An Investigation of Masculinity in J.M. Coetzee’s
*Disgrace* (1999)

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DECLARATION

I declare that “An Investigation of Masculinity in J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace (1999)”, is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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ABSTRACT

The study of Masculinity is a fairly new phenomenon which developed as a refinement of gender studies. The theoretical frameworks on masculinity are still under development and are often severely contested. This study proposes to examine the dynamics of masculinity studies, critiquing the notion of ‘masculinity in crisis’.

The premise of the masculinity in crisis debate is that men are experiencing an increasing sense of powerlessness. This dissertation aims to examine the masculine identities represented in Disgrace and to test whether they are better understood through the lens of masculine theory. The disgraceful situation of David Lurie is arguably not merely a result of hapless circumstance, but rather illustrates significant parallels with the crisis debate. The basic premise of this debate is that the behaviour previously condoned and applauded as healthy 'manliness' is now being labelled as anti-social and destructive. It is not just masculine roles that are under threat. Other forces behind the crisis are “the loss of masculine rights and changes in the pattern of employment” (Beynon 2002:75). One view held by theorists of masculinity studies is that for real change to occur, a fluid definition of masculine identity is needed. In J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace (1999), the main protagonist is David Lurie. He may arguably be said to typify a masculinity that is in a state of crisis because of his stoic refusal throughout the novel to change or reform: “I was offered a compromise, which I would not accept”, he says, and: “Re-education. Reformation of the character. The code word was counselling” (1999:66). His aversion to such counselling and refusal to compromise mark his resistance to change.

Much has already been said about the novel’s protagonist, David Lurie. Of the most striking commentaries is most reader’s distaste of lack of empathy towards the main character. Although he is posited as a main character he is far from begin a hero, in fact has many characteristics of the anti-hero. One of the primary definitions of an antihero, according to M.H. Abrams is:
The chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that which we associate with the traditional protagonist or hero of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest. (Abrams 1999:11)

David Lurie does conform to most of the characteristics attributed to the antihero, as he can be easily read as a figure that is passive and ineffectual. He is also described as a “deceiver” and even “self-deceiver” (1999: 188). The significance of reading Lurie as an antihero is how the antihero is linked with the genre of the tragedy:

The central characters of modern tragedy are fairly insignificant figures: they are anti-heroes, meaning that they are just ordinary people as opposed to the great men and women who feature in earlier tragedies. (...) Modern tragedies centre itself in the family, and then tends to look inwards: the emphasis is on the disorder on the mind as much as on the disorder of the wider world. The heroes and heroines are as likely to be confronting the worst elements in themselves as confronting the worst elements in the world. (Peck and Coyle 2002:109)

*Disgrace* can be read as a modern day tragedy, which differs from the classic tragedies in that the protagonist is not a “[man] of high rank whose fate affected the fortunes of a state” (Abrams 1999:324), instead Lurie, a figure of powerlessness, is affected by the state. Interestingly *Disgrace* offers various strong intertextual links with the poet, Lord Byron. Byron is initially the central focus of the chamber play Lurie intends to write, and Lucy refers to Lurie as “mad, bad and dangerous to know” (1999:77), the same phrase that Lady Caroline Lamb used to describe Lord Byron. The Byronic hero can be seen as a subtype of the antihero, differing in some respects (he might have great talent or exhibit great passion [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Gordon_Byron,_6th_Baron_Byron]).
There are significant similarities and differences between the notions of the antihero and the Byronic hero, yet it is undeniable that Coetzee is trying to resurrect a modern day Byronic hero, deposit him in contemporary South Africa and explore the possibilities of such a character.

An important element to consider when examining the masculine identity of characters is their situational interaction with other characters. Also relevant to such an investigation are the various discourses at play with regard to the construction of these identities. The crisis debate in masculinity studies is based on the supposedly negatively shifting position of men, who (it is claimed) are being shifted from a place of prominence (in the gender power hierarchy) to that of active obscurity. Lurie’s flaw, as an antihero, is his lack of self-reflexivity and empathy. He is so firmly rooted in the ideologies of dominant masculinity that he is unable to recognise that it is the subscription to those beliefs and supposedly subsequent entitlements that cause him to be relegated to the margins of society. Instead of being the hero that changes the world around him, he finds himself in a changed world, unable to adapt.

The problem with the central premise of the crisis thesis is that there is not sufficient evidence, either locally in South Africa or internationally in contemporary western societies, to suggest that men in general have been displaced from the centre of society due to their gender.

This study begins with a brief overview of the novel, as well as an overview of some of the current debates and discussions around this text. The first chapter also outlines the basic principles of masculinity studies and explains why and in which respects the masculine identity is supposedly in crisis.

Chapter two looks at the impact that dissipated power has on masculine identities. It also examines the different social cultures represented in the text and the implications of social diversity (based on gender, race and class) for the male characters in this post-
apartheid South African novel. This chapter takes into consideration the various influences on male identity and the implications of those multi-faceted influences.

Chapter three subsequently examines the protagonist David Lurie’s functioning within the context of the public sphere. In this chapter the implications of the individual destabilisation of power experienced within his career is in focus, as are the repercussions that this has on sense of self-worth as an individual.

Chapter four expands the analysis to the private sphere of the family and intimate relationships, specifically with reference to the sexual configurations and other intimate familial interactions in which David Lurie is involved.

A synthesising overview of the novel is offered in chapter five, where Lurie’s shift from a socially integrated position (with his own special “arrangements” to suit his erotic taste), to that of an individual existing on the margins of society, is traced. This shift is followed through his association with dogs, as well as through focusing on the progress (or lack of progress) and changing nature of his chamber opera. Lastly this chapter investigates the possibility of Lurie’s redemption from a state of disgrace to regain grace.

The question underlying this study is how masculinity, as represented in David Lurie, has changed, if at all. Is the downward spiral in the middle-aged Lurie’s career and life cycle to be read solely as the result of weaknesses in his character (with Lurie seen as representative of a post-modern, post-apartheid Byronic anti-hero), or is his clearly diminishing status to be understood as representative of the fate threatening all white males in South African post-apartheid society? Does the novel suggest both readings? A related question is whether the text challenges or reinforces the validity of the argument that there is a need to rescue masculinity. Finally, the reader is challenged to ask whether in the fictional world of Disgrace and by extension, in post-apartheid South African society, a change in and a destabilisation of masculinity have taken place, and what the implications of such change might be.
1. **DISGRACE (1999) AND MASCULINITY STUDIES**

1.1 An Overview of *Disgrace* (1999)

*disgrace* – a the state of being out of favour or of being dishonoured; a cause of shame, someone or something shameful; disrepute or dishonour; disfigurement; ugliness; defect of grace. (*The Chamber’s Dictionary* 2006:430)

In its unflinching look at post-apartheid South Africa, *Disgrace* is a dystopic novel, offering a sombre vision of post-apartheid South African society as focalized by one white male character, David Lurie. Its focus is the dramatic fall into disgrace of Lurie. His surname aptly suggests an intertextual reference to Lucifer, the fallen archangel, banished from heaven to eternal suffering in hell after his rebellion against God. Lurie’s fall from grace into disgrace in this post-modern novel thus calls to mind Milton’s *Paradise Lost* with its comparable, archetypal revision of Lucifer the archangel, to Lucifer the “prince of darkness” in the nether depths of hell, where no redemption is possible: “Yes there has been a fall, no doubt about that. But mighty? Does mighty describe him? He thinks of himself as obscure and growing obscurer. A figure on the margins of history” (Coetzee 1999:167).

In some of the critical responses to and reviews of this novel, *Disgrace* is read as a realist novel (Cornwell 2002), whereas others (Gaylard 2005) read it as being allegorical or anti-realist in its metafictional refusal of closure, and its tendency towards self-reflexivity. These contradictions in the reception of the novel are in fact indicative of the multiplicity of interpretations that can be found within this text. In *Disgrace* Lurie falls “out of favour” and is “dishonoured” within a specific South African socio-political setting in the last decade of the twentieth century, but this story can also be read as reflecting the state of *homo sapiens* in general, in a wider context:
Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements [of knowledge] were to disappear as they appeared (…) then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea. (Robert Young 1981:10)

By their very nature literary texts form part of a tradition of what has gone before, and in a wider context, are shaped by the society that they reflect. This active interaction between texts, or intertextuality, is described succinctly by Julia Kristeva as follows: “Tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d’un autre texte. À la place de la notion d’intersubjectivité s’installe celle d’intertextualité” (1969:146). Especially when studying a literary novel with aesthetic value such as Disgrace, ignoring the multiplicity of intertexts and their implications results in a much leaner and more meagre understanding.

The literary text represents a fictionalised, mimetic version of “reality”, in which language plays a crucial part in the construction of the subjectivity of portrayed characters. This allows for the possibility of investigating linguistically the (masculine) identities of characters represented within literary texts. Lacan explained how language informs constructions of the self, which he calls the symbolic order. The latter phrase refers to all modes by means of which we communicate in constructing and replicating meaning: “From the Lacanian perspective, our very ‘selves’ are created through language” (Hall 2004: 80). In order to examine the construction of the subjective self, one has to evaluate and analyse the character’s actions, reactions and interpretations of situations, as well as gauge the language used, and the discourses affecting the construction of self:

[T]he concept of self which is being utilised here draws on a post-structuralist understanding of identity, wherein the ‘individual’ ceases to exist as a concrete, self-knowing, grounded person, but is replaced by the

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1 Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations. Any text is absorption and transformation of another text. In the place of the concept of intersubjectivity is installed that of Intertextuality (my translation).
discursive subject; framed in and formed by the various and contrasting subject positions which serve to provide both means of social interaction and sense of self-hood. (Whitehead 2001:352)

The textual analysis of *Disgrace* offered in this dissertation is accomplished by means of a critical investigation of linguistic or signifying practices, as well as a tracing and analysis of the intertextual fabric of the novel. This is done in order to achieve an understanding of the represented “self”, along the lines discussed by Whitehead. Not only does language play a crucial part in the construction of the self but also in the fabrication of society and the ideologies informing those societies:

> We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. (Bakhtin 1980: 269 – 73)

One of the new concepts that masculinity studies bring to the fore, is that men are not always dominant and that societies are not always patriarchal. It opens up the argument that masculinity is not inherent to the physical body of the person, but can rather be seen as a learned behavioural set informed by social circumstances and the environment. Not only can masculinity be distinguished from the physical body of the person but there are also multiple constructions of it:

> Taking its lead from feminism, masculinity studies is thus dedicated to analysing what has often seemed to be an implicit fact, that the vast majority of societies are patriarchal and that men have historically enjoyed more than their share of power, resources and cultural authority. (Adams and Savran 2004: 2)

According to Adams and Savran the legitimacy of masculine power, resource control and cultural authority is under intense scrutiny. Through analysis and critique of masculine
gender identity, legitimacy is often destabilised and contested. Through vigorous investigation of masculinity and its various constructions, masculine assumption of power and legitimacy has become contested and questionable.

1.1.1 Overview of the Novel’s Plot

The novel is narrated in the third person through the indirect interior monologue of David Lurie. Lurie starts off as a professor of modern languages, with a specialisation in Modernism, at the “Cape Technical University” in Cape Town. This fictional university name plays on the reshaping of the tertiary landscape by the new democratic government after its assumption of power in 1994. Increasingly, sciences and technology have been accentuated to the detriment of the study of the humanities. Humanities and languages have become increasingly marginalised. Disgrace tracks the shifting position of David Lurie as professor and therefore a man of some stature, to that of a marginalised figure: stripped of his professional career, friendless, jobless, and landless.

The narrative starts in the metropole of Cape Town and then switches to the rural setting of a smallholding near Salem in the Eastern Cape. Set in the late 1990s, after the advent of democracy in the “new South Africa”, the novel opens with David Lurie proclaiming (surprisingly enough) that he has “solved the problem of sex” (1999:1). He has done this via a standing arrangement with a high class call-girl from an escort service, Soraya. This arrangement does not last and he initiates an affair with Melanie, a student in his course on the English Romantic poets. They have an ambiguous affair, which ends with Lurie being accused of sexually harassing her. He is drawn into a disciplinary hearing by the university committee on sexual harassment. He refuses to admit guilt, loses his job, and ends up leaving Cape Town for a prolonged visit to his daughter, Lucy, on her rural smallholding near Grahamstown. In Grahamstown Lurie attempts to continue working on the “eccentric little chamber opera” he is writing on the life of Byron, one of the results of his interest in the Romantic poets. He also starts helping out Lucy’s friend, Bev Shaw, at the animal clinic for neglected township dogs. His role there is to assist Bev in the mercy killing of unwanted, injured and surplus dogs. Lurie takes it upon himself to care
for the corpses of the dead dogs. During one of his visits to his daughter, three black men attack Lurie and Lucy at home (It is noteworthy that the name Lucy is a strong intertextual link to another Romantic poet, Wordsworth, renowned for his series of poems on the deceased romantic figure of Lucy.) The men lock Lurie in a bathroom and rape Lucy in the bedroom. The second half of the novel deals with the aftermath of that moment. Lurie and his daughter try to come to terms with the brutal attack, but disagree on the way forward and on the interpretation appropriate to the event. Emotionally they drift apart, as both interpret the attack according to his or her stance towards the new South Africa. Lurie refuses to come to terms with the attack, and become increasingly bitter, while Lucy chooses not to abort the child she will have as a result of the group rape, accepting it as she accepts collective white guilt. They are unable to reconcile after this experience and Lurie leaves for Cape Town in exasperation at what he sees as his daughter’s stubborn attitude.

On his way back to Cape Town, Lurie stops over in George to apologise to Melanie’s family. Back in Cape Town, he finds that his house has been ransacked and vandalised. As he visits his old haunts he realises that there is no place left for him in Cape Town. The university has replaced him, he has lost any social contact with acquaintances and Melanie’s boyfriend tells Lurie she will “spit in [his] eye” if she ever sees him again (199:194). With nothing left for him in Cape Town, he decides to return to the Eastern Cape. This time he does not stay with Lucy, but instead rents a flat in Grahamstown. Lurie and Lucy are still at odds regarding her situation on the farm. Lurie tries to persuade her to leave the country and go back to Holland, but she refuses and decides to stay on the farm regardless of the danger. Instead she considers taking up the offer of marriage and protection suggested by Petrus, her previous farm worker, much to Lurie’s dismay.

*Disgrace* ends with Lurie staying on in Grahamstown, continuing to help out at the animal clinic. The open ending of the novel shows Lurie playing excerpts from his opera-in-the-making on a makeshift toy banjo to the three-legged dog, Driepoot, who is awaiting his turn for mercy killing.
1.1.2 Style, language, setting and other literary devices

The language used within *Disgrace* is sober, lean and straightforward. Although the narrative is interspersed with Lurie’s frequent quotations from various European languages, this does not deter from the accessibility of the text. The almost consistent use of Eurocentric phrases, quotes and utterance also serve to align Lurie far more too Western ideology than South Africa. It is therefore no surprise that in Peter McDonald’s article (Disgrace Effects 2002) he refers to Lurie as: “a near-dead white male whose South Africanness is, if anything debatable” (2002: 322).

Throughout *Disgrace*, Coetzee uses the present tense, with the result that there is a sense of immediacy, as if the reader is witnessing events with Lurie as they unfold in the historical present. Mark Sanders comments on the use of the present tense by saying that it “implies an eschewing of the perfective and of the perfective as a reliable marker of completed action” (2002: 365). The point of view in the novel is that of Lurie, and all events are seen from his perspective, focalized by him. The reader therefore has to keep in mind Lurie’s focalization which colours every event with his prejudices and entitlements. Rosalind (one of his ex-wives) comments: ”you were always a great self-deceiver, David. A great deceiver and a great self-deceiver” (1999:188). This characterization of Lurie as “deceiver” and “self-deceiver” alerts the reader to be wary of the protagonist’s words and descriptions of situations. When reading and interpreting the novel, the narrative needs to be approached cautiously, particularly in relation to point of view. Lurie comments on and narrates events from within his own subjective position. What we should be aware of as readers is that there are also other stories that emerge in the interstices of Lurie’s story. His daughter Lucy confronts him with his self-centredness, saying: “You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn’t make an appearance until halfway through” (1999: 198). This metafictional self-awareness also forces the reader to take note of the other stories within *Disgrace*. Although they may not be accessible, one
is forced to acknowledge that they exist and that Lurie’s version is not the only version of the story.

The novel progresses in linear fashion along chronological lines as the increasing marginalisation of Lurie unfolds. It tracks those moments and cognitive decisions that lead to his fall from grace into “disgrace”: from being a prominent professor of literature to a lone figure with only rejected dogs for company. The novel does not end conclusively, or offer a solution to the problems Lurie faces. But this is not necessary if the function of the novel is understood not to be that of providing resolutions to the problems of a dystopic society, but that of tracking the fall from grace of a single, intellectual, middle-class, white South African male in the post-apartheid era.

This shift is seen on various levels, such as Lurie’s move from Cape Town, one of South Africa’s most culturally prominent cities, to renting a room in Grahamstown, a small, provincial university town. It is not only the physical move that becomes emblematic of his downfall but also the fact that at the beginning of the novel he was “at home amid a flux of bodies” (1999:7). When he later returns to Cape Town on a visit he comments that: “It does not feel like a homecoming. He cannot imagine taking up residence once more” (1999:175). He thus moves from a place of prominence and centrality, to one of obscurity. This shift takes place not only on a geographical level, but also on a personal level in relation to his eroded social position and loss of professional occupation.

The motifs central to Disgrace are rape and possession of the female body, the power dynamic of race relations, the life of animals (pre-figuring his subsequent publication The Lives of Animals, [2001]) the place of western cultural artefacts in the new South Africa (Lurie’s chamber opera), remorse, repentance and change, and the overall disgrace of the human condition.
1.1.3 The Context of Writing in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Coetzee places this novel within a clearly demarcated setting and within a definite time frame: South Africa in the late 1990s, after the abolition of the apartheid regime and after the first democratic elections. New legislation was drawn up at the time, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings were taking place, affirmative action was implemented in the workplace, HIV/AIDS and TB were ravaging the population, and violent crime was rapidly increasing.

Coetzee sets *Disgrace* in the period of supposed national optimism reflected in the popularity of the expression “the rainbow nation”. In the interregnum it was feared that the new political social regime would bring with it civil war, which it did not. Fanon comments in *The Wretched of the Earth* that “decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon (...) [and] decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder” (1963: 27). *Disgrace* takes a bleak look at the “new South Africa” where thieves and rapists go unpunished and the only reason to involve the police in such matters is to get a case number for the insurance. South Africa at this early phase could be seen as undergoing a process of “decolonisation”. Fanon has suggested that “decolonisation is quite simply the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men” (1963: 27). Although this is a simplification of Fanon’s argument it is still notable that men are replaced by men. There is still a long way to go before men will be replaced by women, or that gender will not factor in the equation. This transition of power also occurs within the fictional, but mimetically recognizable world, of *Disgrace*. Lurie (the once prominent white professor) is debunked as the epitome of white masculine dominance and self-righteousness (a “baas” in the old parlance), to be replaced by the increasingly powerful black Petrus, erstwhile farm worker (or “bywoner” on Lucy’s farm, with intertextual reference to Coetzee’s seminal work on the farm novel, entitled *White Writing: On the Cultures of Letters in South Africa* [1988]) who becomes the farmer (or “baas”) and figure of authority on what used to be Lucy’s small holding.
1.1.4 Characterization

Aside from the protagonist David Lurie, there are some other characters of interest within the novel. And although, as Lucy comments, they are merely marginal characters (“You are the main character, I am a minor character” [1999:198]), they do play an important part in the understanding and contextualisation of the character of David Lurie. His character is revealed through the interplay with these “minor characters”. (On a metatextual level Lucy’s comment may feasibly be read as the wry wit of the authorial voice, pointing the reader to the narrative structure.)

Melanie is the drama student with whom David Lurie has the affair which costs him his job as professor. She is described as attractive, although an average student. She hails from George, from “[a] tight little petit-bourgeois household, frugal, prudent” (1999:168), as Lurie describes it. Her father is a high school principal and a religious man. A pertinent aspect of Melanie’s character is the contradiction between how Lurie portrays her and how she is described and viewed by her father. According to her father, “she takes things to heart (and she) has such respect for [Lurie]” (1999:37). In contrast, Lurie comments: “So Melanie-Mélani, with her baubles from Oriental Plaza and her blind spot for Wordsworth, takes things to heart. He would not have guessed it” (1999:37). His tone here is even mildly incredulous that Melanie could be a sensitive being.

Lurie’s daughter, Lucy is in her twenties and a lesbian. She lives alone, and maintains her Salem smallholding through marketing her produce at the weekly farmer’s market in Grahamstown. She also keeps dog kennels. Her relationship with Lurie is strained. She calls him David, rather than “father”, implying that he is an untypical father figure. Lurie admits that he has not been a very good guide to Lucy. It is interesting to note that he does not comment that he has failed as a father but as a guide, as if those roles are synonymous. Lucy does not allow Lurie to manipulate her with his rhetoric; as she says to Lurie: “I don’t act in terms of abstractions” (1999:112), implying that Lurie does.
The other male characters in *Disgrace* all remain relatively insignificant, except for Petrus. At first Petrus is Lucy’s farm labourer and jokingly calls himself the “the gardener and dog-man” (1999:64). As Lurie declines more deeply into a state of disgrace, so Petrus rises in presence and importance. The novel starts off with Lurie as a prominent and successful man, but as it progresses this role is systematically taken over by Petrus. This inversion is also indicative of the changed racial hierarchy in the “new South African” society. Where white men were once the main role players in education, work and politics, they are systematically replaced by black role players, through efforts such as “Affirmative Action” and grants.

**1.2 Reception study of *Disgrace* (1999)**

*Disgrace* is J.M. Coetzee’s eighth work of literary fiction. Although it follows *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) chronologically, it speaks more to his earlier work, *Age of Iron* (1990). It is set in South Africa, and as *Age of Iron* took place in the apartheid regime, *Disgrace*, is set in the post-apartheid “New South Africa”. After publication *Disgrace* was met by a flurry of media attention and reviews. Not only for winning the Booker Prize (causing Coetzee to be the first person to have won it twice), but also for the supposedly racist and anti-patriotic sentiment found in the novel.

Early reception of the novel in newspapers and book reviews focused on the novels dystopic view of the new South Africa and the life of David Lurie as “scorned by the new dispensation” (Taylor 1999:25). Initially most reviews focused in the novel, noting the link between Lurie’s experience with the need for repentance and the implied “freedom” repentance would bring. Notably this was also during the time of the TRC hearings in South Africa, and the novel was viewed as offering a somewhat cynical, if not bleak opinion, to the notion that ‘the truth shall set you free’. Tim Tengrove Jones writes: “[Disgrace] refuses to submit to some of the glossy optimistic assumptions that inform [the TRC hearings]” (1999:18).
After winning the booker prize the media attention focused on the implication of such a novel in the international community, and the image of South Africa that it portrays. For months political debate raged between various journalists eventually succeeding in making *Disgrace* even more widely read and widely debated.

*Disgrace* has been described by Gareth Cornwell as “Coetzee’s first mainly realist novel” (1999:248) offering a pessimistic view of post-apartheid race, gender and power relations. He takes a closer look at Lurie’s relations with Melanie and Soraya and notes the racial component between Lurie the white man, expressing himself on the bodies of the racial other. He also challenges the accusation of racism against the novel, by stating that Lucy’s utterance that the rapists were tax collectors “must […] be seen as the deluded attempt of a traumatized woman” (1999:251). He concludes his article with the opinion that Lurie’s work with the animals serve as an attempt to “save the world from further shame and disgrace” (1999:254).

While the novel was first received as a realist text the symbolic and allegorical nature of *Disgrace* was brought into the discussion. Gerald Gaylard (2005) argues against reading *Disgrace* as a realist text. He sees *Disgrace* as a novel with layers of intertextuality promoting a subtle “analysis of cultural history” (2002: 315). He also comments on the canonised western intertexts in a novel about Africa, and the tension which that duality creates.

Rita Barnard (2002) has commented on the language and the metatextual consciousness within the novel. She focuses on the novel’s lexicon and “suggests that a crisis of definitions, relationships, and responsibilities lies at [its] heart” (2002: 385). Barnard remarks on the tension between the European and African influences, and points out that a character such as Ettinger is “[t]oo European […] to survive on the post-apartheid *platteland*” (2002: 385). According to her, *Disgrace* is also indicative of Coetzee’s “abiding interest in the colonial pastoral” (2002:385) and suggests that “a crisis of definitions, relationships and responsibilities lies at the heart of this troubling post-apartheid work” (2002: 384).
In a later article Gareth Cornwell (2002) notes how *Disgrace* disguises itself as a realist text while still remaining allegorical, with a didactic plot. He comments that “the narrative situation of *Disgrace* is conventional [and] the representational mode of the novel appears to be conventionally realist” (2002: 312). From that point he moves on to argue that there is a possibility for a dual reading of *Disgrace*, both as a realist and allegorical text.

Michael Holland focuses on language and asserts that the novel serves “ultimately to relegate the defunct language of western masculinity to the past” (2002: 395). He argues that the novel contains two stories, one set in the city and one in the country. According to Holland’s reading, the story set in the country is not about Lurie, but about Lucy. Yet as the story progresses, Lurie’s “marginality becomes that of an outsider who has never belonged.” Holland suggests that it is in the narration of this novel that duality is achieved. Lurie is the novel’s focaliser, and therefore central to its interpretation is an understanding of the context in which Lurie imagines and describes his circumstances. Yet it is in telling the story that Lurie realises the shortcomings of his language.

Derek Attridge (2000) analyses the implied ideological aspects of the novel for a post-apartheid South Africa. He challenges the notion that the novel critiques the ANC and national effort of reconciliation. David Attwell (2001) also examines the infuriated initial response of the ANC to *Disgrace*. Elleke Boehmer (2002) discusses Lurie’s refusal to confess, set against the historical context and principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-1999): “[T]he novel raises the question of what it is to come to terms with a history of terror and subjection, both for the perpetrator and the victim [and] posits a secular atonement” (2002: 342). She also examines how the body of the woman becomes the space of repentance, and on a metatextual level interrogates David Lurie’s statement on Petrus’s story, that the English language is an unfit medium for complete truth-telling within a South African context. Mark Sanders (2002: 365) similarly links English in South Africa with the controversies surrounding the TRC hearings, with reference to the comparable situation “when Lurie is summoned before the university committee” (2002: 365). He comments on linguistic aspects of the novel and language
usage in *Disgrace*. According to Sanders the author comments upon “the capacity of language to alter itself and its speakers long after losing articulateness for those who have claimed privileged ownership of it” (2002: 372).

John Douthwaite reads *Disgrace* as “symbolic of gender relations and of a post-colonial situation, as well as of the alienated condition of modern man” (2001: 130). His reading of the text tends towards the linguistically technical. He picks up on the minute style changes when Lurie discusses his relations with Melanie, and argues emphatically that the sexual relationship between Lurie and Melanie is not consensual but in fact rape.

Grant Farred looks at the violence found within *Disgrace*, and also the “the silence around the violence and the inability to resist it” (2002: 353). He argues that *Disgrace* “figures the new South Africa as an already (all too quickly) disgraced state” (2002: 353), and that it highlights how violence and abuse has become mundane and ‘normal’. He comments that the loss in *Disgrace* is amplified by Lurie’s own “moral apathy” (2002: 354) and on how a “post-apartheid society has learned, at considerable historical and moral cost, to accommodate violence” (2002: 352). This accentuates the leitmotif of violence as central to South African society, together with rape and sexual harassment of women, and the issue of unequal land distribution. Thus the novel can also be read as engaged literature, cutting to the heart of South African societal problems.

In the reception of *Disgrace* the political implications of the text are investigated, as well as the use of language, repentance and its redemptive qualities. They have questioned the possibility of regaining grace and whether or not the book allows for such a possibility. Lurie’s relationships with women have also been definitively critiqued and most critics read his relations with Melanie as a “structural parallel” to the rape of Lucy. The strength of *Disgrace* would be its multiplicity of interpretations and its ability to still cause controversy almost a decade after its publication. Neville Smith comments: “fictional works such as this are definitely a part of the process of historical change” and that “we need to develop new approaches and directions for understanding our fictional landscape within a shifting world culture” (2007: 214-215). This is where the forging of a new
theoretical critical approach of masculinity studies becomes relevant. The reception of *Disgrace* has focused to a large degree on studying the novel as both a global and South African ideological commentary, with reference to narratological aspects; the aim of this dissertation is to examine the novels representations of male identity and its construction specifically from within the theoretical framework of masculinity studies.

**1.3 *Disgrace* and Masculinity**

One of the aims of this work of research is to investigate to what extent the masculine gender identity of Lurie and Petrus, the male characters in the novel, may be read as having an impact on their situation in society. Previous studies of *Disgrace* have mostly focussed on issues of race, rape, violence and colonial politics; to name a few. For the purpose of this dissertation the theories developed by masculinity studies will be used as a framework for understanding the behaviours and interactions of the characters. As masculine gender identity is influenced and created by the individual’s immediate societal and cultural context, societal and cultural changes bring a need for concomitant adaptation in masculine identity. This enforced process of adaptation is explored in *Disgrace*, especially through the character of David Lurie, and to a lesser degree is, reflected in the character of Petrus: “We must understand gender, and specifically masculinity, as a structure of social practice, one that is reproduced within historical situations through daily actions” (Whitehead and Barrett 2001:27). In essence Lurie’s cannot be read as purely a victim of circumstance (of a society rapidly turning on him) but rather a product of the culture he is in.

As Lurie is the protagonist he will be the primary focus of this analysis. It is arguable that he is undergoing a “crisis of masculinity”, as he experiences a downward, spiralling loss of power and significance throughout the novel. The possibility of an adaptation in masculine identity has been noted in the theoretical literature as one of the ways to escape the “crisis of masculinity”, and the question of whether David changes or not, is a central issue in *Disgrace*. 
1.4 Masculinity Studies - An Overview

Masculinity studies emerged within the last few decades of the twentieth century. These studies developed as a natural outflow of feminism and gender studies. Instead of thinking of masculinity as an integral part of male identity, masculinity studies has made it possible to consider the construction of the masculine gender identity: “Taking its lead from feminism, masculinity studies is thus dedicated to analysing what has often seemed to be an implicit fact, that the vast majority of societies are patriarchal and that men have historically enjoyed more than their share of power, resources and cultural authority” (Adams and Savran 2004:2). This field of enquiry thus offers theoretical hypotheses and apparatus through which masculinity may be scrutinised, in order to deconstruct the processes and politics that inform masculine systems of power.

Thus far masculinity studies have mostly been the terrain of sociologists and cultural theorists. This steadily growing field of enquiry has been co-opted subsequently in other disciplines, which has implications for literary studies, specifically for the potential it offers to bring masculinity into focus in the same way as feminism has brought femininity into focus. In particular, it affords the opportunity to examine a character like David Lurie, who epitomises, at least initially, that successful and powerful masculine figure of authority, the learned and distinguished gentleman living an ostensibly respectable and elevated life, in order to scrutinise the value system he represents. Since masculinity studies have evolved out of feminism and gender studies, it is not surprising that it has a strong post-structuralist and postcolonial theoretical basis. It also provides a theoretical framework for understanding men as products of their environment, society and culture. In a postcolonial critical approach the accent is on different categories of identity according to gender, race and class, and specifically the ways in which different characters relate to each other in a framework of power relations. These power relations are thrown into sharp relief in a novel such as Disgrace precisely because they are depicted as unstable and shifting.
1.4.1. Defining Masculinity

An ideology is a system (possessing its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with an existence and a historical role in the midst of a given society. (Warren, M. quoting Althusser, L [1969:238] 2003:61)

What is notable about Althusser’s definition of ideology is his observation that ideology possesses its own logic and rigour. This constitutes one of the main distinctions between the individual’s behaviour and generally expected behaviour: “[A] ‘crisis in masculinity’ [is] characterised by instability and uncertainty over social role and identity, sexuality, work and personal relationships” (Walker, 2005:161). The confusion and uncertainty felt by the individual therefore constitutes the crisis. Walker considers other contributing factors:

the collapse of traditional men’s work, the growth of a technological culture which can not be ‘passed on’ in any recognisable way between the generations, the rise of feminist consciousness amongst women, and, more abstractly, challenges to the dominance of the forms of rationality with which masculinity has been identified. (Walker 2005:162)

As can be inferred from this statement, the loss of power and legitimacy is not singular in its origin but is rather the result of multiple different causes. One characteristic of masculinity that needs to be addressed is its relation to femininity:

‘Masculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’. A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarised character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture. (Connell.2001:31)
By implication it is therefore possible to track changes in and expectations of masculinity by investigating men’s conception of the feminine and their interaction with the women in their lives. In her seminal work *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir comments on this dualistic nature of the two classic gender identities:

[Women] are defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her: she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (De Beauvoir 1974: xix)

Masculinity studies take their cue from the general crisis of the subject and the other. It is part of the dilemma, that men whose masculinity, now verging on redundant, being defined as “other”, are not passively accepting this definition, but rather through deconstruction finding their own voice and legitimacy.

The concept of the “other” is used in literary and cultural studies these days. Most such uses mean by “other” the racial, gendered and ethnic other. The word is used invidiously to name the way a hegemonic culture or gendered group views different and subaltern ones as exotic or inferior of just plain alien, and therefore as something it would be a good idea to erase or assimilate by some form, overtly violent or not, of ethnic cleansing. (Mills, H.J. 2001:1)

The relationship between the subject and the ‘other’ is exactly what is of interest within *Disgrace*. The novel is set in post-apartheid South Africa, previously a country divided by the notion of self and other, black and white, man and woman. The novel stands as a voice of contrast to the new South African progressive constitution\(^2\) with regard to human rights and equality.

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Disgrace can be read as an oblique commentary on this ideal of equality enshrined in the South African constitution, and arguably, it may be read as a dismissive commentary. Although this investigation will mainly have David Lurie as representative of a defunct white masculinity as its focus, it will also take into account the other masculinities that appear in Disgrace. Not all men are experiencing a loss of power and the accompanying crisis of masculinity. Petrus, as a black man, experiences a rise of power and prominence.

Nor does masculinity always unproblematically equate with hegemonic masculine discourse. Not all men are in crisis, and as Berthold Schoene-Harwood argues, some men are even complicit in upholding masculine hegemony:

This hegemonic configuration of masculinity is always bound to constitute an impossible phantasmatic ideal that ultimately no man can live up to or fulfil. As a result, all flesh-and-blood masculinities must ineluctably find themselves in a position of either complicity, marginality or subordination. (Berthold Schoene-Harwood 2000: xii)

It is only recently that masculinity as a gender identity has been divorced from the historical ideal of manliness. Previously it was assumed that being a man was the universal norm and all deviations from that norm were classified as “other”. Jonathan Rutherford gives a definition of masculinity in his preface to Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines, when he states:

[Our current understanding of masculinity] [...] can be encapsulated in the paradigmatic shift from the historical ideal of manliness to the term 'masculinity' which became popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike the ideal of manliness which was rooted in traditions of patriarchy, masculinity was conceived out of women's revolt against patriarchal relations, as an oppositional, critical and deconstructive term. (Rutherford 2003:1)
Rutherford describes this new masculinity as a direct result of feminism and gender studies. With the emergence of feminist studies and subsequently gender studies, masculinity was eventually also seen as a social construct, differing between cultures and not intrinsic to the physical body of the individual. If femininity and gender are recognisably constructed, then masculinity is also a valid concept, or so the argument appeared to develop. Masculinity studies are said to be a direct outflow from the second wave feminist movement and post-structuralism. It is now an accepted notion in feminist theory that gender is a construct and a fabrication, which is completely separate from what it physically means to be a man or a woman:

Where once men represented the invisible, unmarked norm of human existence and experience, today they are hyper-visible as a gendered group, with academics, marketing executives, journalists and others devoting considerable attention to masculinity or masculinities. (Gill 2003:34)

This stated perspective is pertinent to the issue of masculinity in Disgrace in a number of ways. Firstly, Gill draws attention to the invisibility that one half of the world’s population previously enjoyed, in the sense that men in patriarchal societies have performed the role of universal human subject. Whereas David Lurie moves from hyper-visibility to invisibility socially, his masculinity at the beginning of the novel stands for, or represents an invisible norm (i.e. of homo sapiens and its general state) that shifts as a result of social and political upheaval and becomes hyper-invisible in its vulnerable ineffectuality. Secondly, Gill draws attention to the performative nature of gender by foregrounding the effort required to sustain “masculinity or masculinities”. The effort is intimately linked to and emerges in the rules and forms of behaviour learned through society, culture, and language. As Benwell has noted, "popular culture, in all its forms and instantiations, plays a key role in the constitution of modern identities" (Benwell. 2003:7). When societies change, the requirements dictating gender roles also change. Boys and girls are socialised into certain behavioural patterns, and these patterns are culturally influenced. Gender is not the physical body, but rather the responses acquired
by the subject as a result of social conditioning; therefore it constitutes a cultural phenomenon. Men and women in different cultures will have different traits that define their masculinity and femininity. For the purpose of this study the focus will mainly be on white western masculinity (specifically that of David Lurie) within a specific socio-political context (the post-apartheid South Africa of the late nineteen nineties), with some attention to the black masculine identity of Petrus.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler discusses how gender is shaped and informed by the individual’s immediate environment, and comments further that “it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (Butler 1990:6). Brittan also confirms this insight when he states that “gender does not exist outside history and culture.” He concludes that “both masculinity and femininity are continuously subject to a process of reinterpretation” (1989:1). The logical conclusion from this statement is that gender is therefore contingent on the subject’s society and culture. The subject’s gender is determined to a large degree by the society and culture of which the subject is a product. In the case of both Lurie and Petrus (in *Disgrace*) the implications are noteworthy. The culture and history that elevate the genteel and ‘civilised’ values of Lurie provides him with the same license to domination and indeed violence as Petrus, whose own culture and history have been all but erased as a result of colonisation. It is difficult not to reach the conclusion that any kind of emasculation engenders another kind of violence, particularly in relation to women. Butler’s reading of gender performitivity in this regard is significant:

The notion that gender is constructed, suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law. When the relevant “culture” that “constructs” gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny. (Butler 1990:12)
The individual cannot remove him- or herself from the immediate cultural surroundings. He/she is shaped and influenced by it. Brittan takes this idea further when he states: “how men behave will depend upon the existing social relations of gender” (1989:2). Culture therefore determines gender, and gender determines behaviour. The seismic cultural shifts depicted in *Disgrace* suggest that the violence with which gender, race and class relations are formed will be repeated exponentially when the defining culture and its history is replaced by the culture of beleaguered race it has oppressed. When this happens, gender politics is in danger of disappearing under the weight of more pressing concerns. Coetzee’s novel demonstrates the effects of a dynamic in which older and more established gender relations are simply replaced by emerging and more urgent attempts to avoid emasculation.

**1.4.2 Masculinity Studies and the Hypothesis of “Masculinity in Crisis”**

It has been widely contested that masculinity is in crisis. Arguments for and against this hypothesis proliferate in various journals on gender and identity studies. In this dissertation masculinity as an aspect of the larger field of gender studies (previously the domain of sociology, psychology and cultural studies) seminally informs and defines the literary approach.

Analysing and assessing theories by means of a narrative text enables us to take the abstract ideas of masculinity and apply them to a fictionalized or mimetic, simulated ‘reality’. In the introduction to his collection of short stories, *Smoke and Mirrors*, Neil Gaiman remarks:

> Stories are, in one way or another, mirrors. We use them to explain to ourselves how the world works or how it doesn’t work (…) Fantasy – and all fiction is fantasy of one kind or another – is a mirror. A distorting mirror, to be sure, and a concealing mirror, set at forty-five degrees to reality, but it
is a mirror nonetheless, which we can use to tell ourselves things we might not otherwise see. (Gaiman, 1999: 4)

No text is ever divorced from society. It is a reflection of the society it depicts and out of which it emerges, even if that reflection is distorted or fragmented. As Judith Baxter states, "any text, by virtue of the range of readings to which it is subject, becomes the medium for struggle among different power interests to fix meaning permanently" (Baxter, 2003: 24). One possible reading of the character of David Lurie is that he represents J.M. Coetzee’s negotiation of the so-called crisis of masculinity. In a sense the most revered brand of western masculinity is shown to have become defunct and ineffectual in post-apartheid South Africa, through the characterisation of Lurie. Whether Lurie promotes the notion of a crisis in masculinity per se, or whether other kinds of crises emerge in Coetzee’s treatment of Lurie’s predicament, however, is a question that must emerge in any discussion of the crisis theory.

If masculinity is a construct, not intrinsic to the male body, and variable within the subject’s immediate culture, how then can it be said to be in crisis? A constant concept present throughout the various theorists’ writings on masculinity in crisis is that it directly related to power. In Masculinity and Power, Brittan differentiates between masculinity and masculinism (a term which he himself coined). This differentiation separates the individual’s masculinity from the normative masculine stereotype posited as dominant by mass culture. Essentially the crisis model works on the premise that individual masculinity is always measured and weighed up against this hegemonic masculinity.

Chamber’s Dictionary defines “crisis” as “a crucial or decisive moment; a turning point, a time of difficulty or distress, an emergency” (2006: 358). Through scrutinising of masculinity as gender construct, it can be argued that masculinity as an ideology is at a turning point in its definition and understanding of itself, yet whether that translates into masculinity itself being in "distress" or in "an emergency" is questionable. The crisis theory arose because this dominant ideology so starkly contrasts with the actively
available roles for men today. Just as all men are different, so are the crises they experience, which take place in multiple spheres in any individual’s life. An individual may experience a crisis in the public sphere (in the form of redundancy and under-employment), but also in the private sphere (in the form of failed relationships and loss of sexual prowess). A crisis of masculinity can take on many forms and have many variations between individuals, yet remain centralised around the problem that there is an inability to embody and to achieve a preconceived notion of what it means to be a man.

The main argument against the theory of “masculinity in crisis” is the point that men still have more power in most case than most women do, and masculinity still equates to power. How then can there be such a crisis based on a loss of power, if men are still the dominant gender group?

Conclusion

J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace (1999) is a controversial novel, which allows multiple interpretations. Set as it is within the “new South African” context, issues of race, violence and gender are immediately relevant to the text and the dichotomy between African and western ideologies are exposed. Although this novel has been examined and interpreted with regard to the political notions of redemption, and although it has been subjected to intense scrutiny in relation to language and the significance of English in a South African context, there is still much work to be done with regard to Coetzee’s use of characterisation. In this dissertation the novel will be examined through the lens of masculinity studies, to investigate the ways in which the gender identity of the characters is portrayed as being markedly influenced and affected by the socio-cultural and political environment.
2. “WITHOUT WARNING HIS POWERS FLED”: POWER AND THE CRISIS DEBATE

Then one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost. If he wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her; often, in one way or another, to buy her. (1999:7)

At the beginning of Disgrace David Lurie ruminates on the day when without warning “his powers fled” and people (presumably women) stopped responding to him. As a sexual being, a Don Juan and womaniser à la Byron, he experienced a loss of his earlier ability to hold attention, to charm and seduce. By implication Lurie links his loss of sexual attraction directly to a loss of power. While it may be argued that this loss of power is due to ageing, it could also be contended that it is linked to a broader set of power relations.

There are different opinions on the cause for the experienced shift of power and the subsequent crisis of masculinity. These proffered causes ranges from blaming it on ‘those feminists’, to industrialization, capitalism, post-modernism, and almost any other -ism that can be thought of. Yet, all these presumed causes link with the idea that, posited against the notion of ‘masculinism’, most men fall short. In other words, when men compare themselves with what they and society surmise a ‘man’ should be they realise that they fall short of this ideal.

In examining masculinity in crisis it is necessary to track shifts of power. The same principle is used in science in that power or energy cannot be destroyed, but is merely transformed. It is in the translocation and transforming of power that a moment of crisis is said to occur.

The departure point for this study is the intention to argue that the crisis of masculinity arises out of the increasing difference between individual masculinities and hegemonic
masculinity. The theoretical framework rests on the assumption that it is becoming increasingly difficult to adhere to the notion and be the ‘man’ that hegemonic masculine ideology requires men to be. As societies change, there is an expectation for the individuals within those societies to change correspondingly. Yet most post-modern societies become less comfortable places for masculine dominance. What comes first is not clear: do the changes happen because society increasingly devalues masculinity as a gender or because the traditional roles of men undergo permutation and are usurped by the other gender?

2.1 Hegemonic Masculine Ideology versus ‘Masculinity’

In an attempt to define and describe masculinity in crisis, Brittan distinguishes between masculinity and masculinism. This distinction suggests that masculinity is informed by a “super” ideology or a static, abstract ideology. It also helps to distinguish between the masculinity of the individual and what society suggests or implies masculinity to be:

Those people who speak of masculinity as an essence, as an inborn characteristic, are confusing masculinity with masculinism, the masculine ideology. Masculinism is the ideology that justifies and naturalizes male domination. (Brittan 1989:4)

Brittan suggests that there is an ideology which surpasses gender identity, and which justifies and naturalises male domination. This ideology is reinforced by society and the various social systems embedded in it. I will use the concept of hegemonic masculinity rather than that of “masculinism”, as it is a more descriptive term. To understand the masculine identities of the characters in Disgrace it is necessary to examine the discourses and ideologies that inform their gender identity.

The period of the Romantic poets is significant to Disgrace, especially because of Lurie’s preoccupation with Byron as poet, and his biography. Throughout the novel Lurie is working on a chamber opera on Byron, concerning his last tryst in Italy. Lurie’s life
could be described as mirroring that of Byron in its final stages, albeit in a more pathetic way. Both Lurie and Byron move from a space of centrality (Cape Town and London) to that of obscurity in the rural countryside: “As for Byron, he is full of doubts, though too prudent to voice them. Their earlier ecstasies, he suspects, will never be repeated. His life is becalmed; obscurely he has begun to long for death” (1999:180). In this moment he becomes aware of having ‘outlived’ his own life, and that without his previous work or delusions of self importance his life has lost its meaning.

Byron as a Don Juan archetype (*Don Juan* is also the title of one of his works\(^3\)) was known for his sexual prowess and promiscuity. During one of his lectures Lurie talks to his class about Byron’s poem, “Lara”,\(^4\) which deals with Count Lara, a typical Byronic, “haunted, gloomy and doomed hero”\(^5\) Lurie is inadvertently also speaking of himself and his own situation and feels a bit awkward at giving that lecture with Melanie and her boyfriend sitting in his class: “He has told them to read ‘Lara’. His notes deal with ‘Lara’. There is no way to evade it” (1999:32). It can be argued that his awkwardness in discussing this poem with the class implies that he finds some echo and kinship with the character and situation in the poem.

Lurie’s name also suggests an intertextual link with Lucifer. Lucifer, or Satan, was initially God’s favourite and most beautiful angel, as Lurie in the previously regime and in his youth, was favoured by white western-orientated South African society. He also comments that the snake is his sexual totem (1999: 2), and throughout the novel snakes and sexuality are used in tandem. He further associates Byron, although loosely, with his totem of the snake: “the lovers in duet, the vocal lines, soprano and tenor, coiling wordlessly around and past each other like serpents” (1999: 121). The image of the snake is interesting, as it is Lucifer in the form of a snake that tempts Eve in the Garden of Eden, and eventually brings about the fall of man. Having the prominent phallic symbol of the snake as his totem, as well as his identification with Lucifer through the trace in his name, indicate the protagonist’s male sexuality, a capacity for treachery and for wielding

\(^3\) (1918)  
\(^4\) (1814)  
\(^5\) (http://www.norton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic_5Byronlara.htm).
a dangerous power that can cause a downfall. Tying that back to Mr Isaacs’s comment in the novel that: “the mighty has fallen” (1999: 167), it is remarkable that Lurie at that stage does not recognise himself as having been mighty, but rather sees himself as a “figure from the margins of society” (1999: 167).

Byron’s poem “Lara” on which Lurie lectures in his class on Romantic poetry is also written from the perspective of Lucifer, the fallen angel. As Lurie discusses the poem the impression is given that he is simultaneously attempting to explain his own actions to the class and specifically to Melanie: “Good or bad, he just does it. He doesn’t do it on principle but on impulse, and the source of his impulse is dark to him” (1999: 33). In Professor Lurie’s discussion of the poem he elicits sympathy from the class for Lucifer (and by implication for himself as transgressor): “we are not asked to condemn this being with the mad heart, this being with whom there is something constitutionally wrong. On the contrary, we are invited to understand and sympathize” (1999: 33). Thus Lurie is identified with Lucifer, the “fallen” creature with whom there is “something conditionally wrong”.

It is questionable however whether Professor Lurie convincingly justifies the suffering he caused. Does this elicit sympathy for Lurie’s plight and embarrassment? His reasoning is shown to be flawed and not convincing enough for his sense of entitlement to the female body and his task as a “Servant of Eros” and a “slave of desire” Later on in that section of the text he states: “There is a limit to sympathy. For though he lives among us, he is not one of us. He is exactly what he calls himself: a thing [...] he is condemned to solitude” (1999:34).

This remark about the plight of Lucifer suggests the same isolation and loneliness to which Lurie is condemned at the end of the novel. Having the Romantic poets as role models has brought Lurie to the margins of contemporary society. Their world is not his world. In recalling the life of Byron, Lurie mentions that “amongst the legions of countesses and kitchen maids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape” (1999:160). The deeds of Byron and what he advocated might have been
condoned in his time, but the same does not hold true for Lurie. Lurie’s affinity for and apprenticeship under these poets have relegated him to the position of a totally isolated outcast in the wilderness, with his only companions unwanted, condemned dogs, waiting for death.

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It is relevant to the line of argument of this dissertation to be aware that there are multiple masculinities, and that “it should be recognized that the critical study of men and masculinities is not confined to any particular national border, ethnic group or identity politics” (Whitehead and Barrett 2001:2). Although there might thus be an intrinsic understanding or expectation of what it means to be a man, individual masculinities also differ between races and cultures.

Masculinity is plural. There is no iconic, static definition of masculinity, as not only do masculinities differ between cultures and nations, but they differ even within the domain of white western masculinity. The multiplicity of masculinities is noticeable in Disgrace, when we compare the different male characters in the novel. There is a significant difference between Lurie’s masculine identity and that of Bill Shaw, Bev Shaw’s husband. Lurie is a ‘man of the world’ in contrast to the provincial and pedestrian Bill who is described as "squat [...] with a beet-red face [...] and a sweater with a floppy collar" (1999:73). Then there is Ettinger, the "surl[y old man. [...]who] never go[es] anywhere without his Beretta" (1999:100). The three men are all more or less of the same age, yet all different, with markedly different masculine identities. Here we see that even within a notably narrow category of masculinity there are still distinct differences, not to mention the even broader differences between masculine identities of different races and cultures. This multiplicity of masculine identities posits a problem for the crisis theory, as there are so many variants, even within the white western group. Not all of them are in crisis and they do not all experience a loss of power and significance.

Not all masculinities within the fictional world of Disgrace experience disempowerment. It is clear that it is only David Lurie who seems to be contesting the new state’s ideology
of equality between genders, and is in crisis. Both Petrus and Melanie’s father, Mr. 
Isaacs, are the heads of their households, with obedient wives. Of the Isaacs household 
Lurie comments: “A tight little petit-bourgeois household, frugal, prudent. The car 
washed, the lawn mowed, savings in the bank. All their resources concentrated in 
launching the two jewel daughters into the future” (1999:168). These two men, who 
would have been racially disadvantaged in the previous political regime, now seem to 
socially speaking have the upper hand over Lurie.

There is a suggestion in *Disgrace* that Lurie was treated so harshly by the university not 
only because of his recalcitrant attitude but because Melanie is coloured. Dr Rasool 
caricatured as an archetypal black feminist calls it a case with “overtones” which the 
“wider community is entitled to know” (1999: 50) about and she states that the incident is 
part of “a long history of exploitation” (1999: 53). Lucy also comments on the harshness 
of Lurie’s sentence by saying that in her day it “went on all the time” (1999:66). 
Therefore, presumably, the consequences of Lurie’s affair with Melanie were strongly 
influenced by gender and racial sensitivities as reflected in the new constitution of the 
post-1994 South Africa.

In contrast to Lurie the philanderer and self-centred Don Juan, Petrus is the successful 
patriarch. As patriarch, he is the respected head of an extended family and controls his 
newly-acquired land. In contrast to Lurie’s failed marriages, Petrus has a successful 
marriage and even practises polygamy with multiple wives. Lurie eventually sells his 
house, forfeiting his 'land', while Petrus receives a land grant and has his own house built, 
with the prospect of gaining Lucy’s farm in the future. Lurie fails to act as the protecting 
patriarch of his daughter, yet Petrus's protection reaches as far as distant relatives. He 
even offers to take Lucy as his third wife, so that she too can fall under his protection 
Lucy asks:

I have no brothers. I have a father, but he is far away and anyhow powerless 
in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn for protection, for
The hegemonic masculine ideology is that of heterosexual male domination. It is power and domination and it does not have a capacity for change; as Brittan states, “the masculine ideology is not subject to the vagaries of fashion – it tends to be relatively resistant to change” (1989:4). It is reaffirmed and produced by men, women, in the workplace and even by higher institutions and governments. It informs culture and society: “Masculinism is reproduced and reaffirmed in the household in the economy and in the polity… masculinism was never under real attack because gender relations remained relatively constant” (Brittan. 1989:6).

Jeff Hearn also comments on male power and states that “men’s power remains, while that power is becoming less certain, so that men are becoming less certain of [them]selves” (1987:6). This implies that as man's power diminishes so too does his self-confidence. By implication therefore men obtain their masculine identity and confidence from the power they wield.

2.2 Expected Power versus Experienced Power

One of the issues stemming from hegemonic masculine ideology is that the inference is a certain sense of entitlement bestowed on the 'man', purely on the premise that he is male and therefore superior. This expected entitlement links directly to power; man expects to have power in the various social spheres. The crisis arises out of that expected power not manifesting itself as experienced power:

[The] monopoly of power, resources and status which they had previously been able to claim directly by virtue of their sex, they now had to assert was due to their socially constructed gender identity which expressed some undefined natural difference. Since this invention of masculinity was
essentially a holding operation, however, it has been in crisis since.
(MacInnes. 2001:311)

Men are therefore experiencing a downward shifting gender landscape, as a result of an expected entitlement to power that is not necessarily experienced by the individual. This is especially striking in the character of David Lurie in *Disgrace*. Throughout the novel there is a constant tug-of-war between what Lurie perceives himself to be entitled to, and what his world is prepared to offer him.

Lurie experiences a loss of power, not because of anything done by him, but because the “others” he is supposed to oppress with his ‘masculine power’ are not as easily oppressed anymore. Melanie, Lurie’s student with whom he has an affair, causes great personal upheaval in Lurie’s life, including rejection from his colleagues and a backlash from the media. He also experiences pressure and animosity from Melanie’s boyfriend and her father. These men vehemently oppose his sexual exploitation of the young student. During the attack on Lucy’s farm the disempowered Lurie is physically assaulted and locked in a bathroom, failing in his patriarchal duty of protector. In all these instances it is other men who are oppressing Lurie. Ironically, in the previous political regime all these men would have been oppressed, and would have been his subordinates because of their racial classification.

A crisis of masculinity can be understood as a loss or shift of power (inability to dominate and control), regardless of whether or not the power was ever experienced or deserved. If it is implicit to masculinity for the male subject to have control and power over his ‘domain’, it becomes problematic when that power is unattainable, resulting in instability and self-doubt. The shift in power can occur in any sphere, whether that is domestic or public:

- The concept of ‘crisis’ involves the realisation that their power and authority can no longer be taken for granted. If their power is challenged then a dominant group is in a crisis situation. It begins to look around for
explanations and rationalisations, which allow it to understand and cope with the new situation. (Brittan 1989: 183)

It is after the rape of Lucy when Lurie realises he has failed as a father and as a man, that he comments that a “vital organ has been bruised, abused – perhaps even his heart” (1999:107). This moment of impotence when he needed to be a father and a protector has left him “tired to the bone, without hopes” (1999: 107). Lurie links his loss of power with losing his heart, a vital, life-giving organ.

2.3 Women Usurping Power: Cause for Crisis

If it is true that masculine power is being undermined and that as a result masculinity is in crisis, how does it account for the rape of Lucy? If masculinity and subsequently masculine behaviour were rendered powerless in this age of modernity, then surely those moments of abuse could not have taken place. In other words, masculinity in crisis cannot be understood as an all encompassing and global phenomenon but should rather be seen as a problem experienced by individuals in individual situations. Furthermore it has to be noted that South Africa is a different kind of society than that of Europe, a mix of modern and traditional cultures, of African and Western cultures constantly clashing and interweaving. Although most women are still oppressed in South Africa, there have been measures of freedom and increasing power.

[The crisis of masculinity] is seen to refer to factors as diverse as the impact of second-wave feminism on men, competition with women either at school or at work, the escalating levels of violent acts men are seen to commit, anxieties concerning how men should act within the home or within personal relationships, the representation of men in negative terms in the media, or the undermining of traditional male sex roles. (Edwards 2006:7)

In gender relations between men and women a shift of power has taken place. The crisis theory asserts that women have been and are experiencing emancipation from
constricting gender roles, and that their “situation has been transformed from one of presence to one of power” (Hassin: 1999). This attainment of power has caused a need for re-examination of its own definitions in masculinity studies. Clearly Hassin is using a very narrow definition of women in the above statement. Possibly these powerful women refer to white western middle and upper class women, who in comparison to their mothers have achieved more powerful positions. Yet, the masculinity in crisis model does not restrict itself to a certain group or segment of masculinity, but instead claims that all masculine identities are under fire due to this presumed global uprising of female consciousness. This is a very broad and flawed assumption. Not all women have moved into a place of power, as is clearly seen in the characters and experiences of Melanie and Lucy. Both these women experience some form of sexual abuse at the hands of dominant men. Melanie is psychologically coerced into having sex with Lurie whilst Lucy is gang raped by three assailants. Although both acts were forms of power abuse, it is only Lurie who has to face consequences for it.

As conquerors and dominators men have not needed to question their identity or their roles in society. That is, until now, as Susan Faludi notes in *Stiffed*:

> If men are masters of their own fate, what do they do about the unspoken sense that they are being mastered, in the marketplace and at home, by forces that seem to be sweeping away the soil beneath their feet. If men are mythologized as the ones who ‘make things happen’, then how can they begin to analyze what is happening to them. (Faludi 2000:13)

Faludi makes an interesting comment that men lack the ability to analyse their situation of powerlessness. Society has and is constantly changing (as is locally seen in the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa), and with this change, “to be a man increasingly meant being ever on the rise, and the only way to know for sure you were rising was to claim, control and crush everyone and everything in your way” (Faludi. 2000:11). The domination that Faludi refers to is not possible for men any more as,
according to her, patriarchy and white hegemony have either fallen away, or are only found in the hands of the elite, those with the power and the money to exercise control.

Men have been portrayed in a rather negative light in early feminist writings. In their attempt to redefine femininity and through that emancipate women, such writers seem to have stereotyped and rigidly classified men. As Reid comments:

> Early feminist and gender theory focused almost exclusively on the position and experience of women. Men, except when they were situated as part of the problem (the abuser, the oppressor, the patriarch) were neither the object nor the subject of study. (Reid 2005:6)

Faludi comments that “today it is men who cling more tightly to their illusions. They would rather see themselves as battered by feminism than shaped by the larger culture” (Faludi 2000:14). Faludi is writing from an American context, and has done social research with groups of men who have been marginalized in various ways. The men she talked to and studied all commented on a sense of confusion, loss and betrayal. She notes that “there was almost something absurd about these men struggling week after week to recognize themselves as dominators when they were so clearly dominated by the world” (Faludi 2000: 9). The subsequent implications of that gender stereotyping, is not just a backlash in the form of discrediting feminism as a movement, but also a defensiveness towards any form of gender study.

One of the supposed requirements of hegemonic masculine ideology is achievement. To be “a man” means that you have to achieve and meet certain standards. David is in a state of crisis and confusion when he realizes that he is failing more and more at these requirements. While David’s status as a “manly man” is declining, a previously conceived other and “dog-man” (1999: 64), Petrus, is rising by ‘claiming, controlling and crushing’ to achieve the status of “manly man”.
Reid and Walker state that: “An unquestionably patriarchal system has given way to new ideals of equality between men and women” (2005:1). It is now a less male entitled society. Interestingly this does not hold true for *Disgrace*, as the text’s settings extend to modern societies like Cape Town where there are “Rape Awareness Week[’s]” (1999: 43), where woman are urged to speak out, whereas in contrast Lucy’s silence over her rape is not even blinked at (except by Lurie). The previously unquestionable patriarchy is now being questioned at least in urban South African settings. It is the shift of power relations between men and women, as well as the shift in social and economic power that has become the catalyst for this “crisis of masculinity”.

Lurie is an apt example of a masculine identity at odds with the ideological perspectives of the society he inhabits. His conception of being a “slave of desire” takes a sinister overtone when he is talking to Lucy. He recalls a dog their neighbours had that used to “get excited and unmanageable” when there was a bitch in heat nearby. The owners used to punish it for the way it reacted and subsequently, at the “smell of a bitch it would chase around the garden with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining and trying to hide” (1999: 90), Lurie uses this story to try to explain to his daughter that “no animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts [and that the] poor dog had begun to hate its own nature [and that] at that point it would have been better to shoot it” (1999: 90).

Lurie argues that it is wrong to suppress natural instincts and desires. According to his perception of life it would be better to kill someone than suppress their ‘natural desires’. He is proven wrong not by Lucy’s argument but by the attack on the farm and Lucy’s rape. What he has been advocating (not restraining desire) has now been exercised on the body of his daughter, in the form of multiple rape by three men. Lurie is complicit in this act in that he also sees women’s bodies as something that he can own and possess and use to his own sexual satisfaction: “That is what Soraya and the others were for: to suck out the complex proteins out of his blood like snake-venom, leaving him clear-headed and dry” (1999:185).
Lurie is complicit in the objectification and abuse of women, not only in his actions towards but also in his conception of them. Identity cannot be separated from gender overall identity. As a person’s identity informs their behaviour, so too would their gender identity inform their behaviour.

2.4 Discourse and Gender Identity

Gender identity can be “conceived of as a person’s interpretation and acting out of generally accepted social definitions of what it is to be a man or a woman” (1989: 20). The social definitions can be conceived of as discourses: “Discourse is more than simply the words and phrases we use. In Foucauldian terms discourses provide the very means by which subjects come to be individuals and come to understand themselves as women and men” (Whitehead and Barrett 2001:21).

An individual’s behaviour is dictated by his or her identity, and a person’s identity is informed by their gender identity, which in turn is informed by the social definitions of what it means to be a man or woman. In writing about identity, Butler states:

It would be wrong to think that the discussion of “identity” ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognisable standards of gender intelligibility. (Butler 1990:22)

In *Disgrace* the main ideological (albeit not the only) system informing Lurie's gender identity is that of the Romantic poets and classical literature. We need to be cognisant that Lurie uses (or even abuses) the Romantics and Classics for his own gain, and deviates from their true intent. This is relevant as it is his antiquated ideas about work, love and sexuality and his refusal to change or adjust any of those values that separate him from the rest of society. Lurie is constantly navigating within a world of abstractions and as Lucy comments: “Guilt and salvation are abstractions […] until you make an effort to see that, I can’t help you” (1999: 112). As Lurie reflects on his current position
in life, at the end of the novel, he notes: “What a tale to tell back home: a mad old man who sits among the dogs singing to himself” (1999:212). How does the professor of literature at a prominent university ‘fall’ to such a place where little street children gossip about the mad old man singing to himself amongst the dogs? To understand Lurie’s masculine identity and to determine whether it is changing under pressure, we need to look at how Lurie gets to this place of ‘fallen-ness’.

Lurie is guilty of a narrow, blinkered intellect. He is constrained by his understanding of himself as a teacher of linguistics, by his formalist reading of Byron, unable to establish a conversation either between himself and his students or between the poet and the new, potentially rich, historical moment he occupies. (Grant Farred. 2002: 355)

This again highlights Lurie’s self-indulgent nature, as Farred states Lurie is intellect is “narrow” and “blinker” clearly implying that Lurie only sees what he chooses to see. It is therefore necessary to examine the discourses which influence the construction of Lurie’s gender identity. A pertinent place to start is to study the imagery he uses to describe himself and his life, as well as the language he uses. As Whitehead and Barrett states:

Language gives meaning to our selves and our lives, without which our ability to locate ourselves in the social web would be missing. However, in resorting to simplistic biological interpretations we are merely replicating the myths of gender and thus reinforcing a ‘gender order’ within which males are the primary beneficiaries. (Whitehead and Barrett. 2001:12)

In replicating gender myths though language, Lurie becomes complicit in the construction of his own masculine identity. He is influenced by the discourses he immerses himself in, especially that of canonised western Romantic literature. With regard to identity politics Whitehead remarks:
The concept of self which is being utilised here draws on a post-structuralist understanding of identity, wherein the ‘individual’ ceases to exist as a concrete, self-knowing, grounded person, but is replaced by the discursive subject; framed in and formed by the various and contrasting subject positions which serve to provide both means of social interaction and sense of self-hood. (Whitehead 2001:352)

The influence of the Romantic poets is further emphasised in that words and concepts such as ‘master’, ‘slave’ and ‘servant’ are used multiple times in relation to Lurie’s relationship with the Romantics. Lurie abdicates his own responsibility for his actions, albeit only on a conscious level, by using the discourse of the poets as his reasoning and rationalisation of his actions: “Wordsworth has been one of my masters. It is true. For as long as he can remember, the harmonies of The Prelude have echoed within him” (1999:13)

In the first chapter Lurie already associates himself with the discourse of the Romantic poets. The Romantics “do not turn to God as the source of order, nor is order sought in society: what the Romantics seek is to find harmony in life” (Peck and Coyle 2002:4). Lurie’s subscription to the Romantic ethos is echoed in his arrogant dismissal of the social rules and conduct that is expected of him. Instead, he wraps himself in the narrative of the classics, seeing himself as some sort of avatar of Eros. In describing himself, he says that he has always been “at home amid a flux of bodies where Eros stalks and glances flash like arrows” (1999:6; my emphasis). The choice of words suggests that Lurie sees himself as a hunter, someone who “stalks” with a presumed quiver full of “arrows” and with women as his prey. The use of the image of Eros, as his guide and inspiration is ironic, as Eros is noted for “inspir[ing] desire in countless Greek gods, goddesses, heroes, and heroines” (http://www.loggia.com/myth/eros.html), yet Lurie’s story could hardly be noted as mythical nor can he be seen as a god or a hero. Quite the opposite: he is depicted as an anti-hero, and totally forsaken by the gods. Lurie dissociates himself by saying it is Eros that stalks the streets, not him. This emphasises Lurie’s refusal to take responsibility for his actions. He chooses to listen to the
promptings of the Romantic poets and the mythological Eros, rather than to his own conscience.

He links himself and his perception of himself with certain Romantic notions and pays service to selected Romantic values, as one would serve a master. This is problematic because not only are those values and role models anti-feminist, but they are also destructive and as Lurie confesses to Melanie: “they all died young. Or dried up. Or went mad and were locked away” (1999:15).

His association with Romanticism and the Romantic poets leads him on a similar path. It spurs him on to pursue Melanie, even though he realizes she is too young. He pursues her and finally has sex with her. Details of their encounters are not given to us, yet we are left with a hint that sex was not consensual. Lurie mentions that he “forced her sweater up”, “she is passive throughout” and that their encounters were “undesired to the core” by Melanie, implying that something sinister transpired and that there is more to their relations than what Lurie is revealing. During the hearing he does admit, albeit only to himself, that there was a power imbalance (“Unequal: how can he deny that” [1999: 53]) that he evidently abused Melanie by exploiting his power. The result of the hearing is the loss of his career and entails his having to move to Grahamstown. Here he further realises his powerlessness during the attack on Lucy’s farm: “[h]e speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless” (1999:95). For all his education, he is unable to fulfil his mandate as a father and protector.

Lurie’s hearing at the university further emphasises how his involvement in Romantic discourse only serves to further alienate him from his colleagues. Upon being asked by the university committee on sexual harassment to present his version of what happened between him and Melanie, he uses metaphorical and poetical language, typical of the Romantic poets. Statements such as “paths crossed [and] something happened” (1999: 52) have an air of fate and happen-stance. It gives no hint of premeditation or choice on Lurie’s part. Not only does he use evasive language, but he also states that “Eros entered
[and] after that [he] was not the same” (1999: 52), implying that he was not responsible for his actions but followed the promptings of a ‘higher being’. Due to his delusion of the entitlement prescribed by Romantic discourse Lurie is unable to take responsibility for his actions or even see them as being wrong. According to him he “became a servant of Eros” (1999: 52; my emphasis) as would the Byronic hero, at the mercy of forces beyond himself, again reinforcing the supposed lack of choice he had and absence of premeditation on his side, thus trying to absolve himself through the excuse that he had no choice. He was merely following orders as he was a ‘slave of Desire’. He even ventures to say that he now regrets the many times he did not act on the promptings of Eros.

Before the hearing Lurie remarks that his attitude is wrong. “Vanity and self-righteousness” (1999:47) are the words he uses to describe himself. He realises that his conception of his encounters with Melanie is likely to be seen differently by others, whilst he feels fully justified in his actions. He is enshrouded in the arrogance of the ‘alpha male’ and in this moment he fully adheres to the masculine ideal traditionally prescribed by western society. Yet, also pertinent is the following statement:

> What were once male virtues are often now viewed as masculine vices – part of the ‘crisis’ of masculinity. It is now often argued that a major contribution to further progress in equality between men and women would be for men to consciously reform their misogynist and oppressive gender identities. (MacInnes. 2001:322)

According to the theorists supporting the crisis model, society now rejects those masculine "virtues" that it originally applauded as manly and strong, especially in a South Africa that is hyper-vigilant regarding the “abusive” white man. We see an example of this during the hearing. It is not just the women and the university but also the men that see Lurie’s behaviour as unacceptable. But does this moment justify seeing Lurie as having a masculine identity crisis? Is this moment of self-doubt not rather a direct result
of a too well-developed and stubborn masculine identity, deeply embedded and rooted in his sense of manliness?

Another moment, in which he obeys his sense of the Romantics as models of conduct instead of his own conscience, is during his first phone call to Melanie. When he speaks to her he is at first hesitant, as he realizes that she is “too young, she will not know how to deal with him; he ought to let her go” (1999: 18). Yet despite these misgivings he also states that “Beauty’s Rose: the poem drives straight as an arrow. She does not own herself; perhaps he does not own himself either” (1999: 18). The implication of this is that Lurie suppresses his conscience (including feelings of guilt and insecurity) by saying that it is the poem that drives him on, again using old world ideas as excuses for his exploitation of others. He uses the poem and Romantic ideology as instigation and reason for his exploitation of Melanie. He thus assuages his misgivings and guilt, implicitly claiming that he cannot be held responsible for something if he does not ‘own himself’?

Hegemonic masculinity is complicit in Lurie’s act of exploitation in that it naturalises man’s dominance and authority, and that ideology is reinforced and buffered by culture and society:

Hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual. So the top levels of business, the military and government provide a fairly convincing corporate display of masculinity, still very little shaken by feminist women or dissenting men. (Connell. 2001: 39)

Regardless of all this talk of diminished prowess of the masculine, men are still powerful. The ‘crisis’ of masculinity is not global. One of the possible reasons for these varying masculinities could be the multitude of influences on masculinity. Masculinities are informed by the societies, discourses and cultural influences that surround them. “We must understand gender, and specifically masculinity, as a structure of social practice, one that is reproduced within historical situations through daily actions” (Whitehead and Barrett. 2001:27). If masculinity is a structure of social practice, then a study of
masculinity should include an examination of the social practices surrounding masculinity:

Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioural average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationship through which men and women conduct gendered lives. ‘Masculinity’, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture. (Connell 2001: 34)

**Conclusion**

To explore various masculinities it is necessary to track the ways in which men are treated differently to women and children - how they are attributed power, and what they do with that power: “power […] is a key factor that informs the entire masculinity in crisis thesis” (Edwards 2006: 8).

Masculinity is constructed on the premise that men are entitled to privilege and power. It is clear that masculinity also informs identity. Therefore men will behave as if they are entitled to privilege and power, purely on the premise that they are men. Society has slowly been moving away from this idea. It is not to be denied that men still wield most powerful positions in business, government, relationships, and society in general. Nevertheless, there are changes afoot. Feminism, industrialism, capitalism have all taken some of this male power, slowly chipping away at the monolith of hegemonic masculinity and (as Horrocks notes) it is not just those structures that are oppressive, but also other men:

Most men have very little economic power, but are subject to the dictates of other men. The captains of industry, the high court judge, the chief constable, the army general – these men undoubtedly wield power. But what
about the bus conductor, the Ford worker, the ordinary soldier? These men often experience themselves as relatively powerless, which economically they are. (Horrocks. 1994:31)

A shift in power is indicated, in most arguments for masculinity in crisis. The argument is that men are used to power, feel entitled to it and yet are now denied the power to which they have grown accustomed.
3. MASCULINITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

3.1 Lurie the Professor

For a thorough examination of masculinity it is useful to divide it into the various spheres where it manifests itself. In Disgrace the protagonist plays various roles within the context of the public, the cultural, and the private spheres. Men play significantly different roles and have different expectations of themselves within these different contexts. Traditionally the public world has been predominantly the domain of the masculine. This includes the political arena, the workplace and areas of productivity, whereas the private sphere (of the home and relationships) has been seen as mainly the domain of the feminine. Although the private sphere can be seen as the domain of women, they are still not dominant within that domain. They might be allowed to run the household and rear the children, but they are still expected to be submissive towards their husbands and partners. Traditionally, within both the public and social arena, specific roles have been allocated to men, which have direct impact on their masculine gender identity. In this chapter the focus will be on masculinity and how it is affected by the workplace and perception of that workplace. Here a close examination of David Lurie and how he experiences his role as a professor, teacher and writer, as well as the impact his career has on his character, will be offered. Masculine roles in the public sphere are strongly integrated with notions of achievement and success.

3.1.1 Masculine Identity in the Workplace

Masculinity has traditionally been tied to the individual male’s functioning within a career and his success within that career. Being successful at work has been synonymous with being a successful man. Over the last few decades men’s legitimacy and validity within the workplace have been destabilised and subverted. About the character of David Lurie, it is said that he does not enjoy his more recent career as a teacher of communication studies (previously he taught the Romantic poets, Byron and Wordsworth, whom he loves, and whose work is one of his passions). He finds the new
“Communications” course (which he is forced to teach) “preposterous” (1999:3). He has also pursued a career as a writer and has published three books, “none of which has caused a stir or a ripple” (1999:4), implying his lack of success as an academic writer. This bleak description of Lurie’s lack of prowess in his various career pursuits occur at the beginning of the novel and it is arguably offered as an excuse for the character to find empowerment in other areas, such as sexuality:

Masculinity or the male identity is achieved by the constant process of warding off threats to it. It is precariously achieved by the constant rejection of femininity and homosexuality. This definition of masculinity as a category maintained by making strict polar distinctions of gender and sexuality is consistent with the concept of the ‘heterosexual matrix’ that Judith Butler maintains governs Western culture today. (Gutterman 2001:61)

The “polar distinctions” that Gutterman is referring to, are those binary oppositions that serve to define and stratify both masculinity and femininity. If (according to Gutterman) the “male identity is achieved by warding off threats to it”, we could then ask what threatens male identity? One of the main arguments for the destabilisation of the working man is the increasingly blurred lines between those previously clear cut, binary oppositions within the workplace. It is noticeable that Lurie’s immediate superior is a woman, Elaine Winter, suggesting that Lurie having a woman as a direct superior can be read as tying into the emasculation of the university. Tim Edwards comments that destabilisation in the workplace has an effect of displacement on masculine identity.

Given increased insecurity at work, if not unemployment, coupled with the rising participation of women in paid work and the commonality of dual-income households, there is much reason to assume that the image and indeed practice of men as providers, and the breadwinning ethic that goes with it, have been severely undermined if not displaced. (Edwards 2006:12)
If men are displaced by the destabilisation in the workplace, we need to question how that reflects within his character. Lurie refers to the university as an “emasculated institution of learning” (1999:4) which, by implication, negates Lurie’s ability to be empowered though his work. In fact, working at an establishment that is stripped of its masculine power serves to disempower Lurie.

The public spheres within which the masculine identity operates include those of government, academia, business, finance and politics. Although men perceive a loss of power within these areas, those institutions and structures still favour the masculine identity, or some form of it. It is notable that after the attack, Lurie and his daughter merely contact the police for insurance purposes, not to ask them to capture their assailants. Within the mimetic world of Disgrace, the suggestion is that the official South African police force is (albeit indirectly) racially motivated in deciding whom they pursue and whom not. In this case the suggestion is that they “take sides” with the black assailants and not with David Lurie and his white kindred:

It cannot be denied that men have more power than women in modern Western society. Men still dominate the upper echelons of government and business, and women continue to perform most of the unpaid labour of housework and child care. In addition, women still frequently earn less than men for comparable work, and professions dominated by women are less valued monetarily than those dominated by men. (Kiesling 2001:112)

Kiesling is correct in arguing that men are still in control of the public sphere, but in Disgrace we are forced to question what type of man is in control of those elements and institutions. Lurie is kicked out of the university because of his affair with a student, an act that might have been treated less harshly a decade ago. The university is not unwilling to negotiate with him about his dismissal, but they want Lurie to change to accept: “sensitivity training. Community service. Counselling” (1999:43). The university committee even goes as far as to write a statement on behalf of Lurie “which would satisfy [their] requirements” (1999:57). By signing this statement Lurie would secure a
deal with the rector, lessening the impact of his punishment. Lurie rejects this drafted statement on the premise that it seeks “repentance” and that he is “being asked to issue an apology about which [he] may not be sincere” (1999:58). The university does not allow for ideological reservations and he is dismissed from his post as a teacher.

The implications of the trial are that Lurie will only be allowed back by the university if he complies with their definition of how a male professor should behave towards his female students, and that the authorities view Lurie’s actions as wrong and unwanted. It is not surprising that, at the end of the novel, Lurie’s replacement, Dr Otto, has a “poster-size blow-up of a comic book panel: Superman hanging his head as he is berated by Lois Lane” (1999:77). Essentially Lurie is replaced by a man that identifies with the loss of male power. He not only identifies with it but even culturally celebrates it by having the poster of an earlier hero, the strongest man in the universe (Superman), being berated by his girl friend, and (in hanging his head) accepting it.

Lurie justifies his relationship with Melanie by saying that he was led by “Eros”. He claims that it is his right to desire. In one of his conversations with his daughter, Lucy, he relates the story of their neighbour’s dog in Cape Town. Through this story Lurie implies that it is better to be dead than to be punished for natural sexual instincts. The dog “would get excited and unmanageable” whenever “there was a bitch in the vicinity” (1999:90). Yet the owners of the dog kept on punishing it for this behaviour. Lurie relates this story to explain to Lucy that the dog eventually started to hate its own nature “and was ready to punish itself”. Through this story Lurie asserts that “desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts”. What this moment reflects is Lurie’s attitude to the possibility of change. If he accepted the university’s offer to “repent” and change, he would effectively be punished for his natural sexual instincts like the dog, at which stage it “would have been better to shoot it” (1999:90). Lurie instinctively links the state of forcibly curbed desire with emasculation and death of his sexual instinct and desires. If masculinity is in crisis, it is not all masculinities, as it is undeniable that men have control over most of the world’s resources and power.
Manhood of this sort rested on something more than tools, productivity, or authority: it wasn’t the handiwork that was essential so much as the whole idea of having skills that could be transferred to work critical to society and acknowledged for its public value. (Faludi.2000:86)

Faludi writes that men derive their sense of self from having valued skills. When looking at Lurie, it is noteworthy that his skills are “not critical to society” or his knowledge “acknowledged for it public value” (1999:86). In his writing career none of his books “caused a stir” (1999:4), and pedagogically “he makes no impression on his students” (1999:4). At the farm Lurie also plays an insignificant role as a worker. His main skill, his affinity for language and literature, is of no service to him: “He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa” (1999:95). Skills that would see him as highly laudably and accomplished in the metropole, render him useless and even comical in the rural setting of the Eastern Cape countryside: “He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon” (1999:95). He helps out Petrus not as a skilled worker with any expertise, but as a “handlanger” (assistant labourer, giving a hand where needed) (1999:136). If Lurie’s function is merely that of fulfilling incidental physical labour this renders him replaceable. Later in the novel Lurie decides to help out Bev Shaw at the animal shelter in Grahamstown and again he has no skill but merely “helps out as far as he is able” (1999:84), “offering himself for whatever jobs call for no skill: feeding, cleaning, mopping up” (1999:142). Men derive their sense of validity from their production and careers and it is clear that Lurie does not do that, as his unskilled labour is not ‘critical to society’. Men usually gain as sense of belonging and importance through their careers: “For most men in capitalist societies, their careers, their professions, their trades, their skilled and unskilled jobs are the prime focus of identity without work, they are rootless and disjointed” (Brittan 1989:189).

Lurie’s uprootedness or sense of rootlessness occurs simultaneously with his dismissal as professor. At first he seeks to find refuge with his daughter, but through his inability to sustain a healthy father-daughter relationship with her, he is not able to settle on the farm with her. This inability to develop a sense of belonging remains the case for the rest of
the novel. He eventually sells his house in Cape Town and rents a room in Grahamstown. Through the events in Lurie’s life he loses his home (“it does not feel like a homecoming. He cannot imagine taking residence once more in the house” [1999:175]). Because of his inability to change and refusal to compromise he eventually ends up in a situation where he does not have a job and sells his home. In a reverse of this situation Petrus has received land grants from the government and is building his house – settling on the land, taking root. He owns land and a home whilst Lurie has lost his. The only thing that Lurie has to hold on to is his daughter Lucy, and even she is not keen to have him around. The protagonist eventually immerses himself in his chamber opera and in his work at the clinic.

One of the jobs that Lurie takes upon himself is to take care of the corpses of the dogs that get put down each week at the animal shelter. He ritualistically takes them home with him on Sunday nights and drives them to the incinerator the next morning. He feels that “he is not prepared to inflict […] dishonour upon them” (1999:144). The “dishonour” he is referring to is leaving the corpses overnight with the rest of the city’s waste, and having the workmen at the incinerator beat the corpses of the dogs into a more convenient shape. This act of compassion for the corpses of the dogs might serve to redeem Lurie on a humanistic level, but cannot be defined as “work critical to society [or] acknowledged for its public value” (Faludi 2000:86), which according to her is essential to man’s sense of self worth as a worker. Lurie also comments that “there must be more productive ways of giving oneself to the world” (1999:146).

3.1.2 Under-employment: Redundancy

It is not enough that identity is tightly linked to productivity, but it is also increasingly difficult to find a niche of productivity within the workplace: “Today the ‘crisis of masculinity’ is […] much more severe because of the tremendous structural changes in advanced industrial societies” (Brittan 1989:180). These structural changes can range from the very obvious issue of women entering the work force to the shift from the cultural focus to computerisation of the workplace. There is a comparable shift in the
Lurie’s relation to his career and work is also interesting to note, especially with regard to under-employment and redundancy. Moving with the times, the university that Lurie works at undergoes what he calls “the great rationalization” and where he was once “a professor of modern languages” he is rationalized into an “adjunct professor of communications […] He has never been much of a teacher; in this transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning” (1999:3-4). Lurie instinctively links the rationalization of the university to castration, as he parallels conformity to popular trends, and the dismissal of his own temperamental leanings, as some form of emasculation.

Lurie has a sense of loss and detachment from his teaching job, because he does not have any passion for it (“he continues to teach because it provides him with a livelihood”, 1999:5) and is forced to teach a subject for which he has no affinity (“he finds its first premise […] preposterous” 1999:3). That Lurie finds his job as a teacher unfulfilling is only the first issue, he also finds that “he makes no impression on his students” and that “their indifference galls him” (1999:4). To them he is so inconsequential that they even forget his name. He also has a sense that he does not contribute significantly to society through his work as a teacher. Even the three books he has written were not sufficient to validate his existence and reinforce his masculine identity, since “none of [his books] caused a stir or even a ripple” (1999:4). One could even argue that it is because of his indifference to his job, that he sought distraction, meaning and a sense of power in the encounter with Melanie. If he cannot impress in the workplace, then he will pursue power in the sexual realm.

The status Lurie experienced as a professor of modern languages has at the end of the novel dwindled away to expendability. When Lurie returns to the university to collect his belongings, he takes on the persona of a ghost as he notes it is “a good time to come
haunting” (1999:177). He now identifies with something already dead and forgotten that is merely a shadow in the mortal world. When meeting the replacement lecturer, Dr Otto, the new lecturer does not even recognise Lurie’s name. His loss of power is further emphasised by the new incumbent asking if Lurie would manage to carry the box with his belongings. Lurie’s expendability and redundancy is also realised in the moment when his former colleague Elaine Winter refuses to answer whether he is missed after his early retirement: “And how is the department getting on without me? He asks as cheerily as he can. Very well indeed – that would be the frankest answer: We are getting on very well without you. But she is too polite to say the words” (1999:179).

In his writing career Lurie also fails to assert his prowess as an intellectual and valid contributor to society. Throughout the novel Lurie is working on a chamber opera tracing the life of the romantic poet Lord Byron. At first this starts off as a grand project: “a chamber play about love and death, with a passionate young woman” (1999:180). As the novel progresses, Lurie’s enthusiasm for the lushness and grandness of the opera becomes subdued. Instead of Byron and his young mistress, Lurie eventually conceives the focus of the play as the middle aged Teresa, Byron’s jilted lover: “a dumpy little woman” (1999:181). The lushness of the music also dwindles away to an “odd little seven stringed banjo” (1999:184), one of Lucy’s old childhood toys. Ultimately the chamber opera loses all pretence of being for an audience or eventual publication: “It would have been nice to return triumphant to society as the author of an eccentric little chamber opera. But that will not be” (1999:214). The protagonist recognises that he also fails to contribute to society as a writer-composer, when even his last attempt to offer tangible contribution fails. Instead, the only one that he is able to entertain with his work is himself and the dogs earmarked for euthanasia.

This latter-day anti-hero now finds that as a professor, teacher and writer he is replaceable by a younger model, and not really missed. As a writer he is not needed by society either. Having completed his last tasks in Cape Town he seeks an excuse to return to exile in Grahamstown.
3.1.3 Women as Workers: “Lucy is as a good as a boy. Almost!”

Undeniably the women’s movement and feminism have had a huge impact on masculinity. The crisis model requires investigation into the effect of female independence and the impact of women entering the workplace. The focus here is the impact on men of women’s increasing presence in the workplace:

Some men commented that they feel threatened by women’s improved status and their perception that women have attained equality […] women are thus seen to be usurping roles previously allocated to men, creating uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety. Some men felt redundant. (Walker 2005:168)

If men are destabilised and threatened by females entering the workplace, it can be deduced that men feel that it is their terrain to dominate and control the work environment. Men previously found their masculinity in being the provider. It then stands to reason that women appropriating that power not only causes men to be jealous of the jobs that were supposed to be theirs, but it also causes men to question their own significance and purpose as men: “As men became increasingly conscious of women as potential rivals in the public sphere, they not only felt insecure, but they constructed new rationalisations for gender inequality” (Brittan 1989:180).

Lucy stands out in *Disgrace* as a woman who does not conform to the traditional definition of a woman in need of a financial provider. Lucy owns her land and runs her own produce stall, selling fresh flowers and produce at the Grahamstown market on Saturday mornings. Ironically Lurie describes her as a solid figure, and comments on this when he first sees her on the farm, “here she is, flowered dress, bare feet and all, in a house full of the smell of baking, no longer a child playing at farming but a solid country woman” (1999:60). He also refers to her as a “sturdy young settler” (1999:61), with historical reference to the early nineteenth century history of the Eastern Cape. For Lurie to understand his daughter’s independence, he categorises her with the closest definition
possible: “settler”, “country woman” and “farmer”. All those classifications have political implications tied to them, especially in a South African context. Usually settlers and farmers were patriarchs with large families, but Lucy is alone with her ideas, dogs and rifle, or as Lurie calls her, “an armed philosopher” (1999:60). She does not conform to the traditional image of a settler or a farmer. Although she owns the land, she is alone and does not have a slew of children to inherit the land. In fact she is a lesbian, which contests the idea of the farmer as paterfamilias.

Petrus says to Lurie at his party that “your daughter is different. Your daughter is as good as a boy. Almost!” (1999:130). It is that “almost” that alerts the reader to the political aspects of the novel and the social milieu of the novel. Although Lucy might be able to make a living off the land and is financially independent, she still needs the protection of Petrus, the patriarch. She might live during a time in which woman’s independence is celebrated, but she lives in a country where although on paper gender equality is advocated, it is not general practice, especially not in the rural areas.

These ‘new rationalisations’ of masculinity would have to come into play as the previous premises/excuses for men’s dominance are revealed as false. Men therefore need to clutch at straws to explain and excuse their domination, such as Lurie’s excuse that he was led by “Eros” in his exploitation of Melanie. As Connell observes: “[a] thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate” (Connell.2001:44). In other words, the more proficient and self-reliant women become as workers and providers, the more men sustain their dominance by ‘telling themselves stories’ to legitimise their dominance. The attack on Lucy’s farm (besides the racial overtones) can be read as men asserting their power and dominance over a successful land-owning woman. She owns a smallholding, which produces revenue, and therefore does not need a man to be financially stable: “Like a stain the story is spreading through the district. Not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for” (1999:115). Here the really dominant men are seen to be asserting their power through physical violence. They might not be able to own the land themselves, but they can still exert sexual power over Lucy.
Lucy’s economic independence does not extend to her physical safety. Yet she refuses all Lurie’s offers to move her away to Holland. She becomes frustrated at Lurie shifting her land into the ideological context of the farm. She recognises what Lurie cannot, that there needs to be a renegotiation of ideas and concepts in order, to keep on living in this new South Africa: “Stop calling it the farm, David. This is not a farm, it’s just a piece of land where I grow things […] I’m not giving it up” (1999:200). Through refusing his help and insisting on her own independent existence, she renders him redundant as a provider. The challenge (of men’s role as providers for women) causes men to question their gender and entitlements, and the consequences of their manliness:

Masculine crisis theory is founded on the observation that both men and women deviate from the master gender stereotypes of their society […] the presumption is that this crisis was brought about by the erosion of male power in the workplace and in the home. In the past, men supposedly knew who they were; their roles were minutely specified, and they also knew who women were supposed to be. (Brittan 1989:25)

Brittan argues that the crisis occurs as a result of the destabilisation of the male identity. Change and the inability to adapt to change is an element of the crisis of masculinity. As mentioned before, crisis occurs due to a shift in power, and the inability of the individual to deal with the shift in power. It is not just that women are entering the workplace, but also that the workplace has ceased to be a place of meaning. It is not just unemployment that is an issue but also under-employment. Reid and Walker argue that this often leads to violence. Britton states that “Unemployed men see themselves as powerless and trivialized. The breadwinner’s role (in theory) gives men a sense of identity or structural location” (1989:188). Men are posited as rational, strong and intelligent, whilst women are classified via the age old binary opposition as emotional, fragile and nurturing. Thus men are “designed” for the workplace and women for the home.
Through ideologising physical distinctions men are brought to believe that women are ‘designed’ for the home and men for the workplace. Brittan elaborates on this by suggesting that “the state buttresses hegemonic masculinity by appropriating the discourse of biology, medicine, psychiatry and social science” (1989:129). Because of these physical distinctions between the sexes, men feel a protective urge towards their women. The crisis occurs when men do not succeed in their careers, are unable to care for their women, and even more when women are more economically successful than their men. The expectation that men should be dominant is still a constant ideal. Although women have increasingly assumed places of power, masculine hegemony is still the prevailing state of society.

3.2 Lurie and Other Masculinities: Petrus

In South Africa, the power shift does not only take place between men and women, but also between men of different races. We see this between David Lurie and Petrus in Disgrace. In the fictional but recognizable contemporary South African world of Disgrace society has turned its back only on a certain type of masculinity. The South African post-apartheid context, in which the novel is set, is a time where racial stratification overtly favours the black man. Where as previously it was the white man who oppressed the black man economically and academically, those spheres now favour the black man. The Cape Town University has relinquished its hold on canonised western ideologies and embraced a more culturally localised curriculum. His last employer also treats Lurie more harshly than would have happened in the previous regime. Lucy comments: “Shot? For having an affair with a student? A bit extreme don’t you think, David? It must go on all the time. It certainly did when I was a student” (1999:66). Not only do institutions under the new regime turn against her white male professor father, but they also openly favour black men like Petrus. Petrus was originally hired by Lucy as “the dig-man, the carry-man, the water-man. Now he is too busy for that kind of thing” (1999:151), thanks to land grants given to him by the government. As a result of these grants he is able to buy the farm next to Lucy’s, as well as build a house on it. Through the support of the government, Petrus becomes a land owner and a farmer:
Everything from here to the fence is his. He has a cow that will calve in the spring. He has two wives, or a wife and a girlfriend. If he has played his cards right he could get a second grant to put up a house; then he can move out of the stable. By Eastern Cape standards he is a man of substance. (1999:77)

In working with Petrus on the farm David Lurie’s newly defined position becomes clear: “Petrus needs him not for advice on pipefitting or plumbing but to hold things, to pass him tools – to be his handlanger” (1999:136). Previously Lurie, as white male, would be the one in power, calling the shots, telling Petrus what to do. Here their roles are inverted. The black former labourer or “handlanger” is now in the role of the master or farmer (the “baas” calling up the convention of the farm novel on which Coetzee wrote extensively in White Writing, 1988), whereas the white man is in the role of labourer or handlanger: “a dog-man Petrus once called himself. Well now he [Lurie] has become a dog-man” (1999:146). The patriarchy (Coetzee 1988:135) has been inverted – Lurie is now the “counter voice to the voice of the father/farmer”, subtly commenting on the inversion of roles in the new South Africa.

Petrus has much more prowess as the family man in comparison to Lurie, who has two failed marriages. Not only is Petrus successful as a dominating and controlling husband but he even commands two wives and has many sons and daughters. His dominance as a patriarch and protector is such that he even offers to marry Lurie’s white daughter, thus crossing racial lines with emphasis on the pre-eminence of gender roles (implying that he as the new patriarch can protect Lucy as a woman, where as David can offer no protection). Lucy takes this into consideration:

Objectively I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. I have a father, but he is far away and anyhow powerless in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn to for protection, for patronage? […] I will become a tenant on his land […] a bywoner. (1999:204)
Not only does this passage validate Lucy’s rationality in accepting Petrus’s protection, but it also serves again to reinforce the impression of Lurie’s powerlessness and failure as her protector. That she becomes a bywoner strengthens the intertextual link to the genre of the farm novel – in her case an inverted “farm novel” with Lucy casting herself in the role of the poor relation, the one who is fed out of graciousness, merely eking out a less than desirable existence by the grace of the land owner, the new farmer, Petrus.

Petrus's increasing prominence as the masculine success figure and Lurie’s decline is further emphasised by the ‘Saturday afternoon’ moment: “Saturday afternoon in South Africa: a time consecrated to men and their pleasures” (1999:75). The use of the word “consecrated” has religious connotations. At a time that is supposed to be holy and set aside for religious practice, where men are the gods, Lurie falls asleep. Petrus, on the other hand, is actively partaking of this pleasure: sitting in front of the television, watching sport, drinking beer. The shift of power has moved from the white western male to the black African. Even the media are following the shift, in that the soccer and boxing commentary is in Xhosa and Sotho, languages Lurie cannot speak. This again is a moment that highlights Lurie’s knowledge and expertise as redundant and unvalued by the society he is in. Because of the inversion of roles and ideology he is severely out of place in his new surroundings. He does not belong, he does not fit in.

**Conclusion**

Rationality, productivity and power are all prerequisites to being considered a ‘real’ or successful man: “justification and naturalisation of male power, that is, what remains relatively constant in the masculine ideology” (Brittan 1989:3). These inherently male attributes are threatened by significant power shifts in contemporary society.

Areas that traditionally define masculinity such as being a good provider, owning property or land, having a wife, and being successful in a career, have been inverted and destabilised. It is interesting to note that as Lurie's masculine power declines Petrus's
power increases. This implies that not all masculinities are losing power, but only those outdated, unfashionable ones.

Productivity and usefulness are almost synonymous in the minds of men. They see themselves as defined by their role, title, achievements, and what they offer to society:

   It wasn’t the handiwork that was essential so much as the whole idea of having skills that could be transferred to work critical to society and acknowledged for its public value. By this version of manhood, making things and serving the community were one and the same. (Faludi 2000: 86)

This idea that productivity equates with manliness is echoed and analysed by various theorists, so much so that his occupation comes to define a man.

   The primary point here was that work not only matters to men, but is also part of them as a key dimension of their identity and masculinity. Consequently, successful masculinity was equated directly with success at work whether in middle-class terms of a career or in more working-class terms of physical labour. (Edwards 2006: 8)

At the beginning of Disgrace the protagonist is a disillusioned Capetonian university professor, author of three obscure books, and writing a chamber opera. As the novel proceeds he increasingly shifts from a relatively powerful position in the metropolis to that of an ineffectual, rootless and obscure provincial figure. His stature is reflected accordingly in the fictional press reports in the novel. The first one tells of the scandalous affair with Melanie, and describes him as “Lurie (53), author of a book” (1999:46), whereas the report of the crime on the smallholding describes him as Lucy’s “elderly father” (1999:115). In the first newspaper report at the beginning of the novel, he is called by his title and name, linking him to the works he produced, whereas the second report refers to him anonymously as an
inconsequential senior citizen. Without career and productivity, Lurie has become an insignificant statistic, a nonentity.

When the male subject fails to comply with the “need” predefined by hegemonic masculinity he seems to lose his sense of purpose, this ‘need’ entails being productive. Jeff Hearn elaborates on the rule of men in the public domain:

In looking at the enormity of men’s material powers, how they have come historically to be the way they are, how they oppress women, and how they affect, and even in certain specific ways may oppress [them]selves, I have been increasingly impressed by the power of men and men’s institutions in what is often called the public domain […] thus dominance\public domains\public man\men are in mutually reinforcing relation – that relation is part of the problem of public men. Furthermore, that power and dominance of the public domains and public men appears to be historically on the increase, at least in potential. This is especially clear in the operation of the public institutions of violence, with their increasing corporate capability for destruction and genocide (Hearn 1992:2)

Masculine institutions reinforce and buffer male power. Inversely, male power reinforces and buffers masculine institutions; this is increasingly evident with regards to governments and the wars they perpetuate. The soldiers do not choose the war. The common man is merely swept away by the tide. When it comes to masculinity and productivity the link between the two is as obvious, as well as the impact that productivity or its lack has on the masculine identity. Yet it is not only the public sphere that shapes masculine identity and the position of men in society, but also the private sphere, as will be discussed in the next chapter.
4. MASCULINITY IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Masculinity is not only influenced by changes in society but also by the relationships of individuals. It is not only so much how the individual perceives himself as a man but also how others perceive him and react towards him that effects the individuals own masculine identity. Previously men enjoyed control and domination over women’s bodies, but with the emergence of feminism this conventional entitlement has become debatable and has even been destabilised in modern societies. Men sanctioned this privilege over the female body purely on the premise that they were men. Disgrace, testifies to the diverse culture found on South Africa, a culture that switches from urban to rural and from Western to African with the ease of a car trip. Although feminism and equality between genders have become a norm in metropolitan centres like Cape Town, the same does not hold true for rural areas like the farm in the Eastern Cape, evoked in Coetzee’s text.

The male role in the private sphere has many aspects and variables. These include the family structure, relationships of heterosexual couples, and the relationships between parents and children, to name a few.

Masculine identity is contingent on feminine identity. It is rather ironic that a gender discourse defines itself by what it is not - neither feminine nor homosexual. If masculine gender identity is informed by female gender identity, it is necessary to study what defines female identity, how that identity changes, and the effects of those changes on masculine identity:

The western intellectual tradition was founded on a structure of binary oppositions that, when subjected to close analysis, would inevitably break down as a result on their own internal contradictions. Words (or signs) have no inherent meaning; rather their connotations are derived in relation to other words, and those relations are often value-laden and hierarchical. (Adams and Savran 2002: 4)
Gender identity is posited on an axis of opposition: “Masculinity and femininity are habitually defined in terms of the difference between them” (Beynon 2002: 8). This shifting sexual landscape implies shifting gender roles, and, one would assume, shifting gender identity. Female gender identity has changed as a direct result of feminist post-structural theorising producing new analyses of what it means to be a woman.

Bodies sexed female are produced as “women” by their placement in systems of signification and social practices. Gender, thus, can be conceived as a system of meaning, rather than a quality “owned” by individuals. And, as in all systems of meaning, the effects of gender are not always predictable, stable or unitary. (Robinson 1991:1)

Essentially the concept of “woman” has escaped its rigorous confines of a natural or inherent quality and has therefore been able to be constituted as a fluid and malleable attribute. With masculinity as reaction to femininity, it is logical that as definitions of femininity change, so too should those concerning masculinity. Robinson elaborates this idea by arguing that “the differences within the category of “women” disrupt the singular and essential difference between man and woman” (Robinson 1991:7).

It is notable when tying this back to the crisis argument that, although men are experiencing resistance and change, with a subsequent loss of control in the realm of the ‘private sphere’, they still control, and abuse the women in their lives within the ‘private sphere’. Relationships are an area where gender relations are most evident and usually unequal. “Intimate relationships are undergoing important reconstruction though it notes that unequal gender relationships still limit the extent to which change is possible” (Reid and Walker 2005:xi). As mentioned before, women are and have been renegotiating their gender identity and this renegotiation predictably also takes place within their relationships. When men continue to try and negotiate relationships according to ‘the old rules’ they are somehow surprised that the rules have changed: “Male authority can no longer be presented as taken for granted – it has to be defended and rationalised by
recourse to the most blatant sexual stereotyping” (1989:184). Men still try to justify their sense of entitlement and authority by objectifying women and in doing so they dehumanise them and consequently appease any conscience of their domination.

4.1 Lurie as Father, Protector and Breadwinner: Influences of Patriarchy

*Power relations* show the most visible evidence of crisis tendencies: a historic collapse of the legitimacy of patriarchal power, and a global movement for the emancipation of women. This is fuelled by an underlying contradiction between the inequality of women and men, on the one hand, and the universalising logics of modern state structures and market relations, on the other. (Connell. 2001: 45)

The patriarchal structure is one of the most overt power relations between the genders. It is built on a system of masculine dominance: “A patriarch is the male head of a family, […] means rule or government by a man, with authority passing through the male line from father to son” (Peck and Coyle 2002: 166). Within this structure women are at the mercy of their husbands, fathers and even sons. Patriarchy also has a political component to it:

Western culture and society are male-centred, and […] women are made subordinate in every area of life: the family, the state, in law and in religion. In all these areas women are usually defined only by reference to men, and usually in a negative way: negative because women are implicitly defined as lacking male authority. (Peck and Coyle 2002: 166)

Judith Butler comments on the problematic status of patriarchy by stating that: “the notion of patriarchy has been widely criticised in recent years for its failure to account for the concrete contexts in which it exists” (Butler 1990: 6). This implies that patriarchy is increasingly unable to justify its domination of its supposed “subordinates”. No one is really convinced any longer that men are more suited for the work place and women for
the home due to physical differences between the two genders. Nor does it adequately justify why a man should draw higher salaries for the same job as a woman, nor why a man is entitled and even encouraged to be promiscuous while it is considered unseemly for a woman. Yet somehow patriarchy expects certain “rights”.

What one can deduce is that, since patriarchy is synonymous with power, a power shift in the familial order, in marriage and relationships will lead to a shift in masculine power. This shift is one of the proposed causes of ‘crisis’ within masculinity: “While men’s role of the head of household remained constant during these changes, their power over women was made cultural and rational rather than divinely ordained” (Rutherford 2003:3). It cannot be denied that it is still men who dominate and rule households in most situations. A direct result of the destabilisation of male power is a firmer hold on the power they do have through an over-assertion of physical violence. Essentially men are compensating for the loss of the legitimacy of the patriarchal status by the abuse of the power they do still have:

Reproduction, children, money, inheritance, and power. These all contribute to the appropriation of women’s bodies and labour. Reproduction is not neutral, it is not simply the means of replacing the human species. It can be best represented as being a series of ‘moments’ in which men exercise control over women. From the act of childbirth, to child rearing, to the assumption of breadwinners’ roles [...]. Men dominate reproduction.

(Brittan 1989:118)

If this is the expectation, then an inability to control women’s labour and their sexual function, thereby securing paternity, leads to insecurity and crisis: “Men are not dominant only because they control and own the means of production, but because they dominate the mode of reproduction” (1989:126). Therefore control of reproduction reinforces and is synonymous with male domination. In Disgrace we see this most clearly in Lucy’s rapists. Not only are they indirectly supported by the apathy of the police force, but also the fact that Lucy does not report the rape. The political setting of the book also plays a
part in this moment, as the rapists are black men. They are men who were disadvantaged and powerless under the country’s political regime (apartheid). Through the rape of Lucy, they are not only asserting their physical and sexual dominance over her, but they are also securing their progeny, by impregnating her, thereby asserting and re-establishing their power as men: “They were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principal that ran the show but the testicles, sacs, bulging with seed aching to perfect itself” (1999:199).

Hegemonic masculinity or patriarchy “entitles” men to various “advantages” with regards to women. It goes as far as to imply that if you do not use and exploit those advantages you are somehow less of a man: “Male domination is not only about that appropriation of a women’s labour power but it is also about the appropriation of her sexuality, her body” (1989:17-18). One of the largest areas of this exploitation is in the home. The husband is “educated” psychologically to believe that his wife belongs to him. It is only recently that rape has been acknowledged as an act that can take place between a married couple. Previously it was the man’s right to demand sex from his wife, regardless of her desires: “In the domestic mode of production it is always men who derive advantages and benefits from the service of women” (1989:112). According to patriarchal rules, the husband, as a man, is the head of the house. He literally owns his wife and children: “women themselves became the resource acquired by men much as the land was acquired by men” (1989:122). When Petrus offers to marry Lucy for protection, she is under no illusion that that marriage, although a marriage of convenience, will be without some form of sexual affirmation: “[W]ould Petrus expect me to sleep with him? I’m not sure that Petrus would want to sleep with me, except to drive home his message” (1999: 203). Perhaps especially as a lesbian, Lucy is aware of the power implication linked to men and their sexuality.

Although the crisis debate might posit masculine power as being destabilised, this is not the case within the fictional world of Disgrace or in the imagination of Lurie. Both Melanie and Lucy are at the mercy of the whims and desires of men. Yet their control over a woman’s body is not legitimate. Lurie experiences repercussions from his affair
with Melanie. He is dismissed from his post at the university and is ostracised from society. The rapists are luckier in their reception after the rape. One of them, Pollux, even falls under the protection of Petrus. Remarkable are the differences between the two societies represented in *Disgrace*, the metropolitan one in Cape Town and the provincial one in the Eastern Cape. Patriarchal power structures are still firmly in place in the rural Eastern Cape, and therefore the rapists are not punished or even shunned by society. Pollux is one of the guests at Petrus’s party, and eventually becomes part of his household, essentially one of Lucy’s neighbours.

The crisis model asserts that when men are denied the female body, to which they feel they are entitled, they experience insecurity with regards to their gender identity. That men can ever be denied access to the female body is questionable since there will always be a physical difference of power between the two sexes.

Another aspect of the entitlement bestowed upon men is the influence they have as heads of families. This role also has an important impact on masculine identity: “It is not only the family that constitutes that social order – on the contrary, it is the social order that constitutes the family” (Brittan 1989:112).

Masculinities are informed through the families they are surrounded by. The family is influenced by the ‘social order’ of its immediate society. Therefore, the individual’s masculine identity is directly proportionate to the social attitude towards the masculine. But nothing remains stagnant and societies change, as is seen in *Disgrace*. Lurie can be said to be a left over from a previous regime. As one of his female partners comment: “your people had it easier, whatever the rights or wrongs of the situation […] I mean your generation” (1999:9). He is also referred to as a “hangover from the past” (1999:40) by his head of department at the university. Society has changed around Lurie and he needs to adapt. Again, looking at the difference between Lurie and Petrus, it is interesting to note that in the new South Africa portrayed in *Disgrace* Petrus’s is the favoured masculinity, whilst Lurie’s is the rejected one. This is not only affected by the strong cultural influence permeating the situation (Petrus still operates within a pre-modern
African culture that promotes unquestionable patriarchy), but because with the advent of the new political regime white masculinity (understood to be advantaged by the apartheid government) is not supported by the new government.

The areas of ‘domination’ and ‘stratification’ between the different genders are most clearly seen in men’s relationships with their wives: “married men of all classes stand in an exploitative relation with their wives” (Brittan 1989:113). Petrus as an apt example of a patriarch has control over his wife. At his house warming party he “summons” his wife from the kitchen (1999:129) and she obeys. His wife only interacts with Lucy and does not even raise her eyes to Lurie (pointing towards different cultural mores). Men might be dominated by other men and women, but in the family, men generally dominate their wives. This domination is justified by hegemonic masculinity. It takes place not just on a physical level but also on the level of labour distribution. It is not surprising that Petrus summons his wife from the kitchen. This implies that at the party, supposedly a house-warming celebration, Petrus’s pregnant wife is still busy working, cooking and looking after the guests, whilst Petrus is free to entertain.

After two failed marriages Lurie has become an expert in the conduct of casual affairs. Though he is unable to sustain a marriage relationship, he is able to sleep with random women, thereby asserting at least some form of masculine power.

4.2 Lurie the Philanderer: “Beauty does not own itself”

Patriarchy historically has secured men’s sense of entitlement to women’s bodies and sexual function. Although this entitlement is not overtly endorsed by society and legislation any more, men find it to their advantage to make up stories to justify their exploitation and abuse of women. This is especially clear in the character of Lurie and in the way he conducts his affair with Melanie.

Lurie believes that women’s bodies do not belong to them; as he says to Melanie: “she has a duty to share it [her body, her sexual function]” (1999: 16). In a comparable way
Lucy perceives that the rapists “see [her] as owing something [,] [t]hey see themselves as debt collectors” (1999: 158). Just as it is in Lurie’s interest to make up stories to justify his exploitation of Melanie, he comments that he “is sure they [the rapists] tell themselves many things. It is in their interest to make up stories that justify them.”(1999: 158). He thinks that he understands the rapists, their motivation and justifications: “He does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them” (1999: 160). In other words, Disgrace explores and critiques the notion of masculine entitlement to the female body, not only in depicting the subtle power play between Lurie and Melanie, but also in describing the rape of Lucy. The reader is challenged to draw the parallels between these two instances.

Lurie’s attitudes and ideas about women and their sexuality align him, in a sense, with the rapists. He might not have violently raped Melanie somewhere at gun point in a dark alley, but he also did not give her much choice in deciding that she should sleep with him. It is therefore undeniable that Lurie, as a man, has power. During the hearing it is noted that “as teachers we occupy positions of power” (1999: 53), and later Lurie remarks “[u]nequal: how can he deny that” (1999: 53), both of these statements alluding to the unequal power dynamic between Lurie and Melanie as well as his knowledge of it. It might not have been a physical rape, but it does not negate the possibility of psychological manipulation. If Lurie’s power as teacher and man is undeniable, where does the crisis take place? It may be argued that because he did not get away with the affair, this is indicative of the decline of masculine privilege over the female body. Yet how does that hold true for the rapists, who not only legally get away unpunished, but one of whom is even protected by Petrus, the patriarch, due to his affiliations with this political sanctioned authority? This again points to the notion that masculinity cannot be in crisis, but rather that the popularity of certain masculinities (for instance the dominance of white western man in rural South Africa) has become outdated and gone out of fashion. That loss of prestige and privilege might be traumatic for the rejected individuals, but does not signify a crisis for masculinity as a whole.
Looking at the rationale behind the exploitation of the female body, the way the domination of women is justified, is through the “belief/theory” that women are inferior to men, and cannot take care of themselves. This preconceived inferiority is translated into the assumed ‘human value’ of women. “‘Human value’ is what human beings consider to be the intrinsic worth of other human beings” (1989: 123). It is due to the lack of “human value” ascribed to females that they can be used as tools and commodities to be passed on from man to man, so much so that without a man to protect them, they are fair game: “It is the appropriation of this labour, or ‘human value’, that enables men to continue to dominate women and by extension each other” (1989:124). This implies that men actually expect to own women’s human value, to own women and that through the act of sex, and that they become objects to own and oppress. Yet, as women are becoming more liberated and emancipated from the psychological hold that men have over them, they are refusing the appropriation of their bodies. Notably this does not hold true for a South African context, a country in which abuse and rape statistics are yearly increasing. *Disgrace* critiques this contemporary society with one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, and exposes it as a world where women are still oppressed and abused, and increasingly so.

In a world where men still get away with abuse, rape and murder almost on a daily basis, is not surprising that Lurie suffers only the loss of his job and status for the sexual harassment of Melanie (and that only because he is to stubborn to submit the their request on repentance). Lurie’s loss of sexual potency is echoed in his inability to sustain a marriage or even a healthy romantic relationship. In juxtaposition to him stands Petrus, who is married to two wives and is offering Lucy the opportunity to be his third wife: "If he wants me to be known as his third wife, so be it. As his concubine, ditto" (1999: 204). For Lucy the matter of concern is not so much marriage or sex but rather patronage. She is willing to accept Petrus's offer if "the child becomes his too" (1999: 204); essentially she is willing to side with the most dominant man, the alpha male, who will be able to protect her, give her patronage.
Judith Butler states that “gender can be understood as a signification that an (already) sexually differentiated body assumes, but even then that signification exists only in relation to another, opposing signification” (1999:13). Therefore men can feel powerful by imposing themselves on “weak” females. If women are weak, then men are strong.

Lurie is plagued by notions of “desire”, being pulled to and fro by urges and lusts. He feels compelled to act on those desires, because refusing these impulses is he believes to deny his nature:

One can punish a dog, it seems to me, for an offence like chewing a slipper. A dog will accept the justice of that: a beating for a chewing. But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts. (1999:90)

As this commentary on the sexual desires of man takes place right before the attack on the farm and Lucy’s rape, it is impossible to deny the link Lurie is making between men asserting their sexual dominance and rape. In this statement Lurie comments that to deny men their sexual nature is unjust and it would be better to die than live a half life being punished for male sexual instincts. Yet after the rape it is Lurie who constantly urges Lucy to report the rape, and it is he who cannot let the issue rest. Not only does he constantly ask Lucy about it but he also confronts Petrus about it. In talking about their neighbour’s dog Lucy suggests solving the problem of unwanted desire by having the dog neutered. Lurie’s reply to that is that “at the deepest level [he thinks] it might have preferred being shot” (1999: 90). From this statement it can be inferred that Lurie would rather die, or live whilst “being punished for [his] desires” (1999:90), than be castrated, or in his case changing his behaviour. If that is how Lurie feels about the expression of desire, then we have to ask why the rape of Lucy bothers him so much. Is it really the rape, or is it because as Lucy’s father he was unable to protect her, and that therefore it was not only Lucy’s power that was taken away but also Lurie’s? The rape is not only the physical abuse of Lucy, but it is also a moment in which Lurie is stripped of all remaining vestiges of supposed guardianship over his daughter and patriarchal power.
Throughout *Disgrace* there is the constant question of how Lurie’s encounter with Melanie is different from Lucy’s rape. The novel questions the masculine sense of entitlement that makes Lurie feel that there is nothing wrong with his encounters with Melanie. The only problem Lurie sees with their encounters is that he is too old:

Unnatural. That is what the trial was set up to punish, once all the fine words were stripped away. On trial for his way of life. For unnatural acts: for broadcasting old seed, tired seed, seed that does not quicken […] if the old men hog the young women, what will be the future of the species? (1999: 190)

Lucy’s rape is also unnatural. The notion of seed is used in both instances. “The seed of generations, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman’s body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven” (1999: 194). Here Lurie is referring to his own sexual encounters, but yet again one can ask how this is different from what happened to Lucy, with seed being driven into her to secure a new future. As a result of this parallel between Lurie’s attitudes regarding women and sex and Lucy’s rape, the reader is forced to question the sense of entitlement and supposed “rightness” of male ownership of the female body and to ultimately realize that Lurie’s coercion of Melanie is no different from the rape of Lucy, whether it was forced due to physical power, or due to social power. Women are still sexually coerced and conquered by men. The irony is that Lurie's 'seduction' of Melanie actually reinforces the fact that he still has power, as a man. He can still pursue and 'stalk' his prey. Both Lurie’s ‘seduction’ of Melanie and the rapists’ violation of Lucy are instances of the assertion of masculine power, and ways of ensuring patriarchal control over women.

Lurie and the rapists are placed in a similar position in the novel. They are set up to reflect and expose each other’s actions and intentions. Lurie’s attitudes and beliefs enable him to act in ways contemporary society does not condone, and through his actions and stoic refusal to change, he is relegated to isolation and marginalisation. Lurie believes
that desire is meant to be followed through and that he is entitled to women’s bodies and their sexuality. The fantasies he creates to justify his romantic endeavours serve to promote this notion of entitlement. Yet he lives in a society that does not condone the exploitation of women, at least not openly. He is betrayed by the very same society that promotes the exploitation of the female body.

4.2.1 Sexuality: “he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex”

Sexuality plays an integral part in the construction of the masculine identity, and by analysing the character’s sexuality we learn more about the character. Whereas at the start of the novel Lurie claims to have “solved the problem of sex” (1999:2), the whole text offers a critique of how this “Casanova” indeed fails to solve this problem. It may be noted that it is his preconceived, romanticised and antiquated ideas about women that cause him to expect a certain level of compliance and subservience from the women he is with. Because of that expectation he is surprised and even offended when the women in his life do not comply with his preconceived ideas about what women want and how they should behave. Lurie experiences a loss of power in the realm of relationships and sexual prowess: “Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost” (1999:7).

From the start of the novel Lurie links his sexual powers with his vitality, by saying the waning of such powers turns him into a ghost. A ghost can be understood as a being that is still in the world while it is not of the world. It has the ability to see everything that happens but is powerless to interact with it. It may be proposed that Lurie fashioned his approach to the opposite sex on his poetic alter ego, Byron, an inveterate philanderer. He uses the Romantic poets and romantic ideologies as his “guides”, and this informs both his language use and his motives. The poets, their work and their ideologies (in which he immerses himself) bear close resemblance to hegemonic notions of masculinity. He subscribes to the romantic fantasy to such an extent that he believes these notions to be truths. The problem with this is that his gender identity is therefore informed by some of the most patriarchal and hegemonic schools of thought, whereas he lives in a society that
does not condone that sort of behaviour and sees it as unacceptable – as is reflected by the judgement of the committee on sexual misconduct of his erstwhile workplace.

As a “servant of Eros” he is not capable of seeing women as separate from their sexual function. He sees women only as sexualised beings, to such an extent that he remarks: “he has not taken to Bev Shaw, a dumpy bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck. He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive” (1999:72). He does not care what her personality is like, what she does, or who she is but is almost immediately repulsed by the fact that she makes no effort to be attractive. ‘Making herself attractive’ would mean to preen her physical body for the male gaze, in order to be found pleasing for her physical appearance, not as an individual with her own worth and personality. Yet, ironically he also has an affair with her, this woman by whom he is physically repulsed. Academically and psychologically moulded and shaped by his interpretation of the Classics and Romantic poets, David Lurie understands women only in a sexual context. Arguably it is not only Lurie’s adherence to the ethos of the romantic poets that cause this, but also the way sex has been proliferated and commodified within mainstream society.

Reid finds that the “publicness of sex and sexuality and the shifting gender order have significant consequences for men” (Reid. 2005:9). Sex was one of the areas where the frustrations and insecurities of men used to be assuaged. Men had the right and power over women’s bodies. Close to the end of the novel, after being told Melanie would “spit in [his] eye if she sees [him]” (1999:194), Lurie picks up a random girl on a street corner, “drunk or perhaps on drugs” (1999:194), and she performs oral sex on him. Not only does he use sex as a balm for his bruised ego, but he continues preying on young women, “younger even than Melanie” (1999:194).

It is mainly men who rape and that this act perpetuates violence, especially against women. As governments and constitutions strive to appear more politically correct, men are finding that they have fewer rights to women’s bodies. In Disgrace, Lurie is called into a disciplinary hearing, to address his affair with Melanie. In this instance we see the
rights of women coming into play, with regard to Lurie's position. He is offered "No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age. Everyone's hand will be against you, and why not?" (1999:44). Morell comments on the shifting landscape of power and sexuality:

Sex has become an arena of contestation and accommodation in relationships. Men (and women) have always brought their strengths and weaknesses to intimate relationships but now the stakes are higher as men no longer have the law on their side. (Morrell, 2005: x)

Masculinity and the accompanying sexual violence are some of the focuses of Reid and Walker’s study. In their work they investigate the reasons for men’s violence. They found that “men have found it very difficult to assert their manhood through traditional avenues […] alternative means of achieving manhood, such as violence and having multiple sexual partners, take on exaggerated significance” (Reid and Walker. 2005:15). The contradiction between an overtly sexualised society (in its films, magazines, ‘adult’ shops, et cetera) is in a stark contrast with the legal rights of women. This also brings an element of confusion to the construction of masculinity. In one way the media advertises women as possessions and mere bodies. On the other hand men have no right to possess or ‘claim’ them. Yet at the same time, men are definitely not innocent bystanders, as Reid states: “[m]en are centrally implicated in the shifting sexual landscape” (Reid 2005: 9).

Regardless of Lurie’s power “having fled”, he is still able to seduce and exploit women sexually. The only difference is that he now has to be satisfied by less attractive women, such as Bev Shaw, or prey on vulnerable youngsters, such as the random drugged and drunken girl under the street lights. Furthermore his exploitations have more serious consequences, such as the results of his interactions with Melanie. Lurie’s loss of power does not translate into a lack of sexual power but merely into a need to work somewhat harder to achieve his end goal, his female prey.
4.2.2 Fantasy and Control

Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye
That have usurped upon a living thought
That never more could be

(1999:21)

In one of Lurie’s lectures he reads out the Mont Blanc section of Wordsworth’s, The Prelude. As he tries to explain to his class, and perhaps to us as reader, the idea conveyed is that it is sometimes better not to know or see the truth, the mountain peak, as sometimes the imagined image or idea is so much better than reality. Commenting on this he says: “do you truly wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of the visual apparatus? It may be in your better interests to throw a veil over the gaze, so as to keep her alive in her archetypal, goddesslike form” (1999: 22).

It is in the interests of patriarchy and Lurie to create a reality in which women want to be controlled by men, a reality in which the women are quiet and docile. With patriarchal entitlement to the female body being precarious, it becomes even more important to posit the feminine as weak and subservient: “In order to have a paternalistic masculinity, it is necessary to have an image of women in need of protection from the harsh world of business and politics” (Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 22). The key word from this passage is image. When women are understood as somehow lesser kinds of being than men, their exploitation and abuse becomes justified.

The fictionalisation of the women in Lurie’s life occurs from the beginning of the novel. His whole encounter with Soraya is highly romanticised by him. He chooses the afternoons because of “the promise of shuttered rooms, cool sheets, stolen hours” (1999:7). Soraya is never a real woman to him. She is an idea, an image, as he creates her story and personality to suit him, but at R400-00 per ninety-minute session, he can. He is completely complicit in “own[ing] this function of her” (1999: 2). He is impressed by her
willingness to please and change for him; and he is pleased by the fact that she is quiet and docile. He prefers her that way: “Intercourse between Soraya and himself must be, he imagines, rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest” (1999:2-3).

The main attraction of Soraya, though, is not her passivity, but rather the control Lurie has over the fantasy. She is a woman he can dominate and tell how to behave. She is what he wants her to be. If he wants to believe that she is coy rather than shy, then he is entitled to that belief, in that he is paying her to enact that. His solution to the problem of sex comes unravelled when the illusion of Soraya is broken. Here he encounters a Soraya he does not own and cannot control: the real Soraya. From being the docile, “not effusive” Soraya of his weekly encounters, she has become shrill and commanding: “Demand. She means command. Her shrillness surprises him. There has been no intimation of it before” (1999:10). These idealistic standards he aims towards are also derived from his naïve understanding of women and relationships.

Lurie is constantly creating narratives and fictions around the women with whom he has relationships. With Soraya, he fabricates her temperament as being “quiet and docile” (1999: 1). It is also with her that “It surprises him that ninety minutes a week of a woman’s company are enough to make him happy, who used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage” (1999: 5). One may argue that he is so satisfied with Soraya because with her the fiction is sustained. She is being paid to be compliant, and whatever he wants her to be, thereby sustaining the illusion that he is a dominant man with a submissive woman under his control. It is only when reality seeps in when he phones her at her home that the illusion shatters and he finds her being “shrill” and “predatory” (1999: 10), unlike during their encounters when she was “not effusive” (1999: 1). While the fantasy of dominance is sustained Lurie finds Soraya attractive and pleasing. Once this is shattered, he observes her temperament as predatory and unattractive.

Elements of Lurie preferring fictive to real life relationships also occur in his relationship with Melanie. Noticeable for instance is the different name Lurie gives Melanie:
“Melanie – melody: a meretricious rhyme. Not a good name for her. Shift the accent. Mélani: the dark one” (1999: 18). With the shifting of the accent in her name and its implicit meaning, he not only takes another piece of her innocence away but also distances the real Melanie from the Mélani with whom he is about to have an affair. Indeed when he thinks of her whilst he is on the farm after the affair, he thinks of Mélani: “With the best will in the world he could not find wit in Mélani. But plenty of beauty. Again it runs through him: a light shudder of voluptuousness” (1999: 78).

When we first encounter her, he describes her smile as “sly rather than shy” (1999: 11), and later on he remarks on her “evasive and even coquettish little smile” (1999: 12). In his focalization he perceives her as sensual rather than innocent. Yet when Melanie’s father first speaks to Lurie he comments that she “takes things to heart [and that] she has such respect for [Lurie]” (1999: 37). This suggests the subjectivity of the male gaze. Due to Lurie’s skewed perception of Melanie he is in fact surprised to hear that “she takes things to heart”. Lurie’s perception of Melanie is informed by who he wants her to be: an object of sensual desire. In a sense Lurie’s focalization of Melanie makes her less vulnerable, thus rendering his actions less exploitative. The fantasy of Melanie and their time together remains romanticised only until the end of the novel. Having returned to Cape Town, Lurie goes to see the play Melanie acts in and again remarks:

She is altogether more gifted. Is it possible that in the months he has been away she has grown up, found herself? *Whatever does not kill me makes me stronger.* Perhaps the trial was a trial for her too; perhaps she too has suffered, and come through. (1999: 191)

It is surmised by Lurie that she has suffered. At this stage Lurie still feels that he has enriched her life by being with her and thinks of her as a mate. It is only when Melanie’s boyfriend tells Lurie that “she will spit in your eye” (1999: 194) that Lurie realises that in his perception of her he might be at fault. It is in this moment that the fantasy is shattered. Yet it is interesting to note that after their second encounter, Melanie who used to wear bright and colourfully accessorised clothing is seen in only black clothes even to the end
of the novel. Black clothes are traditionally associated with depression, grief and mourning. When reading Lurie’s comments about Melanie and his relations with her, we need to keep in mind that Lurie is the focaliser of the narrative and as his ex-wife Rosalind comments, “you were always a great self-deceiver, David. A great deceiver and a great self-deceiver” (1999: 188).

If Lurie is guilty of deception and self-deception the reader has to be acutely aware that this protagonist is a fictional construct, a figment of the author’s imagination. The author created a rather unsympathetic white philanderer as the focaliser in his new South African dystopia. The effect of this is the distancing of reader from protagonist (few readers would empathize with this cold, self-centred persona. His personality can even be described as that of an anti-hero). As the early reception of the novel proves, most readers did indeed find it extremely difficult to identify with David Lurie. The question needs to be asked why an author would create such an unsympathetic character as the locus of his dystopic narrative.

The mimetic description in this engaged novel set in the “new South African” cultural environment of the late nineteen nineties is coloured by an intensely pessimistic view. There is no longer a place for cultural products of value such as Romantic poetry and opera. Crimes such as house-breaking, physical brutalisation and rape are rife, and highly qualified professional people lose their jobs due to the new ideologies and technological nature of institutions. Value systems have radically changed, as described in the new nature of the university where Lurie worked. The open ending without clear resolution seems to suggest that the country has “gone to the dogs”. All that was valuable from the perspective of a white, ‘cultured’, educated male of creative bent, is gone. Lurie is an extremely unsympathetic character of high stature at the start of the novel who loses all that he values (western cultural values such as order, space for cultural products and individual freedom of choice), suggests that a new order will replace that which is now defunct. It leaves no space for people of Lurie’s ilk. It suggests immigration as his only option. Had the author chosen a more sympathetic male character, it would not have allowed such a clear profiling of the old order against the new, nor of the hopelessness of
the situation for Lurie. There simply is no space in this “brave new world” for an individual with his characteristics. Petrus’s culture, his new patriarchal order which values clan affiliation above the individual, is set to take over, and unless the white subject, like Lucy, chooses to affiliate herself with them, there is no safe space left in which to survive, except if relegated to the demeaning and ultimately pointless job of handling the carcasses of dead township dogs.

4.3 Influences on the Masculine Identity

If masculinity is an attribute acquired by the individual and contingent on the society and cultural influences surrounding that individual, it is therefore necessary to look at those influences that determine masculine identity. One of the strongest influences on masculine identity is in fact other men. Fathers, friends and brothers all play an important role in the construction of the masculine identity as men emulate and seek approval from each other. “In the age of celebrity, the father has no body of knowledge or authority to transmit to the son. Each son must father his own image, create his own Adam” (Faludi.2000: 35).

In the theory of masculinity we read that boys and men are growing up without fathers and thereby without a strong male influence, yet we never read of any men being significant in Lurie’s life:

His childhood was spent in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sisters fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives, a daughter.

The company of women made him a lover of women and, to an extent, a womanizer. (1999: 7)

Lurie asserts that his lack of a father figure has made him dependent on women, and the way women view him. Yet, Lurie is unable to sustain a relationship. He has two failed marriages and his most successful and satisfying relationship is with a prostitute, Soraya. In the arena of family he constantly mentions how he has failed Lucy as a father, or at
least as a guide. He apologises to Lucy “for not turning out to be a better guide” (1999: 79). It would be prudent to ask whether Lucy ever even needed a ‘guide’ rather that a father who is a protector and a provider. It may be argued that because of Lurie’s lack of a father or even father figure, he is unable to be a father or even a father figure. He also seems to want to play father to most of the women he has sexual relations with: “Almost he says, “Tell Daddy what is wrong” (1999: 27), whilst holding Melanie in his arms in his daughter’s room. The relationship between a man and his parents is also significant in establishing his gender identity. Dominant mothers and absent fathers are both noted as tending to have a negative effect on masculine identities: “Women dominated child rearing is blamed for the continues reproduction of bruised male egos, which make it impossible for them to come to terms with feelings of tenderness and intimacy” (Brittan 1989:20).

Lurie’s statement that being surrounded by women made him a lover of women needs refutation. What he might define as being a “lover of women” in itself is ambiguous; this notion of lover is not the self-sacrificing altruistic understanding of lover, but rather the carnal definition of the word, as one who makes love to women, one who uses them for their sexual function to affirm his notion of himself, his masculine identity. Absent fathers, lead to women dominated child rearing. The absent albeit “breadwinner” fathers, have left their sons emotionally stunted. The other issue stemming from the problem of absent fathers is the lack of an appropriate masculine role model, “Male children […] are increasingly faced with the problem of finding an appropriate role model” (Brittan 1989:33). Their fathers are not there to show them how “a man” should behave; as he claims to have no father or other masculine influences on his life the only masculine influence in Lurie’s life we read about is the Romantic poets. The problem is that men find it difficult to identify with appropriate male role models. If such models are absent, or partially absent, men suffer from an acute sense of gender confusion. A healthy gender identity requires a proper identification with some kind of father figure (Brittan 1989:25). Lurie uses his identification with the romantic poets as fuel and instigation for his exploits. It is his justification and qualification for his sexual exploitation.
Conclusion

Hegemonic masculine ideology is very prescriptive with regard to the role of men within the context of relationships. Within *Disgrace*, Lurie is exposed as an ineffective husband, lover and father.
5. POSSIBILITIES OF CHANGE - IN PURSUIT OF GRACE

5.1 Change and the Crisis

Robert Morell notes in the foreword of *Men Behaving Differently* that: “In a society so rapidly changing and with established power relations being challenged […] it is to be expected that constructions of masculinity will change as well” (Reid and Walker. 2005: ix). But do the constructions of masculinity change, or is the change stoically resisted? This chapter aims to examine the crisis theory and how that relates to notions of change.

According to the ideology of patriarchal thought, to be a man means to lead, dominate and control. By society changing in such a way that it does not automatically allow or condone men to assert claims, express control and crush others any more, it forces them to rethink and redefine what it means to be a man. It is for this reason that Reid states that “masculinity is in a state of flux, reconfiguration and change” (Reid.2005:2). A state of flux is defined as “a state of flow or continuous change” (2006:576), and it is therefore not surprising that, if masculinities are experiencing a state of flux, that it might result in a crisis. The reconfiguration in any given society of the gender based roles expected as the norm from its members is a phenomenon manifested as long ago as in the first group of *homo sapiens* who dwelt together in a cave. It depends on individuals what their different reactions are to cultural and societal change, and whether this leads to a crisis. Whitehead and Barret comment on the concept of a crisis of masculinity by stating:

[M]asculinities are not fixed; they change over time, over space, and, not least, during the lives of men themselves. Having accepted this premise, it is clear that for there to be a crisis of masculinity there would have to be a single masculinity; something solid, fixed, immovable, brittle even. The single masculinity would, by definition, have to be a core masculinity; something which is natural to men and which men can naturally aspire to and hold under most conditions. And this core but brittle masculinity would have to be broken, damaged, or bruised by a combination of consumerism,
feminism, post-industrialization, women’ rights, and so on. (Whitehead and Barrett 2001:8)

In spite of the proposition that in order for there to be crisis, there has to be a core, gender and masculinity studies work on the premise that gender is a performance, not tied to the physical gender of a person. If that is the case might we argue then that there are masculinities in crisis? The main area or rather the central focus of change within masculinity is a shift in power: “The category man is not neutral – it implies power and domination” (Brittan 1989:109). If masculinity is synonymous with power, then surely it stands to reason that a shift in power would induce a shift in masculinity, and that shift implies crisis for some.

Moments of crisis are usually linked to resistance and an inability to adapt to change: “men actively resist the changes implied by the gender revolution, recognising perhaps that, at least materially, they would benefit little from it. Such men often remain locked in a juvenile and crude display of masculinity” (Whitehead and Barrett 2001:10). The dominant mode is that ideology which resists the change. Although some men and women are in fact accepting the need for change, many are still unable to move from the hegemonic belief that men are dominant. Essentially, assuming that men are expecting to be dominant, within their work and relationships, the crisis of masculinity occurs when those moments of assumed power are thwarted or usurped. Britton defines crisis as “some kind of ‘turning point’ or ‘discontinuity’ in personal and social relationships” (1989:183). A turning point is the moment when the individual realises that that he/she cannot continue to live the way he/she used to and realises the need to change and adapt. Yet, as we see with Lurie, just the realisation that there is a need to change does not necessarily translate into actual change: “His mind has becomes a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go. He ought to chase them out, sweep the premise clean. But he does not care to do so, or does not care enough” (1999:72). Although realising that his thoughts are antiquated and not suitable for his current society, Lurie does not “care enough” to bother changing those thoughts Rather, he seems to indulge in them.
It is interesting to note here that it is not all masculinities which are experienced as threatened. The idea that there are multiple masculinities also implies that men have different experiences of their gendered identity. Loss of potency is an especially high ranking issue for men, as potency is almost directly aligned with the image of virile masculinity:

Men are confronting new marital, political and social circumstances. Family structures are changing under the influence of AIDS deaths, illnesses, and poverty, and as a result of the gradual rise in the economic fortunes of women. (Morrell 2005: xi)

It also needs to be questioned whether the ability to change in itself is an answer. At the end of the novel, Lurie can be said to be in the position in which he finds himself because of his stoic refusal to change and to compromise. He is unable to see the world in any other way, and is therefore unable to accept the offer the university makes to avoid retrenchment. He is also unable to see the world in any other way other than with himself in the centre and as focal point. Lucy points this out to him: “You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn’t make an appearance until halfway through. Well contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor” (1999:198). A partial cause of Lurie’s marginalisation by society is his inability to empathise with others. Everything takes place in relation to him, and therefore everything that happens to him is personal. His inability to shift his perspective, to see life from a different vantage point, is one of the reasons why he is in crisis. Another reason for his crisis is that he is simply “out of fashion”, within the post-apartheid South African context. The reign of the white man is over and we see this throughout the novel:

The issue of changing masculinities is, however, probably the key one in terms of understanding changing men and a possible crisis in masculinity. One can find numerous examples of how traditional notions of masculinity
have moved out of fashion across the Western world. But then masculinities have always been subject to fashion. (Whitehead and Barrett. 2001:7)

Crisis is synonymous with flux. The flux of masculinity taking place in contemporary society is only problematic if there is no possibility of change. The possibility of escaping the crisis of masculinity according to Brittan is left to the “humanist man”. It is “only [a] ‘humanist man’ who is capable of coming to terms with the new circumstances arising out of the changing balance of power between men and women” (1989:182). Franklin states:

A humanist man is one who has constructed for himself the goal of sex role equality. Having rejected the outdated masculinist goal of male domination, humanist men also reject the strategies and techniques used by some men to maintain and support sex role inadequacy. Instead, these men seem more likely to endorse an androgynous sex-role orientation, where both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits are values and exhibited in social interaction. (Franklin1984: 208 [in Brittan 1989: 181])

From this it can be inferred that only a man who rejects male domination, focuses on equal sex-roles and endorses androgynous sex role orientation will be capable of coming to terms with the ‘new circumstances’ and crisis that masculinity is experiencing. Reid and Walker echo this idea by stating that “unequal gender relationships still limit the extent to which change is possible” (2005: xi). Not only do the dynamics of sex roles need to be addressed but in addition there needs to be “a rethinking of masculinity which offers new ways of imagining masculinity and, for men, suggest new ways of being a man” (2005:1).
5.2 Tracking Change

As an overview of the crisis that Lurie experiences, there are two main themes that need to be reviewed. They are allegories for Lurie’s shift from centrality to marginality. Firstly there is the chamber opera he is writing and how its conceptualization reflects Lurie’s perception of his own position in the new South African society. Secondly there is Lurie’s affinity with the dogs and how that reflects his own exclusion from society. Lurie’s “power” shifts from a place of centrality and prominence to a place of marginality and obscurity. Lurie’s reaction to change is an inability to adapt, which causes him to be dysfunctional in the new society.

5.2.1 Lurie as Writer and Composer

As a part of the analysis it is necessary to examine how his intended chamber opera serves as a parallel to his own shift from the ‘centre’ to the ‘margins’. At first the opera is imagined as grand and lush, with Lurie placing himself between the two lovers “with a complex, restless music behind it” (1999:180), only finally to settle upon Byron’s jilted lover Teresa as his focus. Lurie’s masculine identity subscribes to patriarchal power principles and it is due to that subscription and his refusal to change those notions and adapt to present realities that he finds himself marginalised and pushed out of society. Throughout the novel Lurie is conceptualising and writing his chamber opera. The flow and shift of this endeavour runs to an extent parallel to the shift of power he is experiencing. Some of the moments in the life of Byron run parallel to the experiences of Lurie. For instance, Byron moves to Italy to escape scandal and Lurie flees to Grahamstown to escape scandal:

He went to Italy to escape scandal, and settle there. Settled down, had the last big love-affair of his life. Italy was a popular destination of the English in those days. They believed the Italians were still in touch with their natures. (1999:15)
In Grahamstown Lurie recognises that the rural way of life differs from urban lifestyles. Yet unlike in the life of Byron, Lurie’s country sojourn does not include a last ‘big love-affair’. He has an affair that is in no way “big” to him. In fact, he initially feels only contempt for Bev Shaw. He callously says to her that in Grahamstown he is “out of the way of temptation” (1999: 148). Not seeing Bev as someone “good enough” for him to sleep with, he thinks of her as a “plain little creature” (1999: 148) and keeps on calling her “poor Bev” (1999: 150). Yet he does realise that “if she is poor, he is bankrupt” (1999: 150).

When he first conceived of the project, Lurie assumed the main focus for his chamber opera would be the love affair between “Lord Byron and his mistress the Contessa Guiccioli” (1999: 180). In a sense he and the countess have a similar relation to Byron - not a sexual one, but a desire for “Byron to bear [them] away to another life” (1999: 180). Byron is Lurie’s last attempt at immortality. Teresa “want(ed) to be loved, […] to be loved immortally” (1999: 185). Both Lurie and Teresa want to receive a sense of the immortal from Byron, Teresa by being known as one of his lovers, and Lurie by the opera he is writing on Byron.

When writing the opera Lurie remarks that the project fails to “engage the core of him” (1999: 181). Instead he desires to focus on an older Teresa, whose “sole remaining claim to immortality and the desire of her lonely nights, is the chestful of letters and memorabilia” (1999: 181). The metatextual element built into this remark also suggests Coetzee’s consciousness of his own creative artefact in the form of the novel, as it reflects David Lurie’s hankering for fame in the face of inconsequentiality and death. At the end of the novel Lurie identifies with a woman past her sexual prime, yearning for Lord Byron, for the poet to restore her to her former glory. This old Teresa he identifies with is sickly and looks more like a “peasant […] than an aristocrat” (1999: 181). She is not the attractive and alluring young woman Lord Byron had his trysts with. Lurie is identifying with a powerless, deserted middle-aged woman. It is Teresa for whom he finds words: Teresa who has been deserted by Lord Byron.
Lurie also sees his sexual 'power' as being gone: “without warning his powers fled” (1999: 7). He is now, as Teresa was, without power: “her years with Byron constitute the apex of her life” (1999: 182), just as Lurie’s years with Byron were the masculine apex of his life, when he was “a man of the city, at home in a flux of bodies where Eros stalks and glances flash like arrows” (1999: 6). The early period may be read as his “years with Byron”, when his charm and masculinity allowed him power and he was at the height of his powers. Now that Byron and the Byronic life is gone, Lurie identifies with the deserted Teresa: “[t]hat is how it must be from here on: Teresa giving voice to her lover, and he [...] giving voice to Teresa” (1999: 183).

Lurie has to write new music, as “it becomes clear that purloined songs will not be good enough”. His journey with Teresa is new to him and yet “astonishingly, in dribs and drabs the music comes” (1999: 183). He tries to use the piano to write the music, a tool he is familiar with and again it does not seem to satisfy; “there is something about the sound of the piano that hinders him: too rounded, too physical, too rich” (1999: 184). The instrument he settles on is a “seven-stringed banjo” he bought for Lucy as a child. None of his familiar tools suffice to write the story of Teresa. He has to venture into the realm of the unknown.

By vocalising Teresa, they (Lurie and Teresa) desire the previous glories that Byron gave them. “Come to me, I plead, my Byron! She opens her arms wide, embracing the darkness, embracing what it will bring” (1999: 213). Yet Byron has deserted them both:

The lyric impulse in him may not be dead, but after decades of starvation it can crawl forth from its cave only pinched, stunted, deformed. He has not the musical resources, the resources of energy to raise *Byron in Italy* off the monotonous track. (1999: 214)

Eventually Lurie admits that the poets have “not guided him well” (1999: 179). At the end of the novel Lurie muses that “it would have been nice to be returned triumphant to society as the author of an eccentric little chamber opera. But that will not be” (1999:
214). Just as Byron has deserted Teresa, he has also deserted Lurie. And like Teresa, Lurie is also now alone and rejected by society.

5.2.2 Lurie: Gone to the Dogs

Dogs are a recurring motif in Disgrace. In analysing the novel it becomes impossible not to notice their constant presence. As the novel progresses and we track Lurie’s movement from a prominent position in society to that of rural obscurity, we cannot fail to notice the steadily increasing affiliation Lurie has with the dogs in the novel. The novel ends with Lurie deciding to put down the deformed dog:

Perhaps he will carry him in his arms, perhaps he will do that for him and caress and whisper to him and support him in the moment when bewilderingly, his legs buckle; and then when the soul is out, fold him up and pack him away in his bag, and the next day wheel the bag into the flames and see that it is burnt, burnt up. He will do all that for him when his time comes. It will be little enough, less than little: nothing. (1999:220)

The symbolism in this act is that Lurie resigns to his own defeat and social deformity. He recognises that he no longer has a place in this world, but has become redundant like a mangy, deformed township dog: “the dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: because we are too many” (1999: 146). During the course of novel Lurie systematically starts identifying with dogs. We see that in his attitude towards them, by his caring for their bodies and the collective pronoun “we” when he is talking about the dogs. They too are a burden on society: “The old, the blind, the halt, the crippled, the maimed. But also the young and the sound” (1999: 218).

The theme of dogs run throughout the novel, dogs that need to be castrated that breed regardless of their numbers. Earlier in the novel Lucy still remarks that “dogs still mean something” (1999: 60), yet during the attack on the farm the guard dogs were not able to protect Lucy and Lurie, in the same way that Lurie, as Lucy’s father, failed to protect her.
It is also in this moment that all the guard dogs are shot in their cages. They were the healthy dogs, good breeds, young dogs that still had value as “watchdogs” (1999: 61). These dogs would have been encouraged to breed. Their killing is symbolic of the ‘death’ of Lurie’s own prowess as a man. The only dog that is not killed is Katy, the abandoned one. Ironically Katy is also one of the dogs with whom Lurie bonds: “He enters the cage, closes the door behind him. She raises her head, regards him, lets her head fall again; her old dungs hang slack. […] Abandoned, are we? He murmurs” (1999: 78). Lucy finds him asleep in Katy’s cage. It is after the attack that Lurie is referred to as elderly by the newspapers, where as he was previously described in connection with either his professorship or the books he wrote.

The two dogs Lurie is closest to are Katy, the abandoned one, and ‘Driepoot’, the three-legged, deformed one. Both are symbolic of Lurie’s fallen and rejected state: “A shadow of grief falls over him: for Katy, alone in her cage, for himself” (1999: 78). As the novel progresses Lurie shows more and more affinity and identification with the dogs. He ultimately sees himself as unwanted and redundant. It is not surprising that, at the end of the novel, “in the bare compound behind the building he makes a nest of sorts” (1999:211), where he spends his time with the doomed dogs, also perhaps waiting for his own Sunday afternoon to be put down.

There is one he has come to feel a particular fondness for. It is a young male with a withered left hindquarter which it drags behind it […] no visitor has shown an interest in adopting it. Its period of grace is almost over; soon it will have to submit to the needle (1999:215).

In the last scene in the novel Lurie and Bev are again “engaged in one of their sessions of Lösung” (1999:218). It is within this scene that there are moments of significance. Firstly it is arguable that Lurie has indeed changed and reformed, at least with regard to the animals, as “[h]e 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” (1999: 219). This ability to “love” the animals is an improvement in his
character, but whether that is sufficient to redeem him is a different question. At the end of the novel he decides to give up on his favourite doomed dog, “Driepoot”. Although *Disgrace* typically has a very open ending, this moment may be read as Lurie’s final acceptance of his own doomed existence. If there is a possibility of redemption within that, it is that he can let the dog go with love and companionship.

### 5.3 Change as Disgrace or Redemption

In Gareth Cornwell’s article, “Realism, Rape and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”, he makes the point that while “*Disgrace* has every appearance of being a realist text” (2002: 131), and states that “the allegorical or didactic plot is disguised as a mimetic one “(2002: 320). The allegorical plot is not immediately apparent, but rather takes place within the realm of symbols and symbolic acts. When approaching the novel from a realist perspective there is no recovery from grace, in the sense that Lurie might return to status as a prominent professor in Cape Town. As we track his journey from centrality to the margins of society we see that many of his choices were made out of the stoic refusal to be a good person (“only as long as I don’t have to become a better person” [1999: 77]), and his refusal to change, to become a more socially accepted man. (“No, I have not sought counselling nor do I intend to seek it. I am a grown man. I am not receptive to being counselled. I am beyond the reach of counselling” [1999: 49]). Yet, as a counter to these utterances his weekly Sunday ritual he performs with Bev Shaw can be read as some form of repentance and symbolic sacrifice.

There are very strong religious overtones throughout *Disgrace*, starting with Lurie’s hearing. It is not surprising that the chair for the inquiry is a “Professor of Religious Studies” (1999: 47); this immediately sets the tone that the hearing is not merely a political occurrence. When asking whether Lurie has consulted anyone the first figure of authority mentioned is a priest (1999: 49). When Lurie want to plead guilty this is rebuffed by the committee as they feel he is simply “going through the motions” (1999: 51) and does not accept his guilt. Lurie becomes annoyed with their refusal to accept his plea and contends that:
I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse. (1999: 58)

Ironically, regardless of the protagonist’s stoic refusal to confess and his insistence that repentance belongs to another discourse, it is exactly that repentance that could have saved him from his “disgrace”. In that moment, Lurie does at least hold true to himself as he will in fact not go through the motions but rather refuses “to issue an apology about which [he] may not be sincere” (1999: 58).

The religious overtones do not end with the hearing but are scattered throughout the text. Another moment of religious significance occurs when Lurie, whilst in discussion with Lucy about his expulsion from Cape Town, describes the principles of scapegoating. As he describes it, “Scapegoating worked in practice while it still had religious power behind it. You loaded the sins of the city on to the goat’s back and drove it out, and the city was cleansed. It worked because everyone knew how to read the ritual, including the gods” (1999: 91). This is again a moment of irony and lack of self-reflexivity on Lurie’s part, for he can indeed be seen as a scapegoat, having been loaded with the sins of the white man during the previous apartheid regime and thereby has been treated more severely. As is mentioned in the hearing, his affair with Melanie is part of “a long history of exploitation” (1999: 53). The concept of the scapegoat is interesting as it suggests something of the origins of ideas repentance and forgiveness. Essentially whoever desired forgiveness and righteousness in the eyes of God, had to give a burnt offering appropriate to their sins. Lurie’s work at the animal shelter and relationship with Bev Shaw can be read as Lurie’s symbolic (albeit possibly unconscious) desire for repentance.

The first moment that suggests that their Sunday afternoon Lösung sessions are more than what they seem is when Lurie refers to Bev Shaw as a priestess: “He has a first inkling of the task this ugly woman has set for herself. This bleak building is not a place of healing
but of last resort. Bev Shaw, not a veterinarian but a priestess” (1999:84). It is possible that the Sunday afternoon sessions and Lurie’s burning of the dogs’ corpses, could be seen as Lurie’s burnt offering to some form of god, with Bev as the priestess administering the rites. There is a sense of ritual in the way Lurie and Bev Shaw conduct themselves during the Sunday afternoon sessions: “one by one he brings the cats, then the dogs: the old, the halt, the crippled, the maimed […] one by one Bev touches them, speaks to them, touches them, and puts them away, then stands back and watches while he seals up the remains in the black plastic shroud” (1999: 219, my emphasis). Which gods they are offering the sacrifices to is unknown, but possibly the gods of the animals, for them Lurie is able to show love and care. “He will do that for him when his time comes. It will be little enough, less than little: nothing” (1999: 220).

The issue of redemption within Disgrace is that, firstly, it is too little too late, and, secondly, that “the gods [have] died […] real actions were demanded instead of symbolism” (1999:91). Lurie, although he has found compassion for another living being, is still relegated to the margins of society, without any way of redeeming himself to regain his former social status.

**Conclusion**

In examining the portrayals various masculinities within Disgrace, it becomes evident that a large portion of the crisis that masculine identities experience occurs as a result of an inequality between the individual’s expectations and his reality. To a certain extent Disgrace also proposes that there is a space for redemption on the contingency of change. A crisis of masculinity stems from inability to adapt when the society in which the individual finds himself has changed. Disgrace highlights various levels in Lurie’s life in which he has experienced change, yet throughout the novel we constantly come across the protagonist’s adamant refusal to change. From the first chapter when Lurie utters that “[t]hat is his temperament. His temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that” (1999: 2), up to the end of the novel when Lurie mentions that he “is too old to heed, too old to change” (1999: 209) we see this point maintained. The cliché “you can’t teach an
old dog new tricks” fits quite aptly into Lurie’s story. A proposed resolution from masculinity in crisis is to reassess and change its own definitions of what it means to be a man, or as Rutherford states:

…[S]uch a definition of manhood was too rigid and oppressive to assimilate the new individualized emotions, sexual identities and aspirations. Patrimony, the communication of meaning and roles from one generation of men to the next (from father to son), underwent an historical disjunction. (Rutherford 2003:2)

It is therefore arguable that Lurie’s disgrace also has links to his masculine identity and his perceived entitlement and stoic ideas resulting from that identity. This crisis is defined in the sense that he is experiencing a shift and change in his position in society. Arguably, if he had had the ability to adapt, he would not have experienced this crisis in such a socially destructive manner.
CONCLUSION

An investigation of portrayals and assessments of contemporary South African masculinity within *Disgrace* takes a closer look at the character of David Lurie within J.M. Coetzee’s mimetic novel *Disgrace*. It uses masculinity studies as a focus for the analysis and understanding of the protagonist and his gender identity. This is done precisely because his actions and reactions are so tightly linked to his understanding of himself as a specific kind of man.

With the emergence of masculinity studies comes the debate that masculinity is in crisis; this is critiqued and examined throughout this analysis in an attempt to find a resolution to this debate. Within *Disgrace* there are two male characters almost in antithesis to each other, David and Petrus, and whilst it may be argued that David is experiencing a crisis relating to his masculine identity the same does not hold true for Petrus. Lurie’s age and race also play a crucial part in his masculine identity, especially in the post-apartheid setting Coetzee has placed the novel. Masculinity is not a defunct ideology within *Disgrace* as it is apparent that not all the male characters are experiencing a loss of power as men. In closely examining the behaviour of Lurie through the lens of a masculinist critical theory we are able to detect and scrutinise the machinations of his character.

*Disgrace* does not exist to entertain or amuse, but incites debate and controversy. It is an unflinching, if not cynical, look at the condition of an ageing white middle-aged man within a post-apartheid South Africa. It opens up the debate for a possibility of redemption, perhaps, but for this man, finds only dishonour and disgrace. The novel critiques the argument of sticking stoically to antiquated ideas and abstractions.

From the analysis undertaken in this study it becomes apparent that masculinity is not a single dimensional concept, but rather a multifaceted, many-headed beast. Trying to marry theories applicable in first world, modern societies to a South African context almost always serve to highlight the narrowness of their definitions and assumptions. As the study in *Disgrace* has shown, although there has been a displacement of power and
status for David Lurie indicating that power shifts can be linked to his masculine identity, the masculinity in crisis theory can not be applied to all the men in the novel. What it does provide is a model for understanding aspects of masculine behaviour. As mentioned in chapter two, where men experienced a loss of power in one sphere, they hardly ever failed to exert power in another sphere. Masculinity studies provide a useful vehicle of analysis by separating the public and private sphere. We are therefore able to take a closer look at the dynamic at play in the character’s cognitive and behavioural patterns in studying how his career and relationships have an important impact on his sense of identity.
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