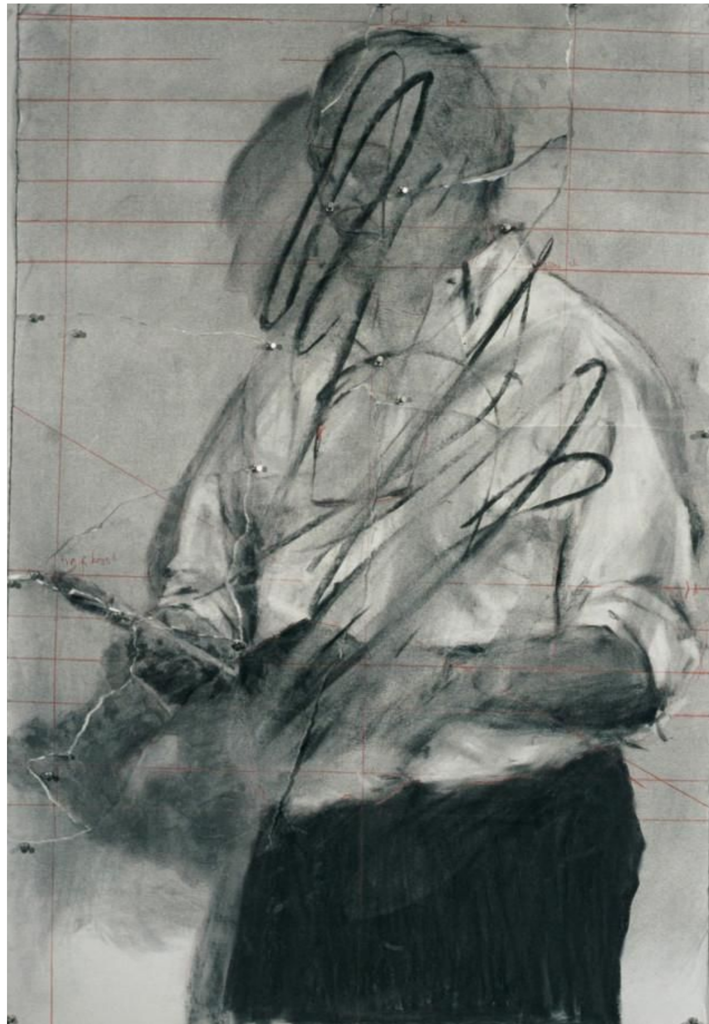
Interpreting Others:
Reading Minds and the Humanism Question in J. M. Coetzee



William Stupp

Fig: William Kentridge, still from *7 Fragments for Georges Méliès* (2003)

S2184761
w.g.stupp@umail.leidenuniv.nl
Literature in Society 2018-2019

First reader: Dr. Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen
Second reader: Dr. Astrid van Weyenberg

<u>Table of Contents</u>

Introduction………1

Theoretical Framework……………………………………………………………………………………………………..4

Chapter One: *Life & Times of Michael K*……………………………………………………………………………….14

Chapter Two: *Disgrace*………………………………………………………………………………………………………30

Chapter Three: *Elizabeth Costello*………………………………………………………………………………….48

Conclusion……..65

Introduction

Humanism is an idea which has had immense influence over intellectual discourse and literary practice in the West for half a millennium. This thesis will deal primarily with liberal humanism, an incarnation which emerged in the 19th Century and reigned as the preeminent model of the human subject in the West for much of the 20th Century. In the past half-century the validity of the liberal humanist viewpoint has been contested by a wealth of antihumanist discourses. As the prefix implies, humanism and antihumanism seem to be fixed in inherent opposition. Though antihumanism is infrequently explicitly evoked by name, its concepts are reflected in a great deal of theory written in the past several decades.

In this thesis, I will focus on the humanist and antihumanist perspectives on subjectivity and the human subject. Each position represents a worldview which proposes a distinct and apparently incompatible conception of the subject. Besides espousing the importance of thinking in human rather than divine terms, humanists emphasize the individuality (from the Latin *individuus* or 'not divisible', i.e. a unit) of the self. The humanist subject is generated by the pairing of the seed of human nature with the ovum of its parents' genetic code, and actualized by its own experience and meditations there on. Antihumanists might roll their eyes at the notion of a unified self and certainly doubt the existence of any substantive human nature. In place of this ambiguous essentialism, they emphasize the importance of social structures and constructs. The antihumanist subject is not innate but constructed, generated from and bound by and to the structures of its society and surroundings.

The conflict between humanism and antihumanism finds expression in the novels of the contemporary writer J. M. Coetzee. Throughout his career, Coetzee has demonstrated an interest in the questions raised by antihumanist discourse. These questions amount to nothing less than the nature of the human being. Coetzee's novels frequently include protagonists who subscribe to the liberal humanist conception of the subject who come to

face other people and events which raise questions about the validity of this framework. Within and across these stories, Coetzee shows humanism to be assailed by various antihumanist narratives and the facts of earthly existence in a nation (South Africa) and world rife with human conflict and oppressive structures. Arising things like colonialism and white supremacy, these questions are shown to be explicitly political in Coetzee's novels.

I will read three of Coetzee's novels with the aim of highlighting and analyzing the ways they deal with the philosophical contest between humanism and antihumanism. The novels are *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), *Disgrace* (1999) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). I will explore how each engages with what I term the humanism conflict or question —the ideological and logical contest between humanism and antihumanism over which more accurately reflects reality or represents a more productive and beneficial mode of thinking. Rejecting the idea that the characters and prose promoting humanist ideals and the possibility of transcending structures are simply a subtle yet firm rebuke on Coetzee's part, a caricature pointing out the flaws of humanism from a decidedly antihumanist perspective, I will attempt to elucidate the position on humanism that can be gleaned from these narratives. I argue that the novels offer a vision of the human subject as strongly influenced by structures, which present serious obstacles to the pursuit of humanist understanding between vastly different individuals. Nevertheless, in this conception the subject is ideally and, with much luck and effort, practically capable of transcending structures, of thinking outside of them in order to understand the subjectivity of others.

The humanism question has been addressed by theorists. In addition to the many who have written at length and in detail about the nature and nuances of countless structures and their counterparts promoting human nature and Enlightenment values, a few writers have sought to theorize a means of moving beyond the humanism-antihumanism dichotomic conflict. I will call extensively upon one such person, the academic Deborah Knight. In her essay "Women, Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Humanism in Feminist Film Theory"

(1995) Knight critically examines humanist and antihumanist discourses from within a feminist context. Ultimately Knight proposes that subjectivity is built upon the interpretation of other subjects. Her concept of the subject retains the essential humanist qualities of a unified self capable of comprehending subjectivities shaped by structures outside its own. My argument is that the position on humanism expressed in the three novels is quite similar to that articulated by Knight in her papers. Each in their own way, the theory and the novels offer a means of moving beyond the seemingly intractable conflict between humanism and antihumanism.

In the first chapter I will present my theoretical framework for exploring the questions surrounding humanism in Coetzee's oeuvre. I will briefly summarize the ideas at the heart of both humanism and antihumanism. Following this, I will define the terms I will be using and explain the nature and scope of the humanism conflict to which I will continually refer. I will then outline Knight's argument and explain her theory of subjectivity before clarifying how I will use it in reading Coetzee.

Having established the approach I will take to reading Coetzee, I will write about each novel in chronological order. These chapters will explain how the humanism conflict figures into the respective text and analyze what conclusions about said conflict can be drawn from the narrative. Finally, I will give my conclusions about Coetzee's position on humanism (as far as can be seen from these three novels) and the extent to which aligns with that view proposed by Knight.

Theoretical Framework

My thesis will argue that these Coetzee novels can be read as offering an extended pondering of what I term 'the humanism question' and as expressing a new or nuanced model of the subject, one which mirrors that articulated by feminist theorist Deborah Knight in "Women, Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Humanism in Feminist Film Theory". The humanism question is the question of which framework, humanism or antihumanism, offers a more accurate and useful means of seeing the self and the world. Humanism and antihumanism are both pluralistic ideas but at the heart of each is a proposition about the nature of the human subject. It is this central aspect of humanism —subjectivity— and its antithesis which will be my focus. I will begin this chapter by defining subjectivity and humanism. I will do the same for antihumanism before explaining the nature and significance of the humanism question in theory, life and literature.

This thesis is centered on questions about the nature and faculties of the subject raised by antihumanist criticism and analyses. Notions of the subject and subjectivity will therefore figure prominently and shall be defined forthwith. I will take 'subject' to mean an individual consciousness understood by itself as a self. There are different approaches to how the subject is constituted. In all cases, it is autonomous in that it is a single being, an agent, influenced but not explicitly directed by anything outside itself. Subjectivity is the frame of reference established by any given subject. It is the subject's way of seeing the world (with

all its foreign objects and alien subjects) that influences or dictates what the subject makes of everything it sees or experiences.

(Liberal) Humanism

The preeminent form of humanism in the West for the past 150 years has been liberal humanism. It was, until fairly recently, frequently asserted to be *the* dominant ideology, "the very air we breathe" according to the English moral philosopher and Christian critic of humanism Basil Mitchell ("Liberal Humanism"). In a series of lectures in the mid-1970s,[1] Mitchell delineated and drew connections between three forms of humanism: rational, romantic and liberal. He described liberal humanism as a subjectivist moral, social and human philosophy that tolerates hosts of contradictory positions. Its fundamental permissiveness masks, according to Mitchell, the inhibition of the individual will of those subscribing to other positions. Peter Barry starts *Beginning Theory* (1995) with a chapter on liberal humanism called "Theory Before 'Theory'". Like Mitchell and Knight, he records the perception that there is something fundamentally Anglo-American about liberal humanism. He outlines ten tenets which reflect the stronger, self-confident vanguard of the liberal humanist critical front. The focus of these is on literary criticism and includes the precepts that good literature "is of timeless significance", retains its meaning absent readers' knowledge of its socio-political context and the biography of the author. The purpose of literature, according to Barry's reading of liberal humanism, is to enhance life and propagate "humane values" while retaining an air of "sincerity" and not coming off as "propaganda" (Barry 17-20).

Beyond these precepts for reading and writing, Barry's tenets of also touch on the liberal humanist view of the human subject. The tenets state that human nature exists and is "essentially unchanging" across time and place and that "[i]ndividuality is something securely

[1] Later published as the book *Morality: Religious and Secular*.

possessed within each of us as our unique ‘essence’”, something which “transcends our environmental influences” and “can change and develop” in a coherent way but cannot be “transformed” arbitrarily (Barry 18). Following from this, the humanistic subject is “unified, coherent, and intentional” (Knight 49). He[2] is an individual in the sense that he is an independent agent and also because he is at least capable of occupying positions which stand in contradiction with dominant social structures and narratives out of devotion to his own values and ideas.

Though my second chapter will make productive use of Mitchell’s theory of romantic humanism, my focus throughout this thesis is the liberal form. Any unspecified reference to humanism can be understood to mean this variety. I defined the humanist subject in my introduction as a coherent being with agency which comes to exist as it does in the world because of a mixture of universal human nature, its material traits (i.e. its DNA) and it’s processing of its own experiences in the world. He is also, according to Knight, seen by antihumanists as “purveying metanarratives, including historical ones”, producing works which are “ahistorical” and projecting his own values as “universal or ahistorical” (44). He “is thought to prefer realist representational practices, coherent character psychology, linear-causal plot structures” and “prefer fictions that mimetically reproduce or mirror the conditions of the social world” and is “seen to be ethnocentric, heterosexist, and imperialist” (45).

Interpreting the writings of P. F. Strawson (and quoting Sarte), Mitchell described the ideal of liberal humanism as “the ideal of imaginative sympathy with the ideals of others, no matter how alien these may be” which “reflects a view of man as a being who [...] is free to become what he wills, whose ‘existence precedes his essence’” (“Liberal Humanism”). Because of their shared nature and possession of reason, it is presumed that highly different human beings will still be capable of understanding each other, of grasping why the other

---

[2] I employ the male pronoun to air the feminist criticism, issued by Kate Soper and many others, that the humanist subject betrays a decidedly masculine sensibility.

acts, behaves and believes dramatically differently. Liberal humanism holds that the individual human being can completely free his mind from structural constraints by the sheer force of his will.

Antihumanism

Antihumanism, as a foundational framework, has influenced writers working across a range of critical projects such as structuralism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism and post-modernism, though none of these modes of analysis are necessarily antihumanist. The art historian Rosalind Krauss writes that “the massive disciplinary shift” in academia was spearheaded by post-structuralism’s work with semiotics and stems essentially from a collective decision that “the unit of social meaning —the sign— would henceforth be the object of study,” replacing the human individual, the subject or the collective (79). This shift in perspective, Knight notes in “Women, Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Humanism in Feminist Film Theory”, had the theoretical effect on feminism of having “turned woman into a sign (turned woman into ‘woman’)” (42). One might replace ‘woman’ with almost any term ‘signified’ by critical theory. The philosopher Kate Soper calls this kind of thinking which emphasizes structures the “postmodernist argument” and writes on the first page of “Feminism, Humanism and Postmodernism” (1990) that it has challenged “the idea that we can invoke any universal subjectivity in speaking about the human condition”.

Where discourses founded on humanism emphasize the individual autonomy of the subject and seek to highlight the ways in which people are —essentially, ideally or theoretically— more similar than different, antihumanism focuses on the ways in which people are *actually* distinguished by structures. As such antihumanist writers have dedicated a great deal of ink to describing the structures which, in their view, dictate the subjectivities of all human beings and revealing their hitherto unseen role in shaping society and people’s apprehension of it. I take ‘structures’ to mean socially-transmitted, constructed ideas with

little or no material basis which nevertheless might appear as real or immutable concepts and categories. The primary structures by which people are separated and around which subjectivities are generated are gender, race, culture, class, language and national-identity.

Accordingly, Knight describes that antihumanist as "undertakin[ing] to write history *differently* and to show how it is possible to move past metanarratives" (44). As "a modernist (and a postmodernist, and more recently, a postcolonialist)" the antihumanist "valu[es] antimimetic and/or avant-garde representations, fragmentary or divided or alienated or ex-centric characters, and plots that depart from the linear-causal in various ways" (44). In contrast to their view of humanists, the antihumanist is self-consciously "aware of differences of ethnicity, sexuality, class, and power" (45).

The antihumanist subject is the decentered subject of poststructuralism. It is unequivocally constructed (Lovibund 100). The central project of antihumanism has been to argue that a great many things which humanists considered to be either personal or universal are in fact socially constructed. By demonstrating the existence of structures and proclaiming their immense power and influence over subjects, antihumanism necessarily weakens the individuality and coherency of the subject and eliminates or reduces the scope of human nature. Moreover, antihumanism has performed this analysis on humanism itself, highlighting the influence of the culture and time from whence it sprung on the selection of values it claimed as universal.

This deconstruction of the humanist self and revelation of the role of structures might convince the doubting humanist that the circumstances he had previously seen as external or peripheral to the formation of his subjectivity (his skin color, his parents' social status etc.) are actually central. He might conclude that the fundamental nature of man is not to reason, but to be buffeted and controlled by powerful and alien forces. He is transformed, he fears, from an autonomous subject into an automaton.

Coetzee and the Humanism Conflict

Because of a shared human nature, the imaginative and rational faculties, understanding between disparate human subjects is essentially always possible under the humanist framework. In principle if not always in practice, these factors grant the possibility that anyone can understand anyone else, that the mind of another (as well as that of one's self) can be read. I label this apprehension 'humanist understanding'. Under the antihumanist framework, apprehension, mutual or otherwise, between human subjects is rendered difficult in the extreme. Humanist understanding is impossible because subjects shaped by vastly different structures will have similarly disparate subjectivities, potentially to the extent that communication between them is difficult and limited. This difference can have the effect of removing all common ground between these hypothetical individuals. If they do indeed lack any shared values, principles or natures, it is hard to imagine them achieving the sort of complete and holistic understanding envisioned by the humanists.

This problem of understanding raised by antihumanism is not merely important because it imperils mutual apprehension. In a vacuum, two autonomous beings incapable of communicating might simply shrug and move on. In reality the problem of understanding exists in an interconnected world defined to a greater or lesser degree by power relations. Subjects shaped by certain structures (and belonging to certain groups) have, throughout history, dominated others. In Coetzee's novels, the problem of reading other minds becomes the problem of reading 'othered' minds, an explicitly political issue. The question of whether one can know another person arises as imminently significant in the face of violent histories and repressive apparatuses. Structures not only make understanding between people difficult or impossible, but also generate and enforce power relations which have grave practical and political consequences for billions of human subjects.

I will look at each novel as an expression of and meditation on this conflict. By analyzing the narrative of the texts and listening to the voices of their characters I will argue

that each book evaluates the humanist model of subjectivity in a manner informed by the antihumanist model. The different ways Coetzee treats characters who share more 'structural' characteristics with himself (namely ethnicity, but also class and gender) from those who do not reveals much about the dialogue between humanism and antihumanism in the novels. Taking note of the basic facts of Coetzee's biography is necessary in order to determine the distance and difference between the structural positions of specific characters and the author who wrote them, difference which, according to antihumanism, problematizes understanding. Therefore it must be said that J. M. Coetzee is a white male born in Capetown, South Africa in 1940.

I argue that the texts express a grappling with humanism, a dissatisfaction with the humanist subject which nevertheless clings to its model of the subject convinced of its own coherence and relative autonomy from structures. I propose that through this, the novels express an alternative view of the subject and that this model has been articulated by Deborah Knight and other feminist, humanist writers.

Feminist Theory, Subjectivity, and Humanism

Feminism can be practiced within either the humanist or antihumanist framework. From Simone de Beauvoir onward, it has highlighted the 'man' in 'humanism'. Soper articulated the developing perspectives of feminists in 1990 by noting that while her predecessors had called for equality as subjects from within humanist discourse, theorists are now abandoning the "'human' subject [which] must always bear the traces of patriarchal ordering" and any humanism which "believes or wishes or pretends that there is no such [feminine] difference" (11).

In *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1986) Moi emphasizes the maleness of the supposedly universal humanist subject, by referring to it as the "phallic self" (7). In labelling it such, Moi connects the humanist subject's obsession with reason and notions of self-containedness with the imaginary unity of a Lacanian male's phallic self-conception.[3] Similarly, Chris Weedon makes a Lacanian argument for antihumanism as the best vehicle for feminist liberation (76). On the opposite side, humanist leanings are evident in Simone de Beauvoir and many others. From this camp several writers have directly addressed this division within feminism and their writings offer a way out of the conflict and posit a subjectivity which echoes the discourse in Coetzee's novels. I will focus on one, Deborah Knight, while noting her expressed affinity with Sabrina Lovibund and Patricia Waugh.

Lovibund captures the sentiment of any humanist feminist in expressing her disbelief that any feminism which "flatly refuse[s] to recognize any philosophical kinship with the 'humanist' tradition could make adequate sense of itself as a political movement" (99). Knight echoes this in her argument that "[a]nti-humanist theory is as fundamentally committed to agency and to subjectivity as humanist theory is, since any theorizing worth the effort to undertake has as its objective to explain and interpret agents and their relations to each other and the world" (51). Her conclusion is that "[t]he humanist/anti-humanist framework trades on a series of remarkably overblown, virtually caricatured, binary oppositions" (47).

Knight: Subjects as Interpreters

I will now summarize the theory on subjectivity articulated by Knight which I will contend explains that expressed in the discourses in Coetzee's novels. Though Knight admits to identifying with the humanists, she is more interested in moving academic discourse beyond the binary opposition than playing the role of the humanist apologist. She seeks to resolve

---

[3] Teresa Dovey wrote a book, the first ever dedicated to reading Coetzee, articulating her thesis that Coetzee's novels can be understood as allegories informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis of the human subject.

the "problem, or at least the alleged problem, of women as subjects; of women and subjectivity" (41). Knight's work on the humanism problem centers on the subject and subjectivity. She begins by offering a briefing on the difference between humanists and antihumanists (quoted, in parts above). She then seeks to dispense with this division, claiming that "authority and authorship" are equally present in antihumanism and humanism before offering her own model of subjectivity (46).

Her intention is to "argue for a subject which is unified, coherent, and intentional, not only because I think this view is the right one, but because I think it goes a long way to dissolving the otherwise tremendously troubling idea that women aren't subjects, or worse, that women are only subjects by virtue of speaking or looking from the phallic position" (49). Her argument is as follows:

Subjectivity and agency are not ontological categories; they are conceptual ones. For this reason, it is not necessary for them to be strong and fixed entities. So, to "speak of anything or anyone as either an agent or a subject, intention is [doubly] relevant" (51). This is because the speaker needs to see intentionality[4] both in the entity regarded as subject and, through this attribution, relates themselves in an intentional way to that subject (51). Therefore, "to be an agent or a subject is already to exist in an intersubjective space," and "[i]ntersubjectivity precedes subjectivity" (51). The acts of understanding and interpreting other subjects engender and define subjectivity. Subjectivity and interpretation are interdependent.

At this point, Knight acknowledges the movement, begun with rejections of Descartes made by his contemporaries and accelerated following Freud, toward an ever smaller and less unified understanding of the subject —a trajectory which necessarily weakens humanism. Still, Knight proposes an enduring subjective unity. Though "a much less

---

[4] It is worth noting that Derrida, an archetypal antihumanist, saw intention as unknowable considering the incoherent and multifaceted nature of the subject, see John D. Caputo, *The Tears and Prayers of Jacques Derrida*.

totalizing sort" than that proposed by Descartes, it is nevertheless *not* "imaginary" in the Lacanian sense (52). It allows for "contradiction and inconsistency" (52). The unity of the subject consists, to Knight, of the subject's "ability to treat herself as well as those whom she would interpret as subjects persisting across time as well as existing at one time" (52). It is not a unity of "absolute integration and self-consistency," but one which is a direct product of the active interpretation of others and the self and awareness and identification of the differences discovered amongst multiplicitous perspectives (52).

Simply put, Knight's idea is of subjects as interpreters. From this, she attributes a sort of "holistic unity" not only within but between subjects. To Knight, this holistic unity is manifested by the practice of narrative. Narrative, has the organizational objective of "account[ing] for continuity and change over time,"; its purpose is to make change comprehensible, or to interpret things (52). Thus "the sort of interpretation which is the hallmark of subjectivity takes the form of narrative, and to be an interpreter is to be engaged in the practice of making sense by narrative means of oneself, others and the world we share, and the artifacts we have produced" (53). Knight finishes by asserting that her account of subjectivity is "pragmatic" in that, following Charles Morris' definition of pragmatism, it deals with the "relationship between signs and their interpreters" (53).

Knight's analysis offers a plausible and considered theorization of subjectivity which acknowledges the objections raised by antihumanism against the humanist subject. I will take from Knight her theorization of subjects as interpreters and subsequent emphasis on narrative as the critical medium of subjectivity, agency and intersubjectivity. I will utilize her ideas as the theoretical framework for my examination of the humanist conflict in Coetzee's novels. If interpretation is indeed "the hallmark of subjectivity," Coetzee's literary efforts to interpret subjective agents alien to himself and construct narratives surrounding them presents an excellent example of subjectivity which seeks to understand itself and others through interpretation. Patricia Waugh notes on page thirteen of *Feminine Fictions* that

certain contemporary feminist novels “suggest is that it is possible to experience oneself as a strong and coherent agent in the world, at the same time as understanding the extent to which identity and gender are socially constructed and represented”. In the following chapters I will argue that Coetzee’s novels occupy such a position, straddling the humanist and antihumanist camps.

Life & Times of Michael K

Life & Times of Michael K (1983) is the fourth novel by J. M. Coetzee. Unsurprisingly, it tells the story of Michael K, a thirty-one year old South African man of uncertain intelligence who

begins the story employed as a municipal gardener. Written at a time when there was no indication that the white-supremacist National Party would ever peaceably institute multiracial democracy, the novel takes place during a fictional South African civil war that history mercifully avoided. As urban tensions rise in the face of a broiling national conflict, Michael flees the city of Cape Town with his mother, headed for her fondly-remembered place of birth in the countryside. When she dies en route, Michael continues the journey on his own.

In *Life & Times*, Coetzee engages with the humanism conflict through question of the possibility of understanding other people, of knowing different minds. Though most of the novel is written from his perspective, Michael is othered to the extent that he remains inscrutable to the reader. Nevertheless, in the second section (whose dramatically different perspective and tone intrinsically raises the matter of subjectivity), Michael is interpreted by a figure who seems much more comprehensible. This medical officer (who I will call the doctor, noting here that this is only a role he is filling) strives to understand Michael and seeks affirmation that he has correctly ascertained some truths about his subjectivity. His endeavor is humanist in nature as it counts on a presumed affinity between even the most disparate individuals. His praise for Michael and ultimate conclusions reflect a liberal humanist romanticization of individuality and freedom, and a hopeful belief in the possibility of the subject's absolute transcendence of inherently repressive structures.

The bellicose circumstances of the novel's political setting and Michael's substantially othered status underline the importance of this larger question of understanding. As practiced by the humanistic medic, this endeavor does noy seem to be of practical or political use in terms of effecting the change he desires. It is also problematized by the colonial power relationship between the military doctor and his patient. Though Michael absconds from the camp and the novel ends with his somewhat optimistic vision, it is hard to see either man escaping, for any significant length of time, from the respective structures which bind them. Despite these problems and failures, the humanist pursuit of understanding, as presented in

Life & Times, still appears to be a laudable and productive endeavor, despite the myriad obstacles. Foolish or not, the ideal of a subject living outside structures is maintained by the notions of the officer and the actions of Michael.

I will begin this chapter by examining the structure of the novel and its narrative voices, which are the foundation of the themes I will explore. Following this, I will explain how the question of understanding is highlighted in the novel and argue for its implications on humanism. I will then expand upon Michael's immense otherness, which highlights the political dimension of Coetzee's exploration of the humanism question. After noting the racial element of his otherness and the humanism at play in the narratives approach to race, I will take a close look at the doctor's reading of Michael, and consider the implications of his lofty conclusions and position toward Michael. Struck by how the text points both to the doctor's error and aptitude, I will turn to Knight's theory for guidance before examining the question this raises about Michael's subjectivity. Finally, I will segue into the rest of my thesis by looking at the link between subjectivity and the motif which compares Michael to animals. Through this I will introduce the interspecies dynamic which recurs in Coetzee's novels as a possible means of transcending the humanism/antihumanism divide and achieving understanding.

Narrative Structure

Structurally the novel is divided into three parts. The first section is a third-person narration told in the past-tense which follows Michael until he is captured by government soldiers while living near the Visagie farm, possible location of his mother's birth. Outside of the first page which describes Michael's birth and relates some thoughts of Anna K and her midwife, the text of the first section is almost entirely restricted to describing Michael's actions in the present. Only sparingly does the narrator directly record the protagonist's cryptic thoughts. Most often, the prose is descriptive and restrained. When the subject of gardening is

broached, the language develops a somewhat more poetical quality and the narration similarly exercises a more assertive and subjective tone when referencing war and its consequences. It is frequently stated within the text that Michael is misunderstood and does not understand what others say and do. He is generally referred to by pronoun ('it' on the first page and 'he' thereafter) or else simply as 'K'. The text's persistent reduction of the protagonist's name to a single letter, a hard consonant which stands out and does not stand for anything, renders Michael as othered. It expresses the distance between the narrative voice and protagonist, highlighting the opaqueness of the character while initiating the narrative that he is a simple man, barely an agent. Where the language is more colorful and subjective, such as in the many instances where Michael is compared to animals, it is unclear whether one is reading this invisible narrator's description or the character's own apprehension of himself.

The second section is written in the first-person by a nameless medical officer at the Kenilworth reeducation camp in Cape Town. A diaristic recording of this medic's thoughts, subdivided in the manner of a personal journal, it records the officer's professional relationships and thoughts about the war, but focuses evermore on Michael as the writer becomes obsessed with his starving patient. Because Michael's name has been misreported in an official document, the writer refers to him as 'Michaels'. With increasing frequency beginning a few entries in, the confessional diarist addresses Michael as 'you'.

This more intimate naming contrasts with Michael's reduction to the letter 'K' and the detached position of the narrative voice in the first section. It demonstrates that the doctor is viewing Michael as an individual, resisting the political and narrative structures which have hitherto dehumanized Michael. As recorded in this log, explicit racial thinking does not figure into his conscious thoughts. Yet the fact that Michael is still misnamed suggests that even respectful, sympathetic and humanistic reading of another person can result in misapprehension. This possibility is significant and troubling in a political context, such as

this one, where the alien subject is also a subaltern. In the last entry, written after Michael's escape, the officer records the notion that he should have joined him in fleeing the camp. Writing to Michael, he imagines what would happen if he caught up with him, how he would proclaim his grasp of the profundity of his patient and seek to become his partner. In his vision, Michael gives no answer. The section ends.

The final pages revert to the narrative form of the section one. The only explicit reference to the events and tentative revelations of the preceding chapter is a remark made to Michael about the overalls he is wearing, clothing he stole in his escape. A free man, he returns to Sea Point and begins to eat, accepting food and alcohol from strangers. After a coerced sexual encounter which embarrasses him, Michael thinks of the farm and reflects on his experience. Echoing the doctor's fantasy, Michael imagines returning to his rugged corner of the Visagie land with an old man accompanying him.

Humanism and Apprehending the Other

The conflict of human(ist) understanding arises as prominent in the novel's second part and the doctor's obsession with Michael. Though Michael is presented as enigmatic in the first section, the narrative voice focuses on his corporeal struggles are and his internal ones are ascertained only in glimpses which hint at their incomprehensibility —as when he hears mysterious sounds overlooking Prince Albert (49). The story raises questions about his intelligence, appearance, motivations, behavior, his relationships to food and to his mother. The text does not dwell on these issues.

Michael is inscrutable, a fact established by the distant narrator. He comes to not value money, refrains from eating for extended periods even when food is available, and adopts a radically minimalistic way of living and gardening despite the discomfort that this engenders. Michael is simply not like most other people, of any culture or color. As David Babcock notes while surveying the secondary literature on the novel, "to those who would

assign a stable meaning to K, his distinctive character survives only as a figure of unknowable otherness" (892). Nevertheless, this endeavor of assignation, which can be read as humanist in nature, is brought to the fore by the writer of the second section, an educated medical officer whose bafflement with Michael's confounding difference becomes an obsession with his subjectivity.

The doctor is desperate to apprehend Michael on a spiritual, emotional and rational level. He seems to want to become like him. The dramatic shift in tone and the emotional and intellectual vehemence of the doctor in the final entry highlight this effort as important. It explicitly raises the question which, John Bolin notes, has divided critics: "[w]hat type of hero is K? and, by extension: what does he stand for?" (344). As reflected in the divergent critical takes on Michael, the doctor's plea for understanding complicates rather than crystalizes the matter of what constitutes Michael's subjectivity. The doctor and the critics attempt to explain, understand and, sometimes, to empathize with a seemingly inexplicable subject.

The doctor's effort is partially validated. It is also portrayed as incomplete and problematic. It is incomplete because the he never receives an answer; it is problematic because the doctor's privileged position in this colonial society organized around structures such as race underlies the dynamic of the relationship, and the possibly dehumanizing language and conclusions of the doctor. Yet the attempt at understanding can be read as a positive way for human beings to move forward in times of social conflict and war, as indicated by Michael's partial answer on the novel's final pages. If the novel is indeed to be read as an allegory, as Nadine Gordimer suggests in her review for *New York Review of Books*, the symbolism of Michael's final vision mirroring the doctor's (both imagine settling down in the countryside with a companion) represents a glimmer of hope with regards to the matter of transcendent understanding across structures.

Apprehending other subjects is important under the auspices of humanism as it is an ideological framework which supposes the possibility of understanding between humans

based upon their shared nature and possession of the rational faculty. In essence, if all human beings share a nature, they should be able to understand one another; even if two people are different and believe differently, they might at least be able to ascertain why the other is and believes that way by looking within themselves as well as at the other person. Under Mitchell's framework, this is fundamental to humanism and particularly emphasized in rational humanism, an objective morality which holds that through empirical knowledge, it is possible to "solve ethical problems" and organize a universally agreeable society ("Romantic Humanism").

This empathetic task of understanding other minds, difficult between any two people, is particularly challenging —and important— when dealing with a person differentiated from one's self in terms of class, language, ethnicity, gender and culture. One of the primary struggles in these novels is the attempt by characters, who seem to believe in the humanist framework and its empathetic possibilities, to understand others. The difficulty of this reaching across difference is heightened by the political context of South Africa, a stratified society, diverse in terms of language and culture, and burdened by a harsh history of colonialism and long period of dominance by white Anglophones and Afrikaners. This makes the question of understanding critical on a practical level and not just a philosophical one.

K as the Ultimate Other

It is the extremity of Michael's otherness which pushes the question of knowing other minds to the forefront of *Life & Times*. A person who is different not only in terms of the more significant structures (i.e. class, gender and ethnicity) but is also othered by physical or mental qualities which set them apart as an outsider even within their own gender, ethnic or socio-economic group, is even more inaccessible. Michael is an outsider in almost every regard. This makes the problem at the center of the text —making sense of Michael— both more difficult and more important. This effort of understanding is presented by Coetzee as

sympathetic and valid even as it is shown to be problematic due to the power dynamics at play, and partially thwarted by society, politics and the distance between human souls.

Michael's position as an outsider is established early on in the text, foregrounding the task of intersubjective interpretation in the novel. Besides being called an 'it' on the first page, Michael is physically othered by his cleft lip, a facial feature which makes him an object of fear and fascination for children and unapproachable by women. He is also othered by his race and neurodivergence. He is frequently described as animal-like by other characters and the narrative voice. The consistent comparison of the protagonist to animals, along with his apparent mental deficiency, suggests that Michael is subhuman. While the doctor challenges the negative connotations of subhuman status through his reification of Michael, his attraction nevertheless stems from Michael's simplicity and obscurity, from his likeness to animals.

The narrative voice of parts one and three emphasizes Michael's otherness and inscrutability. In Stellenbosch, where is mother dies, the primary modes of highlighting Michael's otherness are all enacted: he is compared to animals, he thinks bizarre thoughts, and he frequently cannot understand and is not understood by other people.

After taking his mother to the hospital, Michael worries that she is dying and approaches a nurse for help. When she responds with hostility and simple questions, the text states that "K stood before her like a dumb dog" (27). The narrative voice and other characters compare Michael to animals, insects and pests throughout the novel. Waiting in the hospital yard, Michael meets a patient recovering from an injury. None of Michael's words, if he spoke any, are recorded. He shakes his head when the man asks him a question, after which the man "look[s] critically at his face," bringing Michael's minor disfigurement to mind and highlighting him as an object for specifically critical appraisal (30). Michael buys two chicken pies, giving one to the man. Coetzee writes that the pie is "so delicious that tears came to [Michael's] eyes" (30). Even as the man speaks about "his sister's uncontrollable fits of shaking[,] K listen[s] to the birds in the trees and trie[s] to

remember when he had known such happiness" (30). It is confusing that listening to birdsong and hearing a convulsing person while eating chicken could cause so much pleasure, especially given Michael's later rejection of food, meat above all else. The scene also demonstrates Michael's silence in social situations.

Returning to the hospital building, Michael watches his unconscious mother. He becomes "fascinated" by the movements of "the string of saliva between her withered lips" (30). When he steals his mother's and another patient's teas, Michael is again compared to a hound, this time "a guilty dog" (30). After a night sleeping rough, he learns of his mother's death (the doctor notes that he would have learned sooner had he, like a normal, non-itinerant person left a telephone number). She asks Michael if he wants to make a phone call and Coetzee relates Michael's apprehension that "[t]his was evidently code for something, he did not know what" (30). Michael's difference is revealed; he is unable to read social situations and does not understand that the woman is asking if there is anyone he needs to inform of his mother's death. When she explicitly asks him this, he cryptically states that "[i]t doesn't matter" (31). Baffled by the circumstances, Michael asks another hospital worker "[h]ow will I know?" (32). The obscure symbolism of his mother's halo of flame is repeated but not elaborated upon. He begins his new life by throwing away the articles given to him to ensure his personal hygiene, the maintenance of which is a prerequisite for social life. He even contemplates throwing the clothes away, perhaps to live naked. He ceases to obey the law, disregarding the curfew (34). Michael is rendered as an inscrutable actor occupying a subjectivity very different from that of most other people.

Michael is also othered by his lack of a sexual appetite. It is established on the second page that due to his cleft lip, "K did not have women friends." Apart from a brief infatuation with a young woman at the Jakkalsdrif relocation camp, Michael never shows interest in any woman; apart from the unbidden experience at the very end of the novel, he is never shown to engage in or contemplate sexual activity. The few paragraphs cataloging

Michael's interest in the young woman at the camp highlight his status as other. He falls for the girl after her child dies and she sequesters herself in her grief outside of the society of the camp. The facts which degrade her and other her (her shortness, fatness, refusal to cry and lack of knowledge as to the identity of the father of her dead child) are the same facts which cause Michael to wonder "whether he was at last in love" (89). When the girl returns to the world after three days of grief, Michael "detect[s] no sign that she was different from [other people]" (89). Realizing that she *is* like other people, that is, that she is not like him, Michael loses all interest in the girl.

The Obfuscation of Race and Liberal Humanism

Race is both a means by which Michael is othered and a way liberal humanism is embedded into the novel. When he is apprehended by the police before being sent to Jakkalsdrif camp, a document records Michael as a "CM", identifying him as a coloured male (70). Though this racial categorization, like Michael's name, may have been inaccurately recorded, it indicates Michael is at least seen by others as coloured.

In the novel, few characters are described with overt references to phenotypic traits correlated with understandings of race. This obfuscation of race seems to deemphasize the conflict and othering between ethnic groups; it refigures the (structural) racial and political conflict into an ambiguous and un-interrogated one of individuals who belong to certain obscured groups who fight or dominate other individuals. It also sets Michael and, to an extent, the doctor, apart in terms of their lack of racial thinking. That the war figures around white supremacy is only affirmed by Noël's statement that they are fighting "so that minorities will have a say in their destinies" (157).

Whatever the intention, Coetzee's broad omission of references to race has the effect of making the novel at least *appear* more humanistic. So obscured, *Life & Times* appears to be quite readable in accordance with Barry's ten tenets of liberal humanism: its themes of

bondage, gardening and understanding are timeless (no. 1 & 4), and not reliant on a specific socio-political context (no. 2 & 3), it has a character who heralds individuality and promotes the humane value of freedom (no. 5 & 6), it melds form and function (no. 7), and is too obscure to be seen as propaganda (no. 8 & 9). Due to the questions it raises, there is ample opportunity for the liberal humanist critic to mediate between reader and text (no. 10). Nevertheless, Coetzee highlights some flaws of this approach through insinuations about the doctor's privileged approach which obscures from himself his being influenced by structures.

The Doctor's Interpretation

As an attempt at humanist understanding, made more difficult by Michael's otherness, the doctor's reading of Michael is critical to making an account of the novel's grappling with humanism. In the final entry of the second part, the medical officer proposes an explanation of Michael's actions and submits a broader reckoning of him as a person. Sympathetic, articulate and humanistic, his writings and presumptions are still shown to be problematic. In an increasingly emotive letter, he imagines explaining his diagnosis to his patient. This dramatic outpouring is split by a host of parenthetical clauses which creep into the text, representing the questions and quibbles of the doctor which are only expressible in writing or the imagination. They formalize the monologue, reinforcing the impression that the doctor thinks too much for his own good, that he is playing psychoanalyst and indulging in grandiose philosophizing at the expense of a more materialist and structurally-conscious assessment of social ills (a common critique leveled against contemporary exponents of humanism).

Despite his professed admiration for 'Michaels' and the great and universal meaning he has encountered through him, the doctor's voice still resounds with a self-aggrandizing paternalism. He has "chosen" Michael to be his guide, a relationship which recalls Michael's aversion to becoming "body-servant" to the Visagie grandson (162, 65). He asserts that he is "the only one who saw that [Michael was] more than [he] appeared to be" (164). Most

obviously problematic, if not most damning, is the fact that the officer does not get Michael's name right. Though it is reasonable to assume that the doctor's persistent labeling of Michael K as 'Michaels' is an innocent mistake which Michael himself saw no need to correct, the misnaming of Michael hints at the possibility that the doctor is ruminating more on an imagined Michael than the actual subject before him.

The doctor ultimately concludes that Michael, his personality and very existence, is profound. Exhibiting an expansive emotion, he declares that "Michaels means something, and the meaning he has is not private to me" (Coetzee 164). The doctor approaches Michael from a position of colonial authority and racial superiority, and, despite his pronounced affection, he looks down on Michael, telling him at the start of the letter that he is like "a stick insect [...] whose sole defense against a universe of predators is its bizarre shape" (149). He writes that "we ought to value you and celebrate you," and put his clothes and pumpkin seeds in a museum and calls Michael's way of life "the old way" before comparing him to an endangered species of fish and a last member of a North American tribe, invoking the noble savage trope (151).

Besides determining that he should have joined Michael in his escape, the officer's conclusion is that Michael's refusal to eat is a unique form of resistance (163). This resistance, the good doctor says, is not resistance at all. Rather than resist, Michael has always done exactly what he is told to do by figures of authority, beginning with his mother (the doctor is very critical of Anna K, seeing her as responsible for Michael's maladaptation). Michael has not resisted but only obeyed, and this obedience has sapped him of his energy and will to live. He tells Michael that "your will acquiesced but your body baulked" (Coetzee 163). His resistance, the inverse of normal suicide, is bodily rather than willful, not based on principles or ideas but automatic; it ultimately comes as result of his confinement to a place and lifestyle antithetical to the nature of his (primitive, anachronistic and simple) being. It bear resemblance the dilemma of caged animals who refuse to mate. He determines that K

doesn’t belong in human society —or at least that he does not belong in a society which, like South Africa at war and under apartheid, is torn apart by a (never-defined) politics to the extent that individualistic-universalist humanist values are incompatible with public life.

This recalls Michael’s disinterest in reading stories about “military men and women with names like Lavinia,” in the Buhrmann’s magazines and preference for pictures of faraway, romantic places like Bali and “Finland Land of Lakes” (17). Michael’s preference for pictures of food and exotic, natural places does lend some credence to the doctor’s assessment. Regardless, he presumes to know that about Michael which he himself might not know; the doctor writes that Michael yearned for “for a different kind of food, food that no camp could supply” (163).

Finally, the troubled medic imagines explaining to his absconded patient that his time at the repressive state apparatus that is Kenilworth was “an allegory —speaking at the highest level— of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it” (166). Though he acknowledges that Michael not understood his polysyllabic vernacular, he commends Michael for escaping the system, something the doctor is clearly envious of, and seeks to tell him about the meaning of his garden, which Michael apparently spoke of often as the “Garden of Paradise” (155). This garden from which the ‘true food’ which satiates the soul springs is “nowhere and everywhere except in the camps” (Coetzee 166). This food of life which Michael needs and the doctor seeks, can only be found by Michael, mindless and meaningful. Hence the officer’s wish to follow him.

Finding so much meaning in Michael, the doctor is desperate for confirmation about his intellectual suppositions. In his imagination, he asks Michael whether he is correct in his analysis, whether he has truly read his mind and understood him. Even if they cannot stop to talk, he pleads to Michael to at least indicate whether he has hit the mark by indicating with

his hands (167). Confirmation is of course elusive as, even in his imagination. Michael is gone while he remains in the camp.

The doctor follows a humanistic formula, claiming Michael's meaning to be simultaneously personal to him and universally relevant, mirroring the pairing of a decisive individual will with a shared human nature. Yet it is also seems that he is doing some projecting. At the very least, there is the impression that, if not strictly incorrect, his analysis misses something fundamental about Michael as a person. His abstract, conceptual theorizing does not seem compatible with Michael's modes of apprehension. He is perceived by the doctor as a profound entity, but it is unclear to what degree Michael is acknowledged as a subjective agent.

The doctor's analysis raises numerous questions about Michael K, his story, and the novel itself. The most pertinent is whether the doctor is correct about Michael. While the man psychoanalyzing Michael clearly operates under certain biases relying on some amount of speculation and misinformation, he has spent a great amount of time with Michael and has heard his stories, including some which are not told to the reader. Fundamentally his reasoning that Michael does not eat because his body does not want to live in confinement is both logical and satisfying. It is also a characteristically liberal humanist conclusion which emphasizes the ideal freedom of the human soul. He calls Michael a "universal soul", telling him there are no places left for those like him (150). On the next page, the doctor goes paradoxically further, calling him "precious" and "an original soul [...] a human soul above and beneath classification, a soul blessedly untouched by doctrine, by history".

His words show the humanist tendency to bend toward coherent character motivations and meta-narratives (Knight 43). They demonstrate a romantic valuation of human life and liberty and express the hope that the individual has the capacity to exist outside of definition and restriction by repressive structures and society itself. They also betray the idealism of humanism (particularly the romantic sort, in to Mitchell's definition).

They dwell on abstract concepts like freedom and neglect material circumstances and practical agitation for change. The doctor, a racial and professional elite in his society, still feels solidarity with the disenfranchised Michael. Moreover, he doesn't do anything material to advance his ideological struggle. In any case, once Michael leaves the camp, he begins to eat, a turn of events which might support the doctor's theory.

The officer performs the critical role of mediating Michael as a subjective agent to the reader as the novel predominately does not allow Michael to speak for himself. His bizarre actions (such as refusing to live what would seem a more comfortable life by using the Visagie house) are clearly intentional, but the intention is not given. The matter of intentionality, so important to Knight, is outstanding. The doctor provides an intention through his narrative about true food, but this is only a limited accounting. The task of understanding Michael follows a humanist approach; the text explores Michael as a subject through his individual subjectivity rather than by deconstructing him as a product of socio-political structural forces. The officer's perspective highlights the critical role of interpretation in subjectivity. Even though they may be correct, the problematic nature of the doctor's analysis and his relationship to Michael raises questions about his conclusions. The novel's hinting at this and its omission of relevant political context paradoxically highlights the existence of structures and their influence on the creation of subjects, pointing the reader toward antihumanist criticisms of humanist subjectivity.

The doctor never receives confirmation from Michael about his nature and neither does the reader. Michael remains an inscrutable character, his subjectivity obscured even as he is the subject of the novel. Rather than reveal the nature of Michael's subjectivity through decisive information (from his own thoughts or in his own words) which clearly explains his intentions, the novel grapples with Michael through the necessarily imperfect interpretation offered by the doctor. Knight's theorization of subjectivity will be useful in furthering our understanding of the novel's approach to Michael as a subject and subjectivity in general.

Subjectivity and Interpretation in *Life & Times*

Life & Times offers a literary example of Knight's theory of subjects as interpreters and reflects her view of narrative practice as a critical medium of intersubjective interpretation, the practice of which generates and affirms of the holistically unity of her quasi-humanist subject. For what has the doctor done if not created a narrative, accurate or not, accounting for Michael's inexplicability? Though Michael's subjectivity can only be incompletely ascertained, his status as a subject is affirmed in part by the doctor's interpretive acts. Following Knight's paradigm that intentionality is "doubly relevant", the doctor presumes that Michael is a subject acting with certain intentions and, by engaging in his analysis, he relates his own subjective intentionality to Michael (51). Furthermore, he sees a profound similarity in their intentions, which he might see as evidence of human nature. That the doctor admires Michael and believes he shares with him certain sentiments and the desire to escape enhances the intersubjective relationship, though it is not strictly necessary. The reader, following the doctor/author, is invited to conclude that Michael is "more than what he seems to be" and consider his saga as "an eruption of meaning into the world", but is faced with Michael's own silence on the subject (164). Under Knight's scheme, it is the construction of narrative through the attribution of intentionality which affirms subjectivity. That the narrative wrought by the doctor is problematized even as it is created does not, under this scheme, reduce the validity of the coherent subject it sees or imagines.

Irrespective of Michael's status as a subject, it is clear that the doctor exists actively in an intersubjective space with the person he calls Michaels and that his own subjectivity within the novel is defined by his engagement with Michael as a subject. He is not the 'hero' of the novel, just an interpreter. Even if the subject he perceives Michael to be is radically different from the person Michael actually is, the doctor still regards him as an autonomous subject. Knight's conception of subjectivity allows for "contradiction and inconsistency"; it is not the

correct assessment of another subject which births subjectivity, but the act of interpretation itself (52). If one follows Knight, it is through his grappling with Michael as an inexplicable subject that the text shows the officer to be a subject as well. Through Michael, he is shown have views which do simply reflect those dictated to him by the state and implied by his status, but which reflect his individuality. The doctor is perhaps more correct than he literally is when he feels "sense of gathering meaningfulness" from Michael's presence (Coetzee 164).

Michael as the Interpreter

Though, under Knight's model, the subjectivity of the doctor is engendered through his intersubjective probing of Michael, the question of Michael as a subject remains. The doctor, benefitting from a first-person narration and a greater intellectual capacity, is presented more clearly as a human agent. If intersubjectivity precedes subjectivity, and interpretation establishes agency the troubling question arises of whether Michael is a subject given that the text does not devote the same space to Michael interpreting the doctor or any other character.

Yet Michael does seek to interpret others. He does so in a way restricted by his own status as an other and the nature of his mind. Michael consistently fails in his interpretations: the narrative voice reminds the reader that Michael 'doesn't understand' other people and their actions. Lacking the faculty for apprehension and often thwarted by the "old hopeless stupidity invading him", Michael turns away from other people at the hospital, the Visagie farm and both the Jakkalsdrif and Kenilworth camps (Coetzee 60). Michael recognizes himself as different from others, a thought process which clearly establishes himself in an intersubjective space (Coetzee 77). Though Michael fails in understanding others, this is unimportant in terms of establishing his subjectivity.

Animals and Transcendence

Knight's theory essentially aims to move past the binary humanist and antihumanist positions on the subject by emphasizing the significance of the act of interpretation. In Coetzee's novels a similar objective —transcendence of the humanism conflict which acknowledges antihumanist discourses on structures yet retains coherency of the humanist subject and the possibility of reading other minds— is plodded towards through the emphasis on empathetic and interpretive engagement with non-human subjects. In *Life & Times* this hopefully transcendent dynamic takes the form of a human subject who is consistently referred to as subhuman (as animal-like) and thus implied to be a non-subject, who is nevertheless read as a human subject by an outside interpreter. In the following chapters I will relate on how interpretive relationships with animals advance empathy and expand subjectivity in *Disgrace* and *Elizabeth Costello*. I will also relate how these two novels mediate the tension between humanism and antihumanism in a manner which can be elucidated by Knight's writings. In *Disgrace* this is achieved by showing animals and humans to be interchangeable and in *Elizabeth Costello* it is furthered by the reading of animals as subjects.

Disgrace

Coetzee published *Disgrace* in 1999. *Disgrace*, like *Age of Iron* (1990) before it, is a realist novel (in that, unlike much of Coetzee's fiction, its settings and characters are not historical or allegorical constructs) which follows the perspective of an ostensibly liberal white person in contemporary South Africa which, by 1999, was a 'New South Africa', recently liberated from minority rule.

This person is David Lurie. The narrative follows his scandalous exit from his career teaching poetry and communications at the Cape Technical University following a predatory relationship with Melanie, a student, and subsequent stay on his daughter Lucy's farm in the Eastern Cape. Lurie descends further into disgrace after an attack on the farm leaves him scarred and his daughter raped. Lurie's efforts to move on include redoubling his volunteering as an animal euthanizer's corpse-disposal aide, making things right with Melanie's family, attempting to write an opera, and finally returning to his daughter's side to be with her when her child is born.

Disgrace, like *Life & Times*, contains discourses on humanism and subjectivity. Lurie, an individualistic character with clear romantic and humanist leanings, is forced to reckon with the consequences of his own sexual transgressions, justified by his romantic humanism, and later with the violent sexuality of other men. At the first turn, Lurie does not seem much changed. He is wholly accepting of his punishment while vehemently rejecting repentance. When the tables are turned, Lurie's world and sense of self are shattered. In the course of this dramatic arc he begins to think and feel differently, revealing a critical discourse on humanism which hints at the possibility of moving forward from the humanism conflict.

After the attack, Lurie displays a new interest in understanding others. Though certainly not unambiguously redeemed, he recognizes internally that his romantic and humanist framing of his actions are outrageous and engages in visceral self-degradation. His thoughts reveal him to be more prone than before to read others 'anthropologically', to

interpret people in ways which are reminiscent of antihumanism in that they acknowledge social context and the impact of structures on subjectivity.

Lurie's new engagement with other subjects fits into the framework of the sympathetic imagination, which will be elaborated on in the third chapter. First interpreting and feeling-as other male subjects (Petrus and the rapists), Lurie next attempts to expand this empathetic envisioning to the female position (through his daughter and the character Theresa) with more limited success. It is Lurie's engagement with animals which produces the clearest and most moving changes in his approach to subjectivity. Though his creative efforts prove somewhat insubstantial and his efforts to understand his daughter and Petrus do not lead to any great revelation, Lurie nevertheless establishes for himself a new subjective framework, triggered more than anything else by the imagined plight of animals. Even if Lurie is not sympathetic, he is undoubtedly sympathizing.

Narrative Voice

The narrative voice of *Disgrace* is situated deep within Lurie's consciousness; the reader learns of Lurie's subjectivity through unrestrained access to his rich inner monologue. Unlike that of *Life & Times*, the narrative voice of *Disgrace* possesses full knowledge of its protagonist and allows him to speak for himself.

The narration is, particularly at the start, quite flattering towards Lurie (the first sentence declares that he has "solved the problem of sex rather well,") indicating that text is focalized through him and that all its descriptions reflect his subjectivity. At the same time, the text unabashedly reveals unflattering details of Lurie's thoughts and past actions. Stalking Soraya in the presence of her children, this voice refers to Lurie as a "predator" (10). He is shown to be a man who "hesitates" before slipping down a dark path but proceeds anyway (6). He knows from the start that "[h]e ought to give up, retire from the [sexual] game" and contemplates castration but does neither (9). The book frequently records Lurie's sexual

thoughts which generally involve objectifying and reductive visions of women, including a particularly objectionable instance where, while attempting to apologize to Melanie's father for his problematic sexuality, he cannot help but contemplate what it would be like to have sex with Melanie and her teenage sister at the same time (164).

Lurie's Subjectivity

It is through the difficult nature and unethical behavior of its protagonist that *Disgrace* engages critically with humanism and antihumanism. Therefore, it is essential to take a good look at Lurie's subjectivity. It is significantly informed by English romanticism and the humanist position on the subject. He goes on to at least recognize the ills of his stance, developing new ways of looking at subjects (his own and others) which change his perspective. Lurie is given to romantic (and probably fallacious) notions about the origins of language in singing, which in turn was spurred by "the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul" (4)[5]. The manner of his consistent employment of the words 'heart' and 'soul' fingers Lurie as a romantic and a humanist, representing as they do the essential qualities of individuality and human nature. This musical argument highlights creative, individual will rather than signs or structures.

In Mitchell's model, romantic humanism rejects the rational humanism of the Enlightenment. It opposes the position of objective morality in favor of emotion and the individual freedom offered by either a "subjectivist moral philosophy" or "the rejection of morality all together" ("Romantic Humanism"). For Mitchell, "[t]he romantic's model is the unattached artist who is prepared to subordinate the interests of others, even his own interest, to the development of his genius" ("Romantic Humanism"). Following this theory, Lurie can be identified as a romantic humanist.

---

[5] That this idea, which is never elaborated upon, is reminiscent of Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, doesn't make it less romantic. Nietzsche, despite his professed disdain for romanticism, is still sometimes read as romantic, see Caroline Jones and Judith Norman.

Lurie is characterized from the first page by his affinity with eros, his sexuality. He conceives of himself poetically as “at home amid a flux of bodies where eros stalks and glances flash like arrows” (6). His sexual impulses and the thoughts they trigger constitute a significant portion of his inner life and compel many of his actions. His brief encounters with Soraya “are enough to make him happy”; without them “the week is a featureless desert” (Coetzee 5). Seduction has been, “for decades, [...] the backbone of his life” (7). Without it, Lurie often “does not know what to do with himself” (11).

His preoccupation with sex is given greater depth by his other great interest and source of identification, literature, particularly English romanticism (which Lurie notably struggles to explain to his students in the second chapter). After seeing Soraya, Lurie “thinks of Emma Bovary, coming home sated, glazen-eyed, from an afternoon of reckless fucking” (11). This thought ties these two fixations of Lurie’s mind together, their confluence having an uplifting effect upon Lurie’s sexuality. It connects what is generally seen as a fundamentally non-intellectual physical compulsion to well-regarded and intellectually rigorous works of literature. The specific aspects of his sexuality which might otherwise trouble him, his taste for predation and specific desire for non-white women, are likewise washed clean by these allusions and illusions.

Lurie is inclined to view his lust, his sexual proclivities and his gazing upon women as *eros*, a conception of passionate love perennially adapted and explored by Western writers. His predatory behavior is recontextualized within a venerable literary tradition. In chapter six, Lurie’s actions with Melanie have led to his being forced to explain before a committee of his academic peers how he came to sleep with the student who has since had a complaint registered against him. He affirms that whatever emotions occurred within him are indescribable in prosaic language, that the nature of eros makes it explicable only to the poets. Lurie is happy to keep his explanation minimal, stating that it “[s]uffice[s] to say that Eros entered” (52). Imbued with the spirit of Eros, Lurie “is not the same” person any longer

but becomes a “servant of Eros” (52). Lurie believes this absolves him of responsibility without necessarily removing the need for punishment. The disregard for ethics inherent in this approach recalls Mitchell’s romantic humanism. It is also notably at odds with the Christian approach to morality, an alternative to all humanisms and antihumanism, in which absolution is attained by humbling confession. As Elleke Boehmer points out in “Not Saying Sorry, Not Speaking Pain”, this religious approach is reflected in the committee’s resemblance to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and Lurie’s rejection of it further demonstrates his separation from the mainstream of South Africa.

Before their second-to-last sexual encounter, which the text describes as “[n]ot a rape, not quite that”, Lurie is again struck with desire as he seeks to have sex with Melanie (Coetzee 25). Despite her concerns about her cousin returning, “nothing will stop him” (25). The text then glowingly describes this eros, this spiritual incursion into the subject: “Strange love! Yet from the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that” (25). As Melanie “does not resist” his sexual advances, so too does Lurie, in his own conception, himself refuse to resist eros’ penetration into his own being. Though he can, doing so shames him (52).

Whatever the consequences of succumbing to eros, Lurie contends that he is “enriched” by the effects of its visitation upon him, a clear reflection of his romantic humanism. He is proud of his servitude, such as he construes it, to the extent that he refuses to express regret for the actions despite knowing within himself that this intransigency (born devotion to the principles and poetry around which his identity has been constructed) will lead to negative consequences which gravely impact his life (47). His approach to eros typifies the (self)destructive tendency of romantic, egoistic humanism elucidated by Mitchell. He affirms his own coherent, militantly autonomous subjectivity, but does not care sufficiently about other subjects.

Lurie's Romantic Justification

Already alluded to in my account of his subjectivity, Lurie's romantic justifications for his actions compose a clear critique of his sort of humanism given his objectionable actions. On his first morning at Lucy's farm, Lurie is again offered the opportunity to account for his actions in Cape Town. His daughter asks him whether his relationship with Melanie was "serious" and whether it has ended (Coetzee 69). Lurie is uncertain on the second point and avoids the question, which the text indicates he cannot in his heart answer. As a fifty-two-year-old man, newly burdened by what he sees as the approach of seniority and the end of his sexual acceptability, Lurie recognizes the "unseemly" nature of his staring at women (24, 69).[6] Taken aback by the conversation about intimacies, Lurie nevertheless decides to explain himself, realizing that "if not to her, then to whom can he speak?" (69).

He explains the romantic philosophical grounding of his approach to sexuality first by citing William Blake, who, imagining a diabolical proverb, wrote "[s]ooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires"(69). From this romantic position, apologizing for one's passions, however wrong or sinful, is not a potentially redemptive —and therefore empowering— act, but rather a sordid self-betrayal and "abasement" (54). It is hard to imagine Byron apologizing for an affair, though, as Lurie later ponders, the poet had sexual experiences which could be called rapes (160). He echoes his earlier comment to the reporter that his affair "enriched" him when he tells Lucy that "[e]very woman I have ever been close to has taught me something about myself. To that extent they have made me a better person" (70).

A few days later, Lurie is again pressed to explain himself by Lucy and asserts that his "case rests on the rights of desire" and "the god who makes even the small birds quiver" (89). He recalls to himself the time he forced himself on Melanie in unromantic detail,

---

[6] It is worth noting that "unseemly" is the word the text initially uses before emphasizing with italics that the word "*letching*" comes to Lurie's mind while spying on Melanie. Later, when talking to Lucy, Lurie himself uses "unseemly" in a self-deprecating way to refer to his "preying on children", pointing perhaps to a near-unity of the narrative voice with Lurie's subject if not his consciousness.

visualizing “her arms flop[ping] like the arms of a dead person” and remembers his words before the committee: “*I was a servant of Eros*: that is what he wants to say” (89). Lurie recognizes that voicing his reasoning would be an “effrontery” which demonstrates his “vanity” (89). Nevertheless, he thinks that it is “not a lie, not entirely” and makes the troubling contention that “there was something generous that was doing its best to flower” in the “wretched business” of the rainy afternoon in Cape Town (89). In these thoughts, Lurie is revealed to the reader to understand that his accounts of himself, which echo Mitchell’s picture of the romantic humanist, grate upon the ear and are generally socially unacceptable even as he hews to his satanic-romantic view which clearly disrespects the agency of women.

Having already alluded to Flaubert, the early Christian writer Origen, and Blake to dress-up and explain his sexual practices and frequent exercise of an objectifying male gaze, Lurie now employs an anecdote involving a golden retriever to give a lesson, the meaning cryptic even to himself, about male desire. He reminds Lucy of a male dog from their old neighborhood who was regularly beaten by his owners when he expressed his excitement over smelling sexually available females. Eventually, Lurie says, it would respond to these alluring pheromones with fear, running around “with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide” (90). Lurie “despaired” at this “ignoble” “spectacle” of the animal being punished for expressing desire (90). He tells Lucy that “[n]o animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts” (90). Revealing the sinister implication of her father’s narrative, Lucy asks him if men ought then be allowed to “follow their instincts unchecked” (90). Lurie responds by explaining that what disturbs him about the incident is that “the poor dog had begun to hate its own nature,” and, he presumes, would rather be castrated or, better yet, killed (90). The two wonder whether “desire is a burden we could well do without” (90). This conversation takes place immediately before the farm is attacked by three men, “or two men and a boy” (91).

Changing Perspectives

Lurie's romantic justifications of his obviously egocentric behavior are easily interpreted as deluded or outrageous (in that their implications, if practiced at scale, would be good for nobody) by the reader. When the farm is attacked, Lurie himself is forced to look into and adjust his perspective. In the attack, Lucy's dogs are killed, property is stolen, Lurie suffers minor disfigurement and Lucy is raped by each attacker. While the robbery and assault are reported, Lucy never notifies the police about the rapes. It is a twisted reflection of the story about the dog Lurie has just told. In his account, it is acceptable and just to punish a dog for straightforward offenses against property such as "chewing a slipper," but profane to punish a creature's adherence to necessary natural impulses (90). Lucy is deeply affected by the attack, as is her father who must now reckon with the violence of male sexuality which he has hitherto ignored, obscured and perpetuated.

Lucy tells her father she will not report the sexual assaults because, in the Eastern Cape context, gang rape is a "purely private matter" (112). Lurie rejects this, just as he was vehemently opposed to considering the "overtones" of his relationship with Melanie before the committee. When Dr. Rassool raises the issue of overtones, she is referring to "long history of exploitation of which" his sexual misconduct is supposedly a part (52). That Lurie is dismissive of the suggestion of "overtones" in both cases[7] is a natural product of his individualistic nature and humanistic viewpoint (52). It is also convenient for him. This humanist model of the subject, particularly when drawn in a romantic hue, does not leave overmuch room for the influence of years spent living in a society and speaking its language. Such factors are given absolute preeminence in the alternative conception of the self, the constructed subjectivity of antihumanism. Lurie consistently conceives of himself as an individualistic subject eschewing a social identity connected to a larger group.

---

[7] The overtones in each case mirror each other. Lurie's critics were surely citing histories white oppression and male violence to support a narrative of majority and female liberation while Lucy presumably worries about her story supporting narratives which promote white supremacy by way of black violence.

As such, in his own mind, Lurie's actions are his own, discreet, personal and lacking any inspiration from or ramifications for broader social and political reality. From his romantic humanist perspective, he pursued Melanie because he was otherwise celibate, found her attractive and happened to run into her, and won her because of his charm and persuasiveness. The political, sexual and social context which Dr. Rassool alludes to (and Lurie himself faces in the form of the Women Against Rape group) do not figure into his mind. It is absurd and outrageous for another individual with no access his heart to claim to know what moves him or the meaning of his actions. As soon as Dr. Rassool mentions overtones, Lurie responds defensively and emotionally. He cannot abide the attack on one of his central conceits and interrupts her, protesting the existence of overtones.

After the brutal attack, Lurie enters a deeper state of disgrace and begins a more profound reflection upon the ramifications of his own sexuality. In the second half of the novel, Lurie continues to regularly exhibit an objectifying gaze toward any female in his vicinity, including his own traumatized daughter, and engage in sexual relationships of a questionable nature (with Bev Shaw, who is married, and a drug-addicted prostitute in Cape Town). He maintains his stance that he has been "enriched" by all of his affairs and adjusts only slightly his understanding of why his relationship with Melanie was seen as forbidden (192). He ponders at the end of the novel that "the trial was set up to punish" the "marriage of Cronus and Harmony;" the "broadcasting [of] old seed" (190). Though this interpretation is coherent and has both evolutionary, literary and (archaic) religious resonance, it implies that Lurie has wronged Melanie only indirectly and that his real victims are the younger men like Ryan who would have otherwise had unfettered access to Melanie. As Boehmer notes, "a highly conventional patriarchal and colonial prerogative of possession over the silent 'body of the woman' is exercised" in both halves of the novel (344). Any change has not produced a newly unequivocally accountable and feminist Lurie who respects the agency of women.

During Lurie's darkest moment, trapped in the bathroom of the farmhouse on page 94, the text asks "[h]ow will they stand up to this testing, he and his heart?" In the final pages, he submits to squalor, horror and insignificance. He gives up his honor and his treasured romantic poets, who have not "he must say, guided him well" (179) and vows to look into new ones, including the arguably still romantic "Victor Hugo, poet of grandfatherhood" (214). Boehmer notes that Lurie's acceptance of a disgraceful state as a kind of punishment is connected to "the surrender of individualist, self-justifying reason", a clearly humanist faculty (346).

Lurie's qualified movement away from romanticism reflects Mitchell's critique of romantic humanism. Because of its intrinsic interest in the individual self-actualizing over societal concerns, he says that the application of romantic humanism inhibits or removes the possibility of anyone "becom[ing] a human personality at all" and thus "suffers from an ineradicable incoherence, if taken as a complete account of morality" ("Romantic Humanism"). The moral, social and psychological consequences of this model are laid bare in *Disgrace* by the suffering of Melanie, Lucy and Lurie himself.

The Anthropological Approach

If Lurie does exhibit a qualified movement of away from his initial romantic humanist perspective, the question arises of what he moves toward. Despite the limited nature of Lurie's change (which the text reminds us of through his stray thoughts), he does engage in a process of interpretation and empathization which sees him attempt to understand first the men who commit rape and then the women who suffer it. Concurrently, he embarks on a project of sympathy with and service to animals. Lurie begins this process by taking an "anthropological" approach toward understanding the attack, the rapists, and their motivations (Coetzee 118). He wants to learn more about the rape, to hear the explicit details and to divine its broader meaning, social context, and ramifications. He is frustrated by

Lucy's initial silence and betrays the immensity of his perverse interest in the affair by immediately asking pointed questions when she does decide to speak. In the same vein, he develops a new interest in the subjectivity of Petrus following the attack. This interest is borne of his questions regarding Petrus' possible foreknowledge of the attack and connection to the attackers, but expands in the second half of the novel as the inscrutable character of Petrus becomes a thorn in Lurie's side, a figure he admires but becomes fundamentally antagonistic towards.

In contemplating how he might act on his suspicions about Petrus, Lurie shows an awareness of the structures which mediate social relationships and also, within the antihumanist framework, dictate subjectivity. He ponders the similarities of Petrus' position on the farm and relationship to Lucy as echoing the apartheid-era trope of "*baas en Klaas*" while noting that he cannot give Petrus orders; "[i]n the old days", Lurie thinks, "one could have had it out with Petrus" (116). Earlier, he speculated that the rapists' killing of the dogs might stem from their living in South Africa, "a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man" (110). Here Lurie shows himself to be considerate of the 'overtones' of the incident, though he does not yet reflect accordingly on his own actions.

At this point Lurie is still prepared to like Petrus, "however guardedly" (116). While he accepts that Petrus is "entitled to his silence", Lurie thinks that he "would not mind hearing Petrus's story one day. But not reduced to English"; he becomes "convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa" (117). Beyond having foreboding and alienating implications for himself as an anglophone South African, this thought represents a move toward a mode of interpretation which acknowledges structures.

He interprets Petrus through a lens which acknowledges the cultural and linguistic differences between them as constituting an immense barrier to understanding, yet continues to seek understanding and mutuality, conceiving of Petrus in terms rife with connotations and nuanced meaning. He sees him as a "peasant, a *paysan*, a man of the country" and "an

enthusiast of farming rather than a farmer" (117). He compares him to Ettinger, a German-speaking South African with racist attitudes. This pairing is significant and telling. It demonstrates what I propose to be a central humanist conceit: that though good anthropologists (and perhaps good post-structuralist academics) might correctly determine the generalized ways in which possession of structures such as 'Xhosa culture' or 'whiteness' influence an individual's subjectivity, there are many such structures at play in the formation of any one subject and thus any actualized human being identified by, say, the 'Xhosa' characteristic, though he may share something with every other Xhosa individual, might actually share more subjective elements with a member of a different, even antagonistic, cultural group.

Approaching the matter in this way, Lurie comes to believe that the conclusion that Petrus told the men to attack is "too simple" (118). The truth, Lurie thinks, is more "*anthropological*, something it would take months to get to the bottom of, months of patient, unhurried conversations with dozens of people, and the offices of an interpreter" (118). Despite Petrus' inscrutability to Lurie, he continues to seek to engage with him. He imagines that the 'anthropological' effort of gathering context about the effects of their cultural differences, that is differences rendered by social structures rather than individual or essential traits, will make this task easier. Even though he fails in this, he keeps up the act of interpretation, however passively. Following Lucy, he also attempts to construct narratives which interrogate and explain the rapists.

After the attack Lurie develops a new interest in understanding others. He does so in a new way, adopting this "anthropological" methodology which is apparently antihumanist in nature in that it highlights the role of culture in the construction of the self, necessarily minimizing the role of the self in its own constitution. This methodology highlights the barriers of culture (and of gender and ethnicity and potentially a host of other things) to universalist and individualistic understanding while still holding on to the central aim of moving beyond

these barriers. He seeks to know Petrus' mind and realizes that this task requires a structurally-minded approach. It also reflects Knight's model of subjectivity, which emphasizes interpretation and narrative.

Extreme Empathy and Humanist Doubt

Lurie first adopts an 'anthropological' approach when locked in the bathroom while Lucy is raped. It is linked to his development of new empathetic practices and movement away from romantic humanism. Notably, before their intentions are made clear, the men are described simply, humanistically as men. They are defined first not by their violent intent or their skin color but by their "countrymen's long strides" (91). One is tall and handsome, the second short, and the third, a boy. After he is knocked-out and locked in the bathroom in his attempt to save his daughter, Lurie is approached by the shorter man who demands he hand over his car keys. To Lurie's apparent surprise, the man is direct and unemotional, his face "placid" (94). He apprehends that "it is merely a job he is doing: getting someone to hand over an article," and that his potential use of violence is merely a means to this end (94). Alone in the bathroom, wondering whether he will be beaten and his daughter raped or whether the men will be satisfied with loot alone, Lurie realizes that his knowledge of various European languages "will not save him here in darkest Africa" (95).

Lurie continues to humanize the rapists. He does not, so far as the narrative voice tells us, see the attackers as animals or creatures with alien motivations. Given his propensities, they are figures eerily like himself. Lurie attempts to understand them as humans and seeks to apprehend their nature, something he clearly sees as possible. The man who kills the dogs is described simply as a "being", a term without positive or negative connotation which emphasizes the shared trait of existing (95). When Lurie attempts to escape he is tripped and further humanizes the men by thinking that "they must practice it in soccer" (96). Later, he refers to the group of three sardonically as "visitors" (115). When the

men have left, Lurie does not, despite his expressed woe at his daughter's misfortune, dwell on the vile act of the rapists but rather contemplates a theory of a "vast circulatory system" of material goods and women to which "pity and terror are irrelevant" (98). This theory of the sharing of wealth through theft is systematic and deals with structures rather than human concerns. It allows for the abdication of emotion and individuality, highlighting instead the "schematic aspect" and generality of things (98). In this way, it reflects something of antihumanistic academic discourse which examines structural relations over individual human drama, "the sign" over the subject (Krauss 79). It is a theory which can provide "comfort" to Lurie even in this dark moment as it removes the personal and subjective elements entirely (Coetzee 98).

The humanistic approach suffers another blow in the form of Lurie's relationship with his daughter. Lucy becomes evermore lost to her father. She grows inscrutable to him especially in her decisions to stay on the farm, give birth to her baby and accede to becoming known as Petrus' wife. Immediately after the men leave, Lucy instructs Lurie to "tell [the police] what happened to you, I tell what happened to me" (99). She is claiming that people ought be allowed to tell their own stories (or to refrain from doing so, following Boehmer). The implication is not only that Lurie shouldn't tell the police what has happened to his daughter, but that he cannot because he cannot truly know what happened to her, cannot read her mind. For the rest of the novel, Lurie struggles with this claim and its antihumanist implications on the possibility of escaping the self and transcending others to understand other subjects.

Gender and Sex, Empathy and Understanding

Through the new approaches Lurie takes in the second half of *Disgrace*, the novel highlights the sex and gender as arenas in which Lurie, guided by romanticism, separates himself from

other people. As he moves forward, they also become avenues of his interpretive expansion and developing empathetic approaches to other subjects.

When he asks Bev Shaw how Lucy is doing, she “responds only with a terse shake of the head” (104). Lurie interprets her gesture as meaning that it is none of his business and goes on to think that such matters are “a woman’s burden, women’s preserve,” and thus, despite the shared humanity between the genders, inaccessible to men (104). This thought, disturbing and contradictory to the humanist perspective, makes Lurie question whether women would be better off living segregated from men. Despite his goodwill towards her and an exchange of letters, Lucy remains inscrutable. Lurie “fails to understand” her (133).

On the drive home from Port Elizabeth where the disappointed pair had hoped to recover the stolen vehicle, Lucy suddenly opens up about the attack. Surprising her father, she shares her feeling that the attack was orchestrated with “personal hatred” (156). Lucy wonders aloud why men who she had never met could feel so strongly about her. Her confusion is that of an individual who has had her agency disregarded and her own subjectivity overlaid with an archetype based upon certain elements which, to a believer in a perfectly individualized genesis of subjectivity, are superficial, in this case her womanhood and whiteness. The men saw only the constructed elements of her being and not the individualized ones, they saw not her but others akin to her. Despite his own, humanistic conception of himself as an individual, Lurie is shown to do something similar in his seduction of Melanie. To Lucy, he suggests that “[i]t was history speaking through them”, essentially positing that the men were explicitly operating under an antihumanist framework where individuality is secondary to structure (156).

Lucy thinks that the trio is more interested in rape than theft, that they “debt collectors, tax collectors” and also tries to imagine the pleasure the men took from raping her, speculating that it must have been like “getting away with murder” (158). To Lurie’s chagrin, she suggest that as a man, her father “ought to know” what this mixture of hatred and lust

feels like (158). “[R]apidly, without forethought” Lurie betrays his morbid curiosity about the rape by asking a series of questions about how it happened and whether each man acted the same (159). Together, the two try to work out the motivations behind the attack. After this, silence falls between them and Lurie retreats into his own mind as he attempts to divine what went on in the rapists’. He goes quite far, imagining their happiness after the fact and envisioning their satisfied penis-blades “*purring*” (159).

Lurie’s lurid exploration of the subjectivity and intent of the rapists is a direct challenge to his daughter and Bev Shaw’s claim that he cannot understand. Lurie uses the rational faculty and what Elizabeth Costello calls ‘the sympathetic imagination’ to “be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself”, something he notably never did with Melanie (160). He interprets them, just as Knight stipulates. This apprehension (or presumed apprehension) of the rapists’ state of mind does not alone demonstrate that Lurie is capable of comprehending all possible human states. He does, after all, share a gender and propensity for sex which overrides the agency of another with the men. The more significant question in terms of the possibility of universalist humanist understanding, Lurie recognizes, is whether he “ha[s] it in him to be the woman” (160).

Lurie’s sexuality separates him from other people, women specifically (though he has no friends among the men of the world), in that it causes him to override or ignore the subjectivity of others. His evil “is the evil of having objectized others” (Boehmer 346). His sexualizing them, his frequent male gazing and his tendency to speculate about their sexual qualities, can be interpreted as an impediment to his seeing them as independent agents and treating them as human(ist) subjects.

Yet sexuality is also an avenue through which he explores empathy, even with those who disfigure him and rape his daughter. Sadly for humanism, this empathy is gendered, furthering the divide between men and women by closing the gaps among

men. Still later, Lurie tries to write the Byron-Teresa opera and literally ‘be the woman’. He also adapts to a small and silent life which, according to Boehmer, is reminiscent of the low status of women under patriarchy (343).

Thus sexuality is in a complex and critical relationship with humanism. Lurie’s cavalier attitude towards sex, something rebuked by committee and Lucy, exemplifies some of the flaws of liberal romantic humanism elucidated by feminist critics. Exercising fanatical devotion to the sanctity of one’s own subject often comes with the disrespect of other people lower on the hierarchical ladder. The violent rape of Lucy offers another, more brutal example of male sexuality and the way it overrides female subjectivity. Afterwards sex becomes a means for Lurie to empathize with the rapists, exploring in his mind what it would feel like to do something which he would like to think himself incapable of. Then, (though here the role of sex is less preeminent, more so gender) it becomes an unsuccessful but fulfilling avenue of transcendence in the form of the opera. We do not know if Lurie might eventually succeed in being the woman, of reading ‘her’ mind. As it is, he seems to make more progress imaginatively inserting himself into the subjectivity of animals than women.

The Zoological Approach

In addition to the anthropological and imaginative approaches which see Lurie attempting to understand the intentionality of human subjects by examining structures and interpreting other subjects, Lurie’s expanding sympathetic engagement with animals is a means of integrating antihumanist modes with retention of the humanist perspective. In the second half of the novel, Lurie develops an intense, emotional and ultimately self-degrading concern for their wellbeing and subjective status which matches or exceeds his empathizing with other human beings. In the second half of *Disgrace*, Lurie begins to conceive of human and animal

subjectivities as interchangeable or equal in terms of their capacity to stimulate powerful, sympathetic emotion. This change comes about from his sympathetic insertion into the subjectivities of doomed animals.

After the attack, Lurie grows closer to Katy (the abandoned bulldog and sole canine survivor of the ordeal), becomes enamored with a trio of ducks, and worries about the sheep which Petrus rears and slaughters. Most significantly, he inserts himself into the disgraceful position of ‘dogman’ to the damned hounds of the Eastern Cape and undignified shepherd of their pitiful remains. It is these interactions which spur Lurie to emotion. His perception of the immensity of the suffering of animals and their powerlessness leads Lurie to regard them with sympathy and in so doing to interpret them and regard them as subjects. Crucially, he is ready to accept that these pitiful animals are victims of structures and systems rather than individual murderers and abusers. “There are simply too many of them”, he thinks, echoing Bev Shaw (141).

Lurie has always been emotional but before the attack, when seeing Lucy produces a “sudden surge of tears”, has only been shown to be deeply stirred by things which affect him and not concern for others as such (Coetzee 98). Previously “more or less indifferent to animals”, he now reads their states as woefully wretched and empathizes with them on the most fundamental level of being; the rejection of the antonym of being (142). He viscerally contemplates the grim nature and significance of their deaths and tries to understand how they face it even as he “dispatch[es them] to oblivion” (141). Fixated on a grisly sense of a being’s soul “yanked out of the body” and “twisting and contorting” before vanishing, Lurie leans into the fundamental intention of subjects to live (219).

The passages which describe the euthanizing of the dogs and disposal of their corpses shimmer with macabre detail and reverberate Lurie’s real feeling of doom as “[t]he more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets” (142). Overcome on his drive home and

unable to “understand what is happening to him”, Lurie “has to stop at the roadside to recover himself”; as “[t]ears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake” (143).

Just as he once empathized with the shamed and sexually frustrated retriever who is bound by the narrative in juxtaposition with the rapists, Lurie now looks to the animal victims of violence brought about by the egoistic abrogation of another being’s subjectivity (the analogs of Melanie and Lucy). This development mirrors his empathizing with the rapists and only later and less viscerally with the feminine spirit of Theresa. Considering that Lurie’s operatic venture into this alien, human subject shudders with timidity, Coetzee indicates that his more unambiguously impactful engagement with zoological subjects is perhaps more significant in nudging Lurie away from his romantic and humanist ethics and position on the subjectivity of others.

Elizabeth Costello

Elizabeth Costello was published in 2003, the same year Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel is a continuation and compilation of earlier works, most notably of Coetzee's contributions to the 1999 collection *The Lives of Animals*. In turn, *The Lives of Animals* is itself a published rendering, the literary rebirth of a pair of readings given by Coetzee at Princeton University in 1997. In fact, each part of the novel excluding the final two lessons were published in some form prior to 2003. At the center of all these writings stands Elizabeth Costello. She is introduced as a sixty-six year old Australian novelist most famous for her early novel *The House on Eccles Street* "whose main character is Marion Bloom, wife of Leopold Bloom, principal character of another novel, *Ulysses* (1922) by James Joyce" (Coetzee 1). A public figure touring the academic world, Elizabeth enters into established engages thoughtfully with others in the course of her lecturing, touring and dying.

The novel consists of eight 'lessons' and a postscript, three written from the perspective of John Bernard, Elizabeth's son and a professor of astronomy at an American university, the rest from Costello herself. Within these pages, the novelist gives a lecture on "Realism", two talks advocating conscientiousness toward animal consciousness, and a speech warning against bringing evil into the self and the wider world through fiction. She also attends a lecture on "The Novel in Africa" by a novelist acquaintance and another given by her sibling, Sister Bridget Costello on the dire state of "The Humanities in Africa".

In *Life & Times*, Coetzee raises the issues at hand —the nature of the human subject and the question of reading other minds— mostly indirectly, through the structure of the text, events of the narrative and, briefly, through the queries of the medical officer. *Disgrace* has a somewhat more direct approach as Coetzee allows Lurie to fill the text with his inner voice, which sometimes muses about these issues. *Elizabeth Costello* addresses these concerns

head-on through the thoughts of its eponymous character and her dialogues with other thinkers, living and dead, fictional and non-fictional, which cover a host of philosophical, literary and ethical discourses. These dialectics cover the questions about subjectivity, humanism and understanding which motivate this thesis. The narrative of the novel, such as it is, figures around various ideas which are proposed, interpreted by others and contested. Through their emotional and intellectual engagement with these, *Elizabeth Costello*, novelist and novel both, are shown to acknowledge the infirm ground the liberal humanist subject stands upon while expressing a belief, simultaneously passionate and tentative, in the validity of the transcendent project of humanist understanding.

Costello's theorization and practice of what she calls the sympathetic imagination is central to understanding her position. As conceived by Costello, the sympathetic imagination offers a means of for the humanistically-inclined to engage in the pursuit of reading other minds in a way which overcomes immense barriers in the form of structures and biological difference. The philosophical and ethical questions of animals, their status as subjects and treatment by mankind, are the chief motivators of her thinking and sympathetic imagining. In part by radically deemphasizing reason, Costello expands the arms of this new humanism (or ex-humanism) to embrace animal life.

J. M. Coetzee and the Subjectivity of Elizabeth Costello

The similarities between Coetzee and Costello presents an obvious entry point for this reading of *Elizabeth Costello* as grappling with the question of intersubjective understanding. Besides both being acclaimed novelists known to put new life into other author's characters (as Coetzee did in *Foe*) who come from countries in the Southern Hemisphere founded by settler-colonialists, Coetzee and Costello are of a similar age and both are white, divorced vegetarians with adult children. The most striking differences between Coetzee and his fictional creation come down to two of the most significant factors by which people are

differentiated in the world (and perhaps also the mind): gender and nation of origin. Though he moved to Australia in the early 2000s and became a citizen in 2006, J. M. Coetzee is by birth and upbringing a South African man; Elizabeth Costello is a woman born in Australia.

Because the character Elizabeth Costello resembles the author Coetzee, the novel tempts readers into reading into Costello's positions the author's own views on the humanism conflict and subjectivity.[8] Critics have labored over the matter of where each author begins, uncertain of when Costello is speaking as a character and when she is a "Coetzeean persona", to use Laura Wright's term (12). At any rate Costello's views, despite her polemical speechwriting, seem to be in flux. They are altered by her entering into dialogue with texts and people around her. They are just as often expressed poetically as rationally articulated (unsurprising given her critique of reason). It might be useful to recall Michel Foucault's idea of the significance of discourse on subjectivity. As interpreted by Weedon, for Foucault discourses "constitute the 'nature of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (87). It is possible to read Costello's fluid approach to ideas and conviction as the novel indicating that she is indeed antihumanistically 'constituted by discourse' or 'discursively constructed'. I propose that it is also possible, perhaps even simultaneously, to read this fluidity as demonstrating her accordance with Knight's model of the integral subject generated by intersubjective interpretation and affirmed by narrative. Like Knight, Costello acknowledges the shortcomings of liberal humanism articulated by a great body of antihumanist thought (of the postmodern and religious sort), and personally critiques it while nevertheless displaying clear liberal humanist leanings.

The likenesses and differences between author Coetzee and character Costello are critical to the discourse and conflict surrounding humanism in the novel. Given their similarities, one might expect Costello to be something of a surrogate for Coetzee, just as she was for him (or he for her) at the unorthodox 'lecture' at Princeton in 1997. David Atwell

---

[8] See Pippin and most reviews of the novel, including Yardley's.

makes such an argument in his essay “The Life and Times of Elizabeth Costello”. Because Coetzee is (or was)[9] an aging author of literary novels from a settler-colonialist, Southern Hemisphere background, it might follow that he knows what it is like to be such a person. Therefore, given his aptitude for language and storytelling, he should be able to convincingly create such a person in a fictional setting. Whether one is looking from a humanist perspective and conceiving of a coherent, individualistic subject, or regarding from an antihumanist position a constructed subject constituted by mutable structures, it stands to reason that one can plausibly understand a person from a similar background with a like disposition and related experiences at least well enough to write them. Whether possession of such similarity is necessary, sufficient or merely helpful depends on one’s perspective on the larger question at play. Having made a brief account of the differences between Coetzee and Costello, I will now examine the significance of both with regard to the humanist question of understanding.

Difference, Similarity and Reading Other Minds

The differences established by the possession of an unlike gender are certainly substantial. From either perspective on the humanist subject, a glimpse at either history or the way men and women are treated and created in the present (whether that creation is seen to occur biologically, socially or through some mix of the two) reveals that gender affects a person’s being-in-the-world and their apprehension by others to a significant degree. The question is the extent to which this difference is insurmountable, not only in the context of writing fiction, but also in the philosophical and political question of reading other minds.

From an antihumanist framework, it is conceivable that one might determine gender to be an impassable barrier, a category, construct or way-of-being around which the subject

---

[9] Even before the final lesson which deals with her death, Elizabeth and other authors are sometimes described in this way, expressing an ambiguous position on whether a dead author is or was; whether a hundred years after this ink is dry she is still, through her work, being or whether her being is purely a thing of the past.

is so thoroughly entwined that it cannot be escaped or adequately penetrated into by its opposite. Though few will claim that men cannot understand women to the extent that all men should refrain from the presumptuous and patriarchal act of writing women, the difficulty of this act has been highlighted by discourses which have emphasized the (socially constructed) differences between men and women. Feminism is defined by Chris Weedon as "a politics" in the first sentence of her book *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. As a fundamentally political discourse, feminism warns that men writing as women has been and can be a tool of patriarchy, a regressive literary tactic which silences real women and creates fictional ones who reinforce gender norms and the patriarchal status quo.

Coetzee himself has faced criticism along these lines. Writing about the female-narrated *Foe*, Kirsten Holst Petersen asks in the title of her paper whether Coetzee's dealing with the colonial woman is "An Elaborate Dead End?" and asserts that his writing women is "an assertion of appropriating male authorship" (251). Though she cites Petersen, Laura Wright disagrees, writing in "Displacing the Voice: South African Feminism and J. M. Coetzee's Female Narrators" that Coetzee's use of female narrators reflects his "genuin[e] indentif[ication] with the white female subject position in South Africa" (13). She traces her argument to Sue Kossew who theorized in "'Women's Words': A Reading of J. M. Coetzee's Women Narrators" that Coetzee, or indeed "any 'liberal' white writer" in South Africa during apartheid, has a position something like that of a white woman (177). The reasoning is that a white woman in this context can be simultaneously a powerful oppressor, by nature of their whiteness, and an oppressed victim, by nature of their womanness; so too is a male who is ideologically (if not actively) opposed to the political system which grants his group supremacy. Coetzee calls attention to the question of subjectivity and problem understanding other minds by including a character whose biography (or the broad strokes of it) so closely resembles his own.

Discourse on the Question of Reading Other Minds

More directly, the issue of writing someone of a different gender, an issue which relates to this exploration of humanism and antihumanism, is raised by characters in the first lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*. “Realism” is focalized primarily through John Bernard but affords his mother the opportunity to speak. Both characters can be seen responding to what are essentially antihumanist ideas of the individual in relation to literary criticism. The first hints of this conflict come when John and Elizabeth discuss her qualities as a writer and the way she is perceived as such by the committee which has awarded her the annual Stowe Prize. Discussing their shared view of the members of the prize jury as “lightweight”, John proposes that the heavyweights do not involve themselves in discussing Costello’s work because she hasn’t been “demonstrated to be a problem” (Coetzee 8). Rather, John claims, his mother is seen merely as an “example of how someone of [her] station and [her] generation and [her] origin writes” (8). This hypothetical reading of Costello’s work is reductive and antihumanist in that it highlights a person’s work as a product reflective of the constructs which have produced that person rather than the result of their exercise of creative will and pouring their soul into a work. This reading hurts Elizabeth, who has put much effort into “not writing like anyone else” (8). As a writer, she wants to be regarded as an individual, as simply “the best” and not merely an “example” of what female Australian writers born in the late 1930s are like (8).

On the next page, a paragraph comes from somewhere else; it does not seem to be focalized through John but comes from the voice which has already introduced the novel and structures it by announcing its forward movements in time. This voice calls attention to the conflict, declaring as fact that “[r]ealism has never been comfortable with ideas” and that “ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are enounced, and generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world” (9). On the question of whether the idea that ideas are necessarily

"embod[ied]" by human subjects in realistic fiction also applies in real life, the voice is silent. The dialectic the novel presents is cogently condensed to John's concern that his mother not be tokenized as "a Mickey Mouse post-colonial writer" and Wheatley's "concern not to seem an old-fashioned absolutist" (9).

This discourse continues later in the chapter when John takes his mother to be interviewed on a radio show hosted by Susan Moebius, a scholar who has recently published a book entitled *Reclaiming a History: Women and Memory* which covers Costello. Her first question is whether Costello's most recent novel, which is called *Fire & Ice* and takes place in Australia in the 1930s, came out of experiences in her own life. The question implies the interviewer's subscription to the assumption that because literature privileges 'authentic' knowledge, perhaps because one is more likely to understand another from a similar background, fiction inspired by real events or people known to the author has a greater power. Costello's answer is simple, unsatisfying and offers an exasperatingly coy rebuke to those who would read her opinions as directly reflective of Coetzee's; she says that while writers always "draw upon our own lives" the text in question "is a work of fiction" (12).

Moebius affirms that her novel is "powerful" and wonders in the same thought whether Costello "find[s] it easy, writing from the perspective of a man" (12). This is a question which, if one swaps 'man' for 'woman', might be asked of Coetzee himself. We learn from John that Costello at least has a routine response. Forgoing it, she says that no, it is not easy. But she emphasizes that "it is the otherness that is the challenge", implying perhaps that it is more the essential fact of otherness, of escaping the ego-subject, than the particular otherness of gender which is difficult to transcend (12). Asked whether her intention was to "challenge Joyce" feminist grounds, Costello denies the assertion, echoing her avoidance of another question about her stance on patriarchy in the previous interview (11). Writing for the *Yale Review of Books*, Adam Eaker reads these interactions as "rather cheap shots at feminist post-colonial criticism" delivered not by Costello but Coetzee himself. In any case,

Coetzee shows Costello to be wary of answering any ‘big questions’ about her work. She allows commentators to make their points about intention, the kinds of points which fill academic essays, but gives little comment and moves on.

Responding to Antihumanist Perspectives

These discourses about intention (literary and individual) and understanding other subjects continues throughout the novel. Costello and her son both respond to doubts about their respective beliefs in the possibility of structure-transcending understanding. Through Costello’s responses, a new model emerges with a different approach to subjectivity. At the end of “Realism” when John and Moebius discuss literature outside Elizabeth’s company, John asks her about the book she has written and whether she sees his mother as “a key writer for all of us [...] or just for women”. Bringing up the distinction of whether Costello is a “woman writer or a woman’s writer,” he asks the impossible question of whether Moebius would feel the same way about Costello if she were a man (22). Moebius, who does read Costello as a women’s writer, answers that she cannot know, nor know whether she would feel differently if she herself were a man, implying this hypothetical change in gender would change her subjectivity to such an extent that she might read and react differently to identical texts. John, by now flirting with her, insists that Elizabeth “has been a man” and even a dog (22). Costello herself responds to this point only indirectly but could be interpreted as siding with her son based on her (unvoiced) criticism of Emmanuel Egudu’s lecture in lesson two. She thinks that “*a novel written about people who live in an oral culture* [...] *is not an oral novel*. *Just as a novel written about women is not a women’s novel”* (53). The critical question is unanswered. Does she means that a novel written about women is not a ‘women’s novel’ because it is written about women and not by a woman or because there is no such thing as a women’s novel, only novels, because regardless of the gender of the author and characters, it might also speak to me?

Vouching for the power of what his mother will later call the sympathetic imagination, John asserts that she can “think her way into other people, into other existences” (22). Moebius claims that this power, even if men like John find her men completely convincing, as men and as characters, is ultimately meaningless. She tells him that everything his mother does, “she does as a woman. She inhabits her characters as a woman does, not a man” (23). She insists that he has been duped, that the difference is something “only a woman would see. It is something between women” which he therefore can never understand (23). This division echoes that which Lurie perceives in *Disgrace*. Moebius’ view contrasts with John’s impression that the veracity of his mother’s characters (male and otherwise) “shakes him” (5). Moreover, it has grave implications for a great deal of Coetzee’s writing: if what the character he has written says is true, *Foe, Age of Iron*, *In the Heart of the Country* and *Elizabeth Costello* are inherently farcical because they are written by a man but focus on female subjects and embody female subjectivities.

While John and Elizabeth seem to acknowledge the possibility that this view is correct, that the constructed nature of the individual and accordant restrictions on subjectivity constitute insurmountable barriers to humanistic understanding, both hew to the possibility that it is not. During her speech on realism, Costello states that “[t]here used to be a time, we believe, when we could say who we were. Now we are just performers speaking our parts” (19). She is declaring her belief that the confident, humanist subject been widely replaced by the antihumanist, absolutely constructed subject. She tells her audience that this shift is not necessarily “tragic” because what has been lost now seems like “illusion” (19).

Despite this, Costello still comes off as something of a humanist. This impression comes from her discomfort with herself and her work being explicitly identified by certain aspects of herself (including her gender and being from a rural area) and preference to be seen as an individual rather than “an instance” (8). It is reinforced by her adamance about her practice of writing fiction, the implications of her sympathetic approach to animals on

knowing other (human) minds, and her approach to the intersection of morality and society, which, I will argue below, still reflects that of liberal humanism. While Costello (like Knight) acknowledges that the fully self-actualized, non-constructed self of Descartes and later humanists was an illusion, she nevertheless seem to hold to the idea of a unified self, even if only out of literary necessity imparted by their profession as novelists. Recall that Knight calls this self "much less totalizing" than earlier concepts which lacked any interaction with constructivist discourse, yet nevertheless not imaginary (52).

Solidifying the novel's critical approach is its almost pathological tendency to include views which contradict those held by Costello. Her lecture is mocked and dismissed by John's wife Norma (who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy) as she gives it. To her, Costello's prized sympathetic imagination is but "shallow relativism" (Coetzee 92). She succinctly dismisses her mother-in-law's views on animals as "jejune and sentimental" (61) and claims she has "no self-insight at all", an interesting statement about a character who has been written to be so similar to the author (113). As Brenda Deen Schildgen points outs, "Coetzee can highlight the contradictory elements in his main character's position" by including "the views of Elizabeth's interlocutors, who represent a spectrum of academic positions" (325).

Enduring Liberal Humanism

Despite her reception of antihumanist perspectives and own criticism of liberal humanism, Costello continues to exhibit liberal humanist qualities, even after her death. Even the inclusion of the views of Norma and other detractors fits into the liberal humanist framework, described by Mitchell, under which dissent, when expressed and not acted upon, is absolutely tolerated. In lessons three and four Costello articulates and expresses her notion of the "sympathetic imagination" (Coetzee 80). The first takes the form of a lecture on "The Philosophers and the Animals" given to the assembled students and faculty of Appleton College (where John, our returning focalizer, teaches astronomy); the second is a seminar

given on “The Poets and the Animals”. Despite the persuasive and passionate nature of her speech, Costello is vague about her actual intention. This is revealed by her evasive answer to a dissatisfied attendee who asks her “to clarify” what she thinks any people she has persuaded should actually do (81). Her reticence “enunciate principles” (82) can be explained by a remark she makes near the beginning of her speech: “I want to find a way of speaking to fellow human beings that will be cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical, that will bring enlightenment rather than seeking to divide us into the righteous and the sinners, the saved and the damned, the sheep and the goats” (66).

This statement captures something fundamental about Costello’s enduring liberal humanism tendencies and serves as an adequate starting point to address the associated concept of the sympathetic imagination. Costello’s inadequate response to the question of action is indicative of her enduring liberal humanism. As a Gifford lecturer from 1974 to 1976, Basil Mitchell theorized about the moral and social positions of different humanisms (rational, romantic and liberal) and their connections to each other while mounting a defense of religious and objective morality. Mitchell saw the “starting-point” of liberal humanism to be the task of retaining as many of the romantic humanist subject’s liberties while avoiding the eventuality that a society which operated systemically under romantic humanism would be so chaotic as to hinder the flourishing of individualized subjects (“Romantic Humanism”). He argues that liberal humanism exercises a subjectivist morality which tolerates incompatible moralities, inhibiting in the process the will of “fanatics” to organize society as they see fit (“Liberal Humanism”). Torn by the yearning for the forbidden romantic subject, exposure to opposing moral ideologies, and its self-knowledge that its ‘truth’ is subjective, liberal humanism is bound to be a weak ideology in the sense that it does not require affirmative devotion. This fundamental weakness might lead some liberal humanists to revert back to what Mitchell called rational or scientific humanism, of the sort that today Steven Pinker is

sometimes said to advocate, which places faith in the utopian machinations of reason to create societies in which the humanist subject can truly flourish.[10]

Alternatively, one might remain bound to liberal humanism, despite its own weakness and the siren call of alternative voices. This may be the case with Elizabeth Costello. She seems to believe in the humanist subject even as she acknowledges antihumanism (in both secular and Catholic forms). She renounces reason as significant in the reading of other minds yet clearly displays the liberal humanist ideological and social uncertainty. Looking at her dialoguing and doubting, and noting her aversion to giving the kinds of answers that prescribe anything, and the social burdens she feels regarding offending people including Paul West, Costello appears for a moment to be a typical liberal humanist. Her ultimate inability, despite her passion, to state her beliefs in the afterlife solidifies the impression, at least following certain critiques of liberal humanism.

The Sympathetic Imagination

Liberal humanism endures, even if only as an echo, in part through the sympathetic imagination. As articulated by Costello, the sympathetic imagination amounts to the human capacity for feeling-with which extends beyond the familiar constraints of an individual's own subjectivity. Though earlier alluded to by her son, Costello herself introduces the term toward the end of her lecture on "The Philosophers and the Animals" when she says that despite having difficulty sympathizing with Thomas Aquinas and René Descartes (who seem or seemed, based on their writings, unwilling to sympathize with animals), "there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another" (80). While critics,

[10] See "Steven Pinker is Wrong About Violence and War", an article by John Gray for *The Guardian*. Pinker's detractors are many, including Slavoj Žižek who once labeled Pinker his "enemy" at a public appearance.

including Schildgen and Sam Durrant have questioned[11] whether its power truly is limitless, Costello is certain that "[t]here are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination" (80).

In her lecture and the seminar which proceeds from it, Costello expresses her beliefs surrounding the ethics of mankind's relationship with animals and the validity of the frameworks which support and justify this state of affairs. The speech is provocative, particularly for its rhetorical comparison of the Holocaust to meat-eating and animal abuse. Costello explains that the horror of the Holocaust was not that Nazis treated Jews like lice, but that "the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else" (79). Their sin was the failure to exercise the sympathetic imagination. As a novelist, she insists that a human being is capable of imagining animal consciousness, of thinking of their own individual subjectivity in the body of an animal. She insists that humans can "embody animals —by the process called poetic invention that mingles breath and sense in a way that no one has explained and no one ever will" (98). Like Lurie, she consciously avers from letting any sentimentality seep into her approach to animals.

Crucially, Costello attacks reason as a basis for humanist understanding. She calls reason "a vast tautology" and rejects the possession of it as valid grounds for determining which beings to as subjects. She critiques reason, as it is generally practiced to justify intellectual conclusions and denigrate animals, as mere "instrumental reason," the means by which one "does one use this to get that" (73). The supreme valuation of this means of thinking leads inexorably to "acceptance of [oneself] as primarily an organism with an appetite that needs to be satisfied", a conclusion which is at odds with her fixation on what she calls the soul (73). Following her personal refutation of Descartes' reason-based conception of being and any humanism built on this foundation, Costello has notions about "embodiedness" as an alternative to cogitation and means by which animals can be

---

[11] See "'No Bounds to the Sympathetic Imagination' in J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*" and "J. M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello, and the Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination" respectively.

understood, echoing the text's own notion that ideas are necessarily embodied by people in realist fiction (9, 78, 95, 98).

A truly liberal humanism embraces all humans of all ethnicities, genders and classes in part because they all possess reason. By taking reason out of the equation, Costello moves to bring animals into the fold of sorts of beings regarded as subjects. Writing about *Disgrace* and Costello's lectures in his essay "Dog Gambit: Shifting the Species Boundary in J. M. Coetzee's Recent Fiction", Travis Mason argues that Coetzee has been explicitly working toward "shifting the species boundary on the way to challenging past and present reliances on fixed boundaries", a process made possible by the sympathetic imagination (143). He theorizes that Coetzee's increasing interest in "human/animal relations" is connected to other themes his work has touched on including "racism, sexism and colonialism", and notes that the joining of these issues has already been attempted by Helen Tiffin in "Unjust Relations: Post-Colonialism and the Species Boundary" (Mason 129).

Even though it is grounded in concern for animals, the sympathetic imagination, as conceived by Elizabeth Costello, can be understood as a model which rehabilitates the humanist viewpoint regarding subjectivity and the possibility of understanding other minds from the wounds it has suffered under critical theoretical appraisal. Through the sympathetic imagination, a person is supposedly able to understand any person well enough to regard them as a subject and comprehend any set of qualities or structures well enough to create a sufficiently 'real' character out of them. This empathetic embodying enables a person to transcend the structural barriers, as Costello does in her fiction. It is even purported that people (especially poets) are able to identify subjectively with animals, which John at least thinks his mother has accomplished.

Questioning the existence of a universal human nature, such as it is perceived by liberal humanists, is an important part of the antihumanist challenge. If the individual is solely the product of structures, human nature plays no role in the development of subjectivity or

the practice of human understanding. The sympathetic imagination of Elizabeth Costello does not fall back to human nature or reason. It upholds the possibility of comprehension between disparate beings solely on this sympathetic faculty. As in *Disgrace*, this process is stirred by sympathy with the state of animals facing doom under human domination. It is interpretation and creation of the simplest narrative possible (visceral aversion to death; not-being) which triggers the leap to the subject-affirming intersubjective connection with other beings.

Subjectivity and the Sympathetic Imagination

Knight's theory can be employed to elucidate the relationship between the exercise of the sympathetic imagination and the qualified adherence to liberal humanist modes of thinking. Costello understands that "[s]ympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object" (Coetzee 79). In Knight's formulation, "unified, coherent and intentional" subjects are affirmed as such by their double attribution of intention in intersubjective engagement (49). This relates to the point raised by Dean Arendt (also mused upon by Lurie in *Disgrace*) that human vegetarianism is "a very odd transaction" because animals are not aware and will not cognitively appreciate the good it does them (89). The insignificance of the fact that the dogs in *Disgrace* will "*not in a month of Sundays!*" comprehend the nature of their doom explains why Costello emphasizes the connection as sympathetic rather than empathetic (though she does also talk about empathy) (219). For both characters, feeling-with is necessary and sufficient; feeling-as represents an extra step. Under Costello's and Knight's respective formulations, it does not matter what animals think or whether they do or can subjectively appreciate their or their fellows being rescued from human exploitation. The attribution of intention through the narrative of oblivion-aversion is sufficient.

Knight perhaps goes further than Costello in writing that "understanding and interpretation are activities which define subjects" (51). For Costello it may be that

interpretation (sympathy, in this context of knowing other minds) is all that is necessary, or that the understanding of the sensation of aversion to death (the presence of which in some animals contested by some voices in the novel) is sufficient understanding. Understanding, which Knight understandably does not elaborate much upon, is certainly more difficult than interpretation as it implies an objectivity or correctness; feeling-as, accurately. Utilization of the sympathetic imagination is clearly an act of interpretation: it involves the imaginer looking at the circumstances of another being and interpreting how that being's subjectivity might feel and act from such. But as Dean Arendt notes, people have "come to know how vastly difficult the business of interpretation can be" (Coetzee 129). This new knowledge no doubt comes from antihumanist and constructivist discourses which have highlighted the complexity of structures and their influence on being and perceiving. Knight agrees that it is a difficult task, yet believes it to be always theoretically possible, and, through this belief, remains firmly in the humanist camp with regard to the human subject.

Knight also claims that narrative is integral to the unity of the subject she proposes (52). As a complex form of interpretation, the construction of narratives amounts to "the hallmark of subjectivity", the means by which one "mak[es] sense [...] of oneself, others, the world we share and the artifacts we have produced." (Knight 53) The mode of interpretation which both Costello and Coetzee are engaged in takes the form of narrative. By writing novels about others (including characters from different backgrounds, time periods and of different genders) they establish their own subjectivity as substantial —that is, the coherent yet doubting subjectivity of thoughtful, contemporary liberal humanism. By inhabiting and constructing narratives for beings shaped (in part) by structures and experiences different from their own, they explore the possibility of understanding as well as the barriers to it. By imagining this other as shaped by both structures and human nature they explore and confirm the existence of both. This narrative practice suggests that for Coetzee, Costello and their readers there might be truth to Waugh's claim in *Feminine Fictions* that it is "possible to

experience oneself as a strong and coherent agent in the world, at the same time as understanding the extent to which identity and gender are socially constructed and represented" (13). Costello accepts that elements of her subjectivity stem from the country of her birth (Coetzee 102), yet retains her belief in the feasibility of the individualistic self and strives toward that end.

Finally, the significance of Costello's discursive likeness to Coetzee might be elucidated by the theoretical body seeking to move beyond the humanism conflict. The unity of the self, Knight argues, is not a unity of "absolute integration and self-consistency" but a unity of mutual interpretation between the self and the other which highlights the differences between these plural perspectives or subjectivities, doing so principally through the practice of narrative, something which Costello and Coetzee both engage in (52).

Discourse and Synthesis

Elizabeth Costello's practice as a novelist makes her believe firmly in the power and validity of the sympathetic imagination. The novel centered around her (along with *Slow Man*, a novel around which she orbits) expresses and demonstrates the practice of this theory of the sympathetic imagination. *Elizabeth Costello* is, in large part, a discourse. Throughout the text, ideas and beliefs are expressed and their basis and consequences explored. Critically, this exploration happens through the dialogue of various people. Each participant in these discourses (including a few unnamed characters) is shown to interpret said ideas and the subjects who 'embody' them, to use the novel's own term. The characters (or figures; some of them are real people) to whose minds our only access is their spoken or written words —that is every character except for Costello and her son— are nevertheless interpreted, (painstakingly in the case of Paul West) as subjects by Costello. When she is the focalizer and engaged in discourse, she is constantly humanizing those with whom she is in dialogue.

She reminds herself to “grant [the] possibility” that those she encounters are “soul[s] with the hungers of a soul.” (Coetzee 128)

The intellectual discourses within *Elizabeth Costello* are manifold. It is unnecessary to analyze all of them to see that these discourses themselves demonstrate Coetzee’s use of the sympathetic imagination. If Elizabeth Costello’s subjectivity is a model, the self is both coherent and fluid. It can escape, in the imagination, its own mind and inhabit other subjectivities, even those belonging to different species. In fiction, these imaginings can seem indistinguishable from the ‘real’ thing. If writing other minds is possible, it seems to follow that reading them is too. Despite existing in a novel which contains discourses very critical to humanism, the model of subjectivity in question upholds the central promise of humanism: that, through the power of our own minds, we can understand others. The subjectivity theorized by Coetzee and Costello might bridge the gap between humanism and antihumanism. It is a subjectivity which “is neither absolute and monolithic and univocal nor arbitrary and fragmentary and irreducibly polysemous” (Knight 53). It acknowledges the structures which hem it in while struggling against them. Simultaneously, it closes the division between human and animal by entering into intersubjective space with them and constructing a comprehensible narrative around the mutual aversion to death.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I sought to demonstrate how three of Coetzee's novels engage with what I termed the humanism conflict. By analyzing their structures, narratives and characters, I highlighted the ways this generally occurs: through the emotionally-charged interpretation by humanistic figures of an inscrutable other who is largely or entirely non-vocal (Michael, Petrus and Paul West), and the inclusion of views critical to humanism. These alternative positions are voiced directly via characters or else hinted at by the narrative's highlighting of the egoistic, Western and possibly colonial nature of the humanisms at play. The humanist subject and the pursuit of humanist understanding are simultaneously critiqued and promoted in each novel. Using Knight's theory as a model, which also voices both humanism and antihumanism, I attempted to make sense of this tension and oscillation. I used her account of subjectivity to contextualize the humanist characters' efforts of interpretation, exercises of the sympathetic imagination and subsequent narrative construction. I read these efforts as affirmation of their coherent, quasi-humanist subjectivity.

Viewed together using this framework, several tempting narratives for these three Coetzee novels emerge. The position of the humanist character in each novel might be construed as following Mitchell's schema of humanisms: the doctor in *Life & Times* can be read as an initially skeptical, rational humanist who is infected with romantic humanism; Lurie is a romantic humanist whose reckoning with the consequences of romanticism push him toward the liberal sort; Costello is a critic of humanism who accepts its demise and attempts to move beyond humanism and antihumanism while holding on to certain elements of the liberal humanist perspective. Unlike Mitchell and her sister who read into this turbulent humanist trajectory the need for a return to religion, Costello moves toward a kind of post-humanism or ex-humanism. In this, Costello retains the humanist view of the coherent subject, accepts to an extent antihumanist narratives about the significance of structures in the constitution of the self, and affirms, via the sympathetic imagination, the pursuit of reading other minds, adapting it to move beyond anthropocentrism.

From this common thread of movement between humanisms, another interesting dynamic emerges; each novel features animals as a means of expanding subjective understanding. In the first, Michael's regret after slaying a goat precipitates his minimalistic living, and his own animal-like qualities stimulate the doctor to affirming his subjectivity through passionate interpretation (though he may misapprehend him); a human is read as animal but nevertheless interpreted as intentional. *Disgrace* sees Lurie's engagement with animals lead to his caring about the subjectivity of others being overridden and acknowledging the significance of structures rather than individuals in their fates; humans and animals are interchangeable, or equal in their capacity to stir sympathetic interpretation. Finally, in *Elizabeth Costello* the novelist's radical position on animals catalyzes her use of the sympathetic imagination which in turn advances the humanistic endeavor of reading other minds; animals are read as human-like, as subjects.

My thesis arose from the perception that Coetzee embeds criticisms of liberal humanism in his novels, including the suggestion that this humanism might be a Western and colonial mode of Coetzee himself, and the concurrent question of what to make of the simultaneous inclusion of enduring humanist perspectives. Believing that this did not imply a straightforward rejection of liberal humanism on Coetzee's part, I looked to humanist feminist theory for a conception of the subject which that might better address the complexity of positions and interplay of subjectivity as presented in the novels. In answer to this question, I argued that the antihumanistic recognition and explication of the barriers toward humanistic understanding are used in these novels to advocate for the possibility of understanding against all odds. According to Knight, this pursuit of understanding is essential to recognizing the agency of others. I also noted that Coetzee directs this pursuit toward animals. In his emphasis on non-humans and his deemphasizing of reason, he moves away from humanism while still embracing the radical possibility of interpreting and understanding others, including members of other species. Through this, the subject remains coherent under Knight's terms. It also remains humanistic, though given the nuances of this position, it seems wise to follow Knight and read Coetzee with the recognition that both humanism and antihumanism are "style[s]" and "artifacts of theory" (46, 50). As such, the dichotomy implied is not so stark. It is from this perspective that I make my argument for the novel's conflicted and syncretic approach to the humanism conflict.

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. *The Humanist Controversy and Other Texts*, edited and translated by G. M. Goshgarian, Verso, 2003.

Attwell, David. “Race In Disgrace.” *Interventions*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2002, pp. 331–341.

---. “The Life and Times of Elizabeth Costello.” *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, edited by Jayne Poynor, University of Ohio Press, 2006, pp. 25-41.

Babcock, David. “Professional Subjectivity and the Attenuation of Character in J. M. Coetzee's Life & Times of Michael K.” *PMLA*, vol. 127, no. 4, 2012, pp. 890-904.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 3rd ed., Manchester University Press, 2009.

Blake, William. “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.” *Project Gutenberg*. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45315/45315-h/45315-h.htm. Accessed June 25 2009.

Boehmer, Elleke. “Not Saying Sorry, Not Speaking Pain: Gender Implications in Disgrace.” *Interventions*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2002, pp. 342-351.

Bolin, John. “Modernism, Idiocy, and the Work of Culture: J. M. Coetzee's Life & Times of Michael K” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol.22, no. 2, 2015 pp. 343-364.

Bowra, Cecil Maurice. *The Romantic Imagination*. Harvard University Press, 1957.

Coetzee, J. M.. *Disgrace*. Vintage Books, 2000.

---. *Elizabeth Costello*. Vintage Books, 2004.

---. *The Life and Times of Michael K*. Penguin Books, 1985

Coleman, Deirdre. “The “Dog-Man”: Race, Sex, Species, and Lineage in Coetzee’s Disgrace.” *Twentieth-Century Literature*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2009, pp. 597-617.

Dodd, Josephine. “The South African Literary Establishment and the Textual Production of ‘Woman.’” *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, edited by Sue Kossew, G. K. Hall, 1998, pp. 157-165.

Dovey, Teresa. *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories*. Ad. Donker, 1988.

Nadine Gordimer, “The Idea of Gardening,” review of Life & Times of Michael K by J. M. Coetzee, New York Review of Books, 2 February 1984, 3-6.

Knight, Deborah. “The Rhetoric of Theory: Responses to Toril Moi.” *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1995, pp. 63-70.

---. “Women, Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Humanism in Feminist Film Theory.” *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1995, pp. 39-56.

Kossew, Sue. "‘Women’s Words’: A Reading of J. M. Coetzee’s Women Narrators.” *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, edited by Sue Kossew, G. K. Hall, 1998, pp. 166-179.

Krauss, Rosalind. “Using Language to Do Business as Usual.” *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, edited by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holy, and Keith Moxey, Harper Collins, 1991, pp. 79-94.

von Kutschera, Franz. “Subjective Preferences, Rationality, and Justice.” *Erkenntnis*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1977, pp. 97-111.

Lovibund, Sabina. “Meaning What We Say: Feminist Ethics and the Critique of Humanism.” *New Left Review*, no. 220, 1996, pp.98-115.

Mason, Travis. “Dog Gambit: Shifting the Species Boundary in J.M. Coetzee's Recent Fiction.” *Mosaic*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2006, pp 129-144.

Mitchell, Basil. “Morality: Religious and Secular.” *The Gifford Lectures*. https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular. Accessed 25 June 2019.

---. “Liberal Humanism.” *The Gifford Lectures*. https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular/4-liberal-humanism. Accessed 25 June 2019.

---. “Rational Humanism.” *The Gifford Lectures*. https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular/2-rational-humanism. Accessed 25 June 2019.

---. “Romantic Humanism.” *The Gifford Lectures*. https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular/3-romantic-humanism. Accessed 25 June 2019.

Moi, Toril. “Feminist, Female, Feminine.” *The Feminist Reader Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, edited by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp. 117-132.

---. *Sexual/Textual Politics*. Methuen, 1985.

Nethersole, Reingard. “Twilight of the Humanities: Rethinking (Post)Humanism with J.M. Coetzee.”

symplokē, vol. 23, no. 1, 2015, pp. 57-73.

O'Neil, Michael and Madeline, Callaghan. *The Romantic Poetry Handbook*. Wiley Books, 2017.

Paden, Roger. "Foucault's Anti-Humanism." *Human Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1987, pp. 123-141.

Parvini, Neema. *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. Bloomsbury, 2012.

Pippin, Robert. "Philosophical Fiction? On J.M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello." *Republics of Letters*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2017.

Petersen, Kirsten Holst. "An Elaborate Dead End? A Feminist Reading of Coetzee's Foe." *A Shaping of Connections: Commonwealth Literature Studies, Then and Now*, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, Dangaroo Press, 1989, pp. 243-253.

Schildgen, Brenda Deen. "'No Bounds to the Sympathetic Imagination' in J. M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello." *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2005, pp. 323-336.

Soper, Kate. *Humanism and Antihumanism*. Harper Collins, 1986.

---. "Feminism, Humanism and Postmodernism." *Radical Philosophy*, no. 55, 1990, pp. 11-17.

Waugh, Patricia. *Feminine Fictions*. Routledge, 1989.

Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Wright, Laura. "Displacing the Voice: South African Feminism and J.M. Coetzee's Female Narrators." *African Studies*, vol. 67, p.11-32.

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. *The Humanist Controversy and Other Texts*, edited and translated by G. M. Goshgarian,
Verso, 2003.

Attwell, David. “Race In Disgrace.” *Interventions*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2002, pp. 331–341.

---. “The Life and Times of Elizabeth Costello.” *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, edited by Jayne Poynor, University of Ohio Press, 2006, pp. 25-41.

Babcock, David. “Professional Subjectivity and the Attenuation of Character in J. M. Coetzee's Life & Times of Michael K.” *PMLA*, vol. 127, no. 4, 2012, pp. 890-904.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 3rd ed., Manchester University Press, 2009.

Blake, William. “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.” *Project Gutenberg*. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45315/45315-h/45315-h.htm. Accessed June 25 2009.

Boehmer, Elleke. “Not Saying Sorry, Not Speaking Pain: Gender Implications in Disgrace.” *Interventions*,
vol. 4, no. 3, 2002, pp. 342-351.

Bolin, John. “Modernism, Idiocy, and the Work of Culture: J. M. Coetzee's Life & Times of Michael K” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol.22, no. 2, 2015 pp. 343-364.

Bowra, Cecil Maurice. *The Romantic Imagination*. Harvard University Press, 1957.

Coetzee, J. M.. *Disgrace*. Vintage Books, 2000.

---. *Elizabeth Costello*. Vintage Books, 2004.

---. *The Life and Times of Michael K*. Penguin Books, 1985

Coleman, Deirdre. “The “Dog-Man”: Race, Sex, Species, and Lineage in Coetzee’s Disgrace.” *Twentieth-Century Literature*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2009, pp. 597-617.

Dodd, Josephine. “The South African Literary Establishment and the Textual Production of ‘Woman.’” *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, edited by Sue Kossew, G. K. Hall, 1998, pp. 157-165.

Dovey, Teresa. *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories*. Ad. Donker, 1988.

Nadine Gordimer, “The Idea of Gardening,” review of Life & Times of Michael K by J. M. Coetzee, New York Review of Books, 2 February 1984, 3-6.

Knight, Deborah. “The Rhetoric of Theory: Responses to Toril Moi.” *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 1,
1995, pp. 63-70.

---. “Women, Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Humanism in Feminist Film Theory.” *New Literary*

History, vol. 26, no. 1, 1995, pp. 39-56.

Kossew, Sue. "'Women's Words': A Reading of J. M. Coetzee's Women Narrators." *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee*, edited by Sue Kossew, G. K. Hall, 1998, pp. 166-179.

Krauss, Rosalind. "Using Language to Do Business as Usual." *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*,
edited by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holy, and Keith Moxey, Harper Collins, 1991, pp. 79-94.

von Kutschera, Franz. "Subjective Preferences, Rationality, and Justice." *Erkenntnis*, vol. 11, no. 1, Social
1977, pp. 97-111.

Lovibund, Sabina. "Meaning What We Say: Feminist Ethics and the Critique of Humanism." *New Left Review*, no. 220, 1996, pp.98-115.

Mason, Travis. "Dog Gambit: Shifting the Species Boundary in J.M. Coetzee's Recent Fiction." *Mosaic*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2006, pp 129-144.

Mitchell, Basil. "Morality: Religious and Secular." *The Gifford Lectures*. https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular. Accessed 25 June 2019.

---. "Liberal Humanism." *The Gifford Lectures*. https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular/4-liberal-humanism. Accessed 25 June 2019.

---. "Rational Humanism." *The Gifford Lectures*.
https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular/2-rational-humanism. Accessed 25 June 2019.

---. "Romantic Humanism." *The Gifford Lectures*. https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/morality-religious-and-secular/3-romantic-humanism. Accessed 25 June 2019.

Moi, Toril. "Feminist, Female, Feminine." *The Feminist Reader Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, edited by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp. 117-132.

---. *Sexual/Textual Politics*. Methuen, 1985.

Nethersole, Reingard. "Twilight of the Humanities: Rethinking (Post)Humanism with J.M. Coetzee." *symplokē*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2015, pp. 57-73.

O'Neil, Michael and Madeline, Callaghan. *The Romantic Poetry Handbook*. Wiley Books, 2017.

Paden, Roger. "Foucault's Anti-Humanism." *Human Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1987, pp. 123-141.

Parvini, Neema. *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*.

Bloomsbury, 2012.

Pippin, Robert. "Philosophical Fiction? On J.M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello." *Republics of Letters*, vol. 5,
no. 1, 2017.

Petersen, Kirsten Holst. "An Elaborate Dead End? A Feminist Reading of Coetzee's Foe." *A Shaping of*
Connections: Commonwealth Literature Studies, Then and Now, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek,
Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, Dangaroo Press, 1989, pp. 243-253.

Schildgen, Brenda Deen. "'No Bounds to the Sympathetic Imagination' in J. M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello." *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2005, pp. 323-336.

Soper, Kate. *Humanism and Antihumanism*. Harper Collins, 1986.

---. "Feminism, Humanism and Postmodernism." *Radical Philosophy*, no. 55, 1990, pp. 11-17.

Waugh, Patricia. *Feminine Fictions*. Routledge, 1989.

Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Wright, Laura. "Displacing the Voice: South African Feminism and J.M. Coetzee's Female Narrators." *African Studies*, vol. 67, p.11-32.