

Dog Stars and Dog Souls: The Lives of Dogs in *Triomf* by Marlene van Niekerk and *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee

Wendy Woodward

Summary

This essay begins with a brief overview of current debates on animals and dualism from Mary Midgley's "practical" ethics to Val Plumwood's ecological philosophy. The narratives which I consider, *Triomf* ([1994]1999) by Marlene van Niekerk and *Disgrace* ([1999]2000) by J.M. Coetzee, both posit some continuum between humans and dogs. They locate the dogs culturally and historically and represent them as subjects capable, within heterarchical relationships, of complex interactions with humans. The novels also pose ontological questions about being human in relation to other animals, as well as engaging with metaphysical and spiritual questions. Both Van Niekerk and Coetzee, I argue, make profound ecological statements about the dualisms of racism, speciesism and their reticulations.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel begin met 'n kort oorsig oor die huidige debatte oor diere en dualisme, van Mary Midgley se "praktiese" etiek tot Val Plumwood se ekologiese filosofie. Die narratiewe waarna ek verwys, *Triomf* ([1994]1999) deur Marlene van Niekerk en *Disgrace* ([1999]2000) deur J.M. Coetzee, postuleer albei een of ander kontinuum tussen mense en diere. Hulle plaas die honde kultureel en histories en stel hulle voor as subjekte wat in staat is tot komplekse interaksies met mense binne heterargieke verhoudings. Die romans postuleer ook ontologiese vrae omtrent menslikheid in verhouding tot ander diere, en stel ook metafisiese en spirituele vrae. Ek voer aan dat beide Van Niekerk en Coetzee grondige ekologiese stellings oor die dualisme van rassisme, spesiesisme en hulle retikulاسies maak.

Dogs recur in South African narratives: in *The Story of an African Farm* as Lyndall lies dying in a hotel, Olive Schreiner has the constant Doss warming the dying woman with his body, "his black muzzle ... between her breasts" ([1883] 1995: 271). In *Mittee* Daphne Rooke has the murdering of two dogs on separate occasions metonymise hypermasculine, and, additionally in the second instance, racialised violence against women ([1951]1987: 13, 164). In

Melina Rorke's ostensible autobiography, the pain of her postpartum engorged breasts is relieved when an elderly Xhosa domestic worker brings her a litter of mongrel puppies to suckle, rather than a Xhosa baby as that, in her opinion, would challenge colonial protocol too dramatically (1939: 29-30). These instances suggest, variously, intimate connections between the embodiment of women and their respective canine others, but none of these dogs is portrayed as a subject capable of complex interaction with humans – and it is this particular representation of dogs which interests me here.

If these texts, and others, had their limitations for my frames of reference, so too did any theoretical framework. How was I to write about dogs without laying myself (or the writer) open to charges of sentimentality and anthropomorphism? I could not access any discursive formation within which to locate a cogent discussion of these and other dogs. Jeanette Winterson's short story, "The 24-Hour Dog" ([1998]1999), which deconstructs the (potential) beginning of a human/dog relationship, made me confident that my interest was a legitimate one (but made me agonise about the politics of "pet-keeping" just as another golden retriever joined our household).¹ Donna Haraway's description of the genesis of her notion of "situated knowledges", which began as she watched her dogs and wondered about their ways of perceiving the world through eyes so differently structured from those of humans "but with a huge neural processing and sensory area for smells" ([1988]1997: 285) inspired me about feminists, their dogs and walking. A great many other writings on animals and dogs have, of course, been around for a while as the texts referred to below attest to, but until the publication of J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999), which locates the enquiry in South Africa for me, any research into dogs in South African narratives did not seem to constitute a legitimate enquiry.

Coetzee's text inspired my extended forays into a number of different discourses about animals: Peter Singer's utilitarianism advocates the "greater good" for all animals whom he regards as "equal" [to humans] in their potential for suffering (1976). Tom Regan's "rights view" which he promotes as "rationally the most satisfactory moral theory" argues that "experiencing subjects of a life" all have "equal inherent value" (1985: 23-24). Both philosophers place (male) humans firmly in a position of "mastery" over animal lives and deaths, rejecting emotion as female and unreliable. In regarding "social control as the purpose of ethics" (Luke 1995: 290) they deny that humans could be motivated to relate to animals from feelings of compassion (cf Luke 1995). Besides, so-called "pet" and domestic animals are considered to be beyond the sphere of the animal rights movement, or ecological interests. Katz, for example, who argues persuasively for the rights of nature to be regarded as a subject, discounts all domestic animals as mere "human artefacts" which can be treated instrumentally as objects to butcher

or abuse in experiments (1997: 87). (The same argument could surely be applied to clones or fetuses conceived *ex utero*.)

Mary Midgley's "practical" ethics, for the first time in the trajectory of my reading, deals with relationships between humans and other animals² emphasising that humans are animals ([1978]1979: xiii). She maintains that to refer to the difference between humans and animals is a false dichotomy and is tantamount to differentiating between "foreigners and people" or between "people and intelligent beings" (p. 15). Midgley also debunked very firmly any residual anxieties I might have had about sentiment in discussions of animals: "What does it mean to say that scruples on behalf of animals are emotional, emotive or sentimental? What else ought they to be?" (1983: 33). She argues further that "strong feelings" are regarded as quite "appropriate" in relation to important subjects like war and injustice, proving that "morality does require feeling" (p. 35). Like Stephen Clark (1997: 50f), she would not, however, advocate focusing on such feeling to the exclusion of logic (Midgley 1983: 35).

Midgley also deals with what Hearne calls the "mostly bogus" (1986: 99) issue of anthropomorphism: Midgley dissects the word itself, referring to its etymology as attributing a human character to God (1983: 125). To be critical of "illicitly attributing human sensibility" to animals (p. 115) is spurious, in her opinion; not only is it feasible to gauge animals' feelings from their demeanour and soma (a point that Darwin made ad nauseum ([1890]1989), but it may be a matter of life and death for a mahout, for example, to interpret his elephant's feelings (1983: 115).³ Rather than using the term "anthropomorphism" Midgley advocates that we refer instead to "undue humanising of animals" of which she is critical (p. 128). Yet she also points out that the tendency to label certain [apparently exclusively human] aspects of animal behaviour as anthropomorphic may stem from a deep "embarrassment" about animals' abilities, an embarrassment which she sees as "metaphysical ... because of a philosophical view about what [these descriptions of animal behaviour] might commit us to" (p. 129).

Midgley opens up two central issues in relation to animals, which are relevant to my approach to the representation of dogs in fictional texts: whether we can regard them as conscious beings and what relationship is possible between humans and dogs. While so many animal rights philosophers get bogged down in the issue of language as a marker of consciousness (cf Noske 1989: 128, 131), Midgley defines a conscious being as "one who can *mind* what happens to it, which *prefers* some things to others, which can be pleased or pained, can suffer or enjoy" (1983: 92). Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals* prefers not to use the concept of consciousness, which she equates with Cartesian notions of cognition, proposing, instead,

fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being ... a heavily affective sensation – of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive in the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes’s key state, which has an empty feel to it; the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell.

(Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 33)

If writers of South African fictional texts do not often represent such embodiedness, for humans or dogs, then what of animal subjectivity, which presupposes consciousness?

Doss in *The Story of an African Farm* ([1883]1995), for example, may be a recurring presence for Waldo and Lyndall but his consciousness is limited, so that his relationship with humans is curtailed. If writers do depict dogs as subjects, what relationship with humans does this enable? For Marjorie Garber, in her wide-ranging analysis of dogs in writing and film, entitled, *Dog Love*, the dog “somehow stands for a human fantasy of communication” (1996: 116).

Marie Louise von Franz’s comment that “dogs are the very essence of relationship” (Von Franz quoted by Garber 1996: 91) illustrates this fantasy. Some ecological and ecocritical writers also deal with relationships between humans and other animals (Soper 1995; Snyder 1990) and many foreground the dualistic construction which divides self from other and which has permitted the othering of nature with vastly destructive consequences (cf Plumwood 1993: 41-68; Conley 1997: 59; Murphy 2000: 88, 94). Serres’s sense that “nothing distinguishes me ontologically from a crystal, a plant, an animal or the order of the world” (Serres quoted by Conley 1997: 64) may proffer a salutary counter-balance to what Conley refers to as a “lethal type of narcissism” which has led to the annihilation of nature and indigenous cultures, but the deep ecology notion that nothing should be divided from anything else may have its own colonising imperative, however, in the claim the animal(ised) other may not be differentiated from the self. (My reading of deep ecology is a rather negative one. I have been influenced (perhaps unfairly) by Plumwood (1993: 16-18) in this regard.)

A more feasible ontological shift is one that occurs in ecofeminism and in the traditional beliefs of many indigenous cultures, as Patrick Murphy notes (2000: 87-88). Both extend agency from the human to the nonhuman (2000: 87-88) and replace the dichotomising concepts of “self” and “other” with the notions of “we” and “another” (this is Murphy’s term) to convey an acceptance of an “interconnection” between beings that is heterarchical rather than hierarchical (p. 88). This focus on a redefinition of the self seeks to change ways of relating between humans and beings “who are neither self nor other in any absolute dichotomy but are familiar and connected with us” (p. 88).

Currently, in South Africa it would appear that ecological issues are becoming more salient, as writers shift from a predominant focus on human

history. Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000), for instance, foregrounds issues of land and development, emphasising the inextricability of history, the political and the ecological. At Qolorha the local people may not relate to dogs, but Zim communes with his ancestors through the amahobohobo weaverbirds of a giant wild fig tree and Qukezwa has a close relationship with her late father's horse. (As animals that recur in this novel are either "wild" or farm animals, animals not conventionally defined as "pets", Mda's emphasis will have to be the topic of another paper.)

Both of the South African texts, which I consider, Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* ([1994]1999) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* ([1999]2000) posit some continuum between humans and other animals, dogs in particular.⁴ They also imply (*Triomf*) or specify (*Disgrace*) the necessity for what Michel Serres calls a new "natural contract" while at the same time asking ontological questions about what it is to be human in relation to other animals, most often dogs, as well as asking metaphysical questions about the nature of life and death. Both novels shift the anthropocentric focus of conventional adult narratives.

At the same time, these narratives are located very specifically in post-1994 South Africa. Dogs occupy an uneasy place in colonial discourse, as Rob Gordon ([2003]) has shown in connection with Namibia: the lives of cossetted pets or hunting dogs of colonialists were often accorded more value than those of indigenous people. Somewhat contradictorily, in conventional colonial homologies, the indigenous other is often equated derogatorily with animals. In the South African literary text of a dog and colonialism, *Jock of the Bushveld* ([1907]1957) the racism and hypermasculinity of both man and Jock are uncritically represented. Their prowess in the hunting field perpetuates the colonial lie of an unpopulated interior where all animals are "game" awaiting the marksmanship of the heroic white, male hunter who is assisted by his excessively faithful, and therefore even-more-heroic, hunting dog.

In *Triomf*, Van Niekerk has dogs functioning as loved intermediaries within a racist "poor-white" Afrikaans family. In Nationalist ideologies, wild animals were generally rated higher and their wellbeing more consistently cared about, in the name of conservation, than were historically disadvantaged South Africans. In the Benade family, the domestic dogs are more loved than fellow family members, although, ironically, the foremother of their dogs was previously owned by these same historically disadvantaged South Africans and found in Sophiatown after it was razed under the Group Areas.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee very specifically locates the problem of "unwanted" animals as a concomitant to the poverty of an economically underdeveloped township in the Eastern Cape. Coetzee's implied critique of the way these animals are mistreated or ignored points not only to the poverty of this township, which is a historical legacy of apartheid, but to the lack of a caring

policy about sterilisation of stray animals, underscoring a contemporary negligence of the postapartheid government which has never taken such animals into consideration.

Central to the above South African texts are representations of what John Berger calls a “special relation with animals” (1984: 97) which, he suggests, is resurfacing in Western culture, because “animals have become rare, marginal creatures of childhood, nightmare and dream” (p. 97). Midgley’s sense of an elegiac impulse in human relationship with animals is more complex:

The steady growth of callous exploitation of animals in scientific experimentation is occurring at a time when our response both to individual animals and to nature as a whole is becoming ever more active and sensitive.

(Midgley 1992: 29)⁵

A number of North American current novels, such as Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer* (2000) and Jane Smiley’s *Horse Heaven* (2000), exemplifies this more “active and sensitive” response, which is inherently critical of Western dualism.

To what extent Van Niekerk and Coetzee dismantle the foundational dualism of self and other in their representations of the relationships between dogs and humans is my primary focus. I found Val Plumwood’s sedulous defining of dualism in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* most honed for my analysis (1993: 41-68). Broadly, Plumwood considers the ways that the “master perspective” represents nature, seeing humans as outside of nature which is then conceived of as alien. Her itemising of the ways nature is othered has rich possibilities for analysing the human/other animal-relationship as well: firstly, in “backgrounding” the other is seen as inessential. In “radical exclusion” or “hyperseparation” domination is naturalised and a “denial of overlap” recurs. Contrarily, in “incorporation” or “relational definition” the other is “recognised only to the extent that it is assimilated to the self” because the “master consciousness” cannot tolerate “unassimilated others” (p. 52). In “instrumentalism” or objectification the other is judged by a separate instrumental standard in a morally dualistic way. Finally, the other may be homogenised or stereotyped (pp. 47-60). Plumwood stresses that an ontological acknowledgement of continuity and difference between humans and nature indicates the way forward.

“Singing in Turns”: *Triomf* by Marlene van Niekerk

The issue of keeping pets, as I suggested above, is a controversial one.

Midgley dismisses the notion that pet-keeping is “a gratuitous perversion produced by modern affluence” (1983: 116), citing many examples to prove the contrary (the streetwise dogs which accompany homeless people in the southern suburbs of Cape Town constitute a local example). Similarly, Elizabeth Costello tells her audience that “pet-keeping ... is by no means a western fad” (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 61). While John Berger believes that humans have always measured themselves “[w]ith and against the animal” (1984: 99), he regards pet-keeping as part of the physical and cultural marginalisation of animals (1980: 12-13). He finds nothing positive in the human-pet relationship, which he regards as lacking in “autonomy” for both (1984: 12-13).

Much debate on dogs as pets focuses on the issue of domination. Yi-Fu Tuan dismisses all relationships between humans and their pets, (and humans and gardens) as “tainted” (1984: 5), as exclusively about the human imperative, playful though it might be, to dominate the disorder inherent in nature, whether it is manifested in pets, children, dwarves or black servants in the seventeenth century, or even gardens fashioned into the artifice of topiary (1984). For James Serpell, on the other hand, the human relationship with pets is “egalitarian” unlike the exploitative relationships we have with other animals regarded as economic units ([1986]1996: xviii).

Relationships between humans and pets may certainly be located in an interspecies borderland where possibilities for subjective interaction exist. Inherent in Donna Haraway’s sense of this liminal space for animals and humans, for example, is that animals must “inhabit neither nature (as object) nor culture (as surrogate human), but instead inhabit a place called “elsewhere” if they are to lose their object status (1992: 332). Serpell proposes that pets “straddle that uncertain, ambiguous territory between humans and animals, they are neither strictly one thing nor the other ([1986]1996: 67). Midgley, without excluding pets, is convinced of the “emotional porousness of the species-barrier” (1983: 116). Human relationships with domestic animals, then, may embody potential for engaging across this barrier.⁶

If for Barbara Smuts, the primatologist, the very notion of an animal being a pet implies a “lesser being than the wild counterpart, a being who is neotenous, domesticated, dependent” (1999: 115), she proposes that we interact with animals as “social subjects” (p. 118) with whom it is possible to have “*personal* relationships” (p. 118). In her definition, personhood is “a way of being in relation to others, and thus no one other than the subject can give it or take it away” (p. 118). For a human, engaging in this “intersubjectivity” with an animal involves surrendering the notion of “control over them and how they relate to us” (p. 118).

The potential for such intersubjectivity is illustrated in Jeanette Winterson’s

poignant short story, “The 24-Hour Dog”. The unnamed first-person narrator purchases a young Lurcher from the neighbouring farmer, but so sensitive is she to the puppy’s capacities for “*jouissance*” ([1998]1999: 11) that the need to accustom him to a world of self and other, discipline and time “expose[s]” her “soul” (p. 11). Here the narrator inhabits her own consciousness as well as that of the puppy as she discovers the universe after her swim in a moonlit pool:

I spoke to him and he caught the word as deftly as if I had thrown it. This was the edge of time, between chaos and shape. This was the little bit of evolution that endlessly repeats itself in the young and new-born thing. In this moment there are no cars or aeroplanes. The Sistine Chapel is unpainted, no book has been written. There is the moon, the water, the night, one creature’s need and another’s response. The moment between chaos and shape and I say his name and he hears me.

(Winterson [1998]1999: 4)

Such perfect communication cannot be sustained in the narrator’s world where a manual legislates that to train a dog involves a “mastery” which inflicts on him the misery of isolation by having him sleep on his own at night.

While the puppy seems able to balance the apparent contradictories of freedom and belonging with “innocence” and “acceptance” (Winterson [1998]1999: 11) even appearing spiritually advanced, embodying “such gladness” which for humans “is the effort of a whole lifetime” the narrator believes: “*He’s only a dog. Yes but he has found me out*” (p. 10). Unable to cope with the intensity of meeting him “edge to edge ... in the space between chaos and shape” which they both inhabit, she gives him up and returns him to the breeder. He had been the “dream”, she had promised to be “the bridge or the pulley” (p. 6). No wonder the quotidian life with the “real” dog, a puppy who howled in the night for the warm bodies of his mother and siblings, had dashed her romantic illusions.

Garber, more realistically, notes the oppositional nature inherent in “dog love”: while a dog may embody “a human fantasy of communication” (which is what the Wintersonian narrator imagined with the Lurcher puppy) this fantasy is never simple: “opaque and transparent, other and same, talking and mute, the dog stands for the very complexity of human desire” (Garber 1996: 116). Vicky Hearne, poet and trainer of dogs and horses, would respond that we *must* be master in order to make the dog (or horse) obedient and therefore able to live in a world of modern dangers. She derides “humaniacs” who find the training of an animal cruel or inconsequential (1986: 51). At the same time, to earn the right to use the command “Fetch!” to a dog, a trainer must have

“[s]omething like reverence, humility and obedience We can follow, understand only things and people we can command, and we can command only whom and what we can follow” (p. 76).

In *Triomf* the dogs never seem to require training. Relationships between members of the dysfunctional family and the dogs are completely egalitarian, illustrating the human dependence on the dogs rather than vice versa. Without their dogs – three generations of Gertys and now the last Gerty’s son, Toby – the Benades’ lives would contain only unmitigated horror. As Rosemary Rodd points out: “the companionship of an animal can mean the difference between survival and total social collapse for some people” ([1990]1992: 195); Van Niekerk’s representation of the strong presence of the dogs in the novel contains this possibility.

The dogs in *Triomf* serve to “humanise” (cf Garber 1996: 32) their people, but only to a limited extent. These same dogs also function as what Gordon calls “mobile metaphors” ([2003]) for understanding, in this instance, the racialised constructions of poorwhiteness. Thus the original Gerty represents the only possible connection the Benades could have with Sophiatown. Treppie, Pop and Mol visit Sophiatown after the previous inhabitants have been forcibly expelled by the apartheid state, preparatory to the building of Triomf for less privileged whites (including themselves). While Father Huddleston surveys the devastation “[a]ll the dogs traipsing after him as usual” (Van Niekerk [1994]1999: 6), Mol and her brothers hear “a cry” from under some rubble and find “a tiny puppy with the cutest little looking-up eyes. Ag shame” (p. 6). Mol is the focaliser here, convinced that the dog is adoptable and that she might calm the child Lambert (who is then about four years old), but the feelings of the dispossessed (black) inhabitants are never directly relevant to Mol.

While Pop agrees to take the puppy, Treppie’s response is predictable: “You better just leave that kaffirdog alone, Mol”, Treppie said. “All she’s good for is a stew. I don’t want that worm-guts in our house” (p. 6). A physical fight between the two men ensues, but Mol’s will prevails, even though Treppie has to live with what he calls a “kaffirdog”, a feeling that is exacerbated when Old Gerty, years later, gives birth to Small Gerty and what he terms a “brood of kaffirdog descendants” (p. 7). As poverty-stricken whites, the Benades, if they wish to have dogs, are forced to overlook the genealogy of their animals and what it signifies. Rob Gordon ([2003]) points out how colonial discourses on “kaffirdogs” metonymise attitudes to the indigenous people who own them and who are judged to be mongrel, to interbreed, to scavenge and slink and to be unheroic in hunting.

That Gerty is called after the street in which the Benades find her underscores her racially constructed heritage. She and her descendants function as

genii loci like the fourth generation Toby (also called after a street nearby) although he, more topically than his female ancestors, is sired by a neighbouring policeman's Alsatian. Mol's belief that the original inhabitants of Sophiatown loved their dogs at least acknowledges their potential for feeling. Treppie spins one of his stories, relating how "the kaffirs" came back with pangas to kill the dogs they left behind, although some sympathy for their plight surfaces in his admission that they so loved their dogs that "[a]fter a while ... you couldn't tell who was crying, the kaffirs or their dogs" (Van Niekerk [1994]1999: 4). His recipe for dog stew, however, is mocking. Predominantly, Treppie's tall stories, which represent dogs as subjects with their histories in a localised universe parallel but separate to that of humans, construct racialised humans, rather than animals, as others.

The most dramatic way that the dogs humanise their people is the way they function as intermediaries between the abused Mol, her two brothers – the self-sacrificial Pop and the violent Treppie – and Mol's mentally challenged epileptic son Lambert, who is "not right in his top storey" (p. 16). Unable to communicate with each other due to the horror of their histories and the incestuous relationships between all the men and Mol, they talk through the dogs to each other. Mol points out to the dogs the disintegration and disorder in the house in the hope that the men will respond (p. 10). When Mol fears yet another explosion of Treppie's or Lambert's violence "a person can just say: I'm taking Gerty outside quickly, or: It looks to me like Toby wants to pee against the wall again, come Toby! It's easy. And no one thinks anything funny's going on" (p. 8).

The dogs and Mol and Pop share a discourse that is not only protective but necessary for the humans' psychic survival. According to Mol, dogs may even extend such a discourse: "Dogs understand more about hard times than people. They lick sweat. And they lick up tears" (p. 8). When Mol and Pop attempt to go on "rides" in the car without the interference of the other men, they have to use the dogs as subterfuge. While Mol is outside one day, for example, Toby "charges" out, signifying, Mol realises, that it is actually Pop looking out for her. The subsequent outing is joyous for Toby and Gerty, too, who jump and shiver, embodying Mol and Pop's sense of freedom from the rest of the family.

In Mol's judgement the relationship between dogs and humans is entirely reciprocal: "When people tune in their voices to the dogs like this, the dogs know they're part of the company. That's a nice thing for a dog to know. And it's nice for people too" (p. 11). So convinced is Mol of the dogs having consciousness that she believes they "know" and are pleased that they are not othered. Her interpretation of their behaviour does not project exaggerated human feelings on to them, but takes into account their own language. When Lambert and Treppie appear and belligerently demand to know about the

outing, for example, Toby snarls and Gerty growls and Pop and Mol respond, relating to their anger (p. 14).

In spite of Treppie's bombastic racism about Old Gerty and her progeny, he not only addresses the dogs directly but he cultivates the skill of manipulating Gerty and Toby to start crying which sets off all the dogs throughout *Triomf* and "all the way to *Ontdekkers* and beyond" (p. 17). His theatrical goading of the dogs is initially ambiguous: Mol fears that the neighbours will call the police and that Treppie and Lambert are already drunk, but soon Treppie is engaged in a dialogue with the dogs which accepts them as speaking subjects who have their own "voicings" (cf Murphy 2000: 99). The dogs are transformed from pets and watchdogs into "Wild dogs!" and "Jackals and wolves" (p. 19) according to Pop and Mol respectively. Treppie and Lambert, too, are transformed into animals who howl to the sky, enunciating sounds of the earth "from deep under the ground, from the hollows of *Triomf*" (p. 19).

What began as a manipulative game on the part of Treppie and Lambert to rouse the dogs becomes an almost autonomous dog chorus:

[The dogs] 've got their own front-criers leading them and giving them the notes, and the others pick them up and run with them, the high notes and the low notes and the ones in the middle.

(Van Niekerk [1994]1999: 20)

This chorus, and the way Mol and Pop now listen to the howling which seems to enunciate subterranean tragedies both literal and metaphoric – the political history of the area and an existential despair – suggests a prelinguistic communication between humans and dogs. When Doniger argues that "language is the place from which compassion springs" (1999: 102) she refers not to the reified logos but to other ways that animals seek to communicate. The Benade family for all their brutalised sensibilities are able to grant these dogs "the dignity of listening to them" (Doniger 1999: 105) and thus of responding to them as subjects with whom they have interactive relationships.⁷

Ironically, fellow South Africans are not accorded such "dignity" by the Benades. Van Niekerk represents a world where members of this human family do not know what or who they are, except that they loathe anybody who isn't them. They have a slew of racist terms for everybody, besides whites, who lives in South Africa yet they mock the NP, and even the AWB rejects Lambert. Van Niekerk deconstructs whiteness by revealing racist thinking to be mad, neurotic, psychotic, as emanating from ignorance and fear for one's domestic security. As "poor whites" the Benades lived in areas like Vrededorp where competition with a black underclass threatened them until they were rescued by the Nationalist government and placed in the separate white area

of Triomf. So chaotic and shameless are they in their habits, however, that their neighbour judges them to be “worse than kaffirs” (p. 242).

The Benades, through their family romance, undermine the supposed essence of humanity which is to reject the practice of incest. Instead, they function sexually as animals apparently do – quite indiscriminately – so much so that Mol has no idea which of her brothers is Lambert’s biological father.⁸ While some compassion may be elicited for the genesis of their incestuous relationships as children during the Depression who took to bed with each other quite literally for warmth, the ongoing practice of it has become naturalised for them as adults. Lambert is inducted into an incestuous relationship by his mother as he reaches pubescence: because of her desperation to keep the family together she wants to quieten him down. Lambert in all his monstrosity, potential violence and childlike vulnerability, that “home-fucked misfit of yours” (p. 251) as Treppie labels him, is a living reminder of their family madness.

The Benades do have some morality and a sense of shame for they balk at bestiality. Thus some sexually exploitative practices exist that even they will not engage in.⁹ While “waiting for the perfect shit” (p. 315) Treppie reads a newspaper report about what he calls a “Dog-Day wedding” (p. 316) in which the bestman “screws” a pitbull terrier while the groom holds down “its [sic] head” (p. 316). Even Treppie’s usually voluble stream of consciousness is stunned into silence, as he chooses not to draw conclusions about this.

Ironically, then, the Benades treat their dogs better than they treat each other or fellow South Africans. They do not relate to the dogs “instrumentally” to use Plumwood’s term, and the latter are not, in general, subjected to violence – only Treppie “let[s] fly” (p. 382) against Toby when he tries to look at the former’s scars, and Lambert kicks Gerty when she tries to protect Mol against his rage and intended rape (pp. 66-67). That Lambert banishes Gerty from the house when he rapes his mother suggests that the dog functions as some kind of moral presence that he cannot countenance in his incestuous act.¹⁰

So monstrous is Lambert in both behaviour and appearance, like “a sea-creature floating belly-up” (p. 251) after a fit, that he appears to be classifiable as a nonhuman or nonanimal species. The overlap between the animal nature of humans and dogs is dramatised by Pop who is reduced quite literally to seeing the world from the perspective of a dog by his physical weakness: when he wakes from a nightmare of white smoke to the “reality” of Lambert manically burning fridges, the old car and any object he can lay his hands on, Pop stumbles onto all fours from where he experiences the whole scene (p. 238f) accompanied by Toby. Pop’s inability to speak or communicate, and the horror of seeing Treppie’s inhuman face upside down suggests what it is like to inhabit a dog consciousness discounted by humans.

Mol's somatic experience of inhabiting a dog's body is cultivated quite consciously when she decides to experience Gerty's illness through her own body. Mol's strategy is redolent of Ted Hughes's jaguar poems, which "ask us to imagine our way into [the jaguar's] way of moving, to inhabit that body" as Elizabeth Costello notes (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 51). While Gerty coughs, Mol remembers the time she herself coughed for a year after Lambert had locked her in a fridge and her lungs had been damaged by the gas (Van Niekerk [1994]1999: 161). Now, in the front yard in the mist she "helps Gerty cough" (p. 162) by coughing herself. Mol's lurid and naive sense of Gerty's heart being coughed out of her mouth may not constitute a Hughesian nuanced representation of inhabiting an animal's body. At the same time, her sincere empathy and her stark portrayal of the old bitch's pain is evidence of her ability to acknowledge a continuity of experience with Gerty. Gerty's literal coughing of her heart right out in Mol's imagination not only enlivens a dead metaphor (in the English translation) but graphically symbolises the pain of physical illness and the suffering of mortal existence.

Through the connection Mol has with Gerty, Van Niekerk dismantles any dualistic constructions between human self and animal other. Both inhabit bodies in pain; both are female. Garber is wrong that our love for dogs is "bisexual" (1996: 129), that it does not signify if they are male or female. For Mol, incestuously abused by all the men in the house, Gerty and her predecessors have been the only female presences alongside hers – "anothers", who embody a safer, clearer and unfamiliar love and who provide her with some affirmation of an identity that is not directly related to those of her brothers or son: "Gerty was her dog, and she was Gerty's person" (Van Niekerk [1999]2000: 201) Mol thinks after her death. Toby, in his rather hyperactive maleness, is never able to substitute for his mother in Mol's affections.

Gerty's death is prefigured unconsciously by Pop's dream of a kitsch Disneyland heaven where all the family are transformed into "dog-angels" (p. 197) who eat gratis at the Spur, who play with "magic balls ... like little suns and moons" (p. 198) and lie among the stars which are postboxes for letters to and from earth. All relationships are heterarchical, even with Treppie, and Pop has a sense of continuity with all creatures who share a language.

When Pop and Mol are faced with the reality of a dead Gerty in the bathroom, they decide not to cremate her at the SPCA but to bury her in the yard, in spite of Mol's fear that "the earth is hollow" (p. 204) with sinkholes. Gerty's funeral is ceremonious and solemn. The text for the grave is a struggle for Mol to compose, but she writes: "*Here lies Gerty Benade. Mother of Toby Benade/and sweetheart dog of Mol ditto*" (p. 205), then adds, "*Now she's in dog heaven*" and Treppie contributes the final line "*Where the dogs are seven eleven*" (p. 206) signifying lucky numbers in dice.

When Pop dies, or is murdered by Lambert's breaking a drawer over his head, the doctor writes "heart attack" and "multiple thrombosis" on the death certificate. Treppie and Lambert explain Pop's "multiple skull fracture" as the result of him "moer[ing]" off a ladder. Pop is cremated and Mol puts the ashes above Gerty's grave, adding him on to Gerty's epitaph. Later she plants her birthday rose-bush from Pop in the double grave. She is comforted by the notion that Pop is in the heaven that he dreamed of, that he is resting in a hammock strung in Orion's belt (p. 473) and that Gerty is there too, a dog's star, but "[a]ll you can see is her tail sticking out" (p. 473). Ultimately, the deaths of Gerty and Pop strengthen her: for Mol, death does not signify an abyss of nullity to be dreaded and denied. That Van Niekerk has Mol planting roses in the grave and thinking of Pop and Gerty in the stars suggests that Mol does not conceptualise death dualistically as a source of alienation, but is able, unlike conventional Western culture, to acknowledge death as a natural part of life and growth (cf Plumwood 1993: 101-102).¹¹

Grieving over Gerty's death has prepared Mol for her loss of Pop "her warhead, through thick and thin" (Van Niekerk [1994]: 472). While the heaven she imagines with its human-animal egalitarianism seems to have emanated from Pop's dream, she too had had her own nonhuman-centred vision of an afterlife for dogs: when the barking of the dogs breaks "like waves" over Triomf and the surrounding areas, it "sounds like the end of all time" (p. 5) to her. She envisages the Christian Day of Judgement, except she is thinking of dogs:

she waits for the earth to open up and the skeletons' bones to grow back together again, so they can be covered with flesh and rise up under the trumpets.

(Van Niekerk [1994]1999: 5)

The implication, in both her visions, is that dogs have souls, and are as deserving of immortality as humans.¹²

By the end of the narrative, Treppie and Lambert have "learnt by now to leave her alone" (p. 473) and Mol has independently conceived of the mythic dog-human connection with Orion. Her reaction at the time to Gerty's death which duplicates that of Mol's mother who also "[c]oughed herself to death ... in the bathroom" (p. 200) points to familial connections made through pets, a connection with therapeutic resonances that Garber deems quite natural and understandable (1996: 130 *passim*). Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, deride

individuated animals, family pets, sentimental Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, "my" cat, "my" dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us

into a narcissistic contemplation, and they are the only kind of animal that psychoanalysis understands, the better to discover a daddy, a mommy, a little brother behind them ...

(Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 240)

What Deleuze and Guattari cannot acknowledge, in their high seriousness, and in their denigration of sentiment, is any personal relationship with animals, who, even while kept ostensibly as pets, may be engaged in intersubjective interactions with their humans.

Gerty and Toby are never human *manqués* or mere Oedipal emblems for Mol.¹³ They have their own autonomous beings – and souls – and their own worth. Gerty might be Mol’s protector, her confidante, her source of creativity, but she is also separate and different. Mol never humanises her or anthropomorphises her. She values her for what she embodies, a nondualised another with whom she can have the only truly nonexploitative relationship she has ever experienced.¹⁴

Dogs and “The Disgrace of Dying”: *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee

Disgrace, like *Triomf*, asks ontological questions about the overlap between human and animal, while dismantling conventional dualistic constructions of human/animal, and life/death. Unlike *Triomf*, *Disgrace* raises many issues in connection with the way humans treat animals: animal-slaughter and vegetarianism, and the euthanasing of “unwanted” dogs. The dogs in *Disgrace* are not loved subjects who humanise familial relationships; in general they lack intentionality and creativity. Except, potentially, for the lame banjo-loving dog at the end of the narrative and for Katy, the grieving bulldog, the dogs tend to be ciphers, embodying issues rather than functioning as subjects.

Arguably, dogs are presented, at least initially, in this way because the narrative is filtered through the consciousness of David Lurie, whose ecological sense of animals appears to be nonexistent at the beginning of the narrative, and who, therefore “backgrounds” the other as unimportant or “inessential” (cf Plumwood 1993: 48). In Cape Town, David Lurie exists, stultified, within what Plumwood calls “the master paradigm” in a (colonial) world without animals, and where his sexual activity is a weekly function that he pays for or assumes as his right over a student younger than his daughter. That both women are black emphasises the racial essentialisms of his worldview.

The only way that animals assert themselves in his frame of reference is

when he ponders on castration (his own) as a solution to an ageing man's desire: "animals survive well enough [after castration], if one ignores a certain residue of sadness" (Coetzee [1999]2000: 9). Rather than being regarded with compassion, animals are colonised by the speaking subject here, noticed, like the women for Lurie, only insofar as they are "incorporated into the self and its systems of desires or needs" (cf Plumwood 1993: 52).

Once in Grahamstown, actual dogs and animals impinge themselves on Lurie's consciousness. His daughter, Lucy, a new kind of "frontier farmer" – of "dogs and daffodils" (Coetzee [1999]2000: 62) – boards dogs who are all "watchdogs". On a walk with Lucy, two boarding Dobermanns and the "abandoned" bulldog bitch (p. 68), the bulldog does manifest some subjectivity for Lurie through her apparent self-consciousness as she tries to defecate, "glancing around shiftily as if ashamed to be watched" (p. 68). Lucy and Lurie's sensibilities about animals are metonymic of their ontological differences. Lucy is critical, for example, that animals come "nowhere" on the "list of the nation's priorities" (p. 73). In reaction to Lurie's disassociated dismissal of "animal welfare" people (p. 73), Lucy derides what she believes her father wants for her: intellectual pursuits and a notion of "a higher life":

This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals – That's the example I try to follow. To share some of our human privilege with beasts. I don't want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us.

(Coetzee [1999]2000: 74)¹⁵

For Lucy, then, the quotidian is immanence itself. Further, her acceptance of the belief in reincarnation for all sentient beings is redolent of Buddhist or Hindu beliefs and thus a threat to her father's Judaeo-Christian premise that "[w]e are of a different order of creation from the animals" (p. 74).

But Lucy's "frontier" farming exacts the same penalty that other white farmers in the Eastern Cape experience – violence. When the dogs boarding at Lucy's are shot by one of the men who rape her and set her father alight, she labels it a "massacre" (p. 110), thus assigning personhood to the dogs left dead and dying. The man who perpetrates this massacre takes domination over animals to sadistic extremes, shooting the kennelled dogs as though they are mere symbols of apartheid's shoring up of property and possessions.

Attitudes to dogs and types of dogs have a racialised colonial history, as I discussed above in relation to "kaffirdogs" (quoted in Gordon [2003]). Conventionally, white South African property owners have preferred pure-breds for watchdogs. Lucy's dog boarders are therefore metonymic of white privilege and as manifestations of what Lessing called "controlled animal

savagery” (quoted in Gordon [2003]), which explains the violent responses to them at Lucy’s kennels. While the unnamed attacker may shift the dynamics of the racialised relationship with these watchdogs, rendering them the hunted and not the hunters, he does remain fixed within a master consciousness which, as Lucy puts it, treats the dogs as “part of the alarm system ... as things” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 78).

This master consciousness, entrenched, ironically, in both property owner and assailant in relation to the animals they render mere objects, naturalises domination over animals in a practice that Plumwood calls “radical exclusion” or “hyperseparation”, and is a “key indicator of dualism” (1993: 49). Such an ontology denies any possible overlap between human and animal as the latter is regarded as inimically different and other. But Lurie, when he, too, is constituted as a disempowered victim under threat of death, is forced to acknowledge the continuity between himself and one of the dogs. He sees from his toilet prison how a fatally wounded dog embodies a conscious agentive subject with an awareness of death as it “follow[s] with its gaze the movements of this being who does not even bother to administer a *coup de grace*” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 95).

Even before the horror of this experience David Lurie has shown signs, if somewhat ambivalent ones, of relating to animals as putative subjects. Barbara Smuts points out that nobody in *The Lives of Animals* refers to a “personal encounter with an animal” (1999: 107); in *Disgrace* several “personal” and apparently intersubjective “encounters” suggest markers of David Lurie’s development towards being what he calls a “good person” and being able to use the word “love” disinterestedly, in a way that does not promote his own selfish interests. I would concur with Marais (2000) that *Disgrace* is about “the possibility of ethical action” but, unlike Marais, I would argue that dogs function as subjects who ultimately inspire Lurie’s potential for ethical action.

While Lurie attempts to comfort Katy in her cage, who is “in mourning”, as Lucy says, (Coetzee [1999]2000: 78) about being “abandoned” by her owners, a “shadow of grief falls over him” (p. 79) which encompasses Katy, himself and “everyone”. Lurie identifies with Katy’s abandonment as a universal experience of loss, rather than articulating Elizabeth Costello’s sense that “[f]ullness of being is a state hard to sustain in confinement” (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 33). Given his attitude to animals at this juncture, any empathy with an animal’s embodiedness would, however, have been beyond him.

In another encounter with an animal, the injured goat at the Animal Welfare League Clinic inspires in Lurie a peroration on goats in Africa being “[b]orn with foreknowledge” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 83) about death, although he appears to be trying to comfort Bev Shaw, (Lucy’s friend, a committed

volunteer “animal-welfare person” who has taken on the running of the clinic), rather than believing in the animals’ spiritual preparedness. After he squats down to interact with the caged “rescued” dog at the clinic, he questions his initial impression that the dog has an “intelligent look” (p. 85) with the reprimand to himself that “it is probably nothing of the kind” (p. 85).

When Bev Shaw, whom Lurie judges initially as “a priestess, full of New Age mumbo jumbo” (p. 84) praises him at the clinic for having a “good presence [with animals]” (p. 81), his flippant response is that he must like animals as he eats them (p. 81). Meat-eating, Carol J. Adams points out, is “the most frequent way in which we interact with animals”, although animals are rendered “absent referents” in order for meat to exist (1990: 40). Subsequent to the attack and Lucy’s rape, Lurie seems alerted to what Midgley calls the “symbolism of meat-eating [which is] never neutral. To himself, the meat-eater seems to be eating life. To the vegetarian, he seems to be eating death” (1983: 27). When Petrus brings two sheep to the smallholding and leaves them cruelly, without grazing and in the sun, it is Lurie who argues for them to be given some sustenance and comfort before they are slaughtered (Coetzee [1999]2000: 123-126).

In regarding sheep as living creatures he is restoring them to presence rather than relegating them to the absent referents of meat, which they already are for Petrus. Lucy is caustic about her father’s squeamishness, however, pointing out his hypocrisy in wanting them to be slaughtered elsewhere, and he assures her that he “still d[oes]n’t believe that animals have properly individuated lives” (p. 126). On the other hand, in his inability to eat the meat from these sheep, Lurie does seem to have made a connection between the hypermasculinity of the rape and meat-eating as the pursuit of a “virile culture” (cf Adams 1990: 15). Lucy, similarly, “refuses to touch meat” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 121) after her rape, as though she equates violence against women with violence against animals. Throughout the narrative, Lucy is not represented as eating meat (although the soup she serves could have meat as an ingredient (p. 65)) but some months subsequent to the rape, Lurie eats tinned spaghetti and meatballs when he is camping at the clinic (p. 211).

The dualistic thinking of hypermasculinity, within which Lurie has been trapped, and which allows for acts of violence against the other of the self, whether it be nature, women or animals, recurs in the use of the word “dog” in the narrative. At his party to celebrate the land transfer, as Lucy presumes, Petrus announces that he is no longer Lucy’s “dog-man” (p. 129), thus making it clear that he will no longer do menial work rather than that there are no boarding dogs to care for. Lurie thinks of the rapists “driv[ing]” seed into Lucy “not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog’s urine” (p. 199) as though the marking territory by dogs is

inherently violent. For Midgley it is because humans have been reticent about admitting their own violence that animals are represented as more ferocious than they actually are ([1978]1979: 31). She argues that to use the word “animal” to mean cruel or evil is to confuse the symbol with the thing symbolised (p. 34). Similarly, when Lurie imagines the men raping Lucy enjoying her fear, he thinks of them using a discourse in which dogs signify only violence and terror: “Call your dogs!” They said to her. “Go on, call your dogs! No dogs? Then let us show you dogs!” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 160).

Another instance of a discursive construction of “dog” is when Lurie suggests that Lucy, “like a dog”, is disinvested of all she possesses materially and any rights she might have: “No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity” (p. 205). Lucy’s admission that this state is being “like a dog” critiques the position of dogs as sentient beings who are without rights in South African law. Conversely, accepting this strategy of living with neither possessions nor political guarantees, carries a certain freedom for Lucy: it involves relinquishing what the Western self clings to for its security, and choosing to live, according to Bev Shaw, “closer to the ground” (p. 210) than either Lurie or herself.

One way Lurie passes the time in Grahamstown is to work with Bev Shaw at the clinic, doing menial jobs like a “dog-man”, and spending Sunday afternoons euthanasing dogs. These dogs, unlike Lucy’s boarders, are mongrels, who in racialising discourse would be termed “kaffirdogs”, like those in the Benade family. Whereas a colonial bureaucracy might attempt to control dog numbers belonging to disadvantaged sectors within a discourse which pointed to the need for “population control” of humans (cf Gordon [2003]), the work of Bev Shaw is not motivated by such racist anxieties, but by concern for the suffering of the animals engendered because of their excessive numbers.

Animals have been rendered mere property by the South African Constitution, and excluded from possessing any rights (*Animal Voice* April-June 1996); in *Disgrace* the critique about the suffering of township dogs is directed not at the owners of the proliferating dogs, but at the lack of government intervention in animal suffering which is concomitant with the problems of the historically disadvantaged living in an economically moribund area like the Eastern Cape. For Lurie, however, these dogs become subjects with consciousness, foresight and fear who sense the “shadow of death” (p. 143) upon them, and who are discomfited at times by his presence as he “gives off the wrong smell ... the smell of shame” (p. 142). I disagree with Poyner that it is the mere bodies of these dogs which signify and that they exemplify the culmination in Coetzee’s writing of a lack of “ability to reason or to speak” (Poyner 2000: 72). More apposite to my reading of *Disgrace* is Taylor’s suggestion that Coetzee is “at

one level asking: ‘What are the consequences for ourselves as people of our failure to imagine that animals are sentient beings who should have rights?’” (Taylor 1999: s.p.)

Coetzee represents these dogs in the Clinic as having emotions: some want love and reassurance which Lurie dispenses, although he has always shrunk from “being licked” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 143). That he interprets their fear “as if they too feel the disgrace of dying” (p. 143) confirms both his and their common experience and dread of mortality. This dread of dying on the part of nonhuman animals, is a subject that Elizabeth Costello defends with passion, arguing that whereas an animal is not able to fear death with “intellectual horror” she/he can understand death in “the wholeness, the unabstracted, unintellectual nature of that animal being” (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 34).

Like Costello who talks of “dishonouring [animal] corpses” (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 34), David Lurie is especially concerned about the “honour” of the bodies (and souls) of the dead dogs, taking the body-bags to the hospital incinerator and making sure that they are put carefully onto the feeder trolley rather than the workers having to beat the bodies into shape with shovels. If, as Berger suggests, “a dead animal in the cities is first thought of as an object of disgust” (1984: 97), Lurie labours without disgust, but with veneration for the bodies of the dogs he has helped to kill.

Euthanasing, the killing of a sentient creature in order to save her/him from life and suffering is, as Lurie realises, a paradoxical pursuit. In dichotomising Bev in terms of good or evil, he projects his own uncertainty:

He does not dismiss the possibility that at the deepest level Bev Shaw may not be a liberating angel but a devil, that beneath her show of compassion may hide a heart as leathery as a butcher’s. He tries to keep an open mind .

(Coetzee [1999]2000: 144)

In the animal rights movement, the euthanasia of “healthy unwanted pets” is a controversial issue, but possible conflict has been dissipated, according to Robert Garner, partly because more attention is paid to the huge number of animals killed in slaughterhouses and laboratories, and partly because the euthanasing of unwanted pets by animal welfare societies (rather than by the state) is generally seen as unstrategic as it masks the scale of the problem and undermines the need “for stronger collective measures” (Garner [1993]1994: 90). For Katz the solution is clear: the human treatment of domestic animals falls outside (environmental) ethics (1997: 87).

That euthanasia of animals is so prolifically practised illustrates the pervasive Judaeo-Christian belief that animals are not persons because they do

not have souls (Linzey & Cohn-Sherbok 1997: 137). These authors argue that in order for Jewish and Christian theology to be “liberated” and shifted from its hubristic focus on humans, animals must be recognised as sentient beings who are kin. Mary Midgley criticises the euthanasia of five million dogs annually in Europe because they are not “wanted”, pointing out caustically that human beings, on the other hand, are not permitted to die, whereas primates are killed and experimented on with impunity (1983: 103). In Peter Singer’s opinion euthanasia for terminally ill animals is “the only respect in which we treat animals better than we treat people” (1985: 8), but these dogs in *Disgrace* are healthy, and have to die because of their fertility, because “there are just too many of them ... by our standards, not by theirs” as Bev Shaw puts it (Coetzee [1999]2000: 85). Lacking government support for sterilisation procedures for domestic animals, Bev Shaw’s task is merely a last-ditch attempt to alleviate the human problems with the apparently excess population of dogs in the township.¹⁶

In contrast to the dominant Judaeo-Christian position on euthanasia, in Buddhist thinking – surely relevant here given Lucy’s beliefs in reincarnation and the self – euthanasia is not an option: animals may not attain Buddhahood, but as sentient beings they do have the potential for enlightenment (Gampopa 1995: 14). Taking life, “doing anything intentionally to end the life of another being whether human, animal or any other living creature” is one of ten negative actions to be avoided (Patrul Rinpoche [1994]1998: 102).¹⁷ As all suffering is karmic, to terminate a dog’s pain in this life only means that she/he would have to return in the next incarnation to complete the suffering. Roshi Philip Kapleau in the Zen Buddhist tradition equates euthanasia with other modes of life-taking and feels: “someone who enables the sufferer to die, even by request, is culpable, although the mind state in which such an act is performed vitally affects the resulting karma” (Kapleau 1980: 257).

Bev Shaw in *Disgrace* is instinctively aware of the importance of the mind-state of the euthanasing agent, stressing to Lurie that she wouldn’t want someone “who didn’t mind” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 85) escorting the dogs to meet their deaths. When David Lurie returns to Grahamstown after a trip to Cape Town, he moves out of Lucy’s home to a boarding house, and buys a pick-up truck to transport the dogs’ bodies. The clinic is where he spends his days, where he eats and writes his opera. He develops a “particular fondness” (p. 215) for a young, lame male. While Bev Shaw calls him Driepoot, Lurie refuses to name him as though to do so would be to possess or control him, or set up expectations in the dog that he had been adopted. But the dog is agentive and has “adopted” him, “[a]rbitrarily, unconditionally” (p. 215), demanding subjective interaction and responding to the sound of the banjo. For both dog and man the experience of music becomes an embodied one, as though the

latter learns from the former. The dog, then, has intentionality, a teleology or life-goal (cf Plumwood 1993: 134-135), meriting his inclusion into the opera where he could “loose its [sic] own lament to the heavens” (p. 215).

Lurie thus progresses from his long-held dualistic notions about animals to what Plumwood calls a nonhierarchical concept of difference (1993: 59), which acknowledges dogs as sentient beings who can foresee death, even though they cannot understand the actual process. Lurie’s engagement with the young dog, apparently, is what enables him to speak almost unconsciously, about whether Lucy “loves” her unborn child yet (Coetzee [1999]2000: 216), and is what enables him to call the “attention” that he and Bev Shaw give to the animal they are euthanasing by “its proper name: love” (p. 219).

When it comes to dispatching the young male, Lurie imaginatively enters the dog’s embodied consciousness. Empathising with the experience of death through the dog’s most developed sense (“scenting is believing” suggests Hearne (1986: 79)), he construes death as a smell that the latter has not met before: “the smell of expiration, the soft, short smell of the released soul” (Coetzee [1999]2000: 219). Thus Lurie is coming to terms with the inevitable “end[ing] up in a hole in the ground” (p. 189) through his honouring of the dogs’ bodies, through the disinterested love he now feels and through his belief in the souls of these animals.

The debate about whether animals have souls has been a vexed one in Judaeo-Christian thought. The predominant view that they do not have souls has been used as justification for their ill-treatment and consumption (cf Coetzee 1999: 34). For Elizabeth Costello, the logic is inescapable: “To be alive is to be a living soul. An animal – and we are all animals – is an embodied soul” (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 33). Lurie never dissects his own logic about dogs’ souls, nor confides in the reader about the trajectory of his thinking; he merely mentions the dog’s soul as though this is not a contentious issue.

Giving up the dog to death is an act motivated not by the selfishness that Lurie understands as one of his major characteristics (Coetzee [1999]2000: 146), but by compassion, a love that is neither grasping nor possessive, nor wanting a pet to mirror one’s own image. When Lurie first arrives in Grahamstown his prior idea of living with a dog is illustrated when he tries rather ineptly, due to his own master consciousness, to explain to his daughter about “the rights of desire” (p. 89). He tells her about “a poor [male] dog” who was beaten by his owners whenever he got excited about a bitch and who, consequently, had “begun to hate its own nature” (p. 90). His response currently to the lame dog is more complex: practically, he cannot keep the dog in his peripatetic situation, emotionally, he could not have the dog as a disabled pet, and, metaphysically, he cannot protect the animal from his own mortality.

For Lurie, these dogs at the clinic have become part of a cultural discourse. Classical resonances to his killing of the dogs are invoked by means of the *Inferno* (p. 209), and by means of Lurie's role as a dog psychopomp (p. 146) (although, for Jungians, the dog is a "conductor of souls" for humans (Garber 1996: 90)). He has been transformed into a "good person" (Coetzee [1999] 2000: 216) by appreciation of the immense solitude that he can live now "without abstractions", like Lucy. While dying cannot be avoided, the disgrace and the horror of it has been reduced to the possibility of acceptance.

Conclusion

Texts, both fictional and nonfictional, that deal with human-animal relationships are burgeoning, because, I believe, and as Berger (1984) might suggest, we are losing, irrevocably, the diversity of animal life. Consequently, relationships with individual animals, even with those animals so dismissively named as "pets", become extraordinarily significant. They do not have to embody excessively (un)disciplined ciphers who exist merely to enhance their humans' narcissism. They are our last links with the wildnesses which technocapitalism and our complicit ways of living are so effectively destroying.

Animals are not just symbolic – although animals will increasingly take on this role as species that are exterminated in the twenty-first century – they are sentient beings with consciousness, intentionality and creativity. They live with humans and may extend our limited purviews of time, space and relationship. While dogs may come close to performing as psychopomps in both *Disgrace* and *Triomf*, they also function as far more than Gordon's "mobile metaphors". The terrains in which dogs are located are manifold and complex.

Dogs inhabit culture, not as lesser or putative human beings but as autonomous subjects like humans; they are always already enculturated. The Benades' dogs, the dogs at the Grahamstown clinic and those at Lucy's kennels are all connected with particular places, histories and discourses. Yet they also "inhabit a place called elsewhere" to use Haraway's terms (1992: 332), occupying their own spaces, otherwise the Benades could never have lived with generations of dogs previously owned by the very people against whom they are most racially prejudiced. The lame dog who connects agentively with Lurie embodies a threshold in that he is both from and beyond the Eastern Cape, between African space and European thought and between Lurie's master consciousness and the possibility of a more egalitarian ethics.

Animals are capable, like the Lurcher puppy in "The 24 Hour Dog", of

embodying *jouissance* and a gladness which humans may never attain, because of the reductiveness of an intellectualising self-consciousness. No wonder then that dogs – their presence or absence – motivate some humans in *Triumph* and *Disgrace* to ponder on the spiritual aspects of dying. Because of Gerty's death Mol comes to think of the "afterlife"; because of his experience euthanasing "excess" dogs, Lurie comes to acknowledge them as souls. Dogs, like all animals, are mortal – and potentially immortal. Because human life-spans tend to be longer than those of dogs, we outlive them; thus they can teach us about impermanence, suffering and death. They remind us that humans, too, are also animal and part of nature, no matter how far we might believe we have progressed through culture and language beyond our animality.

In representing the inescapable continuity, as well as the not-so-obvious differences between humans and other animals, both Van Niekerk and Coetzee (and Landsman too), I would argue, are making profound ecological statements about the dualistic thinking of racism, speciesism and their reticulations. The narratives not only deconstruct familiar racialised discourses about dogs and their legal locations in human social formations – as in the South African Constitution which has animals only as property – but also challenge the assumption that humans have the right, as an apparently privileged species, to impose our will on animals, and, by implication, on the earth.

Notes

1. New terms need to be invented in this regard. The term "pet-keeping", like "dog-owning", is patronising to the animal, and does not point to an egalitarian relationship with a resident dog. Animal defence activists prefer the term "companion animal", but, as Barbara Smuts maintains, this suggests that the dog exists solely to provide the human with company (1999: 118-119).
2. Kappeler (1995: 331) critiques the term "humans and other animals", contending that it only valorises the difference between the two, but she never provides an alternative.
3. Similarly, when my guide to the Amer Fort in Jaipur cautioned me to keep out of the way of the beautifully painted and caparisoned elephants trundling tourists up and down the very steep paths because they got "crabby" by the afternoons, I did not think to question his knowledge.
4. In *The Devil's Chimney* (1997) by Anne Landsman the connection between humans and dogs is just one of many human and nonhuman heterarchical

connections. Because I have already written about the blurring of identities between women and animals in *The Devil's Chimney* (cf *Current Writing* 2000), I have chosen not to discuss the novel here at any length.

5. Just who Midgley includes in her rather amorphous “our” here is unclear. As the essay comes from a collection entitled *The Environment in Question: Ethics and Global Issues*, one assumes that she is referring to Western culture generally.
6. In R.K. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi* ([1982]1987) taming wild animals is part of certain yogic practices. A “Tiger Hermit” lives with a tiger, but the relationship lacks the reciprocity of that between dogs and humans in *Triomf* and elevates the master's consciousness at the expense of the animal's. Ultimately, the “Master” is so successful in his “elevating” of the animal's nature to human sensibilities that the tiger feels guilt about his desires for meat.
7. For Elizabeth Costello, on the other hand, since large animals have lost their power, “[a]nimals have only their silence with which to confront us” (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 26).
8. Freud argues that “dog” is a term of abuse partly because a dog has no horror of excrement and no shame about its sexual functions (cf Garber 1996: 141). In *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee has Wunderlich voice this opinion (1999: 40). In *The Devil's Chimney*, Anne Landsman has the dogs hovering on the edges of Connie and Jack's dysfunctional sexual relationship: for example, Flo, the bassett, licks up Jack's semen after he has masturbated ([1997]1988): 40). In addition, all the dogs lap up Connie's waters after they have broken (p. 223).
9. In *The Lives of Animals* the university president's “elegant wife” sees all animals as “unclean” and states: “Animals are creatures we don't have sex with – that's how we distinguish them from ourselves” (1999: 40). Elizabeth Costello counters that uncleanness is assigned rather to the kind of animals we don't eat, for we do not subject them to the particularly intimate process of eating them (Costello quoted by Coetzee 1999: 40).
10. Contrarily, Michael Ondaatje's humorous poem “Postcard from Piccadilly Street” celebrates dogs as the unheralded voyeurs of the world (1989: 38).
11. Landsman, in *The Devil's Chimney*, also has a human (Connie's stillborn baby) and dogs buried in the same grave ([1997]1998: 13). Perhaps there is an embedded essay here about burial companions: Olive Schreiner was buried with her “favourite dog” – as well as her husband and infant daughter (Jacobson [1971]1995: 9).

12. Mol and Pop are not part of a lunatic fringe in this belief. *The Sunday Independent*, 5 August 2001: 2 reports from Washington: "If nine in 10 Americans believe in heaven, there's a good chance their best pals Fluffy and Fido will be up there with them, according to an ABC News and Beliefnet poll. Forty-seven percent of the 1018 adults interviewed in the telephone poll thought their dogs and cats would join them in the hereafter; 40 percent thought heaven was a no-pet zone."
13. Douglas Livingstone's poem "One Elephant" ([1984]1990: 98) exemplifies this representation of animals as lesser humans, rather than as autonomous subjects in their own environment.
14. Many similarities with *The Devil's Chimney* recur: Connie, like Mol, is an alcoholic "poor white" in an abusive relationship and her relationships with dogs are close. But Connie never has an ongoing intersubjective relationship with a particular dog of the intensity that Mol has with Gerty. In her "special friendship" with Skollie, with whom she walks every day, however, she is very aware of his ability to use his sense of smell, (Shaka was a tracker dog) but her observation, "I can see myself in his eyes" ([1997]1998: 39) is double-edged. While this image may affirm her own subjectivity, the dog functions merely as her mirror, a critique that Berger makes of pets and their "owners" (1980: 12-13).
15. That Coetzee has Lucy use, instead of the more usual "animals", the term "beasts" which has accrued such negative connotations of brutality, bestiality and beastliness (cf Midgley [1978]1979: 35) suggests that he may be drawing the readers' attention to the conventional projection of negative characteristics onto the nonhuman (inhuman) other.
16. According to Ghandi, the greatness of a nation could be judged by the way it treats its animals (quoted by Serpell ([1986]1996: 37).
17. Compare the Old Testament commandment "Thou shalt not kill" which has been interpreted to refer to human beings only.

References

- Adams, Carol J.
1990 *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*.
 New York: Continuum.
- Berger, John
1980 *About Looking*. London: Writers & Readers.

DOG STARS AND DOG SOULS THE LIVES OF DOGS IN ...

- 1984 Animal World. In: Mabey, Richard (ed.) with Clifford, Susan & King, Angela *Second Nature*. London: Jonathan Cape, pp. 96-102.
- Clark, Stephen R.L.
1997 *Animals and Their Moral Standing*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Coetzee, J.M.
1999 *The Lives of Animals*, edited and Introduction by Amy Gutmann. The University Center for Human Values Series. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- [1999]2000 *Disgrace*. London: Vintage.
- Conley, Verena Andermatt
1997 *Ecopolitics: The Environment in Poststructuralist Thought. Feminism for Today*. Brennan, Teresa (series ed.). London & New York: Routledge.
- Darwin, Charles
[1890]1989 The Works of Charles Darwin. In: Barrett, Paul H. & Freeman, R.B. (eds), vol. 23. *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*. 2nd edition, edited by Francis Darwin. London: William Pickering.
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Felix
1987 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi. London, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Doniger, Wendy.
1999 Untitled. In: Coetzee, J.M. *The Lives of Animals* edited and Introduction by Amy Gutman. The University Center for Human Values Series. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 93-106.
- Fitzpatrick, Sir Percy
[1907]1957 *Jock of the Bushveld*. London: Longmans.
- Gampopa, Je
1995 *Gems of Dharma, Jewels of Freedom*, translated by Ken Holmes & Katia Forres. Scotland: Altea.
- Garber, Marjorie
1996 *Dog Love*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Garner, Robert
[1993]1994 *Animals, Politics and Morality*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press.
- Gordon, Rob
[2003] Fido: Dog Tale of Colonialism in Namibia. In: Beinart, William & McGregor, Joanne (eds) *African Environments: Past and Present*. Oxford: James Currey. (Forthcoming).

- Haraway, Donna
 1992 The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriated Others. In: Grossberg, Lawrence; Nelson, Cary & Treichler, Paula *Cultural Studies*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 295-337.
- [1988]1997 The Persistence of Vision. In: Conboy, Katie; Medina, Nadia & Stanbury, Sarah (eds) *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 283- 295.
- Hearne, Vicki
 1986 *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Jacobson, Dan
 [1971]1995 Introduction. *The Story of an African Farm*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 7-26.
- Kapleau, Roshi Philip
 1980 *Zen: Dawn in the West*. London: Rider.
- Kappeler, Susanne
 1995 Speciesism, Racism, Nationalism ... or the Power of Scientific Subjectivity. In: Adams, Carol J. & Donovan, Inge *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Durham, London: Duke University Press, pp. 320-352.
- Katz, Eric
 1997 *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield. Studies in Social, Political and Legal Philosophy. Sterba, James P. (ed.).
- Kingsolver, Barbara
 2000 *Prodigal Summer*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Landsman, Anne
 [1997]1998 *The Devil's Chimney*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.
- Linzey, Andrew & Dan Cohn-Sherbok
 1997 *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology*. London: Mowbray.
- Livingstone, Douglas
 [1984]1990 *Selected Poems*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Luke, Brian
 1995 Taming Ourselves or Going Feral? Towards a Non-Patriarchal Metaethic of Animal Liberation. In: Adams, Carol J. & Donovan, Josephine (eds) *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, pp. 290-319.
- Marais, Michael
 2000 The Possibility of Ethical Action: J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: Review Essay. *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 5(1): 57-63.

- Mda, Zakes
2000 *The Heart of Redness*. Oxford Southern African Fiction. Oxford, New York, Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Midgley, Mary
[1978]1979 *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*. Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester.
1983 *Animals and Why They Matter*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1992 Towards a More Humane View of the Beasts? In: Cooper, David E. & Palmer, Joy A. (eds) *The Environment in Question: Ethics and Global Issues*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 28-36.
- Murphy, Patrick D.
2000 *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*. Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia.
- Narayan, R.K.
[1982]1987 *A Tiger for Malgudi*. Harmondsworth: King Penguin.
- Noske, Barbara
1989 *Humans and Other Animals: Beyond the Boundaries of Anthropology*. London: Pluto.
- N.P.
1996 Animal Rights and the Constitutional Assembly. In: *Animal Voice*. April-June, pp. 3-4.
- Ondaatje, Michael
1989 *The Cinnamon Peeler Poems*. London: Picador.
- Plumwood, Val
1993 *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature: Feminism for Today*. Brennan, Teresa (series ed.). New York & London: Routledge.
- Poyner, Jane
2000 Truth and Reconciliation in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 5(2): 67-77.
- Regan, Tom
1985 The Case for Animal Rights. In: Singer, Peter (ed.) *In Defence of Animals*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 13-26.
- Rinpoche, Patrul
[1994]1998 *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by Padmakara Translation Group. The Sacred Literature Series. Walnut Creek, London, New Delhi: Altamira.
- Rodd, Rosemary
[1990]1992 *Biology, Ethics and Animals*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Rooke, Daphne
[1951]1987 *Mittee*. Cape Town: Chameleon.

- Rorke, Melina
1939 *Her Amazing Experiences in the Stormy Nineties of South African History: Told by Herself*. Central News Agency, South Africa, Dassie Books: s.p.
- Schreiner, Olive
[1883]1995 *The Story of an African Farm*. Introduction by Dan Jacobson. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Serpell, James
[1986]1996 *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Serres, Michel
1990 *The Natural Contract*, translated by Elizabeth Macarthur & William Paulson and edited by Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Studies in Literature and Science.
- Singer, Peter (ed.)
1985 *In Defence of Animals*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Smiley, Jane
2000 *Horse Heaven*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Smuts, Barbara
1999 Untitled. In: Coetzee, J.M. *The Lives of Animals*, edited & Introduction by Amy Gutmann. The University Center for Human Values Series. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 107-120.
- Snyder, Gary
1990 *The Practice of the Wild*. Berkeley: North Point.
- Soper, Kate
1995 *What is Nature?* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taylor, Jane
1999 The Impossibility of Ethical Action: *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee. Review. *Mail and Guardian*, July 27.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu
1984 *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Van Niekerk, Marlene
[1994]1999 *Triomf*, translated by Leon de Kock. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, Cape Town: Quellerie.
- Winterson, Jeanette
[1998]1999 "The 24-Hour Dog" In: *The World and Other Places*. London: Vintage, pp. 1-14.