

THE MYTH OF THE CRIMINAL AND ANIMAL SUBJECTHOOD
IN J. M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*

by

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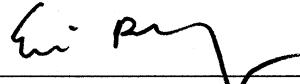
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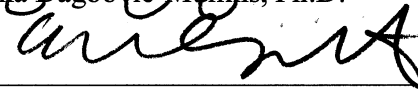
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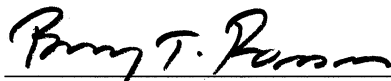
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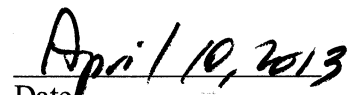
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ABSTRACT

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J. M. Coetzee's brutal novel *Disgrace* questions popular understandings of criminality and victimhood by establishing parallels between its various characters and their actions. Through close reading of Coetzee's descriptions of protagonist David Lurie's behaviors and attitudes towards women, non-human animals, and people of color compared with descriptions of the mysterious trio of men who rape Lurie's daughter and coldly kill the dogs in her kennels, I argue that the line *Disgrace* draws between Lurie and these men is deliberately flimsy, ultimately all but disappearing if we look closely enough at their behaviors and descriptions rather than their justifications. I also argue that the novel's perpetrators rely upon archetypal "rapist" and "criminal" constructs, resulting in an inability for them to ever accurately address their own crimes, despite Coetzee's descriptive parallels. Ultimately, I read *Disgrace* as suggesting that there can be no resolution for violence so long as these mythical archetypes persist.

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AN INTRODUCTION

J.M Coetzee confronts brutality head on in *Disgrace*, his post-apartheid novel of wreckage and loss. This thesis will examine the ways that *Disgrace* speaks to how rape, murder, euthanasia, and other forms of violence—both against humans and nonhuman animals—are validated and perpetuated through mythic images of criminality that serve to displace responsibility, thusly preventing resolution, in situations of violence and victimization. This is apparent through the many parallels throughout the novel, especially those concerning rape and the killing of dogs.

The protagonist of *Disgrace* is David Lurie, a white South African professor of literature who loses his job amid a scandal of sexual harassment. Coetzee utilizes Lurie to create a critique of gendered and racialized violence as well as of nonhuman animal/human violence. Through his actions and through the narrative justifications, Lurie regularly behaves in ways that are textually and situationally similar to ways that he berates others for behaving. Lurie is not, however, merely a hypocritical protagonist; he is the catalyst through which Coetzee critiques the tendency to oversimplify the motives of others while overcomplicating our own, often to the degree that we cannot see our own wrongs, stifling any chance for resolution.

Critics often read *Disgrace* as the story of a deeply flawed protagonist who nevertheless experiences a type of moral growth by the novel's end. Mike Marais argues that "the end of the novel . . . suggests not a failure but a beginning" ("Impossible" 12). Tom Herron is less positive, but sees change in Lurie's character

regardless: “Coetzee’s texts discourage readings that would seem to endorse such fulsome categories as growth and transformation. But something does happen to David, something is kindled in him and that change has something to do with his increasing engagement with animals” (474). However, my reading of the text is perhaps more bleak than either of these, as I ultimately see the novel as one intent on portraying a very deliberate lack of progress merely cloaked in the language of change. Lurie’s final interaction with a dog at the novel’s end, as I will discuss in detail in chapter two, is regressive, specifically quashing any ideas of growth or redemption. *Disgrace* offers no solution to the violence that permeates the entire novel, instead working to expose the problem itself.

The “problem” to which I refer might seem inevitable given the pervasiveness of individualism in modern society: a clash of blame and responsibility, or the tendency to fault others and excuse oneself without making critical inquiry into the possible motives of others or into the flaws in one’s own motives. I identify the “criminal” archetype as the central other-figure against which Lurie defines himself—perhaps even more so than through differences of gender, race, sexuality, and species. Although these issues are all tied up together, and Lurie struggles to identify with anyone, he works hardest to maintain the most distance from criminality. In society, there is “a never-ending supply of blamable scapegoats; the dishonest, inhumane, disorderly criminal ‘Other’ to society’s truthful, humane, orderly ‘self’” (Holloway and Jefferson 260). *Disgrace* critiques this tendency, yet it also confirms and partially validates it. The myth of a criminal-type, or the idea that only a certain sort of person is capable of committing a crime contributes greatly to the corruption and inefficiency of legal systems, both those

portrayed in *Disgrace* and those in the real world. These pervasive images of the criminal-type create chaos in public opinion, resulting in the de facto innocence of anyone who does not fit the mold, and conversely, the de facto guilt of anyone who does. When Lurie's daughter Lucy is gang-raped, the perpetrators are two unnamed black men and a young neighbor-boy named Pollux, who is also black. In this dynamic, Coetzee creates, especially in the two unnamed of the men, characters with no depth: they terrorize, but that is all they do. These two unnamed characters are the embodiment of the criminal-type myth set up to contrast Lurie's complex characterization and motives.

Pollux serves as a small crack in this formula, where Coetzee's critique is perhaps the most obvious: Pollux clearly has an individual experience, but it is always just out of reach of the reader's understanding. We cannot fully access Pollux or his motives, but we are made aware that there *is* something to know. It is through the existence of Pollux, who lies somewhere in this gray space between flat and round character, that I see the strongest evidence that *Disgrace* makes this critique of the "criminal"/"law-abiding" binary. Lurie and the two strangers exist at extremes: Lurie is a richly complex character who is constantly rationalizing his actions. The two strangers are mute, invisible myths. Pollux is the middle ground, the uncertainty, and the ambiguity. Regardless, Pollux is still situated further to the "myth" side of this apparent dichotomy, suggesting that it may not be possible to break down this barrier; it may be all but inevitable.

Likewise, *Disgrace* highlights the failure of legal and authoritative institutions to solve, address, or limit violence. I am broadly concerned with the definitions that are

commonly ascribed to terms like “criminal,” “crime,” and perhaps most abstractly, “justice.” As Jacques Derrida argues in “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority,” “justice” as it is codified under the law is not the same as justice in and of itself, the existence of which we cannot even be certain. The “justice” that the law purports to enforce is instead a form of violence, and it cannot exist without a presupposing of authority. In order for a governing body to exist, it must in some way exert its power initially by ambiguous means: “the operation that amounts to the founding, inaugurating, justifying law, to *making law*, would consist of a *coup de force*, or a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is not just nor unjust” (“Force” 241). This can be seen not only in the great legally-sanctioned injustices of history like the Holocaust and apartheid, but also in the systems that predate and follow them.

In the wake of apartheid’s end, the South African government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address the atrocities of apartheid. Though there have been many changes to South Africa’s government since the end of apartheid, the assumed authority in South Africa remains essentially the same. It is the assumed authority of the South African government that both allows apartheid and subsequently abolishes it—despite significant changes in the government, despite revolution, the system remains largely the same in terms of organization and hierarchy, and fully dependent on the initial establishment of its authority. This is the rule of law that, as Derrida describes, “is not justice. Laws are not just in as much as they are laws. One does not obey them because they are just but because they have authority” (“Force” 240). It is through this authority, which establishes itself above all other possible

interpretations of justice, and through the legal understandings of rape and of animal rights, that the public accepts this incongruence in law. Just as the South African government is the authority that both creates and abolishes apartheid, governmental authorities worldwide simultaneously allow and prohibit variations of what are essentially the same activities. *Disgrace* pays close attention to rape and the killing of nonhuman animals in this regard.

Derrida further argues that while the law can be deconstructed, as can what the law defines as “justice,” actual justice cannot be:

In the structure I am describing here, law is essentially *deconstructible* . . . its ultimate foundation is by definition unfounded. The fact that law is deconstructible is not bad news . . . But the paradox that I would like to submit for discussion is the following: it is this deconstructible structure of law, if you prefer, of justice as law, that also ensures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exist, outside or beyond the law, is not deconstructible . . . *Deconstruction is justice.* (“Force” 242-3)

In stating that the law’s “ultimate foundation is by definition unfounded” (“Force” 242), Derrida asserts that governmental authority is, essentially, an arbitrary assignment of power based on this founding act of violence. It is the process of deconstruction of existing laws, Derrida goes on to argue, that allows those laws to change and adapt (for apartheid to be brought to an end, for example). This is the process by which laws are deemed—rightly or not—as just or unjust, and it is this process which constitutes the possibility of justice, though none of these results can itself be accurately deemed just

or unjust (“Force” 242). Derrida’s understanding of justice is apt for application to *Disgrace* given apartheid’s impact on the law in South Africa as well as the deconstructive possibilities of the many parallels in the novel.

The first of these parallels is perhaps the most overt, as it has been established by critics such as Jon Kertzer. It is the parallel of Lurie’s sexual encounter with Melanie and Lucy’s gang-rape at the hands of three stranger-intruders. I will use the word “rape” to refer to both scenes in *Disgrace*. In calling the former a “rape,” I am articulating its key similarities to the apparently more straightforward rape of Lucy. It ultimately may not matter not if I can convince my readers that this is scene be called a “rape” so much as I prove that Lurie’s behavior is victimizing of Melanie in the same manner that Lucy’s rapists victimize her, and that the text supports this reading. It is all but universally agreed that Lucy is raped, and I can therefore use the word to describe that scene without needing to defend my use of it. I question the certainty with which we speak of Lucy’s experience as well as the uncertainty with which most scholars speak of Melanie’s. As I will describe in chapter one, Lucy’s rape is ambiguous at least to the degree that Melanie’s is. As Irina Anderson and Kathy Doherty argue in *Accounting for Rape*, “victim-hood is a social creation. Definitions of what counts as ‘rape’ and who is to be treated as a ‘genuine’ victim—innocent rather than accountable—are constructed in discourse and practices that reflect the social, political, and cultural conditions of society” (5). Because I am arguing that the similarities between these scenes are generally ignored in favor of the differences, it is then very important that I use the same language to describe them to avoid perpetuating this.

Feminist scholars and others have debated the definition of “rape” extensively. As Susan Brownmiller argues simply, “if a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape . . . [but] this is not and never has been the legal definition” (18). The problem with Brownmiller’s argument is that what qualifies as criminal is, by its very definition, dependant on how the law has articulated criminality. If the law does not define a given act as a crime, then that act is not “criminal,” regardless of its moral or philosophical status. What Brownmiller is clearly suggesting here is that she believes this *should* be what defines the “criminal act of rape” (18), but not how it was actually defined as of her writing. This distinction is vital, as the legal discourse of a given crime shapes how society views that crime, or whether it is viewed as criminal at all. Many have described rape primarily as an act of violence. However, as Catharine MacKinnon describes it, “so long as we say that [rape is an abuse] of violence, not sex, we fail to criticize what has been made of *sex*, what has been done to us *through* sex, because we leave the line between rape and intercourse . . . right where it is” (86-87). MacKinnon articulates that rape should be read as both violence *and* sex, and not as exclusively either-or. Therefore, though we cannot separate the rapes in *Disgrace* from the violence therein, the importance of the role of sex should also not be ignored.

As Frantz Fanon describes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, rape has been used extensively as a tool of oppression by colonizers. Fanon describes the story of an Algerian woman raped by French colonizers, who say to her afterwards, ““if you ever see that bastard your husband again, don’t you forget to tell him what we did to you”” (186). Fanon specifically describes the pain caused by the rape as it creates anxiety in

the woman's husband. Rape, then, is described by Fanon as a tool of "colonizing" every aspect of a man's life, including his sexuality and his wife. Likewise, in South Africa, rape has been used in much the same way by the white colonizers against the Native population. Fanon's description of rape is both problematic and typical—rape, seen not primarily as a crime against a woman, is used as a tool of oppression against a man or a community. This focus on rape as a tool of colonization cannot be considered without due focus on the use of rape as a tool of patriarchy, a perspective largely ignored by Fanon but more accurately described by Brownmiller: "Rape [as a crime] entered the law through the back door, as it were, as a property crime of man against man. Woman, of course, was viewed as the property" (18). As Gareth Cornwell argues, Melanie's probable status as a woman who is South African "coloured," causes her encounter with Lurie to be "contextualized within the several centuries of colonial history in which white men debauched black women with impunity" (315). Both of these forms of oppression are key to *Disgrace*.

While Melanie's race is never explicitly stated in *Disgrace*, there are several clues that she is not white. Her only physical description is ambiguous: "She is small and thin, with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes" (Coetzee 11). Coetzee's descriptive focus on Melanie's dark hair and eyes marks her as distinct from white South Africans of North-West European heritage, like Lurie and Lucy. Lurie refers to Melanie as "the dark one" (Coetzee 18) and Melanie's boyfriend warns Lurie to "stay with [his] own kind" (Coetzee 194). Cornwell and others have read her this way; this causes Lurie's rape of Melanie mirrors Lucy's attack all the more—Lurie becomes fully complicit in the history that he later blames for Lucy's rape.

As Angela Davis explains in “Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist,” this white-on-black sexual violence is often hidden and is easily rationalized by the perpetrators:

Of course, the sexual abuse of Black women has not always manifested itself in such open and public violence. There has been a daily drama of racism enacted in the countless anonymous encounters between Black women and their white abusers—men convinced that their acts were only natural. (Davis 176)

Lurie certainly rationalized his rape of Melanie as “natural,” or as an act of nature, when he compares his sexual instincts to that of a dog who is simply driven by an innate and unchangeable need to mate.¹ For this reason, Melanie’s race is ambiguous as it seems unimportant to Lurie. Conversely, Lurie sees race as vital to Lucy’s rape, which he describes as “history speaking through [the rapists]” (Coetzee 156), as they are black—undoubtedly victims of apartheid policy—and Lucy is white. He sees his behavior, then, as somehow justified as natural, as an act of pure lust, while theirs is a voluntary act of revenge. This perverted narrative allows him to defend his own actions, and certainly to see them as fully distinct from what happens to his daughter.

As much as I argue that Coetzee establishes parallels that disprove and invalidate these myths, I must admit that the text also confirms them through simple plot constructions, and casual readers may read these stereotypes uncritically. As much as “the myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing

¹ This will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

justifications,” (Davis 173) the myth also persists even when not used as an excuse for violence or retaliation, but also in regards to less overt forms of racial oppression. Though apartheid has ended, the myth of the black rapist persists, while no such myth exists for a specifically white rapist, despite the rampant history of sexual violence in South Africa committed by white men. For Lucy, her rape is not a myth, but her rapists *are*—she and her father guess at their motives and construct stories that are both flat and stereotypical. Lucy argues that believes that “they are rapists first and foremost. Stealing things is just incidental” (Coetzee 158). Though Lucy does accept this uncertainly, both she and Lurie fill it in what they do not know with their own narrative. Lucy’s rapists are blank canvases, but they are also symbols. To Lucy and Lurie, they are not individuals, but rather they are representations of personal trauma and social strife. Neither Lucy nor Lurie feel a need to understand these men or their motives, either because, in Lurie’s case, he already believes he does, or in Lucy’s case, because she believes there is nothing to know.

Despite my use of the term “rape,” I do not ultimately aim to answer questions about how we ought to define rape. Instead, I find fault with the dichotomous thinking that labels certain acts so easily as “not rape” while others are clearly marked as “rape,” even when the details of the situation are limited. This divide is not merely a problem with regards to rape, but it permeates all modern criminal justice institutions and legal institutions. Instead, I am critiquing the image of a “rapist” that is common in popular culture, including in *Disgrace*. By a “rapist” image, I mean the idea held that a “rapist” is a particular kind of person, or that the committing of a rape is done in a particular way and involves a particular character or intent. This myth exists both in the obvious

but also in the subtext of modern culture. David Lurie uses this image as a way to deflect responsibility—if he does not see himself as someone who fits the “rapist” image, he cannot accept that he is capable of rape, and he therefore does not have anything to atone for.

A key problem caused by the prominence of this myth is that virtually *no one* sees oneself in this role because it is too simplistic to reflect any real person. As Catharine MacKinnon describes, even those convicted of rape and imprisoned tend to deny what they have done:

Men who are in prison for rape think it’s the dumbest thing that ever happened . . . It isn’t just a miscarriage of justice; they were put in jail for something very little different from what most men do most of the time and call it sex. The only difference is they got caught. That view is nonremorseful and not rehabilitative. It may also be true. (88)

This view directly halts the possibility of change, because the perpetrator refuses to acknowledge that he has done anything wrong. Though the “rapist” myth is more specific than the “criminal” myth, there is much overlap between the two. The criminal myth does not necessarily coincide with sexual violence, but certainly involves violence and dishonesty. This image of a mythic rapist is unfortunately also perpetuated by much of the feminist discourse on the rape. MacKinnon’s quote above, while useful to describe the nonremorseful displacement of blame, nevertheless creates and confirms a stereotype of how an imprisoned rapist feels, allowing for one who does not see himself in that description to opt out entirely.

Beyond the issue of sexual violence, in chapter two, I will address the issue of nonhuman animals that is also present in *Disgrace*. Similarly to how Coetzee portrays crime in regards to rape and other forms of violence, he also focuses on violence against nonhuman animals in general—and dogs in particular—in the novel. Dogs are killed in two distinct ways in the novel: by gunfire through the kennel cages of Lucy’s farm (by the same men who rape Lucy) and by euthanasia in a small-town shelter (by David Lurie and a local woman named Bev Shaw). These deaths are paralleled in the novel. However, Lurie divides them into the acceptably humane and brutally horrific, seemingly without much thought. However, the text invites us to compare these deaths and to see the fundamental ways in which they are similar.

Jacques Derrida further argues in “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority” that animals cannot be subjects of the law because they cannot understand it: “What one confusedly calls ‘animal,’ . . . is not a subject of the law or of right . . . The opposition between just and unjust has no meaning as far as it is concerned” (246-7). Of course, this is accurate, insofar as one can say that the dogs killed in both circumstances in *Disgrace* do not appear to have an understanding of human concepts of *law* or *justice*, nor can they speak and demand consideration under such laws. And, perhaps more importantly, they cannot be expected to *follow* these laws. However, I argue that the fact that animals cannot be expected to understand law ought not mean they cannot be *subjects* of human law as victims. Why does the law draw a distinction—one that appears inevitable to Derrida—between the constitution of suffering and subjectivity?

My reading of *Disgrace* is heavily influenced by Gary Francione’s critique of the property status of nonhuman animals. In this sense, Derrida has ignored the ways

that animals are *already* subjects of the law. Perhaps the rhetoric of “rights” is not entirely appropriate for a solution, but as Francione explains, existing animal-rights laws serve primarily to protect the continued property status of animals:

The property status of animals renders meaningless any balancing that is supposedly required under the humane treatment principle or animal welfare laws, because what we really balance are the interests of property owners against the interests of their animal property . . .

Although we claim to recognize that we may prefer animal interests over human interests only when there is a conflict of interests, there is always a conflict between the interests of property owners who want to use their property and the interests of their animal property. The human property interest will almost always prevail . . . There really is no choice to be made between the human and the animal interest because the choice has already been predetermined by the property status of the animal.

(“Property or Persons” 117)

Therefore, any debate about how animals should be considered under the law must include an understanding of how domestic animals already are defined, ultimately, as property. Animals have not been fully separate from this status since the earliest domestications occurred.

Dogs, insofar as they associate with humans and appear to associate among themselves, are likewise constantly re-establishing power boundaries. Law, being founded as an abstraction, maintains its power even as the individuals and ideas that constitute its make-up change. Dogs, placed under human authority in the first place,

have their social structures disturbed by the new human order. Both *Disgrace*'s dogs and the dogs of the real world are kept in kennels, shelters, and other cages. As Michel Foucault asks, "is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (*Discipline and Punish* 228). *Disgrace* focuses on the kennel and the animal shelter as the overwhelmingly dominant experience for domesticated dogs. The kennel and the shelter, both, not surprisingly, resemble the prisons and the schools to which Foucault refers, with individual cages blocked in neat rows. The dogs shot by the attackers have no escape from their kennels, though Lucy describes them as "watchdogs, all of them" (Coetzee 61), implying their ability to defend themselves and Lucy, a claim which proves itself absurd once the attackers come face to face with the kenneled dogs. Instead, the dogs, caged by Lucy, are shot execution-style with no chance to defend themselves. The kennel, then, operates as a symbol of the human-animal relationship. There is no question of who holds the authority, even if they are not expected to understand the reasons for that authority, because the law is written to benefit only humans.

Shelters are therefore not sites designed primarily to protect these animals, but to manage and process them, despite the genuine emotional bond that shelter workers may form with the animals. As Clare Palmer describes in "Killing Animals in Animal Shelters," "alongside the social recognition of cats and dogs as companions and family members lies the social treatment of them as expendable individuals that can be killed en masse at human will—or even whim" (171). Even in *Disgrace*, Lurie seems to find a sense of kinship with the dogs he helps to kill. It is my argument that this kinship is a façade, and is intended to represent humanity's warped relationship with these

companion animals. As Francione argues, the law treats animal welfare seriously only when the animal's suffering is not considered "useful":

The very same act may be either protected or prohibited depending only on whether it is part of an accepted institution of animal exploitation. If someone kills a cat in a microwave, sets a dog on fire, allows the body temperature of a rabbit to rise to the point of a heat stroke, severs the heads of conscious animals, or allows animals to suffer untreated serious illnesses, the conduct may violate the anticruelty laws. But if a researcher engages in the exact same conduct as a part of an experiment . . . the conduct is protected by the law because the researcher is supposedly using the animal to generate a benefit. ("Property or Persons" 119-120)

The animals in *Disgrace*, even when described sympathetically, always serve as ends to human needs. Legally, the men who shoot the dogs in Lucy's kennels have committed a crime—they've killed *wanted* dogs, dogs that fill human need, dogs that have humans who will miss them. In short, they are property, and their deaths mark the legal destruction of that property, and thus a crime. When Lurie recounts the story of the attack to the police, the killed dogs are mentioned casually after such things as stolen "money, clothes, a television set, a CD player, a rifle" (Coetzee 108), all forms of property. Conversely, Lurie and Bev Shaw's action of euthanasia is both legally sanctioned and widely believed to be the humane solution to the overpopulation of domestic animals that humans are unable to care for—that is, these dogs belong to no one, as they cannot belong to themselves under the law. However, by juxtaposing these

deaths with those of the dogs shot in Lucy's kennels, Coetzee is focusing on the absurdity of this false binary: The actions are, as far as we can know, the same for the dogs, who die regardless. The emotional response the dogs display prior to their deaths places them in stark contrast in the non-sentient items listed in Lurie's complaint regarding stolen goods.

By means of close reading of Coetzee's text, I will show that the line *Disgrace* draws between Lurie and the trio of men who attack him and his daughter is deliberately flimsy, ultimately all but disappearing if we look closely enough at their behaviors and descriptions rather than their justifications. I also argue that the novel's perpetrators rely upon a "rapist" and "criminal" constructs, resulting in an inability for them to ever address their own actions, despite Coetzee's descriptive parallels. Likewise, the deliberate killing of dogs are treated differently depending on the method and intent of the killing. Ultimately, I read *Disgrace* as suggesting that there can be no resolution for violence so long as these myths persist.

CHAPTER ONE

CRIMINAL MIRROR: RAPE & THE DEFLECTION OF BLAME

The two rapes at the heart of Coetzee's text are presented as not only thematically parallel, but also as potentially ethically similar. If we look closely enough at the characters' behaviors and descriptions rather than their justifications, we can see that these parallels reveal how violence is perpetrated and perpetuated under the guise of self-justifications. The novel's perpetrators, especially protagonist David Lurie, rely upon archetypal "criminal" constructs which are both enforced by society at large and heavily ingrained in the individual psyche, resulting in an inability for them to ever accurately address their own violence as such. This happens even in the face of Coetzee's descriptive discrediting of these constructs. *Disgrace* suggests that judging an act by the person (as Lurie does for himself and Petrus does for Pollux) or the person by the act (as Lurie does of the three men) perpetuates violence rather than solves it.

David Lurie's position relative to these rapes is essential. In the first rape, Lurie is a perpetrator, and in the second, he is a witness and concerned father. Although social norms may cause readers to respond to these two rapes very differently, *Disgrace* is set up in a way that aims to avoid this kind of reading. By constructing a stark divide between the black stranger-criminal and himself, David Lurie protects himself from having to take responsibility for his own acts of violence or from even acknowledging

their existence. This divide is maintained through a reliance on an unquestioned belief in the myth that a rapist is a particular type of person. *Disgrace* suggests that until we can acknowledge our crimes irrespective of the crimes of others, there can be no resolution that satisfies the victim nor prevents further violence.

As much as *Disgrace* is a response to the end of apartheid in South Africa, so too is it a response to a public South African fear of and obsession with crime: “There seems to be more to the public obsession with criminality and disorder than the mere *fact* of its reality. South Africans of all stripes are also captivated by *images* of crime and policing” (Comaroff 273). For as much as *Disgrace* questions the idea of criminality, it also indulges in it by confirming the stereotypes that it works to tear down. Lurie regularly finds himself at odds with those who are unlike him—people of color, women, small-town residents, nonhuman animals. *Disgrace* reveals the way that these stereotypes are accompanied by a “criminal” archetype. Because this stereotype is one that must be read as entirely separate from the self, it is therefore non-existent, as no one will assign it to oneself.

Lurie is, by virtue of being the protagonist of the novel as well as by virtue of the narrative structure (though told in third person, Lurie’s consciousness is the focus), a complex and layered character. His sexual encounters throughout the novel are nuanced, as the reader has access to his concerns and thoughts. When David Lurie relentlessly pursues Melanie, a twenty-year-old student in an undergraduate literature course he teaches, he finds that her response to his advances is initially apathetic. As readers, we know Melanie only as Lurie knows Melanie. While Coetzee provides little description of their first sexual encounter, he offers more detail in the second.

Lurie arrives at Melanie's house uninvited and without notice following her quiet requests to be left alone, entering when she opens the door. Even Lurie knows that Melanie is "too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her" (Coetzee 24). Regardless, she *does* resist verbally, saying "'No, not now!'" (Coetzee 25)—the exclamation point overtly emphasizing the conviction with which she speaks. Despite the fact that Melanie does not resist physically, she never rescinds her refusal to consent. As Patrick Lenta argues of this scene, "submission by a victim to the threat of sufficient force to overcome resistance is not equivalent to consent" (9). Lurie's physical actions are aggressive—he picks her up and carries her even after she rejects his advances. Providing that "nothing will stop him" (Coetzee 25), we can be certain that Lurie is uninterested in Melanie's consent. Even more telling is Coetzee's description of Lurie's perception of Melanie's experience: "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away" (Coetzee 25). Given that this description is Lurie's perception of the event, it is easy to believe that the experience is at least as such for Melanie, and more importantly, that Lurie is fully aware of it. That Lurie even needs to defend his actions to himself as "not rape" suggests that he has considered the possibility that they might be. Ultimately, he pushes sex on someone who he knows deeply rejects the act. At this point in the novel, animals exist primarily as metaphors; it is not until later that they become significant characters. Here, Lurie describes his pursuit of Melanie in purely animalistic terms—however, he does not use mating for this metaphor, but rather compares his conquest to a predator

and prey relationship. This metaphor certainly hints at the violence inherent to Lurie and Melanie's relationship. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter two, this kind of metaphor also allows Lurie to defer responsibility to describing rape as natural.

Likewise, by describing Lurie as an "intruder" (25), Coetzee clearly articulates that Lurie is as unwelcome in Melanie's home as Lucy's rapists are in hers.

As a result of his harassment of Melanie, Lurie is fired from his position at Cape Technical University and moves to the Eastern Cape to live with his daughter, Lucy, on her farm. It is there that three black men—two of whom are strangers, and one of whom turns out to be a neighbor—burglarize Lucy's home, rape Lucy, light Lurie's head on fire, and kill most of the dogs that Lucy keeps in her kennels. This rape initially appears to be much more straightforward than Melanie's rape, but the parallels between the two rapes can lead us to see these acts as more similar than we might be inclined to on first glance.

Certainly, many critics have read the two rapes in *Disgrace* as thematically parallel, but most also stress the differences between the events. Jon Kertzer suggests in "Time's Desire: Literature and the Temporality of Justice," that the two rapes in *Disgrace* ought not be read as equivalences:

The story presents two rapes, to which there are radically different responses, one operatic, the other silent . . . Coetzee avoids imposing a moral temporality on his plot, so that while there are many parallels events, they are not equivalences. For example, Lurie's burns are not punishment for his crime. Readers must resist the temptation to interpret his pain as fitting retribution, just as Lurie had scorned the ineffectual

symbolism of his tribunal. Of the two crimes, his seems the less heinous.

(286)

Here, Kertzer makes an unconvincing leap in his logic. In cautioning against reading the two rapes as similar, he assumes that doing so would coincide with the ideology of “punishment” and “retribution.” In other words, if readers see the two situations as too similar, it will inherently lead to a reading that justifies attacks on Lurie and potentially even Lucy. However, thinking of these two acts as similar does not automatically lead to this ethical outcome, nor must it lead us to reject the possibility that the parallels in *Disgrace* also contain a degree of moral equivalence. We *are* meant to be horrified by what happens to Lurie and Lucy, but not because it is so different from what we have already been exposed to, nor to, as Kertzer suggests, indulge the reader in revenge, but so that we might come to ask why we are less horrified by what Lurie has done.

While Lurie faces the routine of his University’s procedures, Lucy’s rapists are unaffected by any formal charges. When Melanie files sexual harassment charges against Lurie, he refuses to play along with the University committee that tries him. In doing so, he is refusing to be treated as a criminal. Lurie rejects the process but does not reject the partial truth of his relationship with Melanie. As a result, he is fired. After Lucy’s rape, however, Lurie becomes increasingly protective of her, urging her to file a police report regarding the rape. This sudden empathy runs completely counter to how he responds when Melanie pursues formal charges against him.

Critic Graham St. John Stott notes that Lurie “refus[es] to take rape seriously when he is the perpetrator” (351), but behaves completely differently when his daughter is the victim. While Stott focuses on Lucy’s refusal to give meaning to her experience

or offer rationalizations for it, I see Lurie's opposing behavior: his almost obsessive moralizing of Lucy's situation, which serves to distance him from any possibility of responsibility associated with his treatment of Melanie. Lurie focuses on the specific circumstances of Lucy's rape, especially his chosen narrative of racial revenge, recommending that she take the course of action that he chides Melanie for taking (pursing formal charges). It is as if by behaving differently in response the actions become different. The response that Lurie takes on here is, of course, different primarily because of Lurie's position relative to the rapes. However, for Lurie, this difference (which he has created himself) is itself proof that the rapes are not similar. Likewise, Lurie's whiteness is central to his denial of culpability. As Carine M. Mardorossian argues in "Rape and the Violence of Representation in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," "the contrast in his response to each instance of sexual violence shows that it is his investment in racist ideology that allows him to do what his investment in sexist norms prevented him from doing earlier, namely, call rape 'rape'" (80). That Lucy's rapists are black—and that Lurie fears the sight of them before they do anything—only makes it that much easier for Lurie to find certainty in his narrative of what has happened to his daughter. Lurie latches onto this narrative, which Lucy wants to put behind her, and onto trying to protect her because it differentiates him from these men, who he perceives as the "real" rapists.

Lurie focuses on these differences extensively, including the lack of familiarity between Lucy and her rapists. Conversely, Lurie sees himself as intimately connected to Melanie. While Lucy's rapists are strangers, Lurie believes he has a real relationship—of whatever type—with Melanie, and that this somehow negates the possibility of rape.

When Lurie comforts a distraught Melanie, he fights the urge to say to her, “Tell Daddy what is wrong” (Coetzee 26) as she sits in his daughter’s old bed. When Melanie stays with Lurie for a short time, he worries that she is exploiting him for favoritism in his class and a place to stay—though it is more likely that she simply has nowhere else to go. However, Lurie is indeed aware that “he is the one who leads, she the one who follows” (Coetzee 28). Likewise, Lurie calls Lucy “the bride of his youth reborn” (Coetzee 86). Lurie, then, has no trouble recognizing how Melanie is like Lucy and vice versa, but he does not carry this to how he may be like Lucy’s rapists. Instead, he can sense connections only between others.

When Melanie peruses formal charges against him, Lurie assume that her “jealous boyfriend” (Coetzee 45) is behind her decision to press charges, even though he has no evidence to this beyond knowing that Melanie’s boyfriend is angry with him. Likewise, Lurie sees it as his duty to convince Lucy to press charges against her rapists. In this sense, Lurie also shares much in common with Melanie’s boyfriend, at least as Lurie imagines him. Lurie sees the decisions of the women around him as necessarily influenced by men, or in need of such influence. As Susan Brownmiller describes, “rape entered the law through the back door, as it were, as a property crime of man against man. Woman, of course, was viewed as the property” (Brownmiller 18). Lurie continues to place women amongst property:² “A risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around . . . Cars, shoes; women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them” (Coetzee 98). Women, to Lurie, remain a sort of property in need of the guidance of

² Likewise, Lurie does the same with animals, as I will discuss in chapter two.

men, and are things to be rationed. Lucy reminds Lurie of this when he asks her to file a police report: ““Let me remind you why we called [the police] in in [sic] the first place: for the sake of the insurance”“ (Coetzee 134). The police, then, are not a source of help, but rather only a means to insurance money received for lost and damaged property.

In order for Lurie to justify his moralizing of Lucy’s rape, he relies on an archetypal rapist-criminal figure. This figure lacks the depth that would be required for it to reflect any real person. Instead, it becomes something against which Lurie can compare himself. This figure is entirely imaginary but, given that Lurie does not personally know the perpetrators of Lucy’s rape, is also easy for him to believe in. The distance between Lurie and these men allows him to imagine their motives as it suits him. The narrative of *Disgrace* transfers this distance to the reader by Coetzee’s deliberate failure to describe anything from the perspective of the strangers who wreak havoc on Lucy and her farm (with the partial exception of Pollux). Because of this, they are never shown as full human beings who commit a horrible act, but rather they are defined entirely by the act. Lurie, conversely, has no such limits, as every page of the text is given to every detail of his complexities. This leaves his treatment of Melanie as only a fragment of his personhood, unlike the limited personhood he assigns to Lucy’s rapists.

Because he defines the “criminal” as the one outside himself, Lurie cannot come to imagine himself in that role. Instead, he is more apt to apply the label to the men who attack his daughter. If Lurie were to admit what he has done to Melanie, because of the myths he has invested his belief into, it would also mean accepting or changing his understanding of himself as a person. It would require him to simplify himself in a way

that he cannot—in a way that Coetzee suggests most of us cannot. He demands that Lucy report her rape to the police and that she acknowledge her status as victim, but does not question the possibility that Lucy’s rejection of this may be tied to her own understanding of what it means to be a victim, a label which she will not accept for herself in the same way that Lurie will not accept the label of rapist. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Lucy’s decision to give birth to her rapist’s child amounts to “a refusal to be raped” (21), but I would more accurately describe it as a refusal to *be seen as a rape victim*, just as Lurie refuses to *be* a rapist. Instead, she disrupts the victim narrative by embracing her fate—it is not so much a refusal to admit that something happened, but a refusal to say publically that she has *become* something different by it. Though Lurie tells Lucy that “there is not shame in being the object of a crime,” (Coetzee 111) Lucy wants to control her story and how she is perceived. Though Lurie says this to Lucy, Melanie certainly experiences shame—resentment, at least—for going forward with charges against Lurie. Lucy is aware that being perceived as a rape victim does indeed come with many social implications, and so she rejects taking on that role publically:

You want to know why I have not laid a particular charge with the police . . . The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone. (Coetzee 112)

Lucy rejects making a public spectacle of her rape because she knows that it will re-victimize her. Instead, she prefers to abandon it; however this section makes clear

that Lucy *does* recognize what has happened her. She does not deny it, she merely opts to keep it to herself.

It is important to note that Lucy's rape occurs entirely off-page. Neither Lurie nor the reader is in the room when the act takes place; it is entirely implied. Yet, we so easily use the term "rape" here, given all of our cultural ideas surrounding it, to define an event that we do not see and which is not described in any amount of detail by the participants or victim. Both scholars and casual readers agree without any meaningful exception that Lucy is raped. I do not need to defend my use of the word here, when referring to Lucy's rape, though I must defend my use of the term to describe what happens between Lurie and Melanie. The detail allows for uncertainty: experience begets complexity. The reader and Lurie both experience the immediacy, but also the nuance, of Melanie's rape. Lucy's rape, then, can be read as so straightforward in part because it cannot be read at all.

It is therefore not the actual rape scenes that are paralleled in the novel, because there is only actually one such scene. Instead, it is the surrounding events and the way that they are described. Both Lucy and Melanie respond to their rapes as if they have been similarly traumatized. Both quickly attempt to cleanse themselves: Melanie immediately "run[s] a bath" (Coetzee 25). Likewise, after Lucy's rape, Lurie finds her "wearing a bathrobe, her feet . . . bare, her hair wet" (Coetzee 97). Additionally, when Lurie is burned, he immediately runs to put water on his head: "He hangs over the toilet bowl, splashing water over his face, dousing his head" (Coetzee 96). Just as Melanie tries to "cleanse herself of it, of him" (Coetzee 25), Lucy and Lurie both respond to trauma with an immediate desire to cleanse themselves with water. This links not only

Melanie's rape to Lucy's, but also both rapes to nonsexual violence thought their connection to Lurie's burns. This parallel suggests that we read both Melanie and Lucy's rapes as not only acts of sexual violation, but as violence.

Despite these parallels, Lurie—and by extension the reader—rely on an extensive repertoire of myths and images that protect both the individual ego and the systems of exploitation to which Melanie and Lucy become victims. As suggested by Mike Marais, imagination causes more problems in *Disgrace* than it resolves:

[Many critics] assume that the Bildung which Coetzee's protagonist, David Lurie, undergoes in the course of *Disgrace* involves the successful development of a sympathetic imagination and hence the capacity to empathize with the other . . . *Disgrace* undermines, even as it installs, the possibility of this development and thereby questions the ability of the imagination to achieve what it is supposed to achieve. ("Imagination" 75-76)

Disgrace does not, then, provide any straightforward resolution to any of the key problems it proposes. As I will detail in chapter two, Lurie also does not utilize his growing relationship with animals to increase either his empathy or self-reflection. As Marais continues, "although the imagination does enable a degree of sympathy and even identification with other beings, it is located in the self and will thus always . . . be limited by the desires and antipathies of the self of which it is ultimately an emanation or expression" ("Imagination" 80). While this may be true, I wish to focus on the limitation of the imagination not only to see or sympathize with the other, but also with the self. That imagination is "located in the self" (Marais, "Imagination" 80) not only

limits the ability to truly empathize, but also the ability to view the self as other. This limitation keeps Lurie from seeing himself as Melanie or Lucy might see him. As Jean-Paul Sartre argues of encounters with others *Being and Nothingness*, “[The other] can not appear to me, as we have seen, as a unifying or regulative category of my experience since he comes to me through an encounter” (259-60). Lurie cannot position himself among any of the other characters due to his inability to see the ways in which they are interconnected. Such problems are, of course, not limited only to Lurie. Lurie is only the vehicle through which *Disgrace* exposes this problem, which is perhaps universal.

Marais further argues that the use of imagination does allow Lurie to eventually sympathize with Lucy in some respects. By extension, he suggests, this leads to some basic understanding of Melanie’s position:

In identifying with his daughter, he is discovering what it would be like to have been raped by himself. In addition, he is discovering the effect of his rape of Melanie on her family because he now finds himself in their position. Hence, after Lucy’s rape, Lurie begins to find it possible to sympathize with Melanie’s father. (“Imagination” 78)

This, however, is itself part of the problem. Lurie eventually apologizes, but it is to Melanie’s father and the rest of her family, not to her. His experience with Lucy has pained *him as her father*, and he can now begin to see how his abuse of Melanie may have hurt her father, the only one who he can manifest any understanding of. He does not really begin to sympathize with Lucy as Marais suggests. Instead, this is more of the same: Lurie experiences the pain secondhand as her father, only because he sees a

reflection of himself in him. He is still only identifying with his own position. Lurie never admits to rape, then, or even to harassment, but instead sees his fault as a “lack [of] the lyric. [He] manage[s] love too well” (Coetzee 171). Lurie is sorry for the hassle, but still denies the act, later claiming to have been “on trial for his way of life,” (Coetzee 190), still seeing himself as the victim of an elaborate and unnecessary campaign against his romanticism.

In one brief moment, after Lucy explains that Lurie could never understand her experience, Lurie does, finally, equate himself with her rapists: “He does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?” (Coetzee 160). In this moment, Lurie acknowledges that he is *capable* of rape, but he does not acknowledge that he may have already committed the act. Instead, he imagines that he is capable of even the type that he works so hard to distance himself from, but that he may not have it “in him” (Coetzee 160) to be a victim, thereby resigning him to continue to victimize others. Likewise, this section also suggests that a victim is a particular type of person, and refers to a stereotype as pervasive as the image of the rapist. Lurie sees himself as immune from possible sexual victimization, further reinforcing the idea that victims are at least partially complicit in their own victimization.

Marais also argues that Lurie’s imagination ultimately fails him, in partially the same way that I have suggested: “It follows that he must sympathize not only with Lucy, as I initially suggested, but also with Pollux . . . In order to sympathize with Lucy, Lurie must sympathize with Pollux . . . precisely because he cannot find it in himself to do so.” (Marais 82). Additionally, Lurie must sympathize with Pollux—and

the two other stranger-criminals—so that he can fully empathize first with *himself*, to discover his own acts of violence, and perhaps only then with Lucy. Lurie does attempt to imagine Pollux’s motives. Rather than bringing him closer to sympathy, this is actually what allows Lurie to *avoid* sympathizing with Pollux, to see Pollux as so removed from himself that he can intentionally overlook any common ground. Part of imagination’s real failure for Lurie is that it allows him to construct rationales that justify his behaviors. As he can imagine anything he wants to fill in the holes in the stories of others, Lurie believes the worst of them and the best of himself. His imagination is, likewise, where he configures himself as a seducer and romantic.

Lurie is obsessed with the poetics of language, as well as with the idea of being a man of romance. As critic Pamela Cooper argues, this constructed self “permit[s] Lurie to elide Melanie’s subjectivity, dispossessing her of a ‘self’ while absolving himself of responsibility for what is, effectively, a rape” (25). Lurie fancies himself a sort of Lord Byron figure, indulging in absurdly flowery language to describe his relationship with Melanie—he refers to himself as a “servant of Eros” (Coetzee 52), for example. This is a description that absolves him of all possible blame, instead placing blame upon the fates. Lurie identifies his rape of Melanie as a seduction precisely because he believes himself to be a seducer: “Lurie’s sense of sexual right rests on his mastery of the symbolism of desire and otherness entrenched within the Anglo-European aesthetic tradition” (Cooper 25). Because this tradition is so specifically Anglo-European, it implies an outsider tradition that lacks the romance Lurie believes himself to possess—without the context of poetics, Lurie’s actions must speak for

themselves. If Lurie tells himself that he is a romantic, all of his actions become romantic by virtue of the pre-existing narrative of whom he believes himself to be.

Lurie further relies on this image of Lord Byron as a defense mechanism: “He thinks of Byron. Among the legions of countesses and kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape” (Coetzee 160). Though he presents no evidence of this in Byron’s case, imagining it allows Lurie to believe that his trouble with Melanie is simply a procedural part of being a true romantic. By describing Byron’s sexual partners as women who he “pushed himself into” (Coetzee 160), Lurie portrays forcefulness—even in the face of a lack of consent—as a part of normal and romantic sexuality. The sheer number of his partners guarantees, for Lurie, that he will eventually be accused of rape, regardless of the claim’s truth. This rhetorical ploy blames the victim for considering the act a rape rather than the perpetrator for committing the act. As Susan Brownmiller argues, blaming the victim for her behavior is “part of the smoke screen that men throw up to obscure their actions” (312). This obscuring allows Lurie to see claims of rape as inevitable, given that he has already decided that some woman will eventually misinterpret his “seduction.”

Lurie’s image of a rapist has, in part, been constructed by Western culture for him since a young age:

He remembers, as a child, poring over the word *rape* in newspaper reports, trying to puzzle out what exactly it meant, wondering what the letter *p*, usually so gentle, was doing in the middle of a word held in such horror that no one would utter it aloud. In an art-book in the library there was a painting called *The Rape of the Sabine Women*: men on horseback

in skimpy Roman armour, women in gauze veils flinging their arms in the air and wailing. (Coetzee 159-60)

Western news media, culture, and art have contributed to Lurie's understanding of rape, and in this way his tendency to deflect blame and romanticize Melanie's antipathy is indicative of a larger cultural climate. As Lurie sees it, he is blameless and under the influence of a "*god who acted through [him]*" (Coetzee 89). He sees his relationship with Melanie as "not rape" (Coetzee 25), and therefore he cannot read it any other way. Stephen J. Schulhofer discusses the problem of culpability in rape in a culture where notions of consent are so often muddled:

A requirement of conscious deliberate wrongdoing, however traditional it may be for other crimes, poses a major obstacle to effective enforcement in the case of rape. The belief that many women feign reluctance or want to be sexually overpowered remains widespread among men, even if it is no longer universal. The prevalence of these attitudes renders a man's claim of mistake [as a defense against accusations of rape] at once deeply disturbing and all too credible. In many acquaintance-rape situations, such attitudes all but guarantee at least a reasonable doubt about whether the man made a mistake. (257)

Lurie's attitudes towards sex and rape, then, are not especially unique, but rather are culturally and even legally re-enforced. This ambiguity about what constitutes consensual sex is confounded by the seemingly straightforward nature of rapes committed by strangers with the use of physical force. Under pressure from Ferodia Rassool, who accuses him of abuse as part of the committee trying Lurie, Lurie rejects

the word immediately. In imagining what he would consider abuse, Lurie wonders what Rassool thinks of him: “What does she see, when she looks at him . . . a great thick-boned male bearing down a girl-child, a huge hand stifling her cries? How absurd!” (Coetzee 53) Here, Lurie directly equates rape (and abuse) with physical force to a degree just beyond his own behavior. Such deflecting perpetuates his insistence that he is blameless.

In *Disgrace*, though, Lurie is not the only character who falls victim to these kinds of cultural assumptions. Instead, in crime-obsessed South Africa, there is “a never-ending supply of blamable scapegoats; the dishonest, inhumane, disorderly criminal ‘Other’ to society’s truthful, humane, orderly ‘self’” (Holloway and Jefferson 260). This results in a constant shifting of blame—those who receive external punishment believe it to not be just, and those who escape such punishment place blame upon those who do not. Petrus, Lucy’s neighbor, struggles to defend Pollux from Lurie’s accusations, saying he is “just a youth, he cannot go to jail” (Coetzee 138). The implicit blame is placed on the two strangers who are nowhere to be found, who cannot speak for themselves. Lurie, meanwhile, blames all three of the men, but particularly Pollux, as he is more accessible.

While Lurie seems himself as a romantic, as a grand seducer on par with Lord Byron, he sees Lucy’s rapists and dangerous criminals motivated by something quite different: a desire for racial revenge, or for retaliation for apartheid. As Rosemary Jolly argues, “[Lurie] views that rape [Lucy’s] purely as a consequence of racial difference, while Lucy sees it as an attempt to subjugate her as a woman living alone” (Jolly 164). Lucy talks about the hatred with which her rape is committed, believing this to be the

worst part. Lurie condescendingly tells Lucy to think of her rape as “history speaking through [her rapists]” (Coetzee 156), believing this will ease her white guilt or help her to otherwise accept what she has experienced. Several times Lurie refers to Lucy’s rape as racial restitution, but Lucy never articulates it as such, instead focusing on the rapist’s belief that Lucy “ow[es them] something” (Coetzee 134) for being female. If true, this they share with Lurie, who flat-out tells Melanie that her beauty “does not belong to her alone . . . She has a duty to share it” (Coetzee 16). Lurie rejects Lucy’s theory because it conflicts with his image of racial crime. As Lurie tells Lucy, “It was a crime. . . You did not choose to be the object. You are an innocent party” (Coetzee 111). His insistence that Melanie must share her beauty, however, suggests that Lurie does not extend this reasoning to her. Instead, Lurie sees Melanie as an object. Coetzee creates this parallel as a means of exposing the hypocrisy inherent to viewing *anyone* uncritically as an object. However, it is still clear from Lurie’s response that he believes that Lucy’s status as an object is the result of her race only, rather than her gender.

This racial different allows Lurie to distance himself even further from Lucy’s rapists. As D. Marvin Jones describes, “the black male has become metaphorical, a way of personifying social and historical forces, of painting a pariah’s face on the problems of drugs, disease, or crime” (Jones 2). This is certainly true in *Disgrace*—even as I argue that the novel is questioning the myth of the black criminal, it is nonetheless indulging in it and repeating it. As E.M. Forster describes in *Aspects of the Novel*, “in their purest form, [flat characters] are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve toward the round” (Forster 67). The black men who rape Lucy—particularly the two adults who go

unnamed—are completely flat characters who exist only to torment Lucy and to teach Lurie, or the reader, a lesson. Pollux, however, stands in contrast to this flatness, though he too is only minimally complex.

As Jones continues, “in the context of the black male, myth is confused with fact, and the stereotypes are received as true: the notion that black males really do share a dangerous tendency to violence, or mayhem, or crime has become ‘common sense’” (3). Lurie certainly believes these things, even as he views himself as progressive. When the three black men walk past Lurie and Lucy, before any violence has occurred, he turns to her and asks ““should we be nervous?” (Coetzee 91). This is Lurie’s gut reaction to seeing three black men in public, even when they have only exchanged “a nod, a greeting” (Coetzee 91), and have given Lurie no reason to suspect them of anything. He suspects them entirely on the basis that they are black men. Coetzee deliberately confirms Lurie’s suspicions. Only a few short sentences later, the men have begun to devastate Lucy, Lurie, the dogs, and the farm.

The black men who rape Lucy fit this stereotype well, in both their simplicity and their absence. Lurie expects that these men be prosecuted, as he expects a different outcome for them as black men than he does for himself as a white man. As Angela Davis describes in “Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist,” rape laws have typically been selectively enforced:

In the United States and other capitalist countries, rape laws as a rule were framed originally for the protection of men of the upper classes, whose daughters and wives might be assaulted. What happens to working-class women has usually been of little concern to the courts; as

a result, remarkably few white men have been prosecuted for the sexual violence they have inflicted on these women. While the rapists have seldom been brought to justice, the rape charge has been indiscriminately aimed at Black men, the guilty and innocent alike. (Davis 172)

Though apartheid has ended, the expectation remains clear in Lurie's mind that black-on-white crime will not be tolerated, even if he understands it to be retaliation for the long history of white-on-black crime in South Africa and elsewhere. Earlier, at Lurie's hearing, Rassool claims that Lurie ignores "the long history of exploitation of which [his abuse of Melanie] is a part" (Coetzee 53), suggesting again that Melanie is not white (though it is possible that Rassool refers to the gendered exploitation of women). However, Coetzee is perhaps deliberately coy with focusing on Melanie's race; as Lurie is so insistent that race plays a part in Lucy's rape but is so oblivious that it may not even occur to him that race is relevant to his behavior as well.

Carine M. Mardorossain notes that "the singling out of one rape along with the normalization of the other, has everything to do with Lurie's racialized and racist perspective" (77). However, this problem of blame-shifting stems not only from racial difference, but also from the simple fact that Lucy's rapists are strangers. The fact that Lurie has no personal connection to these men, and that they enter and exit his life as quickly as the trauma that they bring with them, suggests that Lurie—and the reader—see not the people who commit these acts, but only the way that their acts affect Lurie and Lucy. They are, by default, flat characters not only to the reader, but also to Lurie and Lucy, who cannot access them any more than we can.

Additionally, Lucy's rape is not accessible to Lurie, who is in another room. He becomes upset when Lucy refuses to confide in him about her experience: "Do they [Lucy and Bev Shaw] think he does not know what rape is? Do they think he has not suffered with his daughter? What more could he have witnessed than he is capable of imagining?" (Coetzee 140). Again, it is Lurie's imagination that shapes his understanding of the situation, but this time because he has no access to its truth. Regardless, the imagination simplifies. For the reader, who can also only imagine what Lucy experiences off-page, this sexual violence is represented through the violence that is shown in this section—the violence against Lurie and the dogs, to which I will return to in depth in the next chapter. Beyond being symbolic, this violence intensifies the anxiety of uncertainty associated with Lucy's rape. Lurie is attacked and the dogs are killed, and so we imagine the worst possible situation for Lucy.

Coetzee intensifies this uncertainty for the reader by limiting our exposure to Lucy's rapists—not only is the act of rape never shown, but the perpetrators are described only minimally, and seem to be just always out of reach. Again, they are defined within the text entirely by the acts they commit in those few pages in which they appear. They represent only one "single idea or quality" (Forster 67), and that is the quality of violence and brutality. Because Lurie sees these strangers so clearly as criminals, he cannot imagine himself in the role of the criminal because he has already filled it by those whose motives he sees as so removed from his own. The extremity of their actions—without context to him, visible only through the moments of their encounters and the aftermath—only further confirms for Lurie that his actions pale in comparison to true evil. Lurie is able to deny that he has wronged Melanie because he

has a mythical image of a rapist, one that is only confirmed by Lucy's rape and his unfamiliarity with the perpetrators.

As simplistic and narrow as the characters of two of the attackers are, the character of Pollux stands out for a number of reasons. Most obviously, Pollux is the only of the men who has been identified with a name. Pollux begins the "curve toward the round" (Forster 67) as he approaches a complex character. Pollux is young, having only been "there to learn" (Coetzee 159) during Lucy's rape. This creates some sympathy for Pollux, however minimal, to the reader that the other two perpetrators are not given. There is a sense that Pollux has not freely chosen to rape or steal, but rather has been brought into it by these older men as a child who has limited options. Of course, our lack of access to the other two simply creates questions that have no answers: Were they not once young? Were they not once introduced to violence as protégés? Do they not have histories and motives and complexities?

Petrus, Lucy's black neighbor, replicates the same patterns of denial that Lurie does. Petrus accepts Pollux into his home for much the same reason that Lurie denies his own faults—Petrus sees Pollux as a child, but moreover, he considers him to be family. He is therefore a part of Petrus's understanding of the self. Therefore, Petrus cannot identify him as a criminal any more than Lurie can describe himself as such. Petrus speaks of this specifically: "He is not a criminal. He is not a thief. . . . He is not guilty. He is too young. It is just a big mistake" (Coetzee 139). Petrus cannot hold Pollux accountable, eventually admitting only that "it is bad. But it is finish" (Coetzee 201) and trying to move forward. This serves to protect his own subjectivity by denying the actions of those with whom he identifies. As Franz Fanon suggests in *Black Skin*,

White Masks, “As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others” (82). It may also be the case that Petrus seeks to protect Pollux publically, even if he condemns his actions privately. Petrus is intimately familiar with white racism, and it is unlikely that he reads Lurie’s quest for revenge as fully independent from racism. However, identifying this closely with Pollux makes it near impossible for Petrus to sympathize with Lucy or even Lurie, just as Lurie’s focus on his own self makes it so difficult for him to access sympathy for Melanie. *Disgrace* suggests that it is not possible—or is at least very difficult—to see someone as both the self and also as a criminal. It is, however, possible for Pollux to be all of these things—to be young, to be family, to be human, and to be the victim of racism, but also to have committed a horrible act of violence that left another person traumatized. It is just not possible for the self to acknowledge all of these things simultaneously. Any acknowledgement of Pollux’s crime would overshadow his other traits by virtue of the strength of the myths about crime. Instead, Petrus denies the crime and its significance entirely, relegating it to the past. It is the same for Lurie, who admits immediately to being guilty of the charges brought before him, but never of the scope of what those charges mean. Lurie calls Pollux a “jackal boy” (Coetzee 202), evoking a similar animal metaphor to the fox used to describe his night with Melanie, suggesting that perhaps on some level Lurie is aware of their connection, but does not allow it to reach the surface.

Lucy’s other two attackers, then, receive the majority of the implicit blame from Petrus, as they are nameless and distant, unidentifiable. Likewise, the police do not have the resources, time, or concern to catch them. In this way, they become myths, the

source of so much fear and contempt, but images not grounded in present reality. Lurie blames Pollux, still, because to him, he remains a stranger. When Lurie returns to Cape Town, he “skulk[s] about like a criminal, dodging old colleagues” (Coetzee 175). Lurie admits, now, to behaving like a criminal, to behaving how he imagines the two unknown intruders must. However, he uses this image only as simile. It still does not occur to him that he may be in this position because of an actual crime. Instead, he believes he has been forced into this roll unfairly.

For the reader, however, Coetzee has carefully crafted a narrative that exposes all of these corresponding justifications. The reader has access to enough to Pollux’s story to know that he *has* a story, and this harbors empathy even when Lurie cannot have any. Likewise, Lurie’s justifications of his actions begin to fall apart if we pay close attention to the deliberate parallels between his actions and those committed by the others whom he condemns.

As Erich Fromm argues, no person can exist in the simple way that we so often associate with a criminal or rapist or worse:

The main fallacy which prevents people from recognizing potential Hitlers before they have shown their true faces . . . lies in the belief that a thoroughly destructive and evil man must be a devil—and look his part; that he must be devoid of any positive quality; that he must bear the sign of Cain so visibly that everyone can recognize his destructiveness from afar. . . much more often the intensely destructive person will show a front of kindness; courtesy; love of family, of children, of animals; he will speak of his ideals and good intentions. . . There is hardly a man

who is utterly devoid of any kindness, of any good intention. . . *Hence, as long as one believes that the evil man wears horns, one will not discover an evil man*” (Fromm 432)

The only way, then, that Lurie—or anyone, by Fromm’s argument—can come to see something or someone as evil is to not really know that person at all. For this reason, Lurie can dismiss the strangers as such. Though Fromm speaks of “evil” as a tangible thing, his descriptions here are guilty of perpetuating the same thing by suggesting that evil is the “true face” (Fromm 432) of anyone. The problem with this language is not that it may not be accurate, but that it reinforces the idea that bad qualities can, at some point, eclipse good qualities, erasing them completely, and this idea is precisely what causes total detachment from the concept. The word “evil” is so emotionally charged that it ends up applying to no one.³

Ultimately, however, Lurie takes no responsibility for his actions. Despite apologizing to Melanie’s family and coming to terms with some amount of empathy for her father, he never considers Melanie’s experience nor speaks to her directly about what happened. Lurie’s hypocrisy exposes more than one fictional character’s individual flaws: It exposes the flaws of the entire legal system and of the most widely accepted definitions of rape. It is with these mythic archetypes that legal systems operate, relegating participants into the roles of “criminal” and “victim” with such simplicity that resolution is rarely achieved.

³ I will address this problem in more detail in the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

“GIVING HIM UP”: COETZEE’S DOGS & A REGRESSION INTO VIOLENCE

As established in chapter one, Coetzee’s parallels deliberately draw attention to the divide between self and other that *Disgrace*’s perpetrators use to downplay violence against women. These parallels are similarly mirrored in the novel’s representations of violence against nonhuman animals. Toward the middle of the novel, Lurie begins helping Bev Shaw, a local woman in Lucy’s town, to euthanize the dogs and cats in the town’s shelter. Similar to the novel’s two rapes, the deaths of these dogs occur in two seemingly distinct ways: by gunfire through the kennel cages of Lucy’s farm and by euthanasia. Lucy’s rapists’ shoot several dogs in her kennels, while Lurie and Bev Shaw euthanize countless other dogs in the local animal shelter. Though a surface reading of the text might suggest that some of these deaths are humane and merciful while others are horrific, Coetzee’s use of language parallels prompts us to focus on the similarities between these two methods of dog-killing even among the more obvious differences.

Likewise, these acts of systematic violence against animals are also paralleled with the novel’s rapes, exposing the underlying similarities between sexualized violence, racial oppression, and the relationships between nonhuman animals and humans. Though *Disgrace* is often read as a novel that at least leaves room for progress, change, or growth by the end, I argue the novel is far more bleak than this the reading of “progress” would leave room for. Tom Herron argues that “something is kindled in

[Lurie] and that change has something to do with his increasing engagement with animals” (474), while Noam Gal sums up the structure of the novel quite simply: “first disgrace, then grace” (247). Rather, the novel’s end, which I will examine in the coming pages in more close detail, is regressive, drawing attention to the shattered systems that perpetuate oppression, only moving violence from one group of victims of another. *Disgrace* deliberately masks this regression behind a veneer of progress. In doing this, Coetzee exposes the hidden nature of violence. *Disgrace* offers no solutions to this ongoing violence, but it does attempt to define the causes of this violence through these constant parallels.

The use of dogs in *Disgrace* is itself quite significant. Though the novel also features cats, goats, sheep, and other animals, it is dogs that play the most central nonhuman role. As Donna Haraway argues in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, “dogs are not about oneself . . . They are not a projection . . . They are dogs; i.e., a species in obligatory, constrictive, historical, protean relationship with human beings” (12). The relationship between humans and dogs is unique even among the other companion animals, with the pairing often described as the most natural or genuine, e.g. dogs are so often called “man’s best friend.” *Disgrace* certainly does not portray dogs as human-like, but neither are they represented as fully other. Dogs therefore already occupy an in-between space, one that the reader is undoubtedly familiar with. As Haraway continues, this human/dog “relationship is not especially nice; it is full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play” (Haraway 12). This complex inter-species relationship is aptly reflected in the conflicted roles of *Disgrace*’s dogs as property, watchdogs (tools), companions,

symbols, confidants, objects of pity, and recipients of anger and violence. The dogs in *Disgrace* are not merely there to expose Lurie's hypocrisy with humans, but rather to extend our notion of violence beyond our own species.

Disgrace's first scene of violence against dogs is both brief and brutal. The strangers commit these killings alongside Lucy's rape, Lurie's near-murder, and the destruction and loss of much of Lucy's property. Noam Gal argues in "A Note on the Use of Animals for Remapping Victimhood in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" that this "facile and swift killing of the dogs . . . endows the attackers with an aura of pure evil" (244). However, this aura is deliberately superficial. Rather than actually marking the attackers as pure evil, their actions draw attention to Lurie's later behavior in the novel. In this way, the killings of the dogs operate much like how the rapes operate earlier in the novel, as I have described in chapter one. In both cases, the three attackers are foils for Lurie, as they very briefly commit acts of rape and dog-killing, both of which Lurie also commits in more extensive and drawn-out narrative. Though the men's actions *appear* evil, they are in fact quite routine: "[The shorter man's] face is placid, without trace of anger. It is merely a job he is doing" (Coetzee 94). Just as Lurie sees his encounter with Melanie as a routine seduction, and just as the euthanatized animals meet that fate because there seems to be no other option, the men who attack Lucy and Lurie appear to be merely following the steps of something they have done before and will do again. They are not malicious; they are simply doing what they have long had to do to get by. Once we are able to look at these men as something other than evil, it becomes easier to apply this critique to Lurie himself.

Further, contrary to Gal's claim that killing the dogs marks the attackers as "villains who commit a forbidden act and deviate from any acceptable human values" (244), human killing of nonhuman animals is in perfect accord with status quo human values. For Coetzee, this fact is obvious: animals are killed for food, they are killed for simply being too numerous, they are killed out of anger, and also for no apparent reason. It is the combination of the method of killing and the species of animal that marks the deaths of these dogs as anything other than routine. Certainly, many animals are shot when hunted, and horses and other domestic animals are regularly killed this way. Likewise, unwanted dogs are regularly killed in other ways. It is the combination of all of these factors (gunfire, species membership, and usefulness), it is the dog, as man's close friend, and it is the wanted nature of this particular group of dogs, that causes readers to feel repulsed by these killings. Gal argues that "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" (244). Counter to this claim, however, dogs are indeed wrapped up quite a bit in South Africa's political history of oppression. As Wendy Woodward explains, dogs have been used extensively as tools of apartheid:

White South African property owners have preferred pure-breds for watchdogs. For the attackers, Lucy's dog boarders are therefore metonymic of white privilege which explains the violent responses to them at Lucy's kennels, when they treat the dogs . . . 'as things' in Lucy's words. (258)

These dogs may maintain their innocence in terms of culpability, but they are not recognized by the attackers as merely dogs, but rather as tools of oppression, or as “part of the furniture, part of the alarm system” (Coetzee 78), as Lucy describes. Just as rape has been used as a tool of colonialism—to oppression not only women but the entire community, so too have dogs been exploited for this purpose. Therefore, the dogs here can be seen as further victims of apartheid specifically and human use and exploitation more generally. Coetzee’s multifaceted critique of both racial and species-based oppression is revealed through this divide between the dogs that are *useful* to white South Africans, and those mostly mixed-breed dogs who are abandoned and euthanized. There is no way to remove these dogs from their history in South Africa, as laden with violence as it is. The dogs are indeed innocent, as Gal suggests, they do remain symbolically complicit in the enforcement of apartheid nonetheless.

It is true, still, that there is something about these scenes of detailed violence against nonhuman animals that *does* often elicit an emotional response in readers, perhaps even more so than violence against human characters. Yet, our response to euthanasia is often quite different, even when the dogs are portrayed as likewise innocent and helpless. Gal himself avoids responding directly to the euthanasia of these dogs, but nonetheless reads Lurie’s participation as an act of Biblical redemption: “Due to his magnificent success in offering up a flesh-and-blood animal as sacrifice, his hands are all the more clean” (250). However, a closer reading of the scenes of euthanasia reveal them to be as brutal as the earlier shootings. And, rather than serving as a site of redemption for Lurie, the cold shelter can be understood as a bleak place of

violence, more so than the site of death in Lucy's kennels, which is normally a space in which dogs *live*.

By looking closely at these scenes in the shelter, we can see several parallels to the shootings in Lucy's kennels. Each of these scenes is filtered through Lurie's consciousness, so it is important to separate his thoughts and rationalizations from the objective descriptions of the behavior of the dogs. When the strangers kill the dogs in Lucy's kennels, the scene reads as much more violent [all emphasis added]:

With practiced ease he brings a cartridge up into the breech, thrusts the muzzle into the dogs' cage. The biggest of the German Shepherds, slaving with rage, *snaps* at it. There is a heavy report; blood and brains spatter 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, [and] *flattens its ears*. (Coetzee 95)

Most of the violence here is in Lurie's description; the blood and brains in the cage are disturbing to readers and to Lurie, and to the other dogs, but the dog that has been shot knows no difference. When Bev Shaw and Lurie euthanize the dogs at the shelter, the scene seems less overly violent [all emphasis added]:

Despite the good thoughts that Bev Shaw thinks and he tries to think, despite the airtight bags in which they tie the newmade corpses, the dogs in the yard smell what is doing on inside. *They flatten their ears*, they droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying . . . On the table *some snap wildly* left and right, some whine plaintively. (Coetzee 143)

Though the dog struggling from the gunshot wound to the throat dies slowly, the dogs in both seem aware of their impending doom, and in this sense all of the deaths are difficult and long. The dogs sense danger, and respond with similar body language to communicate those feelings. In both situations, dogs flatten their ears and snap. Likewise, some dogs go quiet with fear while others struggle for their lives. The end result of both actions is death—deaths that, judged entirely by the response and body language of the dogs, appear to be quite similar. While the three strangers kill in the open, Bev Shaw and Lurie work very hard to *cover up* their killings, and this is the primary difference between these sections. They try to hide the deaths from the other dogs, and they certainly hide the killings from the rest of the town, completing them in private, and disposing of the bodies in ways that cover the sight and smell of death as much as possible. Most importantly, Bev Shaw and Lurie hide the truth about the killings *from themselves*. Unlike the human characters, the dogs do not seem to make any moral distinction between these different types of unavoidable deaths. The differences—those that suggest one set of dogs is savagely killed while the other is humanely destroyed—are in human moral and legal understanding only.

Additionally, Lucy and the other characters of *Disgrace* view the kenneled pure-breed dogs, being *wanted* or *useful*, as inherently more valuable than the abandoned and ill mixed-breed dogs at the shelter. Each dog in Lucy's kennels (with the exception of Katy, who has been abandoned) has an owner who will return for it, while the shelter dogs are waiting for either adoption or death. Though Lucy, along with Lurie at times, certainly has some type of emotional connection with the dogs, as Wendy Woodward argues, "*Disgrace* . . . does not represent a dog as a beloved confidant in any sustained

ways, but has dogs (and other animals) mark a character's development" (258).

However, Coetzee's representations of dogs are not so simple that they serve only as metaphors. *Disgrace* does concern itself with the ways that humans treat dogs, and these descriptions are often actively *opposed* to character development. Just as Lucy's rape calls us to question what happens between Lurie and Melanie, the parallels between these killings ask us to re-evaluate our understanding of human/animal relationships, and the ways that animals are killed routinely.

The novel moves seamlessly between these rape parallels and into the violence against animals. As the first violence against dogs takes places concurrently with the novel's second rape, the two types of violence slide into each other. The novel's earliest animal metaphors are replaced by the complexity of a number of tangible dogs. Like the strangers, the dogs as characters remain distant, as Coetzee does not attempt to narrate or envision their experience. Also like the strangers, one member of the otherwise faceless group stands out: Katy, a bulldog, is the only dog to survive the attacks in Lucy's kennels. In the same way that Pollux complicates the group of attackers and opens up the possibility of nuance among them, Katy connects to Lucy and signifies abandonment experienced by the other dogs. Though Lurie feels some grief for Katy (79), he ultimately reduces her to a tool, just as humans have done to dogs for millennia. When Katy attacks Pollux after Lurie catches him looking voyeuristically at Lucy, she aids in Lurie's descent back into overly simplistic anger and racism. Lurie has clearly not shed this racism; rather, it has only grown stronger: "He would like to give that boy what he deserves: a sound thrashing. Phrases that all his life he has avoided seem suddenly just and right: *Teach him a lesson, Show him his place*" (206). Here, Lurie has

regressed into the role of white oppressor perfectly well, as he accepts and agitates Katy's aggression toward Pollux, reducing her to a tool of this oppression as white South Africans have done for so long. Though Lurie superficially seems to bond with dogs as the novel goes on, he is only re-enforcing the existing categories that the dogs are already in. He uses Katy as a tool for racism, and he disposes of the dogs who do not serve this purpose. Both of these are perfectly in line with the status quo.

Beyond their use as tools, nonhuman animals have a mixed relationship with the law, which has occasionally treated them as perpetrators and even potentially as victims. As E.P. Evans's records show in *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals*, animals in Europe have been, at times, subjected to the rule of law, though not generally out of a concern for their interests, but rather out of an invested interest in their interactions with humans:

In ancient and mediaeval times domestic animals were regarded as members of the household and entitled to the same legal protection as human vassals . . . the weregild extended to them as it did to women and serfs under cover of the man as master of the house and lord of the manor. (10)

Domestic animals, then, have a legal history that they share with women, servants, and slaves, one that has occasionally given them consideration primarily out of concern for the property-owning men who use, keep, and oppress them.

The legacy that has shaped the current legal status of dogs as tools or objects only further contributes to their cultural position as disposable. In "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority," Jacques Derrida makes several surprisingly

simplistic statements about nonhuman animals. In discussing the subjects of violence, or the possible victims of violence, Derrida denies the possibility of animal inclusion: “One would not speak of injustice or violence toward an animal . . . An animal can be made to suffer, but one would never say, in a sense said to be proper, that it is a wronged subject, the victim of a crime, of a murder, or a rape or a theft, of a perjury” (“Force” 246). Here, Derrida takes for granted that a nonhuman animal cannot be a *wronged subject*. In fact, his argument is constructed in such a way that it appears that no reasonable person could disagree: if one *were* to say an animal could be a *wronged subject*, it would not be “in a sense said to be proper” (“Force” 246). As Derrida himself says in *Of Grammatology*, “the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses” (1691). Of course, then, we can be certain that Derrida’s statements are intertwined with the intricate history of human-animal relationships, whether he states it or not. By going out of his way to denounce the possibility of legal subjectivity for animals, he creates and confirms the question of that possibility. In exploring the question of whether or not animals can have so-called “rights” in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida refers to his earlier ideas about the law as requiring a force, stating that rights “in principle must always imply a means of constraint” (87). However, as is clear in *Disgrace*, there is certainly already an existing means of constraint from human to nonhuman. If it is possible to systematically exploit animals, it would certainly be theoretically possible to dismantle this system of exploitation.

This existing relationship of constraint, as “full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss” (Haraway 12) as it is, also severs a very specific purpose. Dogs, and other domestic animals are, and long have been, legally defined as the property of humans—not merely tools to be used, but also things to be *had*, things to own that denote status and wealth. As Lucy says, “they do us the honor of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things” (Coetzee 78). As Gary Francione argues, “by treating animals as property, animals are simply excluded as unable to raise legal claims” (*Property and the Law* 12). That is, so long as this founding concept of animals as property—as things—exists, humans will always have authority over nonhuman animals, and property law will always apply. Domestic dogs must be plentiful, and some dogs must therefore be euthanized, to protect the property status of dogs. This allows dog-owners to choose dogs with ideal temperaments and health statuses for the roles they expect of the dogs—watchdogs, companions, herding dogs, etc.

Though Jacques Derrida chooses not to “tackle the immense question of whether we can recognize the rights of subjects that are exempted from or incapable of duties” (*The Animal* 88), he has created in his acknowledgement of this question a denial that nonhuman animals can or have been expected to perform duties. While it is true that nonhuman animals have never been expected to share the exact same duties as humans, they have certainly had duties: watchdogs work to protect the other property of their owners, other animals become food, or provide food, comfort, companionship, or transportation. All of these things are tied up in the animal’s role as a piece of functional, *dutiful* property. A refusal or inability to fulfill these duties—a lack of usefulness—is responsible for the surrendering of so many animals to shelters, where

most are euthanized. This is an extension of the property dynamic, and it is, as Francione argues, irreconcilable with animal rights: “Our myriad laws and regulations that purport to protect animals are unable to achieve even a minimally acceptable level of protection as long as humans are the only rightholders and animals are regarded as ‘property’” (*Property and the Law* 26). Coetzee seems to support the notion that this fundamental relationship is deeply problematic, in that it perpetuates violence both against nonhumans and against humans. When animals are categorized in this way, violence against them becomes not only acceptable but fully integrated into normal human routine. In *Disgrace*, Lurie lumps animals in with inanimate possessions when discussing the aftermath of the attack: “‘Yes, we lost a car’ he says. ‘And the dogs, of course, all but one’” (Coetzee 115). Lurie’s acknowledgement of the loss of the dogs shows little more concern for them than the car, suggesting that these losses are comparable to him.

Like the kennels in which the first set of dogs are killed, the shelter is a space of confinement that reinforces human/animal domination by its mere existence. These spaces make clear the dogs’ place in the human-animal relationship, as a subordinate species to be organized, categorized, and stored, until they are eventually disposed of. Yet, at the same time, the shelter is a sad site: It is a place where killings are done with some sense of grief and regret, and where those killings are hidden and considered shameful. Euthanasia is a “job that one else wants to do” (Coetzee 79), which Bev Shaw has taken on despite the fact that it “cuts her up terribly” (Coetzee 79). Philosopher Clare Palmer argues that the killing of animals in the space of the shelter differs from other forms of animal-killing particularly because of this confused relationship:

What is particularly interesting here is that the apparently contradictory treatment of the animals concerned is not differentiated by species membership, nor by perceived closeness to or distance from humans . . . It is, after all, members of the very same species of animals—indeed, on occasions, the very same individual animals—that are both cherished and killed. (171)

The difference, then, between the valued dog, who is seen as a friend or a tool, and the surplus dog, who is pitied but ultimately killed routinely, is one of convenience and usefulness. Nonetheless, the animals in the shelter are killed with great reluctance, which must at least at some times be read as genuine. Bev Shaw describes the deaths as difficult for her: “I mind deeply. I wouldn’t want someone doing it for me who didn’t mind” (Coetzee 85). This cognitive dissonance is resolved, for both Lurie and Bev Shaw, by championing the idea that these deaths are inevitable, that they provide a way out in a world that has no room for the dogs to live healthy lives: “The dogs that are brought in suffer from distempers . . . from neglect, benign or malign, from old age, from malnutrition . . . but most of all from their own fertility” (Coetzee 142). Most of the dogs’ ailments are caused by their purported caretakers. These caretakers abandon them when they can no longer handle the responsibility. Though Lurie asks “why pretend to be a chum when in fact one is a murderer?” (Coetzee 143) he eventually relents and takes solace in providing false security to the dogs as they die.

Though Lurie sees and feels for the suffering of the dogs he helps to kill, whom he allows to “lick him, if they want to” (Coetzee 143) in the moments before their deaths, he does not use this empathy to significantly alter his behaviors towards them.

Lurie never seriously questions the possibility of finding other solutions to the dog overpopulation, nor to the situations that may have caused the problem in the first place. Instead, he looks for solutions that ease his own conscience by disposing of the corpses of the dead dogs post-euthanasia. This impulse to care for the dogs when no one else will, long enough after their deaths that “rigor mortis has stiffened the corpses overnight” (Coetzee 143), is itself not conducive to their wellbeing. Though it makes Lurie feel better, it actually hurts the dogs—this act of solace allows Lurie to continue to participate in their euthanasia without too much pain to his own wellbeing. By this time, the dogs have literally become what they have been treated as—empty objects. In Coetzee’s novella *The Lives of Animals*, which I will discuss in more detail in the conclusion, Elizabeth Costello speaks of dead animals: “What I know is what a corpse cannot know: that it is extinct, that it knows nothing and will never know anything anymore” (32). This sentiment, along with Lurie’s commitment to the *processing* of corpses, is indeed intended to be read as a fruitless commitment, one that cannot soothe the exploited and killed, but only the conscience of those who are responsible for that exploitation.

Lurie works to help the dogs, then, when they can no longer accurately be called “dogs.” Even he realizes that this action does nothing for them:

Why has he taken on this job? . . . For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; and what do dogs know of honour and dishonour anyway? For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing. (Coetzee 145-146)

Lurie's idea, here, may not seem so far off from increasing the respect for other living things, but it is actually concerned primarily with the treatment of the dead, and Coetzee portrays this respect as futile. Lurie's "idea" of the world does not reflect possibility, but instead blindness—it becomes a defense mechanism, a way to feel separate from the system he helps to perpetuate. His "idea" is concerned only with how the corpses are treated, rather than how corpses are made via the killings in the first place. He cares only for the empty corpse-dogs while living dogs continue to suffer and die at the shelter. Therefore, although he treats the dogs' bodies with what he perceives to be a type of care, he continues to participate in the killing of the dogs and the processing of their corpses. This only furthers the system, which guarantees that there will be more room for the next dogs to die. The dogs in *Disgrace* live and die by the whim of their human caretakers, who take on this responsibility yet abandon it at the same time. This sense of responsibility and abandonment is reflected in the human relationships throughout the book as well—just as Lurie takes on responsibility for the dogs and then takes their lives, he neglects his responsibility to nurture Melanie as a student, instead harassing and exploiting her. Katy, the only dog to survive in Lucy's kennels, has more in common with the dogs in the shelter: She is abandoned, but Lucy continues to care for her. Again and again in the novel, those with caretaking responsibility ignore that duty; in some ways one might read Lurie's willingness to euthanatize and destroy the dogs as an admission that he is unable to provide care for the dogs. However, it is yet another act of negligence, as I will discuss shortly.

More broadly speaking, animal rhetoric has long been used to describe both the most horrific and violent tendencies of humanity and the most pitiful and helpless of

victims.⁴ These metaphors serve to displace both violent behavior and victimhood outside of the normative human experience and into the realm of the nonhuman animal. This sort of metaphor, then, is complicit in human violence against nonhuman animals, which is thusly the norm. As Cary Wolfe argues in *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*, “as long as the automatic exclusion of animals from standing remains intact *simply* because of their species, such a dehumanization by means of the discursive mechanism of ‘animalization’ will be readily available for deployment against *whatever* body happens to fall outside the ethnocentric ‘we.’” (21). This description is apt for application to *Disgrace*. Lurie refers to Pollux as a “jackal” on more than one occasion (Coetzee 80, 208, 217). This term allows Lurie to deny Pollux his personhood, and to view him as animalistic, a status already defined as other. Likewise, Lurie compares Melanie to a rabbit, as subject of pray, allowing him to consider his “hunt” as natural, and her status as a victim as also inevitable. Such dehumanization/animalization is powerful *only* by virtue of a pre-existing lack of respect and self-authority assumed to apply to nonhuman animals. Should such a pre-existing notion not exist, comparisons to nonhuman animals would not be so degrading. Coetzee utilizes this language as a means of critiquing not only racism, sexism, and other forms of “dehumanization,” but the entire idea of dehumanization, which implies speciesism. This makes it quite difficult to critique either type of exploitation without relying on the existence of the other.

Though I resist any attempt to reduce the nonhuman animals in *Disgrace* to mere symbols, they nevertheless do speak to the violence that happens between the

⁴ “He’s an animal” and “to be shot like a dog” are common colloquial metaphors that utilize non-human animals for both the perpetrator and the victim of violence.

novel's human characters as well. Lurie evokes a dog metaphor to raise serious questions about his own culpability in raping Melanie. As Derrida argues, "one will not say of a being without freedom, or at least of one who is not free in a given act, that its decision is just or unjust" ("Force" 251). It is interesting that Derrida uses the word *decision* here, as it seems that without any agency, a "decision" is not so much a decision as a compulsory act. In order to judge an act as just or unjust, it must be assumed that the one acting has control of those actions. In *Disgrace*, Lurie defends actions that stem from instinct (specifically sexually): "One can punish a dog, it seems to me, for an offense like chewing a slipper. A dog will accept the justice of that: a beating for a chewing. But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts" (Coetzee 90). Here, Lurie assigns dogs an understanding of justice that is particularly human—it is one that relies upon the assumption that a dog will connect the action of being beaten with the action of having chewed a slipper, and also the action of being beaten with the action of being "excited and unmanageable" (Coetzee 90) at the sight of a female dog, and further that the dog would then reason out—in the same way that Lurie does—that destroying a slipper qualifies as a destruction of property for which punishment is just, but that its expression of sexuality is natural and thus should not be punished. This line of reasoning is undoubtedly human. Here, Coetzee draws attention to the way that humans simultaneously assign human traits to animals and yet deny them agency. In blurring the divide between species, Coetzee is intimately linking humans and animals in such a way as to question the binary between humans and all other forms of sentient life. Likewise, Lurie distinguishes sexual instinct from other types of instinct, when they may not

actually be as different as he suggests. A dog may feel an instinctual drive to chew something; it may not need to be a slipper, but this desire to chew is likely as instinctual as the desire to mate. By separating sexuality from other natural drives, of course, Lurie is, regardless of his actual words, not concerned primarily with dogs or other animals. When Lurie speaks of this dog, he uses it as a metaphor for, and he is therefore justifying his own behavior in regards to Melanie. This example directly shows how Lurie's purported empathy for the dogs is often only re-directed empathy for the self.

When Lurie defends this instinct and claims to have "the rights of desire" (Coetzee 89), he is denying responsibility for his actions and suggesting that it cannot be just to punish instinct, even if such action has a *wronged subject* or victim—in Lurie's case, the victim being Melanie. He sees this act as one lustful instinct, which allows him to feel some solidarity with dogs—in a sense, to project himself onto them, given their instincts—while feeling none for Melanie. I connect this issue directly to the treatment of the dogs both because it requires the arrogance of authority over a subject group (dogs and women), and also because the role of the law in addressing each of these scenarios differs based on context that does not appear to make a difference to the victim. In this sense, it could be said that animals are not usually viewed as *wronged subjects* in order to protect the systems that benefit from their suffering.

Mythmaking is also necessary to the protection of these systems. The men who kill the dogs in Lucy's kennels become myths, as they enter and leave the novel quickly, leaving behind destruction but no complexity of motive or character. The mythic quality of their violence makes it easier for Lurie, Bev Shaw, and Lucy to downplay their own complicity in violence against dogs by comparison. At the close of

the novel, Lurie helps to euthanize Driepoot, a dog to whom he has become emotionally connected. Lurie's decision to take the dog's life is often seen as development or growth by critics who have suggested that Lurie's act is somehow liberating for both participants. Michalinos Zembylas argues that this act is one of finality for Lurie's conscience: "Lurie's act of giving up the dog is symbolic of relinquishment of desire . . . By relinquishing his care of the lame dog, sacrificing the emotional investment he has made in it, Lurie finds some reconciliation with himself" (225). Likewise, Mike Marais argues that this scene contrasts with Melanie's rape:

In this concluding scene of passive attentionality, the artist figure makes no attempt to reduce death, the absolute other, to an object of intentionality. The novel's ending forms a strong contrast to the earlier scene in which Lurie's rape of Isaacs is cast as just such an attempt: it signifies Lurie's acceptance of the impossibility of death and also the transformation of his desire for the Other into self-substituting responsibility. ("Little Enough" 178)

However, I maintain that this act of violence is a regression. It is a return to the same behaviors that Lurie has practiced all along, particularly with Melanie early in the novel; this scene instead shows that the "artist figure" is irrelevant; it does not matter how Lurie sees himself as his behavior stays the same.

Lurie's decision to take the dog's life is, instead of a reflective moment of self-sacrifice, a return to the selfishness that he has already displayed with Melanie. Lurie again rationalizes his own exploitations by calling them "love" (Coetzee 25, 219). This ultimate denial of the human-animal crime harkens to when, earlier, Lucy compares sex

to murder, asking her father, “When you trap [a woman], hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn’t it a bit like killing . . . doesn’t it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?” (Coetzee 158). At the book’s end, we must assume that Lurie literally holds down the dog he claims to love while Bev Shaw takes its life, just as he has in his previous work at the clinic: “He is the one who holds the dog still as the needle finds the vein and the drug hits the heart and the legs buckle and the eyes dim” (Coetzee 142). This description, too, parallels Melanie’s limp body during her rape. The dogs that know their deaths are coming but “have to be pulled or pushed over the threshold” (143) are described much like when Lurie “carries [Melanie] to the bedroom” (Coetzee 25) against her expressed wishes. Melanie “averts her eyes,” (Coetzee 25) just as the dogs “will [not] look straight at the needle” (Coetzee 143). These death scenes mirror Melanie’s rape because they require the same arrogance of authority from Lurie, who has not changed. When Lurie takes the life of Driepoot, he reflects on the fact that the dog cannot know that “one can enter what seems to be an ordinary room and never come out again” (Coetzee 219). This explanation of the death that takes place in an ordinary room is paralleled in both Melanie and Lucy’s rapes: Melanie’s occurs in her own bedroom, and Lucy’s too in her own home. Though the dog will literally die, Lucy’s death is symbolic. Her life changes so quickly as her options dwindle, as she gives in to the child of her rape and the community she will stay in. By the novel’s end, Lurie has only further extended his circle of exploitation to include animals; his newfound empathies still have the same conclusions that they have always had.

Noam Gal has “read this ‘giving up’ . . . as the finishing post . . . of a normative moral cleansing process” (250). Like other critics, Gal reads this moment as symbolic, one in which we ought to recognize a change for the better in Lurie’s ongoing moral crisis. However, this death is not a “giving up” any more than the exploitation of Melanie is. In order to accept this as a narrative of “giving up,” or of sacrifice, we must accept that the dog is meant to be Lurie’s to surrender, a notion that Coetzee’s text quite simply does not support. Death does not represent freedom or release for the dogs, but is instead the ultimate act of oppression. Though Gal claims that Lurie’s real sacrifice is his commitment to the disposal of the bodies of the dead dogs (249), he also argues that the final scene of the novel completes “the process of becoming a healed victim, fully human, historically and morally re-established, an ex-victimizer” (Gal 251). This reading requires that we ignore the victimization of the sacrificed dog to view Lurie as an “ex-victimizer.”

Instead, the novel’s final lines support the reading that Lurie remains as much of a victimizer as he did at the novel’s start. These lines portray not a release, but a claim of ownership by Lurie over the dog:

Bearing him in his arms like a lamb, he re-enters the surgery. “I thought you would save him for another week,” says Bev Shaw. “Are you giving him up?”

“Yes, I am giving him up.” (Coetzee 220)

Mike Marais argues that “the lamb image, here, suggests a sacrifice, *a willing offering*, to death” (“Little Enough” 178). Further, As Adeline Rother points out, “the novel’s sacrificial thematic has been largely passed over in enthusiastic and sometimes

exuberant discussions of the focalizing character's involvement with animals" (145). However, Coetzee has indeed set up this sacrifice as a false one; that is, the scene suggests that one cannot sacrifice the other and call it ethical. Earlier in the novel, when Lucy calls him a scapegoat for the University, Lurie ruminates on the meaning of animal sacrifice:

Scapegoating worked in practice while it still had religious power behind it. You loaded the sins of the city on to the goat's back and drove it out, and the city was cleansed. It worked because everyone knew how to read the ritual, including the gods. Then the gods died, and all of a sudden you had to cleanse the city without divine help. Real actions were demanded instead of symbolism. . . Purgation was replaced by the purge. (Coetzee 91)

Here, Lurie articulates the novel's central idea about the sacrifice of the other: it doesn't work; no one knows how to read the ritual, so it benefits no one and victimizes the sacrificed. Chris Danta argues in "‘Like a Dog. . . Like a Lamb’: Becoming Sacrificial Animal in Kafka and Coetzee" that "Lurie's work with Bev Shaw in the animal clinic in Grahamstown euthanizing unwanted dogs is an acknowledgement—in the absence of the gods—that the purge has replaced purgation and that real actions are demanded instead of symbolism" (732). However, Lurie's clinical work *does* remain primarily symbolic, unless we are willing to accept that Lurie is in genuine service to humankind or even the dogs in ending their lives, a notion which does not square well with Coetzee's concern for the wellbeing of dogs themselves. Rather, Lurie participates mostly in symbolism, and not in "real actions"; he imposes human cremation standards

on these dogs as a purely ritualistic act to protect his “idea” of the world. Just as he is lit on fire by the attackers and is cleansed by the fire (“There is a nasty smell of singed hair” [96]), he hopes for rebirth in the flames of the incinerator (“the dog would as often as not come riding back too, blackened and grinning, smelling of singed fur” [144]). Likewise, his “giving up” of Driepoot is a symbolic act, a ritual that no one understands besides Lurie, in an attempt to cleanse himself of the horrors of his past.

As sacrificing the dog does allow Lurie to “become a figure of Abraham,” (Rother 145), one might read Lurie’s “giving up” of the dog as a taking on of the burden of making the decision between life and death for a being that the world has made no room to support. Abraham, however, had been asked by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac, while Lurie merely partakes in the act is a symbolic re-imagining of what has become a cultural myth of duty of morality. As Jacques Derrida argues in *The Gift of Death*, “Abraham must assume absolute responsibility for sacrificing his son by sacrificing ethics, but in order for there to be a sacrifice, the ethical must retain all of its value; the love for his son must remain intact, and the order of the human duty must continue to insist on its rights” (66). God has not put Lurie in this position, however, and he is not tasked between choosing between God and a dog-child whom he loves; he chooses only between the dog—who he is only vaguely emotionally attached to—and his own sense of ritual. Because the “gods died” (Coetzee 91), Lurie does not see his act as appeasing a higher power; and yet, he does abandon ethics for the sake of the ritual. In this sense, Lurie does not cave to God’s demands, but the demands of a society that sees no other solutions for the surplus dog problem. Essentially, Lurie aims to evoke Abraham, but

Coetzee has deliberately set up this sacrificial ritual as superficial and self-indulgent at worst, and protective of the status quo at best.

The comparison of the dog to a lamb also harkens to several references to sheep throughout the novel, two of which are killed by Petrus. This again links Lurie to those he labors so hard to distance himself from: Pollux and his kin. The deaths of the sheep trouble Lurie as, near the middle of the novel, he seems to be begin to question human/animal violence, albeit superficially: “A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians . . . Suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him” (Coetzee 126). Feeling shunned and alone, Lurie looks to animals as if to find something he has been searching for. As John Berger describes, “with their parallel lives, animals offer man a companionship which is different from any offered by human exchange. Different because it is offered to the loneliness of man as a species” (6). Lurie’s removal from his position and the life he is used to suddenly thrusts him into an unfamiliar environment, and forces him to confront how important the approval of his own species has become. In this, he seems to begin to foster some sympathy or understanding for members of other species.

However, Lurie’s final act of “giving up” the dog, so like the sheep to him, is a turn away from this compassion. In this moment, Coetzee draws attention to the ethical climate of most human/animal relationships. That is, that as a species we might suspect, and sometimes begin to confront, the possibility that there is something wrong with the ways that humans and animals interact, but most of us are unwilling or unable to challenge or change this relationship. Instead, we become accustomed to it, and this

unease is dismissed as naivety or idealism. As Peter Singer describes, this disconnect often happens in childhood, when people first begin to eat meat:

Many children at first refuse to eat animal flesh, and only become accustomed to it after strenuous efforts by their parents . . . Whatever the child's initial reaction, though, the point to notice is that we eat animal flesh long before we are capable of understanding what we eat is the dead body of an animal. Thus we never make a conscious, informed decision, free from the bias that accompanies any long-established habit, reinforced by all the pressures of social conformity, to eat animal flesh. At the same time children have a natural love of animals, and our society encourages them to be affectionate towards pets and cuddly, stuffed toy animals. From these facts stems the most distinctive characteristic of the attitude of children in our society to animals—namely, that there is not one unified attitude to animals, but two conflicting attitudes that coexist in one individual, carefully segregated so that the inherent contradiction between them rarely causes trouble. (213)

Disgrace is especially concerned with this relationship that Singer describes. The neat ways that we, as a species, have arranged our relationships with nonhuman animals fall apart under close analysis, as they have no basis outside of custom. However, this discovery in adults is difficult, if not impossible, to deal with, in part because it is too huge and seems insurmountable, so it is avoided. Lurie finds that he is overwhelmed by his concern: “The more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets. One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy’s kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to

recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake” (Coetzee 142-3). This brings Lurie to the brink of epiphany, but as the novel continues he is only bound to regress.

Lurie has been “more or less indifferent to animals” (Coetzee 143) for most all of his life, and this crisis is therefore new to him. It is in adulthood that he experiences this clash of feelings about animals. In his discord with Petrus’s plan to slaughter the sheep, Lurie ponders over whether there might be something he can do for the sheep: “He has thought of buying the sheep from Petrus. But what will that accomplish? Petrus will only use the money to buy new slaughter-animals” (126). Here, Lurie is overwhelmed by the limits of his power to affect change, and instead caves to simply avoiding thinking about them altogether. Lurie’s moral confliction ultimately leads to a hardening to this suffering of nonhumans animals in the face of finding no simple solution. This is not unlike the hardening that he sees in Bev Shaw, but that he thinks himself incapable of:

He assumes that people from whom cruelty is demanded in the line of duty, people who work in slaughterhouses, for instance, grow carapaces over their souls. Habit hardens: it must be so in most cases, but it does not seem to be so in his. He does not seem to have the gift of hardness. (Coetzee 143).

Of course, he *does* have this “gift.” Lurie is hardened to Melanie’s suffering, to his relationships with women, including his daughter, and to the suffering caused by apartheid. The whole of *Disgrace* shows Lurie’s final hardening: we watch a carapace grow over Lurie’s soul when he accepts the routine killing of dogs on the final page.

These are killing which initially unease him, but which he cannot imagine any other solution for, and which he ultimately participates in, pushing away his gut reactions of repulsion and pity. Lurie is never likewise conflicted about the killings of the dogs in Lucy's kennels, as these killings violate the existent code, qualifying as brutal and deeply unsettling, as the dogs remain wanted by humans, and their deaths come about unexpected and by gunfire. Not to mention, of course, that none of these conflicted concerns do anything to question the role of animals as a type of property, a notion that could be economically and socially devastating to the Eastern Cape.

The dogs, their deaths, and the corpses they leave behind, like Lurie's attempted murder, are examples of what Julia Kristeva calls the abject:

What disturbs identity, system order [causes abjection]. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composition. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior . . . Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject. (4)

This discomfort leads to repulsion, by Kristeva's terms, because the reality of this ambiguity is too overwhelming. *Disgrace* suggests, however, that this repulsion in the face of the abject leads only to more violence.

In his moments with the sheep and his first encounters at the shelter, Lurie experiences this moral ambiguity intensely, and it unnerves him to the point that he struggles to function, as indicated when he is so overcome with emotion that he has to pull over the car (Coetzee 142-3). However, in his final act of giving up the dog without significant struggle, he abandons this uncertainty, regressing to the same, less difficult

beliefs he has always held in regards animals: “I don’t believe that animals have properly individual lives. Which among them get to live, which get to die, is not, as far as I am concerned, worth agonizing over” (Coetzee 126-127). Lurie certainly does not agonize over Driepoot’s death, though the instincts that he rejects do seem to instruct him to agonize.

The possibility of moral culpability does, on occasion, occur to Lurie: “He does not dismiss the possibility that at the deepest level Bev Shaw may be not a liberating angel but a devil, that beneath her show of compassion may hide a heart as leathery as a butcher’s” (144). Lurie ultimately does not want to confront the “deepest level” that he seems to fear the most—the truth of what he has done to Melanie and what he and Bev Shaw do to dogs, the larger truths of what apartheid has done, of what men have done to women, and of what humans have done to animals. Lurie is not unique in this, as the novel’s other characters do the same—Lucy prefers not to confront the reality of her rape and continued victimization, Bev Shaw continues to view her role as unpleasant but necessary, and Pollux and Petrus refuse to acknowledge their culpability in Lucy’s suffering. Coetzee, however, has confronted these issues through these and other parallels. These techniques challenge the reader to question the supposed straightforwardness of these ideas, including the notion that euthanasia is so obviously different from murder and the moral separation of the two rapes.

This moral confliction over the status of nonhuman animals, which ultimately leads to a hardening and then apathy and inaction, is not terribly different from the gendered and racialized violence that Lurie himself perpetrates. Lurie only recognizes a victim of gendered violence when it is his daughter, just as he recognizes the unjust

nature of the killing of dogs when those dogs are perceived as wanted. Likewise, both of these conflicts mirror South Africa's history of apartheid and continued racial violence and inequality. Lurie recognizes this inequality in theory, where he imagines himself to be an understanding progressive on issues of race, but in practice he only continues to maintain white oppressive systems.

The parallels in *Disgrace* expose the ways that violence is perpetuated, and how we as a species have and continue to fail to address violence as a widespread and systemic problem, instead attempting to categorize and prioritize it to such a degree that it loses all meaning. Just as Lurie cannot or will not acknowledge the similarities between his own actions and those committed by the men who rape his daughter, Lurie's acknowledgements about animal suffer never lead him to change his behavior. The novel ends with a continuation and expansion of exploitation, and the only hope is provides is the hope that we might learn to recognize this exploitation for what it is.

A CONCLUSION
FINDING THE MIDDLE GROUND: COETZEE & THE PROBLEM OF
PARALLELS & COMPARISONS

Though I have emphasized the parallels in *Disgrace*, and certainly similarities above differences, I do not intend to describe these parallels as perfect equivalencies. While I do think that we ought to read them as ethically similar (and that Coetzee has likewise set them up to be read in this way), I do not mean to diminish the nuance or complexities that are always present in scenarios of rape, sexual assault, and our relationships with nonhuman animals. What I hope that I am showing, instead, is that most acts of violence are carried out under rationalizations about these special circumstances, and that these rationalizations must be interrogated as they occur. Instead, I am suggesting that we leave room for nuance even when we cannot see it, and to make an effort to perceive in every act of violence that we condemn that is may be as complexly motivated as those we justify. Likewise, it is important to acknowledge these motivations in order to work actively toward solutions. Denials of wrongdoing, so often wrapped up in ideas about “worse crimes,” cause violence to be perpetuated rather than lessened. Parallels, then, are important to notice so that we can question the behaviors that we might otherwise rationalize away.

Though I have argued that Coetzee intends for readers to pick up on *Disgrace*'s parallels, it is certainly true that most readers probably have not read the novel in this

way. However, this elusiveness is also likely helpful in the effectiveness of the parallels. In 1999, Coetzee published not only *Disgrace*, but also *The Lives of Animals*, a philosophical novella that follows Elizabeth Costello, an academic and speaker on issues of animal rights. The novella is a collection of work that were originally a series of lectures given by Coetzee at Princeton University. Read together, *Disgrace* and *The Lives of Animals* further encourage readers to make these comparisons themselves; each work makes ethical parallels between different moral questions in opposing ways. Where *Disgrace* is coy and complex, *The Lives of Animals* is straightforward and direct.

The Lives of Animals grapples with the usefulness of connecting human/animal exploitation with genocide, particularly the Holocaust, a comparison that Costello champions in her speeches and conversations. At a speaking engagement at Appleton College, where her son works, Costello repeatedly evokes the Holocaust in a discussion of animal ethics. She begins by making the point that the comparison already exists; it isn't controversial to say that the Nazis treated Jews "like animals":

‘They went like sheep to slaughter.’ ‘They died like animals.’ ‘The Nazi butchers killed them.’ Denunciation of the camps reverberates so fully with the language of the stockyard and slaughterhouse that it is barely necessary for me to prepare the ground for the comparison I am about to make. The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals. (*Lives* 20)

Costello, then, is arguing that we should accept that the opposite must also be true. If we can come to a consensus that there is something wrong in treating humans "like animals," then we might do well to interrogate how we treat animals in the first place.

Costello argues these comparisons in a straightforward manner, and they reoccur many times in *The Lives of Animals*. Likewise, both rape and the killing of animals in *Disgrace* are set against the backdrop of apartheid, a legally-endorsed historical evil that nonetheless is not the primary focus of the narrative. One of the most significant concerns of both of these works is the comparison of wide-scale injustice and individual tragedy. As Elizabeth Costello says in her speech, “we have only one death of our own; we can comprehend the deaths of others only one at a time. In the abstract we may be able to count to a million, but we cannot count to a million deaths” (*Lives* 19). This sentiment is clearly reflected in Coetzee’s—and fiction’s more generally—ability to convey large-scale atrocity and universal tragedy through individual stories. Lucy’s rape, Melanie’s rape, and the death of Driepoot are, of course, individual experiences, closely focused, while references to apartheid, racial and gendered oppression, and human/animal violence are spoken of only theoretically; they are not (and perhaps cannot be) recorded in any way that conveys the full reach of their effects.

Costello is especially concerned with not only the ways that the Nazis perpetrated the Holocaust, but also with how it was ignored by the ordinary citizens who denied knowledge of its existence. Costello argues that this willful ignorance is difficult to understand because “we do not accept that people with crimes on their conscience can be healthy and happy” (21). This is much the same myth that I have described in the previous chapters; we believe that to have done something horrible, to have committed violence, that this violence must embody the whole of that person or persons. It is easier, then, to see Nazis and their sympathizers as different sorts of people from us, as Costello argues: “Germans of a particular generation are still

regarded as standing a little outside humanity” (20). We therefore assume that those who are healthy and happy do not have crimes on their conscience—and, conversely, that *we* cannot be participants of any kind of great injustice, because if we were we would be unable to deny it, because it would define who we are. Defining others in this way is therefore a self-defense mechanism that protects violence more than it does the self.

Costello argues in *The Lives of Animals*, however, that the civilians who claimed ignorance to the atrocities of the Nazis were not “inwardly marked by the aftereffects of that special form of ignorance . . . the evidence points in the opposition direction: that we can do anything and get away with it” (35). We get away with it, then, by failing to acknowledge it precisely to avoid these kinds of inward aftereffects. Costello likewise discusses the ways that most people ignore and hide the abuse of animals:

I was taken on a drive around Waltham this morning. It seems a pleasant enough town. I saw no horrors, no drug-testing laboratories, no factory farms, no abattoirs. Yet I am sure they are there. They must be. They simply do not advertise themselves. They are all around us as I speak, only we do not, in a certain sense, know about them. (21)

This kind of ignorance that Costello describes is a willful ignorance; it is the same cognitive dissonance that David Lurie experiences as he is conflicted at the animal shelter. It is the denial of the abject, or the most unnerving parts of our culture. We know that something is wrong with them, but we hide them in order to deny that knowledge, just as Lurie and Shaw attempt to hide their acts of euthanasia.

In more obvious ways, though, Coetzee's use of parallel in *Disgrace* is quite different from his use of direct comparison in *The Lives of Animals*. Parallel functions on a "hidden" level, much like the slaughterhouses and animal testing labs of Waltham. Direct comparison, conversely, is simplistic and, whether accurate or not, is certainly controversial and rhetorically divisive. Elizabeth Costello speaks of this:

I know how this kind of talk polarizes people . . . I want to find a way of speaking to fellow human being that will be cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical, that will bring enlightenment rather than seeking to divide us into the righteous and the sinners, the saved and the damned, the sheep and the goats. (*Lives* 22)

Costello searches for a language that will reach people and change their minds, without revolting or shocking them to such a degree that they simply do not listen. However, she attacks reason, which she describes as inherently flawed because of its tendency to produce justifications that unfairly hold up reason as the ideal means of interpreting the world. Costello's direct comparisons between the meat industry and the Holocaust unnerve her son, who wishes she could be "an ordinary old woman living an ordinary old woman's life" (38), and they alienate much of her audience.

Regardless, comparisons between the treatment of nonhuman animals and the Holocaust are not without some accuracies. In "Can the Treatment of Animals be Compared to the Holocaust?" David Sztybel outlines thirty nine ways that the Holocaust can be directly compared to the Holocaust and that these comparisons "cannot successfully be impugned by alleging that it glosses over particular differences, is insulting, trivializing, or put forward by those who are 'Nazi-like.'" (132). Despite

this, many people reject the comparisons, perhaps “because they are profoundly prejudiced against animals and in favor of human beings” (Szybel 132). The underlying premise of all of these objections is that nonhumans are worth less than humans; that a comparison between their suffering and human suffering is not acceptable, no matter the degree of accuracy, because it implies the moral equivalence of humans and animals. This is, of course, the same premise that underlies the Holocaust, apartheid, and the long-term oppression of women; that the group subjected to such oppression is in some manner inferior, and so the oppression is justified. Even in the absence of this underlying premise, one could argue that speciesism is too different from racism or sexism for comparisons to be apt. As Szybel points out, however, “there are innumerable differences of detail between racism and sexism, as well, but both are still considered to be forms of oppression” (126). The oppression of animals, then, need not be a perfect parallel for these other forms of oppression in order for comparisons to be legitimate.

However, as with other comparisons between human and animal oppression, linking the Holocaust to issues of animal rights is partially problematic because of the response that these comparisons often evoke. Such comparisons are often read as radically out-of-touch at best and dehumanizing or racist at worst. Costello receives a letter from Abraham Stern, who expresses a fairly common reaction to her comparison: “The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say. That is a trick with words which I will not accept . . . The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way” (49-50). Rather than talking about animals themselves, the response that Costello gets from her audience is focused largely

on interrogating her rhetoric and her critique of reason. She is aware of the fruitlessness of much of her own rhetoric, but she continues to use it nonetheless. Coetzee, on the other hand, seems critical of this overtly brazen rhetoric, as her argument is largely ineffective in changing any minds, and it leads only to Costello's disillusionment with everyone that she knows. The language that Costello is searching for may be *fiction itself*, at least given the way that her speeches complement *Disgrace*. In *Disgrace*, the parallels function in a less divisive way, particularly because they can be ignored if they are too ugly to face.

The Lives of Animals, however, does not allow one to escape its comparisons. That the novella is a work of fiction allows Coetzee to make statements without clearly articulating the degree to which Costello's views reflect his own. While some critics read Costello as a deliberate foil for the most extreme animal rights position that Coetzee himself may not support, Alan Northover convincingly argues that "[Coetzee's] views do seem to coincide quite closely with those of Costello" (29) by pointing directly to statements that Coetzee had made on issues of animal rights. Like Costello, Coetzee has made public statements that compare factory farms to the Holocaust:

The transformation of animals into production units dates back to the late nineteenth 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. This warning came to us so loud and clear that it you would have [sic] thought it was impossible to ignore it. It came when in the middle of the twentieth century a group of powerful men in Germany had the bright

idea of adapting the methods of the industrial stockyard, as pioneered and perfected in Chicago, to the slaughter—or what they preferred to call the processing—of human beings. (“Word from J.M. Coetzee”)

However, it is important to note that this statement is made fully within the context of an animal’s rights organization. In comparing Coetzee and Costello, Northover pays little attention to audience. Unlike Costello, Coetzee does not make these comparisons in an open space to spark debate, but rather in a private space to spark further action among already committed activists. However, this quote certainly solidifies Coetzee’s personal conviction in the legitimacy of this comparison.

Instead, it is primarily Costello’s methods that Coetzee critiques. *The Lives of Animals* is thusly skeptical of the usefulness of these kinds of comparisons not generally, but as an effective strategy for convincing those who haven’t yet been convinced. The text suggests that it is not helpful to make sweeping comparisons between different ethical dilemmas to a wide audience because of the way that readers and listeners respond. It takes time to change minds, and the disturbing content of these comparisons leads to a revulsion that leads only to more willful ignorance.

Perhaps the reason that that these comparisons are not often effective is not only because it is insulting to the victims of the Holocaust, rather because it requires comparing the audience to Nazis. Like Lurie rejects the possibility that he is a rapist because of what he knows a rapist to be (in plain and simple terms), most people certainly reject to being compared to Nazis. Political comparisons to Nazism are so prevalent that, in 1990, Mike Godwin described in tongue-in-cheek terms what is now known as “Godwin’s Law”: “As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a

comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one” (Godwin). Though Godwin refers to internet discussions, it is certainly true that Hitler and Nazism are often evoked in all kinds of low-level debates as a strategy intended to shut down all dissent. Nazism is so universally understood as evil that an evocation of similarities between any ideology or practice and Nazism will effectively end all conversation, even though it is so often written off as an absurd fallacy. Of all of Costello’s comparisons, this one—the one between perpetrators, not the one between victims—may be the most important, because it is the one most difficult to accept.

Disgrace also interrogates our tendency to think of evil in such straightforward terms. The novel’s parallels are subtle enough so that they do not alienate those who are not prepared to face them, or those who will reject them immediately. They are deliberately hidden in plain sight, but they still require some unpacking to detect. Lucy’s rape, apartheid, and the shooting of Lucy’s dogs are all intended to be read as straightforwardly “evil,” while Melanie’s rape, Lurie’s subdued racism, and the euthanasia of the shelter dogs each complicate this notion. Coetzee’s text ultimately supports the notion that no individual act of violence is separate from the larger systemic forces of oppression, and that an over-reliance on mythic understandings of violence and ritual does more to perpetuate and protect violence itself than it does to protect us from its truths. The language of fiction allows Coetzee to put forth these notions in a manner that does not overtly offend, but rather that opens up the discussion for a more complex understanding of the roots of violence.

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