

“Savage Practices”: Geography and Human-Animal Relationships in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*¹

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Introduction

After being found guilty of sexual harassment at the Technical University of Cape Town, David Lurie, the protagonist of J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, resigns in disrepute from his position as professor of Romantic poetry and retreats to his daughter Lucy’s smallholding in the country. Although he hopes to find solace away from the city, Lurie soon discovers that his idyllic visions of country-life are misplaced, especially given the realities of post-Apartheid South Africa. He is particularly troubled by the proximity of Lucy’s African neighbor, Petrus. In one revealing moment, Lurie speaks out about his apprehensions, expressing disapproval over Petrus’s decision to bring home a couple of lambs to be killed and eaten in celebration of him purchasing land. The broader implications of Lurie’s reaction reveal a tendency to create cultural distance from, or designate as Other, those who do not conform to his expectations of properly ‘human’ behavior. For Lurie, Petrus’ Otherness is confirmed by the ways in which Petrus interacts with animals:

“I’m not sure I like the way he does things—bringing the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with the people who are going to eat them.”
“What would you prefer? That the slaughtering be done in an abattoir, so that you needn’t think about it?”
“Yes.”
“Wake up, David. This is the country. This is Africa.” (124)

In this context, geography and human-animal relationships play an important role in Lurie’s Othering or dehumanization of Petrus and other black characters in the novel. This role becomes apparent through Lucy’s response to Lurie, which suggests that Lurie’s sensibilities are out of touch with his surroundings.

Indeed, Petrus’ practice of bringing home the lambs that he intends to slaughter appears “out of place” with Lurie’s ideas about “civilized” culture — it is an interpretation that is consistent with Glen Elder, Jennifer Wolch, and Jody Emel’s observation that “[a]nimal practices are extraordinarily powerful as a basis for creating difference and hence racialization” (73). In effect, these practices “serve to position [Others] at the very edge of humanity—to racialize and dehumanize them through a complicated set of associations that measure their distance from modernity and civilization and the ideals

of white [society]" (74). Following these assertions, I use the interplay between geography and human-animal relationships as a lens through which to challenge critical readings that would suggest that Lurie transforms into a more sympathetic character by the end of the novel. I argue that these readings overlook some forms of violence which Lurie perpetuates towards racialized characters, women, and animals throughout the novel. Moreover, this lens helps illuminate what Elder, Wolch, and Emel identify as the multilayered challenge in creating a more inclusive—non-racist, non-sexist, and non-speciesist—ethic of responsibility and care (87). As they explain, this challenge necessitates the destabilization of oppressive links between animals and various processes of Othering, as well as the promotion of compassionate links between animals and humans (87). Significantly, some critics have acknowledged an “animal topic” in the novel (Randall 213); yet there has not been a sustained analysis that considers the conceptual ties between Lurie’s treatment of blacks, women, and animals. To use the words of Elder, Wolch, and Emel, there has been a reluctance to consider the “violence done to people” dehumanized on the basis of “their animal practices” and the “violence directed at animals on the basis of their non-human status” (87). This hesitation has meant that animals and notions of animality, as they intersect with “the strands of thought left in the wake of apartheid and colonialism,” have mostly been overlooked in postcolonial evaluations of violence (Arseneault 1). In this paper, I explore these conceptual ties to show how the body is an important theoretical tool for thinking through the moral status of Others, including animals. Ultimately, my aim is to gesture towards the possibility of a radically inclusive politics, one that more adequately begins to address the wide array of interests and positionalities currently defining the lives of peoples and animals in a postcolonial world.

“Savage Practices”

Elder, Wolch, and Emel’s theory of “savage practices” describes a form of racializing and animalizing certain bodies through human-animal relations or animal practices—a process, they argue, that is predominantly found in postcolonial settings where those seeking to produce and maintain racial difference “are no longer separated by... long journeys from the groups they wish to dehumanize. Instead, they live next door...inviting inspection of their unsettling otherness” (Elder, Wolch and Emel 82). Certainly, this description is applicable to the situation in *Disgrace*, where Petrus has just purchased land adjacent to Lucy’s house and has effectively become Lurie’s “neighbour” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 116, emphasis as cited)—an idea that Lurie stresses to highlight his discomfort and to lament that in “the old days” he “could have had it out with Petrus” (116). Lurie’s mention of “the old days” is an implicit reference to apartheid-era South Africa, when it would have been prohibited for a black person to purchase property within an area designated for white settlement. In “the old

days,” Lurie muses, Petrus would have been “hired help,” without the right “to come and go as he wishes”—thus, one could have “lost one’s temper and sen[t] him packing and hir[ed] someone in his place” (166). In this way, Lurie’s lamentation signals an anxiety over white South Africans’ declining economic and social hegemony, and resonates with Elder, Wolch, and Emel’s argument that the reduction of physical distance between groups means that oppressive discourses have to operate on a more covert level. That is, a more subtle form of Othering occurs through the West’s construction of “animal practices employed by subdominant cultural groups as cruel, savage, criminal, and inhuman,” while the practices of dominant—and largely white—cultural groups are viewed as civilized, rational, and humane (81).

The scene in which Lurie reacts to Petrus’ bringing home the lambs points to Lurie’s bifurcation of acceptable animal practices—those used by dominant groups—from what he sees as Petrus’ unsettling move to bring “slaughter-beasts” into the domestic space. Lurie believes that it is only acceptable to contain animals used for food practices in an abattoir or slaughterhouse, where their bodies need never be seen, and where he “needn’t think about [them]” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 124). In this, he expresses a belief that is widespread throughout Western culture. As Elder, Wolch, and Emel explain, one of the most crucial aspects in determining the legitimacy of an animal practice, for dominant groups, is “the site of harm”: whether or not the harmful action is carried out in purpose-built quarters and “behind locked doors” (85). Even though

in traditional societies the killing and death of individual animals was (and in many places remains) a quotidian experience, keeping mass, mechanized, and industrialized violence towards animals “out of sight” is necessary [in Western societies] to legitimate suffering on [a] vast scale ... [and to create a] veneer of civility surrounding human-animal relations. (85)

In his comments about Petrus’ sheep, Lurie exemplifies a common, yet contradictory, attitude amongst dominant (white) groups, in that he conveys an aversion to *viewing* animal slaughter, despite a vague acknowledgement of slaughterhouses and the violence that occurs against animals there.

While it might be a stretch to imagine that Lurie is intimately aware of slaughterhouse practices due to their commonplace invisibility, South African animal rights activist Michelè Pickover suggests that only “the most callous and most oblivious would deny, particularly in a post-modern technological society, that animals are being abused” through industrialized food production (Pickover 142). Pickover’s analysis, which is geographically centered in South Africa, suggests that individuals like Lurie would be aware, though perhaps not in full recognition, of the ways in which animal bodies are made to suffer in slaughterhouses. Lurie himself seems to concede the violence of Western animal practices when he discusses the assumption that “people from whom cruelty is demanded in the line of duty, people who work in slaughterhouses for instance, grow carapaces over their souls... He does not seem to have the gift of hardness” (Coetzee,

Disgrace 143). Tellingly, Lurie's complaint is not that slaughterhouses exist, but that he does not seem to have the "hardness" he imagines slaughterhouse workers to have. His statements reveal that he is cognizant of routinized violence against animals, but that he does not wish to *view* it—and he does not feel that he should have to. As Pickover observes, privileged South Africans are often insulated by "[l]ayers of sanitized, legal, institutionalized customs and practices that hide [animal] abuse" (Pickover 6). To some extent, Lurie is aware of this insulation, yet he relies on it.

Ultimately, what Lurie's comments about Petrus' animal practices serve to highlight is how his Western sensibilities are disconnected from the material realities of his surroundings. In particular, Lurie's academic interests in European traditions of Romanticism indicate that his frame of reference is located on another continent; consequently, he is fairly uncomprehending of the ongoing socio-economic and political difficulties in South Africa. For instance, when he is attacked by a group of young black men, Lurie realizes that "[h]e speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa" (95). In this moment, Lurie reads as identifying with European colonialism—he values the languages and cultures of Europe, but he is ignorant of African languages and cultures. His ignorance is emphasized in comparison to Lucy and Bev Shaw who both live and work amongst African counterparts and can converse, somewhat, in Xhosa (81, 129). When confronted by his ignorance, Lurie reasons that he is from "the city," a statement which underscores his physical and cultural distance not only from "[c]ountry ways," but also from African peoples who, during apartheid, would have been only peripherally present in 'the city' (125). Furthermore, Lurie's evocation of "darkest Africa" points to a disturbing lack of concerned awareness. His reliance on this racist stereotype signals a tendency to fall back on colonial discourses, which construct Africa as primitive and unenlightened, as a way of making sense of the "unfamiliar [and post-apartheid] world" of Lucy's smallholding (71).

Lurie shows that he seeks to maintain an insulated, or privileged, position within society, one that is safely removed from the various inequalities and struggles created by apartheid. His reaction to Petrus' bringing home the sheep speaks to this privileged approach. More specifically, the arrival of the sheep is threatening to Lurie because the visibility of the animals' bodies compels him to confront the grim realities of the slaughterhouse process, as well as admit his discomfort at having a racialized Other so near in proximity. In many ways, Lurie's outlook is indicative of an inherited, compartmentalized mentality, which characterizes South Africa's colonial past and apartheid. As Mantsadi Molotlegi, a South African animal rights activist, contends, there are several distinct similarities between animal exploitation and apartheid. Molotlegi argues that these similarities include strong "prejudice, callous disregard for suffering...a misguided sense of supremacy...and [enforced] segregation," which help keep the suffering of blacks and animals "from view" (Molotlegi qtd. in Pickover 141). Lurie's unease with the presence of the lambs thus

gestures to two forms of Othering: the first of animal bodies, whose living selves Lurie feels must be concealed “behind closed doors,” and the second of racialized bodies who bring animals meant for food into a visible space. The underlying implication is that the proximity and visibility of certain bodies—both racialized and animal bodies—unsettle Lurie, because they destabilize his notion of a “civilized” and enclosed space. Pickover observes that this kind of mindset, which advocates segregation, operates on “ignorance and complicity,” and “perpetuates injustice, subjugation, exploitation, and violence” (Pickover 143). It is a mindset that essentially stipulates that “civilized” societies need to commit brutality, but they also need to conceal this brutality (143). Lurie’s responses to the arrival of the sheep demonstrate his preference for this concealment, which is, for him, the most significant difference between “civilized” and “uncivilized” behavior. In this way, Lurie designates Petrus as a racialized, non-Western Other, who does not perform the requisite acts of hiding that Lurie finds not only palatable but also pivotal to the protection of his privacy—a privacy that Lurie depends upon, especially in regards to his sexual “exploits,” as will be elaborated in the pages to come.

Significantly, Lurie does not object to the general idea of killing and eating animals, nor is he generally concerned about the lives of animals. For him, it seems only natural, and therefore right, that humans dominate and exploit animals—a point that he stresses even after he contemplates that a “bond” seems to have arisen between himself and the sheep (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 126). Lurie tells Lucy, for instance, “‘I haven’t changed my ideas ... I still 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’” (126-127). On the whole, Lurie views animals, or “slaughter-beasts,” as bodies with select purposes in life: namely, to be used for human needs and purposes. From this vantage point, the “bond” that Lurie claims to develop with the sheep seems dubious—especially since Western animal practices systematically exploit animals on a large and violent scale, producing “battery-caged chickens, crated veal, factory-farmed hogs, and BST-laced milk from downer cows” (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 80). Indeed, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin suggest that Western views, which use animal practices as a way to “vilify, incriminate, or marginalize other human groups,” are “both inappropriate and hypocritical in a society with abattoirs, scientific experiment, and commercial exploitation” (137). Lurie, himself, cannot explain his “bond” with the sheep; he admits that “the bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 126). In fact, Lurie’s supposed “bond” with the sheep appears to revolve around his perceptions that Petrus is encroaching upon his space. Lurie’s commentaries about Petrus’ unsettling “nearness,” for example, are interspersed throughout his contemplations about the sheep. At one point, he feels “a vague sadness” for the sheep, and then surmises that “[he and Lucy] live too close to Petrus. It is like sharing a

house with strangers, sharing noises, sharing smells” (127). In this way, the lambs provide a means for Lurie to express his concerns over sharing space with a “stranger,” or racialized Other. By scrutinizing how Petrus behaves toward animal bodies through his own privileged and Westernized lens, Lurie is able to imply that Petrus is crude and unfeeling, while also constructing his own actions as sensible and considerate. Lurie thus mobilizes Western distinctions between humans and animals—distinctions which comprise the human-animal divide—to other the bodies of those that he does not want to consider fully human or accord moral consideration.

The Human-Animal Divide

Lurie’s racialization of Petrus and other black characters is fostered by Western interpretations of the human-animal divide, which rely on a logic based on perceived incommensurable differences between humans and animals, culture and nature, mind and body. Elder, Wolch, and Emel argue that Western constructions of the human-animal divide construe the boundary between humans and animals “as a continuum of both bodily form/function and temporal stage in evolutionary progress,” serving to reinforce intra-human categorizations and interpret them in evolutionary terms rather than in social and geographic ways (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 81). The general intention of these interpretations, during and since European colonialism, has been to represent Others as devoid of culture, unable to master their own bodies or bodily instincts—and in need of Western civilization. In postcolonial settings, the idea of the human-animal divide as reflective of differences in evolutionary progress has worked to inscribe hierarchies of the more or less human—“savage, barbaric, heathen, or archaic versus civilized, Christian, or modern” (81). In order to think through the degrees of difference produced through the human-animal divide, Elder, Wolch, and Emel suggest that “humans, especially dominant groups, [will have to] accept rather than deny some of the vulnerability that animals have always known” (88). More specifically, humans may have to acknowledge the significance of the body, with all its attendant pains and pleasures, afflictions and dependencies, as a common ground for understanding and appreciating Others, including animals.

This segment of my paper hence explores gestures made in *Disgrace* toward what Coetzee has elsewhere referred to as “that standard of the body” (Coetzee, *Doubling* 248). While the Western traditions in which Lurie is immersed serve to highlight the faculties of the mind, intellectual activities, and notions of sensibility, I assert that *Disgrace* advances a claim for the primacy of the body and a shared embodiment that bridges racialized, gendered, and species boundaries. The primacy of the body remains mostly uncharted territory within readings of *Disgrace*, and many critics focus on Lurie’s supposed transformation into a more sympathetic character by the end of the novel. In contrast, I argue that Lurie escapes into abstract justifications

for violence when confronted with the body and the body's suffering in various forms, and that these justifications effectively allow Lurie to maintain his ability to designate certain bodies as Other. More specifically, Lurie's tendency to use animals as a way of mediating his relationships with the black characters shows a lack of compassionate understanding towards Others. His compartmentalized mentality, and detachment from his own body, also suggests a failure to fully identify and empathize with Others. Finally, Lurie's decision to euthanize his favorite dog, Driepoot, uncovers a resistance to recognizing the shared vulnerabilities and dependencies that connect human and animal, self and Other. Therefore, I contend that the novel reveals how the human-animal divide resonates within Lurie's reasoning, constructing categories of "the human" and "less-than-human" and setting limitations for moral consideration.

In his interactions with racialized Others, Lurie reveals a troubling inclination to use representations of similarity to link blacks to animals, and thereby carry out a colonial process of racialization and dehumanization. That Lurie remains unable to move beyond culturally inscribed and homogenizing race relations with blacks is demonstrated in key moments of slippage when he admits to wanting to revert back to "older" ways of dealing with racialized Others. One such moment that emerges in this context occurs near the end of the novel, when Lurie returns from a morning walk to find Pollux, Petrus' young cousin and one of Lucy's rapists, peering at Lucy through a window. Lurie describes the scene:

The flat of [Lurie's] hand catches the boy in the face. *You swine!* he shouts, and strikes him a second time, so that he staggers. *You filthy swine!* ...The word still rings in the air. *Swine!* Never has he felt such elemental rage. He would like to give the 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.* (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 206, emphasis as cited)

Here, Lurie admits to the desire to (re)locate Pollux to the space of a racialized inferior—to "show him his place" by way of reminding Pollux of his "animal" or brutish nature. Lurie says that he has avoided these thoughts his entire life, but that does not indicate that he has not harboured them—seeing Pollux peering in Lucy's window simply permits Lurie to release his "elemental rage." By associating Pollux with a "swine," an ostensibly "dirty animal," Lurie infers that the boy is "lower on the 'chain of being'" (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 82). The inference acts as a justification for Lurie's violence, suggesting that Pollux lacks rationality and the ability to control his own bodily impulses. The colonial logic underlying Lurie's reasoning is that his actions are punitive, "just and right," because racialized bodies need to be physically policed or taught "a lesson." The logic also works to conceal what might otherwise be seen as Lurie's own proclivity for cruelty, by picturing his assault as a sensible response to a boy who, Lurie estimates, is "a savage" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 206). It is clear through this scene that Lurie has found limited reconciliation with, and sympathy for, racialized Others. Given the opportunity, Lurie is willing to behave violently toward those bodies that he does not

recognize as fully human. To make the claim that Lurie gains a deepening sense of compassion, then, ignores his continued reliance on animal metaphors to justify his aggression against racialized bodies.

Lurie's animal-linked racialization of black characters provides him with a coping mechanism, allowing him to see himself as separate from, and morally superior to, Others. In particular, Lurie is able to assert his "nature" as fundamentally different from those of Lucy's rapists, by associating his own disposition with intellectual reason and "higher" principles, and theirs with the body and unrefined "animal" instincts. For instance, when Lurie informs Lucy of his inappropriate pursuit of Melanie, a young coloured student in his Romantic poetry class, he does so by diminishing the severity of the situation. Though he has been charged and found guilty of sexual harassment by the university, and subsequently lost his job due to his refusal to accept counselling, Lurie euphemistically refers to his "'affair'" with Melanie, implying that their interactions were wholly consensual (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 66). When pressed by Lucy to discuss the "'girl [he was] involved with,'" Lurie responds abstractly by quoting a line from William Blake: "'Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires'" (68, 69). Here, Lurie uses his scholarly knowledge to gloss over the unseemliness of his behavior, and instead suggest that his sexual misconduct prevented the more egregious crime of denying his passions. In a subsequent exchange with Lucy, just moments before Lucy herself is raped, Lurie returns to the idea that his treatment of Melanie was in some way excusable due to "the rights of desire" (89). However, even as Lurie makes this statement, he unwittingly remembers the way that Melanie's "arms flop[ped] like the arms of a dead person" as he undressed her (89). It would seem that, in forwarding this argument, Lurie consults only his own "desires," and overlooks Melanie's bodily aversion towards him. Moreover, the discursive framework that Lurie mobilizes to explain his behaviour highlights his abstract reasoning, which relies on a conceptual distinction between mind and body. His use of the term "desires" shows an avoidance of the more visceral term "instincts." While the former term is associated with notions of culture and sensibility, the latter is connected with animality and violence (Lundblad 85). Lurie's framing of his interactions with Melanie thus points to a strategic 'in the heat of passion' defense—a defense that Michael Lundblad notes, is "not necessarily applied when it [comes] to explaining the motivation of black men [who are] supposedly intent upon raping white women" (87). In this case, Lurie's explanations unveil a racist formulation in which white men are accorded high-minded and reasonable rationales, while black men are irrevocably tied to animal instincts, physicality, and savagery.

Lurie's scripts for acceptable sexual behaviour are put to the test moments later when he and Lucy are attacked, and Lucy is raped by three black men. His argument has been that his actions toward Melanie were not criminal, but a product of his passions (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 90). However, Lurie's outrage at Lucy's violation reveals the arbitrariness of his valorization of desire, showing how he applies this

ideal along differential axes of power and privilege. Indeed, this discrepancy is stressed in the ways that Lurie later interprets the two events: while Lurie insists he “ma[de] love” to Melanie (19, 29), he asserts the rapists “were mating” with Lucy (199). The central difference, Lurie implies, is that his interactions with Melanie were based on “the pleasure principle,” whereas the rapists were directed by “the testicles, sacs bulging with seeds aching to perfect itself” (199). Lurie’s gesture to “the pleasure principle,” once again, signals an abstract and one-sided reasoning, for Lurie tactically neglects to consider Melanie’s “pleasure” in his justifications. Moreover, Lurie’s “pleasure principle” constructs a powerful ideal with which to contrast what he calls the black rapists’ urge for “violent pleasures” (199). These “violent pleasures” are tellingly defined in bodily and animalistic terms, when he ruminates that these rapists “meant to soil [Lucy], to mark her, like a dog’s urine” (199). Implicit in this reasoning is a “racist logic,” which, Lundblad explains, attempts to differentiate “between the nature and origins of various violent crimes and the people who commit them, leading...to the possibility of associating blackness more with a savage delight in torture” than other motives or explanations (87). The implication is that Lurie, as a white man, is a “reasonable person” whose actions are not always his responsibility, as he may act in “the heat of passion” or suffer from a “state of ‘temporary insanity’” (87). In this case, even when Lurie breaks with moral codes—by sexually harassing a young coloured woman or physically assaulting a black boy, for example—he can portray himself as understandably responding to a stimulating or provoking scenario. On the other hand, this logic demonstrates the ease with which “the myth of the black male rapist” can be invoked to interpret the behaviour of black men in fixed, evolutionary and biological terms (89); certainly, Lurie readily imagines these men as driven by “animal” instincts and “devilish impulses” (88). Lurie’s reasoning thus evinces a colonial double standard, where black men are constructed as committing crimes “far worse...than any of the atrocities [that white men] might commit” (89).

Although Lurie remains committed to the distinctions he makes between himself and Lucy’s rapists, Lucy offers an alternative perspective that challenges and undermines these distinctions. Lucy, unlike her father, is not invested in intellectualized or abstract forms of reasoning; rather, she prefers to deal with physical realities. As Lucy informs Lurie, she differs from him, as she cannot “act in terms of abstractions” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 112). What’s more, she disagrees with his conviction that there “are...different order[s] of creation” (74). To her, there is no higher or more cultured plane of existence: “This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals” (74). Therefore, while Lurie’s reasoning resonates with colonial divisions between culture and nature, mind and body, human and animal, Lucy’s viewpoint presents a more embodied and interconnected sense of awareness. This awareness partly accounts for Lucy’s ability to see similarities between the rapists’ and Lurie’s actions, even if he does

not. For instance, when Lurie presses her to talk about her rape, Lucy challenges him by saying:

“You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn’t it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood—doesn’t it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?” (158)

Lurie is taken aback by Lucy’s physical description of “men and sex” and responds in an oblique fashion: “‘Sometimes,’” he admits, “‘For some men’” (158). What Lurie conceals from Lucy is that he can personally identify with this description, for when he violated Melanie he noticed how she seemed “to go slack, die within herself for the duration” (25). Moreover, just like Lucy’s rapists, Lurie is not held criminally accountable for his actions—a point that highlights his hypocrisy in insisting that Lucy “‘call the police’” and “lay *real* charges against [her rapists]” (133, emphasis as cited). Since Lurie refuses to accept responsibility or make amends for treatment of Melanie, he is also familiar with what it is like to “get away with” a sexual offense. Thus, Lurie is more like Lucy’s rapists than he would like to admit; it is an admission that his abstract reasoning and one-sided justifications help him to avoid.

Lurie’s tendency to privilege the mind and mind-related activities reveals the workings of compartmentalized mentality, which cannot attend the body as a shared dimension of both human and animal life. This privileging of the mind indicates limitations in Lurie’s ability to connect and empathize with Others, including blacks, women, and animals. For example, after Lucy challenges him to realize that he “‘do[es]n’t know what happened’” because he “‘w[as]n’t there,’” Lurie feels pushed to envision the scene of Lucy’s violation (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160, emphasis as cited). What he discovers, however, is that he cannot *think* his way into the body of a woman—he cannot “be the woman” or ‘the body’ being violated (160); rather he can only “be there, be the men, inhabit them” (160). Lurie’s attempt to become attuned with the bodily experiences of a woman thus fails, confirming Lucy’s suspicions that Lurie cannot comprehend or sympathize with a rape victim. It is no surprise, then, that Lucy rejects his repeated advice and admonishes him for “not...listening to [her]” (161). In effect, Lurie resists relinquishing control and opening himself up to bodily vulnerability. That Lurie cannot fully identify with Others is further revealed in his activity of writing an opera about Teresa Guiccioli, one of Lord Byron’s lovers. While some critics, such as Mike Marais, have suggested Lurie’s opera is a productive effort to “occupy” Lucy (77), this interpretation overlooks the very real bodily violation that Lurie proves incapable of understanding through his discussions with his daughter. Moreover, it is significant that Lurie’s opera is unsuccessful; as Lurie admits, it “go[es] nowhere” (214). Lurie can only conceive of Guiccioli as a boring, monotonous character; in the opera, she is wholly preoccupied with reviving her relationship with Byron, who Lurie muses “constitute[s] the apex of her life” (182). The opera hence

expresses the problematic notion that women look to men for meaning and value. Also, the notion that Lurie is writing an opera, an act that gives him authority over the bodies, minds, and experiences of his characters, suggests that Lurie continues to privilege the mind as a way of maintaining his deeply engrained views, and keeping himself distant from the shared bodily vulnerabilities.

Lurie's curtailed ability to recognize the body as a means of connecting and sympathizing with Others is further signaled in several moments in which he cannot recognize his own body's responses. For instance, following Lucy's rape, Lurie feels a pang in his chest that he describes as "a vital organ ha[ving] been bruised, abused—perhaps even his heart" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 107). Importantly, Lurie cannot pinpoint the origin of this pain, only guessing that it radiates from "a vital organ." Lurie's uncertainty suggests an inability to read his body's cues and sensations, an inability that is in line with his intellectualized sensibilities, which view the body as distinct from the mind. At one point, Lurie even imagines that he is lying on an operating table having his organs surgically removed:

He has a vision of himself stretched out on an operating table. A scalpel flashes; from throat to groin he is laid open; he sees it all yet feels no pain. A surgeon, bearded, bends over him, frowning. *What is this?* growls the surgeon. He pokes at the gallbladder. *What is this?* He cuts it out, tosses it aside. He pokes at the heart. *What is this?* (171, emphasis as cited).

This scene indicates Lurie's strained relationship with his own body; indeed, that Lurie can see the surgeon's procedures and feel "no pain" implies a cognitive detachment from his physical body, as well as its processes. This imagined dissection emphasizes Lurie's inclination toward a compartmentalized understanding of what 'things' are, where they are located, and how they function. This kind of understanding does not permit an appreciation of the body as an interconnected and complex system with interdependent parts and networks; it cannot deal with intricate, physical realities. Therefore, Lurie's abstract reasoning and disconnection from the body underscore a stubborn incapacity to achieve an expanded ethical consciousness—a consciousness which would allow him to see the world differently, identify with the experiences of Others, and acknowledge the shared systems and vulnerabilities that are constitutive of the body.

That Lurie resists the development of a sympathy based on shared embodiment and vulnerability is perhaps most evident in the novel's final scene, when Lurie decides to euthanize Driepoot. Although many critics, such as Derek Attridge and Michael Marais, have interpreted this scene as a sign of Lurie's growing compassion, I argue that the novel ends in a disconcerting manner, with a gesture of resignation: Lurie takes the life of Driepoot, an individual and unique 'body' that offers him the opportunity for emotional connection and companionship. Indeed, for all that Lurie believes he has formed a connection with Driepoot, this connection does not stop him from facilitating the dog's death in the clinic:

He can save the young dog, if he wishes, for a week. But a time must come, it cannot be evaded, when he will have to bring him to Bev Shaw in her operating room (perhaps he will carry him in his arms, perhaps he will do that for him) and caress him and brush back the fur so that the needle can find the vein and whisper to him and support him in the moment when bewilderingly, his legs buckle; and then, when the soul is out, fold him up and pack him away in his bag, and the next day wheel the bag into the flames and see that it is burnt, burnt up. He will do that for him when the time comes. It will be little enough, less than little: nothing. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219-220)

Significantly, Lurie reasons that Driepoot's death "cannot be evaded," by discounting how he could play a more active role in the dog's life, for example, by fostering or adopting the dog. This one-sided reasoning does not account for Driepoot's feelings—for if provided the chance the dog may well prefer to live, to continue enjoying his daily pleasures, even if just for one more week. Rather, Lurie appears to consult only his own concerns, and more specifically, his need for emotional distance from Others. This need for distance is signaled in Lurie's reluctance to acknowledge his partiality for the dog—he resists thinking of the dog as "his" and is "careful not to give it a name (though Bev Shaw refers to it as Driepoot)" (215). In fact, when Lurie describes his interactions with Driepoot, he focuses on the "generous affection streaming out *toward* him *from* the dog" (215, emphasis added). The dog has "adopted" Lurie, "unconditionally" (215)—but the same cannot be said in return. Importantly, Driepoot's openness, his vulnerability and willingness to develop and exhibit emotion, contrasts with Lurie's hesitation, his rigidity and circumscribed ability to admit his emotional dependencies. Eventually, however, even Lurie must concede that he is doing "less than little, nothing" for the sake of Driepoot, the singular body with whom he has developed "a particular fondness" (215).

Lurie's decision to "giv[e] up" Driepoot for euthanization is thus a disturbing indication that, through his trials and tribulations, he has not grown more sensitive or emotionally aware (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 220). Nonetheless, critics have typically concluded that Lurie has been transformed by the end of the novel: "learning to love by humbling himself and by coming to terms with violence and death ... through [his] volunteer work at the animal clinic" (Kossew 155). For example, Attridge sees Lurie as achieving "something approaching a state of grace" through "his handling of the dogs that *have to be killed*" (112, 113, emphasis added). The euthanization of the dogs, Attridge suggests, should be understood as Lurie's way of "*marking and mourning...registering the individuality of each dog's death*" (116, emphasis as cited). However, this framing of the situation precludes a discussion of the reasons *why* the dogs have to die, and in particular, why they are at the shelter to begin with. That is, the dogs are not simply always-already waiting to be euthanized; they have been brought to the shelter by their owners as a convenient way of "mak[ing] them] disappear" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 142). Lurie replicates the seeming normativity of convenient euthanization when he "gives up" Driepoot, the dog whom he regards with some responsibility. By accepting Lurie's reasoning, Attridge's argument perpetuates the idea

that Driepoot's euthanization is inevitable. Yet this reasoning prevents Lurie from searching for alternatives to the dog's supposed fate. That Lurie preempts other options undercuts the supposition that he has developed some appreciation for Driepoot's individuality.

Not unlike Attridge, Marais contends that Lurie's final act of "giving up" Driepoot is a sign of Lurie's developing sense of sympathy. More specifically, Marais asserts that Lurie's euthanization of Driepoot is a caring and sacrificial gesture performed in the dog's best interests over Lurie's emotional investment. He claims: "Irrespective of his love for it, Lurie *must* sacrifice the dog...Lurie must give up the dog because it is in the dog's best interests that he does so...To sympathize, Lurie must lose, indeed sacrifice or offer, *himself*" (Marais 78, emphasis added). Marais' reading of Driepoot's death implies that Driepoot somehow wants, or even needs, to die. However, there is no explicit indication in the narrative that Driepoot is suffering or is, in fact, in any bodily pain. Driepoot does have "a withered left hindquarter that [he] drags behind [him]," but this physical deformity does not signal that the dog is experiencing pain (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 215). In fact, Driepoot is described as being "fascinated by the sound of the banjo," and "frisk[ing]... around the yard or snooz[ing] at [Lurie's] feet" (215)—hardly the behaviours of a dog who is near death, desiring of death, or in constant discomfort. Problematically, Marais suggests that euthanizing Driepoot is Lurie's only avenue of action. Indeed, to argue that Lurie sacrifices *himself* through Driepoot's death overlooks the very fact that *the dog* dies—and that, to some extent, the dog's body suffers at the hands of Lurie. For Marais, Driepoot effectively becomes a vessel for Lurie's enlightenment, much like the dead dogs become a means for Lurie to achieve grace in Attridge's reading. Such readings effectively work to reduce Driepoot to an abstract object for Lurie's emotional development, without considering his individual and physical body as a source of pain, pleasure, and shared experiences. They never explain why Driepoot should want to die for Lurie's benefit or any other reason.

What is especially disconcerting about Lurie's "giving up of" Driepoot is that he is betraying the trust of the dog for his own ostensible welfare, yet figures the act as one generated through "love." It is at the moment of Driepoot's impending euthanization that Lurie names the act of killing "love":

He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219)

It is significant to note that this is the only "love" that Lurie admits to having for the dogs, including Driepoot. It is a love that arises from a "concentrated" effort to ignore the deeper implications of taking another body's life, and that necessitates, to some extent, a process of emotional detachment and Othering. This love can thus be viewed as another example of Lurie's abstract justifications, which avoid more complex material realities. It can also be viewed as an indication of

Lurie's cynical outlook, since his concept of love is ominously associated with death and destruction. This cynical outlook is further supported by Lurie's repeated remarks that he is "living in disgrace without term," as he is "too old to heed, too old to change" (172, 209). In his cynicism, once again, Lurie differs from Lucy. While Lurie has dedicated himself to his work at the animal shelter seemingly without any hope of improvement or redemption, Lucy has committed herself to the optimistic view that "'Love will grow—one can trust Mother Nature for that'" (216). Lucy's love is associated with growth, potential, and new life. She is determined to "not giv[e]...up" her farm or her pregnancy (200), and "'to be a good mother...and a good person'" (216). In contrast to Lucy's hopefulness, Lurie's pessimism about the future means that he is committed to a life of pain and disappointment. He resists the idea that his life could be transformed by love or personal development, as he has surrendered to the negative belief that "[Life] gets harder all the time" (219, emphasis as cited).

Conclusion

While other critics have read Lurie as a transformative character in *Disgrace*, I have endeavoured to counter these arguments by showing how Lurie resists the development of a sympathy that is based on shared embodiment and bodily vulnerability. Further, my reading of Lurie's character has ventured to highlight that greater attention must be paid to the way that the human-animal divide, which is deeply embedded within Western philosophy, creates limitations for moral consideration. Therefore, I would like to end my argument by emphasizing the idea that the body serves as an important concept for creating an ethical discourse around the vulnerabilities of both humans and animals. It is a move that I have ventured to show would be productive not only for humans who are rendered vulnerable through various forms of Othering, but also for animals. In interviews, Coetzee has explained that, for him, the body represents a state of "grace" (Coetzee, *Doubling* 248); moreover, he has defined grace as "a condition in which the truth can be told clearly without blindness," without "cynicism" (392). Lurie, then, never quite achieves this state of grace, for he is mired in the pessimistic belief that "[o]ne gets used to things getting harder; one ceases to be surprised that what used to be as hard as hard can be grows harder yet" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219). At the moment when he could intervene in Driepoot's life, perhaps by giving the dog another week in the shelter, or by adopting him, Lurie chooses to "give up." The last line of the novel, when Lurie states that he is "giving [Driepoot] up" (220), thus signals that Lurie is resigned to the fixedness of his pessimism, as well as committed to his blinkered way of perceiving the world.

If, as Coetzee states, grace is the clarity of truth without cynicism, Lurie serves as representative of the kind of entrenched cynicism that might make this kind of grace impossible. He embodies the kind of resistant attitude that might actually hinder a transformation of race

relations in South Africa, as he proves stubbornly unwilling to connect with, or develop any real empathy for, Others. In this case, Lucy's embodied awareness—her compassionate outlook and sense of interconnectedness—is perhaps what is most needed to bring about a positive change. Indeed, *Disgrace* suggests that if there is an alternative to Lurie's cynicism, it does not lie in or around his abstract justifications. Rather, it entails a radically inclusive politics, which recognizes and embraces shared embodiment and experiences. As Elder, Wolch, and Emel theorize, such a politics needs to build upon “interaction and exchange,” and reject “the illusion that the devaluation of Others (human or animal) empowers [dominant groups] or offers them protection from harm” (88). It means accepting vulnerability, “a position of humility or marginality,” to better consider, through empathy and connection, “the needs of other life forms” (88).

Notes

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