

The Killing (Off) of Animals in Some Southern African Fiction, or “Why Does Every Animal Story Have to be Sad?”*

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Summary

The paper begins with cameos of my personal experience of killing animals and a discussion of the media debate in January 2007 about the ritual slaughtering of a “ceremonial bull” by Tony Yengeni. It then investigates representations of non-human animal deaths in some recent southern African fiction in relation to the thinking of Jacques Derrida, Martha Nussbaum, J.M. Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello, as well as Buddhist ethics and utilitarianism. All the fictional animals are sacrificed to human ideas of “the animal” even though some of the deaths could be classified as euthanasia: the dogs in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* [1999]2000; Sharisha, the whale, in Zakes Mda’s *The Whale Caller* (2005); Piet, the baboon, in Justin Cartwright’s *White Lightning* (2002); and Mangy-Dog in Luis Bernardo Honwana’s short story “We Killed Mangy-Dog” ([1969]1977).

Ethics relating to animal deaths recur in these fictions: the animals’ putative awareness of impending death, the denial of embodied dignity in contrast to the possibilities of human violence and sadism. The animals killed also lose the potential for a flourishing life, even if their suffering has been brought to a close. Some of the writers deploy the sympathetic imagination in their representations of the particular condemned subjects, so that the reader may enter the experience of the othered animal; all portray how the animals are situated, tragically, within a carnophallogocentric order which rarely acknowledges their subjectivities or individualises their deaths.

Opsomming

Die referaat begin met kamees van my persoonlike ervaring van die doodmaak van diere en ’n bespreking van die mediadebat in Januarie 2007 oor die rituele slagting van ’n “seremoniële bul” deur Tony Yengeni. Vervolgens word voorstellings van niemense dieresterftes in ’n paar voorbeelde van onlangse Suider-Afrikaanse fiksie ondersoek in die lig van die denke van Jacques Derrida, Martha Nussbaum, J.M. Coetzee se Elizabeth Costello, en ook Boeddhistiese etiek en utilitarisme. Al die fiktiewe diere word geoffer ter wille van menslike opvattinge van “die dier”, selfs al kan sommige van die sterftes as “genadedood” geklassifiseer word: die honde in J.M. Coetzee se *Disgrace* [1999]2000; Sharisha die walvis in Zakes Mda se *The Whale Caller* (2005); Piet die bobbejaan in Justin Cartwright se *White Lightning* (2002); en Mangy-Dog in Luis Bernardo Honwana se kortverhaal “We Killed Mangy-Dog” ([1969]1977). Etiek wat verband hou met dieresterftes kom herhaaldelik in hierdie fiksiewerke voor: die diere se veronderstelde bewustheid van die naderende dood, die ontsegging van beliggaamde waardigheid in teëstelling met die moontlikhede van menslike geweld en sadisme. Die diere wat doodgemaak word boet ook die potensiaal van ’n florerende lewe in, selfs al is hulle lyding beëindig.

Sommige van die skrywers wend die simpatieke verbeelding aan in hulle voorstellings van die besondere veroordeelde subjekte, sodat die leser die ervaring van die veranderde dier kan meemaak; hulle beeld almal uit hoe die diere (tragies) gesitueer is binne 'n karno-fallogosentriese orde wat beswaarlik erkenning verleen aan hulle subjektiwiteite of hulle sterftes individualiseer.

Cleo, our fourteen-and-a-half-year-old golden retriever, has become gradually more geriatric and is now incontinent. The vet tells me there is no choice. When he and his helper arrive they seem surprised at my emotional greeting. Cleo is in her own environment in her sun patch at the front door, as my daughter sits at her head and I stroke her back. She shivers slightly at the sight of the vet, and when the lethal injection enters her bloodstream her head crashes onto the verandah tiles. The vet's helper puts her on a stretcher and they whisk her body off before it is cold.

George will not cope with another winter. He has been kept barely mobile with drugs and now the chestnut thoroughbred who was turned into a racing machine too young and then ridden too hard by previous owners is losing condition and in constant pain. We walk with him up the green slope, where he snatches last mouthfuls, while baboons bark in the mountains. The vet positions him, and tells us to stand back. As the injection takes, he falls into the carefully measured pit with a heavy sound of death, but when we take our leave of him, his eye that is visible has a peace and serenity.

We have been constantly woken by rats who have recently discovered the delights of our pantry ceiling. They cannot stay. They gnaw at the woodwork, carouse at all hours and threaten the nests of the garden birds. An effective trap would be the quickest, kindest means of getting rid of them, but our ceiling is vast and precarious, so we settle for strategically placed bowls of poison above the reach of the dogs. A few days later I see a juddering wreck of a creature under the hibiscus; my spouse, at my request, dispatches the rat with the swift blow of a spade.

Our Kagyu Buddhist group is welcomed with some warmth at the Maitland Abattoir which is no longer operational. We explain to the supervisor, in charge of buildings and acres of emptiness, where we would like to go. An escort reminisces, with pride, how ten thousand sheep a day were "processed" there. We go to the killing floor next to the proliferating pens and work out what the machinery is for: stunning, slaughter, the walkway where the workers could prod the cattle to their deaths. I cannot put my cushion on the floor near the drains where the blood streamed, but sit on a chair as we do a compassion meditation for the hundreds of thousands of animals who died in these hell realms.

These cameos open up various attitudes to the killing of animals. Classic utilitarianism endorses the humane killing of an animal who is terminally ill or in constant pain which pertains to the deaths of the dog and the horse (see Palmer 2006: 175). Peter Singer goes as far as to argue that putting a "hopelessly ill non-human animal out of its misery" is the only way we treat

animals better than we treat humans (1985: 8). The rat, of course, is different, or is it? Like the dog and the horse s/he is killed with compassion to prevent further suffering, although initially s/he was poisoned as vermin. In Buddhist teachings the euthanasia of the beloved dog and horse is equated with that of the despised rat, as both are categorised as killing. In addition, attempting to end any being's suffering through the intervention of mercy killing, only means that s/he will have to return in another life in order to complete the suffering (Keown 2005: 113).

The *Dhammapada*, the classic Buddhist scripture, teaches that neither those who kill nor those who cause others to kill are "holy", which extends beyond the Biblical injunction of "Thou shalt not kill", which is read as referring only to humans (see Derrida 1994: 113). This apparent permission to kill other sentient beings permeates modernity. As Jacques Derrida suggests, if we ask "Do we [in the West] have a responsibility to the living?", then "the answer must necessarily be 'no' according to the whole canonized or hegemonic discourse of Western metaphysics or religions" (p. 112). In an interview entitled "Eating Well" he notes that within "the sacrificial structure" of these discourses, space is opened for the killing (of animals) to be regarded as a "noncriminal putting to death" (p. 112). The subject or the one who is accorded subjectivity depends on the sacrifice of the other in a "phallogocentric structure" which "implies carnivorous virility" (p. 113).

The killing-floor of the abattoir is a gothic illustration of the usually invisible practices of the carno-phallogocentric order we live in. The Animal Studies Group claims that "almost all areas of human life are at some point or other involved in or directly dependent on the killing of animals" (2006: 3); Michele Pickover in her timeous *Animal Rights in South Africa* stresses, too, that "human life is founded to a large extent on the exploitation of animals" (2005: 2). In *The Lives of Animals* Elizabeth Costello argues, in relation to the treatment of animals, that "we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it" (Coetzee 1999: 21). As the Animal Studies Group remind us, "[k]illing an animal is rarely simply a matter of animal death. It is surrounded by a host of attitudes, ideas, perceptions, and assumptions" (2006: 4).

In one of those serendipitous coincidences of research and "reality" a nationwide furore blew up, as I was writing this paper, over Tony Yengeni's slaughtering of a "ceremonial bull" in a ritual "cleansing ceremony". Yengeni, newly released from prison after serving four months of a four-year jail term for lying to parliament (Burbidge 2007: 10) celebrated in the traditional manner by sacrificing a bull to the ancestors. *The Weekend Argus* of 20 January 2007 broke the story with the front-page report headlined "Yengeni's Spear Starts Two-Day Welcome Party" and with emotive pictures of a roped Nguni bull, eyes rolling, in the backyard of

Yengeni's parents' home in Guguletu, in greater Cape Town (see Gophe 2007a).

The much-publicised killing of the bull by Yengeni transgressed general expectations that animals slaughtered should die orderly and invisible deaths in which the killers are not emotionally involved (see Marvin 2006: 16). Not only was this bull pictured wild-eyed, but the act of killing him seemed, for the participants, to be elided with a celebration of Yengeni's swaggering masculinity. In contrast, the daily slaughter of animals relies not only on absolute control of the defenceless animal, but on professionals remaining dispassionate and emotionally uninvolved in "non-individualised relationship" with the animals (see Marvin 2006: 17). For Marvin both slaughter (as well as euthanasia) "might be represented as *cold* deaths achieved through confined, clinical, and mechanical killing" (p. 17). (The euthanasia of both Cleo and George thus contradicted this norm. Significantly, in both cases the professional who was to do the killing came to the familiar space of the animal who was accompanied by her or his owner, rather than being handed over.)

Marvin's definition of "hot deaths" encompasses the killing of vermin in which the killers move into the terrain of the animals to search for them. The situation is disorderly, dependent on negative human emotions and the desire for the animals' death, after which there is "relief and satisfaction" as opposed to the unemotionality of "cold deaths" (2006: 17-18). But ritual sacrifice falls somewhere between the two: it does not take place in an official, clinical environment; instead, in the Yengeni case, it was staged in a suburban yard and, apparently, with some emotion on the part of the killers, who spear or prod the bull first in order that he might bellow and thereby signify a spiritual connection with the ancestors.¹

The debate in the media about the ritual sacrifice of the bull, and about the SPCA investigating charges against Yengeni under the Animals Protection Act (Williams & Prince 2007: 1) rapidly became racialised with those for Yengeni accusing those against of being reactionary whites who could not countenance or understand Xhosa tradition and black identity enshrined in the Constitution. Sandile Memela from the Arts and Culture Ministry claimed that cruelty to animals was irrelevant. "Instead it is about man's search for meaning, purpose and the redefinition of the relationship with the cosmos, God and his ancestry" (quoted in Williams & Prince 2007: 1). In addition, Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya argued: "In its dedication to the

1. Much discussion in the media focused on the violence or otherwise of the attempt to get the bull to bellow. Nokuzola Mndende of the Icamagu Institute "which protects African cultural and religious rights" stressed that traditionally the bull is only "prodded on the navel" with the back of the spear and that if the animal remains quiet he is not slaughtered as "that means there is something wrong" and a traditional healer has to be consulted (quoted in Oliphant 2007: 15, "When Culture Gets the Chop").

cow's [sic] cause, [the SPCA] betrayed a glaring insensitivity to South African and African history. Its objections came over as a knee-jerk reaction, inspired by the colonial desire to educate the brutish natives" (Moya 2007: 10).

Although the *Weekend Argus* of January 27 ran an article on the slaughter of cattle at the Grabouw Abattoir (see Gophe 2007b), participants in the vociferous media debate generally failed to acknowledge the daily condemnation to death of hundreds of thousands of animals in Cape Town alone – in so-called meat-processing plants and in informal or illegal slaughtering. The closure of the abattoir my Buddhist group visited (they would surely not have been so accommodating to us if the abattoir had been operational) signified only a deregulation of the slaughtering industry – bad news for the animals as their killing can no longer be centrally monitored by animal welfare inspectors (Pickover 2005: 158-160). What caught the public imagination in the Yengeni debate, instead, was the individualised bull who was killed in a ritual slaughter by an ex-Member of Parliament, consistently brazen and unrepentant about his conviction and imprisonment. Journalist Maureen Isaacson was partly right in her suggestion that the outrage about the bull's slaying was merely a projection of anger against Yengeni himself and his preferential treatment in connection with his imprisonment (Isaacson 2007: 8).

On the other hand, that public attention focused on the tragic death of a specific, beautifully coloured, brown and white brindled bull (see Poland, Hammond-Tooke and Voigt [2003]2004) confirms Derrida's observation that it is only through an acknowledgement of the particularity of "this irreplaceable living being" (2002: 378-379) that compassion may arise. Contradictorily, the subjectivity of the bull himself was barely acknowledged in the debate: not one of the commentators or critics of the practice ever imagined him-/herself into the experience of the bull. In the *Mail & Guardian*, Burbidge, Moya, Forrest and Johnston respectively discussed the issue under the headings: "The Big Beef",² "SPCA Needs to Work with Black People", "Culture Is Not Static", and "Conditioned Ethical Blindness" (2007: 10-11). No space was given to an animal rights activist, a lacuna noted in *The Sunday Independent*, which carries balanced articles on the politics of animals' lives. Their editorial at least bemoaned the loss of an opportunity to air the difference between an animal-rights position which is against the slaughtering of animals per se and the animal-welfare position held by the SPCA which attempts to ensure humane treatment for animals, including those about to be slaughtered (Editorial 2007b: 8).

2. In this belaboured pun Burbidge's headline, like that of Gophe's, "Abattoir Workers Have No Beef with Tradition", renders the bull lifelessly as always already meat.

An editorial in the *Cape Times* mocked “the cultural intolerance of Yengeni’s non-vegan critics”:

Here we have a blithe view that a religious sacrifice is somehow barbaric and uncivilised when compared to Western factory farming and killing methods. What nonsense. The ritual has significant spiritual and cultural meaning; modern husbandry and retailing is simply about profit.

(Editorial 2007: 10)

Perhaps dying alone (without others of the same species) in a suburban backyard after being transported 200km (Huisman, Davids, Mafela & Makwabe 2007: 6) in an open truck is preferable to being slaughtered in an abattoir; we cannot know, nor whether the bull experiences his death as imbued with “spiritual and cultural meaning”.³ The *Cape Times* argument is simplistic, as though meat-eating in the (still mostly white) middle class is entirely devoid of religious or even cultural resonance, and in any traditional ritual, spiritual though it may appear, the end result is a corpse which is eaten. In *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee has Wunderlich say:

“The Greeks had a feeling there was something wrong in slaughter, but thought they could make up for that by ritualising it. They made a sacrificial offering, gave a percentage to the gods, hoping thereby to keep the rest Ask for the blessing of the gods on the flesh you are about to eat, ask them to declare it clean.”

(Coetzee 1999: 40-41)

Elizabeth Costello connects this displacement with the approval attributed to the Judaeo-Christian God, from whom she quotes ““And every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you”” (p. 41). Those cattle, sheep and pigs who die in an abattoir might just as well be prepared to sacrifice their lives to the “spiritual and cultural meaning” of religiously endorsed meat-eating, especially that celebrated in the masculinist ritual of the South African braaivleis.

Another objection in relation to the bull Yengeni slaughtered was that he was “bitten on the bum” according to Burbidge (2007: 10)⁴ by “one of

3. Deon Grobbelaar, manager of an abattoir, would differ. He “compared the cutting of the nerve centre – an area at the back of the head – during African ritual killings, when the animal takes some time to die, as similar to ‘shooting a person in the shoulder and cutting his arm for meat’” (Gophe 2007b; this quotation also gives the lie to the article’s headline “Abattoir Workers Have No Beef with Tradition”).

4. Burbidge puts this phrase in quotation marks but does not stipulate from whom he is quoting. The use of the term “bum” here does not suggest that the animal is being assigned human body parts, but that his hindquarters are being labelled derogatorily.

[Yengeni's] business mogul friends" (Jason & Carter 2007: 3) to get him to move, but the SPCA did object to this deprivation of his dignity. While an animal-welfare position acknowledges the centrality of dignity for the non-human animal as it apparently does here, human interests always pre-dominate over those of animals, which abrogates the notion of animal dignity. What the SPCA was really concerned about was whether the killing was humane or not; they acknowledged "the validity of ritual slaughter" as Allan Perrins from the organisation hastened to stipulate (Nzapheza 2007: 6). The animal's dignity, then, can only be granted by the human, rather than claimed through the animal's agency. (How can an animal comport herself with dignity in an abattoir, for example?) For Martha Nussbaum, dignity constitutes a "metaphysical question", and one that can only be "divisive" (2006: 383), as in the Yengeni case: for the SPCA the bull's dignity might have been compromised by being bitten, but for the traditionalists the very act of the ritual slaughter of the bull seems, implicitly, to confer dignity.⁵

Nussbaum's position that we have "direct obligations of justice" to non-human animals whom we need to recognise, ethically, as "subjects and agents" (2006: 351), does not negate an appreciation of an animal's dignity, however. Thus, respect for their dignity, their right to lead lives free from incontinence and pain predominated in the decisions to euthanase the geriatric golden retriever and the arthritic thoroughbred; killing a dying rat with a spade, however, detracts from her dignity as a spade is not an implement one would use on a beloved animal.⁶ Respecting an animal's dignity is an issue in traditional attitudes. Chief Nyembe, Humane Education specialist and head of *Animal Voice's* Khayelitsha branch, critiques the adoption of "Western values", including the consumption of animals in large quantities, which has meant that animals are treated in the townships without dignity "as if they have no value of their own" (*Animal Voice* Summer 2001/2002: 3). Noni Jabavu in *The Ochre People* ([1963]1982) shows how traditional Xhosa respect their cattle, which are the basis for

5. The SPCA case against Yengeni was finally dropped due to a "lack of evidence of animal cruelty" and "no witnesses" (Peters 2007: 1). Subsequently, SPCA chief executive, Marcelle Meredith derided the Cape of Good Hope Branch for being "foolish to get embroiled in a political matter" (Sapa, *Cape Argus* February 14, 2007: 10). On a more positive note, Mongezi Guma, chairperson of the Cultural and Linguistic Rights Commission felt that the Yengeni furore had led to discussion and more understanding between "different cultures"; he also committed himself to the principles of animal welfare, promising to investigate how "to do cultural slaughtering in a way that will promote and protect the welfare of animals" (Sapa 2007: 10).

6. See Gaita ([2002]2004): 33-37) for a discussion on the "dishonour" he would have inflicted on a severely injured cat by killing her with a shovel.

their economies, by acknowledging their agencies and intentionalities in their decision-making and in their delight in racing each other. When Zakes Mda in *The Heart of Redness*, which is partly about the millennial cattle-killing movement of the 1850s, represents the slaughtering of cattle as a spiritual necessity in the face of colonial territorialism and as a logical response to the containment of lung sickness brought by colonial livestock, the cattle are individualised subjects. It is possible for the reader (or this one at any rate) even to romanticise the ritual slaughtering of a bull who is venerated rather than despised, but Mda's representation is, of course, fictional.

One has to concede that, whether fictional or not, "all human descriptions of animal behaviour are in human language, mediated by human experience" as Nussbaum reminds us (2006: 354), but she then goes on to argue that any projection into the life of another, whether human or non-human, rather than being problematic, is an ethical act:

[I]magining the lives of animals makes them real to us in a primary way, as potential subjects of justice, whereas a contractarian approach, focused on reciprocity between beings endowed with a specifically human type of rationality, is bound to make them only derivatively important.

(Nussbaum 2006: 355)⁷

That imagination is a positive attribute in the representation of animals is also acknowledged when J.M. Coetzee has Elizabeth Costello define "sympathetic imagination" as "shar[ing] ... the being of another" (1999: 34). According to Buddhist ethics "Seeing others as being like yourself" (*The Dhammapada* 2005: 35) means that you cannot kill them. Representations of the killing of animals – in my personal experience, in the recent media and in fiction – may all be characterised by narrative and the deployment of imagination.

Fictional Narratives of Killing Animals

The rest of this paper will consider how several southern African writers have taken the killing of animals as central aspects in their fictions: the dogs, especially Driepoot, in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* ([1999]2000); Sharisha, the whale in Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* (2005); Piet, the baboon in Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning* (2002); and Mangy-Dog in

7. A colleague of mine argued, in a seminar I was giving on non-fictional representations of animals' agencies and intentionalities, that the writers' representations were merely human projections. By that account, of course, both fictional and "real" representations of human relationships are also projections.

Luis Bernardo Honwana's short story "We Killed Mangy-Dog" ([1969] 1977). All the animals, including the whale, are sacrificed to human ideas of what Jacques Derrida calls "the Animal", that undifferentiated, reviled other, "all the living things that Man does not recognise as his fellows, his neighbours, his brothers" (2002: 402) even though some of the deaths could be classified as euthanasia. To varying degrees, the purpose of the writer is to represent the death of an "irreplaceable living being", to borrow Derrida's phrase, in ways which tacitly underscore ethical aspects of killing animals. To what extent these texts could be labelled "animal stories", though, in my rather facetious title question is debatable, as each of these narratives has a primary human protagonist. Yet each protagonist interacts extensively with an animal or animals (or a mammal in the case of the whale) in ways that are central to the plot.

In *Disgrace* David Lurie watches helplessly, imprisoned in the lavatory, as an intruder shoots dogs in his daughter's boarding kennels:

With practised ease [the tall, Xhosa man] brings a cartridge up to the breech, thrusts the muzzle into the dogs' cage. The biggest of the German Shepherds, slaving with rage, snaps at it. There is a heavy report; blood and brains splatter the cage. For a moment the barking ceases. The man fires twice more. One dog, shot through the chest dies at once; another, with a gaping throat-wound, sits down heavily, flattens its ears, following with its gaze the movements of the being who does not even bother to administer a coup de grace.

A hush falls. The remaining three dogs, with nowhere to hide, retreat to the back of the pen, milling about, whining softly. Taking his time between shots, the man picks them off.

(Coetzee [1999]2000: 95-96)

This armed and violent abuse, metonymising a human perception of superiority over "the Animal", points to the sacrificial structures for animals in Western and other cultures. In South Africa this killing of German Shepherd dogs is racialised by the history of white privilege being shored up by guard dogs such as these, with the Xhosa gunman taking "[c]ontemptible, yet exhilarating ... heady ... revenge" (p. 110) as Lurie imagines later, as he buries the dogs.

The deliberate cruelty of the killer may be contrasted with the so-called euthanasia of excessive township dogs by Bev Shaw and David Lurie, who, together, administer the lethal injection and cradle the dogs with "what [Lurie] no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name love" (p. 219). Lurie has been adopted by a lame dog that Shaw calls Driepoot but at the end of the novel he brings him from the holding cages to be killed. The dog licks his face and Lurie carries him in his arms "like a lamb" (p. 219). There are many ways to interpret this final act, but most commentators, apart from Cornwall [2008], focus on its putative redemptiveness (or lack of it) for Lurie (Marais 2000, Poyner 2000, Graham 2002), rather than on the ethical

aspects of euthanising healthy dogs. The resonance with Christian animal sacrifice is unmistakable, which suggests that Coetzee may be critiquing one of the founding myths of Judaeo-Christianity, which as Derrida reminds us, is that of God preferring the animal offering of Abel to the vegetable one of Cain (2002: 411).

Certainly, while the shooting of the dogs in their cages is evidently sadistic and devoid of pity, the killing of healthy township dogs is far more complex ethically, if not in the text itself.⁸ Clare Palmer in her essay on “Killing Animals in Animal Shelters” (2006) dismantles the welfare argument that “humane killing” is “best for the individual animal”, that it is “required” because of excessive numbers, and that it is “best for human beings” (2006: 173). She cites Tom Regan, in *The Case for Animal Rights*, for whom the so-called “humane killing” of animals is “ethically unacceptable” if the animals are healthy and not in unceasing pain. Palmer proposes instead, although not as an easy alternative, that a “relational approach” be adopted in which the killing of animals in shelters could be analysed “as emerging from a whole nexus of historical and cultural relationships and practices” (2006: 179).

Quite why the dogs in *Disgrace* are considered “too many” (and therefore in need of eradication) and by whose standards is never actually explored by any of the characters, even Lucy who adores the dogs she boards.⁹ If, according to the rights view, the killing of these township dogs in *Disgrace* could not be classified as euthanasia as the dogs are healthy, then the possibility remains that Bev Shaw (or even Lucy), in her animal welfare or consequentialist thinking, perpetuates colonial judgement on the dogs in the townships (see Gordon 2003). While some of the dogs are ill or neglected, “most of all they [suffer] from their own fertility. There are simply too many of them” (p. 142). The point of view is unclear, but this could imply an instrumentalising opinion, not only of the township-dwellers who bring their animals to be “dispose[d] of ... dispatch[ed] to oblivion” (p. 142) but of Bev Shaw herself, who might otherwise attempt to find alternatives, such as adoption, or even to permit their living ferally.

8. My reading of *Disgrace* in this regard has much in common with that of Gareth Cornwell [2008] in that both of our papers foreground the deaths of the dogs. In Cornwell’s witty essay with a dog as the speaker, the Clinic, far from being a place of compassion, is likened to “a death factory ... a Treblinka”. Yet I differ from Cornwell (through his speaker) who is adamantly against the conventional reading of the novel as partly “a dramatization of the views of animal rights in *The Lives of Animals*. I am also not as sure as Cornwell’s dog that Coetzee is critical of animal welfare practices and that Lurie instrumentalises Driepoot.

9. Yet it is hard to disagree with Cornwell’s interpretation of this phrase (via *Jude the Obscure*) as critical of the animal-welfare position.

In Honwana's "We Killed Mangy-Dog" the veterinary doctor's order to kill a diseased, stray dog in the village points to a welfare position, in which the humane killing of a particular animal is done for the benefit of humans, whose health might otherwise be compromised (see Palmer 2006: 175). This generalising view discounts the love that both the narrator Ginho, mocked by his gang for being "porky" and a "shit of a black" (p. 108), and "crazy" Isaura, his school mate, who is a developmentally delayed outcast, have for Mangy-Dog. For them both the dog is a subject with whom they converse and who is capable of responding, but in the face of the order to shoot the dog, they are powerless. When the gang of young, adolescent boys, spurred on by Senhor Duarte of the Veterinary Department, get their fathers' guns to practise their marksmanship on the dog, their initiation into a masculinist order which is sacrificial for animals and the weak is satirised, as is the structure itself. So brittle is their hegemonic masculinity that initially none is able to shoot Mangy-Dog, but, lacking compassion, they bully Ginho into dragging the roped dog into the bush and then firing the first shot.

Ginho addresses Mangy-Dog telepathically, assuring him he will no longer feel pain and promising him an afterlife as his soul will have human status:

"YOU'LL DIE AND YOU'LL GO TO HEAVEN, STRAIGHT UP TO HEAVEN ... YOU'LL BE HAPPY THERE IN HEAVEN; but before this I'll bury your body and I'll put up a white cross ... and you'll go to limbo ... Yes, before you go to Heaven you'll go to limbo like a child ... can you hear, Mangy-Dog?"

(Honwana [1969]1977; 108 capitals and ellipses in original)

After the explosion of Ginho's shot, his trauma is compounded by the sound of a scream and whimpering and Isaura's appearance. Ginho and Isaura clutch onto each other as the gang finally fire maniacally at the dog over their heads then boast about their marksmanship and their slow obliteration of the animal.

Honwana skilfully depicts the boys' ambivalence to Mangy-Dog. While he is othered and objectified by the gang, they would not have relished his killing so sadistically if they had not regarded him as sentient and able to feel pain. As Luc Ferry maintains, it is this contradiction that makes the "torture" of animals so "interesting" (2004). The narrative suggests, then, that Mangy-Dog is not so much killed as murdered, terminology reserved usually for the killing of humans, but if non-human animals are represented as subjects then this term is surely justified.¹⁰ Philosopher Raimond Gaita

10. For Gareth Patterson "a simple murder in man's society deeply affects the whole family, so it is with lions. I believe it is as wrong to murder a lion as it is to murder a man" (2005: 62).

contends that the “murder of a human being is more terrible than the killing of any animal” ([2002]2004: 197-198) rationalising “I have heard people say that meat is murder, but I have not met anyone whom I credit with believing it” (p. 198). He clinches his argument with the spurious claim: “Were human beings slaughtered as often as animals are [vegetarians] would take up arms against those who are doing it and the governments that allow it. Yet most people do not get up from the table when meat is served” (p. 198). Most people, of course, do not have the belligerent courage of an Elizabeth Costello nor her disregard for social convention. Gaita’s deliberate disingenuousness muddies the argument against animal killing; particularly in his further comparison of eating meat with eating infants.

Derrida, however, is very clear about the killing of animals being tantamount to murder, asking rhetorically: “Do we agree to presume that every murder, every transgression of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” concerns only man ... and that in sum there are only crimes “against humanity?” (2002: 416). And Coetzee has Costello turn to the significantly named Dean Arendt and say: ““What is so special about the form of consciousness we recognise [in humans] that makes killing a bearer of it a crime while killing an animal goes unpunished?”” (1999: 44).

Justin Cartwright’s *White Lightning* represents the killing of an animal subject as murder in the penultimate scene. James Kronk attempts, ineffectually, and with some desperation, to return Piet, the domesticated, caged baboon whom he acquired when he bought a farm, to Noupoot, a nature area inhabited by a troop of wild baboons. Piet is under sentence of death for having fatally attacked young Zwelakhe, but Kronk suspects that the baboon was framed in a racialised crime. Witbooi, the coloured, long-standing farm foreman had, Kronk believed, murderously persuaded the boy to enter the cage because of the farmworkers’ resentment against the presence on the farm of Zwelakhe’s Xhosa family. Kronk, who has built up trust with Piet, taking him on out of his cage to the beach and up the mountain, now entices him out of his car with a dried peach roll and then drives off into the mist. He returns half an hour later to find Piet severely injured and without an eye after an attack by the wild baboons:

He walks towards me. One of his hind legs is dragging. He whimpers and puts his arm around me.

“Poor boy. Come, Piet.”

I take Roos’s cattle gun from the car. Piet stands shivering as I shoot him in the head on the blind side. I heave his beloved body with difficulty down the rocky slope towards the river. The mist and scrub take it.

If I could speak I would say that I too, like so many of my countrymen, am a murderer, but the limits of my language have met the limits of my world.

(Cartwright 2002: 243)

Kronk's killing of the animal with love, and disposing of the body so that his corpse is honoured has parallels with Lurie's practices at the clinic.¹¹ Like Lurie, too, he conceptualises the killing of an animal as murder while gesturing to what Derrida calls the "sacrificial structures" which discursively construct an animal as incapable of being murdered.

After the event, the Whale Caller conceptualises the death of Sharisha, the female whale with whom he connects through the music of his kelp horn and their orgiastic dances, as a "ritual murder". In her desire to be closer to him she had beached herself and then could not be dislodged, neither by the ineffective politicians, whom Mda satirises, nor by the scientists who can find no solution to Sharisha's plight except to resort to euthanasia by dynamiting her:

Like a high priest in a ritual sacrifice a man stands over a contraption that is connected to the whale with a long red cable. With all due solemnity he triggers the explosives. Sharisha goes up in a gigantic ball of smoke and flame It is like Guy Fawkes fireworks. The glorious death brightens the sky like the pyrotechnics that are used by rock bands in cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg The onlookers cheer and applaud like the carnival crowd they have become

The Whale Caller sits silent and still as blubber rains on him. Until he is completely larded with it. Seagulls are attracted by the strong stench of death. They brave the black smoke and descend to scavenge on the tiny pieces that are strewn on the sand and on the rocks. The sea has become very calm.

(Mda 2005: 205)

Unlike the other representations of killing discussed above, the death of the whale is imbued with ecological significance. What is curious about the representation of the mammal's death, however, is that Mda has Saluni, who has always loathed her rival, Sharisha, as focaliser, which suggests that as readers we need to be critical of her responses. Yet some ambiguity obtains, for the following day the Whale Caller himself is comforted by the whale's death being "glorious". This does not absolve him of having to bear a broader responsibility for Sharisha's death, which he does, by wearing a sandwich board proclaiming "I am the Hermanus Penitent" as he goes on foot from town to town "flogging himself with shame" (p. 210).

In taking responsibility for the deaths of animals all the protagonists heal, to some extent, what Derrida call the "abyssal rupture" between humans and other animals; they face the knowledge of their part in the killing of an

11. Both Graham (2002: 11) and Cornwell [2008] find Lurie's gestures self-serving, rather than compassionate. In his self-interrogation he might assert that he is tending to the dogs' bodies "[f]or himself" but then goes on, "[f]or his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing" (p. 146), which points to an ethics of care for animals and their bodies.

animal and each of them, except for Kronk, looks the animal or animals in the eye. For Derrida, “the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human ... the border crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself” (2002: 381). The gaze of the animal not only potentially brings to the human a consciousness of being “seen by the animal” (2002: 382), but, as David Wood points out in his response to Derrida, Levinas’s “face-to-face relation *means* ‘Don’t kill me’” (2004: 131; emphasis in original).

Animal Subjectivities and Death

Whether an animal is able to have a sense of his or her impending death, as Wood implies, is controversial. Raimond Gaita is dismissive of the possibility: for him, animals have no reflective knowledge so cannot dread death ([2002]2004: 71), but Coetzee has Elizabeth Costello come out strongly against this view and the theory of consciousness that is implied. She counters the argument of O’Hearne who, like Gaita, believes that animals cannot fear death because of their lack of comprehension:

“Anyone who says that life matters less to animals than it does to us has not held in his hands an animal fighting for its life. The whole being of the animal is thrown into that fight, without reserve. When you say that the fight lacks a dimension of intellectual or imaginative horror, I agree. It is not in the mode of being of animals to have an intellectual horror: their whole being is in the living flesh.”

(Coetzee 1999: 65)

The power of the gaze of an animal is dramatised when Cartwright has Kronk shoot Piet on his blind side. In addition, the gaze of Mangy-Dog’s weeping, blue eyes in Honwana’s short story not only frightens Ginho, but deflects all the twelve members of the gang from their murderous intentions, if only for a short space of time.

Derrida’s analysis that the gaze of an animal has ontological significance for the human is dramatised in these stories: unable to cope with the ramifications of killing this specific animal, Ginho “had to shut [his] eyes so [he] didn’t see the dog’s blue eyes, looking at me like someone asking for something without wanting to say it” (Honwana [1969]1977: 100). Throughout the lengthy horror of the shooting of Mangy-Dog, Ginho addresses him, confessing his fear and begging for the animal’s forgiveness. For Ginho, there is no question that the dog does not understand he has been sentenced to die. So acutely aware is he of the embodied fear of Mangy-Dog that the trembling of the dog against his legs, as the boys argue about the logistics of killing their victim in the bush behind the abattoir, sets his own legs shaking.

Similarly, David Lurie in *Disgrace*, is “convinced the dogs know their time has come” (Coetzee [1999]2000) even though the euthanasia is conducted in calm circumstances and is painless. The dogs denote, in their embodied responses, that they “smell” what awaits them, but if they appear to “*feel* the disgrace of dying” they also *know* [the needle] is going to hurt them terribly (p.143; my italics), which may suggest that Lurie has more faith in a dog’s intellectual powers of deduction than Costello. The dogs in the cages who are shot in cold blood very definitely know, too, that they are about to die.

In *The Whale Caller* Mda’s representation of Sharisha beaching herself might seem sacrificial: The Whale Caller, depressed at the breakdown of his relationship with Saluni, intends to blow his kelp horn until he “collapses on the mud and becomes one with it” (2000: 197), and Sharisha wants “to save him from the death he is hankering after” (p. 197), yet her agency and intentionality do not seem suicidal, rather her losing her bearings is represented as a tragic accident:

She has been longing for the horn All she wants is to bathe herself in its sounds To lose herself in the dances of the past. She is too mesmerised to realise that she has recklessly crossed the line that separates the blue depths from the green shallows Her stomach lies on the sand. He stops playing.

(Mda 2005: 197)

Sharisha’s focalisation takes the reader into her embodiment and subjectivity here; the Whale Caller, himself, is in a state of catatonic grief.¹²

In *White Lightning*, Kronk’s sympathetic imagination of Piet is illustrated in his final compassion for the baboon’s embodied subjectivity: his terrible injuries, his hugging of Kronk. Cartwright has Kronk often refer to the baboon as “my boy”, which suggests a non-hierarchical connection with the animal, even an echo of the son he has lost.¹³ The demise of Kronk’s bucolic dream (with the farm about to be appropriated by a mining company) parallels the end of his plans to rehabilitate Piet. The tragedy begins to unfold from the awareness of the baboon: “[Piet] is sitting on his box [in the cage]. He will not come down. There is blood on the ground, terrible amounts of it, on which a crust has formed in places” (Cartwright

12. Although Sharisha is the focaliser, Mda never appropriates her viewpoint, nor unduly humanises it. Compare Witi Ihimaera’s *The Whale Rider* ([1987] 2003) whose “old mother whale” has to humour her hegemonically masculinist “husband” in order to get her point of view heard.

13. For very different readings of this novel, see Pechey (2006) and Marais (2003). Specifically, Marais illustrates that within the “discursive context” of colonial and even present-day South Africa baboons may be “equated” with “black” people; thus he reads Kronk’s appellation of Piet as “my boy” as becoming “increasingly ironic” (2003: 85-86).

2002: 231). But Kronk never believes in Piet's culpability; instead, he recalls the scenario he had sent to his literary agent about a baboon who had rescued a kidnapped child with the rationale: "Baboons love small children" (p. 238).

If we consider, along with Nussbaum, what animals are entitled to, then that includes the right to a "flourishing life". Nussbaum argues against the utilitarian view that the painless killing of an animal is of no consequence as an animal can have no "conscious interests in the future" (2006: 384). She maintains, instead, that any animal with a memory must have a sense of the future and therefore will have a sense of the trajectory of her life "as a narrative extended over time" (p. 384). To kill a healthy animal is deleterious if he loses "centrally valuable forms of capability" (p. 386), which include the following: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; control over one's environment (pp. 392-401). The cases of the terminally ill Cleo or the partly immobilised George in constant pain are not relevant here, as their lives no longer held any promise of thriving. On the other hand, the rat and the bull who were killed were presumably both in good health and had expectations of future lives.¹⁴

In the fictional narratives, the specific loss of capabilities for the killed animal or animals varies, as well as the characters' awareness of the loss. The Whale Caller is keenly aware of what Sharisha has lost by dying, mourning that she could have lived to fifty (Mda 2005: 209); the whale loses the sensuality of her music and play, her emotional attachment to the Whale Caller, and to her calf, her affiliation with others of her own species, her travels through the oceans of the planet. To what extent Piet had the expectation of a flourishing life is more complex: his life as a caged animal from adolescence is an indictment of human violence (the previous farmer had orphaned him by shooting his mother). Before his death Kronk attempted to improve the quality of the baboon's life by taking him on outings and by ill-informed forays to a wild troop. Thus, in dying Piet loses the potential for freedom and his entitlement to bodily integrity without imprisonment. He loses the attachment to Kronk, and, potentially, attachments to members of his own species, also, and tragically, what he had never experienced, control over his own environment.

Ginho tries to dissuade the gang from shooting Mangy-Dog by promising to dispel the reason for the death sentence: "[W]e needn't kill the dog, I'll keep him, I'll treat his sores and hide him so that he doesn't go round the village any more with all those sores that make everybody sick" (Honwana [1969]1977: 96). Mangy-Dog's death obliterates this possibility of bodily

14. I agree with Nussbaum that a cow (or bull) as a "more complexly sentient creature" than a rat can suffer more harm from being killed (2006: 386-388), but that "even painless killing of a relatively simple animal like a rat inflicts some harm" (p. 388).

healing which could have led to affiliation with and acceptance by members of his own species rather than the ostracism he experienced. He also lost the love of Isaura and Ginho and the ability to express his emotions.

Unlike Mangy-Dog, the majority of the dogs killed in the welfare centre in *Disgrace* were healthy, and although their excess numbers might have impinged on the quality of their lives to some extent, they certainly lose the possibility of flourishing. A feral life for dogs who are not dependent on humans might be full of risks, but it is surely a better alternative than to be humanely killed. Killing them, as Palmer suggests, may constitute a “denial of their *lack* of relationship with particular human beings” (2006: 181; italics in original), a denial of their abilities to lead separate lives. When Lurie gives Driepoot up to be killed, the former suggests that he has no alternative, but this is never explored. I have argued elsewhere (Woodward 2001) that this could partly emanate from Lurie’s distaste for keeping a dog as a pet. The boarding dogs, shot in cold blood at close range, die, like Mangy-Dog, in disorderly circumstances. What they are deprived of is not clarified. Although they come from middle-class homes, they could have been instrumentalised as guard dogs, which seems to be the killer’s motive for shooting them.

“Why Does Every Animal Story Have to be Sad?”

To suggest that the writers discussed here depict animals dying because of a romantic connection between beauty and death, as in many conventional “animal stories”, would be unduly sentimental, and misrepresentative. The animals in these texts do not die peacefully on quasi-Victorian deathbeds; they are all killed – violently. Even euthanasia, in my experience of the deaths of Cleo and George, has elements of violence, belying the euphemistic “putting to sleep”. The rat in our garden and the bull in Tony Yengeni’s parents’ backyard metonymise the deaths of countless other beings classified as “vermin” or commodified as meat.

Writing this paper has been an emotional process, as I mourned again the deaths of animals I loved, and recalled the abattoir Hades. Coetzee has David Lurie unsure whether he should “mourn” the death of the sheep Petrus had bought for slaughter. Although “their lot has become important to him” ([1999]2000: 126), he wonders: “Is it proper to mourn the death of beings who do not practice mourning among themselves?” (p. 127). Space does not permit a full denial of this rhetorical question, nor a consideration of what constitutes “mourning” on the part of animals, but, in my experience and those of others who knew them, the canine and equine companions of Cleo and George, respectively, were unmistakably affected by their deaths in ways that resembled mourning.

The deaths of the animals in the southern African fiction considered here could be read as substituting, both literally and figuratively, for the deaths of the main characters: David Lurie and Lucy narrowly escape being murdered by the intruders who shoot the German Shepherds, and if Driepoot and the other dogs in the clinic have to die, Lurie and Lucy do not; Ginho and Isaura escape the danger of being killed by the wild firing of the gang as they pump bullets into the dead Mangy-Dog instead; James Kronk nearly drowns when he swims far out to the sea to escape his attackers, ostensibly bent on revenge for Zwelakhe's death, but Piet's culpability bears an unavoidable death warrant; the Whale Caller sits dangerously close to the dynamited Sharisha and then loses the life and the vocation he knows in a projected death-in-life existence as a penitent.

On the other hand, Mda, Honwana, Coetzee, and Cartwright never deploy animals merely as ideas.¹⁵ Each of their representations of animal deaths foregrounds the ethics of "real" animals being located as sacrificial beings within modernity. For Derrida, a war is being waged "over the matter of pity" for animals, "between those who violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion and, on the other hand, those who appeal to an irrefutable testimony to this pity" (2002: 397). It would be reductive to claim that the texts in this paper constitute such testimonies only, but in their specific representations of the killing of animals, they encourage the reader to imagine sharing the being of another, who is condemned to death.

For those of us concerned, as these writers are, about the lack of justice for animals, we all experience guilt in our inability to stop the ongoing killing of animals. Constrained socially from quitting tables laden with the corpses of dead animals, we can, at the very least, tell stories of their deaths.

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15. Of course a writer may do both. More conventional readings locate animals as symbols but Animal Studies interpretations tend to foreground the "real" as this paper does.

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