

## Animal Ethics in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Spade Over the Bones of the Dead*

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### Abstract

J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* is about animal rights and animal Ethics. In this novel, an aging novelist gives a series of lectures about animals and their moral status. Elizabeth Costello takes issue with the tradition of Western philosophical thought which is based on the binary opposition between reason and emotion. In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, Olga Tokarczuk's Janina Duszejko is also an elderly woman haunted by the horror of what human beings do to animals. The present interdisciplinary study -a library-based qualitative research- reviews the similarities between these two characters and aims to show that Duszejko could be seen as Costello's alter ego. It surveys the writers' choice of sentience over reason, the way the texts have undermined the arguments of their major characters, and the similarities between animals and prisoners of concentration camps. Findings show that Coetzee and Tokarczuk do not uphold the Western tradition that divides experience into reason/emotion, masculine/ feminine, justice/ love, and public/ private. In both novels, the writers avoid binary oppositions and through Costello and Duszejko ask the readers/audiences to open their hearts and become one with their victims.

**Keywords:** Animal rights, J.M. Coetzee, Ecofeminism, Reason, Sentience, Olga Tokarczuk

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## 1. Introduction

Animal rights has been a topic of ethical and philosophical debate for centuries. In recent years the discussion has expanded to include the interconnectedness of gender, nature, and animal ethics. Two novels that explore these themes are J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. Both novels challenge traditional views of animals as mere objects for human use and advocate animal liberation. This article surveys the views of philosophers of ethics of care and the views of ecofeminist critics. Through the analysis of these frameworks in the novels, it tries to gain an understanding of how they challenge the patriarchal system and capitalism that institutionalize the exploitation of animals.

In J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, the eponymous character, Elizabeth Costello is a renowned author and academic who travels around the world giving lectures on various subjects such as animal rights, the ethics of meat consumption, literature, and morality. Throughout the novel, she argues that animals are not mere objects for human use, but rather sentient beings with their interests and rights. She argues that humans have a moral obligation to treat animals with respect and compassion and that our treatment of them reflects our moral character. *Elizabeth Costello* explores the complex relationship between humans and animals and challenges the audience/reader to consider the ethical implications of their treatment of other sentient beings.

*Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* by Olga Tokarczuk follows the story of Janina Duszejko, an eccentric old woman who lives in a remote Polish village. When several members of the local hunting club are found dead under mysterious circumstances, Janina becomes convinced that the animals in the forest are taking revenge on the hunters. She writes to the local police about her theory but they ignore her. She describes the murders of corrupt city officials without admitting that she is the murderer. It is only in the final chapter when her friends confront her that she shows them the picture of corrupt city officials standing over the dead bodies of recently killed animals, including her two dogs. This reveals her motivation for killing all four men involved in the mass killing of deer, wild boars, foxes, and dogs. Janina flees on foot to the Czech Republic and thus evades capture. In her fight for animal rights, she proves victorious.

Animal rights refers to the belief that non-human animals should be treated with the same respect and consideration as humans. Animals have inherent value and should not be used for human purposes such as food, clothing, entertainment, or experimentation. Animal rights advocates argue that animals have the right to live free from exploitation, abuse, and cruelty and that they should be protected from harm and suffering. The concept of animal rights is based on the idea that all living beings have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their species.

Many philosophers have addressed the question of animals and their ethical rights. Levinas's ethics of alterity challenges the view that animals are limited beings who have no moral status. Levinas refuses to define ethics in human terms. Emphasizing

the capacity of animals to suffer and believes that animals can express their suffering by non-verbal means and are thus worthy of moral consideration. It is the face or the expressive capacity of the Other that determines moral status and commands ethical consideration. Levinas underplays the role of language in ethics: "Every social relation leads back to the presentation of the other to the same without the intermediary of any image or sign, solely by the expression of the face." (1969: 213) Although the face does not give direct access to the Other's inner life, it reveals that the Other is capable of suffering. The face also relates one to the Other. Expanding the notion of language to all types of communication, Giorgio Agamben observes that "animals are not in fact denied language; on the contrary, they are always and totally language...Animals do not enter language. They are already inside it." (1993: 52) In *The Animal that therefore I Am*, Derrida accuses Western Philosophical tradition of ignoring animals, a tendency which has resulted in the inhumanity of man: "As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called "animal" offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the human, the ends of man..." (2006: 12) Derrida addresses the difference between human and non-human animals and critiques the way human beings have assigned animals an inferior place. This he sees as the aftermath of the separation between humans and millions of other species considered by humans as animals. Although Derrida questions this distinction, Donna Haraway believes that Derrida "failed a simple obligation of companionship" to the animal other (Haraway 2008: 20). Haraway's is an ecofeminist criticism of the absence of emotion in a male critic.

Different moral philosophers and philosophers of ethics of care have pointed out various aspects of othering animals and animal abuse. An influential philosopher, Peter Singer argues that the boundary between human and animal is arbitrary and observes that the interests of all sentient beings should be given equal consideration. Singer rejects speciesism which gives humans the right to use non-human animals. Defined by Richard D. Ryder as "a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those members of other species" (Singer, 1990: 6), speciesism is discrimination against non-human animals because of their species. Singer compares speciesism to racism to show that this practice is not justified. He believes that racists consider their race to be of greater importance when there is a conflict of interest between people of their race and people from other races and infringe equality. For instance, European racists think that the pain that Africans experience is not as important as their experience of pain. Like racists, speciesists consider their species to be more important than other species when there is a clash of interests between their species and the interests of other species. To human speciesists, the pain that animals like pigs or mice feel is not as important as the pain that human beings feel (Singer, 1993: 58).

Another prominent philosopher, Tom Regan, sees the problem in the way we look at animals: Our social systems permit us to see animals as our possessions. This

allows us to eat them, use them for scientific experimentation, or take advantage of them in various other ways. When we think that animals belong to us, then the unfortunate consequences should not surprise us. But we should make allowances for the fact that “perception, memory, desire, belief, self-consciousness, intention, a sense of the future—these are among the leading attributes of the mental life of normal mammalian animals... Add to this list the not unimportant categories of emotion... and sentience, understood as the capacity to experience pleasure and pain (1983: 81). Regan believes that once we accept that, like us, animals have a mental and spiritual life and are capable of experiencing what we experience, we realize that they have equal moral rights.

Nibert's views are also worthy of notice. He objects to the dominant view about animals and their usefulness to human beings. He believes that the practice of factory farming namely, capturing, oppressing, and killing animals has “undermined the development of a just and peaceful world”. He also rejects science because science justifies the abuse of animals for the advantages of capitalism. He believes that the domestication of animals which is justified through ideological manipulation and state power has resulted in widespread violence against animals and marginalized human beings (2023: 15-21). And Christian points out the similarity between animals and slaves. He maintains that to control them and make them obedient, slaves and animals are separated from their families in childhood (2004: 263).

Philosophers of the ethics of care like Regan and Singer believe that love and sentiment are private, feminine experiences but justice is masculine and public. They are suspicious of emotions that are associated with women. Singer complains that the kind women who are mad about cats prevent his work from being taken seriously (1990: 242). The attribution of sentiments and feelings to women and the male critic's contempt for sentiment emphasizes the division between reason and emotion and classifies reason as a masculine quality. Feminist philosophers critique these theories and argue that emotions and care ethics need to be incorporated into philosophies of animal rights. The opposition between reason and emotion and the dominance of reason in animal ethics explains why ethicists like Singer invoke reason in discussions of animal rights. They believe that it is through the capacity of reason that we can realize how similar we are to other animals and thus be able to grant them equal moral consideration.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Carol J. Adams draws attention to the cruelty towards animals in the modern world. Adams holds that the oppression of animals is institutionalized in our culture on two levels: “in formal structures such as slaughterhouses, meat markets, zoos, laboratories, and circuses and through our language. That we refer to meat eating rather than corpse-eating is a central example of how our language transmits the dominant culture's approval of this activity (2010: 94). Adams examines the way language is used to justify social practices. She states that we marginalize animals, ignore their

feelings, and use them to serve our interests. This is how we take charge of their narrative. We control the language and discussion around them and cover their suffering by omitting their point of view. Thus, animals that are continually hidden become “the absent referent”.

Martha Craven Nussbaum criticizes the way Western philosophy has created the binary opposition between humans and animals and attributes reason to human beings and irrationality to animals. Nussbaum refuses to draw a boundary between human and non-human animals because she believes that human beings and animals share remarkable similarities. For this reason, she insists that we need ethics to tackle the pervasive problem of exploitation of animals and cruelty towards them (2001).

Luri Gruen compares our being cut from our “cognitive/affective capacity” to being lobotomized. Lobotomy- a surgical intervention to alter the function of the brain- was performed mainly by male doctors on female patients who could not adjust to social norms or who were thought to have psychological problems. Gruen argues that lobotomy results in emotional distancing- a cutting down of one’s affect and asks that we should not remain emotionally distanced in the face of violence towards animals. As a feminist philosopher of ethics of care, she suggests “entangled empathy”. This she defines as moving outside oneself to the other person to understand the other being’s needs, feelings, and vulnerabilities and not to project one’s thoughts and feelings to the other. She suggests that we acquire “shifting perspectives.” (2019:11-23)

## **2. Objective of the Study**

This study seeks to explore whether reason and emotion could coexist in dealing with the problem of animal rights. Moreover, it seeks to see whether there is a bridge between the binary opposition which relates the masculine to reason, justice, and the public, and the feminine to emotion, love, and the private. Additionally, it explores in what respects Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* is similar to Olga Tokarczuk’s *Janina Duszejko*, and how she could be regarded as her alter ego. Furthermore, it explores why human beings must rethink their relation to animals. Finally, it explores whether the novels succeed in making the readers redefine their relations to nature and animals.

## **3. Significance of the Study**

This study is an interdisciplinary study that sheds light on the interconnectedness of the oppression exercised on animals and the environment. Ecofeminist criticism shows that the domination of nature and subjugation of women are closely linked and both are rooted in patriarchal structures. This research which is a comparison between J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* and Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, examines the cruelty of human beings towards animals and challenges dominant cultural attitudes towards nature and gender. It also highlights how literature can serve as a tool for resistance and social change as well as recognizing

the agency and subjectivity of non-human beings. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relation between humans, animals, and the environment and inspires readers to rethink their ethical and ecological practices.

#### 4. Literature Review

There is a controversy about Coetzee's position. Does he denounce reason in favor of emotion and sentiment or is he an advocate of reason, justice, and liberalism? Ecofeminists divide over the issue. Deborah Slicer expresses her appreciation for Coetzee's fictional character Elizabeth Costello, finding her fascinating because Costello is, in her own words, a "Wounded animal", the embodiment of suffering of all vegans and activists who find themselves surrounded by family members and friends and colleagues who have no idea how the vegans are suffering. The only fault she finds with Costello is her lack of humor (2022:108). Cora Diamond reads *The Lives of Animals* not as a defense of animal rights, but as a study of "a woman haunted by the horror of what we do to animals. We see her as wounded by this knowledge, this horror, and by the knowledge of how un-haunted others are. The wound marks and isolates her" (2008:46). What has caused this controversy is perhaps Coetzee's speech about animal rights: "I am not an animal lover... Animals don't need my love... I don't care about love. I care about justice", declares Coetzee, the Nobel laureate (Coetzee). Although in this speech Coetzee clearly announces his preference for reason over sentience, in *Elizabeth Costello* his choice is sentience.

Highlighting this speech, Gruen asks why should it be the choice of one over another. Why could not reason and emotion coexist in dealing with the problem of animal rights? The answer she finds in the construction of Western civilization that is based on binary oppositions. The division of culture and society into binary opposition relates the masculine to reason, justice, and the public and the feminine to emotion, love, and the private. Gruen classifies Coetzee with other philosophers of ethics of care who think of themselves as "post-relational". Gruen asks for a bridge to be built between cognition/reason, affect / emotion, and self/ other and introduces the notion of "entangled empathy" which can span the existing gaps (2019: 46-49):

According to this post-relational fiction, care, love, and sentiment are private, feminine experiences; justice on the other hand is seen as masculine and unsentimental. Of course, this binary thinking not only builds on stereotypical gender roles that preclude the idea that men are caring and obscures gender-queer expression, but it also ignores the particularity of caring relationships which are informed by racial, economic, ethical, cultural, and differently gendered experiences that are fundamentally about justice, or more precisely, injustice. (Gruen 2019: 17)

Stephan Mulhall examines Costello's lectures, and their appeal to literature and sentiment in *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy*. Costello's lectures reveal the clash between philosophy and

literature and the way philosophy has always resisted literature. In the first part of the book, Mulhall reviews the philosophical background of *The Lives of Animals* which was the first draft for *Elizabeth Costello*. Mulhall disagrees with the view that Elizabeth Costello is unable to provide a logical reason for her argument because hers are “forms of discourse that philosophy need have no qualms about admitting as modes of thought or ways of reflecting about the world, hence as possible ways of meeting its own distinctive burden — that of acknowledging the claims of reason” (2009: 77). He approves of her argument as an example of “imaginative exercise of speech”.

In “Localism, Locavorism, and Animal Rights in Olga Tokarczuk’s Novel *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*”, Danijela Petković and Dušica Ljubinković highlight the main conflict of the novel as a clash between localism and locavarianism on the one side and animal rights on the other side. Localism and locavarianism are usually considered as alternatives to globalization and as means of asserting a nation’s geographical boundaries. Tokarczuk, however, deconstructs locavarianism as another justification for abusing human and non-human animals and attacks localism and locavarianism as well as globalization (Petković and Ljubinković 2022: 81-94).

Ella Mortensen, in “The Fury’s Revenge: An Ecofeminist Reading of Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*”, explores the theme of revenge. She sees Duszejko’s fury as a revolt against a society ruled by men for power and profit. However, Mortensen observes that Tokarczuk creates an aesthetic distance between the protagonist and the reader by using irony and introducing comic elements into the novel. This makes the reader doubt the legitimacy of Duszejko’s ecofeminist activism.

The critical reviews on *Elizabeth Costello* and *Drive Your Spade Over the Bones of the Dead* highlight the authors’ exploration of complex themes such as the choice between sentience and reason, animal rights, and ecological concerns. Critics have generally praised the authors’ bold approach to these issues as both novels have sparked important discussions about our relationship with the natural world and the ethical implications of our actions.

## **5. Theoretical Framework and Method**

The present study is based on the views of philosophers of ethics of care who accord animals strong moral status. It creates a dialogue between utilitarian theorists like Peter Singer who argue that the interests of animals have the same weight as the interests of human beings. Singer objects to “speciesist bias” and observes that because we do not permit intelligent human beings to subdue less intelligent individuals, we should not allow it for animals who are our equals although less intelligent (Singer 2001:85). However, Singer justifies experiments on animals if it is carried out for the good of mankind. Another influential philosopher of animal rights-Tom Regan-takes issue with Singer’s views and thinks that it is a mistake to ground equal moral status on utilitarian grounds. According to Regan, non-human animals have an inherent val-

ue and inspire respect for this very reason. Singer and Regan's argument for animal rights is based on reason and is rejected by ecofeminist critics.

The study also applies an ecofeminist theoretical framework to the study of the novels. Ecofeminism is an ethical discourse and a critical method. It challenges patriarchal thought and value systems and draws parallels between the way women and other marginalized groups have been dominated. It argues that the patriarchal system that dominates society is also responsible for the destruction of the natural world and the exploitation of animals. As Glotfelty observes, despite "the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world.... Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture." (Glotfelty 1996: 90) ... It "has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman." (Glotfelty 1996: 90)

The present study is a library-based qualitative research which surveys the ways reason has given human beings right over the lives of animals and studies the views of philosophers of ethics of care -Peter Singer and Tom Regan- and compares them with the views held by ecofeminist critics like Lori Gruen and Carol J. Adams.

## 6. Research Questions

1. What are the views of philosophers of ethics of care about animal rights? What are the views of ecofeminist critics? What point of view do *Elizabeth Costello* and *Drive Your Spade Over the Bones of the Dead* align with?
2. In what respects is Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello similar to Olga Tokarczuk's Janina Duszejko? How could Janina Duszejko be regarded as Costello's alter ego?
3. Why is it important that humans begin to rethink their relation to animals? Do the novels succeed in making the readers redefine their relations to nature and to animals?

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1. Janina Duszejko as Elizabeth Costello's Alter Ego

Janiana Duszejko could be seen as Elizabeth Costello's alter ego because the two characters have many qualities in common. The main character in *Elizabeth Costello* is a writer who delivers lectures on ethics and animal rights. In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, Janiana Duszeko is an animal right activist who is greatly concerned about nature and animals. Costello and Duszeko are both outsiders: Elizabeth Costello is not accepted by the society and her family because her views are unconventional. Janiana Duszeko is also an elderly woman who lives alone and is considered eccentric by her neighbors and the towns people. Both characters contem-



plate death and after life. In addition both are outspoken about their views: Elizabeth Costello expresses her view about animal rights and animal ethics in her lectures and Janiana Duszeko delivers her heated lectures about animal rights in public places\_ a shop, the police station or the church.

*Elizabeth Costello* is considered Coetzee's contribution to the animal rights debate. In this interplay between fiction and academic discourse, Elizabeth Costello delivers lectures on various topics. Two lectures that have received great critical attention are about animals and their rights. In these lectures, Elizabeth Costello questions the validity of the boundaries drawn between the human and the non-human, and reason and emotion. Costello reminds her audience that the dividing lines between human and non-human animals are fluid. She also makes them see what they do not want to see: the horror of slaughterhouses and the violence of human beings toward non-human animals which she compares to Nazi death camps during World War II. Beneath the façade of civilization, she sees violence and blood. She goes so far as to make her audience acknowledge their role in the cruelty towards animals. Costello talks not only about animal rights and the necessity of vegetarianism but also about philosophical reasoning that has been used to justify our treatment of animals. The novel addresses important ethical issues: What factors shape our understanding of animals? To what extent has the emphasis on reason in Western civilization prevented human beings from understanding non-human animals? What complexities are involved in exploiting nonhuman animals? Why is it important that human beings rethink their relation to animals? These questions are taken up by Olga Tokarczuk's aging character Janina Duszejko in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. Duszejko also delivers heated lectures about animal rights and the importance of change in our attitude towards animals. Like Costello, she is considered by other characters as an eccentric and weird old woman. However, she, Janina Duszejko is an old woman like Elizabeth Costello but she is not weak and tired and seems to have found a solution to the questions posed by Costello. As if she were Costello's alter ego, she shows her dissatisfaction with cruelty towards animals by exacting revenge on the humans who prey upon and exploit animals. In an interview with the Brooklyn Public Library in 2010, Tokarczuk comments on the anger that drives Duszejko into action:

This book tells the story of a world which, according to the protagonist, is unjust, evil, and built on bad foundations. This is what reading Blake is all about for her, she draws on his philosophy, and it is rather a negative assessment of the world in which we live, the Ulro Earth. Duszejko, as a pure and innocent person, cannot abide in a world that is sinister, aggressive, terrible, cruel, and sometimes macabre. So, the only emotion that is born in a holy person is anger. Anger is not a bad energy. In Polish, we have a phrase that translates to "divine anger," "righteous anger." When someone is righteously angry, we know that the situation has surpassed the tolerated limits, the human norms. This book describes a situation like that. The macabre of killing is a matter of course happening around us, so the only way to behave justly is the "divine anger" that

inundates Janina Duszejko. (Tokarczuk 2020)

By calling Duszejko's anger, "divine anger" and "righteous anger", Tokarczuk approves of an eye for an eye principle. Duszejko acts upon her belief that people should be punished according to the way they have offended and kills the city officials who have murdered her beloved dogs. In terms of thought and speech she is exactly like Elizabeth Costello, but in terms of action she goes far beyond the weak and tired Costello. She is the person Costello could have wished she were.

### 1.2. The Choice of Sentience Over Reason

The Two lectures in *Elizabeth Costello* which show Coetzee's concern with the way human beings treat animals are "The Philosophers and the Animals" and "The Poets and the Animals". In these lectures, Elizabeth Costello shows concern with the way the emphasis on reason in European civilization has prevented people from understanding non-human animals. "Open your heart and listen to what your heart says" (Coetzee 2003: ch.3), says Elizabeth Costello in response to a man who asks if she means that factory farms should close down and people should stop eating meat. By asking the man to open his heart, she rejects the Kantian belief that human reason is the source of moral law and the basis of our belief in freedom. Throughout her lectures, Costello refers to the tradition of Western philosophical thought which is based on the binary opposition between reason and emotion. Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Descartes whom she refers to in her lectures, see reason as the prerogative of human beings and consider it enough cause for the superiority of mankind. Questioning the validity and importance of reason, Costello undermines reason as the sole human capacity that gives human beings right over the lives of animals: "Why should I bow to reason... and contend myself with embroidering on the discourse of old philosophers?" (Coetzee 2003: ch.3)

Like Elizabeth Costello, Janina Duszejko questions a civilization in which violence towards animals is institutionalized because philosophy and theology have normalized the practice:

What sort of a world is this? Someone's body is made into shoes, into meatballs, sausages, a bedside rug, someone's bones are boiled to make broth...Shoes, sofas, a shoulder bag made of someone's belly, keeping warm with someone else's fur, eating someone's body, cutting it into bit and frying it in oil...Can it really be true? Is this nightmare really happening? This mass killing, cruel, impassive, automatic, without any pangs of conscience, without the slightest pause for thought, though plenty of thought is applied to ingenious philosophies and theologies. What sort of a world is this, where killing and pain are the norm? What on earth is wrong with us? (Tokarczuk 2009: 86)

Costello argues that human beings can enter the lives of animals not through rea-

son but through imagination and the heart. Animals, too, come to an understanding of their existence through corporeal imagination, not reasoning. When Costello says “I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life” (Coetzee 2003: 63), she is thinking of what Gruen calls “entangled empathy”.

Costello’s rebuttal of reason and her embracing of sentient is reflected in the titles of her lectures: “The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Poets and the Animals”. The difference between the philosophers and the poets is the difference between reason and sentiment. The philosopher represents reason and the poet represents sentience. In her lectures, Costello makes her preference for poetry and sentience explicit. Throughout the novel, she fights vehemently against the advocates of reason to prove the validity and importance of poetry. She argues that the power of poetry derives from embodiment and “sympathetic imagination”, namely the power of inhabiting the being of another creature. Janina Duszejko is also fond of poetry and constantly cites Blake. At one point, she cites Blake to reject reason: “Unfortunately, the older they are, the more they succumb to the power of reason; they become citizens of Ulro, as Blake would have put it, and refuse to be led down the right path as easily and naturally any more” (Tokarczuk 2009: 91). At the end of the novel, she evaluates the situation by referring to Blake, a reference which echoes the title of the novel: “Drive your plow over the bones of the dead,’ I said to myself in the words of Blake; is that how it went? This is a reference to Blake’s famous lines: “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. / Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity/He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence.” Duszejko questions social norms which determine usefulness and attacks the dominion of human beings over animals. Costello and Duszejko are both advocates of poetry and see philosophy as a practice of moral evasion.

### 7.3. Aesthetic Distance

Coetzee creates an aesthetic distance between Costello and the reader by making his protagonist weak and unassertive. Norma objects to the paradox in Elizabeth Costello’s rejection of reason because Costello uses the language of reason to reject reason: “There is no position outside of reason where you can stand and lecture about reason and pass judgment on reason” (Coetzee 2003: ch.4). Ciferno believes that Coetzee undermines Costello’s authorial voice through her weak arguments (2018: 24). Although Costello undertakes to critique reason through reasoning, she nevertheless manages to make it clear that it is through poetry that humanity can save itself and other animals. As Deckard and Palm observe, “*Elizabeth Costello* the novel says something that Elizabeth Costello the character cannot” (2010: 343). The main idea of the book is reflected in the lectures about the lives of animals where Costello tries to call for action and awareness about animals and their ethical rights. The creation

of aesthetic distance increases the effectiveness of the message. Similarly, Tokarczuk undermines Duszejko's arguments by incorporating comic elements in the novel. These episodes provide a contrast with the tragedy of the murders. Comic elements can be traced in Duszejko's appearance and speech. Although impressive, Duszejko's speech is usually uttered in inappropriate places: the police station, a shop, or the church. The incongruity between Duszejko's philosophical views and the time and place where she delivers her lectures lessens the seriousness of the atmosphere. Duszejko calls people by their epithets which is odd and funny: Oddball, Dizzy, The Commandant, Father Rustle, Black Coat, The President, Good News, The Professor, The Dentist, The Writer. She has what Slicer thinks Costello lacks: humor. In addition, Tokarczuk intensifies the comic element in the novel by reversing gender roles.

Duszejko does not behave the way women are traditionally supposed to behave: "Oh well, I have the courage to admit that my fingernails were quite simply dirty", Duszejko says about herself" (Tokarczuk 2009: 26). "Feverishly I wondered if I had left any dirty underwear out on view" (Tokarczuk 2009:163). She says when she knows that the police have entered her house for investigation. Her neighbor, Oddball, is a man who is extremely obsessed with order and cleanliness in his kitchen. When Duszejko asks him to show his drawer, she sees utensils that "looked like surgical Instruments for complicated operations. It was plain to see that their owner took extraordinary care of them – they were polished and put away in the right places." (Tokarczuk 2009: 155) When he pours her coffee, he takes out a set of circular stencils and "wondered which pattern to choose, and finally picked a little heart shape. Then he sprinkled cocoa powder onto it, and, lo and behold, a brown cocoa heart appeared on the snowy foam on my coffee. He smiled broadly." (Tokarczuk 2009: 211) The contrast between Oddball's feminine behavior and Duszejko's masculine behavior becomes striking when she compares his kitchen utensils to the pickaxe, hammer, nails, syringes, and other instruments she keeps in her commander's car -Samurai-for murder. In addition to their comic effect, these episodes serve to deconstruct the Western traditional division between the male and the female. Mortensen notices the irony in the creation of the major character and maintains that the irony and the distancing throw doubts on the legitimacy of Duszejko's ecofeminist mission (2021: 228). Although these comic scenes and elements create an aesthetic distance between the character and the reader, they finally manage to elicit the desired response from the reader. A deadly serious character would not have been able to invoke in the reader the empathy that Janiana Duszejko invokes.

#### **7. 4. Animals as prisoners of Concentration Camps**

Many writers have drawn parallels between the treatment of animals by humans and the treatment of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps. In "The Letter Writer", Isaac Bashevis Singer has his protagonist Gombiner address his mouse Hulda thus, "In relation to [animals], all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka"

(Singer, Isaac Bashevis 2004:716). Appalled by the atrocious treatment of animals, Elizabeth Costello expresses disgust at a world that is a never-ending concentration camp: “We are surrounded by an enterprise of...cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of...in... bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock, ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them” (Coetzee 2003: ch.3). In bringing up this similarity, what she regrets is the lack of sympathetic imagination in human beings:

The particular horror of the camps, the horror that convinces us that what went on there was a crime against humanity, is not that despite a humanity shared with their victims, the killers treated them like lice...The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims...In other words, they closed their hearts. The heart is the seat of a faculty, sympathy, that allows us to share at times the being of another...There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. (Coetzee 2003: ch.3)

Attracting attention to European-humanist “the anthropological machine”, Agamben explains how the human identity is constantly produced and reproduced in opposition to the non-humans and the animal in extermination camps and discusses the futility of this practice (2003: 22).

Costello emphasizes the importance of the heart and suggests “sympathetic imagination” as a solution. She calls attention to the blindness of human beings to the suffering of others: “I return one last time to the places of death all around us, the places of slaughter to which, in a huge communal effort, we close our hearts. Each day a fresh holocaust, yet, as far as I can see, our moral being is untouched...” (Coetzee 2003: ch.3). Like Costello who compares the victims of the Holocaust to the animals that are slaughtered every day, Duseziko compares slaughterhouses to concentration camps: “Crime has come to be regarded as a normal, everyday activity. That’s just how the world would look if concentration camps became the norm. Nobody would see anything wrong with them” (Tokarczuk 2009: 85). But her speech falls flat on her irresponsive audience: “That’s what I was saying while he was writing. The woman had left the room, and now I could hear her talking on the phone. No one was listening to me, but I went on with my speech. I couldn’t stop, because the words were coming to me from somewhere of their own accord...” (Tokarczuk 2009: 85) Similarly, Costello is unable to attract the attention of her audience and the applause she gets is unenthusiastic (Coetzee 2003: 37). Costello’s message, however, gets through to the audience. As Schildgen observes, by ending the novel with Elizabeth’s imminent death, Coetzee stresses the lack of distinction between human and non-human animals as both are equally subject to suffering and death (Schildgen 2005: 326).

J.M. Coetzee and Olga Tokarczuk attract the attention of their readers to the horror of factory farming. Like concentration camps in which races deemed degenerate were perished and murdered, factory farms and slaughterhouses treat animals as worthless creatures to be killed and sold. Farm animals are concentrated in the

smallest possible space and sent to their deaths in the shortest possible time. Coetzee and Tokarczuk argue that acceptance of these practices shows that we lack empathy for those considered "other". Like the Nazis who dehumanized their victims, meat industry disgraces and demoralizes animals and creates a system in which violence towards animals and exploiting them is justified. The writers compare factory farms and slaughterhouses to concentration camps to make the readers see the real horror practiced on these places and to ask them to think about the ethical implications of their actions. They believe that by recognizing the rights of all beings, regardless of their species, we can have a more just and compassionate society.

## 8. Conclusion

Many philosophers and ecofeminist thinkers have critiqued the way human beings assign animals an inferior place. Arguing that othering animals and the oppression of animals can take various forms, they have attracted attention to the fact that violence towards animals has been institutionalized in the formal structure of our society and in our language: Our social systems allow us to see animals as our possessions and our language uses the absent referent meat instead of corpse which was a living animal before it appeared on our plates as food. These philosophers and thinkers argue that because animals, like human beings, have a mental and spiritual life and are capable of experiencing pain and pleasure, they should be given equal moral rights. A review of the existing debate between philosophers of ethics of care and ecofeminists shows that ecofeminists reject the binary opposition which relates the masculine to reason, justice, and the public and the feminine to emotion, love, and the private. Coetzee's defense of justice has given ecofeminists enough cause to classify him along with Singer and Regan as an advocate of liberalism. In *Elizabeth Costello*, however, Coetzee displaces the idea of reason with emotion and sentience. Although Coetzee declares his preference for justice and maintains that animals do not need his love, in *Elizabeth Costello* he preaches love and empathy for non-human animals through his eponymous character. Like Elizabeth Costello, Janina Duszejko preaches love for non-human beings and asks people to open their hearts to their victims. Duszejko could be seen as Elizabeth Costello's alter ego because like her, she is concerned with animal rights. Like Costello, she is an outsider who contemplates mortality and the afterlife. Like Costello, she is an advocate of poetry and has a deep feeling of resentment towards people who torture and kill animals. She differs from Costello only in one respect: Contrary to Costello who is weak and unassertive, Duszejko is a strong old woman who takes revenge on all the corrupt officials who have tortured and killed animals. The similarity is not restricted to the characters but also includes the novels. In both novels, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, sentience is preferred over reason, an aesthetic distance is created between the major character and the reader, and animals are compared to prisoners of concentration camps.

In *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee deliberately avoids the universals of Western culture which divide human experience into binary oppositions of reason/emotion, masculine/ feminine, justice/ love, and public/ private. Through the character of Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee asks the readers/audiences to open their hearts and become one with their victims. The idea of “Sympathetic imagination” which his character propounds is very similar to Gruen’s “entangled empathy” which transcends space, species, and substance and considers others as part of one’s agency. Similarly, Tokarczuk’s argument in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* is a critique of Western philosophical thought that justifies the inhuman treatment of non-human animals. Outraged because of disrespect toward animal life, Janina Duszejko kills corrupt city officials one by one and thus appears as Costello’s alter ego, one that transcends her weakness and inaction. Coetzee and Tokarczuk both ask for a kind of selflessness that enables one to transcend the boundaries of the self and to penetrate the being of the other. Consequently, they both choose sentience over reason and echo Gruen’s demand for “entangled empathy”. Coetzee and Tokarczuk advocate for a more just world where all living beings are treated with respect and dignity.

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