consists
in understanding and presenting her own illness as part of a more extensive societal
woe. She allegorizes the country’s sociopolitical tribulations in terms of a bodily
illness. This is her own way of coping with her illness which is, of its own nature,
alienating. She comments on the doctor’s reaction: “But already, behind the
comradely front, I could see he was withdrawing. \textit{Sauve qui peut}. His allegiance to
the living, not the dying”.\textsuperscript{43} Coetzee’s aim in detailing the battle of Elizabeth
Curren against a disease that compels one into a state of alienation is possibly to
focus on the losing battle of White South Africa as a nation similarly alienated
from the global community due to its practice of apartheid.

The cancer is presented in terms of a monstrous child, a predatory parasite.
Graham Bradshaw and Michael Neill in their book, \textit{J.M. Coetzee’s Austerities}
(2010) interweaves into their reading of \textit{Age of Iron} the theorization of Susan
Sontag regarding the pathology of cancer. Cancer is, in Susan Sontag’s words, “the
barbarian within”\textsuperscript{44} and the following lines from Coetzee’s novel are evocative of
this parasitic nature of the disease:

The sickness that now eats at me is dry, bloodless, slow and cold …
To have fallen pregnant with these growths, these cold, obscene
swellings; to have carried this brood beyond any natural term,
unable to bear them, unable to sate their hunger: children inside me
eating more every day … toothed, clawed, forever cold and ravenous.\textsuperscript{45}

In the segment which follows this description, she deems death by fire as a way of saving her self-worth. This is, according to Mrs. Curren, the single answer for the country also: “This country too: time for fire, time for an end, time for what grows out of ash to grow”.\textsuperscript{46}

One of the striking features of Coetzee’s novels is that there are a few examples of happy, functional and complete families. Mostly we come across dysfunctional families with broken ties be it the case of Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee, Magda, the Magistrate, David Lurie or even Paul Rayment. There is a special emphasis on the aged, the suffering and the lonely in the novels of Coetzee. Ms Elizabeth Curren at the time of her diagnosis, has her daughter living in the United States and she has no plans of ever coming back to South Africa on ideological grounds. Michael K’s mother also finds herself grouped with the infirm as she ages and fails to perform her routine house-keeping duties. She is said to be a domestic servant, polishing other people’s floors. She lives in a cramped room intended for air-conditioning equipment. The room is marked ‘DANGER-GEVAAR-INGOZI’.\textsuperscript{47} It has no light, no ventilation, and the room is damp. She looks fatigued, disabled and is effectively forsaken by her employers who slash her salary by a third as a result of her infirmity. She is hospitalized for severe dropsy, worn-out by the tyrant class. Her disorder is exacerbated by the ongoing civil war in the country. It is Michael K who is the only companion she has in her last days. Michael K is even refused a wheelchair in the hospital for his mother, but somehow helps her to the bus stop. He is also the last hope of her mother who wishes to return to the idyllic farm of her birth, somewhere in the Karoo. He is the only companion to his mother during her last days on earth: “Carrying her handbag and shoes for her, he supported his mother the fifty paces to the bus stop”;\textsuperscript{48} “when the bus came there were no seats. Michael held onto a rail and embraced his mother to keep her from lurching”.\textsuperscript{49} Essentially Michael K even believes that “he had been brought into the world to look after his mother”.\textsuperscript{50}
Coetzee seems to be sensitizing us to the problems that the aged, the ageing face, when rendered unproductive in a society that acknowledges individuals who contribute economically, that is to the generation of wealth. Disability theorists likewise seek to redress the issue by encouraging people to integrate the ageing, the feeble, and the disabled into the social fold:

Aging is disabling. Recognizing this helps us to see that disabled people are not “other”, that they are really “us”. Unless we die suddenly, we are all disabled eventually. Most of us will live part of our lives with bodies that hurt, that move with difficulty or not at all, that deprive us of activities we once took for granted or that others take for granted, bodies that make daily life a physical struggle. We need an understanding of disability that does not support a paradigm of humanity as young and healthy. Encouraging everyone to acknowledge, accommodate and identify with a wide range of physical conditions is ultimately the road to self-acceptance as well as the road to liberating those who are disabled now.  

Coetzee’s novel, *Slow Man* (2006) too depicts the solitary life of an individual. The slow man in question is Paul Rayment, sixty years old, a retired photographer and archivist much like the Magistrate of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, divorced and childless, living alone. As an “unmarried, single, solitary, alone”, specimen of the human race, Rayment can lay allegiance to the memorable thoughts of a grandmother, busy in household chores but cannot, once in adulthood (much like Coetzee himself, as documented in *Youth*), fail to connect with his blood relations who made him always feel like the “odd one out, the stranger in the corner at family gatherings”. The institution of family has been rendered outdated in the modern world. In Rayment’s words, we take a close view of the trends of a modern family: “My wife remarried. She married a divorcee with children of his own. They had a child together and became one of those complicated modern families where everyone calls everyone else by the first name”. Therefore in moments of crisis, the elderly alone, in a well structured society like Australia’s, can avail not
of the services of the family, but that of the ‘welfare system’ run by the State. Surviving on the welfare system, Paul Rayment is regretful of only one thing—“childlessness looks to him like madness, a herd madness, even a sin. What greater good can there be than more life, more souls? How will heaven be filled if the earth ceases to send its cargoes?”\(^55\) David Lurie in *Disgrace* likewise regrets the fact that, “a father without the sense to have a son: is … how it is all going to end, is … how his line is going to run out, like water dribbling into the earth … everything is changed, utterly changed!”\(^56\)

The setting of *Slow Man* is the very city where Coetzee himself has taken up residence since 2002, Adelaide, Australia. Herein Coetzee gives us in the character of Rayment an individual who finds himself at the margin. He is first of all a migrant from Europe; he is old and most importantly, the novel is a documentation of his transition from a normal, ‘able’ life to that of a disabled. Rayment is out for a ride on his bicycle when he is struck by a car he doesn’t see: “The blow catches him from the right, sharp and surprising and painful, like a bolt of electricity, lifting him off the bicycle”.\(^57\) At the hospital, the prognosis is not all good. His knee is mangled and his leg must come off, though of course the surgeons will try to save as much of it as they can. If he were a younger man, they might attempt a reconstruction. But he is not a young man. He is sixty, so what is the point? The operation is successful, and Rayment must now endure the aftermath: the pain, the dreariness, the dressing, the catheter, the determined good humour of the nurses. Soon a “difficult word” is added to his vocabulary: “prosthesis”. With prosthesis, he will be up and around in no time at all, perhaps even riding his bicycle again. He is told that wonderful progress has been made with prosthetic devices, really outstanding – and this news is unwelcome. Peevish, unsettled, appalled and in pain, Rayment wants no part of a prosthesis:

‘I don’t want to walk today,’ he says. He is learning to talk through clenched teeth. It is not just that the jaw is bruised, the molars on that side have been loosened too, he cannot chew. ‘I don’t want to be rushed. I don't want a prosthesis.’
‘All right, end of subject, we won't rush you into anything, I promise. Now can I talk to you about your leg? Can I tell you about care of the leg?’

Care of my leg? He is smouldering with anger – can they not see it? You anaesthetised me and hacked off my leg and dropped it in the refuse for someone to collect and toss into the fire. How can you stand there talking about care of my leg?\(^{58}\)

Coetzee seems to convey the inadequacy of the able-bodied people in understanding the needs of the disabled. Here Paul Rayment signals how the ‘normal’ seemed to him profoundly ignorant of everything he most needed to convey, his desolation, his anger, his frustration, his sense of bewilderment. Relatively few people can identify with those having physical/mental problems. Sue Halpern makes the following observation:

Physical health is contingent and often short-lived. But this truth eludes us as long as we are able to walk by simply putting one foot in front of the other. As a consequence, empathy for the disabled is unavailable to most able-bodied persons. Sympathy, yes, empathy, no, for every attempt to project oneself into that condition, to feel what it is like not to be ambulatory, for instance, is mediated by an ability to walk.\(^{59}\)

The novel \textit{Slow Man}, thereafter, examines Paul Rayment’s life trapped in a “zone of humiliation with no place to hide from the pitiless gaze of the young, that make him wish for death”; his reluctance to come to terms with the loss.\(^{60}\) Sussman refers to a ‘period of mourning’ in a disabled’s life and that is exactly what marks this phase of Rayment’s life:

the incurrence of disability necessitates a period of mourning similar to that of bereavement, regardless of the depth of the psychological shock in the disabled individual. The requirement, which may be a source of extreme perplexity and discomfort for the
handicapped person, illustrates the extent to which disability is a socially structured phenomenon.  

Certainly Rayment will require rehabilitation, and that engenders yet another question. Would his medical insurance stretch to ‘frail care’? No, it would not. “Well then,” the social worker says, “you’ll have to budget for it, won’t you?”  

Initially he cannot cope with his nurses and, in particular, the one who calls ‘the bedpan the potty; [and] his penis his willie’. Eventually, he employs a care-giver capable of ‘frail care’, Marijana Jokic, a Croatian. Rayment finds her very good with his leg stump, which he has taken to calling le jambon.  

Even under the care of the watchful and supportive welfare programme run by the Australian state, Rayment, as a representative for the disabled, can reflect only on the sense of difference that exists between the abled and the disabled: 

They talk about his future, they nag him to do the exercises that will prepare him for that future, they chivvy him out of bed; but to him there is no future, the door to the future has been closed and locked. If there were a way of putting an end to himself by some purely mental act he would put an end to himself at once, without further ado. His mind is full of stories of people who bring about their own end – who methodically pay bills, write goodbye notes, burn old love letters, label keys, and then, once everything is in order, don their Sunday best and swallow down the pills they have hoarded for the occasion and settle themselves on their neatly made beds and compose their features for oblivion. Heroes all of them, unsung, unlauded. I am resolved not to be any trouble.  

Earlier in Age of Iron, Elizabeth Curren had similarly echoed desperate thoughts, thoughts that suggested a sense of anger and frustration: 

When I am in a mood like this I am capable of putting a hand on the breadboard and chopping it off without a second thought. What do I care for this body that has betrayed me? I look at my hand and see
only a tool, a hook, a thing for gripping other things. And these legs, these clumsy, ugly stilts: why should I have to carry them with me every-where? … The abdomen too, with its dead gurgling, and the heart beating, beating: why? What have they to do with me?  

It was going to be a long struggle for Elizabeth Curren and Paul Rayment and for countless others suffering from one form of physical/mental deformity or disease, to come to terms with ‘it’, the alien body, the body unknown. They all would have to learn to live with a body that felt entirely different to them with possible limbs missing, or functions curtailed besides feeling weak, tired, painful, nauseated, dizzy, and above all, unpredictable.  

It is not that Friday as a Negro can only evoke a reaction of horror from the White Susan Barton: “now I began to look on him – I could not help myself – with the horror we reserve for the mutilated. It was no comfort that his mutilation was secret, closed behind his lips (as something other mutilations are hidden by clothing)”.

Elizabeth Curren in White South Africa witnesses a metamorphosis, a change towards the ugly, in the body of her and in the society at large. She herself is “an old woman, sick and ugly, clawing on to what she has left. The living, impatient of long dyings; the dying, envious of the living. An unsavory spectacle: may it be over soon”. Paul Rayment in Australia can be shamed into believing that he can evoke the same revulsion as felt by Susan Barton on looking at Friday in the eyes of Drago, his god-son:  

If he no longer hides anything from Marijana, it is because he cannot be more abject before her than he has already been. With Drago it is a different story. Thus far he has done his best not to make a spectacle of himself before Drago. Now here he is, a helpless old man in ruinous pyjamas trailing an obscene pink stump behind him from which the sodden bandages are slipping. If he were not so cold he would blush.  

Paul Rayment, diminished in body, weak of spirit, disconsolate, worried by what he believes has been a wasted life, is then consoled by Elizabeth Costello:
Where else in the world, at this late stage, are you going to find affection, you ugly old man? Yes, I am familiar with that word too, ugly. We are both of us ugly, Paul, old and ugly. As much as ever would we like to hold in our arms the beauty of all the world. It never wanes in us, that yearning. But the beauty of the world does not want any of us. So we have to make do with less, a great deal less. In fact, we have to accept what is on offer or else go hungry. So when a kindly godmother offers to whisk us away from our dreary surroundings, from our hopeless, our pathetic, unrealizable dreams, we ought to think twice about spurning her.69

Coetzee represents the old and the disabled body as an ugly body. Here in these instances, marginality is not a metaphor for the unequal power relations between two warring groups or aspects of society, but an unequal and unglorified fight of the individual against society's insensitivity and revulsion towards the ‘old’, fundamentally the ‘cripple’ and the ‘disabled’. Coetzee probes into the mind which is a cauldron of conflicting emotions like those of the barbarian girl, Michael K, Friday and Paul Rayment. In the first three cases, resistance, anger and emotions seek to highlight the loneliness and the difference not only from the colonizers but from the colonized subjects too who can still feel of being a part of a country. When it comes to Paul Rayment his disability still renders him different from a country that prioritizes the abled over the disabled.

To Ato Quayson, there is “flow of affectivity” in writers’ evocation of the disabled. This affectivity can be due to experiencing a variety of emotions like “guilt, bewilderment and fear”, produced out of being terrified at recognizing the human vulnerability to change.70 The notion of the ugly is often attached to beggars, prostitutes but it is the disabled class that garners the most attention as a group that is ‘ugly’, ‘repelling’ and ‘other’. Martha Nussbaum puts it in her account of social scapegoating: “We have chosen these people as surrogate animals”.71 “These people” stand for the diseased, maimed, deformed people. What would be the price paid when already marginalized disabled/colonized people are publicly animalized? Perhaps the best example of this is the so-called
“Hottentot Venus,” whose distended labia and posterior, circulated in the literature of the colonial period, documenting the freak shows of Victorian England. Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s observations regarding such freak shows where, “the human-faced donkey, the three-legged rooster, and the deformed hen” were as likely to be displayed along with the “leopard girl” and “the poodle-man” are pertinent to our study. These studies reveal the public’s fascination for anomalies that seemed to have crossed the ‘species’ boundary.

II

Coetzee, a vociferous critic of animal cruelty, and crusader for the animal rights movement, has engaged in debates that question the dominance and belief of not only Western rationality but human intelligence and compassion. Animals hold a place of escalating, if not a continuous significance in Coetzee’s fiction and this section seeks to locate Coetzee’s response to animal rights within the broader framework of marginalization. This section of our chapter will attempt to assess Coetzee’s determined assault on Western rationalist beliefs and simultaneous celebration of ‘sympathetic imagination’ as opposed to reason. Helen Tiffin in an essay on Coetzee, “Unjust Relations: Post-Colonialism and the Species Boundary,” considers “the question of animals, [alongside] racism and colonialism” with the goal of returning postcolonial criticism “to the very basis of issues such as otherness, racism, and colonialism with which post-colonial discourse has been concerned for the last few decades”. Our purpose in this section is similarly to show that Coetzee’s deliberation on the plight of animals is an additional way of reacting to the diverse forms of oppression that is operational in the world. Critics have also sought to accomplish such a reading of the use of animals by Coetzee, with Louis Tremaine attempting “to reveal a deeper, foundational concern with the condition of living beings, one that at least partially accounts for the source of Coetzee’s response to the various forms of human oppression that he records”.

Coetzee is widely credited with the exploration of the potentially “soft” boundary between human and nonhuman. He is said to have also crossed the
‘species boundary’, as Ian Hackling comments, where he has become attuned to the possibilities of “sympathy between some people and at least some animals”.  

Coetzee enables some of his fictional characters like the Magistrate and David Lurie (initially thinking, reasoning and operating authoritatively but relegated to the position of the margin at the end of the novels), to experience “the ‘self’ in the ‘other’”, with a heightened sense of awareness of being non-human like, of experiencing a ‘burrowed’ existence, underground, far away from the world of racial, gender and other forms of human discrimination. But this process of ‘becoming animal’, we would argue, is rendered in a complex fashion by the writer. Coetzee depicts Michael K as naturally inclined towards the non-human, merging, burrowing into the core of the earth; he presents two representatives of racial otherness as belonging to the category of the “dog-man” in *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace*. He makes the Magistrate and David Lurie appropriate a human-animal existence after they have suffered the plight of animals in their otherwise dignified existence as humans. This new category signifying the coming together of the human and the non-human thus emerges in the fiction of Coetzee. This section precisely reflects on how Coetzee’s work, from *Waiting for the Barbarians* to *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), upsets entrenched ideas relating to humans’ dealings with non-humans like animals and, by extension, upsets margins placed between humans and animals. In his fictions and in his seminal work on animal ethics, *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee engages his attention on the strong binary structure which sets up the human as a general concept and focuses on what Derrida terms “the wholly other that they call animal”, and who proclaims, “Crossing borders or the ends of man I come or surrender to the animal - to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself.”

However, situating Coetzee in the animal rights debate is rendered complex by the fact that he conveys his views through what appears to be his controversial persona and alter-ego, Elizabeth Costello. The two chapters that deal specifically with animals, ‘The Lives of Animals One: The Philosophers and the Animals’ and ‘The Lives of Animals Two: The Poets and the Animals’, reprint two lectures Coetzee himself gave as the fictional author Elizabeth Costello at the Princeton
Tanner Lectures in 1997-98. By relocating these talks into the novel, *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee renders the fictional environment the precinct to argue about animals, animal rights, ethics and human accountability. Some reviewers are cautious in ascribing Costello’s views to Coetzee, believing that Coetzee uses the fictional mode of the philosophical discourse to distance himself from his fictional character. Even though Coetzee maintains an ironic distance between himself and his persona Elizabeth Costello, his views do seem to coincide quite closely with those of Costello. *The Lives of Animals* (1999), edited and introduced by the political philosopher, Amy Gutmann, includes responses from other scholars like Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger and primatologist Barbara Smuts. Here Coetzee employs ‘fiction to present a powerfully moving discussion of animal rights in all their complexity’.

The introductory lines to the novel suggest:

> The idea of human cruelty to animals so consumes novelist Elizabeth Costello that she can no longer look another person in the eye: humans, especially meat-eating ones, seem to her to be conspirators in a crime of stupefying magnitude.

Elizabeth Costello communicates an abhorrence of callous and brutal treatment of the non-human species, and dedicates a large section of her speech to assail the tradition of Western philosophers for their ‘specieism’, and for their use of the criterion of rationality to exclude non-human animals from moral consideration. Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation* (2002), likewise spends an entire chapter critiquing the Western thinkers for the same specieism and blindness towards animal welfare. Singer rings in the issue thus: “In other words, I am urging that we extend to other species the basic principle of equality that most of us recognize should be extended to all members of our own species”.

> Many terms have been integrated into our daily vocabulary to denote oppression of the various kinds and “speciesism”, alleged to be a form of undeserved discrimination on the basis of species membership:

> Philosophy ought to question the basic assumptions of the age.
> Thinking through, critically and carefully, what most people take
for granted is, I believe, the chief task of philosophy, and it is this task that makes philosophy a worthwhile activity. Regrettably, philosophy does not always live up to its historic role. Philosophers are human beings, and they are subject to all the preconceptions of the society to which they belong. Sometimes they succeed in breaking free of the prevailing ideology: more often they become its most sophisticated defenders. So, in this case, philosophy as practiced in the universities today does not challenge anyone’s preconceptions about our relations with other species. By their writings, those philosophers who tackle problems that touch upon the issue reveal that they make the same unquestioned assumptions as most other humans, and what they say tends to confirm the reader in his or her comfortable speciesist habits.  

Kenneth Ferguson ascribes this specification in his essay on Coetzee’s *Disgrace*:

Recognizing that animals may take preference over humans at certain times also profoundly disturbs the centrality of mutuality in the presumed conceptions of political subjects. For the essential tenet of liberal politics (as well as virtually all antiliberal politics) is that of the primacy of the citizen. Those marginal to the status of citizen provide the grounds of debate over issues of equality, rights, and political participation, for example, past questions about women and slaves and contemporary questions regarding minors and the imprisoned. Yet these debates concern the boundaries between the human and the citizen; how much more dramatic the debates over the boundaries of the human?  

Philosophy provides little help in answering this question. Moreover in the European philosophical tradition, animals are said to be possessing neither language nor ethics:

With a handful of exceptions (Montaigne, Hume, Mill, Bentham, and Buber) this tradition has hardly concerned itself with the
animal, and when it has turned its gaze to other living creatures it has viewed them, according to Peter Singer, “as beings of no ethical significance, or at best, of very minor significance”.85

Animal liberationists’ awareness that speciesism is an ideology, explains the struggle that people, sensitive to the suffering of animal, like Coetzee/Costello, struggle to persuade others to the injustice inbuilt in speciesism:

Such a language is available to me, I know. It is the language of Aristotle and Porphyry, of Augustine and Aquinas, of Descartes and Bentham, of, in our day, Mary Midgley and Tom Regan. It is a philosophical language in which we can discuss and debate what kind of souls animals have, whether they reason or on the contrary act as biological automatons, whether they have rights in respect of them. I have that language available to me, and indeed for a while will be resorting to it. 86

Coetzee is thus pleading for a more accommodating philosophy that acknowledges and represents the non-human universe. The story pleads us to re-assess our understanding of reason as a universal value. Is the universe built upon reason? Is God a God of reason? If so, then “man is godlike, animals thinglike”:

I could fall back on that language, as I have said, in the unoriginal, second-hand manner which is the best I can manage. I could tell you, for instance, what I think of St. Thomas’s argument that, because man alone is made in the image of God and partakes in the being of God, how we treat animals is of no importance except insofar as being cruel to animals may accustom us to being cruel to men. I could ask what St. Thomas takes to be the being Likewise Plato, likewise Descartes, in their different ways. The universe is built upon reason. God is a God of reason. The fact that through the application of reason we can come to understand the rules by which the universe works proves that reason and the universe are of the same being. 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.  

But Elizabeth Costello vehemently dissents from this anthropocentric perspective: “reason is neither the being of the universe nor the being of God. On the contrary, reason looks to me suspiciously like the being of human thought; worse than that, like the being of one tendency in human thought.”

We have closed our hearts to animals, Costello deduces. Philosophy, she argues, is relatively powerless to lead, or in any event to lead in the correct direction, because it lacks our sympathies. This places the onus on something other than our rational faculties, to which philosophy characteristically appeals. Our compassion, she contends, should expand to other animals. Elizabeth Costello agrees with Thomas Nagel, the writer of the famous article, “What is it like to be a Bat?”, that the actual consciousness of animals is inaccessible to reason. But Costello supposes that poets can create a kind of corresponding universe in which they can imaginatively construct a consciousness that will seem verisimilitudinous to us, even though we have no way of knowing whether it bears any connection to the consciousness of any actual animal. The fictional form, in Coetzee’s hands, therefore appears to have an ethical purpose: extending our sympathies to animals. If fiction does not so extend our sympathies, then neither will philosophy. If it does, then perhaps philosophy will follow.

Coetzee rouses our interest by creating the persona of an eloquent intellectual cum novelist, alienated somewhat by her age and ideology. Costello cannot but be exasperated with her fellow human beings who are needlessly heartless to animals and apparently devoted to unkindness. From antiquity to the present, our much-admired intellectuals and artists have sought to maintain and guard what John Wesley called “the barrier between men and brutes, the line which they cannot pass”. The traditional markers of human achievement stand out convincingly to be: “first, it was possession of a soul, then ‘reason,’ then tool use, then tool making, then altruism, then language, then the production of
linguistic novelty, and so on.”\textsuperscript{91} Augustine, Aquinas and the generations of theologians who have followed them, reason is the essential characteristic of God, and being “made in the image of God”,\textsuperscript{92} means having a “rational soul,” a term on loan from Aristotle that refers to the capability to engage in abstract speculation. To Augustine and Aquinas, as to Aristotle before them, creatures without “rational souls,” that is, animals are a subordinate order of beings towards whom we have no direct moral responsibility.

In Coetzee’s work, both fictional and non-fictional, animals are functionalized in a drama of human mortality and suffering, one in which the attempt is to reach out to the animal world. Louis Tremaine, in his reading of Coetzee’s involvement with the animal, finds:

An unmistakable and ever more insistent pattern in Coetzee’s fiction, from his earliest to his most recent work, a pattern of incorporating animals as narrative elements associated with suffering and death and, especially, with the question of foreknowledge of impending death.\textsuperscript{93}

In the first of his fictionalized autobiographies, Boyhood (1997), Coetzee seeks to warn the animals’ of their imminent death, but soon realizes that they come prepared with ‘foreknowledge’:

Sometimes when he is among the sheep ... he wants to whisper to them, warn them of what lies in store. But then in their yellow eyes he catches a glimpse of something that silences him: a resignation, a foreknowledge … They 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.\textsuperscript{94}

It is therefore no revelation that the same idea is echoed in The Master of Petersbourg (1994), where Fyodor Dostoevsky iterates: “Animals don’t find it hard to die … Perhaps we should take our lesson from them. Perhaps that is why they are with us here on earth to show us that living and dying are not as hard as we
think”. On an expedition into the desert in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, one of the horses refuses to advance farther, forcing the Magistrate to kill it so that the party could progress: “I can swear that the beast knows what is to happen. At the sight of the knife its eyes roll”. But the most remarkable form of animal foreknowledge is the one in *Disgrace* in which David Lurie plays a direct role, aiding Bev Shaw at a local animal clinic where dogs and other ailing or unwanted animals are put down. David’s “whole being is gripped by what happens in the theatre,” and what fascinates him is the sight of a living thing facing its last moments and, once again, the prospect of the animal’s foreknowledge: “He is convinced the dogs know their time has come”. Watching Bev Shaw comfort a goat that she is about to lethally inject, he says, “Perhaps he has already been through it. Born with foreknowledge, so to speak … They know how death comes to a goat. They are born prepared”. Coetzee/Costello can even compare the animal foreknowledge of death to its human counterpart. Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron* imagines, for example, the experience of the militant Black youth ‘John’ as he awaits an attack, a fatal one at that, by the police:

> He is readying himself for the smoke that will choke his lungs, the kick that will burst the door open, the torrent of fire that will sweep him away. He is readying himself to raise the pistol in that instant and fire the one shot he will have time to fire into the heart of the light … A time being, a suspension, before the return of the time in which the door bursts open and we face, first he, then I, the great White glare.

“Embodied” knowledge, or “embodiedness,” Costello goes on to argue, is precisely what connects our living being as humans to that of animals. What is launched is, the use of the notion of the ‘embodied-soul’ of animals as envisioned by Coetzee/Costello, allowing bracketing of the animal with the human with suffering acting as the leveler:

> 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. One name for the experience of full being is joy.

To be alive is to be a living soul. An animal-and we are all animals – is an embodied soul.

To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being ... of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. 100

Tremaine in his essay similarly echoes the thought of Coetzee/Costello to align the non-human with the human:

A great deal of the human suffering that Coetzee portrays in his writing is produced in the realm of the political, but it is possible to produce that suffering only because we exist and are vulnerable as “body-souls” … Our embodiedness lays us open to the constant possibility of pain and to the certainty of death. 101

Whereas many animal liberationists rely on human reason to remedy the situation, Coetzee and Costello rely instead on “sympathetic imagination”. Costello posits the beauty of this facility which enables the “sympathetic imagination” between beings considered different from each other:

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 ... If I [as a novelist] can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life.” 102

This sense of ‘embodiedness’, the sensation of being, is common to animals, human and non-human alike. This sensation of ‘being’ entails the sensation and experience of suffering. If we were made aware of the ‘human’ suffering of the Vietnamese, Hottentot tribe, the ‘native’ dwellers of Magda’s African farm, the Black vigilantes of the ‘age of iron’, visiting South Africa in the days of
Emergency, the post-apartheid citizens in a state of disgrace, then we are also to acknowledge the sensations, the suffering of non-human animals as documented throughout Coetzee’s fiction from *Dusklands* (1974) to *Elizabeth Costello*, with special focus given in *The Lives of Animals*. There is no question that Coetzee has leveled the ground for the human and non-human characters alike – and that ground is associated in one way or another with the endurance of suffering.

As evinced in our first chapter and in the study of the various categorizations of the marginalized, we had discussed one among many, the notion of the animal as the ‘other’, which was evident during the Middle Ages and which is still a compelling classification in our present world. The animal was and still is taken to be the ‘other’ in opposition to the rational, sane, and civilized homosapiens or man. In a human-centered order of existence, the animal is a non-existent, a cipher. This Western tradition has hardly concerned itself with the animal, and has viewed them, according to Peter Singer, “like machines that convert fodder into flesh”. Moreover humans, through hunting, capturing, and habitat destruction have already ensured, effectively and efficiently, genocides of countless species of animals around the world. Human beings are usually assumed to be of superior moral significance relative to non-human animals. Animals from time immemorial have been beasts of burden or sacrificial creatures needed to appease an angry God and to herald profitable times for the selfish society of humans or needed as ‘dummies’, to be experimented upon in the modern scientific laboratories. Boria Sax points to the fact that animal sacrifices were prevalent in the Hebrew tradition where, “the entire animal was given to Yahweh [God] to be consumed with fire”.

Even in our Hindu tradition of religious rituals, animal sacrifice is of paramount importance as in the worship of Goddess Durga, Kali et cetera. Formalized animal sacrifices are integral to their worship and generally go by the term of *bali*. Against such aggressive and destructive oppression, animals are rendered speechless (much like the marginal humans, those who are senile, mentally challenged or disturbed people) – mute in their own pain and suffering. Animals as victims are often “voiceless,” with little or no attempt by humans to advocate on their behalf. We have to recognize evident ‘speciesism’ in the
sacrifices and in the process how animals are kept confined, subjected to mass murder, and made imperative to experimentation in an industry based economy. Here we can also cite a relevant comment from Roger Fouts, a researcher of primates who is known for his work with chimpanzees. He observes on the practice of not identifying by name the millions of animals used in investigational studies or research every year. Rather, numbers are displayed on tags around the neck, or are tattooed onto the skin.

Coetzee, contributing to this debate on the rights of animals, perhaps is suggestive of the fact that right to life would never be afforded to the non-human animals, they would be fundamentally excluded from leading a life wherein death does not come at the hands of humans either directly or indirectly. In his first of the three fictionalized autobiographies, titled *Boyhood*, what he terms his “first memory” (which he concedes, may in reality have been largely unreal) is of a dog, hit by an automobile: “The car hits the dog: its wheels go right over the dog’s middle. With its hind legs paralyzed, the dog drags itself away, squealing with pain. No doubt it will die”. There are plenty of other scenes in the course of the fictionalized autobiography that portray the suffering of animals at the hands of humans. The family dog eats shards of broken glass that some fellow has left out, and its torment lasts for no less than three days. Coetzee commits to memory, his uncle executing a pig on the farm, his gaze capturing the precise moment of contact with animal flesh: “the bullet took it behind the ear: it gave a grunt and a great fart and collapsed, first on its knees, then on its side, quivering”. Then there are accounts of sheep being slaughtered, as the labourer “tugs the insides out into a basin … the heart, the liver, the kidneys – all the things that a sheep has inside it and that he has inside him too”. In a treatise on his own vegetarianism, Coetzee condemns the inhuman cruelty, inflicted on the ‘embodied souls’ of animals: “It is not death that is offensive, but killing, and killing only of a certain kind, killing accompanied by ‘unnecessary pain.’ Somehow the imagination knows what the other’s pain is like, even the ant’s pain. What the imagination cannot encompass is death. Death, it says to itself, is the end of pain. Death is relief.”
What is of significance here is that, Coetzee is not obsessed with the natural causes of animal suffering arising out of famine or draught or even flood, but the cause of animal suffering that arises out of human callousness. Coetzee depicts the same in *Dusklands*, in Jacobus Coetzee’s account of “the terrors that the communal life of the Hottentots can hold for the established soul,” captured in the picture of a “skeletal hound thump[ing] the earth with its tail, its neck tied to a rock with a thong too thrifty for its teeth to reach”. But Jacobus’ attempt at redeeming the image of the Westerner at the cost of the tribes of Africa does not succeed, as he too embarks on the same path of apathy towards animals. Jacobus’ behaviour towards a small Black beetle, of which he has “always been fond,” a creature whose defense when interfered with is to play dead, is specially significant: “You may pull his legs off one by one and he will not wince. It is only when you pull the head off his body that a tiny insect shudder runs through him”. Even though Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) asserts her “love of nature, particularly of insect life,” she too conveys the same lack of concern for insects as Jacobus: “[she] would tumble the common red ant, and every now and again, secreted beneath a flat stone, a pale dazed flaccid baby scorpion, whom … [she] would crush with a stick.”

Coetzee generally is seen representing animals as creatures that suffer humanly inflicted captivity, pain, or death. In *Foe*, the apes on the island are in withdrawal mode, because “Cruso held them a pest, and he and Friday killed them whenever they could,” and the dogs are all symbolic dumb beasts locked and chained, to which Susan Barton compares Friday. Likewise in *Disgrace*, Coetzee carries the fashionable impression that humans are more important to protect than dogs, with the canines only functioning as deterrents to crime, with the “rise of lawlessness” in post-apartheid South Africa: “There are the dogs. Dogs still mean something. The more dogs the more deterrence. Anyhow, if there were to be a break-in, I don’t see that two people would be better than one.” In the boarding kennels that Lucy runs in South Africa’s Eastern Cape, she looks after other people’s Dobermans, German shepherds, ridgebacks, bull terriers, and Rottweiler’s. These are watchdogs; operational dogs reared and taught to “snarl at
the mere smell of a Black man”. They are White people’s dogs. Often nameless and mostly indistinguishable (as is the case with countless animals put in the service industry), they exist in post-apartheid South Africa as part of an apparatus of deterrence (which preclude electrified fences and guns), designed to control the majority Black population living in depravity and poverty. But then they are not always successful. When there is a break-in at Lucy’s farm, these very dogs suffer once again human-inflicted pain:

Now the tall man appears from around the corner, carrying the rifle. With practiced ease he brings a cartridge up into the breech, thrusts the muzzle into the dogs’ cage. The biggest of the German Shepherds, slavering 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 … A hush falls. The remaining three dogs, with nowhere to hide, retreat to the back of the pen, milling about, whining softly. Taking his time between shots, the man picks them off.

Noam Gal highlights the importance of animals in Coetzee’s fictions by stating:

The most powerful motif here is the animal’s innocence. Dogs in Disgrace are presented as beings that are not part of the political turmoil of post-apartheid South Africa, and their peripheral nature is underscored by the heavy price they must pay for wandering around there, through this field of human landmines.

The deaths that we witness in Coetzee’s fiction of animals in stray numbers or thousands and millions, tell a tale of human intolerance, cruelty and barbarity. In Dusklands, the narrator while describing the daily life of the Hottentots, seizes upon the event of animal slaughter in graphic detail:

What they offered in abundance, today of all days, was hippopotamus fat. Hunters had come back from the great river with
sledsful of the part-cured flesh of a cow that had fallen into one of their pits. They had brought, too, roped feet upward in a sled, two hundred pounds of delicate living flesh, the calf which, watching its mother bleed to death on the stakes, had been caught unawares by the hunters. The women were at this minute pounding the calf with clubs in preparation for its slaughter: by breaking the minor blood vessels while its heart still beat they would lessen the drainage of blood from its already pallid flesh. Once the calf must have broken away from the women, for it came trotting from behind the huts with a laughing crowd in pursuit. It splashed into the stream and was allowed to stand there twitching and panting for a moment before it was prodded back to the slaughtering place.117

In their midst, salivating in the prospect of consuming the delicate meat of the calf, is Jacobus, even preferring certain sections of meat over others: “I longed for its liver or tongue roasted, but knew I could not stomach such elementary fare” for his “stomach was not ready for strong fare”.118 Intriguingly, Coetzee suggests in Meat Country that, “the question of whether we should eat meat is not a serious question”119, since meat-eating is a part of human nature, which compels us to question the seriousness of the writer’s belief and whether the declaration is made embedded in light-hearted irony. However, this declaration is challenged by the regularity and earnestness with which he approaches the issues of meat-eating and violence towards animals in the rest of his writings.

Coetzee nevertheless prolongs the debate on the mass extermination of animals in factories and makes Mrs Curren in Age of Iron capture the iron-hearted killing of innocent, vulnerable ‘flightless birds’:

He, William, Florence’s husband, had a job and the job could not be interrupted. His job was to pounce on a chicken, swing it upside down, grip the struggling body between his knees, twist a wire band around its legs, and pass it on to a second, younger man, who would hang it, squawking and flapping, on a hook on a clattering overhead
conveyor that took it deeper into the shed where a third man in oilskins splashed with blood, gripped its head, drew its neck taut, and cut it through with a knife so small it seemed part of his hand, tossing the head in the same movement into a bin full of other dead heads.120

Coetzee’s animal crusader, Elizabeth Costello similarly sets out her convictions regarding the cruelty of meat production:

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.121

Coetzee prevents the possibility of evading responsibility, that is, human responsibility for the animal genocide and forces the humans to acknowledge their knowledge of the history of animal cruelty and killing. Coetzee also compares what occurs to animals in laboratories and factory farms, to what Jews endured in concentration camps, and compares those who live near such facilities with ordinary Germans who lived near the camps. In this article that Coetzee wrote for *The Age* in 2007, he draws the analogy clearly:

The transformation of animals into production units dates back to the late 19th century, and since that time we have already had one warning on the grandest scale that there is something deeply, cosmically wrong with regarding and treating fellow beings as mere units of any kind.122

For Coetzee the spectacle of the holocaust is rooted in the ethic of violence and human profit. The sense of outrage is taken forward:

Of course we cried out in horror when we found out what they had been up to. What a terrible crime to treat human beings like cattle -
if we had only known beforehand. But our cry should more accurately have been: what a terrible crime to treat human beings like units in an industrial process. And that cry should have had a postscript: what a terrible crime - come to think of it, a crime against nature - to treat any living being like a unit in an industrial process.\textsuperscript{123}

In the last section of this article, Coetzee deftly highlights how this violence is replicated and subconsciously etched in the human mind.

Coetzee’s novel, \textit{Diary of a Bad Year} (2007), also reflects on the Third Reich, World War II, and the Holocaust. Coetzee expands on a theory of complicity that has always been a central theme in his work and that is vigorously focalized through his concern about the Holocaust and its repercussions. That the site of apartheid inflicted South Africa is synchronized with that of Nazi genocide in Coetzee’s work is not unintended, but rather intentional, for the early propounders of apartheid exhausted a great deal of their time and resources learning from the Third Reich. Coetzee is well aware of the sensitivity of raising the Holocaust analogy though. In an essay in \textit{Stranger Shores} (2002) Coetzee writes:

When Aharon Appelfeld began writing in the early 1960s, the Holocaust did not count, in Israel, as a fitting subject for fiction … Combined with this public silence was a feeling that there was something indecent in representing the Holocaust, that the subject ought to be, if not beyond the reach of language, at least out of bounds to anyone who had not lived through it.\textsuperscript{124}

In talking about vivisection, Peter Singer claims, that after Nazism the experimentation on live subjects was given over to experiments on animals and draws the similar analogy between Nazi genocide and genocide of animals in factories. Here Singer is referring to the account of the life of the famous Yiddish Nobel Prize winner, Isaac Bashevis Singer:
What do they know – all those scholars, all those philosophers, all the leaders of the world [who] have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them, all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka. And yet man demands compassion from heaven.125

Noam Gal goes on further to draw an analogy that places the animal and the variously oppressed, marginalized on the same plane in the domain of colonialism:

It seems that the animal as a common medium for the ritual of sacrifice reappears in other sacrificial practices, such as the cultural figuration of victims of colonial conquests in postcolonial art – in literature, for instance. Disgrace could serve as an interesting exponent of this since it presents a range of various victims of the postcolonial condition in South Africa: the Black man without land; the White woman raped by Black men; her [Lucy’s] father who is injured in the attack; abandoned and sick animals in the Black townships, as well as other characters in the text.126

What then, is the connection between colonialism and animals? Coetzee in “Meat Country” proposes that the Western meat-centered diet is a consequence of colonialism: “Europeans emigrated to the colonies for a variety of reasons. Most vivid of these was the promise that they could have meat whenever they wanted.”127 On a different level of discussion, we can analyze how the category of the animal had provided European colonialism the means of expressing the radical difference that had appeared between Westerners and the non-Western ‘natives’ whom they met in an alien landscape. In the light of the routine definitions of European human appearance, manners, and most significantly rationality, the ‘natives’ of the colonized countries were effortlessly projected in animal terms to uphold and validate the colonial dominance. In a similar fashion, the colonial domains of Coetzee’s fiction also chronicle the perennial pattern. In the novel
In *Dusklands*, Jacobus Coetzee reduces the Hottentots and the Bushmen to the category of beasts, born in the wild and wild by nature with souls of animals, heartless in their cruelty towards animals. In *Foe*, for instance, Susan Barton, who is marooned on an island with the Englishman Cruso and his manservant, Friday, confesses that she has “given to Friday’s life as little thought as I would have a dog’s or any other dumb beast’s.”\(^{128}\) In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Empire’s soldiers throw food at the ‘native’ populace and stand watching them as if they were “strange animals”\(^{129}\) No less ruinously, the Magistrate himself facetiously tells the barbarian girl with whom he copulates, that “people will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms, a fox and a girl”.\(^{130}\) David Lurie’s racist attitude manifests itself in *Disgrace* in his unrelenting ‘zoomorphism’ in which animal characteristics are projected principally onto Black people.\(^{131}\) This pattern becomes more pronounced after Lucy’s rape, after which Coetzee associates animal with racial contempt in Lurie’s observations, as when just before the three Black males attack him and Lucy, we read that the youngest one, a boy named Pollux, has “piggish eyes”.\(^{132}\) Later, Lurie will make this bestial insult unambiguous when he identifies Pollux as “the running-dog”,\(^{133}\) and “swine”.\(^{134}\)

It is also interesting to note that Coetzee creates Michael K, a member of the dis-enfranchised class, a colonized but essentially as someone closer to Mother Nature, free in his relation with the earth. Derek Attridge notes in reference to *Life & Times of Michael K*, that Coetzee conveys the “intensity which the bond between human and plant life can acquire.”\(^{135}\) The novel portrays Michael K very much as a ‘human animal’, and this muddying of the stark divide between boundaries and categories, is one of Coetzee’s overarching concerns. From the moment of his birth, Michael K has something animal about him. Indeed the animal embeds visibly on his face in the form of a hare lip. Noam Gal contends at the end of his essay, ‘Victimhood of Animals in *Disgrace*’, that he “think[s] that Michael K should be read along the analysis of animals in Coetzee’s works, as the ultimate ‘becoming animal’: surprisingly, the numerous critical readings of this early novel disregarded the literary slithering of K’s hare lip from a scientific metaphor into a material existence in which Blackness is replaced by hare-ness.”\(^{136}\)
In fact the lip that curls like a hare’s, renders Michael K revolting to his mother as a new-born, and later in adult life unexciting to women – love from whom he promptly gives up all hope of ever getting. He moves like a snail with his hare lip, and later in the novel he is compared to a lizard, a mouse, a stick insect, a bunny, a monkey, and more. Michael K wants to lead a life of a recluse, like the life of a hermit-crab. He wants to recoil from the realm of the civil war gripping the country, marked by violence, impositions, curfews, curbing human life, life sans peace and tranquility. In some ways, Michael K anticipates Vercueil’s detachment in Age of Iron resting, with his head in a cardboard box, learning to hide and be unvoiced. Michael K’s hare lip with its disfiguring impact also prefigures the absent tongue of Friday in Foe. It is entirely possible that Coetzee lends some kind of ambiguity as to the racial identity of Michael K with only the initials of ‘C.M.’, letting us onto his status as a ‘Coloured’ in South Africa, precisely to draw away our attention from the issue of racial identity and to focus on his oneness with the soil, the ecosystem of the countryside. He finds immense satisfaction and pleasure in tilling the soil and living on the produce of the land, like pumpkins. When he would be incarcerated in one of the camps of the war, he would even refuse to eat the food provided by the camp, saying “It’s not my kind of food”137, much to the chagrin of the overseer:

‘What the hell is your kind of food?’ I ask him. ‘And why are you treating us like this? Don’t you see we are trying to help you?’ He gives me a serenely indifferent look that really roves my ire. ‘There are hundreds of people dying of starvation every day and you won’t eat! Why? Are you fasting? Is this a protest fast? Is that what it is? What are you protesting against? Do you want your freedom? If we turned you loose, if we put you out on the street in your condition, you would be dead within twenty-four hours. You can’t take care of yourself, you don’t know how’138.

Likewise, Elizabeth Curren in Age of Iron fancifully imagines the homeless Vercueil as less angelic than animalistic: a man of “long, carious fangs”, “an insect ... emerging ... to forage for crumbs”, “[a]n old horse”139. She, in fact, repeatedly
compares him to a dog: “yellow-eyed, defiant. Dog-man!”; betraying “something unsavory … as in the excitement of a dog digging for carrion”; “cruel, mad, a mad dog”; behaving with “[t]he curiosity of a dog that sniffs at one’s crotch”. In this novel and nearly all of Coetzee’s narrative writing, the presence of animals (dogs in particular) and their association with death are so prominent that they cannot be ignored. Vercueil’s dog, in fact, becomes visible more often than any other figure in Age of Iron, apart from Vercueil himself and Elizabeth Curren. It too is closely associated with anticipation of death, though not its own. In Disgrace we are made familiar with the notion of the dog-man, once with Petrus and then with Lurie. Lurie on his very first encounter with an Eastern Cape Black, sets up a certain association between the Black man and the animal:


Given the many characters in the world of Coetzee’s novels who find themselves psychologically displaced, emotionally disoriented, or even close to deranged, we think that it is precisely the radical potential for individual reformulation in Kafka’s work that has appealed to Coetzee’s sensibility. It is not just in the writer’s awareness of documenting human trauma or alienation but of considering how those elements might bring about something else: a state of mind or extrasensory bearing somewhat undefined by the typically available lexicon, yet one is also able to cause obvious personal or social change. Coetzee in one of his interviews with Attwell refers to his indebtedness to Kafka:

You ask about the impact of Kafka on my own fiction. I acknowledge it, and acknowledge it with what I hope is a proper humility. As a writer I am not worthy to loose the latchet of Kafka’s shoe. But I have no regrets about the use of the letter K in Michael K, hubris though it may seem.
Similarly Kafka’s desert world is not far from Coetzee’s dry landscapes, wastelands and shrunken relationships. Tom Herron in his essay refers to Kafka’s work, and how they have enabled Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to coin a term that further aligns Coetzee and Kafka, the term “becoming-animal”:

To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of non signifying signs.\(^{143}\)

It is specifically the marginality of animals, their essential invisibility in a human world order that renders them critical to the workings of Coetzee’s fiction. Coetzee’s protagonists often commence their fictional journey situated within the binary structure around the colonizer and the colonized, the male and the female, the able and the disabled. But then, the very characters defined by the power inherent in such structures are also liable to lose their ‘authority’ and relegated to a position away from the ‘centre’. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and David Lurie in *Disgrace* validate this proposition aptly and in their changed, altered states of humiliation and powerlessness they begin a journey of discovery of the inappropriateness of Western discourse on the non-human animals. They find themselves with an altered subjectivity more open to incorporate the animal into the human. These two characters can serve to suggest how the personal or political transformation takes place, the first case being the Magistrate’s colonial reformation in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Professor David Lurie’s revaluation of the lives of animals in *Disgrace*. They are changed so profoundly that they must approach a third position – a third subjectivity that substantially alters these characters’ relation to the status quo. As an administrator for the Empire at an unnamed outpost, the Magistrate, much like Colonel Joll, initially epitomizes the “imperial mind”, becomes the paradigm of rationality or reason that will regulate and subordinate the colonized, first the bestial “body” of the girl and then by extension, the ‘native’ population. As an archivist or an archaeologist, the
Magistrate uses scientific logic to understand an assortment of wooden artifacts he has found in the province as a probable source of information about the times past and ways of life of the barbarian people. He can never decipher the exact meaning of the scrolls. The same bewilderment accosts him in the case of the barbarian girl with her torture marks on her body. He finds himself perplexed by the blemished, marked body of the barbarian girl, which will not divulge its secrets against all coercion. In effect, this renders the Magistrate losing his usual physical pleasures in eating and sex. He explicates to the readers that “my sex seemed to me another being entirely, a stupid animal living parasitically upon me, swelling and dwindling according to autonomous appetites.”

It is an animality, a primal sort of existence that more and more challenges his previously held accepted wisdom of the notions of politeness, civility and composure, befitting a ‘civilized’ member of the ruling race. This ruptures his hold on the certitudes of the Empire and tragically terminates his control over the frontier townspeople. He is then captured and tortured for being a suspected conspirator against the Empire. The Magistrate says of his torturers: “They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant 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. They had come to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity.”

In his state of liminality, the Magistrate is forced to relate and dissolve his ‘self’ into the ‘other’, here the animal: “I guzzle my food like a dog.”

“There is no way of dying allowed me, it seems, except like a dog in a comer”;

“[I am] the filthy creature who for a week licked his food off the flagstones like a dog”.

The fall from grace is captured in his sharing the degraded lives of dogs in the cell and around. Following his release from prison, the Magistrate moves in and out of the condition of being “civilized” (European, characterized by the mind) and “barbarian” (‘native’, irrational), approaching a new socio-political sensibility that is revealed in his frequent imaginings about the girl. The girl’s presence, which the magistrate was unable to even recollect the first time, gradually evolves from being a non-entity, to “a tiny whale” and finally a human form with the ability to verbalize. This represents no absolute change, in view of the fact that the Magistrate acknowledges at the end of the novel, that he is still involved in the most deceitful kind of colonialist work, ruling over the
colonized. Even then there is something substantial here: the Magistrate has answered to the need for change, as in his attempt to preserve the homes of the barbarian refugees and in his importunate inclination to circumvent the mechanisms of Empire.

David Lurie in *Disgrace* is similarly rendered vulnerable much the same way the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Richard A. Barney in his article “Between Swift and Kafka: Coetzee’s Elusive Fiction”, records this change in the protagonist:

The case of David Lurie in *Disgrace* makes all the more palpable the fact that for Coetzee, this pattern of change can apply to an unsympathetic, culpable, and downright distasteful individual. Lurie is a teacher without a belief in teaching, a sexual opportunist who abuses his position as university professor, a man estranged from family and friends, and one susceptible to earlier attitudes about racial propriety related to apartheid South Africa. As someone alienated from the life of the university in Cape Town, Lurie has fallen away from his lifelong definition of intellectual vocation; he is further disoriented from his presumptuous bodily disposition by his expulsion from the university for sexual impropriety and, later, by being attacked while staying at his daughter Lucy’s farm, where he goes to take refuge.\(^{149}\)

Accused and publicly humiliated, David is surrounded by student reporters and hecklers: “They circle around him like hunters who have cornered a strange beast and do not know how to finish it off”.\(^{150}\) At the behest of Lucy, his daughter, Lurie reluctantly decides to help a local woman named Bev Shaw at her animal clinic in Grahamstown: “They can smell what you are thinking,” she tells him on the first day; he remains unimpressed though.\(^{151}\) But not long after Lurie finds himself answering to the animals, he helps treat in unnervingly animal-like ways. When at one point he is helping Bev calm an ailing dog who must be put down, Lurie realizes that “he gives off the wrong smell (They can smell your thoughts), the
smell of shame”. Becoming bewildered, “he does not understand what is happening to him. Until now he has been more or less indifferent to animals.” At this moment, however, “he does not seem to have the gift of hardness”.

David had started off with the following certainty: “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”. He is found, at the end of the novel, sitting among “cats … and dogs: the old, the blind, the halt, the crippled, the maimed”, in a “desolate yard in Africa”. He is even contemplating the possibility of bringing a crippled dog into the fabric of an opera, he has been trying to compose for months. His life is as close to having no material value as that of any character Coetzee has created. Bev responds skeptically to Lurie, saying: “I don’t think we are ready to die, any of us, not without being escorted”. Escorting these creatures, both to the table where they are dispatched and to the incinerator where they are disposed of, is the role that David takes on himself. The appellation “dog-man,” applied by Mrs. Curren to Vercueil in *Age of Iron*, returns in *Disgrace*, attached first to Petrus, who cared for the dogs in Lucy’s kennel, and then, with much deeper reverberation, to David, who conducts the dogs in Bev’s clinic to their deaths and cares for them even after their deaths:

Well, now he has become a dog-man: a dog undertaker, a dog psychopomp; a harijan. Curious that a man as selfish as he should be offering himself to the service of dead dogs … He saves the honour of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it.

In a twist of fate, the characteristics of the *dog-man* as in the personas of Vercueil and Petrus, both belonging to the disenfranchised class of South Africa, are now returned to the subjectivity of the erstwhile ruler of the land, the White academician David Lurie. The question raised by Coetzee not only defines the virtual dissolution of the distinction, Lurie initially claimed between the human and the animal, confirming his own liminal sense of self-definition and his compassionate treatment of the beasts he will encounter later in the clinic; it also
has a considerable impact on his relationship with his daughter, which remains overwrought with nervous tension, but hopeful by the last pages of the novel.

When in Coetzee’s fictional world human species realize the dignity of full non-human animals, they become a third term like ‘dog-man’ whose newly defined independence can both clarify and obscure the social relations between self and others. In both the Magistrate’s and Lurie’s cases, there are no easy answers, since the alteration of colonialist or “humanist” thinking, no matter how profound, is by no means redemptive in the sense of erasing their moral culpability. We can hope it is a sign that Coetzee is evolving toward an engagement with animals that puts them first and is genuinely supportive of animal rights. Coetzee imposes upon us an imperative to grant the members of other species equal standing within our moral universe.

In this chapter, we have sought to explore consistently two separate categories of the margin, the disabled and the non-human. Coetzee was initially situated within the context of colonialism and topos of a colonial landscape. But once Coetzee moved to Australia, the context too changed, with the setting often being Australia like in the novels Slow Man and Diary of a Bad Year (2007). The writing bears a far greater clarity and force with the question of ethics emerging as the motivating factor in his writing. And what questions of ethics can be raised without paying attention to the issues of disability and animal rights? The intention of Coetzee’s writing is to produce a change with him believing: “A book should be an axe to chop open the frozen sea inside us. What else should it be?” in a way encapsulating what Kafka had iterated earlier in his writing. Likewise books written with such a purpose should enable us to embrace all inspite of differences in race, colour, gender, body, sexuality or species.
Notes


6. Ibid., p. 104.


10. Ibid., p. 107.


17. *Life & Times of Michael K*, p. 3.


45. *Age of Iron*, p. 64.
46. Ibid., p. 65.
47. Life & Times of Michael K, p. 6.
48. Ibid., p. 6.
49. Ibid., p. 7.
50. Ibid., p. 9.
53. Ibid., p. 196.
54. Ibid., p. 42.
55. Ibid., p. 34.
56. Disgrace, p. 199.
58. Ibid., p. 10.
60. Slow Man, p. 13.
61. Sussman, “Dependent Disabled and Dependent Poor”, p. 386.
62. Slow Man, p. 18.
63. Ibid., p. 23.
64. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
67. Age of Iron, p. 54.
68. Slow Man, p. 214.
69. Ibid., p. 236.


86. *Elizabeth Costello*, p. 66.


103. Peter Singer, “All Animals are Equal”, p. 85.


113. *Disgrace*, p. 60.
114. Ibid., p. 110.
115. Ibid., pp. 95-96.
117. Dusklands, p. 84.
118. Ibid., p. 84.
120. Age of Iron, pp. 41-42.
123. Ibid., p. 1.
128. Foe, p. 2.
129. Waiting for the Barbarians, p. 19.
130. Ibid., p. 37.
131. Tom Herron, “The Dog Man”, p. 488. The term ‘zoomorphism’ is used in this essay to read the character of Lurie.
132. Disgrace, p. 92.
133. Ibid., p. 131.
139. *Age of Iron*, p. 75.
141. *Disgrace*, p. 64.
144. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, p. 49.
150. *Disgrace*, p. 56.
152. Ibid., p. 142.
153. Ibid., p. 143.
154. Ibid., p. 74.
155. Ibid., p. 218.
156. Ibid., pp. 83-84.
157. Ibid., p. 146.