

8-2012

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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/1104>

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RETHINKING HUMAN AND NONHUMAN ANIMAL RELATIONS IN J. M.
COETZEE'S *ELIZABETH COSTELLO* (2003)

by

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M. A., São Paulo State University, 2010
B. A., São Paulo State University, 2007

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky
August 2012

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A Thesis approved on

August 1, 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Susan M Griffin for the guidance, and patience. I would also like to thank Dr. Aaron Jaffe and Dr. John Gibson for the careful reading of this text and rich comments. Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, colleagues and other faculty members at the University of Louisville for the unending support throughout these two years.

ABSTRACT

RETHINKING HUMAN AND NONHUMAN ANIMAL RELATIONS IN J. M. COETZEE'S *ELIZABETH COSTELLO* (2003)

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For the past four decades, scholarship on the relationship between human and nonhuman animals has been growing inside the academy and sprouting ontological and epistemological concerns about the status of the Humanities as an institution. Between 1997 and 2003, South-African author and Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee created Elizabeth Costello, an Australian writer that delivers lectures at certain universities and causes controversy when addressing the nature of animal rights movements. This work aims at analyzing the situations in which Coetzee uses Costello to speak about the cruelty to nonhuman animals. What I argue is that in entering the conversation through the use of a fictional character, Coetzee puts the discourse of both philosophy and science in perspective and forces the reader to rethink the politics involved in the ways disciplines speak of animals.

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INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Costello sits at the middle of the dinner table, across from the President of Appleton University, where she is giving two academic lectures. As the guests eat the fettuccine with roasted eggplant—or the red snapper with baby potatoes, the choice of three guests—they discuss the first part of the lecture, presented earlier that day, on the relationship of dominance between human and nonhuman animals. Costello, a renowned author and scholar, engages in questions and discussions with the pool of guests composed primarily of university professors from various fields, including her son, a physicist, and her daughter-in-law, a philosopher skeptical of her work. As we see the scene unfold through the eyes of her son, we are presented with the varying and contradictory arguments on animal rights but also with a conversation between different disciplines on the status of nonhuman animals within the academy.

J. M. Coetzee, the 2003 Nobel Laureate in Literature, presented two stories of Elizabeth Costello at Princeton University as part of his two Tanner Lectures on Human Values (1997).¹ As both a writer and an accomplished literary critic,² he was expected to deliver a philosophical essay on literary theory. In the epilogue of his *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2004), Derek Attridge, one of the most accomplished scholars to delve into the works of Coetzee, notes the surprise of the audience that evening,

¹These lectures were later reprinted in *Lives of Animals* (1999) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). The version used in this analysis is the first reprint: *Lives of Animals*.

²At the time, Coetzee had taught Literary Theory at SUNY - Buffalo and at the University of Cape Town.

“[Coetzee’s] presence in an academic setting made one particularly conscious of his status as Professor of General Literature at the University of Cape Town” (192). Yet, he began his lecture with a fictional tale about an accomplished female Australian author who, when invited to deliver lectures on her works, shocked the audience by, instead, offering a philosophical inquiry into the state of factory-farming animals and, most shockingly, drawing on the radical comparison between the state of animals in our current economy and the conditions of the Jews during the Holocaust.

This move of using a fictional character to talk about academic topics has been a constant in Coetzee’s public appearances from the years of 1997 and 2003. He used the character of Elizabeth Costello in eight different scenarios to discuss topics of philosophy, animal rights, literary theory, religion, and to speak of South Africa. In 1999, both Tanner Lectures were published into a special volume introduced by political philosopher Amy Gutmann and complemented with responses by four scholars. These responses showcase the different disciplines that have been concerned with the situation of nonhuman animals. Marjorie Garber represents literary criticism, Peter Singer, philosophy, Wendy Doniger, religious studies, and Barbara Smuts, primatology.

These works were delivered and published when the field of Critical Animal Studies was coming to the fore in discussions across disciplines inside the university. Following the first calls to action from the Animal Rights movements of the late 70s, and building on the publication of Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975), the debate on the ethical status of animals has increased exponentially, reaching a wide audience. Different groups have appeared to demand the rights of animals in various degrees—from the terrorist organization Animal Liberation Front, to the outspoken PETA, to the local Humane Societies. Meanwhile, in the academy, the debate has escalated to discuss the

various implications of the uses of nonhuman animal experimentation in the sciences, their employment in entertainment, the problems of a factory farming system, as well as delving into solutions to these inquiries. The table of contents of the Association for the Study of Literature & Environment (ASLE)'s last issue of their *ISLE Journal* is an example of how interdisciplinary this field can be. Publications range across medical research, art criticism, architecture, and cultural studies.

Cary Wolfe explains the ramifications of Animal Studies in the current setting in *What is Posthumanism?* (2010). For him, Animal Studies, which began with “a smattering of work in various fields on human-animal relations and their representation in various endeavors,” has developed from the paradigm of Animal Rights into a field that “is now eager to move beyond that paradigm” (99, 102). The early philosophical statements of this field—represented most prominently by Peter Singer’s aforementioned work and Tom Regan’s *A Case for Animal Rights* (1983)—sought to grant to nonhuman animals rights based on concepts of *rights* and *ethics* that were ultimately grounded in humanistic values that maintained the status of human as superior to animals. These humanistic values were in essence anthropocentric, holding the human as the center of knowledge. As Wolfe explains, the humanistic subject “is achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether” (xv). In his first book on the subject, *Animal Rites* (2003), he criticizes this form of animal studies because it “takes for granted and reproduces a rather traditional version of what I will call the discourse of species—a discourse that, in turn, reproduces the institution of speciesism” (2). Developing on what he says is often referred to as the “linguistic turn” (Posthumanism 73) of the twentieth century—most predominately with

Foucault's criticism of the Human Sciences as institutions of discourse and Derrida's deconstruction of "the relationship between philosophy and language" (Posthumanism 73)—Wolfe argues for a change in the way we understand Animal Studies. He seeks to dismantle the system of humanism that supports the discourse of species and to move toward a posthumanist paradigm that recognizes the shortcomings of our discourse and our language. This form of Animal Studies would, for him, "reveal[] 'us' to be very different creatures from who we thought 'we' were" (Rites 17).

Cary Wolfe's description of the field of Animal Studies contradicts and criticizes the work of most radical Animal Rights supporters, and the debates within this field are ongoing. Carrie Rohman, who expands on Cary Wolfe's work, argues in *Stalking the Subject* (2009) that the debate regarding species discourse finds an "anecdotal resistance of certain philosophy scholars to interrogate their species assumptions" (161). For her, many scholars in various fields do not welcome the questioning of the humanistic basis of scholarship.

Even though philosophy has been groundbreaking in initiating conversations about the implications of human and nonhuman relations, the debate on nonhuman animals within the academy has been very contentious. Coetzee, with his character of Elizabeth Costello, enters this conversation and illustrates the importance of literature in casting light on disciplinary knowledge. Through his character, he portrays a series of discourses—represented by characters within the academy—and puts them in perspective. He makes us aware that these discourses are what Michel Foucault called "apparatuses": a form of discourse that produces and maintains knowledge and power.

Giorgio Agambem, in "What is an Apparatus?" reads Foucault's concept of "apparatus" and traces how, when constituting itself as a locus of power, it becomes a

sacred form of discourse. Agamben makes it clear that this term inherited qualities from Hegel's concept of "positivity," or, as Agamben describes, "the historical element—loaded as it is with rules, rites, and institutions that are imposed on the individual by an external power" (5-6). What Foucault extends in this concept is that it becomes a relationship between the subject and this "historical element," a relationship that determines the power structures of discourses. In scholarly and scientific disciplines, the relationship between the subjects and the history of a discipline—its terms of art, formats, formalities, and protocols—dictate the dynamics of power within that discipline.

Agamben then suggests that we need "to profane" the apparatuses in place, to bring them down from their sacred position and restore them to the common use. I want to suggest that Coetzee, through Costello, is profaning the apparatuses of disciplines that talk about nonhuman animals, namely, Philosophy and Science. In the process of profanation, Coetzee forces us to think about the specifics of each discipline and how it constructs its knowledge about nonhuman animals.

This process, however, is not an attempt to do away with disciplines or disciplinary knowledge; rather, it is an attempt to make us think about the specifics of each discipline, its strengths and its limitations. Cary Wolfe focuses on the importance of disciplinary knowledge in constituting the "field" of animal studies. As he states, "disciplinary differentiation (or 'specialization') is not something to be lamented, avoided, or overcome; rather '*universalization* can be achieved only through specification" (114). The field of animal studies does not have a super-theory; it is a place where different disciplines can come into contact. As Wolfe says, "we should not try to imagine a super-interdiscipline called 'animal studies' . . . but rather recognize that it is only through our disciplinary specificity that we have something specific and

irreplaceable to contribute to this ‘question of the animal’” (115). When Coetzee performs the “profanation of apparatuses,” he is urging us not to abandon disciplinary thought/methodologies—which, as Wolfe argues, are the means to speaking specifically about nonhuman others—but to rethink how those disciplines, in their specificity, theorize about nonhuman animals.

What I want to argue is that the process through which Coetzee performs this profanation is metafiction: a discourse that is constantly aware of its status as discourse. By frequently making references to the process of production of his text, Coetzee makes his reader aware of the relative status of his discourse, and, thus, by extension, of the relative status of the discourses of philosophy and science as well. One can come to the conclusion that philosophy and science are constructed discourses that portray not the absolute truth, but a specific point of view.

The very first work in which Elizabeth Costello appears as a main character, “On Realism,” sets up the metafictional frame of the text. It portrays Elizabeth Costello giving a lecture and a series of interviews about realism. The narrator, however, interspaces the narrative thread by adding commentary on how the narration is set up, why certain facts were chosen and certain parts were skipped. This device works as a commentary on the nature of representation.

Metafiction is defined by Patricia Waugh as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (*Metafiction* 2). The very first paragraph of “On Realism” presents the reader with the most intriguing question about realism: how can language represent reality? As the narrator ponders, “[t]here is first of all the problem of the opening, namely, how to get us from where we are, which

is, as yet, nowhere, to the far bank” (1). How can the storyteller take the reader to the other bank of the river, to the world of ideas, where the story happens? He then comments that it “is a simple bridging problem, a problem of knocking together a bridge” (1).

As the story progresses, the narrator obsessively reminds the reader of the fictional nature of this text. Every time there’s a chronological gap, the narrator notes it: “We skip” (2, 3, 7, 16). In certain instances, the narrator breaks with the narrative thread to provide more extensive comments on how storytelling works: “storytelling works by lulling the reader or listener into a dreamlike state in which the time and space of the real world fade away, superseded by the time and space of the fiction” (16). This takes the metafictional aspect of the text to another level: not only is the narrator recognizing that the story is fictional, but also that all texts, in facing the problem of representation, are fictional in some level. All texts have to cross the bridge.

Understanding the text as a metafiction brings with it political implications. In *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1989), Linda Hutcheon develops the consequences of such a self-conscious fiction in writing (and rewriting) official history. For her, to write history through metafiction (what she calls *historiographic metafiction*s) is “to open [the past] up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (110). Even though Coetzee is not rewriting history per se, the implications of his metafiction are very similar: it prevents the debate on the status of nonhuman animals from being conclusive. More importantly, it moves the discussion from a field of inquiry concerned with a generalizing truth to one that “asserts that there are only *truths* in the plural” (Hutcheon, 109). One that understands the specificity of each discipline and speaks from that locus, understanding its implications.

When Coetzee is using his fiction to enter a debate on the status of nonhuman animals in philosophy and science, he is making us aware of the partial truths that these disciplines are telling. Thus, as Hutcheon speaks of postmodern metafiction, it "does not destroy their 'truth' value, but it does define the conditions of that 'truth'" (13). It elucidates the context of production of its facts. More than that, it also puts each argument into perspective.

In the series of lessons that portray Elizabeth Costello, the representation of her lectures in the form of metafiction provides us not only with specific arguments about animal rights—and, depending on the story, about a wide range of topics such as literary theory, religion, racism, etc.—but also with a set of responses, situations, and other characters that contextualize her argument as grounded and relativize. In that sense, her work accepts its relative value. Hutcheon suggests that this move is a quality of postmodern metafiction that "call[s] attention to both what is being contested and what is being offered as a critical response to that, and to do so in a self-aware way that admits its own provisionality" (13). Members of Costello's audience contest the arguments that she presents in her lectures within Coetzee's fiction. However, these are fictional characters. Thus, both Costello's argument and the responses are understood as provisional: they are seen as points of view loaded with the disciplinary baggage of each speaker.

This self-referential ability of Coetzee's fiction is what makes his work into postmodern. As Hutcheon explains, this postmodern fiction "foreground[s] the way we talk and write within certain social, historical, and institutional (and thus political and economic) frameworks" (184). It questions the established values of philosophy and science in a move to understand that "[a]ll of these theories are shown to be human constructs which can be made to operate in the interests of political power as well as

‘disinterested’ knowledge: they are all—potentially—discourses of manipulation” (184). It helps us understand that these discourses produced by philosophy and, especially, by science have implications in the power relations between humans and nonhumans—not to mention between humans and other humans.

Thus, in reading Coetzee’s fiction, we come to recognize what Hutcheon defines as a “need to examine critically the social and ideological implications operative in the institutions of our disciplines—historical, literary, philosophical, linguistic, and so on” (184). Coetzee incorporates in his fiction the discourses of philosophy and different sciences to put them in perspective and understand them as relative arguments from a specific locus.

In this thesis, I will look at the specifics of Coetzee’s work on Elizabeth Costello and understand how he uses a metafictional discourse to profane the discourses of philosophy and science. In doing so, I hope to understand how each discipline establishes its credibility and to verify the literary devices Coetzee uses to rethink that discipline.

In the first chapter, I will look at Coetzee’s argument about the nature of philosophical inquiry into the relationships between human and nonhuman animals. In the first responses to *Lives of Animals*—especially in Peter Singer’s—there was a suggestion that Coetzee was using his fiction to speak about animal rights without taking responsibility for his arguments. Philosophers Cora Diamond and Stanley Cavell responded to these pieces investigating the implications of Coetzee’s fiction to talk about the rhetoric of animal rights. Diamond analyzes Costello’s breakdown at the end of the lectures as her facing what Diamond calls “the difficulty of reality”: something that is so painful that escapes our thinking it. Cavell explains that this difficulty of reality stems from a disappointment with language in expressing such pain. Thus, philosophy

encounters a difficulty: any rationalization of the issue at hand becomes a deflection of the issue itself. Both Diamond and Cavell interpret the responses to *Lives of Animals* as forms of deflection of what is being done to nonhuman animals.

What I want to argue is that Coetzee, in constructing a metafiction, in profaning these responses, exposes them as deflections. His Costello suggests that a possible alternative to thinking about this subject through the lens of reason is to explore what she calls “sympathetic imagination,” or the ability to use fiction to imagine the possible feelings and thoughts of other minds without engaging in a deflection. Thus, Coetzee’s metafiction works as a sympathetic imagination that gives us a glimpse into the mind of a woman who is wounded by the knowledge of what is being done to animals in our current food industry.

In the second chapter, I will look closely at the dinner scene described at the beginning of this introduction and its importance for the profanation of the discourses of science on nonhuman subjects. Philosopher of science, Bruno Latour, has written extensively on the nature of scientific language in constructing the facts it studies. For him, there is a great gap between the sciences and the humanities. While the former is focused on using a language devoid of all subjectivity, the latter looks for works that privilege subjectivity uninfluenced by technology. He then proposes the field of “science studies” to rethink this gap and attempt to promote a more interconnected academia based on the proposition that a better understanding between disciplines would promote a better understanding of the world. In order to improve the connections between disciplines, however, science needs to rethink its processes of meaning making and understand that the scientific fact does not represent the ultimate objective truth, but rather a set of

interpretations resulting from the relations of the scientist, its object of study, and the context within which the work is being done.

Coetzee's work here works to make us aware of the process of interpretation that science uses to research nonhuman animals. During dinner, Elizabeth Costello discusses with a psychologist, a political scientist, and an anthropologist about the use of animal in our culture. Costello answers each affirmation by a scientist with a question and shifts the focus of each scientific analysis to consider other aspects of the research—bringing to the fore ethical issues and animal abuse. In this conversation, Costello also makes us aware of how each discipline uses a specific language to construct their facts. While science attempts to produce objective interpretations of facts and tries to mask the subjectivity inherent in that interpretative act, Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello works to make us aware that every scientific fact is an interpretation permeated with subjectivity.

Coetzee's overall work ends in a sour note, as Elizabeth Costello leaves. Neither her conversation with the dinner guests after her first visit nor her Q&A with Thomas O'Hearne, the professor of philosophy, yield fruitful conclusions. They both finish in disagreement and a subtle hostility. The disconnection represents a difficulty with the communication between disciplines, a problem that Cary Wolfe analyzes as being the result of a humanistic academia. While we hold the humanistic notion of the subject as being the center of disciplines, there is no possibility for communication. Wolfe finally suggests that interdisciplinary can develop "only, that is, if we become posthumanist" (115).

CHAPTER 1
ON PHILOSOPHY

Coetzee's use of Elizabeth Costello at the Tanner Lectures at Princeton in 1997 featured a wide range of comments on different disciplines. However, Philosophy is presented most prominently and invoked more than other fields in the lectures that Costello is represented as delivering; particularly, the relationship philosophy has held with literature since Plato banished poetry from the Republic. The very titles of both pieces, "Philosophers and the Animals" and "The Poet and the Animals," explicitly target this division between philosophy and literature. The set of responses that ensued from scholars in various fields about this issue of the Tanner Lectures also addressed primarily Costello's approach to Philosophy.

In addressing an audience of philosophers, and writing a story about a writer speaking about philosophy and animal rights, Coetzee is using metafiction to perform a profanation of philosophical apparatuses by problematizing the discourse of philosophy and placing it vis-à-vis poetry. He is exposing that even the philosophical discourse is, to some level, fictional. He is also suggesting that, since philosophy and fiction, on the level of discourse, have the same basis—narrative—,fiction can be used to construct philosophical arguments that might be more complex than syllogistic arguments.

Ever since his presentation of the Tanner Lectures, Coetzee's work has sparked various responses. In 1999, in the republished version of *The Lives of Animals*, utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer, and literature professor Marjorie Garber addressed specifically

the division between philosophy and literature that Coetzee seeks to subvert. The first essay, by Marjorie Garber focuses on the literary aspects of Coetzee's metafiction and places it within the genre of the academic novel, highlighting its similarities and differences. The second essay, by philosopher and animal rights activist Peter Singer, is a commentary on the divisions of fiction and truth and the problematics of a philosophy of animal rights when faced with the radical position of Costello. Thus, these essays provide us with an interpretation of Coetzee's work and an intriguing view of how the discipline of philosophy is seen by these key figures both outside and inside the discipline.

Marjorie Garber, in her response, raises various questions about Costello's lectures and the implications they have for how we see the academic world. She categorizes *Lives of Animals* as a form of "academic novel" (76) and reinterprets references Coetzee makes to current literary scholars. Her most interesting point, however, is characterizing Coetzee's lecture within a lecture as a form of metafiction. For her, the process of creating a text "that embodies and builds itself around a hall of mirrors, a *mise en abîme*" (76), is a process of writing about writing: a metafiction. More than that, this metafiction has the possibility of "insulat[ing] the warring 'ideas' (about animal rights, about consciousness, about death, about the family, about academia) against claims of authorship and authority" (79). In this view, ideas about the relationship between human and nonhuman others becomes secondary; the main focus of the novel, for Garber, is fiction itself. As she concludes, "In these two elegant lectures we thought John Coetzee was talking about animals. Could it be, however, that all along he was really asking, 'What is the value of literature?'" (84). Garber is right to understand Coetzee's fiction as a metafiction that is constantly alluding to the act of writing.

However, this metafiction does not let go of the relations between human and nonhuman others. It asks the value of literature but only as it relates to philosophy and nonhuman animals.

Unlike Garber, Peter Singer has a much more critical response to Coetzee's work. His response, in the form of fiction, starts from the assumption that Coetzee, in using Elizabeth Costello, is finding a way to project his own opinion about animal rights without facing the responsibilities of speaking with his own voice. He creates a fictional tale to discuss the philosophy of animal rights. However, unlike Coetzee's, Singer's main character bears his own name and shares his widely published and well-known philosophical and political positions. Singer concludes his story with the main character, Peter, blatantly using fiction to avoid responsibilities for his arguments.

Thus, Singer becomes an example of the common philosophical understanding of philosophy that distinguishes it from literature. He addresses the problematization of truth and fiction in Coetzee's writing and responds using the same "literary" structure. In his story, the philosopher Peter is weeks away from going to Princeton and responding to Coetzee's Tanner lecture. As he ponders how to respond, he engages in a conversation with his daughter and he both mocks the main line of argument in Coetzee's fiction and uses it to clarify his own philosophical positions.

Singer's analysis of Coetzee's use of Costello is clearly critical, even disdainful. At the beginning of the conversation, Peter's daughter interprets Coetzee's fiction in an analysis that is extremely reductionist: "*Très post-modern . . .* You know, Baudrillard, and all that stuff about simulation, breaking down the distinction between reality and representation, and so on? And look at the opportunities of playing with self-reference!"

(85). Her interpretation is critical of postmodern as a popular tendency that disregards engagement with political change.

Later, Peter attempts to explain his own philosophical arguments—ones that Costello criticizes to some extent. He clarifies his division between human and nonhuman animals and then explains that humans are indeed superior. As he tells his daughter, “normal humans have capacities that far exceed those of nonhuman animals, and some of these capacities are morally significant in particular contexts” (87). As he compares his daughter to his dog, Max, “Naomi was always chattering about what she was going to be when she grew up. I’m sure that you don’t think about what you will be doing next summer, or even next week” (87). His daughter has the capacity to reason about the future, while Max does not possess that ability. Singer is committed to a notion of humanity based on the capacity to reason.

At the end, when confronted with the question of how to respond to Coetzee’s lecture, he and his daughter discuss the benefits of using fiction: for him it is a form that allows one to “blithely criticize the use of reason, without . . . really committing . . . to these claims” (91). Finally, when Singer’s philosopher, Peter, contemplates writing a fictional text, he ironically asks, “When have I ever written fiction?” (91). The irony present in this last sentence implies that Peter Singer, the philosopher, is using Peter, the character, to do precisely what he interprets Coetzee as doing. In other words, Singer is using his fiction to create a discourse that he thinks is free from responsibilities.

The problem with Singer’s position is that it misses the main point in Coetzee’s argument: that fiction, through putting an argument into perspective, is not evading responsibilities for it, but instead anticipating and acknowledging the possible responses

and shortcomings of the argument. Singer's response makes it evident that he understands philosophy and literature as separate discourses, the former superior to the latter. It is this hierarchical separation that Coetzee criticizes. For Singer, the discourse of pure philosophy—avoiding the use of fiction—can speak about nonhuman animals and take a responsibility more effectively.

In a 2003 conference in honor of Stanley Cavell, philosopher Cora Diamond responded to Coetzee's work and to the reflections in *The Lives of Animals*. Five years later, Stanley Cavell himself extended on Diamond's argument, creating a conversation about nonhuman animals, philosophy, and literature. Both philosophers disagreed with Singer in maintaining that Coetzee's fiction should not be taken at face value, but understood as a comment on the very nature of philosophical language and its shortcomings.

Cora Diamond, in her "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," acknowledges that Coetzee, through Costello, goes to the heart of an old debate—one that stems from the beginnings of Greek philosophy—on the very positions of philosophical inquiry versus poetry. Stephen Mulhall, in *The Wounded Animal* (2009), summarizes Diamond's position in this debate as an attempt to:

point out that there are other forms of critical reflection as well—ones with which we are perhaps more familiar in extraphilosophical contexts, but which are no less concerned to deepen our understanding and enrich our thought by embodying certain kinds of affective response to things, and inviting us to share those responses, as well as to critically evaluate them. (9)

Diamond's analysis of Elizabeth Costello develops the dilemmas involved in ethical interactions between human and nonhuman animals and the problems of philosophy when faced with using a purely logical or reasonable philosophical discourse to talk about animals and ethics. She ultimately suggests that the language of reason that is commonly used by philosophy might not be sufficient to discuss the ethics of nonhuman animal abuse.

She uses John Updike's term "difficulty of reality" to explain a situation in which the mind encounters something that it cannot properly process (44). This would be something in reality that resists our thinking or is "painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability" (46). Elizabeth Costello is the embodiment of this difficulty as she suffers from the knowledge that animals are suffering. She embodies what Diamond calls the "wounded animal" that is haunted by the knowledge of what happens to some animals and by "how unhaunted others are"(46). As Costello asks herself at the end of the lectures, "this is life. Everyone comes to terms with it, why can't you? *Why can't you?*" (69). But she cannot escape her wounded self, her knowledge of animal abuse.

Diamond then suggests that the responses in *Lives of Animals*—especially Singer's—ignore this difficulty of reality and engage in a philosophical discussion of animal abuse with a skeptical language that deflects reality. She uses Cavell's term, "deflection," to describe this form of philosophy and points out that the problem is that "The deflection into discussion of a moral issue is a deflection which makes our own bodies mere facts" (59). It deflects the difficulty of reality and uses a language of reason to abstract the abuse to nonhuman others.

Stanley Cavell's response, "Companionable Thinking" (2008), extends Cora Diamond's analyses of Elizabeth Costello. He starts his argument by tracing a difference between the knowledge that haunts Costello, which he calls "inordinate knowledge" and "the mere or unobtrusive or intellectualized or indifferent or stored knowledge" (95) of philosophy. While Costello feels the pain of not being able to cope with the reality that haunts her, philosophy is unable to talk about such reality without deflecting it into the language of intellectualized knowledge.

Thus, he explains that this is the difficulty of philosophy: trying to work through an issue but encountering a problem of language and not being able to represent this issue without deflecting it. As he says, philosophy has "a chronic difficulty in expressing oneself, especially in its manifestation as finding a difficulty or disappointment with meaning, or say with language, or with human expression, as such" (101). It becomes difficult to understand or accept the reality of animal abuse because of the impossibility to find a language that can represent it.

Cary Wolfe, in *Critical Environments* (1998), characterizes Cavell's philosophical method as a form of pragmatism. For him, this pragmatism is unique in how it keeps alive the "problem of philosophical skepticism" (2). Unlike other pragmatists who take a stance of antitheory, Cavell is still attempting to "combine the *desire* for the 'outside' of theory and philosophy . . . with a commitment to antifoundationalism and contingency, to philosophy, in Cavell's words, as a task of 'onwardness,' 'transience,' and 'homelessness,' to thinking as 'finding' rather than 'founding' of foundational philosophy" (2). Cavell believes in the development of philosophy and theory while remaining committed to the politics of the Other, and avoiding foundationalism. For the

politics of the relationship between human and nonhuman animals, Cavell's pragmatism is helpful as it offers a form of philosophical discourse that does not lose sight of its practical implications in daily lives.

Cavell's philosophical position, however, does not offer a solution for the problem of philosophy. It leaves no room for different forms of thought that fall outside the humanistic values of Enlightenment subjectivity. Ultimately, we are left with what McDowell concludes in his "Comment on 'Companionable Thinking'": that "philosophy in the academic mode, in Cavell's own reading, avoids what is really at issue in its engagements with skepticism" (138).

In Coetzee's narrative, there is a division between Costello, who is faced with the problem of reality of animal abuse, and her son and daughter-in-law, who avoid thinking of that problem. Instead of speaking of her own fiction, which would certainly please the audience, Costello decides to speak of animals. This evokes reactions in both John and Norma who, even before her lecture, regard her arguments as too radical. John prefers not to be associated with his mother and takes the opportunity of anonymity provided by their differing last names. Norma, a Ph.D. in philosophy from Johns Hopkins, anticipates that the lecture will be an embarrassment. For her, Costello's works are "overrated, . . . her opinions on animals, animal consciousness and ethical relations with animals are jejune and sentimental" (17). In the small narrative that preludes the lecture, we are already presented with the main theoretical tension within the work: Costello's facing the problem of reality and unable to process how others are not wounded by this problem.

Later, during her lecture, we are presented with yet another demonstration of the problem of philosophy: Costello attempts to criticize reason as a test of superiority

among species but is unable to detach completely from that language. She traces her philosophical tradition; she employs “the language of Aristotle and Porphyry, of Augustine and Aquinas, of Descartes and Bentham, of, in our day, Mary Midgley and Tom Reagan” (22). In this move, she places herself in a specific philosophical tradition that uses logic and reason as a common ground for debate—only to later criticize it. As she states, “that is my dilemma this afternoon. Both reason and seven decades of life experience tell me that reason is neither the being of the universe nor the being of God” (23). She attempts to use reason to criticize reason itself, and then delves into the shortcomings of this as a mode of judgment for species superiority. Through these first remarks, as well as the interactions with her son and daughter-in-law, we can notice the tensions between the language of philosophy based on reason and its problems in addressing such an issue as animal abuse.

Cora Diamond, on the other hand, points out that Costello tries to think through this problem with what she suggests as the “sympathetic imagination” (35): a capacity to imagine the lives of others and attempt to understand them. For Diamond, this means that the fictional character “sees poetry, rather than philosophy, as having a capacity to return us to such a sense of what animal life is” (53). Only through this imagination—or literature—we can have a better understanding of what animals experience. Coetzee offers a text that explores the insufficiency of philosophical knowledge when faced with inordinate knowledge or the problem of reality.

In place of the language of reason, Costello offers a language of feeling and pathos. As she explains, “The heart is the seat of a faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us to share at times the being of another. . . . There are people who have the capacity to

imagine themselves as someone else” (34-35). She uses feelings and imagination to appeal to her audience’s pathos and convince them of the possibilities of understanding animal thought. Dominic Head, in *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee* (2009), recognizes the appeal of Costello’s speech to sympathy and her concept of “sympathetic imagination” as a means to understand the positions of animals and their suffering. Head points out that Coetzee’s fiction “encourag[es] us to allow sympathy to weigh more heavily in the balance” (82). This is one kind of method that breaks with philosophical skepticism and promotes another form of critical reflection.

Through Costello, Coetzee argues for the use of fiction as an alternative to thinking rationally about the relationship between human and nonhuman others. In Costello’s lecture, the language of rationality—of ordinate knowledge—prevents one from acknowledging the position of others. Here, she brings back the allusion to death camps: “The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else” (79). She then argues that it is only through “sympathy” that someone can relate to the situation of others. As she wonders about the killers in the death camps, “They did not say, ‘How would it be if I were burning?’ They did not say, ‘I am burning, I am falling in ash’” (79). In these two statements, she starts by pointing out that Nazi guards did not *wonder* what it would be like to be someone else. Her first sentence uses the participle “would” followed by the conditional “if,” marking a removed statement. She then revises her sentence, repeating the introduction “They did not say,” but, instead, using the present tense: “I am burning.” The use of present tense instead of a conditional past participle marks a discourse of fiction. While in the first sentence the killers would only wonder, in the second statement, the killers would be fully taking the

place of their victims and considering the situation as it happens. Thus, in describing the process of sympathetic imagination, she moves from a distanced position (“. . . would it be if I were burning”) to the imagined center (“I am burning, I am falling in ash”).

Nevertheless, Costello’s sympathetic imagination is not offered as the ultimate solution to the limits of philosophy. After her second lecture, the uncomfortable situations that arise from Costello’s debate with philosopher Thomas O’Hearne show the failure of such endeavor. As her son drives her to the airport, she breaks down, “I no longer know where I am” (69). Everywhere she looks, she sees the “evidences” of animal abuse. Dominic Head concludes that *The Lives of Animals* “promote[s] the sympathetic capacity while simultaneously exposing its intellectual flaws” (83). These flaws would be the suffering that can come from facing the problem of reality. Costello is still wounded at the end of her lectures; she suffers even more by sympathetically relating to animal abuse. Hence, the lectures appeal to sympathy—use it as a means to understanding the suffering of others—but Coetzee also problematizes the results of sympathy. Through the sympathetic imagination, Costello can position herself as a locus of suffering. However, she ultimately does question the very discourse of philosophy and reason that attempt to carry the responsibility of theorizing about nonhuman animals.

Despite the problems with sympathetic imagination, Coetzee’s metafiction can provide the reader with a more encompassing set of voices. After the first lecture is over, we are presented with arguments that contradict Costello. Before going to the dinner table, she is asked a question by an older gentleman in the audience who is eager to know the practicality of her speech. As he asks, “are you saying we should close down the factory farms? Are you saying we should stop eating meat?” (36), he questions the actual

implications of her discourse. He demands clarity, “what wasn’t clear to me is what you were actually targeting” (36). He represents the common response to the discussion on animal studies: what is the practical use of these musings? To think of animals, Costello’s questioner would claim, is not solely to engage in theoretical debates, but to extrapolate to everyday situations. However, Costello’s response is far from satisfactory. She answers, “I was hoping not to have to enunciate principles” (37). She is aware that enunciating principles would partake on the discourse of reason she is trying to criticize.

Just as metafiction is self-aware fiction, Costello works as the embodiment of a philosophy that is self-aware. After the first lecture is over and the guests have moved on to dinner, the narrator asks: “So are they, out of deference to vegetarianism, going to serve nut rissoles to everyone?” (38). Later, Costello responds to the president of the university’s compliment about her vegetarianism—“‘I have a great respect for it,’ says Garrard. ‘As a way of life’” (43). She resists his praise, describing herself as embodying the very complications and contradictions of the text’s multiple discourses, “I’m wearing leather shoes, . . . I’m carrying a leather purse. I wouldn’t have overmuch respect if I were you” (43). Most animal rights advocacy is predicated on a notion that an activist approach, be it vegetarianism or eating local, can be the optimal solution to animal problems and, thus, leave one with a clean conscience. Costello here eschews such a position and creates an approach that recognizes its own faults. This works to relativize the concept of animal abuse. It accepts that the situation is not as black and white as some animal rights activist make it out to be.

Costello’s attempt to take a position in the topic of animal abuse, however, only brings more hostility toward her. During the second lecture, “The Poet and the Animals,”

Costello participates in a conversation with literature students. After her speech, there is a formal session of question and answer with professor of philosophy, Thomas O’Hearne. His inquiries into the logics of animal rights involve outright attacks on Costello’s philosophy and posit very antagonistic points to her earlier claims. As he states, “it is because agitation for animal rights, including the right to life, is so abstract that I find it unconvincing and, finally, idle” (110). To which she responds with the same level of hostility: “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” (110). Although their debate is not disrespectful, they end on a sour note. Her son John notices, “that is the note on which Dean Arendt has to bring the proceedings to a close: acrimony, hostility, bitterness” (67). And still, John blames his mother’s unorthodox views for it, “John Bernard is sure that is not what Arendt or his committee wanted. Well, they should have asked him before they invited his mother. He could have known” (67). In her final formal lecture, Costello is still perceived as being unreasonable and radical. After discussing the situation with his wife at night, John comes to the sad conclusion, “A few hours and she’ll be gone, then we can return to normal” (68). This scene depicts a situation often common in the discussions regarding animal rights or the question of the animal in our lives: the difficulty of speaking about animals without shaking the foundations of the normal.

Conversations about the conditions of animals in our culture usually unsettle most people. It is a delicate topic that causes embarrassment and uncomfortable situations. Coetzee embodies the unsettling nature of this issue in the figure of Costello herself: a sometimes-inconvenient character who triggers feelings of rage and disgust in people. Her response to president Garrard’s queries about her vegetarianism is only met with

respect by the president because of the formalities that protect an invited lecturer. Her responses to other professors at dinner are not met with the same respect. Abraham Stern, infuriated by her comparison of factory farming to the Holocaust, refuses to dine with her. Her own daughter-in-law refuses to take her to the airport in the morning. Her son longs for her departure. Like the disturbing conversations surrounding the relations between human and nonhuman animals, the discomfiting Costello is not likable. Coetzee puts forth the discourse of vegetarianism and animal liberation, but also represents the possible responses to such discourse.

In the act of incorporating different voices into his Tanner Lectures, Coetzee creates a metafictional, multi-voiced text that incorporates various disciplinary discourses to problematize, destabilize, and subvert the traditional divide between literature and philosophy. By inverting the privileged position of the philosophical inquiry over fiction, and especially by using fiction—or the sympathetic imagination—to delve into the conversations within philosophy, he is able to create a work that prevents the discourse on animals from becoming conclusive. Through Costello, we are able to constantly think about the implications of the ways we speak about nonhuman animals and their use in our culture.

CHAPTER 2

ON SCIENCE

In the first part of his Tanner lectures, *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee portrays a scene in which different professors from various disciplines are discussing Elizabeth Costello's address. After the controversial lecture, Costello accompanies her son and other professors of Appleton College to a dinner, where they sit, eat, and discuss the status of nonhuman animals. This scene—described at the opening of this thesis—puts the academic discourses on the relationship between human and nonhuman animals into conversation. While the discussions range from psychology to philosophy and religion, it works as a commentary on the connection between disciplines within the university and, especially, makes us aware of the role of science when working on nonhuman others.

When the lectures were republished in the special edition with responses from leading scholars, we could see that very scene acted out. Just as several professors respond and question Costello, Coetzee receives commentaries on his text. In this chapter, I will argue that, in this scene, just as with philosophy, Coetzee's metafiction works as a statement on the nature of scientific discourse relating to nonhuman animals and its place within the university. When reading the responses of psychologist Ruth Orkin to Costello within the narrative in parallel with Barbara Smuts' response to Coetzee outside the novel, we are presented with a striking commentary on the nature of scientific discourse and its connections to other discourses within academia.

The nature of scientific discourse has been widely discussed. The French sociologist of science and anthropologist Bruno Latour has analyzed the relations between the sciences and the humanities and conducted extensive research on the language employed by science to speak about the nonhuman world. His line of research has culminated into what he considers to be the field of “science studies”: a way to understand the nature of scientific discourse and the relationships it has within its context. His *Pandora’s Hope* (1999), in particular, can help us understand the main conflicts that Coetzee portrays in Elizabeth Costello. Latour argues that the great divide between sciences and humanities in academia is questioned constantly by scientists and other scholars that claim a bridge between disciplines is in place, “but when scores of people from outside the sciences begin to build just that bridge, they recoil in horror and want to impose the strangest of all gags on free speech since Socrates: only scientists should speak about science” (17). Many use the authority of scientific apparatus to devalue the opinions of other disciplines that attempt to make sense of some scientific argument.

Moreover, this attitude promotes the opposite reaction: scholars from other fields devalue the work that tries to conciliate subjectivity to technological advances. As Latour notes, while one camp of the academia argues for the power of pure science free of subjectivity, “the other camp, spread out much more widely, deems humanity, morality, subjectivity, or rights worthwhile only when they have been protected from any contact with science, technology, and objectivity” (18). For him, ideally, a more understanding relationship between the sciences and the humanities—for example—could promote a better understanding of the world; the more relations each discipline establishes, “the more humane a collective” we have (18).

Furthermore, Latour identifies how difficult it has become for each discipline to stay true to the traditional slogan “the less connected a science the better” (20). As he states, “we have many disciplines, uncertain of their exact status, striving to apply the old model, unable to reinstate it, and not yet prepared to mutter something like what we have been saying all along: Relax, calm down, the more connected a science is the better” (20). As the university develops an interdisciplinary scenario where scholars are urged to speak to others from different fields, the traditional division and isolation of each discipline comes into scrutiny. Nevertheless, the sciences are still struggling with bridging the gap.

Hence, Latour suggests that the field of science studies should aim at promoting a fruitful communication between fields of knowledge. He points out the need for translations between fields; for taking the specific scientific fact and setting it vis-à-vis the politics involved in its emergence. As he states, “[t]here’s a translation of political terms into scientific terms and vice versa. . . . The analysis of these translation operations makes up a large portion of science studies” (87). This field would look into how the scientific facts are presented within the social and political framework in which they were produced. It would analyze the process of translation from the specific field of science into the general interdisciplinary environment of the university.

Latour’s concept of translation diverges greatly from the traditional conception of translating as the substitution of equivalents in a different language: “[t]he operation of translation consists of combining two hitherto different interests . . . to form a single composite goal” (88). Instead of substituting language units—keywords, phrases, or data—he proposes that the translator aggregate perspectives from various fields into what

becomes the scientific fact. In other words, translating a scientific fact into another discipline does not entail a mere game of substitution, but a complex process of contextualization of the fact.

To better explain how such a process of translation might be successful, Latour uses the case of Frédéric Joliot, the French physicist who employed his ability to translate his science to other scholars to gain access to more resources. While he was developing the first atomic reactor in France, his research required extremely large amounts of uranium, which was only obtained by allying his scientific findings—on the nature of atomic fission—to the future of science in France. Joliot rhetorically coupled his research to the political context of France after World War II. As Latour points out, “[t]here are in fact moments when, if one holds firmly the calculation of the cross-section of deuterium, *one also holds*, through substitutions and translations, the fate of France, the future of industry, the destiny of physics, a patent, a good paper, a Nobel Prize, and so on” (90). While in one level Joliot was developing a very specific research in physics, he was also involved in the politics of such a research in Europe at the time.

A scientific fact cannot exist as itself if it is to be understood by other disciplines. It needs to be contextualized and translated. This is how Latour considers that we should evaluate a fact:

The quality of a science’s reference does not come from some *salto mortale* out of discourse and society in order to access things, but depends rather on the extent of its transformations, the safety of its connections, the progressive accumulation of its mediations, the number of interlocutors it engages, its ability

to make nonhumans accessible to words, its capacity to interest and to convince others, and its routine institutionalization of these flows. (97)

Each discipline cannot conceive its facts without relating them to the world and recognizing the politics behind its conception. Latour measures the quality of a fact especially by its relations with other sciences.

Latour's focus on the socio-political context of a scientific fact changes the importance of language and subjectivity for science. If a discipline can only be successful by translating itself, then its use of language needs to be deliberate: not only focusing on objectivity but considering its context. The fact cannot speak for itself anymore, but the scientist needs to employ it knowingly in a larger context. Thus, scientific language ceases to be a transparent vehicle for meaning, and becomes a political practice.

In this sense, Latour acknowledges Foucault's realization that language constructs the scientific fact and, in doing so, defines the discipline in which that fact lies. Cary Wolfe, in *What is Posthumanism?*, builds on this notion and characterizes disciplines as "constitut[ing] their objects through their practices, theoretical commitments, and methodological procedures" (108). He draws much on Foucault's idea of discourse and Niklas Luhman's notion of communication to conceive that a discipline is defined more by the communication it establishes than by its objects or persons. As Wolfe states, "it is clear that just as disciplinary formations are not constituted by objects but by communications . . . neither are they constituted by *persons* The fundamental elements of social systems are not people but communications" (115). People are not the discourse of a discipline but take part and contribute to that discourse. An individual can, then, be part of this communication system, but only in through discourse.

Thus, discourses cannot be interdisciplinary and people can only transition between disciplines if they are able to translate between different discourses. As Wolfe concludes, “This means we can say that people can participate in interdisciplinarity even if disciplines can’t, *only* if we are willing to give up the traditional notion of ‘person.’ Only, that is, if we become posthumanist” (115). For Wolfe, while still associated with the traditional notions of humanism, one cannot participate in a communication network between disciplines. As Wolfe states, in humanism, the human is the center “in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates” (xvi) and thus works as the center of a discipline. Subject and discipline are tied in an inescapable relation. It is only by deconstructing the humanist subject, and accepting the fluidity of a posthuman subjectivity that we would be able to promote an interconnected academia.

Consequently, we can say that Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello urges the reader to take the posthumanist stance. Through the responses that Costello gives her dinner companions, we can see that she eschews the traditional scientific belief that facts can speak for themselves. Coetzee thus suggests accepting the subjectivity of each individual within each discipline and exploring research that focuses on that approach.

The conversation between scholars from Appleton College—the predominant second half of the first Tanner lecture—begins with a comment from a psychologist, Ruth Orkin, about scientific experiments done on a chimpanzee that was reared as human. When the scientists asked the chimpanzee to sort some photographs, she placed her photos in the same pile as that of humans. Orkin comments on it, “One is tempted to give the story a straightforward reading . . . namely, that she wanted to be thought of as one of us” (84). What starts the longest conversation in the novel is a comment on the nature of

interpretation of the scientific fact. Orkin goes on to make a stronger claim about the particulars of reading a fact: “Yet as a scientist one has to be cautious” (84). Orkin is attached to a tradition of science that pines for objectivity. Her use of the word “tempted” to describe the act of reading reveals a notion that interpretation of a fact, subjectively giving meaning to a scientific truth, can be considered a religious transgression. For her, a scientist needs to be “cautious” not to fall into the “temptations” of interpretation; one needs to stick to the facts without interpreting them.

As a response to this statement, Elizabeth Costello offers another interpretation of the same fact and, in doing so, evinces the impossibility of taking the fact at face value, without interpretation. As she says, “In her [the chimpanzee’s] mind the two piles could have a less obvious meaning. Those who are free to come and go versus those who have to stay locked up, for instance” (84). Costello starts by focusing on the chimpanzee’s feelings instead of her reasoning abilities, something that science usually avoids doing. This targets the gap between sciences and humanities that Latour describes. Costello even builds on the thought of feelings and supposes a will of the chimpanzee to be free, invoking the animal rights aspect of the scientific interpretation. Thus, she is urging a revision of the scientific fact in view of what Latour describes being ignored by science: “morality, subjectivity, or rights” (18).

Coetzee, in portraying this response by Costello, makes the reader aware of the status of both Orkin’s and Costello’s perspectives as constructed discourses. It is by the metafictional move of narrating this after-lecture conversation within the Tanner Lectures—and, in doing so, representing the Tanner lectures within the lecture—that he calls attention to the constructed nature of these discourses. Ultimately, he suggests that

the scientific fact cannot be presented entirely objectively. Even if a scientist is “cautious” as Orkin suggests, he/she will still be providing an interpretation from a specific point of view—one that may ignore the chimpanzee’s subjectivity, or that may not note the chimpanzee’s will to be free.

As the conversation continues, the participants move from the topic of psychology and chimpanzee ethology to the subject of food and culture; from biological sciences to social sciences. Wunderlich, a professor with strong inclinations toward anthropology, suggests that the reason why humans are seen differently than other animals and thus acceptable as food is because of “cleanness and uncleanness.” As he explains, seemingly invoking the work of Mary Douglas, “uncleanness can be a very handy device for deciding who belongs and who doesn’t, who is in and who is out” (85). Costello’s son, John, who is a physicist and speaks for the first time in the conversation, supports this division between animals and humans. He adds the characteristic of “shame” to the division, to which Wunderlich complements: “Exactly . . . animals don’t hide their excretions, they perform sex in the open. They have no sense of shame” (85). And finally, Wunderlich concludes by tying the notion of “shame” to the religious beliefs that underlie some theories of the division between human and nonhuman. As he states, “Shame makes human beings of us, shame of uncleanness. Adam and Eve: the founding myth. Before that we were all just animals together” (85). He attempts to claim that these religious views influence traditional scientific interpretations.

The commentaries by Wunderlich spark two important responses from the dinner guests: Olivia Garrard, the president’s wife, and Elizabeth Costello. While the first one criticizes Wunderlich for being too abstract, the latter shifts the focus of this conversation

to how it evinces the religious beliefs underlying some anthropological discourses. While the first seems indignant about his comments, the latter is interested in exploring these new possibilities about religion as a basis for these theories.

Olivia is the first one to interject, “But that can’t be how the mechanism works It’s too abstract, too much of a bloodless idea. Animals are creatures we don’t have sex with – that’s how we distinguish them from ourselves” (85). Her comments display a concern with objective analysis. The use of both “mechanism” to define the situation analyzed and “abstract” to qualify Wunderlich’s comments show a preoccupation in maintaining functional field of study—one that works like a machine—and a desire for practicalities—rid of abstractions. She eventually circles her concerns back to Wunderlich’s original comments that humans and animals just don’t mix, refusing to accept his abstraction about the genesis of this division being religion. She concludes simply, refusing any abstractions about divine suppositions that “we don’t mix with them. We keep the clean apart from the unclean” (85). She attempts to provide an objective anthropological view eschewing the possibility of religion as a legitimizer of human/nonhuman divisions.

Elizabeth Costello, on the other hand, waits for Wunderlich to reply to Olivia’s comments and, as in her response to psychologist Ruth Orkin, shifts the focus of the conversation by attempting to point out how Wunderlich’s argument exposes underlying assumptions of anthropological discourse. He adds that the Greeks could not accept slaughter and thus devised ritualistic sacrifices to legitimize their killings. As he states, “Ask for the blessing of the gods on the flesh you are about to eat, ask them to declare it clean” (86). To this, Costello responds, “Perhaps that is the origins of the gods,” causing

another disruption in the conversation. She continues, “Perhaps we invented gods so that we could put the blame on them. They gave us permission to eat flesh” (86). Her comments support Wunderlich’s argument for looking at the underlying assumptions of anthropological claims.

This scene plays within the divide to which Latour constantly calls attention. The division between Olivia and Wunderlich when discussing anthropology is a form of showing how this very field is divided on the use of subjectivity in its interpretations. Ultimately, just like the overall discussions at dinner, these two diverging perspectives end on a note of dissent. While they represent the subjects that Cary Wolfe defines as the “center of a discipline”—humanist subjects—they cannot communicate. They cannot find a common ground.

While Costello is not necessarily the representation of a posthumanist subject, she does show signs of discomfort with a humanistic subjectivity. She avoids definitive affirmations. Her response avoids being absolute about what she believes. She starts the response by using the word “perhaps” more than once. After her commentaries, a silence reigns at the dinner table. The only one to respond directly to her comment is President Garrard, who asks, “Is that what you believe?” Costello, however, does not offer a conclusive answer to this question. She responds just by saying that inventing a god to legitimize eating meat is a convenient belief. She states, “God told us it was OK” (86), but refuses to confirm it as a definitive statement she is making. Unlike Orkin, Wunderlich, Olivia, or any other character at the table, Costello recognizes the tensions of a humanistic subjectivity.

This recognition, in turn, does not render her responses popular. Again, Costello and her ideas are seen as out of place in this scenario. After her commentaries on the existence of God and the legitimization of meat eating, she is the one who has to change the subject in face of an unresponsive audience. Through Coetzee's metafiction, it becomes clear that Costello's position is not well received within the university. He here suggests that the academia is reluctant to accept what Wolfe recognizes as the "decentering of the human" (xvi).

The problems of scientific language and subjectivity take an interesting turn when the Tanner lectures are read parallel to the response by anthropologist and psychologist Barbara Smuts. Even though she is innovative in using her scientific experiences to approach the topic of nonhuman animals, she adheres to the protocols of her disciplines and enacts the discourse that Costello is trying to question when talking to Orkin and Olivia. Hence, when Smuts' work is read with Coetzee's, the metafictional moves that Coetzee performs in his text help us understand the underlying structure of Smuts' rhetoric.

She starts her essay by identifying a gap in Coetzee's lecture: neither Costello nor any other characters attempt to prove Thomas Aquinas and Thomas O'Hearne wrong. They are not able to portray meaningful friendship between human and nonhuman. She finds this gap noteworthy once "we realize that in a story that is, ostensibly, about our relations with members of other species, none of the characters ever mentions a personal encounter with an animal" (107). Then, based on her personal experience, she describes two types of friendship she has had, with baboons in a field expedition to Africa, and with her dog, Safi.

Over several research trips to different parts of Africa, Smuts was able to spend some time in the field observing baboons, among other nonhuman animals. For the time she spent with them, she was able to “abandon[] myself to their far superior knowledge” and “learn[] from masters about being an African anthropoid” (109). Slowly, she was able to survive in the African jungle by following the baboons and being accepted as one of them. She learned about the complex habits of that pack of baboons and their idiosyncrasies. She analyzed their social behaviors and compared them to those of humans.

Smuts’ response is thought-provoking as it portrays the tension between objectivity and subjectivity in scientific research. She begins by classifying her methods as the traditional objective ones of science: “most of my activities while ‘in the field’ were designed to gain objective, replicable information about the animals’ lives” (109). Her gaze as a researcher was not to be as a human disrupting the animals’ lives, but as one of them, not interfering with their dynamics. Nevertheless, she progresses to see her research more personally and subjectively as she interprets that each baboon had a unique personality. As she notes, “there were 140 baboons in the troop, and I came to know every one as a highly distinctive individual” (111). Her hands-off research becomes a process of learning about her nonhuman companions by engaging with them and relating subjectively with each individual. She eventually gave the baboons names such as “Dido” or “Lysistrata” (111).

Nevertheless, Coetzee’s and Smuts’ texts differ greatly on their stand towards humanism. While Coetzee is making a move towards posthumanism and questioning the possibility of interdisciplinarity when speaking about nonhuman animals, Smuts is

attached to a humanist tradition that holds objectivity and reason as central to science. Her position towards the apes with whom she lived does question the binary opposition of human versus animal, but still uses the value of reason to qualify them as worthy of attention.

While Coetzee's Costello feels uneasy with the position of reason in Western philosophy, Smuts, similarly to those involved in the *Great Ape Project*, suggests that we look at the possible relationships of friendship one can have with these animals that have ability to some level of reasoning. Even her relationship with her dog Safi is also predicated on relations of communication that require the animal to be a thinking being. In other words, this friendship that Smuts values can only be constituted between certain species: the ones that possess an ability to think and reason. While Smuts problematizes the relationship between human and nonhuman others in the sciences, she bases her argument in a humanistic notion of rights and ethics that reinforce the separation in that relationship.

Smuts' text is also marked by an attempt at objective scientific language. As she states about her research, "Doing good science, it turned out, consisted mostly of spending every possible moment with the animals, watching them with the utmost concentration, and documenting myriad aspects of their behavior" (109). The use of a qualifier "good" in describing science and then explaining it as a task of "watching" and "documenting" reveals a preference for science that focuses on exposing the facts for themselves, without interpretation.

Bruno Latour notices that scientific research usually attempts to portray objectivity by certain uses of language. As he points out, "a convenient marker of the

appearance of a scientific fact is that the modifier drops entirely and only the dictum is maintained” (93). This is often true of Smuts’ verb tenses in her analysis of the baboons. She uses sentences such as “Adolescent females concluded formal, grown-up-style greetings with somber adult males” or “Grizzled males approached balls of wrestling infants and tickled them” (110). In her descriptions of their actions, she states the fact in simple past tense and doesn’t modulate the verbs: she states the fact in simple past instead of using adverbs such as “maybe” or “perhaps,” or modals such as “would,” or “could.” Smuts even uses this dictum-oriented language to describe the thoughts of her dog Safi: “when playing fetch with a toy, Safi drops it when I ask her only about half the time. If she refuses to drop it, it means either that she’s inviting a game of keep-away, or that she wants to rest with her toy” (117). Her narrative uses the simple tense with no tense modifiers to describe the meaning of Safi’s actions.

Opposed to this scientific language is Costello’s analysis of the chimpanzee in Ruth Orkin’s experiment. She always starts her sentences with some type of adverb such as “maybe” or “perhaps” that reminds us of the possibilities for other different interpretations. She also uses modals such as “could” or “may” to lessen the certainty of her facts. As she states, “in her mind, the two piles could have a less obvious meaning” and “she may have been saying that she preferred to be among the free” (84). This puts the scientific fact into perspective and proposes that even the most objective of facts is inherently an interpretative action.

Costello’s attempt to provide other interpretations to scientific facts about nonhuman animals and to make the participants in the discussion aware of the constructed nature of the scientific discourse doesn’t result in a good outcome. Towards

the end of dinner, Norma, an analytic philosopher who is responding to Costello's arguments, monopolizes the conversation. The open discussion slowly turns into a situation in which Norma is indirectly attacking Costello's view on vegetarianism. Norma starts by making a claim that the traditions that have legitimized eating meat—mainly religious ones—do not influence the current scenario. As she says, “people in the modern world no longer decide their diet on the basis of whether they have divine permission” (87). Shortly Norma asks for Costello's confirmation, “Wouldn't you agree, Elizabeth?” (87). Costello, however, is aware of the situation and keeps her answers to a minimum even though she notices the hostility: “But what is the game she is playing? Is there a trap she is leading his mother into?” (87). The narrator ponders on the possible outcomes of the conversation.

Finally, Norma comes out with a point that contradicts Costello's ideas and ends the conversation: she accuses vegetarianism of being a form of self-definition as an elite group. Norma states, “And maybe, . . . the whole notion of cleanness versus uncleanness has a completely different function, namely, to enable certain groups to self-define, negatively, as elite, as elected” (87). Costello then rebuts this accusation with a story about Gandhi and how his vegetarianism only served to ostracize him, and not to put him in an elitist position. However, Costello's response is only further rebutted by Norma and the other scholars in what ceases to be a discussion and becomes a lecture by Norma.

The dinner ends on a sour note of confusion and disconnection. Dean Arendt responds to the discussion on vegetarianism and opens the floor for Costello who “merely looks confused, grey and tired and confused” (89). Her son then suggests that this be the end of dinner, and she delivers one last remark: “I don't know what I think, . . . I often

wonder what thinking is, what understanding is. Do we really understand the universe better than animals do?” (90). Norma tries to rebut this last remark but is cut off by the closing comments of President Garrard. The discussion ends with no consensus on the relationship of humans and nonhumans; mere confusion.

During the next day, Costello lectures again at the university and this time is questioned harshly by Thomas O’Hearne, professor of philosophy at Appleton College. In one of her last responses to his questions, she reveals her disbelief in the communication between different scholars when the basis is reason. As she states, “Discussion is possible only when there is a common ground On the present occasion, however, I’m not sure I want to concede that I share reason with my opponent. Not when reason is what underpins the whole long philosophical tradition to which he belongs” (112). The discussion the night before at the dinner table has illustrated how reason alone cannot reach definitive conclusions when discussing the status of nonhuman animals.

Thus, only by understanding the nuances of language use in the sciences and other disciplines one can rethink the way we talk about nonhuman animals and consider other interpretations and possibilities of scientific facts. Through the use of metafiction, Coetzee is able to put the discourses of science into perspective and make the reader think about the different ways we speak about nonhuman animals.

Coetzee is thus urging the reader to think about the importance of achieving common ground between disciplines and thinking about how we speak about nonhuman animals. As Latour notices, “the only reasonable, the only realistic way for a mind to speak truthfully about the world is to *reconnect* through as many relations and vessels as

possible within the rich vascularization that makes science flow” (113). It is only by working at the communications between different fields that we can hope to think about the how we are speaking about nonhuman animals. It is only by becoming posthumanist that we can start to promote these interrelations.

CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Costello ends her dinner after her first lecture utterly tired and disappointed. Her final remarks are: “I don’t know what to think. . . . I often wonder what thinking is, what understanding is. Do we really understand the universe better than animals do?” (90). Her failure to communicate with other scholars from Appleton University as well as her difficulty with philosophy when speaking about nonhuman animals illustrate much of the current condition of the field of critical animal studies within the academia.

Discussions about the status of nonhuman animals in the disciplines are becoming more and more a center of focus. Different disciplines have approached this topic from a wide range of perspectives. While philosophy discusses the ethics behind animal rights, bioethics questions the use of animals in scientific research. While agriculture reflects on the impact of cattle in the environment, biology theorizes on the effects of global warming. Now, more than ever, the question of the animal—and its relation to the environment—starts to become a central theme in discussions that range across the university. Paradoxically, while the conversation in the university opens more to the criticism of animal abuse and animal rights, we have reached an unprecedented level of mass killing of animals for human consumption. Besides, focus on the use of nonhuman animals in other facets of our society is growing in the media for the past couple of decades: the issues of puppy-mills, horse slaughters, whale killing, shark finning, avian

flu, swine flu, mad cow disease, as well as oil spill disaster, to name but a few, have been persistent subjects of headlines in the past few years.

While each different discipline has been approaching the subject and introducing new ways to theorize about the question of the animal, literature, Coetzee suggests, can be key in making us aware of the ways we have been talking about nonhuman others, the multiplicity of discourses, and how these are at once a barrier to and, perhaps, an avenue towards a fuller understanding of the relations between animals and humans. Literature has the power to put the discourses of several disciplines into perspective and allow us to criticize them and understand the implications of speaking about their subjects the way they do. Literature can attempt what Giorgio Agamben suggested as the profanation of the disciplinary discourses that center the power of research.

Coetzee's work shows us just that. In using a metafictional frame to portray conversations in philosophy and science, he is forcing us to rethink the way each field has been talking about nonhuman others. He brings the discourses of both philosophy and science down to be examined closely. We are thus able to reflect on how each discipline uses language to construct its truth and suppose different forms of interpreting those truths.

Coetzee shows how the philosophical models that serve as a basis for animal rights, in employing the language of philosophical inquiry, can sometimes deflect from the issues at hand. He also suggests that literature, when committed to imagining others' lives, can help us have an understanding of suffering. Bringing back literature to the Republic may open up understanding across disciplines and, perhaps, across species.

His fiction recognizes Peter Singers's importance in establishing the field of animal studies and the necessity for activism but also demonstrates a tension between the philosophical basis of animal-rights movements and the desire to move beyond the paradigms toward action. His Elizabeth Costello suggests a focus on sympathetic imagination, or using fiction to imagine the life of other beings, without deflecting it through the use of philosophical language. By the devices of literature, we can construct narratives that may show other possibilities of thought for nonhuman animals.

When portraying scholars from the field of science discussing experiments related to nonhuman animals, Coetzee makes it evident what Bruno Latour designates as an obsession in science for clear and objective language. Elizabeth Costello's responses to each scientific claim suggest that even the most objective scientific account is still permeated by subjectivity and has to go through the process of interpretation. When Ruth Orkin speaks about the experiment on a chimpanzee to determine the animal's ability to reason, Costello offers other possible interpretations of the results. Her responses employ a language that is constantly modulated to sound less like dictums and more like wondering. Placed vis-à-vis the language employed by scholars of science, her interventions expose the forms through which science constructs its facts and the underlying paradigms of those constructions.

Costello's commentaries on the nature of thought at the beginning of this section are sparked by her disappointment with the miscommunication present in her visit with scholars of Appleton College. Even though President Garrard and Dean Arendt are courteous to Costello and compliment her on the lecture and her comments during dinner, many of the other professors present—and Norma—question Costello's ideas with a

subtle but recurring hostility. In order to defend their points of view, they make use of arguments from their own disciplines and evade her questions when they are not phrased within the assumptions and methods of their research. She is tired and disappointed in how each scholar, tied to the particulars of their disciplines, is unable to communicate. Her exhaustion comes from struggling with the anthropo- and logocentric basis of many scholars in our university. Even though Elizabeth Costello herself is unsure where she stands in this debate, ultimately, Coetzee's work is a kind of criticism of this form of logocentrism and a suggestion that we attempt to move past it.

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