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J. M. Coetzee's Disgrace: Eros, (Dis)grace, & the Body

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but then ageing is not a graceful business. *Disgrace*, p. 9

'Do you remember Blake?' he says. 'Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires'? *Disgrace*, p. 69

Abstract

This paper looks at the problematic of the body in Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. It argues that the novel's protagonist is initially driven by eros, impulsive sexual desires beyond his control. However, Lurie's conception of the body changes in the course of the novel from one dominated by eros to an ethical one associated with (dis)honor and (dis)grace. Rather than a self-centered eros, Lurie's new awareness of the body is one based on our essential embodiment and the humiliations of dying and ageing. This is why his new understanding of the body, which is the result of a change in his personality, makes him care about the body of the other. Lurie spends much time trying to "honor" the bodies of dead dogs or simply spare them from the disgrace of dying. My reading of the novel explores an ethical conception of the body in Coetzee's novel. Already a contested political site, the body in Coetzee's novel emerges as an ethically (and psychoanalytically) nuanced one.

Keywords: Coetzee; Post-Apartheid/South African Literature; Body; Eros; Ethics; (Dis)grace

1. Introduction

In *Disgrace*, J. M. Coetzee (1999) presents an intricate account of the interrelationship between eros, the body, and disgrace. In this novel, the body is "very strongly linked to power, desire, and disgrace" (Kossew, 2003, p. 155). However, typical critical scholarship on the novel has not adequately clarified the relationship between the body, desire, and disgrace. At one level in the novel, male eros is the cause of disgrace because it pits unrepressed desires against social norms. At another, eros is also what triggers an ethical outlook and a reformed state, i.e. the opposite of disgrace. Actually, one can observe a shift in the novel from one form of love propelled by eros to another form propelled by ethics, which is why a form of male eros leading to sexual disgrace is substituted by a grace-saving love for animals. The novel, roughly speaking, follows the deteriorating fortunes of its "sensual" protagonist, a divorced university professor in his fifties. Erotic desire seems to initiate the downfall of David Lurie; after the sexual abuse of a student in his Romantics class at Cape Technical University, the disgraced Lurie is forced by the university administration to resign his post. He leaves Cape Town to live with his daughter Lucy in a smallholding in the Eastern Cape. There, he and his daughter are attacked by a gang of three black Africans. He is burned and beaten while his daughter is repeatedly raped, and thus made pregnant. By the end of the novel, Lurie is reduced to a dehumanized existence, working among dogs at a local veterinary clinic and acting as a caretaker for dead dogs by ferrying their corpses to the incinerator to ensure that their bodies are properly/gracefully disposed of. Such a plot outline, sweeping as it is, illustrates my thesis that the novel revolves around a dramatic shift in Lurie's personality and lifestyle from the yearnings of an aging body in the grip of eros—i.e. a body taking sexual pleasure by imposing itself on prostitutes, colleagues, or students—to a consuming passion to care about the body of the other. This transformation from taking to giving, I argue, is deeply ethical. Eros, in the form of sexual love or uninhibited libido, used to dominate Lurie's life, but his new life in the country is one dominated by another mode of being, one based on acknowledging the existence of other modes of being. Such a thematic shift from eros to ethics, from desire to conscience, enhances the moral aspect of the novel. Moreover, it critiques our human transactions because grace seems impossible among indifferent human beings and is transferred to (disgraced) animals instead. Whereas the body in Coetzee's apartheid fiction has often been interpreted politically and allegorically so,[1] I claim here that Coetzee's post-apartheid fiction, as evidenced by *Disgrace*, marks a greater shift in the conception of the body from the political to the ethical within Coetzee's oeuvre. Coetzee (1992) argues in *Doubling the Point* that "it is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable" (p. 248; emphasis original). The

authority of the body Coetzee speaks of is not only political. As my discussion of this novel will reveal, the body has an undeniable ethical force.

Coetzee establishes the problematic of the body, i.e. the problematic of sexual desire that blights Lurie, at the very beginning of the novel. The novel's first sentence reads: "For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well" (p. 1). Lurie's frustrations in marriage and professional life[2] make him indulge in numerous sexual affairs with streetwalkers, a part-time prostitute called Soraya, a departmental secretary, and finally a student in one of his classes called Melanie Isaacs. The disgrace of this last affair, in particular, directly affects his life as he loses his job after being found guilty before the university committee that questions him. In a sense, Lurie has a problem coming to terms with the instinctive needs and desires of his body. Married twice but divorced twice, and a womanizer of a sort, he could not actually solve the problem of sex, as he thinks he did. Lurie has to come to terms with his ageing body and his sexual desires. The fact that he attempts to solve "the problem of sex" in itself shows that Lurie struggled with the instinctive needs of his body throughout his life and thought he came to a compromise by visiting a prostitute once a week. This is why for Lurie Thursday "has become an oasis of *luxe et volupté*" (p. 1) in an otherwise empty week devoid of eros. Lurie, the professional man and the conscientious academic, seems to struggle with bodily compulsions.

In fact, Lurie is not the only Coetzee character for whom the body with its drives poses a problem. In Coetzee's oeuvre, the body is tortured, deprived of food, and sexually exploited. Above all, it succumbs to instinctual drives and the ravages of time. For example, the Magistrate in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) similarly faces the problematic of sexual desire and age. His sex life seems odd; he frequents prostitutes and finds in the body of a barbarian girl an irresistible source of fascination and repulsion. He fetishizes her tortured feet, and his ritual of cleansing and rubbing often ends in fits of unsustainable erotic desire. The Magistrate finally makes love to her on their way to return her to her people. Back in his outpost, he continues to have this troubled relationship with his sexual desires, often experiencing his member as an alien, uncontrollable organ (p. 49, p. 163). In fact, his very relationship with the barbarian girl brings about his downfall and subsequent "disgrace" just like Lurie. People in the frontier gossip about his affair with this barbarian girl, and news reach the capital. His taking her to her people is seen as an act of consorting with the barbarian enemy. Therefore, the Magistrate is tortured and humiliated publicly by the Empire's officials. He is "disgraced" in the eyes of his people; his "disgrace" culminates when he is forced to wear a woman's smock (p. 128) for a mock crucifixion.

The Magistrate loses all of his privileges as an administrator in his outpost settlement and symbolically leads a dog's life. He is not allowed to wash himself; he is mocked by children and imprisoned in a cell. Excessive torture makes him think in the following terms: "There is no way of dying allowed me, it seems, except like a dog in a corner" (p. 128). Animals are used metaphorically in this language to figure the magistrate's disgrace. He comes to experience his whole life in terms of bodily pain or self-preservative instincts like hunger and thirst. He is not symbolically different from the animals he compares himself to. Since he is a complacent individual spending his last days on a "lazy frontier, waiting to retire" (p. 8), he wishes to return to his "hunting and hawking and placid concupiscence" (p. 9) once frontier troubles are over. The magistrate, however, is aware of his old age, his "thin shanks, [his] slack genitals, [his] paunch, [his] flabby old man's breasts, the turkey-skin of his throat" (p. 33). Since the body occupies much of his waking consciousness, it is no wonder that we find him speculating in the following terms about his own body and the body of the barbarian girl: "These bodies of hers and mine are diffuse, gaseous, centreless, at one moment spinning about a vortex here, at another curdling, thickening elsewhere; but often also flat, blank. I know what to do with her no more than one cloud in the sky knows what to do with another" (p. 36). The magistrate views the body as a hermeneutical crisis, as a problematic par excellence. He is aware of the disgrace of old age and the humiliations of desire.

While biological functions dominate the body in pain—as evidenced when the magistrate says: "What I am made to undergo is subjection to the most rudimentary needs of my body: to drink, to relieve itself, to find the posture in which it is least sore" (p. 126)—eros asserts itself when the body is beyond the grip of pain, which is why the magistrate's "sex begins to reassert itself" (p. 163) as soon as the imperial officials depart. Just as the (sexed) body poses a problematic for the magistrate, it also poses a problematic for Lurie. Whether in the grip of pain or eros, the nagging body asserts its ontological, existential being. Coetzee (1992) asserts in an interview in his collection of essays and interviews *Doubling the Point* that "Whatever else, the body is not 'that which is not,' and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt" (emphasis original; p. 248). While Coetzee here asserts the ontological existence of the body with relation to pain and suffering, I believe we can extend the analogy to eros. Just like pain, pleasure is bodily in nature. It proves that the body exists beyond doubt. Both pleasure and pain, we can argue, ground the body in its corporeal nature and assert its authority. While a typical reading of Coetzee's apartheid fiction would dwell on the relationship between the body and politics, i.e. on the materiality of the violated body with relation to a traumatic history, my reading of this post-apartheid novel dwells on the relationship between bodily desire and ethics. My overall premise is that the discourse of ethics is privileged over the discourse of politics in Coetzee's post-apartheid fiction.[3]

2. The Body and Eros

It seems that the magistrate's "disgrace" is not that different from Lurie's disgrace. Sexual disgrace applies to both cases where the sexual demands of the body are difficult to escape. After all, both men are trying to come to terms with the difficult demands of an ageing body. For Lurie, the "honey-brown body" (p. 1) of a prostitute is the site of carnal love, a commodity possessed by the agency she works for. This commodification of the body makes love a mechanical

relation and, importantly, an escape from the nagging of desire. Lurie is a follower of eros and, like the magistrate in Coetzee's earlier novel, a man leading a promiscuous life of affairs. Lurie, we are told, "has always been a man of the city, at home amid a flux of bodies where eros stalks and glances flash like arrows" (p. 6). Eros makes Lurie pursue women to the end of sexual fulfillment or victimization. At the same time, Lurie "had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores" (p. 7). In other words, eros dominates Lurie's life to a bothering extent. A failed sexual fling with his department's secretary makes him think of emasculating/castrating himself: "He ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself?" (p. 9). The disgrace of ageing and imminent dying makes him think of castrating himself: "A man on a chair snipping away at himself: an ugly sight, but no more ugly, from a certain point of view, than the same man exercising himself on the body of a woman" (p. 9). An aged man should retire from a game of sexual conquests and contingent humiliations. However, the pull of sexual desire is not easy to quell. In fact, in rejecting a public confession of guilt, apology, and counseling with relation to his affair with his student, Lurie is, in a sense, asserting the authority of the body over the restraints of professionalism. His rejection is tantamount to a rejection of castration, i.e. the words he is about to say to his daughter Lucy when they discuss the case: "He was going to add, 'The truth is, they wanted me castrated,' but he cannot say the words, not to his daughter" (p. 66). Lurie acted alongside his nature rather than against it when he acted out his sexual desire. Castrating a sexually active male is making him hate his masculine nature. However, sex with younger women can be a repulsive experience for an older man who feels unprivileged and thus humiliated.

But Lurie, in his fifties, is in the grip of eros when he pursues Melanie. When he calls her home for the first time to invite her out, he is "in the grip of something" (p. 18) he could not control. A sexual adventure with her is described as: "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (p. 25). While the word "undesired" describes Melanie's emotional state, an apt label for Lurie's act would be "desired", a sexual conquest propelled by eros in the form of sexual desire. Lurie finds himself drawn into this relationship. Once this affair begins, he finds it difficult to withdraw or keep himself away from the inevitable consequences. Eros is uncontrollable. It is the absence of restraint. If eros belongs to the realm of the Freudian id, it is the opposite of the privations dictated by the conscientious super-ego.

Even in times not timely for sexual love, Lurie remembers Melanie with lust as he sees her riding a motorcycle with knees apart (p. 35) or when she comes to him crying (p. 26). After he arrives in the country he still remembers her body, in times apparently hostile to romance as when he greets some school children: "Without warning a memory of the girl comes back: of her neat little breasts with their upstanding nipples, of her smooth flat belly. A ripple of desire passes through him. Evidently whatever it was is not over yet" (p. 65). Again, the word "desire" is especially important in this quote. To the university disciplinary committee he explains that he acted with Melanie Isaac as "'a servant of Eros'" and responds to a student after the hearing that he was "'enriched by the experience'" (p. 52; p. 56). Lurie asserts that he was not himself when he was under the influence of Eros, the god of love who acted through him in this affair (p. 52). In one sexual encounter with Melanie at her flat, he impulsively carries her to the bedroom, begins to kiss her feet and is surprised at the feelings overcoming him, an act described in the following terms: "Strange love! Yet from the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that" (p. 25). This mysterious desire that influences his life seems otherworldly, an enormous force that engulfs his being. As a follower of love and beauty symbolized by Aphrodite, Lurie is still under the spell of Eros.

When he and Lucy discuss his personal life, he finds it difficult to articulate details about his intimate life. He makes a reference to Blake and uses the expression "unacted desires" (p. 69): "'Unacted desires can turn as ugly in the old as in the young'", he says (p. 70). It once comes to his mind that Melanie is but a child he is exploiting, but his reasoning is that "his heart lurches with desire" (p. 20). To enact a desire is to fulfill it, to carry it out. The desires he sexually carries out are momentary, sudden, and unsteady, which is why the word "lurches" is significant.

Lurie pleads guilty yet refuses to issue a public statement of apology to the university. As Gareth Cornwell explains, Lurie can be understood as making "a Romantic gesture of defiant individualism that identifies him with Byron, the poet whose life he has been researching" (p. 314). Cornwell adds that Lurie "professes to regard the promptings of the heart as a sacrosanct authority and accounts for his behavior by describing himself as 'a servant of Eros'" (p. 314). By dubbing himself a "servant" of Eros, Lurie asserts the authority of the sexual impulse over the body. Recollections of his affair with Melanie continue to stir his sexual desire throughout the novel, which shows that eros is not easy to subdue or get rid of. Since Lurie seems to be leading a life based on desire without regard to restraints or principles, it is logical to conclude that his life is amoral and thus unethical. To his daughter he justifies his situation as one resting on eros, on what he calls "'the rights of desire'", and on "'the god who makes even the small birds quiver'" (p. 89). When they discuss his scandal, there are more direct details he wishes he could mention. As he remembers one of his sexual encounters with the girl, he wants to say that he "*was a servant of Eros*" and that it was "*a god who acted through* [him]" (emphasis original; p. 89). His fall is caused by his "inability to question the authority of desire itself and in this he is slave to his bodily instincts. All mind, he falls prey to the body" (Kossew, p. 158). It is as if Lurie could not resolve the tension between the Apollonian principle of order and discipline necessary for his professional life and the Dionysian principle of uninhibition and frenzy dominating his personal life.

In his rationalization about what happened between him and the girl, he feels that "there was something generous that was doing its best to flower" (p. 89). The word "generous" is, to my mind, particularly important since it denotes the profusion of the sexual impulse, its free unaffected nature in Lurie's case. He is so adamant on the notion of desire, on

following his instinctive sexual drive. In his reasoning, even animals should not be forced to deny their nature (p. 90). Contrary to the novel's initial point that Lurie solved "the problem of sex" (p. 1) by visiting prostitutes, desire continues to be a problem in his life. He confesses to his daughter that desire, i.e. the problem of sex, is often for him "'a burden we could well do without'" (p. 90). And to Bev Shaw he confesses that during the act itself with Melanie he did not regret it (p. 148). In other words, when he says that "'In the heat of the act there are no doubts'" (p. 148) he affirms that once in the grip of desire he necessarily enjoys being possessed by eros. Upon imagining Bev Shaw in her younger years, who is now a plain woman working at a clinic for animals, he impulsively acts through eros: "On an impulse he reaches out and runs a finger over her lips" (p. 148). Although he does his (sexual) job with her mechanically—"Without passion but without distaste either" (p. 149)—it is instinct that moves him, the male nature inside him.

When Lurie visits Mr. Isaacs in his school office to talk to him about his relationship with Melanie and thus relieve his heart, his justification to the hurt father evokes the same notion of eros as a compelling passion: "'A fire: what is remarkable about that? If a fire goes out, you strike a match and start another one. That is how I used to think. Yet in the olden days people worshipped fire. They thought twice before letting a flame die, a flame-god. It was that kind of flame your daughter kindled in me. Not hot enough to burn me up, but real: real fire.'" (p. 166). In his reasoning, his affair with Melanie is a "last leap of the flame of sense before it goes out" (p. 27). The fire of passion is a consuming one just as it is a sudden spark. At one point in the novel, Lurie identifies himself and his ex-wife Rosalind as "sensualists" and remembers her "long, pale body thrashing this way and that in the throes of a pleasure that was hard to tell from pain" (p. 187). By recklessly pursuing pleasure,[4] Lurie becomes a hedonist seeking self-gratification. And the female is his way toward achieving such gratification, which is why he feels that there is still "something unfinished" in his entanglement with Melanie: "Deep inside him the smell of her is stored, the smell of a mate" (p. 190). The male principle seeking the female one is the essence of eros Lurie models his life after. It is difficult for him to forget Melanie. The humiliation he feels as an old man trying to perfect his masculinity on the body of a young woman is not enough to prevent him from picking a street prostitute once he is temporarily back from the farm to the city (pp.194-5).

While eros does move Lurie, there are things that aided him in most of his sexual conquests. In this sense, Lurie's fall from grace has something to do with a concurrent loss of power. Lurie's infringement of the university's sexual harassment code, by having a sexual liaison with a student, and a colored one in particular as the text and as some characters hint (Cornwell, 2002, p. 315), adds a racial dimension to the power relations of "patriarchy and the academy" (Cornwell, p. 315) already governing the relationship between Lurie and Melanie. By allowing eros to act though him, Lurie abused his academic authority and privileged male status over a female student. Therefore, loss of power—i.e acceptance of disgrace—is a necessary step in his character reformation. In the words of Cornwell, "among the hard lessons that his subsequent experience teaches him is the necessity of a last initiation, one that will cure his 'mad heart' … by deposing Eros and enthroning Agape in its place" (p. 315). In other words, Lurie's love for dying animals and his identification with their suffering, as we will see shortly, are the result of a dramatic shift from carnal, erotic love for women to another form of sympathetic, asexual love. Although Lurie's change is not necessarily religious in nature and although Christian love is not explicitly offered by the novel as an alternative to Lurie's lifestyle, the suggested meanings of "Agape" as charity and communal love still apply to Lurie's case. It is ironic, though, that Lurie's transformation is effected through a new concern for animals rather than humans. Nevertheless, animals better signify the humiliation Lurie is reduced to. Moreover, they signify the strained relations of people in a post-apartheid South Africa.

3. The Body and Ethics

Disgrace dramatizes a shift in the nature of Lurie's motivation form the sensual to the ethical. His eros-driven actions I have elaborated in the previous section become motivated by another form of love, not the sensual one but that of sympathy towards animals. Lurie finds in love of human and animal dignity a response to disgrace as the necessary result of ageing and death. It is a love for the essence of life, for the souls of beings, be they human or animal. Such a pivotal transformation in the course of the novel accounts for his new attention to other forms of life in the country. Lurie sees his new life as that of a dog. Like his daughter Lucy, Lurie learns to accept humiliation and brutalization as part of the historical guilt of his ancestors. He and his daughter, as white South Africans, pay a price for a history of racism against and subjugation of black African people. They know now that they should lead a humiliating life like that of a dog. Negotiating Lucy's plan to give up her land to Petrus, a greedy African worker assisting her in this time of changed power relations, the following exchange takes place between Lurie and his daughter:

> 'How humiliating,' he says finally. 'Such high hopes, and to end like this.'
>
> 'Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.'
>
> 'Like a dog.'
>
> 'Yes, like a dog.' (p. 205)

Just like Lucy, Lurie has to learn to accept his new life of (dis)grace. The humiliation he lives (his disgraced life) is actually marked by the grace he can impart to the lives of disgraced animals like dogs once they are dead. The ending of this father-daughter dialogue is clearly reminiscent of references to dogs in Coetzee's novels like *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983). In this latter novel, for example, Coetzee's titular hero is reduced to an animal's existence, living like a mole in an underground burrow and eating insects in a turbulent South Africa

during the apartheid regime. Lack of dignity is presented by Coetzee as the direct source of disgrace, and animals are used metaphorically to figure such disgrace. While reasons for disgrace can be other than sexual, i.e. political or racial, part of this disgrace Lucy articulates is sexual since she is sexually humiliated by being gang-raped. Just like her father, Lucy experiences the disgrace associated with perverse sexuality. And animals waver between the literal and the metaphorical. Metaphorically, animals figure the depravity and wretchedness of human life. Literally, they are beings which are capable of suffering and pain. Like us, they are creatures with this material substance we call "the body."

Upon his sexual scandal, Lurie visits his daughter in the country. Once he is in her smallholding in the Eastern Cape, he has to come to terms with the ugly realities of corporeal being. Hungry and tired, he is offered food. As he eats, he wants to be careful as "nothing so distasteful to a child as the workings of a parent's body" (p. 61). For some people like Lucy and Bev Shaw, a life we share with animals is the only one we have, with nothing higher (p. 74). Despite Lurie's assertion that we belong to a different rather than essentially higher realm of being (p. 74), the corporeality of the body, especially a maimed one, is what we share with animals. Lurie's consciousness of what it means to be a body that suffers and dies is heightened by his contact with animals. When he enters the cage of a dejected bulldog bitch, he squats down and even "stretches out beside her on the bare concrete" (p. 78). Such apparently disgraceful act is actually full of grace, for Lurie enacts the "start at ground level" Lucy proposes after this encounter with the bulldog bitch. Humiliation in this scene becomes close to humility as indicated by Lurie's sleeping on the "bare concrete." In such an encounter, the presence of animals is metaphorically indicative. In literature and language, "animals provide touchstones for the delineation of human experience" (Randall p. 214). Animals in this sense are in the realm of the body as opposed to the "higher" meanings we attribute to humanity. Their embodiedness corresponds to the baseness of our lives. This is the utter materiality of the body Lurie has to come to terms with, with all the contingent humiliations. Lurie, we should remember, insists on the animals' lack of "proper souls." He insists on their bodily being when he tells his daughter that "'Their souls are tied to their bodies and die with them'" (p. 78). Once he starts helping Bev Shaw at the animal clinic, what he confronts is not only arguments about animal rights by Lucy and Bev Shaw but also a first-hand experience of the suffering of (diseased) animals in Africa, their "disgrace" of dying.

When his daughter is gang-raped, Lurie himself is set on fire and physically assaulted while Lucy's dogs are shot. The material suffering of the body, animal or human, is a common fate. And if the violation Lurie did to the female body of Melanie was under the name of love/desire, such new violations are done with the intention of malice and hatred. They are a perverse form of the eros he experienced earlier. The confession he would like to hear from a black farmer, Petrus, with regard to the event, is "violation" (p. 119), rape as the opposite of eros. Once in his daughter's smallholding in the Eastern Cape and away from Cape Town, Lurie faces new (and violent) realities that aid him in his ethical awakening. Inter-racial hatred, violence, and suffering all contribute to Lurie's changed (and new) worldview.

Violation is also what would come to one's mind when considering Lurie's concern for the two sheep Petrus plans to slaughter for a party. Lurie starts to identify with the suffering animals, with the bodily violations the other receives at our hands. All of a sudden, the lot of the two Persians is important to him (p. 126). "A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how" (p. 126). While this bond is identified as not that of "affection" (p. 126), it is still a variation on ethical love. He enters an unfathomable communion with animals. The change of his indifferent attitude towards animals is signaled by the tears that "flow down his face that he cannot stop" and the shaking of his hands (p. 143) one evening as he goes home after assisting in killing some animals at Animal Welfare Clinic. The "disgrace of dying" (p. 143) touches him just as it touches the animals he assists in killing. Lurie's "whole being is gripped by what happens in the theatre" (p. 143), i.e. by the killing of dogs at the clinic. This new sentiment towards animals is a variation on and replaces the eros that dominated his life previously and with relation to women. Lurie comes to experience the sanctity of life and the wretchedness of dying.

Lurie's conception of the body changes from eros to (dis)honor. He takes special interest in caring about the bodies of the killed dogs by personally taking them to the hospital incinerator and consigning their unwanted bodies to the fire (p. 144), by not allowing their limbs to be broken by the incinerator workmen since such as act dishonors the dignity of life (pp. 144-145). The disgrace of his sex life, eros, is what triggers a newer understanding of the body, its being, and its humiliating materiality. The eros that previously dominated his life and that made him selfishly think about satisfying his desires is now transformed into caring about other bodies, not his body but bodies "unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves" (p. 146). Tremaine asserts that Coetzee "generally represents animals as creatures that suffer humanly inflicted captivity, pain, or death, sometimes resentfully but more often abjectly" (p. 589). This means that animals are reduced to their "embodiedness" by human beings. We degrade them to satisfy our selfish whims. The general suffering of the beasts of Africa Lurie witnesses in the country is a reality that was absent to him in his self-absorbed, academic life.

The disgrace and humiliation Lurie feels because of this new job counter the honor/grace he is transferring to the corpses in the way he treats them. His call is transformed from the erotic to the elegiac, mourning the (dead) body rather than celebrating its desires. The yearning of the body in the Byron opera he is writing (the love between Byron and Teresa and the related fire of passion he tries to bring back to life in his work *Byron in Italy*) is the opposite of his new life in disgrace. If he is still capable of love, it is a different one. It is not the eros that would attract him to other women but the attention he would give to the dying animal: "He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love" (p. 219). Although Lurie resisted other forms of love in his sensual life, he is now able to extend other forms of love to animals and, thus, sublimate his drives toward non-sexual ends. Love for a diseased animal is a

willingness to alleviate its suffering and then, once the animal is dead, to dispose of its body properly. Lurie finally discovers "what it was that was generously trying to flower: not the masculine prerogative always to act upon his desire, as Lucy had put it, but the gifts given to him over the course of his life by many women" (DeKoven, 2009, p. 869). Although Lucy and Bev Shaw did help Lurie in his ethical awakening, I would like to add the word "animals" to DeKoven's "many women." The suffering and violations of women and animals in a post-Apartheid Africa showed Lurie another aspect of life of which he was oblivious. Although this is not to equate the suffering of women with that of animals, the novel highlights the suffering of the unprivileged, dispossessed, and disfranchised. Lurie's exposure to unseemly aspects of life in the country is the cause of this change in his personality. If his sensual love is modified or disguised, then we are talking about a Freudian metamorphosis in his identity. The "new" Lurie is one who is more aware and accepting of the strictures imposed by reality, things like his advancing years, abundant suffering around him, and the politically strained situation of his country. In other words, the pleasure principle he used to follow gives way to the reality principle associated with death and suffering.

4. Coda

At the very end of *Disgrace*, Lurie gives up a crippled dog he has developed an affinity with for a lethal injection (p. 220). He bears the animal in his arms "like a lamb" as he enters the surgery (p. 220). "'I thought you would save him for another week,' says Bev Shaw. 'Are you giving him up?' 'Yes, I am giving him up'" (p. 220). Giving up is apparently the opposite of caring or our absolute obligation to the other in Levinasean terms. However, Lurie carries the animal this way because now he has no problem in treating it with affection, with "particular fondness" (p. 215). In a sense, he is saving the sacrificial animal from the disgrace of a life of disability and thus loving it rather than giving it up. The animal seems to reciprocate Lurie's gesture of love, for as he opens his arms the dog "sniffs his face, licks his cheeks, his lips, his ears" (p. 220). It is significant that Lurie begins to love this particular dog which no one else showed an interest in adopting (p. 215), and thus loving. Considering Lurie's and his daughter's multifold disgrace in this novel, one can argue that this act is symbolic. If their disgrace is complete now, they have no future in this post-apartheid Africa except that of the diseased/unwanted dogs which are disposed of. From another perspective, Lurie is probably shedding off an unwanted aspect of his life, that animalistic side of unwieldy desire. In a sense, he is giving up a former life of eros in favor of a life of self-denial dedicated to feeding and cleaning animals and then ferrying their corpses to a hospital's incinerator. According to Kossew, the novel records "the collision between private and public worlds; intellect and body; desire and love; and public disgrace or shame and the idea of individual grace or salvation" (p. 155). In attempting to save the disabled dog from the disgrace of disability, and from being unwanted, Lurie is also saving himself, offering value and meaning to his life. Hence, Coetzee's conception of the body has an undeniable ethical dimension that problematizes the whole notion of eros.

Coetzee's *Disgrace* is important because it confirms a shift in Coetzee's perception of literature from politics to ethics or simply problematizes the relationship between ethics and politics. Coetzee has dealt with the problem of representing politics in fiction in his apartheid fictions written before 1994, and here in this post-apartheid novel he interrogates how literature relates to ethical issues. This does not mean that the novel is devoid of political themes. For example, the novel can be discussed in terms of the politics of interracial violence since Lurie's daughter is sexually violated by black men and she herself feels complicit with the power structures that contributed to her victimization. However, the brand of politics we have here is ethically nuanced. Alternatively put, the ethical thrust of this novel delivers political messages about our egocentric desires and apathy towards the suffering of others.

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Endnotes

[1] Actually, Derek Attridge (2004) differs from the mainstream of Coetzee's scholarship by offering literal readings as events. See his book *Coetzee & the Ethics of Reading*. Moreover, in an article I co-authored with Fatima Muhaidat (2012), we argued that Coetzee's apartheid fiction has an inclusive and early ethical vision that extends to animals and plants. Using *Life and Times of Michael K*, we discussed Coetzee's ethicopolitical vision. i.e. the overlap between politics and ethics or an ethically rooted politics. See References.

[2] Lurie, married twice and divorced twice, is thus leading an empty emotional life. At the professional level, things are not better. He was relegated from a professor of linguistics and literature at Cape University to an adjunct lecturer in communications in the same institution, now called Cape Technical University.

[3] Coetzee (1988) in an early article entitled "The Novel Today" goes against "a powerful tendency to subsume the novel under history" (p. 2). Although this necessarily means that the novel should not be subsumed under ethics either, this does not deny Coetzee's fiction its ethical orientation.

[4] In his recklessness and dangerous lifestyle, Lurie is a Satanic figure. For more on the analogy between Lurie and Lucifer as solitary creatures driven by impulses and falling into a state of disgrace, see Brittan (2010, p. 485). In fact, Lurie partakes in the characteristics of the Byronic hero in his daring nature and outcast condition. The Byron poem "Lara" he teaches to his students is significant as it is about the fallen angel Lucifer. He reads aloud to his students:

> He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
>
> An erring spirit from another hurled;
>
> A thing of dark imaginings, that shaped
>
> By choice the perils he by chance escaped. (p. 32)

Coleman rightly says that "Lurie is drawn to the satanic; he identifies with it. If he were to choose a totem it would be the snake. He has even made an academic study of the origins of the Faust legend" (p. 611). Actually, Lucy hints at this association between Lurie and the satanic when she tells him during a conversation when he volunteers to work at the clinic provided that this work is not looked at as an attempt at reforming himself: "'So you are determined to go on being bad. Mad, bad, and dangerous to know. I promise, no one will ask you to change'" (p. 77). In defying norms, Lurie lived a dangerous life.