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Chris Danta

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*Black Angel* by Nataliia Kutykhina.

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## J.M. COETZEE AND THE AESTHETICS OF DISGUST

### I disgust: an existential emotion

Many readers admire the work of J.M. Coetzee for how it uses literary form to communicate ethical thought. “In *The Lives of Animals*, the 1997–98 Tanner Lectures [in Human Values] at Princeton University,” political scientist Amy Gutmann observes, “John Coetzee displays the kind of seriousness that can unite aesthetics and ethics” (Coetzee, *Lives* 3). According to philosophers Anton Leist and Peter Singer in the introduction to their influential 2010 edited collection *J.M. Coetzee and Ethics*, “ethics lies at the bottom

of most of Coetzee’s writings.” To read Coetzee, Leist and Singer claim, is to see how “Ethics, and applied ethics especially, is helped by the literary imagination, if it confronts the conflicting forces visible in different philosophical positions as well as in our everyday culture” (8, 13). Philosopher Jonathan Lear suggests in his contribution to Leist and Singer’s collection, “we can understand the complexity of [Coetzee’s] literary form if we see him as trying to communicate ethical thought” (66). That the form of Coetzee’s fiction expresses ethical thinking is Derek

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Attridge's central claim in his seminal 2004 book *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. "In Coetzee's hands the literary event is the working out of a complex and freighted responsibility to and for the other," Attridge writes, "a responsibility denied for so long in South Africa's history" (31). Attridge appeals to the example of Coetzee to demonstrate how literary works are "capable of taking us through an intense experience of [...] other-directed impulses and acts" such as respect, love, trust and generosity (xi).

Research into the ethical bent of Coetzee's fiction continues to flourish, fuelled in part by the interest scholars in philosophy, anthropology, ecology and animal studies now take in his work.<sup>1</sup> Recently, however, several literary critics have sounded a note of caution by observing that this now-widespread practice of reading Coetzee's fiction for the ethical plot comes at the cost of domesticating its aesthetic wildness. John Bolin and Andrew Dean remind us that Coetzee takes his readers through intense experiences not just of prosocial acts and impulses but also of antisocial acts and impulses. In a 2014 article, Bolin reads Coetzee's 1994 novel *The Master of Petersburg* "as an investigation of the workings of desire in art [...] desire that thrills at the intensities of transgressive violence and perversion." Understood in this way, he observes, *The Master* "poses significant problems for those who would value the literary through its relation to the ethical [...] or as a practical aid for guidance toward the good" (Bolin 516). Dean similarly argues in his 2021 book *Metafiction and the Postwar Novel* that "Coetzee's interest in perversion and transgression forces a reassessment of the overall optimism of [...] accounts of ethics in his work." As Dean notes, Attridge describes many more acts of respect, love, trust and generosity in *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* than he does acts of "disrespect, hate, violation, and selfishness, which are also possible outcomes of an encounter with the other" (59). The question thus arises: what are we to do with the ugly feelings in Coetzee, with those emotions in his work that do not seem to aid or communicate ethical thought?

Disgust, I suggest, is one such antisocial emotion we encounter in Coetzee. According to the *OED*, disgust is "Strong repugnance, aversion, or repulsion excited by that which is loathsome or offensive, as a foul smell, disagreeable person or action, disappointed ambition, etc.; profound instinctive dislike or dissatisfaction" ("Disgust"). Disgust poses an immediate problem for the idea of an ethics of otherness, one that prioritizes my responsibility to and for the other, which Attridge and others argue is central to Coetzee's fiction. To feel disgust toward another person is to denigrate and socially reject that person. As William Ian Miller notes in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, "Disgust evaluates (negatively) what it touches, proclaims the meanness and inferiority of its object" (9). This antisocial and hierarchizing aspect of disgust has led philosopher Martha Nussbaum famously to reject disgust as a basis for morality and law. Nussbaum claims in her 2001 book *Upheavals of Thought* that disgust poses "a threat to the idea of the *equal* worth and dignity of persons that is a very important part of any morality that most of us would favour" (221). Continuing her attack on the emotion in *Hiding from Humanity*, she argues that "the thought-content [of disgust] is typically unreasonable, embodying magical ideas of contamination, and impossible aspirations to purity, immortality, and nonanimality, that are just not in line with human life as we know it." Nussbaum urges us not to rely on disgust as a basis for law because disgust "has been used throughout history to exclude and marginalize groups or people who come to embody the dominant group's fear and loathing of its own animality and mortality" (*Hiding* 14).

Disgust fascinates Coetzee despite the threat it poses to "the idea of the equal worth and dignity of persons" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals* 221). To see why this is the case, we need to understand how disgust paradoxically enables a certain type of existential reflection about human mortality and vulnerability. As Carolyn Korsmeyer notes in her 2011 book *Savoring Disgust*, "Basic visceral disgust induces recoil from objects that are foul and polluting, such as putrefying organic matter,

eviscerated bodies, and the swarms of devouring vermin that surge to finish what death, illness, or rot has initiated” (30). Disgust is an instinctive and reflexive recoil from what we perceive to be dangerous to the vitality and integrity of the self, from things indicating “filth, contamination, mutilation and decay” (Korsmeyer, “Disgust” 754). “The fundamental schema of disgust,” Winfried Menninghaus observes, “is the experience of a nearness that is not wanted” (1). In expressing disgust, we retrospectively register our exposure and proximity to something we have found loathsome. But as the Hungarian philosopher Aurel Kolnai observes in his important 1929 essay *On Disgust*, we maintain an ambivalent attitude to the objects of our disgust: “not only is aversion to its object characteristic of disgust, but also a superimposed attractiveness of the subject towards the object.” Disgusting objects acquire a “macabre allure,” Kolnai argues, because we find them disturbing but not directly threatening. Where we will often feel compelled to flee from objects of fear, we will often let objects of disgust remain near to us and continue to affect us. For this reason, Kolnai considers disgust a relatively weak or passive form of aversion in comparison to other forms of aversion such as fear or anger. “A thing which is perceived as disgusting will always be something which is not regarded as important,” he writes, “which is neither to be destroyed, nor something from which one has to flee, but which must rather be put out of the way” (Kolnai 42). Our sense of superiority toward the object of disgust thus allows us to grasp it cognitively: “fear may lead to the apprehension of a danger, but disgust has the power to impart directly what may be a very clear-sighted partial awareness of its object” (39). While fear is “in its essence fully understandable without any assumption of a mystical wish for the possession of what is feared,” Kolnai claims, there is “contained already in [disgust’s] inner logic a possibility of a positive laying hold of the object, whether by touching, consuming or embracing it” (43).

According to Kolnai, disgust is characterized not simply by aversion to and denigration of

the object. In feeling disgust, we also attribute to the object a strange power to affect us. “Indeed,” Kolnai observes, “it almost seems as if the object of disgust would itself somehow reach out to the affected subject” (41). The object of disgust obtrudes and imposes itself on the one affected by it. The productive aspect of disgust is that it allows the affected subject to gain “what may be a very clear-sighted partial awareness of its object” (39). Nussbaum denies this productive aspect of the emotion, when she dismisses disgust as expressing “impossible aspirations to purity, immortality, and nonanimality, that are just not in line with human life as we know it” (*Hiding* 14). Disgust involves a process whereby the affected subject becomes vulnerable to the “macabre allure” of the disgusting object (Kolnai 42). As Miller puts it, disgust is “an assertion of a claim to superiority that at the same time recognizes the vulnerability of that superiority to the defiling powers of the low” (9). Although expressing disgust lowers the status of the object of offence, it also acknowledges the “defiling powers of the low.” This is how disgust enables a kind of existential reflection: being brought into uncomfortable proximity to things that signify impurity, animality and mortality can prompt us to reflect on our own impurity, mortality and animality. According to Kolnai, the disgusting is “pregnant with death” (74). “The ugly face of death which seems to present itself to us in every disgusting object reminds us of our own affinity to death,” he observes, “of our inevitable submission to it” (78). Korsmeyer agrees that disgusting objects ultimately convey the thought of death. “If there is a meaning that underlies the objects that arouse this emotion,” she writes,

it has to do with physical vulnerability and death [...] [W]ith its palpable visceral and sensory arousal, disgust notices the ignoble aspect of mortality in a particularly intimate way, reminding us of the supremely discomfiting fact that in the end our physical selves share the same fate as the lowly worm. (Korsmeyer, “Disgust” 755)

Kolnai’s phenomenological analysis of disgust helps us to see why a literary writer

like Coetzee would be drawn to this difficult emotion. Disgust, as Kolnai presents it, produces a kind of spotlighting effect through which the attention of the affected subject becomes rivetted to the aesthetic or sensory qualities of the disgusting object. As Korsmeyer puts it, “The intentional structure of this emotion is directed so strongly toward the properties of the disgusting object that it rivets our attention, even at the same time that it repels” (*Savoring* 37). Insofar as disgust allows the affected subject to gain “what may be a very clear-sighted partial awareness of its object” (Kolnai 39), it does so on the condition that the subject remains uncomfortably, claustrophobically close to the object. Disgust thus presents a phenomenological situation that is full of existential drama: a perceiving subject comes too close to a disgusting object, instinctively draws back from that object, but cannot put the object entirely out of their mind because they are still macabrely attracted to it. Disgust creates drama by presenting the human subject in antithetical ways: as *both* reactive and reflective. On the one hand, disgust ties us to the immediacy of our bodies and our sensory reactions to the world. As Miller notes:

What the idiom of disgust demands is reference to the senses. It is about what it feels like to touch, see, taste, smell, even on occasion hear, certain things [...] All emotions are launched by sense perception; only disgust makes that process of perceiving the core of the enterprise. (36)

On the other hand, insofar as it involves not just repulsion but also attraction to the eliciting object, disgust also shows us to be existentially reflective subjects. After instinctively withdrawing from the disgusting object, we may then succumb to its macabre allure by reflecting on the fact of our physical vulnerability.

Disgust is a phenomenon ideally suited to Coetzee’s mode of storytelling. Indeed, my contention in this essay is that we can learn much about how Coetzee tells stories by examining how he treats the subject of disgust. Disgust brings together three of Coetzee’s abiding

concerns: the materiality of the body, the prospect of death and the human–animal distinction. “If I look over my own fiction,” Coetzee tells David Attwell in a much-cited remark in *Doubling the Point*,

I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not “that which is not,” and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes the counter to the endless trials of doubt. (248)

Coetzee follows his modernist literary precursors Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka in presenting the human body as an object of disgust. Brian May notes that the body in Coetzee often elicits “disgust and distress” (404). Victor Brombert similarly observes that the

body with its miseries is a steady presence in Coetzee’s work. It represents from the outset a repellent reality. The budding writer in *Youth* experiences a “horror of physical ugliness.” Unsavory smells, especially offensive body odors, are mentioned in almost all Coetzee’s writings. (123–24)

I suggest that the disgusting body in Coetzee is not just repellent but also macabrely alluring. Coetzee agrees with Kolnai that disgust involves both repulsion and attraction. Moreover, also like Kolnai, he presents disgust as a kind of hermeneutic procedure through which the perceiving subject comes to understand the nature of an object. Coetzee stages many scenes in his fiction in which a focalizing character comes uncomfortably close to a real or imagined object, before recoiling in disgust from the sight or thought of this object. As a result of withdrawing from the disgusting object, the focalizing character reflects on the nature of the object and gains a clear-sighted partial awareness of it.

Coetzee represents disgust so often in his fiction, I suggest, because disgust figures the subject’s relation to the object as both embodied and contemplative. Staging scenes of disgust enables him to do two apparently contradictory things at once: (1) uphold the standard of the body by representing the immediacy

of a focalizing character's physical reaction to the world, and (2) establish a reflective distance between the focalizing character and object that encourages both character and reader to contemplate the ignoble aspect of human mortality. As we will see, the object of disgust in Coetzee varies in nature and scale: most intimately, it can be a part of someone else's body such as the mouth; more broadly, it can be a social behaviour such as meat eating; ultimately, it is the human itself. In the final section of this essay, I locate Coetzee in a literary tradition that uses disgust misanthropically: to gain critical distance from humanity. In his 1999 novella *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee follows the example of Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by turning the human itself into an object of disgust. Elizabeth Costello's disgust of meat eating so overwhelms her at the end of *Lives* that she no longer identifies with her fellow humans.

## II the grotesque mouth in coetzee

Brombert notes the prevalence and prominence of unsavoury smells in almost all of Coetzee's writings, but I argue the mouth is the primary site of disgust in Coetzee. Coetzee presents many scenes in which a focalizing character reacts with disgust after coming to see into the mouth – or even down the throat – of another character. Consider the following passage from his 2003 novel *Elizabeth Costello*, in which John Bernard (the focalizing character in the scene) draws away from his mother Elizabeth Costello after seeing into her open mouth and down her throat as she sleeps on a plane flying them both over southern California.

She lies slumped deep in her seat. Her head is sideways, her mouth open. She is snoring faintly. Light flashes from the windows as they bank, the sun setting brilliantly over southern California. He can see up her nostrils, into her mouth, down the back of her throat. And what he cannot see he can imagine: the gullet, pink and ugly, contracting as it swallows, like a python, drawing things down to the pear-shaped

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belly-sac. He draws away, tightens his own belt, sits up, facing forward. No, he tells himself, that is not where I come from, that is not it. (Coetzee, *Elizabeth* 33–34)

Here we see how disgust is characterized by “the experience of a nearness that is not wanted” (Menninghaus 1). John comes “too close” to his mother by coming to see into her open mouth as she sleeps. He then instinctively withdraws from the sight in disgust. Notice what I have called the spotlighting effect of disgust: John's attention becomes rivetted to the object of disgust (his mother's gaping mouth), even as this object repels him. His disgust reaction causes him to figuratively reduce his mother's identity in this moment to her grotesque open mouth. He recoils partly because of what he can see (“up her nostrils, into her mouth, down the back of her throat”) and partly because of what he can imagine (“the gullet, pink and ugly, contracting as it swallows, like a python”). I suspect Coetzee has been influenced by Charles Darwin's reflections on disgust in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. According to Darwin in this 1872 text, disgust “refers to something revolting, primarily in relation to the sense of taste, as actually perceived or vividly imagined; and secondarily to anything which causes a similar feeling, through the sense of smell, touch, and even of eyesight” (254). Sight tends to be the sense that launches the feeling of disgust in Coetzee. But his focalizing characters also experience disgust by vividly imagining the properties of the disgusting object. John's feeling of disgust intensifies as he imagines what he cannot see of his mother's mouth.

What concerns me in this essay is how Coetzee uses disgust in his narratives as a tool of focalization, that is, as a way of focusing his characters' and his readers' attention on the properties of an object. The spotlighting effect of disgust, I suggest, allows the literary writer to establish a character's – and reader's – macabre fascination with an object. As John becomes fixated on his mother's open mouth,

everything else in the scene seems to disappear from his view except the object of his disgust. There is a sense, moreover, in which the mysteriousness of Costello's identity is somehow contained in his vision of her mouth. A signature rhetorical gesture of Coetzee's is to reduce his characters' identities to the actions, properties and even histories of their mouths. Costello's gaping mouth shows her to be ageing. She is also, crucially, a vegetarian. In *Foe*, Friday's mutilated mouth reveals both the history of his cruel mistreatment by others and his present muteness. In *Life & Times of Michael K*, Michael K's disfiguring cleft lip causes him to withdraw from human society: "He was easiest when he was by himself" (4). Sometimes the figurative reduction of identity to the mouth in Coetzee is general rather than specific. In his 1995 essay "Meat Country" and *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee figures humans as predominantly meat eaters. Disgust arises in his work when the focalizing character sees or imagines something in the other's mouth that causes them to doubt the other's humanity. John feels disgusted when he imagines his mother's gullet "contracting as it swallows, like a python, drawing things down to the pear-shaped belly-sac" because he here sees the non-human animal in the place of the human (Coetzee, *Elizabeth* 34).

Scenes featuring the grotesque open mouth in Coetzee follow a distinct rhetorical or narrative pattern.

1. The observer figuratively reduces the identity of the observed to the grotesque open mouth.
2. The observer describes the grotesque open mouth of the observed, as they perceive or imagine it.
3. The observer recoils from the grotesquery of the other's mouth due to the feeling that the observed belongs to a different order of being to the observer.

We see this narrative pattern in the scene I have been analysing. John figuratively reduces Costello's identity to her grotesque open mouth. He describes what he sees and can

imagine in her mouth. He then recoils from the grotesquery of the sight due to the feeling that Costello belongs to a different order of identity to him: "No, he tells himself, that is not where I come from, that is not it" (Coetzee, *Elizabeth* 34).

Several other scenes in Coetzee display the same rhetorical or narrative pattern. Coetzee's 1983 novel *Life & Times of Michael K* begins with Anna K momentarily being prevented from connecting with her newborn son by her disgust reaction to his cleft lip:

The first thing the midwife noticed about Michael K when she helped him out of his mother into the world was that he had a hare lip. The lip curled like a snail's foot, the left nostril gaped [...] To the mother she said: "You should be happy, they bring luck to the household." But from the first Anna K did not like the mouth that would not close and the living pink flesh that it bared to her. She shivered to think of what had been growing inside her all these months. (3)

This passage forms a kind of complement to the one I have been examining in *Elizabeth Costello*. While in that scene a son recoils with disgust when looking down the gullet of his aged mother, here a mother recoils with disgust when looking into the mouth of her newborn son. In both cases, the observing character figuratively reduces the identity of the one observed to the grotesque open mouth before instinctively recoiling from the sight, sensing the irruption of an irreconcilable difference between the two. In both cases, the observing character recoils in disgust when they see the nonhuman animal in the place of the human. Anna K sees her newborn son's lip curl "like a snail's foot." John sees his mother's gullet contract and swallow "like a python." In both cases, the focalizing character stops recognizing their loved one as human after comparing their loved one's mouth to a nonhuman animal. The mother, Anna, shivers to think of "what had been growing inside her all these months." The son, John, draws back at the thought that this ageing body seated before him is where he comes from.

In an unforgettable scene of oral inspection in Coetzee's 1986 novel *Foe*, we take the perspective of the text's main first-person narrator, Susan Barton, as she peers into Friday's open mouth:

Cruso motioned Friday nearer. "Open your mouth," he told him, and opened his own. Friday opened his mouth. "Look," said Cruso. I looked, but saw nothing in the dark save the glint of teeth white as ivory. "La-la-la," said Cruso, and motioned to Friday to repeat. Gripping Friday by the hair, he brought his face close to mine. "Do you see?" he said. "It is too dark," said I. "La-la-la," said Cruso. "Ha-ha-ha," said Friday from the back of his throat. I drew away, and Cruso released Friday's hair. "He has no tongue," said Cruso. "That is why he does not speak. They cut out his tongue." (18)

Seeing into Friday's open mouth causes Barton to withdraw in disgust. After the event, she reports feeling increasingly uncomfortable in his presence. She begins to look on him

with the horror we reserve for the mutilated. It was no comfort that his mutilation was secret, closed behind his lips (as some other mutilations are hidden by clothing) [...] Indeed, it was the very secretness of his loss that caused me to shrink from him. I could not speak, while he was about, without being aware how lively were the movements of the tongue in my own mouth.

The fact that Friday's mutilation is hidden means she must imagine how it came about. Haunted by Cruso's speculation that slavers cut out Friday's tongue, she shudders as she sees "pictures in her mind of pincers gripping his tongue and a knife slicing into it, as must have happened." Ashamed of her disgust reaction to Friday, she nonetheless notes that "for a time [I] was not mistress of my own actions" (19–20).

As we've seen, disgust in Coetzee is launched not just by actual perception but also by vivid imagination of an object. In lesson 2 of *Elizabeth Costello*, Costello stands on the upper deck of the cruise liner

the SS *Northern Lights* looking out onto the Southern Ocean and imagines the grotesque open mouths of the sea creatures in the waters around her:

The Southern Ocean [...] The seas full of things that seem like us but are not. Sea-flowers that gape and devour. Eels, each a barbed maw with a gut hanging from it. Teeth are for tearing, the tongue is for churning the swill around: that is the truth of the oral [...] Only by an ingenious economy, an accident of evolution, does the organ of ingestion sometimes get to be used for song. (54)

Once again, we take the perspective of a focalizing character as she figuratively reduces the other – in this case, an imagined nonhuman other – to the grotesque open mouth. What disturbs Costello about sea anemones and eels is their singular orientation toward voracious consumption. These creatures seem to her to be nothing but mouths and guts that feed and devour. The unusual word *maw*, which here means "The throat or gullet; the jaws or mouth of a voracious animal" ("Maw"), captures her uncomfortable identification with the sea creatures that "seem like us but are not." Even as she distances herself from them by figuratively reducing them to "organs of ingestion," Costello still grants the sea creatures ontological priority over humans. While she considers our so-called higher capacities for speech and song to be evolutionary accidents, she sees the barbed maws of eels as expressing the "truth of the oral," the fact that "Teeth are for tearing, the tongue is for churning the swill around" (Coetzee, *Elizabeth* 54).

"Disgust begins with the mouth," philosopher Alexandra Plakias observes.

Evolutionarily, it emerges to guard the mouth against potential contamination. As we develop individually, it emerges from our more primitive tendency to expel distasteful substances from our mouths, and teaches us to be careful about what we allow into our mouths. And its most basic expression is the disgust face, which involves the muscles around the mouth.



Disgust is first “a reaction to food and to oral incorporation” (Plakias 195–96). Darwin writes famously in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*: “The term ‘disgust,’ in its simplest sense, means something offensive to the taste. It is curious how readily this feeling is excited by anything unusual in the appearance, odour, and nature of our food” (257). But we can think of disgust more abstractly than this as a reaction to the potential incorporation of anything strange or threatening into the human. While Coetzee focuses his presentation of disgust on the mouth, he also figures the mouth as the part of the body that expresses a being’s identity. This is Costello’s point in the passage above: while sea anemones and eels have evolved to be eating machines, by an accident of evolution humans have become the speaking or singing animal. Barton finds the thought of Friday’s tongueless mouth so confronting in *Foe* because she holds the same belief as Costello that humans are creatures that speak. “According to Susan,” Christopher Peterson writes, “language is essentially human; hence, to be bereft of speech [like Friday] is to dwell within an alienating silence that renders one less than human” (860). Michael K’s cleft lip similarly complicates his relationship to speech. As Ato Quayson observes:

the silence and frailty of his person allows others to interpret him as bearing a resemblance to the lives of animals and therefore of carrying an excess of religious connotations. Like animals, insects, and birds, [Michael K] is not of the human world.<sup>2</sup> (171)

Coetzee stages scenes of disgust in his fiction, I suggest, to expose the fragility of the human–nonhuman distinction. In all the scenes I have examined so far, disgust functions as an emotional defence to safeguard human identity against the external threat of the nonhuman other. The human subject protects itself against the perceived threat of the disgusting object by categorizing this object as nonhuman. But perhaps the most interesting thing about disgust is that the subject’s

defensive reaction to the disgusting object is little more than a rearguard action, since the subject has already been exposed to the object. In disgust, we *retrospectively* register our exposure to something we deem to be incompatible with our idea of ourselves. In this sense, disgust shows our sensory experience of the world outstripping our idea of it. The subject of disgust appeals to Coetzee because it allows him to explore the disjunction between the standard of the body and the standard of the mind in a relatively static situation. As Kolnai shows, the disgusting object disturbs but is not so threatening as to force the perceiving subject to flee the scene. The relatively nonthreatening or inert nature of the disgusting object means the subject can stay close to it and thus gain a clear-sighted partial awareness of it. Although John is palpably disturbed by what he sees of Costello’s gaping mouth, he has only to turn away from her and face forward in his seat to remove the disturbance. The passive or nonthreatening nature of the disgusting object in Coetzee encourages the focalizing character to continue to reflect on the nature of the object, even after they have instinctively withdrawn from it.

In *Foe*, Susan Barton continues to reflect on her disgust reaction to Friday’s mouth well after she peers into it. In a remarkable scene in part II of the novel that turns on the macabre allure of the disgusting, Barton and Friday are walking some miles outside the town of Marlborough when they find a parcel lying in a ditch by the side of the road containing the abandoned body of a dead baby girl.

When I began to unwind the wrapping-cloth I found it to be bloody, and was afraid to go on. Yet where there is blood there is fascination. So I went on and unwrapped the body, stillborn or perhaps stifled, all bloody with the afterbirth, of a little girl, perfectly formed, her hands clenched up to her ears, her features peaceful, barely an hour or two in the world.

“Yet where there is blood there is fascination”: Barton’s striking formulation encapsulates the

macabre allure of the disgusting object. When she discovers that the wrapping-cloth contains the corpse of a newborn baby (perhaps the epitome of the disgusting as it figures the ignoble aspect of mortality), she quickly wraps the bloodied cloth up again and returns the dead baby to where she found it. But after leaving the scene, she cannot put from her thoughts “the little sleeper who would never awake, the pinched eyes that would never see the sky.” She tries to sleep but soon wakes up wondering if she should return to the site before the crows and the rats get to the baby. After abandoning that idea, her thoughts turn to Friday:

I could not stop them, it was an effect of the hunger. Had I not been there to restrain him, would he in his hunger have eaten the babe? I told myself I did him wrong to think of him as a cannibal or worse, a devourer of the dead. But Cruso had planted the seed in my mind, and now I could not look on Friday’s lips without calling to mind what meat must once have passed them.

I grant without reserve that in such thinking lie the seeds of madness. We cannot shrink in disgust from our neighbour’s touch because his hands, that are clean now, were once dirty. We must cultivate, all of us, a certain ignorance, a certain blindness, or society will not be tolerable. (97–98)

Coetzee here seems to allude to a much-cited anecdote about disgust that Darwin tells in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. “In Tierra del Fuego a native touched with his finger some cold preserved meat which I was eating at our bivouac,” Darwin recounts, “and plainly showed utter disgust at its softness; whilst I felt utter disgust at my food being touched by a naked savage, though his hands did not appear dirty” (257). Darwin’s anecdote shows how disgust is “a reaction to food and to oral incorporation.” The Tierra del Fuegian finds the thought of eating Darwin’s preserved meat abhorrent once he has felt its unfamiliar texture. But the story also reveals how disgust

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“protects not only the boundaries of the body, but also the boundaries of the self” (Plakias 196). Feeling the man has come too close to him by touching his food, Darwin reacts defensively by recasting him as “a naked savage.” As Miller notes, “Darwin fears ingesting some essence of savagery that has been magically imparted to his food by the finger of the naked savage” (3).

Susan Barton wrestles with her own xenophobic feelings toward Friday in the passage I have cited from *Foe*. She is haunted by the thought Cruso has planted in her head that Friday is a cannibal: “now I could not look on Friday’s lips without calling to mind what meat must once have passed them” (98). She again figuratively reduces his identity to the image of the grotesque mouth, this time because of what she fears he likes to eat. The power of the idea of the cannibal comes partly from its reduction of human identity to the operation of the mouth. Barton has no empirical evidence that Friday is or was a cannibal. Early in the novel, she recounts that Cruso “would tell stories of cannibals, of how Friday was a cannibal whom he had saved from being roasted and devoured by fellow cannibals” (8). According to David E. Hoegberg, her reading of contemporary travel writing would also have led her to believe she had come to an island full of cannibals (94). But her experiences on the island contradict this colonialist stereotype. “As for cannibals,” Barton reflects,

I am not persuaded, despite Cruso’s fears, that there are cannibals in those oceans [...] All I say is: What I saw, I wrote. I saw no cannibals; and if they came after nightfall and fled before the dawn, they left no footprint behind. (Coetzee, *Foe* 48)

She admits she impugns Friday by thinking of him as a cannibal or as a devourer of the dead like the crows and rats she imagines going for the baby’s corpse. But she cannot put the thought out of her head. She chastises herself, “We cannot shrink in disgust from our neighbour’s touch because his hands, that are clean now, were once dirty.” But this reworking of the Darwin anecdote still others Friday by

assuming he was a cannibal. "If Friday forswore human flesh during his fifteen years on the island," Barton wonders to herself, "why should I not believe he had forsworn it forever? And if in his heart of hearts he remained a cannibal, would a warm living woman not make a better meal than the cold stiff corpse of a child?" Her mind oscillates between trying to suppress her disgust reaction to his mouth and insisting on "his bloodlust." Counterbalancing the melodrama of Barton's private fantasies about Friday's cannibal past is his utter passivity in the scene, the fact that he lies "dead asleep a few paces away, his horny feet that seemed never to feel the cold sticking out from under his robe" (98).

An obvious problem for Coetzee in writing about disgust is how to negotiate the observer's feeling of superiority toward the observed that arises from the disgust reaction. Coetzee tries to resolve this problem by isolating the focalizing character who feels disgust toward the other. An important aspect of the micro-drama of the grotesque mouth in Coetzee I am tracing here is that the observer's disgust toward the grotesquery of the observed paradoxically isolates the observer rather than the observed. According to Miller: "The avowal of disgust expects concurrence. It carries with it the notion of its own indisputability, and part of this indisputability depends upon the fact that disgust is processed so particularly via offense to the senses" (194). Sianne Ngai similarly argues in *Ugly Feelings* that the expression of disgust enables "a strange kind of sociability" by seeking "to include or draw others *into* its exclusion of its object" (336). But this is not the case with Coetzeean disgust. In Coetzee, the avowal of disgust is highly disputable, idiosyncratic, relative. This is partly because Coetzee often presents disgust reactions as the private (and therefore idiosyncratic and contestable) thoughts of characters and partly because he positions the one who is objectified by these disgust reactions on the side of objective reality. Coetzee uses disgust to accentuate the disjunction between the focalizing character's idea of objective reality and objective reality itself. In the

examples I've been considering, the observing characters react privately with disgust to objective situations or realities they remain powerless to change. John reacts to his mother's ageing, Anna K to her son's cleft lip, Susan Barton to Friday's mutilated mouth and supposed cannibalism, Costello to the evolutionary efficiency of the mouths and guts of sea creatures. What we share with these characters is not their affective reactions to these situations but a kind of existential shiver, a sense of their momentary estrangement from objective reality.

### III the human as an object of disgust

Nowhere does Coetzee reveal more clearly how disgust isolates the one feeling disgusted than in *The Lives of Animals*. Elizabeth Costello becomes socially isolated in this text not just because of her disgust of meat but also because she weaponizes disgust in her Gates lectures by developing the offensive comparison that the industrialized treatment of animals resembles the murderous treatment of Jews in the Holocaust. "Let me say it openly," she declares in her first lecture,

we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them. (Coetzee, *Lives* 21)

Disgust is at the heart not just of who Elizabeth Costello is, but also of what she does. One of the first things we learn about her in *Lives* is that she does not like to see meat at the dining table. When she first arrives at John and Norma's house for her three-day visit to Appleton College in the United States, Costello notices that the dining table has only been laid for three: "'Aren't the children eating with us?' she asks. 'No,' says Norma, 'they are eating in the playroom.' 'Why?'" As John

explains the hostile standoff: “The children are eating separately because Elizabeth does not like to see meat at the table, while Norma refuses to change the children’s diet to suit what she calls ‘your mother’s delicate sensibilities’” (16).

John again reflects on how his mother’s disgust of meat alienates her from others, as he prepares to attend the post-symposium dinner being held in her honour at the Faculty Club at Appleton College. In thinking ahead to the event, he worries that he will have to “repair the damage” when, “during a lull in the conversation,” someone asks her why she became a vegetarian, and she gives what he and Norma call “The Plutarch Response”:

The response in question comes from Plutarch’s moral essays. His mother has it by heart; he can reproduce it only imperfectly: “You ask me why I refuse to eat flesh. I, for my part, am astonished that you can put in your mouth the corpse of a dead animal, astonished that you do not find it nasty to chew hacked flesh and swallow the juices of death-wounds.” Plutarch is a real conversation-stopper: it is the word *juices* that does it. (Coetzee, *Lives* 38)

Here, once more, Coetzee makes his reader look through the eyes of one character (the vegetarian) into the grotesque open mouth of another (the meat eater). The Plutarch Response defends the idea of vegetarianism by presenting the vegetarian’s disgust reaction to the act of eating meat. First, it rivets its listener’s attention to the open mouth of the meat eater as this mouth consumes animal flesh. Second, it describes the three stages of eating meat (putting in the mouth, chewing and swallowing) in increasingly grotesque or disgusting terms. Finally, it presents meat eating as aberrant human behaviour because it involves devouring the dead. Referring to the animals that have been slaughtered for the meal as “corpses” both denaturalizes the act of eating meat and dignifies the suffering of the dead animals. It is interesting to note that Coetzee followed the lead of his fictional character by using a version of The Plutarch Response

in a 2003 print interview with the leading Swedish animal rights and animal welfare organization *Djurens Rätt* (Animal Rights). Asked at the end of this interview whether he was a vegetarian and, if so, why, Coetzee replied: “Yes, I am a vegetarian. I find the thought of stuffing fragments of corpses down my throat quite repulsive, and I am amazed that so many people do it every day” (Engström).

Coetzee adapts The Plutarch Response from the remarkable opening chapter of the Platonist philosopher Plutarch’s now-incomplete treatise *De esu carniū* (“Of Eating of Flesh”). In this opening chapter of his treatise, Plutarch (c.45–120 CE) challenges the normalcy of meat eating by reimagining the first meal in which a human being prepared animal flesh for human consumption as an abject gorefest:

You ask of me then for what reason it was that Pythagoras abstained from eating of flesh. I for my part do much admire in what humor, with what soul or reason, the first man with his mouth touched slaughter, and reached to his lips the flesh of a dead animal, and having set before people courses of ghastly corpses and ghosts, could give those parts the names of meat and victuals, that but a little before lowed, cried, moved, and saw; how his sight could endure the blood of the slaughtered, flayed, and mangled bodies; how his smell could bear their scent; and how the very nastiness happened not to offend the taste, while it chewed the sores of others, and participated of the sap and juices of deadly wounds [...] You ought rather, in my opinion, to have enquired who first began this practice, than who of late times left it off. (111)

In this passage, which Coetzee references in footnote 13 of *The Lives of Animals*, we recognize several rhetorical techniques he has borrowed from Plutarch: focusing attention on the mouth, justifying vegetarianism via an appeal to disgust, anthropomorphizing animals as corpses and even ghosts, presenting meat eating as “mired in the bloody, gory, wounding of animals” (King 225). Coetzee is also interested in the dramatic scenario

Plutarch presents in the passage of the one versus the many: why does the one – Pythagoras – refuse to eat meat like the many? Plutarch responds to this aggressive singling out of the vegetarian by meat eaters in the present by in turn aggressively singling out a meat eater from the past. The one who needs to answer for himself, he argues, is not the recently turned vegetarian Pythagoras but rather the first human who engaged in the aberrant practice of meat eating.

By labelling meat eating as aberrant human behaviour, Plutarch sidesteps the problem of the vegetarian's social marginalization. But this is the problem that most interests Coetzee in *Lives*. What he explores in this text is the isolation the vegetarian experiences because of their decision not to eat meat. Unlike Plutarch, Coetzee refuses the utopian gesture of naturalizing vegetarianism by rewriting history. "The question of whether we should eat meat is not a serious question," he writes in his 1995 autobiographical essay "Meat Country." "The 'should' in the question is anomalous: bringing 'should' into contact with eating meat, as with bringing 'should' into contact with sex, is like asking, 'Should we be ourselves?'" Coetzee's point here is that it makes no sense to ask whether we should eat meat because carnivorousness is part of our nature. "We would not be here, we would not be asking the question," he jokes, "if our forebears had eaten grass: we would be antelopes or horses." Coetzee figuratively reduces human identity to meat eating in "Meat Country" to emphasize the social marginality of the vegetarian. While he places the meat eater on the side of objective reality, he places the vegetarian on the side of subjective crankiness. He begins the essay, "A kind of crankhood developed in the England of the 1890s, a creed of brisk cold showers, sandals in all weathers, free love, bicycle locomotion and the avoidance of alcohol and animal flesh." Later in the piece, he relates a personal anecdote that illustrates the meat eater's typical indifference to the cranky sensibilities of vegetarians. He and his wife Dorothy Driver are invited to dinner by a colleague at the University of Texas. When Dorothy rings

up the wife of this colleague to let her know they do not eat meat, the hostess responds in dismay, "Oh dear! [...] We're having ribs first and then chicken. You don't eat chicken? There won't be anything else." As Coetzee observes, almost by way of moral to the story, "It is eccentric not to eat meat in the United States, doubly so in Texas" ("Meat Country").

In the sense that it concerns the social isolation vegetarians experience because of their decision not to eat meat, "Meat Country" provides Coetzee with a narratological and characterological blueprint for *Lives*. According to David Attwell, Coetzee began planning the Tanner Lectures on Human Values that he gave at Princeton University on 15 and 16 October 1997 and later published as *The Lives of Animals* in 1999 with reflections on vegetarianism: "'Not eating meat is not like not eating pork to a Jew,' he writes [in his preparatory notes]. Lacking the prestige of religion, vegetarianism is 'irremediably cranky'" (217). While Plutarch seeks to naturalize vegetarianism in "Of Eating of Flesh" by presenting meat eating as a crucial misstep in human history, in *Lives* Coetzee explores the psychic and social cost to the vegetarian of avowing their disgust of meat in a predominantly meat-eating society like the United States. Focalizing the narrative through John enables Coetzee to show readers how the other carnivorous characters in the narrative isolate and objectify his vegetarian protagonist by ridiculing her beliefs. Costello is constantly being attacked in the text not just for what she says but also for how she says it. John criticizes her performance in the public lectures: "His mother does not have a good delivery" (Coetzee, *Lives* 19); "A strange ending to a strange talk, he thinks, ill gauged, ill argued. Not her métier, argumentation. She should not be here" (36). Norma, a Ph.D. in philosophy, rails against her mother-in-law at the end of the text:

I have no patience when she arrives here and begins trying to get people, particularly the children, to change their eating habits. And now these absurd public lectures! She is trying to extend her inhibiting power over the whole community! (67)

The well-respected Jewish poet Abraham Stern is so offended by Costello comparing the industrialized treatment of animals in factory farms to the treatment of the Jews in the Holocaust that he boycotts the post-lecture dinner. Stern's visible absence from the dining table – John notices that “One place is empty” (38) – transforms the usually celebratory occasion into an uncomfortable and antagonistic social situation.

Conversation at the post-symposium dinner becomes awkward once President Garrard, a political scientist, raises the topic of religious communities choosing to define themselves in terms of dietary prohibitions. “It all has to do with cleanness and uncleanness,” a man named Wunderlich interjects. “Clean and unclean animals, clean and unclean habits. Cleanness can be a very handy device for deciding who belongs and who doesn't, who is in and who is out.” Although she never has occasion to give The Plutarch Response, Costello does express the following Plutarchan sentiment at the meal: “Perhaps we invented gods so that we could put the blame on them. They gave us permission to eat flesh. They gave us permission to play with unclean things.” Figuring meat in this Plutarchan way as a polluting substance provokes defensiveness in others at the table. “Is that what you believe?” Garrard's wife Olivia asks Costello cautiously. The ever-antagonistic Norma weighs into the conversation by dismissing Costello's entire line of thought:

People in the modern world no longer decide their diet on the basis of whether they have divine permission. If we eat pig and don't eat dog, that's just the way we are brought up [...] It's just one of our folkways.

“There is disgust,” Costello shoots back. “We may have got rid of the gods but we have not got rid of disgust, which is a version of religious horror” (41–42).

In *Lives*, Costello's views are presented as irremediably cranky, as the minoritarian views of the one against the many. This is partly why she begins her Gates lectures by comparing herself to Franz Kafka's ape-protagonist Red

Peter in “A Report to an Academy,” who must address a room full of human scientists about his fantastic transformation into a human. Like Red Peter, Costello feels aggressively singled out and made to justify herself by her audience. In the moving final scene of *Lives*, the pressure she is under finally tells and she breaks down in front of John. As he drives her to the airport, John apologizes for his and Norma's unsympathetic treatment of her during her stay with them. “I haven't had time to make sense of why you have become so intense about the animal business,” he confesses. “A better explanation,” Costello replies,

is that I have not told you why, or dare not tell you. When I think of the words, they seem so outrageous that they are best spoken into a pillow or into a hole in the ground, like King Midas.

She elaborates:

It's that I no longer know where I am. I seem to move around perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participating in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! Yet every day I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money [...] Am I dreaming, I say to myself? [...] Yet I'm not dreaming. I look into your eyes, into Norma's, into the children's, and I see only kindness, human-kindness. Calm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can't you? *Why can't you?* (Coetzee, *Lives* 69)

We are now familiar with Costello's Plutarchan strategy of dignifying the suffering of nonhuman animals by characterizing meat as “Corpses. Fragments of corpses.” While seeing her fellows as participating in a crime of “stupefying proportions,” Costello also acknowledges the idiosyncrasy of her disgust reaction to meat, how it isolates her from her fellows by pitting her against objective reality. “This is life,” she tells

herself. “Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can’t you?” (69). Where elsewhere in the text others doubt her, here Costello doubts herself. “What Elizabeth Costello loses is not only a sense of being at home in the world,” Yi-Ping Ong observes, “but also the ability to speak as one of a *kind*. She can no longer recognize the kin and kind – family, species, moral community – to which she belongs” (13).

In so losing the ability to recognize her kin and kind at the end of *Lives*, Costello resembles a famous literary character she discusses in her lectures: namely, Swift’s Lemuel Gulliver.<sup>3</sup> There is perhaps no better illustration in all literature of how disgust isolates the one who expresses it than the remarkable scene in book 4 of *Gulliver’s Travels* in which Gulliver returns home from his voyage to the land of the Houyhnhnms avowing disgust of his fellow humans due to their resemblance to the Yahoos or apelike creatures he encounters in Houyhnhnm land. Swift’s protagonist gives a vivid account of his disgust reaction to the other members of his family on his return to England:

My Wife and Family received me with great Surprize and Joy, because they concluded me certainly dead; but I must freely confess the sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust, and Contempt; and the more, by reflecting on the near Alliance I had to them [...] As soon as I entered the House, my Wife took me in her Arms, and kissed me, at which, having not been used to the Touch of that odious Animal for so many Years, I fell into a Swoon for almost an Hour [...] During the first Year, I could not endure my Wife or Children in my Presence, the very Smell of them was intolerable, much less could I suffer them to eat in the same Room. To this hour they dare not presume to touch my Bread, or drink out of the same Cup, neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the Hand. (244)

As we’ve seen, disgust is “the experience of a nearness that is not wanted” (Menninghaus 1). Gulliver cannot bear for his wife or children to be near to him, to touch him or to touch something he touches. Indeed, he prefers the company – and smell – of horses to humans:

The first Money I laid out was to buy two young Stone Horses which I keep in a good Stable, and next to them the Groom is my greatest Favourite; for I feel my Spirits revived by the smell he contracts in the Stable. My Horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four Hours every Day. (Swift 244)

Gulliver ends his narrative by comically describing how he is trying to overcome his aversion to humans. He has started to allow his wife “to sit at Dinner with me, at the furthest End of a long Table, and to answer (but with the utmost brevity) the few Questions I ask her” (249).

Disgust produces a phenomenological drama of nearness and distance, of a body coming too close to another body and then instinctively withdrawing from it. In *Gulliver’s Travels*, Swift exploits the comic potential of this phenomenological drama of proximity and distance that accompanies the disgust reaction. Gulliver’s wife takes him in her arms and kisses him and he falls into a swoon. Gulliver banishes his wife and children from his presence because he cannot stand their smell. He spends most of his time conversing with horses, in part because he prefers their smell. He finally allows his wife to come near to him, but only if she stays at the furthest end of a long table. While Swift emphasizes the comedic aspect of disgust at the end of *Gulliver’s Travels*, at the end of *The Lives of Animals* Coetzee uses the phenomenological drama of nearness and distance that attends the disgust reaction to produce a strangely intimate and unexpectedly affecting scene between Costello and John.

The crucial difference between Costello and Gulliver – and the reason their final scenes differ so greatly in tone – is that she is acutely aware of how her disgust of meat leads to her revulsion of the human. What Costello struggles to come to terms with at the end of *Lives* is the problem of disgust’s intransitivity: the sense in which disgust does not pass beyond the limits of the one who feels it and so cannot be passed onto another person. Even though she experiences it viscerally, Costello cannot make others feel the overwhelming sense of disgust she

feels toward the act of meat eating. She tries to convey this sense of disgust to John by redeploying the horrific analogy she used in her Gates lectures between the industrialized treatment of animals and the Holocaust.

It is as if I were to visit friends, and to make some polite remark about the lamp, and they were to say, “Yes, it’s nice, isn’t it? Polish-Jewish skin it’s made of, we find that’s best, the skins of young Polish-Jewish virgins.” And then I go to the bathroom and the soap-wrapper says, “Treblinka – 100% human stearate.” Am I dreaming, I say to myself? What kind of house is this? (Coetzee, *Lives* 69)

With this thought experiment, Costello hopes to provoke a reaction from John, to make his body recoil in disgust from the thought of encountering household objects made from parts of human rather than nonhuman animal bodies. But the reality is that John cannot identify with her disgust and so fails to react to her thought experiment in the desired manner. As Jonathan Lamb observes, John represents for Costello “the best available listener[], not incredulous and willing to listen to strange testimony” (175). But even as sympathetic a listener as John, who we are told earlier in the text is “not ashamed of his mother” (Coetzee, *Lives* 16) and her advocacy for nonhuman animals, cannot appreciate the extent of her “anthropological exodus” from her species (Lamb 175).

The sheer intransitivity or incommunicability of her disgust reaction to meat causes Costello to become so isolated from others that she ends up questioning her own sanity, wondering if there is something wrong with her. Coetzee discusses this point in his 2015 book with Arabella Kurtz, *The Good Story*:

I recently watched an adaptation for television of one of the stories that make up my book *Elizabeth Costello* [Alex Harvey’s 2002 BBC-produced *The Lives of Animals*]. Gazing around a gathering, Elizabeth asks herself how it can possibly be true that her fellow citizens are participants in a shadowy compact (shadowy in the sense that its

operations are shielded from public view) to slaughter living beings and devour their flesh. May the truth not rather be that there is something wrong with her, that she has somehow become possessed by a perverse will to see evil where there is none? Elizabeth’s frame of mind is all too familiar to me. (87)

At the end of their texts, both Swift and Coetzee exploit the dramatic possibilities of what I’m calling disgust’s intransitivity. Insofar as it cannot be passed onto another person, disgust has the effect not just of isolating but also of strongly individuating the one who feels it. Nowhere does Gulliver seem more of an individual, more idiosyncratic and more alone than at the end of Swift’s text when he expresses disgust toward his fellow humans. In the same way, nowhere does Costello seem more of an individual, more idiosyncratic and more alone than when she expresses her disgust of the “shadowy compact” of meat eating to John as he drives her to the airport at the end of *The Lives of Animals*. Swift and Coetzee use disgust at the conclusion of their texts to spotlight the idiosyncrasy and existential vulnerability of their central characters, an idiosyncrasy and existential vulnerability that has been there from the start. Rather than expecting readers to share the disgust reactions or extreme views of their characters, Swift and Coetzee establish Gulliver and Costello as objects of macabre allure for readers. While we recoil in shock from the antisociality of Gulliver’s and Costello’s misanthropic outbursts, we also remain rivetted to these transgressive acts of expression insofar as they seem to capture the secret or truth of the literary character and to constitute something like a naked expression of belief.

Coetzee uses John’s focalization to establish Costello as an object of disgust at the end of *Lives*. After chastising herself for being unable to accept people’s willingness to eat meat (“Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can’t you? *Why can’t you?*”), Costello turns to her son with a tearful face. Initially, John doesn’t know how to respond to her: “What does she want, he thinks? Does she want me to answer her question for her?”



Although he cannot share his ageing mother's disgust reaction to the sight and thought of meat, he can acknowledge how isolated, how estranged from objective reality she has become because of this reaction. He can respond to her, that is, in existential terms, as if she were pregnant with death:

They are not yet on the expressway. He pulls the car over, switches off the engine, takes his mother in his arms. He inhales the smell of old cream, of old flesh. "There, there," he whispers in her ear. "There, there. It will soon be over." (Coetzee, *Lives* 69)



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1 Uhlmann and Woessner illustrate the continuing productiveness of this approach to Coetzee.

2 Neimneh and Muhaidat discuss how Coetzee uses Michael K's affinity with the nonhuman to develop an ecological politics in *Life & Times of Michael K*.

3 See Dooley and Phiddian for more on Swift's influence on Coetzee.

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Chris Danta  
School of Cybernetics  
Level 3 Birch Building  
ANU, Canberra 2600  
Australia  
E-mail: christopher.danta@anu.edu.au