

Postmetaphysical Literature

Reflections on J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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A novel by J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, is, it would seem, a book about endings: the end of rape, the end of morality, and the end of humanity—that is to say, the end of a deep distinction between human possibilities and animal possibilities.¹ David Lurie, formerly a professor of modern languages in Capetown, is serving out his time teaching “communication skills” and “one special-field course a year, irrespective of enrollment,” now that his university has been “rationalized.” Lurie tries to spice up this weary existence and propitiate the god Eros by having an affair with a young Coloured theater student, Melanie Isaacs.

In *Disgrace*, we see the dregs of the old South Africa, where white racial supremacy has been overthrown and replaced by a tribalism whose only vestige of universal morality is in the justified self-condemnation of the remaining whites. As Lurie discovers, the old prohibition on racial miscegenation is replaced with a new prohibition on intergenerational sex, at least when not properly paid for. Melanie's boyfriend intervenes so as to break off the affair, and he and Melanie's father see to it that Lurie is brought up on disciplinary charges that result in his dismissal. Lurie then flees to his daughter Lucy's farm in the Eastern Cape, where he takes refuge from the bleak fact that he has outlived his sexual attractiveness. Lucy boards dogs, and Lurie finds his own niche in the country by helping euthanize unwanted animals and by seeing that their bodies are burned in the hospital incinerator: his urban sensibilities about a proper death are applied with a rural awareness of the continuity between human and animal existences.

Finally, we see the end of rape, because, as Coetzee shows, we have lost the metaphysical beliefs in the soul and

in freedom of the will from which we constitute rape as a moral and social category. Lucy is attacked by two men and a boy, the latter the brother of her Xhosa neighbor Petrus's second wife. The attack, Lurie comes to realize, is capitalized on, if not instigated, by Petrus to humble Lucy and to force her to accept Petrus's protection and yield control of her remaining land to him. Lucy cannot prosecute or even admit what the three men have done to her, because in “this place,” South Africa, she can find her place, she says, only by renouncing all claims to rights, whether over her person or her property.

In *Disgrace*, we see not only the end of romance but also the apparent end of all distinctively human possibilities of a life worth living, as racial inequality is overcome by tribal entropy. In the face of the brutal reality of the South African past, nostalgia for civilization and its values is untenable—the only solace that Lurie holds out to the reader is the possibility of redemption through an art that accompanies the memorial traces of longing, like the soft trio of instrumentalists on cello, flute, and bassoon accompanying the singer in Lurie's unfinished opera on Byron's last mistress Teresa. In an artistic sense, *Disgrace* is the ruin of a *plaatsroman*, the subgenre of the South African farm novel, which in *White Writing* Coetzee has successfully cleared for his very own critical plantation.² Yet that art can only redeem us if its value is recognized by a human future, whose probability Lurie presents as highly questionable.

Disgrace is therefore a highly disturbing novel because it seems to present a world dying without hope. The academy is portrayed as deprived of grace by its failure to reproduce the cultural heritage that was placed in its keeping. Here, the insecurities of the Eurocentric intellectual in South Africa, Lurie in *Disgrace*, Helen in *Age of Iron*, or Coetzee himself, can be taken as emblematic of the insecurities of Western culture. Whatever is fertile comes from a genuine encounter with the human problems of our postcolonial world, a world that is neither culturally multiple or even

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culturally mixed so much as culturally bastardized, to adopt an apt term from the lexicon of Breyten Breytenbach.³

In the eyes of outsiders, the university is principally deprived of grace by the political correctness that presently works the levers of its disciplinary machinery. It is to this political correctness that Lurie is sacrificed—or rather, because it is doubtful whether his dismissal represents a genuine loss of intellectual or cultural values, it is this political correctness that his termination goes to nourish.

The world outside the university is represented in *Disgrace* by post-apartheid South Africa in all of her brutal violence and the economic squalor that the violence leaves in its wake. In the new South Africa, the deepest disgrace is the lack of power to protect one's own, Lurie realizes in the aftermath of Lucy's rape (109, 115). The extraordinary gap between the moral standards of the university and those of the outside world may explain the self-righteousness of the university's enforcement machinery. A member of the committee who disciplines Lurie, the female business lecturer Dr. Farodia Rasool, invokes "the wider community" (50), but it seems that the university's moral standards are utterly alienated from those of the wider community. In the university, the ideal is to avoid mixing power relations with sexual relations, as Dean of Engineering Swarts says (52–53). Mixing these relations is precisely what Lucy's "neighbor" Petrus does, as we shall see, and to his profit.

The isolation of the university's moral standards from the harsh realities of post-apartheid South Africa is not necessarily a bad thing. The monastic life as regulated by St. Benedict was cut off in the Dark Ages from the moral standards of the wider community, if one may call the customs of the Franks and Lombards, as described in the history of Geoffrey of Tours, standards. To a great extent, the triumph of the modern order was not a triumph of new standards so much as the triumph of an ability to enforce the moral standards that had always been preached. It is just as well that moral standards continue to be enforced, and perhaps enforced with greater rigor, in the universities, even as the universities become increasingly isolated as moral communities. The moral laxity of a Lurie could be accepted when the university and the moral universalism it champions were not themselves under siege. An anonymous scrawl Lurie receives makes this point succinctly: "YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA" (43).

The notion of a gap in moral standards returns in the gap between the attitude toward animals exemplified by Bev, the priestess of dignified animal death, and eventually, her acolyte and dog undertaker, Lurie, when contrasted with that of Petrus and the three rapists. In her animal clinic, Bev teaches Lurie to give suffering animals the last grace of a painless death. The intruders leave Lucy's dogs to die in pain: they do not "even bother to administer a *coup de grâce*," Lurie complains silently, as he watches them shoot Lucy's animals to express their triumph over her (95). Similarly, when Petrus buys sheep to slaughter for a party and tethers them on a barren patch of ground, Lurie moves the sheep to where they can graze (123–26). The city, he thinks, has as much a right to judge the country as the country does the city (125).

In the Enlightenment form of life, the city values colonized the country.⁴ This project has not succeeded in South Africa. It failed for the first time in 1948, with the proclamation of Afrikaner supremacy under the guise of white racial hegemony, and it has failed again in the racially motivated crime wave that Lucy's rape exemplifies. In a post-apartheid South Africa of ever-rising disorder, the Afrikaner is treated according to the standards by which he treated others, not the standards that were used by enlightened world opinion to condemn him. There is, no doubt, a kind of justice here, although not one that either Lurie or Coetzee is willing to swallow without protest (112).⁵ The very rough justice that makes it impossible to give a moral critique of the violence against rural whites makes the situation even uglier. As Coetzee quotes Breytenbach, writing in 1991, South Africa has "slid straight from prehumanity to posthumanity."⁶

"I do not believe that any form of lasting community can exist where people do not share the same sense of what is just and what is not just," Coetzee said in a 1991 interview.⁷ *Disgrace* holds out little hope for a community among the current inhabitants of South Africa. Yet, as Coetzee goes on to say, he is not a "herald of community," but "someone who has intimations of freedom."⁸ To understand in what sense *Disgrace* is a novel of beginnings and not just of endings, we must seek out those intimations of freedom. These intimations are grounds for hope.

THOSE FOR WHOM THERE IS LITTLE HOPE

In his great essay on Kafka, Walter Benjamin quotes Kafka's remark to Max Brod that there is hope, "plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope—but not for us."⁹ If "us" is the typical reader of *Disgrace*, a white male academic, this statement of Kafka's provides the key, I think, to the novel's disturbing character: there is hope, but not for us.

Lurie's world is erotically oriented. It is "keen," in the language of *Age of Iron*.¹⁰ Lurie describes himself as a man raised by women, "a lover of women, and, to an extent, a womanizer" (7).¹¹ He is willing to push, to use the force of his personality, his money, his position, to get his way with women: not for nothing does he describe the second of his three sexual encounters with Melanie as "not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25).

Lurie recognizes that he is cut off from women's life with women, the way women share their bodies with other women, and he is, at times, enraged by that exclusion (104, 140–41, 198–99). Lurie has no relationships of depth with men. His one effort is with Isaacs, Melanie's father, and this seems to be more of a quest for the sources of Melanie's beauty than the expression of a desire for friendship with a man.

In a life oriented erotically, Lurie is left only with the shreds of his former possibilities (67, 190). Real eros is desire for the beautiful, which is to say the young and beautiful, not the consolation of sex with middle-aged and ugly Bev: "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" (150). Lurie is, he knows, no longer capable of pleasing the young and beautiful, as his second ex-wife

Rosalind rather brutally reminds him (44). Lurie quotes Byron: "I have always looked to thirty as the barrier to any real or fierce delight in the passions" (87). Melanie, Lurie tells Mr. Isaacs, was, in a way, his last real spark (166), his last effort to get something beyond the managed business of sex with whores or with squat, neckless Bev Shaw. Lurie claims the rights of desire (89), thus inspiring André Brink's character Ruben Olivier to scribble that the right of desire is to desire, that is, to be frustrated.¹² Yet, in the course of reflecting on his erotic life, Lurie discovers that management, not flaming, is all he can do—he is lacking in fire and perhaps has always been lacking in fire (171, 195).

Now that Lurie's powers of seduction have faded, his return to grace requires, he thinks, that he learn to empathize with women, especially old women. "Does he have it in him to be the woman?" Lurie wonders (160). Byron's Teresa, in her stout middle age, keening for her lost lover, "may be the last one left who can save him," he thinks (182, 209).

At the beginning of the novel, Lurie renounces hope by renouncing the possibility of change: "Follow your temperament" is his motto (2). During his dinner at the Isaacs', he tells Melanie's father that he is sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift himself (172). Returning to his Cape Town apartment, which was trashed by intruders during his rustication, Lurie sees himself as living the life of "a superannuated scholar," "sitting blankly at a desk in a room full of yellowing papers, waiting for the afternoon to peter out so that he can cook his evening meal and go to bed" (175).

It would seem that Lurie's period of grace is over, as he says of the dog for whom he has come to feel a particular fondness, when he brings the dog to Bev to be put to sleep (215). "I suspect it is too late for me," he responds to Lucy's exhortation "to be a good person" (216). "What pretty girl can he expect to be wooed into bed with a grandfather?" he muses (217). Lurie's willingness to dissipate his limited savings in settling in the town nearest to Lucy's farm is a sign that he is preparing for his own death: "He is spending money like water. No matter" (211). This is a spending of his substance more reckless than his orgasms with Melanie. Yet, at the end of the novel, Lurie has enough hope for his own future that he can even see some prospects in literature: From "Victor Hugo, poet of grandfatherhood," he muses, "there may be things left to learn" (219).

Lucy, the other principal character for whom there is little hope, is Coetzee's version of the archetypal victim of rape, the Roman matron Lucretia. Lucretia killed herself after being raped by her husband's royal cousin, the son of King Tarquinius Superbus. Swearing revenge over her bleeding body, Brutus, another cousin of the royal family, Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, and her father, Lucretius, organized a conspiracy against the Tarquins, expelled them, and established elected consuls in place of kings to rule in Rome.¹³ Lucretia demands that her disgrace be avenged, but redemption is civil, not personal—the Tarquins will be overthrown, but she will not live to see it.

Lucy's fate is everything that the racists warned us about. Coetzee states of Daphne Rooke, who ended her career as a preacher of the gospel of apartheid as reformu-

lated by Vorster, that, "to her credit, Rooke does not indulge in the ne plus ultra of colonial horror fantasies, the rape of a white woman."¹⁴ "The circulation of horror stories," Coetzee reminds us, "is the very mechanism that drives white paranoia about being chased off the land and pushed into the sea," condemning Breytenbach's *Dog Heart* (*Stranger Shores* 256). Yet Coetzee does indulge in the circulation of these horror stories. Coetzee even reminds us that the ne plus ultra is not, in fact, so: It could have been worse, Lucy's white neighbor Ettinger reminds Lurie: "They could have taken her away with them" (109, cf. 160). "Death pace Lucretia, is worse than rape," Coetzee elsewhere pronounces.¹⁵

Coetzee's Lucy, like Richardson's Clarissa, just wants to be let alone, to be left alone by men. Lucy is attractive, yet lost to men, Lurie says to himself (76, 104). Of course, this independence of male "protection" proves impossible for her to maintain against the wave of male violence that engulfs the Eastern Cape. Lucy says that she will make any sacrifice so as to win peace, and she winds up having to sacrifice a great deal to maintain it, when after the rape she accepts Petrus's protection and the nominal status of his third wife. Her labor will make the land Petrus's. This is seemingly an inversion of the colonial order, in which native labor makes white land, following the Lockean rule that my property in my own labor includes "the turfs my servant has cut" (see *Age of Iron* 111). The new inverted order, in which blacks act as colonial exploiters of their former white overlords, would seem to offer no greater hope than the white racial colonialism it replaces.

Lucy, unlike Clarissa, is freed from the possibilities of transcendence: "[T]here is no higher life," she tells her father, and she is agnostic about the soul (74, 78–79). In human terms, it is unclear whether there is any hope for her. She is willing to live like a dog, she says (205), as long as she can live on the land. One wonders if, like the sheep Coetzee describes in his memoir *Boyhood*, she has "calculated the price and is willing to pay it—the price of being on earth, the price of being alive."¹⁶ She is willing to renounce the very human hope of grace or salvation. "Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don't act in terms of abstractions" (112). What hope she holds out is for her unborn child, the product of the rape: although he or she was conceived in hate and violence, Lucy refuses an abortion (198).

THOSE FOR WHOM THERE IS HOPE

Those for whom there is hope in Kafka's novels are the servants or assistants, Benjamin claims (*Selected Writings* 2:798). Those figures in *Disgrace* include Petrus and Melanie.

Petrus's motives in the novel actually become clear enough, although this has not yet been brought out in what little has so far been published on *Disgrace* because the critics seem to refuse to face them. As Lurie tells us, "the real truth" is "something anthropological" (118). By organizing the rape, Petrus asserts his permanence in the land against Lucy's transience. Petrus arranges the attack to drive her off the land: when he sees that she is not driven off, he is willing to take her and the land under his "protection." He offers to

allow Lucy to remain on the land and to leave her alone: he will not even sleep with her, she supposes, except as necessary "to drive home his message" (203). Even if Lucy herself stays, she will stay on Petrus's terms.

"Country life," Lurie consoles himself. "has always been a matter of neighbors scheming against each other" (118). Like most peasants, and like most of us, Petrus is just doing whatever it takes to get ahead, while keeping close account of his own substance; "a pennypincher," Lucy calls him (124). Petrus works hard, does not shrink from violence, even if he need not personally use violence against Lucy, and he manipulates cultural categories adeptly. Petrus's amorality, and moreover his successful amorality, show us how in the unsettled settlement of South Africa. "the trauma of cultural conquest . . . fractured the social and customary basis of legality" (*Giving Offense* 81). White conquest and its disruption have created the opportunities that Petrus exploits. Petrus uses his relatives, especially the simple but violent youth Pollux, to wreak violence against Lucy, and he invokes the relation to protect the perpetrator (201). Petrus is a Robinson Crusoe figure in this way; not Robinson the castaway, but Robinson the slaveowner, and later the governor of a little empire.¹⁷ In the Crusonian world that Petrus establishes, the stranger, like everything and everyone else, exists to be exploited for survival.

Petrus is at the furthest remove from the quest for ethical community, the quest that some readers such as Mike Marais have tried to read into the novel.¹⁸ Lurie calls him a neighbor, but in the ethical sense a neighbor is someone with whom one shares a community of ethical obligation. This is the sense of the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus's answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?" In the ethical sense, then, Petrus is no neighbor to Lucy.¹⁹ Whites, out of guilt, treat black settlers such as Petrus unilaterally as neighbors, no matter how unneighborly the black settlers' conduct, and perhaps this white guilt is justified. Petrus, for his part, is perfectly ready to manipulate this guilt as well.

Petrus, however, works with sexuality in a way that Crusoe does not in Defoe's novel or even in Coetzee's retelling, *Foe*.²⁰ Petrus uses sexuality, and not just labor, to claim land, by marrying Lucy as his third wife and by sleeping with her, if need be, to make his point (202).

Coetzee's portrayal of Petrus's motives and his success aims directly at a fundamental prejudice of white South Africans, as exemplified in Breytenbach's writings on South Africa and its peoples. Whites want to believe that where they cannot take possession of the land, no one can take possession. "I write about South Africa—which is the quintessential No Man's Land. Owning is usurpation," Breytenbach writes in his justly famous prison diary *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*.²¹ Breytenbach continues to celebrate the figure that he calls the "nomad" in his post-apartheid writings. In *The Memory of Birds in the Time of Revolution*, Breytenbach sets forth his exemplary status as "a nadaist and a nomad."²² "We are painted in the colors of disappearance here," he tells his daughter Gogga in *Dog Heart*;²³ "we" are human beings of any particular culture. Breytenbach can more easily admit that his presence and his

people's presence are transient because he believes that everyone's is such.

The prejudice regarding colonialism is that the colonial presence is temporary—as Coetzee himself has written, "To South Africans, white as well as black, a settler is a transient, no matter what the dictionary says."²⁴ Petrus is a settler in the sense of the dictionary. He knows that it is the white presence in the countryside that is temporary, and he wants Lucy's land for his own.

Part of being a nomad, as the anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers showed in *The Fate of Shechem*, is that your daughters are freely available to be exploited for sex by males from the settled population.²⁵ This is certainly how Coetzee portrays the Afrikaners' forebears as relating to the Bushmen, with a little help from Hegel and Sartre:

A wild Bushman girl is tied into nothing, literally nothing . . . a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away. She is completely disposable. She is something for nothing, free . . . She is the ultimate love you have borne your own desires alienated in a foreign body and pegged out waiting for your pleasure.²⁶

Rape is a category of bourgeois society and can happen only to the daughters of the bourgeoisie, where bourgeoisie means urban, civic, and not tribal. As the townsman sees it, rape is something that happens out in the fields, away from town, to a daughter of the town at the hands of those in the fields (see *Deuteronomy* 23:22–27). Pitt-Rivers demonstrates that the norm against rape is simply an elaboration of the norm against exogamy. The norm against exogamy is evanescent to most of us perhaps, but it is fundamental to the regime of apartheid. Petrus therefore brings about an inversion of the norms of apartheid to register his land claim.

If Petrus represents the future of the South African countryside, Melanie Isaacs represents the future of the city. Melanie is Coloured, "small and thin, with close cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes" (11), a product of the miscegenation that apartheid denied and repudiated. At the beginning, Lurie speaks of her striking outfits: on the day of their fateful dinner, "a maroon miniskirt with a mustard coloured sweater and black tights; the gold baubles on her belt match the gold balls of her earrings" (11). Yet, in her last two meetings with Lurie, she wears simple black: black tights and black sweater (19), or "dressed from top to toe in black, with a black woolen cap" (26).

Melanie's somber clothes are one of the few signs of her own attitude toward the affair between her and Lurie. She is the only major character in the novel whose motives are truly enigmatic, perhaps because Lurie, the narrator, is incapable of understanding her. Lurie and Melanie have sex, as I have noted above, three times: the first time in Lurie's house; the second time in her apartment, when she lies passively: "not rape, not quite like that, but undesired nonetheless" (25), Lurie describes it to himself; and one last time, more mutually satisfying, on the bed in his daughter's room (29).

Melanie comes from a highly religious and disciplined family, Lurie learns, months after their affair (163–74), but at the university she has acquired a possessive boyfriend in black leather, who, to the extent of his abilities, follows her everywhere, to every rehearsal and performance (24, 193).

The boyfriend even follows Melanie to Lurie's class after Melanie and Lurie's third sexual encounter (31). The boyfriend is "protective," although something of a pimp: he hovers in the audience while Melanie shares her beauty with the public on stage. Melanie's affair with Lurie is perhaps either an attempt to escape her boyfriend, a probing of the limits of the relationship, or a fling made harmless by the strength of the relationship. The affair with Lurie may represent her own efforts to live within eros tamed. Perhaps it is the boyfriend who supplies the lyrical that Lurie mentions in describing his and Melanie's affair to her parents (171). The lyric is one of violent jealousy, and given that Melanie has not succeeded in escaping the boyfriend's attraction by the end of the novel (193), one wonders whether her fate will be that of Desdemona. She, in the end, may be reconciled to that.

Melanie's affair with her professor threatens to destroy the life she has built for herself in Capetown. She drops out of the university and the theater (36), yet it is hard to see how she is victimized so severely by Lurie as to make her dropping out a plausible response. Coetzee does not give us enough to understand her actions because we see her from Lurie's perspective, a perspective too far removed, by age, race, and enculturation to make sense of her life. But she recovers, finishes her studies, and continues on the stage.

After his rustication, Lurie returns to Capetown to see Melanie perform at the Dock Theater, "a fashionable entertainment spot." She is talented as an actress, "positively gifted," Lurie now appraises her (191).²⁷ Melanie's talent shines forth precisely in a rather formulaic comedy set in a hairdressing salon in the now racially integrated Johannesburg neighborhood of Hillbrow (23). There is room for art, an art that shows our way of life to ourselves, even after the disgrace of the high culture that Lurie has failed to pass down. This is the hope that Melanie instantiates.

CONCLUSION

"Who knows, he thinks: there might, despite all, be a future" (29).

What, then, is the nature of the hope that Petrus and Melanie, Lurie and Lucy, hold out? There is the thin hope for us represented by Melanie's play, Lurie's opera—although that work may be beyond Lurie's artistic powers to complete (214)—or by the novel *Disgrace*. This hope is that we can be redeemed by an art that demonstrates the futility of our cultural inheritance and thereby frees us from the need to seek to live it. There is the thin hope offered by rethinking our relation to animals: the possibility that to be thrust outside the human community, as Lurie is thrust outside the humanistic community of the university, is not to be thrust outside all possibility of community.

Yet in our relationship to animals, we may be able to do little more than ape the ethical relationships we would like to have with other human subjects. We are imagining ourselves into a relationship with those whose ability to reciprocate is doubtful. A real relation to animals would have to be a stratified relation. Like Elizabeth Costello, the fictional lecturer in Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*,²⁹ Lurie seems to want to

imagine himself into an equal relationship—in Lurie's case, as a dog undertaker. Costello excuses herself for her failure to live this equal relationship by confessing her moral weakness, thereby insulating this imagined, if not imaginary, possibility from all intellectual challenges, all arguments.

Petrus and Melanie offer an indefinable hope, a hope that something is coming up in the postcolonial world of South Africa. We who belong to the past, who are possessed by the past, cannot really enter into this hope: as Lurie thinks, "[b]y the time the big words come back, reconstructed, purified, fit to be trusted once more, he will be long dead" (129). We cannot even say whether what is being born is something radically new, or simply *mutatis mutandis*, a more feasible form of the old colonization than the bastard Eurocentric regime of apartheid. The namesake squatter in Coetzee's *Michael K* "was wary of conveying the Visagies' rubbish to his home in the earth and setting himself on a trail that might lead to the re-enactment of their misfortunes."³⁰ By reason of race, Petrus and Melanie cannot possibly set themselves on that trail that might lead to the re-enactment of the whites' misfortunes. Petrus is simply a Cape settler, with the wiles and violence that characterized the Boer: Petrus, unlike the white tribesman of Africa, is not paralyzed by racialism or threatened with the subversion of his values by the remnants of Christianity. Whatever will be the future evolution of the globalized postcolonial cities in the former provinces of European empires, it is the Petruses who will inherit their rural peripheries.³¹

NOTES

1. J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (New York: Penguin, 1999); page references to *Disgrace* will be given by page number alone.

2. J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

3. See Breytenbach's famous 1973 lecture "A View from Outside," in *A Season in Paradise* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985); also J. M. Coetzee, *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays 1986–1999* (New York: Viking, 2001), 254.

4. See, for example, Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1976); the rural response has been described most perspicuously by Tom Nairn, "The Curse of Rurality: Limits of Modernization Theory," in *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London: Verso, 1997).

5. In his second volume of memoirs, *Youth*, Coetzee depicts this as his view at age 22 or thereabouts, so as to bring out its callowness: "As far back as he can remember, Afrikaners have trampled on people because, they claim, they were once trampled upon. Well, let the wheel turn again, let force be replied to with greater force. He is glad to be out of it" (*Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* [New York: Viking, 2002], 100). On this point in *Disgrace*, see Mike Marais, "Very Morbid Phenomena: 'Liberal Funk,' the 'Lucy-Syndrome' and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *scrutiny2: issues in english studies in southern africa* 6, no. 1 (2001): 32–38.

6. J. M. Coetzee, *Stranger Shores*, 250.

7. J. M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 340.

8. *Doubling the Point*, 341.

9. Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," trans. Harry Zohn in *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 798.

10. J. M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (New York: Penguin, 1998; originally published London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1990), 121.

11. Even Lurie's relationship with his daughter seems to be largely erotic, judging by his repeated descriptions of her in terms of her charms (65, 86–87, 207). Incest, however, is not the answer to Lurie's frustrations: nothing, he knows, is as distasteful to a child as the working of a parent's body (61). In any case, Lucy is not interested in the sexual needs of any man, much less her father.

12. André Brink, *The Rights of Desire* (New York: Harcourt, 2000), 154.
13. On the myth of Lucretia in Livy's and Augustine's appropriations, see Michael S. Kochin, "The Death of Tragedy: Genre, Politics, and the Myth of Lucretia" (paper delivered at the John M. Olin Center for the Study of the Theory and Practice of Democracy, University of Chicago, 10 March 1999); in Samuel Richardson's appropriation, Michael S. Kochin and Katharine Philippakis, "The Richardsonian Republic" (paper presented at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association).
14. J. M. Coetzee, "Daphne Rooke," in *Stranger Shores*, 211.
15. J. M. Coetzee, "The Harms of Pornography: Catharine MacKinnon," in *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 76.
16. *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (New York: Viking, 1997), 102.
17. See Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: Norton, 1975), 29–33, 188; *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, chaps. 1–7, available at <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DefCru2.html>>.
18. See Mike Marais, "Very Morbid Phenomena"; Mike Marais, "The Possibility of Ethical Action: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *scrutiny* 25, no. 1 (2000): 57–63; Mike Marais, "'Little Enough, Less than Little: Nothing': Ethics, Engagement, and Change in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee," *Modern Fiction Studies* 46, no. 1 (2000): 159–82.
19. Luke 10:25–37: on reciprocity in the ethical community, see Irad Kimhi, "And who is my neighbor?" (manuscript, Betzalel Academy of Art, n.d.).
20. J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (New York: Penguin, 1986).
21. Breyten Breytenbach, *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986; originally published New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), 314–15; on Breytenbach as a "connected critic" of apartheid, see "Breyten Breytenbach: The Critic in Exile," in Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
22. Breyten Breytenbach, *The Memory of Birds in a Time of Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 8.
23. Breyten Breytenbach, *Dog Heart: A Memoir* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 145.
24. J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, 1.
25. Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 159–61.
26. J. M. Coetzee, *Dusklands* (New York: Penguin, 1996; originally published 1974), 61.
27. Lurie is, however, an unreliable judge of Melanie's talent, because his view of her in the aftermath of the affair is colored by his loss of her.
28. On the exhaustion of the humanist patrimony, see also J. M. Coetzee's second Elizabeth Costello novella, *The Humanities in Africa* (Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 2000), reprinted with some crucial additions in J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2003).
29. J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
30. J. M. Coetzee, *Michael K.* (New York, Viking, 1995; originally published 1984), 104.
31. This paper was presented at a panel, "History and Freedom in Contemporary Literature," at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, and I would like to thank my discussant, Lauren Weiner, for her very useful remarks. I have also benefited from the comments of Anna Kochin, Anthony Appiah, Lucas Morel, Ronald Beiner, Steven Smith, and Michael Keren. Research for this paper was supported by a Dan David Scholarship granted by the Dan David Prize and by a Laurence S. Rockefeller Visiting Fellowship.

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