

**“Not rape, not quite that”: An exploration of the rape narratives in  
J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and *In the Heart of the Country* within the  
South African context.**

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## ***Abstract***

This dissertation provides a close examination of the rape narratives in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and *In the Heart of the Country* within the South African context. Initially, I briefly explore the proposition that the problem of rape in South Africa is perpetuated by the myths about rape which essentially obfuscate the reality of the incidence of rape. Having established what these myths are and how they are detrimental to our understanding of rape, I explore Coetzee's treatment of them in his own rape narratives. I debate whether Coetzee has simply reproduced existing myths about rape, thus perpetuating the shroud of silence which surrounds the majority of rapes in South Africa, or whether he has provided some sort of critique of the myths which are generally regarded as credible. I suggest that there is a marked development in Coetzee's consciousness and handling of myths about rape from *In the Heart of the Country* to *Disgrace*. The conclusion that I reach is that while it seems that Coetzee is critical of certain myths about rape, his criticism is presented in so subtle a manner that its detection is dependent, for a large part, on the integrity of the reader.

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core.

(Coetzee, *Disgrace*: 25)

The incidence of rape in South Africa is horrifying. It has been suggested (Moffett, 2001: 2; Graham, 2002:6) that South Africa has one of the highest figures for reported rape for a country not involved in a war. Furthermore, it is estimated that only one in between twenty and thirty-five rapes is actually reported in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> The statistic that every one in two South African women will be raped suggests a prevalence of gender-based violence in this country that is tantamount to an unspoken “gender civil war” (Moffett, 2001: 4). The plethora of rape statistics, which circulate through the media and through educational programmes, suggests a suitable public awareness of the problem. And yet, for the most part, the reality of rape in South Africa remains invisible. The fact that merely seven percent of reported rapes are prosecuted, makes rape one of the safest crimes to commit in South Africa.

It has been suggested by a number of researchers and critics (Lewis, 2000; Green, 1999 and Vogelman, 1990) and by Helen Moffett (2001) in particular, that the cause of this invisibility may lie with the way in which South Africa society thinks, speaks and writes about rape. Although these particular researchers are concerned primarily with rape as a social problem and therefore with real cases of rape, the myths about rape which are found to be prevalent in South African society can be compared to those found in South African literature. In making this comparison it will be possible to ascertain not only whether the narratives found in the literature reflect those found in society, but also whether the author fuels or provides a criticism of particular myths about rape. It is perhaps useful at this point, to iterate what is meant by the use of the term ‘myths’. In *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy distinguishes between the modern understanding of ‘myth’ as a fallacy and the more complex understanding of myth as the foundation of the “intimate being of a community” (Nancy, 1991:48). In the latter, ‘myth’ is perceived to have a dynamic and interactive relationship with the community.

Myth works out the shares and divisions that distribute a community and distinguish it for itself, articulating it within itself. Neither dialogue nor monologue, myth is the unique speech of the many, who come thereby to recognise one another, who communicate and commune in myth.

(Nancy, 1991: 50)

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.speakout.org.za/events/stats/stats\\_facts.htm](http://www.speakout.org.za/events/stats/stats_facts.htm) for statistics.

Obviously, the two meanings can be combined and 'myth' as the foundation of culture can be 'untrue'. In the following dissertation, the term will be used in both capacities. While the term 'myths about rape' will generally refer to the narratives<sup>2</sup> (that is, the communally held stories or mythologies) which shape the community's understanding of the problem of rape, there will be instances when the term will be used to refer to a particular fallacy (eg. women enjoy being raped).

As I shall demonstrate, many of the myths about rape which are prevalent in South African society do not reflect the reality of (or the reason for) the incidence of rape in South Africa. The reason for this is that many of the myths about rape are based on fallacies (women ask for it), a minority of cases (rapists are strangers) or a hidden political agenda (black men rape white women). Thus the myths which are generally regarded by the public as credible, may have very little to do with the reality of the situation. It follows that if a rape mythology exists and shapes the community's understanding of rape, then any experiences or narratives which fall outside of this mythology effectively become invisible. Furthermore, the entrenched position of these myths is perpetuated by their reproduction not only in the media, but also to a lesser extent in literature.

In April 2000, J.M. Coetzee's post-apartheid novel *Disgrace* was criticised by the African National Congress at a Human Rights Commission hearing into racism in the media for its portrayal of the rape of a white woman by a group of black men<sup>3</sup>. As is often the case, the aspect of gender violation in the rape was hijacked by the South African preoccupation with race. The question which naturally arises is whether the ANC's criticism was a valid one. One cannot simply take the portrayal of the rape of the white woman by black men as an isolated event, one needs to examine it within the context of the rest of the novel. The following dissertation will examine the rape narratives created by J.M. Coetzee in *In the Heart of the Country* (1976) and in *Disgrace* (1999). It will consider whether Coetzee has simply reproduced existing myths about rape, thus perpetuating the shroud of silence surrounding the majority of rapes in South Africa, or whether he has provided some sort of critique of the myths which are generally regarded as credible. In this way it will examine what the novels contribute to the discourse on rape in South Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'narratives' will be avoided when the social phenomenon is being discussed in order to avoid confusion with literary narratives.

<sup>3</sup> The criticism in the statement is as follows: "It might be better that our white compatriots should emigrate because to be in post-apartheid South Africa is to be in 'their territory', as a consequence of which the whites will lose their cars, their weapons, their property, their rights, their dignity. *The white*

However, in order to examine and critique the rape narratives presented in J.M. Coetzee's novels, it is first necessary to explore the myths about rape which are given precedence in South African society and to examine why these myths are so dangerous. This involves looking at South Africa as a 'rape culture', considering the representation (or failure of representation) of the rapist, exploring the myth of the rapist as an 'outsider' rather than an 'insider', examining how rape is understood as a violation of property and finally investigating how the responsibility for the rape is shifted from the perpetrator to the victim.

## I

According to Green (1999: 95-6) a rape culture "condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm" and regards rape as a "crime of passion instead of a crime of violence and a means of social control". This is certainly the case in South Africa where rape, like childbirth (without the obvious joy and benefits that accompany it) – is regarded as a painful, but nevertheless inevitable event that it is women's lot to endure. The acceptability of this attitude is echoed clearly in the thoughts of David Lurie in *Disgrace*, "menstruation, childbirth, violation and its aftermath: blood-matters: a woman's burden, women's preserve."(D: 104). In the case of both an unplanned pregnancy and rape, the individual generally perceived as shamed is the woman. In his study of rapists in South Africa, Vogelmann (1990: 29) discovered that many of the rapists he interviewed regarded rape as a "normal" act and as a result of this did little to conceal their actions. Others, who understood the legal consequences of rape, also took few precautions because they knew that the chances of being prosecuted were very slim. Furthermore, Moffett (2001:5) suggests that as a result of the acceptability of rape within the society, "the vast majority of rapists and abusers have no idea that what they are perpetrating is 'wrong' or 'abnormal', much less a crime." In their research into the phenomenon of gang rape in South Africa, Vogelmann and Lewis (1993:41) discovered the popular township saying that "Jackroll (gang rape) is not a crime it is just a game".

To a certain degree, this approach to rape is a result of the myths which draw a correlation between rape and 'normal' heterosexual intercourse. The first of these myths is that men rape for sexual gratification. While it may be true that in some cases sexual gratification is one of the motives for rape, Lewis (2000:13) claims that rapists often already have active sex lives and rape to fulfil non-sexual needs such as the need for power or control. The second myth,

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*women will have to sleep with the barbaric black men*" (Italics my own, note the words 'sleep with'

which is quite close to the first, is that men rape because they cannot control their sexual lust. The fact that old women and young children (neither of whom are sexually desirable) are raped suggests that uncontrollable desire is not the 'cause' of rape. Such an explanation also suggests that rapes are impulsive which contradicts the evidence that most rapes are planned (Vogelman, 1990: 63). Furthermore, this myth is particularly dangerous as it shifts the blame from the rapist to the victim – the sexual desirability of the victim becomes the 'cause' of the rape. Another myth, which shifts the blame from the man onto the women, is that women encourage or enjoy being raped. Here, confusion between rape and normal heterosexual intercourse becomes evident. Rape is a violent and life-threatening experience which no woman enjoys. It does not follow that if a woman enjoys normal sex she will enjoy being raped. Furthermore, a woman is not inviting a man to rape her by wearing sexy clothing or behaving in a provocative way. Disturbingly, this particular myth is often perpetuated by other women who feel safer blaming the victim than the rapist. Unfortunately, this removal of the rapist from the position of responsibility only increases the prevalence of rape.

Moffett (2001:2) proposes that one of the fundamental flaws with myths about rape in South Africa is that they either erase the rapist completely or cast him as a monster or aberration. Each of these creates its own distinct set of problems. If the rapist is erased from the scenario, there is nowhere for the blame to fall but firmly on the shoulders of the violated woman - 'A man raped a woman' very quickly becomes 'A woman was raped' (Moffett, 2001:7). An argument in favour of this transition might suggest that the agent of the passive sentence is taken for granted because who else could possibly have raped the woman? Furthermore, as the woman's body becomes the site of the rape and often carries visible evidence of it, it is easy to concentrate on the violated body and forget about the perpetrator who carries no obvious signs of his act of violation. Nevertheless, the fact remains that by erasing men from the way in which we talk about rape, we are also erasing them from the way in which we think about it. In his article 'The Rhetoric of the Passive in English' (Coetzee, 1992: 150) Coetzee suggests that,

By affecting the focus of a sentence, the active form can consolidate the superficial subject as "hero" where the passive would consolidate the subject as "sufferer". If the agent is systematically deleted "the impression would be given of a central participant 'to whom things happened' – as opposed to 'who had things done to him'"<sup>4</sup>.

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instead of 'raped by'). See [www.anc.org.za/ancedocs/misc/2000/sp0405.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancedocs/misc/2000/sp0405.html).

<sup>4</sup> Quotation within Coetzee's taken from Roger Fowler, "Style and the concept of Deep Structure," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 1 (1972), 17.

In South African society, rape is something that happens *to* women, not something that is committed *by* men.<sup>5</sup>

Occasionally it is permissible to expose the man/monster responsible for the crime. The very reason for this lies with the notion of a 'monster' – an aberration so far removed from humanity that he cannot be compared to 'normal' men. In order for the 'monster' myth to apply however, the rape needs to be tainted by something horrific (a notion which has the subtext that rape is not in itself a particularly horrific event) such as extreme violence, homicide, mutilation or the rape of a child. The result of the above is that the majority of men (many of whom, according to statistics, do rape) are not regarded, by themselves or by others, as rapists. It is preferable that the 'monster' exists on the fringes of society – if he is mentally handicapped, suffers from a psychological disorder, is a drug addict or a criminal of some sort. In this way it is even easier to distinguish the 'monster' rapist from the 'ordinary' man. He behaved as he did because of his disorder, addiction etc. According to Clark and Lewis (1977: 135), the man is perceived as a threat to society, not necessarily because of the rape, but because of his deviance from the norm – his psychological disorder, mental handicap or otherwise criminal behaviour. The assumption drawn from this particular myth is that if a man does not suffer from any disorders or addictions and if he is not involved in any other criminal behaviour, he is not likely to rape. If only certain portrayals of rapists are legitimate, then only a small percentage of rapes can be regarded as such. Incorporated in the monster myth, is the myth of the hypersexual black man craving the flesh of the white woman.

These myths of denial and demonisation continue to be perpetuated regardless of the fact that research has demonstrated over and over again that normal men *do* rape. Rapists exist across racial, class and educational lines (Vogelman, 1990:88; Lewis, 2000:16). Why then are these narratives privileged? The reasons why the male population would endorse such myths are obvious, but why would women help perpetuate myths which are ultimately dangerous to them? Perhaps because it is more comforting (although not more realistic) to believe that the rapist is 'out there' and not your boyfriend, husband, brother or son. The perpetuation of the monster myth is particularly intriguing if one considers that in South Africa there are relatively few 'serial' rapists and that it is estimated that seventy-five percent of all rapes are gang rapes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It will be assumed throughout this paper that women are the victims of rape as (with the exception of male-on-male rape which occurs in all-male institutions such as prisons, and the rape of young boys) women make up the overwhelming majority of victims.



The myths of demonisation are closely linked to the myth which positions the rapist as an 'outsider'. In South Africa, the insider/outsider boundary usually exists across colour lines. However, it is also possible for the insider/outsider binary to exist within a racial category (perhaps along class lines, national lines or some other culturally specific determinate). In South African history, the most popular version of this myth is of a black man raping a white woman. As a result of years of apartheid and illegal 'miscegenation' in this country, this myth is particularly politically loaded and volatile. While there are, without doubt, instances when black men do rape white women (and the validity of the victim's experience should in no way be trivialised), it is peculiar that this myth is still so firmly perpetuated in a country where the majority of rapes are intra-racial (Lewis, 2000:16). Moffett (2001:13) proposes the social control of women as a motivation for the perpetuation of the insider/outsider narrative. By painting the outsider as a rapist, the insider males can, to a certain extent, control the females within their community through fear of the other. The women, afraid of the outsider, are forced to seek protection from the men within their community. The irony, of course, is that if a woman chooses to reject this so-called protection and displays an unacceptable degree of autonomy then she is in danger of being raped by the men *within* her community as a form of punishment or social control. As the awareness of the prevalence of intra-racial rape is diminished by the preoccupation with inter-racial rape, it becomes very difficult for women raped by those within their community to speak of the rape, thus perpetuating the silence which surrounds the majority of rapes in South Africa. McKay (1991: 253) writes about a phenomenon which exists in the United States of America where some black women choose not to speak out against rapists within their own community for fear of perpetuating and reinforcing the once popular notion of the black man as a hypersexual savage. The myth of the 'black sex-crazed savage' is one which once led to the lynching of many innocent black men. The behaviour of these women clearly indicates a privileging of racial equality over that of gender equality. Moffett (2001:10) suggests that a similar situation exists in South Africa where some black women keep quiet about their rapes not only out of fear, but also because they are "reluctant to add to the picture of black men as brutal, degraded monsters".

As has been demonstrated above, the myth of the rapist as other serves not only to strengthen the divides between groups (thus generally keeping one group in a position of power) but also to subjugate the women within the 'insider' group. Moffett (2001:11) suggests that "the problem arises when women, rather than being seen as the potential victims of a demonised Other, become the Other themselves". For years the apartheid government acted on the principle that the other (in this case, 'non-white' South Africans) was an extremely dangerous

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<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.speakout.org.za/events/stats/stats\\_facts.htm](http://www.speakout.org.za/events/stats/stats_facts.htm) for statistics.

group which needed to be kept in check by a demonstration of force. However, as a work force, the other was also imperative to the survival of white South Africans. As a result of this, the violence inflicted on the other needed to be such that it immobilised their resistance, but not their ability to work. Moffett (2001:11) suggests that in post-apartheid South Africa, women have become the other. Imperative to the survival of society, they are nevertheless, as a subjugated group, dangerous to those in a position of power. And rape, or the threat of it, has become the favoured weapon of subjugation.

The erasure of the rapist from the way in which we speak about rape inadvertently places some of the responsibility for the rape with the woman simply because there is nowhere else for the responsibility to fall. There are, however, myths which hold women responsible for rape in more direct terms. In some cases, such as acquaintance rape or marital rape, due to the acceptability of certain rape scenarios in our society, the rapist may not be aware that he is committing a crime. In others, he may be perfectly aware that rape is a crime, but he may shift responsibility onto the woman with the justification that she was 'asking for it'. According to such myths, women can 'ask for' rape in a variety of ways. The woman may dress or behave in a way which is considered provocative; she may reject the advances of the rapist; she may walk down the street alone; she may exhibit an unacceptable degree of autonomy or she may just be too good looking for her own good. Once again it is clear why men (as a population group) would endorse such myths, the reasons why women do so are slightly more complicated. On the one hand, women may have internalised the myths that hold women responsible for rape. On the other hand, if rape is the responsibility of the raped woman, then other women have a certain degree of control over whether or not they get raped. As long as a woman does not behave in a manner which might provoke rape (whatever that may be) then she is safe. Unfortunately, these myths and the attitudes, which accompany them, only contribute further to the rate at which women are raped and to the stigma which is attached to rape and the violated woman. In *Giving Offense*, Coetzee (1996:80) writes about how this stigma contributes to the obstruction of justice.

The ambivalence of rape victims – particularly outside the west – about seeking redress from the law, and the surprising degree of suspicion or even hostility with which the public, even in the west, treats such plaintiffs, indicates that in matters of honor archaic attitudes are far from dead, that is, that the system of justice of the modern state, based on notions of guilt and innocence, has not entirely supplanted the tribunal of public opinion, based on notions of honor and shame.

Perhaps one of the most entrenched myths about rape is that of rape as a violation of property. In such myths, women are regarded as property and rape is understood as a violation of another man's property. This myth clearly dates back to a time when women were legally regarded as property. Although women's rights have advanced, little has been done to adjust myths about rape which regard women as property. Perhaps the most formalised modern version of this myth can be found in the notion that a man cannot rape his wife. Until recently, South African law was such that it was impossible for a man to rape his wife. The underlying assumption was that the marriage contract acted as a property contract in which the man was the owner and the woman the property (Vogelman, 1990:81). The law has subsequently been changed. However, in reality very little has changed. There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that although the legislature may have changed, the marriage property myth is so embedded in society that a large number of women may still be unaware that marital rape is illegal. A second reason could be that women may fear reprisals from their husbands (a fear that would be exacerbated by an ineffectual justice system and a high rate of gender-based violence and femicide). Finally, it is very difficult for a woman to prove non-consent in the case of marital rape. It would seem that, to a certain degree, which rapes are regarded as legitimate has a lot to do with the victim's ability to prove her non-consent. In the case of a stranger rape or a monster rape, it is a lot easier for the victim to prove her own innocence (especially if there is some degree of physical violence involved). However, in the majority of cases where the rapist is known to the victim, the victim may have a difficult time proving that what took place was rape and not consensual sex.

The 'rape as violation of property' myth has also filtered in a more subtle way into our current understanding of rape. Often the woman's husband or father is regarded as the injured party. The notion that a woman can be raped in order to disgrace or humiliate her male 'owner' who failed to protect her is grounded in the mindset which regards women as "homosexual currency between men" (Hearn, 1998:159). Where marriage acts as a legitimate transaction, rape acts as theft. Furthermore, tied to the notion of women as property, is the idea that a raped woman is in some way spoilt (Vogelman, 1990:26). Clark and Lewis (1977: 115-6) suggest that such an attitude originated historically in the value attributed to the virgin bride, where a woman was valuable currency only as long as she was a virgin. This particular ideology is closely tied to the perception of the female body as a vehicle for reproduction and the exclusivity of a man's rights to his wife's (or wife-to-be's) body.

Although the ideology of the virgin bride no longer exists in most cultures, the notion of women as property over which certain men have ownership has not been completely

disregarded. An example of the subtle infiltration of the women-as-property myth into the way in which we think about rape can ironically be seen in some anti-rape slogans. Although slogans such as 'Protect *our* women' and 'Keep *our* women safe' are intended to stem the tide of rape in South Africa, they are inadvertently contributing to the myths which perpetuate its occurrence. Not only do these slogans paint the rapist as other, they also (obviously, only when held or pronounced by men) suggest ownership. Along with the myth of women-as-property comes that of men-as-protectors. This myth, whilst endorsed by many, is clearly fundamentally flawed. If women's only protection from the 'bad' men is from the 'good' men, their access to protection is tenuous because it lasts only as long as they conform to the behaviour which pleases the so-called 'good' men. Those who provide protection could very easily become those because of whom protection is sought.

Although understanding which myths operate in the South African discourse on rape is imperative when examining Coetzee's representations of rape, it is, nevertheless, also important to consider the fact that Coetzee is producing rape narratives within the field of literature. Myths about rape that circulate in popular (verbal) discourse and in the media (rape reports) are naturally going to differ in many ways from those that appear in a work of literature. A fundamental difference between the two is that a literary work holds the possibility of longevity. That is, while it may be difficult in a number of years to extract current myths about rape from an ever-changing verbal discourse and while media reports are easily discarded and forgotten, literature provides a medium through which it is possible to trace the history of certain narratives. However, in order for a work of literature to attain this longevity, it needs to have an artistic dimension, which is often absent in other representations of rape narratives. This artistic dimension, along with the fictional nature of the text and the omnipotence of the author, complicates (sometimes to the point of obscuring) the representation of rape in literature. Before one can consider Coetzee's representations of rape, one needs to examine, in slightly more general terms, the complications which accompany the representations of rape in literature.

## II

There seem to be two key reasons why the representation of rape in literature is problematic. The first of these, as Sielke (2002:2) suggests is that,

talk about rape does not necessarily denote rape, just as talk about love hardly ever hits its target. Instead, transposed into discourse, rape turns into a

rhetorical device, an insistent figure for other social, political, and economic concerns and conflicts.

Rape has become a popular literary trope and even if not intended as such by the author, is often interpreted by critics as a metaphor or symbol for something else. Representations of rape in literature are very seldom understood purely as the literal violation of the individual. The consequence of this is that rape and its inherent violence have been removed from the realm of the literal. The female body is essentially erased as a site of violation (Higgins and Silver, 1991: 4). In this way, rape has become a figurative device, a metaphor for other violations. The second part of Coetzee's *Dusklands* provides an interesting example of this. On the one hand, there is the literal portrayal of rape in Coetzee's (the character) descriptions of raping 'Bushmen' girls ("she (is) nothing, a rag to wipe yourself on and throw away" (*Dusklands*: 61)) and the rape of the 'Hottentot' girl ("The Griqua was doing things to the child on the ground. It must be a girl child" (*Dusklands*: 102)). On the other hand, there is also a description of the character Coetzee's futile attempts to 'rape' the land/earth – "I bored a sheath in the earth and would have performed the ur-act had joy and laughter not reduced me to a four-inch dangle and helpless urination." (*Dusklands*: 95). Although this is portrayed as a literal act, Coetzee (the character) is also in the process of raping the land (and the indigenous people) metaphorically. Thus the female body is, in a sense, erased as a site of violation. Instead the site of violation becomes the land or the Bushmen/Hottentots. Even in cases where the rape is portrayed quite literally, it is seldom understood by critics purely as the violation of the individual. An example of this can be found in Stratton's (2002: 88-89) interpretation of the rape of Lucy in *Disgrace*. She regards the rape as a metaphor for power relations in the new South Africa. In her opinion, the rape of Lucy represents the shift from white to black power and the violence of the rape suggests that the new government will be more "brutal" than the previous one.

There are perhaps two main reasons why rape has been so readily adopted as a metaphor for other (particularly political) 'violations'. The first of these concerns the invasive nature of rape and the helplessness of the victim in the face of the invasion. In this sense, the metaphor becomes particularly handy when portraying colonialism, or the invasion of one country by another. As rape is often regarded by the perpetrator as some sort of conquest, this metaphor is rather fitting. The second concerns the literary appropriation of the female body as a symbolic territory – of the land, the people or even nature. The problem with removing rape from the literal is that it tends to be overlooked (not only in terms of individual violation, but also in terms of a huge social problem) in favour of the 'bigger' and 'more important' problems which it represents. The converse is of course also true when writers use other scenarios as

metaphors for rape. Unfortunately, the problem is that, instead of exposing the atrocities of rape (as the rape metaphor exposes the atrocities of colonialism), these representations tend to obscure the reality of rape, removing it once more from the literal realm.

Giving rape a symbolic function is just one of the ways in which rape can be obscured and essentially written out of a literary text. Rooney (1991: 91) suggests that “representations of sexual violence are often characterised by silence, elisions, and ambiguities.” It seems necessary to analyse this statement, in order to understand how a *representation* of sexual violence might be characterised by an absence. In the case of elision, there may simply be a gap in the text where (the rest of the text suggests that) there should have been a representation of rape. For instance, the reader may be given the insight into the character’s experiences before and after the incident, but the representation of the actual rape (either during or after the incident) is missing. It is then the task of the reader to ‘read’ the rape back into the text, to fill the gap with their own impressions of what might have happened. An example of this can be found in Coetzee’s (the character’s) description of the rape of the ‘Hottentot’ girl in *Dusklands* – “The Griqua was doing things to the child on the ground. It must be a girl child.” (*Dusklands*:95). In this particular instance, there is no explicit reference to rape. The reader needs to infer that because the child is female, what is happening to her *must* be rape. This process of elision presents a number of problems, not only because the reader may overlook the violation entirely, but also because it reinforces a discourse (which can be observed in society) in which certain rape narratives are elided or silenced in order to maintain a particular status quo. The elision of representations of rape from certain literary texts also ensures that the ‘victim’ remains silent. If there is no representation of the rape, the victim cannot speak out against her violation.

Ambiguities enter the text when it is uncertain whether the act committed is in fact rape, or whether the sex is consensual, an act of seduction. This ambiguity is often caused by the masculine framing of perspective. If, for example, the scenario is portrayed from the perspective of the seducer/rapist, it will more than likely be portrayed as a seduction. If, on the other hand, the scenario were portrayed from the perspective of the victim, it could just as easily be presented as a rape. This is not to suggest of course that every seduction scene is necessarily a rape in disguise. However, the fact that this ambiguity does exist, suggests a certain degree of complicity on the part of the author. While it is possible that in some cases, by presenting the ambiguity, the author is taking a critical stance in relation to the representation of rape, it is more likely that, in the majority of cases, the author is actively involved in suppressing certain rape narratives by privileging the perspective of the male over

that of the female. Although Coetzee privileges the male perspective of David Lurie in *Disgrace*, one suspects that he is doing so critically.

Higgins and Silver (1991:3) suggest that the act of reading rape in a literary text is a complicated one because it often requires that we listen not only to those who speak (and the circumstances in which they speak), but also to those who do not speak or to those who find an alternative way of speaking. Furthermore, it requires that we undertake the seemingly contradictory task of discovering that which has been omitted from the text. This task seems ridiculous because it suggests that the text itself is not a complete entity and that there is an objective reality or 'truth' which exists outside of the text and against which the text can be compared. This is both false and true. On the one hand, a text can be examined purely as a complete piece of fiction in which there are no alternative realities, where the perspective the reader is given is the only one. Furthermore, it is a little naïve to suggest that there is a single alternative reality against which that in the fiction can be compared. On the other hand, however, works of fiction exist within a social space and contribute (albeit minimally) to the construction of that space. Linda Hutcheon (1994: 235) argues that "representation legitimises and privileges certain kinds of knowledge – including certain kinds of historical knowledge". It is imperative therefore, when reading literature, that one acknowledges the possibility of the existence of a silenced history(s), one that may differ from the "master('s) story" (Higgins and Silver, 1991:3).

It would seem that even those authors, who might consciously be trying to critique certain representations of rape, are invariably complicit in suppressing some narratives and perpetuating others. In examining literary representations of rape therefore one needs to consider not only who is speaking and who is being silenced, but also which narratives are being privileged and which are being suppressed and why. Higgins and Silver (1991:4) propose that this becomes more complicated when texts are authored by males because of their implicit complicity in a system which subjugates women and ensures that men remain in a position of power.

It is also necessary to recognise the disturbing fault lines that appear within men's texts and to ask what role male authors play in uncovering the structures that brutalise women's bodies and erase their subjectivity. Do these texts reveal traces of masculine sexual anxiety or guilt? And are even male authors who recognise their complicity in the violence of the gender system ultimately caught in its powerful meshes?

(Higgins and Silver, 1991: 4)

One also needs to consider whether or not it is possible for the male author to portray rape accurately from the perspective of the female victim. If not, this presents an interesting dilemma. For on the one hand, the male author could attempt to represent rape from the perspective of the female victim and in doing so, perpetuate narratives which are fuelled by 'masculine' myths about rape. On the other hand, if the male author chooses to omit the rape scene entirely or portray it from the perspective of the rapist, he is faced with the possibility of all the above-mentioned problems.

J.M. Coetzee attempts both. *In the Heart of the Country* is written from the perspective of the female protagonist Magda, while *Disgrace* is mediated through the thoughts and experiences of David Lurie. The following dissertation will examine the rape narratives in each of the novels separately and in doing so will attempt to establish how the different perspectives influence the narratives. In comparing the rape narratives in the two novels, it will also be possible to ascertain whether those in the pre-democratic novel differ from those in the post-apartheid novel. This comparison should be interesting for two reasons. The first is that one would expect (although this is not necessarily the case) some of the myths about rape to differ in the pre- and post-apartheid periods, because of the shift in power and the change in racial politics. If this is not the case, one needs to consider why certain myths about rape have remained the same whilst other myths (such as those concerning race) have changed. The second reason lies with the fact that statistics demonstrate that the incidence of reported rapes has risen in the past decade. It will be interesting to note whether or not this change is reflected in Coetzee's work.

### III

*In the Heart of the Country* is a slightly problematic text for anyone attempting to establish a critical argument about the content of the novel – the actual 'story'. The reason for this is that one is never quite sure whether some events 'occur' and others are simply fantasies of the protagonist or whether the entire fiction takes place within Magda's mind. It is probably safe to suggest that if the work is read as a realistic piece of fiction, then not everything in the book actually occurs because certain events, such as the death of Magda's father *twice*, are impossible. The problem with approaching the text in this way is that the reader needs to establish which 'events' are real and which are imagined. Naturally, this brings with it a certain amount of controversy. If one were to approach the novel in this way, it would seem



reasonable to regard those events from which the plot subsequently develops, as real. For instance, the first occasion on which Magda murders her father could be regarded as fantasy, not only because one of the characters appears to be a figment of her imagination, but also because the story does not develop from this initial murder. Instead, it stops short, backtracks slightly, and develops from the second murder. Attridge (2004: 24) proposes that the most “satisfactory approach is to assume, as we normally do in reading fiction, that the words are to be taken as referring to real events unless there is good reason, in a particular section of the novel, to take them as the outcome of fantasy or psychological derangement”. The difficulty with reading the novel in this way is that establishing what is real and what is fantasy is largely guesswork. Furthermore, if one attempts to critique the ‘story’ one is faced with the possibility that the story one has extracted is one entirely of one’s own making.

An alternative is to consider the novel in a kind of suspended reality, in which all possibilities are real and equally viable (a similar approach to regarding everything as imagined). The text lends itself quite comfortably to such a reading as it/Magda tends to provide the reader with a number of alternative interpretations of most of the major ‘events’. As this criticism is concerned less with the actual ‘story’ and more with the rape narratives within the story, it will consider each of the rape scenarios (and in some cases the variations on a particular scenario) as ‘possible’. It will also consider, in the cases where there are variations, what these variations mean in terms of the rape narratives and the representation of rape in literature.

Although Coetzee deals with rape quite literally in *Disgrace* and *In the Heart of the Country*, there are instances in the latter when he uses rape in a more figurative sense. The first instance of this can be found in Magda’s description of her relationship with her father.

The land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history, blue as roaches in our ancestral homes, keeping a high shine on the copperware and laying in jam. Wooed when we were little by our masterful fathers, we are bitter vestals, spoiled for life. The childhood rape: someone should study the kernel of truth in this fancy. (*IHC*: 3-4)

Here, Magda (and perhaps Coetzee?) seems to be using the “childhood rape” as a metaphor for the patriarchal system, in which females are taught from a young age to be submissive to the will of the father and any other male substitute. Perhaps the “kernel of truth” refers to the literal rapes which perpetuate the cycle of subjugation. Alternatively, but along a similar train of thought, one could regard the “childhood rape” as a psychological one. This interpretation, however, is problematic, because the word *wooed* suggests seduction rather than rape. The

confusion between the two is perhaps a reflection of Magda's preoccupation with her own virginity and her obsessive, slightly oedipal attitude towards her father. Penner (1989:59) suggests that the 'rape', which is essentially about power and domination refers to the dominant and submissive roles taken on by the father and daughter respectively. Alternatively, one could understand the phrase not as a 'rape' which occurs in childhood, but rather as the 'rape' of childhood – the loss of innocence. Finally, one could, as Kossew (1996: 67) does (in light of the thematic concerns of the novel) interpret the 'rape' as a metaphor for colonialism, in which the spinsters represent the land or the colonised people and the masterful fathers, the colonisers. If one interprets the metaphor in such a way that the spinsters represent the colonised people, then the "wooing" period can be regarded as the period in which the colonisers ensnared the indigenous people with alcohol, religion and promises of modernity. The rape can be seen as the period during which the colonisers stripped the indigenous people of what was rightfully theirs and forced them into a position of subjugation. The fact that the rape is referred to as the '*childhood* rape' suggests not only a perceived innocence of the land/colonised people, which subsequent to the invasion is tainted, but also to an irretrievable period in the history of the country.

In each of these interpretations rape seems to act as a figurative device. There is no real indication of the violence/violation involved in rape. The fact that it is difficult to identify specifically what the phrase "the childhood rape" is referring to is problematic because it leaves one with an even vaguer sense of what the term may be denoting. One is left with the sensation that perhaps the "childhood rape" has no more significance than the descriptive phrase, "laying in jam". If this is indeed the case, then the banality with which the word is used is disturbing. Not only because it demonstrates a cavalier attitude towards the subject of rape (by giving the words 'rape' and 'jam' similar descriptive functions), but also because, in a sense, it undermines the portrayal of the 'actual' rape of Magda later in the novel. An alternative interpretation of the banal use of the word 'rape' (and this is perhaps a little too generous) is that it is fitting for Magda's character to use the word in such a way at this point in the novel. When describing how she imagines the sexual encounter between Hendrik and Klein-Anna, Magda says the following,

How do I, a lonely spinster, come to know such things? It is not for nothing that I spend evenings humped over the dictionary. Words are words. I have never pretended to embrace that night's experience. A factor, I deal in signs merely. (IHC: 29)

If 'rape' exists for Magda as nothing more than a word or concept, then it is perhaps plausible that it serves a similar function in her description to the word 'jam'. One could argue that it is only after she is raped that she is able to articulate the trauma and violence which the word denotes. If this is indeed the case, then it is interesting to note that in her multiple descriptions of her rape, Magda never once uses the actual word. This hypothesis presents one fundamental flaw and that is that if it is not possible to understand and articulate the experience of rape without having been raped, then how can Coetzee portray the experience of rape from the perspective of a woman. One possible answer to this question is that he cannot. Perhaps all he can do is recycle and reconstruct existing narratives in the hope that they will represent the experience. In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee suggests that it is the writer's duty to present (and perhaps even represent) the 'countervoices'.

Writing is not free expression. There is a true sense in which writing is dialogic: a matter of awakening the countervoices in oneself and embarking upon speech with them. It is some measure of a writer's seriousness whether he does evoke/invoke those countervoices in himself, that is, step down from the position of what Lacan calls "the subject supposed to know".

(Coetzee, 1992: 65)

The above seems to suggest that Coetzee believes it is his responsibility to attempt to portray the experience of rape from the perspective of a woman. Whether or not he has been successful is a matter of debate.

Magda's initial rather detached attitude towards rape is demonstrated again slightly further on in the novel when she contemplates leaving the farm.

the truth is that I have no stomach for the people I shall meet, the innkeepers and postillions and highwaymen, if that is the century I am in, and the adventures, the rapes and robberies, not that I have anything worth the robbing, not that I have anything worth the raping, that would be a scene to remember, though it happens to the most unexpected people. (*IHC*: 69).

This passage is clearly meant to be ironic, not only because Magda is later raped on the farm by Hendrik, but also because there are a number of variations of the rape 'scene'. The passage is interesting in terms of analysing rape narratives because it contains a number of common misconceptions and attitudes about rape. The first is that rape is something that happens away from home. The myth that rape is an external threat is clearly dispelled when Magda is raped

in her own home. Secondly, there is clearly an attitude that rape is part and parcel of everyday life (obviously away from the farm) – “the adventures, the rapes and robberies” (IHC: 69). This attitude is very similar to the one currently held in South African society which regards rape as something that unfortunately *happens* to women. Thirdly, by placing rape and robbery next to each other and treating them in the same manner, “not that I have anything worth the robbing, not that I have anything worth the raping”, Magda, or the text, seems to treat the two as equally weighted crimes. Not only does this tie in with the notion that rape is not a serious crime, it also establishes rape as a crime of property. Finally, the idea that a woman needs to have something *worth* raping in order to be raped suggests not only that rape is a crime of sexual passion, but also that women are in some way (because of their attractiveness, behaviour, manner of dress) responsible if they are raped.

Later in the novel, when Magda describes how the ‘law of language’ takes over her body, the invasive imagery used brings to mind the act of rape.

The law *has gripped my throat, I say and do not say, it invades my larynx, its one hand on my tongue, its other hand on my lips.* How can I say, I say, that these are not the eyes of the law that stare from behind my eyes, or that the mind of the law does not occupy my skull, leaving me only enough intellection to utter these doubting words, if it is I uttering them, and see their fallaciousness? How can I say that the law does not *stand fullgrown inside my shell, its feet in my feet, its hands in my hands, its sex drooping through my hole;* or that when I have had my chance to make this utterance, the lips and teeth of the law will not begin to gnaw their way out of this shell, until there it stands before you, the law *grinning and triumphant again,* its soft skin hardening in the air, while *I lie sloughed, crumpled, abandoned on the floor.* (IHC: 91-92, italics my own)

Magda appears to be talking about the law of language (or the laws which make language possible) – the alphabet, nouns, verbs, sentence structure etc<sup>7</sup>. However, it is clear from the above that she regards ‘the law’ as an imposition, an intrusion, as something restrictive. Although there is no direct reference to rape, the rape imagery (at times slightly inverted) is unmistakable. The first sentence describes the silencing of the victim – not necessarily the

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<sup>7</sup> The “law of language” is also inextricably tied to the law of the patriarch/coloniser. If thought is restricted by the language one speaks and if one can only speak the language of the patriarch/coloniser, and if the language of the dominant group is constructed in such a way that it enforces a particular power hierarchy, then it follows that the subordinated individual will never be able to think his or her way out of subjugation.

physical silencing during the act, but silencing of the victim afterwards. The sentence in which the law “stands fullgrown” inside Magda’s “shell” is descriptive of the physical invasion of the body. The sexual connotations of this invasion are made stronger by the use of the word “fullgrown” which is suggestive of an erect penis. Furthermore, the description of her body as shell, which the law inhabits, is also descriptive of the sense of emotional invasion which accompanies rape. The use of the shell motif here is fascinating because in one of the passages in which Magda describes her ‘actual’ rape, she refers to herself as a shell – “he will have to break me open. I am as hard as shell” (IHC:116). The image of “its sex drooping through my hole” is particularly effective because it suggests that it (the law) has completely taken over that space. It is also an inversion of the usual rape scenario in which the “sex” is not drooping through the hole but is rather forced into the hole. Finally, the portrayal of the law standing “triumphant” while the victim lies “sloughed, crumpled” and “abandoned on the floor”, brings vividly to mind the image of the rapist and his victim after his conquest.

If the invasion of the law of language is being described in terms of a rape, one needs to consider why. The answer to this may lie in the connection between the father/coloniser and the law of language. It would seem that it is only the language of the father that Magda regards as an imposition. Perhaps, therefore, it is not so much an invasion of the law of language as an invasion of what the law of language represents. It is uncertain whether the language of the father represents the language of the patriarch, the language of the coloniser, or both. It would seem that both is the most likely, perhaps with a little more emphasis on the language of the coloniser as this seems to be Magda’s ultimate dilemma – where does she belong as both coloniser and colonised (subjugator and subjugated). Although this particular description repositions the female body as the site of violation (‘rape’), it does so in such a way that the rape becomes an abstraction rather than a literal violation.

It is interesting to note that there are two other passages in the novel which are, on the surface, very similar to the above passage. The first occurs after the series of passages which describe Magda’s rape(s) by Hendrik.

What deeper invasion and possession does he plot in his sleep? That one day all *his bony frame shall lie packed inside me, his skull in my skull, his limbs along my limbs*, the rest of him crammed into my belly? What will he leave me of myself? (IHC: 117, italics my own)

The second passage, which is also a reaction to her rape, describes Magda’s desire to separate her mind from her violated body.

I want a home somewhere else, if it has to be in this body then on different terms in this body, if there is no other body, though there is one I would far prefer, I cannot stop these words unless I cut my throat, I would like to climb into Klein-Anna's body, I would like to *climb down her throat* while she sleeps and *spread myself gently inside her, my hands in her hands, my feet in her feet, my skull in the benign quiet of her skull* where images of soap and flour and milk revolve, *the holes of my body sliding into place over the holes of hers....* (IHC: 118, italics my own).

The fact that these three passages are essentially very similar is rather disturbing. Why does Coetzee choose to describe the figurative invasion of the law of language, the literal invasion of the female body during a rape and the imagined possession by a female of another female's body in the same terms? The third passage clearly has a gentler tone than the first two as it suggests a comfortable co-existence instead of a complete invasion in which the host is almost obliterated. The obvious reason for this would seem to be that the 'invading' force in the third passage is female and the purpose of the invasion is to seek refuge rather than to conquer and destroy. Nevertheless, it still describes an intention which is essentially the same and the fact that very similar terms are used in the previous two passages cannot be ignored.

If the first passage (law of language) is supposed to read as a 'rape' (albeit a metaphorical one), then it makes sense that the first and second passages should have some similarities. The problem is that because the two descriptions follow the same formula (a formula which becomes particularly obvious in the notion of one body being packed into the shell of the other), they are, in a sense, equated. If, as was suggested above, the violation in the figurative rape is nothing more than an abstraction (and if the two 'rape' scenarios are equated) then it follows that the violence inherent in the 'actual' rape will become invisible. Furthermore, if the similarity between the two descriptions is intentional – and one suspects that it is because of Coetzee's otherwise scrupulous attention to syntax – then it follows that it is also intentional that the two descriptions, and therefore the two 'events', be read in a similar way<sup>8</sup>. The consequence of portraying the figurative rape and the 'real' rape in the same way is that both become abstractions and the female body ceases to be the site of *physical* violation. By portraying Magda's imagined inhabitation of Klein-Anna's body in the same 'skull in my

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<sup>8</sup> In *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, Coetzee (1992:246) says, "Not only that: I tend to be rather slow and painstaking and myopic in my thinking (in fact, in most things I do). I don't think or act in sweeps." This seems to suggest that any similarities between the passages should be regarded as intentional.

skull' terms, Coetzee is shifting responsibility away from the specifically masculine perpetrator, thus perpetuating the notion of rape as a non-gender-specific problem.

In terms of rape narratives, *In the Heart of the Country* and *Disgrace* follow a similar pattern. Both portray the rape/seduction of a 'non-white'<sup>9</sup> female by a white male, followed by the blatant portrayal of the rape (usually more obviously physically violent) of the white female by a/many 'non-white' man/men. *In the Heart of the Country* has the additional narrative of the rape or attempted rape of a 'non-white' female by a 'non-white' male. It is perhaps a good idea to consider the rapes in chronological order. This should make it easier to establish not only whether the earlier rapes are in any way a 'cause' of the later ones, but also whether the way in which a particular rape narrative is understood is influenced by the other rape narratives in the story.

The first rape/seduction incident in *In the Heart of the Country* is probably the most difficult to analyse as the reader is given the perspective of neither the perpetrator nor the victim. Furthermore, the 'actual' incident is seen by neither the reader nor the character Magda, but is rather relayed to the reader through Magda's imaginings. As such, the only 'factual' knowledge that one has, is that Klein-Anna is naked in the room with Magda's father when Magda fires the shot through the bedroom window. Magda's imaginings provide the reader with a number of possibilities about how Klein-Anna may have reached this point. Although her imaginings occasionally hint that the act might be one of rape, for the most part, Magda situates the act as one of seduction. At no point does the text give a definitive interpretation of the act as either one of seduction or one of rape. Magda's interpretation of the act as a seduction is not particularly surprising considering Magda's slightly oedipal obsession with her father. This obsession becomes clear in the passage where Magda describes her father's desire for Klein-Anna and at the same time her own warped perception of the father-daughter relationship.

Nor can I believe that he does not know how he enters my dreams, in what capacities, committing what acts. The long passage that links the two wings

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term 'non-white' because the two novels differ. While Melanie appears to be coloured (a point which I will discuss in more detail at a later stage), Klein-Anna might be black. It is not clear whether Klein-Anna and Hendrik are coloured or black because although Magda refers to Hendrik's hair as "woolly" (117) and refers to him as a "hotnot" (99), she also describes Klein-Anna's flanks as "bronze" (92). Furthermore, the fact that they both speak Afrikaans and have Afrikaans names suggests that they might be coloured. However, Afrikaans may not be their first language as Magda refers to a language which the servants speak which she knew as a child but has subsequently forgotten. Furthermore, the fact that both the old servant who worked in the kitchen as well as the new one both have the name Anna suggests that the name is one which is simply appropriated for the benefit of the white *baas*. The men who rape Lucy in *Disgrace* are described quite explicitly as black.

of the house, with his bedroom in one wing and mine in the other, teems with nocturnal spectres, he and I among them. They are not my creatures nor are they his: they are ours together. Through them we possess and are possessed by each other. There is a level, we both know, at which Klein-Anna is a pawn and the real game lies between the two of us. (*IHC*: 37)

This excerpt is thought-provoking for a number of reasons. The first is that it makes one question and re-evaluate the statement about the 'childhood rape'. Is that statement actually meant to be read literally, that Magda was raped by her father as a child and it is for this reason that so-called rape fantasies haunt her dreams? Or is Coetzee simply fleshing out the text with Freudian interpretations of the daughter's incestuous desires for her father? If Magda is harbouring rape fantasies about her father, what does this suggest about her 'actual' rape which occurs later in the novel? More importantly, if both are rape fantasies, what does this suggest about Coetzee's understanding about the nature of rape and the myths which perpetuate both the incidence of rape and the silence surrounding the problem?

The uncertainty on the part of the reader regarding whether Klein-Anna is seduced or raped raises the debate about whether rape and seduction are simply opposite sides of the same coin. The suggestion that, in some cases, the distinction between rape and seduction is tenuous is rather contentious because it contradicts the definition of rape as a purely violent act. According to Thornhill (2000:124), this definition of rape, which was popularised by Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*, has become the "central tenet in social science explanations of rape." If rape is purely violent and seduction is primarily sexual, then there can be no grey area in which both exist. Rooney (1991:99) however, argues that this position overlooks the presence of violence in sexuality in western culture. She suggests that the position "elides the eroticization of dominance and submission in favour of articulating feminism's ethical project" (Rooney, 1991:99). If dominance and submission are built into the heterosexual constructions of the desiring male and the desired female, then it follows that any sexual act is not only characterised by, but to a certain degree dependent upon the distinction between the dominant and submissive positions. Although, as Rooney suggests, these roles are perpetuated through "eroticisation", they are also, to a certain degree, held in place by violence or the threat of violence.

It could be argued that the thin line which exists between rape and seduction is simply a matter of degree and nature of coercion. The nature of coercion in the case of rape is typically more violent and indeed physical than the coercion in seduction, which is usually restricted to words. In some cases (of both rape and seduction), sometimes words are all that are necessary



because of a power imbalance or threat of violence which makes the victims of the seduction/rape likely to comply with the seducer/rapist's wishes. Rape usually involves a greater degree of force. Nevertheless, both rape and seduction are acts of coercion. It could be argued that rape and seduction exist along a continuum, where the ends are sexual intercourse and murder. Rape and seduction fall somewhere along this line with the former closer to the 'murder' end and the latter closer to 'sexual intercourse'. As was suggested earlier, what divides them could be nothing more than a difference in perspective. In the case of the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna, however, the perspective of neither the victim, nor the perpetrator is given.

The power balance in the relationship between Magda's father and Klein-Anna is obviously asymmetric. He is the white *baas* in a pre-democratic South Africa. Gallagher (1991:100) suggests that because Klein-Anna is physically, economically and socially dependent on Magda's father, the incident cannot be read as anything but rape. She suggests that Magda fails to understand the incident as rape because she is too preoccupied with "her own further oppression" (Gallagher, 1991:100). Although essentially accurate, this is not entirely true as there are instances when Magda does allow for the possibility that Klein-Anna is raped by the *baas*. The first of these describes the actual encounter,

He locks the door behind him. The girl tries to push his hands off, but she is awed by what is about to happen. He undresses her and lays her out on his servant's coir mattress. She is limp in his arms. He lies with her and rocks her in an act which I know enough about to know that it too breaks codes. (IHC: 39).

This description contains an unwanted intrusion, physical resistance on the part of the victim (and perhaps therefore some degree of force on the part of the perpetrator) and finally resignation. The fact that the 'girl' goes "limp" emphasises her lack of participation in and aversion to the act. As was suggested above, coercion does not necessarily have to take the form of physical violence especially when the threat of violence or the sense of dependency already exists. In Magda's imagined scenarios her father gives Klein-Anna what appear to be little gifts – candies and money. However, whether Klein-Anna is aware of it or not, these gifts carry with them a sense of indebtedness. Furthermore, they create a barrier between Klein-Anna and Hendrik, making her appear complicit in her own seduction/rape, "If she has one secret from her husband she will soon have two. Cunning, cunning gift!"(IHC: 37).

The second instance in which Magda seems to recognise that Klein-Anna might be being raped is when she wonders, “does she merely part her thighs, stolid, dull-nerved, because he is the master (?)” (*IHC:57*). On its own, this thought suggests a heightened understanding of Klein-Anna’s vulnerable position. Coupled however with the thoughts that follow and with Magda’s reaction to Klein-Anna after the death of her father, it becomes clear that Magda is more concerned with her own oppression and self-preservation than with the plight of the other woman. Magda actively adopts a patriarchal discourse in which Klein-Anna is a temptress and a whore. Before the death of her father, she describes Klein-Anna as a “subtle, lascivious, insatiable” woman with “sharp little teeth” and “hot armpits” (*IHC:53*). This description can be compared to the descriptions of her father and Hendrik which appear in the same passage. Her father “roams, burning with shame” and Hendrik is the “insulted husband, the serf trodden under his master’s boot, rising to roar for vengeance”. Neither of these descriptions is loaded with the negative connotations and sense of culpability which accompanies her description of Klein-Anna. After the death of her father, Magda calls Klein-Anna a slut and blames her for the death of her father. The reasons for this however, are obvious, as Magda is trying to shift the blame for her father’s death onto someone else.

As a rape narrative, the portrayal of the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna by Magda’s father is significant for a number of reasons. The first, and perhaps most obvious of these is that it depicts an interracial rape. It was suggested earlier that the portrayal of rape as an interracial phenomenon perpetuates the occurrence of rape in South Africa because it fails to recognise and address the majority of rapes which are in fact intra-racial. It seems reasonable to presume that the preoccupation in South Africa with interracial rape – not only in the media and the general population, but also in works of literature – stems from the history of illegal ‘miscegenation’ in this country. The more popular version of this narrative is the rape of a white woman by a black man. It would seem that this version is more popular not only because it incorporates the myth of the ‘black barbarian savage’, but also because this particular form of ‘miscegenation’ was considered to be far worse than its inversion. Driver (1992: 462) suggests that the reason for this lies with the fact that up until the Tielman Roos Act of 1926, it was only sexual relations between black men and white women that were prohibited. As colonisers, white men were the “possessors of both white and black women”. Furthermore, although they may have done so legally, neither the Tielman Roos Act, nor the Immorality Act which followed, actually prevented the possession of black women by white men. Gallagher (1991: 89) proposes that the reason why sexual intercourse between a black man and a white woman was so prohibited lies with the notion of the Afrikaner woman as the “symbol of purity” for the Afrikaner race. In order to ensure that the Afrikaner race continues

undefiled, the sexual activity of the Afrikaner woman needs to be “properly regulated” (Gallagher, 1991:89). The sexual activity of the Afrikaner male, on the other hand, is irrelevant to the purity of the race.

It is important to remember, when analysing the rape narratives in *In the Heart of the Country*, that the novel was written and published in 1976, during the height of the apartheid regime. The fact therefore that Coetzee portrays the exchange between the black/coloured woman and her white master as possibly a rape/ possibly a seduction, raises a couple of fascinating questions. Was Coetzee simply reproducing the common misconception that a black/coloured (and therefore naturally hypersexual) woman was seduced while her white counterpart was raped? Was he critiquing this model by hinting at the possibility that those incidents, which were popularly portrayed and perceived as ‘seductions’, were in fact rapes? Or was he perhaps trying to demonstrate that the notion of ownership or mastery was inherent in the colonial/apartheid condition? It is perhaps necessary to examine the other rape narratives in the novel before answering these questions.

Embodied in this particular rape narrative is the idea of rape as a crime of property violation. The property dynamics in this particular instance are complicated by the fact that not only is Klein-Anna the property of Hendrik, Hendrik (and consequently Klein-Anna) is in a sense the property of Magda’s father. Obviously he is not property in the sense that a slave is property, but he is nevertheless dependent upon Magda’s father for his economic survival. Magda’s father is aware of this dependency and as both the master and the white man, he can appropriate the black/coloured man’s property with (seemingly) few consequences. Driver (1992:462 –3) describes how black men, as members of the subjugated race were expected, for a variety of reasons, to “offer” their women to white men, the subjugators. Under no circumstances, however, were black men ‘offered’ white women. In portraying her father’s desire, Magda describes the process whereby the other (black) man’s property needs to appear forbidden when in actual fact, because of the social and economic conditions of the time, it is not.

The truth is that he needs our opposition, our several oppositions, to hold the girl away from him, to confirm his desire for her, as much as he needs our opposition to be powerless against that desire. It is not privacy that he truly wants, but the helpless complicity of watchers. (*IHC*: 37)

The “helpless complicity of watchers” is what he gets from Hendrik, who exchanges his wife for some brandy – “Only from my father can he have got brandy. Bribed, therefore, not

tricked" (*IHC*: 66). The question which arises is that, if rape is regarded as a crime against the property of the man who 'owns' the woman, and if the man chooses to exchange (albeit only for a limited period of time) *his* property for brandy, then is the act a crime? In the 'rape as crime against property' myth women are perceived as heterosexual currency between men. While rape is generally regarded as a counterfeit transaction, in this case it could be regarded as legitimate because of the exchange of alcohol. It is clear from Magda's description of Hendrik as the "insulted husband, the serf trodden under his master's boot" (*IHC*: 53) that she too regards the rape/seduction as a crime of property – it is Hendrik, not Klein-Anna, who is insulted.

Magda tends, for the most part, to overlook Hendrik's complicity in Klein-Anna's rape/seduction and focuses instead on the supposed complicity of Klein-Anna. She moves very quickly from describing Klein-Anna as a "bashful" girl or child to a "subtle, lascivious, insatiable" woman. Furthermore, after she has shot her father, she explicitly places the blame on Klein-Anna,

What have you been up to here in the house? You slut! You filth! Look what a mess you've caused! It's your fault, all this mess is your fault!...And stop crying, it's too late to cry, you should rather have cried yesterday, it won't help today! (*IHC*: 80).

In this case, Magda is clearly blaming Klein-Anna for the current state of affairs in an attempt to evade blame herself. Nevertheless, the above accusation contains two attitudes that are typical of the rape myth which 'blames' the victim. The first is the portrayal of the victim as a sexually and morally deviant woman, in this case, a 'slut'. Green (1999: 126) suggests that in the 'victim-blaming' myth,

'Bad' women are the permissible outlet for 'normal' male promiscuity and therefore incapable of experiencing 'real rape'. Prostitutes or any women having sex outside of marriage abrogate their right to consent because they are 'immoral'.

The second attitude is that the victim is responsible for the rape because she did not do enough to prevent it or because she behaved in a way which did not comply with social/sexual norms, thereby "renouncing the rules which protect" her (Vogelman, 1990: 79). This attitude can be seen in Magda's statement, "you should rather have cried yesterday, it won't help today!". As in this case, women are often the source of victim-blaming myths. The reason for this is that if

women hold the victim accountable for her own rape, then they can (or so they think) take precautions to ensure that they themselves are not raped. In the case of the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna however, there is the additional possibility that Magda is blaming Klein-Anna in an attempt to alleviate her father of the blame which is rightfully his. Magda's description of her father roaming around on the farm, "burning with shame" (*IHC*:53), seems to suggest that she has accepted the common misconception that the male sexual appetite is so "powerful and volatile" (Vogelman, 1990: 62) that with the slightest, so-called provocation, the man might be 'forced' to fulfil his sexual needs. The irony of Magda adopting a victim-blaming narrative is, of course, that later in the novel, the 'good' virgin is herself raped.

Both the myth of rape as a crime of property and that of victim complicity are apparent in Hendrik's reaction to the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna. After the *baas* has been removed from the scene, and Hendrik is once again master of his own property, he begins to vent his anger on Klein-Anna, initially by beating her physically and subsequently by attempting to 'rape' her (whether the act is actually committed is not clear). The 'rape' is described in such a way that Klein-Anna's refusal is clear – "She lifts her knees to push him off" (physical resistance), "'No,' she pleads with him" (verbal resistance). This, combined with the obvious physical violence and Klein-Anna's apparent fear for her life, suggests that the incident should, without doubt, be read as a rape or at least an attempted rape. However, it is important to note that when the novel was written, the South African legal system and indeed the majority of the population did not recognise the possibility of rape within a marriage<sup>10</sup>. Legally, in this instance, the rape would have been described as an "aggravating circumstance" in an assault case (Vogelman, 1990:81). The fact that it was possible for a woman to file a case against her husband for physical assault but not for rape suggests that women were regarded specifically as the *sexual* property of their husbands.

Magda's understanding of Hendrik's violence is clearly filtered through the notion that a woman is the property of her husband. Although she initially interferes in Hendrik's attack on Klein-Anna (an interesting move considering her own verbal attack on the woman only moments before), describing her interference as "standing up for the weak" (*IHC*: 82), she soon contemplates leaving them alone to "settle their debts and make peace in their own way" (*IHC*:83). The idea that domestic violence (including marital rape) should be dealt with in the home without external interference is one which continues to be prevalent in South African society. The notion that a man is in some way entitled to beat his wife if she has been

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<sup>10</sup> Before the Prevention of Family Violence Act was passed in 1993, the South African legal system did not acknowledge rape in marriage. The marriage contract ensured that a woman was obliged to

'unfaithful' is rooted in the idea that a woman 'belongs' to her husband. Like a dog that has misbehaved, a woman can be punished by her husband for any incident of deviancy (even if, as in the case of rape, she was forced into the deviant behaviour). The fact that Hendrik (who was himself complicit in Klein-Anna's rape/seduction) 'punishes' Klein-Anna for the rape/seduction, suggests that he too regards her as responsible for the act. Hearn (1998: 150) suggests that

Despite and perhaps because of many men's separation of sex and violence, sexual infidelity by the woman can be seen by some men as justification for their violence. In this view, the woman is not maintaining her self as the man presumes she should. There is a gap and a lack of her being as he presumes she should be ... violence is then justified to 'make good' this gap/lack, either as a corrective of the particular instance or as a punishment, even if that is not likely to be 'effective' in changing the situation.

Magda clearly subscribes to this sentiment as she regards, if not the behaviour itself, then the urge behind the behaviour, the "passion" as "forgivable" (*IHC*: 82). It is not clear however, in the case of Hendrik, if there is a separation between sex and violence. It would seem that sex (in the form of rape) is simply a continuation and perhaps an escalation of his violence - just another way of punching and kicking Klein-Anna. If rape is regarded as a crime against property, then in raping Klein-Anna, Hendrik is reclaiming the property which was stolen from him when she was raped by the *baas*.

If, by raping Klein-Anna, Hendrik is reclaiming the property that was stolen from him, what property transaction is taking place when he rapes Magda? It would seem, as Magda was the 'property' of her father, that he is exacting from the (dead) *baas* the 'payment' for his rape/seduction of Klein-Anna. Alternatively (and this interpretation follows the 'rape as punishment' myth instead of 'rape as crime against property' myth), his rape of Magda could be seen as a punitive means of extracting an alternative form of payment from Magda after she fails to pay him the money she owes him. And as yet another alternative, Hendrik could simply be re-establishing the patriarchal order, which becomes confused after Magda accidentally kills her father and takes on the position of 'master'. However, before establishing which myths are being given precedence in this representation of rape, it is probably a good idea to examine the actual representation(s) a little more closely.

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consent to any sexual advances (violent or desired) that her husband may have chosen to make. (Lewis,

The representation of this particular rape has caused some dissension amongst the critics. This dissension is caused, for the most part, by the debate regarding whether the rape 'actually' took place or whether it was simply a fantasy on the part of Magda. Attwell (1993:67), Dovey (1988:169) and Rody (1994:175) are all of the opinion that the rape is imagined. Both Attwell and Rody suggest that the variation caused by the repetition denies the rape status as an 'event'. Although each of these critics regards the 'rape' as a fantasy or a projection, their interpretations differ. Attwell understands the various repetitions as projections of fear (as opposed to desire) on the part of Magda. In killing her father, Magda may have freed herself from his patriarchal rule, but in doing so she has lost her protector, thus placing herself in a very vulnerable position. Attwell suggests that the 'rapes' be read as a metaphor for decolonisation or nationalism. The fundamental flaw with this interpretation, if one is concerned with rape as a social problem, is that it turns a very realistic and indeed tangible portrayal of rape into an abstraction. Although the female body is clearly positioned as the site of the violation, the rape becomes a metaphor for political transformation. Dovey's interpretation of the 'rapes' is that they imitate Magda's fantasies of being raped by her father. By imagining herself being raped by Hendrik, Madga is submitting to a new master. Dovey also suggests that in doing so, she is being invaded by another version of the law of language (the first one being connected to her father through the dominant discourse) and it is for this reason that the passage describing the invasion of the law of language is so similar to that describing the 'rape' by Hendrik. Rody proposes that because the 'rape' embodies the stereotypical revenge of the black man – that is, the rape of the white woman – it should be read as a fantasy on the part of the white woman. She suggests that regardless of whether the rape is real or imagined, it has the same effect, that is, it reverses the power balance placing the black man in the position of power. This interpretation is fascinating because it supports the idea that the threat of rape is as powerful a tool of subjugation as rape itself. The problem with Dovey's and Rody's interpretations is that they describe the 'rape(s)' as 'fantasy' on the part of Magda without substantiating clearly whether they intend the word to be understood simply as an 'imagined projection' or whether they intend it to be understood as a '*desired* imagined projection'. When it comes to a discussion on rape, the distinction is quite important, for while many women might imagine the scenario of being raped, none actually desire to be raped.

It is perhaps a good idea, at this point, to compare the passages in which Magda is 'raped' by Hendrik to that in which she *imagines* Hendrik talking to Klein-Anna about the possibility of raping her. In doing so, it is important to consider not only the context in which each of the

passages occurs, but also Magda's emotional reaction to the 'rape'. Immediately preceding the passage in which Magda imagines Hendrik talking about raping her, she expresses a desire to be intimate with both Hendrik and Klein-Anna and embarrassment over her own virginity and exclusion from the world of sexuality – "I blush for my own thin smell, the smell of an *unused* woman, sharp with hysteria, like onions, like urine. How can he ever wish to burrow his nose in my armpit, as I mine in his!" (*IHC*: 93, italics my own). The character of Magda clearly correlates the concept of being a woman with that of being sexually active. When she imagines Hendrik talking about raping her, therefore, she imagines the 'rape' simply as sexual intercourse – an act which would transform her from a virgin child into a woman. She does not consider the violence and power issues which are inherent in the act of rape.

He tells her what I need. He tells her that I need a man, that I need to be covered, to be turned into a woman. I am a child, he tells her, despite my years, I am an old child, a sinister old child full of stale juices. Someone should make a woman of me, he tells her, someone should make a hole in me to let the old juices run out. Should I be the one to do it, he asks her, to climb through the window one night and lie with her and make a woman of her and slip away before dawn? Do you think she would let me? Would she pretend it was a dream and let it happen, or would it be necessary to force her? Would I be able to fight my way in between those scraggy knees? Would she lose her head and scream? Would I have to hold her mouth shut? Would she be as tight and dry and unrelenting to the last as leather? Would I force my way into that dusty hole only to be crushed to jelly in a vice of bone? (*IHC*: 94).

The reference to "stale juices" suggests that Magda believes her state of virginity to be an unnatural one. In 'making her a woman' therefore, Hendrik would not be violating the integrity of her body, but rather correcting the unnaturalness, helping the old juices to run out. Initially, the act which would 'make' Magda a woman is glossed over with the words "lie with her". This and the idea that she could "pretend it was a dream" paints Hendrik as a lover (who creeps in through the window at night) rather than a rapist. Up until this point the 'fantasy' is not one in which she is raped, but rather one in which Hendrik is her lover (it could perhaps be regarded as a seduction fantasy). The 'fantasy' becomes one about rape when she imagines Hendrik saying "or would it be necessary to force her?" Although the 'fantasy' describes resistance on the part of Magda, it does not really describe the violation of the victim. In fact, if anything, it describes the imagined violation of the perpetrator.



The passages which describe the 'rape' of Magda by Hendrik, on the other hand, are concerned primarily with the violence and violation of rape. The context of these passages is fundamentally different to that of the passage describing the 'imagined' rape. While the passage in which the rape is clearly imagined, is concerned primarily with sex, the passages which portray the 'actual' rape(s) are concerned with sex only as a tool of power. Immediately preceding the portrayal of the 'actual' rape(s), the power balance which exists between Magda and Hendrik is upset by Magda's failure/inability to pay Hendrik and thus maintain her superior position. The rape(s) whether actual or imagined can be interpreted as a re-negotiation of the positions of subjugator and subjugated. In these descriptions, both Magda's resistance and Hendrik's force becomes tangible and specific. Although it varies from one passage to the next, the violence done to Magda's body and her physical and emotional response to this violence/violation is clearly described. The detachment which characterised the description of the 'imagined' rape has been replaced with a sense of fear and helplessness. If both portrayals are simply 'fantasies' (in the sense of imagined scenarios) on the part of Magda, then one needs to question why they are so fundamentally different. If Magda initially contemplates or imagines rape as an unspecific, fairly painless (for the victim) *sexual* act, why is it that she suddenly perceives it to be a violent act concerned primarily with *power*? Furthermore, if both scenarios are imagined, why do the descriptions of the 'actual' rape(s) take on a specificity which is absent not only in the 'imagined' rape, but also in her imaginings about the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna?

Kossew (1996:66) commits to neither the 'fantasy' nor the 'event' interpretation but suggests instead that it is up to the reader to decide which, if any, of the versions should be regarded as 'real'. It was proposed earlier, that as a male, it might be impossible for Coetzee to understand, and therefore represent, rape from the perspective of the female. By providing the reader with a number of possible interpretations and committing to none of them, it is possible that Coetzee is attempting to circumvent this problem. Some insight into Coetzee's intentions can perhaps be found in 'The Lives of Animals' where the protagonist, Elizabeth Costello addresses the question of the sympathetic imagination, in a lecture condemning the slaughtering of animals. She argues that it is possible to encounter the world from the perspective of another. She says the following regarding the relationship between the Germans and the Jews during the Holocaust:

The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else. (...) In other words, they closed their hearts. The heart is the seat of a faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us to share at times the being of another. Sympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to

do with the object, the “another” as we see at once when we think of the object not as a bat (...) but as another human being.

(Coetzee, 2004: 79)

Although this is the voice of the character Elizabeth Costello and not the author Coetzee, it is the principle of the ‘sympathetic imagination’ that is important. If one were to follow this line of reasoning, then it would seem that it is possible for a male to ‘imagine’ and therefore represent rape from the perspective of the female. This question of the sympathetic imagination becomes pertinent again in the case of *Disgrace* when Lurie attempts (unsuccessfully) to ‘imagine’ the rape of his daughter from her perspective.

Gallagher (1991: 102), who does not comment on the multiple representations, reads the rape of Magda as an ‘event’ in which Hendrik’s appropriation of Magda’s body reverses the hegemony of the master/slave relationship, making Hendrik the subjugator and Magda the subjugated. Attridge (2004:26) suggests that because the narrative stops, backtracks and is reformulated, two alternative rape scenarios are being described. This is not to suggest that the rape takes place twice, but rather that the reader is given two alternative versions of the same rape. Attridge (2004:27) proposes that although both descriptions cover Magda’s pain, humiliation and violation, Magda’s concern in the first description is simply that Hendrik stop, whereas in the second description her thoughts “range more widely”. Although Attridge outlines the differences between the two descriptions, he does not provide any explanation for the difference. Penner (1989: 67), on the other hand, provides a very thought-provoking interpretation of the multiple representations. He regards the rape as an ‘event’ and accounts for the various representations by understanding them as a process of acceptance. Penner suggests that in each successive representation, the violence of the rape (both Magda’s opposition and Hendrik’s violence) decreases, while Magda’s acceptance of the event increases. Understood as such, the multiple representations of the rape describe the process whereby the victim comes to terms with the trauma (both physical and emotional) of the rape. This interpretation is particularly fascinating because it suggests that, although the rape is understood as an ‘event’ in the story, Coetzee is not actually portraying the rape itself, but is instead portraying the victim’s emotional response to the rape.

It would seem therefore that if one regards the rape as an ‘event’, it is possible to interpret Coetzee’s approach in one of two contradictory ways. On the one hand, the multiple representations could be read as an acknowledgement of the inability of a male writer to portray the experience of rape from the perspective of the female victim. As such, the multiple representations serve to provide the reader with a *sense* of the emotional trauma of the female

victim, which the male writer may fail to capture in a single representation. The 'countervoice' is not one distinct 'voice', but rather a number of different possibilities, 'countervoices'. On the other hand, if the representations are read as the victim's emotional response to the rape (the process of acceptance), it would seem to suggest that it is possible for a male writer to portray the emotional experience of rape from the perspective of the female victim.

Whether or not Hendrik 'actually' rapes Magda can be quite significant when one is examining rape narratives because although the reality of the event does not change the actual narratives, it influences how they should be read. For example, the myth of the 'black barbarian savage' could be understood in different ways depending on whether the rape 'actually' took place or not. If the rape did take place, then it could be argued that Coetzee is making use of the popular (but statistically inaccurate) myth that white women are *always* in danger of being raped by savage black men (as opposed to the danger of being raped by white men). Alternatively, by employing the myth of the 'black barbarian savage' Coetzee could be drawing a subtle comparison between the accepted narrative of the rape of a white woman by a black man and the less popular (and at the time probably unaccepted) narrative of a black woman being raped by a white man. On the other hand, if the rape is imagined, then Coetzee could be critiquing the 'black barbarian savage' myth by demonstrating how (because of the myths which are perpetuated in society) white women *expect* to be raped by (are always waiting for) the barbarians. It is important to note that the prejudices of the reader play a significant role in the interpretation of this narrative. Even if Coetzee is providing a critique of the 'black barbarian savage' myth, it is more likely that a reader who subscribes to this myth will read the text as a verification of the myth than as a critique.

If one considers all three of the rape scenarios which occur in *In the Heart of the Country* together, the narrative which emerges most strongly is probably that of rape as a crime of property. In fact, this narrative can, in a rather simplistic way, be seen to bring all three rapes together. When the *baas* rapes/seduces Klein-Anna, the crime is against Hendrik as it is his property that has been violated. In order to reclaim his property he too rapes Klein-Anna and after the death of the *baas* he violates or 'steals' what was once the *baas*'s property. Another narrative which emerges quite strongly in the novel is that of rape as a form of punishment. Hendrik rapes Klein-Anna for her perceived infidelity and it would seem that he rapes Magda because of her inability to pay him the money she owes him. The question which needs to be addressed is whether Coetzee is simply reproducing these myths or whether he is providing a criticism of them.

The two binary relationships of subjugator and subjugated, which emerge as preoccupations of *In the Heart of the Country*, are those of colonialism and patriarchy. Inherent in the master/slave relationship is the notion of ownership. Throughout the novel, Magda, as both subjugated and subjugator, struggles (but fails) to transcend the clearly defined roles within these relationships. She cannot escape her role as subjugated because almost as soon as she has killed her father, he is replaced by Hendrik (a position fortified by the 'rape'). She cannot escape her position of subjugator because she fears the possibility of further personal oppression if she relinquishes her position of power. The novel suggests that both patriarchy and colonialism give rise to a perpetual cycle of relationships which are doomed to failure because they are characterised by inherent inequality. Bearing in mind that the novel is concerned with the failings of patriarchy and colonialism, it seems reasonable to conclude that in providing examples of the 'rape as crime of property' and the 'rape as a form of punishment' myths, Coetzee is in fact critiquing the attitudes which perpetuate these myths.

A myth about rape which is perhaps being more obviously critiqued, is that of the 'black barbarian savage'. It was suggested earlier that how one interprets the rape of Magda by Hendrik influences the way in which the myth is understood to operate in the novel. However, it would seem that regardless of how one interprets the rape, Coetzee provides a critique of this myth. If the rape is a figment of Magda's imagination, then it could be argued that Coetzee is demonstrating how this particular myth is so pervasive in society, that it haunts the imagination of white women to the point that it might as well be a reality. The consequence of this is that white women are kept in check under the 'protection' of white men. In Magda's case, this protection has disappeared and she has suddenly become vulnerable (in reality or in her mind) to the threat of the black man. If, on the other hand, one interprets the rape as a 'real' event, its inclusion could still be regarded as a critique of the myth. If one were to read the rape as an isolated incident, it would seem that Coetzee is in fact endorsing the myth. However, read in conjunction with the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna, it would seem that he is criticising the myth by positioning it against its inversion. Furthermore, by portraying the latter as possibly as rape/ possibly a seduction, he could be critiquing the way in which certain narratives are obscured whilst others are flaunted.

#### IV

Before reaching a definitive conclusion about Coetzee's use of rape narratives in *In the Heart of the Country*, it is perhaps a good idea to examine those used in *Disgrace*. The novels are in fact, in some ways, remarkably similar. The similarities extend beyond those mentioned before

regarding the two 'rape' scenarios, to include similarities in characters and the relationships between characters. The most obvious of these, as Marais (2003:274) suggests, are the similarities between the characters of Magda and Lucy. Although the two characters occupy different time periods (and subsequently different social and political settings) both are characterised by their role as *boervrou*, by their 'abnormal' sexuality, by their strained relationships with their fathers and, finally, by their failed attempts to overcome the inequality inherent in interracial relationships in the South African context. While in *In the Heart of the Country* it is the daughter Magda who hints at a (albeit imagined) strangely sexual dimension to the daughter/father relationship, in *Disgrace*, it is the father, David Lurie who does so. When considering the 'reasons' for Lucy's lesbianism, Lurie considers the possibility that he has loved his daughter too much, that she has found his love a "burden" and given it a "darker reading" (D:76). Later he suggests that in his old age she has become "his second salvation, the bride of his youth reborn" (D:86). Although none of these descriptions contains the obvious oedipal implications of Magda's wandering thoughts, he is preoccupied, in his sexual relationships with younger women, with their proximity in age to his daughter – "technically he is old enough to be her father". In his 'relationship' with Melanie, this preoccupation becomes more obvious, not only because he sleeps with her in his daughter's bed, but also because when she is upset he almost says to her "Tell Daddy what is wrong" (D:26). Bethlehem (2002: 22) suggests that Lurie's fixation with his paternal role should not be interpreted as repressed incestuous desire, but rather as entrenched patriarchy masquerading as "fatherly concern".

There is also a similarity in the portrayal of the characters of Melanie and Klein-Anna and in their relationship to the white father figure. Although these two characters are similar - both are young (at times described as children), 'non-white'<sup>11</sup> women - the similarity lies more in the manner in which they are portrayed. Although *In the Heart of the Country* is written from a first person perspective and *Disgrace* is written from that of the third person, the reader's access to the characters of Klein-Anna and Melanie is limited in similar ways. In *In the Heart*

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<sup>11</sup> Although Melanie's race is not explicitly stated, there are a number of clues which hint at the fact that she is coloured. The first of these is Lurie's slight adaptation and interpretation of her name as 'the dark one'; the second is the fact that 'Isaacs' is a typically 'coloured' surname. Thirdly, her character in the play has a Kaaps (Cape Coloured) accent and finally, when telling Lurie to stay away from Melanie, Ryan suggests that he stays with his "own kind" (D: 194). Stratton (2002:85) suggests that Coetzee purposefully omits any explicit reference to Melanie's race, thus making any attempt on the part of the reader to assign her to a racial category an "exercise in racial stereotyping". She (Stratton, 2002:85) proposes that this is "one of Melanie's functions in the narrative: to subvert the notion of racial categories, the fundamental assumption of apartheid South Africa". While this may be the case, the fact that most South Africans would automatically (and furthermore unconsciously) place Melanie in the coloured racial category suggests that the classification system which was so fundamental to the apartheid regime, still has a powerful role in democratic South Africa.

*of the Country* all of the other characters in the novel are seen through the eyes of the narrator Magda. In *Disgrace*, on the other hand, because the novel is written from a third person perspective, there appears to be a narrator who exists independently of the protagonist David Lurie. This would suggest unbiased access to the character of Melanie. At times however, it is difficult to distinguish between the narrator and David Lurie. Furthermore, the reader is only ever really given access to the thoughts of the character David Lurie. Aside from those which are spoken, Melanie's and Lucy's thoughts remain undisclosed throughout. The portrayal of Klein-Anna and Melanie could, at best, be understood as a deliberate failure on the part of Coetzee to represent an individual. Both of the women are portrayed primarily as objects of desire and exist as characters and individuals only to the extent that they exist for the respective protagonists. In each of the novels the other characters are presented to the reader through the 'eyes' of the protagonist. Thus, the reader's understanding of a particular character is limited to the understanding of the protagonist.

In *In the Heart of the Country*, Klein-Anna lacks the complexity of the other characters. She is almost silent throughout the novel and seems to exist only in relation to the other characters – as Hendrik's wife and as the object of Magda's and the *baas's* desire. Klein-Anna is physically desirable, she has no apparent desires of her own and significantly, her most 'individual' attribute is an item of clothing – her red kerchief. Similarly, Melanie Isaacs exists only as an object of David Lurie's desire and because he fails to see her as an individual, so does the reader. She is barely given an identity beyond that which describes her desirability. Even in his mind, David Lurie, as often as not, refers to her generically as 'the girl' and thinks of her in terms of her "neat little breasts" and her "smooth flat belly" (*D*:65). Although Melanie's interest in acting hints at individuality, her role in the play *Sunset at the Globe Salon* (a comedy about the new South Africa in which Melanie plays an aspiring hairdresser) seems to be included only because her desirability in Lurie's mind is heightened by the crassness of the character she portrays. Lurie pays little attention to her ability as an actress and the second time he watches the play, he imagines a simultaneous private performance in which he alone can see a cold flame burning Melanie's clothes off her body. Like the attention paid to Klein-Anna's red kerchief, the attention paid to Melanie's "daring" (*D*: 14) clothing and physical perfection ensures that the reader's knowledge of the character is entirely superficial. Although the reader's knowledge of Lucy is also limited, it seems to go slightly beyond the surface (where it stops with Melanie) to include something of her 'personality'. The reason for this seems to lie with Lucy's occasional verbal assertions of independence.

You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until

halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. (D:198).

If David and Lucy are the major and minor characters, Melanie is an extra.

Perhaps the most important similarity in the manner in which Melanie and Klein-Anna are portrayed, lies with the absence created in the text as a result of the relative silence/silencing of each of the women. Of the two, the silence of Klein-Anna is more obvious as she hardly speaks at all. While Melanie may be more talkative than Klein-Anna (she is verbal about her studies and involvement in the play), she is silenced by Lurie when she objects to his advances. When she does 'speak out' against him, it is with the help of and through male characters. Her father intervenes and helps her file the complaint and later in the novel, when Lurie watches the play for the second time, it is Ryan who says to him, "Leave her alone, man! Melanie will spit in your eye if she sees you." (D: 194). Furthermore, neither Lurie nor the reader actually 'hears' her complaint. This creates an absence in the text, as a result of which the reader is forced to imagine what she might have said. In *In the Heart of the Country* it is not clear whose perspective is being privileged in the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna because everything is relayed to the reader through the character of Magda. In *Disgrace* however, it is clear in the rape/seduction of Melanie, that the male perspective of David Lurie is being privileged over that of Melanie. This, in itself, should alert the reader to the possibility that that which is portrayed as a seduction by David Lurie could in fact have been experienced as a rape by the female victim. However, this bias in perspective is not the only textual evidence which suggests that the seduction is in fact a rape.

One of the difficulties that one is faced with when attempting to establish whether that which takes place between Lurie and Melanie should be classified as rape or seduction is that there are a number of occasions which need to be considered. For instance, while the first two encounters may be regarded as rape, the third may not. Naturally this presents a conundrum because it seems illogical to classify one incident as rape if on another occasion the victim willingly engages in sexual intercourse with the rapist. This very problem is presented in the case of marital rape (or rape by a boyfriend) where the victim of the rape may have been willing on previous occasions (and may be willing on future occasions) to engage in sexual intercourse with her husband/ boyfriend. The situation becomes particularly complicated if the consensual sex occurs after the incident of rape, because in retrospect, the rape is regarded as a seduction and the woman is forced into a position of complicity.

As in the case of Klein-Anna and the *baas*, the power balance between Melanie and Lurie is clearly unequal. It is an imbalance which Lurie not only acknowledges (she is one of “his charges” (D: 11), under his “tutelage” (D:12)), but also exploits. When Lurie is finally brought before the disciplinary committee, it is for this exploitation of power – the “mixing of power relations with sexual relations” (D:53). At the disciplinary hearing one of the female members of the committee, Farodia Rassool<sup>12</sup>, refers to “the long history of exploitation of which this is part” (D:53). It is not clear however, whether she is referring specifically to the exploitation of people of colour (especially coloured women<sup>13</sup>) by white men or whether she is referring generally to the sexual exploitation of women by men. If it is the former, although the gender issue is present, the issue is primarily a racial one. If, on the other hand, she is referring generally to the sexual exploitation of women, she could be objecting to the obfuscation which takes place when a rape is portrayed simply as an indiscretion on the part of the perpetrator, an illegitimate affair.

Lurie’s first attempt at seduction fails. He tries to “lubricate” (D:168) Melanie with wine and whisky, attempts to coerce her with his words and even suggests that it is her duty to sleep with him because of her beauty, “Because a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it” (D: 16). Lurie performs an interesting mental jump between a woman’s duty to ‘share’ her beauty and her duty to have sex. This jump follows a similar pattern to the myth which suggests that some women force men to rape them for a variety of reasons which can include being too beautiful. He also suggests that she “does not own herself” (D:16). This opinion closely follows the myth which suggests that a woman cannot own herself (she is owned by men) and therefore is not violated when she is raped. This failed seduction attempt also portrays Lurie as a man who regards himself as a lover, a “womanizer” (D:7), albeit past his prime. Before Lurie decides to seduce Melanie, the reader is given a glimpse of his character when he reminisces about the powers of sexual magnetism he once possessed. Real or not, he admits that these powers have left him and that if he “wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her; often, in one way or another, to buy her” (D:7). In wining and dining Melanie he is attempting to seduce her, attempting to buy her. When his attempts to buy her fail however, he steals her.

In his second attempt, Lurie beguiles Melanie into accepting an invitation to lunch in a (seemingly safe) public place. After lunch however, he takes her back to his house and has sex with her. It is at this point that something seems to have been elided in the text. In the first

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<sup>12</sup> One infers from her name that she is more than likely Muslim and thus, not white. The issue of her race is relevant because it complicates the implications of her statement.

<sup>13</sup> This possibility assumes that Melanie is coloured.



seduction attempt, much attention was paid to Lurie's method of seduction, to his means of trying to get Melanie to have sex with him. In this instance, on the other hand, the text glosses over this interaction with "He takes her back to his house. On the living-room floor, to the sound of rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her." (D: 19). This should, to any discerning reader, be slightly confusing. Immediately prior to this, during their conversation at the restaurant, Lurie assures Melanie that he won't let things "go too far" (D: 19). The question which arises is, what could 'going too far' possibly be referring to, if not to sex? Furthermore, Melanie's passivity during the act, "she is passive throughout" (D:19), suggests that she does not desire the act, but rather endures it. Lurie's description of Melanie after he has finished having sex with her suggests more than passivity, it suggests an aversion and an attempt on the part of Melanie to distance herself from what is happening to her body.

The girl is lying beneath him, *her eyes closed*, her hands slack above her head, a *slight frown* on her face....*Averting* her face, she *frees* herself, gathers her things, leaves the room. In a few minutes she is back, dressed. 'I must go,' she *whispers*. He makes no effort to detain her. (D:19, italics my own).

The notion of seduction suggests a certain degree of *willingness* on the part of the seduced. This 'after sex' scene can be compared to the one which takes place later in the 'relationship' after Melanie seems willingly to engage in having sex with Lurie. In this instance not only does she engage during the act, but afterwards lingers for a conversation and "strolls around the room picking up her clothes, as little bashful as if she were alone." (D:30). However, before reaching this point of what seems to be consensual sex, there is another incident which more obviously fills the criteria of a rape. This incident occurs a few days after the first when Lurie arrives uninvited at Melanie's house and thrusts himself upon her. It is peculiar that Lurie does not regard this incident as rape, because Melanie opposes his actions both verbally, "No, not now!" (D:25) and physically ("struggling").

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away. (D:25).

What constitutes rape if not undesired sexual intercourse? Perhaps Lurie feels that Melanie's resistance is not great enough for the act to constitute a rape, "She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes...and turns her back on him." (D: 25). Such

aversion clearly suggests unwillingness on the part of Melanie and Lurie's assessment that she fails to resist him ignores her initial verbal and physical resistance and is undermined by the statement, "But nothing will stop him." (D: 25). Embedded in this attitude is the notion that in order for an act to be regarded as a rape, the victim needs to present an extreme form of resistance and preferably undergo some form of physical abuse.

Immediately following the rape discussed above, Lurie imagines a scene in which Melanie cleanses herself, "At this moment, he has no doubt, she, Melanie, is trying to cleanse herself of it, of him. He sees her running a bath, stepping into the water, eyes closed like a sleepwalker's" (D:25). Although this is only a projection of what Lurie imagines Melanie to be doing, it is important to note that this scene is essentially remarkably similar to the one (which is also partly imagined by Lurie) in which Lucy has a bath to cleanse herself after she is gang raped. Even if both scenes are imagined by Lurie the similarity between the two is important because it indicates that Lurie perceives the acts which precede the 'bath' scenes in similar ways. Therefore, although he refuses to acknowledge that he has raped Melanie (and is therefore a rapist), he does acknowledge, albeit unconsciously through the imagined scenarios, that the two women have undergone similarly traumatic sexual experiences. Furthermore, as Marais (2000:175) demonstrates, there are further parallels between the two rape scenarios. Firstly, there are similarities in the manner in which the intrusion is described. Like Melanie, "Lucy is "surprised" by the "intruder(s)" who "thrust" (D:24) themselves upon her" (Marais, 2000:175). Secondly, in each case, there is a suggestion of a connection between rape and death. Lurie imagines that Melanie decided to "die within herself for the duration" (D:25) and Lucy describes herself as a "dead person" (D: 161) after she is raped.

The third and final time that Lurie has sex with Melanie *appears* to be consensual. Obviously the reader is also given Lurie's perspective on this occasion and the fact that he thinks that it was as "good as the first time" (D:29) suggests that he is oblivious to the experience of the other individual involved in the act. There are however some fundamental differences in how Lurie portrays Melanie's participation in the act. While in the first two instances, Melanie's involvement (if it can be called that) is characterised by aversion, in the third instance there seems to be a degree of participation.

She is quick, and greedy for experience. If he does not sense in her a fully sexual appetite, that is only because she is still young. One moment stands out in recollection, when she hooks a leg behind his buttocks to draw him in closer: as the tendon of her inner thigh tightens against him, he feels a surge of joy and desire.

This turn of events is unexpected, even for Lurie, who expresses his surprise when Melanie, some time after the second rape, seeks refuge at his house instead of making a scene with “angry words” (D:26). In attempting to understand this development in the plot, it is perhaps useful to consider Melanie’s position. She is isolated from her family, not only through distance, but also because of what Lurie has done to her. It would seem that she turns to Lurie because he alone shares her “secret”. Not for long however, as on the afternoon of the incident of consensual sex, Lurie is confronted by Ryan about the fact that he “fucks” (D:26) Melanie. This confrontation can be seen as the end of the ‘relationship’ between Lurie and Melanie as it is followed by a series of events which eventually lead to Lurie’s dismissal. The question, therefore, that arises is why does Melanie (suddenly) voluntarily have sex with Lurie before exposing his behaviour? It is not clear why Coetzee chooses to follow the initial two instances of rape with one of what appears to be consensual sex. The effect is that the nature of the relationship becomes muddled and even the reader who was confident in his or her assessment of the first two incidents as rape begins to question the validity of such an assessment. Perhaps this is Coetzee’s intention, perhaps he wishes to demonstrate the process whereby many rapes become obscured because they do not fit the profile of textbook rape. On the other hand, he may have been suggesting that it is only after Melanie becomes aware of her sexual ‘power’ that she is able to expose (or exploit?) Lurie. There are two problems with this interpretation. The first is that it suggests that a woman has access to some sort of sexual ‘power’ in the context of a rape. The second is that it carries with it the idea that Melanie may be falsely accusing Lurie of rape or sexual harassment.

Not only does the rape of Melanie fail to fit the profile of what is sometimes referred to as “the perfect rape” (Green, 1999:122) (because of the repeated nature, the lack of physical violence and third incident of consensual sex), Lurie does not fit the *popular* (but inaccurate) profile of the rapist. He is a white middle-class intellectual. The idea that certain types of men are rapists while others are not, is expressed by Mr Isaacs when he says, “If we can’t trust the university, who can we trust? We never thought we were sending our daughter into a nest of vipers.” (D:38). Perhaps the reason why Lurie (and critics such as Kissack and Titlestad (2003: 138) who regard the rapes as seductions) does not regard the incidents as rapes is not because they do not meet the criteria of rapes, but rather because he does not regard himself as a rapist. Although Lurie does not embody the popular notion of a rapist, there are a number of indications that he does in fact fit the more scientifically documented profile of a rapist. Vogelman (1990:103) suggests that

The offender frequently does not consider himself a rapist. He considers himself a lover and his victim a sexual partner, because, in his own terms, he behaved as a lover should – aggressive, domineering and forceful.

It is clear that Lurie regards himself as a lover, a ‘Casanova’ as one of the anti-rape protestors suggests. It is also clear from his descriptions of the ‘affair’, that he regards Melanie as a sexual partner. Although he may not have been particularly aggressive, his sexual interactions with Melanie could easily be described as either ‘domineering’ or ‘forceful’. His descriptions of having sex with Rosalind, with whom he proposes it was hard to tell ‘pleasure’ from ‘pain’, suggests a warped perception of sexual roles and intercourse. Furthermore, he exhibits what could only be described as a kind of sexual pathology – he sleeps with prostitutes and any other woman who happens to cross his path even if, as in the cases of Dawn and Bev, he is not in any way attracted to them. One is forced to question how many of the “hundreds” (*D*:191) of women he has had sex with, consented to the sex. Of all the reactions to his ‘relationship’ with Melanie, Rosalind’s is the most intuitive when she says, “That sounds very grand. But you were always a great self-deceiver, David. A great deceiver and a great self-deceiver. Are you sure it wasn’t just a case of being caught with your pants down?” (*D*:188).

Lurie holds remarkably sexist opinions about women. He bases his opinions on women on whether or not he finds them physically attractive. On first meeting Bev Shaw, he feels an instant aversion to her because of her physical appearance, “He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive...Nothing to be proud of: a prejudice that has settled in his mind, settled down.” (*D*: 72). He knows what he does is wrong and yet he does it anyway – a condition worse than ignorance. Even his daughter, whose lesbianism is interpreted as “an excuse for putting on weight” (*D*:86), does not escape his sexism. Lurie is a character whose intelligence, it is presumed, Coetzee expects the reader to take seriously, and yet there are numerous occasions on which he expresses opinions as profoundly stupid as the above. It would seem that there are two possible explanations for this. The first is that Coetzee does not regard such statements as ridiculous. The second is that he is treating the character of David Lurie ironically. The difference between the two is fundamental to the reader’s understanding of the novel. If Coetzee is treating the character of Lurie ironically, then it would seem that it is his intention that the reader question not only Lurie’s sexist attitudes, but also his actions and his very reliability as a witness to events.

Lurie’s sexism is particularly apparent in his ideas about the roles that males and females should take on during sexual intercourse. He is satisfied with Soraya who is “docile” (*D*:1) and Melanie who is submissive, but ‘repelled’ by Dawn who demonstrates some form of

autonomy by “bucking and clawing” and working herself into a “froth of excitement” (D: 9). However, sexist ideas (although they may make a significant contribution), do not make a rapist. Vogelman (1990: 69) suggests that “dehumanisation” of the individual is fundamental to the act of rape. According to Vogelman (1990:69) to see another individual as human involves granting the individual “identity and community”. Following such a definition, there are clearly times when Lurie dehumanises Melanie. After the first instance of rape he refers to her as ‘the girl’ (the girl who happens to still be lying underneath him). During the second rape, Lurie imagines her first as a character on stage and then as a rabbit caught in a fox’s jaws. She is stripped of her individual identity and becomes instead a collection of body parts – “neat, perfect little breasts” (D:23), “upstanding nipples” and a “smooth flat belly” (D:65). Melanie is also dehumanised in her capacity as an exotic, ‘other’ woman. Lurie’s ‘relationship’ with Soraya introduces the reader to his fascination with ‘exotic’, ‘non-white’ women. Because Lurie can pay for sex with Soraya (and she behaves as he desires), he is initially content with the boundaries of the relationship. However, once Soraya chooses to withdraw her sexual availability and accessibility, Lurie attempts to transgress the boundaries and infringes upon the forbidden area of her private life. Horrell (2002:27) proposes that for Lurie “the body of the other: fascinating, desirable and seemingly irrefutably different, becomes a site for the inscription of power.” Lurie literally transgresses the boundaries of Melanie’s person and the integrity of her body. The parallel between Melanie and Lucy Lurie is, of course, that to their rapists, both women are ‘exotic’.

The concept of the victim’s body as a “site for the inscription of power” (Horrell: 2002: 27) can be understood both literally and figuratively. Literally, the penis is the weapon, which physically inscribes the power of the rapist onto the body of the victim. Figuratively, the victim’s body becomes a site of conquest. This idea can best be understood in terms of the occupation of territory (perhaps because rape is so often used as a metaphor for the invasion of land). However, it is simply another variation of the myth of male ownership of female bodies. Lurie expresses his sense of sexual conquest over Melanie’s body when he sees her driving past on a motorbike with Ryan.

Melanie, on the pillion, sits with knees wide apart, pelvis arched. A quick shudder of lust tugs him. *I have been there!* he thinks. (D: 35, italics original).

The conquest of Lucy Lurie's body is more obvious, not only because of the nature of gang rape, but also because, as a result of her pregnancy<sup>14</sup>, her body bears physical evidence of the invasion. The rape of Lucy appears to be racially motivated and is understood by Lurie as such<sup>15</sup>. A racially motivated rape, such as this one, could be understood as a form of ethnic cleansing, in which "the woman who is raped becomes a hollowed vessel for the rapist's nation" (Green, 1999: 95). By impregnating Lucy, the rapists are muddying the 'pure' white racial bloodline. Furthermore (and this follows the narrative of rape as a crime against property) they are visibly marking Lucy and her offspring as their property. As Green (1999:95) suggests, the problem with an ethnic cleansing narrative is that while the racial aspect is brought to the fore, the "gender hatred" and "individual tragedy" involved in the rape become indiscernible.

Unlike the rape of Melanie, the rape of Lucy follows the formula of the 'perfect' rape scenario. As a rape victim, Melanie's credibility is brought into question not only because of the incidence of consensual sex, but also because of a lack of conformity on her part to social norms, which opens the way to a narrative of victim-blaming. In this narrative there are a number of factors which reduce the victim's credibility. In Melanie's case, the first of these is that she is portrayed as something of a 'loose' woman. Not only does she live far away from the protection of her father, she also has *another* 'boyfriend'<sup>16</sup> on the side. Secondly, she wears provocative clothing, which Lurie describes as "daring"(D:14) and "sexy"(D:168). Finally, in accepting Lurie's initial invitation for a drink, Melanie is behaving inappropriately, "stepping out in the forest where the wild wolf prowls" (D: 168), and is thus responsible for the consequences of *her* actions. Lucy, on the other hand, is a white lesbian (another form of sexual deviancy, however one which cannot situate her as complicit<sup>17</sup>), who wears "asexual" (D:89) clothing and is with her father at the time of the rape. The rape itself is credible because it takes place on a single occasion, it is part of another crime (the robbery) and there is an acceptable degree of secondary violence – the dogs are shot and David Lurie is locked in a bathroom and set on fire. Unlike the professor, the rapists fit the popular profile. They are black, they appear to be uneducated (one is even slightly mentally handicapped), there are

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<sup>14</sup> Lucy's pregnancy can be seen as something of a literary contrivance, not only because there is a limited three day period in a month during which a woman can become impregnated (thus making it more likely that Melanie would fall pregnant), but also because there are more immediate means of stopping a pregnancy than abortion.

<sup>15</sup> It is not entirely clear whether or not Lucy regards the rape as racially motivated.

<sup>16</sup> There is no evidence that Ryan is actually Melanie's boyfriend or ex-boyfriend. This is a fact assumed by Lurie based on Melanie's question, "What if I already share it?". He could just as easily be a protective friend or family member.

<sup>17</sup> The ridiculous idea that it is worse for some types of women to be raped than others is expressed by Lurie when he thinks, "Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow" (D:105). This

three of them, they are violent and they are strangers. Ironically, an interesting parallel can be found between the behaviour of Lurie and that of Pollux, the slightly mentally handicapped rapist. Although he is enraged when he catches Pollux spying on Lucy through the bathroom window, he is guilty of a similar crime when he sits in the darkened theatre spying on Melanie.

If Lucy's rape is the 'perfect' rape, why does she choose to keep silent about it? She gives her father the following explanation when he questions her about it,

The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone. (*D*:112).

The time and place she is referring to, is post-apartheid South Africa. The fundamental flaw in Lucy's reasoning is that she regards her rape as a 'private matter'. As a victim of a gang rape, her rape can never be a 'private matter', it is public by its very nature. While one man is raping her, the other two bear witness to the act, thus making the rape public as it occurs. Furthermore, while Lucy may choose to remain silent about her violation, the men who raped her will not. Vogelmann and Lewis (1993:40) suggest that not only do gang rapists fail to conceal their identity, they also publicise the rape in order to "earn respect". Lurie who, not surprisingly, has little difficulty imagining the rape from the perspective of the rapists, pictures the spread of the story in the following way,

Like a stain the story is spreading across the district. Not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for. (*D*: 115).

Lucy's decision not to report the rape brings with it a number of complications when one is attempting to analyse the use of myths about rape in the book. For, on the one hand, such a decision is more reflective of the reality of rape reporting in South Africa than its converse. Furthermore, while such a decision does contribute to the silence which surrounds rape in this country, it is nevertheless a personal decision and one which is often motivated by the knowledge of a poor judiciary system and the possibility of having publicly to relive the rape.

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notion seems to be based on the idea that rape can't be all that bad for heterosexual women because they enjoy having sex with men anyway.

Lucy says the following to her father on one of the many occasions when he tries to get her to report the rape.

What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to *justify* myself – not to you, not to anyone else. (D:133, italics my own).

While a failure on the part of victims to report rape contributes to the silence which surrounds the problem of rape in this country, it is important to remember that it is not the cause of the problem. Lewis (2000:19) suggests that there is a common misconception that a woman who fails to report a rape to the police is in some way responsible for any subsequent rapes that the rapist may commit. The responsibility lies solely with the rapist. It is possible that in portraying Lucy as a woman who *chooses* not to report the rape, Coetzee is trying to convey that it is the victim's prerogative to choose whether or not her story is told. While Lucy's decision is perfectly acceptable, the motivations given and her acceptance of the rape as an unfortunate fact of life are questionable. Lucy suggests that in post-apartheid South Africa, her rape (in more general terms the rape of a white woman by black men) is a private rather than public matter. Bearing in mind that Lucy is rather a 'liberal' character, one needs to question, as David Lurie does, whether her reaction would have been the same if she had been raped by a white man. It is possible that Lucy's decision is based on a liberal reaction to the historical situation in this country, where the threat of rape by the 'black barbarian savage' has been used not only to subjugate, but also as an excuse for violence against, the black male populace. If this is indeed the motivation for Lucy's decision, it creates something of a dilemma. For while Lucy refuses to report the rape because she does not want to contribute to the 'black barbarian savage' myth, Coetzee has, in a sense, already done so when he created the situation in which the white woman is raped by black men. It has been demonstrated that the perpetuation of the 'black barbarian savage' myth is damaging to both race relations and the understanding of the problem of rape in South Africa. However, the proposition that the victim should remain silent when such rapes *do* occur, clearly privileges the issue of race over that of gender violence.

Marais (2003:280) suggests that the reader only ever has access to Lucy's response to the rape through David Lurie's "uncomprehending perspective". This is true in the sense that everything seems to be mediated through David Lurie and there are occasions on which, in his attempts to understand Lucy's motives, he suggests what she might be thinking or feeling. Marais also proposes that Lucy's use of the word "misreading" (D: 112) aligns the reader with David Lurie in his attempts to understand not only Lucy's violation, but also her reaction to it.



However, there is one occasion on which the reader is given 'direct' access to Lucy's thoughts on the matter when she says,

But isn't there another way of looking at it, David? What if.... What if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? (*D*: 158, italics original).

Her alternative way of looking at her rape is highly problematic for a number of reasons. The first is the method of payment. If indeed something is owed, then surely some form of monetary payment would be sufficient – perhaps that which is taken in the robbery? However, as Lucy herself suggests, these men are *primarily* rapists, they are not 'debt collectors' or 'tax collectors' but land owners – they have "marked" their "territory" (*D*:158) and expect complete "subjugation" (*D*: 159). Secondly, her reasoning situates women's body as the "terrain of struggle" (Horrell: 2002:29), the ground over which battles of race are fought (in many ways this follows the narrative of rape as a crime against property). As Green suggests (1999:95) this obscures not only the "gender hatred" that is inherent in rape, but also the individual nature of the tragedy. Thirdly, in accepting that being raped under these circumstances, constitutes some form of punishment for the racial injustices of the past, Lucy is giving the issue of racial injustice precedence over that of gender violence. Finally, in accepting the rape as an inevitability of living in post-apartheid South Africa, Lucy is negating the fundamental *right* of every woman over the integrity of her body.

As an explanation for her decision to stay on the farm Lucy says to her father,

Yes, the road I am following may be the wrong one. But if I leave the farm now I will leave defeated, and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life.  
(*D*: 161)

Lucy's sense of determination suggests that, although she is aware of the 'price' she may have to pay, she nevertheless refuses to be subjugated by the rapists. If their intention was to shame her or frighten her into leaving, by refusing to do so, she emerges triumphant. However, at the end of the novel, Lucy is on the verge of signing her land over to Petrus<sup>18</sup> in exchange for his

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<sup>18</sup> One is never sure whether or not Petrus is complicit in Lucy's rape. Not only is he conveniently away on the weekend on which it occurs, he is also related to one of the rapists whom he subsequently takes into his family and protects.

protection (part of the agreement is that the child of the rape will become a member of his family)<sup>19</sup>. Out of the horror of the rape, comes a multicultural 'family' fit for the 'new' South Africa. Barnard (2004:221) argues against a "redemptive reading" of Lucy's pregnancy because such a reading either "accepts" or "ignores" the premise that rape is the 'price' Lucy must pay for staying on. Marais (2001:37) suggests that Lucy's passivity and her refusal to follow her father's advice either to leave her home or fortify it against the possibility of another attack, is in fact, a form of resistance. He suggests that if she were to "wait for the barbarians" in this way she would be participating in (and thus reinforcing) the very power dichotomy which led to her rape. Theoretically this proposition is tenable. However, as was demonstrated in the case of Magda, in practice it is doomed to failure because the individual cannot escape the wider system of power relations in which he or she lives. Bower (2003: 16) is perhaps more pragmatic in his opinion that Lucy represents an "unrealistic option", not because she chooses not to report the rape, but because she does not attempt to protect herself from further violation. He suggests that "self-preservation is as important a requirement of our existence as atonement" (Bower, 2003: 16).

This statement is particularly pertinent if one considers that, in South Africa, rape brings with it the added (potentially fatal) threat of HIV/AIDS. The issue of HIV/AIDS only enters *Disgrace* after Lucy has been raped and David Lurie discusses with Bev Shaw the possibility of Lucy contracting the disease. The inclusion of the issue of HIV/AIDS *at this point* raises a number of questions about Coetzee's intentions. For while it is a reality that rape has contributed to the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (and that the contraction of the disease is a very real threat to rape victims), rape is not the only means by which HIV is transmitted. The situation is complicated further by the fact that Lucy is raped by *black* men. Throughout the novel, the only time that a condom is ever mentioned is when Bev Shaw produces one when she is about to have sex with David Lurie. The mention of the condom at this point is significant for two reasons. The first is that it highlights the absence of the mention of condoms on previous occasions and the second is that it is Bev and not Lurie who produces the condom. If the condom had not been included on this occasion, it could have been assumed by the reader that a condom was used on previous occasions. The mention of the condom however, combined with the fact that it belongs to Bev, suggests that Lurie did not use a condom during any of the earlier sexual encounters described in the novel. Significantly, Lurie has had unprotected sex with prostitutes (not to mention the 'hundreds' of women in his past) and is therefore as likely a carrier of HIV as the rapists.

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<sup>19</sup> This property transaction is significant because of its relation to the narrative which regards women as the property of men. If Lucy's rape is regarded as a property violation against her father, then the

The fact that Lucy's rapists are portrayed as a possible source of the virus and Lurie is not raises the question of intent on the part of Coetzee. Has he simply reproduced the popular misconception that HIV/AIDS is a disease which is only prevalent in the black population? Or is he criticising this misconception by treating Lurie ironically and drawing a subtle comparison between the sexual practices of Lurie and the rapists? Stratton (2002: 90-1) suggests that even if Coetzee is treating Lurie ironically, the correlation between black people and HIV/AIDS remains "intact in the narrative". However, this is not necessarily the case. The problem seems to lie with the subtlety of the comparison. It could be argued (bearing in mind that such an argument may be giving Coetzee too much credit) that in providing so tenuous a connection Coetzee is forcing the reader to undergo the process whereby he or she uncovers (and in doing so re-evaluates) the misconception that HIV/AIDS is a black disease for him or herself. In doing so, Coetzee may be attempting to make the reader aware of how certain narratives are privileged over others and as a result of this, obscure the 'truth'. The problem, of course, is that if the reader fails to make the connection, it appears as if Coetzee is in fact endorsing the misconception/narrative. In such cases, instead of exposing the misconception, Coetzee inadvertently contributes to its perpetuation.

The inclusion of the issue of HIV/AIDS is also significant because of the way in which both rape and the disease are conceived of in terms of pollution of the body. A body that contracts HIV is perceived to be polluted not only because there is, as yet, no way to eradicate the disease, but also because that body then becomes contagious – a carrier of the pollution. In the case of the rape of Lucy, the two become interchangeable. Not only do the rapists pollute her body, through the invasion of their unwanted penises, semen and offspring, but also through the possible transmission of HIV. The possibility of the pollution of HIV simply becomes an extension of the pollution already inherent in the rape. Lurie, however, does not regard his rape of Melanie as a rape and as such, there is no sense of the pollution which accompanies rape, except perhaps in the imagined scene in which she washes herself after the second rape. Furthermore, if (in Lurie's mind at least) the pollution of rape is associated with the pollution of HIV and rapists are perceived as the carriers of that pollution, then it follows that if Lurie fails to see himself as a rapist, he is also not likely to regard himself as a carrier of HIV. Graham (2002:7) suggests that Lurie's preoccupation with the violation/contamination of Lucy's body (especially with regard to the possible contraction of HIV) can be compared to his complete want of regard for Melanie's body after he has raped her, having had (what seems to be) regular unprotected sex. It is not clear however, whether this lack of regard is signing over of her land, is the legitimate property transaction that ensures her protection. Having been

related to his failure to see himself as a potential carrier of HIV or whether it is simply part of the lack of regard, which is inherent in rape, for the individual and her body.

The violated bodies of the two women lie at the centre of *Disgrace*. Connecting the two rapes is fundamental to the reader's understanding of the novel and it is this process which distances the reader from Lurie, who fails throughout to see the acts as the same. Azoulay (2002:40) suggests that by creating so obvious a contrast between the invisibility of the rape in the first section and the preoccupation with it in the second, Coetzee is not only representing Lurie's "failure of vision", but is also forcing the reader to undergo this failure as an experience. In the novel, rape is only ever portrayed from the perspective of the rapist. Although the violated bodies of the women lie at the centre of the text, the experience of the victim is always absent. This is true even in the case of Lucy, where the perspectives of the actual rapists are not given. In this case, the absent scene of the rape is made visible through Lurie's imaginings. However, although he is able to imagine the scenario of the rape, he is only ever able to imagine the violation from the perspective of the rapist.

Lucy's intuition is right after all: he does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman? (*D*: 160).

Lurie's failure to acknowledge the suffering of Melanie would seem to indicate that the answer to his question is no. Melanie's 'story' ends with Lurie visiting the Isaacs family to apologise for the grief he caused Mr and Mrs Isaacs and for lacking the "lyrical" (*D*: 171). During the same conversation, he attempts to evade responsibility for his actions by adopting a victim-blaming narrative and suggesting that Melanie was in some way responsible for inciting his behaviour – "It was that kind of flame your daughter kindled in me. Not hot enough to burn me up, but real: real fire." (*D*: 166). At no point does he acknowledge Melanie's violation or suffering. Although the question was expressed by David Lurie it can perhaps be understood in more general terms to be asking whether men (and thus male writers) can understand the violation of rape from the perspective of women.

Both Graham (2002:13) and Azoulay (2002: 34) suggest that because the stories of Melanie and Lucy are missing from (or perhaps hidden in) the text, the responsibility lies with the reader to uncover their violation. This is a difficult task because it involves recovering the

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raped, Lucy is no longer valuable property.

women's experiences and 'freeing' their "trauma" (Azoulay, 2002: 35) from the story put forward by the narrator, whose voice is at times indistinguishable from that of Lurie. Furthermore, this approach relies on the awareness of the reader. If the reader fails to acknowledge that the women's stories have been silenced and that their violation is hidden in the text, then Coetzee inadvertently becomes complicit in the process of silencing. While one could argue that by purposefully omitting the women's stories, Coetzee is acknowledging his inability as a male writer to express the suffering and violation of rape from the perspective of the female victim, it could also be argued that, in doing so, he is relegating the suffering of rape to the female domain (thus re-enforcing the notion that rape is a problem to be dealt with by women). Another possibility is that Coetzee chooses not to portray the experience of rape from the perspective of the female because he feels that it would be impossible to articulate the trauma of the experience. In order for this possibility to be likely however, Coetzee's approach to the representation of trauma would need to have changed since writing *In the Heart of the Country* where the trauma of Magda's violation is quite explicitly articulated. Graham (2002:13) proposes that by situating the experience of the women outside of the realm of discourse, Coetzee is contributing to a "much wider and more problematic phenomenon of silencing".

Critics of Coetzee have approached the use of silence in his novels in a number of ways. Perhaps the most relevant of these, for the purpose of this discussion, are the approaches of Parry (1996) and Marais (1996). Parry (1996: 46) suggests that silence is closely related to sexual passivity. She cites Michael K, Friday and Vercueil as examples of silent characters who are obviously sexually passive or impotent. This notion of sexual passivity could very easily be applied to the characters of Klein-Anna and Melanie. A distinction between the two however, is that where sexual passivity is regarded as unusual in males, it is often expected in females. She suggests further that the silence of certain characters demonstrates how silence is inflicted upon certain socially disadvantaged individuals. It could be argued that Coetzee does not give these women voices because, in reality (and perhaps in comparison to Magda and Lucy), they have very few opportunities of being heard. Marais (1996:75), on the other hand, suggests that in Coetzee's novels, the silence of certain characters is invested with power.

Silence is neither a sign of submission nor merely a strategy of passive resistance, but a counter-strategy through which the other preserves, even asserts, its alterior status and in doing so interrogates the fixity of dominant power structures and positions.

While this argument may be applicable in the case of Friday, Michael K and to an extent even Lucy Lurie, it is only because there is another who wishes each of these characters to speak. If however, no one wishes to hear the silent individual's story, then how can silence act as a form of resistance?

The most obvious myth about rape to emerge out of *Disgrace* is clearly that of the 'black barbarian savage'. It could be argued that in presenting the rape of Lucy without the ambiguity that was inherent in the rape of Magda by Hendrik, Coetzee is endorsing this particular myth. However, the fact that the rape is clearly meant to be paired with the rape of the coloured woman by the white man, undermines this argument. Stratton (2002: 89), who is of the opinion that Coetzee is endorsing the 'black barbarian savage' myth, has argued that while the two rapes are clearly meant to be paired, they cannot be compared because of the difference in the "type and level of violence". Stratton clearly ascribes to a rating system in which some rapes are perceived to be more traumatic than others. While it is true that the physical violence in Lucy's rape may have exceeded the violence in Melanie's, there are other factors, such as prior knowledge of the rapist, which increase the trauma of the incident. Furthermore, the fact that a rape such as Lucy's is treated by society as credible, whereas a rape such as Melanie's is not, influences the victim's support system and her ability to deal with the trauma. One could argue against Stratton that in pairing the two rapes, Coetzee is not simply trying to "get away" (Stratton, 2002:89) with the portrayal of the rape of a white woman by black men, but is making a statement about how South African society privileges certain rape narratives over others. The statement seems to be that while there are instances where white women are raped by black men, there are at least as many occasions on which the rapes of coloured/black women by white men are obfuscated.

While the pairing of these two rapes works well to critique the popularity of the 'black barbarian savage' myth, the fact that both rapes are interracial presents the problem that, in *Disgrace* at least, rape appears to be an interracial phenomenon. This is damaging not only because it fails to represent the majority of intra-racial rapes which occur in South Africa, but also because it suggests that rape and race are inextricably connected. It could be argued that they are connected in the sense that current gender power relations appear to have been influenced by the racial power relations of the apartheid era. That is, both systems have a means of subjugating the subordinate group, which in the past was blacks and is currently women. The old apartheid phrases, "*Teach him a lesson, Show him his place*" (D: 206), that Lurie feels tempted to use after he catches Pollux spying on Lucy, have become phrases used to justify rape as a form of subjugating women – "How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for." (D: 115). However, race is not the cause of rape. To

suggest that it ignores the majority of intra-racial rapes which occur in South Africa and the gender hatred inherent in the fact that it is *women* who are raped. There has been a tendency among critics of *Disgrace* to concentrate on the racial dimension of the rapes and in doing so, to overlook what should (in the case of rape literature) be the more fundamental issue of gender violence.

As it has already been demonstrated, one's understanding of Coetzee's use of myths about rape (and thus his portrayal of the rapists) is largely determined by whether or not one interprets the rape/seduction of Meanie as a rape. If one does not regard the act as a rape, then the only rapists that the reader is given, are the men who rape Lucy. In this instance, the portrayal of the rapists follows the monster narrative. It is possible for this myth to operate because of the excessive violence which is used on David Lurie and the dogs. The rapists are described by both Lurie and Lucy as "dogs in a pack" and the youngest one has the additional aberration of being slightly mentally handicapped. If one regards the rape of Lucy as the only rape in the novel, then it would seem that Coetzee is either simply reproducing or endorsing a myth which obscures the way in which we think about rapists and consequently the problem of rape in this country.

If, on the other hand, one regards the rape/seduction of Melanie as a rape, then it would appear that Coetzee is challenging common misconceptions about the 'abnormality' of the rapist. Not only is the alternative to Lucy's monsters a white, middle-class academic, (who is known to and trusted by the victim) he is also the protagonist of the novel. He is the means through which the reader sees the world of *Disgrace*. In a sense, the reader temporarily occupies the space of David Lurie and thus the perspective of a rapist who refuses to acknowledge that he is one. The distance between the character of David Lurie and the reader however, means that the reader is able to acknowledge that he is a rapist. The portrayal of a man, who clearly fulfils the role of someone's father or husband, as a rapist who fails to see himself as one, suggests that by erasing 'normal' men from the way in which we speak about rape, we are creating a situation in which 'normal' men cannot even see themselves as rapists. David Lurie cannot concede that what he did to Melanie Isaacs was indeed rape, because as a 'normal' man, he does not fit the profile of and therefore cannot be a rapist. Coetzee's portrayal of Lurie as a 'rapist who is not a rapist' also demonstrates the degree of acceptability that rape has found in South African society. Aggressive sexual behaviour is condoned as long as it falls within certain socially accepted parameters. Lurie's rape of Melanie is regarded as sexual harassment, but only because of the fact that it transgresses certain university rules.

Finally, the last myth about rape which emerges strongly from *Disgrace* is the myth of rape as a crime against property. This myth does not really come to the fore until Lucy is raped. This attitude is most evident in the thoughts of David Lurie.

Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them. (D: 98).

If women, like shoes and cars, are property to be circulated in the system, then it follows that the system is one owned and controlled by men. Lurie's sense of ownership over his daughter (and the loss of this ownership after she is raped) is clear in the thought, "Not her father's little girl, not any longer." (D:105). Considered outside of the myth of 'women as property', this thought is ridiculous – Lucy is very clearly an adult woman. The fact that she is not his "any longer" suggests that, in some way, the rape severed his sense of ownership. David Lurie's sense of inadequacy, his disgrace perhaps, lies in his failure to protect Lucy, "And I did nothing. I did not save you." (D: 157). That Petrus ascribes to the myth of rape as a crime against property can be seen in his solution to the 'problem' of Lucy's rape. His ideal solution is that Pollux should marry Lucy, but because Pollux is too young to marry, he offers to marry Lucy in his place. In marrying Lucy, he would be undoing the damage done to Lurie's property by the rape. Although Lurie perceives Petrus's suggestion that a "woman must marry" because it is "too dangerous" (D:202) if she does not as a form of blackmail, the notion of a male protector (closely tied to the notion of male ownership) is one which Lurie himself ascribes to. Lucy too seems to understand that the system currently operating in South Africa is one in which women are dependent upon men for protection from other men – "I have a father, but he is far away and anyhow powerless in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn for protection, for *patronage*?" (D: 204, italics my own).

It is only after the rape of his own daughter, that Lurie feels the need to explain his behaviour to (and eventually apologise to) Melanie's father. Significantly, he does not apologise to Melanie, which suggests that he feels that it Melanie's father and not Melanie herself who has been wronged. It is not entirely clear whether or not Coetzee is reproducing the myth of rape as a crime against property or criticising it. How one understands his use of this myth seems to lie with how one interprets the character of David Lurie. If one were to regard the character of David Lurie as a 'voice' for Coetzee or as a moral standpoint from which to interpret the other events in the novel, then it would follow that one would conclude that Coetzee is endorsing



the narrative. If, on the other hand, one regards Lurie as a characters whose thoughts and actions need to be scrutinised (and more often than not, criticised), then one could conclude that Coetzee intends the reader to question the validity of the myth.

## V

One of the questions which was put forward at the beginning of this paper is whether Coetzee simply reproduces existing myths about rape which are essentially detrimental to the understanding of the problem of rape in South Africa, or whether he critiques these myths and thus contributes positively to the discourse on rape. Both *In the Heart of the Country* and *Disgrace* present ambiguities which make this question hard to answer. In the case of *In the Heart of the Country*, these problems lie largely with an inability to definitively interpret the text. The fact that one is never able to establish whether Klein-Anna is seduced or raped and whether Magda is actually raped or simply fantasises about it, means that it is very difficult to establish where Coetzee stands in relation to myths such as the 'black barbarian savage' myth. Furthermore, it could be argued that the very suggestion of rape fantasies (in the sense of desired fantasies) is detrimental because it perpetuates a dangerous misconception. In order for the novel to provide a critique of certain myths, the rape/seduction of Klein-Anna needs to be read as a rape and it needs to be understood in conjunction with the rape of Magda. Alternatively, if the novel is to provide a critique of the 'black barbarian savage' myth, Magda's rape needs to be understood as imagined (a proposition which is problematic in itself). *In the Heart of the Country* also presents the problem that there are a number of occasions on which rape is used figuratively. As such, 'rape' becomes a device for exploring the issue of colonialism and the female body (although still seemingly the site of violation) stands for the subjugated people or the invaded land. The consequence of this is that the concept of rape and rape as a gender-based social problem become separated. This separation will inevitably result (in literature at least) in an adumbration of the reality of rape as a social problem.

The problem with *Disgrace* lies largely with the subtlety of the criticism and the dependence on the reader to make connections between certain events and people in the novel. If the reader understands the subtlety and makes the connections then *Disgrace* provides a thought-provoking critique of a number of myths about rape, which contribute to the silence surrounding the problem of rape. If, on the other hand, the reader fails to make the connections, the text reads as an endorsement of the very same myths. Unfortunately however, the assessment is not quite as straightforward as this. There are a number of inclusions (or exclusions) which are problematic. The first of these is the inclusion of the act of consensual

sex between Melanie and Lurie. While it could be argued that Coetzee is trying to demonstrate that it is possible for a couple to have both consensual and non-consensual sex (rape), the inclusion is questionable as it contributes to obscuring the fact that the first two encounters should be classified as rape. The character of Lucy also presents something of a problem because the motives for her decision not to report the rape and to stay on the farm (as well as her pregnancy and multiracial child) appear to be slightly contrived. The fact that both rapes are interracial is also problematic. For while the rape of Melanie, when read in conjunction with the rape of Lucy, acts as a critique of the 'black barbarian savage' myth, the fact that both are interracial suggests that race and rape are inextricably connected. Not only is this assumption false, it also overlooks the majority of intra-racial rapes which occur in South Africa. The silence/silencing of Melanie and Lucy could be read negatively as contributing to the "phenomenon of silencing" (Graham, 2002:13), however it could also be read as a reflection of the reality of the silence which surrounds rape victims. Furthermore, it could be argued that Coetzee leaves enough clues in the text for the stories of these two women to be re-created by the reader and thus freed from the hegemonic testimony of David Lurie.

Although the use of a male narrator in *Disgrace* means that the two victims of rape are silenced, it also means that Coetzee is able to portray the experience of rape from the perspective of the rapist. In doing so, he is able to critique the way in which society has constructed an idea of the rapist which excludes 'normal' men. The behaviour of the character of David Lurie also demonstrates how aggressive sexual behaviour has attained such a degree of acceptability in South African society that some men may not even be aware that they are committing rape. Coetzee's vivid portrayal of the experience of rape from the perspective of the female victim in *In the Heart of the Country* is commendable and suggests that it is possible for a male writer to capture the female perspective. However, it loses some of its impetus when read in conjunction with Magda's rape/seduction fantasies and the description of the figurative rape by the law of language.

The fact that the two novels were written in different political periods also needs to be taken into account. It is quite natural that *In the Heart of the Country*, which was written during the apartheid period, should be more concerned with the official oppression of 'non-white' racial groups than with the more general oppression of women. Furthermore, it could be argued (and the increase in rape statistics would seem to support such an argument) that while the subjugated group during the apartheid period was one based on race, it is now one based on gender. It is not clear however, whether this shift is reflected in the two novels. In both *In the Heart of the Country* and *Disgrace* the rapes appear to be racially motivated. Both Klein-Anna and Melanie appear to be raped for their exotic appeal as other, while Magda and Lucy are

raped primarily because they are white and represent the property/bloodline of the white male. In *Disgrace* however, there appears to be a deeper understanding of the gender hatred inherent in rape and of the connection between aggressive male sexual behaviour and rape.

Although both novels share the flaw of portraying rape primarily as an interracial phenomenon, there is clearly a development in Coetzee's treatment of myths about rape from *In the Heart of the Country* to *Disgrace*. His approach to myths about rape in *In the Heart of the Country* appears to be slightly haphazard and any criticism of 'detrimental' myths could very easily be a result of chance or a positive interpretation on the part of the reader. How the rape narratives in *In the Heart of the Country* are interpreted is almost entirely dependent on the integrity of the reader. If a reader is inclined to believe a particular myth, such as the 'black barbarian savage' myth, the scenario in the novel will serve to endorse such a belief. On the other hand, if the reader is inclined to question the validity of a particular myth, the novel will more than likely provide an alternative interpretation. In *Disgrace* Coetzee appears to dealing with the narratives in a more conscious manner and his criticism of certain myths, although subtle, is unmistakable.

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