

2010

# Laying Bare the Sins of the Father: Exploring White Fathers in Post-Apartheid Literature

Casey M. Reck  
*Claremont McKenna College*

---

## Recommended Citation

Reck, Casey M., "Laying Bare the Sins of the Father: Exploring White Fathers in Post-Apartheid Literature" (2010). *CMC Senior Theses*. Paper 63.  
[http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc\\_theses/63](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/63)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

**CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE**  
**LAYING BARE THE SINS OF THE FATHER:**  
**EXPLORING WHITE FATHERS IN POST-APARTHEID LITERATURE**

SUBMITTED TO  
PROFESSOR KERI WALSH  
AND  
AN ANONYMOUS SECOND READER

AND  
DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY  
CASEY RECK

FOR  
SENIOR THESIS  
FALL/2010  
NOVEMBER 29, 2010

## Intro:

### For Better or for Worse

The dissemination of the apartheid system in 1994 not only resulted in a sudden and dramatic political transformation, but also in a radical change to everyday life for South Africans. Governed for decades in the private sphere by the same forces that controlled the government, the conclusion of apartheid coupled racial equality with the emergence of a new set of social problems. As post-apartheid authors grapple with coming to terms with the changes made to everyday South African life, their novels are “marked by an abrupt shift away from a racial focus towards a wider concern with all the many and various dimensions of human existence” (Ibinga 1). Although their works still address the country’s ever-present racial issues—a discourse from which they have not been liberated—there is a strong emphasis on the difficulty of the changes South Africa is undergoing. In their novels, authors, such as Mark Behr, Nadine Gordimer, and J. M. Coetzee, use the figure of the father to explore the complexities of South Africa’s transition, raising questions of how to atone for the past, whether whites can survive the present, and if it is possible to achieve internal unification in the future.

The newly elected African National Congress (ANC) created the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*, No. 34, establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC, which soon became the focal point of the country, was presided over by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. With its “objective of bringing gross acts of human rights abuse into the public domain has, if nothing else, shown that bearing witness to the past plays a constitutive part in healing the trauma inflicted by apartheid” (Poyner 106). The TRC was instrumental in opening up discussion of apartheid by

encouraging South Africans to candidly give their personal stories a public voice. The result of having victims confront their perpetrators shed light on the past in a public manner, exposing many truths whites had been unwilling to acknowledge, prompting them to face their roles in apartheid.

Believing the catharsis of the TRC was enough to heal apartheid wounds, early post-apartheid literary works were characterized by “a new form of writing called ‘honeymoon literature’ . . . . The most striking feature of honeymoon literature is its overriding tendency to praise the miraculous materialization of the so-called multiracial ‘rainbow nation’” (Ibinga 1). As the different races of the country came together in unification, a new, more inclusive South African family seemed to emerge. After years of internal strife, authors assumed the country’s celebratory tone to embrace the new political and social changes being initiated within the country.

However, it did not take long for South African writers to realize the transitional process did not end with Nelson Mandela’s election or the TRC hearings. Taking a similar path to that of other postcolonial African writers, post-apartheid writing depicts the disillusionment that quickly replaced the initial euphoria as “the past continues to haunt people’s everyday lives” (Ibinga 1). As the initial honeymoon bliss wore off, it became evident it takes more than an election to change a social mindset. As Yazir Henry, one of the victims to come before the TRC, asserts, “[w]e need to realize that although a lot rests on the shoulders of the government, every South African has a responsibility to ensure that the lessons of pain and suffering that penetrate our daily lives are acknowledged and addressed” (Henry 173). Reconciliation cannot be imposed on South Africa by the ANC or TRC; South Africans must collectively recognize the

silenced and unspectacular daily horrors of living under the apartheid regime in order to move forward as a united nation. Accordingly, South African writers have once again taken up their pens to explore the themes of politics, oppression, and race. Instead of demanding political responses to these issues, though, the authors now turn their gazes inward to investigate the fundamental ideological changes South Africans need to make in order for the governmental shift in power to be successful.

The TRC has provided the writers with the liberty to do so, giving them license to reveal the horrors of apartheid in order to promote social change: “No publisher will say to a writer now, ‘Yes, we know it got bad, but you mustn’t exaggerate’” (Meyer 87). Similar to the way in which the TRC brought private stories into the public realm, post-apartheid narratives encompass the private struggle to come to terms with the past and the complexity of moving forward in a way that opens up history to discussion. Realizing the potential for healing the public through the telling of private stories, “novelists and writers have been enabled to turn their gaze inwards to the private sphere, to reflection and self-questioning” (Poyner 103). In this manner, readers can find an expression of their struggle to transition into post-apartheid life through fictional characters. Addressing issues of the past and present, post-apartheid authors strive to assist in the country’s development.

One lingering aspect of the past that post-apartheid novelists address is the hegemonic masculinity of white South African men. In his book, *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, masculinity scholar Robert Morrell declares, “[i]n times of transition the state (and its citizenry) becomes involved in issues of masculinity whether it likes it or not” (Morrell 21). An essential feature of the apartheid era, the authority of white

masculinity becomes problematic in the post-apartheid era as men struggle to adjust to their feeling of powerlessness. During apartheid, the South African government was the political manifestation of dominant, all-consuming masculinity. Due to this, the country's move toward becoming a more progressive and inclusive nation requires a severe reduction to the power wielded by white males pre-1994. Considering how ingrained this form of male power had become in white men, though, learning to navigate the new South Africa in the aftermath of apartheid proves to be extremely difficult for them.

This problem is magnified due to their sense of disempowerment extending beyond the public and political realms: “The father is seen as ‘a source of stability, discipline and order in the family and, by some kind of magic, in society as well’” (Lindegger 129). The authoritative male power encouraged by the apartheid government carried over into the domestic sphere as well, resulting in all white South African men possessing an ingrained sense of superiority. In the wake of apartheid, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu automatically filled the newly opened male positions of authority, taking control of the country. These new, benevolent fathers—Mandela, the father of the new South Africa; Tutu, the Holy patriarch supervising the TRC—established a different model for masculinity within the public sphere. Their promotion of benign jurisdiction denounces abusive hegemony, further erasing white male identity. Thus, the collapse of the National Party has also led to the destruction of the white male's self-image, thereby making the transitional process all the more difficult.

On account of the link between the public and private power of white males, the father figure becomes the literary embodiment of the apartheid regime, used in post-apartheid literature to investigate the remnants of the apartheid state and the possibility

for these men to adapt to the new South Africa. Within the country there is a “historical legacy of racial emasculation by which African men were infantilized. To restore the value of fatherhood in constructions of masculinity it is necessary to tackle both of these factors” (Morrell 8). White racial abuse of power embedded the South African father with a negative connotation. These men took the idea of being regarded as the “head of the household” to the extreme and applied it to an entire country. Acting as the ultimate patriarch, the apartheid government subjugated all non-whites within the country. The intermingling of public and domestic male authority did not just blur the line between the two entities; it erased the line completely: “In the context of the hierarchical and patriarchal authority systems of the day, the father sat at the pinnacle of the pecking order.... In effect, the father was the patriarch, the symbol and custodian of ultimate power and responsibility in the family and in the community” (Lesejane 173). Now, without political support, white South African men discover themselves not only disempowered politically, but privately as well. Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* (1995), Gordimer’s *The House Gun* (1998), and Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) all confront the entrenchment of apartheid masculinity through father figures.

Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*, though written the year after the conclusion of apartheid, is set during the 1970s—the height of Afrikaner control. The novel establishes the type of hegemonic masculinity associated with white males during apartheid. Through the depiction of the eight-year-old narrator’s (Marnus) relationship with his father (Major-General Erasmus), Behr reveals how apartheid ideology became ingrained in the younger generations. As Marnus “grows to the realization that ‘I and father are one,’” he assumes “the gender characteristics of the father” (Lindegger 123). Although it

is natural for a son to aspire to become his father, adopting the General's masculinity proves to be detrimental. The beliefs espoused by Marnus reflect his race's racist and superior opinions. By repeating his father's ideas, Marnus illustrates the power of indoctrination within the white South African household.

Marnus' father also embodies the close relationship between public and private authority. As a prominent figure within the military, the General possesses legitimate, legal power. This translates into the home, where he governs the same way he does in the army—with rigid, uncompromising, and irrefutable authority. *The Smell of Apples* emphasizes that the “concept of a father as the one with ultimate authority and responsibility was central to the determination of the role of men in the family and society. This resulted in patriarchy becoming the norm” (Richter and Smith 164). The presentation of powerful domestic masculinity and how it ingrains submissiveness to authority within the home makes it clear how the response was replicated in the public sphere.

Both *The House Gun* and *Disgrace* expand upon Behr's novel, analyzing how white men handle their fall from power. Gordimer elaborates upon the ingraining of hegemonic masculinity to implicate all whites in the tumultuous past. Through Harald Lindgard, a mild-mannered foil to Major-General Erasmus, Gordimer emphasizes the idea of masculinity as a social construct. Despite Harald's seeming unobtrusiveness, he is also responsible for South Africa's continuing cycle of violence. Although he is not racist, Harald never publicly condemned apartheid: “Harald's religion surely protected him from the sin of discrimination. True, he had never done anything to challenge it in others; not until the law had changed society to make this safe and legal for him”

(Gordimer 87). Harald believed the liberal and accepting nature of his faith could shelter him from bearing responsibility for the country's past.

However, he is implicated along with the rest of his race when his son commits murder, an act that initiates him into the undercurrent of the country's violence. Although it is difficult for him to find an explanation for how his son could take the life of another human being, Claudia, his wife is aware of how religion was used to legitimize his power within the household. When talking to Duncan, their son, she avoids "referring to 'your father'; any reminder of that identity with its authoritarian, judgmental connotations—Harald with his Our Father who art in heaven" (Gordimer 82). Harald's religion cannot protect him from being associated with the more obviously dominant white males; it was simply a different form of entitled power, a way in which he separated himself.

*Disgrace*, the most explosive and internationally recognized of the three novels, closely charts David Lurie's struggle to adapt to the new restrictions on his power. Throughout the novel, Coetzee strips the protagonist of all of his masculine authority in order "to look at new aspects of power distribution and social relations" (Ibinga 3). With the rejection of the old authoritative establishment, Lurie finds himself stranded in post-apartheid South Africa. He declares he does not "want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us" (Coetzee 74). However, Coetzee's novel presents a reversal of masculine power, leading Lurie to exist under black rule the same way blacks had lived under white control. Essentially, he is reduced to living out the rest of his days as a dog or pig would.

Behr, Gordimer, and Coetzee all explore the possibilities of the new South Africa through the father characters in their novels. This Thesis will examine how white

hegemonic masculinity became ingrained through the father within the domestic sphere, and the implications this has for men in the wake of apartheid. Focusing on the degree to which Harald Lindgard and David Lurie accept the new limits to their paternal authority, the possibility of achieving national unification will be tested against the success these men have in recreating their personas in a less dominant manner. In *The House Gun*, Gordimer asks, “[w]hen you have been given a disaster which seems to exceed all measure, must it not be recited, spoken?” (Gordimer 71). Or, in the case of post-apartheid South Africa, must it not be written? Using literature as an artistic complement to the TRC, Behr, Gordimer, and Coetzee explore the legacy of apartheid through the fathers in their novels.

## Ch. 1:

“Go on, Have a Bite”<sup>1</sup>

A few months after South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994, playwright Athol Fugard declared South Africa to be “one of the last bastions of chauvinism” (Morrell 3). Under National Party governance, white hegemonic masculinity was safeguarded and encouraged due to its integral role in upholding apartheid ideology. The apartheid government “was made up of men—Afrikaans-speaking, white men. They espoused an establishment of masculinity which was authoritarian, unforgiving and unapologetic” (Morrell 17). The country was run the same way an oppressive patriarch governs his household, leaving no room for criticism or questioning, and indoctrinating the next generation from an early age within the domestic sphere. The white father was an essential tool in ensuring the prevailing of this authoritarian masculinity, turning the white household into a subset of the South African state. The extension of political ideology into the Afrikaner home inextricably linked public and private worlds through their mutual dependence on each other and male power. Therefore, the overthrow of the National Party led to white males feeling emasculated, both politically and socially. This sense of disempowerment and loss of identity are explored by post-apartheid novelists through literary father characters, posing the figure as analogous to the apartheid state. The inseparable bond between white South African fathers and the apartheid government is emphasized by literary fathers to exhibit white male difficulties in transitioning into the post-apartheid era. In *The Smell of Apples*, Mark Behr presents Marnus’ father as the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Dir. William Cottrell and David Hand. Perf. Lucille La Verne. Walt Disney Pictures, 1937.

embodiment of the apartheid state, suggesting the collapse of the National Party is also the conclusion to white existence.

In 1970, South Africa “was a highly militarized state with a panoply of repressive instruments to deal with those who did not agree with the direction of government polity” (Morrell 17). Brutally eliminating any competition or dissenters, all males of European descent were given unchallengeable authority within the country. However, the hegemonic masculinity of the government was not confined to the political sphere. In order to maintain their authority over the black majority, Afrikaners encouraged and fostered this form of masculinity in their sons, combining the public with the private to produce an authoritarian society completely constructed around white male power. Hegemony, which in the apartheid context refers to “a particular form of masculinity which is dominant in society, which exercises its power over other, rival masculinities, and which regulates male power over women and distributes this power, differently, amongst men,” came to be the defining characteristic of not only Afrikanerdom but all white masculinity within South Africa (Morrell 9). The success of the National Party and apartheid depended on the ability of white males to control everyone within the country, an achievement made possible by the link between the public and private.

Set in the mid 1970s, Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* depicts the apex of white male domination during apartheid, portraying not only its powerful yet hypocritical nature, but also how it became instilled in the younger generations. Behr critiques Afrikaner masculinity through the character of Major-General Johan Erasmus, the eight-year-old narrator’s father, and the blatant embodiment of every element of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity associated with apartheid. Dad, as he is referred to throughout the

novel—further emphasizing the political link to the private sphere—is a “‘man’ amongst men...strong, unflinching, unwavering, determined, single-minded...he who supremely governs” (Olivier 522). He epitomizes the ideal Afrikaner male, possessing a high ranking position with the military, establishing him as the ideal role model for his young son. The Major-General controls every cultural influence on his wife and children, from the newspaper the family reads—“Dad only reads *Die Burger*.... We don’t read the *Cape Times* or *The Argus* because the journalists who work there are mostly English or foreigners who didn’t grow up here, and don’t care about South Africa. The *Cape Times* is just propaganda” (Behr 85)—to the music his wife listens to—“Dad doesn’t like us listening to jazz.... Dad says jazz is just one step away from pop music” (101), and “pop music can cause you to become a drug addict” (67). Not only is Dad a high-ranking military official, and therefore a powerful authority figure within the country, he is also the ultimate authority figure within his home. He rules not by physically abusing his family, but through mental control, ensuring they closely observe his rules and ideologies in order to earn his difficult approval.

Dad’s dictatorship-like control ensures the Erasmus family structure mimics that of the apartheid state. His sovereignty within the home reveals how complicity with the government’s racist actions was possible: “[t]he authoritarian state has a representative in every family, the father; in this way he becomes the state’s most valuable tool.... [He] reproduces submissiveness to authority in his children” (Bloem 220). Due to his father’s persona and control over the flow of information reaching the home, Marnus is deeply entrenched in Afrikaner masculinity from the day he is born. In this way, although “[m]asculinity is not automatically acquired, it is also true that boys and men are not

entirely free to choose those images which please them. Their tastes and their bodies are influenced...by discourses of gender which they encounter from birth” (Morrell 8). The General’s opinions on race, class, and gender are mirrored in Marnus’ beliefs as the boy does all he can to develop into the man his father is. For that reason, the sickness of apartheid “lies in the family environment.... For the individual the authority of the state is a reproduction of the authority of the family by which he was shaped in his childhood” (Bloem 216). The figure of the father is instrumental to the state because he is his children’s model of authority, demanding loyalty and submissiveness from them, which then translates into an affinity for the apartheid state. The ideology the father instills in his son prepares him to assume his father’s place within society, guaranteeing the future of Afrikaner male rule.

This also fosters a strong desire to impress the figure in power. Marnus strives to make his father proud of everything he does, whether it is receiving top marks on an essay, becoming captain of his rugby team, or agreeing with the Major-General. One day, while fishing with his best friend, Frikkie, Marnus feels a strong pull on his line. Although he has extreme difficulty reeling in the catch, he “can’t let Frikkie take over. If he takes the rod, it means we both caught the fish and then it’s not only mine” (Behr 93). It is important to Marnus that he alone is able to accept his father’s praise for the act. Eventually, Marnus’ arms become too tired and he is forced to allow Frikkie to hold the rod for a while. However, Marnus feels the pressure of his father’s imminent arrival: “The beach is still deserted, but I’m getting worried that Dad and the General will arrive while Frikkie’s holding the rod” (Behr 94). Unwilling to permit Frikkie to have the glory of making the catch, Marnus once again takes control of the rod.

The all-consuming desire of the son to please his father culminates with Dad's appearance on the beach. At this point, Marnus has been attempting to reel in the large yellowtail for over an hour. Although he is exhausted, he increases his efforts when he spots the Major-General, doing all he can to impress his father. However, realizing he cannot succeed on his own, Marnus wishes his father "hadn't come. I'm so scared of losing the fish, or of not being strong enough to bring it in" (Behr 95). His fear of failing in front of his father is too much for Marnus to handle. Instead of assisting his son, Dad yells at Marnus to pull himself together: "Move on back to the beach and stop being a crybaby. Mister Smith and Frikkie are watching you" (Behr 97). Always concerned with presenting an image of strong, independent masculinity, the Major-General refuses to aid his son or allow him to appear weak in front of others. When the shark escapes, all Dad says is, "He beat you," a defeat Marnus notes would not have happened if "he had helped me when the shark got close" (Behr 98). The humiliation Marnus feels after failing to impress his father encourages him to redouble his efforts in receiving his father's approval, giving the Major-General the power to mold his son into a hegemonic male Afrikaner.

It is not only in action but also in ideology that Marnus endeavors to resemble his father. Marginalizing alternative masculinities by muting or stigmatizing them, "[h]egemonic Afrikaner masculinity was intricately bound up with social and political power in Afrikaner society and hence with Afrikaner nationalism" (Morrell 157). Marnus is a sponge, absorbing all of the Afrikaner propaganda imparted to him by his father. Dad tells Marnus "the history of the Afrikaner...is a proud history. We must always remember that and make sure one day to teach it to our own children" (Behr 38). Convinced of the

nobility of his ancestry, Marnus is led to believe all races in opposition to Afrikaner power are inferior. In a horrific espousing of his naïve interpretation of South African racial tensions, Marnus declares, “[o]f all the nations in the world, those with black skins across their butts also have the smallest brains. Even if you can get a black out of the bush, you can’t get the bush out of the black” (Behr 39). Trusting his father’s infallibility, Marnus logically concludes blacks oppose white rule due to their inherent lack of intelligence. Similarly, he proclaims that on weekends coloureds “get drunk and they murder and rape each other” (Behr 32). These statements are the results of a young, impressionable mind being assaulted by a particular set of beliefs on a daily basis, an affront his mind has not been able to escape. The result of Marnus’ extreme admiration for his father is that white masculine ideology, and thereby apartheid ideology, continues to be passed on through an ingrained psyche of supremacy.

Trusting the righteousness and superiority of Afrikanerdom is essential to the type of masculinity encouraged in Marnus. One day, as Marnus and his father overlook Kalk Bay, the General tells his son “[e]verything, everything you see, we built up from nothing. This is our place, given to us by God” (Behr 124). Behr proposes a sense of entitlement is what promotes the superiority complex of the whites. The “independence loving aspect” of the masculinity of Boer men conceals “a willingness to resolve disputes by fighting and an unbending resolve to defend ‘the Boer way of life’” (Morrell 12). Believing South Africa was nothing more than groups of uncivilized tribes living in the “bush” before the Europeans imported “high culture” labels the indigenous South Africans as barbarians without any right to govern their own land. The conviction of the inability of black men

to civilize South Africa gives Afrikaners the right to exert complete control within the country.

This sense of entitlement is heightened through the novel's religious invocations. While still overlooking Kalk Bay, Marnus calls attention to the fragrant smell of the apples filling the car. Dad uses the apples to further emphasize the positive impact of the Afrikaners on South Africa, informing Marnus, "[e]ven the apples we brought to this country" (Behr 124). This Biblical reference establishes the white male as the earthly embodiment of God. Under their strict white male rule, South Africa has been transformed into a contemporary Eden, complete with the forbidden fruit. The synergy between Afrikanerdom's "religious, political and cultural leadership" is what made its hegemonic rule indisputable (Morrell 158). After all, who can argue with the authority of the upholders of God's will on Earth? The symbolic quality of the apples develops the concept of Afrikaner rule as being endowed with Divine authority, which has allowed them to restore this section of the world to its pre-Fall state.

The acceptance of his father's patriarchy as natural is challenged when Marnus witnesses his father rape Frikkie. The veil of secrecy "over the reality of domestic violence," which, since the 1970s, "has been lifted in the media" to expose "the reality of unhappy marriages and domestic violence," is also lifted for Marnus in this instant (Morrell 163). However, instead of rebelling against his pedophile father, the eight-year-old Marnus never says anything, not even when he is a grown man—the ultimate exhibition of the power of indoctrination. Through Marnus' silence, Behr "lays bare the very business of programmatically poisoning and thereby (self) colonizing the mind" (Olivier 526). Marnus' pro-patriarch choice proves how inextricably encapsulated his

mind is by Afrikaner masculinity. His response to discovering his father has sexually assaulted his best friend does not bring about resistance to authority; instead, his silence ensures the perpetuation of the white male's abusive power.

Eating apples with Frikkie the morning after the rape, Frikkie declares, “[t]hese apples are rotten or something” (Behr 179). Marnus then notices it is not the apples that stink; it is the hand holding the apple. Taking Frikkie's corrupted hand, Marnus sniffs “the inside of his palm. It smells sour” (Behr 179). Moving from an Edenic state of innocence, Marnus' newly acquired knowledge about his race and father allegorically initiates him into the realm of experience, exposing the corruption at the heart of Afrikanerdom. Once the fruit has been tampered with, the collapse of apartheid cannot be far behind. The absolute power of white masculinity has become problematic; Marnus' father has not only exerted power over blacks and coloureds, but he has abused one of his own, tampering with the forbidden fruit. After Frikkie's rape Marnus “associates the smell of semen with rotting apples, with the ‘contaminating seed of militarist patriarchy’” (McMurtry 103). Even though the unity of public and private masculinity has succeeded in establishing complete control for white males, the sense of infallibility it encourages in Afrikaner males causes the men become blinded by their power. Although the white man is not immediately expelled from Paradise with this revelation, Marnus is now aware of the hypocrisy of his idol, signifying the inevitable self-destruction of bloated Afrikaner masculinity. The patriarchal hegemony that “underlies or is inherent in the Afrikaner Broederbond, like any system, contains the means of its own demise” (Woods 168). It is white masculinity, the very element upon which Afrikaner domination was built, that is responsible for the demise of the race.

In the end, the only way Marnus can escape living out the dreams of his father is through death. While fighting for South Africa in Angola, Marnus is fatally wounded. Instead of feeling anguish at the too early conclusion to his life, Marnus expresses a sense of relief and gratitude for finally being released from his father's control: "I feel Dad's face against my chest and my arms around his head, and I feel safe. But now it is a different safety. Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history" (Behr 198). Even though he became disillusioned at the age of eight, Marnus could never escape history nor the identity imposed upon him by his father. Behr's novel's presentation of the all-consuming and inescapable nature of white masculinity establishes it as the defining factor of white South African men. Posed as self-destructive yet inescapable, Behr's depiction of Marnus' self-sacrifice at the end of the novel forestalls the possibility of white men transitioning into a more positive future, offering no alternative besides death.

After Frikkie's rape, Marnus experiences an "extinction of belief, of *anything* to believe in, in the wake of the remorseless indoctrination of apartheid ideology. Here there is nothing that survives, nothing that is untainted or unscarred" (Medalie 48-49). Marnus' only legacy is that of disenchantment. Behr suggests it is better for the white male to die once the hypocrisy and corruption of Afrikaner masculinity has been exposed rather than attempting to create a new life out of the disillusionment. *The Smell of Apples* is unflinching in its emphasis on the "extraordinary power of indoctrination...the older Marnus is the product of his upbringing, the indoctrinated child is the origin of the Permanent Force member fighting...in Angola" (Medalie 50). In joining the army, Marnus follows in his father's footsteps, assuming his place within the realm of violent

masculinity that has shaped Afrikaner history. His innocent “childhood was founded on a violence which he finally encountered and exercised as an adult” (Samin 21). Even though patriarchy is presented as corrupt and destructive, it is also shown to be invincible through Marnus’ inability to expose his father.

The character of Major-General Erasmus is used in *The Smell of Apples* to explore the power of indoctrination within white South Africa. Behr questions the possibility of white men to free themselves from their ingrained sense of superiority and hegemonic masculinity in post-apartheid South Africa by “uncompromisingly laying bare some truths about the Afrikaner community” (Samin 20). The unwillingness of Marnus to expose his father, in fact, the relief he expresses when he discovers Frikkie will never say anything either, constructs a troublesome future for white South African men. Marnus would rather die than publicly confront his father and the establishment of authoritative masculinity. *The Smell of Apples* illustrates why the transition from the apartheid era into post-apartheid South Africa is extremely difficult for white men. As the Marnus’ father tells him, “[a] *Volk* that forgets its history is like a man without a memory. That man is useless” (Behr 38). Since post-apartheid Africa requires white men to discard their dominant masculinities, they are essentially being asked to forget their history, and are thereby rendered useless. Marnus’ happy relation of his childhood in the pastoral and “idyllic setting of False Bay in Cape Town” proves to be nothing more than a false recreation of Eden from which the white male is expelled after the democratic election of 1994 (Samin 20). *The Smell of Apples* establishes the type of masculinity Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee explore through its taboo position within South African life post-Fall.

## Ch. 2:

“The Sins of the Father are to be Laid Upon the Children”<sup>2</sup>

In South Africa, the termination of white administrative power in 1994 “signified a major break with the past for Afrikanerdom... Afrikaner masculinity no longer prescribes ideals of masculinity to South African society at large, to white men in general, or even to Afrikaans-speaking, white men” (du Pisani 172). Going from the complete authority depicted in *The Smell of Apples*, white men, both Afrikaner and English, were met with an immediate sense of displacement with the conclusion of apartheid. After decades of being defined by their hegemonic masculinity and legitimizing their supremacy through the political sphere, white males find themselves not only disempowered politically, but in the midst of a gender and racial identity crisis. In the post-apartheid era, even the white English man cannot exist as he used to: “South Africa, until recently, was a man’s country. Power was exercised publicly and politically by men.... For white men, the uneven distribution of power gave them privileges but also made them defensive about challenges...to that privilege” (Morrell 18). Now, not only has that privilege been challenged, it has been overthrown, which is why navigating post-apartheid South Africa is challenging for these newly disempowered men.

Rather than setting their novels during apartheid as Behr does, Nadine Gordimer in *The House Gun* and J. M. Coetzee in *Disgrace* examine the white male identity crisis from the perspective of life post-apartheid. Each author explores a father’s reaction to new governmental policies, which focus “on the empowerment of the ‘formerly disadvantaged’...[leaving] white men in a position which may well be seen as ethically

---

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. 3.5.1. New York: Penguin, 2000.

exposed and which is certainly uncertain, fragile and politically disempowered” (Horrell 3). For decades the private and political lives of white South African males had mutually and parasitically fed off each other, until they became indistinguishable. Due to their inseparable nature, the collapse of the National Party and the disintegration of the white public world the regime made possible led to the simultaneous destruction of the private lives of whites, resulting in an inescapable sense of alienation and displacement.

In *The House Gun*, Gordimer reveals the unconscious entrenchment of hegemonic masculinity in all white males—even the English—indicating the entire race’s complicity with apartheid. She suggests that by unveiling the various facets of apartheid masculinity it becomes possible to make conscious alterations to this identity that can no longer exist. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee presents the stripping of white South African masculinity not only as part of the transition from white to black rule, but also as a shock from which neither this generation nor the following ones can recover if black rule governs in the same way white rule had. Each novel examines the implications of the white fall, for both the fathers and their children. Gordimer forces Harald Lindgard, the father in *The House Gun*, into the new public realm to explore the possibilities for a white male in this new environment. In contrast, David Lurie, Coetzee’s protagonist, refuses to participate in the new public sphere, attempting to create a new identity privately. Navigating the tenuous threshold of post-apartheid South Africa, Gordimer and Coetzee explore the flexibility of white South African masculinity, questioning its ability to adapt and manifest itself in a less dominant form.

Refusing to explicitly portray hegemonic masculinity, Nadine Gordimer’s *The House Gun* examines South Africa’s transition in a non-traditional way. Her subtle hints

at an underlying but non-consuming form of masculinity indicate it is possible for white males to successfully adopt less aggressive and power-hungry personas. Harald is described as having “[a] face that suggests a personality subservient and loyal,” characteristics usually associated with dogs, a theme Coetzee builds upon (Gordimer 20). Whereas Major-General Erasmus would certainly have never been described as possessing these characteristics, and David Lurie makes it clear he cannot live comfortably with his masculinity clipped—as a “dog”—Harald has settled into a non-dominant life in the new South Africa without too much trouble. Instead of acting as if the “[r]enunciation of the feminine and affirmation of the masculine difference are central to patriarchal power,” Harald has no desire to assert his control aggressively over others (McMurtry 101). His wife, Claudia, a doctor, is portrayed as his social and domestic equal, with often no distinction made between the two; when one does something it is written as “he/she” did this or “he/she” said that. Harald is content having his identity be in no way superior or distinct from his wife’s, refuting the common criticism of South African masculinity.

However, although Harald does not embrace the obviously aggressive and controlling features attributed to South African males of European descent by Behr, he is not an atypical South African white male. Harald represents another, less explored form of white masculinity, one Gordimer draws out over the course of her novel to include all whites in bearing the responsibility for the country’s tumultuous past. In addition to institutionalizing hegemonic masculinity, apartheid also created the less blatantly powerful masculinity found in white suburbs. These private enclaves, separated from the shacks of the blacks and coloureds, fostered their own brand of superior males. In this

sheltered environment where men with stable jobs, nice homes, and content families resided, “a hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity developed which identified the following features as desirable elements of masculinity: white, financially independent, Protestant, mature” (Morrell 22). These are all qualities Harald is able to maintain within the new South Africa, which is why his identity seems to remain intact through the transition.

Coetzee, in contrast, explores the authoritative masculinity typically associated with the National Party in order to analyze how these white men privately adapt to the new political atmosphere. Through the character of Lurie, it appears the white male no longer has a place in South Africa without his defining characteristic: hegemonic masculinity. In *The Smell of Apples*, the young Marnus cynically remarks, “Dad always says the things you remember from childhood are your most precious memories. You never forget the things you were taught or the things that happened to you as a child. Those things make up your foundation for the future” (Behr 184-185). Lurie wholeheartedly concurs with this presentation of the power of indoctrination, and thus feels displaced, unlike Harald, from the moment the apartheid regime collapses. Throughout Lurie’s life “race and class...[determined] how men understand their masculinity, how they deploy it” (Morrell 10). With new definitions attached to race and class, Lurie’s self-identity can no longer revolve around his position of racial social privilege because it is a position he no longer inhabits.

Throughout *Disgrace*, Lurie’s masculinity is closely linked to desire, and his displacement within the new South Africa is visible through the altered meanings of sexuality within this different context. In the past, sex was theoretical for Lurie: “For a man his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather

well” (Coetzee 1). Sex was something he understood and could control, which is why he mentally fails to understand the new limits to his power within post-apartheid South Africa. Similar to the conclusion of apartheid, “one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled” (Coetzee 7). The unrestricted sexual power granted him by the National Party has come to a conclusion, a political impact on his personal life. Lurie’s struggle to transition and comprehend his disempowerment is expressed through his decline in sexual power.

Aware of his power reduction, Lurie attempts to regain it through force. This leads to him overstepping new authoritative boundaries, physically violating Melanie Isaacs, one of his pupils at the University of Cape Town (UCT). A representative of the previous regime of white males, Lurie believes “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings to the world. She has a duty to share it” (Coetzee 16). Without considering the possibility of Melanie having objections to the affair, the delusional Lurie assumes the two can carry on some sort of twisted relationship. As if the terms of this affair, where there is no desire on her part, could be dictated by Melanie, Lurie reminds himself “he is the one who leads, she the one who follows. Let him not forget that” (Coetzee 28). His obsession with regaining control prohibits him from realizing that in a relationship he is not supposed to have to violently dominate the female. He perceives it as “[n]ot rape, not quite, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core” (Coetzee 25). Technically, Melanie does not say “no,” but there is no mistaking she does not desire this affair. Rather than assisting the troubled Melanie, Lurie takes advantage of her vulnerability and his authoritative position. The girl tries to ward off her professor, “[b]ut nothing will stop him” (Coetzee 25). Just as the Afrikaners had self-

destructively abused their governmental power by marginalizing blacks and coloureds, Lurie exploits his position of power as Melanie's professor by sexually assaulting her. His difficulty in comprehending his new sexual limitations illustrates the complexities of the transitional process for white males.

Lurie is reprimanded for failing to uphold his academic position of authority properly at UCT, a censuring unheard of for a white professor during apartheid. Lurie asks if what he did was wrong because the girl is so much younger. He is told his act is forbidden because there is "a ban on mixing power relations with sexual relations," explicitly forbidding the type of power-mixing characteristic of the apartheid era (Coetzee 53). Although he is a romantic, Lurie's use of sex as a tool of power makes it violent, undesired, and unacceptable. His inability to accept the reduction to his power only makes matters worse for Lurie, causing him to lose his job, further severing his ties with the past and his power. The admonishment he receives for his actions is a public critique of his private actions, cutting him off completely from his old way of life, rendering him physically and mentally isolated—an outcast.

Standing up for white hegemonic masculinity, Lurie refuses to apologize for his actions at his hearing. Instead, he withdraws from Cape Town to reside with his daughter, Lucy, in the Eastern Cape. A place physically removed from the government, Lurie believes this private geographical location is also removed from new political ideologies, and therefore will not castigate his ingrained sense of white male authority. When Lucy questions his decision to resign from UCT, asking what sort of compromise the committee suggested, he replies, "[r]e-education. Reformation of the character.... It reminds me too much of Mao's China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology. I'm

old-fashioned, I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot” (Coetzee 66). Representing the same type of masculinity depicted in *The Smell of Apples*, Lurie perceives apologizing as emasculating. He refuses to show the type of remorse the counsel desires and expects of him, unwilling to reform himself in order to maintain his occupation: “I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself” (Coetzee 77). Lurie perceives leaving Cape Town as a way to escape making any alterations to his character. Contemplating the contrition the committee wished of him, Lurie almost adds, “[t]he truth is, they wanted me castrated” (Coetzee 66). Originally positioned at the culmination of male power, any change Lurie makes to himself will require a reduction to his masculinity, a sacrifice he is not willing to make.

His seduction of Melanie emphasizes the “traditional patriarchal procedures...in which such privilege, like Lurie himself, is embedded” (Cooper 25). The political and private overlap of apartheid ideology renders Lurie unable, or unwilling, to recognize his violation as wrong. As he tells his daughter, “[o]ne can punish a dog...for an offence like chewing a slipper.... But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts” (Coetzee 90). If not even a dog will stand for being punished for acting upon his desires, Lurie, a white male, should not have to accept penalization. To punish him for being “a servant of Eros” is to make him despise his own nature (Coetzee 52). Lurie has been reprimanded for his aggressive abuse of power, but he has not yet been so defeated that he denies his sexual instincts. His unwillingness to keep his desires in check suggests his sexual power is essential to his being. Since this power was dependent on the government for legitimacy, though, Lurie finds himself in an identity crisis with the conclusion of apartheid.

Although he does not consider himself to be aligned with apartheid ideology or Lurie's brand of masculinity, Harald also struggles to adjust to the new restrictions on his masculinity. Safeguarded from most of the changes in white suburbia, it is through his role as a father that Harald feels his male authority challenged. While Lurie strives to reassert his power through sex, Harald endeavors to reaffirm his power in the political sphere. Receiving news that his son, Duncan, has committed murder, a "blast of heat came over Harald, confusion like anxiety or anger.... Some reaction that never before has had occasion to be called up" (Gordimer 7). Harald cannot comprehend how his son—an affluent, educated, successful, white man—turned into a murderer. Violence had always been a part of the world of the "other," not of his and Claudia's. The authority given to fathers within the home during apartheid had made it unthinkable their children could veer off the path laid out for them. Even after witnessing his father rape Frikkie, Marnus still follows in his father's footsteps by joining the military, rendering him unable to ever break free from the mental control Major-General Erasmus has over him. Here, however, Gordimer presents a case in which a child has no reason to rebel against his upbringing, yet does. Within the context of *The House Gun*, the murder Duncan commits forces his father to grapple with how his son has become a part of his race's violent history.

Initially, Harald does try to excuse himself from having any influence on his son, an attempt to prevent his own implication in the murder. Harald examines his role as a father in an effort to understand his son's deed: "I'm his father! I ought to know" (Gordimer 51). As Duncan's male role model, Harald believes his son should have learned his masculinity from him. It cannot be blamed on Claudia since Duncan "did more with his father, shared more activities...there is a particular responsibility on the

father” (Gordimer 65). However, Harald knows he never set a violent example for his son. Duncan’s childhood might have given him a sense of white entitlement, yes, but certainly not the capacity to commit murder. Harald knows “[Duncan’s] sense of moral responsibility, Christian and humanism, as inculcated since childhood by his parents, is against the performance of any violent act” (Gordimer 235). Nevertheless, he has found it within himself to take another human’s life. A son is supposed to identify with his father’s presentation of masculinity, yet there is no evidence of Duncan doing so.

Harald surmises the change must have taken place when Duncan was away from his father’s influence: “the army. *That* was where the life-ethic the son had absorbed from his parents was reversed. When he did his army service he was taught to kill; whether disguised as parade ground drill...what was being given was licence to cause death” (Gordimer 67). Even though Harald himself had not instilled authoritarian masculinity in his son, sending Duncan to the army had fostered it anyway. Serving in the military instilled in Duncan the other side of white masculinity from the sense of entitled privilege that results from a secluded home: “militarism [has] long been [a] consistent feature of conservative Afrikaner masculinity” (du Pisani 165). Harald had sent his son to the army to teach his son “to transform antisocial sadistic aggression into socially useful aggression...[to show] how it is possible to engage actively and assertively with the world without being destructive” (Lindegger 124). Instead, the military must have turned Duncan into a socially aggressive man.

Another way in which Duncan breaks from his father is through his sexual experimentation. Not only does Duncan live with three gay men, but he also has a sexual history with Carl, the man he murdered. It is explained to Harald that Duncan found his

girlfriend, Natalie, with “Carl. A man who doesn’t love women, but goes for Natalie” (Gordimer 24). Harald now understands the man whom his son killed was not only caught sleeping with Duncan’s girlfriend, but was also Duncan’s ex-lover. This shifts Harald’s blame from being directed at the influence of the military to the bisexual lifestyle his son engaged in with his housemates: “Wasn’t it a matter of being fascinated by the set in that house? Fashion that’s been around for his generation, the idea that homosexuality is the real liberation, to suggest this as superiority beyond the ordinary humdrum” (Gordimer 120). Therefore, it must be Duncan’s desire to escape his father’s mold of masculinity that leads to Carl’s death.

Similar to Harald’s shock at Duncan’s crime, Lurie’s masculine authority is truly challenged by his role as a father and his realization that he appears to have had as little influence over the shaping of his daughter as Harald had over Duncan. Lurie’s attempt to maintain his power by escaping the city and the public realm only results in more detrimental challenges to his masculinity. First, he has to confront the fact that Lucy is a lesbian. Lurie observes she is “[a]ttractive...yet lost to men. Need he reproach himself, or would it have worked out like that anyways?” (Coetzee 76). He is unsure how his daughter ended up being attracted to other women. Lucy’s homosexuality, something forbidden during apartheid, tests Lurie’s authority as a father. His daughter is supposed to adhere to the ideologies instilled in her as a child, yet Lucy, like Duncan, clearly veers from the path laid out for her. Lucy’s sexual preferences force Lurie to question what it is he wants from his daughter: “The truth is, he does not like to think of his daughter in the throes of passion with another woman.... What does he really want for Lucy? Not that she should be forever a child.... But...as a father grows older he turns more and

more...toward his daughter” (Coetzee 86). He understands it is natural for Lucy to become independent, but she was supposed to have developed into the woman he wanted her to be. Her duty should be to give him grandchildren, an assurance that the next generation of his seed will comply with his model of authority. Having homosexual children poses as threats to Harald and Lurie’s masculinity from within their own family units.

The ultimate blow to Lurie’s masculinity, though, comes not from the repercussions of taking advantage of Melanie or even from Lucy being a lesbian; it comes from Lucy’s rape. His inability to protect Lucy from her attackers is a failure to carry out his duties as a man and father. Lucy tells her father her attack “was so personal.... It was done with such personal hatred” (Coetzee 156). Though she does not know the three men who raped her, she senses the men had a personal vendetta against her. The black men used her body to punish her race for its cruel exertion of masculinity. Lurie understands why this is: “It was history speaking through them.... A history of wrong. Think of it that way.... it may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors” (Coetzee 156). It is not an act of violence aimed at Lucy specifically; her rape is a public debt collected privately. Lucy believes she has to literally pay for the sins of her father, symbolizing the personal suffering the next generation of whites must endure because of their fathers’ guilty masculinities.

Lurie not only fails to protect his daughter, but he is further emasculated because he cannot control the interpretations of the rape: “Faced with an implied parallel between his sexual coercion of Melanie and Lucy’s violation, humiliated by his inability to help his daughter, Lurie feels rebuked as a man, a father, and—intellectually—as an

interpreter... of experience" (Cooper 25). As an intellectual and as a literature professor, Lurie has made a living off of interpretation. His daughter's refusal to allow him to presume he understands what happened to her prohibits Lurie from having any power in controlling the coping process. Lucy refuses to talk about her rape, only permitting Lurie to "tell what happened to you" (Coetzee 99). His daughter denies him an opportunity to defend or preserve the little masculine authority he has left, both publicly and privately. Lurie's power possesses no legitimacy because Lucy forbids the private to be mixed with the public, the essential collaboration upon which apartheid politics and white domestic domination was based upon.

It is Lucy who takes care of her father after her rape, not the other way around. She takes Lurie to the hospital to have his wounds inspected while she goes to the police station, thereby giving herself control over the interpretation of the events. Lurie notices his daughter "is all strength, all purposefulness, whereas the trembling seems to have spread to his whole body.... If she is trembling, she shows no sign of it" (Coetzee 101). In dealing with the trauma caused by the white masculine domination during apartheid, it is the children who must be strong and take charge of their race's transition into the future. However, they are also the ones who are punished for a history they are not guilty of. In an ashamed reaction to his inability to be of any service, Lurie has a dream the night after the rape where Lucy calls out to him for help. Hurrying to his daughter's side, Lucy only "shakes her head. 'I wasn't. Go to sleep now'" (Coetzee 103). Lurie realizes his daughter has neither any expectations nor any desire for him to protect her. Lucy successfully decreases patriarchal authority, but, in doing so, she fails to stand up for herself in a way that will ensure a less problematic future for her generation.

The next day Lurie begins to comprehend the severity of the shock his system has undergone due to the events. While he may not have been aware of the new limits to white masculinity before or during his trial, Lucy's rape, his inability to save her from black men, and her subsequent refusal to permit him to handle the situation awaken him to his powerlessness. He realizes "[t]he trembling, the weakness are only the first and most superficial signs of that shock. He has a sense that, inside him, a vital organ has been bruised, abused...the organism will repair itself, and I...will be my old self again. But the truth, he knows, is otherwise" (Coetzee 107). Although he did all he could to maintain his power, it is impossible for him to continue to exist like he had. In the old South Africa he could have protected his daughter or at least ensured a severe punishment for the men who abused her; now he cannot. His newfound awareness leaves him stranded, useless, and totally unprepared for life in this new country. Lurie's queasy and humiliating withdrawal from power strips him of all his previous authority as a professor, father, and man.

It is not just Lurie who is punished, though. Even for Lucy, the strong woman who denies the interplay of the public and private by silencing the story of her rape, the new country is not a promising place. Although she first creates a simple life for herself and then rebukes her father's authority, both acts that defy Lurie's authority, her continued existence is less hopeful than Marnus' death. Lucy becomes pregnant from the rape: "The rape of Lucy, a lesbian, violently imposes heterosexual destiny.... In this way, masculine power is shamed, mourned" (Cooper 29). Examining sexual assault from the victim's perspective rather than the perpetrator's viewpoint, as he had before, Lurie is finally able to understand how destructive it is on a personal level. Witnessing the impact

abusive masculine power has on his daughter, Lurie comprehends how detrimental its continuation under the new regime will be for his race. He reflects upon rape, realizing it is all the more tragic because Lucy is a lesbian: "Rape, god of chaos and mixture, violator of seclusions. Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow. Did they know what they were up to, those men?" (Coetzee 105). The punishment Lucy receives for her father's sins is extreme and worrisome. Trying to convince Lucy to get an abortion, Lurie is informed, "I can't run my life according to whether or not you like what I do. Not any more. You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character.... I am not minor" (Coetzee 198). Refusing to play a supporting role in her own life, Lucy declares her independence from her father. However, her rape, and therefore her future, is the disheartening result of her father's abusive masculinity. Even as a simple, rural farmer and lesbian, Lucy fails to escape being a representative of the settler history of appropriation. Instead, she receives a punishment that will live on as a daily reminder of her race's abuse of power. She is part of the living for whom Marnus mourns.

Gordimer's Harald also attempts to take control of his son's situation, only to discover that along with his initiation into the reality of post-apartheid South Africa comes a severe diminishing of his patriarchal power. Intending to take control, he decides there "can be only one premise, one set by the parents: he did not do it.... Duncan is not innocent, but he cannot be guilty" (Gordimer 30). Harald, like Lurie, is determined to control the interpretation of the crime in order to make up for his perceived lack of influence over the man Duncan has become. Once he is obligated to accept his son did commit this terrible act, he concludes the "crucial matter, then, is the lawyer; again there

must be the best lawyer. That decision they are not prepared to leave to him, they will be adamant about this” (Gordimer 30). Although Duncan is a grown man living on his own, Harald is not ready to relinquish his power as father. Choosing his son’s defense counsel gives Harald some form of control over his son’s sentencing. However, Duncan selects his own lawyer, refusing any assistance from his parents. This single act denies Harald any influence over his son’s trial and future. Before his son committed murder, there was not much change inflicted upon Harald’s life by the new South Africa. After the murder, though, Harald’s life is turned upside down as he discovers his status as a white male no longer gives him any privilege.

Instead of having control over Duncan’s future, Harald learns Duncan’s life is in the hands of Senior Counsel Hamilton Motsamai: “They had heard it at once, in the shock of the name; the choice of a black man” (Gordimer 33). Even though Harald is mild-mannered and a self-proclaimed liberal, he is still uncomfortable with black rule. Not only does Duncan weaken his father’s masculine power by choosing his own lawyer, he selects a “stranger from the Other Side of the divided past” (Gordimer 86). For all his liberalism and non-racist ways, Harald cannot help but be skeptical of the man who has replaced him in his position of power as a father. Duncan’s act forces the Lindgards from the comfort of their side of the fence, awakening them to the changes taking place within the country.

When the Lindgards meet with Senior Counsel Motsamai, “[w]ithout bothering to ask permission from them...[he] had established first-name terms.... He has the authority. Present within it, he has complete authority over everything in the enclosure of their situation.... They are in his pink-palmed black hands” (Gordimer 86). The man

assumes a position Harald is used to holding: the position of power. Motsamai's use of their first names "is a sign not of equality...it's a sign of his acceptance of you, white man" (Gordimer 88). Motsamai's reversal of the tradition of referring to servants by their first names symbolizes his power over the Lindgards. Due to his past conditioning, Harald is aware "that the position that was entrenched from the earliest days of their being is reversed: one of those kept-apart strangers from the Other Side has come across and they are dependent on him. The black man will act, speak for them," instead of the other way around (Gordimer 89). Although Harald has never considered himself to be a racist, he realizes his ingrained expectation to always possess more authority than a black man associates him with white hegemonic masculinity. Without being aware of how much he identified with the hegemonic masculinity encouraged under apartheid, it is gone before Harald can take advantage of it.

When Harald questions the legal adviser to the Board of his company about the abilities of his son's defense, he realizes he is only performing this investigation because Motsamai is black. Though he is ashamed of himself, it is inevitable that "where murder is done, old prejudices still writhe to the surface" (Gordimer 33). Aware of how his race wielded power, Harald cannot help but be wary of how this black man will defend his son. The adviser voices Harald's concerns: "You've had doubts about your son's defence being conducted by a black man" (Gordimer 38). Even though Harald never explicitly expresses the threat he feels to his masculinity because a black man has replaced him as his son's protector, as David Lurie does, his tension is evidence of his ingrained sense of racial superiority.

In *Disgrace* the aftermath of Lucy's rape, like Duncan's trial, brings racial tensions to the forefront of the novel when a black man usurps Lurie's traditional power. Lucy's pregnancy, the legacy of her rape, strengthens black rule. Petrus, her black neighbor and the man who is supposed to protect her in the Eastern Cape, informs Lurie he will marry Lucy. Lurie is astonished: "You will marry Lucy.... Explain to me what you mean. No, wait, rather don't explain. This is not something I want to hear. This is now how we do things.' *We*: he is on the point of saying, *We Westerners*" (Coetzee 202). Being sure to distinguish himself racially from Petrus, Lurie fruitlessly grasps at his whiteness for power. However, Lucy considers Petrus' proposal, not only undermining her father's wish, but also extending black rule by legitimizing it within the private sphere. Reminding his daughter that Petrus already has two wives, Lucy tells her father, "Petrus is not offering me a church wedding followed by a honeymoon on the Wild Coast. He is offering an alliance, a deal.... Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection, I am fair game" (Coetzee 203). Lucy's only chance of being safe is for her to allow Petrus to take care of her. Lurie and his daughter have to give in to Lucy entering into a non-loving marriage with a black man because neither has any control over her destiny. The marriage, evidence of the extension of black power to the domestic realm, establishes the same co-mingling of masculine power associated with apartheid. Lucy must accept the fault for her father's guilty masculinity, and thus spend a lifetime being punished for her race's history.

This present Lurie cannot navigate without his hegemonic masculinity is even more problematic for the next generation. Masculinity depends on the father's ability to be able to pass on his seed. Yet, "[w]hat kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed

driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine?" (Coetzee 199). This child is part of the daily punishment Lucy must bear for the sins of her father. Within his very own lifetime Lurie goes from a dominant male to the grandfather of a child who is the product of a black on white rape. Embodying the bleak fate of white South African men, Lurie despondently questions, "is this is how it is all going to end, is this how his line is going to run out.... Who would have thought it!" (Coetzee 199). The demise of the white man is something he cannot comprehend, nor something for which his daughter can achieve atonement.

In the end, Lurie's deficiency of power is brought full circle through the sexual relationship he settles for with Bev. Although Lurie "does not like women who make no effort to be attractive," and considers the plain, farm woman beneath him, he can no longer do any better (Coetzee 72). He has been painfully thrust into the post-apartheid world, and along the way has lost all of his sexual power and ability to be selective about his partners. He learns to go through the motions, "[o]f their congress he can at least say that he does his duty," but there is no longer any passion in the act (Coetzee 150). The change taking place within the country asserts itself through Lurie's sexual desires: he goes from feeling entitled to have any woman he desires to settling for a woman who is neither desirable nor beautiful. Additionally, Bev's "domain is death, not generation.... By having sex with Bev, in the operating room where she destroys animals, Lurie seals his movement from desire to dissolution" (Cooper 36). His progression from a self-proclaimed servant of Eros to his relationship with Bev denotes the conclusion to hegemonic masculinity.

While Lurie must accept an unsatisfactory relationship with Bev and Lucy's pregnancy as punishment, Harald is punished through the discovery of his implication in the past. He learns it is neither the military nor Duncan's sexual experimentation that has led to the murder; it is his identification with his father's brand of privileged masculinity that is to blame. Natalie, Duncan's girlfriend, declares Duncan is a "spoilt brat," claiming he is so over-protected "that he's not used to any opposition, anything that threatens his will, the way he thinks things ought to go" (Gordimer 73). Duncan's violent outburst is not part of his military training, nor can it be attributed to the influence of his homosexual friends; it is part of his conditioning to feel entitled to the exclusive rights to Natalie's body. Although "hegemonic masculinity does not rely on brute force for its efficacy, but on a range of mechanisms which create a gender consensus that legitimates the power of men," faced with a situation that directly undermines his authority, Duncan, like Lurie, resorts to violence (Morrell 9). Understanding Duncan has been greatly influenced by his father's brand of masculinity, Harald is forced out of his comfort zone, realizing "his own life [is] no longer outside but within the parameters of disaster" (Gordimer 29). Duncan's crime implicates his father in apartheid, but it is he, not Harald, who must suffer the majority of the punishment.

Natalie explains Duncan made rules by which he expected everyone else in the house to abide by. Although he "'went along' with the way everyone lived on the property, he thought this coincided with his ideas...at the same time he...couldn't tolerate it when this style...came into conflict with the other rules he'd freed himself from. From the older generation. Yours" (Gordimer 74). Duncan thought he was part of the free, experimental world of his housemates. However, in actuality, he was

unsuccessful in distinguishing himself from his upbringing. Natalie maintains Harald's rules and ideology "were still there in him although he believed they were not. She said something: he's in prison now, but he was never free" (Gordimer 74). Both Harald and Duncan had believed he had detached himself from his father's influence. The murder, though, only proves Harald's masculinity has a powerful impact on Duncan. No longer can being a white male protect Harald from the brutality of the country; no longer does being a liberal mean he is not also responsible for apartheid; no longer can he pretend to not be inextricably linked to the political downfall of his race.

During Duncan's trial, Harald, who "sits silently and seems to have nothing to do with the proceedings, expresses...the powerful repercussions that the judgments to be handed down will have in the private lives of citizens" (Medalie 641). The question of responsibility, which recurs throughout the novel, is answered as Harald comes to terms with how the public sentencing his son receives is a condemnation of the power whites exercised privately. In court, Motsamai defends Duncan's act by placing the fault on society, and thereby all white males: "[t]he climate of violence bears some serious responsibility for the act the accused committed, yes; because of this climate the gun was there.... But the accused bears no responsibility whatever for the *prevalence* of violence" (Gordimer 271). Motsamai emphasizes the fact that although Duncan did commit the crime, he is a product of a cycle of violence for which he is not responsible. It is apartheid, the public manifestation of white hegemonic masculinity, which deserves the greatest share of the blame. However, in the end, Duncan must be made an example for his race, and he is the only one who can officially be punished. His father realizes, "the people out there...will condemn him to death in their minds no matter what sentence the

judge passes down upon him.... Harald hears and knows, his son...shall have this will to his death surrounding him as long as he lives” (Gordimer 241). Harald and the rest of white South Africans are punished both through the exposure of the cycle of violence they have created and through the suppression of their dominant masculinity, but at the end of the trial, it is Duncan who sits alone in his jail cell and is condemned in the mind of the public. Duncan’s jail sentence is a punishment he is forced to accept on behalf of his race’s history of guilty masculinities.

Coetzee suggests the painful transition white masculinity is undergoing is due to the close relationship between the public and private, and is one these men will not be able to survive by continually challenging their disempowerment. Coetzee acknowledges how essential dominant masculinity has become to the identity of white South African males, demonstrating how difficult it is for these men to part with it. By struggling against his sense of powerlessness, Lurie only inflicts worse punishments upon himself. In the end, it is not just his pride that is wounded; it is Lucy as well. Lurie laments the tragic conclusion to his glorious race: “How humiliating.... Such high hopes, and to end like this.... Like a dog” (Coetzee 205). Without his power Lurie feels sub-human. Ultimately, “[s]truggle, a violent unsettling, ultimate subjugation and reversal of hegemony are all, it would seem, that is offered to Coetzee’s white nation” (Horrell 4). Failing to participate in the public, Lurie is unable to reach a compromise with new black power. The novel’s depiction of the reshaping of patriarchy reveals “whiteness as alienated and the native white man as internal exile” (Cooper 33). Through the character of David Lurie, Coetzee proposes that if the white man does not adjust to living without his hegemonic masculinity he will be continually punished until he is reduced to nothing.

Lurie's awakening to South Africa's response to the abuse of masculinities like his does not fill him with remorse, nor does it seem his situation will ever improve. It is only a matter of time before he dies out, like a dog. Lucy, on the other hand, will continue to exist and receive punishment for her father's transgressions.

Both Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee explore how white males adjust to the limitations placed upon their lives after the collapse of the apartheid era by analyzing the punishments the men received. Gordimer renders all white males complicit with apartheid through Duncan's trial, a public event that exposes Harald's private role in the past. Coetzee's explicit engagement with male chauvinism proves the close relationship between white public and private power under the National Party's rule, exposing how difficult it is for these men to part with their dominant masculinities. Although the two novels approach masculinity from different angles in order to make different points, each ultimately proves it is the next generation that receives the majority of the punishment. Although white masculinity both reflects "the region's turbulent past and [has] been a cause of that turbulent past," it is not the fathers who experience the brunt of the penalty for their roles in history (Morrell 12). Both Duncan and Lucy make conscientious efforts to escape the influence of their fathers and to recreate themselves in a different, less hostile vein. They discover their attempts are futile, though, and are forced to pay for the sins of their fathers. Belonging neither to the generation responsible for apartheid nor the generation born in the new South Africa, Duncan and Lucy are merely the stepping stones for the new society. The two of them represent the "ground zero" through which the country must pass on its way to a brighter future.

### Ch. 3:

#### Breaking the Silence

Published the year after Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* (1998), J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) is the earlier novel's photonegative. From a sexually experimental child to a powerful black man to an emphasis on literature to concluding with the birth of a child, *Disgrace* contains a startling number of parallels to Gordimer's novel. For all the similarities of the two novels, their predictions for the future of white South Africans could not appear any more dissimilar. Coetzee's novel challenges *The House Gun*, rendering David Lurie unchanged at every point Harald Lindgard is progressive, resulting in a bleak and despondent counterpart to Gordimer's life affirming novel. The lesser known of the two, *The House Gun* implies that when all whites accept responsibility for the past it will be possible for South Africa to move forward as a unified nation, suggesting the country's progress does not have to be rendered stagnant. On the other hand, Coetzee's globally dominant text on post-apartheid life seems to refute the idea of a "Rainbow Nation," ridiculing the hopeful image South Africa self-consciously projects to the international community. However, despite their opposing tones and conclusions, the two novels actually prove the same point. While Gordimer highlights the need for the past to be dealt with publicly through Duncan's trial, Coetzee proves the need for the public realm through the stasis the almost total absence of the public sphere creates. Although *The House Gun* and *Disgrace* confront the future of white South Africans from diametrically opposing standpoints, each novel indicates the past must be dealt with publicly and privately for unification to be achieved.

Although Duncan is more committed than his parents to building a post-apartheid nation, diverging from the norm through sexual experimentation and multi-racial friendship choices, he has difficulty truly freeing himself from his parents. *The House Gun* is concerned with Duncan's story, and therefore the future of South Africa, but the focus is on Harald and Claudia, and thus the ability of the older generation to transition. Several times the novel itself raises the question of why Duncan is denied a voice: "Why doesn't Duncan speak" (Gordimer 44), "[w]hy is Duncan not in the story?... His act has made him a vacuum" (151), and, "[a]gain, why is Duncan not in the story?" (191). Duncan, like Marnus, struggles to find his own identity. The enigmatic quality of Duncan's character in the narration of his own story reiterates the importance of the father figure and the extreme control fathers have over their children. By withholding Duncan's personal reflections, Gordimer forces his private story into the public realm where his parents attempt to make sense of it. The communal and public endeavor to understand Duncan's inner turmoil proposes lasting change must begin with his father.

After Duncan murders his white ex-lover and housemate, Carl, the breakdown of the traditional family unit, a fundamental feature of Afrikanerdom, is publicly exposed. For the first time, Harald realizes Duncan lives in an unconventional household: "mostly homosexual, but not entirely so; mostly white, but including one black man; mostly male, but including one woman; mostly South African, but including one foreigner" (Medalie 638). This melting pot of people embraces the new constitution, blatantly countering the all-white, gated-community to which Harald and Claudia have retreated. Harald is not comfortable with the new family unit with which his son has replaced his traditional nuclear family. Confronted with his son's bisexuality, he wryly notes, "men with men.

Nothing special about that, nothing to be ashamed of, condemned, these days—the new Constitution recognizes their right of preference. That is so. That’s the law” (Gordimer 116). Even though Duncan’s lifestyle is condoned by the new legislation, Harald fails to understand why one would embrace these new freedoms. The conglomeration of people residing with Duncan is representative of the society the new constitution is making acceptable, yet one to which Harald does not belong. The trial forces his son’s private life into the public gaze, obligating Harald to communicate with his son’s housemates in order to understand his son. Dealing with the crime publicly rather than privately introduces Harald to the possibilities the future holds by motivating him to interact with those willing to experiment and adopt the practices encouraged by the new government.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee challenges the optimism of Gordimer’s novel with the character of Lurie, who denies it is possible for whites to make the changes necessary for progress. Lurie’s morally repugnant and unalterable persona is indicative of a “queasy withdrawal from power, an uneasy, shamed and perhaps sour submission to the political and social systems operating in the ‘New South Africa’” (Horrell 3). Although Lurie does not believe his “relationship” with Melanie, one of his students at the University of Cape Town, warrants a trial or punishment, he neither attempts to defend his actions nor challenge the verdict. Unlike *The House Gun*, the trial in *Disgrace*—the one glimpse of the public realm within the novel—is brief and unaffecting, concluding with Lurie’s refusal to make any compromises. Had he apologized for his crime against Melanie he would have received a minor punishment, but would not have lost his teaching position. Lucy tells him he “shouldn’t be so unbending.... It isn’t heroic to be unbending” (Coetzee 66). Lurie, however, anticipates no need to sacrifice his principles. Instead, he

surrenders himself to the notion one “just has to buckle down and live out the rest of one’s life. Serve one’s time” (Coetzee 67). He is unaware that without some modification made to his perception of honor, serving out his time will be for the remainder of his life.

Lurie, like Harald, is only feels the impact of the changes occurring within the country through his role as a father. Thinking back to Lucy’s childhood, Lurie remembers how his daughter had been “quiet and self-effacing, observing him but never, as far as he knew, judging him. Now, in her middle twenties, she has begun to separate” (Coetzee 89). By referring to him as “David” instead of “Dad,” choosing farming as an occupation, having a sexual relationship with a female, and sharing her property with a black man, Lucy has, without malicious intent, undermined her father in every way. Lurie wonders if “history had the larger share” (Coetzee 61) in shaping his daughter than he did, telling Lucy “I can’t help feeling that...being a father is a rather abstract business” (63). Just as the trial had opened Harald’s eyes to who Duncan really is, living with Lucy forces Lurie to question how much influence he has on his daughter since she has radically broken with his ideologies. He interprets his own retreat and failure as a father and Lucy’s subsequent distancing methods in agency-free terms, blaming history rather than himself.

Realizing how much their children have tried to differentiate themselves from their fathers is only the beginning for Harald and Lurie. Duncan’s crime not only urges his father to engage with contemporary South African society, but by consciously selecting a black defense attorney in defiance of his parents—“He knows it’s not a question of money. He knows he can depend on us” (Gordimer 33)—Harald’s illusion “that he can exist beyond the pale of the historical process” begins to be stripped away through his forced interactions with Motsamai (Diala 54). In his sheltered world where no

significant change took place post-transfer of power from whites to blacks, Harald had no reason to intimately interact with a newly powerful black man. Although Harald is not racist, “if racist means having revulsion against skin of a different colour, believing or wanting to believe that anyone who is not your own colour or religion or nationality is intellectually or morally inferior,” he is deeply shocked by Motsamai’s appointment as his son’s lawyer (Gordimer 86). He is hesitant to permit Motsamai, the “other,” to have power, but Duncan insists, forcing his father to face the reality of the new South Africa. Harald finds himself dependent upon this black man to protect his son, for Motsamai is all there is “between them and the Death Penalty. Not only had he come from the Other Side; everything had come to them from the Other Side, the nakedness to the final disaster: powerlessness, helplessness, before the law” (Gordimer 127). Harald is alienated from his old life, discovering himself in the same position blacks had been in only a few years prior. For Harald, the wall comes crashing down when his son commits murder, exposing him to all the realities of the post-apartheid nation.

As horrifying as it is for Harald to discover he is stranded in the new South Africa, the future offers more hope than initially perceived. Motsamai skillfully defends Duncan, whom everyone knows to be guilty. The case is not won, an impossibility ruled out from the beginning, but Duncan does not receive the death penalty. The sentencing, Harald realizes, is remarkably fair. Despite Harald’s inability to control the outcome, his lack of appreciation for the new constitution, and his deprivation of hegemonic white power, Duncan still receives a favorable prison term. The judge declares the “value of human life is primarily enshrined in our Constitution. The question of sentence is a very difficult one; it must not only act as a deterrent but there must also be a measure of

mercy. I sentence you, Duncan Peter Lindgard, to seven years imprisonment” (Gordimer 273). Invoking the new constitution, the judge reaffirms life for the white man, a life preserved through Motsamai’s efforts. Duncan is punished for his crime, but, more significantly, he is shown mercy and given the opportunity to change. Through the character of Motsamai, Gordimer presents a hopeful view for the future of whites under black rule.

To fully understand his new place within society, Harald must make modifications in order to reintegrate himself into the country, including chipping away at the wall of ignorance encapsulating his generation. In *The House Gun*, the “delusions of the liberal white family that thought it could insulate itself against the impact of the enormities of the apartheid state” are removed only when the Lindgards can realize their “inevitable implication in society, in history...their place within the human fold” (Diala 54). The first phase in reshaping the country is by destroying the liberal white notion that they are not responsible for the atrocities of the past. Gordimer proposes, “in post-apartheid South Africa, with everyone equal before the law, blacks would not have to say ‘no’ in order to assert themselves, but that it is instead for the average white to discover, earn, and affirm a valid identity in a society with a black majority” (Diala 65). Black rule does not have to be seen as detrimental for whites; it simply requires whites to form new identities that can co-exist with black power.

In comparison, the effect of black rule takes a negative turn in *Disgrace*. Lucy’s contemplation of Petrus’ marriage proposal is a desperate attempt to “have peace around me. I am prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace” (Coetzee 208). Recognizing Petrus has all the power in their relationship, Lucy considers his

proposal in order to ensure her protection. Like Duncan, her future is in the hands of a black man. Without Petrus' assistance she will not be able to maintain her livelihood. Consenting to Petrus' offer will not give her peace, though; it is only an acceptance of black abuse of power, promoting the continuation of South African violence. Lurie understands his daughter is willing to make sacrifices in order to make the new South Africa work, but he knows she is forfeiting too much. Lucy's self-punishment gives Petrus complete control over her life: "Why should Petrus bother to negotiate? She cannot last: leave her alone and in due course she will fall like rotten fruit" (Coetzee 204). The relinquishing of the power to negotiate ensures Lucy will soon be reduced to nothing. The type of power Lucy gives Petrus recreates apartheid, but now with blacks in charge.

Suffering, accepting "an eye for an eye" punishment will not end the cycle of violence. After her rape Lucy questions her father: "What if...what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it.... They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors.... Why should I be allowed to live here without paying?" (Coetzee 158). Similar to Duncan, Lucy understands she must be punished for the crimes of the past. However, despite her "awareness of her modesty before history, she illustrates the anxieties of complete white renunciation of all privilege and sense of rights, a renunciation that may literally entail destitution" (Diala 66). In this instance, black power has become dominant and abusive, and Lucy believes she has no right, as a white person, to publicly challenge it. The lack of understanding between father and child illuminates Lurie's inability to shape history. It is noble of Lucy to turn

the other cheek, but one has to wonder how much must be sacrificed in order for a truce to be issued between whites and blacks.

Gordimer presents neither an answer to how whites should be dealt with, nor any guarantee for the future. However, the stripping of ignorance is presented as an important step in the journey to racial unification. Duncan's act of violence exposes his parents to and engages them in reality: "There is a labyrinth of violence not counter to the city but a form of communication within the city itself. They no longer were unaware of it, behind security gates. It claimed them" (Gordimer 141). The discourse of violence to which the couple is introduced reveals how every personal relationship is infected by the apartheid state in its aftermath. Harald and Claudia are forever altered when they realize no expensive electric gate or security system can isolate them from the violence raging within their country. The difference between the Lindgards "as what they used to be, watching the sunset, and what they are now is that they are within the labyrinth through intimate contact with a carrier of a nature other than the ones Claudia cited" in her work as a doctor (Gordimer 141). Violence is no longer an abstract concept idea to be attached to the racial "others" in South Africa; it is a universal issue that affects everyone within the country.

*The House Gun* does not absolve any whites from the guilt of the past, agreeing that "[t]he whites of South Africa participated, in various degrees, actively or passively, in an audacious and well-planned crime against Africa" (Kosew 5). Challenging all white South Africans to recognize their participation in apartheid, Gordimer's novel promotes self-enlightenment as the way to achieve national reconciliation. Although Harald is "one of the directors of a large insurance firm with a pragmatically enlightened

policy towards blacks” (Gordimer 40), he was content not to transform his “private opinions into convictions by giving them public expression” (Diala 55). Harald believed his silent liberal-mindedness was enough to save him from the repercussions of the termination of apartheid. Instead, he finds himself being equally punished along with the other white South Africans as his own inaction is publicly put on trial for murder alongside his son.

Linking the “issues of violence, guilt and responsibility,” Gordimer turns “the spotlight on those ‘liberal-minded’ whites who were not racist but had stood by while the crime of apartheid was perpetrated” because they hoped to avoid “losing their privileged place within that society” (Kossew 5). Harald does not lose his occupation or social standing as Lurie does, but through his role as a father, his silence is punished. In the courtroom, a place filled with individuals publicly expressing their ethical consciousness, Harald “is alone as he never has been alone in his life” (Gordimer 134). The unexpected murder Duncan commits forces Harald to reconsider the life he had taken for granted. Becoming cognizant of his own involvement in Carl’s murder, he feels “his moorings in his familiar world completely threatened by the enigmatic onslaught of the law” (Diala 55). Duncan’s trial is not his own alone; by bringing the private realm into the public sphere, Harald and society are also put on trial.

In contrast, Lurie’s unwillingness to allow his own trial to change his character denies the public sphere any place in his life. He tries to take a more private route by attempting to see the beauty in Lucy’s lifestyle, even if it deviates from the path he had wished for her. Observing her simple, rural existence, he is initially convinced post-apartheid life is not drastically different: “In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs

and daffodils. The more things change the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein. Perhaps history has learned a lesson” (Coetzee 62). Lucy’s punishment for the past is to exist in a more rustic and pure manner, tending to the land as a way of healing the country. After the rape, though, it becomes evident that history has not learned a lesson. Instead, it is continuing in the same violent, inhumane vein as before. Although he is outraged by the crime against Lucy, Lurie cannot help but note his own desire for revenge in order to reassert his authority implicates him in that which he wishes to condemn: South African power relations (Diala 56-57). Rape is a psychological as well as physical violation, an act purely motivated by the need to exert control over another human being. Just as Harald had become aware his own ideologies were put on trial along with Duncan’s crime, Lurie is forced to acknowledge the parallels between his own crime against Melanie and the rape of Lucy. Refusing to work out the past publicly, Lurie receives a harsh personal punishment.

Lucy’s rape rips Lurie from the comfort of his insular seclusion. His failure to protect his daughter—“And I did nothing. I did not save you”—renders him despondent (Coetzee 157). He cannot fathom how life can continue in the aftermath of the terrible offense against his daughter. This punishment, unlike the termination of his teaching career, is in no way merciful. Along with the rape, Lurie’s “pleasure in living has been snuffed out. Like a leaf on a stream, like a puffball on a breeze, he has begun to float toward his end” (Coetzee 107). Rather than initiating a new life, as Duncan’s impromptu act of passion-driven violence does, this malevolent violent exploit represents the beginning of Lurie’s slow and torturous death. Dealing with his own shock from the rape in addition to covering Lucy’s daily duties while she privately tends to her wounds is “a

burden he is not ready for.... Lucy's future, his future, the future of the land as a whole—it is all a matter of indifference, he wants to say; let it all go to the dogs, I do not care” (Coetzee 107). In *The House Gun*, Harald realizes he exists in a country inflicted with perpetual violence. However, he and Duncan are able to promote the continuation of life through their willingness to bring the private and public together. Lurie also recognizes the deeply embedded nature of violence. However, instead of trying to break the cycle, he gives up on life because he is unable to seek vengeance against Lucy's perpetrators. Forced to internalize the pain prohibits him from receiving any sense of closure or justice, leaving Lurie unable to find a meaning to his life.

While striving to get Lucy to talk about what occurred, Lurie is informed “what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not” (Coetzee 112). Asking Lucy what she means by “this place,” he is told, “[t]his place being South Africa” (Coetzee 112). Lucy's silence is her reaction to her understanding of the limitations on whites within post-apartheid South Africa; she refuses to speak because she is very aware of her place within a history that perpetuates and breeds violence. Lurie is disheartened by his daughter quiet, passive aggressive response to history's punishment upon her body: “Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?” (Coetzee 112); “You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again” (133). Lucy's understanding of the new South Africa denies her any right to seek justice

publicly. Lurie, however, understands that by only dealing with the rape privately, Lucy will never put an end to the cycle of violence or receive atonement.

Lurie's dissatisfaction with Lucy's silent response leads him to realize the need for the public sphere. Although he refused to publicly apologize for his crime against Melanie during his hearing, he now seeks out her family, believing he will be able to move forward once he asks for their forgiveness. By visiting the Isaacs, Lurie begins to move from the private to a form of the public sphere. Even though this seems like a step in the right direction, Lurie is as mentally remorseless when apologizing to Melanie's family as he was during his committee hearing. He now, though, understands his inappropriate behavior was the result of his neglect to understand contemporary South African power relations, telling Mr. Isaacs Melanie "struck up a fire in me.... A fire: what is remarkable about that? If a fire goes out, you strike a match and start another one. That is how I used to think" (Coetzee 166). At the very least, Lurie has learned it is no longer acceptable for him to act on his impulsive desires. He contemplates the semantic evolution of passion within his life: "Burned—burnt—burnt up" (Coetzee 166). Linguistically, Lurie realizes his flame has been extinguished. He is finally able to apologize for his actions, remarking, as he is about to leave the Isaac household, "I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. You have a wonderful family. I apologize for the grief I have caused you" (Coetzee 171).

Mr. Isaacs informs him the question is not "what lesson have we learned? The question is, what are we going to do now that we are sorry?" (Coetzee 172). In Isaacs' view, progress is not made through apology alone; it must be coupled with a willingness to change in order to have any impact. Lurie replies, "I am sunk into a state of disgrace

from which it will not be easy to lift myself. It is not a punishment I have refused.... On the contrary, I am living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being” (Coetzee 172). He is sorry, but his unwillingness to reform his character prohibits him from moving beyond guilt-consciousness as Harald does. He has utilized the public realm, but has not achieved any real personal transformation, thereby invalidating his apology. Instead of learning from his punishment and making an effort to raise himself out of his state of disgrace, Lurie contents himself to accept it as his new way of life, eliminating the possibility of reformation.

His fall from grace is complete the moment he moves beyond rhetoric and prostrates himself on the floor before Melanie’s mother and sister: “With careful ceremony he gets to his knees and touches his forehead to the floor. Is that enough? he thinks. Will that do? If not, what more?” (Coetzee 173). This is the first time Lurie physically acts out his apology. However, by questioning the physicality of his act, contemplating if this is how true contrition should look removes all sincerity from the act. He raises his head to look upon the two women, “sitting there, frozen. He meets the mother’s eyes, then the daughter’s, and again the current leaps, the current of desire” (Coetzee 173). Even in this moment of ostensible repentance, Lurie lusts after the young Desiree, failing to achieve true remorse. Lurie verbally and physically fails to perform the type of meaningful act of restitution Mr. Isaacs’ has in mind.

Harald, however, is able to couple Duncan’s trial with his private quest for understanding, and is therefore much more successful than Lurie in progressing forward. Meditating upon his son’s crime, Harald wonders about the continued permeation of violence in present-day South Africa, coming to the conclusion the “[s]tate violence

under the old, past regime had habituated its victims to it. People had forgotten there was any other way” (Gordimer 50). Duncan is just a creature of habit, a product of history. Reading Hermann Broch’s *The Sleepwalkers*, a novel about people living between dissolving and emerging moral constructs, just as sleepwalkers exist in a state between sleeping and waking. Acknowledging the parallels between the themes of *The Sleepwalkers* and post-apartheid South African life, Harald gathers, “the transition from any value system to a new one must pass through that zero-point of atomic dissolution, must take its way through a generation destitute of any connection with either the old or the new system” (Gordimer 142). South Africa is in the midst of a transition between two ethical systems. Since Duncan never achieved his father’s masculinity nor fully immersed himself in the new South Africa, he belongs to neither era. Instead, he is a part of a generation whose detachment from both the former and the emerging political systems makes a new future possible. Harald realizes “[w]ithout rejection of all that is humane, in the times only just become the past, a human being could not have endured the inhumanity of the old regime’s assault upon body and mind” (Gordimer 142). Rejecting the humanity of blacks and coloureds was integral to the success of the Nationalist government. In the aftermath of that inhumane era, it is natural for the habit of dehumanization to persist. Duncan, like so many others in the country, regardless of upbringing, operates on the tradition of human brutality instilled in him by the dominant masculinity of the apartheid regime.

Understanding Duncan’s violence by applying Broch’s text to the South Africa exposed by Duncan’s crime and the trial, Harald views the country’s violent tendencies as an internal desecration of the freedom the new South Africa is attempting to achieve.

Learning from his son, a reversal from Behr's novel, Harald comprehends what the "country is doing to itself; he knows himself as part of it, not as a claim that what his white son has done can be excused in a collective phenomenon...but because violence is the common hell of all who are associated with it" (Gordimer 143). Duncan's act is associated with the culture of violence that has been established within the country and has filtered down to even the most unlikely of individuals. Harald's recognition does not excuse Duncan's actions, but it makes it possible to see how his son could have committed murder and perceive what needs to be changed within the country.

Through his newfound awareness, Harald is finally initiated into the post-apartheid era. His ignorant belief that he could escape being affected is removed as he perceives he and Claudia now belong "to the other side of privilege. Neither whiteness, nor observance of the teachings of Father and Son, nor the pious respectability of liberalism, nor money...could change their status" (Gordimer 127). Even the liberal attitude Harald learned through his religious practices has not prepared him to make this type of adjustment. Without anything from the past, Claudia and Harald are relocated to a new place as "definitive as the forced removals of the old regime; no chance of remaining where they had been, surviving in themselves *as they were*" (Gordimer 141). The Lindgards have reached the zero-point of the transition process.

Always a religious man, Harald's relationship with God is altered throughout his son's trial as he finds himself increasingly anguished and alone. As his daily routine is transformed and he becomes more cognizant of his role in the past, Claudia realizes "Harald doesn't pray any more" (Gordimer 129). Realizing he has dealt with his opinions on public matters in the same way he does his faith, privately, he is forced to question his

relationship with God. After all, his quiet liberalism got him nowhere. Able to believe his son capable of committing murder, Harald knows he must be punished: “So much for the compassion of Harald’s God.... So much for the religious faith that the father had lived by in moral superiority...every Sunday taking the small boy with him to give him the guidance for his life” (Gordimer 105). Duncan’s act challenges Harald’s faith as it has never been challenged before. Following the conclusion of the trial, Harald’s faith is restored, but in another form and coupled with a new awareness of God. This ability to make progress signifies that out of everything terrible that has transpired is “something new, to be lived with in a different way, surely, than life was before? This is the country for themselves, here, now. For Harald a new relation with his God, the God of the suffering he could not have had access to, before” (Gordimer 279). The change in Harald’s relationship with God is symbolic of his progress.

Lurie also tries to progress through literature, but as a writer instead of a reader. Told by Lucy he “cannot be a father for ever,” he begins to compose a literary piece to preserve his existence (Coetzee 161). Just as the decline in his sexual prowess mimics the eradication of white patriarchal power, so his work on his opera, *Byron in Italy*, is symbolic of the bleak future awaiting white South African men. Originally, Lurie envisions the opera “as a chamber-play about love and death, with a passionate young woman and a once passionate but now less passionate older man” (Coetzee 180). The conception for the piece resembles Lurie’s perception of his own state of being at the beginning of the novel. Similar to the way in which Harald uses literature to understand Duncan’s crime and his connection with God, Lurie attempts to move beyond his daughter’s rape by writing an opera. As the novel progresses and Lurie fails to truly

apologize for his crime against Melanie and is unable to move beyond Lucy's rape, he puts effort into reconciling himself with the past and become a new man through his writing.

While the internal processing of the trial through literature allows Harald to form a new relationship with God, Lurie's struggle to regain an identity and evolve through his spiritual outlet, literature, is evident through his difficulties with the composition of *Byron in Italy*. Although the opera consumes the majority of his time, the "project has failed to engage the core of him. There is something misconceived about it, something that does not come from the heart" (Coetzee 181). No longer able to pretend he is a modern day Byronic hero due to his decline in sexual power and social dominance, Lurie searches for meaning in his work. He attempts to give a voice to Byron's mistress, Teresa, the "other," in her dumpy, middle-aged state. He wonders, "[c]an he find it in his heart to love this plain, ordinary woman? Can he love her enough to write a music for her? If he cannot, what is left for him?" (Coetzee 182). Finally understanding he more closely resembles Teresa than Byron, Lurie attempts to compose a voice for this woman, and thereby his current emasculated state. He realizes "[o]ut of the poets I learned to love...but life, I found...is another story" (Coetzee 185). Life, like the original storyline for the opera, is not the romantic, poetic ideal he imagined it to be. Processing this information while composing the music for Byron and Teresa, "the trio of instrumentalists play the crablike motif, one line going up, the other down, that is Byron's" (Coetzee 186). As he begins to identify more with Teresa and less with Byron, Lurie seems to make his first progressive steps, beginning to exist, at least linguistically, in a new form.

This transition of power from Byron to Teresa within *Byron in Italy* is crucial for Lurie's continued existence. Lurie is "too old to heed, too old to change. Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest; he cannot, not with honour. That is why he must listen to Teresa. Teresa may be the last one left who can save him. Teresa is past honour.... She will not be dead" (Coetzee 209). If Teresa can refuse to die, then Lurie figures he can do the same. However, his attempts to sympathize with this forgotten woman are all for naught. Although the opera has "occasional good moments, the truth is that *Byron in Italy* is going nowhere. There is no action, no development.... He has not...the resources of energy, to raise *Byron in Italy* off the monotonous track on which it has been running" (Coetzee 214). Lurie's effort to cope with the past and the crimes—both his and Lucy's—privately falls short of Harald's catharsis. His opera, an attempt to move into the public through art, does not speak to him the way *The Sleepwalkers* speaks to Harald. Lurie's inability to transform his old identity, the most essential element in ensuring a future for himself, renders his and South Africa's condition as stagnant as the opera. Since Lurie's writing is the only way in which he tries to move forward, he is unsuccessful. For Harald, literature is a complement to the publicity of the trial. Because he accesses the public and the private, he is able to develop as a person. By only processing the past privately, Lurie is unable to achieve Harald's successful results.

Due to its public nature, Duncan's trial is a cathartic event, purging the Lindgards of both pity for their son's situation (and the old way of life) and fear for his future (a symbolic representation of the future of the white race). Once skeptical of Duncan's living arrangements, Harald now accepts that "in the postcolonizing world after apartheid, sexual, familial, and racial identities enter into cross-cutting and

simultaneously displaced (replaced) combinations” (Diala 64). By agreeing to look after Natalie’s baby while Duncan is in prison, Harald commits to taking responsibility for a past that is not entirely his fault, but in which he did have a hand. The child may not be his grandson, but “[c]hildren belong, never mind any doubt about their origin, in the family” (Gordimer 290). Harald has not only learned to accept the new type of South African family unit, but he has become a part of one. Accepting the African tradition of regarding a child as a communal responsibility, the Lindgard’s consent to adopt the child signifies that “[b]eyond genetics, beyond the usual binary pairings, whatever happens, Duncan will in some sense be the father of the child...the triangles, instead of closing down for evil, open up for a kind of good” (Diala 64). Raising this child, a product of the new South Africa, is both private and public acknowledgement of the participation of the liberal whites in apartheid and a move toward national harmony.

Lucy’s pregnancy in *Disgrace* symbolizes the opposite. The future implied by the approaching birth of her child establishes a horrifying world that Lurie has no control over. His impending role as a grandfather “implies the defeat of time” (Diala 59) since it heightens his sense of mortality: “So it will go on, a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less, till it may as well be forgotten” (Coetzee 217). Lucy’s quiet acceptance of her rape and resulting pregnancy evoke the conclusiveness of her race’s fall. She saves her baby to spite her father, despite her revulsion for the child growing inside her womb. Lucy regards “her attempts at self-crucifixion as a form of restitution” (Diala 60). Unlike her father, Lucy is able to engage with history. However, the manner in which she does evidences “Coetzee’s valid paradigm for whites’ negotiation for a precarious foothold in post-apartheid South

Africa...his conception of their fall from grace evokes near absolute depravity” (Diala 60). Lucy’s decision to have her child, against her father’s will, is not an acceptance of responsibility that will ensure a harmonious future for South Africa. Keeping her baby symbolizes no more atonement than Lurie’s insincere apology to the Isaacs.

Although the Lindgards still have to make a conscious effort to move forward, their attempts to come to terms with the past and Duncan’s act are sincere. Emblematic of the positive evolution of the Lindgards, the final pages of the novel are given to Duncan. When Harald relinquishes his voice in telling Duncan’s story he gives way to the more progressive generation, symbolizing his own progress and hope for the future. Duncan, who is both responsible for the future of his race and for tearing his parents from their cocoon of ignorance, earns his right to *The House Gun*’s concluding chapter. While in prison he has time to reflect, realizing “violence is a repetition we don’t seem able to break” (Gordimer 294). Apartheid may have ended, but the cycle of violence is ingrained in the South African existence. Reading *The Odyssey* in jail, Duncan compares Odysseus’ lengthy and precarious voyage home to his own desperate desire to return “home.” Although still within his native country, Duncan has become as alienated as Odysseus. Duncan deduces he has options: “Put out your eyes. Turn the gun on your own head. Or throw away the gun in the garden. That was a choice made” (Gordimer 294). After killing Carl, Duncan could have turned the gun on himself or gauged out his eyes in Oedipal fashion. Instead, he put down the house gun, the symbol of the casual treatment of violence, and publicly admitted to his crime and accepted a seven-year jail sentence.

Duncan wonders if it is possible to “break the repetition just by not perpetrating violence on yourself. I have this life, in here. I didn’t give it for his. I’ll even get out of

here with it, some year or other. The murderer has not been murdered” (Gordimer 294). Although prison severely limits him, Duncan still has his life. Additionally, rather than simply enduring his term, Duncan proceeds with his architectural work: “The plan their son is going ahead to draw in a prison cell...predicates something that will come about. Ahead. Belief. Steel and cement and glass, in this form; yet an assumption of a future” (Gordimer 108). While serving out his sentence Duncan actively ensures a future through the continuance of his work. His ability to see beyond the short-term repercussions for his action turns his crime and punishment into something positive.

Contributing to the reconciliation debate, Gordimer points to deeply ingrained habits as impairments to the integration of liberal whites. Duncan is restricted to the prison yard for a seven-year term, but his parents would have served a “probable life term in the impregnable walls of their insularity” had his act not expelled them from their world of false contentedness (Diala 56). Although he shows no remorse in court, an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of public contrition to compensate for the crimes of the whites within the country, by complementing his trial with a search for meaning while in jail, Duncan refutes white stagnancy. Reading *The Odyssey* while in jail, he begins to find meaning in his experience and is able to reshape his identity. The novel ends with Duncan professing he must “find a way to bring death and life together,” and so must the white man (Gordimer 294). This is no easy feat. However, it is one, Gordimer suggests, that is possible.

Instead of a reaffirmation of life, *Disgrace* concludes with a despairing view of the future. Lacking Duncan’s long-term vision, Lurie decides to put down his favorite dog at Bev Shaw’s clinic. Leading the dog into the room where the killing is done, Lurie

knows the dog is not aware that “one can enter what seems to be an ordinary room and never come out again. Something happens in this room...here the soul is yanked out of the body...this room that is not a room but a hole where one leaks out of existence” (Coetzee 219). Although he is contemplating the implications of this room for the dog, this is also what the new South Africa comes to signify for Lurie. He entered the post-apartheid era without knowing it is not the same country as the one to which he had belonged. Discovering the changes that have transpired is a realization from which there is no return: Lurie cannot live out an ignorant existence; he is entrenched in this new land. He bleakly notes that one “gets used to things getting harder; one ceases to be surprised that what used to be as hard as hard can be grows harder yet” (Coetzee 219). Life does not become harder before it becomes easy again; it simply becomes easier to understand that it only gets harder.

Bev is surprised to see the dog in Lurie’s arms: “I thought you would save him for another week.... Are you giving him up?” (Coetzee 220). Although forgotten and homeless, the young dog does not have to be relinquished at this time. However, perceiving the similarity between his own situation and the dog’s, Lurie knows “a time must come, it cannot be evaded, when he will have to bring him to Bev Shaw in her operating room” (Coetzee 219). Knowing the pain he himself is suffering as he waits out the time until he dies, Lurie decides to not postpone the inevitable any longer. The novel concludes not with a dedication to finding a way to create life out of death, but with Lurie informing Bev, “[y]es, I am giving him up” (Coetzee 220). Instead of striving to reaffirm life, Lurie chooses death over life. Sacrificing the dog is not demonstrative of his ability

to accept responsibility; it is the ultimate abdication of responsibility, a symbolic suicide, and a complete denial of life.

Coetzee's non politically correct response to Gordimer's more socially acceptable novel challenges readers, forcing them to question how feasible it is for South Africa to achieve internal unification. The novel makes a compelling argument, and "Lurie's generation, for whom the renunciation of white (male) privilege is the ultimate disgrace, is indeed pitted against death" (Diala 66). Under unsympathetic black rule, as evidenced through Petrus, whites will never receive forgiveness for the past. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that black rule is inherently hostile. Rather, it is an allegorical representation of an extreme case where a white gives up everything in order to submit to what he perceives as an African identity. Coetzee, through Petrus, appeals for the "blacks' recovery of marginalized histories to be compassionate and exclude the old orthodoxies and chauvinism" (Diala 68). The bleakness of *Disgrace*'s conclusion serves as a warning against blacks punishing whites for the past indefinitely and against total white self-sacrifice. Lucy's willingness to sacrifice herself only serves to widen the racial divide as it encourages the destructive behavior of *Disgrace*'s black characters. Coetzee's "disturbing and somber engagement with the limitations of the reconciliation process" is terrifying (Diala 67). Nevertheless, the disconcerting quality of the novel strategically uses fear to influence public opinion.

The future presented in *Disgrace* represents what will happen if South Africans attempt to only internally deal with the past. Although the public domain, such as the space created by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is not the only method of coping with the remnants of apartheid, it is necessary to take these opportunities

seriously, and give these issues public attention in order for the country to advance positively into the future. Coetzee's writing style emphasizes the importance of accessing the public realm. By closely following Lurie's every move and giving a voice to his every thought, no matter how mundane—"dumpy little women with ugly voiced deserve to be ignored" (Coetzee 79); "[d]o I like animals? I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them" (81); "a chin that comes straight out of her chest, like a pouter pigeon's. As an ensemble, remarkably unattractive" (81-82)—readers are forced to live inside his mind for the duration of the novel. The close connection that is established between the reader and Lurie increases the shock value of his numerous harsh and judgmental thoughts. This extreme internal quality of the novel heightens the reader's awareness of how defunct Lurie's opinions are because of his lack of connection to the outside world. The outrage caused by being forced into an intimate relationship with Lurie encourages readers to contemplate what is wrong with his beliefs and actions. Due to *Disgrace*'s authoritative position as the dominant post-apartheid text, it is important to note that the future Coetzee presents is not the negative portrait it is often regarded as. Rather, by almost entirely excluding the public sphere, the novel is essentially an internal examination of one character, making it a useful warning and counterpart to *The House Gun*.

While Coetzee inverts Gordimer's novel to show what will happen if whites neglect the public arena, *The House Gun* combines the public with private literary and religious pursuits of understanding to prove the necessity in drawing on both. Through the flawed yet likeable character of Harald, *The House Gun* makes it clear the persistence of violence within the country is a communal problem, and, therefore, a social issue that

needs to be dealt with collectively. Observing from a more distanced perspective than Coetzee offers as Harald is torn from his isolated community and submerged in the realities of post-apartheid life, readers come to realize how problematic the repetition of violence within South Africa is. It is not something any South African can escape blame for; everyone is implicated. However, once Harald begins to acknowledge his role in the past and accepts Natalie's child into his home, it becomes more plausible for society to move forward:

the possibility of recovery is suggested in the cautious optimism of the ending; and by the novel's figuring of complex new relationships and moral dilemmas in a society trying to simultaneously come to terms with the past, deal with the present trauma and construct a positive moral and ethical climate for its future. (Kossew 5)

The road ahead is not one Gordimer outlines for her readers—though she does guarantee many twists and bumps—but it is one, she suggests, that will ultimately lead white South Africans to a better place than the one they are currently in. By giving attention to numerous characters of various races and backgrounds, Gordimer illustrates it is possible for South Africans break the barriers of the old regime. Even without the possibility of returning to the past there is a chance for a more inclusive and positive future.

Although J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* assaults Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*, the two novels prove—albeit in contrasting manners—how essential it is to publicly understand South Africa's past, present, and future. The character of David Lurie, rather than indicating the impossibility of a progressive white future, is representative of an extreme group of whites, not the majority: "Groups of extremists who cannot adjust will die out with the present middle-aged generation" (Diala 65-66). Gordimer's illumination of the tension underlying the transitional process demands all whites accept

responsibility. The transformation of Harald's character from ignorance to guilt-consciousness to the final transformation into a state of acceptance makes a positive future possible. Lurie's inability to have any public outlet for his private turmoil renders all his potential for progress stagnant. His and Lucy's internalization of national problems only leads to death and destruction. It is through Duncan's trial that Harald undergoes an emotional release for his private literary and religious search for meaning. While seemingly oppositional texts, *Disgrace* agrees with *The House Gun* to emphasize the need to break the silence of the apartheid era in order to enable white acceptance of responsibility and make possible the refashioning of identities and a positive future.

## Conclusion:

### A Literary Commission

When I explained to a friend that the subject for this Thesis is white fathers in post-apartheid literature, she asked, “Daddy issues, much?” I laughed at her Freudian analysis of why I would want to explore the white South African father figure. The motivation for this Thesis stems not from my relationship with my own father, but from a semester I spent studying abroad at the University of Cape Town (UCT) during the fall of 2009.

Before going abroad I had read but not connected with African literature. However, on the first night of my home stay in the coloured township of Ocean View, my host mother—completely unprompted—told me about her weight struggle and attempted suicide. This abrupt exposure to the candor South Africans have developed over decades of intimate living conditions finally enabled me to understand the honest and direct tone of post-apartheid novels. Rather than pretending apartheid never happened, I discovered that the South Africans I met, ranging from my home stay mother to my peers at UCT, were more than willing to talk about the recent past. I encountered blacks and coloureds who readily told me about the forced removals their families endured and about their experiences as children during the rule of the National Party. While it was fascinating to discuss their transitional process and aspirations for the future, what was even more interesting for me was listening to the children of the perpetrators, the whites of my generation. I remember that one day in my history class a white English girl declared that all white South Africans are responsible for apartheid. She went on to admit to her own parents’ support of apartheid policies, telling the class about their shocked reaction the

first time she brought a coloured girl home from school. Through this, and many other interactions with UCT students, I became increasingly intrigued by the lack of hesitation with which the whites of my generation seemed to have about recognizing their own parents' complicity. Understanding the candor of South Africans in discussing apartheid allowed me to finally make sense of post-apartheid literature.

I discovered that one of the reasons for this type of self-condemning honesty is to be found in the route unification has taken within South Africa. Whether it is through the TRC or literature, the healing process of the post-apartheid years has largely focused on truth telling in an effort to reconcile the people of the country. South Africa has truly made a concerted effort to encourage victims to speak out about their personal pain and for perpetrators to publicly admit to their crimes. This constant interplay of the public and private that has been actively promoted by the new government strives to replace the negative results their interaction had in the past for the country.

Post-apartheid literature has assisted in this process, transitioning from “the public sphere of politics and protest to the more introspective, private sphere: to love and personal relationships, the family and sexual taboo, truth telling, soul-searching and so on” (Poyner 105). The TRC took the first steps in fostering unification; now it is up to the next generation, the generation of Duncan and Lucy, to continue breaking with the past and their fathers. Novels, such as *The Smell of Apples*, *The House Gun*, and *Disgrace*, are private narratives made public through the medium of writing, offering South Africans the space to reflect on the past and start the process of healing on their own terms.

The new South African fathers are already projecting a much more hopeful image to the world. Nelson Mandela, a father in his own right as well as the respected patriarch

of the new South Africa, has done a great deal to minimize the cycle of violence and unify the country. In addition, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, by heading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has also stood up for ushering in a new era. Unlike the hypocritical and domineering patriarchy encouraged by the apartheid regime, as illustrated by Behr, these two national fathers promote communication, peace, and the truth. Rather than suppressing the horrors of apartheid, they encourage South Africans to relive the past in order to come to terms with the present.

However, no matter how benevolent the new South African patriarchs are, it is up to my generation to pave the way for lasting change. It is children of the victims and perpetrators that are going to make the new South Africa work; the generation of Duncan and Lucy is the foundation for the future. Although they must pay for the sins of their fathers, they have the capacity to liberate future generations of South Africans. Out of *The Smell of Apples*, *The House Gun*, and *Disgrace*, only Gordimer uses optimism to prove the positive possibilities of the future. Behr and Coetzee, on the other hand, are concerned with how South Africans should not approach the future, which is why their novels serve as warnings rather than accurate presentations of the future.

This can be seen by examining which characters are ultimately liberated from their fathers in the conclusions of the novels. In Behr's novel, Marnus is not liberated. Unable to escape his father and history during life, his only finds freedom through his own death. Coetzee's Lucy is not liberated either. Her passive aggressive attempts to pay for the sins of her father through her silence and pregnancy do nothing more than continue the cycle of violence. Then there is Duncan Lindgard. Duncan, the new father who earns his voice in *The House Gun*'s conclusion. He is aware that he belongs to

neither the apartheid nor post-apartheid eras, but he does not give up. Unlike Lurie, he continues to plan for his future, and for the future of his child of the new South Africa. Like the white students I met at UCT, Duncan is doing all he can to admit to the past in order to ensure a brighter future. Although South Africa is currently passing through the “zero-point of atomic dissolution,” it is through efforts like Duncan’s that South Africa will be able to establish political and economic equality between people of different backgrounds (Gordimer 142). Gordimer’s presentation of the future of South Africa most closely resembles my own findings while studying abroad, which is why I agree with her life-affirming conclusion.

When I studied abroad at the UCT my goal was to enlighten my conception of the country, both by actively participating in the culture and by taking a variety of courses on South African history and literature. Studying South Africa while living in the country fostered an appreciation for the ways in which many South African authors construct narratives about post-apartheid life. I realized the allegorical qualities of the narratives can aid in South Africa’s healing process. Through my identification with the texts my eyes were also opened to issues facing my own society. I realized the impact of post-apartheid literature is not limited to South Africa. Not only does it facilitate the country’s own healing and unification process, it also possesses extraordinary value as conflict-resolution world literature, telling stories relevant to a global audience. Through personal experience I have found it also increases cross-cultural understanding and empathy through the portrayal of internationally empathetic characters. These novels have the same capability as Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* to open readers’ eyes to injustices and hypocrisies within their own communities, regardless of the country they live in.

Behr, Gordimer, and Coetzee are not “elevating ‘art for art’s sake’ above politics;” they are proving “the supposed poles of this debate are not mutually exclusive” (Poyner 105). Political views can be expressed by telling stories in a private manner, focusing on the personal relationships of South Africans. After all, these are the relationships that need to change in order for the country to move beyond the apartheid years and become politically stable. By having access to an unofficial commission of literature shedding light on the past, South Africa will be able to grapple with the injustices of apartheid and work towards achieving a true Rainbow Nation. The TRC exposed the horrors of apartheid in a public way, which was a necessary first step for the country to take. By bringing many burdensome truths out into the open and by expressing a desire for reconciliation, the TRC achieved a great deal. However, no single commission can accomplish the lofty goals it set for itself. At its conclusion, there was a need for alternative artistic methods to be implemented to bring about an idea of nationhood. Post-apartheid literature picks up where the TRC leaves off, also bringing the private and public realms together to examine the lingering legacy of apartheid. The search for truth and understanding proves to be complex and therefore difficult. However, having access to an unofficial commission of literature that sheds light on the guilty white masculinities of the past and the role of the younger generation in moving forward, post-apartheid authors are bringing the social and political together to confront the past in order to achieve lasting internal unification.

## Works Cited

- Attwell, David. "Coetzee and Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27.4 (2001): 865-67. Print.
- Behr, Mark. *The Smell of Apples*. New York: Picador USA, 1995.
- Bloem, Rose. "Haunting Depictions of Dominance and Oppression: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*." *Memory, Haunting, Discourse* (2005): 215-28.
- Coetzee, J. M. *Disgrace*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Cooper, Pamela. "Metamorphosis and Sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of *Disgrace*." *Research in African Literatures* 36.4 (2005): 22-39.
- Diala, Isidore. "Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and Andre Brink: Guilt, Expiation, and the Reconciliation Process in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.2 (2001): 50-68. Print.
- Du Pisani, Kobus. "Puritanism Transformed: Afrikaner Masculinities in the Apartheid and Post-Apartheid Period." *Changing Men in Southern Africa*. Ed. Robert Morrell. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 2001. 157-75.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *The House Gun*. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- Henry, Yazir. "Where Healing Begins." *Looking Back Reaching Forward*. Charles Villavicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd, Eds. Cape Town: U of Cape Town, 2000, 166-173.
- Horrell, Georgie. "Post-Apartheid *Disgrace*: Guilty Masculinities in White South African Writing." *Literature Compass* 2.1 (2005): 1-11.
- Ibinga, Stephane S. "Post-Apartheid Literature Beyond Race." *This Century's Review*. 2006. Web. 2 Sept. 2010.  
<[http://www.thiscenturyreview.com/post\\_apartheid.html](http://www.thiscenturyreview.com/post_apartheid.html)>.
- Lindegger, Graham. "The Father in the Mind." *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Ed. Linda Richter and Robert Morrell. Cape Town: HSRC, 2006. 121-31.
- McMurtry, Mervyn. "Perverted Rites of Passage." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 37. The New Man? (1998): 101-03.
- Medalie, David. "'The Context of the Awful Event': Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25.4 (1999): 633-44.

- . "'Such Wanton Innocence': Representing South African Boyhoods." *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 12.1 (2000): 41-61.
- Morrell, Robert. "The Times of Change: Men and Masculinity in South Africa." *Changing Men in Southern Africa*. Ed. Robert Morrell. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 2001. 3-37.
- Olivier, Frederike. "Decolonizing the Patriarch: A Reading of Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*." *Colonizer and the Colonized* (2000): 515-28.
- Poyner, Jane. "Writing under Pressure: A Post-Apartheid Canon?" *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44.2 (2008): 103-114.
- Samin, Richard. "'Burdens of Rage and Grief': Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid Fiction." *Commonwealth" Essays and Studies* 23.1 (2000): 19-26.
- Stobie, Cheryl. "Fissures in Apartheid's 'Eden': Representations of Bisexuality in by Mark Behr." *Research in African Literatures* 39.1 (2008): 70-86.
- Woods, Paul C. "Sins of the Father?: Thematic Concerns in South African Homosexual Writing." *Re-imagining Africa: New Critical Perspectives* (2001): 163-74.