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Gillian Gane

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### **Abstract**

Coincidentally two major novels about the New South Africa both have protagonists called David; David Lurie in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is an aging white man, 'a moral dinosaur', in his daughter's words (89), a man unwilling to change in a world that is changing: 'I am not prepared to be reformed', he says (77). David Dirkse in Zoe Wicomb's *David's Story*, by contrast, has devoted his life to bringing about political change in South Africa; he has long been involved in the guerrilla struggle and holds high office in Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress. Like his comrade-in-arms Dulcie, he is 'coloured', in the traditional South African terminology; one strand of the novel is about his quest for his ancestors among the Griqua, a people tracing their ancestry back to the earliest Khoi inhabitants of South Africa, but mixed with many other racial groups.<sup>1</sup>

GILLIAN GANE

## Unspeakable Injuries in *Disgrace* and *David's Story*

Coincidentally two major novels about the New South Africa both have protagonists called David; David Lurie in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is an aging white man, 'a moral dinosaur', in his daughter's words (89), a man unwilling to change in a world that is changing: 'I am not prepared to be reformed', he says (77). David Dirkse in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, by contrast, has devoted his life to bringing about political change in South Africa; he has long been involved in the guerrilla struggle and holds high office in Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress. Like his comrade-in-arms Dulcie, he is 'coloured', in the traditional South African terminology; one strand of the novel is about his quest for his ancestors among the Griqua, a people tracing their ancestry back to the earliest Khoi inhabitants of South Africa, but mixed with many other racial groups.<sup>1</sup>

Though these two men are worlds apart, neither fits into the New South Africa. Both end up disgraced and defeated — David Dirkse, the revolutionary hero, dead by his own hand. My focus, however, will not be on these two male protagonists; instead, I will focus on particular women in their stories while trying at the same time to address some absences, gaps, and displacements in the texts they inhabit. Both novels are centrally about dramas of race and the violation of women. The intersection of race and gender is of course always fraught with tension, yet gender seems to carry a disproportionately heavy burden in these novels. In *Disgrace*, in particular, one must suspect that gender is at least to some extent displacing another identity category that cannot easily be named. When I found myself mistyping the title of the novel as *Disrace*, what was missing suddenly became clear: the novel is *dis-raced*—it is uncomfortable with naming racial categories or discussing racial issues. David Lurie is losing the power and privilege he is accustomed to, but instead of pointing to the new racial order he fixates on questions of gender and sexuality. For instance, he refers oddly to the Cape Technical University where he teaches as 'this transformed and, to his mind, *emasculated* institution of learning' (4) [emphasis added]. Perhaps he is squeamish about the impoliteness of naming race; perhaps racial and gendered power are so intertwined in his mind that he genuinely conflates them. In both novels, there is a tension between testimony and silence, truth-telling and secrecy, the private and the public. In each novel, a violated woman chooses to remain silent about her own violation; but her secret is of course revealed to us in the novel itself —

paradoxically, her very silence becomes a source of discourse. Questions of secrecy and silence reverberate beyond the violation of women as each novel struggles with truths that are unutterable and inadmissible.<sup>2</sup>

Both novels explicitly lament the inaccessibility of truth and the inadequacy of the language available to them as a means of articulating that truth. David Lurie is 'More and more ... convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa' (117). The language is 'tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites. Only the monosyllables can still be relied on, and not even all of them'; he cannot imagine what is to be done, 'short of starting all over again with the ABC' (129). In *David's Story* too there are recurrent references to the failings of language. The novel ends with a surreal vision of language collapsing under violent assault as a bullet explodes into the narrator's computer and 'the shrapnel of sorry words scuttle out, leaving behind whole syllables that tangle promiscuously with strange stems, strange prefixes, producing impossible hybrids that scramble my story' (212–13). David Dirkse says that even if Dulcie's story could be figured out, 'it would be a story that cannot be told, that cannot be translated into words, into language we use for everyday matters' (152). He himself is repeatedly defeated in his struggles to write; he uses 'all the symbols from the top row of the keyboard', doodles, draws pictures. David is uneasily obsessed with truth, though in what he writes, truth itself 'is the word that cannot be written' (136). When David finds his own name and Dulcie's on a hit list, he is shaken to the core, jolted into questioning the foundations of his world: 'can it be true that he does not know the truth? Or worse, that it stares him in the face, the truth which he cannot bear?' And then he pulls himself together — 'mentally he clicks his heels', a revealing description of his reversion to the familiar ethos of the fighting man: 'No ... his honour is unquestionable and the truth lies in black and white, unquestionably, in the struggle for freedom, for the equal distribution of wealth, for education for all, for every man and woman and child's right to dignity' (116). '[T]he truth lies in black and white': an extraordinary, ambiguous statement that points to the complications at the heart of the novel.

If language is inadequate as a tool in the hands of those who struggle to articulate the truth of their own experience in a time of change, certain texts exercise an unexpected power. In both novels the male protagonist is confronted with a document that threatens him profoundly, but is struck by the juxtaposition of his own name with that of a woman, the coupling of the two names signifying a forbidden intimacy. David Dirkse sees the writing of Dulcie's name beneath his own on a hit list as 'coupling' the two of them in 'intimacy', driving them into a 'naked embrace' (136). For Coetzee's David Lurie, the document is the form his student Melanie Isaacs has filled out charging him with sexual harassment: 'Two names on the page, his and hers, side by side. Two in a bed, lovers no longer but foes' (40). A hit list, a charge sheet: two potent documents with far-reaching and

momentous consequences, in one case linking two names as designated victims, in the other opposing them as accuser and accused.

In *Disgrace*, there is one woman who speaks out, making public what David Lurie believes is a private affair, and one woman who remains silent. It is significant that Melanie Isaacs, the woman who speaks, is coloured, though Coetzee typically conveys this only obliquely.<sup>3</sup> Before his seduction of Melanie, a student in his Romantics class, David Lurie has 'solved the problem of sex' (1) by patronising prostitutes selected from the 'exotic' listings of an agency called Discreet Escorts. He is evidently attracted by women of colour; it is not unreasonable to suppose that he enjoys the power that accrues to him through the convergence of disparities in gender and race. Certainly he is sexually aroused by the stage performance in which Melanie assumes an accent that is 'glaringly Kaaps' (24) and the persona of a 'dom meid' (192) working in a hairdressing salon.<sup>4</sup> It is this that leads directly to what is effectively a rape, as if Melanie's racial alterity both inflames David's desire and bolsters his sense of his own entitlement. The complaint that Melanie goes on to lodge with the university authorities, the hearing to which it leads, and David Lurie's subsequent disgrace and dismissal from his job, are symptomatic of the new era. In the old days it would have been unthinkable for a coloured woman to accuse a white man of sexual impropriety. Now, in a proceeding that cannot fail to remind us of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is David who is silent — who resists the whole proceeding, who certainly will not admit to any failings on his part, who is unregenerate and unredeemed.

The woman in this novel who does not speak is David's daughter Lucy. Lucy is clearly from the start a very different person from her father. She moved to the countryside as part of a rural commune which sold handicrafts and grew dagga (that is, marijuana) among the corn (60). She is a lesbian. She is evidently strongly opposed to racism and used to 'fly into a rage at the use of the word *boy*' to refer to adult men (109). She now runs the farm on her own, boarding dogs and raising flowers and vegetables. A black man, Petrus, is her assistant and in the process of becoming a partner in the business. Lucy sets herself apart above all from her father's intellectualism, from his belief in the higher faculties of humans. Accurately sensing David's disdain for her friends, she says, 'You don't approve of friends like Bev and Bill Shaw because they are not going to lead me to a higher life' and continues, 'it is true. They are not going to lead me to a higher life, and the reason is, there is no higher life. This is the only life there is' (74). When he says that 'it's not a good idea' for them to go back to the farm after they have been attacked, she responds, 'it's not an idea, good or bad. I'm not going back for the sake of an idea. I'm just going back' (105). 'I don't act in terms of abstractions,' she tells David (112).

While David, disgraced and dismissed from his job, is visiting Lucy on the farm, three black men break into the house, lock David up in the lavatory, and

rape Lucy. Lucy will not speak to her father about the rape, and she refuses to report it to the police:

‘... As far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone’.

‘This place being what?’

‘This place being South Africa.’ (112)

Rape is in fact an act that ruptures the boundaries between the private and the public, that violates the privacy of a woman’s most secret bodily parts and appropriates them for public use. In the hostile stranger rape to which Lucy was subjected, men broke forcibly first into the privacy of her home and then into the privacy of her body. Rape is always a political act — the exertion of male power over a female body; in a rape that crosses racial lines the issues are even more charged. When, as here, it is males of the subordinate race who rape a woman of the dominant race, the rape is likely to inflame vindictive racial passions. For whatever reasons — she does not explain — Lucy forestalls the further eruption of the rape into a widening public arena: it is, she insists, ‘a purely private matter’. To her father, moreover, she maintains repeatedly that he cannot know what she has experienced. ‘*You don’t know what happened,*’ she tells him, ‘you don’t begin to know’ (134) [emphasis in the original]. At least three times it is repeated that David cannot know, cannot understand his daughter’s experience of rape (134, 140, 157), and since, though the novel is narrated in the third person, it is entirely focalised through David, we as readers are effectively told likewise that we cannot know what Lucy has experienced. It is an experience that remains unspoken and unknown — an absence within the text.

Lucy does eventually break down in tears and talks to her father about the rape, while continuing to insist that he cannot ‘understand what happened to me that day’ (157). The rapists’ ‘personal hatred,’ she says, ‘stunned me more than anything’ (156). She believes that her attackers ‘are rapists first and foremost.... I think they *do* rape’, and what is more she believes they will return. She imagines that they see themselves as ‘debt collectors, tax collectors’, and she wonders whether she shouldn’t see them in the same way: ‘what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on?’ she asks (158). Horrified, David urges Lucy to leave the farm: ‘You wish to humble yourself before history’, he writes in a note to her; ‘But the road you are following is the wrong one. It will strip you of all honour; you will not be able to live with yourself’. (160). Lucy replies, ‘I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life. All I know is that I cannot go away’ (161). Her anguish is apparent, and yet this does not make her want to flee danger; the honour that David stresses does not matter to her. Then it transpires that Lucy is pregnant as a result of the rape and will not think of having an abortion. Her black business partner and neighbour Petrus, who already has

two wives (and who turns out to be related to one of Lucy's rapists), suggests that he marry her. Again, David is outraged and incredulous, while Lucy calmly points out the practical advantages of making a deal with Petrus. 'How humiliating.' David says. Lucy agrees that it is humiliating; 'But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity' (205).

Lucy's choices are deeply disturbing. We might approve of her stance as a white South African; humility, the recognition that there is a debt to pay, a willingness to start over with nothing — these would not come amiss for white South Africans, but to feminists her acceptance of rape and her choice to bear the child conceived as a result of rape are dangerous, not least in their implications for all women in a country where violence against women is epidemic. If someone must take on the sins of white South Africa, why should it be Lucy? As Mary Eagleton points out, the novel places the feminist reader in a difficult ethical position: like Eagleton, I find myself at times frustrated with Lucy and sharing her father's concern for her, though David Lurie is otherwise a character with whom I have very little sympathy (Eagleton 196).

At the end of the novel, there is a scene where David appears to become reconciled to the future Lucy has chosen. At her request, he has moved into Grahamstown, but one day he drives out to the farm and comes upon Lucy unobserved as she works among the flowerbeds. The man who not long before reacted with revulsion and despair to the news of his daughter's pregnancy, now thinks:

So: once she was only a little tadpole in her mother's body, and now here she is, solid in her existence, more solid than he has ever been. With luck she will last a long time, long beyond him. When he is dead she will, with luck, still be here doing her ordinary tasks among the flowerbeds. And from within her will have issued another existence, that with luck will be just as solid, just as long-lasting. So it will go on, a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less, till it may as well be forgotten. (217)

For whatever reason, David has come to terms with Lucy's pregnancy and the prospect of a racially mixed grandchild. Where before he heaved and wept as he wondered, 'is this how it is all going to end, is this how his line is going to run out, like water dribbling into the earth?' (199), he now looks with equanimity on the continuity of generations, accepting the dwindling of his own part in this lineage but nonetheless perceiving his own contribution as a 'gift' to the future. He goes on to experience a moment of transcendence, an epiphany:

There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of midafternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. A scene ready-made for a Sargent or a Bonnard. (218)

Flushed, Lucy looks moreover 'the picture of health' (218), the pastiness and slackness David recently observed miraculously gone. The pregnant woman blending into a landscape of flowers and bees becomes an icon of beauty, fecundity, Goethe's eternal feminine — and a hopeful future for the land.

Lucy greets David and invites him in for tea. After their estrangement, his new status as visitor holds out hope for their relationship, too: 'Visitorship, visitation: a new footing, a new start' (218). Significantly, however, this is not quite the end of the novel: after these words, there is one final section, a page and a half long. On Sunday, David as usual helps with the killing of unwanted dogs at the Animal Welfare League clinic, where he now works regularly as a volunteer; the novel ends with David carrying in ('like a lamb') the dog that loves him and consigning him to Bev Shaw's needle — 'giving him up' (220). The brief vision of grandfatherhood, of Lucy's beauty among the flowers, is after all an anomaly in a novel otherwise so unrelievedly bleak.

Dulcie Oliphant in *David's Story* would seem to be a far cry from the gentle flower farmer Lucy in *Disgrace*. Dulcie holds high rank in the liberation army and her feats of arms are legendary. According to David Dirkse, she left home at thirteen; at twenty she was a trained cadre who shot a murderous policeman with his own gun (133). She has 'supernatural powers'; rumour credits 'her legendary strength, her agility, her incredible marksmanship, her invincibility' (180). Nor is it military prowess alone that makes Dulcie extraordinary, for she is also a consummate politician who wins the trust of the conservative Griquas of Kliprand by knowing their hymns and praising their sense of community (131–32).

Dulcie is surrounded by mystery. 'Dulcie and the events surrounding her cannot be cast as story', we are told, 'There is no progression in time, no beginning and no end. Only a middle that is infinitely repeated, that remains in an eternal, inescapable present' (150). David Dirkse is the narrator's only source of information, and he is even more recalcitrant and evasive on the subject of Dulcie than he is on other topics; the narrator admits that since she has only 'disconnected images, snippets' to work with, she has invented much of her material on Dulcie (80). When David himself tries to write about Dulcie, he 'chose to displace her by working on the historical figure of Saartje Baartman instead' (134).<sup>7</sup> There are then layerings of displacement among which it is virtually impossible to find a 'real', 'true' Dulcie.

The single most salient and most horrifying fact about Dulcie is the torture to which she is subjected. In the small hours of the morning men repeatedly enter her bedroom, having defeated 'reinforced bolts and locks' and an alarm system (81). They wear black tracksuits and face-obscuring balaclava helmets (179). Their procedures are clinical; they carry a doctor's bag filled with instruments of torture (82) and engage in 'a shadow play of surgeons' (178); sometimes they are accompanied by actual medical personnel, a 'real doctor' (82), a nurse responsible for 'mopping up, dressing wounds' (178). The 'one who seems to be in charge'

says on their first visit, 'Not rape, that will teach her nothing, leave nothing; rape's too good for her kind' (178). Yet some of the torture is clearly sexual in nature: her night clothes are removed as the session begins (178), and among the signs left on her body are scars on her buttocks (19) and 'bleeding nipples' (115). Dulcie gathers too from what her tormentors say that 'she cannot be killed; that instead they rely upon her being driven to do it herself' (179). They repeat again and again the name of Chapman's Peak, where a driver who fails to make a sharp turn will fly off the mountain into the sea below (180); in defiance, each morning after they have left, she drives that road 'at breakneck speed' and successfully navigates the turn (179). (It is instead David who will leap off Chapman's Peak to drown.)

Dulcie endures these unspeakable torments stoically. She imagines herself relocated to a 'a storybook place' where 'the body performs the expected — quivers, writhes, shudders, flails, squirms, stretches — but you observe it from a distance'. Or she thinks of 'that which is done to food, to flesh — tenderise, baste, sear, seal, sizzle, score, chop' (180).<sup>8</sup> She is marked with the traces of her torments: there is a 'crisscross-patterned tattoo' on her thumb (18) and similar marks on her buttocks; on her back are 'four cent-sized circles' resulting from 'the insertion of a red-hot poker between the bones' (19); she has 'cracked ribs' (115). She thinks of Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, whose scarred back became a tree.

Who are Dulcie's tormentors? She sees hands that are both black and white; the figures in their black tracksuits are familiar, but imagining them as 'friends, family, comrades ... brings a moment of pure terror, of looking into the abyss'. So she stops trying to identify these visitors, deciding that 'That is where death lies' (179). Dulcie is confronted with the devastating possibility that her comrades in the struggle have secretly turned against her.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, an even more chilling circumstance. Dulcie and David are in love, according to the narrator, but it is a love not only unconsummated but unspoken; David, as a man of honour (and a married man), cannot act on his love, though the superhuman Dulcie is reduced to adolescent helplessness by her obsession with him. Dulcie realises that 'this pretence of a relationship' — her relationship with David, such as it is —

coincides with the visits by night; that the coincidence carries a meaning that she has not yet fathomed; that one is a recursion, a variant of the other: the silence, the torture, the ambiguity; and that in such recursions — for if on the edge of a new era, freedom should announce itself as a variant of the old — lies the thought of madness madness madness ... (184) [ellipsis in the original].

What is the link between Dulcie's relationship with David and the visits of the torturers? Is she being tortured because of their relationship — in a Movement increasingly conscious of race, are the two of them being singled out as coloureds, perceived as all the more threatening because of the bond between them? Or,

unthinkably, is David himself implicated in the torture of Dulcie, maybe even a participant in that torture?

The only physical contact between the two of them has been David's placing his hands on Dulcie's shoulders; this is referred to three times, twice from his point of view and once from hers. For David, newly aware of the instability of the world, 'taunted by the new, as truth upon conflicting truth wriggles into shape', as he 'held her there, at a distance ... only then ... did the world, the treacherous, helter-skelter world, keep still and hold its peace' (177). In the new world of moral ambiguities, Dulcie provides David with a secure moral ground (this reinforces our understanding of a crucial difference between the two of them: while David accepts the need for *realpolitik*, Dulcie is unwavering in her moral commitment and her idealism); but his response is to reject her steadfastness: 'He will not risk it again. It is the swaying world — the smell of blood and the loud report of gunshot — that is for real' (178). This in itself is ominous and makes Dulcie's perspective on that moment of physical contact all the more significant:

Once, only once, did David come close enough to place his hands on her shoulders. His fingertips pressed precisely into the wounds under her shirt, plunged intimately into her flesh, caressed every cavity, every organ, her lungs, liver, kidneys, her broken heart, with a lick of fire. She would not have been surprised to see those hands withdraw dripping with blood. (199)

Dulcie's perception is completely different from David's; her experience is of penetration, an entry into her wounds (targeted 'precisely' at those wounds), the 'caress' of 'a lick of fire' that draws blood. At the least we have here two strikingly different gendered perceptions of the same encounter. At the worst, this aligns David with Dulcie's torturers even if it does not place him directly in their company — though the pain articulated here apparently does not diminish her love for him. This is a moment comparable to Lucy's acceptance of her rape as a tax she must pay; both women here accept violation and suffering and commit themselves to enduring it in silence.

There is no indication that Dulcie ever protests the torments she undergoes or even speaks of them.<sup>10</sup> At one point David uncharacteristically resorts to metaphor in describing Dulcie: 'she's not like anyone else,' he says; 'I think of her more as a kind of ... a kind of a scream somehow echoing through my story' (134). The narrator finds this 'preposterous'; she responds, first, that 'Dulcie herself would never scream. Dulcie is the very mistress of endurance and control'; second, and more tellingly, 'Dulcie knows that there is only a point to screaming if you can imagine someone coming to your rescue; that a scream is an appeal to a world of order and justice — and that there is no such order to which she can appeal' (123). Dulcie is the silent scream resonating through the novel, the protest that can be neither uttered nor heard. Her sufferings are the product of a world where 'The truth lies in black and white' — a world increasingly divided into two

polarised racial groups, where truth oxymoronically *lies*, a world moreover where the military ethos of the struggle is now in tension with the ideals of a nascent democratic society, a world, finally, where women cannot become too powerful. Betrayal and conspiracy are in the air; the enemies that beset both David and Dulcie could be the forces of the apartheid regime — or, more chillingly, they could be their own comrades in the struggle. What cannot be fully confronted or openly said is the terrifying possibility, first, that Dulcie and David's former comrades in arms are now out to get them — the two of them linked because they are both coloured — and, second, that, perhaps in part as a consequence of his own victimisation, David is involved in the torture of Dulcie.

The understanding the narrator eventually reaches of Dulcie's plight is presented in a story she tells David:

Let me tell you another story, I say. About Bronwyn the Brown Witch who can do anything at all. Oh, there are tests galore for her, the usual ones of three wishes, three trips into the woods, three impossible tasks. She passes them all. She uses her magical powers to get her friends out of scrapes, to feed the poor, to stave off hurricanes and earthquakes, to drive back the enemy, until one day her friends, the sticks in the forest, come clattering together, lay themselves down on top of each other until they are a mighty woodpile. There is no way out. Bronwyn the Witch must die on the stake.

(203)

David is visibly shaken: 'you must know about such things, about how things happen, how they twist and turn and become something else, what such terrible things really mean', he says. He eventually continues, 'You're wrong.... The sticks won't sacrifice themselves. Yes, she's grown too big for her boots and they've had enough of her. She must give up her power, hand over her uniform, make way for the big men'. Dulcie 'knows too much', but can evidently be relied on not to speak out (204). After a silence, he says, 'You know, Dulcie will be alright. She'll hang in there by the skin of her teeth and she won't give up a damn thing. Yes ... she won't be sacrificed, by God, she's a witch alright' (205).

It is at this point that the narrator describes a wordless page David handed her long before showing 'the dismembered shapes of a body'; 'I have no doubt,' she says, 'that it is Dulcie who lies mutilated on the page' (205). We as readers cannot doubt at this point that David is complicit in Dulcie's torture. This is moreover the last we see of David; five pages later (after a description of an ANC rally on June 16th, seen largely from the naive point of view of Ouma Sarie, David's mother-in law) we learn of his suicide.

We do however see Dulcie once more, or a surreal vision of Dulcie. As the narrator tends the flowers in her walled winter garden, on the penultimate page of the novel, Dulcie appears:

Only when I turn to go back to work do I see her sturdy steatopygous form on the central patch of grass, where she has come to sunbathe in private. She is covered with

goggas crawling and buzzing all over her syrup sweetness, exploring her orifices, plunging into her wounds; she makes no attempt to wipe the insects away, to shake them off. Instead, she seems grateful for the cover of creatures in the blinding light and under the scorching sun. (212)

As in the vision of Lucy at the end of *Disgrace*, Dulcie blends into a garden scene of flowers and sunlight. The scene of Lucy's flowerbeds in their 'season of blooming' included bees, emblems of fertility (216); this garden scene features undifferentiated 'goggas' (that is, insects or bugs) and, revealingly, they cluster not around the flowers but around Dulcie's body, feasting on its 'syrup sweetness'. Her wounds are 'orifices', entrances into her body, like mouths or vaginas. Lucy is transfigured by her pregnancy: her body is a vehicle in which the future takes shape. Dulcie is comparably transformed, her body too offered up as a sacrifice for the nourishment of others. In these final epiphanies, both women are metamorphosed into emblems of the land, the wounded nation that yet endures and carries within it the seeds of the future.

One yearns for hopeful endings to these two novels of the New South Africa. These visions of violated female bodies melding into blooming and fecund landscapes, however, are in the end profoundly troubling. The equation of women and land is of course a familiar one. Anne McClintock has discussed the gendering of territory to be conquered ('virgin' lands) in imperial discourse, noting that 'the feminising of terra incognita was, from the outset, a strategy of violent containment' (24). Yet this trope appears in postcolonial literature as well, where it is the emerging nation that is likely to be gendered female and seen as an object of love.<sup>11</sup> In either, women and the land alike are objects to be desired and possessed by males.<sup>12</sup> The persistence of this trope, not only, in Coetzee's story of a male 'moral dinosaur' but in an account of revolutionaries written by a woman of colour, is disturbing. If we believe that women can hold out hope for the future of the New South Africa, we must surely hope that they will do so in ways that go beyond silently suffering rape, torture, and betrayal and sacrificing their violated bodies for the sustenance of others.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Dorothy Driver's Afterword to the novel includes useful information about Griqua history; John Matshikiza writes about their troubled status in contemporary South Africa in 'In Search of the Griqua ... and Their Real Leader'. Wicomb herself has written passionately about the complications of coloured identity in 'Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa'.
- <sup>2</sup> André Brink's essay, 'Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature', offers productive insights into the silences that have haunted South African literature. He discusses not only the 'territories forbidden to language' in the apartheid era, but the ways in which 'the very urgencies of a struggle against apartheid encouraged the imposition of other silences' (15). He points also to 'woman as a presence largely

excluded from official South African discourses' (23). Also germane here is Benita Parry's essay in the same volume, 'Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee'; Parry charges that in Coetzee's work 'the consequence of writing the silence attributed to the subjugated as a liberation from the constraints of subjectivity ... can be read as re-enacting the received disposal of narrative authority' (150).

<sup>3</sup> In *Life and Times of Michael K*, for instance, the only definitive clue to Michael's racial identity is the obscure annotation 'CM' on a charge sheet (70); few readers will be able to decode this as 'Coloured Male'. In Melanie's case, one clue is David's re-accenting her name: Meláni: the dark one' (18). Another is her boyfriend warning David to 'Stay with your own kind' (194).

<sup>4</sup> 'Kaaps' as a noun, according to the Dictionary of South African English, means 'the dialect (of Afrikaans or English) spoken by the 'coloured' people of the Western Cape. Coetzee himself explains elsewhere the traditional racial coding of identity designations in Afrikaans: the words *man* and *vrou* are used for white men and women, the words *jong* and *meid* for males and females of other races (1988 131).

<sup>5</sup> David's particular preoccupation has become the disposal of the dogs' bodies; he personally loads them onto the trolley at the incinerator so that the workers will not smash their rigid limbs with shovels: 'He saves the honour of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it' (146). The most significant change David undergoes is in his attitude towards animals, which can be read as another curious displacement, given that his attitudes towards women do not change markedly, and that there is no indication that his racial attitudes changes at all.

<sup>6</sup> At least two other critics comment on the reconciliation in this penultimate scene with Lucy among the flowers. Michael Marais sees in it 'a restoration of the filial bond' (176) and claims that 'the scene signifies the irruption of the ethical into the political' (177). Mary Eagleton links this scene to the following, final scene: the dog that David, 'reconciled to Lucy and accepting of her choice' offers up, she suggests 'is the sacrificial lamb but is also a figure for Lucy who has become "like a dog". Lurie offers her up as Abraham offered Isaac.... Lucy offers herself as had her namesake, the Sicilian virgin martyr, St Lucy, one of whose attributes was a silencing wound in the throat' (200).

<sup>7</sup> Saartje Baartman is the Khoi woman who was displayed in Europe in the early nineteenth century as 'the Hottentot Venus'. The narrator of *David's Story* dismisses David's detailed novelistic account of Baartman, saying, 'There are quite enough of these stories' (135); in her article 'Shame and Identity', Wicomb discusses Baartman as 'an icon of postcoloniality' in the New South Africa (91).

<sup>8</sup> Dulcie seems to be thinking of what is being done to her own flesh; two pages later she is described as 'Marinated in pain', with 'macerated flesh' (180); can it be that she pictures herself not only as a body sacrificed for the consumption of others, but as meat tenderised and flavoured to appeal to those who consume her?

<sup>9</sup> David too has faced this possibility: the source of the hit list seems to be his comrades, since David recognises some names 'connected with informers' (114), and we know from the photograph found in his pocket after his death that someone is attempting to frame David himself as a traitor (211).

<sup>10</sup> How anyone knows about them is a mystery, since David says nothing of these torture sessions, the narrator has never spoken to Dulcie, and we cannot in any case imagine Dulcie speaking of them.

- <sup>11</sup> In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, for instance, the central female character, Mumbi, an object of love to all the male protagonists, bears the name of the first woman of Gikuyu mythology. (The creation myth featuring Mumbi and Gikuyu is told in another Ngugi novel, *Weep Not, Child* [32–34]). Another example is the poetry of Dennis Brutus, who addresses South Africa as a lover in, for example, 'Nightsong: Country', which opens: 'All of this undulant earth/ heaves up to me;/ soft curves in the dark distend/ voluptuously-submissively' (44).
- <sup>12</sup> One is reminded of anthropologist Sherry Ortner's provocative question, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?'

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