



Male-male relationships in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*¹

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Abstract

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Kochin (2002:8) makes the following interesting observation regarding the life of the main character, David Lurie, in Coetzee's novel, "Disgrace" (1999), and his observation will be explored in detail when analysing the novel, and in particular the presentation of masculinities: "Lurie has no relationship of depth with men. His one effort is with Isaacs, Melanie's father, and 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." The focus of my investigation is on male-male relationships and the way in which they impact on the other characters in the novel. What contribution does the novel make to the debate on masculinity within the context of South African literary studies?

Opsomming

Man-manverhoudings in J.M. Coetzee se *Disgrace*

Kochin (2002:8) maak die volgende insiggewende opmerking oor die lewe van die hoofkarakter, David Lurie, in Coetzee se roman, "Disgrace" (1999). Sy uitgangspunt sal in meer detail ondersoek word in hierdie bespreking, en in die besonder sy voorstelling van manlikheid: "Lurie het geen diepgaande verhouding met ander mans nie. Sy een poging is wel met Isaacs, Melanie se vader, maar dit wil voorkom asof dit meer 'n

1 This article is based on a chapter from Crous (2005) completed under the supervision of Prof. A.H. Gagiano, University of Stellenbosch.

soektog na die redes vir Melanie se skoonheid is, as die begeerte om vriende met 'n ander man te wees." Die klem val in my ondersoek op die man-manverhoudings in die roman en die invloed daarvan op die ander karakters in die roman. Watter bydrae lewer die roman tot die debat oor manlikheid binne die konteks van die Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde?

1. Introduction

J.M. Coetzee's eighth novel, *Disgrace*,² was published in 1999 and earned him his second Booker Prize. In the editorial of a special edition of the journal *scrutiny*,² which deals almost exclusively with *Disgrace*, Leon de Kock (2002) observes that, "not since the aftermath of an earlier metatext by Coetzee, *Foe*, have we seen such multiples of invested, engaged and argumentative critical writing about a South African author". Some of the readings of the novel have alluded to the theme of masculinity that forms the basis of this article and focus on Lurie's "mid-life male recklessness" (Ram, 1999), his "taste for exotic women" (Horrell, 2002), his concern as a father for his daughter (Azoulay, 2002) and on him as "a kind of representative man" (Kunkel, 1999) when he is reduced to basically the same level as the dogs, as "a packet of flesh without transcendent meaning" (Kunkel, 1999).

Kochin makes the following interesting observation regarding the life of the main character, David Lurie. It will be explored in detail when analysing the novel, and in particular the presentation of masculinities: "Lurie has no relationship of depth with men. His one effort is with Isaacs, Melanie's father, and 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" (Kochin, 2002:8).

2. Masculinity and friendship

In his essay entitled, "Friendship, intimacy and sexuality", Messner (2001:253-265) examines the issue of male friendship extensively. According to him women usually have "deep, intimate, meaningful, and lasting friendships", whereas men have "a number of shallow, superficial, and unsatisfying acquaintances" (Messner, 2001:253) – which I find a somewhat sexist generalisation. The main reason for this shallow nature of men's friendships is the way in which men are brought up. They are taught to be homophobic, not to express their

2 Page references refer to Coetzee (1999).

emotions and to be competitive towards other men. Men enjoy each other's company during sporting activities, for example, because within the framework of such activities there is no threat to what Messner (2001:254) describes as their "fragile masculine identities". On the sports field men can relate to one another without the development of intimacy between them. The danger inherent to such assumptions, according to Messner (2001:255), is that men's friendships are examined "against the standard of the type of intimate relationships that women tend to develop" and one needs to ask the question: How are (men's) friendships with each other affected by – and in turn how do they affect – their attitudes toward and relationships with women? Is there a definite "displacement of the erotic toward women as objects of sexual talk and practice" (Messner, 2001:258) and are women merely seen as "objects of sexual conquest" in order for men to gain status within the male peer group?

Nardi (2001:289) points out that friendship entails "an element of community building, mobilizing and effecting social change" resulting in some form of heteronormativity of the dominant culture. The latter is often evident in "the pomp and posturings of virility" (Woods, 1993:168) displayed by men during which they, ironically enough, display the so-called vices associated with women, namely "shallowness, narcissism, flirtatiousness, immodesty, lack of critical distance and sentimentality" (Woods, 1993:168). Male friendships, especially when conducted in public, are "scrutinizable, regulable, controllable, manipulable" (Culbertson, 1996:171) in an attempt to guard against behaviour not befitting a man. Should men attempt some form of intimacy within their relationship, there is often a so-called triangular relationship with a woman who functions as a disguise for the men's "homosocial behaviour". The latter term was coined by Sedgwick (1992:1) and she explains it as follows: "Homosocial is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'."³

In contrast to male friendships based on some form of machismo where men's bodies are portrayed as violent, controlling, often

3 See Heyns (1998 [1994]:108-122) for a thorough application of this theory in his reading of selected gay texts written during the so-called State of Emergency in South Africa.

"preoccupied with phallic values or disconnected from close male friendship" (Nelson, 1996:313), Doty (1996:186) suggests "co-operation and reciprocity, exchange and alliance" as important for the wellbeing of society.⁴

3. Male-male relationships in *Disgrace*

A central passage that deals with the issue of male-male friendship in *Disgrace* will be examined below:

'I'm all right. Light burns, nothing serious. I'm sorry we've ruined your evening.'

'Nonsense!' says Bill Shaw. 'What else are friends for? You would have done the same.'

Spoken without irony, the words stay with him and will not go away. Bill Shaw believes that if he, Bill Shaw, had been hit over the head and set on fire, then he, David Lurie, would have driven to the hospital and sat waiting, without so much as a newspaper to read, to fetch him home. Bill Shaw believes that, because he and David Lurie once had a cup of tea together, David Lurie is his friend, and the two of them have obligations towards each other. Is Bill Shaw right or wrong? Has Bill Shaw, who was born in Hankey, not two hundred kilometres away, and works in a hardware shop, seen so little of the world that he does not know there are men who do not readily make friends, whose attitude towards friendship between men is corroded with scepticism? Modern English *friend* from Old English *freond*, from *freon*, to love. Does the drinking of tea seal a love-bond, in the eyes of Bill Shaw? Yet but for Bill and Bev Shaw, but for old Ettinger, but for bonds of some kind, where would he be now? On the ruined farm with the broken telephone amid the dead dogs (p. 101-102).

The cited contemplation on friendship occurs in the novel immediately after the rape incident on the farm (p. 91-97) and deals in particular with the way in which people in the rural areas interact and are interdependent on one another. From the passage we learn that David has always looked at male-male friendships with a sense of scepticism and has always been distrustful of such unions. The

4 Compare in this regard Gagiano (2001:31-46) for an examination of machismo within the African context, exemplified in the novel of Mphahlele. She distinguishes between a "benign form of masculinity" and a more "dominant or hegemonic masculinity".

reference to the “drinking of tea” not only calls to mind the old saying of “tea and sympathy” but also evokes associations with the ritual sharing of some or other cup as to seal a friendship. “Tea” is also associated with the settlers, in particular the white English-speaking settlers, and the act suggests a sense of cultural civility in the harsh rural landscape. There is definite opposition between “hardware store” and “drinking of tea” since the former belongs to the domain of men and the latter, traditionally, to the domestic domain of women. The reference to the hardware store also suggests David Lurie’s condescension towards the “[c]ountry ways” (p. 65) and towards a small town shop clerk who has seen “so little of the world” – in comparison to the cosmopolitan David with his knowledge of opera (he is composing one himself) and his love of “Beethoven and Janaček” (p. 176). Bill Shaw, however, is characterised as someone who could combine these two elements in his personality. Out of necessity, David is forced by circumstances to accept the friendship of the strange men in the area surrounding Lucy’s farm and become part of their interdependent group of friends. There is indeed, as Doty (quoted above) suggests, “co-operation and reciprocity, exchange and alliance” among the settlers in the Eastern Cape and David is forced to adapt to the new dispensation, just as Lucy does when she accepts Petrus’ proposal to marry and take care of her (p. 202).

3.1 David and Hakim

One could also contrast this sense of bonding to David’s experiences with other men in the urban context, in particular his attitude towards Aram Hakim and the other men serving on the committee that has to investigate the claims of sexual harassment against him. Hakim, “sleek and youthful” (p. 40), is the Vice-Rector and has been a friend of David’s for years. They used to play tennis together (p. 42). Hakim’s attempts to support David during the trial and to provide him with some advice are derided by David as mere “male chumminess” (p. 42). In their case their friendship is based on some mutual interests: they are both academics and they play tennis together. Their male-male bonding fits with the often stereotypical assumption about such friendships (see also Messner, 2001), namely that they only occur within a sporting context. Hakim transgresses the heteronormative boundaries of such friendships when he expresses sympathy for David and cautions him to get legal advice (p. 41). For Hakim their friendship seems to extend beyond merely tennis playing together and he is really concerned about David’s wellbeing (“These things can be hell”, p. 42). This is

indeed evident during the hearing when Hakim tells him straightforwardly that they “would like to help [him]” so that David can find “a way out of what must be a nightmare” (p. 52).

David's reaction to the concern of his friends, in particular that of his close male colleagues,⁵ is that they want to secure his future as an academic and do not want to see him “begging the streets” (p. 52). They are also very aware of the fact that they too have had “their weak moments” (p. 52) and may have harassed their students in the past. This is echoed by Lucy when she talks to her father about sexual harassment and observes that if “they prosecuted every case of [sexual harassment] the profession would be decimated” (p. 66). Both his daughter and his male colleagues feel sympathetic towards him, yet their “chorus of goodwill” (p. 52) is an irritation to him. Interestingly enough, apart from Lucy, there is “no female voice” (p. 52) among his colleagues to support him. This is self-explanatory: the female characters side with the female victim, probably because they have suffered in the past as well. This explains why Farida Rassool wants “the severest penalty” (p. 51) and typifies his stubbornness in refusing to co-operate as “quixotic” (p. 49).

In the context of the hearing, when David's female colleagues act in a “coldly formalistic way” (p. 51), it subverts the sexist assumption that men are intellectual and formal in their conduct, whereas women tend to be more emotional. The male colleagues are the ones who feel that David should confess and, in doing so, expose his vulnerability. In an act befitting Archbishop Desmond Tutu before the Truth Commission, the aptly named Desmond Swarts pleads “one last time” (p. 53) that David should make some form of statement. He admonishes David not to “sneer at [their] efforts” (p. 54) and merely wants him to acknowledge that what he did was wrong.⁶

5 The female characters, Farodia Rasool and Elaine Winter are not presented as being sympathetic towards David. Elaine Winter, his departmental chair, is described as someone who has never liked David, because she regarded him as “a hangover from the past” (p. 40) – probably a patriarchal, white male remnant of the past dispensation.

6 Compare in this regard Poyner (2000:67-77), who reads the trial of David Lurie as “an allegory of the troubled Truth and Reconciliation Commission within the context of a nation in transition”. Bonthuys (2002:60) also comments on the difference in viewpoint of Lucy and her father on the issue of reconciliation. Samuelson (2003:63-76) uses this novel as a point of departure for a lengthier discussion on “selected fictional narratives that explicitly respond to the TRC”.

Evidently what is being portrayed here is a new form of masculinity. Du Pisani (2001:171) has pointed out that in the new post-apartheid South Africa there has been a loss of political power for Afrikaner men in particular, but white males generally feel “threatened by affirmative action and gender equality”. Whereas academics could probably have got away with harassment in the past, now it is no longer possible and David Lurie signifies the new male, the one who is supposed to accept responsibility for his sexual misconduct. On the one hand his colleagues want to secure his position as an academic because if affirmative action is applied, he would not find a new position easily – and there has already been “great rationalization” (p. 3) at their institution. In this regard David mentions to Lucy that he is “no longer marketable” (p. 88) and will always be associated with the scandal. On the other hand we have the female academics who want to implement the policies of gender equality and see to it that he is punished for his deeds. Whereas his male colleagues have started to “unlearn [their] privileges as [their] loss” (Spivak, 1996:4) and go along with the new gender-sensitive environment with its “[r]e-formation of the character” (p. 66), David alleges that he has an old-fashioned nature and refuses to do so.

To David, to apologise in public and acknowledge his transgressions would be similar to some form of castration (p. 66). He would rather be “put against a wall and shot” (p. 66) than confess. His mindset is ruled by the old notion of heroic masculinity, which prescribes that one should rather die an honourable death than admit defeat or betray one’s ideals. In modern terms, one could rephrase this notion and say: rather suffer the consequences than show one’s emotions and confess openly. Poyner (2000:70) has indicated that David seeks “his own, private form of redemption” and therefore refuses to confess. Krog (2004:130) points out that the rape of Lucy eventually “exposes Lurie’s moral bankruptcy” and he wants Lucy to “make it public”, something which he himself is not prepared to do in the case of Melanie Isaacs.

David views the investigation by his colleagues as an attempt to force him to engage in “breast-beating” (p. 66) and to show “remorse, tears if possible” (p. 66). He also regards their investigation as “a spectacle” (p. 66) and feels that they want to castrate him (p. 66). This is an important issue, especially since it comments overall on the issue of masculinity, and it calls to mind Freud’s theory of castration anxiety and the castration complex. According to Badcock (1988:179) this can be briefly explained as follows: “A system of unconscious representations centering on fear of castration and related to infantile sexual theories which sees

females as castrated males and castration as punishment for sexual sins." David's silencing of the self not to utter the word "castration" to his daughter, could be read as a Freudian slip because, unconsciously, he feels that he is being punished for his "sexual sins" with the prostitutes, the girlfriends, and in particular with Melanie Isaacs.⁷

To David confessing his sins would be on the same level as losing his phallic power. The latter refers not to the literal amputation of his sexual organ, but rather to the symbolic attributes associated with the phallus as "an empty marker of difference" (Eagleton, 1985:168). Phallic power implies accepting the law of the father within patriarchal society, severing all ties with the maternal body and identifying oneself as a subject in relation to others around you. Segal (2001:103-104) shows that the phallus is responsible for "an ineluctable bond between male sexuality and power" and argues that society tends to sustain the symbolic power of the phallus. The result thereof is that "men's sexual coerciveness towards women has been socially tolerated, often, indeed both expected and encouraged." David, the "lover of women" and "womanizer" (p. 3), the man who was enriched by each of the women he was involved with (p. 192), and especially David, the older man who has to act his age, will lose his sexual prowess and energy should he allow himself to be admonished for his sexual sins. He will no longer represent the norms attributed to hegemonic masculinity and be able to hide his vulnerabilities and weaknesses. He will no longer fit the hegemonic definition of manhood as "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power" (Kimmel, 2001:272).

When Ettinger offers to lend one of his guns to David (p. 113), it could be read as a neighbour's good intention to help safeguard life on the farm, but it also suggests that David as subject is offered a substitute phallus. The gun is usually a phallic symbol, "a symbol of

7 David Lurie was brought up in an all female household and "[h]is childhood was spent in a family of women" (p. 7) and this has made of him "a lover of women" (p. 7) and "a womanizer" (p. 7). He calls his life "an anxious flurry of promiscuity" (p. 7). This is supported by Rosalind when she talks of "[j]ust [his] type" (p. 189) and mentions his "inamorata", "quick flings" and "peccadilloes" (p. 189) – all of which suggests his love of quick amorous affairs and petty indiscretions, even while they were married. He has never been a faithful husband to her. This also echoes Mr. Isaacs' remark: "We put our children in the hands of you people because we think we can trust you" (p. 38), which reiterates the almost predatory nature of David's sexual promiscuity. Supporting his favourite Romantic poet, Byron's ideas, David believes that a woman should share her beauty (p. 16) – but "beauty" could also mean "the sweet young flesh" (p. 150) that he so much desires and wants to abuse for his own pleasure.

male power and aggression” or “the ultimate weapon of patriarchy to penetrate and possess women” (Poe, 2003:6). Ettinger is always carrying his Beretta in a holster at his hip (p. 100) and this symbolises phallic masculinity and phallic power. After the attack, when discussing it with Ettinger, David asks, “if he had had a gun, would he have saved Lucy?” (p. 100). By making this obvious link between the gun and the protection of his daughter, David inextricably links phallic power to the protection of women, and in particular to fulfilling his role as father and protector of his family. Kossew and Schwerdt (2001:133) are of the opinion that the guns and dogs in this novel are “emblematic of a society trying in vain to protect itself from the violence within”, particularly since the violence “has taken up residence inside the once-hallowed white domestic spaces of the suburban block or the farmhouse.” To expand on this, I would propose that Lucy’s keeping of a gun could be read as signifying the possession of a substitute phallus. It is her way of exemplifying a sense of power in the realm usually associated with the male frontiersman and farmer. Ironically, the attackers take this rifle (p. 95) and use it during the brutal attack on the farm to shoot the dogs, and in doing so they rob her of this substitute phallus and relegate her to the role of sexual object, victim and, later on, mother of an illegitimate child. Lucy is seen by her own father as someone who is “lost to men” (p. 76) because of her “Sapphic love” (p. 86) for other women, whereas Petrus observes that she is “as good as a boy” (p. 130). Elsewhere David contemplates whether it is worse “to rape a lesbian ... than [to rape] a virgin” (p. 105). Heterosexual men often resent gay women for not having “need of men” (p. 104), and therefore such women need to be taught a lesson. David suggests this when, according to him, “the word [has] got around” (p. 105) that Lucy was gay and that she had to be violated. The fact that David is musing over “what women do together [sexually]” (p. 86) and whether they “need to make the beds creak” (p. 86) is another example of the heterosexual man’s stereotypical obsession with gay women and their sexuality.

On a sexual level, David also experiences a form of castration, because up to the rape incident he has been a womaniser, and a man who, according to Rosalind, loves young women with “[c]unning little weasel [bodies]” (p. 189). His relations almost have undertones of a kind of father-daughter incest and he feels protective towards his girlfriends. In this regard one can compare, for instance, making the bed for Melanie in his daughter’s room and later making love to her in the same bed (p. 26-27). Significant is that unconsciously he wanted to ask her, “Tell *Daddy* what is wrong” (p. 26 – MC). His

symbolic castration is underpinned by the fact that he now has to resort to an affair with the motherly, caring Bev Shaw, who is definitely not sexually attractive to him ("He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive"; p. 72). David has an obsession with beautiful women, and it is ironic that the first thing he observes about Lucy when he visits her is the fact that "she has put on weight" (p. 59). Yet, when he learns of Lucy's pregnancy he finally has to admit to himself that old age has taken over and "[w]hat pretty girl can he expect to be wooed into bed with a grandfather?" (p. 217).

There are other male-male relationships in the novel that could definitely not be described as friendships per se. For the sake of analysis, they could be contrasted to the friendships between David, Hakim, Bill Shaw and Ettinger, and these are David's relationships with Petrus, Ryan and Mr. Isaacs.

3.2 David and Petrus

Kochin (2002:14) alleges that Petrus is treated as a neighbour because of David's white guilt, and Petrus is ready to "manipulate this guilt as well". I want to suggest that one could go as far as interpreting the relationship between the two men as the inability to accept the other as an equal and, ensuing from that, the inability to form a friendship with the other. David remarks that there "was a time when he thought he might become friends with Petrus" (p. 152) but because of Petrus's decision to allow Pollux to stay with him ("He is my family, my people" – p. 201) and because David feels that Petrus is "not an innocent party" (p. 133) when it comes to the rape of Lucy, he detests Petrus. There is a distinct class difference between the two men, with one being from the urban middle class and the other from the working class in the rural areas, but David as the intellectual from the city is also aware of class differences between him and Bill Shaw, for instance. Under the old apartheid dispensation black men were, in the words of Majors (2001:210), "rendered invisible" or viewed as "helpless victims of a racist system" and there was a definite institutionalised decimation of black males. In *Disgrace* Petrus represents the new black male, the post-apartheid black man who is rendered *visible*. He is a landowner, a "co-proprietor" of a piece of land (p. 62) owned by a white woman. The fact that the farm belongs to Lucy is also significant since, as Du Pisani (2001:158) shows, the white farmer in the South African context has always been a man typifying virtues such as being "simple, honest, steadfast, religious and hard-working". In addition to the farm being owned by a woman, one should also remember that she is a lesbian. In this portrayal of life on the farm there is indeed,

as Poyner (2000:72) suggests, “a shift from white patriarchal authority to black” – and there is a distinct deconstruction of the typical rural scenario pertaining to gender roles and racial identities. Gagiano (2004:45) writes that Petrus is constantly “expanding [his] patriarchal land ownership scheme” and one way of “legitimis[ing]” his claim on the land is to marry Lucy. Krog (2004:128) comments on the relationship between David and Petrus and observes that “the eye and behaviour of Lurie are virtually the same as the eye and behaviour of Petrus.” She calls Petrus “the antagonist or the [morally bankrupt] mirror image of [a morally bankrupt] Professor Lurie” and states that although David Lurie does not see himself as “a white version of Petrus” (Krog, 2004:131) the text provides us with “enough convincing parallels to make Petrus and Lurie echo each other in troubling ways” (Krog, 2004:131).

Initially the impression is created in the text that Petrus “does what needs to be done, and that is that” (p. 116). Petrus is presented as co-proprietor of Lucy’s farm (p. 62) but he is also “the gardener and the dog-man” (p. 64) for Lucy. From David’s first conversation with Petrus (p. 64) one deduces that he uses simple language to address the worker and his language suggests the stereotypical way in which white people generally address black people, particularly black people of the working class. In contrast to David’s patronising treatment of Petrus, Lucy entrusts him with the right measurement for the spray and mentions that “[h]e has his head screwed on right” (p. 64). Whereas working the land and making a living from it is a necessity for Petrus, to David it becomes a way of passing the time, although “his fingers are soon too cold” (p. 70) to do the job properly. David turns Petrus into an object of study because to him “it is an education to watch [Petrus]” (p. 137) at work. Compare also in this regard David’s description of Petrus as “[a] good peasant” (p. 118) who provides David with several “reading[s]” (p. 118) of Petrus’s involvement in the attack. The description of the “anthropological” search for the truth and the use of “an interpreter” (p. 118) also confirm that Petrus and his ways of doing are objects of knowledge that needs to be analysed.⁸ Whereas both Lucy and Bev Smith regard Petrus as “solid” and “dependable” (p. 171), David remains suspicious of him and cannot accept the new dispensation in which Lucy will become “part of [Petrus]’ establishment” (p. 203) and form “an alliance” or “[a] deal” (p. 203) with the man who is

8 Compare Gagiano (2004:48; note 18) for an analysis of the use of the word *anthropological* in this context.

allegedly indirectly involved in the attack on Lucy. On the farm, where David has realised that he has never been a proper father to Lucy, as was pointed out above, he comes to the conclusion that "[they] live too close to Petrus" (p. 127) and it feels like "sharing a house with strangers" (p. 127). He cannot befriend the man who is Lucy's surrogate father ("Fatherly Petrus"; p. 162) and protector – especially since he was unable to fulfill this role during the attack on the farm. The presence of Petrus would always act as a reminder of his inability "to be a good person" (p. 216) and perhaps develop "an eye for rural life" (p. 218).

3.3 David and Ryan

Another example of male-male interaction between David and another man is found in his dealings with Ryan, Melanie's boyfriend. Sedgwick (1992:21) posits that within a particular erotic triangle the bond between the rivals is "even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices" than is the case with the bond "between either of the lovers and the beloved". We learn little about the interaction between Melanie and Ryan, who, according to the focaliser's description "looks like trouble" (p. 30), but through Ryan's interaction with David we learn not only about his machismo, but also indirectly about Melanie's emotional instability following the relationship with David – albeit as interpreted and conveyed by a third party, namely Ryan.

Ryan is able to unnerve David Lurie and acts as some form of conscience when it comes to Melanie Isaacs: "And don't think you can just walk into people's lives and walk out again when it suits you" (p. 30). David is forced to test his assumptions and masculine identity against that of Ryan, the younger, more virile man: always wearing black, the colour representative of "the younger generation rather than the product of racial discrimination" (Azoulay, 2002:36). Ryan also reminds David of his age and his transgression as a lecturer and figure of authority, as well as his inability to continue his relationship with Melanie without being reprimanded by the authorities. He is also the one who tells David to forget about Melanie and to "find [himself] another life" (p. 194).

The interaction between David and Ryan is characterised by overt displays of macho behaviour. For example, Ryan is crude ("That you fuck her."; p. 30), he threatens David and vandalises his car (p. 31). His overt display of machismo often occurs within David's personal space (e.g. the office) or in David's domain of authority, namely his lecture (p. 31-33). The reference to the "erring spirit" (p. 32) or

Lucifer is significant in this context, since indirectly David sees his rival also as some type of Lucifer figure. The boyfriend not only has some form of control over Melanie, but also silences the rest of the class (“They will not speak, they will not play his game, as long as a stranger is there to listen and judge and mock”; p. 32). The battle over the desired female is fought within an intellectual context and the two men wish to humiliate one another. True to his haughty nature, David shuns the boyfriend as being the stereotypical possessor of “motorcycles and flashy clothes” (p. 33) and nothing more. During their final confrontation in the theatre David derides him for being childish (p. 194), but has to accept his final fall from grace. He is no longer virile and sexually attractive to Melanie and has to resort to having sex with a drunken prostitute.

3.4 David and Mr. Isaacs

The relationship between David and Melanie Isaacs’ father is significant. After their first meeting Mr. Isaacs comments, albeit in an ironic manner, that Melanie “has such respect for [David]” (p. 37), but that the sense of naïve trust that both father and daughter put in the university and its lecturers is violated: “If we can’t trust the university, who can we trust?” (p. 38). In an attempt to get “something [of his] heart” (p. 167) David visits the Isaacs family and, in an unprecedented gesture, he “gets to his knees and touches his forehead to the floor” (p. 173). This dramatic act of contrition is, as Diala (2001:57) points out, futile because whilst undertaking this gesture David is “afire with lust for [Melanie’s sister]”. She reminds him of Melanie and immediately he sees her, there is the urge to touch her (p. 164).

David seems apprehensive to speak to Mr. Isaacs, because Mr. Isaacs does not like him and he “does not like his tricks” (p. 173), which underpins the notion that David is not really serious about coming clean. He is there out of curiosity and does not want Mr. Isaacs with his small town ideas and his religion to prescribe to him, especially when the latter tells him that David is on a path “that God has ordained for [him]” (p. 174). One could suggest that Mr. Isaacs realises that David is not really there to ask for forgiveness, but that he was conveniently in the vicinity and there was always the possibility of seeing Melanie again. Perhaps David’s unease with Mr. Isaacs is based on the fact that the latter sees through him and, as a devoted Christian, does not want to give him the absolution that he seeks in a way similar to his dramatic gesture at the feet of both mother and daughter. Mr. Isaacs as representative of the other acts in this scene as some type of mentor figure and friend who assists

David on his journey of self-interrogation and relinquishing of his egocentric past. It is interesting to note that, as is the case with Petrus (and Ryan), David manages to invade the private space of the male other, but does not want to relinquish his patriarchal power. Nor does he want to accept that within the space of the other he is no longer in charge.

4. Conclusion

According to Sedgwick (1992:66) in some instances of male-male interaction, there is no sense of "brotherhood, but of extreme, compulsory, and intensely volatile mastery and subordination". In this novel under discussion we have a sense of this in the portrayal of the power struggle between two men, each representing a different generation. On the one hand we have the middle-aged professor who has to learn to relinquish his desire for younger women and learn "grandfatherhood" (p. 218), representing the white male from the old apartheid order, and on the other we have the young urban macho man with his "ear-ring and goatee" (p. 193) representing the new post-apartheid order. It is evident that masculinity associated with Romantic ideals about love and, concomitant to that, a Byronic lascivious pursuit of younger women (presented by David) has to make way for a form of enigmatic and macho masculinity (presented by Ryan). If we include Pollux and the rapists in this comparison, we could infer from their conduct that post-apartheid masculinity is associated with some form of homosocial behaviour (the rapists are compared to "dogs in a pack"; p. 159) in which men act together, are sexually violent, especially when it comes to women, and protect one another (Petrus takes care of the young Pollux, for instance). The latter remark underpins what Gagiano (1999:5) writes about the novel, namely that it "endorses and legitimises a number of prevalent stereotypes – particularly in its depiction of racial identities (and shifting roles) within the dispensation following the formal end of apartheid rule".⁹ The novel suggests that post-apartheid masculinity, and in particular black masculinity, has very little regard for the bodies of women, and

9 Connell (2001:41) comments extensively on the stereotypical view on the black rapist and his symbolism within white right-wing politics. The following remark by Krog is apposite in this regard: "[M]any black readers feel uncomfortable that they are once again stereotyped as unfair brutes cruelly depriving well-educated white men of their rightful lives" (Krog, 2004:134). For a more extensive commentary on Coetzee's role as social commentator on South Africa, see Gagiano (2004).

white women in particular. Does that support the idea posited by Fanon (1967:63) that the body of the white woman is associated with “white civilization and dignity” or is it a case of “the quest for white flesh” (Fanon, 1967:81)?¹⁰ In support of this one can take, for example, the incident in which the young boy Pollux returns to the farm and peers in through the bathroom window to peep at Lucy taking a bath (p. 206). When Pollux is confronted by David in an attempt to save his daughter’s honour – having failed the first time – the boy’s reaction is quite meaningful: “We will kill you all!” (p. 207). Although this reaction is blamed on his being “mentally deficient” (p. 208), it could also be read as support of Fanon’s notion of the white female body being unattainable and out of reach. The following remark by Messner (2001:263) is applicable here:

Though [such] structured denigration of women truly does hurt young males, in terms of making the development of true intimacy with women more difficult to develop, ultimately, it is women – the ‘prey’ – who pay the price for young men’s fear of intimacy with each other.

This links with the whole notion of a lack of ethical behaviour in the new South Africa, as is portrayed in the novel. Men do not respect women and the political changes in the country “have not affected the base of sociality, that is, the way in which the individual conceives of his/her fellow relations to his/her fellow human beings” (Marais, 2000:3).¹¹

In contrast to the ideal that the new male has to accept responsibility for his sexual misconduct, post-apartheid masculinity is portrayed in the novel as being avaricious and selfish. In order to improve one’s social standing and gain possession of the land, one is even willing to commit sexual violence to instill fear and acquire new land in the process – as is alleged by David about Petrus. A distinct link is made between the male appropriation of land and the appropriation and domination of the female body. Or as Xaba (2001:119) writes:

10 This is also suggested by David when he compares the rape of his daughter to “mating” (p. 199). The attack was meant “to soil her” (p. 199) and “to mark her” (p. 199). Compare also Krog (2004:133) in this regard: “[S]ymbolically Lucy bears the brunt of the actions of her father – the deeds of one generation visited upon the next. In a sense, one could say that Lucy is raped by her own father.”

11 The issue of ethics forms the basis of several readings of the novel (see Marais, 2000; 2001 and Clarkson, 2003).

[I]t is no secret that the knife-edge life of violent crime is eminently more remunerative than the palliatives offered by the Adult Basic Education and Life Skills programmes in which former 'comrades' and 'exiles' are expected to enrol [in the new South Africa].¹²

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12 Compare the remark by Marais (2000) that at the end of the novel we come to the realisation that "[the] history of violent conflict is still in progress and that it is played out, in miniature, on the smallholding."

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Key concepts:

Coetzee, J.M.: *Disgrace*
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Kernbegrippe:

Coetzee, J.M.: *Disgrace*
man-manverhoudings
manlike vriendskappe
manlikheid