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Refusing to Speak: The Ethics of Animal Silence and Sacrifice in Coetzee and Derrida

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**REFUSING TO SPEAK: THE ETHICS OF ANIMAL SILENCE AND SACRIFICE IN
COETZEE AND DERRIDA**

Abstract

J.M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello interprets animal silence as a form of resistance to human exploitation. This essay interrogates Elizabeth Costello's interpretation of animal silence by exploring the role of such silence in the construction of the human subject via its constitutive finitude. I consider three textual speaker/protagonists—Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*, Derrida in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, and David Lurie in *Disgrace*—who are interested, and even invested, in the relationship between the particular resistant potential of animal silence and their own mortality as autobiographically-speaking human beings. I argue that the intersection between nonhuman silence and human mortality should be understood

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through the concept of sacrifice, which, as my reading of Derrida demonstrates, destabilizes any interpretation of animal silence as autonomously resistant. Through this relationship between silence and sacrifice, I seek to resituate the ethics of *Disgrace*, and especially to decentre the speaking voice of David Lurie as the ethical heart of the narrative, presenting a significant revision to previous readings of the novel. While much critical attention has proposed that the seeming expansion of Lurie's sympathetic imagination in his interactions with dogs signals his development as an ethical being, my argument locates the ethic of the novel not in the speaking voice of David Lurie, but rather in the many significant silences, both human and animal, contained within the text.

In *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello declares, "Animals have only their silence left with which to confront us. Generation after generation, heroically, our captives refuse to speak to us" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 25). Costello draws attention to the "generation" and re-generation of animals as suffering objects of human possession; at the same time, she anthropomorphically codes animal silence as "heroic," casting the position of the animal outside of human language as an active resistance to domination. For Costello, the animal does not lack language; rather, the animal "refuses" to enter into a relationship with human language in which it would inevitably be cast as inferior. While this idea of the nonhuman animal's "heroism" offers a sense of agency rather than passivity to the oppressed and exploited animal, Costello's dependence on silence in constructing heroism is ethically problematic. In this essay, I argue that the intersection of nonhuman silence and human language should be understood through the concept of sacrificial exchange, and that this sacrificial economy destabilizes any interpretation of animal silence as autonomously resistant.¹ The three texts I consider, *The Lives of Animals*, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, and *Disgrace*, are centrally concerned with the ethical stakes of textual representation and the way that representation becomes foundational for the material exploitation of nonhuman animals. The speaker/protagonists of these texts—Elizabeth Costello, Jacques Derrida, and David Lurie—are all interested, and even invested, in the relationship between the resistant potential of animal silence and their own mortality as autobiographically-speaking human beings. A rigorous attention to the relationship between silence and sacrifice exposed in these three texts relocates in particular the ethics of *Disgrace*. While most previous interpretations of this novel focus on the ethical development or attainment of "grace" in the protagonist, David Lurie, my analysis decentres Lurie's oppressive perspective, establishing

instead the novel's many significant silences, both human and animal, as the ethical heart of the narrative.

Coetzee (1999) originally delivered *The Lives of Animals* as a series of lectures at Princeton University, challenging the expected form of the lecture by presenting, instead of a philosophical meditation, a fictional text. Within this text, Coetzee's protagonist, the novelist Elizabeth Costello, is also invited to deliver two philosophical lectures, in which she addresses the representation of nonhuman animals in philosophy and literature. Throughout *The Lives of Animals*, Costello explores ways in which textual and linguistic representation (particularly in philosophical discourse) creates and maintains the conditions for the physical oppression of animals. From her perspective, the entry of the animal into language, via this textual representation, amounts not to an inclusion, but rather to a violent exclusion of the animal through the appropriation and containment of its silence. Aaltola (2010) argues that “silence,” in *The Lives of Animals*, is a matter of not being heard, rather than not speaking.² Thus, both the animal and the poet are heroic in their silences, because both refuse to adapt to the requirements of audiences that are deaf to their concerns (Aaltola, 2010, p. 121). Aaltola's reading suggests that animality functions in the novel as a trope for artistic creation, and that this representation of animals, rather than embodied animal lives, has been Costello's subject all along. Is the silence of nonhuman animals, then, a mode of resistance, or does it in fact allow nonhuman animals to be cast as blank figures for textual representation? Is Costello herself silencing other animals by using them to fuel her own generative power?

Costello sees the animal rendered powerless by the physical inevitability of animal genocide, what Derrida calls the “artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival” of the livestock animal in the industrialized conditions of human consumption (Derrida, 2008a, p. 26). Costello's idea that animals “confront us” with their silence suggests that language, and the animal as defined by language, are intimately entwined with the horrific “generation”—“generation after generation”—of animal bodies. As a result of this entanglement of human language with the physical oppression of nonhuman animals, silence is the animal's only available form of resistance. The problematic nature of this construction is exposed, however, when we connect this “interminable” generation with the argument, frequently expressed in Western philosophy, that the animal cannot die, that the animal's lack of language prevents it from experiencing finitude, the self-conscious living toward death that, in turn, comes to define

the human in opposition to the nonhuman animal. In his *Electric Animal*, Lippit (2000) provides a thorough genealogy of this undying animal.³ Although his opening premise is that animals are “no longer sacrificial” but “spectral” and “undead” (Lippit, 2000, p. 1), Lippit acknowledges that the constitution of the human subject, as defined by its finitude, requires the *sacrifice* of the animal (p. 8). Animals appear in *Electric Animal* as a kind of technology for defining the human; although Lippit imagines this technology as having a fragmenting or interruptive effect on human language (p. 183), it is in fact linguistic representation that creates the opposition between the undeath of the animal and the finitude of the human. As Lippit observes, “by tracking the animal across the philosophical spectrum, one discovers the systemic manner in which the figure of the animal comes to portray a serial logic: the animal is incapable of language; that lack prevents the animal from experiencing death; this in turn suspends the animal in a virtual, perpetual existence” (p. 7). Elizabeth Costello's connection between language and oppression suggests that defining a lack that excludes the animal from death occurs *in* language, so the only recourse for the animal is a resistant silence that in turn defines the animal, for language, as undying; this relationship of generation to silence uncovers the tautological foundation of the distinction between human and animal death. Human finitude is based on the suspension of the animal, and this suspension is founded on the animal's silence. The philosophical denial of finitude to the animal may be the reason that, in Coetzee's title, animals can only have lives—life after life, without recognizable deaths.

Human death is the corollary subject to animal life in *The Lives of Animals*. In the performance of the lecture, Costello herself confronts her audience with a silence: the silence of the decaying, gendered body, the silence of a movement towards death that might elude narrativization. Costello's hope for herself (as an author who exists, finally, in the generation and regeneration of her works), and for the animal, is to stand, silently, outside the spectralizing logic of representation. Costello's perception of her own bodily mortality thus shapes her conceptualization of animal silence. In Durrant's (2006) analysis, the decay of Costello's body, as figured throughout the text, is part of her “sacrifice” to the animal; he argues that she is literally walking “flank to flank” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 65) with the dying animal body (Durrant, 2006, p. 132). What is missing in Durrant's reading is that livestock animals are never permitted to live out their corporeal lives; they are not in the process of dying, but instead are being herded to their deaths. Killed as juveniles, replaced by another generation of juveniles, with bodies

perfected for consumption by antibiotics and genetic engineering, animals do not live toward death in the same way Elizabeth Costello does. I do not mean to suggest that Costello herself is not an animal; rather, I want to point out that she enjoys a privileged relationship to her own individual animality that is denied to most nonhuman animals by the conditions of their material and discursive oppression. Human awareness of the changes wrought by time upon a single body requires a degree of individuation reserved for human beings and, to a lesser extent, companion animals. Costello's decaying body is a privilege of being human, a fact that complicates philosophical and literary equations between animality and corporeality.

Costello herself is not immune to this uncritical association between animality and embodiment; her concept of the sympathetic imagination calls us to recognize our shared embodiment with animals. She equates the state of being “full of being” (the fullness that, she argues, allows human beings to imagine themselves in the positions of others through an exercise of the “sympathetic imagination”) with “embodiedness” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 33). Kafka, she claims, felt like an animal-human hybrid because his brain or consciousness was (like Red Peter's) “mounted inexplicably on [a] suffering animal [body]” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 30). Despite her insistence on animality as a form of full embodiment that human and nonhuman animals share, the only living bodies that appear in *The Lives of Animals* are human. Costello's concern is clearly to engage with the nonhuman animal as a representational figure—rather than a material body—and to expose how the nonhuman animal as a figure (and particularly as an *undying* figure) supports the human ability to represent or narrativize its own embodiment and bodily mortality. Bodily change, decay, and degeneration are, in a sense, narrative movements; they are part of the privilege of self-narration, of autobiography. Against these movements, we can set the suspension of the nonhuman animal: multiple rather than individual, eternally young, eternally “healthy” animal bodies in industrial agriculture are held in a state of undeath. The sacrifice of nonhuman animal bodies for human use is thus not only the sacrifice of their lives, but also the sacrifice of their life narratives, their movements of living and dying. This static condition is chillingly literalized by such devices as gestation stalls and veal crates, which, preventing any movement, hold the animal body in a condition that can be termed neither life nor death.

Against this undeath of the nonhuman animal, human beings can achieve a relationship of finitude to their own mortality. Elizabeth Costello aligns the figure of the writer—and, by extension, herself—with the animal not by linking body to body, in a shared experience of

embodied mortality, but by linking the writer to the animal spectre to spectre, in an experience of undeath. *The Lives of Animals* suggests that Costello is afraid of *not* dying. As a public figure, and in her writing, Elizabeth Costello is generated and regenerated. Yet despite her ability to narrate, the technologies of reproduction that perpetuate the existence of her words function, in fact, to suspend her narrative, rendering silent her autobiographical voice. In this undeath of the author, writing and animality are linked: both animals and writers sacrifice their finitude to a consuming audience.⁴ Costello's insistence on the embodied nature of nonhuman animal experience, then, is also an insistence on her own embodied experience and sense of her own exploitation, and on her own desire to live toward her death.

If to be silent, in these lectures, is not to be heard, both the suspension and the silences of the writer and the animal are aligned; silence perpetuates the state of undeath, since to speak and to be understood is to narrativize oneself, to change one's self over time, in short, to autobiographize. Throughout the text, we see the audience's resistance to understanding Elizabeth Costello, as we can imagine an audience resisting Coetzee's challenge to the form of the lecture. To speak about one's life or experiences and to be understood presupposes the ability to live towards a death, to move, age, and decay; it presupposes the capacity to experience finitude. Finitude is not only consciousness of mortality, but also the ability to narrativize one's mortality, an ability dependent upon the freedom to experience one's own mortal body. This experience is what is denied to nonhuman animals in the industrial conditions of generation and regeneration against which Costello speaks; finitude, most often figured as something that animals constitutively lack, is in fact something they are denied, not only in literary or philosophical representation, but also in the material conditions of their exploited lives.

Elizabeth Costello's plea for the ethical consideration of animals relies on two central assumptions about animality: first, that animals are constitutively silent, and that this silence can be interpreted as a form of resistance, and second, that animals are properly associated with embodiment. Exploitation, according to Costello, denies the corporeality of animals by denying their embodied suffering, a form of suffering that a new ethics, drawn from poetic discourse and based on the sympathetic imagination, should seek to recognize. In his series of lectures, collected in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida exposes how these same representational tropes enact a sacrifice of the animal that enables humans to experience their own bodily decay. One morning, naked, in his bedroom, Jacques Derrida is confronted,

“frontally,” with the silent animal in the form of his cat (Derrida, 2008a: 4). As Elizabeth Costello might hope, the animal’s silence “shame[s]” the philosopher in this moment of interspecies encounter (Derrida, 2008a, p. 4), when each is confronted with the material, individual, body of the other. Of this materiality Derrida is careful to assure us: the animal “is a real cat [...]. It isn’t the figure of cat. It doesn’t silently enter the bedroom as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse our myths and religions and fables” (2008a, p. 6). Again, a few pages later, Derrida emphasizes that the cat “does not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race” (2008a, p. 9). Derrida is too sensitive a reader not to recognize his own paranoiac repetition. His disavowal of his cat’s relationship to the cats of human culture functions as a reminder that, in fact, she enters the scene of her encounter with him as a figure always already predetermined in his mind by representation. It thus becomes clear that, like Costello, Derrida is concerned with the construction of animal *figures* in philosophical discourse. Derrida’s body, rather than the cat’s, is his focus in narrating their opening encounter, and his body speaks the text of the lecture. Although like Costello, Derrida attempts to use cultural representations to dismantle anthropocentric conceptions of the animal, his text is skeptical about the emancipatory potential of recognizing mutual animal-human embodiment. The fact that his cat is at once both a “real” cat and a cultural figure, rather than a simply and fully embodied being, is one of the ways Derrida highlights his consciousness of the relations of power and the weight of culture, both of which determine in advance the course of any discussion of the animal. I am, then, in agreement with Shukin (2009), who finds the cat a spectral, rather than an embodied or material presence in the text (p. 37). I do not agree, however, that Derrida’s discussion, as a result, ignores the difference between figurative and corporeal life, nor, in my view, does he disregard the relations of power, such as the “material institutions of pet ownership” (Shukin, 2009, p. 38), that inform his meeting with the cat. On the contrary, Derrida’s encounter foregrounds how an embodied relation with the material animal is made impossible by just the institutions that Shukin names, by relations of power that are rendered first and most influentially in human language. The spectrality of the animal figure, and the way it creates and sustains structures of power based on species, is the very subject of Derrida’s discussion. This spectrality, while it enables the process of deconstruction, is in itself disturbing and problematic to Derrida, as indicated by his references to the conditions of industrial slaughter.

The clearest indication in Derrida's text that he is, through this staged encounter, engaging with a full cultural history of the animal in the Western tradition is his focus on the gaze. When Derrida encounters the animal through her "gaze," he does so as a consequence of the repression of other sense experience in the construction of the human.⁵ Derrida's encounter occurs when he is "caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal" (2008a, p. 3). His attention to the gaze does not, however, belie an unconscious anthropocentrism.⁶ The deliberateness of this focus is clear in his repetition of "animal" sense-language—"sniff the trace" (2008a, p. 32); "to track, to sniff, to trail, and to follow" (2008a, p. 33)—and by his explicit observation of the effacement of smell in philosophy and literature (2008a, p. 55). At the moment of the encounter, then, when Derrida recognizes, through "the gaze called 'animal' [...] the abyssal limit of the human" (2008a, p. 12), he indicates that what is at issue is the human itself. The gaze is what humans use, from the confines of their own sensory limitations, to imagine (as Elizabeth Costello does) a resistant place outside of language in which the animal might stand, not smelling but looking, "just to see" (Derrida, 2008a, p. 4)⁷

This desire to place oneself fully inside one's body, to experience being "full of being," can be seen in Costello's idealistic conception of animal embodiment. While Costello employs representational tropes that code animality as a form of pure embodiment, Derrida attempts to subvert them. The form of the lecture makes the lecturer's body the most "real" embodied presence in the room. Coetzee, of course, complicates this form by performing the lecture in the character of Elizabeth Costello, a performance that Laura Wright has identified as a kind of "drag" (2006, p. 100). This complication marks Coetzee's consistent preoccupation with the authority of the speaker or the focal consciousness in fiction, the voice that shapes the reading or interpretation. In *The Lives of Animals*, the layering of performances draws deliberate attention to both Coetzee's and Costello's refusal to obey the generic requirements of the philosophical lecture. As readers of the text, we can only imagine the jarring experience of hearing Elizabeth Costello, voiced by Coetzee, begin the lecture again, after eighteen pages have already elapsed: "Ladies and gentlemen,' she begins" (1999, p. 18). The insertion of such a conventional opening into this unconventional text wryly destabilizes the idea that the lecturer is present, as a speaking body who speaks for, and by extension *of*, herself/himself, something Coetzee consistently refuses to do. This layering of voices and bodies in *The Lives of Animals* functions similarly to Derrida's encounter with his cat: the spectrality of the figures (cat, Costello) destabilizes the very

idea of “full” embodiment. In the act of performance, these lecturers’ ability to appear as speaking, self-narrating bodies depends upon the spectral, undying figures of animals. Asserting that humans and animals are linked by a shared sense of embodiment merely utilizes an existing trope of animality in order to constitute the “fullness” of human experience. The existence of nonhuman animals as corporeal beings is sacrificed to the human need self-consciously to narrate individual human bodily experience, the subjective experience of living-toward-death. As Derrida argues in *The Gift of Death*, death itself confers singularity, or “irreplaceability,” upon the subject (2008b, p. 42). This human autobiographical discourse holds nonhuman animals in place, as spectral figures, so that humans can move forward in time, can experience their own singular finitudes.

Derrida’s representation of the silent animal gaze exposes the limitations of Elizabeth Costello’s construction of silence as a locus of resistance. For Derrida, the idea of the animal’s silence supports and reinforces the conceptual violence of representation, which, in turn, supports and reinforces material violence against animal bodies. From Derrida’s perspective, therefore, silence cannot function as the animal’s resistance to domination by language. The task of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is to uncover the trace of the animal *within* language, not to place animal silence on the opposite side of an abyss from human speech. The exposure of the animal’s trace reveals the sacrifice that allows the human to occur as an autobiographical (that is, a self-narrating) subject. In Derrida’s autobiographical lectures as in *The Lives of Animals*, an audience faces the silence of the decaying body. In his nudity, during the opening encounter, Derrida indicates that his body—particular, male, aging—will be a concern for this text. Towards the end of the four talks included in the volume, Derrida indicates a plan for his future work on the question of the animal; he says, “I’ll do it, I hope, if I have the time and strength” (2008a, p. 159). This awareness that time is escaping him arises directly from the sacrifice of animal finitude. Derrida indicates that to speak about the animal, in its discursive undecidability, is to be haunted by mortality: the undying animal makes possible both the lecture as a speaking-towards-death and human living-towards-death. In their bodily mortality, neither Derrida nor Costello gains a sense of the animality of their decaying bodies. Rather, it is under the silent gaze of the animal that the human body is configured as mortal, and that the apprehension of that mortality creates the finitude that is the autobiographical condition. Nonhuman animals -- out of time, out

of death, out of language -- can only, through their silent gaze, exist in a supplementary, and sacrificial, relationship to this human autobiographical narrative.

If the animal is sacrificed to an eternal undeath in order that the human may die, a corollary sacrifice can also be performed: the animal can be killed so that the human may become immortal. This relationship is the basis of what I will, drawing from Derrida's *The Gift of Death*, call the "sacrificial economy": put simply, this economy turns upon the exchange of death for life, and life for death. Thinking broadly, we can see that this unequal trade supports a vast range of relationships between human and nonhuman. Certain cultural traditions of representing human consciousness, civility, achievement, and morality depend to a certain extent on a sacrifice of the animal as an unconscious, uncivil, backward, amoral being. This definition of human life in opposition to animal life rests upon metaphorical animal death: the animal is dead to consciousness, dead to civility, dead to progress, and dead to morality. In more material ways, animal death supports human life, with meat consumption being only the most literal manifestation of a broader carnophal logo centric economy.⁸ Both meat consumption and (self-) consciousness, however, point to the ways in which animals must *live* in order for the human to die: by feeding the body (a process that necessarily recalls the body's vulnerability to decay) and by being conscious of one's own embodiment, one's own movement through a life, the human establishes its sense of finitude. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and *The Lives of Animals*, we see this latter manifestation of the sacrificial economy in two speakers whose performances connect animal silence with a human ability to experience finitude.

What happens, on the other hand, when a human being, supposedly fully self-conscious, wants to escape his own finitude, to live forever, to stop his mortal progress, to render himself undead? Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, published in the same year as *The Lives of Animals*, depicts just such a subject, a subject desperate to escape his own mortality. *Disgrace* is the story of a literature professor, David Lurie, who, after refusing to apologize for his sexual exploitation of a student, retreats from his urban life to his daughter Lucy's remote homestead. Although it is written in the third person, the narrative is focalized exclusively through Lurie, creating a claustrophobic, insular, and solipsistic perspective. To approach the intersection of silence and sacrifice in *Disgrace*, it is necessary to recognize that the protagonist David Lurie's self-consciousness is dependent upon silences. From the beginning of the novel, women are the silent figures through which Lurie constructs his image of himself. Lurie "hear[s] no female voice"

(Coetzee, 2000: 52), despite the fact that women are trying to speak to him; he does not hear the prostitute Soraya, who rebuffs his incursion into her life, nor does he hear his student Melanie, who tries to prevent him from raping her (indeed, he even refuses to read her statement). Women, nevertheless, refuse to remain silent: despite the ways in which Lurie's narrative attempts to contain and control the voices of women, they insistently interrupt the text, demonstrating the limits of Lurie's insular and solipsistic world. Silences are the foundation of Lurie's selfhood; he, however, is only interested in two silences: his own, in front of the committee, and Lucy's, on the subject of her rape. Lucy's silence is indeed a way of resisting Lurie's domination of the narrative (although, with regard to her position as a whole, her decision not to speak is more complex): she will not allow him to take her story. While Lurie views Lucy's silence as wrongheaded, he sees his own as almost heroic. In both instances, the novel problematizes the idea of silence as resistance. Lucy's silence is clearly an attempt to navigate between passivity and resistance, atonement and autonomy; her silence is not a pure act of resistance, but rather a negotiation of priorities and desires to which the tight focalization through Lurie allows us no access. Lucy's silence results from a need to reconfigure a shattered self. Lurie's silence, by contrast, allows him to maintain his autonomous self-perception, and his narrative of himself as a wronged lover; his refusal to engage in any mutually responsive conversation about his actions is a manifestation of his extreme solipsism and his desperate attachment to autonomous selfhood. His narrative allows us to see how "speech" -- with Lurie as the logocentre of the novel -- appropriates the silence of the other. When Lurie begins to encounter animals, and animal silence, then, the ground has already been laid for an exploration of the limits of the human sympathetic imagination in relationships in which one party is voiced and the other is silent.

Lurie's decaying body obsesses him: he views himself as becoming "unlovely" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 44) and "old" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 190). One of the central questions of *Disgrace* is clearly whether Lurie will accept the fact of his embodiment, whether he can accept the movement of the autobiographical narrative by learning how to die. Citing the change in Lurie's physical and material life, much of the criticism of *Disgrace* relies on an equation of animality with abjection: Lurie, through the "reduction" of his circumstances, becomes increasingly abject, until he has "nothing," a fact that, in turn, allows him to connect with his own animality and to sympathize with nonhuman animals (Boehmer, 2002, pp. 343, 346; 2006, p. 137; Durrant, 2006,

p. 129). This reading rests, however, on some problematic ground. First, Lurie in no way relinquishes his position of privilege. While it is true that he is no longer a professor, that he has been physically injured, and that he has fewer material possessions than he once did, he is nevertheless still a white male in a place where, despite a (slowly and incompletely) shifting social order, white maleness is the ultimate position of power. As Boehmer (2002, p. 349) notes, David Lurie remains a subject, in the classical sense; at the end of the novel, he is still a speaking “I.”⁹ That Lurie is never “abject” is indicated by his continued hold on the narrative, colonizing and dominating the voices of others. His repeated assertion that he has been “enriched” by his relationships demonstrates, for example, his appropriation of the perspectives of women into his own narrative (Coetzee 2000, pp. 56, 70, 192). Although, as McDunnah observes, there are striking moments when his control falters (2009, p. 21), Lurie continues to guide and construct the text through its conclusion. His undeniable power over the narrative, and his position of privilege over a reader who is trapped inside his point of view, problematizes any reading of him as a figure of abjection or reduction.

This idea of reduction brings us to the second point that has been central to some interpretations of Lurie's development: the idea that an animal is reducible to a body, and any human awareness of embodiment (hunger, pain, etc.) necessarily connects to the animality of that human body. A nonhuman animal is a figure of silent bodily suffering, and Lurie, because he suffers physically, is “reduced” to an animal; this reduction is the source of what these readers see as Lurie's expanded sympathies with other species (O'Neill, 2009, p. 203; van Heerden, 2010, p. 56; Wright, 2010, p. 162). What Derrida teaches us, however, is that we should be suspicious of tropes of animality, and this idea of the body as “animal” is one of the most persistent tropes in Western culture. If Lurie sees himself becoming animalized and abject through his experience, there is no reason to trust his interpretation; he has given us enough reason to question his self-representations, despite Attridge's strange assertion that “we have no reason to doubt” Lurie's “own account” (2000, p. 104). The first act of the novel, before Lurie leaves Cape Town, clearly establishes his vice-grip on the narrative (with, as Myrtle Hooper perceives, the limited third person serving as a block to any reader response, any “you” to complement the speaking “I” [2010, p. 143]), as well as the demonstrable faults in his interpretations of other characters, especially in his encounters with Melanie Isaacs. Like Rosemary Jolly, I contend that the novel carefully avoids endorsing the “objectifying discourse” that defines the body as “animal” (2006,

p. 153). What we can see, however, is that Lurie *himself* draws the association between his own physical mortality and that of the animals around him.

Lurie, as a “city boy” (Coetzee, 2000, p. 218), has long been estranged from living animals. As Tom Herron observes, animals in the first section of the novel appear only as food and metaphors, and Lurie's narrative is not particularly attentive to them (2005, p. 475). When he moves to Lucy's farm, however, physical contact with animals is unavoidable, and animals begin to appear regularly in his line of sight. In particular, after the attack in which Lurie is burned, the dogs are killed, and Lucy is raped, Lurie becomes more attentive to the animals around him. This widening of his gaze has been read as the development of Lurie's respect for the lives of other species, and as evidence of his deeper understanding of his kinship with other animals (Aaltola, 2010, p. 129; Donovan, 2004, p. 79; Herron, 2005, pp. 471, 478; van Heerden, 2010, p. 56). The observable change in Lurie's view of other species does arise directly from the coincidence of his physical contact with animals and his experience of his own bodily vulnerability, but this shift in his thinking is not a deepening of compassion or sympathy, but rather an awakening to the possibilities of the sacrifice.

Derrida observes that “at the heart of all these discourses [through which philosophy defines the animal] *sacrifice* beats like a vital impulse” (2008a, p. 90, emphasis in original). One of the central paradoxes of the sacrificial economy is that the animal must be *unlike* the human in order to be sacrificed in place of the human, but enough *like* the human for that sacrifice to have value. This sacrificial economy emerges as the crux of both conceptual and material relationships between human and nonhuman animals in *The Lives of Animals* and *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Both texts concern representations of animals that rely upon the undecidability of the animal, upon the animal as a figure, rather than as a body. The logic of these representations then expands and extends, governing, as both Costello and Derrida note, the practices of “generation” that support intensive agriculture. David Lurie, in the urban context of the first part of *Disgrace*, is engaged with similar kinds of representation. The animal appears as object (meat) and as metaphorical figure, manifestations that both rely on the suspension of animal lives and deaths. In the rural setting of the second part of the novel, however, physical contact with animals makes animal life and death “real” for Lurie. His movement from the city to the country signifies a turn from one method of sacrificial exchange— animal life for human death—to another—animal death for human life. “Real” animals are thus folded into the sacrificial economy in a way that does not

require humans to confront their own failure of sympathy; rather, the inverse logic allows the conventional power relation between human and nonhuman to flow smoothly between urban and rural spaces. At a time when Lurie is becoming increasingly aware of his own mortality, he finds, in his exposure to animals, a way that he may be able to maintain the integrity of his selfhood. He imagines that he can perpetuate his existence as his own image of himself through the sacrifice of the animal.

It is through Lurie's relationship with dogs that the text exposes this shift in his thinking. Having once asserted that animals are categorically different from human beings, and having expressed his relationship to animals solely in terms of his carnivory, Lurie begins to believe that the dogs he helps to euthanize at Bev Shaw's clinic possess both "a body and a soul" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 161). In the clinic yard where Lurie attempts to compose an opera about Byron and his mistress Teresa, a dog whom he calls Driepoot is apparently affectionate towards him: "Arbitrarily, unconditionally, he has been adopted; the dog would die for him, he knows" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 215). Lurie's "knowledge" of the dog's devotion to him echoes his similar ascription of feelings and motivations to the novel's female characters; the convenient difference, here, is that there is no human language to resist Lurie's dominating voice.¹⁰ I would like to draw particular attention to the moment when, hearing Lurie's banjo, "the dog smacks its lips and seems *on the point of* singing too, or howling" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 215, my emphasis). Lurie asks himself if he would "dare" to "bring a dog into the piece" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 215). Something, however, stops the dog from giving voice at the crucial "point," and Lurie does not mention his interspecies opera again. In displaying the desire to sing, but not singing (or not being *allowed*, by Lurie, to sing), Lurie's dog—that is, the dog that exists in his interpretation—becomes an object fit for sacrifice.

The final scene of *Disgrace* is the subject of much critical debate. As Rita Barnard admits, this moment presents a "strenuous interpretive challenge" (2003, p. 221). Geiger compares the ending of *Disgrace* to "an open wound" (2010, p. 159); this fitting analogy calls into question any redemptive reading of Lurie's decision to euthanize (or, rather, to ask Bev to euthanize) Driepoot. It may be that, as Donovan and Barnard have argued, the death of Driepoot can be seen as an acknowledgement, on Lurie's part, of the sheer insurmountable scale of animal suffering (Barnard, 2003, p. 222; Donovan, 2004, p. 88), a reading that would align with Derrida's conclusions about sacrifice in *The Gift of Death* (2008b, p. 71). This kind of gesture,

however, does not seem consistent with Lurie as we have seen him. What *is* consistent is his appropriation of another's voice, of another's life, in service of his own desires. In sacrificing Driepoot, Lurie makes an attempt to save himself from his own mortality by asserting the substitutable finitude of the dog. Lurie brings the dog to Bev, "Bearing him in his arms like a lamb" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 219), evoking sacrifices in the Christian tradition. We should remember, in this moment, Melanie Isaacs, who has also been "borne" in Lurie's arms; her name now appears as a clear reference to Abraham's sacrificial gesture. I draw attention to this connection not to make a simple equation between Melanie and Driepoot, or exploited woman and exploited animal, but rather to demonstrate the referential texture that the novel uses to signal its ambivalence about Lurie's action, an ambivalence that complicates, if not entirely forestalls, any redemptive reading of Driepoot's death. The final words of the novel are Lurie's: "Yes, I am giving him up" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 219). Had this sentence not featured the fatal pronoun, "I," that has signaled the solipsism of Lurie's narrative, it might be argued that, in fact, he has substantially developed as an ethical being; it is clear, however, that Lurie himself, and not the dog, remains the subject of this sacrifice. Once again, we see Lurie taking over the voice and the body of the other. Driepoot's life is not Lurie's to "give up"; in fact, Lurie is not "giving up" anything in this moment. Rather, he is reasserting himself as a subject through the sacrifice of the (animal) other.

Lurie's opera does not represent an ethical opening through interspecies collaboration, an act of the sympathetic imagination, or a becoming-animal; it may suggest all of these things, but, primarily, it is another instance of Lurie's appropriation of the voice of another into his own narrative.¹¹ By bringing Driepoot to the very edge of entering human cultural representation on his own terms, by "howling," and then foreclosing the possibility of that voice, Lurie makes of the dog the perfect sacrifice that he could never quite make of the languaged female of his own species: the silence of the animal, accompanied here by the possibility of animal voice, is the condition of the entry of the animal into the sacrificial economy as Lurie has begun to perceive it. In order for a sacrifice to be meaningful, the animal object must have finitude; to have finitude, the animal must have (the potential for) language; in order to be sacrificed in the stead of the human, the animal must be (potentially) languaged but silent; these conditions are the necessary requirements for the sacrifice of Driepoot's life for Lurie's.¹²

As Marais notes, *Disgrace*, particularly through the focalization through David Lurie, demonstrates the limitation of Costello's "sympathetic imagination" (2001, p. 15). This limitation is, indeed, central to the ethic of the book, which also problematizes Costello's configuration of animal silence as a form of resistance by foregrounding the way in which Lurie appropriates the silences of others. In *Disgrace*, no easy opposition distinguishes silence from speech. Inside Lurie's consciousness, those who speak (like Melanie) can be silenced, and those who are silent (like Lucy) can be made to "speak" through his interpretation of their silence. Through this representation Lurie's dominance of the narrative displays the entrenchment of certain forms of privilege, despite the changed social structures of the "new" South Africa; in *Disgrace*, there is still no autonomous female or animal voice. This representation amounts to a powerful social critique as soon as we recognize that the principal ethical movement here is not the master narrative of Lurie's "development," but rather the momentary interruptions of all of those imperfectly silenced non-Luries who introduce fissures into his narrative control. Coetzee is not a writer who is particularly interested in redemption, or in teleological forms of character development. It is therefore surprising that David Lurie has so often been read as someone who "develops." Undoubtedly he changes in some respects, but the reader observes the change within the enclosure of Lurie's own perspective.

This more critical assessment of David Lurie complicates previous readings that to different extents actually adopt Lurie's perspective when interpreting the novel.¹³ To question the extent of David Lurie's moral awakening, redemption, or "state of grace" (Attridge, 2000, p. 112) at the end of his narrative is not to empty the novel of its ethical content; rather, it is to decentre Lurie as the text's ethical focus. This move is a crucial one, and its necessity is everywhere indicated throughout the course of the novel in the narratives to which we never have access (Melanie's statement; Lucy's experience of the rape; Driepoot's "song"). Lucy gives us a key to interpreting the novel when she tells David, "You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 198). Lucy seems to speak, here, for all of the others, both human and nonhuman, who have "enriched" Lurie's narrative. She indicates the proliferation of possible stories, the sheer multiplicity of voices, that Lurie chooses to keep silent.¹⁴ Lucy's own insistent use of the pronoun "I" possibly indicates a parallel

solipsism in her own narrative. Particularly in the context of their discussion of Lucy's pregnancy, however, Lucy's use of first-person appears as an assertion *against* Lurie's dominant "I," and, used quite consciously on Lucy's part, against the ethical impoverishment of Lurie's perspective. The material point is that we do not get more than a glimpse into the functioning of Lucy's "I" as a narrative centre before Lurie forecloses this possibility, calling it an "eruption" (Coetzee, 200, p. 198). He immediately cuts off her attempt to assert her own subject when he tells her, "That's enough, Lucy" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 198). What *Disgrace* suggests is that, despite the end of apartheid, despite the change in social structures, despite the emphasis on truth-telling and confession, the white male is still casting himself as "the main character" in the narrative of the nation, and he still attempts to dominate all other voices with his version of events. This entrenched privilege allows David Lurie to position himself as a victim, denying both his position of privilege and his anxiety over that position's new instability. He maintains the integrity of his self-construction by silencing all other voices, sacrificing them to the dominating speech of the white, male, carnophallogocentric subject.

When Elizabeth Costello speaks of the confrontation with animal silence, she envisions that silence as a form of resistance to human oppression. Derrida's lectures demonstrate, however, that silence itself has been appropriated by philosophical discourse to contain the animal within a sacrificial economy: silence renders the animal paradoxically deathless and, when the possibility of language is present, sacrificeable. In this doubled and contradictory relation to death, the animal can function either to bolster the immortality of the human subject, or to allow that subject the experience of finitude, access to the autobiographical narrative of living and dying, and the promise of a recognizable death. Derrida's challenge to Elizabeth Costello's conception of animal silence as a form of resistance is affectingly realized in the narrative of *Disgrace*, in which the speaking subject's power over the silent other is encapsulated in Driepoot's sacrificial death. In *Disgrace*, nonhuman animals indicate the ethical potential that occurs between silence and speech, between the constructs of pure embodiment and pure consciousness; only by interrupting the economics of sacrificial exchange that appropriate both the voice and the silence of the other (in *Disgrace*, both nonhuman and female) can entrenched relations of power, based on race, gender, species, ability, and other categorical constructs be exposed and challenged. By thoroughly challenging the concepts of language and embodiment that so rigidly separate human from nonhuman in ways that serve human privilege, we can locate

the potential for a new ethical relation between animal and human, a new relation that the material conditions referenced in each of these texts render both necessary and urgent.

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Notes

- ¹ Derrida refers to an "economy of sacrifice" throughout *The Gift of Death* (2008b, pp. 10, 94).
- ² As Julietta Singh also suggests in her recent article on listening and disciplinarity in *The Lives of Animals*.
- ³ As Nicole Shukin observes, in the end Lippit seems actually to endorse this idea (Shukin 2009, p. 41).
- ⁴ Of course, this interpretation presupposes a highly figurative understanding of the relationships between human and animal; the link between being an exploited animal and being a famous author is nonexistent in material terms. The text fully engages with this metaphorical connection, however. For example, President Garrard concludes the first day's presentation with the words: "Much food for thought. We look forward to tomorrow's offering" (Coetzee 1999, p. 45), evoking both the consumption and sacrifice of Elizabeth Costello.
- ⁵ In addition to Derrida himself (2008a, p. 55), Cary Wolfe also discusses this repression in the Freudian definition of the human at some length (2003, pp. 2-3). For Wolfe, it is necessary that we "recast the figure of vision" and "resituate it as only one sense among many in a more general -- and not necessarily human -- bodily sensorium" (2003, p. 3). Like Costello, then, Wolfe sees a productive anti-anthropocentrism in a concept of the fully embodied being (whether human or nonhuman); he does not, however, propose any escape from the fact that just such a concept of embodiment has been a constitutive part of speciesist discourse in the West.
- ⁶ This text has come in for criticism, particularly for Derrida's seeming attachment to a boundary between animal and human. Matthew Calarco finds Derrida's reassertion of this boundary both "dogmatic" and "puzzling" (2008, p. 145). It is indeed a strange moment when Derrida claims that "[e]verybody agrees on this [the existence of the animal-human boundary]; discussion is closed in advance; one would have to be more asinine than any beast [...] to think otherwise" (2008a, p. 30). This departure from his habitual style of thinking (what question is ever "closed in advance" for Derrida?), however, indicates that deliberate attention is being drawn to this moment. Derrida is at work in this text thoroughly destabilizing the meanings of "asinine" and "beast," and is engaging with *figures* that are *called* "animal" and "human," rather than actual living beings. Keeping all this in mind complicates, I think, the anthropocentrism of this statement.
- ⁷ John Berger suggests a complex relation to the animal gaze, one in which the state of being seen by the nonhuman animal has a certain power to "surprise" the human (1980, p. 5).

Nevertheless, any focus on the gaze, because of its limitation to the most privileged human sense apparatus, remains anthropocentric.

- ⁸ Derrida coins the term "carnophallogocentrism" in the interview "Eating Well" (Derrida, 1991).
- ⁹ This is one reason that I find readings that suggest that Lurie "loses himself" (Marais, 2001, p. 11) unconvincing. The fact that Lurie maintains his status as a subject also calls into question the idea that his condition of disgrace can be figured as a becoming-animal, as Tom Herron's interpretation suggests (2005, pp. 471, 482).
- ¹⁰ As in the case of Lurie's claims about the novel's female characters, some critics also accept that Lurie is accurately reporting the emotions of Driepoot (for example, van Heerden, 2010: 57). I am not questioning the fact that dogs can communicate their emotions in ways that humans can understand; rather, I am entirely sceptical of David Lurie as a recorder of the interior lives of others.
- ¹¹ Calina Ciobanu's recent essay argues that the interspecies opera opens the possibility of posthumanist representation in the novel, and provides a lens through which to read Lurie's ethical change (2012, p. 682). While this reading is a sensitive and interesting one, it does not take into account that Driepoot does not, in fact, lend his voice to the opera.
- ¹² This moment recalls Agamben's reading of Hegel, which suggests that human language arises not from animal silence, but from the animal voice as it can only articulate itself in the moment of death (1991, p. 45). Agamben examines another philosophical strain of thinking about the nonhuman animal's relation to death and to language, one that, again, requires the sacrifice of the animal.
- ¹³ Examples include Attridge's claims that the committee is "puritanical" and "moralistic" (2000, p. 102), and that Lurie's coercive relationship with Melanie is "a singular erotic experience" (2000, p. 117), van Heerden's view that Melanie is "ignorant" and that Lurie tries "to initiate her into a deeper appreciation of art" (2010, p. 48), and Marais's contention that Lurie becomes Lucy's "keeper" (2001, p. 11).
- ¹⁴ Lucy's statement also goes some way towards disproving Hooper's claim that the novel uncritically adopts or endorses Lurie's perspective, particularly with regard to the female characters (Hooper 2010, pp. 140, 142-143).

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