Disgrace

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J. M. COETZEE

Coetzee's youth was spent mostly in Cape Town and Worcester, where he moved (at the age of eight) with his family. He attended the University of Cape Town, where he received bachelor's degrees in both English and Mathematics. In 1962, Coetzee moved to London, where he worked for IBM as a computer programmer and gained a master's degree from the University of Cape Town for a thesis on the author Ford Madox Ford. Then, on a Fulbright scholarship, Coetzee went to the University of Texas at Austin in 1965, gaining his PhD in 1969 for a thesis on Samuel Beckett using computerized stylistic analysis. While Coetzee aspired to become a permanent resident of the United States, his participation in anti-Vietnam-War protests ultimately prevented this. He returned to South Africa in the early 70s, where he taught English literature at the University of Cape Town, acquiring various promotions up until his retirement in 2002, when he relocated to Australia.
Coetzee has won numerous awards for his novels, including two Booker Prizes (for *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace*) and the Nobel Prize in Literature (in 2003). Coetzee was a vocal denouncer of apartheid in South Africa.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1994, South Africa held its first universal suffrage election, meaning that the country's black majority could vote for the first time in the nation's history. This finally brought an end to apartheid, but the country's racial dynamics remained quite tense, as the white minority began to fear black retribution. This fear arose from the fact that South Africa's black citizens had been egregiously mistreated for centuries, as even after slavery ended, the country's government often used violence against them and even created "white zones" and "black zones," which meant forcibly removing many black South Africans from their land and selling it cheaply to whites who wanted to farm on the newly vacant properties. When apartheid ended, then, resentment continued to run throughout the country. This is why David is so uncomfortable with the idea of his daughter Lucy living alone in a farmhouse surrounded by Petrus's family and friends. Although Lucy—who is white—didn't steal her farm from a black family, it's quite likely that the land used to belong to black South Africans, making Lucy a potential target for retribution. Furthermore, the fact that Petrus is able to transition from a hired hand to a true "neighbor" is a result of the country's post-apartheid laws.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Given that *Disgrace* deals with the reverberations of apartheid in South Africa, it's worth considering its relationship with *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Alan Paton's novel about racial injustice, which was published in 1948, the first year of apartheid. Taken together, the two texts encompass the broad chronology of apartheid, which technically ended in 1994, though the consequences of this racist system are still at play today. *Disgrace* also bears certain similarities to Nadine Gordimer's 1979 novel *Burger's Daughter*, since both books look at what it means to be a nonracist white person in a country with extremely fraught racial dynamics.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Disgrace
- **When Published:** July 1, 1999
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Realism, Contemporary Fiction
- **Setting:** Cape Town and Salem, South Africa
- **Climax:** Returning from a walk, Lucy and David encounter three men, who rob Lucy's farmhouse, light David on fire, and rape Lucy.
- **Antagonist:** The three men who attack David and Lucy
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

The Big Screen. In 2008, *Disgrace* was adapted as a film starring John Malkovich.

The Man Booker Prize. *Disgrace* won the Man Booker Prize in 1999.

PLOT SUMMARY

David Lurie is a middle-aged professor in Cape Town, South Africa. Although he used to teach Classics and Modern Languages, he's now an adjunct professor of Communications, which means he doesn't care about the topic he teaches. However, he's still allowed to conduct one course of his own choosing, so he leads a class on Romantic poetry, though even this hardly gives him satisfaction. He has other ways of attaining pleasure, though, like visiting a prostitute named Soraya every Thursday night. After having been married twice, he likes Soraya's straightforward company, which is contained to one night at a time. His dynamic with her soon changes after he accidentally encounters her and her two sons in public, an experience that introduces a strange element to their

transactional relationship. The next time he visits, she tells him she's leaving the brothel to take care of her ailing mother, and when he calls her several weeks later after tracking down her phone number, she yells at him for "harassing" her and "demands" that he never speak to her again.

Around this time, David is walking on campus when he comes upon Melanie Isaacs, a beautiful twenty-year-old student who is in his Romantic poetry class. Catching up to her, he invites her to his apartment, where he offers her wine and dinner. Throughout the evening, Melanie is tense and jumpy. Despite this, David tries to make her feel comfortable, and though it's obvious she wants to leave, he asks her to stay the night. In response, she asks why she should do this, and he tells her that beautiful women have a "duty" to share their beauty with others, though this argument is unsuccessful and she soon leaves. However, he takes her to lunch several days later, and afterwards he drives her to his apartment and has sex with her on his living room floor, noticing that she simply lies beneath him in a passive manner—something that doesn't actually bother him. As David's affair with Melanie proceeds, she begins to withdraw from him even more, and her attendance in class suffers as a result. Because of their involvement, though, he marks her as present. He also continues to pursue her, attending one of her theater rehearsals and even showing up at her apartment unannounced one evening and throwing himself on her, taking her in his arms and moving toward the bedroom even as she tells him to stop because her roommate will be home soon. In the bedroom, he takes off her clothes, and she helps by lifting her hips when he slides off her pants. This, however, doesn't mean she's any more responsive than the first time they have sex. "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core," Coetzee writes. The following day, she misses class again and, thus, misses the midterm exam, but David gives her a 70% anyway.

The following weekend, Melanie appears at David's apartment and asks if she can stay. It seems she's quite upset about something, so he prepares a bed for her in his daughter's old room and lets her sleep. The next morning, he goes into the bedroom and asks what's wrong, and she says she needs to stay with him for a little while. Against his better judgment, he agrees. The next day, they have sex one last time. Then, that afternoon, a young man named Ryan comes to David's office and threatens him, telling him to stay away from Melanie. That night, David's car is vandalized. After this, Melanie stops coming to David's apartment, though she comes to class one day with Ryan, who sits beside her and looks challengingly at David as he lectures. After class, he tells Melanie she will need to take the midterm the following Monday, but when the day comes, he finds a notice in his faculty mailbox informing him that Melanie has withdrawn from his class.

From this point on, things move quickly. Melanie's father calls David and asks him to convince her to stay in school, since she has always "respected" him. However, Mr. Isaacs soon finds out what really happened, at which point Melanie files a sexual harassment complaint. In David's hearing, the disciplinary committee gives him a chance to present his side of the story, but he simply pleads guilty to whatever Melanie has said. Since he hasn't even looked at the allegations, though, the committee members find his behavior confrontational and arrogant, ultimately urging him to issue a statement of genuine regret, which he's unwilling to do. As such, he's forced to resign from the university.

After his resignation, David goes to the Eastern Cape to visit his daughter Lucy, who lives on a farm. For the past several years, Lucy has been farming with her partner, Helen, but Helen has recently left, so she's on her own except for a man named Petrus, who works for her but is about to become an owner of the stretch of her land that he lives on. Having heard only a little about David's troubles in Cape Town, Lucy doesn't press him for details, instead telling him he can stay as long as he'd like and urging him to see her hospitality as "refuge." He, for his part, plans to work on an opera project about the poet Lord Byron, though he has trouble getting started. To pass the time, he helps out with the dog kennel Lucy runs on her property, sometimes working alongside Petrus. He also helps Lucy sell her goods at a farmer's market and meets her friends, Bev and Bill Shaw, both of whom he finds excessively plain and unattractive, two things he holds against them. However, because he's bored, he decides to volunteer at the Animal Welfare League, where Bev Shaw treats injured animals and—more often than not—puts them down.

On a walk one evening, David and Lucy pass three men they don't recognize. When they get back to the farm they find these ominous strangers, who claim they need to use the telephone because one of their sisters is giving birth. Lucy reluctantly lets two of them in, and David realizes within minutes that something is amiss, but he can't do anything because the strangers have locked Lucy—and themselves—in the house. When he forces his way inside, they hit him over the head, drag him to the bathroom, and lock him in there. No matter how hard he tries, he can't break down the door, so he calls Lucy's name and feels helpless. Through the window, he watches the men walk outside with Lucy's rifle and shoot the dogs in the outdoor kennel, killing all but one, a small bulldog named Katy. After what seems a long time, the door opens and the men douse him in flammable liquid before dropping a match on him. Suddenly, he feels and sees flames jump up from his body, and he rushes back into the bathroom and splashes the fire out with toilet water, at which point the attackers lock him inside once more. With their arms full of various appliances, the three men get into David's car and drive away.

After the attack, Lucy lets David out. She's wearing a bathrobe, her hair is wet, and she refuses to talk about what happened, though it's obvious the men raped her. Telling him she's going to

walk to her neighbor Ettinger's house, she asks him to "stick to [his] own story" when talking about what happened. She then leaves and returns with Ettinger in his truck, and Ettinger takes David to the hospital, dropping him off to get his burns treated. When David emerges hours later, he discovers that Bill Shaw has been waiting for him, not Lucy. Surprised that Bill would wait for him despite hardly knowing him, he's shocked to hear Bill say, "What else are friends for?"

In the coming weeks, David is bothered that Petrus was nowhere to be seen during the attack. David learns that he was conveniently out of town. When he returns, though, David can't get any information out of him, which makes him suspicious. During this period, Petrus has a party to celebrate his new ownership of part of Lucy's land. At this party, David and Lucy see one of the three attackers, a young boy named Pollux. As David advances upon him and threatens to call the police, Petrus comes between them and discourages him from taking action. Later, in the house, Lucy also tells her father not to call the authorities, and though he once again tries to talk to her about what happened, she refuses to discuss the matter.

Sensing that he and Lucy have been together too long, David returns to Cape Town, though first he makes a stop in Melanie's home town, where he visits Mr. Isaacs at work. Although he's surprised to see him, Isaacs is open to talking to David and invites him over for dinner that night. Throughout the evening, Melanie's mother and sister are tense, but Mr. Isaacs treats David with kindness. After his wife and daughter retreat into another part of the house, though, Isaacs tries to understand why David has come, ultimately urging him to make peace with God about what he's done. Frustrated by this unexpected moral attack, David rushes into the back of the house, finds Melanie's mother and sister sitting on a bed, and kneels before them, putting his head to the floor in a display of repentance.

Back in Cape Town, David discovers that his apartment has been broken into. Restlessly, he tries to work on his opera project, but he decides to return to Lucy's house because Bev hints over the phone that something has happened. Upon his return, Lucy tells him she's pregnant and that the baby inevitably belongs to one of her rapists. What's more, she's decided not to get an abortion, since she's already had one in her life and doesn't want to go through it again. All of this is news to David, who thinks his daughter his making the wrong choice but knows he has no say in the matter. Worse, though, Lucy tells him that Pollux—whom she claims has certain cognitive challenges—has moved in with Petrus. Still, though, she refuses to leave. This deeply upsets David, so much that he completely loses his temper when he sees Pollux spying on Lucy through a window several days later. Knowing right away that Pollux is watching her dress, he lets Katy maul the young man while he himself kicks him and screams terrible things at him, suggesting that he's an inferior "swine." Hearing this commotion, Lucy runs out and comes to Pollux's aid, but as she does so, her top slides down, exposing her breasts. When she turns away to fix this, Pollux jumps up and walks away, screaming that he will kill them.

Because of this outbreak, Lucy indicates that she wants David to move out. Knowing he has only made things worse for his daughter, then, David moves to a hotel, resigning himself to working at the animal shelter with Bev Shaw and waiting for Lucy to give birth. Because he commits so much time to the Animal Welfare League, he grows fond of a certain dog, whom he spares every week by deciding not to put him down. Before long, though, he accepts that he's only putting off the inevitable, and so he brings the unsuspecting animal to Bev, saying, "I am giving him up."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

David Lurie – A fifty-two-year-old professor in Cape Town, South Africa, and the protagonist of *Disgrace*. David is an intelligent but vain man who has enjoyed his good looks throughout his adulthood, leading the life of an effortless ladies' man. Twice divorced, he is discontent with his professional life as an adjunct professor of communications, since he used to be a tenured faculty member specializing in the Romantic poets. As such, he doesn't mind much when he throws his entire career away by sleeping with Melanie Isaacs, one of his students. When Melanie files a sexual harassment complaint about him, he refuses to apologize for his behavior, and so he's forced to resign from the university, at which point he travels to the Eastern Cape, where his grown daughter, Lucy, lives on a farm. As he tries to adjust to a new lifestyle, three men appear and rob the farmhouse, locking him in a bathroom and even trying to set him on fire. Worse, they rape Lucy. In the aftermath of this terrible event, David struggles to support Lucy, who doesn't want to talk about what happened. Meanwhile, he volunteers at the Animal Welfare League, where Lucy's friend Bev Shaw works. David finds Bev unattractive and simple, but he can't deny her good nature, as she shows extreme kindness to the animals she has to put down. And though he doesn't particularly like Bev, he eventually starts sleeping with her just to have some kind of sexual connection. During this time, David urges Lucy to move off the farm, especially because Petrus—a man who lives on the same land as Lucy—seems to have a connection with one of the three men who committed the robbery. However, Lucy insists upon staying and, as a result, David loses his temper, succumbing to a violent impulse that only further damages Lucy's relationship with Petrus. Because of this, she asks him to move off the land.

Lucy – A young woman in her twenties living in a somewhat dingy farmhouse in Eastern Cape, South Africa. Lucy is David's only child, and though they get along fairly well, they aren't

close. Still, this doesn't keep Lucy from welcoming him when he visits after resigning in disgrace from the university. Having heard only a little about what happened, she doesn't press David for details, instead telling him to stay as long as he wants, saying he can treat her hospitality as a "refuge." Indeed, Lucy has plenty of room for David, since her partner, Helen, has recently left. As such, she lives a solitary life, though a man named Petrus and his family live on the same stretch of land. When David first arrives, Lucy explains that Petrus helps her with the gardens and with her kennel business, since people leave enough dogs with her that she needs extra assistance. Unfortunately, though, Petrus is nowhere to be seen when three men arrive one day, make their way into the house, lock David in the bathroom, rape Lucy, steal a number of items, and ruthlessly murder all but one of the dogs. Afterward, Lucy refuses to talk about what happened, urging David to focus on his own injuries. Despite this stoic attitude, she changes the way she lives her life, avoiding her everyday activities and drowning in emotional pain. Seeing this, David insists that she should move, saying he's suspicious of Petrus, though Lucy disregards this and tells him to mind his own business. Before long, they discover that Petrus knows and wants to protect one of her attackers, Pollux, who eventually comes to live with him. Even still, Lucy refuses to leave, and right around the time she tells David that her rapists got her pregnant, he catches Pollux spying on her. In a blind rage, he beats young Pollux, though Lucy stops him and then asks him to move off the property once and for all.

Melanie Isaacs – A twenty-year-old college student in David's class on the Romantic poets. Melanie is hesitant when David invites her to his apartment for the first time, and though she stays for dinner and drinks, she refuses his suggestion that she spend the night. Shortly thereafter, David takes her to lunch, where she's quiet nearly the entire meal, after which David takes her home and has sex with her on the floor. Despite her passive willingness to do this, Melanie remains withdrawn, as if she doesn't want to be sexually involved with David but isn't prepared or able to say no to him. In the coming days and weeks, she stops attending his class, but David marks her present anyway. One evening, he arrives unannounced at Melanie's house and starts kissing her and leading her to the bedroom, where they have sex. Again, Melanie doesn't resist him, but this time she tells him to stop, since her roommate will be coming home soon. Nevertheless, David continues. To his surprise, Melanie arrives at his house several nights later and asks if she can stay, and they have sex for the final time. Around this period, a young man named Ryan visits David's office and threatens him because of his relationship with Melanie, even going as far as to vandalize his car later that day. What's more, David receives a call from Melanie's father, Mr. Isaacs, who asks if there's anything he can do to help her. Apparently, he explains, she has decided to drop out of school, though Isaacs can't fathom why she would do this, since she's always been a good student. It's isn't long after this telephone conversation that Isaacs finds out the true cause of his daughter's unhappiness, at which point he helps her file a sexual harassment complaint against David.

Petrus – A man who shares Lucy's land, works in her garden, and helps with her kennel business by taking care of the dogs. Petrus—whose wife is pregnant—is interested in expanding his land, and while David stays with Lucy, he notices Petrus's gradual detachment from duties on Lucy's farm. Indeed, throughout the novel, Petrus becomes more and more interested in his own property, eventually putting up a fence between his house and Lucy's, laying pipes in the ground, and beginning to build a new home. What David and Lucy don't know at first is that Petrus is related to—or at least friends with—Pollux, one of the three men who rape Lucy and beat David. When they discover this, David confronts Petrus, telling him that he plans to report Pollux to the police, but Petrus tells him not to do this, insisting that the trouble is in the past. Shortly thereafter, Pollux comes to live with Petrus, putting him in close contact to Lucy. Because of these uncomfortable conditions, David tries to convince Petrus to watch over Lucy's farm, saying that he wants to take his daughter away for a little while so that she can take a little vacation. However, Petrus refuses to do this because he doesn't want to take on more labor, since he's in the process of expanding his own assets. As something of a consolation, though, he offers to marry Lucy, though he already has two wives. This, he upholds, would at the very least keep Lucy safe, since nobody in the area would dare rob or rape her again if she were one of Petrus's wives. Unsurprisingly, David finds this offer absurd, but Lucy doesn't write it off, and though she doesn't make a decision before the end of the novel, it seems likely that she will accept Petrus's offer.

Bev Shaw – A middle-aged woman living in Eastern Cape, South Africa with her husband, Bill Shaw. An avid animal lover, Bev is one of Lucy's only friends in the area. When David meets her, he finds her irritating and plain, though he eventually comes to recognize her kindness. After all, she is devoted to improving the lives of helpless animals by spending the majority of her time as a volunteer at the Animal Welfare League, where she ends up having to put down countless unhealthy or unwanted animals. For lack of something better to do, David starts helping her at the animal clinic, which is how he comes to see her gentleness and kindness. Before long, he ends up sleeping with her, and though he doesn't seem to gain much from the experience, it's obvious that her attraction to him makes him feel less alone in this otherwise lonely, foreign place. In many ways, Bev stands in stark contrast to David, since her selflessness and lack of vanity juxtapose his arrogant, hot-headed nature.

Bill Shaw – Bev Shaw's husband. A man David finds overwhelmingly simple, Bill shocks him with his kindness by

picking him up from the hospital on the day of the attack. Even though he has to wait hours for David to be discharged, he insists that it's the least he could do, upholding that this is what friends are for. David, for his part, is baffled by the idea that Bill—whom he barely knows—would go out of his way to help him, and he wonders if he could ever bring himself to do the same thing. This, however, doesn't stop him from having an affair with Bill's wife on weekly basis—an affair Bill apparently never finds out about.

Pollux – One of the three men who attack David and rape Lucy. A teenager who is somehow related to Petrus, Pollux has unidentified (or at least unspecified) cognitive challenges, though this doesn't deter David from attacking him when he catches him watching Lucy dress through the window. This takes place shortly after Pollux moves in with Petrus, and though David wants to call the police to tell them about the young man's presence, both Petrus and Lucy dissuade him from doing so. As such, David lets a dog maul Pollux when he finds him peeping on Lucy, all the while screaming things he's never said before in his life, like, "*Teach him a lesson, Show him his place.*" These phrases draw upon the fraught history of South Africa's tense race relations, suggesting that part of David's scorn for Pollux has to do with the fact that the young man is black. Before he truly injures Pollux, though, Lucy rushes out and helps the boy, who runs away saying, "I will kill you!" and "We will kill you all!"

Mr. Isaacs – Melanie's father. Not long after he has sex with Melanie for the final time, David receives a call from Mr. Isaacs, who asks him to talk to Melanie because she has apparently decided to drop out of school. Since Melanie has always spoken highly of David, Mr. Isaacs wants him to be the one to approach her about this decision. Two days later, Mr. Isaacs appears at the university and confronts David, having just found out about his relationship with Melanie. Angry and flustered, he shames David in front of a handful of students. It isn't long after this encounter that David learns that Melanie has filed a sexual harassment complaint against him. Later, David visits Mr. Isaacs at his job as a school principal, and though Isaacs is thrown off by his presence, he invites him over for dinner with his wife and younger daughter, both of whom are very conflicted about meeting him, though Isaacs himself is rather welcoming.

Soraya – A prostitute David visits in the beginning of *Disgrace*. David sees Soraya every Thursday night and feels that their appointments completely satisfy his sexual desires. However, he happens to see her in public with her two sons one day, and this brief encounter drives her away from him. The next Thursday, she tells him that she won't be there in the future because she has to go home to care for her mother. And though he knows he shouldn't, David eventually tracks her down and calls her at home, but she tells him that he's "harassing" her and that she never wants to hear from him again.

Ryan – A young man who is either Melanie's boyfriend or ex-boyfriend. Regardless, he is deeply upset that Melanie has had sex with David—so upset that he appears in David's office one evening and tells him to stay away from Melanie. Later, David finds that his car has been vandalized and is certain Ryan is the one responsible. Ryan's menacing presence is the first indication that something will go wrong between David and Melanie, as it takes place not long before Melanie files a sexual harassment complaint against him.

Rosalind – David's second wife, to whom he is no longer married. Rosalind is still involved in David's life, since they've found themselves capable of maintaining a friendship in the aftermath of their marriage. However, when Rosalind hears about the scandal surrounding David's name, she admonishes him, ultimately telling him that he ought to be ashamed of what he's done. At the same time, though, she later tries to tell him that she's there for him if he needs her, saying she'll be ready to make him a home-cooked meal whenever he wants.

Aram Hakim – The Vice-Rector of David's university, and one of his longtime acquaintances. When Melanie files a sexual harassment complaint about David, he is called to Hakim's office, where he speaks with Elaine Winter, the chair of his department, and Farodia Rassool, a social sciences professor. Hakim is eager to help David in any way he can, but David is too hotheaded to listen to him, ultimately telling him, Winter, and Rassool not to tell him what to do. Moments later, Hakim walks him to his car and commiserates with him, saying that David has his "sympathy," though this doesn't make David feel any better about the situation.

Elaine Winter – The chair of David's department. Elaine is present when David is first summoned to Aram Hakim's office to discuss Melanie's sexual harassment complaint. Coetzee notes that Elaine has "never liked" David, seeing him as "a hangover from the past, the sooner cleared away the better." It is perhaps partially because of Elaine's presence in this meeting that David feels so incapable of maintaining his temper.

Farodia Rassool – A professor in the Social Sciences department at David's university. Along with Elaine Winter, Farodia is present when David is first called to Aram Hakim's office to discuss Melanie's sexual harassment allegations. This is because she is the chair of the university's "committee on discrimination," which is also why she attends David's hearing with the disciplinary committee. During this second meeting, Farodia points out that David is ridiculing the entire process by pleading guilty to Melanie's accusations without even bothering to learn what they are. Standing up against David's arrogance, she states the obvious fact that he feels little to no remorse for what he has done. Despite these claims, though, David refuses to show any kind of genuine regret.

Manas Mathabane – A professor of Religious Studies who serves as the chair of the disciplinary committee that hears David's sexual harassment case. Like Farodia Rassool, Mathabane recognizes David's insincerity throughout the

disciplinary hearing and repeatedly tries to persuade him to treat the process more seriously. However, it's also clear that he wants to help David keep his job. In fact, he even calls David at home several days later and tells him that the Rector is prepared to let him retain his position if he issues a public apology—an apology that Mathabane has presumably written himself on David's behalf. Despite this gesture, though, David declines to issue this statement, prompting Mathabane to say, "David, I can't go on protecting you from yourself." Not long after this conversation, David is asked to resign from the university.

Desmond Swarts – The Dean of the Engineering department, and one of the colleagues sitting on the disciplinary committee that hears David's case. When David starts digging a hole for himself by refusing to review Melanie's allegations, Swarts kindly encourages him to stop and consider whether or not he's acting in his own best interest. Furthermore, he goes out of his way to avoid the "coldly formalistic" manner of addressing David that the rest of the committee has adopted, saying, "David, are you sure you don't want a postponement to give yourself time to reflect and perhaps consult?" He then points out that David might lose his job, saying, "That is no joke in these days." Nevertheless, David continues to behave stubbornly.

Ettinger – An old man who lives near Lucy's farm. Unlike Lucy, Ettinger has decked his property out with all kinds of security, fearing attacks like the one Lucy and David experience. After this attack, Ettinger advises Lucy and David to buy some guns, offering to lend them one of his own for the time being. And although Ettinger's hypervigilance is perhaps validated by what happens to David and Lucy, they tend to view him as a paranoid old man.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Helen – Lucy's former romantic partner, who used to live with her on the farm but has left for Johannesburg, leaving Lucy all by herself.

Katy – A bulldog in Lucy's kennel, who has been abandoned by her owners. Katy is the only dog the three attacker's don't murder during their visit.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

DESIRE AND POWER

In *Disgrace*, J.M. Coetzee scrutinizes the nature of human desire, specifically looking at the relationships between power and sexual yearnings. Because *Disgrace* is partly about a fifty-two-year-old professor who loses his job after sleeping with a student, it's impossible to ignore the power dynamics at play in the novel, as Professor David Lurie uses his elevated position to manipulate twenty-year-old Melanie into having sex with him. David is drawn to the idea of being in a position of power, and his relationship with Melanie enables him to experience this sense of authority. This thirst for power is present in all of his sexual relationships, as every person in the book that he sleeps with he also thinks is somehow inferior to him. In the end, though, he's the one left jobless, emotionally unsupported, and widely disrespected, thereby proving not only that he was wrong to think of himself as more powerful than the women he sleeps with, but that approaching sexual or romantic relationships with such a selfish and objectifying attitude actually leads to loneliness and despair, not power.

David's appetite for power in the context of sex is made apparent in the novel's first chapter, when he visits a prostitute named Soraya. A regular client who visits every Thursday evening, David has developed a fondness for Soraya, about whom he knows very little. "Because he takes pleasure in her, because his pleasure is unfailing, an affection has grown up in him for her," Coetzee writes. This suggests that David is interested first and foremost in "tak[ing] pleasure in" Soraya. Although this has led to a certain kind of "affection," it is clearly superficial, stemming primarily from the notion that—because he pays to sleep with her—David need only sit back and enjoy what she has to offer, as if he's entitled to her body. This then shows that he is comfortable in relationships that have uneven power dynamics.

Although David's arrangement with Soraya hints that he doesn't mind relational imbalances, their weekly appointments nonetheless reveal the complex nature of power when it comes to sex and romance. At first glance, David is in a position of dominance because he can apparently pay Soraya to do whatever he wants. What's more, he's free to be completely himself, whereas she must present herself in a way that will please him. "During their sessions he speaks to her with a certain freedom, even on occasion unburdens himself. She knows the facts of his life," Coetzee notes. David feels at liberty to do and say whatever he wants to Soraya, since he's the client—something that must feel quite empowering. However, by thinking only about himself and what will satisfy him, he fails to recognize the ways in which Soraya actually has power over him. After all, she's providing him with a service that can be (and eventually is) revoked. Plus, she guards her private life in a way that makes her less vulnerable than him. "Of her life outside [the brothel] Soraya reveals nothing," Coetzee explains. As

such, readers may come to wonder who really holds the power in this relationship—is it David because he feels entitled to speak freely, or is it Soraya because she withholds information and thus remains separate from (and thereby uninfluenced by) him? Although Coetzee doesn't answer this question definitively, the question itself indicates that sexual power dynamics are rarely black and white.

David's thirst for power through relationships becomes even more pronounced when he pursues Melanie, a student in one of his classes. When he convinces her to come to his house for a drink, she doesn't feel comfortable declining his offer because he's an authority figure in her life. After giving her wine and dinner, he doesn't hesitate to state what he wants, bluntly saying, "Stay. Spend the night with me." That he says this so straightforwardly shows just how confident and powerful he feels in relation to Melanie. Furthermore, when she asks why she should stay, he says, "Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it." This graceless theory further reveals David's misogynistic sense of entitlement, making it clear that he thinks he has some kind of right to Melanie's body. Though she initially manages to leave before anything happens, several days later she ends up having sex with him. "Though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable," Coetzee writes, a sentiment that once again suggests that David likes to feel powerful while his partners are "passive."

Later, when David is forced to resign as a result of his coercive sexual behavior, his yearning to feel superior remains intact, as he eventually has sex with Bev Shaw, a woman he thinks of as frustratingly simple and unattractive. In doing so, he recaptures the sense of sexual superiority he so badly desires, though he also tells himself to stop thinking of Bev as "poor Bev Shaw." "If she is poor, he is bankrupt," Coetzee writes, ultimately reminding readers that David's attempts to feel sexually powerful do nothing to change the fact that he is jobless and widely unpopular in his own community. In this way, then, the author shows readers the damning effects of pursuing relationships for the sole purpose of exerting power over another person—a pursuit that can only leave one spiritually and emotionally "bankrupt."

SHAME, REMORSE, AND VANITY

As the title suggests, *Disgrace* is a novel that investigates shame and dishonor. Having had an illicit affair with Melanie, David is summoned to a disciplinary hearing, where he refuses to examine her allegations. Instead, he simply states that he's guilty. In doing so, he avoids having to pore through her statement, effectively sidestepping the matter and making it easier for himself to dismiss his own immoral actions. When his colleagues press him to express a sense of genuine remorse, he only doubles down on his refusal, assuming an arrogant rhetorical stance and acting as if the entire matter is beneath him. With this, he keeps himself from having to face his own wrongdoings, acting like he's too proud to humble himself with an apology. In turn, Coetzee illustrates the ways in which people sometimes use their own vanity and arrogance to avoid moral culpability and penitence.

From the very beginning of his disciplinary hearing, David assumes the posture of a vain man who doesn't care what happens to him. "Vanity, he thinks, the dangerous vanity of the gambler; vanity and self-righteousness. He is going into this in the wrong spirit. But he does not care," Coetzee writes. At first, it might seem rather ethical and selfless to approach a disciplinary hearing with this attitude, since David appears ready to accept punishment for his immoral behavior. However, it soon becomes clear that his "vanity" is a front he puts on in order to stay strong and resist the disciplinary committee. This becomes apparent when he subtly but callously disparages the entire hearing, pleading guilty without even glancing at Melanie's written allegations. "Pass sentence, and let us get on with our lives," he says, telling his colleagues that he's sure they have "better things to do with their time than rehash" the details of this case. By saying this, he frames his transgression as insignificant and petty, something that isn't even important enough to attract attention. As such, he undermines the disciplinary hearing, a move that enables him to see and present himself as a moral person who made a small mistake and is willing to face the consequences. In reality, though, his sexual manipulation of a young student is much more harmful and complicated than he'd like to admit.

The real reason David refuses to examine Melanie's allegations is that he doesn't want to confront the damage he has done. Farodia Rassool, for one, recognizes this, which is why she takes issue with his vague brand of repentance, saying, "I want to register an objection to these responses of Professor Lurie's, which I regard as fundamentally evasive. Professor Lurie says he accepts the charges. Yet when we try to pin him down on what it is that he actually accepts, all we get is subtle mockery." When Dr. Rassool says this, she draws attention to David's unwillingness to closely examine the implications of what he has done, eventually pointing out that he makes "no mention of the pain he has caused" and "no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part." Reluctantly, then, David agrees to apologize, saying, "I took advantage of my position vis-à-vis Ms. Isaacs. It was wrong, and I regret it. Is that good enough for you?" In response, Dr. Rassool says, "The question is not whether it is good enough for me, Professor Lurie, the question is whether it is good enough for *you*." In this moment, she touches upon the true reason David is so reluctant to legitimately participate in this hearing. Indeed, it isn't simply because of his vanity that he refuses to humble himself by issuing an apology, nor is it because of his conceited nature that he's unwilling to review Melanie's accusations—the real reason

he won't do these things is that both actions would force him to reckon with "the pain he has caused."

The "question" of whether or not David's remorse is "good enough" resurfaces later in the novel, when he visits Melanie's family. Although he doesn't say why he has come, Mr. Isaacs eventually understands that David is there for forgiveness, but this forgiveness has seemingly nothing to do with Isaacs himself and everything to do with David, who wants to be let off the hook. When Isaacs doesn't give him the satisfaction he's looking for, David runs into the house and bows down before Melanie's mother and sister, humbling himself in front of them and asking himself, "Is that enough?" The mere fact that he asks himself this question suggests that what David's after is a superficial kind of forgiveness, one that will save him from having to feel bad about his own actions. His display of humility is actually a self-centered attempt to escape guilt and shame.

In the disciplinary hearing, David belittles the punitive process in order to invalidate it, enabling himself to write off his punishment as petty and narrowminded. Shielding himself both from his own shame and from the committee's power over him, he uses his vanity as an excuse for why he won't humble himself before his peers. Similarly, he makes a grand display of shallow repentance when he's at Mr. Isaacs's home, thereby framing himself as some sort of martyr in order to stop feeling guilty about what he's done. In this manner, Coetzee implies that excessive displays of pride and vanity are often used as masks to hide deeper insecurities, effectively enabling people to evade moral responsibility and ignore their own shortcomings.

VIOLENCE AND EMPATHY

Disgrace concerns itself with failures of empathy. When David forces himself on Melanie, he recognizes that his advances are "undesired," but he continues anyway, exhibiting a troubling lack of compassion. In a similar but much more severe manner, the three men who rape Lucy do what they want to her without considering her humanity. These cases are quite different, since one is a blurrier instance of relational coercion and the other of sexual violence, but there are some uncomfortable overlaps between both situations. Indeed, while what David does to Melanie isn't as physically aggressive as what the three rapists do to Lucy, he and his daughters' abusers have something in common: they prioritize their own cravings over all else, even when this means subjugating another human being. Simply put, they act without empathy. By presenting this discomforting similarity, Coetzee gives readers a way of approaching the complex topic of sexual harassment and assault, ultimately suggesting that all such instances—whether physically violent or socially manipulative—are at their core failures of empathy.

After Melanie and David have sex for the first time, she avoids him. Instead of taking this as an indication that she doesn't want to continue their relationship, David appears one afternoon at her apartment, and when she opens the door, he embraces her. Melanie tries to tell him that her cousin will be home soon—indicating that she feels she has to justify her desire not to have sex with him—but he ignores her protests. This moment shows how David has created an unequal relational environment in which he feels free to ignore Melanie's wishes. Her comment about her cousin does nothing to stop him, as he brings her to the bedroom and undresses her. What's most important to note in this scene is that David isn't unaware of Melanie's reservations, as he notices that she "avert[s] herself" from him. At the same time, Melanie "helps him" undress her, though she remains otherwise passive. "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core," Coetzee writes. Readers see that, although it's perhaps true that David hasn't technically raped Melanie (and even this could be contested), he *has* subjected her to sexual activities that he knows she doesn't "desire." In this way, it becomes painfully obvious that the only thing he's thinking about is what *he* wants, and he's perfectly willing to make Melanie uncomfortable in order to satisfy himself.

After failing to empathize with Melanie, David is distraught when three men appear at his daughter Lucy's farm and, after locking him in the bathroom, rape her. Of course, he is traumatized by his own experience, since the men steal his car and try to light him on fire, but what stays with him is the image of the intruders abusing his daughter. This image forces him to consider the lasting repercussions of sexual abuse in a way that he hasn't previously contemplated. Indeed, when he got in trouble for harassing Melanie, he told a reporter that he didn't "regret" what he did, saying, "I was enriched by the experience." Judging by this statement, it's apparent that David was still thinking only about himself even after he was publicly disciplined. Now, though, he finds it impossible to move beyond what has happened to Lucy, as he sees the profound impact of this traumatic experience on her life. Whenever he tries to talk to her or to Bev Shaw about what happened, though, he grows frustrated because they insist that he can't possibly understand. "Do they think he does not know what rape is?" Coetzee writes. "Do they think he has not suffered with his daughter?" Of course, David *hasn't* truly "suffered with his daughter," since he's not the one who was raped. However, the idea that he's so hurt by the entire experience suggests that he's finally starting to empathize with someone else. Whereas he appeared unwilling or unable to put himself in Melanie's shoes, now he projects himself into Lucy's experience and is horrified by what he finds.

As the novel goes on, Coetzee explores David's gradual progression toward a more empathetic worldview. This manifests itself in his willingness to volunteer with Bev Shaw at the Animal Welfare League, where he helps her put unhealthy and unwanted pets out of their misery. At first glance, this might seem like a job for somebody who *isn't* empathetic,

since—as David thinks at one point—it requires a certain "hardness." However, this isn't necessarily the case, as David discovers when he first asks Bev if she "minds" having to end so many lives. "I do mind. I mind deeply," she says. "I wouldn't want someone doing it for me who didn't mind." By the end of the novel—in the aftermath of Lucy's rape—David devotes himself to these helpless animals because he finally understands how callous and uncompassionate he has been. "He has learned by now, from [Bev], 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," Coetzee notes. Although David can't change what he did to Melanie, he *can* learn to embrace empathy, which ultimately would have kept him from transgressing in the first place. In this sense, Coetzee intimates that if more people cultivated their capacities for empathy, there would most likely be fewer instances of violence in the world, though Coetzee characteristically applies complexity to David's newfound empathy, since he is—after all—killing an animal. As such, the author implies that people ought to *strive* to be empathetic while also acknowledging that choosing to live compassionately might not always be an easy choice.

LOVE AND SUPPORT

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee spotlights the benefits and subtleties of interpersonal support. After David is publicly shamed in Cape Town for sleeping with Melanie, he travels to his daughter's farm to temporarily escape his troubles. Unlike his ex-wife Rosalind, who upon hearing about the scandal calls him and admonishes him for what he's done, Lucy doesn't force David to talk about what happened with Melanie. Instead of prying him with questions, she casually mentions what she's heard about the situation, doing so in a way that doesn't cast judgment on her father but does give him the opportunity to talk about his problems if he wants to. However, when it comes time for David to support Lucy in the aftermath of her rape, he fails to show her the same kind of light and caring approach, instead overwhelming her with his own concerns. In doing so, he ends up servicing his own anger about the situation instead of giving her the kind of support she needs. Coetzee thus suggests that sometimes the best way to help a person is to simply offer love and "refuge," both of which can be presented in an unobtrusive, accepting manner.

Shortly after news of David's affair with Melanie circulates, he's forced to face the fact that he has very few supporters. He has dinner with his ex-wife Rosalind, who harshly comments on his predicament, saying, "Am I allowed to tell you how stupid it looks?" When David says, "No, you are not," she plows on, saying, "I will anyway. Stupid, and ugly too." As she continues, she chastises him for what he's done, finally saying, "Don't expect sympathy from me, David, and don't expect sympathy from anyone else either." By saying this, she emphasizes how much he is on his own when it comes to this particular matter, stressing the fact that nobody is willing to support him through this difficult period.

It is precisely because David can't "expect sympathy from anyone" that Lucy's easy acceptance of him on the farm is such a gift. In one of the first conversations they have upon his arrival, she asks how long he plans to stay, and he immediately feels the need to clarify that he won't overstay his welcome. "I'd like to keep your friendship. Long visits don't make for good friends," he says, clearly thinking that—like Rosalind—she will be unwilling to support him emotionally. However, she goes on to hint that she knows about his troubles and that this won't affect how she treats him. "What if we don't call it a visit?" she says. "What if we call it refuge? Would you accept refuge on an indefinite basis?" Lucy not only shows her father that he's welcome to stay for as long as he'd like, but that she's willing to give him the support—the "refuge"—he needs in order to rebuild his life. What's more, she communicates this without actually mentioning what took place at the university, thereby leaving it to her father to decide whether or not he wants to talk about his problems. With this, readers see Lucy's gentle and accepting approach when it comes to trying to help her loved ones—an approach that makes it easier for David to process what has happened to him on his own time and in his own way.

In contrast to Lucy's hands-off style of offering support, David finds himself incapable of giving his daughter the emotional space she needs after she is raped. Part of this is because he believes she's avoiding the topic altogether, repressing it because of the memory's painfulness. To be fair, this is a legitimate worry, one that any parent would most likely have. However, David comes on too strong whenever he tries to get her to move off the farm, frequently urging her to making a decision about what to do in the aftermath of her attack—a decision she isn't ready to make. Finally, though, she breaks her silence one day when they're driving in the car, suddenly telling him how terrible it was to see how much her rapists seemed to hate her. Spotting an opportunity to convince her to move away, David jumps in and insists that she should take a vacation in Holland, but she refuses, adding, "Thank you for the offer, but it won't work. There is nothing you can suggest that I haven't been through a hundred times myself." He asks what she *does* plan to do, but she replies, "I don't know. But whatever I decide I want to decide by myself, without being punished. There are things you just don't understand." In this way, she shows her father how important it is for her to process this on her own, without his interventions.

However, David is unwilling to let this happen. He ends up severely beating one of her rapists, a young boy Lucy has told him not to touch because of the boy's mental disability and relationship with Petrus, who lives on her land. Through this action, David demonstrates his unwillingness to stay out of Lucy's affairs, and though he's only trying to help her, his

actions drive them further apart, since Lucy asks him to stay elsewhere after his violent eruption. By comparing and contrasting David and Lucy's methods of supporting one another, then, Coetzee indicates that sometimes a person's mere presence is enough to emotionally sustain a loved one through a difficult period—a lesson David seemingly doesn't learn until he moves out of Lucy's house and slowly accepts that she has the right to process her trauma however she wants.

TIME AND CHANGE

In many ways, *Disgrace* is a novel about a man who resists change. First of all, David has a strange relationship with the process of aging, which is evident in his fascination with sex. He uses sex as a way of maintaining his sense of youthfulness, ultimately trying to recapture his days as a handsome young ladies' man. This tendency to live in the past also rears its head when he denounces the idea of self-improvement, refusing to go to counseling because he believes a person can't change after a certain age. Similarly, he finds himself struggling to accept the new social and racial dynamics of post-apartheid South Africa when he moves in with Lucy. Having grown used to a system in which white men like himself are powerful and dominant, he finds himself challenged by the idea of submitting to black men like Petrus, who often have more cultural capital than he does in rural towns like the one Lucy inhabits. But just because he resists transformation doesn't mean David doesn't *recognize* that everything around him is changing—he's aware that society no longer accords with the way he sees the world, but he makes no effort to adjust. And given that his many refusals to change lead to punishment, public humiliation, and a strain on his and Lucy's relationship, it's clear that Coetzee wants to illustrate the harmful effects of such an inflexible worldview.

For his entire life, David has always attracted women, something he came to take for granted. At the age of fifty-two, though, he finds himself incapable of getting the attention he used to. "Without warning his powers fled," Coetzee notes. "Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost." The last sentence of this passage suggests that David feels suddenly pushed to the margins of life. Because he feels this way, Coetzee explains, he commits himself all the more to his sex life, which he apparently believes will help him feel young again. "He existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity," Coetzee writes. "He had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores." Considering the fact that David sees "promiscuity" as a way of recapturing his youth, it's not necessarily surprising that he pursues Melanie, a woman so young he doesn't even know how to properly flirt with her. Coetzee emphasizes the extent to which David uses his sexual relationship with Melanie as a method of preserving his own sense of youthfulness—an attempt that demonstrates how reluctant he is to embrace change even when there's nothing he can do to stop it.

When the disciplinary committee hints that David might be able to keep his job if he's willing to undergo counseling, he doubles down on his refusal to embrace change. "I have not sought counselling nor do I intend to seek it," he says. "I am a grown man. I am not receptive to being counselled. I am beyond the reach of counselling." When he says this, he frames himself as someone unable to alter his ways, and gives himself an excuse to avoid reckoning with his own shortcomings, since counseling would certainly force him to face the implications of his bad behavior. By suggesting that he's "beyond the reach of counselling," then, he protects himself from ever having to change, though this only hurts him in the long run, since it leads to public disgrace and the end of his career.

The theme of change in the novel—which is set in contemporary South Africa— also relates to the country's fraught transition from an apartheid system to a post-apartheid system of government. Between 1948 and 1994, South Africa used institutionalized racial segregation to subjugate black people, though the country's white rulers were actually the minority population. After apartheid ended, race relations remained tense (and still do), and some black people began to target the country's white minority. These tensions are alive in *Disgrace*, as David comes to Lucy's farm to discover that a black man named Petrus who shares her land is slowly accruing more wealth and power than Lucy. Lucy, for her part, is fine with this and even helps Petrus expand what he has, but David is disconcerted by this setup. His worries, it seems, have to do with his hesitancy to adjust to post-apartheid life in rural South Africa, where whites no longer have unchecked power over others.

At first, David doesn't act on his racist outlook, but he finds himself incapable of containing his rage when he discovers that Petrus knows Pollux, a boy who was one of Lucy's three attackers. Surely, David has every right to be angry with this boy, but when he catches him staring at Lucy as she undresses, his rage bears traces of his racist and dated worldview. "Never has he felt such elemental rage," Coetzee writes. "Phrases that all his life he has avoided seem suddenly just and right: *Teach him a lesson*, *Show him his place*." In this moment, David allows his anger to mingle with his inability to accept South Africa's new social order, ultimately weaponizing his resistance to change and using it as a further excuse to beat Pollux. Indeed, his frustration regarding his own fading power combines in this scene with his opposition to the vanishing dominance of white people in South Africa. Lucy, on the other hand, has no problem with the way their country has transformed itself, which is perhaps why she later chastises David for behaving so extremely. In fact, it is because of his violent reaction that Lucy finally asks him to move out of her farmhouse. As such, Coetzee

shows readers how David's resistance to change affects his life for the worse. What's more, the fact that David achieves nothing by beating Pollux suggests that fighting against change is not only harmful to one's own life, but completely futile, too.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE OPERA

Throughout *Disgrace*, David thinks from time to time about writing an opera about the Romantic poet Lord Byron and his lover Teresa, clearly identifying with the poet himself in a rather vain, egotistical manner. Because he has high hopes for this project despite not having really started it, the opera itself gradually becomes a symbol of David's ability to delude himself, as he manages to convince himself for the majority of the novel that this work of art will be magnificent when, in reality, it's clearly destined to fail. After the devastating attack on Lucy's farm, though, David admits to himself that the idea isn't as good as he originally thought. "There is something misconceived about it, something that does not come from the heart," Coetzee writes, explaining that David eventually decides to shift the opera's focus so that it centers not on Byron, but on Teresa. In fact, he decides to start the play long after Byron has died. This willingness to rethink the project signals David's newfound sense of self-awareness, as he perhaps realizes that his original desire to write about Byron's love life was nothing more than an arrogant wish to write about his own romantic affairs. In this way, the changing opera signifies David's shifting perception of himself and his slow recognition of his vanity. Indeed, the fact that nothing ever comes of the opera—which David soon accepts is nothing more than "the kind of work a sleepwalker might write"—parallels David's progression through life, since he finally understands that neither he nor his opera are destined for greatness.

THE SHEEP

Because David is normally a rather unempathetic person, the fact that he develops a fondness for Petrus's sheep is significant, as the animals come to represent his small and fleeting ability to show compassion. Petrus, for his part, is simply focused on preparing for his party, so he ties the sheep up and waits until the day of the celebration to slaughter them. However, David doesn't like having to look at them, since they have no room to graze and are rather loud, so he asks Petrus to move them. When he refuses, though, David takes it upon himself to untie the animals and lead them to a grassy area, thereby defying Petrus's wishes. As such, the sheep also symbolize David's tendency to disrespect other people in order to get what he wants.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Disgrace* published in 1999.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Because he takes pleasure in her, because his pleasure is unfailing, an affection has grown up in him for her. To some degree, he believes, this affection is reciprocated. Affection may not be love, but it is at least its cousin.

Related Characters: Soraya, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

This is an explanation of David's relationship with Soraya, a prostitute he visits in Cape Town on a weekly basis. Coetzee goes out of his way to note that David "takes pleasure in" Soraya, suggesting that it is because of this pleasure that he has grown to like her. As such, readers see that David is a man who places a high amount of value on physicality and the fulfillment of sexual desire. In fact, he's so wrapped up in the "unfailing" pleasure Soraya gives him that he doesn't seem to care that the "affection" he has for her isn't "love." This is because he's uninterested in true romance, instead prioritizing satisfaction, which he thinks leads to something *close* to love. This, apparently, is enough to make him content, and he convinces himself that Soraya feels the same way toward him, though there's no true indication of this. In turn, Coetzee demonstrates the ways in which David is willing to blind himself to reality in order to pursue and fully enjoy his sexual desires, focusing first and foremost on whether or not he can "take pleasure" in another person.

❝ He has toyed with the idea of asking her to see him in her own time. He would like to spend an evening with her, perhaps even a whole night. But not the morning after. He knows too much about himself to subject her to a morning after, when he will be cold, surly, impatient to be alone.

That is his temperament. His temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set. The skull, followed by the temperament: the two hardest parts of the body.

Related Characters: Soraya, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Coetzee explains that David wants to advance his relationship with Soraya by asking her to meet during her free time. What he fails to consider, of course, is that their relationship is purely transactional—the reason he feels any affection for her in the first place is because it's her job to make him feel this way. Interestingly enough, though, this isn't what keeps him from asking her out. Instead, he characteristically focuses on himself, knowing that he would be "cold" and "surly" to her in the morning if she were to spend the night with him. This isn't the main reason that asking her out would be a bad idea, but the fact that it's the only thing David thinks about is an indication of how focused he is on himself. Furthermore, he appears unwilling to address his flaws, believing that his "temperament is not going to change" because he's "too old for that." By reasoning with himself in this manner, he gives himself an excuse to go on leading the life he wants to lead. Rather than addressing his tendency to be "cold" and "surly" to people he cares about, he decides that change is impossible, thereby enabling himself to avoid having to reckon with his own shortcomings.

❝ 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. His needs turn out to be quite light, after all, light and fleeting, like those of a butterfly. No emotion, or none but the deepest, the most unguessed-at: a ground bass of contentedness, like the hum of traffic that lulls the city-dweller to sleep, or like the silence of the night to countryfolk.

Related Characters: Soraya, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

As David considers his arrangement with Soraya, he realizes that she gives him all he "needs" in the way of romantic and sexual satisfaction—or, in truth, only sexual satisfaction, since he comes to believe that all he has ever really craved is a relationship built upon lust and carnal fulfillment. This comes as a relative to surprise to him, since he "used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage." After all, he has been married twice, and his life as a professor has lent him a certain sense of stability. However, what he discovers by sleeping with Soraya once a week is that he doesn't require a truly "emotion[al]" connection, instead delighting in the "light and fleeting" kind of bond that comes along with sleeping with a prostitute. Given this disposition, it's rather unsurprising that he fails to consider the greater emotional impact of his relationship with Melanie. Focused only on the triviality of his own "needs," he opts not to think about how she—as a young woman and his student—might not approach their relationship with the same sense of detachment.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ As she sips, he leans over and touches her cheek. 'You're very lovely,' he says. 'I'm going to invite you to do something reckless.' He touches her again. 'Stay. Spend the night with me.'

Across the rim of the cup she regards him steadily. 'Why?'

'Because you ought to.'

'Why ought I to?'

'Why? Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.'

His hand still rests against her cheek. She does not withdraw, but does not yield either.

'And what if I already share it?' In her voice there is a hint of breathlessness. Exciting, always, to be courted: exciting, pleasurable.

'Then you should share it more widely.'

Smooth words, as old as seduction itself. Yet at this moment he believes in them. She does not own herself. Beauty does not own itself.

Related Characters: Melanie Isaacs, David Lurie (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

This interaction takes place between David and Melanie after they've had dinner for the first time in David's apartment. Trying to get her to stay, David makes the lofty claim that women don't "own" their "beauty." When he says that Melanie "ought" to sleep with him, he insists that "she has a duty to share" her good looks. By expressing this

sentiment, David acts as if Melanie owes something to him, as if she is indebted to him simply because she is attractive. He acts as if he's entitled to her body. While setting forth these manipulative and misogynistic claims, he also touches her face, noting that she neither "withdraw[s]" nor "yield[s]." However, the mere fact that she doesn't pull away from him doesn't mean she's interested in sleeping with him, and it seems reasonable to argue that he should be able to pick up on her disinterest without her having to physically "withdraw" from him. Nonetheless, though, he allows his desire to drive him forward, suddenly believing wholeheartedly in the idea that Melanie "does not own herself." In turn, readers see how easily David manages to justify his lustful thoughts and actions, even when they are deeply flawed.

Chapter 3 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Melanie Isaacs, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, David and Melanie have sex for the first time. First of all, it's worth noting that they don't have intercourse in David's bedroom, in his bed, or even on the couch. Rather, they have sex right on the floor, a fact that represents the unromantic and purely lustful nature of their relationship. Although it's true that intense passion might lead a couple to make love in the middle of the living room, in this case it seems a manifestation of how wrong it is for David—Melanie's superior—to be embarking upon a sexual relationship with her. What's more, he notices that she is "passive" throughout the entire experience. However, this clearly doesn't bother him, as he still "finds the act pleasurable." In turn, Coetzee illustrates that David doesn't care about what his sexual partners feel. Instead of finding it troubling that Melanie isn't fully engrossed in the moment, David fixates on his own desires, not caring about how Melanie perceives the experience.

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away.

Related Characters: Melanie Isaacs, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when David appears at Melanie's house and—without warning—starts kissing her and steering her toward the bedroom. Although she tells him to stop and says her cousin will soon be home, he doesn't listen, eventually reaching the bedroom and beginning to undress her. Then, as they have sex, Coetzee notes that it isn't necessarily "rape," though it *is* true that the entire experience is "undesired" on Melanie's end. Similar to how she remains "passive" during the first time she and David have sex, now Melanie goes "slack," as if she wants to "die within herself" until the act is over. It's worth considering Coetzee's assertion that David doesn't "quite" rape Melanie, since rape is such a complex and difficult topic. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines rape as "unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person's will or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception." Perhaps Coetzee suggests that David doesn't rape Melanie is that, though he is overly aggressive and manipulative, he doesn't necessarily carry out this act "forcibly" or "under threat of injury." At the same time, though, one might argue that his actions *are* rather forceful and that just because Melanie goes "slack" instead of resisting him doesn't mean he isn't violating her in an "unlawful" manner.

Needless to say, what David does to Melanie is immoral. For the purposes of the narrative, though, Coetzee draws a distinction between rape and sexual harassment. This is perhaps because he wants to compare and contrast what David does to Melanie with what the three attackers do to Lucy. It's also the case that the third-person narrative sometimes dips in and out of David's own consciousness, so it may be partly *him* (rather than Coetzee's narrator) admitting that the sex was undesired, but declaring that it wasn't rape. In all, Coetzee invites readers to consider the challenging ambiguity surrounding sexual abuse.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Note that we are not asked to condemn this being with the mad heart, this being with whom there is some thing constitutionally wrong. On the contrary, we are invited to understand and sympathize. But 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*, that is, a monster. Finally, Byron will suggest, it will not be possible to love him, not in the deeper, more human sense of the word. He will be condemned to solitude.

Related Characters: David Lurie (speaker), Ryan, Melanie Isaacs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

David says this during a lecture about Lord Byron's poem "Lara." As he delivers these words, he stands before an entire class of students, but the only people he can think about are Melanie and Ryan, both of whom are watching him as he speaks. As such, he is quite self-conscious about what he says, since Ryan has recently vandalized his car and told him to stay away from Melanie. It is perhaps because this is on David's mind that he zeroes in on how Lord Byron presents Lucifer in "Lara," saying that readers aren't "asked to condemn this being," but rather to "sympathize" with him. Lucifer is usually presented in literature as an antagonistic character and a representation of a "fallen angel." Despite this, though, David concentrates on the fact that Byron treats Lucifer with an open mind, inviting readers to empathize with the character's "mad heart." In turn, Coetzee provides a lens through which to examine David himself, with whom readers are "invited to understand and sympathize" despite his many flaws. At the same time, though, "there is a limit to sympathy." When applied to David himself, this suggests that, although Coetzee doesn't necessarily "condemn" David for sexually manipulating Melanie, it might not be possible to fully empathize with him. Coetzee presents David as a morally perplexing character, one readers might find themselves incapable of embracing even if he does possess certain redeeming qualities.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Don't expect sympathy from me, David, and don't expect sympathy from anyone else either. No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age. Everyone's hand will be against you, and why not? Really, how *could* you?

Related Characters: Rosalind (speaker), Melanie Isaacs, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David has a conversation with his ex-wife Rosalind about the scandal surrounding his affair with Melanie. Instead of offering him support, Rosalind assures him that he'll receive no "sympathy" from her, adding that he shouldn't "expect sympathy from anyone else either," especially not "in this day and age." When she says this, she implies that David might have gotten away with what he did in another time period, but that in contemporary times this sort of behavior is no longer tolerated. This moment is worth noting, since David himself is often so focused on the ways in which his life is changing. Indeed, he later resists the new ways of life that have arisen in post-apartheid South Africa, where as a white man he no longer occupies a position of power to the same degree. When Rosalind makes it clear that nobody will give him any "sympathy" "in this day and age," then, David undoubtedly feels the sting of change—a sting that will continue to follow him throughout the novel, manifesting itself in different ways and challenging his belief that he's too old to reform himself.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ We are again going round in circles, Mr Chair. Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part. That is why I say it is futile to go on debating with Professor Lurie. We must take his plea at face value and recommend accordingly.

Related Characters: Farodia Rassool (speaker), Melanie Isaacs, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Farodia Rassool says this at David's disciplinary hearing. When David insists upon pleading guilty without reviewing Melanie's allegations, Rasool picks up on the fact that he

isn't taking the hearing seriously. He is posturing as if he's completely willing to take responsibility for his actions, but when the committee tries to discern what, exactly, he's taking responsibility *for*, he makes the matter seem petty, suggesting that he's only "guilty" of failing to "resist" a natural "impulse." This allows him to frame his transgressions as minor when, in reality, he has caused "pain" and played into a "long history of exploitation." This is an important moment, for it is the first time in *Disgrace* that another character unabashedly criticizes David's arrogance and reveals it for what it is: a way of avoiding moral culpability. By pretending that he's too proud—too sure of himself—to look at Melanie's allegations, David effectively manages to sidestep the heart of the matter, sparing himself from having to come face to face with his own moral shortcomings.

'Very well. I took advantage of my position vis-à-vis Ms Isaacs. It was wrong, and I regret it. Is that good enough for you?'

'The question is not whether it is good enough for me, Professor Lurie, the question is whether it is good enough for you. Does it reflect your sincere feelings?'

He shakes his head. 'I have said the words for you, now you want more, you want me to demonstrate their sincerity. That is preposterous. That is beyond the scope of the law. I have had enough. Let us go back to playing it by the book. I plead guilty. That is as far as I am prepared to go.'

Related Characters: Farodia Rassool, David Lurie (speaker), Melanie Isaacs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

This interaction takes place between David and Farodia Rassool during David's disciplinary hearing. Having spent the majority of the hearing refusing to issue a statement of regret, David finally agrees to apologize for what he's done, ultimately trying to placate the committee members, most of whom simply want to help him keep his job by giving him an opportunity to express remorse. However, he once again belittles the entire disciplinary process, this time delivering a stale and inauthentic apology that in its terseness mocks the idea of repentance rather than demonstrating genuine regret. When he asks if this is "good enough" for the committee, though, Rassool makes an important point, saying that the real "question" is whether or not this apology is "good enough" for David himself. Although in this moment David finds it absurd to think that he would ever care whether or not he has articulated his "sincere feelings," later in the novel he appears desperate to find forgiveness. As such, readers see that Rassool's approach in this scene is quite prescient, since she seemingly intuits that David will eventually come to regret his unwillingness to properly take responsibility for his wrongdoings.

Chapter 7 Quotes

'Well, you're welcome to stay.'

'It's nice of you to say so, my dear, but I'd like to keep your friendship. Long visits don't make for good friends.'

'What if we don't call it a visit? What if we call it refuge? Would you accept refuge on an indefinite basis?'

Related Characters: Lucy, David Lurie (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

David and Lucy have this conversation when he first arrives at Lucy's farm. Because David is working on the assumption that—as Rosalind assured him—nobody will be willing to extend sympathy to him in the aftermath of his scandal, he tells Lucy he won't stay with her for very long. Not wanting to be a burden, he says that he knows "long visits don't make for good friends." However, Lucy isn't like Rosalind, who only further shames David for what he's done. Instead, she remains gentle and caring, saying that he doesn't have to see his time on the farm as a "visit." When she suggests that they think of his time with her as a "refuge," she not only subtly indicates that she knows he's going through some trouble, but also that she is willing to accept him regardless of his transgressions. Since David is a rather vain man with nobody to turn to, Lucy's good will is highly valuable, ultimately helping him cultivate an environment in which he can process what he's been through. This, it seems, is the kind of support he needs, though it remains to be seen whether or not he'll actually use this "refuge" to think about his wrongdoings.

Chapter 9 Quotes

'I'm dubious, Lucy. It sounds suspiciously like community service. It sounds like someone trying to make reparation for past misdeeds.'

'As to your motives, David, I can assure you, the animals at the clinic won't query them. They won't ask and they won't care.'

'All right, I'll do it. But only as long as I don't have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself. I'll do it on that basis.'

Related Characters: Lucy, David Lurie (speaker), Bev Shaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Lucy tells David that he ought to do something with his time. Because they have been getting in frequent arguments around the house, he accepts that he needs something to keep him busy, but when Lucy suggests that he volunteer at the Animal Welfare League with Bev Shaw, he is skeptical, since this would mean helping others. His skepticism arises from the fact that he is quite averse to the idea of change, immediately disliking anything that might seem like he's trying to atone for his "past misdeeds." This refusal to change is yet another way of avoiding ever having to examine himself and his shortcomings, since becoming "a better person" would mean reckoning with his mistakes. "I am not prepared to be reformed," he tells Lucy, saying that he wants to "go on being" himself. As such, he once again commits himself to the idea that he's beyond the reach of rehabilitation and personal atonement—a belief that enables him to continue living his life in a complacent manner.

Chapter 11 Quotes

'My case rests on the rights of desire,' he says. 'On the god who makes even the small birds quiver.'

He sees himself in the girl's flat, in her bedroom, with the rain pouring down outside and the heater in the corner giving off a smell of paraffin, kneeling over her, peeling off her clothes, while her arms flop like the arms of a dead person. *I was a servant of Eros:* that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? *It was a god who acted through me.* What vanity! Yet not a lie, not entirely. In the whole wretched business there was something generous that was doing its best to flower. If only he had known the time would be so short!

Related Characters: David Lurie (speaker), Melanie Isaacs, Lucy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David tries to explain to Lucy what his defense would have been if he had actually tried to justify himself in front of the disciplinary committee. To begin, he points to the power of "desire" to steer people in the wrong direction, believing that he was a "servant of Eros." This argument minimizes his personal agency, which in turn frames his transgression as a momentary lapse of strength instead of as a moral failure. However, even David recognizes how feeble this argument really is—after all, he is clearly using lustful attraction as a scapegoat, purposefully dodging culpability by blaming desire. And yet, he can't completely dismiss the idea that this was, in some ways, the truth, since he thinks there was "something generous that was doing its best to flower" while he was pursuing Melanie. Although this is vague, it seems as if David is referring to the beginnings of love, suggesting—though only to himself—that he and Melanie may have built a genuine and healthy relationship under different circumstances. Although this might be the case, it's worth pointing out that relationships can't be separated from the circumstances in which they take form. To say that David and Melanie's connection might have "flower[ed]" in another context means nothing, since it's not only purely hypothetical, but also out of touch with the fact that David was clearly attracted to Melanie *because* of the circumstances surrounding their relationship. In other words, David was drawn to Melanie largely because he liked the feeling of superiority he experienced while pursuing her. As such, it's clear that their relationship *wasn't* "doing its best to flower" in a "generous" and admirable way, though David remains unwilling to admit this.

❝ 'There was something so ignoble in the spectacle that I despaired. 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.'

'So males must be allowed to follow their instincts unchecked? Is that the moral?'

'No, that is not the moral. What was ignoble about the Kenilworth spectacle was that the poor dog had begun to hate its own nature. It no longer needed to be beaten. It was ready to punish itself. At that point it would have been better to shoot it.'

Related Characters: Lucy, David Lurie (speaker), Melanie Isaacs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

After David tries to explain to Lucy what his defense would have been if he had tried to justify his actions to the disciplinary committee, he reminds her of a dog that used to live next-door to them when she was a child in Kenilworth. Whenever this dog encountered a female dog, it went wild—so wild that its owners would punish it severely. After a while, when the dog came across a female dog, it didn't know how to react. Its biological excitement would flare up at the same time as its fear, and so it would cower in utter confusion and unhappiness. David always hated watching this, he explains, because he found it "ignoble" that the dog couldn't follow its desire. By telling this story, David frames his own transgression as nothing more than an "instinct." Like the dog, he was only following his "nature," and, as a result, he was punished. Of course, this viewpoint completely disregards the fact that humans—unlike dogs—are capable of applying rational thought to their "instincts." However, David is eager to frame what he did to Melanie as out of his control, for doing so helps him avoid taking responsibility for his actions.

Chapter 12 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Lucy, Ettinger, Bev Shaw, Bill Shaw, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Bill Shaw picks David up from the hospital and, when David thanks him, says, "What else are friends for?" After Lucy's farm is attacked by three strangers, Lucy fetches Ettinger, who drives them off the farm and brings David to the hospital before taking Lucy to the police station. When David emerges, he's surprised to find Bill waiting for him, since he doesn't think of Bill as a close friend. In fact, he has only had one real interaction with Bill, and didn't even take a liking to him. David finds both Bill and his wife, Bev, rather plain, and has gone out of his way to express this to Lucy, as if it's not enough to inwardly dislike them. Now, though, he finds himself benefitting from Bill's kindness, a fact that encourages him to consider how he perceives friendship. A selfish man himself, it's almost unfathomable to David that Bill would feel any sort of "obligation" to help him. And yet, he can't deny that he would be completely down on his luck if it weren't for people like Bill and Ettinger, both of whom have helped him and Lucy immensely in the aftermath of the attack. Given that *Disgrace* is a novel that explores the ways in which people support one another, this passage is worth noting, since Bill's kindness provides a stark contrast to David's self-centered worldview, emphasizing the extent to which David is unused to existing in healthy, supportive

relationships.

Chapter 13 Quotes

The events of yesterday have shocked him to the depths. The trembling, the weakness are only the first and most superficial signs of that shock. He has a sense that, inside him, a vital organ has been bruised, abused—perhaps even his heart. For the first time he has a taste of what it will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future.

Related Characters: David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David tries to cope with his fear and pain after the three attackers visit the farm, light him on fire, and rape Lucy. Whereas up until this point he has presented himself as a confident man who doesn't let even the most troublesome events shake his firm grasp on life, now he feels completely upended by tragedy, realizing that he's in "shock" for perhaps the first time in his life. When he notices that it feels as if "a vital organ has been bruised" inside him, readers see that he is starting to consider the ways in which traumatic events affect people not only in the moment, but in the days, weeks, and years to come. It's impossible to consider this without also thinking about the selfish aggression David forced upon Melanie. Although he didn't necessarily use violence to have sex with her, there's no denying that he was forceful and invasive. What's more, given that Melanie filed a sexual harassment complaint against him, it's rather clear that she was troubled by what he did. Now, as he tries to overcome his own traumatic experience and deal with his daughter's rape, readers are invited to consider the uncomfortable irony surrounding this sudden reversal, since David has gone from abuser to victim.

She does not reply, and he does not press her, for the moment. But his thoughts go to the three intruders, the three invaders, men he will probably never lay eyes on again, yet forever part of his life now, and of his daughter's. The men will watch the newspapers, listen to the gossip. They will read that they are being sought for robbery and assault and nothing else. It will dawn on them that over the body of the woman silence is being drawn like a blanket. *Too ashamed*, they will say to each other, *too ashamed to tell*, and they will chuckle luxuriously, recollecting their exploit. Is Lucy prepared to concede them that victory?

Related Characters: Lucy, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

As David tries to heal in the aftermath of the attack on the farm, he urges Lucy to talk about what happened to her. Although she doesn't want to go through the details of her rape—or even press charges against the three men—David tries multiple times to get through to her, emphasizing how important it is that she confront the matter. When she still refuses, though, he has no choice but to sit back and brood, thinking about how "the three invaders" are "forever part" of his and Lucy's life. Similarly, he is "forever part" of Melanie's life, since a person rarely forgets someone who subjects them to unwanted sexual contact. Coetzee doesn't address this parallel in this moment, instead letting David focus on his own attack. By showcasing this blind spot, then, the author demonstrates that David is still unwilling to thoughtfully consider what he did to Melanie. Instead of drawing a connection between how he feels now and how Melanie must have felt in the aftermath of their interactions, David fixates on the idea that his and Lucy's attackers won't be brought to justice. In turn, readers see that David's refusal to confront his own wrongdoings hasn't changed.

'[…] Do you think what happened here was an exam: if you come through, you get a diploma and safe conduct into the future, or a sign to paint on the door-lintel that will make the plague pass you by? That is not how vengeance works, Lucy. Vengeance is like a fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets.'

'Stop it, David! I don't want to hear this talk of plagues and fires. I am not just trying to save my skin. If that is what you think, you miss the point entirely.'

'Then help me. Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?'

'No. You keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don't act in terms of abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can't help you.'

Related Characters: Lucy, David Lurie (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

In this conversation, David once again tries to convince Lucy to take action against the three men who raped her. Unable to comprehend why she doesn't want to file report about what happened to her, he suggests that she sees her suffering as an "exam." This idea draws upon South Africa's embattled history, as David implies that Lucy feels guilty for being a white person in a country that for centuries systematically oppressed the black majority. Under this interpretation, Lucy could see her rape as a form of atonement, as if she needed to undergo a certain rite of passage in order to continue living on her own property. However, Lucy objects to this idea. Instead, the reason she doesn't want to tell the authorities that she was raped is seemingly simpler: she doesn't want to talk about the experience because it was traumatizing. David remains incapable of giving her the support she needs, however. Instead of showing her the same gentle kindness that she showed him when he first came to the farm, he pontificates and talks at length about something that only hurts her to hear, ultimately prioritizing his own worries over hers.

Chapter 15 Quotes

'[…] Petrus is not an innocent party, Petrus is *with* them.'

'Don't shout at me, David. This is my life. I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself—not to you, not to anyone else. As for Petrus, he is not some hired labourer whom I can sack because in my opinion he is mixed up with the wrong people. That's all gone, gone with the wind.'

Related Characters: Lucy, David Lurie (speaker), Pollux, Petrus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

In this conversation, David and Lucy argue about whether or not Petrus can be trusted. Having just found out that Petrus knows Pollux—one of Lucy's three attackers—David insists that they call the police. According to him, they have finally tracked down one of the offenders, so there's no reason not to take immediate legal action. Lucy, on the other hand, doesn't want to call the police. Although her decision ultimately lets Pollux go free despite his heinous crimes, there's no denying that it should be up to her how she handles this particular situation. This is what she tells David, reminding her that she is "the one who has to live here." If she were to report Pollux, her relationship with Petrus would become even more complicated than it already is. Lucy anticipates her father's objection to this by emphasizing that Petrus "is not some hired labourer," knowing that David will be quick to suggest that she try to get rid of him. When she says this, she reminds David that they are no longer living under apartheid, when it would have been easy to banish Petrus and his friends and family from the land. Instead, the legal power dynamics of apartheid are "gone with the wind," a fact that Lucy stresses because she knows her father is having a hard time adjusting to the new way of life in South Africa.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ 'I know what Lucy has been through. I was there.'

Wide-eyed she gazes back at him. 'But you weren't there, David. She told me. You weren't.'

You weren't there. You don't know what happened. He is baffled. Where, according to Bev Shaw, according to Lucy, was he not? In the room where the intruders were committing their outrages? Do they think he does not know what rape is? Do they think he has not suffered with his daughter? What more could he have witnessed than he is capable of imagining? Or do they think that, where rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is? Whatever the answer, he is outraged, outraged at being treated like an outsider.

Related Characters: Bev Shaw, David Lurie (speaker), Lucy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

In this conversation, David speaks to Bev Shaw about Lucy. Because he feels as if he can't connect with his daughter, he voices his concern to Bev, but she only tells him that she has been through quite a lot. In response, he bitterly says that he *knows* what Lucy has "been through" because he "was there." In response, she makes the reasonable point that he *wasn't* actually there. After all, David was locked in the bathroom while the three men raped Lucy. However, this logic frustrates David, who thinks that he doesn't need to have actually witnessed what happened in order to understand his daughter's trauma. "What more could he have witnessed than he is capable of imagining?" he wonders. What this approach fails to take into account is the fact that "witness[ing]" a horrific act isn't the same as *experiencing* it for oneself. It might be the case that David has a good idea of what Lucy had to endure, but this doesn't mean he truly knows what it was like for her to be raped. Rather than stopping to consider this, though, he focuses only on the fact that he is "outraged at being treated like an outsider." Once again, then, he fails to embody the kind of unimposing support that Lucy clearly requires during this period, fixating on his own involvement in the event rather than paying attention to how he can give Lucy what she needs.

❝ Curious that a man as selfish as he should be offering himself to the service of dead dogs. There must be other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world, or to an idea of the world. One could for instance work longer hours at the clinic. […] Even sitting down more purposefully with the Byron libretto might, at a pinch, be construed as a service to mankind.

But there are other people to do these things—the animal welfare thing, the social rehabilitation thing, even the Byron thing. He saves the honour of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it. That is what he is becoming: stupid, daft, wrongheaded.

Related Characters: Bev Shaw, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

In the aftermath of the attack, David spends much of his time helping Bev Shaw. In addition to helping her put down the many dogs in the shelter, he takes it upon himself to drive the bodies to a nearby incinerator. When he stops to reflect upon this bleak task, he considers the fact that "there must be other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world." This suggests that he is—for perhaps the first time—trying to change, at least in some small way. Otherwise, he wouldn't be thinking about the best way to make use of himself. Interestingly enough, he recognizes that most of the jobs he might be inclined to do are all tasks that multiple people are willing to take upon themselves. As such, he chooses a thankless duty, telling himself that "there is no one else stupid enough to do it." However, while this might seem like a selfless act, it's worth noting that David seemingly derives a sense of perverse satisfaction from the fact that he's the only person willing to take the dogs to the incinerator. In this way, he fashions himself into something of a martyr, taking an odd kind of pride in the deranged "honour" of disposing of dead dogs. It seems he has overcompensated for his wrongdoings, trying a bit too hard to demonstrate his repentance—so hard that one might naturally wonder if he's trying to cover up a lack of genuine remorse.

Chapter 17 Quotes

Let me not forget this day, he tells himself, lying beside her when they are spent. After the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs, this is what I have come to. This is what I will have to get used to, this and even less than this.

'It's late,' says Bev Shaw. 'I must be going.'

He pushes the blanket aside and gets up, making no effort to hide himself. Let her gaze her fill on her Romeo, he thinks, on his bowed shoulders and skinny shanks. It is indeed late. [...] At the door Bev presses herself against him a last time, rests her head on his chest. He lets her do it, as he has let her do everything she has felt a need to do. His thoughts go to Emma Bovary strutting before the mirror after her first big afternoon. *I have a lover! I have a lover!* sings Emma to herself. Well, let poor Bev Shaw go home and do some singing too. And let him stop calling her poor Bev Shaw. If she is poor, he is bankrupt.

Related Characters: Bev Shaw (speaker), Melanie Isaacs, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David lies next to Bev Shaw after having just had sex with her, and feels sorry for himself. "Let me not forget this day," he thinks, considering the fact that he has now slept with a woman he clearly believes is inferior to him. He laments the fact that he has gone from sleeping with "the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs" to sleeping with Bev, who he thinks is painfully simple and unattractive. As he continues to think in this manner, he lets Bev do whatever she wants, not caring if she studies his body or puts her head to his chest. In this regard, he sees himself as a prize, clearly thinking that he's doing Bev a kindness by letting her see him naked. What he doesn't stop to consider, though, is that he is no doubt getting just as much enjoyment out of their relationship, since she is—at this point in the novel—the only person willing to give him any comfort or support; he's not currently on good terms with Lucy. When he thinks about Emma Bovary—the protagonist of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*—he accentuates the idea that Bev is elated to "have" him as a "lover." However, he then begins to grasp the fact that his conception of her is quite disparaging, realizing that he shouldn't call her "poor Bev Shaw." In turn, readers see that David is aware of his own vanity, which often causes him to think of himself as superior to others. In this moment, though, he finally admits his own shortcomings.

Chapter 19 Quotes

One word more, then I am finished. It could have turned out differently, I believe, between the two of us, despite our ages. But there was something I failed to supply, something'—he hunts for the word—'lyrical. I lack the lyrical. I manage love too well. Even when I burn I don't sing, if you understand me. For which I am sorry. I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. You have a wonderful family. I apologize for the grief I have caused you and Mrs Isaacs. I ask for your pardon.

Related Characters: David Lurie (speaker), Melanie Isaacs, Mr. Isaacs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

David says this to Mr. Isaacs after having eaten dinner at Melanie's house. In their final conversation, David apologizes for what he has done. The way he does this, however, is characteristically self-serving, as he focuses first and foremost on his own interests, primarily apologizing for his failure to properly "love" Melanie. Indeed, he begins by saying that he thinks "it could have turned out differently" between Melanie and himself—a thought that Mr. Isaacs surely has no interest in pursuing, since David is essentially suggesting not that he regrets what he did to Melanie, but that he didn't do it correctly. "I lack the lyrical," he says, using what Lucy might call an "abstraction" in order to compensate for the fact that he did something wrong. By the end of the apology, at least, he manages to turn things around, dropping his intellectual considerations of lyricism and passion and turning instead to a straightforward expression of regret. Still, though, it's worth noting that he never says he wishes he didn't try to embark upon a relationship with Melanie. Instead, he apologizes "for the grief" he has "caused" the Isaacs family, and although this at least acknowledges that his actions have led to pain, he still avoids actually admitting that his entire relationship with Melanie was immoral and wrong.

'So,' says Isaacs, 'at last you have apologized. I wondered when it was coming.' He ponders. He has not taken his seat; now he begins to pace up and down. 'You are sorry. You lacked the lyrical, you say. If you had had the lyrical, we would not be where we are today. But I say to myself, we are all sorry when we are found out. Then we are very sorry. The question is not, are we sorry? The question is, what lesson have we learned? The question is, what are we going to do now that we are sorry?'

Related Characters: Mr. Isaacs (speaker), Melanie Isaacs, David Lurie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

After David apologizes for the pain he has caused the Isaacs family, Mr. Isaacs considers the very nature of his apology. First, he repeats David's assertion that if he had not "lacked the lyrical," things might have worked out with Melanie. By restating this in such a straightforward way, Mr. Isaacs calls attention to the absurdity of this argument, which is vague and pretentious without actually addressing the fact that it was wrong for David to pursue Melanie in the first place. More importantly, though, Mr. Isaacs turns his attention to what it means to be "sorry" after the fact. Indeed, he points out that it's easy to express sorrow after having been "found out." This is rather ironic, since—although it's certainly true that most people are "sorry when [they] are found out"—David himself has taken this long to even reach the point of admitting remorse, suggesting that he has a long way to go before he'll ever be able to make things right. To that end, Isaacs underlines the fact that it doesn't truly matter whether or not David is sorry. Rather, what David should focus on is how he can rectify what he's done—a notion that David is sure to dislike, considering how much he resists reformation and change.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ 'I don't trust him,' he goes on. 'He is shifty. He is like a jackal sniffing around, looking for mischief. In the old days we had a word for people like him. Deficient. Mentally deficient. Morally deficient. He should be in an institution.'

'That is reckless talk, David. If you want to think like that, please keep it to yourself. Anyway, what you think of him is beside the point. He is here, he won't disappear in a puff of smoke, he is a fact of life.'

Related Characters: Lucy, David Lurie (speaker), Pollux

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between David and Lucy directly after David catches Pollux spying on his daughter through the window. When Lucy comes outside and rescues Pollux from David's wrath, David tries to explain himself, saying that the young man is "shifty." Going on, he once again reveals his fondness for the past, saying, "In the old days we had a word for people like him. Deficient." Although this sentence in and of itself doesn't necessarily have to do with apartheid, David's overall sentiment is one of intolerance and nostalgia, as he longs for the days when it was more socially acceptable to mistreat others. Lucy, for her part, strongly resists this worldview, since she is more eager to embrace the ways in which her society is changing. This is why she's willing to help Pollux despite the fact that he was spying on her—she doesn't want to do anything that might exacerbate her relationship with him and Petrus, since that relationship is already strained by the fraught racial dynamics that are at play because of the lasting effects of apartheid. Trying to get her father to recognize that it's unhelpful to fantasize about "the old days," Lucy insists that Pollux is a "fact of life" and that he's not going to simply vanish. By saying this, she encourages David to open himself up to the world as it is now rather than living problematically in the past.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

David Lurie is fifty-two, twice divorced, and has "solved the problem of sex" by visiting a prostitute named Soraya every Thursday afternoon. In an apartment rented by the prostitution agency, he and Soraya have sex and pass the time. He has even begun to feel truly affectionate toward her because he "takes pleasure in her," and he can almost convince himself that she feels the same. In fact, he has considered asking to spend time with her when she's not working, but he knows he'll lose interest in her in the morning if they ever spend a night together. This, he knows, is his "temperament," which he doesn't believe can change, since he's "too old for that."

From this initial snapshot of David Lurie, it's clear he's a man driven first and foremost by desire. Instead of focusing on romance, David sees sex as a "problem" that can be "solved" by simply having it on a regular basis. He also isn't ashamed of his sexual yearnings or the fact that he is only interested in Soraya as a sexual being. By believing that he's "too old" to change his "temperament," he effectively gives himself an excuse to continue doing what he wants without having to examine his impulses, ultimately avoiding genuine self-reflection in order to pursue his sexual appetite.

David frequently "unburdens" himself by talking to Soraya about his private life, but she doesn't tell him stories in return. Despite his willingness to talk about personal matters, he avoids speaking about his job at Cape Technical University, mainly because he thinks he'll bore her. He used to be a professor in Classics and Modern Languages, but was recently demoted to an adjunct position when his department was reconfigured into a Communications department. Now he teaches courses he doesn't care about, except one class in the Romantic poets, which the university has allowed him to continue offering. This is somewhat demoralizing, since he has written three books about poetry and opera, but none of this seems to matter to anyone anymore.

David's demotion has led him to feel underappreciated, as he considers the fact that his new colleagues don't care about his scholarly work. His career doesn't lend him a sense of fulfillment, which is perhaps why he so unabashedly follows his sexual desires, since this is one way he can eke out satisfaction in an otherwise unrewarding life. The fact that he's comfortable speaking to Soraya about his personal life suggests that he feels at liberty to say and do whatever he wants in her presence, whereas she has to remain guarded. In turn, readers see that David has no problem engaging in sexual connections that have uneven relational dynamics.

The fact that his ninety-minute sessions with Soraya satisfy him so much surprises David. Indeed, he "used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage," but now he sees that all he needs is a weekly appointment to have sex with a woman who won't even share her real name with him. Unfortunately for him, though, his arrangement with Soraya changes when he sees her and her two sons walking in the city one day. Making eye contact, he immediately "regrets" spotting her in public. Not long after this encounter, Soraya tells him she won't be returning to the prostitution agency because she has to "take a break" to care for her ailing mother. When he asks how he'll be able to reach her, she tells him to call the agency.

Again, Coetzee underlines the fact that David is primarily interested in satiating his sexual desires, not engaging in actual romantic relationships. However, he soon discovers that even transactional relationships like the one he has with Soraya can be delicate and complex. Indeed, as soon as he (accidentally) works his way into Soraya's private life, their impersonal arrangement suffers, ultimately demonstrating that no matter what he'd like to tell himself, Soraya doesn't actually care about him on a personal level.

Several days later, David calls the prostitution agency and asks for Soraya, but they tell him they can't give out her information. He books an appointment with another woman who has taken the fake name Soraya, but he finds her "unpractised" and unsatisfying. For his entire life, David has benefited from his striking good looks, never having any trouble attracting women. Now, though, he is disconcerted that women don't look at him the way they used to, which is why he has started seeing prostitutes. He has also flung himself into several ill-advised affairs with his colleagues' wives. In the wake of Soraya's disappearance, he takes his department's secretary out and, on their second date, they go to his house and have sex, though he avoids her in the following days.

It's again made clear how little David thinks about other people when it comes to his personal (and sexual) relationships. A vain man who takes pride in his ability to attract women, he now feels desperate to satisfy his desires—so desperate that he won't hesitate to sleep with the spouses of his colleagues, nor will he think twice about rudely using a coworker to relieve his sexual yearnings. David prioritizes what he wants over all else.

Sometimes David thinks it would be better to be castrated than to see the death of his sexual powers. This, however, isn't something a person can ask a doctor to do, so he continues to obsess over Soraya, eventually tracking down her number and calling her at home. When she answers, she says, "I don't know who you are. You are harassing me in my own house. I demand you will never phone me here again, never."

For a man who's so focused on his own sexual desires, it's surprising that David thinks—even in an offhanded way—about castration. However, it's obvious that he only fantasizes about this because it would make his own life easier, not because he recognizes the fact that his fixation on his yearnings ends up hurting other people. In keeping with this failure to consider how his actions make other people feel, he calls Soraya at home, violating her privacy even though it's clear she wants nothing to do with him anymore.

CHAPTER 2

David is bored after Soraya leaves, so he spends the majority of his time in the library, researching Lord Byron because he wants to start a new project. Instead of a scholarly piece of writing, though, this time he wants to compose an opera, "a meditation on love between the sexes." After an afternoon in the library one day, he sees a student named Melanie Isaacs on campus. She is in his class on the Romantic poets, and is a very attractive twenty-year-old. Coming up to her, he invites her for a drink at his apartment, and after a "cautious" hesitation, she agrees, saying that she doesn't have very long before she has to be back. Once inside his apartment, he serves her wine and puts on Mozart, asking her what she thinks about his class. As he tries to flirt with her, her answers are flat and guarded, though he isn't discouraged.

Now that David isn't visiting a prostitute on a weekly basis, he apparently wants to satisfy his cravings by pursing Melanie. This, of course, is very self-destructive behavior, since sleeping with a student poses a great threat to his career. However, David's primary concern is getting what he wants, so he doesn't stop himself from trying to court Melanie. In turn, readers see that he's ignoring how he might suffer from this pursuit while also completely ignoring how Melanie herself will be affected by his advances. Though it's clear that she's not particularly interested in him, he pushes on nonetheless, not stopping to care—or even think—about her feelings.

"I am going to throw together some supper," David says. "Come on!" he says when he sees Melanie's doubting look. "Say yes!" In response, she agrees to stay, but says she has to make a call, so she goes to the phone and has a long conversation before returning, at which point he asks what she wants to do for a living. Telling him that she's studying theater, she reveals that she wants to get into "stagecraft and design," and then they have dinner, during which he continues to ask her questions and she continues to answer in a timid fashion. When they finish eating, Melanie prepares to leave, but David tells her not to go, leading her into the living room and playing her an old cassette tape of a dance performance. "He wills the girl to be captivated too," Coetzee writes. "But he senses she is not."

Part of what makes David such a difficult character to morally reckon with is that he isn't actually blind to how other people are feeling. In fact, he's perfectly capable of recognizing that Melanie isn't "captivated" by him, but this doesn't stop him from continuing to forge onward with his plan of seducing her. He chooses to ignore anything that might get in the way of what he wants, thereby exhibiting a certain lack of empathy, for although he can "sense" Melanie's discomfort, he continues to behave in a way that clearly unsettles her.

When the video ends, David and Melanie continue to make small-talk, as Melanie asks him about his life—his marriages, his book projects—and then again prepares to leave. "I'm going to invite you to do something reckless," David says after giving Melanie coffee with a shot of whiskey. "Stay. Spend the night with me." When she asks why she should do this, he says, "Because you ought to." "Why I ought I to?" she asks, and he says, "Why? Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it." As he says this, he places his hand against her cheek, and though she doesn't move away, neither does she embrace the touch. "And what if I already share it?" she asks. "Then you should share it more widely," he says.

In this moment, David sets forth the uncomfortable idea that Melanie has a "duty" to "share" her beauty. By saying this, he implies that Melanie owes *him something simply because she's pretty. This also accentuates the power difference between them—after all, he is her professor, meaning that she probably doesn't feel comfortable rebuking or refusing him. He even suggests that she should consider herself indebted to him in some way, ultimately manipulating her into thinking that she has an obligation to do what he wants. Considering only his own desires, David tries to convince Melanie into doing something she clearly doesn't want to do.*

David recognizes internally that what he's saying is "as old as seduction itself," but he realizes that he truly "believes" in his logic in this moment, thinking that Melanie "does not own herself." Going on, he quotes Shakespeare, saying, "From fairest creatures we desire increase, that thereby beauty's rose might never die." This, he understands immediately, is a miscalculation, and he watches her face "lose its playful, mobile quality." "I must leave, I'm expected," she says, and when he embraces her to say goodnight, she "slips" away and departs.

David convinces himself that Melanie actually owes it to the world to "share" her beauty. This suggests that he's quite capable of deluding himself in order to justify pursuing his sexual desires. However, he fails to woo Melanie, possibly because of their extraordinary age difference. His decision to quote Shakespeare not only falls flat because he overestimates her maturity, but because it reminds her that he is her professor.

CHAPTER 3

David understands he should stop pursuing Melanie, but he doesn't. Instead of forgetting about her, he obtains her personal information from the university and calls her at home. Although she's surprised, she agrees to meet for lunch, where she hardly says a word. After the meal, he takes her to his apartment and they have sex on the living room floor. "Though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable," Coetzee notes. Immediately afterwards, she picks up her belongings and leaves. When she doesn't come to class the next day, David sends flowers to her apartment, but still he doesn't hear from her. Then, several days after they first sleep together, he sees her in the university lobby and gives her a ride home. When he asks if she'll invite him inside, she tells him her roommate is home and quickly gets out of the car.

Again, David demonstrates his willingness to transgress certain boundaries in order to satisfy his sexual desires. It's also again evident that he doesn't care about the imbalance of power in his relationship with Melanie, since he doesn't mind the fact that she is "passive" while he has sex with her. This is because all he cares about is getting what he wants, so he doesn't stop to think about whether or not Melanie is actively enjoying—or, for that matter, actively disliking—what's happening. Melanie's absence in class after their sexual encounter illustrates just one of the harmful effects of this relationship on her overall life, as it has clearly made her uncomfortable about interacting with David in an academic setting.

The next week, Melanie is in class once again. As he lectures, David can't help but furtively address what he says to Melanie, making veiled allusions to passion and love. Several days later, he attends one of her theater rehearsals, sitting in the dark auditorium and watching her onstage, and though he feels somewhat guilty for pursuing such a young woman, he also feels as if he can't be "blamed for clinging" to his "place at the sweet banquet of the senses." The following day he arrives at her apartment unannounced. "He has given her no warning; she is too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her," Coetzee writes. "No, not now! My cousin will be back!" she says as he steers her toward the bedroom.

Once more, readers see that David is perfectly capable of recognizing why his relationship with Melanie is wrong, but he doesn't let this stop him from pursuing her. He is good at giving himself excuses, this time reasoning with his conscience by saying that he can't be "blamed" for what he's doing because it's natural for an older man to want to retain a sense of youthfulness. This, it seems, is partially why David is so attracted to Melanie: he sees her as someone who will help him feel better about the fact that he's no longer young. Thinking this way, he has no problem striving for what he wants, even when Melanie herself indicates that she doesn't necessarily want to continue their relationship.

Despite Melanie's words of discouragement, David continues to hold her as he makes toward the bedroom, where he begins to undress her. "She does not resist," Coetzee writes. Lying on the bed, she allows him to take off her clothing, "even help[ing] him" by moving her body in ways that make it easier for him to take off her pants. "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core," Coetzee notes of the experience. When they're finished, Melanie immediately asks him to go because her roommate is sure to return at any moment. In the car, he suddenly feels guilty and wrong, realizing that he has made "a huge mistake."

Coetzee is interested in exploring the unsettling grey areas of sexual harassment. On the one hand, he presents David as an unempathetic man who will take what he wants from women regardless of what they say. On the other hand, Coetzee spotlights the subtle ways in which David's abuse of Melanie falls short of straightforward sexual violence, since there is apparently a certain part of Melanie that is willing to go along with David's desires. However, this is seemingly just because of the power imbalance in their relationship. Melanie doesn't feel comfortable refusing David outright, and though there is perhaps a part of her that is interested in the idea of having sex with him, this doesn't mean she actually wants to pursue a physical relationship. David doesn't care whether or not his advances are "undesired," though, going forward with his own yearnings without considering the complicated situation he has forced upon Melanie. His harassment of Melanie is thus an instance of sexual coercion, in which he uses his authority and power—instead of full-on physical aggression—to get what he wants.

Melanie doesn't come to class the following day, which is the day of the midterm exam. Despite this absence, David marks her as present and gives her a grade of 70% on the test, noting that this is a "provisional" score. For the entire next week, he doesn't see her at all, not until she shows up at his apartment on Sunday night. He braces himself for her anger, but she surprises him by asking if she can spend the night. Relieved, he gets her settled in his daughter's old room, sensing that something is amiss and that she needs space. The next morning, he comes in and asks how she's feeling, but she tells him she doesn't want to talk about what happened. As such, he takes her in his arms and she begins to weep, at which point he comforts her, almost saying, "Tell Daddy what is wrong."

Coetzee spotlights the ways in which David and Melanie's sexual relationship has profoundly altered the dynamics of their academic relationship. Indeed, the extra slack David gives Melanie in the classroom is the direct result of what has happened between them. The fact that Melanie then comes to David for comfort adds even more complexity to their relationship, since David suddenly feels not only like her professor and sexual partner, but also like a protective father figure. Coetzee illustrates the messy interpersonal dynamics that arise when a person in a position of power uses his authority to trespass beyond the standard boundaries of a student-teacher connection.

When she stops crying, Melanie asks if she can stay at David's apartment for "a while," and though he knows this is a terrible idea, he tells her she's welcome to do so. Just as he's about to stand up, he runs his hand over her breasts and behind, then tells her he has to go teach. Upon returning in the afternoon, he finds her eating toast, looking rested and well. After telling him that she won't be back until after rehearsal that night, she acknowledges that she's "missed a lot of classes" because the play is eating up her time, and then she promises to attend his course the following day, though he realizes that he has no way of "enforc[ing]" this. "She is behaving badly, getting away with too much," Coetzee writes. "But if she has got away with much, he has got away with more."

Again, Coetzee shows readers why it's not a good idea for a professor to engage sexually with a student. Although David has abused his power in order to get what he wants from Melanie, in doing so he has also forfeited a certain amount of that power, since he can no longer treat Melanie with a professor's objective authority. Because he feels guilty about what he has done, he realizes that he can't get angry at Melanie for using his compromised position to her own advantage—after all, he has taken certain liberties with her, and now she is doing the same with him, though in a much less destructive manner.

CHAPTER 4

David and Melanie have sex one last time. It takes place in his daughter's old bedroom, and as they get dressed afterwards, she asks him if he frequently sleeps with his students. In response, he uncomfortably insists that he doesn't "collect women," but she says, "Aren't you collecting me?" Later that day, when he's in his office, he receives a strange visitor. "So you are the professor," the man says, sitting down with his leather jacket, leather pants, and "thin goatee." When he tells David that Melanie has been talking about him, David asks what she has said, and the boy says, "That you fuck her." As David tries to change the topic, the boy starts berating him, telling him that he can't "just walk into people's lives and walk out again." He pushes the papers off David's desk before storming out of the office.

When Melanie asks if David is "collecting" her, she touches upon his tendency to see women as nothing more than objects of desire. Similarly, the young man who visits him in his office takes issue with his self-centered decision to intrude upon Melanie's life without stopping to truly think about the effect he will have on her. This young man's presence is yet another sign—along with Melanie's absences and her presence at his apartment—that there will be consequences for what David has done.

That night, David waits up late for Melanie, but she doesn't appear. The next morning, he discovers that his car has been vandalized, the paint scratched, the tires slashed, and the locks jammed with glue. In the coming days, he sees nothing of Melanie, and when he enters class, the students fall silent, a sure sign that they've heard something is going on. Worse, the boy who visited his office is sitting next to Melanie. Not knowing what to do, David goes forward as planned, lecturing about Lord Byron. Whenever he asks a question, though, nobody offers an answer—nobody, that is, except the young man, who eventually responds to David's question about "what kind of creature" Lucifer is. "He does what he feels like. He doesn't care if it's good or bad. He just does it," the boy says.

It's significant that the boy answers David's question about Lucifer, since his response can clearly be applied to David himself. Just like Lucifer, David "does what he feels like" without caring if "it's good or bad." It is because of this mentality that he has pursued Melanie, failing to think much about whether or not she desires him in return. In this moment, then, David has to face his own shortcomings while standing before his students and listening to this young man rebuke him.

David ends class early and asks Melanie to accompany him to his office, where he closes the door before the young man can enter. "My dear," he says, "you are going through a difficult time, I know that, and I don't want to make it more difficult. But I must speak to you as a teacher. I have obligations to my students, all of them. What your friend does off campus is his own business. But I can't have him disrupting my classes. Tell him that from me." Going on, he tells her that she needs to focus more on her classwork and that she has to take the midterm exam she missed. In response, she tells him she can't take the test because she hasn't done the reading, so he says she can take it in his office the following Monday, which will give her time to study.

Once more, readers see how complicated David and Melanie's relationship has become as a result of their sexual liaisons. The fact that David chooses this moment to inform Melanie that she has to take the midterm exam suggests that he wants to regain some sense of power. Having been humiliated in class by the young man—who is presumably Melanie's boyfriend or ex-boyfriend—he now tries to reassert his authority. Given the circumstances, it would be fair to argue that he has no right to do this, since he's the one who has transgressed and, thus, should be the one to pay the price. He tries to recapture his dominance anyway, proving that it's important to him to feel powerful.

CHAPTER 5

On Monday, Melanie doesn't come to David's office. When he checks his faculty mailbox, he finds "an official withdrawal card" with her name on it, and an hour later receives a call from her father. "Professor," Mr. Isaacs says, "I wonder if you can help us. Melanie has been such a good student, and now she says she is going to give it all up." Continuing, he asks David to talk some sense into Melanie, since she has always spoken highly of him. Awkwardly, David says he'll "see what [he] can do," later telling himself that he won't "get away with" this. Still, he calls Melanie at home to speak to her, but her cousin answers and tells him she won't come to the phone. In the coming days, attendance is down in his classes, and he senses that everybody knows what's happening.

Slowly but surely, David's life begins to crumble as a result of his affair with Melanie. Although her father doesn't yet know why Melanie has decided to drop out of school, he'll probably find out, and then David is unlikely to escape the situation unharmed. In fact, news of what he's done has clearly already begun to circulate, as evidenced by the low attendance in his classes. As a result, readers see that Melanie isn't the only one who will suffer because of David's unflinching decision to satisfy his sexual desires. David has also doomed himself, though in a different way.

One afternoon during this period, David is surprised to hear Mr. Isaacs's voice behind him in the department's common space. "Professor," Isaacs says in front of several secretaries and students, "You may be very educated and all that, but what you have done is not right." As David cowers before him, Isaacs says that parents trust people like him with their children and that he should be "ashamed" of himself for what he's done. Hearing this, David tries to duck away, rushing down the hall as Isaacs shouts after him, saying, "You have not heard the last of it, I tell you now!"

This is the first scene in which the novel's title, Disgrace, *starts to make sense. Having violated the boundaries of conventional student-teacher relationships, David now faces a public shaming. From this point on, it's clear that he will have to find a way to live under the critical gaze of his surrounding community, which will no doubt condemn him for prioritizing his sexual desires over Melanie's wellbeing.*


David receives a notice from the Vice-Rector's office the following morning. The message tells him that a student has filed a sexual harassment complaint against him. As he reads this, he thinks about how Melanie wouldn't have "taken such a step by herself," thinking that her father must have urged her to do this. That evening, he goes to a meeting at the Vice-Rector's office, where Aram Hakim—the Vice-Rector—welcomes him. Inside, David finds the chair of his department, Elaine Winter, and the chair of the university's "committee on discrimination," Farodia Rassool. As he takes his seat, Elaine—who he believes has never liked him because she sees him as leftover personnel in her department—explains that, in addition to Melanie's sexual harassment complaint, they are also investigating the fact that David marked her as present even though Melanie has indicated that she hasn't been attending class.

Finally, David has to face what he's done. In this section, Coetzee illustrates the consequences of his transgression, as David not only has to confront the sexual harassment complaint, but also the more logistical problem regarding his fraudulent attendance records. In this way, he's forced to reckon with the fact that his relationship with Melanie—if, indeed, it can even be called a relationship—affected his ability to carry out his role as an unbiased educator. As such, it becomes clear that mixing sexual desire with power significantly skews a person's capacity to occupy an authoritative position in the first place.

"I have no defence," David says, regarding both Melanie's complaint and his fraudulent attendance records. At this point, Hakim interjects and assures David that this isn't a hearing, but simply an opportunity to "clarify procedure." He then says that there will be a disciplinary committee that will hear his case. He also suggests that David seek legal counsel, and when David begins to object to this, he urges him to "sleep on it." "Don't tell me what to do, I'm not a child," David erupts, leaving the office in a fit of anger, though he has to wait at the building's front door for Hakim to unlock it for him. On their way to the parking lot, Hakim expresses his "sympathy," saying that these situations are very difficult, but David merely "shrugs" and drives away.

At first, it seems as if David might handle this situation responsibly and even humbly, since he honestly says that he can offer no defense of his actions. However, he immediately contradicts this sense of humility by snapping at Hakim and insisting that he can't be told what to do. Hakim is only trying to help David, but David sees this as a challenge because he's too egotistical and proud to listen to anyone but himself. As a result, he brushes off Hakim's "sympathy," effectively estranging himself from the only person who has—thus far—offered him support.


News of David's scandal begins to circulate even though the upcoming hearing is supposed to be "confidential." A lawyer he used for one of his divorces tells him that he should have a woman represent him during the hearing and that he should "minimize the damage" by appearing willing to undergo certain restorative measures, like counseling—a suggestion that frustrates David. One night, he has dinner with Rosalind, one of his ex-wives, and she brings up the "problems" he's having at the university. "Am I allowed to tell you how stupid it looks?" she asks, and when he says no, she pushes on, saying, "I will anyway. Stupid, and ugly too." Going on, she tells him not to "expect sympathy" from her or anybody else. The next morning, Rosalind calls and tells him that a local paper has written very unflattering things about him.

David bristles when his lawyer suggests that he remain open to the possibility of counseling. This is because he is averse to the idea of change, thinking that he is "too old" to reform himself—a sentiment readers will remember from the first chapter, when Coetzee notes that David believes his "temperament" will never change again. Of course, this line of thinking merely enables him to continue to lead his life according to his desires without ever having to examine his shortcomings. When Rosalind tells him not to "expect sympathy" in the aftermath of his affair with Melanie, readers see that he will have very little support from even his closest acquaintances.

CHAPTER 6

David's disciplinary hearing takes place in a room next to Hakim's office. The committee is made up of Manas Mathabane (a religious studies professor who is chair of the committee), Farodia Rassool, Desmond Swarts (dean of the Engineering department), a woman from the school of business, and a student observer. As they convene, Mathabane asks David if he has any objections to the makeup of the committee, and David says, "I have no challenge in a legal sense. I have reservations of a philosophical kind, but I suppose they are out of bounds." Moving on, Mathabane addresses Melanie's complaint, asking David if he'd like to hear what Melanie said in her own hearing, which took place the day before. David doesn't show any desire to hear this, and so Mathabane outlines the second matter, which has to do with David's fraudulent attendance records.

From the very beginning of his disciplinary hearing, David appears arrogant and abrasive. When he suggests that he has "reservations of a philosophical kind" about the entire process, he insults the purpose of the hearing without specifically going into why, exactly, he disapproves of it. In this way, he undermines his colleagues' efforts to conduct a fair disciplinary meeting, framing it as morally flawed. David continues to inevitably press forward in his actions, refusing to compromise or see things from others' perspectives.

"That is the sum of it?" David says when Mathabane lays out the charges. He then says, "I am sure the members of this committee have better things to do with their time than rehash a story over which there will be no dispute. I plead guilty to both charges. Pass sentence, and let us get on with our lives." Once he says this, Hakim reminds him that the purpose of the disciplinary isn't to find him guilty, but to "hear both sides of the case and make a recommendation" to the university regarding the nature of his punishment. He then gives David a chance to tell his version of the story, but David refuses to say anything more than that he's "guilty." "I do not wish to read Ms Isaacs's statement," he says. "I accept it."

Again, David's willingness to plead guilty seems like a sign that he's ready accept responsibility for his immoral actions. However, this isn't the case; as he continues to speak, he disparages the disciplinary committee, belittling the entire hearing by suggesting that everyone must have "better things to do" than listen to the particulars of his case. By saying this, he not only makes his transgressions seem petty and insignificant, but enables himself to avoid Melanie's accusations and keep from confronting what he's done.

Disapproving of David's arrogant behavior, Farodia Rassool notes that the disciplinary committee perhaps has a "duty" to "protect" him from himself. At this point, the professor from the school of business asks David if he'd be willing to do counseling, and David says he absolutely would not, pointing out that he is a "grown man" who is "not receptive to being counselled," adding that he is "beyond the reach" of such forms of rehabilitation. Hearing this, the committee takes a break to discuss the situation amongst themselves, sending David out of the room. When they bring him back, Rassool objects to David's attitude, suggesting that he is making "subtle mockery" of the disciplinary process. "In a case with overtones like this one, the wider community is entitled—" she begins, but he cuts her off, saying, "There are no overtones in this case."

Once more, David expresses his unwillingness to go to counseling. He apparently believes a person can't change after a certain age, though this in and of itself seems like nothing more than a way of avoiding responsibility for his actions. After all, if David went to therapy, he would have to examine himself and his moral failures, but if he doesn't, he can simply move on with his life, continuing to do whatever he wants. This is also why he makes "subtle mockery" of the disciplinary process, since doing so will make it easier for him to write off his punishment as petty. As such, readers see that the majority of David's rhetorical moves are nothing more than self-defense techniques that will enable him to avoid moral culpability. It is because of this that he insists there "are no overtones in this case." In truth, there are many *"overtones," since what he did to Melanie is complicated and problematic. By telling himself that the entire ordeal is a black-and-white matter of guilt and innocence, though, he saves himself from having to delve into the true moral implications of his actions.*

Ignoring David, Rassool insists that the "community" deserves to know what, exactly, David has done and why he's being punished. Mathabane, for his part, adds that the committee is certainly clear about why David is being punished, but that they want to make sure *David* is "crystal clear in his mind." Still, though, David refuses to examine Melanie's allegations, and though his colleagues on the committee urge him to reconsider this—saying he might be able to keep his job if he shows a sense of remorse—he doesn't change his approach. Eventually, though, he gives a brief summary of what happened between him and Melanie, saying that he was a "servant of Eros." In response, Rassool points out that David is speaking "in circles" and that, despite his willingness to plead guilty, it's obvious he isn't thinking at all about "the pain he has caused."

When David says that he was driven to do what he did to Melanie because he became a "servant of Eros" (the Greek god of love) he tries to shift blame away from himself. Framing his transgression as a natural lapse of strength in the face of desire, he suggests that his mistake is understandable and forgivable (and does so by emphasizing his own status as an intellectual and academic). What this approach fails to take into consideration is that he meticulously manipulated Melanie into having sex with him. Their intimacies didn't take place spontaneously in the throes of passion—David actively pursued Melanie until she finally stopped resisting him.

The disciplinary committee encourages David to issue a statement of regret, so he callously says, "Very well. I took advantage of my position vis-à-vis Ms Isaacs. It was wrong, and I regret it. Is that good enough for you?" In turn, Rassool tells him that it doesn't matter whether or not this statement is good enough for her, but whether or not it's good enough for *him*. Still posturing in his arrogant way, though, David simply says that he has said what they want him to and that they can't force him to prove his "sincerity." Mathabane wraps up the hearing and dismisses him. On his way out of the building, David encounters a number of reporters, all of whom want to talk to him about the hearing. At one point, a journalist asks if he regrets what he did, and he says, "No. I was enriched by the experience."

Rassool raises an important point about the way David is approaching the matter. Rather than focusing on whether or not his statement will appease the disciplinary committee, she urges him to look within himself, clearly understanding that his unwillingness to genuinely consider what he's done to Melanie stems from a desire to avoid reckoning with his own shortcomings. However, he still refuses to face the moral implications of his actions, as made especially clear when he tells the reporters that he was "enriched" by the "experience" of sleeping with Melanie—a sentiment that brazenly disregards the fact that he has harmed her. Once again, he focuses only on his own desires while also posturing in an arrogant manner to sidestep the moral consequences of his actions.

Not long after the hearing, Mathabane calls David at home. He explains that the Rector will avoid "extreme" disciplinary "measures" if David issues a public statement of regret. In fact, Mathabane has a draft of a statement that would meet the necessary requirements. When he reads it, David pinpoints a specific line: "I sincerely apologize [...] and accept whatever appropriate penalty may be imposed." When he asks what this means, Mathabane tells him that the "penalty" would involve a brief leave of absence. However, David once again refuses to cooperate because he insists that he isn't genuinely remorseful. "Very well," Mathabane sighs. "Then I can only say, you will be hearing from the Rector."

David frames his unwillingness to issue an insincere apology as a commitment to honesty and integrity. By doing this, he postures as someone who cares deeply about right and wrong—an ironic stance, given that he's about to lose his job for behaving immorally. Nonetheless, his stubbornness allows him to feel as if he's taking some sort of moral high ground, and though this is a backwards way of looking at his situation, it enables him to continue living his life without feeling remorseful.

CHAPTER 7

After being forced to resign from the university, David decides to visit his daughter Lucy, who lives in the Eastern Cape of South Africa on a "smallholding" in a farmhouse. When he gets out of the car and greets her, he notices that she has gained weight, though not necessarily in a bad way. Happy to see her, he thinks about when she first moved here six years ago, when she lived in the farmhouse with a "commune" of young people who wanted to farm and sell their wares at farmers' markets. When the commune decided to move elsewhere, Lucy stayed with her partner Helen, and David helped her buy the property. As he gets settled, Lucy explains that Helen has been gone for several months, leaving her on her own "aside from the help." This concerns David, but Lucy says that having one extra person would do little to deter robbers.

Despite David's overall aversion to change, his life will be very different now that he has resigned from his teaching position. Even he seems to acknowledge and embrace this by going to visit Lucy in a rural area. It's now especially important to not that Disgrace *takes place in post-apartheid South Africa. After many years of racial segregation—when the white minority ruled the country and subjugated the black majority—race relations were understandably quite tense, and though the novel doesn't necessarily deal with these tensions until later on, it's helpful to keep in mind that Lucy is living alone in this rather fraught context, which is perhaps why David is worried when he hears that Helen is no longer living there.*


David asks if Lucy has a gun, and she assures him that she has a rifle, though she's never used it. She then gives him a tour of the grounds, showing him—among other things—the outdoor pens where she runs her kennel. When he was last here, David remembers, there was only one pen's worth of dogs, but now there are five. "Watchdogs all of them," Lucy remarks. David asks if they get bored, pointing to a small bulldog, and Lucy tells him that this particular dog—Katy—has been abandoned by her owners. As such, Lucy is the one to care for her, along with Petrus, who is her assistant and soon-to-be "co-proprietor."

Despite Rosalind telling David not to "expect sympathy," Lucy is seemingly still a supportive person. It is also her job to care for animals, a fact that naturally invites readers to consider if she will show David the same kind of kindness. Of course, David is the one who isolated himself from his community by acting immorally, but this doesn't mean he doesn't need the kind of loving support that all humans require.

David tells Lucy about his plan to work on an opera while he's visiting. "You must have heard about my troubles," he says at one point, and Lucy admits that Rosalind mentioned the matter on the phone, but she doesn't press him for details. She does, however, ask if he will "miss" teaching, and David doubts that he will, since he never thought of himself as a very good professor in the first place. As they talk, Petrus enters and introduces himself, saying, "I look after the dogs and I work in the garden. Yes. I am the gardener and the dog-man." Having said this, he pensively repeats, "The dog-man." In turn, David admits that he sometimes feels nervous about Lucy living here all by herself, and Petrus agrees that it is a "dangerous" place. "Everything is dangerous today," he says. "But here it is all right, I think."

Thankfully for David, Lucy appears willing to let him avoid talking about his problems back home, not pressing him for details right away. Petrus is an important character, though Coetzee only provides a fleeting snapshot of him at this point. Still, Petrus's repetition of the phrase "dog-man" is noteworthy, as it suggests that he is perhaps unhappy with this designation. Given that he lives on Lucy's land but is about to become a "co-proprietor," his possible dissatisfaction is important, since a change in his role could alter the way Lucy lives her day-to-day life. Petrus also belongs to the Xhosa people of South Africa, meaning that—unlike Lucy and David—he is a black man who has experienced racial discrimination under apartheid. As such, the fact that he's about to become a "co-proprietor" of Lucy's land (the result of the new post- apartheid constitution) illustrates the extent to which the country is changing.

When Petrus leaves, Lucy explains that he lives in the "old stable" with one of his wives, though he has another wife elsewhere. Over dinner that night, Lucy asks how long David plans to stay, and when he says that he doesn't want to burden her, she tells him he can stay as long as he wants, though he insists that "long visits don't make for good friends." "What if we don't call it a visit?" she asks. "What if we call it refuge? Would you accept refuge on an indefinite basis?" This prompts a discussion of David's troubles in Cape Town, and when Lucy asks what he would have had to do to keep his job, he tells her he would have needed to go to counseling. "I'm old-fashioned," he says, "I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot."

Lucy's willingness to let David stay as long as he wants is kind and helpful. It seems she is ready and able to give him support in this difficult time, as evidenced by her suggestion that he think about his stay as a "refuge" from his troubles. Unlike Rosalind, she doesn't judge him for what he's done, though she doesn't condone his actions. She simply accepts the fact that he needs some time away from his own life. Despite this kindness, though, David maintains his arrogant refusal to change. Although Lucy's farm would be a perfect place to reflect upon his actions and change for the better, he clings to the notion that he'd rather be "shot" than have to genuinely confront his shortcomings.

CHAPTER 8

On a walk the next day, David and Lucy talk again about what happened with Melanie, and she gently suggests that he pursue women his own age, though her comments aren't terribly judgmental or critical. Still, though, David quotes William Blake by saying, "Unacted desires can turn as ugly in the old as in the young," going on to add that each of his romantic affairs have always made him a "better person." In response, she says that she hopes he doesn't also mean that *he* has made his lovers "better people," too, though she immediately says she's joking when he gives her a wounded look.

It's obvious that Lucy doesn't approve of what David did with (or to) Melanie. However, she voices her disapproval in a simple, gentle way, only lightly rebuking her father for his wrongheaded approach to his own love life. As such, she subtly invites him to examine his own shortcomings without scaring him off—an impressive feat, considering that David is quick to disparage and discount anyone who encourages him to scrutinize himself.

That weekend, David accompanies Lucy and Petrus to the Saturday farmer's market, where Lucy has a booth and many loyal customers. At the market, Lucy introduces him to her friend Bev Shaw, who is in charge of the local Animal Welfare League outpost. Although his daughter has clearly taken to Bev, David finds it difficult to like her, since he "does not like women who make no effort to be attractive." On their way back to the farm, they end up paying a visit to the Animal Welfare League, where David meets Bev's husband Bill, whom he finds just as plain and unlikable as Bev. On the way home, David admits that, though he respects such ardent animal-lovers, they make him want to "go off and do some raping and pillaging" or "kick a cat." This offends Lucy, who senses that David is insulting her way of life.

David's vanity and arrogance come to the forefront of the novel when he disparages people like Bev Shaw. Not only does he judge her based on her looks, but he even manages to portray her kindness as a negative trait. This is possibly because he is threatened by people who are so moral, since he knows on some level that his own morality is deeply flawed.

CHAPTER 9

That night, David recognizes that he has insulted Lucy, so he gets up from watching TV with Petrus and finds Lucy in her room. "It's not working out, is it?" he asks. "Shall I leave?" However, Lucy tells him to sit down and then says that everything is fine, adding that she's "glad" to have him. The only problem, she says, is that David needs a little time to "adjust" to life outside the city. She suggests that he should start helping Petrus around the property and volunteering with Bev Shaw at the Animal Welfare League, though he points out that he doesn't think he'll get along with her. "You don't need to hit it off with her," Lucy says, but David says this all sounds "suspiciously like community service."

Once again, David expresses his resistance to change. This time, he takes issue with the idea of helping Bev Shaw at the animal shelter even though it's obvious that he needs something to keep him occupied. Still, though, he clings to his belief that he's incapable of change—a belief that only gives him an excuse to stay the same.

After talking to Lucy, David goes out to the pens and lies down next to Katy, eventually falling asleep by her side. Later, Lucy wakes him up and the two of them talk about whether or not dogs have souls. David argues that they don't, and the discussion turns again toward Bev Shaw, who often has to put dogs down. "She is a more interesting person than you think," Lucy says. "Even in your own terms." This last sentence gives David pause, as he suddenly wonders what she means by his "own terms." As he thinks about this, a wave of sadness passes over him for Katy and, in truth, everybody in his life. He apologizes to Lucy for being an inadequate parent, and then agrees to help Bev at the shelter.

Lucy manages to get through to David, ultimately convincing him to stop resisting the idea of change. This happens because David picks up that his daughter sees him as an elitist man who would never accept someone like Bev Shaw. Of course, this is an accurate assessment, but something about acknowledging his daughter's recognition of his shortcomings depresses him. Notably, Lucy doesn't actually try very hard to convince her father to change his mind; she merely talks to him in a casual way, opting not to shame him for how he's behaving. David clearly responds to subtle and gentle encouragement better to harsh judgment.

CHAPTER 10

At the Animal Welfare League, David watches as Bev treats a wounded goat. After an initial inspection, she tells the animal's owner that the goat is beyond her help. Although the owner could wait several days for the veterinarian to come, the animal probably won't last that long, so Bev offers to put it down, but the owner refuses. When the owner leaves, Bev explains to David that they can't "force" people to put down their animals, though it would be the kind thing to do. When David asks if she "minds" having to put down so many animals, she replies, "I do mind. I mind deeply. I wouldn't want someone doing it for me who didn't mind." After a pause, David tells Bev that he has been "disgrace[d]," asking if she still wants his help. "If you are prepared…," she says, but doesn't finish.

Because David so often thinks only of himself, it's worth noting that he's now in a context that is all about helping others. Bev not only helps the people who bring her their pets, but also the animals themselves. Even when she has to kill one of the animals, she clearly does it with love and remorse, showing them empathy and kindness in the last moments of their life. It is perhaps because David recognizes how selfless and pure Bev has to be in order to do this job that he asks if he's fit to help her. After all, he knows—at least on some level—that he isn't selfless, so he wonders if he'll be able to approach this task with the necessary amount of respect.

CHAPTER 11

One morning while watching geese, Lucy asks David if he has any plans to find a new teaching job, but he tells her that nobody would hire him. Even if he advocated for himself, he claims, society is no longer willing to hear his excuses. Curious why he thinks nobody would listen, Lucy asks him to state his "case" for why he had an affair with Melanie, and he says, "My case rests on the rights of desire." He then reminds her of a dog that used to live next to them when she was a child. Whenever this dog saw a female dog, it would get excited, so the owners would beat it. As such, every time it saw a female, it would get both excited and scared. David says he always found this "ignoble," suggesting that it would have been kinder to simply kill the dog.

When David says that his "case rests on the rights of desire," he suggests that his transgressions with Melanie were natural functions of human desire, which he believes he is entitled to have. Going on, he outlines the idea that it's unkind to keep sexual beings from acting out their desires, even positing that death is better than having to live a life in which one is unable to satisfy their carnal cravings. By outlining these ideas in this way, David treats the entire matter as if it is some abstract intellectual theory, when what he's really talking about is how he doesn't deserve to be punished for sexually harassing a young girl. Readers see again how adept he is at creating justifications for his immoral actions.

As Lucy and David continue their walk, they pass three unfamiliar men. "Should we be nervous?" David asks, and Lucy says she isn't sure. However, the men simply pass them by, but when Lucy and David return to the farmhouse, they find them standing in the yard. Lucy calls out for Petrus, but he's nowhere to be seen. One of the men then says that he needs to use the house's phone because one of their sisters is giving birth. Reluctantly, Lucy goes inside with two of the strangers while David stays outside with youngest of the three. As soon as Lucy and the men disappear, though, David knows something is amiss, so he calls for Lucy to come back outside. Just as he's about to follow, though, he hears the front door lock.

Coetzee has already established that Lucy lives in a dangerous area—one of the first conversations David has with her upon arriving at the farm is about whether or not it's safe for her to be living alone. In this moment, then, readers begin to understand why the characters are so worried about what might happen to them in this place.

The boy near David starts running to the other side of the house, so David lets Katy off her leash to chase him. Unfortunately, though, Katy is too slow. As for himself, David runs to the kitchen door and kicks it in, but as soon as he enters the house, something hits him hard on the head and he loses consciousness, eventually waking up to find himself locked in the bathroom. "Lucy!" he screams, but he's unable to kick down the door. Still, he continues to call her name until a man comes into the bathroom and takes his car keys before locking him in again. He then watches out the window as the men pace in the backyard with Lucy's rifle, which they use to murder the cooped-up dogs.

Needless to say, it is quite ominous that these three men have locked David in the bathroom while Lucy remains somewhere else in the house. Given that Disgrace *is in part a novel about sexual transgressions and the ways in which some people prioritize their desires over others' wellbeing, it's not hard to piece together that the men are most likely raping Lucy. David suddenly finds himself looking at the issue of sexual abuse from a new and very unsettling angle. The murder of the dogs is also especially horrifying, as they are wholly innocent victims of the men's invasion.*

The next time the bathroom door opens, David rushes out, but one of the men trips him and douses him in liquid. He then hears a match ignite and is suddenly "bathed in cool blue flame." Horrified, he swats at his face and listens as his hair catches fire, quickly moving back into the bathroom and throwing toilet water on himself. "Lucy!" he screams once he extinguishes the flames on his body. The three men, it seems, have driven off in his car. Eventually, Lucy appears in the bathroom door. She is in a bathrobe and her hair is wet, but she shows little emotion, simply walking out to the dog pens and surveying the carnage. After seeing this, she shuts herself in the bathroom and tells David not to enter, refusing to answer whether or not she's all right.

Seeing Lucy in the aftermath of her rape is a startling thing for David, who wants badly to make sure she's all right. However, she has nothing to say—she has just undergone a terrible act of violence, and now David comes face to face with how truly devastating it is for a person to experience such violation. Lucy doesn't want David's comfort in this moment—she withdraws into herself to preserve her strength, and also perhaps rejects David because of his own history of sexual coercion.

The farmhouse is trashed, and the three strangers have stolen many items, but David can only think about Lucy. Lucy, on the other hand, remains calm, informing her father that she's walking to her neighbor Ettinger's house to get help. Before she leaves, she says, "You tell what happened to you, I tell what happened to me." At first, David doesn't understand what she means, and then he tells her that she's "making a mistake" by refusing to talk about what happened to her, though she simply says, "No I'm not." Overcome, David says, "My child, my child!" and embraces her, but she is "stiff" and unresponsive in his arms.

It is completely understandable that Lucy wants to stay quiet about having been raped, since this is her decision. At the same time, her unwillingness to address the matter is an indication of how much courage it must have taken Melanie to come forward about how David harassed her. In this way, Coetzee shows readers the emotional complexities that arise when a person is processing trauma.

CHAPTER 12

Lucy returns with Ettinger in his truck, which they use to take David to the hospital for his burns. When they arrive, David is surprised that Lucy isn't going to wait. Instead, she's headed to the police station to report the stolen items, and it becomes clear that she has no intention of letting law enforcement know what the three men did to her. When David emerges hours later with a skullcap-bandage and a patch over one of his eyes, Bill Shaw is there to pick him up. David apologizes for inconveniencing him, but Bill says, "What else are friends for? You would have done the same." This statement astounds David, prompting him to consider the nature of friendship, since he knows that he *wouldn't* have waited for hours to pick up Bill from the hospital if the circumstances were reversed.

A selfish man himself, David doesn't know how to respond when Bill Shaw shows him kindness based on a relationship David wouldn't even categorize as a friendship. After all, David has already decided that Bev and Bill Shaw are people he's completely uninterested in associating with. As such, he's thoroughly surprised to see Bill's willingness to support him in this difficult time—something he is quite unaccustomed to.

David and Lucy spend the night at Bill and Bev's. To David's dismay, Lucy remains unwilling to speak about what happened to her. In the middle of the night, he has a dream that she's calling for him, but when he enters her room, she only tells him to go back to bed. The next morning, David tries to get information out of Bev about Lucy's condition, but it's clear Bev doesn't think David could possibly understand. Finally, in a conversation with David, Lucy tells him that she has seen a doctor. "And is he taking care of all eventualities?" David asks, and Lucy says, "How can a doctor take care of all eventualities? Have some sense!" She then informs them that they need to return to the farm, and though he insists that it's unsafe, she points out that it has *always* been dangerous.

When David first came to Lucy's farm, she was the one supporting him through a difficult period. Now, though, their roles have reversed, except Lucy doesn't want him to do anything to help her. However, David has a hard time keeping his distance, as he's too worried about his daughter to leave her alone. It's also possible that his concern has to do with the fact that he now feels even more guilty about what he did to Melanie, though neither he nor Coetzee states this explicitly. His attempts to check in on Lucy fall flat, since there isn't much he can say to change what happened to her. This is also why she points out that a doctor couldn't possibly "take care of all eventualities," essentially saying that, although a doctor can attend to her medically, the main problems she faces now have to do with emotional trauma.

CHAPTER 13

David feels as if a "vital organ" inside him has been "bruised," and he isn't sure how long it will take to heal, though he knows he can't rely on Lucy to help him. Indeed, he feels like his "pleasure in living has been snuffed out." Before long, two police officers arrive and accompany them back to the farm, where Lucy walks them through the damage without mentioning that she was raped. When the officers leave, David once again tries to get his daughter to talk about what happened (urging her to tell the authorities the full story), but she ignores him. Instead, she starts setting up a place for herself to sleep in the pantry, since she can't bear to spend the night in her room, where she was raped. However, David insists that she should take his room, so he moves into hers.

The emotional support Lucy requires in this moment isn't the kind David is prepared to give her. What he wants is for her to talk about getting raped and to tell the police about what happened, but she's not ready to do this. Despite this disconnect, though, David does manages to do something for her—by moving into her room (where she was raped), he enables her to process her trauma the way she wants to, making it possible for her to move into his room so that she doesn't have to sleep at the scene of the crime (or in the pantry). Although this might seem simple, it is apparently the kind of support Lucy needs right now.

At dinner, David once again tries to broach the topic of Lucy's rape, but she is unreceptive. Finally, though, she tells him that she hasn't told the police because she believes that what happened to her is a "private matter." David objects to this, suggesting that Lucy's refusal to report her rape must stem from a belief that she has to suffer in order to live on a farm in the Eastern Cape as a white woman. Hearing this, Lucy insists that David has no idea what he's talking about, saying that he's "misreading" her. "Never yet have they been so far and so bitterly apart," Coetzee writes, noting that David is "shaken."

David's belief that Lucy is purposefully suffering has to do with the history of South Africa: he thinks that she feels she must make amends for the fact that white people oppressed black people under slavery and apartheid for so many years. According to David, Lucy thinks she has to atone for the wrongdoings of her race and believes that keeping quiet about her rape is a way to do this. (This line of thought also establishes that the three attackers were black, which Coetzee has not explicitly mentioned.) When Coetzee notes that David and Lucy have "never" been so divided, he demonstrates just how thoroughly violent and traumatic experiences can interfere with a person's entire life.

CHAPTER 14

The next day, Ettinger calls and tells David they can borrow one of his guns until they get their own, and David says they'll think about the offer. Though he recognizes that Lucy should take certain measures to protect herself and her property, he knows she disapproves of such things, since she is in love with the "old" rural lifestyle—a lifestyle that is apparently "doomed." That day, Petrus comes back from wherever he was at the time of the attack. When David sees him working outside, he strides over to him and talks about the attack, trying to see what he knows, though Petrus says very little about the matter. Instead of discussing the incident, Petrus turns his attention to whether or not Lucy will go to the market that Saturday, pointing out that she might lose her stall if she doesn't attend.

Since apartheid ended in South Africa, there has been a significant amount of conflict between white and black people. In rural areas like the Eastern Cape, there are more black people than white people, and some whites fear for their lives, afraid that their neighbors will attack them because of the country's fraught history. David, it seems, is one of these people, clearly unsettled by the shifting racial dynamics of post-apartheid South Africa, though Lucy appears not to share this sentiment. David's guarded attitude comes through when he decides to question Petrus, clearly suspicious of him because he is black and because he was absent on the day of the attack. David's struggle to accept change—particularly the shuffling of power dynamics—again comes to the forefront of the novel.

Because Lucy doesn't want to go to the market, David goes with Petrus. Throughout the day, Petrus says nothing about where he was during the attack, and David begins to suspect that he knew it was going to happen. "In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus," Coetzee writes. "In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one's temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place." Now, though, this isn't an option, since Petrus isn't only "hired help," but more of a neighbor. Indeed, Petrus just happens to "sell his labor," but that's not the reason he lives on Lucy's land, which is soon to be his land, too. And though David is inclined to like him, he senses that Petrus "has a vision of the future in which people like Lucy have no place."

David's discomfort with the idea of change in South Africa is quite apparent, as he bristles against the fact that things are no longer like they were "in the old days." Of course, it's somewhat reasonable to be suspicious of Petrus, since he seems so tight-lipped when it comes to the attack, but David's frustration in this scene has subtle overtones of racism, since he's upset that he can't exercise the unchecked power over black people that would have been available to him as a white man during apartheid.

CHAPTER 15

When Petrus first returned, he brought with him two **sheep**, whom he now has tied to the stable, where they make so much noise that David asks him to move them. Petrus, however, ignores this request, saying instead that the sheep are for a party he's having that Saturday, when he'll slaughter them. "I invite you and Lucy to the party," he says. Frustrated that Petrus refuses to move them, David does the job himself an hour later, letting them graze. In the days before Petrus's party, David begins to feel a strange sense of attachment to the sheep, though he isn't usually such an animal lover. Still, he wonders if he could buy them from Petrus in order to save their lives. Instead, he decides not to go to the party.

David's compassion toward the sheep is worth noting, since he isn't generally a very compassionate or empathetic man. In the aftermath of Lucy's rape, though, he is a bit more capable of feeling sympathy toward others, perhaps because the attack has forced him to see how terrible it is when a person prioritizes their own desires over another's wellbeing.

On Saturday, David asks Lucy if they should go to the market, and she tells him that he should decide; they don't go. At a certain point, David smells a fire and realizes that **the sheep** must already have been slaughtered, since Petrus is clearly beginning to roast them. And though this makes him sad, he eventually agrees to accompany Lucy to the party. She has dressed nicely for the occasion, saying that this is a "big day in Petrus's life." After all, the party is in celebration of the land-transfer from Lucy to Petrus, which has just officially gone through.

Despite David's newfound sensitivity toward the sheep, it doesn't take much for him to change his mind and go to the party. As such, readers see that, although he is perhaps a bit more empathetic in the wake of Lucy's rape, this change doesn't necessarily refigure his entire worldview. His belief that he's incapable of change might, in some ways, be true.

Halfway through the party, Lucy comes to David and asks him to leave with her. She explains that she has just spotted one of her three attackers in the crowd of partygoers. Hearing this, David rushes outside and finds the person in question. It is the youngest attacker, the one who stood outside with David when the other two initially went inside. "I know you," David says, coming straight up to him. "Who are you?" responds to boy, though David feels that his tone says, "*By what right are you here?*" Before anything can happen, Petrus approaches both of them, speaking quickly to the boy in Xhosa, which David doesn't understand. Trying to explain, David says that the boy was one of the three attackers, but Petrus insists that the boy says otherwise. When David says he's going to call the police, the crowd gives a murmur of disapproval.

Once again, the shifting racial dynamics of South Africa bring themselves to bear on Disgrace, *since David senses that part of the young man's aggression toward him is rooted in the idea of who has the "right" to occupy a place. Although David belongs to the race that used to rule South Africa and subjugate the black majority, now he is the odd man out at a Xhosa party, where he and Lucy are the only white people. As such, he struggles to accept the fact that he is no longer automatically entitled to power—even when facing someone who has committed a terrible crime. This new dynamic makes the entire situation much more complex than it would otherwise be.*

Back in the farmhouse, David is about to call the police when Lucy stops him. "It's not Petrus's fault," she says, pointing out that if David summons the police, Petrus's entire party will be "destroyed." David can't fathom this line of thinking, stressing that Lucy shouldn't be "protecting" Petrus and that she should press "*real* charges" against the boy. In turn, Lucy tells her father not to shout at her, saying that she can live her life however she wants without having to explain her decisions. "As for Petrus," she says, "he is not some hired labourer whom I can sack because in my opinion he is mixed up with the wrong people. That's all gone, gone with the wind." She then reminds David that he doesn't know what she's been through, but he insists that she has to stand up for herself. "No," she says, ending the conversation.

David demonstrates his inability to support Lucy in an inobtrusive, subtle way. Rather than gently giving her the kindness and direction she might need, he emphasizes what he thinks she should do, ultimately failing to consider the emotional and psychological turmoil this rather aggressive approach might create. Lucy also picks up on his struggle to accept the changing social order in South Africa. This is why she reminds him that she can't simply fire Petrus, underlining the fact that such practices—which are built upon the racist power hierarchy of apartheid—are "gone with the wind."

Alone, David walks back to the party and stands in the back of the crowd as a man speaks in Xhosa. As he looks around, he notices the young attacker staring straight at him while others also glare at him. This doesn't bother him, however. In fact, he's glad that they all notice him, glad they know he's there instead of cowering inside "the big house."

David's desire to be seen by the young attacker and the rest of Petrus's group indicates how important it is to him that he assert his dominance. Unwilling to accept that as a white man he is no longer in an automatic position of power, he brazenly disrupts Petrus's party.

CHAPTER 16

The next morning, Lucy doesn't speak to David. At one point, Petrus asks for his help putting down piping for his new house, and though David tries to decline, he eventually gives in. As they work, David asks the name of the boy from the night before, wanting to know where he lives. "You see, David," Petrus says after a pause, "it is a hard thing you are saying, that this boy is a thief. He is very angry that you are calling him a thief. That is what he is telling everyone. And I, I am the one who must be keeping the peace. So it is hard for me too." After Petrus says this, he becomes evasive about the issue, declining to answer whether or not he's related to the boy. However, he assures David that Lucy is safe and that he'll "protect" her, but David remains unconvinced.

On the one hand, Petrus is a rather ominous character, since he's actively defending one of Lucy's attackers. On the other hand, it's clear that he's simply in a difficult position, since he merely wants to shield one of his own from harm while also maintaining a more or less positive relationship with David and Lucy. This is yet another byproduct of the social upheavals that have taken place since the end of apartheid, when both white and black people suddenly have to navigate how, exactly, they will interact with one another after such a long history of racial injustice.

The next time David is at the shelter with Bev, he tells her that he and Lucy aren't getting along. In response, she tries to soothe him by saying that Petrus will protect Lucy, but this only angers David, who goes on a rant about how Petrus might have had something to do with the attack in the first place. Hearing his frustration, Bev mutters, "Poor Lucy, she has been through such a lot!" When David says that he knows what she's been through, Bev says, "But you weren't there, David." This frustrates him all the more. "Do they think he does not know what rape is?" Coetzee writes. "Do they think he has not suffered with his daughter?"

It is unfathomable to David that Lucy or Bev might think he doesn't understand what Lucy has been through. To be fair, he certainly feels for his daughter and is thoroughly unsettled by the fact that she was raped. However, this doesn't mean he has "suffered" in the same way that she did. Though he might be capable of empathizing with her, he ought to defer to her judgment when it comes to how she wants to process her trauma. At the same time, it might be the case that Lucy is purposefully avoiding her emotional pain, so it could be helpful for someone to help her confront it. But given his history with Melanie, David is likely not fit for this role.

David tries in the coming weeks to work on his Byron opera, but he remains uninspired. Instead, he focuses on his work at the animal clinic, where he and Bev put down countless dogs. Although he thought he might become accustomed to such a difficult job, he realizes he's no longer "indifferent to animals." What he hates most is when a dog trusts him completely, licking his hand just before he leads it to its death. His primary job, though, is to take the dead bodies to an incinerator in black plastic bags. Each Monday he drives the corpses to be burned, and he wonders why he has taken on such a job. "Curious that a man as selfish as he should be offering himself to the service of dead dogs," Coetzee writes, later indicating that David has chosen this task because nobody else is willing to do it.

The ways in which David repents for his wrongdoings are strange. Although his devotion to these animals seems to point toward a change in his ability to empathize, it's worth noting that he takes on this job out of a sense of obligation—because he doesn't think anyone else would do such a thing. This selflessness is admirable, but it lacks a certain authenticity, as if David's just going through the motions of this job because he can't think of another way to feel better about himself. Rather than allowing readers to fully believe in David's moral rehabilitation, Coetzee presents a portrait of a man who finally recognizes his own shortcomings but seeks to rectify them in oddly half-hearted ways.

CHAPTER 17

One day at the Animal Welfare League, Bev turns to David and remarks that he "must be used to a different kind of life." When he asks her what she means, she suggests that he surely misses "having women friends." This conversation leads her to say that she assumes he's bored in the Eastern Cape, and he points out that at least he's "out of the way of temptation." As soon as the words leave his mouth, though, he realizes this is a mean thing to say, and so he tries to picture Bev as a young woman. Then, "on an impulse," he "reaches out and runs a finger over her lips," and she doesn't move away. The following day, Bev calls him and asks him to meet her at the clinic, where they have sex on blankets laid out over the floor.

David regrets saying that he's "out of the way of temptation" because this statement implies that he would never be "tempted" by someone like Bev. It's worth noting that he then forces an abrupt display of intimacy by touching Bev's lips, as if he can make up for this mean-spirited comment by giving her the gift of his touch. Of course, it is this vain belief that anyone would be delighted to be touched by him that got him in trouble in the first place, since he never truly stopped to consider whether or not Melanie wanted to go through with their relationship. It seems that David still hasn't changed very much, despite his daughter's rape and his newfound commitment to treating helpless animals.

After having sex, Bev and David lie on the blankets, and David thinks, "After the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs, this is what I have come to. This is what I will have to get used to, this and even less than this." As he continues to think about "poor Bev Shaw," he realizes that he should stop referring to her by this name in his head. After all, "if she is poor, he is bankrupt."

Although it might be the case that David's sexual impulses haven't necessarily changed, it's clear that he has undergone at least a small transformation. After all, he never would have slept with Bev Shaw if he weren't living in a state of disgrace, since he finds her frustratingly unattractive. More significantly, though, the mere fact that he acknowledges how unfair it is to disparage Bev in his mind suggests that he has actually gained a new sense of self-awareness, finally admitting some of his own shortcomings.

CHAPTER 18

Unexpectedly, David receives a call from a detective claiming to have found his car, but when he goes to identify it, it's not really his. The police also tell him they arrested two men in connection with this car, but that they've already been released on bail. On the ride home, David talks to Lucy once more about how important it is that she face what happened to her, encouraging her to move out of the farmhouse, which he says is "full of ugly memories." And though she says she can't bring herself to talk about the matter, she eventually says, "It was so personal. It was done with such personal hatred." She then admits that she's afraid on the farm, but she maintains that she can't leave yet. "Whatever I decide I want to decide by myself, without being pushed," she says.

Disgrace *is a complex book because Coetzee rarely presents a straightforward idea. David and Lucy's relationship is an example of the vague middle ground that Coetzee enjoys exploring so much. In particular, David's attempt to get Lucy to talk about her trauma is both admirable and ill-advised. It's clear that Lucy is repressing her emotions, as evidenced by the fact that she insists upon not talking about what happened but then launches into how devastating it was to notice her attackers' "personal hatred." At the same time, though, David's methods of forcing his daughter to rehash this terrible experience are overbearing and insensitive, completely ignoring Lucy's wish to process her trauma in her own fashion. This is why Lucy says that she needs to choose whether or not to leave the farm "without being pushed."*

Lucy tells her father that he doesn't "understand" what she went through, but he insists he does. "I will pronounce the word we have avoided hitherto," he says. "You were raped. Multiply. By three men." Going on, he expresses his regret that he couldn't do anything to save her, though she dismisses this, saying he shouldn't blame himself. Still considering the experience, she adds that she could tell her attackers had raped women before, and David once again insists that she should leave the farm. "If I leave the farm now I will leave defeated," Lucy says, "and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life." Later that night, she slips a note under his door that reads: "I cannot be a child for ever. You cannot be a father for ever. I know you mean well, but you are not the guide I need, not at this time."

In this scene, Lucy tells David once and for all that he needs to let her handle this situation on her own. Instead of succumbing to his overwhelming belief that she should move away, she recognizes the value of staying on the farm at least until she can gain a sense of personal agency. If she were to leave now, she would "leave defeated," which would affect the way she conceives of her personal sense of power for the rest of her life. However, David has a hard time seeing this, and instead of giving her the space she needs, he speaks in painfully straightforward terms about Lucy's rape, clearly trying to shock her into seeing things his way.

David and Bev continue their affair, though they sometimes don't even make love, instead just lying in each other's arms. One evening, he tells her that Lucy doesn't want to follow his advice, and Bev says that he doesn't need to worry, promising that she and Bill will—along with Petrus—will help "look after her."

Estranged from his former life as a ladies' man, David now takes comfort in his relationship with Bev—a kind of comfort he has perhaps never experienced before, since his other affairs have been almost purely sexual, whereas his bond with Bev rests on something else. She gives him a sense of assurance that he sorely lacks, though it's unclear how much he actually appreciates or acknowledges this.

CHAPTER 19

David goes to Melanie's home in search of Mr. Isaacs, but Melanie's little sister tells him he isn't home yet, so David drives to the middle school were Isaacs is a principal. When he enters his office, he reintroduces himself and says, "If you don't want to see me I'll leave at once." Isaacs tells him to have a seat. David explains that he resigned from the university, saying, "Since then I have been at a loose end. I was passing through George today, and I thought I might stop and speak to you." This, he says, is because he wants to say "what is on [his] heart." He says that his relationship with Melanie was not planned out, but rather an "adventure" that "men of a certain kind have," adding that Melanie made him feel a sense of "fire."

It isn't clear what David hopes to achieve by visiting Mr. Isaacs. The fact that he talks about seeing Melanie as an "adventure" and about having a taste for "fire" suggests that he still doesn't fully understand the fact that his actions negatively impacted her. Instead of thinking about what it would be like for Isaacs to hear his daughter's abuser wax poetic about passion, David says whatever he wants. What's most important to note about this scene, though, is the fact that he has sought Isaacs out at all. This suggests that he craves forgiveness. The only problem is that he focuses on justifying his actions rather than actually apologizing for what he's done, making it hard for Isaacs to forgive him.

David goes on a brief tangent about the nature of "fire," talking about how people used to "worship" it. Before long, Mr. Isaacs asks why David has come just to tell these "stories," and David apologizes. He then asks after Melanie, and Isaacs tells him she has returned to school and is doing well "under the circumstances." When Isaacs asks how David is doing and how he has been passing the time, David tells him he's been staying with his daughter and that he's working on a "sort of book." "So," Isaacs says after a moment, "how are the mighty fallen!" Then, when he asks David if there's some other reason he came, David gets up to leave, claiming that he only wanted to ask after Melanie. Just before he departs, though, Isaacs invites him to dinner.

David tends to use abstraction to obscure certain matters. For instance, he speaks at length about "fire" and passion in order to minimize the fact that he sexually harassed Melanie, ultimately trying to frame it as a natural lapse of willpower instead of a moral failure. Isaacs is a compassionate man who apparently sees through David's longwinded explanations, however, intuiting that there's something bothering David that he can't express. This, it seems, is why he invites him to dinner, demonstrating not only his capacity for forgiveness but also his willingness to give David an opportunity to properly atone for his actions.

At dinner that night, Melanie's mother and sister are awkward and uncomfortable around David, but Mr. Isaacs is kind and welcoming. Throughout the meal, conversation is stiff, and at the end of the night—when he and Mr. Isaacs are alone—David insists that things could have "turned out differently" between Melanie and himself if he hadn't "failed to supply" something "lyrical." "I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. You have a wonderful family. I apologize for the grief I have caused you and Mrs Isaacs. I ask for your pardon," he says, and Isaacs responds by saying, "So, at last you have apologized. I wondered when it was coming." Isaacs then speaks about God, suggesting that David should find a way to get right with God in the aftermath of the pain he has caused.

The beginning of David's apology seems no different than the vain and self-obsessed explanations he has already offered in his own defense. This is because he approaches the topic of sexual harassment in extremely abstract terms, saying that he could have built a successful relationship with Melanie if only he had been able to "supply" something "lyrical." This kind of intellectual abstraction does nothing to make Mr. Isaacs feel better about what happened to his daughter, nor does it help him understand why David did what he did in the first place. However, David does manage to issue a genuine apology—the first time throughout the entire novel he expresses remorse for what he's done.

Having listened to Isaacs's statement about God, David asks if he thinks it's "enough for God" if he (David) lives "in disgrace without term," and Isaacs says he doesn't know. Isaacs also urges David to consider why he really came. With this, David decides that he doesn't like Isaacs, and he advances further into the house, where he finds Melanie's mother and sister behind a half-closed door. Seeing them both sitting on the edge of a bed, David gets on his knees and puts his forehead to the floor before them. "Is that enough?" he wonders. As he stands, he makes eye contact with both Melanie's mother and sister, and feels a "current of desire" jump through him before he finally leaves.

In this moment, the remorse David has expressed no longer seems legitimate or authentic. He simply wants to do whatever is good "enough" to purge him of his wrongdoings. Isaacs recognizes that David has only come to apologize so that Melanie's family will let him off the hook, not because he genuinely wants to change or show regret. In keeping with this, David kneels before Melanie's mother and sister, a grand show of repentance that is ultimately rather vapid, since all he can think about is whether or not this simple act is "enough" to let him go on with his life. Furthermore, when he gets to his feet again, he feels the same "current of desire" that he felt in relation to Melanie, and though it's not clear whether this is directed at Melanie's young sister or her mother, it's easy to see that he hasn't actually changed much since sexually harassing Melanie in the first place.

CHAPTER 20

David returns to Cape Town to find that his apartment has been broken into and his belongings stolen. The next day, he goes to the university to retrieve his mail and finds a new professor in his office. During this period, he tries to work on his **opera** about Byron, finally making some headway by focusing not on Byron himself, but on Byron's lover, Teresa. He also starts composing music on the banjo instead of the piano, finding the humble instrument much more appropriate.

At this point in Disgrace, *David's life has crumbled to almost nothing. In stark contrast to his arrogant outlook when he first got in trouble for sexually harassing Melanie, he's now forced to confront just how harmful it was for him to blindly follow his desires, as he truly has nobody and nowhere to turn to except Lucy and her farm.*

CHAPTER 21

David meets Rosalind for coffee, and though she notices the injuries he sustained from being lit on fire, he brushes off her questions. Moving on, Rosalind mentions that she heard about his trial, saying it sounds like he was "too stiff and defensive." In response, he says he was trying to make a point by standing up for "freedom of speech" or, for that matter, the "freedom to remain silent." Rosalind subtly mocks him for being too idealistic, though she also suggests he might have been tricking himself into believing in his "principles" when, in reality, he was simply "caught with [his] pants down."

Although it's harsh of her to point this out, Rosalind makes a good point when she suggests that David's refusal to apologize during his hearing was nothing more than an attempt to avoid taking responsibility for his actions. By telling himself that he was standing up for certain "principles" (about "freedom of speech" and desire), he effectively managed to frame his dismissal as a result of his stubbornness, not of his immoral actions. This, in turn, has enabled him to ignore some of the moral implications of what he did. It also once again turns his concrete actions of sexual manipulation into something that sounds more abstract and theoretical.

Rosalind also notes that she saw Melanie in the university play, saying, "You have thrown away your life, and for what?" When David argues that he hasn't thrown away his life, she insists that he has, saying that she's worried about his future, since he has little money and no job. Flustered, she tells him she doesn't want to get into an argument, and as she gets up to leave, she says, "When you are tired of bread and jam, give me a call and I'll cook you a meal."

Unlike Lucy, Rosalind is critical and judgmental of David because of his affair with Melanie. However, it's worth noting that she does still care about him, which is why she offers to cook him dinner if he ever needs it, though the way she says this implies that she thinks he's making a martyr of himself by pretending he's completely fine. Indeed, she tells him to come to her when he's done eating "bread and jam," suggesting that he's acting as if his meager new existence isn't bleak and miserable.

Unable to resist, David goes to Melanie's play, reveling in the thrill of seeing her onstage. Partway through, though, he feels spitballs begin to pelt the back of his head, and when he turns, he sees Melanie's boyfriend, Ryan, the one who vandalized his car. Having attracted David's attention, Ryan starts making noises at him, creating such a disturbance that David leaves the theater, though this doesn't save him from Ryan, who follows him out and tells him to stay away from Melanie, saying, "Let her alone, Man! Melanie will spit in your eye if she sees you."

The fact that David goes to Melanie's play is a further indication that he isn't truly remorseful for what he's done. Although he went to her house and made a show of bowing repentantly before her family members, this was only to relieve himself of his own guilt, since in the privacy of his own life he continues to lust after her. What's more, by appearing at her performance, he demonstrates once again that he doesn't care about how his actions might affect her. Seeing David would certainly unsettle Melanie, but he doesn't consider this—or if he does, he doesn't care.

On the drive home from the theater, David picks up a prostitute and parks in a cul-de-sac. When they finish, he studies her head as it rests in his lap. She is evidently quite drunk or high, and he realizes for the first time how young she looks. Despite this, he feels "contented," thinking, "*So this is all it takes! How could I ever have forgotten it?*" "Not a bad man but not good either," Coetzee writes in reference to David.

The thoughts David has after having oral sex with a prostitute again illustrate just how much he has stayed the same. In the very beginning of the novel, he considers how thoroughly "contented" he feels after sleeping with Soraya, and now he reminds himself that this is "all it takes" for him to be happy. In this sense, his desires have remained the same, and though Coetzee notes that this doesn't necessarily make him a "bad man," he goes out of his way to state that David isn't a good man, either. Coetzee manages to present David as a deeply flawed person without actually condemning him, a choice that allows readers to make their own assessment.

CHAPTER 22

David stays in touch with Lucy over the phone, but something about their conversations bothers him, so he calls Bev and asks if Lucy's doing all right. Not wanting to reveal too much, Bev says there have been "developments," so David returns to the farm. After discovering that Petrus has put up a fence between his and Lucy's property, David sits down with his daughter and asks if she's okay, and she reveals that she's pregnant. "You mean you didn't take care of it?" he asks, and she says, "I have taken care. I have taken every reasonable care short of what you are hinting at. But I am not having an abortion. That is something I am not prepared to go through with again." When she says this, David learns that his daughter has been pregnant before—something he was previously unaware of.

It's worth keeping in mind that for the past three chapters Coetzee has showcased David's lack of remorse regarding what he did to Melanie. Now, though, he once again puts David in a situation that requires him to be empathetic, kind, and supportive. In this way, the author tests David, ultimately inviting readers to watch how, exactly, he will handle the idea of Lucy having one of her rapists' babies.

Lucy says that she didn't tell David about her pregnancy sooner because she didn't want him to "erupt" like he often does, making everything about himself. Taken aback, David tries to be reasonable, merely saying that he's "shock[ed]" but that he will support her however he can. Later, after he has moved back into her old room, Lucy comes in and tells him that the boy who was at Petrus's party has returned. His name is Pollux, she explains, and he is living with Petrus. Apparently, Pollux is Petrus's brother-in-law and has dropped out of school. Lucy says that the boy seems to have "something wrong with him," but she can't force him off the land because it's no longer her property.

To his credit, David takes the news of Lucy's pregnancy rather well. This might be because Lucy points out that he often "erupts," thereby encouraging him to take a moment to gather himself before saying something he can't take back. However, it will clearly be harder for him to keep his cool than he'd like, since she also tells him that Pollux is living right next door. Lucy suggests that Pollux has some kind of mental disability, and she even seems to sympathize with him despite what he did to her.

The next day, David once again speaks with Petrus, this time lamenting the fact that Petrus lied to him about not knowing Pollux. Now, though, Petrus doesn't pretend to be friendly, instead saying that he's simply protecting his "people" in the same way that David is trying to protect Lucy. He also says that the matter is behind them, though David forces him to admit this isn't the case. In response, Petrus says he will marry Lucy, instructing David to relay the offer to his daughter. When David says that Lucy is uninterested in marriage, Petrus says, "But here, it is dangerous, too dangerous. A woman must be marry."

Again, Petrus is a difficult character to understand. He's protecting one of Lucy's attackers and helping him get away with a terrible crime, but this is also simply an attempt to help his own family—the same thing David is trying to do. What's more, if Pollux truly does have a cognitive disability, it makes all the more sense why Petrus would want to protect him from the law, though of course there is no good excuse for sexual violence. Petrus's offer to marry Lucy might seem strange at first, but it actually makes sense under the circumstances, since Petrus is right that this is one of the only things he can do to truly protect her from future attacks if she insists on staying at the farm.

To David's great surprise, Lucy is unfazed when she hears about this conversation, saying that Petrus has been "hint[ing]" about marriage for a while. To calm her father down, Lucy tries to show him the benefits of this possibility, saying that what Petrus is offering is nothing more than a "deal," under which she would provide land and he would provide "protection." Unwilling to accept this, David insists that this is blackmail, but Lucy ignores him and tells him to return to Petrus and tell him that she has agreed to his proposal as long as she can retain ownership of the farmhouse. "No one enters this house without my permission," she says. "Including him." Scarcely believing his ears, David says that this is "humiliating," and Lucy agrees, but she adds that this point of humiliation might be a good place from which "to start again."

Unlike David, Lucy looks at Petrus's marriage proposal in an objective manner, weighing the pros and cons and determining that it is one of the only ways she can stay on the land. For David, though, this is an absurd idea, since he's still having trouble adjusting to the idea that a white person has to fear land ownership in South Africa in the first place. As such, readers once again see that Lucy and David have different relationships to how their country is changing. Whereas David's vision of South African life remains rooted in the past, when white people held the majority of the power, Lucy accepts and lives within the contemporary post-apartheid framework.

CHAPTER 23

While walking Katy the next morning, David comes upon Pollux watching Lucy dress through the window. "*You swine!*" he screams, slapping Pollux in the face as Katy attacks him. Surprised, the young man is unable to defend himself as Katy lunges at him, tearing at his arms while he tries to cover his face. As David watches, he realizes he's never felt angrier. "Phrases that all his life he has avoided seem suddenly just and right: *Teach him a lesson*, *Show him his place*," Coetzee notes. As David thinks these things, he gives Pollux a hard kick. "I will kill you!" Pollux shouts from beneath Katy, and then Lucy gets there, pulling the dog off of him and asking him if he's all right.

The fact that David uses this violent opportunity as an excuse to say "phrases" he has "avoided" for his entire life suggests that he has been holding onto these toxic ideas for a long time. When he says "Teach him a lesson" and "Show him his place," he draws upon South Africa's racist history, suggesting that a young black man like Pollux has an inferior "place" in society—ideas rooted in colonialism, slavery, and apartheid. In this moment David allows his anger to bypass his usual social inhibitions, and takes out all of his anger on Pollux.

Blood leaks from Pollux's arms, and as Lucy helps him up to bring him into the house, her "sash" falls down, exposing her breasts. When she turns away to cover herself, Pollux jumps up and screams, "We will kill you all!" before moving toward Petrus's house. Facing David, Lucy tells him that she can't handle him and Petrus's clan at the same time. By way of justification, David explains that Pollux was watching her, but she brushes this off, saying, "He is disturbed. A disturbed child." David says, "In the old days we had a word for people like him. Deficient. Mentally deficient. Morally deficient. He should be in an institution." Lucy tells him to keep such thoughts to himself. Wrapping up their conversation, Lucy hints that she wants David to move out, and so he agrees to pack his things.

Again, David shows his inability to accept the changing nature of his environment, implying that his actions would have been justified "in the old days." Because Lucy doesn't want anything to do with "the old days," though, she is offended by this statement, finally making it clear that David's presence on her farm is only causing her trouble. David simultaneously demonstrates his failure to embrace change and his failure to support Lucy in a productive manner.

In the aftermath of his fight with Pollux, David finds a room in a nearby hotel and works at the Animal Welfare League with Bev. He knows he has only made his relationship with Lucy worse, but he can't help but think that he'd do the same thing again if given the chance. In the coming days, he buys a truck from one of Bill Shaw's friends and uses it to transport dead dogs to the incinerator. All the while, he focuses on writing his **opera**, playing the banjo, and thinking about Byron's slighted lover, Teresa.

Even though David knows that what he did to Pollux was wrong, he also knows that he'd do it again. This is in keeping with his stubborn habit of rejecting remorse, instead doubling down on his moral failures simply for the sake of moving relentlessly forward. As such, readers once again see that David hasn't truly changed, even after all the emotional and physical turmoil he's been through.

CHAPTER 24

Though he spends the majority of his time thinking about and writing **the opera**, David knows it's going nowhere. The only other thing that captivates him as he waits for Lucy to give birth is a dog he meets at the Animal Welfare League. Unlike the other animals, he has developed a "fondness" for this dog, whom he knows is destined for Bev's lethal needle. Despite this, though, David spares him week after week, taking other dogs to be put down instead.

The only sign that David has changed at all is his newfound interest in animals. When he first arrived in the Eastern Cape, he admitted that animal lovers like Bev Shaw irritate him, but now he finds himself drawn to a dog at the Animal Welfare League. However, it's obvious that he will eventually play a role in this dog's death, making his relationship with the animal a rather difficult one—an indication that even his most rewarding and morally redeeming relationships are weighed down by complications.

David has lunch one day with Lucy after they both work at the farmer's market. As they talk about her upcoming role as a mother, she tells him that she's "determined" to be a good person. "You should try to be a good person too," she adds, but he only says, "I suspect it is too late for me. I'm just an old lag serving out my sentence." Several days later, he visits Lucy's farm for the first time since the incident with Pollux. David watches her proudly as she gardens, thinking about how she has become her own person. When she turns to see him, she invites him in for tea as if he's a visitor. "Good," he thinks. "Visitorship, visitation: a new footing, a new start."

Rather than showing readers how David has changed for the better, Coetzee focuses on the ways in which this man has resisted *change. After everything that has happened—public humiliation and violence and interpersonal conflict—David has managed to stay more or less the same, doggedly believing that it's "too late" for him to undergo any kind of meaningful transformation. However, as Coetzee builds toward a conclusion, he suggests that David might be able to change at some point in the future—after all, David sees Lucy in the garden and apparently embraces the idea of "a new start," something he has had little or no interest in until this moment. In this way, Coetzee contests David's idea that it's "too late" for him to change, essentially suggesting that, although it might take a long time, he is not immune to the possibility of transformation.*

During one of Bev and David's sessions of putting down animals at the Animal Welfare League, David finally brings in the dog he's developed an affinity for. "One more," he says, knowing that no matter how long he avoids it, he'll soon have to put the dog to sleep. "I thought you would save him for another week," Bev says as the unsuspecting dog wags its tail and licks David's face from lip to ear. "Are you giving him up?" Bev asks. "Yes," David says, "I am giving him up."

In contrast to the optimistic idea that David might have gained "a new start" now that he has moved off the farm, his sudden decision to put down this dog suggests that he still actively rejects the notion that he has—or might—become a more empathetic person. When he first developed a fondness for this dog, it seemed as if he was possibly undergoing a change of heart, since he used to scoff at animal lovers. In this moment, though, he seemingly wills himself to recapture the cold, unfeeling attitude he used to have regarding animals, forcing himself to kill this dog as a way of reminding himself that it's "too late" for him to become a better person.

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