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# J.M. Coetzee and Elizabeth Costello: Landscapes and Animals

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**Abstract:** The South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee is well-known for references to animals in his fiction, also given the fact that he and one of his well-known characters, Elizabeth Costello, raise awareness of the cruelty enacted on animals. Many studies have been conducted on Coetzee's animals, but less attention has been placed on the settings and landscapes in which the animals are situated. Hence, this study aims at understanding the role of the landscapes surrounding the animals via an ecocritical approach. The paper focuses on Coetzee's fiction featuring Elizabeth Costello, namely, *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005), and *Moral Tales* (2017) by identifying the animals and by discussing the related settings and landscapes. The research concludes that, despite the presence of several animals, there are almost no references to animals in pristine habitats, that most of the animals are in anthropized settings, and that animals' and humans' suffering are hidden in a shared landscape. This understanding is discussed as an ecological message about the interlinkages between the human and nonhuman worlds and between animals' and humans' wellbeing, also referring to the animal/human interconnectedness within the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** J.M. Coetzee; Elizabeth Costello; ecocriticism; landscape; animals; interlinkages

## 1. Introduction

The South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee is well-known for references to animals in his fiction, also given the fact that he and one of his well-known recurring characters, the fictional Australian novelist Elizabeth Costello, raise awareness of the cruelty enacted on animals<sup>1</sup>. Hence, many studies have been conducted on Coetzee's animals mostly from a philosophical, literary, and anthropological perspective (e.g., [Donovan 2004](#); [Fuentes 2006](#); and [Mulhall 2009](#)), but less attention has been placed on studying and discussing the settings and the landscapes in which the animals are situated. Exploring these landscapes may provide further insights on Coetzee's work; hence, this paper aims at providing an overview of the animals, as well as the settings and landscapes around them, with the objective to provide further understanding on Coetzee's view on the interaction between the human and nonhuman worlds.

The analysis is conducted on those of Coetzee's works that feature the character Elizabeth Costello, the fictional Australian novelist, namely:

<sup>1</sup> Coetzee is a Patron of *Voiceless-The Animal Protection Institute*. Further information at ([Voiceless-The Animal Protection Institute Website](#)).

- *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee 1999a) [LA]<sup>2</sup>: an edited volume which includes Coetzee's Tanner Lectures on Human Values held at Princeton University on 15–16 October 1997, an introduction, and four commentaries to the lectures.
- *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (Coetzee 2003) [EC]<sup>3</sup>: a collection of eight stories plus a Postscript.
- *Slow Man* (Coetzee 2005) [SM]<sup>4</sup>: a novel.
- *Moral Tales* (Coetzee 2017a) [MT]<sup>5</sup>: a collection of seven stories.

First, we provide an overview of the animals identified in those works by highlighting their provenance (e.g., real animals, intertextual references to literary or scientific animals<sup>6</sup>), and then we examine in which settings and landscapes the animals are situated with a particular focus on the nature of the landscape. Thereafter, we conclude by underlining Coetzee's message that humans' and animals' suffering occur in a shared, anthropized landscape and by discussing how this message entails a strong ecological message on the interdependence between the human and nonhuman world.

## 2. Results

### 2.1. Who Are the Animals?

The complexity in defining and describing animals is present throughout the selected works, as also confirmed in the definition of the actual word "animals", which, in the tale "The Glass Abattoir" (MT), is defined as a "catch-all word"<sup>7</sup>. Animals are addressed as a category of beings different from human beings, as species and/or groups (e.g., penguins), as well as individual animals (e.g., a pet, a zoo animal, a farm animal, and a factory-farm animal).

Concerning the arguments and viewpoints on how to define animals and on how to distinguish them (nonhuman beings) from human beings, the selected works provide definitions which are related to philosophical, religious, and literary perspectives, but also with some references to biological, behavioral, and psychological sciences. At the same time, there are some passages in which the divisions between "animals" and "humans" are questioned, as is particularly visible in conversations concerning primates, and in particular in the discussion in *The Lives of Animals* on whether Red Peter from Kafka's story (Kafka 1917) is an ape or a human being.

Different views on how to define animals, and whether human beings can actually understand what an animal is and feels are provided in the Lectures published in *The Lives of Animals*<sup>8</sup>. The first Lecture is about classifying living beings (animals and humans) and how social constructs have been used to define the categories (e.g., who eats whom). The topic is addressed through many different perspectives and characteristics: from possession of reason, a living soul, consciousness, to the distance from god(s). These considerations are discussed from philosophical (e.g., by referencing to Kant and

<sup>2</sup> The version used for this study was published by Princeton University Press (PUP; Princeton, New Jersey) in 1999 and was edited and introduced by Amy Gutmann. The actual book used is the third edition printing and the first paperback printing. LA is the abbreviation used in this paper to refer to this work.

<sup>3</sup> The version used for this study is the 2004 Vintage Edition (London). EC is the abbreviation used in this paper to refer to this work. It is to be noted that Lessons 3 and 4 are Lectures 1 and 2 in LA.

<sup>4</sup> The version used for this study is the 2006 Vintage Edition (London). SM is the abbreviation used in this paper to refer to this work.

<sup>5</sup> While the original work was written in English, the collection has been first published in Spanish (*Siete Cuentos Morales*) in May 2018 by Literatura Random House (Coetzee 2018a), and then in French (*Abattoir de Verre*) in August 2018 by Éditions du Seuil (Coetzee 2018b). As per Attridge (2019), there are no fixed plans for its publication in English (however, some of the tales were published and/or read in English, see, e.g., Coetzee 2017b, 2017c, 2017d). The French version was used as the main reference for this study, with some cross-references to the Italian translation published by Einaudi (Coetzee 2019). MT is the abbreviation used in this paper to refer to this work.

<sup>6</sup> By "scientific animals", we mean those animals used for scientific experiments and described in the scientific literature.

<sup>7</sup> In the French translation, the concept is worded as follows: "Les animaux: quel mot fourre-tout" (p. 158/MT-Fr). The reading of the tale in English at MALBA does not include part 5 of the French translation. Hence, "catch-all word" is a French–English translation by the author of this paper. It is interesting to note that the Italian translation reads "Animali: che nome impreciso" (Coetzee 2019, p. 88), which can be translated in English as "Animals: what an imprecise term".

<sup>8</sup> Thereafter, also republished as Lessons 3 and 4 in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* in 2003.

Descartes), religious (e.g., by recalling St. Thomas), anthropological (e.g., references to myths and food taboos), and biological (e.g., recalling a continuum that “stretches from the Martian [ . . . ] to the human being” p. 31/LA) perspectives, as extensively discussed by [Mulhall \(2009\)](#). The second Lecture focuses more on the legal and human rights viewpoints, by referring, *inter alia*, to language and reason via an interdisciplinary perspective enacted through the dialogue between a physicist and a philosopher of mind. In this Lecture we also find a definition of human beings, which states that “Man is an intellectual being” (p. 54/LA) who understands the complex system of interactions with other beings and “with the earth and the weather” (p. 53/LA), and implies that animals do not have such a grasp of the world. The debates and topics highlighted in these Lectures are also addressed in other fiction writing by Coetzee featuring Elizabeth Costello, including the more recent tales “The Old Woman and the Cats” and “The Glass Abattoir” (MT); the latter also giving many views from philosophy and ethology by referring to scholars and scientists, such as Heidegger, Descartes, Daston, Steiner, and Marian Dawkins. These multidisciplinary arguments seem to alert the reader to the fine line separating humans from nonhuman beings and to call the reader’s attention to the difficulties in defining the unique nature of humanity; difficulties which have been addressed by many scientists and scholars throughout history, as also discussed by [Buckeridge \(2009\)](#).

In the selected works, Coetzee not only refers to animals as an overall category of nonhuman beings, but he also includes references to given species, group of animals, and to individual animals. A brief overview of the different animals in the selected works is provided<sup>9</sup> here to illustrate which are the animals selected by Coetzee and whether these animals are real ones, intertextual references to literary animals and to scientific animals, or mainly terms and/or expressions used to define comparisons, analogies, metaphors, and allegories. Of course, each animal could also have many different characteristics and functions, as also underlined by Coetzee in the Postscript to *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*: “A dog sitting in a patch of sun licking itself, says he, is at one moment a dog and at the next a vessel of revelation” (p. 229/EC).

In *The Lives of Animals*, several animals are evoked by Elizabeth Costello and include intertextual references to both fictional and real animals. In particular, in Lecture 1, we can see two individual animals that are also intertextual references, namely the “educated ape, Red Peter”, the character from *A Report to an Academy* by [Kafka \(1917\)](#), and Sultan the chimpanzee from the chimpanzee colony housed at the beginning of the 1900s at the Anthropoid Station on the island of Tenerife by the Royal Prussian Academy of Science and described by Wolfgang Köhler in his book *The Mentality of Apes* ([Köhler 1921](#))<sup>10</sup>. While Sultan the chimpanzee is an intertextual reference to a scientific book and, hence, we can describe him as a real scientific animal within a real setting, Red Peter is an intertextual reference to a fictional animal created by Kafka and can be defined as a literary animal within a fictional setting. Other literary animals mentioned include bats, which are also an intertextual reference to *What is it like to be a bat?* published by the philosopher [Nagel \(1974\)](#), and cats as an intertextual reference to Michel de Montaigne’s *Essays/Essais* ([de Montaigne 2007](#)). More general terms to refer to animals as food are also found in the text, including “pork”, “pastrami”, “drumstick”, and “fish” (p. 83/EC), whose nature seem to be very tangible and real, as real as the death of the animals. Lecture 2 is more biodiverse than the first lecture; we find references to many different types of animals, from “insects and the microbia” (p. 105/EC), “gnat” (p. 99/EC), “snails, locusts, wolves, malaria virus, rabies virus, HI virus” (p. 113/EC), “chickens and pigs” (p. 100/EC), up to also “pensive gorillas and sexy jaguars and huggable pandas” (p. 100/EC). As in Lecture 1, we find two individual animals that are intertextual

<sup>9</sup> For a more comprehensive and detailed list of animals, see [Spini \(2019\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> The chimpanzees’ cognitive abilities were studied by psychologist Wolfgang Köhler who subsequently published his studies in a book *The Mentality of Apes* ([Köhler 1921](#)), a seminal book in primatology and comparative psychology (see, e.g., [Ruiz and Sánchez 2014](#)). The description provided by Coetzee are intertextual references to Köhler’s book and related photos/images on the cognitive experiments. It is to be noted that Coetzee refers to the very first edition of the monograph dated 1917 (see p. 71/EC) and not the second one published by Springer and generally referenced by other scholars.

literary animals, namely a panther from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "The Panther" (Rilke 1902) and a jaguar from Ted Hughes' poems "The Jaguar" and "Second Glance at the Jaguar" (Hughes 1957, 1967). On the other hand, both the panther and the jaguar, which have inspired the poems, have been identified as real zoo animals, respectively, a real panther that was housed at the *Ménagerie* of the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris, and a real jaguar that was housed at Regent's Park in London. In addition, we find that two of the four essays invited as comments to the Lectures include references to real animals, namely the ones by the philosopher Peter Singer who mentions his dog (Singer 1999), and by the primatologist Barbara Smuts who talks about her dog and the baboons which she studies as a primatologist (Smuts 1999).

In *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, animals are also found in the text, but very few are actually real animals. In Lesson 1 "Realism", there are many animals referenced, and in particular there are instances in which human characters are described as animals via similes, metaphors, and analogies: for instance, Elizabeth is compared to an "old, tired circus seal" (p. 3/EC), writers and thinkers are defined as "fish or fowl" (p. 10/EC), and writers also as "monkeys [ . . . ] picking away at typewriters" (p. 27/EC). There are also brief references to "cockatoos screeching at the bottom of the garden", parrots typical of the Australian fauna usually mentioned by Costello to define her childhood in Melbourne (p. 9/EC), extensive references to the above-mentioned ape in Kafka's story (pp. 18–19/EC and p. 32/EC), along with the mentioning of gorillas and elephants in an abstract term (p. 32–33/EC). Lesson 2 "The Novel in Africa" includes real wildlife inhabiting the Antarctic environment, namely whales (pp. 37–38/EC), King penguins (p. 54/EC), and albatrosses (p. 55/EC). There is a brief reference to elephant(s) ("[ . . . ] he is an expert in the same way that an elephant is an expert on elephants: [ . . . ]", p. 43/EC). Lessons 3 and 4 are the above-mentioned Lecture 1 and Lecture 2 (see above). In Lessons 5 "The Humanities in Africa" is almost animals-free, apart from referring to the word "animals" (p. 136/EC) and to highlight that an academic attire features some "ermine-trimming" (p. 124/EC). Lesson 6 "The Problem of Evil" addresses the theme of evil and cruelty, and mentions animals as "animal populations" and "cattle, sheep, poultry" (p. 156/EC). It also refers to "Koba the bear" (name given by Lenin to Stalin "Koba") and defines Satan as a "liver fluke" or "pinworm" (p. 180/EC). Lesson 7 "Eros" makes reference to animals in trying to describe sexual acts by gods (p. 187/EC), but also in defining humans vis-à-vis gods as when Elizabeth Costello speculates whether gods are as curious about us as we, humans, are curious about "chimps", "birds", and "flies" (p. 190/EC). In Lesson 8 "At the Gate" animals and humans are part of an overall allegory in which some of the human characters are described as animals, and animals seem to be defined as divine creatures. Here, we recall the intertextual references to work of the French caricaturist Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard Grandville (as well as to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll [Carroll 1865]) in describing the judges by referring to animals, the realistic and yet allegoric frogs in which Elizabeth Costello believes (p. 216/EC) and the allegoric presence of a "DOG/GOD" (p. 225/EC).

In the novel *Slow Man*, we do not find as many species as in the other works, and very few real animals and animal characters. Animals are mostly used as simile, metaphors, and analogies within expressions and/or in the definition of feelings and characteristics of human characters. For instance, the protagonist's amputated leg is defined as "sightless deep-water fish" and as "cured ham" (p. 28/SM), or the poor people's frightened state in the Fauchery's photos is compared to that of the "oxen at the portal of the slaughterhouse." (p. 52/SM). Among the real animals, there are some animals which are more recurrent than others, namely dogs and ducks, which can be seen as real animal presence; a similar fauna to the one found in *Disgrace* (1999b) but with a less important role. In particular, we refer to the sick dog in Lourdes which is shot by Paul Rayment's father (pp. 43–44/SM) and a dog which comes around Paul Rayment and Elizabeth Costello (p. 194/SM). The importance of bringing a dog into the story is also underlined in Costello's metafictional notes: "Bring in a dog, a little mutt that wags its tail to all and sundry, yapping, eager to please?" (p. 122/SM), almost by recalling the fact that dogs are "part of the furniture", as highlighted by Coetzee (1999b) in *Disgrace*. Ducks are found in several instances within the novel, such as in the case when Elizabeth Costello is

“clustered around by ducks” in the park (p. 151/SM) and when “the duck family, more than a family, the duck clan, is gathering for another assault on the land. Evidently, he [Paul Rayment], the intruder, has been assessed and found harmless” (p. 157/SM). Other presences of real animals include “bees” (p. 253/SM), “birds” (e.g., p. 193/SM), and “crickets” (p. 11/SM), which seem also to be featured as decoration to the settings. Furthermore, there are also citations of animals made by humans, such as the “mechanical duck”<sup>11</sup> (p. 91/SM) and the “birds, toads, cats, dogs” moulded in plasticine, which is a fictional intertextual reference to a book by Elizabeth Costello (p. 119/SM).

*Moral Tales* includes several references to real animals in the stories. Two of these tales even feature animals in their titles. The first tale is entitled “The Dog” and describes a real animal—a captive dog, a pet, whose name is not mentioned—who is expressing his dominance over human beings, even if he is enclosed in a human setting. The other tale is the “The Old Woman and the Cats” and illustrates the presence in Costello’s home of about a dozen cats that are not accepted by human beings as they have become too wild. Furthermore, the tale “As a Woman Grows Older” includes an allegorical reference to a cuckoo which Elizabeth Costello and her daughter hear singing “a two-note motif, high-low, repeated time after time” and which is defined as “a nasty bird”. Most of the references to animals are present in the tale “The Glass Abattoir”, such as the animals to be killed in the glass abattoir (e.g., pigs and chicks), the young goat that will be slaughtered at the market, the rabbit used in Descartes’ experiment, and the chick at the hatchery. The goat could be considered as an intertextual reference to the goat in *Disgrace*, the rabbit is a real scientific animal, which is described by an intertextual reference to Gary Steiner’s book *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (2005)<sup>12</sup>, and the hatchery chick is portrayed as a real animal featured in a documentary and, hence, a reference to either a fictional or real documentary.

Despite the many representatives of the animal kingdom in the selected works, we do not see any specific skews towards wildlife from Coetzee’s home country (South Africa) nor from his adopted country and Costello’s home country (Australia). Only brief references are made to African wildlife (e.g., chimpanzee, gorilla, giraffe, elephant, and monkey) and to Australian endemic fauna (e.g., cockatoo and emu). In fact, animals are not defined as a representation of the natural history of the geographical place in which the story unfolds, as they are mostly defined via an anthropocentric approach to their use by human beings. Animals are defined as animals for knowledge and science (e.g., Sultan the chimpanzee), for entertainment and tourism (e.g., the zoo panther and the albatrosses in Antarctica), for food and livelihood (e.g., the chick at the hatchery), for company (e.g., the cats in Spain), for definition of outdoor spaces (e.g., ducks in the park), and for cultural symbols (e.g., ermine-trimmed academic gown).

On the other hand, we also find personification and anthropomorphism applied to the description of some of the animals<sup>13</sup> and thus making the animals more active subjects than just objects of human activities. This will be in line with what is described by de Waal concerning anthropomorphism as a mean to “place animals closer to us than to machine” (de Waal 2006, p. 63). Anthropomorphism is accompanied by the application of zoomorphism to people, as for instance clearly visible in the description of the judges in Lesson 8, also including an intertextual reference to the work of Grandville.

The simultaneous presence of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism can be considered as a way to recall that “while it is true that animals are not humans, it is equally true that humans are animals” (de Waal 2006, p. 65); an argument also underlined by Elizabeth Costello in “The Glass Abattoir”. However, the intertwining of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism may also be interpreted as John

<sup>11</sup> The story refers to a mechanical duck which came to Croatia in 1680, from Sweden; however, the French mechanical duck (*Canard Digérateur*, or Digesting Duck) built by Jacques de Vaucanson may actual be the real reference.

<sup>12</sup> The description by Coetzee is in line with the one of the experiments outlined in Gary Steiner’s book *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* published by Pittsburgh University Press in 2005. See Steiner (2005, p. 159).

<sup>13</sup> There is also a discussion on anthropomorphism *per se* in Lecture 1 while discussing the description of chimpanzee behaviour in Köhler’s book (see p. 30/LA).

Berger interprets the use of animals in Grandville's work, only as a way for Grandville to "en masse to 'people' situations" (Berger 1977, p. 29). Here, given Coetzee's country of origin, we could also hint an association to South African folktales and myths in which, as also discussed by Morrison (2008), animals are personified and in which there are no rigid distinctions between human and nonhuman characters and worlds.

The settings and landscapes in which the animals are situated and described may provide further insight on how to further interpret their presence in Coetzee's works but also on Coetzee's view on the interlinkages between human and nonhuman worlds.

## 2.2. Where Are the Animals?

There are many settings described in the selected works: there are natural and built environments ranging from American Colleges, to Antarctica, Zululand, Australia and up to Amsterdam, Nice, and a rural village in Spain. Most of the stories unfold in private and secluded places (e.g., homes, university lecture halls, hotels, ladies' rooms, hospitals, and nursing homes), non-places or places of transitions (e.g., airports and cars), and outdoor environments (e.g., parks, rural areas, and urban areas). Some places are real places (e.g., Amsterdam with its canals and Rijksmuseum, pp. 160–61/EC, and the Spencer Street Bridge in Melbourne, Lesson 6/EC), some are fictitious (e.g., Dulgannon River, Lesson 8/EC), and some refer to places described in other literary texts (e.g., from Paul West's *The Very Rich Hours of Count Von Stauffenberg*<sup>14</sup>, Lesson 6/EC) or depicted in real photos (e.g., Antoine Fauchery's photos, e.g., p. 52/SM).

As highlighted in Section 2.1, despite the great number of animals mentioned in the texts, there are several literary and scientific animals situated in anthropized landscapes via intertextual references, and there are very few real animals as animal characters in real landscapes. In fact, there is actually only one reference to real wild animals in a natural habitat: the animals and landscapes surrounding the events in the Southern Ocean<sup>15</sup> and Antarctica, in Lesson 2/EC. Given that the setting is described for its "inhuman cold" (p. 35/EC), we have the feeling that it is a wild space not corrupted by humans. The ocean and seascape are not really described in its geo-physical character (given the presence of the fog, p. 54/EC) but only via reference to earlier literary work by Edgar Allan Poe (e.g., "Poe never laid eyes on it, Edgar Allan, but criss-crossed it in his mind", p. 54/EC) and to the ocean's inhabitants (e.g., "The sea full of things that seem like us but are not. Sea-flowers that gape and devour. Eels, each barbed maw with a gut hanging from it", p. 54/EC). In fact, there is an overview of the Antarctic wildlife visible to Elizabeth Costello and the other passengers on arrival at Macquarie Island. King penguins and albatrosses are described from the eyes of the tourists who see idyllic scenes of innocent penguins, and from Elizabeth Costello's view recalling that the island was the hub of the penguin industry in the 19th Century (p. 55/EC). This dual perception highlights that we are in the presence of an anthropized landscape where humans have influenced and managed the natural environment. This is confirmed also by studying the history of the island, which highlights many different types of human disturbances (including the penguin and sea lion industries) and most recent conservation efforts within the island, which has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site<sup>16</sup>.

Other real settings where we expect to find several animals are rural landscapes in which human and nonhuman lives are intertwined in the practice of agriculture. Lessons 5 and 8 include events in rural areas, namely rural Zululand in South Africa (Lesson 5) and rural Victoria in Australia (Lesson 8); two environments that are described in very different ways.

The description of rural Zululand is mainly the description of the Hospital of the Blessed Mary on the Hill, Marianhill, and its chapel. While we have a feeling of a fictitious place (maybe given by the

<sup>14</sup> See West (1980).

<sup>15</sup> There is also reference to the Indian Ocean on p. 116/EC, but there is no description of it (it is just something to cross via an airplane).

<sup>16</sup> For information on the history of Macquarie Island, see (Australian Government's Antarctica Website).

presence of a TV crew), the place described could be the actual Mariannhill (written with two “n”) in Kwazulu-Natal where the hospital was built in 1927 by a group of Trappist monks (since October 2007, the hospital is called the St. Mary Hospital and is managed by the Kwazulu-Natal [KZN] Department of Health<sup>17</sup>). Again, there are not many descriptions of the geo-physical components of rural Zululand, with exceptions of few insights towards the end of the story: “She waves a hand towards the window, towards the hospital buildings baking under the sun, towards the dirt road winding up into the barren hills” (p. 141/EC). There are a few hints concerning the architecture of the buildings (i.e., the chapel as an “unpretentious brick and iron building”, p. 134/EC). The events set in Marianhill do not include any specific animal presence or animal character; not even bulls and cattle characteristics of Zulu livelihood and culture. The absence of animals is also confirmed within the conversation between Elizabeth Costello and Joseph the carver, as when asked if he carves animals, he says that “Animals is just for tourists” (p. 136/EC). This brief and simple sentence include all the stereotypes related to the African wildlife and landscape<sup>18</sup> and highlights one of the above-mentioned functions of animals from an anthropocentric perspective (i.e., for tourism). This view is also corroborated by other references in the selected works to the so-called charismatic wildlife species, such as a great apes and elephants, as they are not described in wild landscapes but only in abstract and/or captivity-related settings (e.g., “A gorilla cage with the idea of a gorilla in it, an elephant cage with the idea of elephants in it?”, p. 32/EC).

Lesson 8 provides a very thorough description of rural Victoria, by including geo-climatic features of the landscape (e.g., “a region of climatic extremes: of scorching droughts followed by torrential rains that swelled the rivers with the carcasses of drowned animals”, p. 216/EC) and a lengthy description of the frog life cycle in the Dulgannon river and mudflats, with frogs that seem to blend into the mudflats. It is a very organic, ecological, and realistic image of the landscape, even if this river and surrounding landscape do not correspond to any particular geographic area in Australia (e.g., Harvey 2011). It is an allegorical landscape told within an overall allegorical story (and full of literary clichés, according to Elizabeth Costello) suggesting nature as a real entity in which to believe. This could be in line with the fact that the role of the frogs in the landscape is possibly based on myths and folklore concerning frogs and rain in Southern Africa (see e.g., Phaka et al. 2019<sup>19</sup>).

The tale “As a Woman Grows Older depicts another allegorical landscape that is defined by the road taking Elizabeth Costello and her daughter to the *auberge Les Deux Ermites* in the French countryside; an explicit allegory confirmed by Elizabeth Costello’s thoughts about travelling in an allegory. It is the landscape that features the above-mentioned cuckoo, which, given the bird’s brood parasites behavior, seems to represent the idea of imposing one’s life and survival unto others; being either human beings or animals.

The few real animals such as dogs, ducks, bees, and birds are located in green spaces, such as parks, gardens, and other outdoor spaces — real landscapes almost defined by the presence of these animals. However, most of the animals featured in the text are situated in captive, private, and secluded settings: animals in homes, animals in farms, animals in zoos, animals in laboratories and research stations, and animals in factory-farms. These settings and related landscapes are defined by intertextual references or by theoretical arguments and metaphors. To exemplify this, we recall the many references to zoos, both in realistic, literary, and metaphorical ways. For instance, the zoo is depicted in a metaphorical way in *Slow Man* when Paul Rayment suggests to Elizabeth Costello that she could get a zoo and put all the characters made up by her in cages for the public’s entertainment. On the other hand, literary references to zoos are found in the discussion of Rilke’s and Hughes’ poems, which, as mentioned

<sup>17</sup> For further information see (Department of Health of the Province of Kwazulu-Natal Website 2018).

<sup>18</sup> It is to be highlighted that in *Foe* (Coetzee 1986), Coetzee describes the stereotypical image of the African landscape as follows “Africa I represented as a row of palm trees with a lion roaming among them” (p. 146).

<sup>19</sup> Phaka et al. state that among common myths there are “that grass frogs bring rain while African clawed frogs (Pipidae) are thought to fall from the sky during torrential rain” (Phaka et al. 2019, p. 6).

above, are inspired by real zoo animals in real zoological gardens. Again, there are not many details on the actual “staging in the zoo” (p. 50/LA), but we can see that the focus is on the perception of the caged environment by the animals: a prison as perceived by Rilke’s panther (“It seems to him there are a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.” quoted from a translation of the poem<sup>20</sup>) and no cage as felt by Hughes’ jaguar (as said by Elizabeth Costello “The cage has no reality to him, he is *elsewhere*” on p. 51/LA and as said in the poem “He spins from the bars, but there’s no cage to him”). The different perception of the captive environment is also addressed from the people’s point of view, when the text refers to the fact that the zoo exhibits a lack of private life for animals (pp. 32–33/EC) and the fact that, at the beginning, zoos were perceived as places in which to insult animals (“the spectators felt the animals were there to be insulted and abused like prisoners in triumph”, pp. 58–59/LA).

This differential perception of the surroundings is also seen in the more detailed descriptions of the chimpanzee Sultan’s captive settings and life on Tenerife island. In this context, the environment is described in more detail (this is probably due to the many photos and images of the cognition experiments described in the text: images also used in introductory primatology classes<sup>21</sup>) so as to show both the scientist’s and the chimpanzee’s probable perception of the experiment’s design and the overall landscape. The reference to being on an island—even if the island landscape is not described—may also imply the explicit isolation of the field station from mainland where people live and from the chimpanzees’ places of origins (chimpanzees are not endemic to Tenerife island), a separation that recalls the establishment of prisons on islands (e.g., Robben Island in South Africa). In fact, the text corroborates this view as it refers to the place as “the island prison camp” (p. 29/LA).

There are also pets in home settings, such as the dog in the tale “The Dog”, as well as the cats in the tale “The Old Woman and the Cats” (MT). Both the dog and the cats are kept and fed by humans, yet they still exhibit their wild nature to the point that the cats have become too wild for the people in the village to take care of them (only Elizabeth Costello can take care of them). Their life and death depend on humans, as shown by the suffering dog, which is killed in the woods in Lourdes (p. 44/SM), a clear intertextual reference to the dogs euthanized in *Disgrace*.

Last, but definitely not the least, there are those animals that are destined to become food on our tables and that are either raised in farms (e.g., Camus’ hen referred to in *The Lives of Animals* and the goat described in *Moral Tales*) or in factory-farms. In particular, specific references to factory-farms and slaughterhouses are found, such as in the case of the Chicago stockyard, the “slaughterhouses of the world” (p. 159/EC), and the planned glass abattoir and the poultry hatchery in the tale “The Glass Abattoir” (MT).

Again, the description of these places is not very detailed; the places are in a way “nondescript space”<sup>22</sup>. However, they are more defined by the landscapes than the other above-mentioned settings, as we are told that they are explicitly hidden in the landscape so as to be kept out of sight. They are off-scene, as they are “obscene” (*sensu* pp. 158–159/EC). The issue is brought up in several instances, including when Elizabeth Costello talks about the American town of Waltham: “It seems a pleasant enough town. I saw no horrors, no drug-testing laboratories, no factory farms, no abattoirs. Yet I am sure there are here. They must be. They simply do not advertise themselves” (p. 21/LA). This matter is also underlined in discussing the perception of the landscapes in Poland and Germany during the Holocaust where people lived “more than few kilometers from a camp of some kind” (p. 20/LA). Elizabeth Costello’s somewhat eccentric idea of building a glass-walled abattoir in the middle of the city as a demonstration site of what happens in a real abattoir (“The Glass Abattoir”<sup>23</sup>, MT) confirms the unspoken social contract that these types of sites have to be hidden within the landscape.

<sup>20</sup> See translation by Stephen Mitchell accessed on 20 June 2020 at <http://wenaus.org/poetry/panther.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Photos can be seen at: ([Max Planck Institute \(EVA\)](#)).

<sup>22</sup> *Sensu* “a nondescript space that could have been a garage or equally well an abattoir” (p. 158/EC), with reference to Paul West’s description of the execution place.

<sup>23</sup> See reading/videos available at ([Coetzee 2017d](#); [Malec 2017](#)).

We can conclude that throughout the selected works, the animals are mostly situated in anthropized setting, which are not described in a detailed environment and illustrated landscape<sup>24</sup>. In many cases, a literary representation of the landscape is almost absent; yet, somehow, we do feel the landscape in which the story unfolds. It almost confirms that for Coetzee a landscape is something to be felt and not to be illustrated; Coetzee refers to the verb feel with respect to the landscape in the text in some instances, namely: “he had a feel for landscape, for the bush, that was genuine” (p. 146/EC) or “There are moments when it feels like Italy” (p. 217/EC). This is very much in line with the definition of “landscape” as an area “as perceived by people” (ELC 2000<sup>25</sup>).

This is a different type of approach to the landscapes surrounding animals, with respect to other works by Coetzee. In fact, other works includes more examples of naturalistic detailed descriptions of landscapes, such as the description of the island landscape in *Foe*<sup>26</sup> (1986) and of Lucy’s farm in *Disgrace* (1999b), as well as the ecological account of the Fens in *He and his man* (Coetzee 2004; NobelPrize.org 2020). This difference is probably due to different viewpoints on the landscapes, as the selected works include the perception by selected animals of the landscapes; a perception which includes an awareness of the role of humans in managing and controlling the landscape and other beings.

### 3. Discussion: Landscapes, Animals, and People on This “Earthly Cage”

In effect, the settings and environments around animals in the selected works are landscapes that are very much managed and controlled by humans, to the extent that the natural components are not very prominent. In the texts, even the most pristine wild-looking landscapes are described as being managed and controlled through human activities (e.g., conservation and tourism on Macquarie Island)<sup>27</sup>. In fact, the brief strokes to illustrate the landscapes, or the absence of a literary description of the landscape, seem to convey a very strong message about the interaction between the human and the nonhuman worlds, namely a message about dominance, segregation, and control. This message is also reinforced by highlighting the above-mentioned viewpoints of animals in perceiving the human-made landscape, captivity, and segregation. This is exemplified by literary and scientific animals in *The Lives of Animals*, namely the jaguar and the panther in their perceptions of the zoo-cage, the literary ape Red Peter in his understanding of freedom, and the chimpanzee Sultan in his reading of the experiment’s design. Another example is also the awareness of the gate by a real dog causing his aggressive behavior (“The Dog”/MT), in contrast to the calmness exhibited by the allegorical old dog beyond which there is “nothing but a desert of sand and stone, to infinity” (Lesson 8 “At the Gate”, pp. 224–25/EC). Given the nature of these animals, the viewpoints are those of the human beings interpreting the settings, via exhibiting sympathy and empathy with the animals; an issue which entails a shared experience of a shared landscape.

Furthermore, as we have seen in Section 2.1, the landscapes are not described in detail, and here we suggest that the non-description conveys the places’ indifference with respect to the cruelty which they can hide, and recalls that it can pertain “all” places on planet earth. This view reflects the 19th century global societal transformations that separate society from nature, namely, when slaughter houses are hidden in the landscapes (see e.g., Rigby 2015), animals are becoming machine-like objects and products (see e.g., Beldo 2017), and public zoos are established as demonstration of “human dominance of nature” (Grant 2006, p. 60) and as sites of “enforced marginalization” (Berger 1977, p. 31). These are changes which are also underlined by Coetzee himself when discussing the transformations

<sup>24</sup> Example of more detailed landscape by Coetzee can be found in the Nobel Prize Lecture “He and his man” (Coetzee 2004; NobelPrize.org 2020).

<sup>25</sup> See definition of “landscape” as used in the text of the European Landscape Convention (ELC 2000): “‘Landscape’ means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors;”.

<sup>26</sup> As reported by Samuelson (2020), the description is based on features from the place where Coetzee wrote *Foe*, namely the Cape Peninsula in South Africa.

<sup>27</sup> This also reminds us of the pristine environment of the island and its human-made terraced landscape in *Foe*.

in the processing of animals into meat and other animal products (Coetzee 2007) and clearly conveyed in the idea by Elizabeth Costello to establish a glass-walled abattoir as a demonstration site in the middle of the city (“The Glass Abattoir”/MT).

These 19th century transformations are occurring in parallel to the changes that separate dominant people from subordinate individuals and that segregate colonizing populations from the colonized, through the management of the landscape. In fact, throughout history, landscapes have been populated with “sites of enforcement marginalization”—be them zoos, prisons, townships, or even concentration camps, enabling dominant communities to benefit the most from the local human, animal and/or mineral resources. Coetzee’s home country, South Africa, is definitely a place where the management of landscape has enabled powerful domination over other human and nonhuman resources through the establishment of the apartheid system, including a strong landscape management system defined by the Group Area Act (see e.g., Nattras 2017).

Hence, we suggest that Coetzee’s view of the use of the landscape, to control and inflict cruelty on animals, is also a way to highlight that the same practice can be applied on other people. This point is supported by the arguments provided by Coetzee in drawing a fine and blurred line between animals and humans, and by hinting to southern African traditional views in which individuals are part of the whole; not just part of the human world (as developed within the concept of *ubuntu*) but also of the natural world (Morrison 2008). Hence, by suggesting a communal experience by humans and animals within the landscape, the selected works highlight that animals’ and humans’ suffering are hidden in shared landscapes. This allows Coetzee to convey a strong ecological message that humans’ and animals’ lives and wellbeing are interconnected within a web of landscapes on planet earth.

While this understanding is very much in line with the theoretical scientific basis of the “One Health” approach (see, e.g., OIE 2020), it is definitely an issue which is not embedded in the broader sustainability consciousness nor in its practices. Global crises like the current COVID-19 Pandemic are further demonstrating the importance of shedding light on hidden parts of the landscape, as they cannot be forgotten or separated from the pleasant touristic parts. This has been clearly seen in the difficulties in identifying the place of origin of the animal–human transmission for the novel coronavirus, as well as to the attention placed on slaughterhouses and abattoirs within the pandemic. In fact, recent attention given to abattoirs, as settings where the working conditions are furthering the human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus, highlights that those places are not just provoking suffering against animals but also against humans (see, e.g., FAO 2020; FRANCE 24 2020). Apart from the epidemiological impact on the workers, the lack of availability of meat—due to the suspension of activities in abattoirs—is also having a negative impact on those communities who benefit from the mass-production of meat and other animal products. This clearly confirms that hiding cruelty against animals and cruelty against people in “site of enforced marginalization” within a well-planned and managed landscape will ultimately have a negative impact even on those people who perpetrate cruelty and evil actions.

Hence, by showing us where animals are now living and suffering, Coetzee is showing us where we are all also living and suffering, on what he calls the “earthly cage” (p. 190/EC), and is conveying a strong ecological message about the interlinkages between animals’ and humans’ wellbeing. Elizabeth Costello’s idea to build a glass abattoir as a demonstration site in the middle of the city may not actually be a bad idea to remind people about the fact that animal and human suffering is still present, even if not visible, in the landscape.

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