

Defenceless Bodies in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Rethinking the Hand's Role in Being Human

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*Abstract: The article discusses the relation of the hand and humanness, a relation which permeates the novels of South African author John Maxwell Coetzee. It focuses on the hand's protecting function in one of Coetzee's earlier novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). The article argues that the free use of the hands has often been overlooked in definitions of what it means to be human, but to deprive someone of the hands, or of the capacity to use them is one of the most important means of dehumanisation. First, the paper examines how we understand being human in general through Nick Haslam's theory on the two different senses of humanness and the two respective types of dehumanisation. While non-physical (cognitive, psychological, and social) characteristics have been analysed extensively in discussions of the features that make us human, the role of the body has often been neglected. However, Coetzee's works show that the specificities of the human body, and especially the human hand as an "instrument" to protect, create, communicate, and connect with the world and others through touch is a key feature of humanity. The restriction of the hands leaves the body defenceless, thus in a vulnerable state not dissimilar to that of animal bodies. The article concludes that in Coetzee's novel, the disablement of the hands results in animalistic dehumanisation.*

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INTRODUCTION

When the question, “What makes us human?” is posed, the answers tend to be *soul*, *rationality*, *autonomy*, *agency*, *language*, or *empathy*. My aim here is not to confute these views but to point out how much the actual physical body of the human is overlooked in these conceptions in favour of these non-physical characteristics.

In his seminal article on dehumanisation, Nick Haslam distinguishes between *animalistic* and *mechanistic* dehumanisation, based on the two senses of humanness. Haslam differentiates between “uniquely human” (usually acquired) characteristics which “define the boundary that separates humans from the related category of animals,” and “human nature” (inborn) characteristics that are essential to humans, but “may not be the same ones that distinguish us from other species” (256). According to Haslam, the denial of uniquely human characteristics—such as “civility,” “refinement,” “moral sensibility,” “rationality, logic” or “maturity”—results in animalistic dehumanisation, while the denial of human nature characteristics—such as “emotional responsiveness,” “interpersonal warmth,” “cognitive openness,” “agency, individuality,” or “depth”—leads to mechanistic dehumanisation (257–258). Typically, Haslam’s research is only concerned with non-physical characteristics; only cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are identified. By definition, physical, thus bodily characteristics would belong to “human nature” (HN) because these attributes are described as deeply “rooted” and “biologically based” (257). Interestingly, when Haslam explains what he calls the HN sense of humanness, he, for the first and last time, gives a corporeal example of an essential characteristic; however, he does so only within the realm of non-human animals: “Having wings is a core characteristic of birds, but not a reliable criterion for distinguishing them from other creatures ...” (256). Nevertheless, he refrains from providing a similar physical kind of example for an essentially but not uniquely human feature. A similar tendency is observable in the subchapter in which Haslam describes how people with disabilities are often dehumanised. Only people with some kind of cognitive disability are mentioned while the dehumanisation of those with motor or sensory disabilities is completely left out (253).¹

1 Disability studies, however, may offer a new angle on the relation between the physical body and the concept of the human. People with disability are often perceived as “not being fully human,” apparently because their disability indicates “an absence, lack, or loss” (Murray 39). The completeness of the body is part of our understanding of being human. Lennard J. Davis, one

Although it is unquestionable that non-physical characteristics are at the forefront of Haslam's research, there is one aspect of dehumanisation in his theory where the body has importance. Many individuals and whole groups of people have been likened to animals based on their ethnicity or race, writes Haslam; furthermore, these people have been depicted in a way that their physical features are caricatured to make them "look animal-like" (252–253). Animalistic dehumanisation is defined by Haslam as the denial of "uniquely human" characteristics and it is often accompanied "with a prominent bodily component, as in the nakedness of the Abu Ghraib prisoners" (Haslam 258). It seems that animalistic dehumanisation often *requires* more than simply the denial of uniquely human characteristics. In many cases, the dehumanisers feel the need to distinguish themselves from the target individual or group not only on a cognitive level but on a physical, and hence bodily level as well. This urge to distinguish the body of the dehumanised from that of the dehumaniser, to destroy the human-likeness of it either in a visual depiction or by exposing and torturing the actual body proves—together with the findings of disability studies—that besides the cognitive, psychological, and social attributes, the body has its significant place in the concept of being human.

THE BODY TOO SIMILAR

Concerning the relation between the groups labelled as "human" and "animal," one can generally identify two contrary approaches. One stems from Christianity and western philosophy and creates a binary opposition between humans and animals. The other, influenced by the views of eighteenth-century naturalists, such as Linné and Buffon, as well as Darwin's evolutionary theory, advocates the continuity between humans and other animals, in other words, it emphasises that the human is part of nature (McFarland and Hediger 4; Tallis 319).

of the most prominent figures in disability studies, argues that the "normal" human body paired with the "abnormal" disabled body was invented in the nineteenth century, as a result of a growing interest in statistics ("Constructing Normalcy" 4). Using a law from astronomy, French statistician Adolphe Quetelet conceptualised "*l'homme moyen*" or the average Man" and this concept served as a basis for eugenicists whose idea was "to create a dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be" (Davis, "Constructing Normalcy" 4, 8). Another fact Davis points out is that similarly to people with disability, disability studies itself is marginalised, while race, gender, and class are always in the focus of discussions. He finds this puzzling and asks: "What is more representative of the human condition than the body and its vicissitudes?" (Introduction xv).

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Recent discussions of the human–animal question usually revolve around the ways these two categories imbricate. Perhaps the most well-known champion of Animal Studies is Donna Haraway, whose views on the relationship of human and non-human beings go even beyond continuity and may rather be called an “entanglement” approach. She calls the idea of human exceptionalism a fantasy and a downright foolishness and sees the human and non-human critters as messmates connected via “lively knottings that tie together the world” (Haraway vii, 11, 19, 244). Though Haraway’s book, *When Species Meet*, was published as the third volume of the *Posthumanities* series, she does not think of herself as a posthumanist: “I am not a posthumanist; I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind” (19). Despite Haraway’s disassociation from post-humanism, thinking of the human–animal relation as a continuum and doing so within the posthumanist paradigm are two things that do not exclude each other. Cary Wolfe, the editor of the *Posthumanities* series, formulates a new perspective on posthumanism that acknowledges that “we ourselves are human animals, part of the evolutionary history” but at the same time “also insists that we attend to the specificity of the human” (*What is Posthumanism* xxv). He refuses N. Katherine Hayles’s description of post-humanism, which, according to Wolfe, “imagines a triumphant transcendence of embodiment”; drawing instead on the ideas of Derrida, Luhmann, and Foucault, he describes his sense of post-humanism as one which “requires us to attend to that thing called ‘the human’ with *greater* specificity, *greater* attention to its embodiment, embeddedness, and materiality” (*What is Posthumanism* 120). It is this “shared embodiment” and the “*physical* exposure to vulnerability and mortality” which connects us, human beings with non-human animals (Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism* 62, “Introduction” 8). Or, as philosopher Cora Diamond puts it: “The awareness we each have of being a living body, being ‘alive to the world,’ carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them” (74). Although this latter approach, advocating the human–animal continuum has been gaining more and more ground thanks to the animal rights movement and the emerging field of Animal Studies in recent decades, the binary distinction is still deeply engraved in our concepts. According to the opposition-based approach, humans are superior to animals, either because of their souls or because of their rationality. For example, Renaissance humanist philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola stated that it is the soul that makes Man capable of ascension, thus he can lift himself “above

the temptations of the flesh” (Kontler 4). This hierarchical perception of the human–animal relationship and the demonisation of the body may lie under animalistic dehumanisation discussed in the previous section.

Though the second, continuity-based approach is generally attributed to Charles Darwin, the attempt to place Man in nature goes beyond the nineteenth century. László Kontler argues that “in spite of the paradigm-shift inaugurated by Darwin, his ‘system’ was not possible without, and was still deeply anchored in, the early-modern developments ... the naturalisation of man and the historicisation of nature” (15). The two most influential eighteenth-century naturalists were the Swedish Carl von Linné and his “constant adversary,” the French Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (Foucault 148). Linné is often credited “with having included the human in zoological classification” in his 1735 *Systema Naturae* (Hoquet 24). However, his inclusion of Man among animals is conspicuously lopsided:

Like other animals who enjoy life, sensation, and perception, seek for food, amusements, and rest, and who prepare habitations convenient for their kind, he [Man] is *curious and inquisitive*; but, above all other animals, he is *noble in his nature*, in as much as, by the *powers of his mind*, he is able to reason justly upon whatever discovers itself to his senses; and to look, with reverence and wonder, upon the works of Him who created all things. (10–11, emphases added)

Despite his new approach, Linné was influenced by the idea of the Great Chain of Being and thought within the Christian paradigm. Though he placed Man among animals, he did not assert a “relation with animals” (Hoquet 25). He felt the need to emphasise Man’s God-given superiority. It is intriguing how Haslam’s division of HN and UH characteristics corresponds with Linné’s description of Man whose *curiosity* is similar to that of animals’ (HN characteristic), but whose *nobility* and *reason* (UH characteristics) raise him above them. Another important thing to note in Linné’s work is that, faithful to the Enlightenment, he turns Man, who until then had been the creature *endowed with a soul*, into “the last and best of created works, formed after the image of his Maker, *endowed with a portion of intellectual divinity*” (12, emphasis added). Furthermore, Linné’s system supported the polygenetic theory because he divided the human species into four subcategories based on supposed morphological and psychological traits (European–white, African–black,

American—red, and Asian—yellow). This was problematic since, after ranking these categories, he found not much difference detectable between the “lower” categories of humans and apes (Kontler 8–9).

Buffon is best known “for having enacted an important shift in the concept of species” when he stated that two specimens belonged to the same species if they were capable of producing “fertile offspring” (Hoquet 22; Kontler 9). Consequently, Buffon claimed that there is only one species of human: “mankind are not composed of species essentially different from each other; ... on the contrary, there was originally but one species, who ... have undergone various changes by the influence of climate, food, mode of living, epidemic diseases, and the mixture of dissimilar individuals” (Buffon27). Though Buffon argued that there was only one human species and he turned his attention to bodily traits rather than supposed psychological ones like Linné, he still focused on the differences and not the unity of these traits and, thus, created a hierarchy within the human species somewhat similar to the one created by Linné. According to Buffon, “[t]he most temperate climate lies between the 40th and 50th degree of latitude, and it produces the most handsome and beautiful men. It is from this climate that the ideas of genuine colour of mankind, and of the various degrees of beauty, ought to be derived” (Buffon 26). This means that those who were not—basically—white Europeans, were considered to be representatives of “degenerated versions of the original type” by the French naturalist (Hoquet 21). These developments of Linné, Buffon, and other eighteenth-century naturalists, or as Foucault calls it, the “quasi-evolutionism of the eighteenth century” (167), were necessary steps towards Charles Darwin’s ground-breaking evolutionary theory.

The Great Chain of Being, though Darwin tried to distance himself from it, had its influence on his work as well, since the idea of links between living beings originated in this concept (Tattersall 32). However, instead of a hierarchy between these creatures, Darwin always put emphasis on the continuity linking them. Towards the end of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin turned his attention to morphology and discussed the interesting fact that the limbs of a man, a mole, a porpoise, or a bat—be it a hand, paw, paddle, or wing—are “constructed on the same pattern” so that bones are positioned similarly (*Origin* 359). To explain this phenomenon, Darwin suggested the existence of an “ancient progenitor” of mammals, meaning that, for instance, those variations of the limbs are the result of “the natural selection of successive slight modifications” of an “archetypical ancestor’s” limbs

(*Origin* 360). The topic of similarity in the construction of mammals is further elaborated in Darwin's other influential work, *The Descent of Man* (1871). "It is notorious," wrote Darwin, "that man is constructed on the same general type or model with other mammals" (*Descent* 10). After reiterating that the bones, muscles, nerves, blood vessels, and so on, are positioned in all mammals according to a common pattern, Darwin compared the pictures of a human and a dog embryo in roughly the same phase of development as another proof of resemblance (*Descent* 15). These statements bridged the gap between Man and other animals, two groups which had seemed to be separated by a chasm until then: "Consequently we ought frankly to admit their [man and all vertebrate animals] community of descent ... It is only our natural prejudice, and that arrogance which made our forefathers declare that they were descended from demi-gods, which leads us to demur to this conclusion" (*Descent* 32–33).

Besides showing the morphological and developmental continuity connecting human and other animal bodies, Darwin also examined cognitive and social characteristics. His unconcealed intention was to prove, using examples both from academic sources and his own life, "that there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties" (*Descent* 35). Darwin examined faculties and characteristics like intelligence, emotions, imitation, memory, reason, or language, ones that have been always associated with Man, but which could be possessed by animals as well considering the examples provided. Darwin's conclusion in this respect resonates with the continuity-based approach he advocated in the case of corporeal structure and development: "the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of *degree* and not of kind" (*Descent* 105, emphasis added).

Though Darwin always stressed the link between Man and other animals, he could not overlook the fact that despite the common progenitor and the morphological, developmental, and even mental similarities, Man is still different in a way. He claimed that Man is "the most dominant animal that has ever appeared on the earth" who owes this dominance "to his intellectual faculties, his social habits, ... and to his *corporeal structure*" (*Descent* 136–137, emphasis added). Meanwhile, Darwin also realised the neglect surrounding the human body's significance; thus, he dedicated the second part of Chapter 4 of *The Descent of Man* to its

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rehabilitation: “Although the intellectual powers and social habits of man are of paramount importance to him, we must not underrate the importance of his bodily structure” (*Descent* 138).

Clearly, the body is more closely tied to the second, continuity-based view of the human–animal question. Due to the similarities between the corporeal structures of humans and other animals, the physical characteristics of the human are not considered to be special or exclusive enough to raise the human on a pedestal above other species and, thus, they are often overlooked. As Darwin pointed out, the body must not be entirely disregarded when reflecting on the human. However, even though Darwin established a difference between animals and humans based on partly bodily features, later, the body started to be seen as a point of contact and continuity between animals and humans, and bodily vulnerability became one of the characteristics that we share with animals. Raymond Tallis writes that “whatever human possibilities may be uncovered or postulated through reflection and exploration, we deceive ourselves if we forget how we remain fastened to our physical body and, through embodiment, are vulnerable to pain and suffering” (5).

This approach that connects human and non-human animal bodies through shared vulnerability but at the same time upgrades the body’s relevance resonates with J. M. Coetzee’s thoughts on the body, expressed in *Doubling the Point*, his essay and interview collection published in 1992: “If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not ‘that which is not,’ and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt” (248). The heft of this “embodied perspective” is indicated by the fact that following Coetzee’s earlier, apartheid-inspired works, written in a South African context, the suffering body has remained in the focus in the form of ageing and disability, in his later, “Australian novels” (Hall 64). It seems that the way Diamond, Tallis, and Coetzee see the body only furthers the thought that the body is not special enough to make a difference: animals feel pain too. However, the body does not only expose humans and animals to pain and suffering, but it also opens other possibilities. In the case of humans, the “specificity,” as Wolfe would call it, that grants numberless possibilities is the hand.

The sentiment in *The Hand*, “[w]e use it as we draw our breath, unconsciously” (13), by nineteenth-century physician, neurologist, and artist Charles Bell, summarises how humans relate to the hand—it is an essential part of human life, just as breathing is, and is used without a second thought. The hand’s significance is usually realised when its functioning becomes hindered by injury or illness. Meanwhile, the hand holds a special position: it is both part of the body and, at the same time, is outside the body; as a result, it can be used as an instrument. The four main areas of use of the human hand may be described as protection, creation, communication, and touch. Indeed, the hand has raised the curiosity of many philosophers, physicians, and naturalists, from ancient times to the present day.

Aristotle famously called the hand the *tool of tools*, stating in *On the Parts of Animals*: “the hand would appear to be not one single instrument but many, as it were an instrument that represents many instruments” (373). He classified the hand, similarly to the face, as a non-uniform (composed of uniform parts e.g. bone) and instrumental part (109, 111, 113). Aristotle emphasised the strong bond between hands and intelligence, but he disagreed with Pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras’s assertion that Man had become the most intelligent animal because he had hands (371). Although the direction of this relation has remained contested, the existence of the connection between the hands and Man’s distinguished status among animals is generally accepted (see e.g. Galen, Tallis). Thus, Aristotle’s objection was not against the connection itself but the direction of this cause-and-effect relation. One of Aristotle’s most important principles is that “matter” serves “form”—the body serves the Soul—therefore, humans have hands because they are the most intelligent of animals (36, 71, 373). Consequently, each body part has its purpose and, thus, all these parts are shaped so that they can realise their respective purpose (77). From the examples he provided, it seems that Aristotle saw the main purpose of the hands of Man to be defence. Disagreeing with those who thought Man to be the most vulnerable and defenceless of the animals, Aristotle claimed that Man had a huge advantage over other animals, namely that he could take off, put on, and change his “defensive equipment” at will: “Take the hand: this is as good as a talon, or a claw, or a horn, or again, a spear or a sword, or any other weapon or tool: it can be all of these, because it can seize and hold them all” (373).

Physician and philosopher Galen of Pergamon was influenced by Aristotle and dedicated an entire work to the human hand. He shared Aristotle's opinion on the relation between hands and Man's status: "because he is the wisest animal he has a hand" (7). Galen emphasised that the purpose of the hand is protection, since the human body is without any weapon; thus, "by the use of these [hands] he [Man] arms the body, and preserves it in every way" (9). However, Galen outdid Aristotle in a way because he identified another essential function of hands besides protection, namely *creation*. Man is not only a "warlike" but also a "peaceable" animal, and as such, he is able to *write, build, or make* by using his hands (7).

Centuries passed till the communicating aspect of the hands was realised by philosopher and doctor John Bulwer who wrote *Chirologia: Or the Natural Language of the Hand* (1644). As the further subtitles of the work write, Bulwer thought of the hand as "the chiefest instrument of eloquence." Bulwer claimed he found a huge deficiency while reading the classics, especially the works of Aristotle, in which "one Province not to have Beene visited, and that is *Gesture*." *Chirologia* was not only unique at its time but proved to be an influential work in the long run. Bulwer believed the gestures to be "the onely speech that is universall to Man" and the hand to be the "most *talkative*" part of the whole body; thus, it is not surprising that he was among the first who made suggestions on the education of deaf people and the use of sign language in England (Bulwer, *Chirologia* 1, 3).

Despite Aristotle's elaborate discussion of the sense of touch in *De Anima* and his comments on the hand in *On the Parts of Animals*, it seems he missed connecting the two thoughts. It was French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac who filled the gap in his 1754 work the *Treatise on the Sensations*. The hand being the "principal organ of touch" is a core element in Condillac's argument (446). He argued that "all our knowledge comes from the senses" and that "our sensations are only ways of being" (293). To resolve this paradox, Condillac raised touch above the other senses and claimed that, by touch, we realise that outside of our "sentient being" there are "extension and objects" (296). To prove his theory, Condillac proposed a theoretical experiment in which he opened the senses of a human-shaped statue one by one (or two or three at the same time), thus demonstrating the different characteristics of each sense. Condillac concluded that his statue would need three things in order to realise that there is a world outside of it: mobility of the limbs, objects around it, and that its hands were placed first on itself and then on the objects around

it (295, 396–400). Hence, the hand was ascribed a new role of being the instrument of touch and by this, being the intermediary of knowledge.

The beginning of the nineteenth century brought a comprehensive book on the hand, entitled *The Hand, Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as Evincing Design*, which was published as part of the Bridgewater Treatises in 1833. The intended purpose of these Treatises was to discuss an interesting scientific issue in a way that “promote[d] God’s existence by detailing the purposeful design of the universe” as a necessary “response to the extreme materialistic physiology coming from France in the eighteenth century” (Capuano 1). The author, Charles Bell claimed that the hand was a perfect construction of divine creation and it is exactly its perfection “which makes us insensible to its use” (13). Bell’s work discusses the hand from a new, natural theological point of view, but it also repeats and, thus, summarises thoughts on the hand mentioned afore. First and foremost, Bell reiterated the idea of Aristotle and Galen about the hand’s protecting function and that having hands is a consequence of Man’s superior cognitive powers: “We ought to define the hand as belonging exclusively to man—corresponding in sensibility and motion with that ingenuity which converts the being who is the weakest in natural defence, to the ruler over animate and inanimate nature” (16). The talkative hand originating from Bulwer also appears in the text as the “instrument of expression” (218). Bell supported his argument on this function by pointing out how the position of hands in paintings added to the meaning of the given works. Finally, though Bell did not mention or refer to Condillac in his work, his ideas of touch, which is “seated in the hand,” are almost word-by-word identical to those of Condillac (150). It is claimed that the most important of the senses is touch because it is by the motion of the hand and touch that “we have a knowledge of our own body as distinguished from things external to us,” and that we have a certain knowledge of the world external to us (179, 192–193).

The hand is also a core point in Darwin’s argument about the importance of the corporeal structure of humans in *The Descent of Man*. The first bodily feature Darwin highlighted was indeed the hand and its perfection. Darwin acknowledged Bell’s argument that it is the hand, working in concert with reason, which ensured the dominance of humans in the world, but as a naturalist, he explained this by the process of natural selection instead of some divine plan (*Descent* 141). The muscles of the hands and feet, being responsible for mobility, are crucial in natural selection: those individuals whose muscles adapted better could gain subsistence and defend themselves more easily; hence, they would be more likely to survive and

produce offspring (*Descent* 136). The hand's perfection and consequently Man's dominance is the result of natural selection: "Man could not have attained his present dominant position in the world without the use of his hands which are so admirably adapted to act in obedience to his will" (*Descent* 141). Darwin, similarly to Condillac and Bell, connected the hand and touch and claimed that touch is the sense on which the hand's "delicate use largely depends" (*Descent* 141).

Tallis agrees with Anaxagoras and uses the hand as the starting point of his argument. He looks at the small anatomical differences between human and primate hands to demonstrate how these subtle yet significant details lead to a handful of events causing the discontinuities between humans and primates beyond the biological (247). This perspective makes the binary and continuity-based approaches to the human–animal relation meet somewhere in the middle. Talis's main point concerns the hand and the development of agency and is summarised as follows: "The origin of the sense of agency has been attributed to the special powers and virtues of the human hand. This organ makes possible the transformation of our relationship to our own bodies into an instrumental one, as opposed to one of 'dumb' suffering" (295). The hand awakened the sense of agency in humans and since then, it has been the actor and protector of this sense. The human hand is able to put food into one's mouth, to defend oneself or, to the contrary, to cause harm, as well as to make contact with the other through touch. In short, the hand has the power to protect the body from suffering, caused either by hunger, pain, or loneliness, through action.

THE SUFFERING BODY AND THE HAND IN *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*

The suffering body is a recurring theme in Coetzee's novels, and the hand plays a particularly important role. In *Slow Man*, for instance, Paul Rayment, a new amputee ponders the question of whether the Venus of Milo would still be considered the portrayal of beauty if one day it was revealed that the statue did not lose its arms sometime in the past—as it is widely accepted—but it had been originally modelled on an amputee (76). This is, in fact, a question that is interesting not only from an aesthetic perspective, but it raises broader philosophical concerns as well. The hand in Coetzee's novels is often disabled due to torture, injury, illness, or ageing. According to Robert A. Wilson, disability, similarly to gender and race, can be a "marked variation that dehumanises" (181). Moreover, if the hands

are impeded, they cannot function as actors and protectors, thus leaving the human body to suffer. What remains without protection is a vulnerable physical body not dissimilar to that of animals. The disablement of hands dissolves the demarcation between human and non-human animals; therefore, the disabling of the hand is a particular form of dehumanisation.

Coetzee's 1980 novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, serves as a perfect starting point for exploring the relationship between hands and humanness. The novel is unquestionably dominated by hands, many of which are bound, tortured, or, to the contrary, ready to bind and torture (and there is also a distinct role of caring hands, which should be the subject of another paper). The mainly restraining, oppressive, and even destructive, in short, negative ambiance surrounding the hands exemplifies the fictional Empire's ideology, which is a reflection of the colonial and apartheid ideology in South Africa.

Though the unnamed narrator of the story serves the Empire as a magistrate of one of its settlements on the frontier, he becomes doubtful and begins to question the rightness of the Empire's ideology when Colonel Joll arrives in the town. The high-ranking officer of the Third Bureau captures and tortures nomadic people, called the "Barbarians," claiming, without any apparent evidence, that these people are plotting to attack the Empire. Joll leads a campaign against the Barbarians beyond the frontier, and after just a few days, he sends back a group of prisoners escorted by soldiers to the settlement. The magistrate is ordered to *hold* the prisoners until Joll returns. He is exasperated by the fatuousness of the Colonel who has captured these innocent fishing people simply because they hid seeing the approaching soldiers. Not knowing what to do with them but wishing to treat them humanely, the magistrate accommodates the fishing people in the barracks yard and provides them with food. A soldier offers bread "to the oldest prisoner. The old man accepts the bread reverentially in both hands" and, then, divides it among his people (19). The bread's way, going from hand to hand, signifies that the prisoners are still looked upon as fellow human beings; however, the magistrate's description of the scene where he and his men watch the fishing people eat "as though they are strange animals," foreshadows the future relation of the two groups (19). After a while, the town gets tired of the prisoners, and they begin to seem more and more animal-like. The food, which was offered from hand to hand at first is simply thrown: "the kitchen staff refuse them utensils and begin to toss them their food from the doorway as if they were indeed animals" (21).

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Later, Colonel Joll returns triumphantly with a dozen Barbarian captives. The men are bound in an extraordinarily cruel and painful way that the magistrate describes as follows:

at the end of the rope, tied neck to neck, comes a file of men, barbarians, stark naked, holding their hands up to their faces in an odd way as though one and all are suffering from toothache. . . . A simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man's hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks. "It makes them meek as lambs," I remember being told by a soldier who had once seen the trick: "they think of nothing but how to keep very still." (113)

It has been common practice to tie the hands of captives since the dawn of time, this being the easiest and surest method to deprive them of their ability to act and to place control over them into the hands of the captor. However, the way these men are bound goes beyond common practice. Being the chief instrument of protection, the hand can protect the body from suffering, but in the case of the Barbarian captives, their own hands turn into both the cause of and the protector against pain. From human beings, they are turned into "meek lambs" simply because they cannot use their hands freely. With the wire loop pierced through their hands and cheeks, the captive men are doubly robbed of their agency: they cannot act, or otherwise, they would hurt themselves, and as a result, they are unable to fend off the pain coming from outside. Four of the men are made to kneel and are tethered to a pole by their loops. The men's restrained posture is contrasted with the gestures of Joll. The colonel controls events like a conductor "directing the soldier with little gestures of the hand" (115). Then, Joll writes "ENEMY" on each man's back, literally turning them into enemies with the act of his hand, and the soldiers begin hitting them with canes.

The magistrate cannot stand this injustice and when Joll raises a hammer, he intervenes. Short of any weapon, the magistrate has to rely on his hand, which he "points at him [Joll] like a gun" (116). "'Not with that!' I shout. The hammer lies cradled in the Colonel's folded arms. 'You would not use a hammer on a beast, not on a beast!'" (117). Humiliated, deprived of agency, and beaten almost to death, however, the prisoners seem more animal- than human-like. Their upper limbs, having lost their function completely, ceased to be arms and hands and have transformed

into paws: “the four prisoners who lie docilely on the earth, their lips to the pole, their hands clasped to their faces like monkeys’ paws” (117). The magistrate is attacked by a soldier and his last weapon, one of his arms, gets broken by a strike of the soldier’s stick. Besides being a physical injury, the break of his arm marks a metaphoric break in the magistrate’s belief in human supremacy. The moment he loses the capacity to use his hand freely and, thus, becomes vulnerable, he realises the similarity linking human and non-human animals:

I raise my broken hand to the sky. ‘Look!’ I shout. ‘We are the great miracle of creation! But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself! How—!’ Words fail me. ‘Look at these men!’ I recommence. ‘*Men!*’ ... What I wanted to say next I cannot remember. A miracle of creation—I pursue the thought but it eludes me like a wisp of smoke. It occurs to me that we crush insects beneath our feet, miracles of creation too, beetles, worms, cockroaches, ants, in their various ways. (117–118)

The faltering words and the eluding thoughts of the magistrate in his injured bodily state can also be interpreted in terms of Cora Diamond’s assertion about Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello*. According to Diamond, it is exactly because she is very much aware of the shared vulnerability of human and non-human animals that Costello refuses to engage in the debate about animals, which unfolds around the dinner table after one of her lectures. “She sees our reliance on argumentation as a way we may make unavailable to ourselves our own sense of what it is to be a living animal” (53). Although the magistrate’s recognition, unlike Costello’s, is involuntary, the realisation of shared embodiment and, thus, him being a “living animal,” dawns on him when he stops arguing and feels what it means to be an embodied being.

This injury of the hand is, nonetheless, only the beginning of the magistrate’s dehumanising torture. The Colonel and Mandel the warrant officer make sure that he does not make himself a martyr whose death would turn the entire town against the Bureau. His protestation is depreciated and the magistrate himself is tortured and made the laughing-stock of the settlement. The torturers “were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice as long as it is whole and well” (126). The magistrate is made to run naked and do tricks to entertain the soldiers, scullery

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maids, and children. As a final attraction, he is almost hanged from a tree, but eventually, Mandel knots the rope around his hands bound behind his back.

If I can hold my arms stiff, if I am acrobat enough to swing a foot up and hook it around the rope, I will be able to hang upside down and not be hurt: that is my last thought before they begin to hoist me. But I am weak as a baby, my arms come up behind my back, and as my feet leave the ground I feel a terrible tearing in my shoulders as though whole sheets of muscle are giving way. (132)

Once more the impotence of the person with bound hands is in sharp contrast with the agency of those whose hands are free: “Two little boys drop out of the tree and, hand in hand, not looking back, trot off” (132). The magistrate bellows uncontrollably and only hopes that if the town’s children hear him, “they do not imitate their elders’ games, or tomorrow there will be a plague of little bodies dangling from the trees” (133). After this last “performance,” the magistrate is released from his cell and can do whatever he wishes because he has ceased to be a threat to the Third Bureau, he “lost his last vestige of authority” (136). However, along with authority, due to his damaged arms, he seems to have lost the last trace of humanness and sense of self as well, for he uses the third person singular instead of “I”: “for a week [he] licked his food off the flagstones like a dog because he had lost the use of his hands” (136).

It was noted in the introduction that Haslam identifies the denial of HN characteristics, where bodily features would belong by definition, as mechanistic dehumanisation. However, reviewing the descriptions of people with bound or injured hands in Coetzee’s novel, we see that the disablement of hands results not in mechanistic, but in animalistic dehumanisation. The bound Barbarian prisoners become meek lambs, their hands turn into monkey paws, while the magistrate licks his food from the floor like a dog. Despite being a biologically based corporeal characteristic, the human hand stands out from the human nature category and fits into the category of uniquely human characteristics as well.

One day the arrival of a corpse on horseback causes a sensation in the settlement. The man was once a member of Joll’s troop who was most probably captured by the Barbarians. However, the magistrate does not mention any trace of wound or torture, only one thing is certain: the man has been dead for days. What is most

alarming for the townspeople is the posture of the corpse: “He is lashed to a stout wooden framework which holds him upright in his saddle. His spine is kept erect by a pole and his arms are tied to a crosspiece” (153). It is not clear whether the man was tied to the framework already as a corpse, or while he was still alive, in which case his death was caused by the restrained posture of his body, most importantly by the inability to use his hands. Nevertheless, the intention behind this crucified scarecrow figure is clear: it is the response of the Barbarians to the “civilised” way their captured people were treated by the Empire.

Eventually, after this unsuccessful campaign, Colonel Joll and his troops leave the settlement for good, and the town’s life returns, it seems, to normal. The visit of the Third Bureau does leave a subtle but unsettling trace nonetheless. Though the children of the town did not begin to hang each other from trees, their watching the beating of the bound-handed barbarians and, then, the hanging of the magistrate planted the seed of the Empire’s ideology in them. It is the danger of this tendency that beliefs are transmitted from one generation to the next that the magistrate senses unconsciously but is unable to grasp: “There has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it” (170). The “elders’ game” is reflected in the game of children. It is winter and the magistrate watches children building a snowman in the middle of the square. When the body and head are completed, the children place pebbles for ears, eyes, nose, and mouth, and even a cap on top of its head. The children, either because they do not realise their absence or because they deliberately want to finish the snowman this way, do not give their creation hands: “It strikes me that the snowman will need arms too, but I do not want to interfere,” he notes (170). The snowman, thus, stands without hands to act or protect, its body exposed entirely to the world.

CONCLUSION

Although the meaning of “human” is not set in stone, tentative definitions of the concept are certainly dominated by cognitive, psychological, and, or social characteristics. Our physical body seems to be self-evident and, thus, slips our notice. Nevertheless, the way disability is perceived reveals our deeply engraved idea about the “normal” human body. Another proof of the body’s role in the concept of the human is provided by Haslam whose work (though it focuses mainly on non-physical characteristics) defines animalistic dehumanisation as one kind

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of dehumanisation which may involve bodily dimensions. Perhaps it is this connection between humans and other animals through the body that relegates the body to the background and makes it seem less significant. This link through the biological body may have begun to emerge when naturalists first included Man in zoological classification and solidified with Darwin's evolutionary theory. In the recent discourse on the human-animal relationship, it is our shared vulnerability that is always emphasised, the human and non-human animal bodies are knitted even closer.

However, despite the shared vulnerability, there is the hand, a body part that is used almost unconsciously, that renders humans capable of defending their bodies in various ways. For philosophers from Aristotle to Tallis, the hand seems to be a marker of humanness, a bodily characteristic that differentiates humans from other animals. Naturally, the hand can do much more than simply protect the body; however, its most fundamental purpose or function is defence.

The body, its vulnerability, and suffering are central themes in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. This entails that hands have a significant role in the novel as well. They are depicted either as weapons ready to cause harm, or as useless appendages that are bound, broken, or torn. The latter kind of depiction always indicates the deprivation of humanness. Thus, the disablement of the hands in *Waiting for the Barbarians* marks a form of dehumanisation. The characters with disabled hands are likened to different animals (lamb, monkey, dog); hence, in terms of Haslam's theory, they become the victims of animalistic dehumanisation. At the same time, the hand proves to be understood as a uniquely human characteristic.

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