

## Rewriting History/Animality in J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*

Brian Daniel Deyo

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**Abstract:** This article examines two works of fiction that speculatively rewrite settler histories in South Africa and Australia, J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*. In the interest of critically addressing the silences, elisions, and ideological simplifications of imperialist histories of the colonial encounter, both texts imaginatively attend to the lived experiences of European settlers and indigenous peoples during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In their respective accounts of the colonial encounter, Coetzee and Flanagan represent how racist, anthropocentric, and ecophobic mentalities are unsettled by affective intensities that instantiate the body's resistance to the political, economic, social, and religious logics of colonialism. Both authors coordinate the body's resistance with animality, which in turn is posited as a kind of affective power that has the potential to ethically and aesthetically reconfigure the human-animal binary of Western discourse. This essay proposes that Coetzee and Flanagan attempt to resituate the human ecologically by rewriting history, imaginatively recuperating the value of indigenous sensibilities, and positively reinscribing human animality.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, settler colonialism, J.M Coetzee, Richard Flanagan

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The song is gone; the dance  
is secret with the dancers in the earth,  
the ritual useless, and the tribal story  
lost in an alien tale.  
Judith Wright, "Bora Ring"

Animals have been figures of ambivalence in many human cultures.<sup>1</sup> We need an analytic that accounts for how and why ambivalence toward animals may reflect an animus toward our own animality. Moreover, we need to consider the way history modulates animosity toward animals and human animality.<sup>2</sup> The vexed, unsettling relation to human animality played a significant role in the shaping of attitudes toward indigenous peoples, animals, and the environment throughout histories of colonial settlement. The practical consequences of such attitudes were, and still are, far-reaching in scope and magnitude. Val Plumwood traces the origins of such attitudes, which imply a “rationalist hyper-separation of human identity from nature,” to antiquity (8). The long-standing, inveterate practice of abstracting human-centered forms of reason from the field of nature evolved into an especially virulent stance toward embodiment and materiality during the Enlightenment and became especially apparent in “historical projects of subduing and colonizing nature [that] have come to full flower only in modernity” (Plumwood 15).

These historical projects, driven as they were by Cartesian assumptions of the uniqueness, power, and integrity of reason, were also aided by European religious ideas on the unique destiny of “Man,” which poses a rather formidable contradiction. One way to parse this matter is to speculate whether both sides of the contradiction—the claims of reason and religious faith—are similarly constituted to varying degrees by irrational instincts for mastery and control. As Simon Estok suggests, “control of the natural environment, understood as a God-given right in Western culture, *implies* ecophobia,” which he defines as an “irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world” (4–5; emphasis added). Estok maintains that ecophobia, while it may manifest itself in a variety of ways and historical contexts, is particularly acute—even if subtle—in Western discourse. Referring to the Book of Genesis, he speculates on what may be driving its textualization of human ascendancy over the natural world: “One of the constitutional moments in Western history has control as its key issue: the biblical imperative about human relations with nature gives Man (a man actually: Adam) divine authority to control everything that lives” (5). The biblical imperative to which he refers illustrates several items I believe postcolonial ecocriti-

cism needs to attend to in its critical practice. It is, first and foremost, about “power and control” (Estok 5). Estok reads the imperative as constitutively Western and male, sanctioned by God, and directed to the extra-human world in its entirety, positing “Man” as a kind of demigod. What remains tacit, as he wants to insist, is a kind of absent referent: ecophobia. And while Estok maintains ecophobia is probably universal inasmuch as it is a symptom of human beings’ feelings of insecurity with respect to the unpredictability of nature in the most general sense, he also suggests it may denote anxiety that what goes by the name of “Man” is insuperably tied to an animal body, to nature, to mortality, in addition to a realm of contingency over which it has limited control. And it is precisely this anxiety that may have been particularly unsettling throughout the course of settler histories.

In the interest of theorizing ecophobia I attend in the main to two works by postcolonial writers that limn the psychological complexities the term might be made to designate: J. M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands* and Richard Flanagan’s *Wanting*. Coetzee and Flanagan imaginatively rewrite settler histories in South Africa and Australia, respectively. Both novels can be read as critical interventions that attempt to redress the distortions and abuses of imperial historiographies, namely those that represent colonial histories as part and parcel of the triumphal, fully legitimate achievement of European modernity. To achieve this end, Coetzee and Flanagan speculate on the lived immediacy of encounters between Europeans and indigenous peoples.

**“Hottentot, Hottentot, / I am not a Hottentot”: Unsettling Settler History in J. M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands***

*Dusklands* rewrites official accounts of the settler experience and explores how one man, Jacobus Coetzee, situates himself vis-à-vis the African wilderness and the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. It dramatizes what Sue Kossew refers to as “the deep anxieties about identity, settlement and belonging to the land that is characteristic of settler-invader colonies” (25). Moreover, the novella’s analytic of the colonial encounter works to identify and limn the affective bases of colonial racial ideology. The radical differences of the everyday life of indigenous peoples,

which posed significant challenges to the economic values of European society, are considered in richly nuanced psychological detail, a strategic move Coetzee deploys to rectify the obfuscations or silences of imperial historiography.<sup>3</sup> However, though Jacobus is driven into the heart of the “wilderness” by material necessity, his attitudes toward the so-called Hottentots (or Khoikhoi)<sup>4</sup> are not easily accounted for by capitalist ideology alone. Economic rationality forms only a part of the calculus of his representations of indigenous peoples, for he encounters a world of difference that fundamentally challenges the idea of his own humanity. Jacobus’ character is freighted with Enlightenment ideas about “Man,” Nature, reason, and the role of Providence in history—all of which work together, as a conceptual system, to posit an anthropocentric universe. Though he confidently situates himself at the centre of this system, his encounters with the land and peoples of Southern Africa radically de-center his point of view.<sup>5</sup> When his identity is undermined, he is prone to violent acts that underscore a deep-seated irrational fear of nature, matter, and human animality. As Coetzee intimates, Jacobus’ pathology is tacitly driven by an even deeper fear that, in spite of what he *thinks*, his very being is reducible to and, what is worse, bound up with nature in ways that belie his desires for transcendence.<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, the indigenous peoples of South Africa are represented by Jacobus as animals: sunk in a sensory, sensuous body, driven by instinct and passion.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he sees the indigene as ineluctably lodged within a mechanistically conceived natural order. Thus he consistently imposes conceptual barriers between himself and nature, a realm that is always already subject to the domesticating power of his gaze. We see how this works via his reactions to the African wilderness, which demonstrate a decidedly abstract, anthropocentric view of reality. As he embarks on a quest for ivory with a group of Khoikhoi servants, the narrative dramatizes the limitations of his point of view, which evinces a totalizing view of nonhuman exteriority. Armed with guns, beasts of burden, and a cart to carry the various accoutrements of civilization to defend the self against the privations and perils of the frontier, Jacobus can also be said to defend himself against the African wild with a host of ideas. One idea to which he is particularly beholden

is that the world he enters is governable by the powers of reason. As he confronts the alterity of the wilderness, he thinks:

In the wild I lose my sense of boundaries. This is a consequence of space and solitude. The operation of space is thus: the *five senses* stretch out from the body they inhabit, but *four* stretch out into a vacuum. The ear cannot hear, the nose cannot smell, the tongue cannot taste, the skin cannot feel. . . . *Only the eyes have power.* The eyes are free, they reach out to the horizon all around. Nothing is hidden from the eyes. As the other senses go numb or dumb the eyes flex and extend themselves. *I become a spherical reflecting eye* moving through the wilderness and ingesting it. Destroyer of wilderness . . . *I am all that I see.* Such loneliness! Not a stone, not a wretched provident ant that is not comprehended in this traveling sphere. What is there that is not me? I am a transparent sac with a black core full of images and a gun. (Coetzee, *Dusklands* 79; emphasis added)

Jacobus is represented as a disembodied consciousness that assimilates the singular particulars of the world in strict accordance with an abstract idea: namely that everything he “sees” can be ordered and thereby mastered by reason.<sup>8</sup> Note the fashion whereby the first person pronoun, “I,” is suggestively conflated with the “eye,” which is implicitly coordinated with the *cogito*, an intellectual power that is presumed to yield a fully comprehending—indeed comprehensive—knowledge of the landscape and its inhabitants. As David Attwell argues, the above meditation on boundaries parodies the “scientific discourses that have evolved in the wake of the Enlightenment,” thereby “laying bare the narrator’s subject-position,” revealing it to be, above all, a “fiction of self assertion” (Attwell 39, 48). Moreover, as Attwell explains, such discourses are “the principal means” through which the narrator works to “manage” the world and “achieve self-affirmation and mastery” (39–40). One may also add that Jacobus’ disposition toward extra-human reality is extraordinarily phlegmatic, suggesting a carefully controlled, almost reflexive aversion to sense and feeling; thus his subjectivity seems im-mured within a cognitive firewall that cannot be affected or touched by

his environs.<sup>9</sup> Jacobus' assertion that "only the eyes have power" suggests power is indeed a function of insensibility (Coetzee, *Dusklands* 79). And Coetzee's representation of Jacobus' rarefied mental description of "his" environment is so impervious to reality as to render him blind. Not only is he blind to his surroundings, he exalts himself with respect to indigenous peoples. The mind of the indigene, according to Jacobus, is incapable of mastering and controlling the passions; it is merely played upon by exteriority without the aid of reason. But there is a special kind of irony afoot, for Jacobus' protestations of superiority are tellingly strident. One is tempted, if not compelled, to read his derogatory representations of the indigene as symptoms of fear: the fear that he is, at bottom, no different, and that his pretensions to reason are none other than an expression of this fear.

Jacobus' mechanical insistence on the animality of the indigene is consistent with his failure to identify or understand the logics of indigenous society, culture, and history, and this failure is characterized as deeply irrational and dogmatic.<sup>10</sup> Consider, for instance, Jacobus' classification of a Khoikhoi camp he settles upon in his travels:

It consisted of perhaps forty huts arranged in a rough circle. . . . The huts were of uniform construction: bark mats and animal skins spread over hemispheres of supple branches that had been thrust into the ground and lashed together at the apex. The apex is open, allowing the Hottentot abed a barred view of the night sky. It has led to neither a special relationship with the sky-gods nor a Hottentot astrology. It is *nothing but* a smoke hole. (77; emphasis added)

Jacobus expresses a dark fascination with the apparent unreflective innocence of the Khoikhoi, which he adduces from their failure to conceive of metaphysics or organized religion. As he notes earlier: "The one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We, however, are Christians, a folk with a destiny" (57). The Khoikhoi are conceived to be *nothing but* animals, and for him this is proved by the fact that they appear to be "locked into the present" (57). In other words, the indigene "does not care where he comes from or where he is going" (57–58). Thus

for Jacobus the human is indexed by the capacity to imagine oneself—or *a* self—within the framework of historical time. This particular conception of the human depends on a belief in divine Providence, which, of course, lends an illusion of legitimacy to his evangelical mission in the African wilderness. As he reiterates, “I am a tool in the hands of history” (106). Again, Coetzee deploys irony to satirize Jacobus’ claims to reason. Keeping in mind Jacobus’ figuration of the indigene as natural slave—“They lacked all will, they were born slaves” (74)—one cannot miss Jacobus’ enslavement to history: in other words, the very discourses that empower him as a white European male settler also divest him of the freedom to think, feel, imagine, and act outside of their terms.<sup>11</sup>

If the passage cited above is read as critical illustration of the triumph of history *and* the failure of the sympathetic imagination, its irony becomes even more complex. The fact that the apex is described neither as window onto revelation nor as a spur to metaphysical flights of fancy intimates Coetzee’s skepticism with regard to his creation’s judgments. The phrase “nothing but” astringently conveys a pathological dimension of settler culture, a culture that would appear to demand from the world explicit confirmation of the unique value and sanctity of what goes by the name of human experience: to be more specific, the experience of white, Christian males of European origin in the particular time and place *Dusklands* represents (Coetzee, *Dusklands* 77). Succinctly put, the attitude of contempt for the indigene’s apparent lack of interiority is satirized and transvalued for the reader, for Jacobus’ contempt is a function of his visceral, virtually unstinting commitment to a version of Christianity that dovetails all too neatly with the acquisitive logics of colonialism.

Jacobus’ faith in himself is indeed sutured by his faith in God, which is in its turn tied to the idea that nothing in this world happens except by design. As he states:

Those of us who may momentarily doubt that we are included in the great system of dividends and penalties may take comfort in Our Lord’s observation on the fall of the sparrow: the sparrow is cheap but he is not forgotten. As an explorer of

the wilderness I have always thought myself an evangelist and endeavoured to bring the heathen the gospel of the sparrow, which falls but falls with design. (101)

Coetzee's deliberate conflation of economic and religious terminology is telling. The "great system of dividends and penalties," associated as it is with notions of divine justice, is related in Jacobus' telling to what he later refers to as the "economy of the whole" (101). Jacobus is wedded to a system of ideas that redound to his economic advantage and to the dignity of his person, which is to say his position within a history deemed to work in lockstep with the will of God, and anything that resists or challenges Jacobus' vision of life terrifies him to the core.

Whereas Jacobus' representations of indigenous life actively divests it of value on religious and metaphysical grounds, one can argue Coetzee's satire works to imaginatively invest it with value. Jacobus' representation of the Khoikhoi camp, quoted in detail above, works on two levels: on one hand, we receive an apparently authoritative ethnographic account of the camp; on the other, we hear a different voice, one that quietly insists on the beauty of a life dignified by its material and spiritual austerity. Jacobus sees the apex of a "Hottentot" hut as "*nothing but* a smoke hole," which violently forecloses what we may imagine the author invites the reader to imagine: how the opening in the apex of the hut allows the "Hottentot abed a barred view of the night sky" (77). Whether the opening "has led to neither a special relationship with the sky-gods nor a Hottentot astrology" (101), as Jacobus arrogantly assumes, seems beside the point. What matters and seems to be of inestimable value is that we are invited to imagine the life of the "Hottentot" otherwise, to maybe see what Jacobus' vision of life denies: that there is value in a life shorn of ultimate meaning or religious significance. Existence itself thus seems to be accorded a kind of power and significance that unsettles the position of the reader vis-à-vis Jacobus' assertions to the contrary. Precisely what the being of the Khoikhoi is—whether he or she is in possession of an aesthetic sense, the capacity for philosophical contemplation, or religious ecstasy while viewing the night sky—remains an open question. While Coetzee raises doubts and

questions on the authority of Jacobus' mode of seeing, he also denies himself the authority to represent the being of the Khokhoi in definitive terms. Thus Coetzee strategically opens the reader to a mode of seeing that is ethical precisely inasmuch as it is open to the ambiguities of literary interpretation. And perhaps it is the desirability of interpretive closure that Coetzee's writing powerfully unsettles in this particular textual instance.

Coetzee, it seems, is profoundly attracted to this mode of writing, which may explain his deep admiration of the style of writing Samuel Beckett practiced. In an introduction to Beckett's poems, short stories, and criticism, Coetzee writes:

Beckett was an artist possessed by a vision of life without consolation or dignity or promise of grace, in the face of which our only duty—inexplicable and futile, but a duty nonetheless—is not to lie to ourselves. It was a vision to which he gave expression in language of a virile strength and intellectual subtlety that marks him as one of the great prose stylists of the twentieth century. (Introduction, xiv)

Coetzee equates Beckett's style and vision with a profoundly ascetic consideration of human dignity, and one cannot help but wonder whether the philosophical outlook of this particular writer can be said to express itself in *Dusklands*. Might there be a connection between Coetzee's sincere admiration of Beckett's style, the vision of human life it implies (the moral duty it demands?), and the value he wishes to impute to the Khoikhoi people? Over and against the religious fanaticism, acquisitive instincts, and vainglory we are made to see in Jacobus, Coetzee's enticingly gnomic renderings of the indigene's mode of being-in-the-world suggests as much. One might even speculate that the indigene is figured as a model for the sustaining and sustainable vision of life Coetzee divines in the work of Beckett. Considered in this light, Jacobus might be considered as a slave to a vision of human destiny that is as ethically and aesthetically sterile as it is unsustainable. Furthermore, Jacobus' vision, falsified as it is by Coetzee's exacting satire, is reduced to the status of a risibly destructive fiction.

Interestingly, the fiction of the “human” as central actor in a world ordered and designed by divine fiat is challenged during Jacobus’ encounters with the Namaqua people on his way to hunt elephants. In addition to Coetzee’s representation of Jacobus’ enslavement to history, Coetzee tactically strips away his dignity by reducing him to the status of an animal body. Jacobus suffers a painful exodus from a world of pure representation into a world of undeniable contingency; ultimately he is, in a manner, thrown into a world without religious consolation or meaningful design. The stripping process begins shortly after he offers “gifts and promises of friendship” to the Namaqua people with hopes to obtain permission to pass beyond their village to harvest ivory from the carcasses of elephants; however, after succumbing to dysentery, his ironclad control over his servants is provisionally suspended (Coetzee, *Dusklands* 66). While his Khoikhoi servants let down their guard and yield to a riotous night of dancing, drinking, and sex, his cart is stolen along with its contents. Upon waking early in the morning, realizing what has transpired and how defenseless he is—without food, without guns, without manpower—Jacobus yearns to make his way back to “civilization.” Before he does, he is disabused of illusions of godlike omnipotence and control—over the land, his servants, the indigenous peoples he encounters, his passions, and, by implication, his reason. As his ego defenses are pared away, Jacobus’ physical and psychological vulnerability is laid bare; he learns what it is like to be treated like an animal—or what it means to be on the wrong side of history. This engenders feelings of helpless abjection, a mortifying corrective to his heroic pretense of invulnerable masculinity. Insult is added to injury when, after he attempts to reassert his will and authority to regain the service of his men and retrieve his stolen goods, he is tortured and beaten by the Namaqua people: “Naked and filthy I knelt in the middle of the ring with my face in my hands, stifling my sobs in the memory of who I was” (90). After he survives the altercation, he wonders, “With what new eyes of knowledge . . . would I see myself, now that I had been violated by the cackling heathen. Would I know myself better?” (97). After being reduced from a “well set up elephant hunter to a white-skinned Bushman,” Jacobus yearns to reestablish his dignity, which is

to say his control over himself and his surroundings (99). After he returns to “civilization” and enlists the service of the colonial authorities to return to the site of his abjection, he engages in a genocidal reprisal, exercising his will on the putative cause of his disgrace. After he murders his servants for the sin of insubordination, Jacobus is temporarily addled with doubt: “How do I *know* that Johannes Plaatje, or even Adonis, not to speak of the Hottentot dead, was not a world of delight closed off to the senses? May I have not killed something of inestimable value?” (106; emphasis added). The lines evoke William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where the poet asks, “How do you know but ev’ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses five?” (Blake 35). Jacobus, if only for a short spell, agonizes over the question as to whether he has indeed annihilated a world of sensation and delight that his heartlessly narrow subjective world seems so disturbingly unable to allow. It is a bracing moment, for his act of violence initiates a degeneration from a risibly confident position of stoic rationality to one of overwhelming self-doubt that merely *verges* on sympathy—a potentially transformative sympathy that, instead of reading so-called animal bodies as the unregenerate locus of a “fallen humanity,” plunged in wickedness and sin, reads them as sacred, precisely because they are *open to and affected by* the beauty and ineffable complexity of the material world. The fact that Jacobus’s identity is momentarily unsettled by this intimation of similitude indicates a kind of *power* within himself that he is at pains to disavow—the power of a potentially shared sensation of the joy of “being.” Nevertheless, his fear of being drawn into the sphere of passionate feeling—a realm of affective life that bears the ideological stigma of the “feminine” or “animal” in Enlightenment societies—binds him to an alienated form of masculinity that wholly undercuts his capacity for sympathy, fellowship, and meaningful community. The community with which he identifies—the Christian, European community of rational beings, ethically sterile as it is—deifies a form of reason (or power) that is illimitable as long as compassion or pity does not stand in its way. However, by delineating the tragic consequences of Jacobus’ alienation—from himself, others, the living, extra-human, material world—*Dusklands*, bleak and pessimistic

as it may seem, locates our capacity for fellow-feeling within the body, animality, and the senses, which activate and enliven the passions and connect us to overwhelmingly beautiful, mysterious, and fragile worlds that remain just beyond the gaze of reason.

**“The Thought of Her Played Uneasily on People’s Minds”:  
Coloniality and Animality in Richard Flanagan’s *Wanting***

Flanagan’s *Wanting* dramatizes the European settler’s mixed reactions to Australia, rendering a nuanced account of the settler’s ambivalence with respect to the novelty of its ecology. Australia’s “ceaseless vegetation,” “endless nameless mountains,” and “mapless rivers” both enchant and repel the novel’s British cast of settlers (Flanagan 172). Flanagan also conveys how the settlers’ attempts to settle an unsettling place—and, by implication, master alterity through the orders of thought and language—are regularly rebuffed by Australian ecology. The narrator frequently suggests how disconcerting this particular ecological space may have appeared to the European settler, describing it as a “weird land predating time, with its vulgar rainbows, its vile, huge forests and bizarre animals that seemed to have been lost since Adam’s exile” (172). Thus Flanagan’s Australia is imagined to be in possession of a power that resists the settler’s anxious attempts to master feelings of cultural dislocation.<sup>12</sup> To complicate matters, the novel stages how the aboriginal peoples of Australia confound the settler’s inherited notions of the human’s supposedly transcendent role with respect to nature. Like *Dusklands*, *Wanting* imagines the violence of the colonial encounter as a result of the anxiety and fear that emerges amidst European settlers’ perplexed reactions to the indigene’s unabashed animal nature. While both texts insinuate that these destructive passions are ego-driven defenses against the recognition of kinship with the indigene, *Wanting* is a touch more explicit in its diagnosis and critique of the settler mentality. Flanagan adeptly tracks ecophobia and shows how the settlers’ self-representations, supplemented as they are by the discursive animalization of aboriginals, reflect an inauthentic relation to their own animality, vulnerability, and mortality. Inasmuch as the body of the indigene powerfully reminds the settler of his inauthenticity, the reader is able to

see why the aboriginal mode of being-in-the-world, which is uniquely embedded in Australian ecology, is so unsettling to his/her pretensions to god-like transcendence.<sup>13</sup>

Flanagan's fiction speculatively rewrites the experiences of several historical personages: the Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson; Charles Dickens; the explorer and former governor of Tasmania, Sir John Franklin; and his wife, Lady Jane. Since the episodes on the English author fall outside the scope of my reading, I will predominantly focus on Robinson, with passing reference to the Franklins, particularly their relations with the orphaned aboriginal girl, Mathinna, who was taken into the Franklins' care for a brief spell—and subsequently abandoned—shortly after Sir John had taken up his post as governor of Tasmania.

Robinson is introduced as the “The Protector” of a group of aboriginals who have been sent to the camp of Wybalenna on Flinders Island in the aftermath of the Black War. He has been commissioned with the task, as the narrator states, of “raising his sable charges to the level of English civilization” (2). Shortly after the camp doctor succumbs to a fatal case of dysentery, Robinson is compelled to perform the role of surgeon. Meanwhile a mysterious disease has spread throughout the camp, and Robinson is aggrieved to discover his training in science is miserably inadequate to the task of healing the afflicted. When Mathinna, the daughter of the aboriginal chieftain, Towterer—renamed King Romeo by Robinson—rushes to inform him her father is gravely ill, he proceeds to his hut to assess the severity of the situation:

Even before he was inside, the Protector was beset by a strong odour of muttonbird grease, unwashed bodies and a fear—*wordless, nameless*—that somehow this rotting stench related to him, to his actions, his beliefs. Sometimes the idea would come to his mind that these people he loved so much . . . these people whom he had brought to God's light were yet dying in some strange way, in consequence of him. He knew it was an irrational idea. A perverse, impossible idea. . . . But he could not stop the idea returning again and again. (Flanagan 11–12; emphasis added)

Robinson's consciousness is compelled to mediate between the empirical and the abstract. Two kinds of knowledge are in perpetual conflict: sensuous, affective knowledge and a sort of cognitive, schematic knowledge that informs his identity as a Christian and a man of science. One discerns a dynamic interplay between a semi-conscious knowledge of self and world that threatens to undermine his identity as a figure of paternalistic authority, and the narrator keys in on the role repression plays in the maintenance of his identity over and against the threat of alterity. Note that he initially senses a "wordless, nameless" threat to self, which is then mastered by a cognitive translation of sense into "irrational," "perverse," "impossible" ideas (12). Though the empirical is domesticated by an ostensibly rational mediation of alterity—both without and within—his attempts to allay the threat of affective knowledge fail, for the idea that he is somehow responsible for the suffering at Wybalenna returns to him with an affective intensity that the operations of reason can never fully dispatch.

The dissonance between embodied knowledge and what is presumed to count as rational arguably testifies to the white settler's experience of himself as precariously situated between an ideational world that refers to Europe and an experiential world that fails to square with the former. To illustrate, as Robinson anxiously follows Mathinna to King Romeo's hut, he is reminded of his official duties: "to accustom them [the aboriginals] to English domesticity and to break them away from their own rude windbreaks" (10–11). As he makes his way, he is afflicted by a sense of his mission as futile and vain, then reflects:

[I]f one didn't think of the white beach behind, red-bouldered and leathery kelp-rimed, or the woodlands beyond, strange and twisted; if one just ignored this wretched wild island on which they sat at the edge of the world and instead concentrated on these buildings—it was possible to see that the two rows of tenements looked for all the world like some newly built street in a modern town like Manchester. (11)

Robinson's wistful analogy is possible, yes; but the possibility requires the suspension of sense and a denial of contingency—or that which

remains just beyond the “edge” of a “world” defined by colonial conceptions of space and time, order and reason (11). The passage underscores Robinson’s repression of the “wild,” which Flanagan suggests is somehow threatening to the values of English civilization. A terrible irrationality drives him to deny what a disinterested observer cannot. The repression of the alterity of the Tasmanian wilderness—and the affective intensities it generates—must be mastered for Robinson to consolidate his sense of duty and the identity it confers.

Robinson’s faith in the virtue of his role as Protector, in the rational efficacy of science and medicine, in his ability to convert the aboriginals to Christianity, and, most importantly, in the God to whom he prays and defers in times of difficulty, is profoundly unsettled as he bleeds Towterer in a desperate attempt to save his life. As he dreads the great chieftain’s imminent demise, his uneasy faith in the redeeming powers of science gives way to prayer: “*Lead, kindly Light, amid th’ encircling gloom; lead Thou me on!*” (14; emphasis in original). As Robinson’s faith in the powers of reason diminishes, his faith in the efficacy of prayer diminishes shortly thereafter. The event of Towterer’s death exceeds Robinson’s intellectual grip, thus attenuating the authority of scientific *and* religious explanations of what is afoot: indeed Flanagan suggests Robinson’s extreme investment in reason and God amounts to a non-rational, visceral attachment to ideation that unduly inhibits his imagination, thus estranging him from reality. As Mathinna looks into his eyes, mystified by his strange incantations, Robinson abruptly pauses and searches his mind for a different tack: “Unsettled, he searched for a new rhythm of words to soothe his nerves” (15). Again, he reverts to the language of science, as if to reassure the frightened girl of his authority: “Now is the period in which King Romeo’s pulmonary system will find its equilibrium. . . . Whereby well-being . . . such that blood . . .” (15). Robinson’s anxious attempts to regain his authority are redoubled when his gaze alights on Mathinna once again: “Mathinna looked down at her naked feet, and so too for a moment did the Protector, then feeling an embarrassment verging on inexplicable shame, he looked back and away, and walked out of the hut into the relief of the cold sea air” (15). As he leaves the hut, he feels “angry,” but “his anger perplex[e]s him”

(15). He is angry for the contingency of the late doctor's demise and the Governor's failure to expeditiously replace him, and yet he is proud of "his own ability as a man of medicine . . . he, a layman, a carpenter, self-reliant and self-made and self-taught, the very triumph of self" (16). Robinson's heroic belief in the powers of reason, of hard work, in the indefatigable value of self-assertion with a view to the good, is destabilized by his apprehension of the force of contingency in a world that resists his self-representations. The mere sight of Towterer's physical abjection unsettlingly drives the reality of human vulnerability and mortality to the quick, and while he is reduced to a state of extreme anxiety and fear, his field of vision inadvertently hits upon Mathinna's feet, which engenders a naked, heart-stopping sense of shared vulnerability. A kind of sympathy happens to Robinson that is far from ordinary, for it is tied to a sense of shame that, inexplicable as it may be to him, is artfully suggested to bear importantly on his prior relations with Towterer—and, more broadly, the aboriginal peoples of Australia. Mathinna's naked feet complexly symbolize these relations, which is probably why Robinson reflexively turns away in embarrassment.

Aside from the example above, Mathinna's feet are referred to on so many occasions that it cannot escape the reader's notice. The trope, naked feet, reinscribes colonial discourse's derogation of the body of the indigene. The first term, naked, is consistently made to signify physical vulnerability—a condition of being potentially exposed to harm or death, although it also works to suggest a lack of artifice. And yet it signifies, too, a quality of openness to the mystery and complexity of human experience, in spite of its unsettling ambiguities. Additionally, the second term of the trope, feet, which denotes a part of human anatomy that connects one to the ground, implies a quality of unassuming worldliness: which is to say they stand for a kind of earthy humility that shames the settler's pretenses to transcendence. Mathinna's naked feet stand for an authentic relation to human animality that possesses the power to create a conversion of sensibility in the settler: one that Flanagan imagines to be as existentially attractive as it is demanding and frightening, namely because of the colonizer's vexed relation to his embodiment and the destabilizing force of the passions, not to men-

tion the awareness of human animality, vulnerability, and mortality the colonial encounter so viscerally intensifies. In other words, Flanagan's representations of Mathinna's feet are charged with a heavily *affective* signifying power that threatens to depose the self-flattering certitudes of colonial identity.

Flanagan's representations of Mathinna offer a substantive alternative to the identity of the colonizer. He inscribes her feet with a power to know, experience, and value the world without recourse to abstract justifications or the consoling mediations of language. One is given to understand her feet as a source of joyous vitality and connection with the natural world. The following description conveys as much quite beautifully:

A small girl ran through the wallaby grass almost as high as her. How she loved the sensation of the soft threads of fine grass feathering beads of water onto her calves, and the feel of the earth beneath her bare feet, wet and mushy in winter, dry and dusty in summer. She was seven years old, the earth was still new and extraordinary in its delights, the earth still ran up through her feet to her head into the sun. (9)

The primary mode through which Mathinna receives the world is sensation and feeling. The passage implies she does not differentiate herself from her surroundings. Her feet ground her connection with the natural world, so that her physical being is shot through with uninhibited delight. The passage obviously valorizes passion and sensation, especially since they ground a connection between her body and the material world. For the world is not mediated through abstraction; rather, her experience is one of embodied, affective immediacy.<sup>14</sup> The fact that Flanagan lyrically emphasizes Mathinna's affective attachment to the world of nature and animals—coupled with the fact that Mathinna, like most other aboriginal characters, does not make superior distinctions between the human and the nonhuman—dramatically articulates the author's visceral aversion to anthropocentric, ecophobic value-systems that deny the value experience of indigenous peoples, not to mention nonhuman animals.<sup>15</sup>

The scene described above evocatively parallels another scene that reflects Robinson's earliest experiences with the aboriginal people, namely Mathinna's father, Towterer. Given that Robinson's complex affective responses to Mathinna's naked feet occur during the scene of her father's death, one can speculate whether his overwhelming experience of shame and grief subsequent to Towterer's demise is implied to be addled by the memory of his earliest experiences with the man, his people, *and* Australian ecology. For Flanagan's poignant, affectionate rendering of Mathinna's uniquely authentic relation to her body, which is suggested to enable her receptivity to the beauty of nonhuman exteriority, is artfully instantiated in Robinson himself well before Towterer's untimely death. Like Mathinna, Robinson is opened, albeit briefly, to a mode of receptivity in himself for which he feels profoundly indebted to Towterer, the aborigines, and Mathinna.

The narrator introduces the scene of Robinson's short-lived conversion of sensibility with a telling conversation that takes place with the Franklins. Robinson is regaling the new governor of Tasmania, Sir John Franklin, and his wife, Lady Jane, with an account of his first encounters with the aboriginals. Lady Jane has already expressed interest in the possibility of adopting Mathinna, whom she learns has recently become orphaned due to the loss of her mother, Wongerneep, and her father, Towterer. Robinson, upon Lady Jane's request to know the specifics of Mathinna's family history, proceeds to unwind a tale of his friendship with Towterer as it evolved amidst "the sylvan forests and sublime beaches of western Van Diemen's Land" (56). It is an enchanting tale that, as the narrator nevertheless insists, does not convey "King Romeo's true story"—nor does it speak the truth of Robinson's friendship with Towterer (58), for Robinson aims to impress Lady Jane with a story that accords with his reputation as a heroic conqueror of the wild and Christian redeemer of benighted, savage souls. Nevertheless, Robinson's intuition of his complicity in the deaths of "his" people and the destruction of their culture returns with shattering insistence. As he spins his yarn, his doubts about the virtues of handing Mathinna into the care of the Franklins are addled by the memory of a virtually transformative experience with Towterer—the selfsame memory that is implied to

affect him while his vision encounters Mathinna's naked feet earlier in the narrative.

Robinson recalls but does not bother to narrate to the Franklins how, upon his first acquaintance with aboriginals, "the natives felt [his] limbs all over, trying to ascertain if he had bones, if he were a ghost" (59). They begin to dance and sing and, after considerable hesitation, Robinson gives into their insistence that he undress and join them. "Overcome by a logic he didn't understand," he dances, "momentarily beset by the terrifying idea that this was what he truly desired in life" (60). "Naked . . . leaping, stamping, flying," the man finds himself "lost in a strange abandon" (60). He is startled to wonder whether this experience is the "true reward" for his mission in the wilderness rather than the prestige and "money" he would be granted for bringing the natives in from the wild (60). For the first time in his life he feels "open to everything," "alive to other humans and to himself in a way he had never known" (60). However, this feeling of delightful abandon "could not last" (60). For his feeling of radical freedom pushes him into a provisional apprehension of "something beyond himself," something that makes "no sense," "something beyond understanding" (60).

Later he recalls the experience as "ridiculous" and "wicked," for it contravenes "what was expected of him and who he really was" (60). "The very reason he was there would not allow any resolution of the matter other than the capture of these blacks" and bringing them into a "world where no one danced naked and no one opened themselves to others, and where all practiced closing down themselves and everything around them" (60–61). Robinson's mind cannot recognize the experience as anything but aberrant contingency, a "disorder" and "heresy" that must be repressed and forgotten, for what he experiences, liberating though it may be, flies in the face of reason and religious belief, threatening to destabilize his vision of the world and, by extension, himself (61).

Yet the vital force of his experience continues to tear at the tenuous fabric of his identity. His mind, though "ordered by religion," falls prey to the suspicion that "God existed *only* as the ultimate obstacle between a man and his soul" (61; emphasis added). Robinson briefly intuits God as an unnecessary fiction that unduly inhibits the affective intensities

the material universe has the power to orchestrate. And for the short period he happens to be mastered by the dance, he sympathizes with the aboriginals, whose dance ritually celebrates the whole of existence in a way that obviates intellectual orderings or religious justifications. Far from ecophobic, Robinson's provisionally ecstatic comportment toward the universe partakes of what one might call an ecological imagination; overwhelmed by this state of awareness, his identity as colonizer is made to seem scandalous, both to him and to the reader. Flanagan cogently underscores the power of affect and sensation, which undermines the order of reason, logic, and religious belief. God is posited as an obstacle to the soul, which is identified with the body, with feeling, sensation, the tactile sense, and Robinson's instinctual drive to connect with others.

Of course, colonial discourse derogates the body as wild and savage, the very locus of the beast within that threatens to disorder the rational soul, not to mention the social norms that guarantee the production, maintenance, and reproduction of colonial power. In other words, Robinson's recollection of transformation by passion and sensation reveals the body's power, the resistance it levies against the repressive force of hegemonic forms of reason. The body, associated as it is with a well-nigh "uncontrollable animality" (55), is encoded in Robinson's mind as a danger and a threat to his very sense of self, something he must guard against lest he lose control of the dignity of his person. That said, one can imagine why he looks away from Mathinna's feet after he vainly tends to her dying father. It may be that her feet exhibit an animal magnetism that reminds him of Towterer's impressively human *élan* and wisdom, the man who is, in a way, responsible for orchestrating the existentially rewarding experiences he fails to honor in the story he later tells the Franklins. It may be that her feet call to mind her innocence, her animality, her physical vulnerability, indeed her undeniable mortality: thus, the human's humble animal origins, which, as the text insists, cannot be separated from the ecological. Faced with the presence of Towterer's dying body, coupled with the memory of an experience that unsettled his faith in God, a universe designed for the benefit of humanity, and by turns leveled his belief in his own authority—his belief in the supposedly essential differences between colonizer and colonized—

Robinson bows his head in shame, walks away from Mathinna and the corpse of her father, which both signifies the utter finality of death and intimates the death of the aboriginal way of life: its unique culture, its world view, which he feels/knows to be of inestimable value. In other words, by abandoning the sight of Mathinna and Towterer, he abandons himself to the seemingly unremitting logic of settler history.

Robinson cannot dignify the true story of his friendship with Towterer in his own language. Friendship with the indigene defies the very logic upon which coloniality subsists: the repression of the body, desire, animality. Not long after his meeting with the Franklins runs its course, his thoughts turn to Mathinna, who has absconded from the camp after catching wind of the Franklins' plans to adopt her: "deep inside, Robinson grew oddly troubled" (110). The narrator recounts Robinson's qualms on giving the girl up; he is unsettled by a nameless quality he perceives in the Franklins: "there was about Sir John something that Robinson, ever a keen student and petitioner of power, could not quite put into words" (110). Yet he rationalizes his decision to yield her up to the hands of fate:

If the Protector was loath to part with that for which the Franklins asked . . . he was nevertheless succeeding in persuading himself that he would hardly be abandoning the child to the scum of the penal colony. Rather, he told himself, it was to the very finest flowers of England, disciplined in habit, religious in thought, scientific in outlook. . . . And their selfless goal? To raise the savage child to the level of a civilized Englishwoman. How could he deny anyone such an opportunity? (111)

Ironically, Robinson sacrifices his most ennobling instincts to fiction, to power, to history, and disgracefully cobbles together the words that help him to accept the hand he plays in denying Mathinna her freedom. Toward the novel's conclusion, several years after he had last seen Mathinna, who has been abandoned recently by the Franklins, he makes plans to return to England. He wonders "what had become of the experiment of the black princess, but all he met with were sorry

rumors” (231). Broken and crestfallen due to his failure to achieve that “most elusive accolade, greatness,” he imagines the possibility of redeeming himself by narrating the “strange history of [his] encounters with the savages of Australia and Van Diemen’s Land” (231). Maybe a book would garner him “celebrity, honours, money” (231). Vanity, he thinks: “No one was interested. Nor, ultimately, he had discovered, was he” (231). For what, after all, would he be commemorating? Strange, outlandish, impossible tales. His thoughts turn to the past: “He heard strange chanting. Saw a man naked dancing between the stars and the earth. Remembered rivers, a dark child at his door” (231). Unsettled by the memory of Mathinna, informed as it is by strange, nameless feelings, Robinson is haunted by the past, by an alternative history that must, for the time being, remain untold.

Similar to the conclusion of *Dusklands*, *Wanting* ends on a tragic note. Jacobus Coetzee and George Augustus Robinson, while they think of themselves as manly, heroic conquerors of nature, the frontier, and peoples who stand in the way of progress and history, are nevertheless by turns addled by unsettling feelings of loss, regret, and self-doubt. Though they think they have sacrificed themselves for a noble cause—for the nation, for civilization, for the sake of the destiny of “Man” sanctioned and willed by God—they cannot withstand deeply troubling doubts on the value of their sacrifice. For their sacrifice is haunted by the specter of what the logic of settler histories demands: the sacrifice of the indigene, the animal, of nature, sympathy, and the opportunity to embrace the possibility of a more authentic, sustaining, and sustainable vision of life. Coetzee’s and Flanagan’s speculative rewritings of settler histories, bleak and unsettling as they are, arguably stand for the creation of a novel set of values that simultaneously address the legacies of imperial history and our embattled environmental present. The fact that they render settler histories with such alarming honesty is valuable: to frankly acknowledge the violence of the past is a value in itself, especially when the failure to look at it seriously may guarantee its insidious continuation in the present. But what seems especially noteworthy is how both texts seek to find grounds for hope in their speculative renderings of the colonial encounter. By imagining the ambivalence at the heart

of the colonial encounter, they show how the colonizer's more redeeming social instincts are disabled and co-opted by historical discourse; at the same time, they dramatize the body's resistance to the social, political, religious, and economic logics of colonialism. Both authors insist we consider the power of the body's refusal of ideology. To stage the body's power in all its living complexity, without recourse to maudlin simplification, indicates yet another formulation of value that demands our attention. For, as Coetzee and Flanagan show, the body—our very animality—has a way of reminding us of our physical vulnerability, our mortality, the very finite nature of our existence in this world; precisely because of this, we are reminded of our kinship with other sentient beings. To refuse the basis of our kinship, Coetzee and Flanagan suggest, is scandalous, both for ethical and aesthetic reasons. Over and against our failure to acknowledge animality and its implications, they proffer the value of the sympathetic imagination, which may yet have the power to reorder our relations with nature, not as aggrieved antagonists, but as joyful, affirmative participants.

## Notes

- 1 Armstrong sees the neglect of animals in postcolonial studies as a critical limitation: "Concerned as it is with the politics of historical and contemporary relations between 'Western' and other cultures since 1492 or thereabouts, postcolonial studies has shown little interest in the fate of the nonhuman animal" (413). For Armstrong, to posit the nonhuman animal as a locus of ethical concern does not mean we have to sacrifice our commitments to human justice; ethically reconfiguring human-animal relations is one way to ameliorate contemporary social and environmental problems, which he links with the intellectual legacies of colonialism and imperialism—in particular, the human-animal binary of colonial discourse.
- 2 Oliver comments on Agamben's concept of the anthropological machine, a symbolic economy that idealizes "human" characteristics, powers, and potentials vis-à-vis a derogated "animality." She states: "The human-animal divide . . . is not only political but also sets up the possibility of politics. Who is included in human society and who is not is a consequence of the politics of 'humanity,' which engenders the polis itself" (1).
- 3 In *White Writing: On the Culture and Letters in South Africa*, Coetzee examines the varied written responses of settlers to indigenous society and culture. Noting how the settlers' obsessive preoccupation with the spiritually redeeming powers

of work informs their derogatory accounts of the indigene, he speculates on the philosophical and ethical costs of the settlers' exalted estimation of the value of work:

Nowhere in the great echo chamber of the Discourse of the Cape is a voice raised to ask whether the life of the Hottentot may not be a version of life before the Fall . . . a life in which man is not yet condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, but instead may spend his days dozing in the sun, or in the shade when the sun grows too hot, half-aware of the singing of the birds and the breeze on his skin, bestirring himself to eat when hunger overtakes him, enjoying a pipe of tobacco when it is available, at one with his surroundings and unreflectively content. The idea that the Hottentot may be Adam is not even entertained for the sake of being dismissed (on the grounds, say, that the Hottentot does not know God). Certainly no one dreams of asking whether what looks like Hottentot *dolce far niente* may not be the mere outward aspect of a profound Hottentot contemplative life. (19)

- 4 Though Coetzee uses the term Hottentot for purposes of historical authenticity, one should note his use of racist nomenclature is used in a non-racist way to deconstruct settler ideology. The term Khoikhoi has displaced the derogatory use of Hottentot in contemporary critical discourse.
- 5 In *Modernism, Narrative, and Humanism*, Sheehan connects the “Cartesian tradition of reason, logic, cognition, [and] reflexivity” with the “discourse of the modern subject” (6). One of the underlying tenets of this discourse is “the idea of autonomy, the belief that ‘man is the measure of all things’” (6). The idea of the subject as “above” nonhuman exteriority, including the body and the passions, works to create a form of reason that, for Sheehan, is fundamentally anthropocentric: “For man to be the measure of all things, he must place himself at the center of the world and make it ‘his’” (6). The central point I wish to make is that Coetzee’s representation of Jacobus’ point of view underscores the extent to which it cannot contain or master contingency or what falls outside anthropocentric systems of representation or forms of reason.
- 6 Huggan and Tiffin submit that, in order to become truly “post-imperial,” “a reimagining and reconfiguration of the human place in nature necessitates an interrogation of the category of the human itself and the ways in which the construction of ourselves *against* nature—with the hierarchizations of life forms that construction implies—has been and remains complicit in colonialist and racist exploitation from the time of the conquest to the present day” (6; emphasis in original).
- 7 Deane notes how imperialism enlists Enlightenment philosophical discourse to exalt Eurocentric notions of reason against the so-called primitive body of the colonized: “the abstraction of reason led to the liquidation of the sensory, sensuous world of the primitive (or natural); this too fed imperial theory since the

- occupants of colonized territories were taken to be immersed in such a world and therefore incapable of, or at least insufficiently evolved toward, the rational condition of the European" (357).
- 8 Wolfe coordinates the figure of vision with the discourse of reason that, as he says, maintains the full transcendence of the human with respect to its animality. In the interest of reinscribing the human-animal nexus, Wolfe wants to "recast the figure of vision (and therefore the figure of the human with which it is ineluctably associated) to resituate it as only one sense among many in a more general—and not necessarily human—bodily sensorium" (3). One should add that Coetzee presciently anticipates Wolfe's posthumanist ethical project in *Dusklands*. It is also worth noting that Coetzee's posthumanism is more vividly articulated in *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*, experimental novels that decry the ethical limitations of the discourse of reason and extol the virtues of sympathy.
- 9 I derive my notion of reason as "cognitive firewall" from Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul*. In the section, "That the exercise of virtue is a supreme remedy for the Passions," Descartes installs reason as a virtue with the power to withstand "the most vigorous assaults of the Passions" (101). In his analysis of the power of reason, Descartes casts the passions as bestial threats to the integrity of the self and the order of representation (or rational science).
- 10 Jacobus' blindness to the logic of indigenous social and cultural forms, I am claiming, is a function of his enslavement to what Derrida calls "metaphysics—white mythology, which . . . reflects the culture of the West, logos, that is, the mythos of reason" (213).
- 11 Attridge says Jacobus "exhibits the prejudices of the eighteenth-century Dutch frontier-dweller in South Africa, prejudices that allow him to treat the native inhabitants of the country as an inferior and, if necessary, expendable species" (15). He also mentions how *Dusklands* strategically demonstrates how these prejudices are determined by the "discourses of the ruling culture," which are contested by the resistance of indigenous figures that call into question their "universalizing pretensions," thereby compelling the reader to "recognize their historical origins and contingent existence" (13). In a similar move, Attwell claims Coetzee historicizes a "specific social identity" through Jacobus, a character whose point of view is largely constituted by the discourse of philosophical rationalism (37). Attwell contends Coetzee "exposes the subject-positions and ethical duplicity that are masked by rationalism's objectivist pretensions" (37). While Attridge and Attwell focus on Coetzee's use of irony and satire to debunk the universalizing and objectivist pretensions of colonial discourse, I am arguing *Dusklands* evinces something more than a deconstructive enterprise: something along the lines of an ethical project that aims to subversively rearticulate the human-animal binary with a host of affirmative meanings and associations. For work that exemplifies this notion and reads Coetzee's fiction through the insights

of ecofeminist philosophy and animal/animality studies, see Donovan's "Miracles of Creation': Animals in J. M. Coetzee's Work."

- 12 The novelist, Grenville, explains how her research for her novel on nineteenth century settler colonialism, *The Secret River*, helped her to gain insight into the unsettling features of the Australian environment. She says she felt the need to feel firsthand what it might have been like to encounter the Australian wilderness as a settler. After she attempts to re-enact the settler experience by camping in "the bush," she explains how the environment affected her: "It was like a gigantic breathing creature all around me, not hostile, but a being to which I was entirely irrelevant" ("Unsettling the Settler").
- 13 Mason writes, "in the first law of ecology, everything is connected to everything else" (132). He also speculates whether notions of the ecological can be thought alongside the erotic, or "oikos" with "Eros" (132). Flanagan arguably takes up this consideration by suggesting that colonial desire, while driven to represent the other as immured in a reductively conceived animal body, is simultaneously attracted to the indigene's mode of being-in-the-world, which is attractive precisely because it is unburdened by ideology and thus open to an inner world of undifferentiated, sensuous and affective intensities wrought in connection with local ecologies. Interestingly enough, Coetzee, as I have suggested above, is attracted to what one might call ecological being in his attempts to speculatively ascribe value to Khoikhoi modes of being-in-the-world in *Dusklands*: a move that is made more directly in *White Writing*. One should also add Coetzee's figurations of the value of human animality are portrayed through his characterization of Michael K, who is described variously as "a soul blessedly untouched by doctrine, untouched by history," and "a creature left over from an earlier age, like the coelacanth or the last man to speak Yaqui" (*The Life and Times of Michael K* 151).
- 14 Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello articulates the potential ethical value of affective modes of knowing and engagement. She seems to insist that the discourse of reason, which coordinates thought with being, unduly valorizes human intellection almost precisely as much as it derogates intuition, feeling, imagination, and the like. The ethical consequences of this valorization, she argues, have been—and still are—disastrous, both for racialized humans and animalized nonhumans. To counter this tendency in Western thought and culture, she coordinates joy with being, a capacity and power humans share with some (but not all) nonhuman animals. She states:

To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being—not a consciousness of yourself as a ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary a sensation—a heavily affective sensation—of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes' key state [reason], which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell. (Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 78)

15 Though the scope of this section of my essay limits itself to Flanagan's positive reinscriptions of indigenous modes of being-in-the-world, his sensitivity to the plight of nonhuman animals is indexed throughout the novel. Furthermore, the author's sensitive portrayal of animal suffering and death is probably a function of his attunement to nonhuman animal subjectivity: various animals, including oxen, possums, wallabies, and parrots are represented to be in possession of the capacity for relatively complex forms of intra- and interspecies social interaction. However, most importantly, he seems especially attuned to nonhuman animals' respective capacities for joy. One might argue Flanagan's renderings of Mathinna's value experience are made to crucially depend on her non-rational, deeply affective attachments to various nonhuman animals. I borrow the phrase "value experience" from Whitehead. He uses the phrase to articulate a conception of morality that may extend itself beyond the human: "Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole. This characterizes the meaning of actuality. By reason of this character, constituting reality, the conception of morals arises. We have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of the universe. Existence, in its own nature, is the upholding of value intensity" (Whitehead 111).

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