

Disgrace Study Guide

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Plot Summary

David Lurie is a professor of Communications at Cape Technical University in Cape Town, South Africa. He is a middle aged man, twice-divorced, living alone. He finds no pleasure in his work. His previous position was in modern languages, but his department was eliminated and now he teaches students something that he is not particularly interested in. He is a lonely man, and finds pleasure in going to a prostitute every week. One day he sees the woman, Soraya, in the city with her two sons, and shortly after that the prostitute stops working at the brothel where David frequented. He is now left alone and lonely.

David is a man who has had more than his share of women in his life. Most of these women have been strangers, one-time affairs that ended as quickly as they started. David pursues one of his young students, Melanie Isaacs. He sleeps with her on several occasions, despite her protests and complete lack of interest in him. He finds her exciting and doesn't really think about how she feels. Melanie, with the urging of her family and her boyfriend, files an official complaint against David with the University. David is given the chance to save his job by apologizing and taking the blame for what he did. When he is unwilling to do so, his only other option is to leave the university for good.

David goes to live temporarily with his daughter from his first marriage, Lucy. She lives on a farm in the Eastern Cape alone. She previously had a female companion who lived with her, but she has left. As David arrives on the farm, he begins to help out with the daily chores. He sees that his daughter is a country woman, despite himself being a city man. Lucy's neighbor is Petrus, a black man who was once her employee but has now bought a piece of land next to her and is a true landowner. David marvels at how the times have changed in South Africa with blacks and whites. One day, Lucy's farm is attacked by three men who take a lot of her belongings, set David on fire, and brutally rape Lucy. This incident leaves David shaken to the core, and Lucy in a state of disbelief. Lucy, however, does not tell the police about the rape, and keeps it to herself. She believes that in some way the rapists were paying Lucy back for all of the wrongs that have been done by whites towards blacks in South Africa.

As David continues to live on the farm, he often helps out Bev Shaw, who runs an animal clinic. He helps with the gruesome task of putting down unwanted and sick dogs. He feels a strange connection with the dead dogs, and goes to great lengths to ensure that their bodies are disposed of properly. David and Bev sleep together on a couple occasions, even though Bev is married. As David eventually finds out that Lucy is pregnant, he also learns that one of her rapists is living next door with Petrus. Petrus is now an independent man and even offers to marry Lucy in order to keep her safe. Lucy knows that he is only after her land, but thinks that this may be her only option. David keeps insisting that Lucy leave the farm immediately for her own safety, and this drives a deep wedge between father and daughter.

David is busy writing an opera that he has been contemplating for some time, and finds himself connecting to the character of the female lead. Returning to the city, he realizes that there is no place for him here anymore and that he is an outsider among his former peers. He returns to the country, lives in a small rented room, and tries to reconnect with his daughter. He continues helping out at the animal shelter.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In this introductory chapter we meet the main character of the story, David Lurie. He is a fifty-two-year-old divorcee, and a professor of communications at Cape Technical University in Cape Town, South Africa. His previous role was that of a professor of modern languages, but his department was closed down and he was transferred to the communications field. He finds his new position quite boring, and although he completes his job every day, he is disinterested in the field of communications and is not very involved in his students' learning process. David finds the basis of the communications field absurd; he secretly feels that the origins of speech lie in song, and in the empty human soul.

David has been married twice, and has a daughter from his first marriage. In his youth he attracted women very easily with his good looks and charm. Knowing very well that he would be considered a womanizer, he could and did have many different women in his life. As the years crept up on him, he has resorted to seeing a prostitute weekly to satisfy his needs. Every Thursday, he drives to the town of Green Point and goes into the apartment where his escort awaits him. Soraya is a dark-skinned Muslim woman whom he has come to have some feelings for. For ninety minutes, they have sex, talk, and spend time together. He realizes that she must have many clients besides him, but still thinks that his feelings towards her are reciprocated. He shares details of his life with her, while she does not tell him anything about her life on the outside. He even thinks about asking her to meet him outside the brothel some day.

One Saturday morning, things changed between David and Soraya. As David is walking down the street in the city, he sees Soraya in a crowd holding the hands of two small children. He sees that the two boys look just like her. As they make eye contact, there is an uncomfortable feeling between them. David has now seen her in her real life role as a mother. Their weekly appointments continue for a while, although it is awkward as neither of them talks about what happened. David wonders what her husband must think of her chosen secret profession, or if he even knows at all. Soraya ends their meetings four weeks after the incident; she says she is taking a break to care for her ill mother and doesn't know when she'll return. David calls the agency after a few days, and is told that Soraya no longer works for them. They cannot give out her home number because that would be against their rules. David spends an evening with another prostitute, also named Soraya. However, he finds this only mildly satisfactory. He romances a new secretary at his work, only to end up having to avoid her after an unsatisfactory sexual encounter with her. As he can't get Soraya out of his mind, he tracks her down using a detective agency and calls her. She tells him he is intruding and to never call her again; he is upset.



Chapter 1 Analysis

In this introductory chapter, we meet the main character of the book, David Lurie. Right away, we see the kind of man that he is; lonely, disenchanted with life, and looking for companionship in the wrong places. We are made to feel a bit sorry for him when he grows so attached to the prostitute, only to be denied love so harshly. David is past his prime, and nothing in his life brings him pleasure anymore. Even his passion for languages and literature cannot be expressed through his work anymore, and this leaves him empty and alone.

His misunderstanding of his relationship with Soraya only causes David trouble. It is quite absurd for him to think that there could be something deeper between them. Nevertheless, he goes on thinking this, fooling himself into thinking that she might have feelings for him as well. David's feelings are due to desperation, as there is nobody else for him to turn to that could return his feelings.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

David is lonely. He has nothing to look forward to every week, since the Thursday interludes have been cancelled. He spends a lot of time in the university library, reading and researching quietly in the deserted reading room. One Friday night, he notices one of his students as he is walking home. Her name is Melanie Isaacs; she is a thin girl with short black hair, wide cheekbones, and large, dark eyes. As he catches up to her and they begin to chat, he can't help but think of her in a romantic way. Every semester, it seems, there is another Cape Town beauty that is in his class and that he has a crush on. They walk on and discuss the various authors that they have studied in class this semester. He invites her to his apartment for a drink, and she reluctantly agrees.

They are inside his apartment; David has put on some soft music and has opened a bottle of wine. They discuss more poets and writers; David tries to get a sense of Melanie's mood. He offers to cook dinner for her, and again she reluctantly agrees. Over tagliatelle with anchovies, they open a second bottle of wine. As dinner comes to an end, he leads Melanie to the living room to watch a video of two dancers. David senses that Melanie is not that interested in the film. They drink coffee with a shot of whiskey and David asks her to spend the night with him. As she asks him why she should do this, he rationalizes his request by saying that her beauty is too great and should be shared with others. Her demeanor changes; he senses that she sees him as her professor again. She quickly gets up and leaves his apartment.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter we see the beginning of what will turn out to be a very nasty situation for David. He mistakenly thinks that he can try to seduce a student and get away with it. From the reader's first encounter with Melanie, we see in her actions that she is reluctant and not inviting towards her older professor. She does not understand why her professor would invite her over for dinner and make her drink wine. It seems that she drinks the wine more out of nervousness than anything else. As David suggests that she should sleep with him in order to share her beauty with the world, we get another glimpse into David's twisted understanding of women and how they should be treated. Melanie does not appreciate this either and leaves.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Even though David realizes that he should stop this pursuit right away, he can't help himself. He does see Melanie as a little girl, as his student, and this excites him. He calls her one Sunday morning, and takes her to lunch before she has the guts to say no. She is very passive at lunch, but he brings her back to his apartment and makes love to her on the living room floor. She is inhibited and quiet throughout the lovemaking, but he finds her very satisfactory and exciting. Their act must have been very quick, for her sweater is just raised up over her breasts and his pants are at his ankles. She quickly gets up without saying anything, dresses, and leaves.

The next day, Melanie is not in class. David sends her flowers. The following day, he sees her waiting out the rain under an overhang, and offers her a ride home. She barely speaks to him as he drives, and when he asks to see her she tells him that she is busy with rehearsals for a play that she is in.

On Wednesday, as Melanie returns to class, the class is discussing a poem about the Alps by Wordsworth. David tries unsuccessfully to shed some light on the poem to the class, but all he gets back are blank stares. He tries to compare the words in the poem to real life, to love, and in a subtle way to what has gone on between him and Melanie. He realizes the students are not getting his point at all.

David sneaks into the dark auditorium and secretly watches the rehearsal of the play that Melanie is in. It is a comedy about the new South Africa, set in a hair salon. As he watches Melanie prance around the stage with a broom, David gets excited.

The next afternoon, David comes to Melanie's apartment unexpectedly. She has no time to turn him away, and he forces himself into the apartment. He takes her to the bedroom, despite her protests and pleas that her cousin will be returning shortly and will catch them. He is too excited by the sight of her young body and makes love to her. She is completely passive, almost like she has turned herself off for the unpleasant act and is waiting for it to be over. As David sits in his car afterwards, he is disgusted with himself.

A week later, after having missed class this whole time, Melanie shows up on David's doorstep. She is dressed in black, and asks if she can stay with him for the night. David is surprised and invites her in, giving her a place to sleep in his daughter's old room. She cries on the bed but does not tell him what's wrong. The next morning, she asks him if she can stay with him for a while. David is scared at the thought of her staying with him, of her seeing his ways every day. But he agrees, since the thought of her being here every day excites him. He knows this is wrong, that people will find out about this and there will be a scandal, but at the moment he doesn't care. Melanie quickly makes herself at home, fixing herself something to eat and leaving dirty dishes in the



sink. He realizes that she is exploiting him, but also that he has exploited her in much worse ways.

Chapter 3 Analysis

David's repeated use of Melanie's body could be seen by some as rape. The author clearly shows us that Melanie is completely disinterested in David, and that she is in fact just too scared to push him off and to really fight him. She tries to protest him on several occasions, but he does not see this as her true wishes. He is so taken by her looks and by her young body that he doesn't really care what she thinks. Her body and her being have been violated by this old man, and she shuts down on the inside and just lets it happen. David, however, does not see it this way. In the back of his mind he realizes that what he's doing is wrong, but his lust overpowers him.

The reader sees towards the end of this chapter that this part of the story will not end well. An affair between a student and a teacher could be detrimental to the teacher's career, and we suspect that this is where the story is heading.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

As David makes love to Melanie on the floor of his daughter's room, he senses that her inexperience is the cause of her shyness during lovemaking. He also imagines that she is beginning to respond more to his touch, and is very excited by this. Melanie asks him about his past and his life, if he has slept with other students, and why he doesn't keep pictures of his past wives. That same day, as David is in his office, a young man enters his office unannounced. He is dressed in black leather and has a sense of trouble around him. He says he knows David has been sleeping with Melanie, and threatens him. That evening, Melanie does not come to his apartment and his car is vandalized in the street.

When Melanie shows up in class again a few days later, the boy in leather is sitting next to her. The students are all very quiet and seem to be waiting to see what the professor will do about this intruder's presence. David does nothing, goes on as if nothing is out of the ordinary. They begin discussing Byron's work and life. David reads passages from the poem, but receives no response from the class. Finally, the intruder offers a thought, and surprises David with the correctness of the thought. He apparently wants to show that he is not just leather and trouble, that he has a brain too. After class, David calls Melanie into his office. He speaks to her sternly, as he would to any student, telling her that she should not be bringing her friend to class with her. He also reminds her of the test she has missed, and urges her to come to his office on Monday to take the test. She protests that she is unprepared, he tells her to just take the test and he will worry about the results. That evening, a motorcycle passes him in the street; it is Melanie with her leather-clad friend.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The symbolism of the lovemaking in David's daughter's room is seen here. Melanie is definitely young enough to be David's daughter, and in some way he sees her as such. For him to even think about her romantically as she lies crying in his daughter's room gives us another glimpse of what his thoughts are like.

When Melanie pries a little into David's personal life, she is trying to understand what kind of person she is. She must be feeling pressure from her family to report him, but is unsure that this is the right thing to do. She tries to find a reason to like him, to understand why he has done this to her. David gives her no good reason.

As we are introduced to Melanie's boyfriend, we see that he is trying to intimidate David. It is obvious that he knows what went on between them, and he is trying to show David that he is in trouble. David sees this, but refuses to acknowledge to himself the kind of trouble he will inevitably be in.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Melanie does not come to take her test, and that same day David gets an official notice in his mailbox that Melanie has dropped his class. This is followed by a phone call from Melanie's father, asking him to talk to Melanie to try to convince her not to drop out of school. Melanie's father says that Melanie has the highest respect for the professor, and that maybe he can talk some sense into her. Her parents are very upset that, after three years of studying, Melanie has decided to just drop out and get a job. They do not understand the reason for this. David knows that he is the reason, but promises Melanie's father to talk to her. As he calls her apartment, her cousin coldly states that Melanie does not want to speak to him. Over the next couple of days, David notices that attendance in his class has dwindled; he suspects that the story must be out about him. Melanie's father approaches David in the department office; he accuses him of misusing the students' trust, and of doing his daughter wrong. Secretaries and other students hear this exchange.

The next morning, he receives a memorandum in his office which states that there has been a complaint filed against him with the university. It is on the basis of Article 3.1 of the Code of Conduct, the one that deals with harassment of students by teachers. David reads all of this in shock, his heart pounding. He is sure that Melanie wouldn't have had the strength to file the complaint by herself; he imagines her father and cousin must have pushed her to do this. He sits in his office and imagines how the three of them went to the school and went through the motions of filing the paper; how Melanie filled in her name, his name, and the accusation.

At five o'clock, after regular office hours, David is called into the Vice-Rector's office. Aram Hakim, the Vice-Rector, informs him about the nature of the complaint against him. He suggests that David get a good female attorney and familiarize himself with the harassment procedure that's about to come. Elaine Winter, the chair of David's department, mentions that Melanie stated she had been absent for all but two classes in the past month. However, Melanie's record shows an unblemished attendance and a good midterm grade - David is not able to provide a good explanation for this.

David notices a change in the air around him at school. People shy away from him, and those he was friendly with in the past choose not to talk to him. David speaks to lawyer that had handled his divorce, who advises him to find a woman to represent him and to be ready for different outcomes of this ordeal.

As David meets his ex-wife Rosalind for dinner, he quickly learns that she knows of his troubles. Apparently the information has leaked out to the general public, and people are talking about him. She tells him that she heard the girl took some sleeping pills; he states he has no knowledge of this. Rosalind is upset and disgusted by David's behavior with his young student, and says so. By the tone in her voice, David remembers back to



the time when they were still married. He realizes he does deserve the harsh words for what he has done. He mentions to Rosalind that after the hearing he may take some time off and pay a visit to his daughter from his first marriage, Lucy, who lives on a farm in the Eastern Cape. The next day, Rosalind calls David to tell him that there is a piece written about his indiscretions in the local paper.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The situation escalates quickly at the University. Even though the case is supposed to be private, everybody at the school knows what's happening. David remains cool throughout the process, and it makes us wonder if he is really sorry for what he did to Melanie. Apparently he feels no remorse and wishes that Melanie wasn't influenced by her parents and her boyfriend to tell on him.

Rosalind is the first person that we are introduced to from David's life besides a prostitute. This reinforces how lonely he really is. He has no close friends or family nearby, only colleagues who now shy away from him when they see him.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

David attends the hearing in front of a committee of his peers. It consists of Farodia Rassool, from Social Sciences, Desmond Swarts, Dean of Engineering, and a man he does not know. Manas Mathabane, Professor of Religious Studies, is heading the committee. Also present is Aram Hakim, his secretary, and a young woman who is an observer from the Coalition Against Discrimination. David feels confident as he walks into the room, even though he knows that this confidence might hurt him in this process. The committee informs David that this is not a trial, but just an inquiry into the facts of the case. The committee's job is to make a recommendation in this case. David is informed that there are two charges against him: first is Melanie Isaacs' charge, and second is the charge from the Registrar related to the validity of Melanie's student record for the last month. David calmly states that he pleads guilty to both charges; the committee is not satisfied. The women on the committee feel that David is just pleading guilty in hopes of making this case go away and that he really does not own up to the mistakes he has made. The men on the committee try to persuade David to think seriously before pleading guilty, to seek representation, and to consider all of his options. They are concerned that David might not realize that he can lose his job over this. David is defiant and only keeps saying that he pleads guilty to all that he is charged with.

As David leaves the hearing, he is surrounded by reporters taking his picture and asking questions. A female reporter probes him for answers, but he is sly and does not answer in a straightforward way. The next day's student newspaper has a picture of him and an article talking about the committee meeting and that Professor Lurie finds his experiences with his students enriching.

David gets a call from Manas Mathabane. Manas informs him that the Rector is willing to not take extreme measures if David issues a statement of repentance. Manas reads the statement to David, which basically says that David is very sorry for what he did on both counts, and sincerely apologizes to all parties that he has harmed. David is furious unwilling to sign such a statement, and asks Manas why this secular committee wants to see him repent. Manas advises David that this is the best thing for him to do in order to not lose his job over this serious issue. David is defiant and states that he will not agree to such a statement because it is not true.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The only people that David was even somewhat close to, his coworkers, have all turned against him. As he stands in front of the committee, he is defiant in his actions and refuses to truly apologize. This arrogant behavior seems unreasonable, since the reader realizes that David will lose his job unless he sincerely apologizes. It makes us want to

shake him, to knock some sense into him and to tell him to own up to his mistakes at least in order to save his job. He does not do this; instead he only infuriates the committee further by his laid-back approach to this serious situation.

He picks on the religious aspect of the statement that the rector wants him to sign, when in fact there is nothing in the statement that is so controversial that he shouldn't sign. David is stubborn, and this stubbornness will drive him down. He realizes this but just doesn't seem to care.

The title of the book, *Disgrace*, alludes here to the disgrace that David has put Melanie in. He, an older professor, has sexually violated his young student, to the extent that she even dropped out of her classes. On the other hand, David has also been disgraced, by his actions and his community's reaction to his indiscretions.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The chapter opens up with David packing up his things and leaving town. He drives to the town of Salem in the Eastern Cape, where his daughter lives. Lucy lives in the outskirts of town on five acres of land. She had originally moved there as part of a commune, but stayed behind when the commune moved on. She has purchased the land with the help of her father, and now makes her living boarding dogs and selling fruits and vegetables in the market. As Lucy greets David on the front porch, he notices that she has gained weight in her hips and breasts; he imagines this is what happens to a woman when she lets herself go and lives the simple country life. He wonders how he and Rosalind, both city intellectuals, could have raised such a child who likes the country life.

Her house is large; she used to share it with Helen, Whether Helen was a roommate or a lover, David is not quite sure. Either way, Helen seems to have been away for a long time. Lucy now lives here alone, with just a rifle to protect her. On the property also lives Petrus, a Black older weathered man, with a wife and children who live in the city. On the property also lives Petrus' second, younger wife. He helps out with the gardening and the dogs. Lucy shows her father around the property; new kennels have been built since he was last here a year ago. The vegetable and fruit plants are really growing, and David notices how Lucy seems so natural in her country environment.

She feeds him a supper of soup, bread, and sweet potatoes, and asks how long he will be staying. David tells her he will probably only stay a week, write his stage play that he has been conjuring up, and then move on. They discuss his recent indiscretions at his job; Lucy is surprised that her father didn't try to fight the accusations, or at least negotiate with the board for a lesser punishment. In any case, she offers for him to stay on the farm with her as long as possible.

Chapter 7 Analysis

As we realize that David has voluntarily given up his teaching position at the university, we are a bit shocked at his boldness. He has no other job prospects, and nothing substantial to occupy his time with, but he still has chosen to hold his head high and not apologize to the school and to Melanie.

Lucy's country life surprises David, and he wonders how his child could be so different from him. In fact, David's life seems very unhappy and unsatisfactory to him, when on the other hand Lucy seems very content in her environment. She has really become a countrywoman who enjoys her natural surroundings.

As we are introduced briefly to Petrus' character, we have to place it into context. Apparently, the latest changes in South Africa have given many new freedoms to

Blacks, and Petrus is one of those new landowners who is no longer just a hired help. Nevertheless, he is still around for Lucy, helping out on her property for a fee.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

As David and Lucy walk three of the dogs together, they talk about his intimate life. David is uncomfortable talking about this subject with his daughter, but realizes he has nobody else to talk to. Lucy wonders if the affair with the young student is really over, or if he still has feelings for her. David says that no matter what, what was between them has ended. Lucy suggests to him that maybe he should get married again, or find somebody closer to his own age. She points out that the older he gets, the more difficult it will be for him to attract young women. As they turn back towards the farm, David notices a sign for cycads. Lucy explains to him that even though it is illegal to pick cycads in the wild, she grows them from seeds and sells them. When David asks her if she is happy with her life, she simply says, "It will do."

At five o'clock on Saturday morning, Lucy wakes her father to accompany her to the market. They prepare the goods, with Petrus' help, and drive to the market square. They set up their stall, which consists of flowers, potatoes, onions, and cabbage. David is amazed at this very different life that his daughter leads; he thinks back with irony that just two weeks ago he was teaching students in a university. Lucy sells all of her goods by the end of the rush of people; she does considerably better than people in the two stalls on either side of her. One of the patrons who stops by is Bev Shaw, who Lucy sometimes helps run the animal refuge. Lucy tells her father that they will be stopping by Bev's place after the market closes. Right away, David does not take to Bev Shaw. To him, she is a woman who does not take care of her external appearance, and he does not like that.

As they arrive at the animal clinic, Lucy and David walk into a run-down house full of trinkets and animals. This used to be a government-sponsored charity called the Animal Welfare League, but it ran out of money a long time ago. Bev Shaw, who now runs the place out of her own good will, greets them and shows them in. Bill Shaw is in the kitchen drinking tea, and offers David a cup. David is relieved when Lucy says they are not staying, but that she is just picking up some medicine for her animals. David can't help but voice his opinions once they are back in Lucy's car. He feels that people like Bev and Dave are the kind of people that try to do so much good in the world and end up going on a killing spree or a shooting rampage out of frustration. Lucy is insulted by his hint that she should associate herself with better people; she tells David that these are the best kind of people, and that she finds their work to be of the noblest kind. They fight in the car and drive silently the rest of the way home.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter shows a quiet struggle between father and daughter. He is so accustomed to his city way of life that he cannot fathom how people live in the country. As they go on

about their day on the farm and at the market, David is definitely not in his familiar surroundings, and this makes him uncomfortable. This is what makes him lash out towards the Shaws and to make them seem like worse people than they really are. David does not feel right even being inside the clinic, since he is under the impression that he is somehow a better person than the Shaws are. This hypocrisy really surprises the reader.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

On Saturday afternoon, David sits in the living room and absentmindedly watches the soccer game on TV. He does not understand the language of the commentators, so he turns down the volume and nods off. When he wakes, Petrus is sitting on the couch next to him with a beer, watching the game with interest. As it ends, they turn the channel to a boxing match. David leaves the room and goes to see Lucy, who is reading in her room. He tells her that he can see his stay here is not working out. She disagrees, saying that he just needs time to adjust to this way of life and needs to find things to do to take up his time. She suggests that he can help her with the dogs by cutting up meat for them. She also tells him that Petrus has bought the adjoining piece of land, and will need help plowing it and making it work for him. She is sure that Petrus will be able to pay a wage out of the land grant he received. Lucy also suggests that David should volunteer to help Bev Shaw with her animals. After some thought, David agrees to all three of these activities; although he is adamant that he will be helping Bev out of sheer boredom, and not because he feels he has to repay his debt for being a bad person. As they talk, David can't help but notice Lucy's good bone structure. He sees that she is an attractive woman in her prime despite of her extra weight, and he wonders if she is passionate when she is with men.

Chapter 9 Analysis

David's city ways are definitely not meshing well with Lucy's country life. Lucy, however, is more understanding and patient than David, and suggests different activities for him to keep him busy while he is staying with her. David, in the back of his mind, realizes that if he is seen helping out Bev Shaw, it will appear that he is a sinner who is trying to repent for his sins by volunteering for a good cause. He is stubborn and does not want to seem this way, even if deep down inside he does feel this way.

We notice a role reversal here, as David is about to become Petrus' hired help. Petrus is now a man with money, a man that can afford to hire an extra pair of hands to help around his land. Just a few years ago, Petrus was that hired help.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

David arrives at the animal clinic early in the morning, and already he fights his way through a crowded waiting room filled with people and their animals. He finds Bev Shaw in an exam room, and jumps in to help her hold down a dog she is examining. Together, they take care of the dog's sore tooth. Next they examine a goat whose scrotum is swollen and red; its' owner says that the goat has been savaged by dogs. Bev sees that this goat is in very poor condition and offers to put the goat down; the owner refuses and storms out of the clinic. As the day goes on, they tend to as many animals as possible. David is truly amazed by this unattractive little woman who has taken it upon herself to try and control the animal population of Africa. Her place is one of last resort for many of the animals; they are brought here to die, and she helps them do that. She says that she does not like to put animals down, but that somebody has to do it.

At the end of the day, David helps in the dog kennels. They distribute the food and watch as the dogs eat. David tells Bev that he is here helping her because he has been disgraced in the past, and this is why he is staying with his daughter. Bev still accepts his help.

In the evening, David has trouble falling asleep. He lies on his bed and listens to the sounds of his daughter's life—drawers opening and closing, dishes being washed. He wonders how long Helen will stay away and whether it's because of his presence. He is not exactly sure, but he imagines that Helen and his daughter are lovers, and ponders that strange thought for some time. David realizes that Lucy is no longer a child, but wonders if he would feel as disturbed if he knew that Lucy shared her bed with a man.

Chapter 10 Analysis

We can only assume that Lucy has told Bev Shaw about her father's past indiscretions and the reasons why he is staying with her. Bev does not seem to mind this at all, but in fact is very appreciative of his help. This primitive job that Bev does seems gruesome and meaningless to David. Bev is actually a very important member of her community who performs a valuable service for many people. Since nobody else is eager to volunteer for the job of putting down animals, she has taken this task upon herself.

Whether Lucy is a lesbian or not is a question that is not answered here. We wonder if it will be answered later on in the story. David has a hard time imagining Lucy with another woman; he can't even understand how two women can satisfy each other. From what we know of his numerous encounters with strange women, he is not a man who is known for his great lovemaking skills. We remember Melanie's unresponsiveness to his touch. So, it can be fairly said that David is not one to judge how two women are able to satisfy each other, when he himself has probably never really satisfied a woman.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

On Wednesday, David and Lucy watch the wild geese fly by and then take the two Dobermans for a walk. Lucy asks if he likes to live in this part of the world, and suggests that he could look for a job at the nearby Rhodes University. David tells her that his reputation will follow him anywhere he goes, and the only job he could get would be that of a clerk or a kennel attendant. Lucy wonders why David is hiding out after his incident, and why he doesn't at least try to justify himself in front of his colleagues. He explains that he sees what happened as an act of nature—that all men, like animals, have desires that simply cannot be turned off. These desires are part of their nature and should not be punished. He feels that it is better to be dead than to be forced to live life without acting on one's desires. Lucy disagrees, stating that people certainly can live without desire. As three strange Black men walk by them, David gets a bit nervous, but the men pass.

As David and Lucy walk back to the house, they hear the dogs barking in their cages. They see the two men and a younger boy in the yard. Lucy calls out for Petrus, but he is not around. The men tell her that they have had an emergency on the road and would like to use her phone. She and David look at each other and tend to believe the story, despite being scared in the situation. Lucy walks into the house with one of the men. The other one follows, and the door is locked from the inside. David, in a panic, tries to climb through the bottom opening of the door, but is hit on his head and loses consciousness.

As he comes to, he is in the bathroom with the door locked from the outside. He does not know how much time has passed. He screams for Lucy, not knowing what has happened to her and praying that the men have not hurt her. One of the men comes into the bathroom, takes David's car keys, and douses him with some kind of spirit. David begs for them to take anything they want, but just not hurt them. A match is struck as David is covered in flame and the bathroom door is locked again. He manages to put out the fire on his head and hands with the water from the toilet, and hears the sound of the dogs being shot in their cages and of his car driving away.

He is screaming for Lucy, terrified that they have done something terrible to her. The door opens and Lucy is there in her bathrobe, barefoot, with wet hair. She runs to the cages and consoles one of the dogs with a wound to its' throat. David tries to console her, to hug her and make her feel more secure, but she does not respond to his touch. They survey the damage. Many things have been taken from the house and what is left is a mess. David's head is hairless, covered in brown ash and pink sores. As Lucy locks the bathroom door behind her, David tries to wash himself at the kitchen sink. Lucy is now dressed, and is leaving to walk over to the neighbor's house to call for help. She tells David that when they tell their story of what happened, he should stick to telling only the part that happened to him. She will tell her side on her own.



Chapter 11 Analysis

This shocking event is preceded by the interesting conversation between father and daughter. David sees his own actions at the university being driven from a deep passion that lies within all men, and says that he would rather not live than be forced to live with passion. Lucy, on the other hand, just sees this as her father's stubbornness and stupidity, and does not understand how he's willing to give up his life and his job for the cause of passion. This conversation is a foreshadowing of the gruesome event that's about to occur on the farm.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Ettinger, the neighbor, drives Lucy and David to the hospital. David is surprised that Lucy wants to go to the hospital first and not the police, but Lucy is adamant about having David see the doctor for his burns. He sits in the waiting room for two hours before he is seen by an Indian woman who bandages him up and gives him pain medication. Back in the waiting room, he is surprised to see Bill Shaw, who has come to pick him up. Bill considers David his friend, and David wonders if he would do the same if Bill had been hurt. Lucy is back at the Shaw's residence, where she has taken a sedative and is resting. Bev assures David that Lucy has been to the police and has seen a doctor herself.

After David takes a bath, Bev lays him down to sleep on a couch that smells of cats. He falls asleep fast and is visited by a dream. He dreams that Lucy is calling out for him, asking for his help. He gets up and tries to save her, only to bump into a chair in the room. He makes it to the room where Lucy is sleeping and sits by her bedside as she drifts off to sleep. He wonders if her soul had spoken to him and asked for his help.

The next morning, Bev takes care of Lucy in her room as David eats breakfast in the kitchen. David wonders how Lucy is doing. He realizes she has been raped by those men, and he wonders to himself if the men knew that she is a lesbian. He goes to the room and speaks softly to Lucy. He asks her if she has seen a doctor to take care of her. She answers that she saw her doctor, but some things cannot be taken care of. She says that they will go back to the farm today to clean up and to start all over again. David thinks this is a bad and unsafe idea, but Lucy has made up her mind.

Chapter 12 Analysis

David sees firsthand the kind of good people the Shaws are. They help David and Lucy out in their greatest time of need, and David realizes that he's not as kind a person as they are. Subconsciously, David feels very guilty for not being able to help Lucy, and feels responsible for what happened to her on the farm. Even though he was locked in the bathroom, he feels that he could have done something to get out of there and fight off the three men.

Even though Lucy is in a very fragile state, she is adamant about going back to the farm to continue living as close as possible to the way she used to. David is surprised and frightened by this strength he sees in his daughter.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Bev Shaw changes David's bandages, as they get ready to return to the farm. David looks at himself in the mirror and sees a mummy. As he waits for Lucy in the garden, he thinks in despair about what has happened. He feels his life and his strength draining out of him, as though all human emotions and feelings are disappearing into thin air. He realizes that neither he nor Lucy will ever be the same again. He sees that it will take Lucy a very long time to recover, and is scared at the thought of being the one responsible for the farm, the garden, the kennels. Two policemen arrive and follow David and Lucy back to the farm. As Lucy tells them her version of what happened, she tells everything except for the part where she was raped. The policemen take the report and leave. Shortly, the telephone repairmen arrive, and then Ettinger stops by. Petrus has been missing ever since the incident, and nobody knows where he could be.

David kindly offers to bury the dogs. He asks Lucy why she has chosen to hide her story, rather than tell the police about the rape. Lucy insists that she has told the whole story. As David contemplates the events, he realizes that the three men will hear on the news about a robbery and an assault, and will be proud of their conquest and happy that she is too afraid to tell on them. He digs a hole in the ground big enough for six large dogs, and buries them.

When David sees that Lucy is moving her things into the small storage room, he tells her to take his room. Since he is not keen on moving into the musty storage room, he decides to take Lucy's room instead. He feels this is more fair; this way, the intruders will not keep reminding them of their presence here, and life will go on. Over dinner, David asks Lucy again why she won't tell the police the truth. He guesses that she may be trying to show him what it's like for a woman to be violated by a man, but she insists that this is not the case. She tells him that in this day and age in South Africa, this is a private matter that she should keep to herself. David tries to make her understand that she can't make herself pay for the crimes of humankind and that she should not try to be noble. Lucy is frustrated that David does not understand her reasons, and they finish dinner in silence. They both sense that there is a rift between them.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Following the incident, the gap between father and daughter widens. David is outraged that his daughter won't tell the police about the rape, and he thinks this is very arrogant and selfish of her. Lucy does not seem to be afraid, but is still hiding the rape from others. The incident has left her understandably shaken and she is just not herself. David falls into a deep despair over what has happened. We see his personality and his perspective changing slowly as he works on the farm and buries the dogs. Before

coming to live with his daughter, he did not have a high regard for animals or the people that took care of them. Now, he has become one of them.

The new South Africa has brought with it new freedoms and new rules. This seems to be the reason why Lucy doesn't want to tell on her accusers. Maybe she is afraid of retaliation from the black community, or maybe she feels that she somehow deserved this treatment. The reader will have to wait and see if this is further explained.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The next day, Ettinger offers David a gun. David tells him he will think about this, and goes on repairing the kitchen door as best as he can. Suddenly, he notices that Petrus has come back. He has come back with his wife, and brought supplies for his new land. David watches as Petrus unloads the truck and goes into his house. David wonders why Petrus didn't tell Lucy that he was going away for a few days, and why he went away at this particular time. Lucy brushes the comment off. Throughout the day, Petrus does not make any contact with Lucy or with David. David spots him working near the dam, and approaches him. They talk about the incident; Petrus has heard about it. Petrus inquires if Lucy will be at her stall in the market tomorrow; Lucy tells David that she is not up to going. David sadly realizes that this is because of the disgrace, Lucy is ashamed and frightened to show her face in public because of what happened to her. She was an independent, strong woman, and those three strangers have shown her what a woman can be used for.

David goes to the market with Petrus the next day. They make some sales, but not nearly as much as Lucy usually brings in. Many people stop by and look at David's bandaged head and ask about Lucy. Petrus is the one who runs the stall, David is just there to help. He reads a newspaper, which recounts the robbery on the farm, but there is no mention of the rape. David thinks again about Petrus and his strange disappearance, but realizes that Petrus is not obligated to report his every move to him. He suspects that Petrus has bigger plans; he must be planning on taking over Lucy's land some day, and maybe even Ettinger's.

David is suspicious that Petrus was somehow involved in the incident, or at least knew about it and could have warned Lucy. He helps Petrus clean out a concrete storage dam in order to get to talk to him some more. He tells him that those men must have had a reason for picking out Lucy's place. Petrus calmly reasons that it is the job of the police to catch the perpetrators. This sends David into a quiet rage, for he is sure Petrus would not have been so calm if it had been his wife who was violated and not Lucy.

David's days are completely taken up by the tasks that Lucy used to do on the farm. He cooks, cleans, gardens, goes to the market, helps Bev at the clinic, and helps Petrus with his irrigation system. His eye and his skin are healing quicker than he expected. In the meantime, Lucy is not getting any better. She stays up all night and sleeps during the day, having become a total recluse in her own thoughts. David sends a letter to Rosalind, telling her that they had a break-in but are both fine, to be sure that Rosalind hears the news from him and not somewhere else. He fights with his own demons; he is losing his identity here with each passing day. His new burned look has made him a monster; he is no longer attractive to women by any means. The books that he brought to the farm in order to work on the Byron project were in the trunk of the car, and are



now long gone. He has put off working on the play for so long but he sometimes gets ideas of how the musical part of it will go.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Lucy has been disgraced by her perpetrators. She has been violated in the worst way, and must now live with this knowledge her whole life. David wonders if Lucy will ever be her old self again, and doubts it. One does not just get over an event like this, especially knowing that the perpetrators are still free.

In some way, Lucy's disgrace is similar to Melanie's disgrace. Of course David was not a violent rapist, but he still violated the girl against her wishes, on numerous occasions. This time, David is on the other side of the fence, and he can clearly see how a person is affected by such a violation. Even though he never compares Lucy's situation to Melanie's, we see him becoming emotionally drained as he realizes what has happened.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Petrus is working on his part of the land, and David notices that there are two sheep tied to a stable nearby. The sheep are on a bare patch of ground, with no water or grass for them to enjoy. Petrus tells David that the sheep are for the party that he is throwing Saturday night, and invites David and Lucy to the party. David suggests to Petrus to move the sheep to a grassy patch of land so they can graze. Later, Lucy says that the party is probably to celebrate the land transfer that will be going through shortly. Lucy supposes they should make an appearance at the party, to seem proper. David is frustrated at the sheep's bleating, and takes them over to an area by the dam where there's plenty of water for them to drink and grass to graze. He thinks it's cruel to leave the sheep without food or water, even if they will be slaughtered soon.

David cannot help but be disturbed by Lucy's constant moodiness. He thought she would slowly be better, become more like her old self, but now he wonders if she will ever be able to fully recover. He wonders if she has gotten some disease from the men; when he asks her, she tells him that she is a grown woman and that she has had all of the tests done. Now all she has to do and wait some months to know for sure if she has caught anything.

The next morning, David notices that the sheep have again been tied to the stable on a dry patch of land. He is frustrated by this, and does not accept that this is just the country way of life. It seems to him to be indifference, even hardheartedness. The sheep deserve to have a decent couple of last days of their lives. David surprises himself as he feels closeness to the sheep. He is not sure why, and can't put it exactly into words. He thinks back to Bev Shaw handling the sick goat and wonders if he has to change into a person more like Bev Shaw, more in tune with the animals. He tells Lucy that he would rather not go to the party. Lucy mocks him a bit, by pointing out his newfound emotions towards the animals.

Saturday comes, and preparations for Petrus' party are in full swing. David watches as some women arrive, and soon he smells boiling meat; he knows that it is the meat of the sheep that have been slaughtered. He feels a certain sadness in his soul for the sheep, but is not sure he should mourn beings that don't mourn amongst each other. He takes a brisk long walk to clear his head. The party is in full swing by evening, with young and old folks arriving. Lucy puts on a dress and heels for the party, and David joins her as they walk over to Petrus' house. They join the party. Noticing that they are the only two white people in the house, they find themselves having a nice time. Petrus introduces them to his wife, who is pregnant. He says that they are hoping to have a boy since boys don't cost as much money as girls do. Lucy gives them a nice bedspread as a present, for which they are very grateful.



At the party, Lucy dances with a young man while David eats a plate of food. Suddenly, Lucy sees the three perpetrators, and urges David to leave with her immediately. David is furious, and goes over to the younger boy, who he clearly remembers out of the group. He causes a scene, and Petrus tries to intervene. Petrus insists the boy is his guest and he does not know why David is threatening him. The party has grown silent as people watch David. Lucy leads him away from the scene and back home. David is very frustrated at Lucy's choices, he tells her she should stand up for herself and report the boy immediately to the police. Lucy tells him this would be unfair to Petrus since his party would be ruined, and she does not want to be rude to him. She points out that Petrus is not just some hired help she can get rid of, he is now an equal to her. David tries to convince Lucy that she will not be able to live with herself much longer if she continues keeping this secret. She tells him that she is not calling the police and slams the door.

David is very sad at this apparent gap that is growing between him and his daughter. It is almost like they are a married couple, fighting more and more every day. He realizes that he will have to leave the farm soon, since Lucy must be resenting the day he came to stay with her. He also can't imagine Lucy being able to stay here by herself much longer. He sneaks out of the house and enters Petrus' house by the back door, noticing the boy among a crowd of people. He says nothing, just stands in the doorway and watches. The partygoers look at him with unease, but David lifts his head high and keeps watching.

Chapter 15 Analysis

We witness David's transformation even further as he cares for the helpless goats. To him, they are not just food for the party, but beings who have souls and who deserve a decent life. Petrus apparently does not see it this way, and this silent struggle between David and Petrus ensues.

The party is a stark contrast to David's mood and Lucy's condition. Petrus very well knows what happened to Lucy, but chooses to go on and have a celebration for himself. He invites Lucy and David, not out of kindness or concern but out of necessity. David suspects that Petrus wants to take over Lucy's land, and he must remain on good terms with Lucy if this is to happen in the future.

Lucy is ashamed about what happened to her and the last thing she needs is to see her perpetrators again. As David tries to talk to the boy at the party, he is shunned away like the outsider that he is among that crowd. We wonder if Petrus knows that it was these men that violated Lucy, and suspect that he does.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The day after the party, Petrus asks David to help him lay down pipes in the land. David does not want to help, as he has come to really dislike Petrus, but has no way to back out of the project. As they work on the land, Petrus goes on and on about his plans for this land, and David dislikes him more and more with each word. Finally, David steps in to the conversation and asks Petrus about the boy at the party last night. He says that he must know who the boy is, that the boy is guilty and should be turned in to the police. Petrus says that the boy is not eighteen yet and will not be put in jail anyway, and that he is not guilty of anything. Petrus knows what happened here a few days ago, and David is frustrated that Petrus seems so indifferent to the events. He even brings up that insurance will cover the loss of David's car, when in fact he apparently knows it is much more than the car was lost. Petrus assures David that Lucy is safe on the farm. David does not believe him since Petrus was not able to protect Lucy from the last attack, and apparently even knows the perpetrators.

As David confesses to Bev Shaw that he is afraid to leave Lucy alone on the farm, she assures him that Petrus is a good man and that he will watch after Lucy. David is not convinced and points out that even though Petrus may not have planned the attack, he conveniently disappeared at the right time for the attack to happen. Bev says that poor Lucy has been through such an ordeal, and David is shocked at the implication that he was not there for her at the time of need.

David has bought a small television to replace the one that was taken, and he and Lucy sit and watch TV in silence on some days. During the day, he tries to always stay outside, working on the grounds in order to give Lucy her space inside. He knows he is not wanted here anymore, but cannot bear to leave Lucy here alone. His work on Byron is not moving at all; he cannot find the words to even write the beginning. He works long hours at the clinic, helping Bev Shaw as she puts down unwanted dogs on Sunday evenings. He is not particularly fond of Bev, but continues helping her in the clinic. He never asks Bev how she can stand doing this job; he knows she will say that there is nobody else to do it. Although he never thought of himself as a compassionate man and as a lover of animals, David finds himself emotionally attached to these unwanted dogs that he has to hold as Bev injects them with their final shot. He has taken it upon himself to dispose of the corpses every week. On Monday mornings he drives to the city incinerator and loads the bags in one by one. This is usually the job of the workers there, but he has chosen to do this task himself after seeing how the workers mistreat the bags with corpses in them. For reasons he himself cannot explain, he has chosen to contribute to the goodness of the world in such a strange way.



Chapter 16 Analysis

We begin to wonder more and more if Petrus was directly involved with the crime. He seems indifferent to what happened to Lucy. Maybe, in some way, he feels that Lucy deserves this because of all of the wrongs that have been done against his people in the past. It seems awfully unfair for one young woman to carry the burden of a country's misdoings. For the first time since the beginning of the novel, we also begin to identify with David more and more; he is frustrated at the wrong that has been done against his daughter, but is helpless to do anything about it.

David's transformation is even more obvious here as we see him take such gentle care of the dog carcasses. Just a short time ago, he would have laughed at somebody doing what he's doing now. But now, he sees it as his moral duty to take care of the animals in their very final moments. He realizes that there is nobody else to do this gruesome task and does it with conviction. In a way, he may be realizing that he is alone in this world and that one day his body will be disposed of as well.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

On a regular Sunday evening, as their work is done in the clinic and the dog carcasses are loaded into the car, David and Bev talk. Bev thinks David is used to a different kind of life, sleeping with different women in the city. David is amazed at how women talk; Lucy must have told Bev all about her father's misfortunes with women. David grazes his finger across Bev's lips, and a flame is ignited. The next day, when the clinic is closed, Bev calls David to meet her at the clinic. They meet and make love on a blanket on the floor. David imagines that Bev has been preparing for this for many Sundays, to make love to a man who comes from the city and from a different way of life. David lets her do the things she wants to do with him to satisfy her needs. He himself is only mildly satisfied after their act. He thinks in despair that this is the kind of woman an old man like him will have to resort to sleeping with, as he will no longer attract young girls who excited him so much more.

Chapter 17 Analysis

David reverts back to his old self, showing that he hasn't really changed as much as we thought. Bev is a married woman, but David doesn't even think about that. He is just concerned for himself, mourning the days when he was able to attract younger, more beautiful women.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

As David watches Petrus plow his land with a tractor, he sees how Petrus is a changed man in the new Africa. In the old days, it would have taken him all day to plow somebody else's land with his hands. Nowadays, it just takes him a couple of hours on a tractor to plow his own land. David approaches Petrus, asking him if he would mind looking over Lucy's land if Lucy were to want to take some time to herself and go to Cape Town with David. Petrus seems a bit skeptical, saying that he has a lot of his own work to do, and it would be difficult for him to take care of Lucy's land as well.

David gets a call from the police station, saying that his Corolla has been found. He is very surprised, since he didn't think the cops were even working on this case anymore. When Lucy and David drive to the police station to get his car, Lucy chooses to wait in the Kombi while David goes inside. The cop had told David over the phone that the two men had been apprehended for the crime, and Lucy doesn't want to run into them at the station. David is disappointed as he sees that the Corolla is not his, and when he hears that the men had been released on bail.

As they drive back, they again talk stiffly about the incident. David tells Lucy that she should consider leaving the farm in order to put the ordeal behind her. He offers to pay for her to go to any other country of her choice, but she says that she has thought through all of her options and has to decide on her own what she'll do. Lucy confides that she saw such hatred in the men's eyes, and that's what really scared her the most. It's like she saw the hatred for all of the wrongs that have been done against their people in South Africa in the past. In turn, David confesses that he feels guilty for not being able to save her from the men. Lucy assures him that there is no way he could have saved her, and that she's actually convinced that the men will come back for her. When David again tells her that she should leave the farm, Lucy supposes that by staying on the farm this is the price she will have to pay; to be raped again by the former slaves who think it is their justified payback for all the wrongs done to them in the past. Even though both Bev Shaw and Lucy keep saying that he can't understand Lucy's situation because he wasn't there, he feels that he can put himself in the place of the men and imagine their thoughts and actions. He isn't sure, however, if he can put himself in Lucy's place.

Later that day, David is frustrated and writes his daughter a letter, expressing that she should leave the farm and not take on the burden of South Africa's past onto her shoulders. Lucy responds with a letter of her own, telling him that he's like a monkey with his eyes closed and that he does not see her situation. She writes that even though she is dead on the inside, if she leaves the farm now she will never be able to live with herself.



At the clinic again, David and Bev lie in an embrace on the floor. They have not made love, since apparently that is of no interest to either of them. They discuss David's first wife, Evelina, who was Dutch. After their divorce, she moved back to Holland and remarried, but Lucy chose to live in South Africa. David confides in Bev that he's trying to get Lucy to go live in Holland again, to get away from this life here. Bev reassures him that she and Bill will look after Lucy often, and Petrus will be there to help as well.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The changing times and standards of South Africa are shown in the beginning of this chapter. When asked for help, Petrus is no longer the kind neighbor that helps Lucy out in her time of need. Instead, since he is very busy with his own land, he refuses to watch out for someone else's land, even if that land belongs to the woman whom he has known for a very long time. We suspect more and more that Petrus would much rather take over Lucy's land completely.

The fear that has overtaken Lucy is real and it is a direct reflection of South African culture. Since Lucy lives in this environment and knows the ins and outs of the new society, she is certain that the attack on her was to show the new power that the blacks have in this society. She is sure that the attackers will return for her, but chooses not to do anything about it. In this way, she is trying to show that she is still a strong independent woman, but in fact we see how vulnerable she is.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

David travels to see Mr. Isaacs, Melanie's father. He is let into the house by Melanie's younger sister, Desiree, who says that her father is working at the nearby school and will be home soon. David notices that Desiree is even more beautiful than Melanie, and his thoughts trail to the image of the two girls together in bed with him. He abruptly cuts off his thoughts and goes to the school to find Mr. Isaacs.

David tells Mr. Isaacs his side of the story of what happened with his daughter. David says that there was no premeditation on his part, that Melanie just struck a fire within him that just wouldn't go out. Mr. Isaacs seems pleased when he hears that David has left his teaching post and has now resorted to working on his daughter's farm. As David turns to leave, Mr. Isaacs follows him and invites him to dinner at his home that evening.

At dinner, there is an awkward silence. The beautiful Desiree looks in disgust at David as the old man who slept with her sister. He cannot help but keep noticing her beauty, and his mind wanders. Mrs. Isaacs, a short woman who once was beautiful, simply does not speak to David. So it is up to David to fill the silence, with stories of his daughter and the farm and the clinic. He talks of the simple country life, while leaving out all of the gruesome details. They manage to get through dinner somehow, and David begins to leave. As his last words, he tells Mr. Isaacs that he is sorry for what he put Melanie and her whole family through. He asks for Mr. Isaacs' forgiveness. Mr. Isaacs is quite cold, asking David if he has learned his lesson from God. David points out that he lives in a state of disgrace because of what has happened, and has owned up to his actions. Mr. Isaacs says that he won't try to get David reinstated at the University, if that's what he came for. As he is leaving, he goes into an adjacent room and sees Desiree and her mother sitting on a bed, talking. Again, waves of desire wash over him. He kneels on the floor in front of the women and touches his forehead to the floor silently, then quickly leaves the house.

Chapter 19 Analysis

We are not really sure why David goes to see the Isaacs family. Mr. Isaacs is understandably upset at what had happened at the university to his daughter, and sees David's visit as a way for him to get his apology. One has to wonder why Mr. Isaacs feels that David should apologize to him, and not to his daughter, but that is not addressed. Again here, we see David's old ways. As he sees Melanie's younger sister, he immediately has erotic thoughts about her. One would think that after all that has happened he would be able to control his emotions and thoughts a little better, that he has learned his lesson, but apparently this has eluded him.

The only reason that David was invited to dinner was to get him to apologize to the family. It is not clear why David even accepted this invitation, if he wasn't intent on making the apology in the first place. When we see him apologizing in what looks like a very sincere way, we have to wonder how true this really is.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

As David returns to Cape Town after being gone only three months, it seems like he has been gone for much longer than that. He is not sure how he can go on living here, lurking in the shadows among his former co-workers. He is sure he will have to sell his home and move to the outskirts. His finances are a mess, and he imagines himself growing old alone. As he enters his house, he sees that it has been ransacked; every room has been turned upside down and everything of any value has been taken. David goes to the University and visits his old office. He picks up his books and things from the young man who now occupies his office.

As he wanders about town at dawn, he is unsettled that he is now truly on his own, with nobody to tend to but himself. He misses the countryside, and wonders if he'll be forgiven for leaving the duty of disposing of the dog carcasses. The people in town seem to not notice him, his neighbor looks away as she sees him. David calls Lucy to check on her and ask if she would like him to return. Lucy tells him that she will let him know when he is needed; for now, the Shaws and Petrus have been helping her out. At the supermarket, Elaine Winter is next to him in line. She is the chair of his former department at the University, and she treats him quite coldly. She does not ask him how he's been, just pays for her groceries and hurries out of the store.

David sits down to write his play on Byron. He had originally imagined it as two secret lovers, Lord Byron and Teresa, secretly pining for each other at the lavish castle where Teresa and her husband live. Byron is a man past his prime, while Teresa is a beautiful young woman longing for true love. David had previously thought his story going this way, but now he cannot find the words to continue the story. So he tries another angle, one where Teresa is now a middle-aged woman caring for her elderly father, and Byron is long dead. Byron had betrayed her, slept with other women, and viewed her as just one of his conquests. In Teresa's life, however, Byron was the one true love that she justified her life for. The aged Teresa calls out to Byron's ghost, and he answers faintly. Her strength of character shows as she helps Byron's ghost find the right words to communicate with her. David is so inspired by Teresa that he is even able to write the original music to accompany the play. He uses the banjo for this. David sees himself in neither Teresa's nor Byron's character; he envisions himself as part of the accompanying banjo music. He spends days working on this, and is completely enthralled in the process. There is also a sudden voice of Byron's daughter Allegra, who is upset that her father has left her to live with the nuns. Byron does not answer his daughter; he is on the other side now, and does not want to be bothered with what was in his life. Byron is also desperately trying to rid himself of Teresa, who even in his afterlife desires him with her whole being.



Chapter 20 Analysis

If it wasn't clear to him before, it's clear to him now—David has truly become the outsider of his former community. Everything around him in the city is telling him that he doesn't belong here anymore, from his house being destroyed to his keycard not working at the university. In an act of desperation he calls his daughter, in hopes that she will ask him to return to the farm. She does not do this, and he feels even more useless than ever.

The idea for his play has drastically changed in his mind. This is partly due to his newfound hopelessness and disappointment in life. Teresa, the main character, can be seen as an extension of David's personality, and we get to see a glimpse of David's thoughts through her endless song.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

David meets Rosalind in town for coffee. She looks in disgust at his mangled ear and asks him how he's been. She has heard of how he did not cooperate at his hearing at the university, and wonders why he tried to stand up for some principle instead of trying to save his job. David tells her that he did the right thing, and that he's not worse off for not having the job anymore. Rosalind does not see it this way; she sees an unemployed elderly man with no salary, no future, and no respect from his community. He tells her of the opera that he is writing and mentions that he will be selling his house soon. As they are about to part, Rosalind mentions that Melanie is performing in a local play.

David wonders if what happened between him and Melanie is really over. Would she have any feelings for him if they were to see each other again? Or would she just regard him as an old man with a mangled ear who violated her? With regret, David realizes that there is no place for old men in the world of passion, that the young couple with the young.

David goes to the theater to watch Melanie in *Sunset* at the Globe Salon. Although the play is quite bad, David is enthralled by Melanie and how much she has grown. He sits in the dark theater watching her, and remembers back to the scores of women that he has had over his years. He thinks it's interesting how his life is in some way entwined with all of them, and wonders if any of them think about him. All of a sudden, he feels a spitball land on him; he turns and sees Ryan, Melanie's boyfriend. He gestures him outside. After climbing through annoyed patrons, David goes outside to be berated by Ryan. Ryan tells him to stay away from Melanie and to go spend time with his own kind. As David drives back from the play, he sees a prostitute on a street corner and picks her up. They have very routine sexual relations in his car and he leaves her where he found her.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Rosalind takes the same stance that Lucy took: why didn't David own up to his mistake at the university and try to keep his job? This is as hard for both women to understand as it is for the reader.

David's weak character is again showing here. As he goes to the theater to watch Melanie in the play, we wonder why he is doing this. Does he think she wants to see him? Does he actually think that there could still be something between them? At the end of his encounter with Melanie's boyfriend, the reader gets a sort of satisfaction out of seeing David realize that he is of a completely different generation and should let the young people be. Again, we see his old self emerge as he picks up the prostitute.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

David regularly calls Lucy on the phone. She reassures him that all is well on the farm, but he gets a strange feeling that she's not telling him something. He makes up a story about a job interview nearby, and asks if it's ok if he spends a couple days with her. As he arrives, Lucy admits to him that she is pregnant. He is shocked and asks her why she didn't have this taken care of at the doctor's office. She says that she would not have an abortion again, and from this David understands that she must have had one in the past. He cannot believe that she would have a child by one of those men, and Lucy insists that she would not punish a child based on who its' father is. David is very upset and goes off by himself to cry in a corner.

Over dinner, Lucy informs David that the boy, the youngest of the three that raped her, is now living next door with Petrus. The boy's name is Pollux and he is Petrus's relative. David is outraged that the rapist is peacefully living on the same land as his victim, but Lucy says that she can't order him off the land because it's not her land. David again tries to tell Lucy to leave the farm; the tension between them is just as bad as it was before he left.

David confronts Petrus about the presence of Pollux on the farm. Petrus says that the incident is in the past, and nothing can be done now. He says that if Pollux was old enough he would marry Lucy, but since he's just a boy, Petrus himself would be willing to marry Lucy. David sees this as blackmail, and tells Lucy about Petrus's preposterous proposal. Lucy is not surprised, but says in fact that Petrus has been talking for quite some time now that Lucy should be more a part of their family for her own safety's sake. Lucy knows that Petrus is after her part of the land. She actually does not mind this, but sees this option as her only way to continue living on this land. Since she does not want to move away from here, this is her choice. She tells David to tell Petrus that she will marry him, on any terms that he wants, and that he gets to take title to her land. She will just remain a tenant in the house that will now be on his land. David protests, tells her that she should have more dignity than that, but she sees herself as a person with no other options, like a dog.

Chapter 22 Analysis

As we learn that Lucy may have had an abortion in the past, we wonder what has made her decide not to have one now. One cannot imagine worse circumstances under which to have a child. If she wasn't opposed to it before, then what has changed? Maybe what has changed is the South African way of life. Newfound freedoms for the former oppressed class in turn raise certain barriers for the whites. At least, that's the way Lucy seems to perceive it, that she should somehow be made to carry the burden of past wrongs.



Petrus steps into a different role as he proposes marriage to Lucy. This will not even be a true marriage, since Petrus already has two wives. It will just be an arrangement that Petrus sees as best for the situation, and Lucy is willing to calmly comply with what the man wishes. The reader doubts that this would have been Lucy's way of thinking before the incident and before the pregnancy, but the recent events have changed her personality completely.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

As David is returning from his walk with the dog Katy, he sees Pollux peeping through a window at Lucy. David is outraged and punches the boy in the face, while Katy tackles him to the ground and begins biting him. The boy is screaming, and Lucy runs out of the house to pull the dog off him. He gets up, bleeding, and runs off to Petrus's house. David wonders why Lucy would protect the boy. Lucy tells him that she cannot handle living with him anymore, and he packs his bags. David realizes that he did not accomplish anything good by attacking the boy; he only pushed Lucy further away from him.

He goes to Bev Shaw's clinic and they discuss Lucy's situation. Bev tells David to back away from Lucy and let her make her own decisions. David tells her that he has moved out of Lucy's place and is looking for a room to stay in, and that he'll be available to help at the clinic again.

David rents a small room near the hospital and spends all of his days helping out at the clinic. Since he is not allowed to cook in his rented room, he has fashioned a small home for himself in the clinic. He cooks his food there, talks to the dogs, and writes music for Teresa and her lover.

Chapter 23 Analysis

We can hardly blame David as he seems to overstep his bounds by hitting the boy. After all, this is the person who could potentially be the father of Lucy's child, and he is acting selfishly. As David finds a small room to live in and learns he isn't even allowed to cook in the room, we see his situation is very desperate. He is very lonely and sad, for he is an elderly man who has resorted to spending his days with unwanted and sick animals.

In some ways, his lifestyle has dramatically changed from a few months ago, but in other ways it hasn't. He is still alone, still without companionship, and still in denial about his life so far.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

David continues writing his opera. Teresa is longing for her lover to return to her. Although this opera has been consuming David day and night, he is sad to admit that the story is not going anywhere. In fact, there is no story, only the wounded Teresa singing an endless aria into the empty air. He is sad that his work won't be a great one that many scholars will discuss. There is one particular dog in the clinic that David has grown fond for. It has a withered left leg which is dragged behind the dog as he walks. David has been careful not to give him a name and thus become too attached, but he lets the dog out often and even contemplates once giving the dog a role in his opera. David realizes the dog will have to be put down soon.

Although David has been careful not to visit Lucy on the farm since he left there, he still helps her out at the market on Saturday mornings. He sees that her belly is not obviously showing yet, but he is sure that it will be soon. Petrus has not made any more offers to Lucy, so things are the same for now. One day, as David parks his car and walks over to the farm, he sees Lucy contently working in her garden. He realizes that she is woman who is happy in her surroundings, despite all that has happened. He also realizes that he will become a grandfather soon. He can't imagine himself in that role, and can't imagine how any young woman would want to have sexual relations with a grandfather. As Lucy notices David, she kindly invites him in for tea. He is happy to notice that their relationship is beginning to patch up slowly.

It is Sunday again, and David and Bev are busy putting down the old, sick, unwanted dogs. One by one, David brings them into the operating room where Bev talks to them, soothes them, and then administers the lethal shot. David wraps them up in plastic and places them by the door. The process does not get any easier, in fact Bev says that it only get harder with each one. This week it is time to put down the crippled dog, the one who loves David's music and the one who David has grown to love. He knows he could save the dog for another week, but what good would that do? He brings the dog in and holds him while he is put down.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Teresa's character mirrors David's situation. The story is going nowhere, as is David's life. There is no next chapter, no job waiting for him at another university, no young women lined up to make love to him, and nothing really to look forward to. Even Lucy, who is going through such an ordeal, is in a happy place in her life. It may not be true happiness, but she is at least content with the decision that she has made. She is comfortable on her farm, and will keep this simple way of life for as long as she can.

David's attachment to the animals is bringing out a softer side to his character. As he parts with the dog that he has grown to love, he is parting with his old way of life as well.



Characters

David Lurie

David is a college professor in Cape Town, South Africa. He is a man who used to see a prostitute weekly until the prostitute quit her job at the brothel he attended. He leaves his job at the university after having sexual relations with one of his students. He is a twice-divorced man who has found pleasure in women his whole life. His desires have gotten him in trouble, and now have left him alone and hurt. David's daughter, Lucy, lives on a farm in the Eastern Cape, and he goes to visit her after the incident at the University. David is a city man, and is uncomfortable with the thought of his daughter living on a farm. Since he now has no job, he has plenty of time to concentrate on the opera about Byron that he has had floating in his head for quite some time. It takes him a long time to build up his concentration, but he finally begins to craft a love story out of the characters of Byron and Teresa. He identifies himself more closely with Teresa, who sings endlessly to her dead lover who had betrayed her while alive.

David's character changes in some ways, and stays the same in others, throughout the story. He has been a man who has been set in his ways his whole life, and it is very hard for him to change. As he leaves the city and comes to the farm, he slowly adapts to the country way of life. In the beginning, he despises people like Bev Shaw, and dislikes animals. Towards the end of the story, he grows to love the unwanted and sick dogs, and feels a certain connection to them. At the end of the novel, David has aged much more than the three months that have gone by. He is now a solitary old man who spends his time with unwanted dogs and has no chance of ever attracting young women again.

Lucy

Lucy is David Lurie's daughter from his first marriage. She is a young woman who lives alone on a farm in the Eastern Cape. She used to live with a female companion, but she has left. Lucy is not drawn to men; she is much more comfortable in the company of women. We are not exactly sure if she is a lesbian or not. After the gruesome attack on her at the farm, we find out that she is pregnant by one of the attackers. She decides not to have an abortion, to David's dismay. We learn that in the past Lucy had an abortion, so we wonder why she has had this sudden change in morals. It may be partially due to the changes in South Africa. Since the blacks have acquired their newfound freedoms, Lucy feels that she somehow deserved this treatment and should keep this baby as a reminder.

Lucy is adamant about keeping the rape a secret, since she sees it as part of what she has to do to make up for all the wrong that has been done towards blacks in South Africa in the past. Next to her land lives Petrus, a black man who has bought part of her land and is now a landowner like Lucy. David feels that Lucy is not safe alone on the



farm and keeps insisting that she move away. Lucy will not move and abandon her way of life. Petrus has proposed marriage to Lucy. This seems ridiculous, since Petrus already has two wives, and the only reason he wants to marry Lucy is to take her property. Lucy sees this as an option, as a way for her to live more safely on the farm.

Bev Shaw

Bev runs the animal clinic in the town where Lucy lives. She is a short, stocky, unattractive older woman. The clinic used to be supported by government funds, but now Bev must ask for donations and runs the place almost for free. Bev is married to Bill Shaw. She initially lusts after David, who has volunteered to help her in the clinic. They eventually sleep together on the floor of the clinic. This goes on for a short while, but David finds no satisfaction in her. Bev shows David the process by which she puts down unwanted dogs, and together they do this unpleasant task every Sunday.

Petrus

Petrus is a black man who used to be Lucy's hired help. In the new culture of South Africa, Petrus has now bought out a part of Lucy's land and is building a house for himself on it. He has two wives: an older woman who lives elsewhere, and a younger pregnant wife who lives with him on the farm. Petrus still helps out Lucy with her tasks, but now he must be paid fairly. When Lucy finds herself pregnant by one of her assailants, Petrus offers to marry her in order to keep her safe. In fact, he just wants to have the rights to her part of the land.

Melanie Isaacs

Melanie is a student at Cape Technical University where David teaches. She is a bright student who is very interested in theater. She is seduced by David, who has sex with her on several occasions. Influenced by her parents and her boyfriend, Melanie files a complaint against David with the University staff. David faces a hearing where he does not apologize for his actions, and leaves the university. Melanie later returns to school and continues acting in local plays.

Mr. Isaacs

He is Melanie's father. He comes to confront David at the University and causes a big public scene. He is furious with David for sleeping with his daughter. Later, when David goes to speak with Mr. Isaacs, Mr. Isaacs invites him over to his house for dinner. We learn that the only reason he does this is to try to get a genuine apology out of David.



Soraya

Soraya is the prostitute that David goes to see every Thursday. He has been going to see her for a long time, and enjoys her greatly. He even thinks that there might be something more between them. After he sees Soraya with her sons in the city, she is no longer welcoming to him and soon leaves her job at the brothel. David is dismayed; he misses her and tracks down her phone number. When he calls her, she is shocked and tells him to never call her again.

Teresa

Teresa is the main character in David's opera. She is a middle-aged woman whose lover has died. She longs for him to return, and sings an endless aria to him. David sees himself in Teresa.

Rosalind

Rosalind is David's ex-wife. She was his second wife, and a stepmother to Lucy. Rosalind is the opposing voice to David's as she chastises him for not apologizing for his wrongdoing.

Pollux

Of the three men who raped Lucy, one of them was a teenage boy by the name of Pollux. It turns out that he is a relative of Petrus.' David becomes furious when Pollux turns up next door, living with Petrus so close to Lucy. Lucy does nothing to stop it.



Objects/Places

The Farm

David's daughter, Lucy, is living on a farm in the Eastern Cape. David comes to stay on her farm after his incident at the University, and learns the country ways of life. The farm is the scene for the terrible violation that takes place one afternoon. As the house is ransacked, David set on fire, and Lucy raped, the whole property becomes a reminder of what went on that day. This is also the place where Petrus, the black worker who has bought land next door, lives. He wants to take over Lucy's land one day, in order to expand his farm operations.

The University

David used to work at the Cape Technical University as a professor. He worked there for many years, until he had sexual relations with a student there. The student, Melanie, reported him to the university board, and David had to leave his teaching position since he did not want to issue an apology for his actions. David used to be a respected member of the University society, but after this incident he is shunned by his former peers there.

The Committee Room

This is the room in the University where the hearing is held regarding David's case. A group of his peers/coworkers hears the case. David is arrogant and not willing to apologize for what happened. The committee tries to convince him that he should rethink his position and try to save his job, but he does not do this.

The Brothel

David goes to see a prostitute every Thursday at a brothel near town. He enjoys the time he spends with Soraya, and wishes that they had more of a relationship. When he accidentally spots her in town with her children, Soraya gets scared that her secret profession will be discovered and quits working at the brothel. David is devastated by this.

The Clinic

Bev Shaw runs the animal clinic in town. People from near and far come with their sick and unwanted animals. Sometimes it is to get treatment for the animals, but most of the time it is to have them put down. Bev has the unpleasant task of putting down the dogs every Sunday. When David comes to stay with Lucy on the farm, he begins helping out



at the clinic. He does this for free, and at first is disgusted with the process. After some time, he grows to understand the sick animals and grows an attachment to them. The clinic is also the place where David and Bev secretly make love.

The Incinerator

David takes it upon himself to take the dead bodies of the unwanted dogs to the incinerator. He gently performs this task of loading the bodies into the flames, and tries to do this with as much dignity to the dogs as possible.

David's House in the City

David used to live there when he was still teaching at the University. It is also the place where he brought Melanie Isaacs for the first time, fed her dinner, and gave her wine in hopes of sleeping with her. As he returns to his old home after his three-month stay in the country, he finds that it has been completely ransacked by vandals. He does not seem to mind, and decides to sell the house in order to get money.

The Market

On Saturdays, Lucy takes her produce and her flowers to the market in town. She has a stall there and successfully sells her goods throughout the morning. After the attack on her, she is unable to do this any longer out of shame and fear. David takes over this task for her, going to the market and selling her goods.

The Volkswagen Kombi

This is an old car that Lucy has on her property. She uses it to transport her goods to the Saturday market. David also begins using this car to transport the bodies of dead dogs to the incinerator.

Petrus' House

Petrus has bought the adjoining piece of land next to Lucy's, and is building a new house on his property. He lives with his young wife and they are expecting a child together. Pollux, the boy who was involved in Lucy's rape, is living with Petrus in his home. They are just steps away from Lucy's property.



Social Sensitivity

Disgrace centers on David Lurie, a man well established in life and profession who discovers that all comforts can disappear in a very short amount of time. Lurie is an academic, a professor at a university in Cape Town, South Africa. During the course of the story, Lurie undergoes significant change. His university has recently been modified in both name and structure; it is no longer Cape Town University College, but Cape Town Technical University, and his department, formerly Classics and Modern Languages, has been completely dissolved, leaving him with only a couple of classes to teach in Communications. The changes in Lurie's life reflect the atmosphere of South Africa, which is being altered, politically and socially. As apartheid is finally being recognized as an unjust manner of social structuring, changes within the social fabric are being rendered. This becomes especially evident in the relationship between Lurie's daughter Lucy, a white woman, and Petrus, a black man, as they negotiate the newfound roles of emancipated Africans. As the novel progresses, Petrus ceases to be under Lucy's employ and becomes a landowner himself. In this case, Lurie represents the established order in the way that he views Lucy and Petrus's changing relationship, in his mistrust of Petrus in general and in his disapproval of Petrus's new role of landowner. Lurie must adapt to the changing face of the countryside, as he must adapt to the changing physical appearance of his daughter. He must also accept her way of dealing with her role as country dweller and her relationship with Petrus.

In this simple story of a man's indiscretion and the aftermath, Coetzee explores the complex binary relationships of many aspects of contemporary South African life.

Investigations of male-female, parent-child, city-country, black-white, employer-employee are all included, and each is examined from an angle slightly skewed from what might be considered common viewpoints. Coetzee works to deconstruct these binaries by skewing common perceptions of them. Lurie's actions can be both traditional and nontraditional, depending on who is involved and the situation. This allows the reader to consider the relationships from varying viewpoints. Today's South Africa finds itself in unstable times, and individual reactions to this instability comprise many of the socially interesting aspects of this story. David Lurie's actions and the subsequent reactions of those around him speak to the ways that people look for stability in a rapidly changing world. When nothing is safe physically, such as Lurie's or his daughter's house, nothing is safe emotionally or mentally.

Although the story is confined to Cape Town and the surrounding countryside, and many aspects are particular to this society, the insight that Coetzee provides can be extrapolated far beyond this particular geographical area. The way that Lurie deals with changes in his life, those caused by societal shifts, and those common to all, such as aging, can be viewed as one individual's way of coping. Lurie attempts to maintain his position in life, sexually, through his conquests. These deteriorate in a number of ways (Soraya, his mistress, refuses to see him; Melanie, the student of whom he takes advantage, and her family press charges) because of his misguided attempts to control the situation by taking the situation out of its proper context. By attempting to control the



lives of others in this way and refusing to allow them to react in their natural way to his actions, Lurie creates the destruction of his own comfortable way of life. He forces his own discomfort by remaining in the country with his daughter and by revisiting the Isaacs family. In the beginning of the novel, Lurie works on the surface of things, and it is after the attack by three young men in the country that he begins to work on a deeper level; he begins to view life through more than one lens.

Techniques

Coetzee allows the characters to speak for themselves through the reliance on dialogue with minimal authorial interruption.

The story is seen through David Lurie's eyes, whose thoughts are related frequently.

This creates a certain distance from the other characters as Lurie attempts to understand his own feelings towards his situation and subsequently to understand the actions of the other characters. As the novel unfolds, Lurie increasingly escapes into his opera. Towards the end of the novel, the opera takes up entire chapters, gaining more precedence within the story. The female voice, speaking through Lurie, through the opera, becomes louder as the narrative turns to her. Coetzee uses the opera to allow Lurie's change to manifest through his approach to the opera and its conception. The tale of the aging mistress and the lost poet mirrors the changes that wreak havoc within Lurie's life and almost squelch his own poetic voice.



Themes

Disgrace

The theme of disgrace is repeated in various ways throughout the book. The first instance of disgrace is when David chooses to violate his student, Melanie Isaacs. He makes love to her on several occasions, not minding the fact that she at first would struggle with him and towards the end would just lie there passively and wait for it to be over. He is so caught up in his urges that he fails to notice what he has done to the girl. As Melanie reports David to the school board and the story leaks out, David is disgraced in the eyes of his peers and his community. He is no longer a respected professor, just an old man who had sex with his student. Thus he feels that he has to leave his teaching position and go hide out in the country.

The next disgrace occurs on the farm, with his daughter. When she is brutally raped and impregnated by three men, Lucy feels shame and guilt for what happened to her. In a way, she even blames herself, and feels that she may have deserved what happened to her. She sees her incident as part of a bigger picture, and that the wrongs done against the blacks in the past make it somehow acceptable for them to do wrong against whites. Lucy completely retreats into herself, no longer wanting to have even the minimal social interaction that she used to have prior to the incident. The theme of disgrace is strong throughout the book and hits different characters in different ways.

Loneliness

David, despite having a good job, is a very lonely man. We learn that he has been married twice, with both marriages ending in divorce. All of his adult life he has been a womanizer, sleeping with random women just for the thrill of it. We wonder if that is the reason for his two divorces. He enjoys going to a prostitute, which seems to be the only thrill in his life. As he loses his job due to his indiscretion and his stubbornness, his loneliness overtakes him as he tries to find a place for himself.

Lucy is lonely as well. She lives on a farm alone, although at one point a possible female lover lived there with her. We are not sure why the lover left, or if the woman was even a lover at all. It is clear that Lucy is content on the farm, because she is used to her surroundings and enjoys the country way of life. But David is sure that Lucy is very lonely and wishes that she would find a mate.

In that regard, we can say that Bev Shaw is lonely as well. Her life is spent putting down sick dogs. She sees David as a city man, an exotic creature who has come into her life. She sleeps with him but this does not cure her loneliness.



Stubbornness

David's stubbornness is the main reason that he loses his job. The university is willing to forgive his indiscretion if he just sincerely apologizes, but David sees nothing wrong in acting out his desires towards a student. He is not even willing to pretend to apologize, but instead is willing to lose his job and his way of life over something that did not have to happen. He continues being stubborn as he sleeps with Bev and with a prostitute, and goes to see Melanie act in her play. One would think that he would have learned his lesson, that he would be more careful in his actions, but this is not the case. He is unable to change his character.

Lucy is a bit stubborn as well. She would be much safer and better off living somewhere else for a while, in order to get away from the dangerous situation that is developing in South Africa. But she sees it as her duty to stay where she is to prove a point to her attackers, and to go on living like she used to even if everything around her has changed.

As David Lurie negotiates the change in his life and his society, he must find new ways to communicate. At his departmental "trial" for his illicit relationship with Melanie, Lurie refuses to say the words that would absolve him of his crime. He insists on communicating his feelings about the situation in his own way, which he does through silence, and this silence causes his dismissal.

Likewise, in his conversation with his exwife after the incident, he interacts with a person who refuses to remain politely silent about his indiscretion, and forces him to examine it in more ways than just as another of his common affairs. In addition, throughout the story, Lurie is haunted by his opera, and as his experience with the environs of South Africa widens, and his viewpoints begin to change, so does his opera. After the attack, the opera's focus shifts from Byron to his forgotten mistress.

Lurie's increasingly more frequent retreat into the world of his opera demonstrates his way of reacting to the forces at hand, and his discovery of new ways to look at situations and new ways to communicate his and others' feelings about the world and human relationships. He turns to the opera more and more as his own control over women is gone, for it is one final way that he can exert control. Even his relationship with Bev Shaw, whom he thought he could easily manipulate, is more than what he initially considered it to be.

Lurie then encounters more to think about male-female relationships and the ways that men and women communicate on the farm as he interacts with his daughter. Lucy refuses to conform to society's (and Lurie's) view of what she should and should not do, and what she should or should not look like. She is a lesbian; she dresses in the manner that she pleases and no longer feels the need to maintain the standards of beauty that are upheld by society. Most important, she refuses to view her robbery and rape in the same way as her father and the rest of society. She frequently tells Lurie that he does not understand the way in which she is dealing with the incident, and when she



does finally talk to him about it at his insistence, she continues to view her situation in an "abnormal" light, by refusing to press charges and continuing to live on her farm.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee uses sex as a way to communicate. This communication occurs between the two people involved in the act itself, but communication also occurs between the couple, or a member of the couple, and the society as a whole. Lurie refuses to listen to his partners Soraya and Melanie outside of the act of sex and therefore misuses their relationship. Lucy and her partner are perceived in a different way because their relationship transgresses certain societal codes, and as a result, Lurie feels that this might possibly be a reason for the attack. During the attack, Lurie is uninvolved, emasculated, unable to react, locked up in a bathroom while the three men rape his daughter. The sexual act that occurs does not include him, and he can do nothing to stop it. Lucy later views the rape as the assailants' act of communicating with her and others like her as they use the rape as a way, in Lucy's terms, to mark their territory. It is their way of reacting to their own repression, and their way of exerting power over others in, possibly, the only way that they can. Lucy understands this and as a result, views the attack not as a personal affront to her. Lurie, who was not involved directly, sees the situation from the outside, physically and emotionally, and therefore finds it more difficult to react to it in a similar way. He wishes to respond in kind to the attack or to demand justice in some way. What Lurie does not realize, especially at the beginning, is that justice does not exist in a traditional way in his society, or perhaps, does not exist at all for some.



Style

Point of View

The book is written in the third person. It presents somewhat of a neutral tone, the author making sure that the reader sees all aspects of each situation. However, since the main character is David Lurie, everything we observe happens through his eyes. We get numerous insights into David's thoughts, but no one else's. All of the other characters are presented to the reader from David's perspective.

Setting

The story is set in South Africa. The first half of the novel takes place in the city of Cape Town. It is here where David lives his lonely life and goes to see a prostitute weekly. At Cape Technical University, David is a professor of communications. In one of his classes he meets a student, Melanie Isaacs, who he has relations with. Melanie reports him to the school board and David has to leave his teaching position because of this indiscretion.

The second half of the story takes place on a farm in the Eastern Cape. David's daughter, Lucy, lives on the farm, and leads a country lifestyle. David comes to stay with Lucy after the incident at the University, and stays for a while. It is here that three men ransack the house, set David on fire, and rape Lucy. Although David keeps insisting that Lucy leave the farm and go to a safer place, she refuses to leave the place where she is most comfortable.

Language and Meaning

The language used throughout the book is easy to understand. The narration flows smoothly and the reader has no problem following the various themes throughout the book. The more difficult parts are somewhat towards the beginning of the book, where David is still in the professor's role, and the reader is privy to his thoughts that are in terms of various authors that David so cherishes. These passages are small, and are written in a more literary language.

On the farm, David sometimes has trouble with the dialect of the local people. He wishes that everybody would speak the same language as him, but this is just not the case. We also notice that towards the end of the book, David no longer thinks in terms of the authors that he so used to love.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-four chapters. The chapters are all of different length, some being as short as one page. The story is chronological, with brief flashbacks as David remembers something from his past.



Quotes

"Is he happy? By most measurements, yes, he believes he is. However, he has not forgotten the last chorus of *Oedipus*: Call no man happy until he is dead." Chapter 1, page 2.

"The company of women made of him a lover of women and, to a certain extent, a womanizer." Chapter 1, page 7.

"Why? Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it." Chapter 2, page 16.

"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." Chapter 3, page 25.

"The two secretaries do not pretend to hide their curiosity. There are students in the office too; as the stranger's voice rises they fall silent." Chapter 5, page 38.

"Melanie would not have taken such a step by herself, he is convinced. She is too innocent for that, too ignorant of her power. He, the little man in the ill-fitting suit, must be behind it, he and cousin Pauline, the plain one, the duenna. They must have talked her into it, worn her down, then in the end marched her to the administration offices." Chapter 5, page 39.

"He does not feel nervous. On the contrary, he feels quite sure of himself. His heart beats evenly, he has slept well. Vanity, he thinks, the dangerous vanity of the gambler; vanity and self-righteousness. He is going into this in the wrong spirit. But he does not care." Chapter 6, page 47.

"It is not a defense. You want a confession, I give you a confession. As for the impulse, it was far from ungovernable. I have denied similar impulses many times in the past, I am ashamed to say." Chapter 6, page 52.

"He is aware of her eyes on him as he eats. He must be careful: nothing so distasteful to a child as the workings of a parent's body." Chapter 7, page 61.

"So: a new adventure. His daughter, whom one upon a time he used to drive to school and ballet class, to the circus and the ice skating rink, is taking him on an outing, showing him life, showing him this other, unfamiliar world." Chapter 8, page 71.

"But if you want to put a stop to the scandal-mongering, shouldn't you be standing up for yourself? Doesn't gossip just multiply if you run away?" Chapter 11, page 88.

"Yet she too will have to leave, in the long run. As a woman alone on a farm she has no future, that is clear. Even the days Ettinger, with his guns and barbed wire and alarm



systems, are numbered. If Lucy has any sense she will quit before a fate befalls her worse than a fate worse than death. But of course she will not. She is stubborn, and immersed, too, in the life she has chosen." Chapter 15, page 134.

"He saves the honour of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it. That is what he is becoming: stupid, daft, wrongheaded." Chapter 16, page 146.

"Stay with your own kind." Chapter 21, page 194.

"So that is it. No more lies. *My people*. As naked an answer as he could wish. Well, Lucy is *his people*." Chapter 22, page 201.



Key Questions

Coetzee is known as one of South Africa's foremost authors. His fiction does not always take place within South Africa, but in this story, the city and countryside of Cape Town is a primary focus. The country is attempting to recover from apartheid, the effects of which are far from being over. The process of change, socially and personally, is important in this story, and the ways in which people adapt to tragedies of all sorts is a significant theme. The discovery of processes of dealing with difficulties makes up the main action of the story.

1. Throughout the story, Coetzee, when referring to Lurie, only uses "he." The only way that the reader finds out his name is through other characters' dialogue. Why would Coetzee do this? In addition, is there significance in the fact that Lucy calls her father only by his first name?

2. Lurie's attitude toward women and sex is somewhat cavalier. Would you consider Lurie a misogynist? How would you describe his reaction to the charges of rape?

3. Why would Lurie refuse to speak in his own defense at the trial? What do you think Coetzee is trying to accomplish with that sequence of events?

4. When Lurie visits the Isaacs in their home, Mr. Isaacs asks Lurie who he wants to apologize to. To whom do you think Lurie was directing his apology?

Why does David Lurie visit Mr. Isaacs in his office and then accept the dinner invitation?

5. Is there any significance to the dissolution of the Classics and Modern Languages department and the other changes occurring at Lurie's university? How are the changes significant in this particular context—this city at this time?

6. Find out what you can about apartheid and South Africa's current situation.

Does Coetzee present a faithful representation of the problems and difficulty that South Africa is experiencing at this time?

7. What is the significance of the animal shelter? What do the dogs represent throughout the story?

8. Why would Coetzee use Byron as the subject of Lurie's opera? Why use this particular story for the opera to focus his creative efforts?



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the reasons why David refuses to apologize to the University committee for his wrongdoing.

Do you think Melanie decided to report David on her own, or was she influenced by others? Why?

What do you think Petrus' role in the attack was?

Do you think that the men who raped Lucy will return to cause her further harm?

Why was Bev Shaw so intent on sleeping with David?

Why does Petrus offer to marry Lucy? Why doesn't he talk directly to Lucy about his proposal?

Go forward one year. What kind of life do you see Lucy leading? What about David?

Literary Precedents

Coetzee is among the most prominent South African writers in recent decades.

For a look at the other side of apartheid, Mark Mathabane's *The Kaffir Boy* tells his story of growing up as a black boy in South Africa during apartheid. This work provides another source to look at in terms of stories about South Africa and provides counterpoint to Lurie's position towards Petrus and his customs.



Related Titles

Disgrace is Coetzee's eighth novel. One of his works in particular, *Foe*, like *Disgrace*, explores male-female relationships through the introduction of a female character, Susan Barton, into Defoe's story of *Robinson Crusoe*. Told in the first person from Susan's point of view, the result is an intriguing interplay of man and woman both on the island and continuing after in civilization, and Coetzee uses their interactions to explore the creative process, especially the nature of writing and communication. Susan's relationship with Friday after the death of *Crusoe* proves to be extremely complex as they attempt to tell the story of the island.

When Susan approaches writer Daniel Foe with a request that he write their story, he is hesitant. The resulting interplay of the three characters creates an interesting situation of male-female and black-white out of which the telling of their time on the island is created. These themes are echoed, for example, in *Disgrace* in David Lurie's experience of teaching communications classes, and in his attempt to write an opera, as he tries to grasp the music and words that surround him and focus them into the story of Byron and his mistress.



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