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“Am I Wrong to Want Justice?”: How J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* Forces Readers to Think through the Problem of Law

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“Am I Wrong to Want Justice?”:

How J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* Forces Readers to Think through the Problem of Law

Nicholas Langenberg

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

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Department of English

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Thesis Approval Form



The signatories of the committee members below indicate that they have read and approved the thesis of Nicholas Langenberg in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in English.

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Dedication

To David: Thank you for helping me to understand the world more fully, for challenging me to always look for the nuance in a situation, and for holding the bar high enough to make me grow.

To Kurt: Thank you for sharing with me some of your unending passion and enthusiasm, for always giving far more than is required, and for being the first to introduce me to these ideas.

To Brian: Thank you for giving me the freedom to explore, the encouragement to keep going, and the honesty to tell me when I'm straying a bit too far.

You've each influenced my life in very significant ways, and I am deeply grateful.

Abstract

Since the publication of J. M. Coetzee's first post-apartheid novel, *Disgrace*, a number of scholars have noted the ways that this text encourages its readers to re-think their understanding of law. Many other scholars have also noted the ways that *Disgrace* explores the ideas of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. However, up until this point, there has been no analysis written that considers the legal explorations of *Disgrace* alongside the legal philosophies of Deleuze, and in this thesis, precisely such an analysis will be offered.

By considering these two bodies of work in light of one another, it will be shown that *Disgrace* encourages its readers to re-think their understanding of law through the use of violent and visceral encounters. By analyzing these disruptions, the thesis will argue that both *Disgrace* and Deleuze's philosophical works encourage readers to think of law differently in three fundamental ways. First, they both move their readers away from an understanding of law as sets of rules and procedures, and they both move readers toward an understanding of law as an ongoing process of jurisprudence. Second, they both reject an image of law that is rooted in transcendental ideals and values, and they both emphasize instead an image of law that is grounded in imminent realities. And finally, they both encourage their readers to rethink their understanding of the subject, displacing the idea of the autonomous, rational, individualistic subject with the idea of an embodied, fluid, and interconnected subject.

Through these explorations, the law will be interrogated and re-conceptualized as a regulating force, one that influences the interactions taking place between different assemblages within a given society and, and it will also be reconsidered in its role as a unique manifestation of power, one that simultaneously emerges from social discourse and that functions as a particularly potent form of discourse itself.

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Introduction

Disgrace's Engagement with a New Image of Law

In his 1987 Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech, J. M. Coetzee lamented the way that “unnatural structures of power... define the South African state” (Coetzee & Attwell, 97). He suggested that these unnatural structures of power have resulted in a literature that is “in bondage,” one that is unnaturally “preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them” (98). Regardless of whether or not these claims are true of South African literature in general, they certainly do describe Coetzee’s works, all of which interrogate the “unnatural structures of power... [that] define the South African state,” and this is especially true of *Disgrace*, the first novel Coetzee published after the end of apartheid.¹

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee tells the story of David Lurie, a professor of literature who specializes in Romantic poetry and who is writing an opera about the infamous seducer-of-women, Lord Byron. At the very beginning of the story, the reader is told that, to his own mind, David has “solved the problem of sex rather well,” but as the story unfolds, it becomes increasingly obvious that this is not the case at all. David has not “solved” the problem of sex, and this fact is made brutally apparent as David repeatedly engages in acts that violate the boundaries of his sexual partners. Furthermore, because one of those partners is a student of

¹ When the term *power* is used in this essay, it will always be used in the Foucauldian sense; one succinct summary of Foucault’s thoughts on power that describes quite accurately the way that the term will be used throughout this thesis is provided by Nickolas John James’s “Law and Power: Ten Lessons from Foucault,” in which James writes that Foucault’s works contain the following insights: “(1) power is not a bad thing; (2) power cannot be abolished; (3) power is not monopolised by the powerful; (4) power is everywhere; (5) power always provokes resistance; (6) power shapes knowledge; (7) power determines truth; (8) law is a strategy of power; (9) law is only one of the many strategies of power; and (10) power and discourse are non-subjective” (31); see also: Scott, “Foucault’s Analysis of Power’s Methodologies,” 127.

David's—specifically, a twenty-year-old named Melanie Isaacs—David becomes engaged in a public scandal, one which results in a quasi-legal trial and leads, ultimately, to the loss of his job. Since he then has no reason to remain in Cape Town, David decides to go and stay with his daughter Lucy, on her farm in the Eastern Cape.

As soon as David arrives on the farm, it becomes apparent to the reader that David and Lucy possess very different views of the world. While David thinks in terms of sweeping histories, transcendental ideas, and individualistic values, Lucy thinks in terms of concrete realities, immanent relationships, and communal values. And as the remaining events of the story unfold—including Lucy's rape/David's assault by three black men, David's decision to serve as cremator for dogs that must be euthanized, and David's various engagements with black South Africans who live alongside Lucy on the cape—the differences between these two characters only continue to become more and more pronounced. On nearly every issue—animal rights, social justice, the role of the law, the purpose of friendship, the concept of history, the effects of rape—David and Lucy disagree, and their disagreement invites the reader to think through the many different issues that they debate with one another (usually in ways that seem very formal and theoretical). This philosophical pondering, though, should not be understood as idle contemplation; rather, it is charged with intense emotion for the reader due to the fact that the issues at stake are so visceral and concrete. Thus, it is appropriate to suggest that *Disgrace* does not merely *invite* to think through these issues, but that it actually *forces* them to do so by infusing the debates with images of bodily harm and death.

The fact that *Disgrace* forces thought in this way—by presenting encounters that are meant to shock the reader and by staging philosophical debates amongst its characters about

those encounters—is important to recognize.² For this tendency to force thought is a unique characteristic of Coetzee’s writings, and it is a characteristic that causes Coetzee’s writings to bear a close relationship to the writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In Deleuze’s writings, the concept of *forcing* thought takes on great significance. The reason for this has to do with Deleuze’s insistence that much of what we think of as the act of thinking is actually the act of recognition; in other words, we believe that we are engaging with real problems when we are, in fact, simply subsuming our experiences into our existing categories of recognition. Worse yet, because we carry with us an idea of what it means to think—a notion which Deleuze refers to as a “dogmatic image of thought”—we are blind to the ways that thinking has been prevented from actually occurring. Thus, the only way for real thought to actually take place is when a violent encounter disrupts the image of thought that we carry with us (Williams 2411). This happens whenever something is experienced that cannot be made to fit the “image of thought” that the subject possesses and that, therefore, forces thought to take place in order for an immanent problem to be addressed (Lefebvre, *IL* 74).

The fascinating aspect of Coetzee’s writings—in terms of their relation to Deleuze’s philosophy—is that they are able to stage these sorts of encounters over and over again without ever allowing the reader to ever feel as if they have “solved” the problems that are raised within the text. Thus, by reading one of Coetzee’s novels, a reader is forced to think in Deleuzian ways even if they have never encountered Deleuze’s ideas prior to engaging with the text. Furthermore, because Coetzee is interested in exploring many of the same metaphysical and ethical questions that Deleuze explored in his writings, a reader who engages with Coetzee’s texts is not only exposed to Deleuze’s methods but also to many of Deleuze’s theories about life

² When I use the term “encounter,” I am using it in the Deleuzian sense, as described by Lefebvre in *The Image of Law*, 59.

and the nature of reality. As Deleuzian scholar and translator Paul Patton contends:

Coetzee deserves to be added to the Deleuzian literary canon [simply] for the way in which *Disgrace* presents a conception of pure life as immanent in the everyday existence of humans and animals alike, for the manner in which the central protagonist embarks on a line of flight or deterritorialization which transforms his sense of who he is and his understanding of life, and finally for the process through which this transformation takes place by means of becoming-animal. (Patton, “Becoming Animal and Pure Life” 103)

Given the fact that *Disgrace* explores many of the same ideas that Deleuze explored in his works—and given the fact that *Disgrace* also explores the foundations and limitations of Western legal discourse—it is surprising that more scholarly attention has not been devoted to an analysis of the novel in terms of Deleuze’s philosophy of law. After all, both Deleuze and Coetzee seem interested in interrogating the relationship between law and power in their writings, and a great deal of scholarship has been developed in an effort to reveal the ways that each of these thinkers, separately, has conducted precisely these sorts of interrogations of the law.³ Therefore, it seems that it would be fruitful to conduct an analysis of the aspects of *Disgrace* that are brought to light when viewed through the lens of Deleuze’s philosophy of law, and in this thesis, precisely such an analysis will take place. In order to conduct this analysis, though, it is necessary first, to offer a brief overview of Deleuze’s methods and ideas.

As has already been noted, Deleuze devotes significant attention in *Difference and*

³ Two of the studies that concern *Disgrace*’s relationship to law and that have been especially important for this thesis include Elizabeth Anker’s “Human Rights, Social Justice, and J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” and Michelle Kelly’s “Playing it by the Book.” Some of the studies that concern Deleuze’s relationship to law and that have been especially important for this thesis include many of the books and essays written by Alexandre Lefebvre, De Sutter & MCGee’s *Deleuze and Law*, and Rosi Braidotti’s *Deleuze and Law: Forensic Futures*.

Repetition to his notion of an “image of thought.” These images, he writes, “take the common form of an ‘Everybody knows...’” (*DR*, 130, qtd. in Lefebvre “Habermas” 404). They are the images that we hold of what it means to think. They “operate on the level of the social and the unconscious, and function ‘all the more effectively in silence’” (*DR* 167, qtd. in Lefebvre “Habermas” 404). For Deleuze, these images of thought prevent real thinking from occurring. They seek only to recognize phenomena and to subsume it under pre-existing logic, and they are incapable of allowing new concepts to take form (Williams, loc. 2332). Thus, for Deleuze, the “dogmatic image of thought” must be violently interrupted in order for thinking to occur, and this has huge ramifications for Deleuze’s philosophy of law.⁴

In a Deleuzian philosophy of law, it is assumed that a legal image of thought—an idea of what law is and how it ought to operate—functions in the background of our minds whenever we think about law or legal issues. This image can be detected in most Western discourses about law, and it has a number of distinct characteristics: (1) it invokes false repetition, which for Deleuze, means that it converts singularities into particulars in order to subsume them under universalizing rules (Lefebvre “New Image” 106); (2) it functions vis-a-vis an Aristotelian logic of distributive difference, one which limits true thought by subsuming all cases under recognizable categories (Lefebvre, “New Image” 108); (3) it relies upon a belief in the validity of discursively agreed-upon communal norms (Lefebvre, “Habermas” 397); and (4) it encourages thinking through transcendental values rather than immanent situations.

In this thesis it will be shown that *Disgrace* engages with these aspects of the

⁴ Throughout this thesis, when I refer to Deleuze’s philosophy of law, I am referring to the works of a number of scholars, including Rosi Braidotti, Paul Patton, Penelope Pether, Marc Schuilenburg, Lissa Lincoln, David Saunders, and—especially—Alexandre Lefebvre. Because Deleuze never wrote a text that was specifically devoted to the development of his philosophy of law, it is the writings of these scholars and others that have given shape to the Deleuzian legal philosophy that will be used throughout this thesis.

contemporary image of law in ways that encourage the reader to question their legitimacy. Moreover, it will be shown that the novel accomplishes this rethinking by staging encounters that violently disrupt the image of law that the reader is likely to hold and by offering reflections on law that can replace the dogmatic images that have been violently disrupted. From the outset, though, it must be emphasized that the argument being presented is not that any certain laws should be replaced by any other certain laws (as might be expected when thinking about the “new” image of law that is being invoked by Deleuze’s writings). Rather, the claim being made is more radical; the claim is that the very image of law—the unconscious idea a reader possesses of what law is and how it functions—is being replaced in *Disgrace* by a different image of law, one that is profoundly Deleuzian and one that rejects many of the ideas that underlie contemporary legal discourse. This new image of law has many characteristics— it rejects a notion of law as codified rules in favor of a notion of law as creative jurisprudence; it de-emphasizes transcendence in order to emphasize immanence; and it ceases to imagine the subject of law as an individual by imagining instead a complex assemblage as its subject—but the most important aspect of this image is that it seeks not to describe how law *ought* to function, but how law *does* function. In doing so, it seeks to move legal discourse away from idealistic notions and toward accurate depictions of the relationship between law and power.

Because this thesis takes for granted many of the insights of the posthuman turn—including the assumption that the legal subject envisioned by the dogmatic image of law (the individual, autonomous, rational agent) is being replaced in contemporary thought by a rapidly evolving, posthumanist notion of the subject—little attention will be devoted in the following pages to descriptions of posthuman theory in general.⁵ Rather, this thesis will assume a

⁵ For more information on the posthumanist ideas that serve as a backdrop for this thesis, consult the works of Rosi Braidotti, particularly *The Posthuman*, *Posthuman Knowledges*, and

preliminary knowledge of the ramifications of the posthuman turn, and it will devote full attention to an analysis of the effects of this turn on the image of law, particularly as it is presented in *Disgrace*. In doing so, it will suggest that the humanist image of law is no longer adequate to address our understanding of the world and that certain works of literature—such as *Disgrace*—are helping bring into existence a new image of law, one that more fully incorporates our current understanding of ourselves and our present place in history.

Chapter One

Encounters in *Disgrace*: Rules & Jurisprudence

When reading *Disgrace*, it quickly becomes apparent that the novel is conducting some sort of exploration of the philosophical underpinnings of law. Legal language and legal debates abound within the text, and a number of scholars have written about this aspect of the novel.⁶ Elizabeth Anker, for instance, writes that “questions of criminality and legal reparation dominate both the trajectory of the plot and the philosophical quandaries at issue in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” (Anker 233). Similarly, Michelle Kelly insists that *Disgrace* “emerges from a context in which the political is saturated by the legal or juridical,” and she argues that this fact “has surfaced in recent critical accounts” of the novel (Kelly 161). And even a cursory consideration of some of the major moments in the text—such as a consideration of the committee-hearing scene or a consideration of the conversations that take place between David and Lucy—call to mind an abundance of legal issues that the text is exploring. Thus, there is little question that one of the major concerns of *Disgrace* is an exploration of philosophies of law. There are, however, a number of questions that remain about those explorations. Why, for instance, does *Disgrace* use the language of legal discourse to depict matters that seem to lie beyond the scope of the law? Why does it frequently tie the legal questions it raises to other discourses, such as those of history or literature? And what effect does the novel’s treatment of legal philosophy have upon the reader?

In answering these questions, it is extremely helpful to consider *Disgrace* alongside the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. One reason that such a reading is especially fruitful is because

⁶ This is also true of many of Coetzee’s other works, such as his recently finished *Jesus* trilogy, in which questions about the philosophical underpinnings of law are perhaps even more pronounced than they are in *Disgrace*.

Disgrace encourages readers to think in exactly the ways that are called for in Deleuze's writings, and when the former is read in the light of the latter, a number of its seemingly ambiguous elements are given new meaning and coherence. At the same time, when *Disgrace* is used as a lens through which to understand Deleuze's philosophy, a number of the abstract ideas that Deleuze writes about take on a tangible form. Thus, a reading of *Disgrace* alongside the writings of Deleuze helps shed light on both bodies of work.

In this chapter, such a reading will be conducted, and specific attention will be drawn to the elements of *Disgrace* that encourage readers to think of law in new ways. Specifically, it will be shown that there are many aspects of the text that prompt readers to distance themselves from the idea that law exists as a set of codified rules and to think, instead, of law as a process of jurisprudence. Prior to considering some of those aspects, though, it is helpful to first understand Deleuze's thoughts on both laws and jurisprudence, which are best expressed in some of the interviews he conducted over the years. In a conversation with Antonio Negri, for instance, he states, "what interests me isn't the law [*la loi*] or laws [*les lois*] (the former being an empty notion, the latter uncritical notions), nor even law or rights, but jurisprudence. It's jurisprudence, ultimately, that creates law, and we mustn't go on leaving this to judges" (Lefebvre, "A New Image of Law" 103). This statement makes a distinction between three different concepts of law, and it is important to consider them each in turn.

The three distinctions that can be drawn from Deleuze's exchange with Negri are the following: a) the idea of law as a transcendental concept, b) the idea of law as a codified set of rules, and c) the idea of law as a creative act of jurisprudence. For Deleuze, the first of these notions is "empty" because it neglects concrete situations in favor of transcendental ideas about how law *ought* to work in an ideal society. This point will be explored in greater depth in the

next chapter, but for now, it is sufficient to say that, because of Deleuze's commitment to radical immanence in all of his works, it is obvious that he would find this notion of law to be deeply problematic. The second notion of law—that of law as a list of codified rules—is also very troubling for Deleuze, primarily because his philosophy emphasizes the need to unblock the flows and movements that can become blocked by a variety of forces. In the case of *legal* thought, this occurs when the dogmatic image of law prevents real thought from taking place by attempting to subsume all cases under a set of applicable rules (Lefebvre, *The Image of Law*, 3). As Alexandre Lefebvre explains, this image of law is problematic for Deleuze because it prevents the law from maximizing its potential to *do* what it is capable of *doing*. Specifically, it prevents the law from 'becoming' through its engagement with legal problems.

In Deleuze's philosophy, the concepts *doing* and *becoming* take on great significance. They do so because, for Deleuze, one of the main limitations of Western thought has been its tendency to categorize and to identify the essence of a particular thing or idea. This need to identify leads subjects to think of difference as "difference between" rather than as "difference in itself" (Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 28). This matters because thinking of difference as "difference between" leads to a diminished appreciation for the processes of differential repetition that are taking place everywhere, at all times, allowing for new becomings. Because these processes of repetition always include some degree of change, everything that exists—including the law—is always in a continual state of instability, allowing for new connections to be continually made. Thus, Deleuze doesn't write about things as stable or even definable. For Deleuze, there is no point at which anything—a self, a society, an organ, or a concept such as law—is able to be fully defined and separated from the intensive fields in which it exists. In fact, these things—these images—ought not to be thought of as things at all; rather, they ought to be

thought of in terms of their intensities, in terms of their origins, and in terms of their processes of becoming. The reason they ought to be thought of in such ways is because this way of thinking not only allows for a greater understanding of the particular image being considered but it also allows for greater insight into the potentials for new becomings that exist within a given image, and this has significant ramifications for a Deleuzian image of law.

For Deleuze, law is an intensive field. In his philosophy, there is no point at which something ceases to be legal. Rather, points exist where the intensity of the legal becomes more or less pronounced. As De Sutter and McGee write: “Legal institutions are rhizomes, and legal reasoning is rhizomatic extension, pulsation, fulguration [and] it is a damaging error to act, in legal theory, as though law was a stable entity, a creature of pre-giveness, necessity, apodicticity” (12). Deleuze often uses the concept of a rhizome to explain his thinking about the overlapping connections that bring into existence a certain thing, concept, or idea. Just as there is no point at which the bulb of a certain rhizome—such as the fruiting body (the mushroom) of a mycelium web—can be discernibly separated from the rhizomatic web in which it exists—the small tendrils, spores, other offshoots, and even the soil or air of the mushroom rhizome—so, too, is it impossible to separate an entity, such as law, from the connections that converge in order to temporarily stabilize its current manifestation.⁷ However, because the dogmatic image of law presents law as a pre-given reality, thinking is often blocked from seeing both the origins of law’s current manifestation and the potentials for its becoming. Thus, a Deleuzian image of law places great emphasis on removing these blockages and on identifying both the intensities and

⁷ As Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple.” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21)

the connections that define the current function of the law. Where does the intensity of the concept “legal” end? Where is it most manifest? And what must be true of the world if the current manifestation has been able to come into existence (Colebrook 13)?⁸ Ultimately, Deleuze’s philosophy advances an image of law that concerns itself not so much with what law *is* but, rather, with what law *does*, where law’s influence is *intensified*, and where the limits lie in law’s potential process of *becoming*.

Of course, there is much more that could be written about each of these aspects of a Deleuzian image of law—and indeed, the remainder of this thesis will focus on exploring these ideas by revealing the ways that *Disgrace* engages with each of them—but the important thing, for now, is to notice that nothing in Deleuze’s image of law focuses on the aspects of law that are most present in the dogmatic image. There is nothing to be said, for instance, about social contracts or establishing the difference between legitimate and illegitimate laws (Moore 133); there is no mention of judges who decree which sets of rules can be best applied to a case at hand (Lefebvre, *The Image of Law* 6); there is no focus placed on the idea that laws result from legislative processes which are, themselves, influenced by democratic discourse (Lefebvre, *The Image of Law*, 38); and there is no assumption that “coherent set[s] of principles” or values are represented within legitimate laws (Lefebvre 31).

The reason for this absence isn’t because Deleuze denies that judges and legislative processes are part of law; it is simply because his notion of law advocates for a much broader understanding of its scope, and he rejects lines of thought that would diminish this understanding

⁸ “This world as it is known and lived emerged from a range of potentialities that have a *real* range and conditions. The real, though, is not the actual. What Deleuze is doing with theory is demanding that we do not accept *any* structure without interrogating its real emergence. There can only be concepts, laws and societies because of a virtual potentiality that allows for the creation of actual instances.” (Colebrook 13)

(De Sutter 4). For Deleuze, the work performed by judges, lawyers, and legislators is far less important—in terms of an analysis of the law’s function—than are the micropolitical interactions that take place within and amongst different subjects in a given society (Patton, “Immanence, Transcendence” 29; Lefebvre, “Human Rights...” 53). Given this fact, it becomes much easier to see why so many of the situations that are presented in *Disgrace* are presented with language that suggests they are *legal* problems even though the dogmatic image of law would not regard them as such; for when these situations are considered in the light of Deleuze’s philosophy, it is clear that they are, in fact, problems for the law.

By presenting situations in which harm has occurred but in which it is unclear how that harm ought to be rectified, *Disgrace* forces readers to think through legal problems in exactly the way Deleuze envisions when he speaks of an encounter that “forces” thought to think (Lefebvre, *Image of Law*, 72). For Deleuze, thought is normally prevented from taking place because recognition dominates so many of our interactions. Only when we experience “an unanticipated and violent encounter” can thought be stimulated “past the purview of recognition” (Lefebvre, *The Image of Law* 72). This violence, though, should not be thought of as a physical violence. Rather, it is an epistemological violence, one that occurs “whenever clichés, habits, categories, and propositional certitudes are no longer sufficient to account for, think, and react within a situation” (Lefebvre, *The Image of Law* 73).

Disgrace, of course, is filled with exactly these sorts of situations—ones in which none of the reader’s concepts of law or justice seem adequate to address the situation at hand—and these situations force the reader to think in jurisprudential terms by causing them to search for ethical solutions where none seem to exist. For instance, when *Disgrace* presents David’s sexual interactions with Melanie, it does so with language that makes it very difficult for the reader to

decide how they ought to feel about those interactions. At every point where the text indicates that Melanie has, indeed, been coerced into having sex with David against her will, it also presents language that casts doubt upon that conclusion.

For example, between pages 14 and 21 of the text, Melanie explicitly rejects David's advances at least five times (often by even saying the word "no" in response to his advances). Now, in most stories, this fact would allow the reader to conclude that David's actions undoubtedly constitute sexual harassment, if not outright rape; in this story, however, each of those statements of "no" is undermined by textual evidence that suggests Melanie might not *actually* be saying no: the first instance, for example, is followed by a hug; the second, third, and fourth instances are framed by two lines in which Melanie thanks David for giving her a ride home; and the fifth instance is closely followed by the statement that "she does not resist" (14, 17, and 21, respectively).

The effect of these juxtapositions—especially during a first encounter with the text—is to make the reader feel confused about how to interpret its events. For while they are likely to experience uncomfortable emotions when reading about the events described in this section of the novel, they are also led to doubt their initial assumptions as they engage with various phrases that lead them to believe that Melanie does desire the events that are taking place. For example, when David first rests his hand against Melanie's cheek, the text says that "she does not withdraw" (14). Similarly, when David shows up at Melanie's home unannounced and begins making his sexual intentions known, Melanie says, "No, not *now*," implying that she might be interested in David's advances at a different time (22, emphasis added). Finally, the text tells the reader that, during one of Melanie's encounters with David, "she *lets* him lay her out on the bed and undress her: she even helps him, raising her arms and then her hips" and that "she hooks a

leg behind his buttocks to draw him in closer” (27, emphasis added). Through phrases such as these, *Disgrace* creates uncertainty in the reader, and it is this sense of uncertainty that causes them—*forces* them—to think through a situation in which their image of justice—their inherent notions of right and wrong—do not easily apply. This is a case in which recognition fails, and it fails precisely because the novel is designed to force the reader to experience an encounter.

These sexual encounters with Melanie, however, are not the only ways in which *Disgrace* creates such encounters. In fact, I would argue that *Disgrace*'s plot consists primarily of a series of encounters, ones which force readers to think (in a Deleuzian sense of the term) and which build upon and complicate one another in the same way that legal cases build upon and complicate one another. Through these encounters, *Disgrace* immerses the reader in a complex web of situations and it leaves it to the reader to think through the problems and questions that are raised by these encounters, thus forcing the reader to engage in Deleuzian acts of jurisprudence.

For example, once the reader has experienced the section of the novel in which Lucy is raped, they view the interactions that took place between David and Melanie in a very different light. After having witnessed Lucy's pain—and after having been forced to contemplate the different ways in which people of different subject positions (different genders; different ages; different racial identities) experience and interpret events—the reader gains greater insight into the harm that was caused to Melanie by David's actions. The text insures that readers are forced to rethink their initial reaction to the first chapters of the novel by including a number of passages that link David's actions to those of Lucy's rapists.

After the rape, for instance, as David and Lucy are discussing the events that took place, David says, “I am sure they tell themselves many things,” indicating that he realizes the rapists

are capable of justifying their actions to themselves in a way that blinds them to the harm they have caused (155). Ironically, he does not recognize this same tendency within himself, but Lucy does, and through her insight, the reader is also made aware of the similarities between David's tendencies and the tendencies he believes the rapists possess.

Additionally, because Lucy's response to David includes the phrase "you are a man, you ought to know," a connection is created between David and the rapists, suggesting that David ought to understand the things that were taking place in the rapists' mind as they raped Lucy, and the reader is thus prompted to consider the similarities or differences between the two situations. This reconsideration is further encouraged due to the fact that Lucy's response includes a description of rape that closely mirrors the text's description of David's interactions with Melanie. Lucy says, "When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn't it a bit like killing?", and this phrasing calls to the reader's mind two of the most vivid images of David's sexual encounters with Melanie: the first, when the reader is told that she is "lying beneath him, her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head" (17); and the second, when the text reads that "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" (22) By carefully allowing Lucy's description of the rape to parallel the text's earlier description of the events that were described as "not rape, not quite"—and by specifically using language that describes being pinned down and dying to describe both situations—the reader is positioned to draw connections between the two events in their mind and to re-think their response to the first encounter that the text staged between Melanie and David.

The question must be asked, though: how can the claim be made that a *re*-thinking of the earlier events must take place after the reader is exposed to Lucy's rape and her description of it?

Certainly, it is clear that the two sections are designed to parallel one another, but isn't it possible—perhaps even likely—that many readers would recognize the harm being done to both women as they were reading about these two descriptions of predatory sexual behavior? Isn't it possible that the reader has always considered David's actions toward Melanie to be in the wrong? Such questions are worth asking, but as will be shown, the text has been constructed in such a way that the reader is extremely unlikely to recognize the harm being done to Melanie when they are reading the first few chapters of the novel, despite the fact that there is actually plenty of evidence that ought to have caused them to do so.

One of the primary ways that *Disgrace* blinds the reader to the harm that they should have been able to recognize is through its use of the close third-person point of view. Because the point of view in the story is not that of an omniscient narrator, but rather, that of a narrator who is only able to portray events through the lens of David's thoughts, the reader is placed in a position of sympathy with David. Because the reader sees the events taking place through the lens of David's thoughts, they are initially hesitant to regard David's actions as rape, and they are initially primed to see—as David does—the many reasons why his relationship with Melanie is morally acceptable. This closeness to David's thought also encourages the reader to dismiss the many phrases which suggest that David is being predatory in his actions. Quite a few of these phrases exist in the early chapters of the novel, and the fact that the reader is able to read them without concluding simply that David is a predatory figure offers a testament to the novel's ability—and determination—to keep the reader in a state of uncertainty regarding their interpretation of the text's events.

Consider, for instance, the fact that the novel describes David as reaching out, unbidden, to touch Melanie's cheek (14). Or the fact that he violates her privacy by letting himself into the

department office in order to copy down all of her personal information (16). Or the fact that the novel says he “tries to put her at ease” (suggesting that he can tell she is not at ease and yet doesn’t alter his interactions with her) (16). Or the fact that he shows up at her house, having given her “no warning,” making her “too surprised to resist” his intrusion (21). In a simpler novel, these passages would simply be allowed to stand out, and they would be used to create an image of a character who ought to be feared or judged harshly. They would not be complicated by other lines that cause the reader to question David’s culpability—or Melanie’s complicity—in these events. They would also, certainly, not be placed alongside a passage in which Melanie seems to willingly engage in sex with David. But because such lines and passages *are* included, the reader is thrust into a position in which they are uncertain of whether or not David is guilty, and this position is further complicated by the fact that the reader is continually exposed to David’s internal thoughts as they read the text. Because they are presented with a point of view that expresses David’s feelings about events as they are unfolding, the reader is primed to sympathize with David; at the same time though, because the novel also constantly presents evidence that undermines David’s feelings about the events taking place, the reader is forced to doubt their interpretation of the events, leading them to feel extremely uncertain about any interpretation they are making of the text.

This uncertainty is by no means an accident. In fact, it is one of the central effects of *Disgrace*, one that reinforces the novel’s engagement with a Deleuzian image of law, and it functions on several levels. As has already been shown, the uncertainty that the reader feels about their interpretation of David’s interactions with Melanie causes them to wrestle with their notions of right-and-wrong; they have a sense that something wrong is happening, but they are prevented—through the text’s back-and-forth weaving of contradictory evidence—from

assigning clear blame or responsibility. They are prevented from simply recognizing a situation and assigning to that situation a pre-given label, such as rape or harassment, and they are thus forced to think in jurisprudential terms about a situation that Deleuze would describe as a “problem for law.” This jurisprudential thinking is continued, though—and slightly altered—with each new passage of the text. Once the reader has read the scene that describes Lucy’s rape, they are forced to reconsider their initial reaction to the scenes describing the interactions that took place between Melanie and David, and because they have been vividly exposed to the harm that was done to Lucy, they are now more likely to think about those scenes in terms of the harm that was also done to Melanie. Their interpretation of the interactions are now likely to place less emphasis on assigning a term to the crime and more emphasis on tracing the specifics of the harm that was done. In this way, the uncertainty that is intentionally woven into the text opens up space for the reader to think in the same ways that are envisioned in a Deleuzian image of law; it opens up space for them to think through legal problems jurisprudentially, without simply resorting to acts of recognition and subsumption.

In addition to the ways that it forces readers to think by preventing them from resorting to recognition and by causing them to consider a legal problem in the light of a different-yet-related legal problem, the novel uses uncertainty by drawing attention to its own unstable systems of signification. In other words, the text is extremely self-aware of the ways that it deconstructs itself, and it accomplishes this level of self-awareness through its use of an extremely fluid point-of-view, one that flows back and forth between a subjective and an objective perspective constantly and which also, at times, veers off into territory that could not be described as either subjective or objective. In order to understand why this is relevant to the novel’s engagement with images of law, it is important to recognize that the narration presented

in *Disgrace* is not simply a close third-person voice; rather, it is a close third-person voice that is disrupted constantly by interjections of free indirect discourse that reflect David's thinking at that moment in the text. These snippets of free indirect discourse offer the reader insight into David's mind, but they do not do so with David's own words. Rather, they cause the character to seem to speak "as if he were listening to his own words reported by someone else" (Cinema 2, 242).

This effect—which is present all throughout *Disgrace*—has been written about extensively by Deleuze in his two volumes of cinematic literary criticism, *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*. In these works, Deleuze describes the free indirect perspective as the "fourth person singular," and he argues that it opens up space for a viewpoint that is neither subjective nor objective; rather, it presents a voice that is extra self-aware and that draws the reader's attention to the forces that have shaped a character's subjectivity, even while they are watching that subjectivity act itself out before them (Schwartz 125). When describing how this effect is applied in cinema, Deleuze writes, "the distinction between what the character saw subjectively and what the camera saw objectively vanished, not in favor of one or the other, but because the camera assumed a subjective presence, acquired an internal vision, which entered into a relation of simulation ('mimesis') with the character's way of seeing" (Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 483). The irony, though, is that this effect of seeing the world as the character sees it draws the reader's attention more closely to the subjective nature of the character's viewpoint, thus allowing for greater critical exploration of the forces that have shaped the character's thought.

Deleuze's description of the free, indirect viewpoint in cinema is extremely helpful in understanding the different degrees of objective and subjective perspectives that fluctuate throughout *Disgrace*. For although the entire novel is narrated through a close, third-person point

of view that only allows the reader to perceive events through the lens of David's thought, the degree to which the reader is made aware of that lens shifts, sometimes reflecting a viewpoint that could be considered more objective and, at other times, presenting events or ideas in a much more subjective way. This difference is most obvious when passages of direct dialogue—which seem to the reader to be entirely objective—are placed alongside descriptions of events that are recognizably being filtered through the lens of David's worldview. For example, when news first breaks of David's interactions with Melanie, he goes to visit his ex-wife Rosalind for dinner, and because their conversation is mostly presented as direct dialogue, the reader perceives the scene through a more distant and objective perspective than they would if the conversation were simply being delivered through David's internal monologue. However, after Rosalind finishes briefly chastising David about his indiscretion, the passage shifts into David's mind by relaying events directly through the lens of his thought:

The old tone has entered, the tone of the last years of their married life: passionate recrimination. Even Rosalind must be aware of that. Yet perhaps she has a point. Perhaps it is the right of the young to be protected from the sight of their elders in the throes of passion. That is what whores are for, after all: to put up with the ecstasies of the unlovely.
(Disgrace 42)

This close, subjective perspective carries the story forward while also offering the reader insight into David's feelings about the events that are unfolding around him. In this case, the subjective perspective allows the reader to become aware of David's indifference to Rosalind's claims while also indicating that, although David may consider her point to be valid, he does not feel the weight of her chastisement in any meaningful way. Furthermore, David's concluding thought—a jaded reflection on the purpose of sex workers in society—indicates to the reader that David is

primarily thinking about his situation in disengaged and abstract ways.

In the scene just considered, the distinction between the subjective and the objective perspective is rather clear and straightforward, and if this were true throughout *Disgrace*, then Deleuze's concept of the free indirect perspective would not be particularly relevant to a consideration of the novel. However, in *Disgrace*, the perspective being offered is rarely so clear. At times, the use of direct dialogue or thought tags—"he would like to have said" or "he thinks"—makes the scene seem quite objective, and at other times, the novel pointedly indicates to the reader they are within David's mind, thus marking the scene as highly subjective. But at many points in the novel, the events described are presented in a way that makes the reader aware of multiple perspectives at the same time. As Deleuze puts it, "a character acts on the screen, and is assumed to see the world in a certain way. But simultaneously, the camera sees him, and sees his world, from another point of view that thinks, reflects and transforms the viewpoint of the character" (Deleuze, *Cinema I* 74). In *Disgrace*, this effect is created in a number of ways, but the overall result is twofold: first, the reader remains constantly aware of the lens through which David sees the world; and second, the reader is forced to remain constantly uncertain about how to interpret the information they are receiving through the lens of David's thoughts.

One of the primary ways that *Disgrace* causes the reader to be aware of the lens through which they are receiving the story is to include within its narration questions that are loaded with multiple meanings. For instance, when David is first taking Melanie out to dinner, the text interrupts their conversation with the line: "Too far. What is far, what is too far, in a matter like this? Is her too far the same as his too far?" (17). This question seems to be simultaneously directed at three people: David, the reader, and Melanie. The line, of course, allows the reader to

glimpse into David's mind, but at the same time—due to its presentation without any dialogue tags such as “he thought”—it seems to come directly at the reader, as an interjection in the narrative, thus prompting them to briefly ask themselves the question: what is too far?

Furthermore, because this line includes a reference to Melanie's mind—“Is her too far the same as his too far?”—the reader's focus is also directed toward Melanie's perspective, and they are reminded to consider her interpretation of the events alongside David's.

By shifting the closeness of the narration back and forth in this way—sometimes striving more toward objectivity, sometimes indicating that the perspective is very subjective, and sometimes creating a subjective perspective that draws extra attention to its subjective nature—*Disgrace* creates a dynamic in which the reader is reminded constantly to consider the lens through which they are receiving the story, and at many times, this leads the reader to struggle to determine how to make meaning from a certain passage. For example, consider again this description of one of David's sexual encounters with Melanie:

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. (*Disgrace* 23)

Although this passage—which seems to be simultaneously a statement to the reader and a glimpse into David's mind—begins with the insistence that the events transpiring are “not rape, not quite,” the remainder of the passage offers evidence that Melanie was significantly violated by David's actions. The images and phrases presented are ones that carry with them intense connotations of death and emptiness—“undesired to the core”; “die within herself”; “like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck”—and yet the language being presented is also

unquestionably David's. The use of repetitive clauses that build upon themselves along with the use of metaphors marks a style that the reader has come to accept as David's own. In Deleuze's words, there is a "literalness of the voice," an effect that is like David "listening to his own words reported by someone else" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 242). The result is a passage that strikes the reader in a number of different ways simultaneously. First, they are told that the sexual act is "not rape." Yet, at the same time, they are presented with evidence that Melanie is being significantly harmed. And yet they are *also* being reminded that this portrayal is merely David's interpretation of the events, leading to the question: was the actual encounter more violating than is being presented? Or less? Is David overthinking Melanie's resistance? Or is he downplaying the negative impact for the reader?

The novel's use of this "fourth-person singular" voice creates uncertainty in the reader not only regarding David's interactions with Melanie but also regarding every aspect of the text, and this becomes especially important to consider when thinking about the ways that *Disgrace* addresses issues of race. Often, *Disgrace* has been criticized for the way in which it portrays black characters. It was decried as a racist novel by the ANC, and it has received scathing criticism from South African writers such as Nadine Gordimer and Christopher van Wyk, the latter of whom condemned the way that, in this novel, "the white characters are fleshed out, the black evildoers are not" (Smith 31, Mardorossian 72). While these criticisms may certainly be legitimate, it is also important to remember that all of the characters and events that are portrayed in *Disgrace* are being presented through the lens of David's thoughts. More importantly, though, it is important to remember that they are being presented through the lens of David's thoughts in a way that consistently draws attention to that lens. Thus, while it is true that most readers will feel very uncomfortable—and even disgusted—when experiencing the novel's portrayal of black

characters, it is also true that this discomfort seems to be an intentional affect of the novel, one that is created through close proximity to David's racist and sexist way of understanding the world and one that is revealed through consideration of all the ways in which the novel is self-aware of its distorted narrative lens.

Even during some of the most dramatic and intense scenes in *Disgrace*, attention is drawn toward David's white, eurocentric worldview. Just before he is set on fire, for instance, the reader is given this insight into his mind:

He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron.

Mission work: what has it left behind, that huge enterprise of upliftment? Nothing that he can see. (93)

In this short passage, there are a number of phrases that give insight into the way that David sees others. The words "darkest Africa," "savages," and "their own lingo" reflect David's binary understanding of his society. He thinks in terms of those who are "civilized" and those who are not, and this way of seeing the world inevitably causes him to see those who do not align with eurocentric values to appear like caricatures. So while it is true that the black characters in *Disgrace* are not "fleshed out"—and while it is true that they are even presented mostly in unfavorable lights—the thinness of these characters' depictions tells the reader much more about David than it does about any other character.

However, it is important not to miss the fact that *Disgrace* is full of narrative markers that remind the reader that they are experiencing the world through the lens of a particular person,

one who has been deeply shaped by discourses about race, gender, and civilization. This lens is revealed by a number of textual cues, including language that paints the world in accordance with poetic or literary ideals, questions that are posed to both David and the reader, and an obsession with historical ironies. By scattering these reminders of the lens through which the story is being conveyed—and even including them when describing moments that are horrifying or terrifying—the text makes it difficult for the reader to ever forget that they are experiencing the events and the people of the story through David’s eyes, and this allows the story to achieve certain results that would not be possible otherwise.

One of the affects that is made possible by “fourth-person singular” style that is deployed throughout *Disgrace* is that readers who happen to inhabit a similar subject position to David—which includes all readers who are shaped by Western ideas about law, education, and society, but especially white, male readers—are often forced to ask themselves where they “ought” to part ways with David’s thinking. Of course, at times, this feels natural, such as when David is blatantly ignoring Melanie’s attempts to resist him or when he is commenting on Bev Shaw’s “dumpy little” body or when he is making fun of traditional Sotho and Xhosa names (22, 77, 194). However, the majority of the narration in *Disgrace* is presented so fluidly, with a voice that is so confident and elegant, that it can be extremely difficult for the reader to remain at a critical distance from David’s rendering of events. Often, it is easy for a reader—especially a white, male reader who is familiar with David’s manner of speaking—to become lost in the narration and to forget that they are experiencing these events through an extremely distorted lens, one that is prone to see almost everything in a racist and sexist way.

When analyzing the text closely, it becomes apparent that nearly every description presented in the book—from David’s description of other people to his description of Petrus’s

party to his description of the events that are taking place around him—is being presented in a light that is either racist or sexist to different degrees, and because these degrees fluctuate, the reader is often prevented from noticing the racist and sexist rhetoric they are accepting as objective narration until a certain cue within the text crosses their threshold of tolerance. When this happens, it is possible for a reader to be alerted to the way that David’s deeply distorted view of the world has seemed natural to them. Thus, for many readers, *Disgrace* presents the possibility of confronting the degree to which their own worldview has been distorted by the sorts of racist and sexist discourses that make it possible to accept David’s rendition of people and events as straightforward. And through its use of the “fourth-person singular” viewpoint, which fluctuates constantly back and forth between a seemingly objective presentation of events and one that reminds the reader—quite clearly—that no such presentation has ever been taking place at any point within the text, *Disgrace* makes such an effect not only possible, but probable.

Ultimately, there is no transcendental voice present in *Disgrace* that could grant legitimacy to the conclusions that the reader might make about this passage or about any passage in the text. At the same time, though, the novel does not seem to be trying to make the reader completely doubt the reliability of its narrative, as is the case in many other poststructuralist novels. Rather, *Disgrace* most consistently uses its narrative style in order to draw attention to its internal inconsistencies and to force the reader to make decisions about morality, ethics, and law in spite of those inconsistencies. As the text forces the reader to engage in this process—as it forces them to make meaning without recourse to a stable narrative—it mirrors a process that is envisioned by a Deleuzian image of law: a process by which subjects are forced to make meaning from unstable legal discourses. *Disgrace* mirrors this process by presenting a text that is both self-conscious about its own internal inconsistencies and by simultaneously devoting itself

to an exploration of the philosophical underpinnings of law. Because the reader is always made aware of fact that they cannot derive any fixed meaning from the text—because each interpretation is always intentionally undermined by evidence for a different interpretation—they are forced to think of the text as always open to a certain range of new meanings and interpretations, just as the law is always unstable and always open to a certain range of new meanings and interpretations. Moreover, by never allowing its questions about legal philosophy to recede very far into the background of the text, the text prompts the reader to make their interpretations while they are also thinking about the way that law functions in society.

One of the sections of the novel in which this connection between legal philosophy and textual interpretation is especially apparent is the committee-hearing scene. In this scene, David is called before a committee of his peers in order to give his account of his interactions with Melanie. However, as soon as the scene begins, it is marked by a number of phrases that indicate that it is exploring the scope of the law. The first and most obvious of these phrases occurs when the head of the committee asks David if he has any reservations about the makeup of the committee. In response, David says that he has no “challenge in a legal sense,” but that he does have “reservations of a philosophical kind” which he supposes are “out of bounds” (45). This distinction between the legal and the institutional is then brought up again and again as the scene progresses, with the head of the committee repeatedly insisting that the investigation they are conducting has no *legal* authority. At the same time, though, the reader is made very aware that real consequences are going to flow from the actions of the committee, and David himself repeatedly resists the idea that the committee *is not* a legal institution. Thus, the reader is forced to ask themselves: what are the limits of the law? When does something become a legal issue and when is it not a legal issue? If the committee wields power and makes normative decisions about

how professors are or are not to interact with students, then what difference is there between their actions and the actions taken by a different legal body?

In a moment, it will be shown that this passage of the text engages with these questions in complex and nuanced ways, but before analyzing the committee-hearing scene in close detail, it is helpful to consider some of Deleuze's concepts about the scope of the law and the nature of power because they are relevant for an analysis of the scene. In particular, it is helpful to focus on three of Deleuze's concepts that help to make discussions of power more tangible: the assemblage, the molar, and the molecular. For Deleuze, the concept of the assemblage helps to bypass the categorical thinking that threatens to prevent thought from occurring. Rather than regarding an image—the self, the society, the law—as a pre-given thing, Deleuze suggests that these images ought to be regarded as rhizomatic assemblages, points of overlap where certain connections have created a momentarily stable site of intensity. Thus, a given institution, such as the university committee or South African society, has been brought into existence by a certain set of connections, and in order to understand the potentials for such an institution, it is essential to understand the connections that caused it to emerge. As Claire Colebrook explains:

What Deleuze is doing with theory is demanding that we do not accept *any* structure without interrogating its real emergence. There can only be concepts, laws and societies because of a virtual potentiality that allows for the creation of actual instances.... For Deleuze, a strong theory of the virtual allows us to take a given positive phenomenon, such as a law, and look at its actual and historical genesis *and* then look at its potentiality.

(13)

In addition to understanding an assemblage's origins and potentials though, Deleuze also emphasizes the need to trace an assemblage's segmentation, in order to understand which aspects

of that assemblage are changing rapidly and which aspects are changing slowly. To help make this task more tangible, he offers the concepts of the molar and the molecular. The molar he defines as that which tends toward stasis, while the molecular is that which tends toward change and movement. However, these concepts should not be regarded as binaries, but rather as relations to one another. Just as a large amount of molecules (a *mole*) takes on given properties that none of the molecules individually possess, so too, does a molar segmentation of an assemblage take on properties that the molecular segmentations of that assemblage lack.⁹ At the same time, though, the molar still derives its form from the molecular and the molar has some influence over the potential becomings that exist on the molecular level.

One way of understanding this idea is by considering the French Revolution. According to Deleuze, the important thing to think about in an analysis of the Revolution is the question: “[W]hich peasants, in which areas of the south of France, stopped greeting the local landowners?” (Deleuze and Guattari, 216). As Brent Adkins explains: “The molecular flow of courtesies that accompanied the molar segmentation of land, landowners, and peasants, began at some point to turn against the molar segmentation and interrupt it. It is on this level that the revolution began and spread” (loc. 2620). The molar segmentation of the assemblage that was pre-revolutionary France began to change on the molecular level, and it is impossible to understand the molar change without considering the molecular change that preceded it. By

⁹ Two passages from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* may help shed light on these concepts: “There is no question, however, of establishing a dualist opposition between the two types of multiplicities, molecular machines and molar machines; that would be no better than the dualism between the One and the multiple. There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single *assemblage*, operating in the same *assemblage*: packs in masses and masses in packs” (34); “Movement has an essential relation to the imperceptible; it is by nature imperceptible. Perception can grasp movement only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form. Movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception” (280–281).

thinking of a given assemblage, such as law, in terms of its molar and molecular segmentations, it is possible to create a more accurate image of that assemblage and to *do* more with the image that is created. In terms of law, this means creating an image that helps to account for its actual (rather than theoretical) genesis, to understand its actual effects, and to chart the range of its actual potentials.

The committee-hearing scene in *Disgrace* encourages readers to think of law in these terms in three different ways. First, it stages the debate about the scope of the law by causing David and a few other characters to insist on a limited range of the law's influence while causing other characters to insist on a more expansive image of law. Second, it displaces the idea that the law exists as a pre-given reality by symbolically recreating the complex web of interactions from which the law emerges. And third, it draws attention to the fact that the law receives its legitimacy from social discourse, thus undermining the image of the law as a codified set of rules that need simply be applied to a given situation (Kelly 173). In order to appreciate the effect that this passage of the novel has upon the reader, though, it is necessary to consider each of these aspects in turn.

As soon as the reader begins engaging with the committee-hearing scene in *Disgrace*, they notice that the novel is staging debates between characters who understand law quite differently. While characters such as Professor Hakim and David insist on a limited version of the law that primarily perceives the law as something that has been pre-determined and must simply be applied to the case at hand ("playing it by the book"), other characters, such as Dr. Rasool and Dr. Swarts, suggest that the law is malleable and that its application ought to be determined by a number of factors, including David's own remorse, the difference between David's and Melanie's subject positions, and the historical situation in which these characters

find themselves (49). These debates—especially when being read by a reader who is already conflicted about their desire for both David’s and Melanie’s well-being—cause the reader to feel disoriented throughout this section of the text, and this sense of disorientation encourages the reader to grapple carefully with each of the different viewpoints being offered as they search for a solution to these events that would feel in some sense “right,” despite the fact that no “right” solution seems to exist.¹⁰

As noted, though, *Disgrace* also uses this section to encourage the reader to rethink their image of law by beginning the passage with a number of statements that draw a distinction between a limited view of law and a more expansive view of law. For instance, David states at the beginning of the inquiry that he has “no challenge in a legal sense” but that he does have “reservations of a philosophical kind” (45). This statement causes the reader to wonder about the nature of David’s philosophical reservations and to ask themselves why those reservations aren’t relevant to the inquiry at hand. This statement is then closely followed by many snippets of dialogue that explore the difference between a trial and an enquiry, between recommendations and sentences, and between a plea and a confession. The reader realizes, though, that the distinction is pointless, and they thus ask themselves why the novel is drawing so much attention to a futile question. After all, regardless of whether the committee hearing is regarded as legal or not, its actions are still going to have a real effect on both Melanie’s and David’s lives. Thus, the repetition of the distinction between the legal and the quasi-legal only serves to draw the reader’s attention to the arbitrary nature of such a boundary; if, as Foucault argues, the “power to punish”

¹⁰ Coetzee’s tendency to write in a way that intentionally confuses his readers—and thus forces them to slow down in their attempt to understand the implications of his language—has been noted by a number of scholars. Jan Wilm, for instance, writes that “Coetzee’s works activate both a figurative and a literal approach to the texts” and that “the act of reading is slowed down and the act of reflexive responding is intensified” within most of Coetzee’s works (Wilm 113).

is now distributed throughout society—including in institutions that fragment the “legal power to punish”—then an image of law like the one Lurie possesses allows for the majority of the law’s power to remain masked (Foucault, *Discipline* 21; *Will* 86). By insisting upon an image of law that views the law as a list of codified rules that could be applied to any situation and that is inherently limited in scope, Lurie offers the reader a representation of the dogmatic image of law and he shows how this image prevents an accurate tracing of the law’s real range of influence.

In contrast to this image, the novel presents a number of characters, but the most influential is Dr. Farodia Rasool, the professor from the social sciences, who offers an image of law that more closely resembles Deleuze’s notion of jurisprudence. Dr. Rasool insists on paying attention to the case’s overtones, to its impact on the wider community, and to the “long history of exploitation” of which the case is part (47, 49). Because Deleuzian jurisprudence places so much emphasis on tracing the ways that a specific legal situation creates its own unique problems for the law and on tracing the ways in which that legal situation connects to other images—such as the image of the society or the image of historical discourses about exploitation—it is clear that Dr. Rasool’s statements reflect a Deleuzian understanding of jurisprudence, and they open up space for the reader to think in jurisprudential terms. Importantly, it is Dr. Rasool who takes issue with David’s attempts to reduce the act of jurisprudence being performed by the committee to an act that would be more aligned with the dogmatic image of law (one which would simply attempt to apply the rules of the law to the case at hand). In Dr. Rasool’s words, a number of important concepts in a Deleuzian image of law are brought to the surface. For instance, consider the following passage, in which Dr. Rasool pushes back against David’s guilty plea:

‘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. To me that suggests that he accepts the charges only in name. In a case with overtones like this one, the wider community is entitled—’ (48)

In this passage a number of aspects of the Deleuzian image of law are on display. There is an insistence on working through the actual events that took place and that brought into existence the problem at hand; there is also a resistance to identifying a specific crime and a refusal to think in terms of recognition and subsumption; and finally, there is attention being drawn to the ways that the law derives much of its form and power from the community in which it exists. As Kelly notes, David’s “attempt to hide behind legal procedure in the name of the discursive purity of the law merely highlights his disavowal of the cultural underpinnings of it,” and Dr. Rasool’s words and comments re-establish the link between the law and the community from which it emerges (Kelly 173).

Of course, many critics and readers of *Disgrace* have pointed out that this section of the novel—and particularly the debate between David and Dr. Rasool about the difference between a plea and a confession—could be read as a thinly veiled critique of the TRC, and this is true. It is important, however, not to reduce this section of the novel to *merely* a critique of the TRC. For, as Kelly observes, *Disgrace* does not merely condemn the TRC; rather, it situates the TRC “within the multiple discourses that shape ‘the law’” (Kelly 168). In other words, while it is certainly valuable to recognize that the novel is drawing attention to the shortcomings of the TRC, it is also important to recognize that it is using this section to cause readers to question their image of the law and to recognize that many different manifestations of power—including the TRC—ought to be considered within the scope of the law, in order to accurately map the

law's current influence and potential.

As this section of the novel reveals, there is absolutely no distinction between the concept that David considers to be “legal” and the influence that the committee holds. Both derive their legitimacy from social discourse that is shaped by power relations, and this fact is further underscored, symbolically, through the names and roles that the text assigns to each of the committee members. These roles are not at all arbitrary, and they serve to draw the reader's attention to various aspects of society that Deleuze insists shape the law. These aspects include all of the institutions and discourses that play a role in influencing the interactions that take place between different assemblages within a given society, and they are represented by Dr. Hakim, (David's friend), by Dr. Rasool (from the social sciences), by Dr. Mathabane (from religious studies), by Dr. Swarts (Dean of Engineering), by an unnamed professor from the business school, and by a student representative from the Coalition Against Discrimination. By using these specific characters to compose the committee that will judge David, the novel suggests that this committee and the conversations that take place within this scene are representative of South African society as a whole. It does so by including characters who are aligned with different facets of society—in terms of the themes invoked by their specific areas of study (religion, social science, business, engineering)—and in terms of the ethnic associations that are invoked by their individual names. It then builds upon this setup by allowing each character's opinions and ideas to closely align with the department that they represent and by staging debates that are meant to cause the reader to think about law less as a list of codified rules and more as a sphere of influence that emerges from the interactions that take place between different elements of society.

For instance, when the novel introduces Manas Mathabane, it does so by saying that

David is “ushered in and seated at the foot of the table by Manas Mathabane *himself*, Professor of Religious Studies, who will chair the inquiry” (45, emphasis added). This phrasing suggests that Mathabane possesses a certain degree of authority, and this suggestion is underscored throughout the section as various professors defer to Mathabane and as his statements are delivered—unlike the statements of other characters—after a colon (such as in the statement, “Mathabane: ‘If he is censured.’” (48)). Furthermore, Mathabane is associated with religious authority through the first name “Manas”, a Sanskrit word that carries religious significance in Buddhism and Hinduism (in which it describes an aspect of consciousness that separates man from animals and correlates to objective judgment) and in Christianity (in which it invokes King Manasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years and radically altered the legal and religious systems of Judah). This suggestion of religious authority is also strengthened through the ways that Hakim—who seems to choose for himself the role of David’s intermediary—whispers in Mathabane’s ear and speaks for David before a number of decisions are announced. Finally, it ought to be noted that, through the surname “Mathabane” (a surname that is most prevalent in the Eastern cape), the novel ties this character’s experiences to those of other black South Africans while also invoking the work of the South-African writer Mark Mathabane, who became famous for his autobiography *Kaffir Boy* (a harsh depiction of a childhood spent in one of South Africa’s many over-crowded townships).¹¹ The result is a character who possesses exactly the sort of power that was commanded by Desmond Tutu during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigations—a character who draws power not from the codified rules of the law, but rather, from all of the social discourses and communal bonds which

¹¹ The inclusion of all of these references in one character is typical of Coetzee’s writing style, and, as in other instances where this strategy is employed, it serves here to symbolically reinforce the conversations that are literally taking place in this section (Wilm 50).

converge upon his person and grant legitimacy to the decisions he makes.

This same effect is repeated with each of the other professors and institutions referenced in the committee-hearing scene. By carefully structuring the scene to include individuals who represent different discourses that shape the law, the passage expands the scope of the law beyond David's limited understanding of its powers. These discourses include the economic influences that are represented by Dr. Swarts and by the professor from the business school, the sociological and historical discourses that are represented by Dr. Rasool, and the religious discourses that are represented by Dr. Mathabane. Furthermore, though, by including many references to psychological discourses—such as the idea that David is in need of counseling—the passage includes these discourses within its image of the forces that shape the law as well. Finally, by including a student representative from a political-rights group (coalition against discrimination) and many references to the ways that the media and public opinion are placing pressure upon the committee's decisions, the novel draws attention to the way that communal discourse shape the law's influence.

By using these sorts of strategies, the novel opens up space for the reader to begin asking themselves questions about the function and purpose of the law, and this questioning is further encouraged by one of the statements that ends this section, which occurs when David states that Dr. Rasool's question about his sincere feelings is "beyond the scope of the law." This statement prompts the reader to think about the scope of the law and about how large that scope could—or should—be. In the face of so many different representations of power, David's view of the law as simply a code of rules that could be applied to the crime he either has or has not committed seems very empty and irrelevant, and a Deleuzian image of law—as a sphere of influence that flows forth from power relations and receives its legitimacy through social discourse—seems not

only useful, but necessary.¹²

With this in mind, it becomes much easier to interpret one of the final passages in the novel, which takes place when Lucy insists that she wants to marry Petrus and become his third wife. To David, this idea is ludicrous. He replies that “it’s not workable” and, again, that “*legally* it’s not workable,” (199, emphasis added). However, when viewed through the lens of a Deleuzian image of law, it is clear that the idea is very much *legally* workable. It works because it takes into account the communal nature of law and because it recognizes that law functions through social discourse, including the discourses that would legitimize Lucy’s status as one of Petrus’s wives. Thus, David’s invocation that the situation is not legally workable merely serves to cause the reader to recognize the shortsighted nature of David’s image of law, one which is inherently limited and which reduces law to a list of codified rules that can be applied to each situation.

Clearly, the novel suggests, there is no set of rules that could have been applied to each of the complex situations presented in its pages. For if there were such a set of rules—and, in fact, there is, but the novel finds them wanting—then David would be correct in his assessment of both situations. Both when he was a perpetrator and when his daughter was the victim, he would have been correct to appeal to the codified rules of the law (Kelly 167). For, *legally* (as many of

¹² None of this is meant to deny the observation made by Lenta and others that the committee-hearing scene serves to reveal Foucault’s analysis of the way that discipline currently functions in society; it is certainly true that David’s resistance to the various forms of power represented by the committee can be read as a resistance to the normative influence of that power. However, just as the scene is more than a critique of the TRC, it is also more than a critique of contemporary forms of discipline, and in fact, it situates those forms of disciplines within the “multiple discourses that shape the law” (Lenta 5, Kelly 168). In order to read the scene as simply a critique of the TRC or modern forms of normative discipline, it would be necessary to read David as a heroic figure. But as has already been shown, the novel prevents such a reading, and thus the scene becomes much more ambiguous and its references to power or to the TRC come to serve more purpose than simple critique.

his fellow faculty members make clear) David has not committed a *crime* in his relations with Melanie; and *legally* (as David insists to everyone who will listen) Lucy is in the right to report her rape to the police and to seek the punishment of her rapists. And yet it is quite clear—due to a thoughtful consideration of the harm that either has or could be done in each of these situations—that neither of these scenarios are meant to be acceptable to reader. Thus, the idea of law as a codified set of rules that can be applied to any situation is called into question. And, furthermore, as the reader engages in the process of thinking through these two situations, the idea of law as a creative act of jurisprudence is reinforced.

By forcing the reader to think about law in these ways, the novel leads readers to reflect on the question of how law comes into existence. Of course, according to the dogmatic image, the answer to this question takes the form of a number of abstractions—about judges, about legislators, about democratic discourse, about social contracts—none of which correspond to the immanent reality of real life. But *Disgrace* offers another way of thinking about the way that law is brought into existence. In the pages of this novel, the image is created of jurisprudential processes that are carried out by various subjects as they enter into interactions with one another. These interactions, of course, are influenced by the law, but they are not determined by the rules of the law, and through such interactions, the characters in *Disgrace* cause certain legal discourses to become more legitimate while making other legal discourses less legitimate. In this way, the sphere of the law is altered; in a very real way, the law's power and the law's functions are affected by the interactions that take place between subjects within its sphere of influence.

In the next chapter of this thesis, these interactions will be explored further. There, it will be shown that *Disgrace* helps readers to think more about processes of becoming and less about notions of rights. In doing so, the novel moves readers further away from a dogmatic image of

law, one that relies upon transcendental notions that are inadequate for addressing the complex demands of life, and toward an image of law that concerns itself with immanent situations.

Chapter Two

Rights in *Disgrace*: Transcendence & Immanence

One of the more interesting—though often overlooked—aspects of *Disgrace* is the fact David spends much of his time either working on or thinking about the opera that he is writing about the life of Lord Byron. Through this opera, the reader is granted a level of insight into David's mind that they do not experience even when reading David's own internal thoughts. The reason for this is that David's thoughts in the novel are extremely contradictory, prone to change, inconsistent, and—more often than not—delivered in the form of questions that David is asking himself in an attempt to understand the changes he is experiencing. The opera, on the other hand, provides David with a space to create characters and relationships that reflect his understanding of the world, and as that understanding changes over the course of the novel, so too, does the opera.

When David first envisions the opera, he imagines that it will be “a chamber play about love and death,” one that is backed by “a complex, restless music” to which Byron can add his “dark, convoluted lyrics” to reflect on the end of passion and an embrace of death. By the end of the story, though, the opera has transformed entirely. Byron is now completely absent. In fact, he is long dead, and his story is being told by a middle-aged Teresa, who is now “a dumpy little widow installed in the Villa Gamba with her aged father” (177). The complex orchestral music, too, has been replaced, and the only music that remains is that which is produced by Teresa on a small, tinny banjo. Alongside Teresa, there are now two other voices as well: that of a howling dog and that of Byron's daughter, Allegra, whose voice “cuts insistently across the voice of the lovers” (181). The result is an opera that is no longer about abstract ideas and values but, rather, one that is rooted in the real emotions, experiences, and struggles of actual life (Tegla 222-223).

The transformation of David's opera underscores a transformation that is central to both *Disgrace* and to Deleuze's philosophy: the difference between transcendence and immanence. According to Deleuze, the dominant tendency in Western philosophy has been to think in terms of transcendental ideas. This tendency is strongly critiqued in *Difference and Repetition*, where Deleuze engages at length with both Aristotle and Kant. In terms of Aristotle, he argues that Aristotle's conceptual differences misrepresent the way that difference actually works—as “difference as such” rather than as “difference between”—and he argues that this can easily be observed in Aristotle's attempts to isolate, identify, and categorize different *individual* entities (Lefebvre, *Image of Law*, 62). In terms of Kant, Deleuze argues that Kant's belief in a “transcendent category of recognition” leads the German philosopher to ascribe to certain faculties uses beyond their limits. For Deleuze, on the other hand, a given faculty's use is always immanently related to its interactions with other faculties, and difference exists within all assemblages, in different ways and to different degrees (Williams 2570).

In order to better understand Deleuze's beliefs about Western philosophy's tendency to think in abstractions, it is helpful to turn to Paul Patton's essay “Immanence, Transcendence, and the Creation of Rights.” In this essay, Patton explains that a “refusal of transcendence” remains a constant motif in all of Deleuze's works, and he further explains that this applies to all realms—to all “values, concepts of history, or human nature”—and that Deleuze's “thought renounces all forms of appeal to transcendent values...in favour of a radical immanence” (15).¹³ This radical immanence means that—for Deleuze—the focus is always placed on understanding an

¹³ Of course, this is not to dismiss the fact that Deleuze often writes about the transcendent nature of problems, such as when he writes: “The problem is at once transcendent and immanent in relation to its solutions. Transcendent, because it consists in a system of ideal liaisons or differential relations between generic elements. Immanent, because these liaisons or relations are incarnated in the actual relations which do not resemble them and are defined by the field of solutions” (*DR*, 212).

assemblage in terms of its “own unsteady relations” rather than in accordance to any sort of “universal substance” (Williams 4046). This, however, should not suggest that Deleuze is a pragmatist; his philosophy, after all, engages heavily with non-existent possibilities for becoming (*the virtual*). Rather, the point to be made is that Deleuze rejects thinking in terms of transcendental categories and notions in favor of exploring actual interactions and changes—both those that currently exist and those that are possible—between various assemblages. And this holds true for law as well. As Claire Colebrooke explains:

Deleuze and Guattari challenge the transcendence of law and they do this both through an actual history that traces the genesis of law, and then through an analysis of what they refer to as ‘social and desiring machines’, arguing for modes of operation irreducible to the transcendent concept of law. Second, and through a theory of the virtual, Deleuze discloses an entirely other, immanent, vital and more positive conception of jurisprudence. (15-16)

In the previous chapter, great attention was paid to the ways that both Deleuze and *Disgrace* encourage their readers to think of law as jurisprudence; in this chapter, attention will be paid to the way that both Deleuze and *Disgrace* also encourage their readers to think of law in terms of immanent relations. It will do so, first, by exploring how *Disgrace* stages situations that are “irreducible to the transcendent concept of law,” and then, secondly, by considering how the text asks readers to think of its characters as “social and desiring machines.”

Before turning full attention to *Disgrace*, though, it is worth pausing to consider one more set of Deleuze’s thoughts on transcendence, simply because they are so directly related to the discourses that take place within *Disgrace*. These comments can be found in Deleuze’s now-infamous interview with Claire Parnet, in which he was asked to elaborate on his feelings about

human rights. In this interview, Deleuze appears to struggle. He is hesitant and pauses between statements, searching for the right words, no doubt aware that his thoughts could easily be taken out of context. Still, he ends up relating human rights to “impotent thought” (*penée molle*), carried out by imbeciles (*débiles*), and yet he appears frustrated that it is impossible to resist this impotent thought because any attempt to do so leads one to hold “detestable positions” (*‘on a envie de devenir, de tenir des propos odieux’*) (Lefebvre, “Human Rights in Deleuze”, 48).

In other places, this frustration with the impotent thought of human-rights discourses is developed further. Deleuze says that, “If you’re talking about reconstituting transcendence or universals, restoring reflective subject as the bearer of rights, or setting up a communicative intersubjectivity, then [human rights are] not much of a philosophical advance (*invention philosophique*)” (Lefebvre, “Human Rights in Deleuze” 50). He also says that “Human rights say nothing about the immanent modes of existence of people provided with rights” and that they “suppose a universal and abstract subject of rights, identified with no one in particular and irreducible to singular, existent figures” (Lefebvre, “Human Rights in Deleuze” 51). Finally, Deleuze argues that it is “in the name of all this [abstract logic] that thinking’s fettered, that any analysis in terms of movement is blocked” (Lefebvre, *The Image of Law* 55).

At a later point in this chapter, great attention will be devoted to exploring Deleuze’s claim that human rights discourses inhibit new becomings. For now, though, it is sufficient to recognize that Deleuze rejects human rights for the same reasons he rejects other abstract philosophical notions: they turn the focus away from immanence and toward transcendence; they make all situations—and all subjects—interchangeable with one another; they serve as axioms that prevent thought from occurring; and they blind subjects to harm of their own making (Lefebvre, “Human Rights”, 51). These reasons for rejecting transcendence are also at work

within *Disgrace* (and, for that matter, in most of Coetzee's other works as well).¹⁴

In *Disgrace*, the rejection of transcendence can be seen in the differences that exist between David and Lucy. These differences—which are not only present, but are also magnified by the novel's plot and phrasing—offer the reader an opportunity to think at length about the difference between living in a transcendental way and an immanent way, due to the fact that David is almost always thinking in transcendental terms, while Lucy is almost always thinking in terms of immanent relations.

Within the first few pages of *Disgrace*, it is made extremely clear to the reader that David is a character who navigates the world in terms of transcendental values. For example, the reader is told that “intercourse between Soraya and himself must be, he imagines, rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest” (2). Through lines such as these, the reader gains insight into David's mind, and they are made to realize that, for David, events—such as sex—become meaningful only through their relationship to abstract ideals. As Moreover, these thoughts are repeated over and over again throughout the first chapter. In this chapter, the reader is told that David believes the origins of speech lie not in practical needs for human animals to communicate their “thoughts, feelings and intentions” to one another, but rather, “in song” and that “the origins of song [lie] in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul” (3). Similarly, when David experiences sex or difficulties with sex, he navigates these emotions not through consideration of the actual situations in which he is involved, but through reflections on cultural mythologies, such as the story of Emma Bovary or the legends of Origen (4, 8). And when David decides he wants to hire Soraya to have sex with him, the reader is told that he makes this choice because she is listed by

¹⁴ As David Attwell notes to Coetzee during an interview in *Doubling the Point*: “Your narrators play out the failure of the Cartesian self to reach transcendence” (26).

the agency as an “exotic” (6), and it is made clear—through descriptions of her physical body and the ideas that David associates with that body—that it is the *idea* of her that David desires. This point is reinforced when David’s desire for Soraya wears off, after he glimpses her in public, with her two small children, denying him the arousal he was able to gain from the abstract notion. Finally, the chapter underscores this idea even further, by offering an example of David’s sexual encounters with another human—a secretary from his office—who exhibits clear signs of sexual arousal and bodily response, but whose “bucking and clawing” only serves to repel David (9). Through all of these examples, the same point is made: when David’s transcendental notions are brought into contact with real-world, concrete realities, he always escapes back into the realm of ideas.

Now, if this attachment to romantic ideals was simply a part of David’s personality—and if no harm resulted from this attachment—then it would not be worth elaborating much on this aspect of his character. However, this is not the case. As the text reveals, David’s tendency to retreat into the world of ideas causes great harm to others, and moreover, it blinds him to the ways that his actions are responsible for that harm. As has been previously noted, the text uses Lucy’s rape to cause the reader to rethink their assessment of the events that took place between David and Melanie and to recognize that Melanie suffered significant harm through her interactions with David. Another section in which this point is stressed takes place near the end of the novel, when David attends a play in which Melanie is performing. As Jack Dudley points out, this scene is established in a way that mimics the modernist usage of an epiphanic moment, utilizing extremely stylized prose to describe a commonplace occurrence, and culminating in a moment when David asks himself—as he watches Melanie perform—“If he is being led, then what god is doing the leading?” (188; Dudley 119). Immediately after this question occurs to

him, though—and just as he seems to be on the verge of finding an answer—a spitball hits him in the back of the head.

This humorous refusal to grant epiphanic insight not only underscores the novel's insistence on immanence, but it also reveals the degree to which David's thoughts have consistently misled not only himself, but also the reader. Because the scene features such high levels of reflexivity and expectation, the reader who is exposed to it for the first time, really does feel that something significant is about to happen. After all, as David is sitting in his seat, a number of things happen: he asks for a sign to tell him what to do; he experiences a vision—a “stream of images” that pours down around him—of all the women he has known on two continents; he reaches out toward Melanie, with his soul, across twenty rows of empty seats, wondering if she can “smell his thoughts”; and he thinks to himself about the ways that both he and Melanie have been changed for the better by their interactions with one another (186).

And then a spit ball hits him in the head and an answer is provided: Melanie's interactions with David did not enrich her at all. In fact, as Melanie's boyfriend tells David once they are both outside together, Melanie would spit in his eye if she saw him at that moment (189). The clash between this immanent awareness—that Melanie wants nothing to do with him at all—and the transcendental ideas David had been fostering a moment before—that she would want to smell his thoughts from across the theatre—is so shocking to David that he immediately leaves the theatre, drives into town, and pays a girl younger than Melanie to have sex with him. Thus, the novel moves the reader in two very important directions via this one scene: first, because of the way it mocks David's transcendental ideals, it moves the reader away from thinking in terms of ideas and towards thinking in terms of concrete realities; and second, because of the way it reveals Melanie's disgust for David in clear and stark terms, it forces the

reader to recognize the fact that David's transcendental thoughts have prevented him—and, by extension, the reader—from seeing the harm that was done to Melanie through his interactions with her. Because David's transcendental notion of justice is based on a belief in individual rights that either are or are not violated, he concludes that if a right has not been violated (i.e. if what happened between two people was “not rape, not quite”), then an injustice has not occurred (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 21). But this is exactly the sort of thinking that Deleuze criticizes when he criticizes human-rights discourses: they blind subjects to harm of their own making; they cause subjects to overlook the immanent problems that arise from a given situation; and they cause violation to be viewed as either something that has occurred or as something that has not occurred, rather than as a spectrum in which varying degrees of harm may take place without any specific rules necessarily being violated.

Through its depiction of David's character, *Disgrace* repeatedly draws attention to the ways that transcendental notions prevent subjects from understanding the specific nature of a situation in which they are involved. Moreover, it also encourages the reader to think about the ways that such notions limit the degree to which subjects can change and enter into new becomings. However, the novel's treatment of these ideas is not limited merely to its depiction of David's worldview. In just as much color, the novel presents Lucy and her worldview, and it is through the juxtaposition of these two characters that *Disgrace* performs its real exploration of the differences between a transcendental understanding of the world and an immanent one.

In Lucy, the reader experiences a character who speaks and acts and navigates her life in ways that are completely opposed to the ways in which David does the same, and this difference is made very clear to the reader as soon as they are introduced to her as a character. In the first scene in which she is included, Lucy is portrayed as being intimately connected with the earth.

She is constantly barefoot; she is in touch with the land on which she lives; and she displays considerable knowledge of the plants she grows and of the natural cycles that take place throughout her farm. The result of these depictions is to cause the reader to feel a sharp distinction between the way that Lucy lives and the way that David lives; the former is constantly connected to concrete reality, while the latter is constantly absorbed in the world of ideas. And this distinction only becomes more pronounced in the chapters that follow.

In chapter nine, for instance, David and Lucy engage in an extensive debate about South African history, self-improvement, animal consciousness, the purpose of life, and the existence of souls. At one point during this debate, David compares animal-welfare people (such as Bev and Bill Shaw) to “Christians of a certain kind,” to which Lucy responds by stating that she can sense David’s expectations that she ought to be doing something “better” with her life than existing on the farm. She says that he doesn’t “approve of friends like Bev and Bill Shaw because they are not going to lead me to a higher life,” and when David denies this fact, Lucy insists that it is true, saying: “They are not going to lead me to a higher life, and the reason is, there is no higher life” (72). And it is to *this* idea that David firmly objects. Up until this point, he had been denying Lucy’s claims about his internal thoughts; he had been denying that he expects her to do great things with her life or that he doesn’t like her friends (both of which, of course, are false denials, and because the reader has been privy to David’s thoughts, they realize that these denials are completely false; David *does* expect his daughter to do better things with her life, and he *does* reject her friends in his own mind). He is unable, however, to deny that he believes in a “higher life,” one that includes a purpose beyond the earthly experiences of human life and one that is separate from the sorts of lives that nonhuman animals lead. Thus, at this early point in the novel, Lucy is associated with immanent, concrete existence, while David is

associated with transcendental, abstract existence.

This association is then further underscored at other places in the novel. When David and Lucy are taking a walk together, for instance, David asks Lucy if “this”—the garden and the house and the farm on the Eastern Cape—is what she wants in life, to which Lucy simply responds: “It will do” (67). This focus on “what will do” in life strikes the reader as significantly different from David’s constant obsession with the most ideal way to live life and with his focus on what others will decide about the life he has lived. Similarly, when David insists, after the rape, that Lucy go somewhere else—that she allow him to pay for her to move to Holland or to Cape Town—Lucy responds that she is going to continue to live on the farm. Of course, David is unable to understand this response, and he insists that continuing to live on the farm is “not safe” and “not a good idea,” to which Lucy responds: “I’m not going back for the sake of an idea. I’m just going back” (102). This distinction between acting “for the sake of an idea” or of acting in some other—though often undefined—way is raised frequently throughout the novel, making it difficult for the reader to ignore. For example, a few pages later, when David asks Lucy if she is attempting to correct the wrongs of history by suffering in the present, Lucy replies: “No. You keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don’t act in terms of abstractions” (109-10). Because this statement that Lucy doesn’t “act in terms of abstractions” ends the conversation, the reader is left to wonder about the terms by which Lucy does act. Furthermore, because Lucy’s actions are often perplexing to the reader and because the reasons she takes these actions is never explicitly explained—it is only presented as not “for the sake of an idea”—the question about how she determines the best way to act is continually thrust upon the reader, prompting them to think about the distinction between acting in accordance with transcendental ideals and some other way of acting.

This question becomes difficult for the reader to ignore shortly after Lucy is raped, when she insists to David that, as far as she is concerned, what happened to her was “a purely private matter,” and when she says that “in another time, in another place, it might be held to be a public matter” but that “in this place, at this time, it is not” (108). Lucy is aware that, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, any attempts she might take to seek punishment for her rapists would result in the reinforcement of racist discourses about the rape of white women by black men. As Carine Mardorossian writes:

If she presses charges, the gendered dimension of the rape will immediately be recuperated by a racially motivated reading and reify social hierarchies that have historically been produced precisely through the link between rape and the construction of race. As historians have shown, the way rape has been brought to the public’s attention since the nineteenth century has primarily been through racism.
(75)

As Lucy’s actions in this section of the novel reveal, she is aware of the way that racist discourses have converged upon the notion of rape, making it impossible for her story to ever be separated from the racism that marks her society. And the novel, too, seems interested in exploring this point, as is revealed by its juxtaposition of the two acts of sexual violation against one another. By asking readers to think about the similarities and differences between the two situations—and by asking readers to recognize their own willingness to see David’s interactions with Melanie as “not rape, not quite”—the novel invites reconsideration of the discursive influence that is occupied by the concept of rape. More specifically, it asks the reader to recognize the fact that the term is quickly assigned to any sexual violation of white women that involves black men, but that it is far more rarely assigned to situations that involve white men as

the perpetrators of the violation (Mardorossian 74) In this way, *Disgrace* once again presses its readers to recognize the limitations of forms of thought that only seek to assign guilt or innocence based on the criteria thought to be necessary in order for a certain crime to have occurred.

It is worth noting here that many critics have condemned *Disgrace* for the way in which it seems to suggest that Lucy's choice to remain silent is born out of white-guilt and a desire to atone for the sins of South Africa's racist past (Mardorossian 72-73). However, it must be recognized that this interpretation of Lucy's motivations is put forth by David, not by Lucy. Lucy is not, as David puts it, "'expiat[ing] the crimes of the past by suffering in the present'" (112). Rather, she is refusing to participate in the racist discourses that surround rape. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, Lucy's response to the rape allows her to refuse "to be raped" (qtd. in Mardorossian 77). Lucy refuses to legitimize the notion of rape because she recognizes that racist discourses have converged upon the legal category "rape," shaping it into a concept that can do nothing to alleviate the pain she is experiencing but that can cause a great deal of pain in the lives of others. As Mardorossian writes:

Seen in this light, Lucy's refusal to seek legal reparation is not an extension of her 'refusal to resist' so much as of her resistance against a legal machinery that poses as neutral arbiter between incriminated and isolated individuals in a context of collective violence it was historically instrumental in creating. (76-77)

In refusing to speak about her violation, Lucy is not simply refusing justice; she is refusing a certain type of justice, one which has been made to seem legitimate through a long history of discourse and which has already caused a great deal of suffering. For Lucy, justice must be sought out within a given situation, and it must take into account the past, the present, and the

future, as well as all of the variables that make a particular situation unique from all others. For Lucy, the idea of a certain rule or right being violated means nothing at all because the rules and rights cannot be made to fit the concrete situation with which she is dealing.

Once again, this aspect of the text takes on greater meaning when read in the light of Deleuze's philosophy of law, which insists on elevating discourses that trace and articulate actual, immanent realities and on downplaying discourses that rely on transcendental notions, such as human rights. In this light, it is clear why David's insistence on rights throughout the novel seems so problematic and why Lucy's insistence on understanding the actual situation—and on asking questions about how harm might be mitigated, moving forward from a specific situation—proves to be extremely productive. Furthermore, Deleuze's philosophy about rights helps to make intelligible other sections of the novel that explore the idea of rights in ways that are initially confusing for the reader. For example, when David chooses to defend himself regarding his actions with Melanie, one of the phrases he uses is the phrase "rights of desire," and when the reader is first exposed to this phrase, it is likely to strike them as inherently problematic, even if they can't explain why. I would like to suggest, though, that Deleuze's thoughts on both rights and desire provide a fruitful lens for understanding not only this phrase, but also many other sections of the novel that are thematically related to it.

In Deleuze's writings, the term *desire* means far more than it does in ordinary parlance. For Deleuze, desire does not arise from lack (in the Freudian/Lacanian sense). Rather, desire simply happens. It is its own affect (one which arises from certain connections that take place amongst assemblages), and it is an affect that produces other affects within other assemblages. Remember that, for Deleuze, there is no such thing as a desiring *individual*; rather, there are only desiring *assemblages*, which form from the overlap of certain intensities and which are always in

the process of changing. For example, the orchid can rightly be thought of as an assemblage. The wasp can also be thought of as an assemblage. More importantly, though, the orchid-wasp can *also* be thought of as an assemblage, and it is no less an assemblage than either the orchid or the wasp (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 12). Furthermore, the desire that brought into existence the orchid-wasp is an essential aspect of the orchid-wasp assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 215).

In this same way, whenever desire occurs within an assemblage—such as the assemblage that is David Lurie—it is always in relation to certain connections and certain new becomings that are taking place. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “Desire is never separable from complex assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 215). Moreover, desire is far more than an animalistic urge; it is “never an undifferentiated instinctual energy” but rather is the result of “a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 215). Once again, it is helpful here to think of the orchid-wasp assemblage. Various aspects of this assemblage (the assemblage that is the orchid, the assemblage that is the wasp, the assemblage that is the pollen, the assemblage that is one organ of the wasp’s body, and so on) are each engaging with desire. As the map of the orchid-wasp continually changes, so too does the orchid; its flowers come to resemble the female genitalia of the female wasp, while the wasp’s bodily responses continue to change in relation to the flowers (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 12).

Given this profoundly relational understanding of desire, it is fascinating to turn to David Lurie’s use of the word in *Disgrace*. When he uses the term *the rights of desire*, Lurie seems to suggest that he was simply responding—in accord with his Romantic heroes—to his bodily passions. He was not thinking; he was simply desiring. And, on its face, this defense almost

makes sense to the reader. After all, David is essentially arguing that he was acting in accordance with his bodily needs and that he cannot be faulted for doing so. However, by tying the term *right* to David's idea of *desire*, the text is able to construct a phrase—*rights of desire*—that strikes the reader as inherently wrong (even upon their first exposure to it), though it is difficult to explain precisely *why* the term is wrong. I would like to suggest, however, that the answer to this question is revealed quite plainly by Deleuze's philosophy.

Remember that, for Deleuze, rights are inherently minimalistic and universally applicable to all subjects. They are only ascribed to those things that could be considered (in a transcendental sense) to belong to everyone, and thus, they are never capable of producing new becomings or new connections. Even worse—from a Deleuzian standpoint— notions of rights prevent such connections from occurring because they reinforce false perceptions of the existence of autonomous individuals whose rights could be violated. (Of course, Deleuze's point here is not at all to say that harm cannot be done via actions that are conventionally regarded as "rights-violating" but, rather, to insist that "rights-violating" is the wrong way to think of the harm that was done.) When this understanding of rights is placed alongside Deleuze's understanding of desire—as a force that can only be understood in relation to connection and transformation—then it is clear that the term "rights of desire" is an oxymoron; it creates a paradox, and the ironic nature of this paradox draws attention to the limitations of rights-based discourses.

There are a number of reasons why this phrase—"rights of desire"—is able to stick with the reader and to capture so succinctly many of the tensions that are present within the text. The first reason is simply because the idea of rights plays such a prominent role in *Disgrace*. Over and over again throughout the novel, concepts of rights are invoked. However, whenever they are

invoked, something within the text—either the nature of the specific right, or its explicit denunciation, or the tone of the language used to discuss it, or David’s belief that it is illegitimate—makes it difficult for the reader to conclude that the right is being presented in an entirely sincere way.¹⁵ Usually, the reader senses that the right being invoked is being called into question in some way. And because this effect is created so often throughout the text, the reader is always aware that the text is conducting some sort of exploration of the limits of rights-based logic.

Alongside this awareness, though, the reader is also continually aware that the novel is grappling with issues of desire. Of course, the reader is unlikely to think of it in those terms, but they are nonetheless likely to perceive that the novel is investigating the ways in which desire—as a force that creates connections, fosters new becomings, resists stasis—is at work within the text. After all, throughout much of the early part of the text David is largely defined by his resistance to this type of desire. In the first few chapters of *Disgrace*, David is not able to enter into connections with anyone. He is thoroughly himself, and he is completely resistant to the idea of change. He insists on thinking in terms of what people *are* rather than in terms of what they are becoming. He thinks of what a man like him *is*; what a Lucy *is*; what a Bev *is*; what his own temperament *is*. In fact, this sense of a permanent temperament is so important to David, that the term occurs within his internal monologues nine times in the first three pages of the text, and

¹⁵ The following is just a partial list of some of the points in the novel when rights are invoked problematically: when David suggests that perhaps the young have a right to be protected from seeing their elders in the throes of passion (42); when David is told that he has a right to challenge the makeup of the committee (45); when David insists that he has the right to make a plea regarding his guilt or innocence (49); when the novel discusses Petrus’ right to come and go as he pleases (114); when David asks Pollux by what right he is on Lucy’s land (128); when Lucy claims she has a right not to need to justify herself (129); and when Lucy denounces her rights at the end of the text (200); by using the language of rights in each of these unrelated situations, the novel sets up a refrain that encourages the reader to think more deeply about the effects and limitations of rights-based discourses.

always the underlying idea is that one's temperament is impervious to change.

Thus, even though David invokes the idea of pleasure as a defense for his actions, there is a clear lack of desire—in the Deleuzian sense—in his life. Remember that, for Deleuze, to reduce desire to either animalistic urges or Freudian/Lacanian lack is to miss the point. Desire is not about simply wanting something that one does not yet have, nor is it the type of desire that David seems to invoke when he talks about “rights of desire,” namely a sexual need that builds up in the body and is then eradicated momentarily through sex. For Deleuze, following Spinoza, desire is always productive and always defined by relationship. As Brent Adkins explains,

Spinoza's desire does not arise out of a lack. Rather, desire should be thought of as entering into combinations with other modes such that our ability to affect and be affected is increased rather than diminished. Understood in this way, Spinoza's ethical project consists in showing that entering into some combinations increases one's ability (virtue, power, potentia), and that entering into other combinations decreases one's ability. (1898)

In this light, it is clear that, despite David's image of himself as a person who is full of passionate desire, he is actually a character who has become quite prevented from experiencing desire in the sense that Deleuze and Spinoza discuss. He is a character whose life offers very few opportunities for anything new to take place. He believes himself incapable of change and he intentionally prevents himself from entering into any new connections with anyone. Once again, though, it is important to notice that *Disgrace* does not simply seem to suggest that the problem for David is a problem of personal ethics. Rather, by continually portraying David as a character who thinks in terms of individualistic rights, the novel draws attention to the ways that an image of law constructs the subjectivities of those who adhere to that image. When considering David's

life—and especially when considering his resistance to change and connection—it makes perfect sense that he would embrace an image of law that places great emphasis on the role of individualistic rights. However, it is also possible to say the opposite: to say that the image of law that is dominant in David’s society has constructed David so that he is incapable of experiencing change and connection. In fact, this is not only possible, but it is also suggested by the overall arc of the story, and in order to understand why this is so, it is necessary to once again consider Lucy, the character in *Disgrace* who seems to serve as foil to many of David’s experiences regarding both rights and desire.

As has already been demonstrated, the novel depicts Lucy as a character who focuses on immanent reality and not on transcendental ideas. It also presents her as a person who is constantly experiencing desire in the way that Deleuze uses the term, and the two depictions are not unrelated. Just as David is shown to be shaped by the image of law that dominates his society—one that is extremely dependent on rights-based logic—Lucy is shown to be shaped by her *resistance* to that image. In fact, one of the most frequently cited lines of the entire novel is one in which Lucy explicitly denounces her own rights, saying that what she wants is to start over again, with nothing, “no cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity” (200). This line tells the reader explicitly that one of the major differences between David and Lucy is their response to notions of rights, thus tying the ethical explorations that take place within the text to notions of law. Furthermore, by drawing attention to Lucy’s disavowal of rights at this point in the text—just after she has told David that she wants to marry Petrus—*Disgrace* creates a connection between Lucy’s ability to enter into new connections and the disavowal of her rights. In order to understand why this is so significant, though, it is necessary to consider the passage that precedes this point in closer detail.

Merely a moment before Lucy disavows her rights, an exchange takes place between Petrus and David in which Petrus tells David that he intends to marry Lucy, despite the fact that he already has two wives. In response to this suggestion, David becomes enraged, but he nevertheless does tell Lucy about Petrus's offer, and much to his surprise, she is responsive to the idea. In fact, as she discusses the different possibilities that it presents—which include her ability to keep the house and the kennels and to raise her unborn child as part of Petrus's household—her tone suggests some hope again about the future, and this hope is very significant because hope has been missing from Lucy's portrayal since the rape took place. Prior to the rape, Lucy is depicted as being constantly busy and relatively happy. She takes care of her dogs, grows flowers, interacts warmly with local clients at the farmer's market, and often makes jokes and teases David lightheartedly. After the rape, however, all of this ends. Lucy is no longer presented as being lighthearted, and she now performs the activities that once brought her joy in a mechanical and sad way. As she tells David in a letter, "I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life" (157).

This idea of being a dead person is a regular motif throughout *Disgrace*, and it is worth considering the ways that this motif comes to bear on the work the text is doing with ideas about rights, desire, connections, and law. Over ten different times, the text refers to Melanie, Lucy, or David as being dead. It also, however, refers to Teresa—the main character in David's revised opera—as a character who will "*not* be dead" (141, emphasis added). And it constantly uses the language of death to describe the dogs that play such a major thematic role throughout the text. Certainly, all of these invocations of death (and especially the depictions of living characters who are described as being dead) are meaningful within the story, but it is not entirely clear how the reader ought to interpret these descriptions. I would like to suggest, however, that an answer can

be found when thinking about these descriptions in the light of Deleuze's ideas about desire and potential.

Because Deleuze values the ability to enter into new connections or to participate in new becomings, he is especially critical of forces that would prevent such connections from taking place or that would limit a subject's potential. In *Disgrace*, there a number of these forces at work, but one of the dominant ones is the image of law that pervades the background of the text and that is shown to play a major role in constituting subjects such as David. By presenting David as a character who is thoroughly constituted by notions of individual rights and transcendental values—and by also presenting him as a character who is incapable of experiencing change or connection—the novel calls into question the image of law that relies so heavily upon such ideas. At the same time, though, the novel presents Lucy, a character who is defined by her resistance to the transcendental values and rights-based logic that underlie David's worldview. For Lucy, there is never an option to turn to the law because the law—as it exists in her society—can do nothing to fix the immanent problems of the situation in which she is living. Yes, as David points out, she could turn to the police and seek punishment for Pollux, but this does not seem like a viable option to Lucy, though the reasons *why* it is not a viable option are not made at all clear to the reader. In fact, the text actually draws attention to the question of why Lucy is making the choices she makes, thus encouraging the reader to search for an answer for themselves. By elevating the question in this way, the text makes it very likely that the reader will begin to think about the differences between David's idea of law and Lucy's idea of law, two distinct perspectives that capture the contrast between an image of law that emphasizes notions of rights and an image of law that emphasizes the need to increase a subject's potential.

It is important to remember that all of these explorations of the limits of rights-based discourses are unfolding within the context of a society that has just recently separated itself from the legal institution of apartheid, which functioned by denying rights to the vast majority of the people living within South Africa. Because the novel frequently reminds the reader that it is taking place just after this transition, Lucy's renunciation of rights calls into question the belief that granting rights to people who were previously denied those rights will do anything to address the immanent problems they are facing. Because rights-based logic doesn't take into account the unequal distributions of power that shape interactions amongst subjects, it can do nothing to create the type of society that Lucy desires. Moreover—and as the novel continually makes clear—nothing about the problems Lucy is facing would be improved by seeking punishment for Pollux. Even if Pollux were punished, nothing would change for Lucy; she would still be stuck in the state of death-in-life in which she found herself after the rape, and by seeking punishment for Pollux, Lucy would actually be preventing herself from entering into any of the new connections that she ultimately desires. Once again, it is important to note that the text draws great attention to the fact that the dogmatic image of law—which David invokes when talking to Lucy about how her marriage is not *legally* workable—would prevent Lucy from entering into the connections that lead her to new becomings. This is significant because it shows how the text is interested in revealing the limitations of an image of law that seeks to regulate how individuals may *not* act toward one another—as chiefly enshrined in discourses about individual rights—rather than in removing the barriers that prevent subjects from entering into new becomings.

In the scene in which David and Lucy discuss her marriage to Petrus, the dogmatic image of law is called into question through a very nuanced set of transitions and juxtapositions. First, it

is made clear that the notion of marrying Petrus causes Lucy to feel some level of hope about her future. Then, it is made clear that the law—as it currently exists—would prevent such a marriage from occurring. But Lucy dismisses this notion and exhibits a resolve to act in accordance with a different image of law, one that derives its legitimacy from the cultural norms of the Eastern Cape. And, finally, Lucy’s desire to act in accordance with this image is tied to a renunciation of her rights. Thus, it is suggested that in order for new connections and becomings to take place, many aspects of the dogmatic image of law—especially its emphasis on individual rights—must be called into question and, moreover, that ideas which allow for greater connections and increases in potential must be granted greater legitimacy.

For those familiar with Coetzee’s life and work, none of this will come as a surprise. After all, in his 1987 Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech, Coetzee made it very clear that he has strong feelings about forms of law that prevent connections from taking place between subjects. As he says,

In the early 1950s, the heady years when the great city of apartheid was still being built, a law was passed making sexual relations between masters and slaves a crime. This was the most pointed of a long string of laws regulating all phases of social life, whose intent was to block forms of horizontal intercourse between white and black.

The only sanctioned intercourse was henceforth to be vertical; that is, it was to consist in giving and receiving orders. (Coetzee, *Doubling*, 96-97)

For Coetzee, the ways in which law can prevent connections from taking place between different subjects in a “horizontal” (i.e. equal) manner is deeply disturbing. And this is also true for Deleuze. However, both authors seem concerned not only with how law *can* prevent connections from taking place amongst subjects, but also with how—in accordance with the dogmatic

image—it is often assumed to primarily function by doing so.

As *Disgrace* reveals through its depiction of David Lurie’s thoughts regarding law, it is quite common to think of the law, first and foremost, as a system that protects individual rights by limiting the ways in which subjects may act toward one another. Because of this, law is often regarded as a force that *prevents* change from taking place rather than as a force that causes change to occur. There is, however, no reason that this ought to be the case, especially because, in many ways, it isn’t even true. As Foucault first pointed out, law—as a manifestation of power—is an inherently productive force. It operates by producing, not by limiting.¹⁶ The dogmatic image of law, however, blinds most subjects to this fact. While it is certainly true that many aspects of law do, in fact, limit the degree to which subjects may interact with one another, this is not an inherent component of law; instead, it is merely the product of certain power relations that have produced such limitations, to the benefit of certain subjects and to the detriment of others.¹⁷

As Lucy’s actions at the end of *Disgrace* make clear, though, law is also capable of increasing opportunities for new becomings and of decreasing impediments to flows or

¹⁶ As Foucault said in an interview: “If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (Foucault, *Power*, 120). Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish*, he writes: “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces: it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (194).

¹⁷ As a manifestation of power, Foucault would point out that law produces and creates far more often than it limits and constrains; however, the image of law as a force that primarily constrains is a production of the discursive practices that have shaped the image of law in its current form. These discourses blind subjects to the productive potential of the law and they help to maintain current unequal distributions of law by reinforcing a false image of its functions.

movements. It is always something that emerges from a complex set of interactions amongst and between different assemblages. The idea that law is inherently limiting serves to reinforce current distributions of power by preventing the subjects who engage with law from recognizing its inherently productive nature.

In this chapter, it has been shown that *Disgrace* encourages its readers to think of law as a productive force by calling into question aspects of the dogmatic image of law that rely upon transcendental values and rights-based discourses. In the next chapter, it will be shown that the novel carries its critique of rights forward by calling into question the idea of the subject as an individual, one who is believed to be endowed with those rights and who is innately separate from other, equally endowed individuals.

Chapter Three

Animals in *Disgrace*: Individuals & Assemblages

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of *Disgrace* is the way in which the novel depicts and problematizes human and nonhuman animal relationships. One of the reasons that this aspect of the novel is so effective at forcing the reader to think is because the text simultaneously allows the plight of non-human animals to dominate its pages while also refusing to offer any clear or straightforward solutions to the pain and suffering that mark their lives. For example, consider the scene in which David reflects on his concern for the sheep that Petrus will slaughter for his party:

He has thought of buying the sheep from Petrus. But what will that accomplish? Petrus will only use the money to buy new slaughter-animals, and pocket the difference. And what will he do with the sheep anyway, once he has bought them out of slavery? Set them free on the public road? Pen them up in the dog-cages and feed them hay? A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him.

(122)

In this scene, David reflects on the bond that is coming to exist between himself and these other animals. When read slowly, it is clear that the passage offers the reader an opportunity to think about a number of questions that do not have any clear answers. The passage indicates that there is a moral problem surrounding the sheep, and yet it also makes clear that there isn't any sort of ethical or pragmatic solution available to David that would address the ethical dilemma. The

sheep are going to die, and there isn't any alternative possible in David's world that could contest that reality. At the same time, though, the novel does not seem to be presenting this passage simply to reflect on the unaddressable nature of the problem. If that were the case, the text could simply have stated the fact that David cannot change anything about the lot of the sheep. Instead, though, *Disgrace* offers insight into the problem by posing a series of rhetorical questions, thus making it more difficult for the reader to accept the foregone conclusion that there is nothing that can be done for the sheep and inviting them to think beyond the limits of David's thinking as they consider each of the questions for themselves in turn: what *will* it accomplish to buy the sheep? *could* he release them? *could* he put them in kennels and feed them hay? And if the answer to each of these questions is *no*, then what are the reasons for these inevitable blockages of thought?

One possible answer that is provided by the novel—and that is directly relevant to the text's engagement with images of law—is that David's subjectivity has been constructed in such a way that he is not able to think beyond the limitations imposed by the system of law that governs his society. In order to fully appreciate the way that this suggestion emerges throughout the text, though, it is helpful first to once again consider some of Deleuze's thoughts on law, since they are able to bring to the surface and connect many of the disparate and subtle images that are at work within in the novel. Rather than presenting Deleuze's ideas directly, though—as has often been done throughout this thesis—it is necessary here to present Deleuze's thoughts through the words of posthumanist scholar Rosi Braidotti. One of the reasons that such a rendering of Deleuze's ideas is especially fruitful at this point is because Braidotti has spent the past three decades applying Deleuze's philosophy to the changes that have taken place within the twenty-first-century world, specifically concerning the evolving understanding of human and

nonhuman animal relations.

In an essay titled “Locating Deleuze’s Eco-Philosophy,” Braidotti writes that “we are witnessing today a proliferation of discourses that take life as a subject and not as the object of social and discursive practices” (96). What this means—as she explains throughout the first several pages of the essay—is that the dogmatic image of the subject is being replaced with a new image of the subject, causing a reconsideration of “the Law, legal discourse and critical jurisprudence” (96). In her other works, Braidotti lays out in painstaking detail the traits that define the dogmatic image of the subject, and these traits are important to consider when analyzing *Disgrace* because the novel draws heavily upon them in its depiction of David Lurie. As Braidotti writes in *The Posthuman*, the image of the subject that is presented in humanist thought is “equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour,” as well as individuality, autonomy, and self-determination (loc. 310; 449). Furthermore, she writes that, within the modern manifestation of law, such a subject is not only assumed to exist but is, in fact, *made to exist*, due to the ways that the law forms subjects in accordance with its image (Braidotti, Hanafin, & Colebrooke, 1).

In *Disgrace*, the connection between Lurie’s image of himself as an individual, rational, self-determined agent and the law is well established. As has already been shown, David repeatedly invokes the idea that he—as an autonomous individual—is equal to other individuals with whom he interacts and that such individuals have recourse to a form of law that will “play it by the book” in delivering justice (39). Of course, this belief in the law’s impartiality is completely undermined by the fact that David often invokes the rules of the law when encountering situations where the individuals involved possess completely unequal degrees of power, thus drawing the reader’s attention to the illegitimacy of such notions. More importantly,

though, because David's notion of himself as an autonomous, rational individual is linked to his way of thinking about law, the novel suggests that there is a connection between the two, and this connection becomes especially important as David's character changes throughout the novel, primarily because those changes reflect Braidotti's—and Deleuze's—idea of the new subject that is emerging in legal discourse today.

In “Locating Deleuze's Eco-Philosophy,” Braidotti writes about the ways that the posthuman turn has caused life itself to become considered as a subject. The reasons for this transition in thought are numerous, but they primarily have to do with all of the discourses that have dislodged “man” from the privileged center of philosophical thought. As humans have increasingly come to understand themselves as part of a nature-culture continuum, the ideas that underscored their distinction from other animals—and that have been used to define their subjectivity against that of other forms of life—have become increasingly difficult to maintain. As Braidotti writes:

The displacement of anthropocentrism is exposed by Deleuze and Guattari in the theory of becoming minoritarian/becoming-animal. This process of molecularisation entails the redefinition of one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of human sensorial and perceptual co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we call the self. This ‘self’ is in fact a moveable assemblage within a common life-space which the subject never masters nor possesses, but merely inhabits, crosses, always in a community, a pack, a group, or a cluster. (106)

By drawing on Deleuze's insights about the rhizomatic nature of reality, Braidotti is able to

articulate the ways that subjects are increasingly coming to view themselves as assemblages, shaped by a wide variety of forces that converge upon their being, most of which they have little power to control, and all of which are connected to a much larger assemblage that is also undergoing a continual process of change. This image of the subject, however, is not an abstract, idealized notion about the oneness of all life; rather, it is an image that emerges from the awareness—acknowledged consciously or not—that there are not any lines separating humans from the immanent force of life that is unfolding throughout the world (98). Due to the scientific discourses with which we live, we are all currently being forced to recognize that our ideas about our autonomy, the uniqueness of our intelligence, and our separation from other animals have little merit, and we are thus increasingly led to consider the degree to which our lives are inextricably entangled with those of countless others.

Of course, in *Disgrace* this same shift in understanding is dramatically portrayed through the transformational process that David undergoes throughout the story. One of the most significant impacts the novel has upon the reader is delivered via its depictions of David's interactions with the bodies of dogs who are euthanized at Bev's clinic. Because these depictions are delivered with such visceral language, it is almost impossible for a reader not to be affected by them. It *is* possible, however, for a reader to encounter these sections—and to take note of the changes taking place within David—without appreciating many of the nuanced ways that the novel is engaging with posthumanist notions of the subject. In fact, the reason that the novel's treatment of non-human animals—as well as its conclusion—feels difficult to apprehend is precisely because the text is engaging with these animals' lives in a way that prevents easy appeal to moral sentiments or simplistic solutions. In *Disgrace*, there is a complex reconsideration taking place of the way that subjects understand both themselves and others, and

in order to appreciate the depth of this reconsideration, it is necessary to slowly trace the novel's portrayal of non-human animals, especially dogs.

Although there are no dogs mentioned during the first six chapters of *Disgrace*, their presence explodes onto the scene once David arrives in the Eastern Cape, and from this point on, scarcely two or three pages will pass without dogs being mentioned in some way. By causing dogs to permeate the background of the novel so thoroughly, *Disgrace* not only emphasizes the degree to which its characters' lives are inseparable from these animals', but it also primes the reader to pay attention when dogs—and their welfare—become central to the thematic movement of the text as a whole. One of the first places in which this occurs is just after David and Lucy visit Bill and Bev Shaw at their home, which rather repulses David. He notices the “rubbishy furniture,” the “clutter of ornaments (porcelain shepherdesses, cowbells, an ostrich-feather flywhisk), the yammer of a radio, the cheeping of birds in cages,” and the “cats everywhere underfoot” (70). He also glances into the back yard and sees only “an apple tree dropping wormridden fruit, rampant weeds, an area fenced in with galvanized-iron sheets, wooden pallets, old tyres, where chickens scratch around and what looks uncommonly like a duiker snoozes in a corner” (71). Because the implications of David's observations are all negative, it comes as no surprise to the reader that he responds judgmentally when Lucy asks him what he thinks of her friends.

“I'm sorry, my child,” he says. “I just find it hard to whip up an interest in the subject. It's admirable, what you do, what she does, but to me animal-welfare people are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat” (71). In the previous chapter of this thesis, this exchange was analyzed in order to show how it reflects Lucy's commitment to

immanence and David's attachment to transcendent ideas, such as the idea that humans have souls and animals do not. Now, though, it is important to consider the discussion in terms of the way that it shows how unaffected David is—at this point in the story—by the suffering of other animals and to also notice how deeply the same suffering affects Lucy.

When David implies that the work of helping the nation's suffering animals is a "losing battle" and that it probably makes both Lucy and Bev despondent to see the hopelessness of the situation, Lucy replies that it doesn't matter to her if the cause seems hopeless because the animals that Bev helps are "greatly relieved" (71). She also shows that she cannot help but to imagine herself experiencing their pain when she says "I don't want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us" (72). When David responds to this suggestion, he does so in a dismissive way, suggesting that because "we are of a different order of creation from the animals," any kindness we show to them ought to be done out of "simple generosity, not because we feel guilty or fear retribution," and it is through this response that the novel sets up one of its longest and most drawn-out encounters: the clash between living with an awareness of one's place within the assemblage of life and the view that one exists outside that assemblage, as an autonomous and self-regulating subject.

It is worth noting that the specific terms David uses to denounce Lucy's way of thinking about herself in relation to nonhuman animals are "guilt" and "fear [of] retribution." These words carry great significance for a number of reasons. First, they are significant because they rely upon negative connotations to dismiss and rationalize Lucy's efforts to think through her connections to other animals. When Lucy suggested that she would not like to come back to live under humans as a dog or pig, she does not literally seem to be suggesting that she believes in reincarnation; after all, she had just stated that "there is only this life," and a few pages later, she

says that she isn't sure that any living creatures possess souls (71). Thus, the purpose of her words is not meant to invoke a literal belief in reincarnation but, rather, to present a way of thinking that allows her to work through the process of imagining herself into the existence of another animal, to think through its suffering, and to ask questions about how that suffering also causes the suffering of others, including herself. By responding to this process in the way that he does, David not only reveals how the belief he carries about his special place in the world prevents him from entering into states of empathy and compassion for others, but he also draws attention to two ideas that will play out in his story throughout the rest of the book: guilt and retribution.

Although the concepts of guilt and retribution carry negative connotations—which David draws upon at this point to refute Lucy's empathy for other animals—they also have positive manifestations that, when expressed in slightly different language, continue to carry the same meaning. Guilt, of course, simply means that one is ethically convicted regarding their interactions with others, and retribution implies an awareness that one's actions are going to result in negative consequences for oneself. And although David contends, at this point in the text, that neither of these considerations are valid when determining how to interact with nonhuman animals, they do eventually begin to shape his way of existing in the world.

After Lucy and David discuss the difference between relating to nonhuman animals in a way that recognizes “the life we share with [them]” versus in a way that considers them to be “of a different order of creation,” the text devotes several chapters to developing these ideas further—mainly through dialogue—while also subtly and slowly showing that David is beginning to change through his interactions with nonhuman animals. In fact, one of the first points at which the reader notices that David is affected by these animals takes place in the very

next chapter, when David is feeling lonely and goes to take a walk in the yard. He lets himself into the dog kennels and notices Katy, the “old bulldog bitch,” who is the only one who refuses to stir when he enters (75). David goes and sits down next to Katy and says to her “Abandoned, are we?” And then Lucy finds him, sleeping next to the old dog.

Although this scene progresses almost too quickly for the reader to notice the contradiction between David’s beliefs and his actions, it is significant to note that David—who does not profess to even like dogs—seeks out the comfort of this dog when he is feeling troubled. More significantly, though, it is worth noting the words he uses to speak to her: “Abandoned, are *we*?” By using the inclusive *we* to speak to Katy, David is including himself in her abandonment, and because the text has made it very clear that David is struggling with feelings of isolation and loneliness in his old age, there is a suggestion here that he is beginning to recognize a shared vulnerability with Katy. This sense of a shared vulnerability is very important, both because it opens up space for David to begin to think of himself and others differently than he had in the past, and because it relates to Braidotti’s notion of a shared vulnerability that helps us to think of our subjectivity differently. As she writes:

The proper subject of the posthuman convergence is not ‘Man’, but a new collective subject, a ‘we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same’ kind of subject. This means that humanity is both a vulnerable and an insurgent category.

Posthuman subjectivity can be understood as a process of becoming in its own immanence and not in binary oppositional terms. (*Posthuman Knowledge*, 54)

Despite the fact that David is still very far—at this point in the text—from thinking of himself in a “we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same” way, Braidotti’s words do reflect the trajectory that his transformation will take. Slowly, throughout the text, he will come

to see himself more as a part of the assemblage of life of the Eastern Cape, and the scene with Katy offers the first insight into the process through which this transformation will take place: through a recognition of a shared vulnerability that leads him into empathic modes of relating to others and, ultimately, to the realization that his life is affected by the lives of other animals.

Before discussing David's transformation further, though, it is important to note that this same scene with Katy also invokes one of the other thematic movements of the novel's engagement with nonhuman animals: their place within human legal systems. Just after David wakes up from his nap with Katy, Lucy reflects on Katy's suffering. She says:

'Poor old Katy, she's in mourning. No one wants her, and she knows it. The irony is, she must have offspring all over the district who would be happy to share their homes with her. But it's not in their power to invite her. They are part of the furniture, part of the alarm system. They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things.' (76)

Lucy's specific choice of words in this passage—"part of the furniture, part of the alarm system"—is significant because it creates a link between dogs and the two main areas of the law that are equated with dogs in *Disgrace*: the systems created by the legal institutions of capitalism and the legally sanctioned violence of apartheid. By stating that the dogs are "part of the alarm system," Lucy is acknowledging the fact that dogs have been used for decades in South Africa to police and control black South Africans, and the novel continues to remind the reader of this fact throughout the rest of its pages. The text says that Lucy's dogs are "watchdogs, all of them...working dogs, on short contracts" and that South Africa is a country where "dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man" (58, 108). By scattering statements such as these throughout the text, the novel makes it clear that dogs have been—and are being—used to

perpetuate the inequalities of power that were—and are—bolstered by South African law.

Furthermore, through the use of such scenes, *Disgrace* establishes a strong connection between dogs and power, and this connection is strengthened through some of the text's most powerful scenes. When the three men who rape Lucy, for instance, murder the dogs in their cells, it is made clear to the reader that they are doing so because the dogs represent the legal institution of apartheid (93).¹⁸ And when Lucy compares herself to a dog, she does so alongside a discussion of legal terms: cards, weapons, property, and rights (199).

In much the same way, the novel also links dogs to the system of capitalism that is sustained through the protection of South Africa's legal system. When she says that dogs are "part of the furniture" and that they are treated "like things," Lucy is acknowledging the way that nonhuman animals' bodies are placed on the outside of the binary, subject-object logic of humanism. Within the framework of humanist legal and economic systems, either an entity is a rational, autonomous, self-governed subject—and, thus, capable of bearing rights—or that entity is not, and it is thus denied access to rights and is capable of being commodified as an object.

One point at which the novel draws the reader's attention to the effects of this logic in an especially clear and powerful way occurs when David begins bringing the bodies of the dogs who have been euthanized at Bev's clinic to the local hospital where their bodies can be incinerated. In this scene, three separate images are woven together in a way that draws the reader's attention to all three: the physical waste and excess generated by systems of capitalism,

¹⁸ As further evidence supporting the idea that the dogs in *Disgrace* are employed symbolically in order to draw attention to unequal distributions of power, consider the following passage, in which David imagines the scene that must have unfolded for Lucy: "The men, for their part, drank up her fear, revelled in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror. Call your dogs! they said to her. Go on, call your dogs! No dogs? Then let us show you dogs!" (141) In these lines, the word "dogs" is clearly being used to figuratively refer to power. Lucy has been deprived of her dogs—of her power—and the men take that power for themselves.

the bodies of the dogs, and the bodies of poor South Africans who make their homes near the dump. In the very beginning of the passage, the first two are suggested, when David reflects that he would not want to simply leave the dogs bodies to be incinerated because that would mean “leaving them on the dump with the rest of the weekend’s scourgings: with waste from the hospital wards, carrion scooped up at the roadside, malodorous refuse from the tannery—a mixture both casual and terrible” (141). Already, this reflection marks considerable distance from the attitude David reflected earlier in the novel when Bev asked him if he likes animals and when he responded by joking that he eats them so he must like them (78). No longer is David able to see the animals who have died as objects to be consumed; no longer does it feel okay to him to equate their dead bodies with the physical objects that are discarded at the dump. Now, to do so would feel both casual and terrible.

But the passage does not end there. It goes on, describing in visceral detail the way that the dogs’ bodies are incinerated. It tells the reader, using the following language, that on David’s first visit to the dump, he had left it to the workmen to dispose of the bodies:

Rigor mortis had stiffened the corpses overnight. The dead legs caught in the bars of the trolley, and when the trolley came back from its trip to the furnace, the dog would as often as not come riding back too, blackened and grinning, smelling of singed fur, its plastic covering burnt away. After a while the workmen began to beat the bags with the backs of their shovels before loading them, to break the rigid limbs. It was then that he intervened and took over the job himself. (141)

This dark description of the treatment of the dogs’ bodies is then followed up closely with a reflection on the humans who are gathered at the incinerator. The reader is told that they are mostly women and children, all poor, who wait in the morning to sift through the hospital waste,

looking for “syringes, pins, washable bandages, anything for which there is a market” (142). By using the specific word *market*, the text subtly links the waste and suffering of the dump to the capitalist forces that drive people to engage in such miserable work so that they can afford to live. It then reinforces this connection by stating that “if what he brings to the dump does not interest them, that is only because the parts of a dead dog can neither be sold or eaten,” and this line, once again, creates a link between the dogs and the market forces that regard them as things.

Ultimately, the image that is presented throughout the scene at the dump suggests a form of evil that is—as the text stated at the beginning of the scene—“both casual and terrible” (141). It is a form of evil that seems to reflect Coetzee’s own thinking when he described—in his Jerusalem Prize Acceptance speech—a “banal kind of evil,” and it is one with which the text explicitly engages over and over, including at the very end of this horrible scene (Coetzee and Attwell, 96). After having drawn the reader’s attention to the suffering that is taking place at the dump—and after having linked that suffering, by association, to the suffering that marked the lives of the dead dogs—the novel presents a series of reflections that are delivered in David’s voice. He asks himself: “Why has he taken on this job? To lighten the burden on Bev Shaw? For that it would be enough to drop off the bags at the dump and drive away. For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; and what do dogs know of honour and dishonour anyway?” (142). The text then answers this question by stating that it is: “For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing” (142).

This language reflects a shift in David’s thinking that is, at first, difficult to grasp. After all, David is right. The dogs are dead; they do not care how their bodies are treated. But David’s thinking in this section indicates that he is beginning to think in some of the ways that are

described by Rosi Braidotti in “Locating Deleuze’s Eco-philosophy.” He is beginning to recognize that the suffering that is permitted by the systems we create affects us as individuals, regardless of whether we engage in that suffering or not. Moreover, he is beginning to recognize that his response to that suffering shapes him, both when he is ignoring it and when he is responding to it in ways that grant honor to the lives of the dead dogs. For Rosi Braidotti, this sort of awareness reflects a recognition of life as a rhizomatic subject. It reflects a “philosophy of radical immanence and affirmative becoming, which activates a nomadic subject into sustainable processes of transformation” (105). In *Disgrace*, David is presented as a character who is in the process of such a transformation, shifting from a man who thinks of himself as an individual, autonomous agent who is incapable of change to a person who sees himself as being interconnected with and affected by other living creatures. And because the novel draws the reader’s attention to the process that is causing David to experience this transformation, it is able to offer insight into the ways that such a change most often takes place.

Although there is no point within the text at which David could be said to have conclusively changed, there are a number of points that strike the reader as significant and that suggest that his former worldview is no longer mapping adequately onto the reality of his lived experience. One of those places is the scene in which David considers the plight of the sheep. At this point in the text, as has already been noted, David’s demeanor towards other animals is very different than it had been earlier in the text, and although the novel does not make it clear that this change is due to David’s awareness of his own vulnerability, the language of the passage does seem to imply that this is the case. After all, David’s reflection about the sheep takes place shortly after he and Lucy have both been attacked, and his description of the bond that is forming between himself and the animals falls just after he thinks about the mortality of the sheep, stating

that “It seems a miserable way to spend the last two days of one’s life” (122). This placement of the reflection on the sheep suggests that something about his encounter with pain, suffering, and nearness to death caused David to notice the suffering of other living creatures more acutely, reflecting Braidotti’s insight that an awareness of shared vulnerability creates opportunities for new ways of conceptualizing our relation to others.

It is also worth noting that this passage marks the first point that occurs in the text in which David seems to desire change to take place within himself, and this shift is unlikely to go unnoticed by the reader, considering the fact that David has remarked so often—both to others and to the reader—that he does not believe himself to be capable of change. Thus, when he asks himself: “Do I have to change?”, the reader is drawn into the question more fully than they would be if the novel had not granted so much attention to the unchangeable nature of David’s character up to this point. Because it has done so, though, when the reader experiences this point in the text, they are likely to wonder about why David is suddenly desiring the change that he has so adamantly resisted. The answer, of course—as indicated by the preceding paragraph—is that he feels himself incapable of experiencing a connection that he suddenly wants to experience. As he is staring at the sheep in the yard, David is drawn toward the animals, but they retreat from his approach. He then thinks of Bev Shaw and the way that she could relate so naturally to other animals and he wonders: “How does she get it right, this communion with animals?”, and it is this question that prompts him to wonder if he needs to change (123).

Because this scene indicates to the reader that David is desiring types of connection that are only possible if he undergoes some sort of transformation, it seems natural when—twenty pages later—they encounter David on the side of the road, having pulled over, with tears streaming down his face, wondering what is happening to him. This is not to say, of course, that

the scene does not deeply affect the reader, but rather, it is simply to say that the novel creates a through-line that stretches from David's first scene at the clinic through his attack and then through the scene where he regards the sheep before it depicts him in a state of profound transformation. It is important to notice this through line in order to appreciate the degree to which David's exposure to his own vulnerability and his exposure to the lives of other animals frees dislodges him from his beliefs about his separation from other animals and his inability to experience change. By the time the reader experiences David pull to the side of the road and they read about the tears that are flowing down his face and about how he cannot stop the shaking of his hands, they are fully aware that it is David's mere exposure to the lives of the animals on the Eastern Cape that is causing such a profound change in his character, and the lines that fall immediately after this scene reinforce this notion.

As David reflects to the reader about his experiences at Bev's clinic, he describes a scene that is almost the complete opposite of the description of his first day helping her euthanize the dogs. Whereas upon his first visit he had thought "They can smell what you are thinking: what nonsense!", he now thinks "If, more often than not, the dog fails to be charmed, it is because of his presence: he gives off the wrong smell (They can smell your thoughts), the smell of shame" (79; 139). And whereas previously he had felt awkward interacting with the dogs—"Awkwardly he joins in the tussle, pressing the dog's hind legs together, forcing it to sit on its haunches"—he now gently offers them his fingers to lick as they prepare to die, thinking "Why should a creature with the shadow of death upon it feel him flinch away as if its touch were abhorrent?" (78; 140). By juxtaposing these two scenes in the way that it does, *Disgrace* draws the reader's attention to both the changes that are taking place within David and to the reasons that those changes are finally able to occur. In fact, it strongly urges the reader to think about the reasons those changes

are occurring by forcing David to ask himself the question, saying:

He does not understand what is happening to him. Until now he has been more or less indifferent to animals. Although in an abstract way he disapproves of cruelty, he cannot tell whether by nature he is cruel or kind. He is simply nothing. He assumes that people from whom cruelty is demanded in the line of duty, people who work in slaughterhouses, for instance, grow carapaces over their souls. Habit hardens: it must be so in most cases, but it does not seem to be so in his. He does not seem to have the gift of hardness. (140)

Of course, the reader recognizes the irony here. There is no such thing as a gift of hardness, just as David's other assumption—that "people from cruelty is demand...grow carapaces over their souls"—is also not true. There is nothing natural about the sort of hardened, isolated, and closed-off life that David had led up until this point. In fact, it is far more natural for humans to be affected by other living creatures. However, as the text makes very clear in its first several chapters, David was prevented from acknowledging his connection to others because of his adherence to a belief system that holds humans to be individual, isolated, autonomous, and rational agents, responsible only for their own actions and primarily affected by their own decisions.

The reason that this insight is significant—in terms of the overall explorations of this thesis—is because the legal discourses that uphold our current image of law flow forth from the same discourses that shaped David's subjectivity at the beginning of the novel. They are the discourses that insist upon the individuality of the subject and that prevent subjects from being affected by others because they deny that such affects and connections are possible. But *Disgrace* reveals the fragility of these ways of thinking by showing that even a character such as

David—a man who has “always been more or less indifferent to animals”—cannot sustain his belief in humanity’s separation from the rest of life once he is even slightly exposed to the lives of other creatures (139). It is this fragility that Deleuze exposes in many of his works, when he writes about the ways that dogmatic images of thought prevent real thinking from occurring. Dogmatic images—which take the form of “everyone knows” lines of thinking—function by blinding subjects to all the evidence that would contradict their legitimacy. In this case, it is through adherence to the dogmatic image of the subject that David has been able to prevent himself from seeing the ways that he shares the same form of life that is shared by the other animals around him. Once he is exposed to those other animals, though—and to their suffering—he is unable to sustain this belief any longer, and he is forced to rethink his separation from the rest of life.

This sort of transformation, Braidotti contends, “lays the foundations for a system of ethical values where ‘life’ stands central,” not as a “pre-established given, but rather posited as process, interactive and open-ended” (105). Braidotti’s attempt to prevent her readers from thinking of life as a pre-established given reflects Deleuze’s insistence on mapping the actual convergences, transformations, processes, and potentials of a given entity when thinking about that entity—such as life itself—but it also reflects *Disgrace*’s engagement with notions of life, which challenge the reader to think of life as a messy, chaotic, unfolding that involves both human and nonhuman animals in its process of becoming, and one that is profoundly shaped by the laws and institutions that humans create.

One of the ways in which *Disgrace* prompts readers to think about the effects that these systems have upon the unfolding of life in a given time and place is by utilizing language that invokes other works of literature that also dealt with human-created legal systems. As Calina

Ciobanu points out, *Disgrace* “operates on an intertextual register” by invoking a vast number of different works, drawing lines from each in a way that causes a reconsideration of the theme that is explored in the original work (670). An obvious example of this can be found in the section that ends the scene at the dump, when the reader is told, “the dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: *because we are too menny*” (142-3). The line *we are too menny* is a clear reference to Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*. In the original work, though, it described the bodies of children who killed themselves because they believed that their existence was causing too much difficulty for their parents, who were struggling to support the small family. By invoking this line, Coetzee is doing something that is both interesting and unsettling, and Ciobanu captures the effect in very clear language:

This instance of intertextuality signifies something like this: We recognize being ‘too menny’ as a tragedy in Hardy’s novel; what happens when we extend the logic of Hardy’s doomed children to these doomed dogs? What assumptions, what disavowals become manifest when we consider life alongside life? Within a humanist framework, this would be a wholly inappropriate question. The act of setting the deaths of dogs alongside the deaths of children would run the risk of suggesting some sort of equivalence between them. At best, we would be anthropomorphizing animals; at worst, valuating animal life at the expense of human life, elevating the animal by undermining the human. (669)

Of course, though, this is not at all the effect that is created upon the reader. Rather, the text invokes this line in a way that calls into question the “humanist modes of thought that we assume as given” (669). The novel is equating the wrongness of the two situations in a way that allows for nonhuman animals’ suffering to be considered alongside the suffering that is created by legal

systems such as those that caused the deaths in Hardy's novel. In *Jude the Obscure*, it is made very clear to the reader that the economic and social systems that dominated life in England led to the deaths of the small children.¹⁹ In the same way, *Disgrace* strongly suggests that there is a link between the suffering of the people and the dogs of Eastern Cape and the economic and social systems that have been created through South African law.

Just as the text uses the visceral imagery of the scene at the dump to direct the reader's attention toward the "casual and terrible" evil generated by the economic exploitation of capitalism and its binary logic that regards nonhuman animals as things, it also uses another visceral scene to tie suffering to the larger systems that have been created by human laws. Shortly after Lucy is raped, David attempts to make sense of the tragedy that occurred, and he thinks to himself—in another of his many reflections that seem more directed at the reader than delivered as internal monologue—"A risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things" (95-96). Because this line mirrors the *we are too menny* language that will be invoked in the later scene at the dump, the two are linked within the novel. More importantly, though, because the language of this scene refers to the lack of resources within South Africa, it is calling into question the way that those resources are allocated. Of course, the reader realizes,

¹⁹ Just before Little Father Time kills himself and his siblings, the text reads: "The failure to find another lodging, and the lack of room in this house for his father, had made a deep impression on the boy — a brooding undemonstrative horror seemed to have seized him" (222). It is also worth noting, here, that Coetzee's invocation of *Jude the Obscure* deepens *Disgrace*'s commitment to exploring the ways that humans need to become more aware of nonhuman animal suffering because this is also one of the major themes in Hardy's novel, as evidenced by the passage in which the family's pig must be slaughtered: "The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired. The dying animal's cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends" (42).

however, that the problem is not actually that there are “too many people, too few things” but that the way in which those things are allocated leads to brutal suffering. This sense is then reinforced when David’s thoughts continue and he thinks: “Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant” (96). This line—not human evil, just a vast circulatory system—is very significant in the context of this dark novel. By linking the suffering that is depicted in *Disgrace* to a vast system, the novel is drawing attention to the ways that individual acts of evil are unnecessary in order for great suffering to be perpetuated. Rather, all that is necessary is adherence to systems that create inevitable suffering for both human and nonhuman animals alike.

Thus, it is extremely fitting that one of the solutions this novel seems to offer to the suffering it has presented comes in the form of Lucy’s renunciation of this system. As she is expressing to David her desires for the life she wants to live, Lucy says that she wants to “start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity” (200). David responds to this suggestion by saying: “Like a dog.” And Lucy repeats, in a way that implicitly seems to shift the emphasis: “Like a dog” (200).

As Calina Ciobanu once again points out, this phrase is undoubtedly meant to invoke *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, in which the main character—Josef K—ends the story by saying “like a dog” as he allows himself to be killed, and there is absolutely no doubt that Coetzee would have been aware of this fact (Ciobanu 686). Coetzee’s debt to Kafka has been explored by a number of critics, and in interviews he has given, he himself acknowledges this debt (Medin 82; Danta 726; Meyers 334; Attwell, *Doubling the Point* 199). Furthermore, many of Coetzee’s earlier novels contain clear references to Kafka. The main character of *The Life and Times of Michael K* seems to draw his name from *The Trial*’s Josef K, and there is a scene in *Waiting for the*

Barbarians that completely rewrites the entire story of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" (Moses 121). But what is the effect of this intertextual invocation of Kafka? One possibility is that it performs within the novel a similar work to that which was performed by the *we-are-too-menny* invocation of *Jude the Obscure*; it draws a connection between the themes explored in *The Trial* and those that are playing out in *Disgrace*. Since *The Trial* engages in a long and drawn-out exploration of the ways that modern legal systems trap and dehumanize the subjects whom they regulate, the effect of including a direct and well-known reference to this story by Kafka causes the thematic similarities at work with *Disgrace* to be underscored.

Just as significantly, though, the reference also serves to re-write the phrase "like a dog." Whereas in *The Trial*, the term was used to indicate that K's humanity has finally been completely stripped away from him, its use in *Disgrace* shifts the emphasis away from the differences between humans and dogs and places it instead on their similarities. In stating that she wants to be "like a dog," Lucy is reclaiming the phrase. She is removing the disgrace associated with being like an animal, and claiming for herself all the ways that the similarities allow for new opportunities for becoming. As Calina Ciobanu once again explains very well:

Clearly, the phrase 'Like a dog,' which is doubled in this scene (uttered first by Lurie and then by Lucy), resonates first and foremost with the shame that marks K at the end of his life. And yet, K's death need not dictate the terms of Lucy's life. My point is that while we might read Lucy's statement as 'I am like a dog, because I am reduced to the level of the animal that has nothing, the novel holds open the possibility, via acts of revisionary citation and the radical potentiality of the literary, that to be 'like a dog' in this new world is not necessarily to be subhuman, after all.

(686)

Through her words and actions at the end of the story, Lucy is offering a different vision of the subject, one that is not defined as an individual, autonomous, rational agent, but rather as a much larger assemblage, shaped by the interactions that take place within it. By associating Lucy with the dogs at the same time as she articulates her vision for a future in which she will forge a family unit with Petrus on the Eastern Cape, the novel reinforces the suggestion that Lucy's desire to be "like a dog" allows her to embrace connection and to distance herself from the discourses about rights, property, and power that prevent her from experiencing the connections she desires.

And, of course, the association of Lucy with the dogs that play such a crucial role in *Disgrace* also holds huge implications for any interpretation of the novel's conclusion. Because Lucy has been tied to the image of a dog throughout the text, though, the novel also seems to be implying at this point that David is not only giving up the dog but that he is also giving up Lucy, freeing her to live into the new becomings that she is allowing herself to enter. Moreover, by giving up the dog David is following in Lucy's path and becoming "like a dog" in his own way. He may not be entirely giving up his rights, his cards, or his property but, by this point in the novel, he has significantly distanced himself from the image he carried of the world, one which was predicated on rational rules, transcendental values, and individual subjects who interact freely with one another. In its place, he has begun to think of the world more in the way that Lucy does, recognizing the ways that creative acts can lead to new becomings, gaining ever more awareness that his person is shaped by a complex web of interactions with others, and replacing his tendency to think in terms of abstractions with a desire to think about life in terms of immanent conditions.

The only reason that such an ending is effective, however, is because David's process of

transformation was gradual and because it was marked by the sorts of shifts that Braidotti writes about in “Locating Deleuze’s Ecophilosophy.” Specifically, it came about through David’s awareness of his shared vulnerability with the animals with whom he interacted. By coming face-to-face with their suffering for long enough to free him of his previously held vision of the subject, David slowly came to recognize the limitations of beliefs about his own independence. Through this process, he developed the kind of self that Braidotti suggests is possible in this current age:

The kind of ‘self’ that is ‘styled’ in and through [a process of recognizing shared life and shared vulnerability] is not one, nor is it an anonymous multiplicity. It is an embedded and embodied set of interrelations, constituted in and by the immanence of expressions, acts and interactions with others and held together by the powers of remembrance.

For David, those powers of remembrance are defined by the same memories and images that most profoundly affected the reader as they read the text: the images of the dead dogs’ bodies, the scenes of waste and struggle at the dump, the depiction of the sheep awaiting slaughter, and the descriptions of the dogs awaiting death at Bev’s clinic. By allowing the reader to follow David on this visceral and moving engagement with the other vulnerable animals who live on the Eastern Cape, the novel not only thematically suggests that the dogmatic image of the subject must be replaced with something new, but it also affects this same change within the reader and offers in its place a way of thinking about life that is far more open to new possibilities of becoming.

Conclusion

Disgrace's Engagement with Death: A New Image of Life

In this thesis, many of Deleuze's ideas have been explored by considering their explication within the pages of *Disgrace*. The limitations imposed by dogmatic images of thought have been fleshed out through consideration of the ways that *Disgrace* disrupts these images via violent and visceral encounters, ones that open up space for thinking to take place that falls outside the dogmatic image. The Deleuzian notion of law as a jurisprudential process of unfolding has been juxtaposed against the image of law as a set of rules, and the legal language of *Disgrace* has been shown to encourage the reader to think beyond the latter, in order to see the law as ever-changing and open to new possibilities. The limitations of transcendental notions have been interrogated through consideration of the ways that these notions prevent David from experiencing connection or desire, and the benefits of thinking in terms of immanence have been revealed through consideration of Lucy's life and ethics. And finally, the Deleuzian notion of the assemblage as a cite where various intensities overlap—lending momentary stability to a given place, subject, or concept—has been shown to be a more accurate way of understanding the world than is possible when thinking of places, subjects, and concepts as if they were fixed or stable entities. In each of these discussions, the law has been interrogated as a unique manifestation of power, one that simultaneously emerges from social discourse and that functions as a particularly potent form of discourse itself. The law has been re-conceptualized as a regulating force, one that influences the interactions that take place between different assemblages within a given society and one that lends legitimacy to the norms that govern subjects' lives.

There is, however, a major idea that is present in *Disgrace* that has not yet been

adequately addressed in this thesis, and it is an idea that comes to bear not only on these other ideas but also upon any image of law that is dominant within a given society: the idea of death. Throughout the thesis, the idea of death has often been implicitly connected to other ideas that are being explored within *Disgrace*. Whether discussing David's fears of old age, the Byron Opera, or the bodies of the dogs, the idea of death has subtly lingered all around the edges of the exploration being undertaken. In *Disgrace*, though, death does not stay at the edges of the page; it is viscerally presented to the reader, often forcing them to acknowledge its presence and to consider the ways that ideas about death circulate within a society. Thus, it would be wrong to end this discussion of the text without also considering the ways that *Disgrace*'s treatment of death relates to its treatment of law, and once again, in order to undertake this consideration, it will be helpful to turn to Deleuze.

In Deleuzian thought, death is not considered to be in binary opposition to life. Rather, it is considered to be another stage of becoming that is immanent to life's unfolding. Life, in this sense, is not conceptualized as something that belongs to an individual subject; instead, it is conceptualized as a process that manifests itself through countless living beings. It does not end at the threshold of death; mortality is not its central stage; and it cannot be properly understood within the sorts of humanist frameworks put forth by thinkers such as Heidegger (Braidotti, "Locating Deleuze's Eco-Philosophy, 112). In contrast to these humanist notions of life, Braidotti—drawing on Deleuze—advances the idea of life as *zoe*, life as a force that carries itself forward through death, and as she writes in "Locating Deleuze's Eco-Philosophy," this re-thinking of death as part of the continuum of life clashes with many of the notions that are dominant in the dogmatic image of law. As she explains:

The key implication for the Law of Deleuze's re-casting of the life–death distinction

in terms of a vital continuum based on internal differentiations is the double overturning of individualism on the one hand—in favour of complex singularities—and of anthropocentrism on the other—in favour of multiplicities of flows and assemblages. (113)

By re-casting death as an essential aspect of life, Deleuze and Braidotti challenge many of the ideas that are central to the contemporary image of law, especially the notion that law ought to strive to safeguard individual human life to the greatest extent possible.

In the dogmatic image of law, the individual is assumed to have the right to live for as long as they are able, and the law derives much of its legitimacy from its purported role as protector of this right. Today, the law is still widely regarded as a force that safeguards individual human rights against anything that would impose itself upon them, one that frees each subject as fully as possible to pursue their desires, and one that strives to extend the lives of human subjects for as long as possible, no matter the costs. However, the emphasis that the dogmatic image places on protecting individual human lives prevents consideration of the *quality* of life that is being made possible, through law, for the vast majority of living creatures. While it is becoming increasingly apparent that this image of law is diminishing the quality of life of almost all living creatures across the globe, its alternative has been slow in arriving, largely due to the difficulty of thinking beyond the humanist notions that have shaped the law into its current manifestation. Adherence to the belief in fixed rules, minimalistic rights, and the individual human as the subject of law have remained strong, despite other changes in understanding that have accompanied the posthuman turn.

In *Disgrace*, though, each of these characteristics of the dogmatic image of law is called into question, and the effects of living in accordance with that image's logic are displayed

through horrific and violent scenes. Moreover, by including notions of death alongside other notions that it interrogates— notions about rules, rights, and individualism— *Disgrace* suggests that it is necessary to think differently about death in order to transform the quality of life, and one of the primary ways it makes this suggestion is by drawing attention to the ways in which death and life are each regulated by the law. When David is considering the plight of the sheep that are going to be slaughtered for Petrus’s party, for instance, he remarks that he has never cared which animals will live or which will die (123). However, he also notes that, in this instance, he does—for some reason— seem to care. Specifically, he says: “In this case, I am disturbed I can’t say why [*sic*]” (123). The reason for this sudden concern is not revealed to the reader explicitly, but the suggestion is that David suddenly cares because he has entered imaginatively into the lives of these two sheep. He has asked himself what it might be like to end his life in the way that they must end theirs, and this act of imagining himself into their bodies has changed the way he thinks about the sheep. By thinking about their experiences, he is drawn out from the isolation and disconnection that mark the majority of his experiences, and he begins to see the world differently as a result.

This description of David’s imaginative movement into the experiences of other living creatures is paralleled in other sections of the text. When David is struggling to understand Lucy’s experience of being sexually violated, for instance, he asks himself—and, by extension, the reader—if he has it “in him to be the woman,” and when he is euthanizing the dogs at Bev’s clinic, he increasingly finds himself thinking about the world as it is perceived by the dogs (157, 213). By presenting these scenes with vivid language and careful detail, the text invites its readers to also imaginatively enter into the lives of other living creatures and to think about the ways that current systems of law affect their bodily existence (Marais 76). This task, of course, is

never fully possible, but the novel nonetheless attempts to draw readers into the process, indicating through David that even the slightest act of imagining another living creature's bodily experiences can result in a rethinking of the structures that shape the world in which one lives.

One of the motifs that is repeated over and over again throughout *Disgrace* is the notion of the perfective voice, which signifies "an action carried through to its conclusion" (69). Often, the text interrupts its own narrative with the interjection of a string of verbs that exemplify the perfective: "I live, I have lived, I lived" (69); or "Burned —burnt—burnt up" (162). These interjections, though—like many other aspects of David's narration—serve mostly to draw the reader's attention to the limitations and blockages that are imposed on David by his way of seeing the world. Ultimately, the idea of the perfective is itself exposed by the novel to be misleading. In *Disgrace*, there is no such thing as a final conclusion. Just as the title of the novel is written in the present tense, indicating a continuing condition, so too, will life itself continue to unfold long after the death of any one individual (Gorra 7). The shape of that life, though, will depend very greatly on the image of law that shapes the interactions taking place within and between all the assemblages that comprise this world.

When reading *Disgrace*, the reader is invited to reconsider many of the ideas that underlie the current image of law dominant in Western society. In order to do so, though, they must also expose themselves to horrific scenes of violence and poverty, ones that have been brought into existence through the legal contorsions of power that define the society in which David and Lucy live. The hope that lies on the other side of all this darkness, though, is that by engaging with the tasks set forth in this text—tasks of recognizing the limitations of one's own subject position, tasks of thinking through seemingly addressable problems, and tasks of imaginatively entering into the lives of other creatures—the reader will be able to think beyond

the limitations that are imposed by the dogmatic image of law and begin to imagine, as David does, their own possibilities for a better world.

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