

Review

No country for old men: Finding a place to be in New South Africa

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This paper examines the interconnectedness of masculinity and setting in African fiction by a close reading of Coetzee's *Disgrace*. The negative effects of subscribing to a single masculinity have been discussed in scholarly works since masculinity studies were given mainstream attention over two decades ago. However, the importance of setting to the formation of and subscription to masculine archetypes has not been carried over from men's studies (the sociological antecedent of literary masculinity studies) to masculinity studies. The author argues for the importance of setting to masculine identification by showing the ways the performance of masculinity changes based on differences in place and time. Specifically, this work analyzes the traumatic effects of the abrupt change of masculine performance on men due to the change of setting.

Key words: Africa, masculinity, setting, performance, trauma.

INTRODUCTION

"For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well" (*Disgrace*, 1). Thus begins John Maxwell Coetzee's *Disgrace*, an allegory of the South African problem and masculine dynamics. This paper's title, a callback to the 2007 Oscar-winning movie *No Country for Old Men*, is a reference to the passing of time and generational change. Similar to the movie, this paper details the growing nature of violence within the men who occupy particular spaces and the shock experienced by a character whose authority is undermined by this change. In *Disgrace*, the protagonist, David Lurie, is a professor at Cape Town Technical University. He engages in an illicit affair with his student Melanie. After threats from

Melanie's boyfriend, a sexual harassment case is filed against David. He refuses to feign remorse despite attempts to convince him to do so by a disciplinary committee. This leads to his being sacked from the university. Lurie longs for a change of scenery after his recent debacle through which he is now a social pariah. He moves to the countryside to live with his daughter Lucy and tries to adapt to his new reality. The countryside does not provide the escapism David needs and presents its problems when Lucy is raped. Both David and Lucy are traumatised by the event and David largely fails in his role as caretaker. He returns to the city a confused man and decides that he no longer belongs there after a meeting with Melanie's family. David returns to the

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countryside to help his now pregnant daughter and finds a bit of relief in the care of dogs.

While there is no particular science to writing a successful novel, Coetzee skillfully achieves the feat of presenting a thought-provoking and interesting reading experience. Coetzee (1999), as quoted by Marais (2003), describes South African literature as similar to writing from prison. He makes this statement as a result of the tendency to ignore deeper human conditions and the unhealthy concern for issues of power. The challenge I take on in this essay is to explore these deeper human conditions, particularly of finding one's place in the world and the struggle for self-liberation, presented in *Disgrace*. These are discussed while still looking at the issues of power that foster them. I argue that Coetzee's *Disgrace* while projecting a sense of purgatory, as supported by Herron (2005), advocates the freedom to be a man unshackled by the restrictions of societal expectations. The restriction of men to specific modes of being facilitates the deterioration of their general welfare. References are made to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis as well as Judith Butler's performative gender theory to realize these goals. Preceding the analytical section of this paper, both theories are briefly explained. The study also investigates some studies on *Disgrace* and South African masculinities. The relevance of this is to distinguish this research from previous research and provide lived experiences of the difficulties of being a South African man to provide a backdrop for the world presented in the novel. The analysis is also structured into two parts: 'Professor Lurie in the city' and 'David in the countryside'. The two topics juxtapose each other to show the changing nature of masculinity and the role of period and place in the determination of masculinity.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

Modern masculinity studies can be traced to Freud's psychoanalysis which was very different at the time. Freud's confidence in veering from orthodoxy, and his subsequent investigation of the make-up of what it meant to be masculine and to a lesser degree feminine, opened a floodgate of research possibilities. This foray into the minds of men is what Connell (2005) describes as "the first sustained attempt to build a scientific account of masculinity" (8). Psychoanalysis was given serious attention by Freud in 1899 in what has been described as his "most significant work" (Gay, 1998, 26): *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In this work, Freud explained that dreams could be interpreted and shown to affect everyday life.

Freud establishes as the fundamental premise of psychoanalysis, the division of the mind into the conscious and unconscious (Freud, 1989). He argues, despite an expected resistance from students of philosophy, that there is an unconscious state of the

mind, and proceeds to show how this unconscious state *manifests* itself: "the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious" (5). Freud maintains that humans are motivated to take certain actions by this unconscious. Freud (1989) had some interesting insights on the formation of individual personalities and viewed the super-ego as the safeguard against natural instincts which are governed by the id. The id and the super-ego are therefore in constant contradiction. The super-ego serves the function of making sure that an individual follows societal norms and does not stray too far from what is considered right. What Freud shrewdly postulates here is that the superego is the means through which society overwhelms an individual by forcing him or her to go against instincts and assume prescribed roles. A man who instinctively had what society described as womanly traits would then be forced to quickly correct this anomaly and assume the prescribed role of a real man.

The strides Freud made in the development of the theory of psychoanalysis have become so influential to many theorists and theories. Butler (2007) was one of the theorists who applied Freud's teaching in her work. Freud's explanation that humans are compelled to take certain actions by the unconscious was a submission that changed the way the human psyche was looked at. Butler (2007), for instance, applied this in her performative gender theory by showing how humans unconsciously take up prescribed roles without a realization of what drives them. Butler suggested that bodies enacted gender and were not merely possessed by gender. Gender was explained as a place that could be occupied by bodies, irrespective of the sexual organ that was deemed naturally correspondent to specific genders. Though Butler's performative gender theory is largely hinged on social forces and the role they play in individual performances of gender, Freud's influence is undoubtedly present when she explains gender. This explanation starts with socially constructed images that people (and in these case men) have to live up to and concludes that the repetition of acts to live up to these images leads to an internalization. Thus, what starts as intentional actions become unconscious repetitions.

This is ultimately linked to the performance of gender where men take on traits they have been trained to view as normal. There is, therefore, a connection between the way the performance of gender is carried out and the unconscious.

STUDIES ON DISGRACE AND SOUTH AFRICAN MASCULINITIES

South Africa has, for a while, been a country wrought with problems surrounding race as a result of the European presence. Incidentally, the polarity that exists between the black and white masses of South Africa serves as the

focus of most scholarly work on *Disgrace*, as ample scholarly attention has been given to the text's role as a bleak look at the racial clash in South Africa. Oriaku (2016) for instance, contends that David Lurie serves as a representation of the Apartheid era's imperious and often officious nature, and this is an assertion Anderson (2007) agrees with. Oriaku states that Lurie's "predatory masculinist ways" (150) is a reference to the injustice that dominated South Africa during the apartheid era. Lurie's move to the countryside, according to Oriaku, is a move away from the changing order of a South Africa where accountability was now insisted on.

Andersson (2007) builds upon Oriaku's argument (2016) by explaining Lurie's place as the unchanging Afrikaner, upon whom the 'black people' find it appropriate to unleash their anger. Andersson looks at the issue of agency and seeks to prove that David Lurie, despite the appearance of being in control, is a victim of external forces. In the countryside, David Lurie becomes a victim of the tension in South Africa between the blacks and whites. The submission that David becomes a victim after his move to the countryside, is one I share. Without utilizing the concept of agency that is the focus of Andersson's study, I explore the performative nature of masculinity in relation to David's movement in the two settings presented in the novel.

Pechey's linkage (2002) of *Disgrace* to a tormented South Africa follows the same line of thinking of the two preceding studies. For Pechey, David Lurie is visibly lost in the new order of South Africa (Pechey, 2002). This is realized in the usage of such a term as "darkest Africa"; a reflection of the protagonist's haplessness. The use of language, according to Pechey, is an intentional manipulation by the writer to show the protagonist's effective degradation. Buikema (2009) agrees with the importance of language to the world of *Disgrace*. Buikema explains that David Lurie's understanding of language is a major factor for his refusal to admit to wrongdoing when he appears before the disciplinary committee. To admit that he is wrong with a simple phrase is a tradeoff that involves Lurie trading his place as a powerful white man, to "abstract equality" with the blacks (Buikema 2009, 316). Another analysis of language is carried out by Sanders (2002), whose detailed look at the use of language in the narration reveals certain key aspects of David Lurie's characterization. Sanders assert that use of language in the novel and Lurie's disgust at the reduction of language to a tool of communication in the university, are the sentiments of the novel's writer.

The criticality of the motif of black and white opposition in the novel means that it cannot be ignored in analysis and all the works reviewed have, in one way or another, investigated it. Although this research also employs this theme, it serves mainly as a backdrop to further understand the masculine dilemma of post-apartheid South Africa. It is in this field of analysis that works on

Disgrace are surprisingly scarce, with just a few looking at the issues of men (Herron 2005; Sam, 2016, 2019).

Sam (2016, 2019) look at the transformative nature of the masculinity in *Disgrace*; a transformation they see being exemplified by David Lurie's abandonment of the dog. Sam (2016, 2019) use the dog-man image, also employed by Herron (2005), and David's willingness to discard it, to show how David allows room for change in the African man by what Sam (2016) describes as "the transformation [that] lies in the choice of the individual to shape the future" (698). By showing that the dog is in fact representative of David Lurie and his traits, Sam (2016) and Sam (2019) aver that abandoning the dog equates abandoning some traits David has for so long held on to. David then has the option of exploring other ways of being. Herron (2005), who also uses the dog-man image albeit in a slightly different sense, confirms David's slow transition into an "animal" (489). Whereas Sam (2016) and Sam (2019) use the dog-man image to show the similarities that exist between the dog and Lurie, Herron's use of this image is to show David Lurie's descent into desolation. Herron (2005) likens this to a future Africa where the co-existence between dark-skinned and white-skinned Africans was an impossibility. Again, while Sam (2016) uses the dog-man image to project a positive African future, Herron (2005) presents a drearier picture. These works tend to connect the male characters, most notably David Lurie, to a much broader spectrum of analysis. This research is the inverse of this. Precisely, the trauma that David experiences as a result of the change in setting is explored in this analysis. This adds another variable that is not explored by previous scholars.

To aid comprehension of the analytical sections of this troubled character, white masculinities and to a lower degree, black masculinities need to be understood. The mid-1990s saw a rise in the literature on masculinities in South Africa and this is especially true for white masculinities. Mooney (1998) speaks about the "Ducktail subculture [which] emerged in a period characterized by far-reaching changes in South African society" (753). This subculture's emergence, the result of the Depression and the Second World War, opposed yet aligned with more dominant forms of white masculinity. While their opposition to authority, subscription to violence, and feats of physical strength were not in line with dominant white masculinity, their racist and homophobic tendencies were characteristic of more dominant white masculinity in South Africa. While not overtly present, *Disgrace* contains racist undertones that reflect this feature of white masculinity in South Africa.

Vincent (2006) also conducts a study of white masculinity by looking at the intersection of race and gender in his analysis of masculinities in South Africa. Vincent delves into the transition of masculinities from the end of apartheid and focuses on the men "in a relatively privileged place" (350). Recognizing the fundamentality of

race in masculinity, especially in a country that has experienced violent expressions of racism, Vincent explains that the dominant South African masculinity has mostly been white. The dominance of this ideal masculinity was hinged on racism hence the post-apartheid era has interesting ramifications for white South Africans. Of these ramifications, one of extreme significance to my study is the observation that the post-apartheid era brought along with it assumed and sometimes real losses by white South Africans. Vincent also challenges an assertion made by Morrell (2001) about the fight for dominance by hitherto repressed black masculinities. Claiming that there is no one white hegemonic masculinity to be challenged, and referring to the overlap of white and black understandings of masculinity, the relevance of Morrell's argument is lost in Vincent's critique. Though both issues raised by Vincent are valid, an earlier statement made by the critic explains Morrell's point. Racism as the basis of white South African masculinity means that there is a denominator that separates white and black conceptions of masculinity. The loss of a means to legally establish this white dominance meant that other sleeping masculinities could now jostle for dominance, hence Morrell's argument. Simple as this may be, Morrell does not "underestimate the power of whiteness and middle-classness to continue to control the hegemonic center even in the transitional context" (Vincent 2006, 356). As legitimate as Vincent's argument of the power of whiteness in "a higher learning environment" (356) may be, it presents a narrower picture of the South African situation which also has a rural environment not so kind to white masculinity, as demonstrated in *Disgrace*. Given that Vincent's thesis suggests a lingering whiteness in the overall political structure of South Africa, the rebuttals to arguments like Morrell's are to be expected.

The competition between black and white masculinity is not missing in Luyt's examination (2012) of the representations of masculinities in South African television advertisements. Subscribing to Carrigan et al. (1985) assertion of the importance of media in legitimizing forms of masculinity, Luyt explains the marginalization of black men in advertisements in the South African media. Despite the seeming resurgence of black masculinity in South Africa, Luyt maintains and is backed by his data that the resurgence is not reflected in the media. White men are consistently portrayed as holding more authoritative positions.

On black masculinities, one of the most recent and meticulous studies in South Africa is Ratele's study (2016). Ratele states the "political and psychological liberation of black people from all forms of racism" (113), as the baseline of his study. He details the issues of black masculinity, and the way the formation of a hegemonic form of identity starts from boyhood. Ratele acknowledges that many black men attempt to assert their masculinity by imposition on others. From presenting one's self as fearless to the rape of women,

masculinity is asserted in mostly but not only violent terms. Ratele, without overtly attempting to do so, presents a problematic issue of the 'who is to be blamed' question of masculinity studies. Ratele urges against blaming a group of people for the problems men face, but rather heteropatriarchal institutions that are directly responsible for these issues. What Ratele suggests, especially, in looking at men who have experienced or been produced by South Africa's apartheid is to imperatively consider such men in relation to the history that produced them. Collapsing these men into the race category and analyzing them as black people is to take away an essential part of their being. The opposite is also true; to view black men only by their gender category without reference to the racial determinant lacks the depth that is crucial in such an analysis. Since "men are fundamentally gendered as much as raced" (Ratele, 2016, 115), both identity markers are used in my analysis, though the focus is primarily placed on masculinity.

Ratele (2013) also offers a fascinating statistic that shows the high rates of homicides amongst black young males who are at once hegemonic and subordinated. The paradox of this assertion seems far-fetched at first, but Ratele's arguments of the role of emotion in masculinity formation help understand this view. By stating that black young men are caught in a limbo of "fear and psychosocial insecurity on one hand, and fearlessness, anger and rage on the other" (248), the simultaneous occupying of both masculine paradigms is better appreciated. Adhering to the ideals of what is considered black hegemonic masculinity does not provide protection against feelings of fear and insecurity as a result of the history of South Africa. This emotional fluctuation experienced by these young black men then tends to lead to homicidal behaviors and actions.

Interestingly in *Disgrace*, emotional turmoil is experienced by a white South African and underscores the unpredictability of masculinity. Though all the arguments raised by previous scholars (Vincent 2006; Ratele 2013; Ratele 2016) may be true, we realize that removed from the *pack*, white South African men are just as vulnerable or even sometimes more vulnerable to xenophobic behavior in the post-apartheid era. The analysis is carried out under the two major settings presented in the novel; the city and the countryside. I examine the changes in masculine identification in both settings, how this is done and why it is presented as it is.

ANALYSIS

Professor Lurie in the City

Firstly, a little must be said about the style of this novel. The writer takes an interesting approach in telling the story of David Lurie. Written in what seems to be a third-person narrative, it maintains the style of third-person writing but is told primarily through the point of view of

David Lurie. This suggests that the first-person point of view is in fact what is dominantly used, despite what the many instances of third-person pronouns may suggest. What this reveals is what the character Lurie alludes to when we learn that “he is all for double lives, triple lives, lives lived in compartments” (*Disgrace* 6). By this extract, Lurie is designated as a man whose life is lived in compartments. It appears to be traditionally sound or proper on the outside but remains radical internally. This is mirrored in the style of writing the author employs. Lurie’s maintenance of the socially respected position of professor and the non-conformity of his affairs with a prostitute and his students are expressions of this double life. More than that, the proclivity for the use of the third-person pronoun may also be an acknowledgment of a self, inside the outside self. It is an indication of the performance which is carried out by the surface body but not necessarily by the inner self (Butler, 2007). Hence, when the narrator refers to himself as “he”, the self that is narrating the events is the unconscious; “which is repressed and not capable of becoming conscious in the ordinary way” (Freud, 2013, 6). David is a relatively powerful man and is respected in the setting of the city. His masculinity is expressed mainly through his ability to woo women and his maintenance of this ability. If Freud (1989) is to be believed in his compartmentalization of the elements that govern actions, Lurie is hardly governed by his superego, and frequently gives in to his id. Since the superego and sexual instincts are in opposition to each other (Freud, 2013), Lurie’s many sexual encounters and inability to control his urges point to a triumph of his id over the ego. The need for sex by Lurie in the city is an illustration of the freedom he enjoys in that environment, and the dominance he is able to establish in such sexual encounters. He dislikes his sexual escapade with a prostitute he hopes will successfully replace Soraya (his previous prostitute) because she “works herself into a froth of excitement that in the end only repels him” (*Disgrace* 9). ...unlike Soraya who is “quiet, quiet and docile” (*Disgrace* 1). Soraya’s honey-brown skin (*Disgrace* 1) gives room for the reading of the power dynamics between the two characters as racially motivated. No indication is given of Lurie’s conscious need to subjugate someone of a different color but his strong liking for docility from women of another color (Melanie being another example) makes it plausible to read it as such. Whether Soraya is Indian or bi-racial, her color and submissiveness are empowering for Lurie.

He enjoys the power he wields when he is with Soraya, and the role of commander is one he is not willing to cede. The control Lurie enjoys during these sexual encounters is an outlet for his inability to exercise such ‘absolute power’ in his daily, public dealings. These sexual encounters also provide a false sense of mutual affection for him as he creates versions of the women he has sexual intercourse with, that please him. He prefers to think of Soraya as more than a prostitute for whom he

has developed affection. He chooses to hold on to the hope that she has similar affectionate feelings for him because “affection may not be love, but it is at least its cousin” (*Disgrace* 2). By this statement, Lurie tells of a longing for love though he chooses to settle for something which resembles it. He similarly prefers to think of his relationship with Melanie as pleasurable for both parties despite Melanie’s obvious discomfort about their encounters. This need for affection and refusal to admit this is an indication of repressed fears of being alone, which can likely be attributed to a feeling of seclusion in South Africa. Bartnik (2014) rightly states that Lurie appears to be a relic of an era gone by and his characterization falls in line with this observation.

Whether by intention or merely because he is a “servant of eros” (*Disgrace* 52) as Lurie claims, he exploits his position of power in the city over his student Melanie and engages in objectively unprincipled sexual encounters with her.

Perhaps a little bit of a background here may situate us within the psyche of a man who is evidently out of place in the society. The position of dominance Professor Lurie enjoys in his relationship with Soraya ends when Lurie sees her with her children. This destroys Soraya’s compartmentalization of her life since she prefers to keep her work as a prostitute separate from her role as a mother. The modicum of power he exercised over her through monetary means is lost, as a result of his interference in her personal life. Professor Lurie is not quite used to this change in power dynamics, given that Soraya has provided the comfort he needs since he realized he could no longer woo women as he once could. Likened to a stronger animal preying on a weaker animal, David is prepared to take on a vixen. The interesting choice of metaphors strengthens the notion of an alpha male. Professor Lurie is not perturbed by the prospect of pursuing someone who in all senses is stubborn and unwilling. He yearns for a return to their former dynamic where he wields all the power and is still prepared to venture into her “nest”. The comforting thought of remaining the predator allows for the maintenance of a powerful disposition and spurs him on towards his next conquest; Melanie Isaacs.

An explanation for this is offered by psychoanalysis which teaches that satisfaction lies in the presence of ‘the other’, mostly women who are necessarily opposite and by this opposite nature, create a sense of fulfillment in the man (Frosh, 1994). The term ‘other’ is used in this essay to represent both women as used by Butler (2007) and the racially oppressed (Sanders, 2002). Lurie craves a feeling of dominance and in the setting of the city, he has the resources to achieve this. Melanie and the other women professor Lurie gets sexually involved with, provide this feeling of dominance for him, and the loss of one must immediately be replaced with another who would perform a similar function. It is for this reason Lurie is caught in a loop of chasing satisfaction from sex. His

affair with Melanie is revealing in its exposition of a man afraid to fade into obscurity and wanting to live vicariously through a younger woman. Though not specifically mentioned, a lady whose name is a variant of the Greek word for 'blackness' can be assumed to be black. This makes Lurie's relationship with Melanie all the more compelling, a reenactment if you like, of the unequal white-black relationship of the apartheid era. He fluctuates in the performance of his masculinity during Melanie's first visit to his house, first being 'the lover' before unintentionally slipping into "a teacher" (*Disgrace* 16). The predatory instincts that he exhibits earlier, once again come to the fore when he refuses to relent in his pursuit of his student, spurred on by his powerful stature in the city. He finally achieves his goal of sexual intimacy:

He takes her back to his house. On the living-room floor, to the sound of rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her. Her body is clear, simple, in its way perfect; though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion (*Disgrace* 19)

Lurie enjoys passivity and submission, and the pleasure he derives from such a drab encounter does little to prove otherwise. This encounter between Lurie and Melanie is a bit dreary. He is excited by her stillness but this is not the picture of a loving or even happy sexual encounter. There is no charm in the intimacy, just the selfish pleasure of Lurie. There is a brief manifestation of his superego when he questions his decision to sustain a sexual relationship with Melanie "Yet his heart lurches with desire" (*Disgrace* 20). The superego as explained by Freud (2013) is the storage unit for prohibition. In most people, the ego serves as the balance between prohibited desires and societal rules. Lurie is unable to strike this balance and is mainly a creature of desire because he has not experienced the ruthless nature of societal rules. Again, the importance of setting is realized, as the apartheid era experienced by Lurie in South Africa allows for overshadowing of the superego by the id. The continuous performance of this uninhibited need to satisfy his sexual desires no matter the cost enforces a shutdown of his superego so we only see a glimpse of it when it does manifest. The second time Lurie reminisces his first sexual encounter with Melanie, a different message is communicated. We are now told that "he forced the sweater up" (*Disgrace* 23) in what is dangerously close to rape. The sudden change from the first description during which they "make love" is once again a demonstration of Lurie's penchant for false reality. This is an indication of what, in psychoanalysis (Tyson, 2014), is selective memory; the first instance being his conjecture of perfection, and skewed to fit into a certain narrative of consent. Their next encounter is not so different, with Lurie still refusing to admit what is quite clearly rape. He dismisses it as "not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired" (*Disgrace* 25). It is difficult to empathize with this narrative of being

unwanted but not rape when we are informed that he "thrusts himself upon her" (*Disgrace* 24), and forcibly has sex with her despite her protests. Kimmel et al (2004) show that men in power pursue their pleasure to the detriment of women and in the case of Lurie's relationship with women, it is difficult to argue that the opposite is true.

While the point of view used flatters Professor Lurie in the way he is presented, a keen eye would recognize the arrogance that underlines his dealings with people he believes to be below him. The privileged position referred to by Vincent (2006), offered by institutions of higher learning, is enjoyed by Professor Lurie in the city, and this leads to a false sense of security. Vilar (2005) informs us about the price of wanting to maintain "exclusive rights over one vagina" (32). And professor Lurie does express such a need to have sole possession of Melanie;

The last thing in the world he needs is for Melanie Isaacs to take up residence with him. Yet at this moment the thought is intoxicating. Every night she will be here; every night he can slip into her bed like this, slip into her. People will find out, they always do; there will be whispering, there might even be scandal. But what will that matter? (*Disgrace* 27)

We are told by Vilar (2005) that such attempts to bind a woman lead to dire consequences, and Lurie starts to see that happening in his relationship with Melanie when he says "she is behaving badly, getting away with too much; she is learning to exploit him and will probably exploit him further" (*Disgrace* 28). There is a strong sense of irony in this statement, in his reference to her actions as bad behavior, and his fear of losing control is evident. Eventually but not surprisingly, he is forced to leave his job as a result of offensive behavior with his student.

The question of whether Professor Lurie can be considered an ideal man in the city remains. Here we can refer to Connell's clarification (2005) of the different conceptions of hegemony. Lurie may not be ideal in the way Kani in *Of Men and Ghosts* is, nonetheless Lurie's intellectual capabilities in the setting of the city have granted him certain privileges that in a radically patriarchal society could only have been acquired through physical toil. Connell makes it clear that hegemony is realised when a certain masculine ideal is viewed by society as the best. The fact that hegemony is not one single universal construct makes it possible to look at Lurie as ideal. The city has institutions that ensure that mental strength is regarded as the paramount sign of strength. Lurie has the power (acquired through cognitive superiority) to prevent the much taller boyfriend of Melanie from entering his office, "With the boyfriend trailing behind, he leads her up the stairway to his office. 'Wait here,' he tells the boy, and closes the door on him"

(34). It is with this power of intellect he can woo young ladies, even in his old age. Intelligence is glorified in the city, almost worshipped. Physical strength plays little or no part in determining the power of a man. Lurie maintains a “high and mighty” (38) personality even in the presence of Melanie’s father, who accuses him of taking advantage of Melanie. In the city, despite his wrong action of having sex with a student of his, Lurie can stand up to his accusers. He is unashamed of his actions and remains adamant he owes no one an apology. The analysis so far suggests that Lurie is in fact, ideal though there remains the uncertainty as to whether his interaction with Soraya during which he is ordered to stay away can be interpreted as weakness.

Nonetheless, his stubbornness and refusal to apologise to the public for wrongful behaviour is a result of the power and freedom he enjoys in the city. Buried deep within this unhealthy appetite to dominate is a desire to conquer, to cling to his youth and masculinity. The South African situation is important in the context of Lurie’s refusal to apologise for what he deems an ordinary expression of self. Luyt (2012) informs us of the inequality of race and gender in South Africa as well as the subordination of most black men. The suppression of rights and desires of black men was not an uncommon occurrence in South Africa during the apartheid era, and Professor Lurie’s refusal to succumb to a feeling of guilt may be an unwillingness to occupy a spot that was previously for a suppressed group. The intelligence of this character is not in doubt, and his constant introspective comments are reminders of his superior intellect. Professor Lurie’s comments, even those that appear to be passed with no particular object of interest, give way to many interpretations of his character. An instance of this evasion of a feeling of guilt that I find registered in his refusal to accept his wrongs is in an interaction with his class during which they discuss ‘Lara’. Apprehensive about the theme of shame that they are discussing, parallels are drawn between Lurie and the devil. Much like himself, Lucifer “doesn’t act on principle but on impulse, and the source of his impulses is dark to him” (*Disgrace* 33) but Lurie asks that “we understand and sympathize” (*Disgrace* 33). Lurie’s refusal to admit his guilt has been likened to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in South Africa to bring justice at the end of apartheid (Poyner, 2000; Boehmer, 2002; Sanders, 2022). Like the commission which was highly criticized for being in favor of the whites, Lurie refuses to acknowledge his mistake. By doing this, he shirks all guilt and maintains the stance of having done nothing wrong.

We also see that Lurie’s inclination towards acting the justified devil though not moral goes back to his need to maintain control and order of his life. He responds to a suggestion to rethink his position on apologizing to the public by saying “don’t tell me what to do, I’m not a child” (*Disgrace* 41). Despite claiming otherwise, his childlike defense of the indefensible does very little to endear him

to the public, who view him as a monster for his actions. From this perspective, the actions of Lurie can easily be interpreted as a result of the privileged position occupied by white men in South Africa, as corroborated by Vincent (2006). Also, this childish flare-up is very clearly a verbal residue of the previously discussed fear of loss of control. Since language is performative and, in many ways, therapeutic in helping create a belief system most suited to personal interests (Frosh, 1994), Lurie’s defense of his actions and refusal to be controlled enable him to hold on to an image of superiority. The castration anxiety phenomenon in psychoanalysis though not usually applicable in modern life, can be applied in this context. This phenomenon as explained by Tyson (2006) states that boys fear that their penises would be taken away from them and is similar to penis envy where girls desire a penis (26). The period within which Freud wrote, the Victorian era, which emphasized the dominance of men and the subservience of women, explains why both genders may have such thoughts. Women would want to have the power of men and men would not want to lose that power. Similarly, Lurie’s admission of guilt would put him in a comparable position to the black South Africans who, like the women of the Victorian era, were made subservient.

What is discussed in this section of analysis is the power wielded by Professor Lurie in the city. We find that the city proves to be a hunting ground of sorts for Lurie who is frequently on the hunt for new women, to validate the power of his masculinity. His intellectual superiority makes him a powerful man, and it is this superior intellect that prevents him from acknowledging his obvious wrongs, to prevent a feeling of powerlessness.

David in the countryside

In the countryside, where David’s daughter Lucy resides, there are no institutions of higher learning to consolidate his place as a powerful man. Butler (2007) suggests that masculinities are formed as a result of power relations and traditions. As a result, norms change based on setting, and this is the dilemma of David, who in the tradition of the countryside has no power. For a man who has so often preached the necessity of choice and freedom, the stark contrast between the countryside and the city is unsurprisingly unattractive to David. The validation of himself he achieves with his sexual relationships with younger women is lost and he becomes, by all accounts, isolated. He nurtures a fear of the countryside, a fear that is reasonably explained by the dearth of white people and the many black people. Petrus, a black man introduced first as Lucy’s assistant is not as fearful of the countryside. When David informs Petrus of his misgivings about his daughter’s stay in the countryside, Petrus responds by saying that “everything is dangerous today. But here it is all right...” (*Disgrace*

64).

'Petrus', the Greek name which means 'rock' is perfect for the character, "solid, dependable Petrus" (*Disgrace* 171). He is not as worried about his safety as David is because he occupies a comfortable spot in the hierarchy of the countryside. In the countryside, Petrus is the ideal man and this is knowledge Lucy is aware of. His physical strength in a place where most jobs require some form of physical activity makes him superior. Petrus is viewed by David's daughter as the most secure source of protection and his presence is reassuring to her, and this is proven by Lucy's rape which occurs in his absence. In the setting of the countryside, Petrus is indeed a 'rock', immovable and buried deep within the culture of the setting. David on the other hand is unfamiliar with this place that is not in awe of his intellectual capacity and is rightly lost. He is not as suited to the countryside as Petrus is, and this is made evident very early when he attempts but fails to cut flowers. He quickly realizes that his offer to "take over from Petrus..." is ill-informed so "he passes the twine back to Petrus and instead wraps and packs" (*Disgrace* 70). What starts as a rebellion of sorts against people he believes to be attempting to castrate him, quickly becomes an admission of defeat as he thinks his move to the countryside is a conclusion to his life. He proclaims, "I live, I have lived, I lived" (*Disgrace* 71). There is a drastic change in his relevance from professor in the city, to dog-man in the countryside:

You could help with the dogs. You could cut up the dog-meat. I've always found that difficult. Then there is Petrus. Petrus is busy establishing his own lands. You could give him a hand. 'Give Petrus a hand. I like that. I like the historical piquancy' (*Disgrace* 77).

He is not capable of much in the countryside and must accept menial jobs. Herron (2005) and Sam (2016) both offer their reading of David's degradation to dog-man. Though both scholars come to different conclusions in their studies, there is an agreement that David loses his power in the countryside.

The dog-man label is more than a job to care for dogs and the many parallels shown between humans and animals in the novel are proofs of this. *Disgrace* draws a subtle analogy between animals and the marginalized. Animals are regularly used and portrayed as weak, lost and in no control of what happens to them (Herron, 2005). The dog-man image places David in the same bracket as a lowly animal in the countryside. His descent into this dog-man begins with denial on the part of David, possibly, as a result of Petrus' acceptance of that role himself. As Herron (2005) states, David affiliates most black people with animals and David is not quite ready to accept that he can be described in the same way a man like Petrus is. David, who initially takes very little interest in these animals, begins to associate himself with them and seems as lost and helpless as they are, hence, the

dog-man identity. The society he now lives in enforces a clamp on his character, and David who was previously so authoritative in his belief in sexual freedom is destroyed by it and is frank in his confession that "he is losing himself day by day" (121). The animals in *Disgrace*, according to Herron (2005) "are entirely at the mercy of that other, supposedly higher animal in whose world the lower orders of creatures are... (473)" and David seems to have met the same fate. As a dog-man, he does not just take care of dogs but shares the attributes of these dogs who are at the mercy of more powerful creatures.

Also, David's reference to the change in the order of hierarchy where the previously more powerful white man can now be employed by a black man has a hint of sarcasm to it, one that is more clearly confirmed when he says in what seems to be a longing for the old days, "Just like the old days: baas en Klaas. Except that he does not presume to give Petrus orders" (116). Though David does not necessarily demonstrate racial insensitivity, this statement appears to be a reminiscing of lost power, and the change of setting that has effectively castrated his powers as a man. David is not open to change, and like the hulking presence of the cherry orchard in *The Cherry Orchard*, represents the past (Chekhov, 2016). Knowing this, his declaration that "I am not prepared to be reformed" (*Disgrace* 77) is not so unusual. Despite this declaration and against his better instincts, David slowly devolves into a weaker man. His comments on the weaker animals accepting their place in the world (*Disgrace* 85) is more than just a comment on wildlife, as it foreshadows what he will become.

David's sojourn in the countryside is characterized by a loss of power and privilege, and the rape of his daughter is the realization of David's fear of the danger of the countryside and his powerlessness. In the city, David is a pillar of strength, never once showing any sign of fear, even when his car is vandalized and he is threatened by Melanie's father. In the countryside, the opposite is the case as is seen in David's attempts to dissuade the men who carry out the rape by pleading. The vanity of this plea is in David's assumption that he can speak his way out of a situation with men who are exercising a base human instinct for pleasure and domination in a setting that allows them to do so. He quickly realizes the stark truth that he "speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally..." (*Disgrace* 94). The "darkest Africa" David refers to is the countryside setting where the white man does not enjoy the power and influence that characterizes the city's institutions. He becomes an easy target, lost in a setting that is full of hatred for him. David finds himself in an unfamiliar position, and the prospect of an amicable dissolution of this fracas is impossible. Our protagonist must now submit to the new order as he is abused. There is a stark contrast between Lucy's reaction to the rape and that of her father. Lucy remains calm and collected whereas David is visibly and

mentally shaken by the act. What seems to be an irrational reaction to a grave incident is a result of Lucy's acceptance of her place in the countryside. Lucy acknowledges that she wields little power in the countryside, a fact David is yet to fully understand. Though David is aware of his reduced importance in the countryside, the reality of this does not fully sink in, hence his shock.

With the exception of the boy who accompanies them as student, the men who carry out the rape occupy the position of superior man. In a country that treats black men as the inferior other, these men can now exercise power over two white people who do not occupy a privileged position in the setting of the countryside. The chance to exercise such power over people who have historically been the superior race is one that these men are more than willing to take. Vincent (2006) explains this act of imposition;

The idea of hegemonic masculinity signals the fact that at any given social moment, some men are in a position to impose their particular definitions of masculinity on others in order to legitimate and reproduce the social relations that generate their dominance (Vincent, 2006, p 355).

Thus, apart from being a vengeful act, the rape of Lucy imposes the idea of hegemony nursed by these men on her and her father. The men's understanding of what it means to be hegemonic leads them to carry out their act. Ratele's study (2013) on the simultaneous occupation of superior and inferior gender positions by black men can be used to explain this assertion. The black men in the moment of rape subscribe to the violence and rage (as evidenced by Lucy's surprise at the anger of the men) that Ratele explains to be indicative of black hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the men, during the rape are operating with an understanding of hegemony. The setting of the countryside allows them to exercise superiority and the ability to cause to submit, a previously more powerful group of people makes these men the undoubted victors. While rape is not exclusive to the countryside, the Black men who rape Lucy do not do so with any fear of repercussion. The rape is a literal realisation of their dominance in the countryside where they do not need the cover of darkness. The dichotomy between Lurie raping Melanie and Lucy's rape is in the method of dominance offered by the two settings. Lurie takes advantage of his superior intellect to force himself on Melanie while the men apply brutish strength. In both scenarios, the men rely on the most revered form of being a man to have their way. This confirms Ratele's stance on imposition and rape as a method of masculine assertion (2016). The boy who accompanies the men in the rape of Lucy is said to have been "there to learn" (*Disgrace* 159). This forceful submission of weaker ones then appears to be the norm in this setting and is passed on to the younger boy whose performance of masculinity would no doubt be shaped by

this lesson. David, who has for so long avoided this shift in position, becomes 'the other', together with his daughter. For Lucy, she is not surprised by the action but the hatred with which it is carried out:

'It was so personal,' she says. 'It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was. . . expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them.' (*Disgrace* 156)

Two reasons can be given as explanations for this hatred, one of which was offered by the protagonist. The first of these, so diplomatically explained by David, is a result of a "history of wrong" (*Disgrace* 156). The South African transition to democracy left distinct traces of the violence that marked the apartheid era. The often-ruthless measures taken by the state against individuals who were deemed enemies of the state trickled down to the citizens. The policy of exclusion effectively positioned some people as privileged and the unfortunate ones as "the other" (Bartnik, 2014; Sanders, 2002). Ruthless patterns of behavior were institutionalized and the privileged few (mainly white people) were legitimately capable of causing harm to non-whites. The end of the apartheid era and the ushering in of a new democracy provided an avenue for revenge for the previously marginalized. The setting of the countryside, which is dominated by blacks, accompanied by the end of the apartheid era, makes it unsuitable for 'white' presence without some form of 'black' protection. David and his daughter, unfortunately, find themselves in the crosshairs of this vengeful crusade. Their presence in a setting recognized to be the territory of non-whites makes the violence towards them, an expected result. The chasm between white and black South Africans that Ratele (2016) talks about as a result of years of black South Africans being mistreated, is therefore the first and most obvious reason for this hatred. Secondly, like the European women in *Season of Migration to the North*, Lucy is a repository of a history of unfair treatment whose domination gives a little bit of satisfaction to the men who were previously wronged (Salih, 1970). Thus, as Mustafa did, "they put her in her place...they showed her what a woman was for" (*Disgrace* 115). Once again sharing similarities with another unfortunate character, the similarities between Lucy and Ayowa in *Of Men and Ghosts* are obvious (Aidoo, 1991). Both are thought of as too good for their molesters and both become a means to establish dominance. The psychoanalytic concept of displacement (Tyson, 2014), where anger towards a person is transferred to another person who is usually incapable of resistance, is applied in Lucy's rape. The anger felt for the institution of apartheid, that was held in place by powerful white men, is transferred to Lucy.

David struggles to come to terms with his devaluation, is haunted by his inability to save his daughter, and feels

a lot of shame in his admission that he did nothing to save his daughter. His failure to save his daughter during the rape is in stark contrast to his time before the disciplinary committee when he found a way to defend himself with words. The power of civility that afforded David the chance to speak his way out of an apology in the city is not practical in the countryside. Lucy's rape is the most important indicator of David's powerlessness in his new setting. David tries to maintain a strong outlook but is betrayed by the shock which invades him as a result of his helplessness in trying to save his daughter. Since psychoanalysis must go beyond an examination of the psyche to "deal with the intrusion of the external world into the inner" (Alford, 2018, 43), it is important to discuss the effects David's sojourn in the countryside have on him. While there are no specifically identified set of physical traits that indicate trauma (Marder, 2006), constant flashbacks to a traumatic memory and reenactments of the memory, are symptomatic of a person suffering from trauma. The dreams David has reference Lucy's rape and are indicative of a broken man. Luckily, due to the nature of our data, an analysis of his dreams can be attempted without regard for the accuracy of these dreams (Freud, 2010). Freud teaches that dreams are a projection of our psychological experience and are stand-ins for real-life events. In what he labels visions, David sees his daughter crying out, "Come to me, save me!... In the vision she stands, hands outstretched" (*Disgrace* 103). David's descent into becoming the dog-man gives credence to character traits originating from dreams (Freud, 2010). In the setting of the countryside, David occupies this unfortunate position of 'lower creature' to the more dominant black men. He continues to have nightmares in which he "runs from the man with the face like a hawk..." Drawing the link between this dream and Kani's appellation as a hawk in *Of Men and Ghosts*, the interpretation of this as David's loss of ideality, and fear of the actions of an ideal man, are not far-fetched. This phenomenon of using a single image in a dream to represent more than one wound is termed condensation in psychoanalysis (Tyson, 2014). David is nursing the wounds of his devaluation as well as the effects of his daughter's rape. The tool used in enforcing this devaluation is the ideal man, and the hawk is a symbol of the ideal man David attempts to escape. He is no longer drawn to the dominance that he once enjoyed, after witnessing its extreme consequences. The isolation that also characterizes victims of trauma is present in the novel as David Lurie moves away from his daughter and is more invested in the dogs; he becomes "simply nothing" (*Disgrace* 143). His move to a place, withdrawn from his daughter, is necessitated by a need to escape a constant reminder of the trauma associated with the farm where Lucy is raped. While David is not the direct victim of the rape, he is more afflicted by it since the rape hastens and enforces the process of becoming the other. His fixation with power and unwillingness to

give up this power, in a setting that snatches it away from him, is a major cause of the trauma he suffers. David is not quite ready to become the other hence the shock of his sudden devaluation is what causes his breakdown. As is characteristic of a traumatized person, he devotes his time to controlling what he can (Alford, 2018): himself and the dogs. The dogs, which have been explained to be extensions of David Lurie, allow the reading that David controlling the dog is simply an attempt to have more control over himself. The early period of David's stay in the countryside was marked with a thinking that he was better than most. After the rape and his dreams, David has no choice but to accept his place as a lesser man and perform his gender as such. He hopes to one day return to his old self, to become as expressive as he used to be but "the truth, he knows, is otherwise. His pleasure in living has been snuffed out" (*Disgrace* 107).

Catalyzed by the rape and in a last-ditch effort to hold on to what may be left of his redemption, David directs his attention towards Petrus. Without proof and based purely on suspicions, David decides that Petrus is somehow connected to Lucy's rape, and tries unsuccessfully to get Petrus to confess to it. He regrets his inability to punish Petrus as he thinks about the days during which he could have meted out punishment, "In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one's temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place" (*Disgrace* 116). As much as he tries to distance himself from the "one" he describes in his statement, David is talking about himself and his longing to punish Petrus. David seems to be nursing some scorn for Petrus who was once "a boy, now he is no longer" (*Disgrace* 152). This hatred is not merely from Petrus' absence during the rape, but from the fact that he who was once "a boy" is now the greater man. His daughter's frank admission of this fact cements his non-existing influence in the countryside:

Objectively I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. I have a father, but he is far away and anyhow powerless in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn for protection, for patronage? To Ettinger? It is just a matter of time before Ettinger is found with a bullet in his back. Practically speaking, there is only Petrus left. Petrus may not be a big man but he is big enough for someone small like me. And at least I know Petrus. I have no illusions about him. I know what I would be letting myself in for (*Disgrace* 204).

Lucy's acceptance of her place as a lesser person in the countryside enforces the idea of the lowering of the status of the white man and the elevation of the black man. It is only in the absence of Petrus that the rape is carried out and though David interprets this to mean he has some knowledge of the rape; it mainly enforces Petrus' influence in the countryside. His absence removes

the only form of security Lucy has and leaves her exposed to the dangers of her setting. David tries to convince Lucy to move to Holland, a place where his powers can be restored and allows him to perform dominant masculinity. Lucy chooses to remain in the countryside, under the care of Petrus who is objectively better security.

It has already been established that David's gender performance is greatly dependent on his sexual prowess and dominance of his id over the superego. This phallic masculinity marked David as a powerful man and makes his sexual affair with Bev Shaw an interesting landmark in the arc of this character. Confessing his surprise at his decision to make love to Bev, David presents us with this thought, "After the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs, this is what I have come to. This is what I will have to get used to, this and even less than this" (*Disgrace* 150). Without the aid of a setting that feeds his power, David must now resort to a previously unattractive source of satisfaction. For a man whose masculinity is so strongly tied to his sexuality, this decrease is a signal of a descent in masculinity. Indeed, David proves himself an unsympathetic character, difficult to empathize with, as a result of his constant criticism of others. He does not identify himself as much of a rapist as his daughter's attackers because he remains, in his mind, an intellectual fellow. Even so, David is not too different from the attackers. They all use positions of power to enforce their will on weaker women. The only difference between David and the attackers is the setting where their acts are performed. Similarly, however, both settings give power to the perpetrators, and both victims are powerless in the most important terms that matter. Much like the attackers, David is himself a rapist (Travis, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Applying the critical theories of psychoanalysis and the performative gender theory, this paper has argued the correlation between setting and masculine performance. In David Lurie, we see a masculinity that is expressed by the uninhibited expression of his sexual desires and the shutdown of his superego. The setting of the city allows him to exercise power through sex and still maintain a triumphant demeanor despite the verifiably wrong nature of his actions. We find that the power he enjoys in the city setting makes David's time in the countryside almost uninhabitable for David. He becomes an old man not by virtue of his age but by the desire to hold on to a power he has lost in a place where violence is strength and where men who commit crimes go unpunished. David slowly devolves into dog-man and this transition is quickened by his daughter's rape which is the most important realization of David's powerlessness. Conclusively, the work has established David's traumatic experience as an offshoot of his inability to recognize his lost power in a setting that is not welcoming to an "old

man".

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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