

**IN THE NAME OF LOVE: DAVID LURIE'S ROMANTICIZED VIOLENCE IN J.M.
COETZEE'S *DISGRACE***

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Abstract

The thesis argues that the protagonist of J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, David Lurie, enacts a limited worldview, which is indicative of a colonialist mentality informed by scholarly interests in Romanticism. It thus asserts that *Disgrace* opens a space to explore how certain legacies, or vestiges, of Romanticism are implicated in systems of oppression: colonialism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, and speciesism. Specifically, I am interested in the extent to which these Romantic vestiges constitute a fantasy for Lurie, allowing him to participate in these systems of oppression, while also providing him with a means to understand himself as sensible and empathetic. As such, my project seeks to demonstrate that the novel presents a challenge to Romantic tendencies that oversimplify materially complex realities. Further, I argue that Lurie's fantasy relies upon cultural dualisms that privilege reason over nature, man over woman, white over black, and hu(man) over animal, resulting in a construction of 'the human' that is masculine, white, and of the mind. That is, his fantasy calls attention to a construction of 'the human' that is implicitly hostile to Others. Therefore, this thesis interrogates Lurie's objectification of women and animals to demonstrate that Romantic tendencies can function as a veiling mechanism, allowing Lurie to perceive their bodies as mere supports to his fantasy. Moreover I contend that critics' sympathetic readings of Lurie serve to minimize the violence he commits against feminized and animalized bodies within the novel, and that this failure to critically engage with Lurie's Romantic self-justifications evinces vestiges of Romanticism that continue to inform and maintain relationships of domination and exploitation.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved canine companion Samson (2003-2011), who was both a very good friend and teacher.

1 Chapter: Introduction

In a modest, petit-bourgeois household in the South African town of George, a fifty-two year old man kneels and presses his forehead to the floor, prostrating himself at the feet of a mother and her daughter. He has blundered into the room unexpectedly, saying nothing to them before falling to the floor. It is uncertain whether the man knows exactly what he means to convey with this posture. He could be signaling a number of emotions—exhaustion, submission, adoration, contrition, or perhaps any combination of these. Keeping his head lowered, he wonders how he is being perceived. “Is that enough? he thinks. Will that do? If not, what more?” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 173). The man looks up. The mother and the daughter are staring silently back at him, perplexed and astonished. Their hands, once busy with a skein of wool, have not moved. They are frozen in their places. In that moment, he feels a surge of erotic desire for both of them; it appears suddenly, as if it were a product of the display he has just performed. He stands up, murmuring some banal words of parting before he leaves.

The man described in the scene above is David Lurie, the central protagonist of J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. Published in 1999 and set in post-apartheid South Africa, the novel tells the story of how Lurie, an aging white professor of communications and Romantic poetry at the Technical University of Cape Town, sets in motion a series of events that will leave him disgraced. At the beginning of the novel, Lurie believes that he has created a self-sufficient and contented life for himself. When his weekly assignation with an “exotic” prostitute ends, however, Lurie engages in what he regards as “an affair” with a coloured student more than thirty years younger than him, Melanie Isaacs (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 7, 18). Lurie pursues this ‘affair’ with Melanie in a predacious and aggressive manner, abusing his position of

authority as her teacher, and ignoring her disinclination to engage with him. When Melanie lodges an official complaint against Lurie, he becomes the subject of a disciplinary hearing and is eventually forced to resign from the university. Lurie's deportment throughout the hearing is characterized by his adamant refusal to accept the disciplinary committee's requests that he make a public apology and undergo sensitivity training. He admits guilt to the charges brought against him, but justifies his behaviour by claiming allegiance to "the rights of desire" (89). After the hearing, Lurie leaves the city for his daughter Lucy's small farm in the country, where he expects to be able to "gather himself, gather his forces" (121). Quickly into his stay, however, a group of young black men arrive on the farm, physically assailing Lurie and raping Lucy.

Following this attack, Lurie insists that Lucy press charges against her rapists and move away from the country. Lucy, on the other hand, is determined to cope with her rape in a private manner and to maintain her life on the farm. During this time, Lurie becomes increasingly antagonistic toward Lucy's black neighbour Petrus, who Lurie believes may have been aware of—or even arranged for—the attack on the farm. Lucy responds to these mounting tensions by informing Lurie that: "You have not been listening to me ... I know you mean well, but you are not the guide I need, not at this time" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 161). Feeling estranged from Lucy, Lurie returns to Cape Town, where he works on an opera about Byron and recommences his pursuit of Melanie. He travels back to the farm, however, when he discovers that Lucy is pregnant with the child of one of her rapists. When he learns that Lucy intends to go forward with the pregnancy, he disapproves of her decision. But he also fears that "some new disaster [may] take place on the farm," and decides to stay in the vicinity (210). Lurie rents a room at a nearby boarding-house, and devotes his time to

volunteering at a local animal clinic, where he helps to euthanize unwanted dogs. There, he develops “a particular fondness for” Driepoot, a young dog with a crippled leg that enjoys sitting by Lurie’s feet and listening to him play the banjo (215); Lurie believes that Driepoot “would die for him” (215). The novel ends with Lurie carrying Driepoot into the surgery room, and “giving [him] up” for euthanization (219).

Despite its relatively recent publication, *Disgrace* has become Coetzee’s most discussed novel, inspiring what one critic calls “a flood of ... response” (Randall 212). In addition to being a commercial success, some have asserted that it is “a literary triumph” (Graham, “Yes” 4). Indeed, Elleke Boehmer claims that the novel “may well have paved the way for [Coetzee’s] 2003 award...of the Nobel Prize in Literature” (Boehmer, “Sorriest” 135). One of the reasons for the attention the novel has received is that against the 1990s background of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) it seems to offer an immediate commentary on the task of reconciling socio-economic and racialized divisions within the ‘new’ South Africa. Notwithstanding its popularity and general acclaim, however, *Disgrace* has garnered a great deal of negative criticism. In particular, its reception in South Africa has been “ambivalent” (Graham, “Yes” 4), as some commentators have criticized the novel for depicting the interracial rape of a white woman in the post-apartheid context, and thus “perpetuating the worst nightmares and clichés about [black South Africans]” (Mardorossian 73). Some early readings of the novel accused Coetzee of racism and “turning away” from the “‘positive’ political agenda” of reconciliation (Graham, “Yes” 4). As a result, the novel has initiated a heated debate about racial representation and discourse, as well as an ongoing dialogue about the difficulty of transforming social relations between racial groups (see Anker, Attwell and Attridge).

Discussions of *Disgrace* have subsequently attempted to defend the novel from its initial, controversial reception, by exploring the complexities around the themes of shame, confession, and forgiveness that informed the TRC. These readings allow scholars to engage with how the narrative resonates politically, but they may also work to mask the severity of Lurie's individual actions, by expressing sympathy for Lurie as one of the white South Africans whose "old certainties" are disappearing (Attridge 100). That is, while these readings are useful in critical reflections on the resonances of the TRC, they may also read in commiseration with Lurie, actively forgetting some of his more predacious and harmful behaviours. As a consequence, these readings overlook the relationship between Lurie's worldview and questions of violence against various bodies, particularly feminized and animalized bodies. Indeed, the significance of *Disgrace* rests not only in its proclivity to encourage critical discussions of the TRC and its associated themes, but also in its ability to uncover the ethical and political dimensions of Lurie's limited worldview, which this thesis argues hinges upon his understanding of Romanticism. For me, Lurie's worldview is indicative of a colonialist mentality that is further informed by his scholarly interest in Romantic poetry. Therefore, I assert that *Disgrace* opens a space to explore how certain legacies, or vestiges, of Romanticism are implicated in systems of oppression: colonialism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, and speciesism.

While scholars have noted that there is a difficulty in defining Romanticism along strict lines, there is, nonetheless, a list of particular characteristics of Romantic literature that define this period of English literary history. These include an emphasis on individualism, freedom from rules, privileging the imagination over reason, devotion to beauty, and reverence toward women and nature (Chaplin and Faflak xvii). Chaplin and Faflak contend,

further, that the tradition emerging from these characteristics is a rather “elitist conceptualization of [literature] as the ultimate expression of a Romantic aesthetic that emerges in and through the work of a small number of especially gifted men” (xvii). In keeping with their assertion, this thesis examines the ways in which Lurie’s self-justifications and actions reveal a tendency to situate himself as a Romantic subject guided by exclusionary, male-privileging notions of desire and freedom, ostensible reverence for women, and a sense of superiority toward blacks and animals. I assert that Lurie’s interest in Romanticism creates a fantasy derived from his own interpretation of spiritual and philosophical tendencies found within the Romantic tradition, a tradition that some scholars, such as Chaplin and Faflak, contend constitutes an ideology, a complex of values and beliefs. In general, these spiritual and philosophical tendencies are characterized by an effort to respond to social and political problems by escaping into the realm of the imagination and ideas. My thesis argues that these Romantic tendencies allow Lurie to rely on a fantasy—to reimagine his actions as sensible and emotive, rather than recognizing them as strange, inappropriate, and exploitative. Furthermore, I contend that extant criticisms of *Disgrace* reveal their own interests and biases, by tending to accept Lurie’s use of Romanticism, and potentially overlooking the material realities and forms of violence that are veiled and seemingly justified by his fantasy.

I opened my discussion of *Disgrace* with a scene in which Lurie physically prostrates himself in front of a woman and her daughter. This scene, which arises from a visit that Lurie pays to the Isaacs family at their house in George, is significant because it both reflects and reinforces Lurie’s reliance on a Romantic fantasy, a fantasy that helps Lurie to see himself as the quixotic male lead and to avoid confronting and taking responsibility for his problems.

Lurie visits the Isaacs household because he ostensibly wishes to “speak his heart” to Melanie’s father (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 166). In making an apology to the father, however, Lurie claims that Melanie “struck up a fire in [him],” and he asserts his own “lack [of] the lyrical” as the reason for their ‘affair’ not “turn[ing] out” (166, 171). After listening to Lurie’s abstract explanations, or “stories,” Melanie’s father challenges Lurie: he asks, “Who did you really come to speak to?” (166, 173). It is in response to this question that Lurie staggers down the hallway to find Melanie’s mother and school-aged sister in another room and perform the “careful ceremony” described at the beginning of this chapter (173). The scene at the Isaacs household evinces Lurie’s dependency on obscure, romanticized notions and gestures, as well as the complexities of Coetzee’s narrative technique, which manages the point of view in *Disgrace*. It is a technique that the author describes elsewhere as allowing the third-person narrator “to enter and leave a character’s consciousness with a minimum of obtrusiveness and to express judgements without seeming to do so” (Coetzee, *Inner Workings* 7). In focalizing the narrative through Lurie’s consciousness, the narrator denies the reader direct access to the other characters and seemingly affirms Lurie’s perspective. However, by presenting the reactions of the other characters, in this case the stunned incomprehension of Melanie’s mother and sister, the narrator also signals the limitations of Lurie’s outlook. These limitations emphasize that Lurie is unable to properly communicate with, and account for, the perspectives of others.

Indeed, the other characters in the novel have their own personalities and interests, which often conflict with those of Lurie. This is evidenced in Melanie’s father dismissing Lurie’s ‘stories’ and questioning his motives. Further, the inscrutability of the other characters creates a space for criticism of Lurie’s character. For example, the astonished

reaction of Melanie's mother and sister provides the reader with a momentary glimpse of outside perspectives of Lurie. More than that, the narrator reveals Lurie's inability to explain his own motivations and behaviours even to himself. Tension is created for the reader, then, in that the narrative proximity to Lurie creates a sense of immediacy and an inclination to sympathize with his actions; at the same time, the inappropriateness of his behaviours and his inability to recognize them as such encourages the reader to distance him or herself from Lurie. This tension thus creates a space for the reader to critically evaluate Lurie's motives and actions with a sense of detachment and reflexivity. In this way, my thesis holds that Coetzee's narrative style in *Disgrace* is not intended to affirm or reproduce Lurie's Romantic fantasy. Rather, the intimacy between the narrator and Lurie's point of view provides insight into the logic that informs Lurie's behaviour, and that underlies and propagates his fantasy.

The literal posture that Lurie assumes at the feet of Melanie's mother and sister can be thought of as a physical demonstration of the figurative posturing that he enacts throughout the narrative. The scene invites the reader to find reverence in Lurie's gestures—until the appearance of an errant slip of desire for Melanie's mother and sister. Lurie's act of prostration also depends upon him transforming the mother and sister into reluctant participants of his Romantic fantasy. This fantasy and the consequences it has for the Isaacs family and other characters are the focus of analysis for my thesis. Further, this thesis investigates how Lurie's fantasy allows him to participate in systems of oppression that protect his interests as a white male, while also providing him with a means to understand himself as sensible and empathetic. Therefore, I ask the following questions: What are the deeper implications of Romanticism in the novel? To what extent can Lurie be seen as explicating and extending Romantic ideology—its idealizing tendencies and its notions about

the nature of ‘man’—to motivate and justify his behaviour? Furthermore, how do these tendencies and notions help to create a fantasy that prevents Lurie from recognizing and taking responsibility for his behaviour, including the discrimination and mistreatment of those women, blacks, and animals that he designates as Other?

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the novel provides a space for challenging abstract and Romantic tendencies that oversimplify materially complex realities. I argue that Lurie’s Romantic fantasy relies upon cultural dualisms that privilege reason over nature, man over woman, white over black, and hu(man) over animal, resulting in a construction of ‘the human’ that is masculine, white, and of the mind. That is, his fantasy calls attention to a construction of ‘the human’ that is implicitly hostile to Others. Further, I contend that this fantasy points to an instrumentalizing logic that is rooted in Romantic ideology, and which can have the effect of objectifying Others for the purpose of benefitting or ‘enlightening’ Romantic subjects. Thus, this thesis interrogates Lurie’s objectification of women and animals to demonstrate that Romantic tendencies and notions can function as a veiling mechanism, allowing Lurie to perceive their bodies as mere supports to his fantasy. Moreover I contend that critics’ sympathetic readings of Lurie serve to minimize the violence he commits against feminized and animalized bodies within the novel, and that this failure to critically engage with Lurie’s Romantic self-justifications evinces vestiges of Romanticism that continue to inform and maintain relationships of domination and exploitation.

Most sympathetic readings of *Disgrace* have noted the ethical overtones of Lurie’s work with animals (see Randall, Patton, Kossew, Marais, and Graham). These accounts call attention to the “animal topic” in the novel, quite rightfully stressing that animals are part of Coetzee’s ethical vision (Randall 213). Analyses of this topic, however, typically arrive at

the conclusion that Lurie gains a sense of redeeming compassion through his endeavours at the animal clinic, where he euthanizes dogs. Specifically, Lurie's act of 'giving up' his favourite dog, Driepoot, for euthanization is read by critics as a selfless and caring gesture performed in the dog's best interests. In this way, the book is generally considered a sort of *Bildungsroman*, and Lurie is read as a dynamic character. Sue Kossew argues, for example, that Lurie "learn[s] to love by humbling himself...this occurs through the tragic personal encounter with violence [as represented by the attack on the farm] and through [Lurie's] volunteer work at an animal clinic" (Kossew 155). Paul Patton similarly contends that Lurie humbles himself by giving up Driepoot: "he is now able to give up, including his honour, his intellectual pride, and his attachment to life itself. He becomes capable of letting go of his social and personal identity" (Patton 117). Readings of the novel thus tend to accept, or at least graciously forgive, Lurie's coercive relationship with Melanie, and they interpret Lurie as making partial "atonement" for his past transgressions against women, by helping to euthanize the dogs at the animal shelter (Coleman 615). I contend that these readings are problematic as they work to reduce the dogs, and specifically Driepoot, to objects for Lurie's 'enlightenment' or emotional development, while presuming to speak for the dogs' best interests; indeed, they never explain why the dogs, including and especially Driepoot, should want to die for Lurie's benefit or for any other reason. These readings thus seem to overlook multiple abuses of power, of which women and animals are the primary victims. In order to open new conversations with extant criticism of the novel, I hold that the story of Lurie is not necessarily the story of Lurie's *transformation*, limited or otherwise—rather, I assert that Lurie remains a stagnant character throughout the narrative. Because the narrative remains quite firmly situated within or near Lurie's own perspective, his lack of change is

recognizable, indicating, if anything, that Lurie simply fantasizes his transformation, or emotional development, using a pastiche of Romantic conventions. By reading Lurie as a stubborn and stagnant character, I seek to complicate and enrich discussions of *Disgrace* by encouraging examinations of various forms of violence that might otherwise be too easily overlooked or dismissed—specifically, the rape of women and the routinized killing of animals.

This thesis is comprised of three main chapters following this introduction. Chapter Two provides a methodological framework for my analysis of key scenes in the novel. This methodology demonstrates how Romanticism can be considered an ideology—a system of values and beliefs which has the potential to facilitate the construction of Otherness along gendered, racialized, and animalized lines. This chapter explores the Romantic construction of ‘the human’ and seeks out moments within the novel where this construction provides Lurie with a means of justifying his actions towards those bodies he deems as Other. Chapter Three utilizes this methodology to provide close readings of how Lurie’s rape of Melanie Isaacs is represented in the novel, examining the ways in which Lurie’s use of Romanticism veils the inherent violence of his actions. It investigates the contradictions in the way that Lurie perceives his treatment of Melanie and the way he understands his daughter Lucy’s rape and her rapists, discussing the significance of these. Chapter Four examines Lurie’s reliance on Romantic sensibilities in interpreting his actions toward the bodies of racialized and animal Others. Specifically, this chapter looks at how Lurie utilizes human-animal relationships as a way of understanding his actions as kind and compassionate, while construing the actions of Lucy’s black neighbour Petrus as savage and cruel. Finally, in the conclusion I argue that while Romanticism and Romantic criticism focus on the power of the

mind, intellectual aesthetics, and notions of sensibility, *Disgrace* engages with a dialogue regarding the primacy of the body and shared embodiment between man and woman, human and animal. Through an analysis of the novel's final scene, it aims to show that Lurie's 'giving up' of Driepoot signals his continued devaluation of the body and points to the deeper source of his disgrace.

2 Chapter: Romantic ideology and the Construction of Otherness

In order to establish the methodological framework for my analysis of J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and subsequent critical appraisals of the novel, this chapter has two aims: providing a theoretical foundation regarding Romantic ideology and ecofeminist criticisms of Romanticism, and demonstrating how Romantic notions facilitate the construction of Otherness, leading to the maintenance of a hierarchal status quo that privileges the concerns of those metaphysically identified as 'human.' First, it will consider the idea that Romanticism is an ideology, a complex of values and beliefs that has influenced scholarship and criticism to the extent that for a long time critics had largely absorbed and perpetuated its "body of illusions" (McGann 12). Second, it will question Romanticism's altruistic claims regarding a morality of empathetic imagination, where Romantic subjects are able to speak to a universal condition, and, in particular, for those Others who are seemingly remote from middle class and male experiences. More specifically, I will problematize this notion of universality, because of the inherent fallacy of transcendence within Romantic ideology, which relies upon oppressive cultural dualisms—of reason to nature, mind to body, man to woman, and (hu)man to animal—for the purposes of maintaining an exclusive category of 'the human.' Finally, this chapter will challenge the idea that Romantics struggled against and rejected Enlightenment ideas about scientific rationality and social progress, and assert that Romantic ideology is enmeshed in a larger, hierarchal framework, which allows for discriminatory violence towards Others. It will support this assertion through an examination of David Lurie, who is identified in *Disgrace* and in extant criticism as a kind of Byronic hero prone to "Romantic gesture[s] of defiant individualism" (Cornwell 314). The ultimate aim of this chapter, then, is to search out the Romantic justifications articulated by Lurie

throughout the novel as a means of mitigating accountability for the violence that he commits upon women and animals. I will provide a synoptic reading of *Disgrace* to identify key moments within the narrative, drawing attention to Lurie's reliance upon a Romantic fantasy involving notions of 'the human' and the transcendental nature of 'man,' and pointing to how these may be implicitly hostile to Others.

2.1 Romantic Ideology and Ecofeminist Criticism

Interrogations of Romantic ideology are a relatively new development in the discipline of Romantic studies. Over the past 30 years, critics have begun to question how Romanticism fits within a larger historical, literary, and cultural context, and recognize that the premises of Romantic ideology have formed the basis of the present critical establishment (Ross 5).

Jerome McGann offered a persuasive analysis on this topic in 1983, which he called, *Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. His observations not only inform my approach in this thesis, but act more generally as a basis for interrogations of Romantic ideology in cultural and literary studies at large.

In his influential critique, McGann identifies that Romanticism is an ideology, a "complex form of consciousness" that not only appears in the literary work in the nineteenth century in England, but also continues to be supported and reproduced in scholarly and critical traditions (McGann 12). He argues that scholarship and criticism have been dominated by this ideology to the extent that critics who aimed to study Romanticism objectively had, in fact, uncritically absorbed and perpetuated its "body of illusions" (12). This "body of illusions," furthermore, is characterized by an overriding effort to respond to political and social problems by "reach[ing] for solutions in the realm of ideas"—a maneuver which, he asserts, has helped to define the 'human' in metaphysical, "ideal and spiritual

terms” (71). It is an approach, moreover, that works not only to dissolve the social and political dimensions of human identity, but also to de-historicize Romantic ideas by refusing to accept their special, self-determined limits (71). For McGann, then, Romanticism is “everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby actual human issues ... are resituated in a variety of idealized localities” (1). In this way, McGann contends, Romantic ideology has had “grand” implications, working to uncouple Romantic subjects from their socio-historical specificity, and contributing to the view that they can speak to “universal truths” (66). Furthermore, Romantic ideology has been privileged in criticism, precisely because of its supposed ability to transcend its age and speak to universal truths about mind, nature, and human identity (3). Therefore, McGann argues that scholars must gain critical perspective on Romanticism by questioning its central claims about transcendence and the unifying powers of the empathetic imagination (137). He contends that “the grand illusion of Romantic ideology” is that one can escape socio-cultural and material realities “through imagination and poetry” (131). Such an illusion, he warns, threatens to distort scholarly activity and impede historical awareness.

Since its publication, McGann’s analysis of the Romantic ideology has been influential in the development of self-critical assessments of the idealizing and spiritualizing tendencies of Romantic writing and scholarship (Chaplin and Faflak 79). Feminist perspectives, in particular, have not only contributed to this criticism, but also helped to change and transform the field of Romantic studies (Watkins xi). Feminist criticism contends that Romanticism is a gendered discourse, and suggests that even the most ground-breaking studies of the later twentieth century, including McGann’s description of Romantic ideology, do not account for a diversity of positions, especially for female and feminine positions

(Chaplin and Faflak 80). Several critics, such as Marlon Ross and Anne Mellor, explore the ways in which gender functions in Romantic ideology, raising questions about some of Romanticism's most closely held assumptions concerning nature, imagination, and the feminine, and providing a means to destabilize these assumptions. Specifically, they suggest that the result of Romantic ideology is the construction of a figure of the 'human' that is masculine, white, and essentially of the mind. I now turn to these critics, as their work provides critical insights into the exclusionary and oppressive logic hidden within Romanticism.

In his study of Romanticism, *The Contours of Masculine Desire*, Marlon Ross argues that Romantic ideology is a distinctly "masculine phenomenon," noting that "Romantic poeticizing is not just what women cannot do because they are not expected to; it is also what some men do in order to reconfirm their capacity to influence the world in ways socio-historically determined as masculine" (Ross 3). Ross stipulates that Romanticism arose in response not only to social and political change, but also to a "fear of emasculation," which was the result of "the emergence of influential literary women" (12). In this way, he suggests, Romanticism presented a way of instilling a "myth of the masculine poet's unrivaled power of culture," and of declaring the Romantic subject's superiority over Others (12). Ross emphasizes that the Romantic notion of the 'human' is typified by a poet who "must be able to take risks ... rather than being tied down"—who must be "above and beyond society" (16-17). Moreover, he proposes, the poet achieves this status through his suppression of women and nature. In this, the poet incorporates women and nature into his poetry, effectively projecting his own perceptions on to them, and appropriating their qualities as a source of inspiration and as leverage for his will to write (4). Significantly, this

claims for the poet a privileged sense of independence and mobility, while relegating women to secondary and fixed positions. Within this formulation, it appears that women should ‘naturally’ look to the poet for meaning and value, as they lack his ability for intellectual and transcendental musings (4). For Ross, then, the poet exemplifies the masculine human identity at the center of Romantic ideology. Further, he points out that this configuration of the poet is a new idea in the nineteenth century, and one greatly nurtured by a small group of male poets now referred to as the Romantics (17). Ross thus gestures to the oppressive and exclusionary intent within Romantic ideology and its conception of the poet.

Similarly, in *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne Mellor contends that Romanticism is premised on masculine assumptions, and examines the relation between nature, the imagination, and the feminine in Romantic ideology. In particular, she considers the extent to which nature is gendered as ‘feminine’ in Romantic poetry. For example, looking at William Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, Mellor observes that the poem describes nature in feminized language and metaphors, and at times personifies nature as a woman (Mellor 18). However, once the poem associates the poet’s imaginative powers with nature, it endeavours to efface the feminine, referring to nature as a ‘brother,’ rather than a ‘she’ (19). Mellor thus surmises that despite the poem’s initial gestures Wordsworth is not celebrating nature for its supposed ‘feminine’ power, nor is he placing it alongside his own creative capabilities; rather, he is seeking to subsume and masculinize this power for the benefit of his own “glorious” (masculine) imagination (20). This effacement of the feminine, Mellor argues, demonstrates how Romantic subjects are able to appropriate “positive” feminine attributes, such as sensibility and compassion, while still denigrating “negative” feminine characteristics, such as interdependence and vulnerability (29). In this way, Romanticism’s altruistic claims

regarding a morality of an empathetic imagination can conceal an effort to access Others according to determinedly masculine standards. Moreover, Mellor identifies a disembodied ethos informing Romantic poets such as Wordsworth; as she explains, the “heroic masculine self,” who is the subject or subjectivity in Romanticism, “must transcend the body and achieve pure mind” in order to “achieve coherence and endurance” (148). That is, Romantic poets ultimately seek to transcend and evacuate embodiment, though they foreground portrayals of embodied life in their poems. The universal and transcendental subject at the center of Romantic ideology is only rendered possible through “the arduous repression” of the body and “the Other in all its forms: of the mother...of other people, of history, of nature” (149). Therefore, Mellor stresses that the ‘soul,’ or human identity Romanticism constructs is distinguished not only from women and Others, but also from physical nature and the material body itself (148). This ostensibly-disembodied human identity located outside of nature further works within and informs Enlightenment philosophy, which has produced a framework that maintains these relationships of exploitation and domination.

Because Romanticism arose during a historical period of industrialization, which transformed concepts of labour, class, and cultural policy, early readings of the movement credited Romantics as struggling against Enlightenment ideology, a way of thinking that privileged forms of progress supported by industrial developments and scientific explorations. Through its sentimentalizing descriptions of natural landscapes and nostalgic musings of agrarian communities, Romanticism was seen as rejecting the totalizing and authoritarian tendency of Enlightenment’s reason as well as its construction of an objective, de-spiritualized nature. However, more recent readings have noted that Romanticism “does not overleap Enlightenment thought” (Watkins xv). As Daniel Watkins observes, “For all its

disruptive energies, Romanticism remains ideologically committed to certain categories constituent of the Enlightenment: reason is tamed but preserved; nature remains prominent, though in re-enchanted form; progress is valued, though lifted to spiritualized and idealized levels” (xv). In other words, the relation between Romantic and Enlightenment thought is marked by deep continuities. Furthermore, Romanticism is aligned with Enlightenment’s contention that humans are capable of transcending embodiment. As David Aers remarks, Romantic ideology presents human identity as a metaphysical, “supra-social entity,” much like Enlightenment’s autonomous and free agent whose impartial standpoint is seemingly independent of any particular historical or social order (Aers 65). He further explains that descriptive features of Romantic poetry have a tendency to delete social activities and relationships from depictions of ‘man,’ presenting an ideal that is presumably universal and unconstrained (67). Early Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, were more interested in an idyllic world of self-subsistent farmers than they were in the socio-political realities of agrarian workers, who were being displaced by bigger land-owners, development of markets, and capitalism (67). In this way, Romantic ideology helped to erect “a cult of abstract individualism” (69) just as thoroughgoing as that of Enlightenment.

Some critics, such as David Aers, Jonathan Cook, and David Punter, contend that Romanticism’s abstract individualism has actually helped to legitimate and strengthen the development of Enlightenment social formation and ideology (Aers, Cook, and Punter 5). They suggest that Romantic notions of transcendence and imagination direct attention away from “life-processes” involving socio-economic and political problems by putting emphasis on individualized priorities, like creativity and personal ‘freedom’ instead (5). Providing an

example of the poem, "Ruined Cottage," Aers observes that Wordsworth's "presentation of sympathy is devoid of moral content," as the poet writes about a desolate peasant woman, but does not "meditate on the social dimensions" that have contributed to her present circumstances nor take action to alleviate her "psychic disintegration" (79). Rather, Wordsworth appears to draw "strength" from the woman's suffering as an indication of his own "superior awareness and sensitivity," by turning away from the scene and commenting that all men should feel the sympathy that he does (79). For Aers, this Romantic approach "makes it especially easy to pose as a defender of 'liberty of minds' without having to oppose any of the powerful groups and individuals currently transforming and dominating the lives and habitat of most human beings" (69). As a result, he proposes that the only guidance Romantic poetry seems to "offer the reader is to withdraw into his or her privacy," to disengage with society, and to engage in individualized introspections and pursuits (70). Therefore, rather than providing a meaningful critique of Enlightenment ideology, Romanticism can be interpreted as diverting attention away from certain material and socio-political realities, and contributing to unresponsive and reconciliatory attitudes towards modes of domination and control.

The emergence of ecofeminist theory further helps to elucidate the masculine-privileging, oppressive logic in Romantic ideology that functions to produce cultural dualisms and maintain an exclusive category of the 'human.' This methodological approach is informed by the present conception of ecofeminism, which is defined by Val Plumwood as a means of uncovering how oppressions based on race, class, and gender are part of the same ideological framework that allows for the oppression of animals and nature (Plumwood, "Decolonizing" 503). Plumwood stresses that women, lower-class workers, and people of

colour have been categorized as being ‘closer’ to animals and nature in order to justify their oppression (503). For her, this conceptual link between oppressions is important, as it points to the construction of Otherness: “a model for domination and transcendence of nature in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature, necessity, and the feminine” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 23). In this model, nature represents “the underside of rationalist dualisms” that oppose reason to nature, mind to body, man to woman, and hu(man) to animal (Plumwood, “Decolonizing” 503). This idea of nature thus provides for the ideological and conceptual grounds for domination, as these ‘rationalist dualisms’ have the effect of producing an instrumentalizing logic, which objectifies Others for the purposes of benefiting those metaphysically defined as “truly or ideally human” (503)—in *Disgrace*, I will argue, Lurie presents himself as being ‘truly human,’ enacting this instrumentalizing logic. Hence, the reductionist terms established by the dualisms of mind/body and reason/nature can reduce Others to ‘mere’ bodies: slaves, servants, and tools for ‘human’ needs and desire (504). Moreover, Plumwood’s contention that the identity constructed by the underside of these dualisms “has no intrinsic value ... [and] is not for-itself” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 53) allows me to move my analysis beyond interrogations of Romanticism by problematizing the category of ‘the human’ itself.

Ecofeminist criticism opens up a range of questions and concerns regarding gender, race, and animality that lie at the core of my reading of *Disgrace*, providing a means of destabilizing ‘the human’ as a fixed and exclusive category as it has been constructed under Romantic and Enlightenment thought. As Josephine Donovan argues, ecofeminism offers a viable theoretical base for an ethic of responsibility and care, promoting a ‘human’ identity that is inclusive and interconnected with all life (Donovan, “Animal” 169). Indeed,

ecofeminist criticism considers that the metaphysical bifurcation between groups results in the “natural[izing] and glorifi[cation of] social domination, making the relationships between oppressor and oppressed appear ... ‘complementary’” (Heller 227). The intention of ecofeminist theory is thus to encourage the development of “a pluralistic structure, and an inclusive and contextual framework that values and emphasizes humans in relationships, denies abstract individualism, and provides a guide for critical action” (Gaard 2). As discussed above, Romantic ideology participates in the “Foundational Fantasy” of Enlightenment thought—it partakes in a model for transcendence of nature and embodiment, and perpetuates the illusion of individual autonomy (Plumwood, *Environmental* 15). The cultural logic in Romantic ideology thus works to support a hierarchal framework, reinforcing unequal relations and effectively impeding a better understanding of and appreciation for women and the natural world. Ecofeminist Chaia Heller asserts that Romanticism prescribes a particular form of ‘love,’ which is predicated on the desires of the (masculine) Romantic subject, rather than on the identity and desires of Others (222). Further, the Romantic subject “fails to challenge the patriarchal ... ideologies and institutions of domination that legitimize the denigration of women [and Others]” (220). She thus concludes that “Romantic love is a pitiful attempt to love and know another from behind the wall of domination” (222). In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that Romantic idealizing can enable discriminatory relations, for example, by allowing Romantic subjects, like Lurie, to claim to ‘love’ women while raping them, and to ‘love’ animals while killing them. I argue that an analysis of Lurie’s fantasy, which is derived from conventions of Romantic ideology, will unveil how these conventions serve to support metaphysical and physical forms of violence against women and animals. This chapter will now bring the

methodologies I have outlined above, which I term post-Romantic ecofeminism, into conversation with *Disgrace*.

2.2 Post-Romantic Ecofeminism and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

Prior to undertaking analyses in Chapter Three of Lurie's exploitative treatment of women, and in Chapter Four of Lurie's discriminatory relationship with animals, I provide here a synoptic reading of *Disgrace* through the lens of a post-Romantic ecofeminism. This reading is critical to my subsequent chapters because it identifies key moments within the narrative overall where Lurie's Romantic justifications of 'love,' 'desire,' and 'freedom' create a fantasy that helps to privilege his interests over Others. Because Chapter Three and Four focus on reading specific scenes in *Disgrace*, a full narrative synopsis is necessary to ensure that my argument is not limited by reading too selectively, as well as to provide a sense of how I read the novel as a whole.

Lurie reveals an astonishing ability for self-serving, Romantic justifications of his own actions, enacting the workings of an individualist logic that encourages egocentricity and is grounded in reasoned abstractions. The novel opens with a description of his weekly assignation with an "exotic" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 7) prostitute, named Soraya:

For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex very well... Waiting in the door of No. 113 is Soraya. He goes straight through to the bedroom... and undresses... He strokes her honey-brown body, unmarked by the sun; he stretches her out, kisses her breasts; they make love. (1)

From the novel's very first line, Lurie's selfish conceit is evident in his depiction of Soraya as a practical solution to what he terms "the problem of sex" (1). Even though this account is provided by a third-person narrator, the terms used resonate with Lurie's perspective on his

relationship with Soraya. While the narrator signals distance from Lurie's perspective with the use of 'to his own mind,' the narrator nonetheless reads as having intimate access to Lurie's point of view, and indeed echoes this point of view. This is clear when the narrator refers to Lurie and Soraya as 'making love,' a euphemism that disguises that Lurie is undertaking a paid assignation with Soraya. The distance between the narrator and Lurie thus appears, at times, almost nonexistent, as the narrator presents Lurie's thoughts, but not the thoughts of other characters. Significantly, this fluctuating distance between the narrator and Lurie means that there are several scenes, particularly sexual scenes, in which the narrative is directly focalized through Lurie and his Romanticized perspective, which works to figure Lurie's descriptions as sensible, even congenial. In this way, what Lurie calls 'the problem of sex' and his solution to this 'problem'—hiring an escort—can be reconstructed as 'making love,' a description that presupposes emotional and physical desire, and obscures the prosaic nature of Lurie's arrangement with Soraya.

Tellingly, Lurie's choice of words is not original; 'the problem of sex' is a historical phrase tied to a nineteenth century debate in Europe about sexual difference, and discussed at length in Otto Weininger's 1906 book *Sex and Character*, which claimed to prove "that women were inferior animals" (Weininger qtd. in Glover 100). As cultural theorist David Glover explains, Weininger uses the phrase to outline a then-popular theory of sexual difference, purporting to demonstrate "the scientific invincibility of" women's inferiority to men (Glover 102). The phrase thus gestures to a patriarchal tradition in Western culture, where 'reason' is employed "as a license for a fantasy of erotic mastery, allowing the clear-eyed male thinker to escape from the sexual chaos of womanhood through the power of the intellect alone" (102). As a result, the 'problem of sex' invoked in the first line of *Disgrace*

signals that Lurie is firmly situated within this patriarchal culture, deriving his capacity to exploit from its rationalizing and discriminatory tradition.

Lurie's capacity to exploit is further supported by his inherited colonialist mentality and the residues of apartheid in South Africa. As Lucy Graham comments, Lurie, in many ways, performs what Sol T. Plaatje refers to as 'the white peril,' "the hidden sexual exploitation of black women by white men that has existed for centuries" (Graham, "Reading" 437). In other words, the novel points to a colonial history in which white men have exploited women whom they consider "inferior in terms of race and class" (437). Indeed, it is significant that Lurie intentionally seeks out what he calls "exotics" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 8), as his actions gesture to his assumed right to purchase and pursue the bodies of women whom he perceives as different and inferior. Furthermore, it suggests that Lurie desires a sense of superiority and control in his interactions with women; he is perfectly happy to benefit from the power afforded to him by his privileged position in society, which is reflected not only in his race and his colonialist mentality, but also in his role as professor at the university. Revealingly, he praises Soraya as a "ready learner, compliant, pliant" (5), suggesting that he seeks continual validation of his presumed authority over women, and that his personal expectations as lover and his professional expectations as professor are entwined. Certainly, this is confirmed when his arrangement with Soraya ends because Lurie wants and then expects greater access to Soraya, and she does not acquiesce to his desires. Following the end of their arrangement, he begins to sexually pursue a young, 20 year-old coloured student, Melanie Isaacs, in his Romantic poetry class.

Lurie pursues Melanie, whom he refers to as the "dark one" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 18), in the same persistent manner that he follows Soraya through the market after accidentally

meeting her and her two sons in public (6): he gives no thought to Soraya's disinclination to engage with him. Soraya leaves the escort agency shortly after this occasion, choosing to guard her private life and her family from Lurie's intrusive behaviour—and yet, Lurie still insists on hiring a detective agency to find out her home phone number:

He ought to close that chapter. Instead, he pays a detective agency to track her down.

Within days he has her real name, her address, her telephone number. He telephones at nine in the morning, when the husband and children will be out. 'Soraya?' he says.

'This is David. How are you? When can I see you again?' A long silence before she speaks. 'I don't know who you are... You are harassing me in my own home. I demand you will never phone me here again, never.' (9)

This scene is infused with tension as it is unclear who is voicing the comment that 'he ought to close this chapter.' The narrator may be passing judgement on Lurie for his naïve and continued pursuit of Soraya, or the narrator may be presenting Lurie's own thoughts, in which case the character is aware, to some extent, of the inappropriateness of his behaviour. Even in this latter case, however, Lurie stops short of letting this awareness inform his actions in choosing to indulge his fantasy of a more personal, reciprocal relationship with Soraya. In either case, the moment opens a space within the narrative, inviting the reader to question and pass judgement on Lurie and his actions.

Soraya's refusal to acknowledge that she knows Lurie seemingly surprises him—he has constructed their relationship differently than she has, supposing that there is greater intimacy between them. Soraya's statement confirms that Lurie's construction of their relationship has been a fantasy of his own making, and that her role in it is not as a romantic partner. Her statement can further be extended to reveal that Lurie does not know Soraya; he

believes her to have a husband, yet there is no confirmation of this relationship beyond what Lurie imagines. Most significantly, Lurie persists in the belief that Soraya will set aside her familial obligations to satisfy his interests. This belief allows Lurie to push aside his inklings that Soraya does not want to engage with him, and leads him to make use of his wealth to impinge on Soraya's life through the use of a detective agency. Lurie employs similarly invasive tactics with Melanie, for example, by searching out her address and contact information using the university's private files (18). The description of Lurie's weekly assignation with Soraya at the beginning of the novel thus indicates a larger pattern in his life, warning that Lurie does not feel responsible for the women he pursues, nor does he respect the private lives they live; rather, he feels entitled to what he wants from them.

Even though Lurie later claims otherwise, possession and ownership, rather than passion and desire, are key issues in his pursuit of Melanie. Lurie is not immediately overcome with yearning for Melanie; rather he deems her an appropriate 'body' to pursue, taking notice of her racialized or 'exotic' characteristics, such as her black hair and "almost Chinese cheekbones" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 11). He confesses to himself that he is only "mildly smitten with her. It is no great matter: barely a term passes when he does not fall for one or other of his charges" (11-12). Lurie's decision to pursue Melanie is thus calculated; he considers the risks of getting involved with a student and dismisses them. He reasons that she is "[t]oo young. She will not know how to deal with him" (18), determining that her naïvety will work to his benefit. In this way, Lurie takes full advantage of his privileged position in society, indulging the self-interested logic informing his decision-making.

Immersed in a Romantic tradition, Lurie tries to convince Melanie to sleep with him by employing allusions to Romanticism. During their first encounter, for instance, Lurie

counsels her that she “ought to” spend the night with him, as “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone ... she has a duty to share it” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 16). As Graham observes, Lurie’s comments suggest an underlying assumption that, as his student, “she is somehow his property” (Graham, “Reading” 438). Lurie cites Shakespeare, a literary precursor to Romanticism, to underscore his idea that a woman should acquiesce to a male admirer and accept her ‘natural’ obligation to produce heirs. He does so after failing to convince Melanie with this initial appeal, dubbing her “beauty’s rose,” and quoting the opening lines of a Shakespearean sonnet: “From the fairest creatures we desire increase, That thereby beauty’s rose might never die” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 16). Significantly, Melanie endeavours to reject Lurie’s sexual advances, for example, by leaving early that night and not providing him with her contact information. Nonetheless, Lurie refuses to recognize her efforts to rebuff him.

Lurie uses the telephone number listed in the university files to call Melanie. When she answers the phone, Lurie admits that “he hears all her uncertainty” (18). However, he disregards the confusion in Melanie’s demeanour, confessing to himself that he is “in the grip of something. Beauty’s rose: the poem drives straight as an arrow” (18). The reference to ‘beauty’s rose’ recalls his previous attempt to seduce Melanie and gestures to his Romantic fantasy that she has a duty to acquiesce to his desires and sexual advances. Lurie’s suggestion that he is ‘in the grip’ of this fantasy underscores his willingness to dismiss inclinations that “he ought to let her go” (18). Lurie’s conversation with Melanie, which is largely one-sided, is indicative of the nature of their relationship in general. Melanie is described as being “too confused” to lie to Lurie and to avoid his lunch invitation (18); furthermore, at their lunch meeting, Lurie observes that “she has no appetite, [and] stares glumly over the sea” (19).

Despite Melanie's recalcitrance and her admission that she might be "worried about the two of [them]," Lurie decides to take her to his house and have sex with her. The narrator provides limited descriptions of the sexual exchange that follows:

On the living-room floor, to the sound of rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her... Though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion.

When he comes back the rain has stopped. The girl is lying beneath him, her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head, a slight frown on her face...

Averting her face, she frees herself, gathers her things, leaves the room. (19)

The term 'making love' is used to describe Lurie's interactions with both Melanie and Soraya, indicating that at these points of sexual exchange the perspectives of Lurie and the narrator are merged and indistinguishable.

Lurie's fall into 'blank oblivion' after sex with Melanie precludes the possibility of the reader observing Melanie, specifically because of the proximity of Lurie and the narrator's points of view. When Lurie falls into oblivion, the narrator goes with him. This blending of perspectives initially lends authority to Lurie's interpretation of the events; however, this authority is immediately troubled by closer attention to Melanie when Lurie 'comes back' from oblivion. Her body language reflects passivity and detachment, with the frown on her face being the only indication of emotion. Lurie's achievement of oblivion speaks back to Mellor's contention that the transcendental subject of Romanticism is only rendered possible through the suppression—in Lurie's case, the physical suppression—of the Other. In time, Lurie shows up at Melanie's apartment unexpectedly, catching her unprepared to defend herself. This scene is another in which the perspectives of the narrator and Lurie become

difficult to differentiate. Melanie is portrayed as being “too surprised to resist [Lurie]... [he] thrusts himself upon her” (24). Lurie takes Melanie to her bedroom and has sex with her. The ensuing exchange is described as “not rape, but nevertheless, undesired to the core” (25). The contradiction present in this statement bespeaks the inherent tension in Lurie’s interactions with Melanie. Indeed, the reassuring assertion of ‘not rape’ contrasts with the admission that the act was ‘undesired to the core’—an admission that concedes Melanie’s physical resistance and aversion. As I will argue further in Chapter Three, Lurie grossly abuses his position of power and privilege to exploit Melanie; moreover, his coercive behaviour towards her is undoubtedly rape, despite his claims to the contrary.

For his sexual violation of Melanie, Lurie is subsequently charged and found guilty of sexual harassment by the university. Importantly, the charges against Lurie do not indicate the forceful and physical nature of his violation. Even still, Lurie refuses to perform any form of contrition or apology, suggesting that the “rights of desire” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 89) supersede his obligations to comply with the university’s recommendations to make a public confession and undergo counselling. Moreover, because Lurie categorizes himself as a “servant of Eros” during the disciplinary hearing (52), he is identified in the novel and extant criticism as a kind of Byronic hero who appeals “to an instinctual paradigm of ... desire” (Mardorossian 79). Importantly, Lurie’s Byronic posturing serves to blind him to the colonialist history of which his actions are a part, offering a respite from the guilt and shame he might otherwise feel. As Farodia Rassool, a female committee member presiding over the hearing observes, “[I]t is not abuse of a young woman that he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is a part” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 53). Rather than

recognizing the gravity of Rassool's comments, Lurie interprets them as being exaggerated and puritanical, later stating that she and the other committee members "wanted me castrated" (66). In other words, through his identification as a Romantic subject, Lurie is able to obscure and self-justify the violence of his relationship with Melanie. Much like the Romantic ideology associated with those poets whom Lurie refers to as his "masters" (13), he diverts attention away from the social and material realities of the situation—the "actual human issues" (McGann 1) of the effects of his actions on Melanie's body—by putting emphasis on abstract and male-privileging notions of 'desire' and 'freedom.' In effect, Lurie relies on a Romantic fantasy of himself as an individual who is "above and beyond society" (Ross 17) and who is free to realize his desires even if it means violating Others. In this way, he is able to ignore the accusations against him, and reframe the situation so that he, not Melanie, is the victim.

Because he refuses to apologize and make amends for his abuse of power, Lurie is eventually forced to resign from his position at the university. He reacts to the social disgrace by retreating to his daughter Lucy's small farm in the country, where she grows produce and flowers and operates a boarding kennel for dogs. His decision to visit Lucy indicates that, despite his claims of being an autonomous and 'free' individual, Lurie relies on his relationship with women as "an outlet for expression of a wide range of emotional needs: the need for intimacy, for comfort, for reassurance" (Herman, *Father* 56). Indeed, Lurie admits that throughout his life he has been surrounded by women: he spent his childhood "in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sisters fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives, a daughter" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 7). Furthermore, he recognizes that his 'love' for women has made him, "to an extent, a womanizer," a user of women (7). Lurie's

relationship with women reveals his metaphysical dependence on a female opposite for a sense of “coherence and endurance” (Mellor 148). In this way, Lurie’s ‘love’ for women can be seen as a form of reductionism, working to diminish women to a list of his emotional needs and desires. As Heller notes, the Romantic subject does not consider a woman as a separate and independent being, seeing her instead as an extension, or support, of his own masculine, or ‘human’ identity (Heller 222). Despite his professed ‘love’ for them, then, Lurie can be seen as objectifying the women in his life and using their disadvantages to his advantage.

Lurie’s failure to recognize the individual complexity of the female characters in *Disgrace* is made especially clear through his interactions with Lucy who, unlike him, prefers to deal in physical realities rather than intellectualized notions. As Lucy informs Lurie, she differs from him, as she cannot act or make decisions ““for the sake of an idea”” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 105). She perceives Lurie’s discomfort with her peasant lifestyle; however, she tells him that there is no higher or more cultured plane of existence: ““This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals”” (74). Lurie’s immediate response is to chide her: ““We [‘humans’] are a different order of creation from animals. Not higher, necessarily, just different”” (74). This response resonates conspicuously with the colonial rhetoric used to rationalize unequal relations between racialized groups in South Africa, further indicating that Lurie represents not only the attitudes and behaviours of the old colonial regime, but also the cultured cast of mind that sustained the possibility of these relations. In many ways, Lurie signifies what Plumwood calls “a cultural mind,” a mentality that “cannot acknowledge ... its material body, the embodied and ecological support base it draws on” (Plumwood, *Environmental* 15). Alternatively, Lucy represents an interconnected,

embodied sense of awareness that is informed not only by reason, but also by feeling. When Lurie argues that animals “‘don’t have proper souls...[t]heir souls are tied to their bodies and die with them,’” Lucy replies, “‘I’m not sure that I have a soul. I wouldn’t know a soul if I saw one’” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 78-79); she rejects the idea that humans can transcend embodiment. In this way, Lucy destabilizes Lurie’s configuration of the unitary and transcendental ‘human,’ gesturing to how it is complicit in sexism, racism, and speciesism—the discrimination and exploitation of both human and nonhuman Others.

Lurie’s relationship with Lucy becomes increasingly strained after an attack on the farm in which Lucy is raped and Lurie is beaten by a group of young black men. In Chapter Three of my thesis, I will explore how Lucy’s rape serves as a parallel in the novel to Lurie’s rape of Melanie, working to dissolve clear distinctions between the two crimes and offering a mechanism through which Lurie’s Romantic posturing can be challenged. However, for now, I want to emphasize that Lurie does not witness Lucy’s violation: he is imprisoned in the bathroom of Lucy’s homestead while she is being sexually assaulted. As Lucy repeats, then, Lurie “‘do[es]n’t know what happened,’” and she refuses to tell him, stating he cannot “‘begin to know’” or understand what she has undergone (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 134, emphasis as cited). The underlying implication is that Lurie does not know what it is to be a rape victim. Further, Lucy sees similarities between the rapists’ and Lurie’s actions, even if he does not. When he presses her to talk about what happened, Lucy challenges him by saying, ‘You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange – when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her – isn’t it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood – doesn’t it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?’ (158)

Lurie is taken aback and answers in an oblique fashion: ““Sometimes,”” he admits, ““For some men”” (158). What Lurie conceals from Lucy is that he can personally identify with her description of rape, for when he violated Melanie he noticed that she seemed “to go slack, die within herself for the duration” (25). As I will argue in Chapter Three, Lurie never recognizes the violence he commits upon Melanie’s body, nor is he held criminally accountable for his actions. Thus, in many ways Lurie is more like Lucy’s rapists than he would like to admit. Later, Lurie tries to imagine the scene of Lucy’s violation, asking himself, “[D]oes he have it in him to be the woman?” (160). Revealingly he finds that he can “be there, be the men, inhabit them” (160), but he cannot inhabit the woman or the body being violated. Lurie’s attempt to use his empathetic imagination fails, confirming Lucy’s suspicions that Lurie cannot comprehend the experience of a rape victim, and revealing the limits of his sympathy. Furthermore, the limits of Lurie’s sympathy speak to Mellor’s comments about the limitations of the empathetic imagination. She argues that such imaginative endeavours often conceal an effort to assess a situation according to a privileged, masculine perspective (Mellor 29).

Lurie’s concern for Lucy is not based on his understanding and ability to empathize with her predicament; rather, it derives from his feeling that he should be able to protect her, and thus, in part, from his need to fulfill the Romantic role of the “heroic masculine self” (Mellor 148). This need is made clear the night after Lucy’s rape when he has “a vision” of Lucy, where she beckons to him, ““Come to me, save me!”” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 103); Lurie describes that, “In the vision she stands, hands outstretched, wet hair combed back, in a field of white light” (103). This highly romanticized vision of a maiden in distress compels Lurie to awaken Lucy from her sleep, insisting that she has, in fact, been calling for him and that

she needs his help. Lucy's reaction, however, exposes that she "is not at all as in the vision" (103) –she is annoyed with him and tells him to go back to bed. Moreover, Lucy rejects Lurie's repeated advice to contact the police to tell "the whole story" of her attack (110). Lurie pleads with Lucy to be what he calls 'sensible' and 'rational;' he tells her that she must not "meekly accept ... what happened," and that she must take legal action to preserve her "self-respect" (112, 134). When Lucy decides that the matter is private and does not concern him, Lurie disagrees with her. He argues that he was there and, therefore, he is responsible; he laments, "I did not save you" (157). Lurie's comments reveal a desire to rescue Lucy and play the role of the Romantic hero. Even though Lucy insists otherwise, Lurie asserts that his inability to protect her is at issue. In this way, he subtly reframes the situation so that he, once again, is the primary sufferer, not the female rape victim; as Lucy discerns, "You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life ... [but] I have my own life" (198). Importantly, Lucy does not feel that Lurie responds with sufficient understanding to her situation. She tells Lurie, "You keep misreading me...I don't act in terms of abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can't help you" (112). Here, once again, Lucy signals that she has an embodied sense of awareness premised on feelings. She seems to be prompting Lurie to feel as well, in order to understand her; however Lurie cannot relinquish his dependency on abstractions. Through his constant doubting of her decisions, he implies that Lucy is incapable of her own self-determination and resistance. He remains committed to a Romantic fantasy of masculine heroism and does not listen to her explanations; as a result, he interprets her decisions as a sign of weakness and capitulation, rather than an indication of her own culture-creating rationality, self-consciousness, and compassion.

While staying at his daughter's farm, Lurie volunteers at the local animal shelter where he assists Bev Shaw, the director of the clinic, to kill and dispose of stray dogs. Lurie begins this work at the request of Lucy, because he is bored on the farm and looking for “‘things to do’” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 76). Through his job at the shelter, which includes comforting the dogs who are about to be euthanized and then transporting their dead bodies to the garbage dump, Lurie observes that people bring their dogs to the shelter as a convenient way of getting rid of them: “They do not say straight out, ‘I have brought you this dog to kill,’ but that is what is being expected . . . What is being asked for is, in fact, *Lösung*” (142). Lurie translates the German word *Lösung* to mean “sublimation,” a transformation into a purer and more idealized form, “leaving no residue, no aftertaste” (142). It is partly for this reason that many critics have interpreted Lurie's work at the animal shelter as “mercy-killing” and as “a gift of love” (Boehmer, “Not Saying” 343), for ostensibly *Lösung* connotes that Lurie is assisting the dogs to attain an ethereal, more idealized form. I will be performing a more detailed analysis of Lurie's work at the animal shelter in Chapter Four of my thesis; however, I want to emphasize here that the abstract, idealizing terminology of ‘sublimation’ serves to obscure a more disturbing and complex reality involved in killing the dogs. Indeed, ‘sublimation’ suggests that Lurie's work should also have “no residue, no aftertaste,” no lingering feelings of bitterness, sadness, or regret – and yet this is clearly not the case. Lurie discovers that “[t]he more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 142). Furthermore, the more common translation of *Lösung* is solution – “as in *Endlösung*, the Nazi term for the ‘final solution’” (Donovan, “Miracles” 87). The word thus draws an implicit association between human treatment of animals and the Holocaust, pointing to the violent reality hidden behind the notion of ‘sublimation.’ *Lösung* inconspicuously gestures to

a prioritizing of ‘human’ concerns over those of Others, pointing to a larger, ideological framework that maintains hierarchal relationships of exploitation and domination.

Lurie’s ability to perceive himself as a Romantic individual allows him to remain a stubborn and stagnant character throughout the novel. Shortly after an altercation with Lucy in which she tells him that he is not the “guide” she needs, Lurie leaves the farm feeling spurned, returning to his apartment in Cape Town (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 161). He comforts himself that he is now “a free man, with duties to no one but himself” (178), and he resumes the activities that nurture his Romantic identification. At first, he devotes his time to a pet project: an opera concerning Byron’s liaison with Teresa Guiccioli. Previously, he had planned the opera to be about a passionate young woman’s love for an older man, but he now alters his plan, conceiving of Guiccioli as “a dumpy little widow” who is trying to sing Byron back to life (180). Some critics, such as Mike Marais, have interpreted this change in the opera to reflect Lurie’s attempt to “occupy” or understand Lucy, as this older, less sexualized version of Guiccioli presumably resembles his daughter (Marais, “Task” 77). Marais argues that it signifies a positive development in Lurie’s personality (77). However, it is significant that Lurie imagines Guiccioli as an obstinate, monotonous character, completely lacking in Lucy’s dynamism. In this way, the opera indicates that Lurie still has difficulty “be[ing] the woman” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160) and confirms the limits of his imagination. In the opera, Guiccioli is preoccupied with reviving her relationship with the Romantic poet, for Lurie envisions that, “[h]er years with Byron constitute the apex of her life. Byron’s love is all that sets her apart” (182). The opera thus expresses the expectation that women should look to men for meaning and value. It also expresses desire on the part of Lurie to resurrect the figure of Byron, or the masculine identity at the heart of Romanticism. However, the opera is

largely unsuccessful; as Lurie admits, it “go[es] nowhere” (214). At one point, Lurie envisages Byron singing back to Guiccioli, asking her to “*Leave me, leave me, leave me be!*” (185, emphasis as cited). On one level, Lurie realizes that his thoughts about Romanticism are outdated, dead – just like Byron is in his opera. Nonetheless, on another level, he refuses to let them go – like his opera, he makes no progress; he remains committed to his ways.

Soon after returning to Cape Town, Lurie loses interest in his opera and begins compulsively thinking about Melanie. She, again, becomes the crutch for his failing sense of masculine identity. He surreptitiously attends the play in which she is featured, watching her performance and indulging in lustful thoughts. He imagines her clothes “burn[ing] off her body in a cold and private flame,” so that she is “as naked and as perfect as on the night in Lucy’s old room” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 191). Lurie’s reference to flame is significant as he has previously likened his feelings for Melanie to a fire, implying that he has uncontrollable passion for her (166). However, he now locates the fire within Lucy’s old room, referring to a night where he had sex with Melanie in his daughter’s childhood bedroom. The underlying implication is that his roles as lover, professor, and father are becoming enmeshed in an amalgamated fantasy. Rather than feeling ashamed of his thoughts, Lurie feels reassured, suggesting his desire for patriarchal control. When Melanie is applauded for her performance, Lurie suppresses an instinct to yell out, “*Mine!*” and take credit for her talents “as if she were his daughter” (191, emphasis as cited). Lurie’s actions are thus motivated by a need to absorb the ‘positive’ attributes of women for the benefit of his own self-image. When he is eventually driven out of the play by Melanie’s boyfriend, Lurie’s immediate response is to search out a “streetwalker,” who is “even younger than Melanie,” in order to repair his injured ego (194). Even though the woman is vulnerable, “drunk or perhaps on

drugs,” Lurie feels revitalized by their exchange, and drops her off “where [he] found her,” feeling “strangely protective” after his brief interlude in the woman’s life (194-195). Lurie’s feelings in this scene bespeak his desire to play a patriarchal role of protector—a role that veils his propensity to exploit the same women he professes to want to protect. Far from being the transformative character that some critics have suggested, then, Lurie continues to think, to reason, and to behave in much the same way that he always has.

Disgrace ends inconclusively, with Lurie repeating his past actions and achieving much the same upsetting results. After learning that Lucy is pregnant, he returns uninvited to Lucy’s farm and resumes his work at the animal shelter. Importantly, Lucy does not grant Lurie permission to stay with her, as his presence serves to disturb the delicate ““peace”” that she has been able to create for herself (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 208). In particular, Lurie continues to advise Lucy on how to live her life, most notably by implying that she should have an abortion (198). Also, he remains hostile towards the neighbour, Petrus, whose cousin was involved in Lucy’s rape and whom he finds responsible for her troubles. He carries on making provocative and disparaging comments about the rapists, and refuses to recognize the similarities between his own actions and theirs. Lurie blames them for the growing tensions between him and his daughter, instead of self-reflexively assessing his own behavior. For example, he admits to Bev that his relationship with Lucy is experiencing difficulties, yet he rationalizes that these difficulties originate with ““the people she lives among”” (209). Largely for these reasons, Lurie is required to find his own place of residence at a nearby boarding house. In many ways, then, Lurie’s relationship with Lucy remains on precarious terms, as he continues in his stubborn and unbending behaviour.

Feeling alienated from Lucy, Lurie invests his time at the animal shelter, allocating his energy to the task of euthanizing stray dogs, even buying a large truck to help him to transport their dead bodies to the incinerator (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 210). In this way, he commits himself to his task without any hope of improvement or redemption, either for himself or for the dogs: as he says, he is “living in disgrace without term” as he is “too old to heed, too old to change” (172, 209). Through his trials and tribulations, Lurie has not become more sensitive or emotionally aware. This is powerfully evidenced in his ‘giving up’ of his favourite dog, Driepoot, for euthanization. Indeed, his decision to ‘give up’ Driepoot directly contrasts Lucy’s decision *not* to ‘give up’ her farm or her pregnancy (200). In effect, Lurie fails to heed Lucy’s assurances that, ““Love will grow – one can trust Mother Nature for that”” (216), when he resolves to kill Driepoot, another being that offers him emotional companionship. Certainly, Lurie never explains why, exactly, he has to kill Driepoot. Presumably, if he wanted to, he could adopt the dog—but he does not seem to consider this option. Thus, the novel ends with a gesture of resignation, conveying a sense of “pessimism about the likelihood that things will soon change” (Donovan, “Miracles” 88). Furthermore, Lurie justifies his participation in the killing of Driepoot and the other dogs by professing to ‘love’ them; he assumes to know what is best for Driepoot, despite acknowledging that the dog may not want to die (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219). Therefore, Driepoot’s death serves to link Lurie’s treatment of women and animals, showing how his ‘love’ is premised on violence towards feminized and animalized bodies. As Heller suggests, Romantic ‘love’ can conceal an “underlying desire to control and denigrate [Others],” permitting the Romantic subject to remain complicit in the oppression of Others “while maintaining his fantasy of protecting ‘woman-nature’” (Heller 224, 225). Therefore, Lurie’s disgrace, which is underscored by the

novel's title, lies partly in being wedded to a Romantic fantasy that supports his justifications of his behaviour, a fantasy grounded in an obstinate separation of lived reality from idealized conceptions of it. Lurie is thus able to sustain his own defensively self-protective understandings of his actions as part of a larger, abstract set of 'human' activities and inclinations, not individual acts of violence upon other beings.

3 Chapter: Romantic Ideology and Violence towards Women

This chapter utilizes the methodology set forth in Chapter Two in a close reading of scenes where Lurie rapes Melanie Isaacs, and juxtaposes Lurie's reaction to his treatment of Melanie with his reaction to the rape of his daughter Lucy. Critics examining Lurie's relationship with Melanie have tended to read in sympathy with him, accepting his account that his sexual encounters with the young woman were "not rape, not quite that" (Coeztee, *Disgrace* 25). They have framed it as "an affair" (Gal 241), "a final fling" (Kosew 155), "a brief liaison" (Attridge 101), and a "dalliance" (Cornwall 319). Romantic scholar Margot Beard writes that "Lurie makes love to Melanie" (Beard 65), reiterating Lurie's choice of words, and concealing the coercive nature of the relationship. Other critics, such as Derek Attridge, portray the relationship as "a seduction," and even seem to criticize the university's disciplinary hearing as an overzealous "shaming" of Lurie (Attridge 101,102). In many ways, then, critics have commiserated with Lurie, serving to diminish the predatory and violent nature of Lurie's interactions with Melanie. This tendency to sympathize with Lurie further evinces an assumption that the novel is a *Bildungsroman* and that the protagonist is a sensitive character.

In contrast to these critics, I contend that Lurie not only grossly abuses his position of power and privilege as a white male professor to sexually violate and exploit Melanie, but also, upon being caught, attempts to explain and justify his actions using a Romantic rationale. As such, this chapter will perform two main tasks: First, I will examine how Lurie's understanding of, and actions toward Melanie within the frame of Romantic ideology allow him to transform his interactions with Melanie "into an aesthetic encounter" (Higgins and Silver 4). This aesthetic encounter bespeaks Lurie's reluctance to acknowledge his

sexual violation of Melanie and creates a veneer of seductive language to disguise his physical and sexual violence towards her. Lurie's interactions with Melanie thus require what Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver refer to as "the act of rereading rape," a conscious effort on the part of the reader to acknowledge sexual violence in order to restore the body as the site of suffering (4).

Building upon Higgins and Silver's argument for rereading rape, and informing this rereading with trauma and rape scholars, I argue that Lurie demonstrates how Romantic ideology can be extended to work as a veiling mechanism, allowing him to perceive women as objects, bodies to support his Byronic fantasy. This fantasy arises from what critics see as Byron's set of Romantic values, which are communicated through his poetry (see Lessenich and Quennell). More specifically, Rolf Lessenich argues that

Byron's moral thought, focused on the internal nature of man rather than on his external conditions of life and void of all necessitarianism, followed a distinctive pattern. Men cannot be called guilty or not guilty, and their actions cannot without arbitrary despotism be judged by either divine or human tribunals because they are quite incapable of resisting the passions of their natures. (Lessenich 36)

In other words, the literary figure of 'Byron' presents an ideal of man that suggests men are driven by 'natural' passions beyond their control. A Byronic fantasy, then, allows Lurie to face his disciplinary committee and remain indignant at the suggestion that his behaviour requires sensitivity training and counselling (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 43). Lurie is incensed by the implication that his desires are "inappropriate," stating to the committee that he was "having an affair with the girl," while making a point of "walking with his head held high" (43, 42). Lurie's reference to Melanie as 'the girl' shows his desire to avoid her name and to

distance himself from his actions. Further, Lurie claims that he has “reservations of a philosophical kind” in regards to the hearing (47). I argue that these reservations arise from what Lurie views as an impingement on his Byronic fantasy by the committee, which he sees as attempting to police his ‘natural’ desires and passions. Therefore, I assert that Lurie’s identification with the Romantic figure of Byron is inextricably tied to his exploitive relationship with women, especially in regards to Melanie. I also contend that readings of *Disgrace* that overlook or diminish Melanie’s rape point to an inability or unwillingness to question Lurie’s Romantic posturing, as well as a failure to empathize with Melanie as an individual character, rather than as an extension of his Romantic desires. I contend that it is important to empathize with Melanie, even though the reader does not have direct access to her perspective, in order to critique Romantic ideology and its privileged notion of ‘man’ as well as the erasure of violence it facilitates.

The second task of the chapter is to examine how Lurie responds to his daughter Lucy’s rape by condemning and dehumanizing the rapists without first considering the similarities between their actions and his own. I argue that the rapists serve as a parallel for Lurie’s actions, problematizing clear distinctions between the two crimes. I explore how Lurie utilizes allusions to Romantic notions such as love, passion, and desire to defend his own abusive behaviour, while using them as a cultural weapon against Lucy’s rapists to assert his identity as a more sophisticated and superior ‘human’ being. I conclude that Lurie’s use of Romanticism, as well as sympathetic readings of *Disgrace* that excuse Lurie’s character, ultimately reveal a cultural privileging of the mind and Romantic arguments—for example, about desire—while the body is construed as something feminized, animalized and Other, and therefore not worthy of examination.

3.1 Rereading Rape

In *Rape and Representation*, Higgins and Silver argue that sexual violence and rape have become “so ingrained and so rationalized through their representations” that they often “appear ‘natural’ and inevitable, to women as to men” (Higgins and Silver 2). In Western culture, they contend, literary representations of rape are “almost always framed by a masculine perspective premised on male fantasies about ... access to and possession of women’s bodies” (3). As studies have shown, these ‘male fantasies’ include presumptions that women are alluring temptresses who invite sexual encounters, that women secretly desire to have sex, that women initially resist but then enjoy sex, and that men have sexual needs that prevent them from governing their behaviour (Searles and Berger 1). According to Higgins and Silver, these fantasies inform representations of rape, making patriarchal thinking seem self-evident and ‘natural,’ while also shaming and silencing women, who “often end up blaming themselves [for their sexual violation]” (Higgins and Silver 3). Higgins and Silver thus assert that the prevalence of male perspectives in cultural texts produces restrictive notions of what constitutes rape and how victims should respond, suppressing alternative perspectives and more comprehensive notions of rape and its effects (3). As I will later argue, it is these restrictive notions that facilitate Lurie’s claims that his interactions with Melanie do not constitute rape, serving to suppress Melanie’s perspective. However, the narrator in *Disgrace* also signals Lurie’s blinkered perceptions—at crucial moments providing glimpses of Melanie’s perspective—and this effectively calls attention to these restrictive notions, and opens a space for their criticism.

Higgins and Silver are wary of literary conventions that construct rape as a seductive or “aesthetic encounter” where the woman’s beauty seemingly determines her fate; moreover,

they suggest that the conventions at issue here include those of the Western lyric tradition and Romanticism's quest for beauty and truth (Higgins and Silver 7). In other words, sexual violence and rape are "pervasive" and "invisible" themes in literary texts, which have been made "unreadable," in part, by Romantic conventions that obscure physical realities and the woman's bodily violation (3). As a result, Higgins and Silver propose that the "process of rereading rape" begins by "restoring rape to the literal, to the body" (5, 4). This means recognizing the physical, mental, and emotional pain that is involved in rape, and "reading the violence and the sexuality back into texts where it has been deflected, either by the text itself or by the critics: where it has been ... represented rhetorically as titillation, persuasion, ravishment, seduction, or desire" (4). As I will demonstrate, Lurie deflects the violence of his relationship with Melanie, by portraying it as desire, seduction, and so on. Furthermore, this rhetorical language has been reproduced and perpetuated by some of the novel's critics. As such, I intend to reread the scenes of sexual encounter between Lurie and Melanie as rape, specifically, in order to trace the impact of Lurie's behaviour on Melanie's physical and mental well-being. Higgins and Silver suggest that such a reading is necessary to recognize and illuminate "radically different" and previously silenced 'feminine' perspectives, providing a source of resistance and change (3).

Trauma and rape scholars concur with Higgins and Silver that much is at stake in rereading rape in literary texts. For example, Patricia Searles and Ronald Berger contend that cultural "scripts provide the vocabularies of motives and techniques of neutralization that rapists use to explain and justify their conduct" (Searles and Berger 2). These scripts work to reinforce masculine assumptions, producing 'norms' that have been institutionalized in a cultural system, and "making it difficult for women to achieve justice and to hold men

responsible for the harms that they have perpetuated” (1). Many scholars investigating rape maintain that sexual violence should be viewed as an extension of normative male behaviour: “the result of conformity or over-conformity to the values and prerogatives which define the traditional male sex role” (Scully and Marolla 60). In effect, cultural scripts in Western society help to encourage men to associate dominance, strength, and superiority with masculinity, and submissiveness, passivity, and inferiority with femininity. Accordingly, men are taught to have expectations about their level of sexual needs, as well as “expectations for corresponding female accessibility which can function to justify forcing access” (60). Cultural scripts thus prepare, in many ways, women to be victims and men to be aggressors of sexual violence (60). In *Disgrace*, I will argue, Lurie draws from cultural scripts that are embedded in Western patriarchy and Romantic poetry both to make his motives for pursuing Melanie seem ‘natural’ and to romanticize his exploitative behavior towards her.

In many ways, Lurie can be seen as enacting and extending the traditional male sex role in Western culture, drawing attention to the predominance of masculine, or patriarchal, thinking in Western institutions and cultural texts, in general. As the result of this predominance of patriarchal thinking, some feminist critics have categorized Western society as a “rape culture,” a culture in which both genders are socialized to regard male aggression as ‘natural’ and a ‘normal’ part of sexual interaction (Scully and Marolla 60). Specifically, Judith Herman argues that the tendency in men towards sexually exploitative behavior, including harassment and rape, is a consequence of Western culture’s patriarchal social structure, which produces men “whose capacity to nurture is severely impaired, whose ability to form affectionate relationships is restricted, and whose masculine identity,” since it rests upon a constant repudiation of his identification with the ‘feminine,’ is unstable, or “forever

in doubt” (Herman, *Father* 56). Within this social structure, she finds that men are inclined to seek out sexual contact with women of perceived inferior status, because it affords these “psychologically rather fragile and constricted” personalities with a temporary affirmation of their precarious sense of masculinity (56). Furthermore, because men are socialized to have a diminished capacity for affectionate relations, Herman proposes that they have difficulty empathizing and identifying with women. She surmises that without the ability to empathize men lack “a major internal barrier to abusive action” (56). At the same time, men often find other relationships restricted, exacerbating their desire for a sexual relationship with a compliant and submissive woman to affirm their masculine identity (56). This is evidenced in *Disgrace* through Lurie’s arrangement with Soraya, a woman who works for an escort service. Lurie describes Soraya as “quiet and docile,” lauding her “honey-brown, dark” and youthful body (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 1); he admits to himself at one point that he is “old enough to be her father” (1). This demonstrates Lurie’s tendency to pursue sexual relationships with younger women of a perceived lower social status. As Herman asserts, such a tendency becomes comprehensible within the larger context of Western culture and its patriarchal social structure.

There are indications in *Disgrace* that Lurie’s exploitative behaviour towards Melanie is part of a wider, institutionalized pattern of professor-student relations at the university. This institutionalized pattern is, I argue, an example of a patriarchal social structure that privileges the interests of men over women. Significantly, the charge against Lurie under the university guidelines is one of harassment, not rape. This points to how institutional policies can obscure and minimize allegations of violence and wrongdoing against the professor, by not distinguishing between charges of harassment and activities that could be considered

illegal, like sexual assault. Moreover, Lurie receives sympathy from male committee members at his disciplinary hearing. For example, Lurie's colleague, Aram Hakim, extends an offer of help to Lurie, stating that, "We [the committee] would like to help you David, to find a way out of what must be a nightmare" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 52). Revealingly, Hakim suggests that it is Lurie who is enmeshed in this nightmare, not Melanie, thus indicating where his sympathies lie. Furthermore, he comments to Lurie earlier that "these things can be hell," implying that disciplinary hearings over sexual harassment cases are not uncommon at the university (42). Hakim's cordial attitude towards Lurie provokes him to observe an atmosphere of "chumminess" amongst the male committee members, while also noting that, "[i]n this chorus of goodwill ... I hear no female voice" (52). In fact, Lurie receives very little sympathy from the female committee members, signalling that they are more inclined to identify with Melanie than with him. Farodia Rasool, an outspoken female member of the committee, criticizes Lurie for making "no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is a part" (53). Rasool's comment could reference the history of white men exploiting coloured women, but it could also reference the history of professors exploiting their students. Even Lucy seems aware of abuses of power at the university. She remarks, (though she is not fully informed of the severity of Lurie's actions toward Melanie), that "[i]t must go on all the time. It certainly went on when I was a student. If they prosecuted every case the profession would be decimated" (66). The underlying system at work in these statements is that predation upon students by professors is not an aberration, but appears recurrently within the institution.

It is also important to note that some critics such as Elizabeth Anker and Derek Attridge have interpreted the university's response to Lurie's sexual violation of Melanie as

excessive, further indicating a degree of acceptance regarding the Western patriarchal social structure at the university. Anker, for example, argues that Lurie's allusions to

Byron's views about desire [both during and after the disciplinary hearing] ... exhibit a certain wisdom that works to illuminate critical limitations of human rights and the available diagnoses that they offer. Significantly, Lurie's appeal suggests that the construct of human rights denies the prevalence and naturalness of sexual and other manifestations of desire. (Anker 246)

Anker explains: "To the extent that human rights fail to countenance sexual and other irrational manifestations of desire, *Disgrace* implies that the rights paradigm is, in a basic sense, structurally inadequate" (247). In other words, insofar as the disciplinary committee does not seriously consider Lurie's Romantic arguments for "the rights of desire" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 89), it provides for a limited form of justice. However, as Carine Mardorossian points out, "[h]ad the professor having the 'affair' been a black middle-aged man forcing himself on one of his young white students, the emotional (and legal) response to that scene of violence would be fundamentally different" (Mardorossian 79). Moreover, the response would have been different had the professor been a woman having an 'affair' with a young male student. I agree with Anker, then, that *Disgrace* reveals an 'inadequacy' in the discourse of human rights. However, for me, this inadequacy arises not from its disavowal of "innate human realities" (Anker 246), but from its privileging the interests of those, such as Lurie, who occupy positions of power and privilege, and who are traditionally viewed as being more 'human' than Others. Anker does not consider that the discourse of human rights is conditioned by cultural expectations about gender and race and not applied in a universal manner. I contend, therefore, that the university's response is not excessive, as Anker

suggests, but rather that it is not strict enough because it regards Lurie's transgression as an 'indiscretion' rather than a human rights violation. Further—as I will later argue in greater detail— what remains largely unexamined in these discussions of Lurie's desires is the physical, mental, and emotional effects that these desires have on the body of another, namely Melanie.

Not unlike Anker, Attridge seems to laud Lurie's refusal to cooperate with the disciplinary "committee's demands that he make an acceptable public confession and undergo counselling" (Attridge 102). According to Attridge,

[w]hat has precipitated Lurie's public shaming is not his submission to the desire to fuck Melanie Isaacs ... but his refusal to submit to these demands, a submission that in his eyes would constitute acceptance of the newly-asserted institutional rights and newly-emergent collective mores that he finds repugnant. 'These are puritanical times,' he says, 'Private life is public business' ... In this new age, hitherto private details of sexual intimacy have become matter for daily discourse, but rather than heralding a greater acceptance of sexual diversity and needs, this shift marks an increase in puritanical surveillance and moralistic denunciation. (102)

That is, he agrees with Lurie's statements that 'private life,' including sexual "liaison[s]" and "seduction[s]," should not be part of the public sphere (101). For him, Lurie's ostensible prosecution by the university signals an unfortunate breakdown of the divide between public and private. In contrast, Herman contends that Western culture's designation of domestic life to the private sphere has served to silence women by fear and shame, ultimately giving "license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation" (Herman, *Trauma* 28). She explains that the strict maintenance of the private sphere serves to compound the shame that

women feel about sexual violence, as they tend to feel shame both about the violence and about talking about the violence, which is framed as ‘private’ and ‘secret’ (28). The committee’s ‘demands,’ which Attridge calls ‘puritanical’ and ‘moralistic,’ can thus be reread as a means for Lurie to openly acknowledge and make amends for his sexual wrongdoing, rather than dismiss it as ‘private’ and ‘natural.’ Importantly, the ostensible naturalness of the violence Lurie commits upon Melanie is part of a larger framework further propelled by the vestiges of Romanticism.

3.2 Rereading Rape in Romanticism

Romanticism’s conception of masculine identity informs the larger, Western, male-privileging framework that organizes social relations in a hierarchal manner in order to appropriate feminine qualities and sexuality for the use and benefit of men. As mentioned above, Higgins and Silver contend that Romantic aesthetic conventions, which represent rape metaphorically as persuasion, seduction, and desire, serve to reframe sexual violence in a way that “‘naturalizes’ and elides rape,” supporting the power dynamics upon which this violence depends (Higgins and Silver 4, 7). Other feminist critics have further investigated this assertion, closely examining the masculine tradition of lyric poetry and Romanticism. Nancy Jones, for example, explores the “deep-seated tendency” of Romantic poets to subsume a woman’s voice, which is equated with nature, into a man’s voice, which is ostensibly “artfully-shaped” and “controlling” of nature (Jones 263). Jones draws a comparison between the conventions of the medieval pastourelle and Romantic poetry, remarking that, in the first, “a knight forcibly takes the woman’s body,” whereas, in the second, a “male poet, more subtly but no less forcibly, takes the woman’s voice” (265). Looking specifically at William Wordsworth’s “A Solitary Reaper,” Jones observes that the

poem enacts the pattern of the medieval pastourelle, revealing an effort to de-eroticize and obscure the violence of “what is traditionally an erotic and predatory encounter” (270). The poem describes that the speaker encounters a “Maiden” who is “singing at her work,/And o’er sickle bending” (Wordsworth qtd. in Jones 268); the speaker pauses to admire the woman before continuing on his way, carrying her “music in [his] heart ... [forever] more” (Wordsworth qtd. in Jones 268). Jones concedes that the poem’s speaker is “not literally a rapist, nor is Wordsworth consciously celebrating men’s power to rape” (Jones 267). However, she asserts that the speaker’s idealizing response to the woman’s singing displaces physical to metaphoric conquest, taking not the woman’s body, but her body’s relationship to nature through her song (267). The encounter described in the poem is thus predicated on a desire for mastery, whereby the male poet treats the woman and her song as “vessels into which he will pour his own poetic power” (270). However, while Jones contends that Romantic poetry originates in a displaced but “intense desire” to assert power over women (274), I would argue that this is more true of a tradition of Romanticism, which was historically cemented by the emergence of the discipline of English literature studies. Importantly, Romantic poets, including Wordsworth, provide Lurie with the cultural scripts that help to motivate and justify his actions, for these poets construct poetry as a male tradition in which women’s bodies and voices are interpreted as the currency of masculine assertion and prestige.

Lurie’s affiliation with Wordsworth is well referenced throughout *Disgrace*. As Lurie unreservedly remarks to Melanie, Wordsworth is ““one of [his] masters”” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 13). Furthermore, once his interactions with Melanie become public and he is made the subject of disciplinary action, Lurie refers to himself as a “disgraced disciple” of Wordsworth

(46). The use of ‘disciple’ suggests that Lurie views himself as almost religiously following Wordsworth’s philosophies, a description that does not seem entirely inappropriate given Wordsworth’s tendency to style himself as a “Prophet” in his poetry, “come to teach men about ‘Nature’ and the ‘mind of man’” (Aers 64). In many ways, then, Lurie can be seen as subscribing to Wordsworth’s view that poetry is the defining discourse of ‘man.’ This idea is further implied by the title of Lurie’s book about Wordsworth, *Wordsworth and the Burden of the Past* (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 4), which conveys a sense of inheritance that is likely to determine, or delimit, the poet/scholar and his intellectual movements. The title suggests that Lurie is similarly defined by such an inheritance, and points to Lurie’s ascription to a belief, which is perpetuated by a certain legacy of teaching Wordsworth, that poetry is an exclusive male tradition that is passed from one generation of men to the next. As Judith Page describes, Wordsworth defines poetry as an inherited male tradition, a tradition that is not merely “phrases and figures of speech,” but rather “a universal, permanent and philosophical language,” communicating essential ‘truths’ about ‘the nature of man’ (Page 32). In this sense, Wordsworth promotes a fixed definition of ‘the nature of man,’ producing delineations of masculinity and intellectual activity. This partly explains Lurie’s admissions that “[h]is temperament is fixed, set” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 2)—as it would appear to him that his identity as a ‘man’ is at stake in this temperament. Indeed, even though Wordsworth describes poetry as “a man speaking to men” (Wordsworth qtd. in Page 32), he also asserts that a poet is greater and more knowledgeable than ordinary men (32). It is a description that serves not only to exclude women, but also some men, such as “inferior poets and authors,” from the tradition (33). Wordsworth thus imparts an exclusive and patriarchal model of a literary man, presenting an attractive image for Lurie, whose familiarity with Romanticism, and affiliation

with Wordsworth, provides him with a means to assert his identity as a superior ‘human’ being, as well as his presumed right to appropriation.

The nature of Lurie’s usage of Romanticism becomes evident through an analysis of Lurie’s teaching of Wordsworth in his Romantic poetry class. The Wordsworth poem he assigns for study is *The Prelude*, which is one of Wordsworth’s most discussed texts, centering on an autobiographical portrayal of Wordsworth’s maturation into a poet, and outlining the development of his Romantic model of ‘man’ (Aers 64). In particular, the poem presents a philosophy of sensibility, which presumably harmonizes the ‘mind of man’ with the ‘exterior world’ (64). The lines that Lurie first analyzes with his class are taken from Book 6, describing a scene in which the poet expresses his feelings of disappointment upon seeing Mont Blanc:

We also first beheld
Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
To have the soulless image of the eye
That had usurped upon a living thought
That never more could be. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 21)

As Lurie tells his students, the passage explores the question of how “‘the realm of pure ideas’” might coexist with “‘the onslaughts of reality’” (22). In essence, the passage describes two ways of seeing: seeing with the eyes, what Lurie calls “‘mere sense-images,’” and seeing with the imagination, “[t]he great archetypes of the mind” (22). However, he spends a great deal of time glossing the term, “usurp”, and highlighting the implicit aggression involved in its meaning: “‘*usurp upon* means to intrude or encroach upon. *Usurp*, to take over entirely, is the perfective of *usurp upon*; usurping completes the act of usurping

upon” (21, emphasis as cited). The irony of these comments is that Lurie is currently engaged in the act of usurping upon one of his students, Melanie. Thus, while he endeavours to interest his students in the semantics of Romantic poetry, he also attempts to solicit sexual attentions from Melanie. He ponders, “How to bring them [his students] to him? How to bring her?” (22). The situation in which Lurie teaches is thus far from a harmonious blend of the two realms he describes, the intellectual and the physical, or the mind and the body. Rather, it is fraught with the tension of Lurie’s contradictory motives: to educate and exploit (usurp upon) his students. Moreover, Lurie acknowledges that *The Prelude* contains contradictions as well, pointing to a second passage in which Wordsworth may “even contradict the Mont Blanc moment” (22). He suggests that Wordsworth “seems to be feeling his way toward balance” (22), instead of speaking from a place of established certainty. The same could be said (but with greater severity) of Lurie. Despite his ability to philosophize and discuss poetic abstractions, Lurie does not exemplify the Romantic sensibility of which he speaks so highly.

Lurie’s lack of conviction on Romantic sensibility is demonstrated through his inability to inspire his students and his instrumental use of the Wordsworth poem to convey “covert intimacies” to Melanie (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 23). Faced with the “[b]lank incomprehension” of his students, Lurie realizes that “[h]e has gone too far too fast” (23). However, rather than turning back and elucidating his earlier thoughts about the poem, he divulges in a tangential discussion intended mostly to provoke the notice of Melanie. The observation that he goes ‘too far too fast’ thus applies not only to his teaching techniques, but also to his behaviour towards Melanie. Certainly, at times, he realizes the immorality of his actions. At one point, he reprimands himself, “*No more than a child! What am I doing?* Yet his heart lurches with

desire” (20, emphasis as cited). Instead of turning back, or recoiling, from his pursuit of Melanie, Lurie rushes forward. He says to the class:

‘Like being in love,’ he says. ‘If you were blind you would hardly have fallen in love in the first place. But now, do you truly wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of the visual apparatus? It may be in your better interest to throw a veil over the gaze, so as to keep her alive in her archetypal, goddesslike form’

It is hardly in Wordsworth, but at least it wakes them up. (22)

This reads as an admission on Lurie’s part that he has, in a sense, ‘throw[n] a veil over [his] gaze’ of Melanie, transforming her into an archetype in his mind—an archetype who finds him desirable, who is as much pursuer as pursued—and this veiling is most evident shortly after this scene, when Lurie rapes Melanie. He is determined not to let his ‘mere sense-images,’ or acknowledgements of Melanie’s vulnerability, ‘usurp upon’ his imagination, or his goddesslike, archetypal vision of her.

The language Lurie uses in his lecture on Wordsworth bears a striking similarity to how he describes Melanie during the rape scene. Lurie projects upon Melanie the image of Aphrodite, an archetypal figure in classical mythology: “Strange love! Yet the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 25). Lurie’s reconstruction of Melanie as a goddess of desire bespeaks his investment in the aesthetics favoured by late-Romantics like John Keats and Percy Shelley, who often referenced classical mythology in their poems. These aesthetic references allow Lurie to break away from their encounter with the thought that it was “[n]ot rape, not quite that,” although he recognizes that he is “undesired to the core” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 25). While the rape scene will be analyzed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter, I want to

emphasize that Lurie's manipulation of Romantic aesthetics provides the foundation for his behaviours toward Melanie. More specifically, Lurie's use of 'veiled' terms and archetypes like Aphrodite help to obscure the violence of his predatory encounters. As noted above, Wordsworth's appropriation of women's bodies and voices in his poetry does not make him 'literally a rapist;' it does, however, establish a metaphoric economy by which Lurie can read the struggles of Melanie as indicative of passion, appropriating her body and silencing her voice for his purposes, and making him quite literally a rapist. This speaks back to Lurie's admission that his explanation of Wordsworth's poetry is 'hardly in Wordsworth,' but appears as Lurie's own extension of the cultural scripts found in Wordsworth's patriarchal model of 'man.' Significantly, Lurie's extension of Romantic aesthetics is also rooted in his understanding of Byron.

As noted above, Lurie bases his pursuit of Melanie and other women on an appropriation of select traits of Wordsworth's Romantic sensibilities that best suit his intentions. Throughout *Disgrace*, Lurie both refers to and reproduces an amalgamated understanding of Romantic ideals by pairing Wordsworth's principles with those of Byron, another Romantic poet whom he greatly admires. For Lurie, Byron contributes a hypersexuality to Wordsworth's sensibilities; indeed, Lurie's awareness of Byron seems to focus on Byron's ostensibly predatory sexuality. Several times Lurie imagines Byron's sexual activities, at one point even thinking about the "legions of countesses and kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160). Situated within Romantic studies, Byron has been read as "espousing an immutable law of passion's irresistibility" (Lessenich 26). Specifically, Byron, in the preface to his well-known poem *Don Juan*, critiques poets that focus on "nature's solitude," finding that these pursuits are "an

inadequate substitute and a useless anodyne for emotional gratification” (25). Byron’s interpretation of emotional gratification is decidedly more physical than that of Wordsworth, however. Lessenich contends that the musings of Don Juan, the titular character of Byron’s poem, “constantly relapse into... thoughts of female beauty and longings for physical love of woman” (27). For example, Don Juan considers the physical love of woman (“A bosom whereon he his head might lay” [Byron 1.96.5]) a source of inspiration and a means of transcendence for him to achieve a “glowing reverie,” or a ‘higher’ state of mind (Byron 1.96.3). This focus on the physical love of women underpins the Byronic Fantasy, which Lurie veils with Wordsworth’s sensibility.

Lurie’s interpretation of Byron’s hypersexuality propels him to reconstruct any claim of sexual misconduct into an overreaction; this move parallels Byron’s response to being exiled to Italy following his wife’s claims of infidelity, including a sexual relationship with his half-sister (Quennell 10). Quennell characterizes Byron’s response to these charges as “one of indignation and aggrieved bewilderment”—Byron “admitted his faults, but would not admit that he had committed any offence against his wife that would justify her conduct” (10-11). Similarly, Lurie’s response to the disciplinary committee is one of defensive confusion; he is unable to believe that Melanie would have charged him with sexual harassment, believing that she “would not have taken such a step by herself ... [because] she is too innocent for that, too ignorant of her power” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 39). This response reveals that Lurie has appropriated both Melanie’s voice and her body into his Romantic fantasy—for Lurie, Melanie is no more capable of using her voice to disgrace him than she is of denying his sexual overtures. Indeed, Lurie is situating himself alongside Byron by focusing on the ostensible lack of violence in his actions; while musing upon Byron’s sexual

encounters, Lurie concedes that “there were no doubt those who called it [Byron’s actions] rape,” but, importantly, for Lurie, “none [of the women] surely had cause to fear that the session would end with their throat being slit” (160). This passage acts a point of explanation for Lurie’s assertion of ‘not quite rape,’ which is affirmed by critics like those cited in the opening of this chapter. Lurie conceives of ‘real rape’ as including an act of life-threatening violence, while his and Byron’s coercive sexual encounters inhabit a space of Romantic privilege and the outlet of ‘natural’ desires. As such, a deconstructive analysis of Lurie’s ‘male fantasy’ of rape as an act that includes some drastic act of violence, such as the threat of death, establishes a space for drawing parallels between Lurie’s rape of Melanie and Lucy’s rape at the hands of three black men during Lurie’s stay on her farm.

3.3 Reading Rape in *Disgrace*

Lurie’s allusions to Romanticism have the consequence of allowing him to obscure the violence of his actions and forsake his ethical responsibility towards Others. Significantly, he is able to claim throughout the novel that he has been “enriched by the experience” of raping Melanie (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 56, 192). This ostensible enrichment demonstrates an instrumentalizing logic rooted in Romantic ideology, whereby the bodies of Others are objectified as a means of benefiting or ‘enlightening’ Romantic subjects. Further, using his own manipulations of the Romantic sensibilities of Wordsworth and Byron to veil his actions, Lurie is able to distinguish his sexual encounters with Melanie from ‘real rape,’ which, he suggests, involves a life-threatening action. This consequently allows Lurie to make a distinction between his ostensible ‘relationship’ with Melanie and the rape of his daughter Lucy, which, for Lurie, is a much more heinous and violent crime. Lurie’s use of Romanticism thus functions as a lens through which he is able to transform his abusive

behaviour “into an aesthetic encounter” (Higgins and Silver 4); in turn, he can then view his behaviour as positive and honourable despite professional and personal backlash.

I am particularly interested in how Lurie describes his rape of Melanie, and how the rape is frequently described by critics as either being consensual, or at worst constituting sexual harassment. My aim is to show that Lurie can be seen as explicating and enacting the oppressive logic hidden within the Romantic ideology and its conception of ‘the nature of man.’ Indeed, I argue that the novel opens a space for criticism of this kind of Romantic posturing, pointing to how it obscures and justifies violence towards Others. The scene in which Lurie arrives at Melanie’s house to rape her contains multiple references to violence, although Lurie does not recognize his actions for what they are: the deliberate rape of a twenty year old woman who resists him. The scene begins with Lurie arriving on Melanie’s doorstep, at the home she shares with her cousin Pauline:

He gives her no warning; she is too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her. When he takes her into his arms, her arms crumple like a marionette. Words heavy as clubs thud into the delicate whorl of her ear. ‘No, not now!’ she says, struggling. ‘My cousin will come back!’

But nothing will stop him. He carries her to the bedroom ... (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 24-25)

Each of Lurie’s actions is described in violent terms. While this scene might be read as Lurie being incapacitated by his passions, Mardorossian contends that this scene is ultimately representative of Lurie’s narrow and patriarchal worldview. She argues that:

Readers are made privy to the reasoning that leads Lurie to decide this is not rape, and it is impossible not to participate in his way of thinking without also taking away from the violence of the act. He sets the terms in which the event is viewed so readers are

made complicit with an economy that obscures his responsibility by focusing on the victim's. The narration encourages them to ask not 'what was he thinking?', but why does she not resist ... This passage, then, forces readers to engage in a debate about whether this is legally and actually a rape based on *her* behavior. As a result, his behaviour is naturalized as expected and somewhat normal. (Mardorossian 79, emphasis as cited)

Lurie's understanding of his own behaviour as 'natural' and not at all violent contributes to his ability to obscure his responsibility for Melanie's rape and derives from his convenient understanding of the Romantic sensibilities, which for him center on notions of masculinity and desire. Despite recognizing Melanie's disadvantages as a student of his and as an individual who is so much younger and deferential toward authoritative figures, Lurie in no way hesitates in his actions toward her.

Lurie first begins his pursuit of Melanie by asking her to come over to his house for a drink. Melanie responds with hesitation upon hearing Lurie's invitation; she gives "a pause, cautious," and then agrees, stipulating that she must "be back by seven-thirty" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 12). This stipulation suggests that Melanie has a curfew, a specific time when she is expected by a caretaker or person of authority. It is a suggestion that is later supported by Melanie's having to call someone, perhaps her cousin, to inform him/her of the possibility that she might stay out past seven-thirty. Moreover, the "call takes longer than he [Lurie] expects. From the kitchen he hears murmurings, silences" (13). The implication is that Melanie has to partake in a rather lengthy discussion of her whereabouts and her activities, further indicating that she may be under authoritative supervision. Suggested in these passages is a tendency in Melanie's character to acquiesce to authority and to adhere to rules

set in place for her behaviour, further implying that Melanie is likely to capitulate to the demands of an individual who is in a position of authority over her, namely Lurie, her professor. Herman suggests that this form of deference is reproduced by the patriarchal structure of the family within Western culture (Herman, *Father* 60). According to Herman, “the man has the power to give the woman away, and also to take her for himself” (62). The power dynamics that Herman describes work to place Melanie in a position where, if a male authority figure chooses to eroticize the relationship with a younger, female subordinate, he will often “encounter little to no resistance” (58). This is evidenced by Lurie’s so-called ‘courtship’ of Melanie, where he reads her body in a way that constructs her actions as coquettish.

At his home, Lurie “stares, frankly ravished” by Melanie, who responds by “lower[ing] her eyes” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 12). Lurie consistently reads Melanie’s actions as coquettish, using the word to describe her “evasive...little smile” (12). While the cause of Melanie’s lack of eye contact with Lurie might be read as a sign of resistance to his overtures, Lurie construes the behaviour as one indicative of flirtation. Further, Lurie ignores signs that Melanie’s youth and her position as a student situate her in a space where his advances cannot easily be rejected. Several of Lurie’s descriptions of Melanie in the early scenes of *Disgrace* gesture toward her body’s apparent childlikeness: “little breasts against him” (17); “Her hips are as slim as a twelve-year-old’s” (19); “A *child!* he thinks: *No more than a child!*” (20, emphasis as cited). Lurie’s age, in this case, becomes another sign of his authoritative position as one to whom Melanie must defer. Lurie wonders if men his age “can be blamed for clinging to the last to their place at the sweet banquet of the senses?” (24). This reminiscence directly precedes Lurie’s rape of Melanie, in a moment when Lurie is

spying on Melanie at her drama rehearsal (24). His mention of a ‘sweet banquet of the senses’ signals Lurie’s use of a manipulated fantasy of Romantic ideals; indeed, Lurie’s reading of Byron’s diaries focuses on the privileging of youth in a way that suggests this ‘banquet’ is accessible only to those young enough to experience “fierce delight in passions” (87).

Most problematic is that a ‘delight in passions’ need not be mutual. A close-reading of Lurie’s rape of Melanie demonstrates how one-sided his fantasies are—Melanie is an empty vessel for Lurie to pour his desires into. Her attraction to or desire for him is not required for Lurie to fulfill his Romantic imagination as one still able to access the banquet of senses. Upon carrying Melanie into her room, Lurie proceeds to rape her. Melanie:

...does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes... As though she has decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration ... So that everything might be done to her, as it were, far-away. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 25)

Melanie is described as letting Lurie “lay her out on the bed and undress her,” that she “rais[es] her arms and then her hips” although “little shivers of cold run through her as soon as she is bare” (25). Herman asserts that women who are being raped sometimes “cop[e] with the sexual episodes by mentally dissociating themselves from them... They ‘fr[ee]ze up’ or preten[d] that ‘it [is]n’t really happening’” (Herman, *Father* 86). Herman’s use of language here closely parallels Melanie’s reaction to Lurie touching and manipulating her body—her shivers and averted face read as an attempt to dissociate herself from the rape. Lurie, however, carries on as though Melanie had given him full consent, only afterwards conceding that the ‘not quite’ rape was “[a] mistake, a huge mistake” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 25).

This concession, however, does not propel Lurie to make amends for his behaviour; as noted at his disciplinary hearing, Lurie does not feel his actions warrant censure.

Lurie's reaction to Melanie's 'not quite' rape is significant because it reads as remarkably opposite to how he responds to the rape of his daughter Lucy. Preceding Lucy's rape, both she and Lurie are walking back to the holding where Lucy lives as a small-scale farmer and the caretaker of a boarding kennel for dogs. In explanation of his actions to Lucy, Lurie quotes the poet Blake: "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 69). For Lurie, the greater crime would have been to not pursue Melanie sexually; his rape of her, in this case, prevents the more egregious crime of denying his natural passions, which would inevitably overcome him. Lurie returns to this statement during another walk, just before Lucy herself is raped; Lurie likens himself to a dog that had lived in Lucy's childhood neighbourhood. This dog, a male, would become "excited and unmanageable" whenever a "bitch [was] in the vicinity" (90). Each time this occurred, the dog's owners would beat the dog, until the dog would "try to hide" whenever a female dog came near (90). While Lucy reads Lurie's story as having the moral that "males must be allowed to follow their instincts unchecked," Lurie assures her that the message is actually that the dog "had begun to hate its own nature" (90). Because Lurie has aligned himself with the male dog, he is suggesting that it would be worse for him to hate or constrain his desires than to 'free' himself and pursue women. This is a decidedly Romantic sentiment, as Lurie is suggesting that 'the nature of man' is fixed – that men should abide by "the passions of their natures" (Lessenich 36). When Lucy mentions that the male dog could have been neutered, Lurie counters that he believes "it might have preferred being shot" (Coetzee,

Disgrace 90). For Lurie, then, death is preferable to denying what he sees as his inborn masculine ‘nature.’

Lurie’s cultural scripts for acceptable sexual behaviour are problematized moments later when Lucy is raped by three black men. His argument throughout his pursuit of Melanie and his subsequent disgrace has been that his actions were not criminal, because they are a product of his ‘natural’ desires as a man. However, Lurie’s outrage at Lucy’s violation reveals the arbitrariness of his valorization of ‘natural’ male desires, and points to how he appropriates and applies Romantic ideals along differential axes of power and privilege. Indeed, this is revealed in the ways in which Lurie describes the two events: Lurie “makes love” to Melanie (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 19, 29), whereas the rapists “were mating” with Lucy (199). The central difference, Lurie implies, is that his interactions with Melanie were based on “the pleasure principle,” while the rapists were directed by “the testicles, sacs bulging with seeds aching to perfect itself” (199). Lurie’s gesture to the ‘pleasure principle,’ once again, signals his one-sided fantasy of Romantic ideals, for certainly Lurie neglects to consider Melanie’s ‘pleasure’ in his interactions with her. In this case, Lurie uses the ‘pleasure principle’ to both conceal the violence of his actions and differentiate them from those of the rapists. *Disgrace* thus shows how romanticized notions can function as a double standard, for while Lurie maintains that his actions toward Melanie are not criminal, he contends the opposite in the case of Lucy’s rape, insisting that Lucy should contact the police to file a legal report against her rapists (110-112, 132-135).

Significantly, Lurie depicts the actions of Lucy’s rapists in animalistic and bodily terms revealing a strategy to assert his identity as a superior ‘human’ being. It is a strategy that Lurie repeats, for example, when he likens the rapists to “dogs” and “swine” (Coetzee,

Disgrace 160, 206). Sociologist Charles Patterson explains that the practice of vilifying people by designating them as animals is an ideological mechanism, serving as “a prelude to their persecution, exploitation, and murder” (Patterson 26). In colonial settings, this mechanism was employed to designate the “white race” as dominant over the supposed “lower races of man” (24), and in Africa, in particular, it produced “many discourses on the animal nature of ‘negroes,’ both slave and free, and their beastlike sexuality and brutish nature” (28). This mechanism, then, provides Lurie with a coping mechanism through which he can view himself as separate from and morally superior to the rapists, placing them “low down the hierarchal ladder next to animals” (28); in effect, he is able to assert his ‘nature’ as fundamentally different than that of Others, by associating his ‘nature’ with intellectual activities and ‘higher’ principles, and theirs with the ‘body’ and unrefined instincts to procreate. It is a gesture that resonates with colonialist mentalities, which were exceedingly anxious about ‘subduing’ the otherwise ‘unfettered’ procreative functions of those who were deemed ‘less than human’ (14). Lurie thus applies his Romantic ideals of the ‘natural’ desires of ‘man’ only to himself, showing that his definition of ‘man’ is consistent with the specifications of a Western colonial past, and speaking to the exclusive tradition of Romanticism of which he sees himself a part.

Some critics, such as Michael Marais, acknowledge that a “structural parallel” in *Disgrace* exists between the rape of Lucy and Lurie’s rape of Melanie (Marais, “Task” 76). Marais, in particular, argues that, these two rape scenes challenge Lurie’s “assumption of autonomy and the careless freedom with which it invests him” (76). Marais ultimately suggests that the rape of Lucy and the rape of Melanie are not only similar, but that “the inference to be drawn is that the two acts are identical” (Marais, “Little” 175). This argument

is limited because it neglects the power dynamics and contexts in which the rapes are committed. These dynamics work within a system of cultural expectations that almost normalize a white, male professor having coercive sex with his coloured female student, but that vilify black men perpetrating similar violations on a white woman. Further, the severity of Lurie's actions appears lessened, because Marais reads his rape of Melanie and the subsequent rape of Lucy as being able to teach Lurie to sympathize with women. Indeed, the severity of Lurie's actions has been the focus of critic Gareth Cornwell, who argues that while "one would not deny the existence of such a parallel" between Lurie's rape of Melanie and the rape of Lucy, "to affirm that the two acts are identical is nonsense" (Cornwell 319). Cornwell's analysis focuses on Melanie's ostensible lack of "permanen[t] damage" following Lurie's actions, whereas Lucy, who becomes pregnant following the rape, is clearly the greater victim (Cornwell 319). Cornwell goes so far as to suggest that "Coetzee himself seems to signal the discrepancy between the events by representing the former in some detail and not representing the latter at all" (Cornwell 319); in this way, he implies that this apparent discrepancy somehow mitigates Lurie's actions.

To suggest that Melanie suffers less from her rape than Lucy, however, reads as a nearly deliberate overlooking of several moments within the novel that signal Melanie has been depressed, and perhaps even suicidal. During a conversation with his ex-wife, who appears to have a significant amount of information about Lurie's disciplinary hearing, Lurie dismisses "the story...that she [Melanie] took sleeping pills" as a "fabrication" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 45). Importantly, Lurie refuses to read Melanie's testimonial statement (49), and so clings to the idea that she was a consensual partner in their relationship: "Twenty. Of age. Old enough to know her own mind" (45). Indeed, Lurie later seeks out Melanie's father for

information on her wellbeing rather than speaking directly to Melanie, demonstrating his inability to consider that his rape of Melanie has adversely affected her (173). There are other instances within the text that demonstrate Melanie might be ‘damaged’ by Lurie’s actions, including her absence from the university following the rape. Melanie informs Elaine Winter, the head of Lurie’s department, for example, that she has only attended two classes in the past month and that she missed the mid-term test (40). Yet, according to Lurie’s records, Melanie’s attendance “‘is unblemished and she has a mark of seventy on the mid-term’” (41). Cornwell’s argument, then, fails to account for the ways in which Lurie deflects any evidence that Melanie has suffered because of him, which is why a rereading of rape in *Disgrace* is so necessary.

Readings of *Disgrace*, which overlook or diminish Melanie’s rape, ultimately point to an inability or unwillingness to question Lurie’s Romantic posturing, as well as a failure to empathize with Melanie as an individual character, instead of as an extension of his Romantic desires. Ultimately, a rereading of rape in these scenes does not discount Melanie’s suffering simply because her scenes with Lurie contained more details or because Melanie exists as a projection of Lurie’s Romantic fantasy, but rather points to Higgins and Silver’s assertion that one must pay careful attention to moments of deflection where violence is veiled by literary conventions that naturalize and elide violence (Higgins and Silver 7). As I have argued, it is particularly crucial to attend to Lurie’s Romantic arguments regarding desire as a means of masking the severity of his actions while exacerbating the violence committed by those he does not recognize as fully ‘human.’ As such, an analysis of Lurie’s form of Othering, which continues to rely upon his understanding of Romantic sensibilities, is the next move in critiquing the cultural scripts in *Disgrace*. It is a move that will be further

explored in Chapter 4 to underscore Lurie's cultural privileging of mind, while he construes the body as something feminized, animalized and Other.

4 Chapter: Romantic Ideology and Violence towards Animals

David Lurie expresses his discomfort with Lucy's African (black) neighbour, Petrus, bringing home two lambs to be killed and eaten in celebration of his purchasing land. The broader implications of Lurie's reaction reveal his tendency to create cultural distance from, or designate as Other, those who do not conform to his expectations of properly 'human' behaviour. For Lurie, Petrus' Otherness is seemingly based on the ways in which he interacts with animals:

'I'm not sure I like the way he does things – bringing the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with the people who are going to eat them.'

'What would you prefer? That the slaughtering be done in an abattoir, so that you needn't think about it?'

'Yes.'

'Wake up, David. This is the country. This is Africa.' (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 124)

In this context, geography and human-animal relationships play an important role in Lurie's dehumanization of Petrus and other black characters in the novel. This role becomes apparent through Lucy's response to Lurie, as she suggests that Lurie's sensibilities are out of touch with the realities of his rural surroundings. As I argued in Chapter Two, Lucy can be interpreted as having an interconnected, embodied sense of awareness, which contrasts with Lurie's privileging of Western romanticized and abstract notions.

In particular, Petrus' practice of bringing home the lambs he intends to slaughter is “out of place” with Lurie's ideas about 'civilized' culture—an interpretation that is consistent with Glen Elder, Jennifer Wolch, and Jody Emel's observation that “[a]nimal practices are extraordinarily powerful as a basis for creating difference and hence

racialization” (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 73). In effect, these practices “serve to position [Others] at the very edge of humanity—to racialize and dehumanize them through a complicated set of associations that measure their distance from modernity and civilization and the ideals of white [society]” (74). In this chapter I will use the interplay between geography and human-animal relationships as a lens through which to view and challenge critical readings that suggest Lurie transforms into a more sympathetic and aware character by the end of the novel. I argue that these readings uncritically accept Lurie’s Romantic justifications and in so doing, overlook and dismiss some forms of violence, particularly towards animals. Moreover, this lens will help me to illuminate the “dual challenge” in creating an inclusive—non-racist and non-speciesist—ethic of responsibility and care (87). As Elder, Wolch, and Emel explain, the questions emerging from this dual challenge are:

how to break the links between animals and racialization, and stop the violence done to people racialized on the basis of their animal practices; and how to make the links between animals and people, and stop the violence directed at animals on the basis of their nonhuman status. (87-88)

The key to answering these questions, they suggest, does not involve dismissing difference or using it to legitimize harm or domination. Rather, it necessitates recognizing and respecting difference, as well as shifts in prevalent modes of thinking about and dealing with Others.

This chapter utilizes the theories of Elder, Wolch, and Emel’s “La Pratique Sauvage,” or the Savage Practice, and places them in conversation with other scholars of ecofeminism and critical animal studies, in order to investigate the human-animal relationships in *Disgrace*. More specifically, I interrogate how Lurie’s Romantic sensibilities inform his ideas regarding acceptable relations between humans and animals. My aims are to uncover

and examine the processes through which Lurie discriminates against Others—women, blacks, and animals—and to explore the shifts in thought and practice that are needed to expand ethical responsibility beyond the scope of a traditionally Western self-defining, self-affirming identification, and to create a more inclusive ethic. Unfortunately, while a number of critics have recognized an “animal topic” in the novel (Randall 213), there has been a reluctance to consider the conceptual links between Lurie’s treatment of blacks, women, and animals; to use the words of Elder, Wolch, and Emel, there has been a reluctance to consider ‘the violence directed at animals on the basis of their nonhuman status.’ In this chapter, I engage with three such cases in order to demonstrate how ‘the body’ can act as an important conceptual tool for thinking about the moral status of Others, including animals. Through a close analysis of Lurie’s behaviour towards Others, and his behaviour towards animals in particular, I argue that ethics is not a field of Romantic, or metaphysical, justifications, but rather a matter of recognizing the shared embodiment and vulnerability of all living beings, both human and animal.

4.1 La Pratique Sauvage

Elder, Wolch, and Emel’s theory of ‘La Pratique Sauvage’ describes a form of racializing and animalizing certain bodies through human-animal relationships or animal practices—a process, they argue, that is predominantly found in post-colonial settings where those seeking to produce and maintain racial difference “are no longer separated by ... long journeys from groups they wish to dehumanize. Instead, they live next door (figuratively and, not uncommonly, literally), inviting inspection of their unsettling otherness” (Elder, Wolch and Emel 82). Certainly, this description is applicable to the situation in *Disgrace*, where Petrus has purchased land adjacent to Lucy’s house and has effectively become Lurie’s

“neighbour” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 116, emphasis as cited) —an idea that Lurie stresses to highlight his discomfort and to lament that in “the old days” he “could have had it out with Petrus” (116). Lurie’s mention of ‘the old days’ is a reference to apartheid South Africa, when it would have been prohibited for a black person to purchase property within an area designated for white settlement. In ‘the old days,’ Lurie muses that Petrus would have been “hired help,” without the right “to come and go as he wishes”—thus, one could have “lost one’s temper and sen[t] him packing and hir[ed] someone in his place” (166). In this way, Lurie’s lamentation that he can no longer ‘have it out’ with Petrus signals his anxiety over the dominant (white) group’s declining economic and social hegemony, and resonates with Elder, Wolch, and Emel’s argument. They contend that the reduction of physical distance between groups, accompanied by the de-legitimization of some forms of inequality— in this case, apartheid—means that oppressive discourses have to operate on a more covert level, as “fanciful representations as people-as-beasts are less potent than images of people-acting-beastly towards animals” (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 82). That is, Elder, Wolch, and Emel argue that a more subtle form of Othering occurs through the West’s construction of “animal practices employed by subdominant cultural groups as cruel, savage, criminal, and inhuman,” while the practices of dominant—and largely white—cultural groups are viewed as civilized, rational, and humane (81).

The scene at the beginning of this chapter in which Lurie reacts to Petrus’ bringing home the lambs evidences Lurie’s bifurcation of acceptable animal practices—those used by dominant (white) groups—from what he sees as Petrus’ unsettling move to bring ‘slaughter-beasts’ into the domestic space. Lurie believes that it is only acceptable to contain animals used for food practices in an abattoir or slaughterhouse, where their bodies need never be

seen, and where he “needn’t think about [them]” (Coeztee, *Disgrace* 124). In this, he expresses a belief that is widespread throughout Western culture. As Elder, Wolch, and Emel explain, one of the most crucial aspects in determining the legitimacy of an animal practice, for dominant (white) groups, is “the site of harm”: whether the harmful action is carried out in purpose-built quarters and “behind locked doors” (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 85). Even though

in traditional societies the killing and death of individual animals was (and in many places remains) a quotidian experience, keeping mass, mechanized, and industrialized violence towards animals ‘out of sight’ is necessary [in Western societies] to legitimate suffering on [a] vast scale ... [and to create a] veneer of civility surrounding human-animal relations. (85)

Elder, Wolch and Emel observe that dominant (white) groups display an aversion to *viewing* animal slaughter, despite the acknowledgement of slaughterhouses and the knowledge of violence that occurs against animals there. As I will show, Lurie exemplifies this contradictory attitude.

While it might be a stretch to imagine that Lurie is intimately aware of slaughterhouse practices due to their commonplace invisibility, scholars within critical animal studies, such as Michelè Pickover, argue that only “the most callous and most oblivious would deny, particularly in a ... technological society, that animals are being abused [through Western animal food production]” (Pickover 142). Pickover is a South African animal rights activist whose analysis of animal practices is geographically centred in that country, and thus provides evidence that individuals such as Lurie would be aware, although perhaps not in full recognition, of the ways in which animal bodies are made to suffer in slaughterhouses. Lurie

obliquely acknowledges the violence of Western animal practices when he discusses an assumption that

people from whom cruelty is demanded in the line of duty, people who work in slaughterhouses for instance, grow carapaces over their souls... He does not seem to have the gift of hardness. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 143)

Importantly, Lurie's complaint is not that slaughterhouses exist, but that he 'does not seem to have the gift of hardness' that he imagines slaughterhouse workers must have. His statements reveal that he is aware of routinized violence against animals, but that he does not wish to *view* it—and he does not feel that he should have to. As Pickover observes, individuals like Lurie are insulated by “[I]ayers of sanitized, legal, institutionalized customs and practices that hide [animal] abuse” (Pickover 6). To some extent, Lurie is aware of this insulation and relies on it.

Ultimately, what Lurie is drawing attention to is the way that Petrus' animal practices threaten Lurie's Western, and more specifically, Romantic sensibilities, which are grounded in individual and intellectual pursuits. As I have previously argued, Lurie's academic interests in Romanticism inform his sense of identity and his way of viewing the world. In particular, Romantic sensibilities can direct one's attention away from “life-processes” involving socio-economic and political problems, by placing emphasis on individualized priorities like personal creativity and ‘freedom’ instead (Aers, Cook, and Punter 5). Lurie even seems attuned to his ignorance of ongoing ‘life-processes’ in South Africa. When he is attacked by a group of young black men, Lurie realizes that “[h]e speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 95). Lurie reads here as identifying with European colonialism—he values the languages and

cultures of the European Renaissance and the Romantic period, but he is ignorant of African languages and cultures. His ignorance is emphasized in comparison to Lucy and Bev Shaw, both of whom live and work amongst African (black) counterparts and can converse, somewhat, in Xhosa (81, 129). As Lurie defensively declares, he is from “the city,” a statement that implies his physical and cultural distance not only from “[c]ountry ways,” but also from African (black) peoples (125) who, during apartheid, would have been only peripherally present in ‘the city.’ Moreover, Lurie’s reliance on stereotypes, like his evocation of ‘darkest Africa,’ underscores his lack of concerned awareness, and signals a tendency to fall back on racist, colonial discourses, which construct Africa as a primitive, unenlightened space, in order to make sense of his unfamiliar surroundings.

Lurie’s academic interests thus contribute to his lack of awareness and understanding of South African socio-political issues; as he admits to Bev Shaw, he is ““what used to be called a scholar. [He] wrote books about dead [European] people”” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 162). Lurie’s perspective is part of a larger scholarly tradition, which has historically centered on European creative, artistic, and intellectual achievements. It is a tradition that, as Jerome McGann explains, has been influenced by Romantic ideology and its “grand illusion” that one can escape socio-cultural and material realities “through imagination and poetry” (McGann 131). As I argue in Chapter Three, Lurie is invested in the Romantic ideology and its scholarly tradition, as is evidenced by his referencing of the Romantic poets, Wordsworth and Byron, throughout the novel. David Aers further notes that Romantic ideology effectively encourages scholars to disengage with their surrounding societies and to engage in individualized introspections instead (Aers 70). Lurie’s attitude toward the ‘life processes’ of Africa and the bodies of Others can, therefore, be interpreted as an extension of his

Romantic sensibilities, which highlight moments of ‘escape’ and ‘introspection,’ while allowing Lurie to create a fantasy for himself that imagines it is possible to avoid the material and socio-economic inequalities that have allowed for his privileged position within society and facilitated these ‘moments.’

Lurie’s privileged position in society, which is reflected in his race, academic interests, and role as professor at the university, works to distance him from the material means of production and the impact of political and socio-economic difficulties. This distance, in effect, allows him to see himself as being outside of ‘life-processes,’ which involve the domination and exploitation of Others—while still benefiting systematically from these ‘life-processes.’ In this regard, Lurie can be seen as bearing a resemblance to William Wordsworth, who also occupied a privileged position within society and largely saw himself as “above and beyond society” (Ross 17). As Aers argues, Wordsworth had the socio-economic freedom to indulge in his imagination, and thus was more interested in an idyllic world of self-subsistent farmers than he was in the disturbing political and material realities of agrarian workers—workers who were being displaced by bigger land-owners, institutionalized and mechanized practices, and capitalism (Aers 67). As a result, Aers criticizes this Romantic approach, finding that it allows both poets and scholars to pose as defenders of ‘liberty’ without having to take direct action or to provide for any meaningful political or social change (69). Lurie’s reaction to Petrus bringing the sheep home is an example of this Romantic approach; the arrival of the sheep threatens to disrupt the idyllic nature of Lurie’s perceptions of the world, because the visibility of the animals’ bodies forces him to confront the grim realities of death and the slaughter process, as well as to admit his discomfort at having a racialized Other so near in domestic proximity.

In addition, Lurie's sensibilities are supported by an inherited, discriminatory mentality, which characterizes South Africa's colonial past and apartheid. As Mantsadi Molotlegi, a South African animal rights activist, argues, there are several distinct similarities between animal exploitation and apartheid. Molotlegi contends that these similarities include "prejudice, callous disregard for suffering, and a misguided sense of supremacy ... [and that] group areas and segregation help to keep suffering of black people from view, so too with the animals" (Molotlegi qtd. in Pickover 141). Lurie's unease with the presence of the lambs thus unveils two forms of Othering: the first of animal bodies, whose living selves Lurie feels must be concealed 'behind closed doors,' and the second of racialized bodies who bring animals meant for food into a visible space. Lurie does not wish to be aware of Petrus or the lambs that he brings home to slaughter, as their presence disturbs his cultural expectations that certain bodies be contained in specially-zoned establishments, and hidden away from the visible places of his everyday life. Pickover contends that this sort of mindset, which advocates for segregation, operates on "[s]ilence, ignorance, and complicity," and "perpetuates injustice, subjugation, exploitation and violence" (Pickover 143). For Maneesha Deckha, this mentality further stipulates that 'civilized' societies *need* to "brutalize animals," but they also *need* to "hide the brutality" (Deckha 32). Lurie's responses to the arrival of the sheep thus demonstrate his preference for this concealment, which is, for Lurie, the most significant difference between acceptable and unacceptable 'civilized' behaviour. In this way, Lurie designates Petrus as a racialized, non-Western Other, who does not perform the requisite acts of 'hiding' that Lurie finds palatable.

Significantly, Lurie does not object to the general idea of killing and eating animals, nor is he typically concerned about the lives of animals. For him, it seems 'natural,' and

therefore right, that ‘humans’ dominate and exploit animals. For example, when Bev Shaw makes the hopeful suggestion that he likes animals, Lurie responds, ““Do I like animals? I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them”” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 81). This instrumentalizing logic, which privileges his interests over those of Others, is strikingly similar to the one that Lurie exhibits towards women. For example, Lurie’s fixation with Melanie Isaacs’ ‘body’ evidences that he likes ‘some parts’ of women in the same way that he might like ‘some parts’ of animals: they are a source of his own gratification. Early on in the novel, Lurie focuses on Melanie’s “little breasts” and her “slim” hips (17-19), and later, he ruminates about her “sweet young flesh” (150). These descriptions serve to associate Melanie’s ‘body’ metaphysically with those of the animals that Lurie consumes. As Carol J. Adams argues, there is a relationship between Western meat-eating practices and the violence committed against Others; this connection derives from what Adams calls “thingification,” which refers to when “someone who is a unique being” is transformed through cultural practices into an object for consumption (Adams 22). The parts of the sheep and the parts of Melanie do not form ‘unique’ individual beings for Lurie—he is attracted to limbs, breasts, thighs, and pieces of meat, each reduced to a ‘thing’: “devoid of specificity, ...the...flesh of what was once a living, feeling being” (22). Lurie even seems alert to his ‘thingification’ of the sheep, as he expresses more unease about their whole, bodily presence, than he does about their eventual deaths.

Lurie admits that, for him, there is “nothing remarkable” about the notion that Petrus’ sheep have been “destined since birth for the butcher’ knife” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 123); he speculates that “[s]heep do not own themselves, do not own their own lives. They exist to be used, every last ounce of them” (123). This statement, once again, resonates with Lurie’s

earlier contentions regarding Melanie's beauty, that "she does not own herself [because] beauty does not own itself" (16). As noted in Chapters Two and Three, the appropriation of women and nature can be seen as a characteristic of Romantic ideology, whereby male poets utilize 'feminine' and 'natural' qualities as a source of inspiration and leverage for their own will to write (Ross 4)—in effect, this appropriation can be termed a metaphysical consumption of the bodies of Others for the inspiration, transcendence, and endurance of male identities. This form of consumption requires the bodies of Others—particularly female bodies and bodies tied to nature—to be rendered into pieces, rather than recognized as complex wholes. Lurie, then, is able to regard Melanie and the sheep as parts that do not 'own' themselves, because they presumably lack the requisite interiority to fulfill subjecthood. In other words, Lurie arguably does not consider that women and, to a greater extent, animals are subjects of their own lives, or that they live lives that matter to themselves. It is a point that he stresses even after he contemplates that a "bond seems to come into existence between himself and the two [sheep]" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 126). He tells Lucy, "I haven't changed my ideas ... I still don't believe that animals have properly individual lives. Which among them get to live, which get to die, is not, as far as I am concerned, worth agonizing over" (126-127). On the whole, Lurie views animals, or 'slaughter-beasts,' as bodies with select purposes in life: namely, to be slaughtered and used instrumentally for 'human' needs and purposes.

From this vantage point, the 'bond' that Lurie claims to develop with the sheep seems dubious or, at least, hypocritical—especially since, as Elder, Wolch, and Emel contend, Western animal practices systematically exploit animals on a large scale, producing "battery-caged chickens, crated veal, factory-farmed hogs, and BST-laced milk from downer cows"

(Elder, Wolch, and Emel 80). Lurie, himself, cannot explain his 'bond' with the sheep; he admits that

The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 126)

In fact, Lurie's 'bond' with the sheep implies that he interprets violence toward animals in culturally- and place-specific ways. Even though Lurie cannot explain his objections to Petrus' animal practices, he acknowledges that he has not developed affection for the animals, nor does he recognize them as individual beings. Rather, Lurie's objections seem to revolve around his perceptions that Petrus is encroaching upon 'his' space. Lurie intersperses commentaries about Petrus's unsettling 'nearness' throughout his contemplations about the sheep. At one point, he feels "a vague sadness" for the sheep, and he surmises that "[he and Lucy] live too close to Petrus. It is like sharing a house with strangers, sharing noises, sharing smells" (127). The underlying implication is that the proximity and visibility of certain bodies—both racialized and animal bodies—unsettle Lurie, because they disrupt his image of a 'civilized' and enclosed (white) space. Moreover, the lambs' bodies provide a means for Lurie to express his concerns over sharing space with a 'stranger,' or a racialized Other. As Elder, Wolch, and Emel suggest, then, animal bodies are a "site of political struggle over the construction of cultural difference and the maintenance of white supremacy" (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 85). By scrutinizing and interpreting how Petrus behaves toward animal bodies through his own (Western) cultural lens, Lurie is able to imply that Petrus is crude and unfeeling, while constructing his own actions as sensible and considerate. Lurie thus mobilizes Western distinctions between 'humans' and animals—

distinctions which comprise the human-animal divide—to other the bodies of those that he does not want to consider fully ‘human’ or accord moral consideration.

4.2 The Human-Animal Divide

Lurie’s racialization of Petrus and other black characters is fostered by Western interpretations of the human-animal divide, which relies on a logic based on perceived, incommensurable differences between humans and animals, culture and nature, mind and body. Elder, Wolch, and Emel argue that Western constructions of the human-animal divide construe the boundary between humans and animals “as a continuum of both bodily form/function and temporal stage in evolutionary progress,” serving to reinforce intra-human categorizations and interpret them in evolutionary terms rather than in social and geographic ways (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 81). They assert that the general intention of these interpretations, during and since Western colonialism, has been to represent Others as devoid of culture, unable to ‘master’ their own bodies/bodily instincts—and ultimately in need of Western ‘civilization.’ In postcolonial settings, the idea of the human-animal divide as reflective of differences in evolutionary progress has worked to inscribe hierarchies of the more or less ‘human’—“savage, barbaric, heathen, or archaic versus civilized, Christian, or modern” (81). In this way, the human-animal divide is comprised of a series of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms, which are built on the foundational distinctions between culture and nature, mind and body. These dualisms coincide with gender, race, and animal oppressions and work to designate certain bodies as Other. In order to think through the various degrees of separation and difference created through the human-animal divide, Elder, Wolch, and Emel suggest that “humans, especially dominant groups, [will have to] accept rather than deny some of the vulnerability that animals have always known” (88). In other

words, 'humans' will have to acknowledge the significance of 'the body,' with all its attendant vulnerabilities, afflictions, and dependencies, as a common ground for understanding and appreciating Others, including animals.

In concurrence with Elder, Wolch, and Emel, scholars of ecofeminism and critical animal studies have argued that embodiment and vulnerability are key conceptual tools for rethinking the moral status of Others, including animals. Ecofeminists, such as Val Plumwood and Terri Field in particular, discuss "the problem of the mind/body distinction," demonstrating how it "maps onto other harmful hierarchal dualistic pairs," which include man and woman, white and black, human and animal, self and Other (Field 40). These scholars assert that the implicit association of Others with their bodies has worked to exclude them from the cultural (or 'civilized') sphere, insofar as culture is associated with 'the mind' and mind-related activities. They argue that, because 'the body' shares a devalued position with women, blacks, animals, and Others, "recovering the body is part of the ecofeminist project" (40). Moreover, Field endeavours to extend Plumwood's deconstructive theoretical approach, by suggesting that recovering the 'abstract' body, or ideas about 'the body,' "does not go far enough" to release Others from their place of exclusion and marginalisation (40). Field argues that the 'physical' body itself is a source of pain, pleasure, and shared experiences, and thus provides "a point from which to rethink all those binary pairs associated with the mind/body dualism" (40). It is in this sense that 'the (physical) body' can be utilized as a deconstructive term, and bodily experiences can work to undermine the oppositions created by the dualistic logic of these binary divisions.

As such, this segment of my chapter seeks to reveal the gestures made in *Disgrace* toward what Coetzee himself has referred to as "that standard of the body" (Coetzee,

Doubling 248). While the Western and Romantic traditions in which Lurie is immersed highlight the faculties of the mind, intellectual activities, and notions of sensibility, I argue that *Disgrace* is making a claim for the primacy of ‘the body’ and shared embodiment between man and woman, black and white, human and animal, self and Other. The primacy of ‘the body’ remains highly uncharted territory within readings of *Disgrace*, and many focus on Lurie’s progression from, as Patton argues, a man with a “Romantic ideal of his virile self” to one who has selflessly given up “his honour, his intellectual pride and his attachment to life itself” (Patton 107, 117). In other words, Lurie is interpreted as undergoing a transformation, “learning to love by humbling himself and by coming to terms with violence and death ... through [his] volunteer work at the animal clinic” (Kossew 155). In contrast, I argue that Lurie continues to escape into Romantic justifications for violence when confronted with ‘the body’ and the body’s suffering in various forms, and that this escape allows Lurie to maintain his ability to designate certain bodies as Other.

Derek Attridge’s influential reading of *Disgrace* interprets Lurie as achieving “something approaching a state of grace” through his work at the animal shelter, and in particular, through his “service to the dead dogs” (Attridge 112). In particular, Attridge argues that Lurie’s behaviour becomes more sympathetic towards animals throughout the course of the novel; he explains that:

Although Lurie’s growing attachment to animals, his increasing awareness of their own singular existence, can be traced in a number of narrative developments—the two Persian sheep, the abandoned bulldog, the many animals he helps Bev Shaw to treat at the clinic—the most telling and fully-realizing exemplification of his new attitude is his handling of the dogs that *have to be killed*. (113, emphasis added)

Attridge asserts that Lurie, through his relationships with animals, begins to appreciate the unknowingness of Others (Attridge 113). That is, Lurie gains an awareness of his inability to comprehend Others, due to their difference and individuality. The euthanization of the dogs, Attridge argues, “is understood as *marking* and *mourning*...registering the individuality of each dog’s death, of contesting the reduction of dead animals to mere accumulation of matter” (116, emphasis as cited). He arrives at this conclusion by framing Lurie’s duties at the animal shelter as a way of paying homage to the singularity of all (once) living beings (117). It is a reading that is most notably challenged by Rita Barnard, who collaborated with Coetzee to write a paper about *Disgrace*. She contends that Attridge’s “interpretation does not readily transfer to the final scene” in which Lurie ‘gives up’ the dog that “has been presented as singularly affectionate and endearing” (Barnard 221-222); she concludes that, “[t]he final scene, in short, is not one that is readily processed,” and that may resist conventional readings (222).

Nevertheless, critics have typically arrived at similar conclusions as Attridge, albeit using disparate methods: the message in these readings is that Lurie’s work at the animal shelter has allowed him to develop awareness of and sympathy for animals, and Driepoot in particular. Moreover, they reiterate Attridge’s notion that the dogs at the shelter *have to be killed*, implying that the systematic, institutionalized killing of animal bodies is justified in order to satisfy ‘human’ concerns and purposes. This framing of the situation precludes any discussion of the reasons *why* the dogs have to die, and more specifically, why they are at the shelter to begin with. That is, the dogs are not simply always-already waiting to be euthanized; they have been brought to the shelter by their owners as a convenient way of getting rid of them (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 142). Lurie replicates the seeming-normativity of the

convenience of euthanization when he ‘gives up’ Driepoot, the dog with whom he has formed an attachment and for whom he feels some responsibility. Lurie’s understanding of his actions as compassionate, allows him to imagine Driepoot’s euthanization as inevitable; in effect, this understanding precludes him from searching for alternatives to the dog’s supposed fate. Presumably, Lurie could consider fostering or adopting the dog—indeed, Lurie even has the option of postponing Driepoot’s death for another week (219). That he chooses not to undercuts the supposition that Lurie has developed some appreciation for Driepoot’s singularity.

Attridge’s claims that Lurie gains an appreciation for the unknowingness of Others and that he values the singularity of all living beings can be further problematized by Lurie’s tendency to use animal bodies as a means of mediating his relationships with Others. In particular, Lurie is never able to recognize or appreciate the singularity of the black characters in the novel. That Lurie remains unable to move beyond discriminatory and culturally inscribed race relations with blacks is demonstrated in key moments of slippage when he admits to wanting to revert back to ‘traditional’ ways of dealing with racialized Others. This occurs at several points during the novel, but most significantly, near the end of the novel, when Lurie returns from a morning walk to find Pollux, Petrus’ cousin and one of Lucy’s rapists, peering at Lucy through a window. Lurie describes his feelings:

The flat of [Lurie’s] hand catches the boy in the face. *You swine!* he shouts, and strikes him a second time, so that he staggers. *You filthy swine!*

...The word still rings in the air. *Swine!* Never has he felt such elemental rage. He would like to give the boy what he deserves: a sound thrashing. Phrases that all his life

he has avoided seem suddenly just and right: *Teach him a lesson, Show him his place.*
(Coetzee, *Disgrace* 206, emphasis as cited)

Here, in a moment of anger, Lurie admits to the desire to (re)place Pollux in the space of a racialized inferior—to ‘show him his place’ by way of reminding Pollux of his ‘animal,’ or brutish, nature. Lurie says that he has avoided these thoughts his entire life, but that does not indicate that he has not harboured them—seeing Pollux peering in Lucy’s window simply gives Lurie license to treat Pollux as an ‘animal.’ He configures Pollux as a ‘swine’—a derogatory term for a person who is like an ‘animal,’ without singularity, intelligence or redeeming quality—in order to physically take his retribution for Lucy’s rape. It is clear through this scene that Lurie has found limited reconciliation with the unknowingness of Others, and that he is still willing, when given the opportunity, to animalize and behave violently toward those bodies that he does not recognize as fully ‘human.’ To make the claim that Lurie has gained a sense of sympathy for animals, then, ignores his reliance upon animal metaphors to deny the singularity of Others, to homogenize them into an indistinguishable, amorphous group, and to justify his violence toward their ‘bodies.’

Some critics claim that Lurie not only gains a sense of sympathy for animals but that, in the act of euthanizing dogs, learns self-sacrifice. Michael Marais contends that Lurie’s final act of ‘giving up’ his favourite dog, Driepoot, for euthanization is a caring, merciful, even sacrificial gesture performed in the dog’s best interests over Lurie’s emotional investment. Marais argues, for example, that Lurie euthanizes Driepoot for his own emotional deepening:

Irrespective of his love for it, Lurie *must* sacrifice the dog. This is the implication of the question that Bev Shaw asks him, ‘Are you giving him up?’ Lurie must give up the dog

because it is in the dog's best interests that he does so. His own needs, desires, feelings, predilections, and predispositions are totally immaterial. To sympathize, Lurie must lose, indeed sacrifice or offer, *himself* (Marias, "Task" 78, emphasis added).

Marais' reading of Driepoot's death implies that Lurie is concerned with Driepoot's best interests and alleviating the dog's suffering through his actions—that Driepoot somehow wants, or even needs, to die. However, there is no explicit indication in the narrative that Driepoot is suffering or is, in fact, in any bodily pain. Driepoot does have "a withered left hindquarter that [he] drags behind [him]," but this physical deformity does not signal that the dog is experiencing pain (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 215). In fact, Driepoot is described as being "fascinated by the sound of the banjo," and "frisk[ing]... around the yard or snooz[ing] at [Lurie's] feet" (215)—hardly the behaviours of a dog who is near death, desiring of death, or in constant discomfort. Problematically, Marais suggests that euthanizing Driepoot is Lurie's only avenue of action, rather than adopting or fostering the dog that he claims to 'love.' Indeed, to argue that Lurie sacrifices *himself* through Driepoot's death overlooks the very fact that *the dog* dies—and that *the dog's body* suffers at the hands of Lurie. For Marais, Driepoot effectively becomes a vessel for Lurie's enlightenment, much like the dead dogs become a means for Lurie to achieve grace in Attridge's reading. As with Attridge, Marais finds that Lurie learns, to a certain extent, to care for Others—although Marais delimits his argument by acknowledging that Lurie is never able to sympathize with black South Africans.

Marais derives much of his evidence for Lurie's development of sympathy—particularly for women—from the opera that Lurie is writing on Byron and one of Byron's mistresses. In so doing, Marais repeats a deep-seated tendency in the Western scholarly

tradition to privilege ‘the mind’ and mind-related activities, and fails to attend ‘the body’ as a shared dimension of human and animal life. Specifically, Marais interprets Lurie’s opera as an intellectually creative and largely successful means for Lurie to learn to sympathize with Lucy; he states that, “the ‘lyric impulse’ that enables him [Lurie] to compose the opera ... also enables him to lose himself by imagining himself into the existence of his daughter” (Marais, “Task” 77). In this, Marais seems to deemphasize indications throughout the narrative that Lurie cannot *think*, or imagine, his way into ‘the body’ of a woman; when trying to picture the scene of Lucy’s rape, for instance, Lurie finds that he can “be there, be the men, inhabit them,” but he cannot “be the woman,” or inhabit ‘the body’ being violated (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160). Further, Marais’ suggestion that Lurie uses the opera as a way of identifying and sympathizing with women ignores the very real bodily violation that Lurie proves incapable of understanding through his discussions and interactions with Lucy. While I have gone into greater detail analyzing Lucy’s rape in the previous chapters, it is important to reiterate that Lurie does not successfully become attuned to the bodily experiences of the women in his life because, ultimately, he is incapable of opening himself up to physical vulnerability. The very fact that Lurie is writing an opera, an act that gives him authority over the bodies, minds, and experiences of his characters, demonstrates that Lurie is relying upon Romantic conventions that privilege ‘the mind’ as a way of keeping himself distant from shared bodily vulnerabilities.

In his analysis, Marais does not explore Lurie’s ability to *feel* or to recognize ‘the body’ as an agent for recognizing “shared vulnerability” (Thierman 186). This shared vulnerability, which includes a shared finitude and mortality, is, for theorist Stephen Thierman, a “starting point for which to begin thinking about the possibility of an expanded

ethical consciousness” (186). This is not a consciousness that Lurie would find readily accessible, as he values intellectual, mind-related activities as the starting point to understanding Others. This response largely ignores “[t]he vicissitudes of the flesh, the arc of ageing that we follow from birth to death and decay, the experience of pain and suffering...all the ways in which the fragility of the human becoming can be understood as fundamentally an ‘animal’ vulnerability” (192). Indeed, Lurie experiences several moments in which he cannot recognize his body’s responses. Following Lucy’s rape, for example, Lurie feels a pang in his chest that he describes as “a vital organ ha[ving] been bruised, abused—perhaps even his heart” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 107). Importantly, Lurie is unable to pinpoint the origin of this pain, only recognizing that it appears to radiate from a vital organ. This signals Lurie’s inability to read his body’s responses, an inability that is very much in line with his Romantic sensibilities, which view the body as distinct from the mind. At one point in the novel, Lurie even imagines that he is lying on an operating table having his organs surgically removed:

He has a vision of himself stretched out on an operating table. A scalpel flashes; from throat to groin he is laid open; he sees it all yet feels no pain. A surgeon, bearded, bends over him, frowning. *What is this?* growls the surgeon. He pokes at the gallbladder. *What is this?* He cuts it out, tosses it aside. He pokes at the heart. *What is this?* (171, emphasis as cited).

This scene signals Lurie’s abstract relationship with his own body; indeed, that Lurie can see the surgeon’s procedures and feel no pain suggests a complete detachment from his own body, as well as its processes. The surgeon’s questioning of Lurie seems to highlight Lurie’s continuing inability to pinpoint the origin of his emotional distress. Lurie’s imagined

dissection of his own body gestures toward his inclination for a compartmentalized understanding of what things are and what their functions are, rather than an appreciation of 'the body' as a holistic and complex system with interdependent parts and networks. Thus, I suggest that Lurie is unable to achieve a sympathy that would allow him to connect with the experiences of women and animals, as he resists an appreciation for the shared systems and vulnerabilities that are constitutive of 'the body.'

Even critics such as Lucy Graham, who criticize Lurie's treatment of women, tend to compliment his treatment of animals and Driepoot. Graham, for example, sees Lurie's treatment of Driepoot as "an alternative" to his earlier treatment of Melanie, and suggests that his interactions with the dog may constitute a genuine effort to care for an Other (Graham "Yes" 9). Interestingly, Graham's reading of Lurie's relationship with Others focuses specifically on the role of 'the body' in forming empathy and responsibility for the Other. Graham makes use of Levinasian ethics, which focuses on responding to 'the face' of the Other, in order to construct an argument regarding Lurie's "irresponsibility toward Melanie" (7). She contends that Lurie demonstrates how a sense of responsibility to an abstract idea of the Other "can lead one to sacrifice responsibility for another body" (7). In other words, she argues that Lurie does not recognize that Melanie has a 'face' to which he must ethically respond, whereas 'the bodies' of Driepoot and the other dogs become 'faces' for which Lurie does develop responsibility. Specifically, Graham asserts that:

[A]t the end of *Disgrace* the sacrifice, 'the gift of death,' is not given in the name of an abstract other, but for the suffering body of another. 'Yes, I am giving him up,' Lurie says, bearing the dog in his arms. An alternative to Lurie's earlier sacrifice of Melanie

Isaacs, this final *lösung* is a sacrificial gesture of care for another body. (Graham “Yes” 9, emphasis as cited)

Ironically, in performing such a reading, Graham seems to reduce Driepoot to an ‘abstract’ Other, rather than considering his individual and ‘physical’ body—which, as Field explains, is a source of pain, pleasure, and shared experiences. Certainly, the novel describes Driepoot’s *pleasure* in daily activities, but makes no mention of his pain. In labelling Driepoot ‘a suffering body,’ Graham effectively assumes, not unlike Marais, that Driepoot’s body is suffering *before* Lurie decides to euthanize him. Although this reading recognizes Lurie’s mistreatment and instrumental use of Melanie’s body, like the others, it ultimately suggests that Lurie is a character who develops sensitivity, and uses Driepoot’s death to respond sympathetically to the unknowingness of Others. However, these readings are highly problematic, as they work to reduce the dogs, and specifically Driepoot, to objects for Lurie’s ‘enlightenment’ or emotional development, while also assuming that Lurie’s best interests are the dogs’ best interests. Indeed, these readings never explain why the dogs, including and especially Driepoot, should want to die for Lurie’s benefit or for any other reason.

Together, the arguments of these three critics are examples of the various ways in which Lurie has been read as a transformative character in *Disgrace*. I read against these arguments to contend that Lurie resists the development of a sympathy that is based on shared embodiment and bodily vulnerability with those blacks, women, and animals that he has Othered as a part of his Romantic sensibilities. Further, my reading of Lurie’s character signals that greater attention must be paid to the way that the human-animal divide, which is embedded within Western philosophy, renders the categories of human and animal as fixed and incommensurable; these categories help to set a limitation for moral consideration,

designating the interests of those recognized as ‘human’ as far superior to those who are animal. The human-animal divide resonates within the narrative itself as a vehicle for Lurie to forgive himself of the inability to empathetically respond to the experiences of those he has Othered, and further resonates in criticism of *Disgrace* by constructing the bodies of animals as amorphous tools for Lurie’s betterment. Indeed, the animals in *Disgrace* should be considered as characters, living and breathing beings capable of their own interests and emotions, and complex individuals in their own right—their deaths should not be so easily interpreted and rendered into a positive development for Lurie’s character. Finally, in my Conclusion, I carry out a more in-depth reading based on the primacy of the body in order to further advance an inclusive ethics based not on the incommensurable differences put forth by traditional Western and Romantic philosophies, but on the shared vulnerabilities and dependencies that bridge the divide between man and woman, white and black, human and animal, self and Other.

5 Chapter: Conclusion

Throughout my thesis, I have worked to open up critical investigations of Lurie's character beyond those that present him as someone whose emotions deepen, who "learns to love" (Kossew 155). In doing this, I have looked specifically at the way in which Lurie's Romantic fantasy, a pastiche of Romantic conventions he has produced through his understanding of Wordsworth and Byron, has given Lurie a mode of asserting his identity as a superior 'human' being, and Othering the bodies of women, blacks, and animals through an instrumentalizing logic that he reads, at times, as a form of idealization, particularly of women. As I have argued, this fantasy has allowed Lurie to reconstruct his rape of Melanie as an act of passion and desire, and his killing of dogs, and specifically Driepoot, as an act of compassion and kindness. Furthermore, this fantasy is premised upon tendencies and notions found within Romantic ideology, which is characterized by an effort to escape material realities by retreating into a realm of imagination and idealized abstractions. Ultimately, my argument finds that *Disgrace* is not celebratory of these tendencies that constitute a kind of Romantic escapism; indeed, the novel invites an examination into the vestiges, or legacies, created by such tendencies, signalling to how they are implicated in systems of oppression, including colonialism, racism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, and speciesism.

The novel's narrative style, which often conflates the narrator and Lurie as one, has led to sympathetic readings of Lurie's more violent actions. I hold, however, that the narrative style is not intended to reproduce the ideological tendencies that inform Lurie's Romantic fantasy. Rather, the intimacy between the narrator and Lurie's point of view provides insight into Lurie's logic, which informs his decisions and actions and is linked to his discrimination against women, blacks and animals. At times, however, the narrator also creates distance

from Lurie, offering the space where the Romantic and instrumentalizing logic behind Lurie's violence may be exposed and laid bare for further analysis of the interrelationship between his behaviour toward women, blacks, and animals: an analysis that has been the overarching aim of my thesis. I have attempted to demonstrate that overlooking this interrelationship reveals a certain, albeit inadvertent complicity in readings of *Disgrace* that may perpetuate the same ideological tendencies that can render Lurie as a sympathetic character. These tendencies reinforce notions about the transcendental nature of 'man' and reproduce a system of dualisms that have the effect of privileging Lurie's interests as a white male over the interests of the other, and Othered characters in the novel. I contend that *Disgrace* may be signalling the need to critically engage with violence against women and animals, and to start thinking about what this violence holds for the process of decolonization. My argument thus contributes to ongoing critical engagements of the novel, including those that seek out its resonances with the TRC and the politics of post-apartheid, in an effort to signal the need to attend to overreaching systems of oppression supported by Lurie's Western and Romantic sensibilities.

As I have demonstrated, many critics tend to read the final scene in *Disgrace*, the moment when Lurie brings Driepoot to Bev Shaw for euthanization, as an indicator of Lurie's deepening compassion. In contrast, I argue that a close reading of this scene shows that the novel ends in a disconcerting manner, with a gesture of resignation: Lurie kills Driepoot, another being who offers him the opportunity for emotional development and companionship. Indeed, for all that Lurie believes he has an emotional connection to Driepoot, this does not stop him from facilitating the dog's death in the clinic:

He can save the young dog, if he wishes, for a week. But a time must come, it cannot be evaded, when he will have to bring him to Bev Shaw in her operating room (perhaps he will carry him in his arms, perhaps he will do that for him) and caress him and brush back the fur so that the needle can find the vein and whisper to him and support him in the moment when bewilderingly, his legs buckle; and then, when the soul is out, fold him up and pack him away in his bag, and the next day wheel the bag into the flames and see that it is burnt, burnt up. He will do that for him when the time comes. It will be little enough, less than little: nothing. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219-220)

Significantly, Lurie romanticizes his role in Driepoot's death, as the one giving comfort during the dog's final moments. He reasons that Driepoot must die, by neglecting to consider how he might play a more active role in saving the dog's life, for example by adopting or fostering the dog. Moreover, Lurie neglects to consider what Driepoot's feelings might be, for if given the choice the dog may well prefer to live—to continue enjoying his daily pleasures, even if just for one more week. Rather, Lurie consults his own feelings, and more specifically, his own need for emotional distance from Others. This need for distance is evidenced in Lurie's reluctance to assign Driepoot a name (Bev Shaw is the one that refers to the dog as Driepoot) and in his reticence in describing "a particular fondness for [the dog]" (215). In fact, Lurie's focus is on the "generous affection streaming out *toward* him *from* the dog" (215, emphasis added). The dog has "adopted" Lurie, "unconditionally" (215)—but the same cannot be said in return. Driepoot's openness, his vulnerability and willingness to develop and exhibit emotion, thus contrasts with Lurie's hesitation, his rigidity and circumscribed ability to form attachments and to admit his emotional dependencies.

Lurie recognizes that what he is doing for Driepoot and the other dogs is ‘less than little, nothing’ because he is not improving their lives, but ending them. More to the point, he is transforming Driepoot from a particularized individual, with unique characteristics and personality, into a homogenized and inanimate form— a nondescript bag that will be destroyed in the garbage dump’s incinerator with the other anonymous bags. Further, Lurie realizes that he is betraying Driepoot’s trust and affection for him, as he speculates on the dog’s innocence, his inability to decipher Lurie’s intentions. Lurie ponders, “What the dog will not work out...what his nose will not tell him, is how one can enter what seems to be an ordinary room and never come out again” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219). Yet, contrary to Lurie’s thoughts, the room would not seem ordinary to Driepoot—Lurie is present in this space, as the one for whom Driepoot has developed a devoted affection. There is no reason for Driepoot to suspect that Lurie would kill him. In this way, Lurie’s ‘giving up of’ Driepoot is profoundly troubling, as he is betraying the trust of a being for its ostensible welfare, yet figures the act as one generated through ‘love.’

Lurie’s love, then, whether for Driepoot, or for Others, is one premised on control and violence. It is at the moment of Driepoot’s impending euthanization that Lurie names the act of killing, love:

He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219)

It is important to note that this is the only ‘love’ that Lurie admits to having for the dogs, including Driepoot. It is a ‘love’ that arises from a ‘concentrated’ effort to ignore the deeper implications of his taking another body’s life—to obscure the violence of which he is a part.

This love is thus another example of Lurie's efforts throughout the novel to avoid more complex material realities by relying on idealizing abstractions. As Thierman states, "we do not need a transcendent system that would underwrite and specify our obligations, duties, rights, etc., with respect to animals" (Thierman 204). What we do not need are Romantic justifications, like Lurie's 'love,' that automatically get mobilized to wrap around acts of oppression, betrayal, control, and death in a veil of sensibility. In contrast, what we do need is to recognize the primacy of 'the body' as a starting point of connecting with Others and developing an ethics that does not reproduce systems of dominance, nor permit the figure of the 'animal' to circulate as a mark of inferior beings on whom violence is justified and legitimate.

This thesis concludes, therefore, by advancing the idea that 'the body' is an important conceptual tool for creating a new ethical discourse around the vulnerabilities of humans and animals. It is a move, I have aimed to show, that would be productive not only for humans, who are rendered vulnerable through various forms of Othering, instrumentalization and dehumanization, but also for animals. In interviews, Coetzee has explained that, for him, 'the body' represents a state of "grace" (Coetzee, *Doubling* 248); moreover, he defines grace as "a condition in which the truth can be told clearly without blindness," without "cynicism" (392). Lurie, then, never quite achieves this state of grace, for he is mired in the cynical belief that "[o]ne gets used to things getting harder; one ceases to be surprised that what used to be as hard and hard can be grows harder yet" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219). At the moment when he could intervene in Driepoot's life, perhaps by giving the dog another week in the shelter, or by adopting him, Lurie chooses to 'give up.' The last line of the novel, when Lurie states that he is "giving [Driepoot] up," thus signals that Lurie is resigned to the fixedness of

his pessimism, as well as committed to his blinkered way of perceiving the world. If, as Coetzee states, grace is the clarity of truth without cynicism, Lurie serves as representative of the kind of entrenched cynicism that makes grace impossible. Throughout this thesis, I have read *Disgrace* as a challenge to the Romantic fantasy that upholds Lurie's perspective as one that precludes even the smallest possibility of change. While it may be tempting to allow ourselves to sympathize with Lurie and his disappearing "old certainties" (Attridge 100), to do so is to overlook the violence that made these certainties possible. *Disgrace* seems to suggest that if there is an alternative to these old certainties, it does not lie in and around idealized abstractions, but in recognizing and embracing the material realities that join all living bodies.

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