“It is a new world they live in”:  
A CBI Approach to the Post-Apartheid Experience  
in J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace

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Abstract

The essence of this literary essay is to look closer at two key characters in J.M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* and use these characters to pick up on changes and living conditions in post-apartheid South Africa. Simultaneously, another object of this essay is to find ways to use *Disgrace* in the English language classroom. By using the methodology of Content-Based Instruction, the learning experience can also with ease turn into a collaborate effort, between subjects, across the curricula. *Disgrace* would work well in an ESL classroom as well as across the curriculum due to all-important contents such as the importance of respect and civic rights in a multicultural society. Since *Disgrace* deals with cultural aspects of the South African society after apartheid, postcolonial theory also becomes a vital part when analyzing and understanding the novel.

The novel reflects a South African society that in a short period of time has undergone many groundbreaking changes, such as becoming equal for all. The main characters, who previously belonged to the privileged few, must therefore come to terms with these changes and adjust to a new world and a political, economic and cultural power shift, which can be a bitter transition for some of those who lose more than they gain. The novel also depicts a violent and criminal society that bears the scars of an unjust past, which leads some of the younger characters to speak of emigration. There is also a generational gap where the older white generation tends to be more bitter over lost privileges and the younger generation to be more humble and content.

Keywords

Coetzee J.M, Content-Based Instruction, *Disgrace*, Emigration, ESL Classroom, Generational Differences, Post-Apartheid, Postcolonialism, South Africa, Violence.
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1. Introduction

When listening to the news and other media it is not uncommon that Africa and some of its nations are portrayed as areas with difficulties. It may be poverty, piracy, war or other reasons and many of these troubled regions have one thing in common, namely postcolonialism. This is something that interests me as a student of History because many of Africa’s current problems originate from the European settlement some hundred years back. It also interests me on a personal level since I feel that Africa often is something of a forgotten continent to us in the West. While I find it personally educational to learn more about postcolonialism and its effects on the African continent, it is also very much a modern and global issue and something that we as teachers should raise awareness about in our teaching.

This is also something that the Swedish curriculum LGR 11 (English language translation) highlights. Concerning History and its aim, as given in LGR 11, it is written that “pupils should obtain an understanding of different cultural contexts and ways of living” and in the same section of LGR 11 it is described that History should involve “an insight that the past affects our view of the present, and thus our perception of the future” (163). Furthermore LGR 11 also highlights in the section containing contents of communication that pupils in classes 7-9 in English should be familiar with “living conditions, traditions, social relations and cultural phenomena in various contexts and areas where English is used” (34). South Africa is an example of one such English speaking area and thus pupils should be aware of its living standards, traditions et cetera, in order to obtain an understanding of different cultural contexts. The second quote from above also shows that students should be familiar with how the past and present is linked in South Africa and that this in turn may affect the future.

The ability to understand different cultures and to educate pupils in how these traditions came to be is therefore an important aspect of the curriculum. That history can have an affect on the present is evident, so knowledge of the past is therefore a vital part when one wants to understand any culture. For instance, many regions in Africa are still struggling with issues like national identity; so an aspect of the curriculum is to discuss why they are struggling. These troubles could, for instance, be seen as a heritage from the European settlers and could also in some cases be the foundation to a biased attitude towards certain people based on ethnicity or culture.

South Africa may in this regard have been one of the worst examples of prejudice and violence during apartheid and in light of this I chose to use the novel *Disgrace* (1999) by the Nobel Prize awarded author J.M. Coetzee, as the primary source of my essay. The aim is to
look at South Africa both from an historical angle and to descry historical traces from the
days of apartheid but also to see how the author portrays post-apartheid South Africa
nowadays, through the eyes of the two characters David and Lucy and from the context and
through the people they meet. Finally, I also aim to find ways to use this novel as a teacher in
the classroom. My main objectives are therefore:

• To see how the South African society is represented through the eyes of the characters
  David and Lucy and how this can be put into a context of post-apartheid South Africa.
• To explore to what extent there is generational differences between the two characters
  David and Lucy in their view of and attitude towards the society they live in.
• To find uses for the novel *Disgrace* in the English language classroom.

1.1 Literature Overview

*Disgrace* revolves around David Lurie, a white poetry professor in Cape Town, South Africa
and his daughter Lucy who lives on the countryside. David is a 52 year old divorcée who
often makes unethical decisions both socially and professionally. He has for instance had
numerous relationships and affairs with both prostitutes and with the wives of his colleagues.
His behavior soon puts him in a state of disgrace and without any work. The reason is an
affair he is having with one of his students, Melanie Isaacs, which soon backfires and
becomes a local headline and something that the university will not stand for.

As a way of getting away from it all David decides to visit his daughter, Lucy, who
owns a farm in Eastern Cape. Here he learns or perhaps re-learns certain values in life that he
has forgotten in Cape Town and he also rekindles his relationship with his daughter as he
helps out on the farm. Although, David soon realizes that he and Lucy are living as an ethnic
minority in the region and the environment surrounding them becomes increasingly hostile
and not before long they are the victims of a hate crime. Both Lucy, who is raped during this
attack, and David, who is severely beaten, seems to think that South Africa’s unjust history
has something to do with the crime being “unnecessary rough”.

There is also more to this attack than David first perceived. He starts to realize that
their black neighbor Petrus, who on occasions helps out on the farm, knows the assailants and
has an interest in Lucy’s farm. He has his aim set on neighboring farms in the area and will
realize this ambition one way or another. A recurring theme in the novel is also that the main
characters often get knocked down and have to rebuild themselves and in a sense this is a
metaphor for the rebuilding process that South Africa is going through.
1.2 South African History

Robert Ross shows in his book *A Concise History of South Africa* (1999) that Southern Africa has been inhabited for a long period of time. He points out that many fossils have been found there and in some cases also some of the earliest remains of men and women of the modern type. Over the millennia it then developed a tripartite division of the population in Southern Africa with hunter-gatherers, later known as “Bushmen” or “San”, pastoralists and agriculturalists (6-7).

During the seventeenth century the first Europeans began to arrive to the Cape, making it a Dutch colony, as described by John McLeod in *Postcolonial Studies* (2007). Over the centuries that followed more and more European nations began to compete over and focus their intention on Africa. Subsequently the Dutch settlement was overtaken by the British in 1795 and through the second Boer war (1899-1902) the Union of South Africa was established. During this war the British defeated their longstanding rivals with Dutch roots, the Afrikaners, over South African supremacy and this led to the incorporation of the old Cape Colony into the union (28). Ross points out that the union included areas like Transvaal, the Cape and protectorates like Swaziland, which were previously incorporated African chiefdoms. The union was treated like Australia or Canada, namely as a self-rulled white dominion under British control (64; 74, 83-85).

South Africa’s modern history is otherwise defined by apartheid, which means separateness. In 1948 the National Party in alliance with the Afrikaner Party won the South African election, (only white people could vote) and soon a variety of acts and laws which separated the people based on ethnicity were passed. One such example was the Population Registration Act that could make people claim rights or be deprived of rights based on a racial classification. Other examples, according to Ross, were the Mixed Marriage Act and the Immorality Act that restricted heterosexual fraternization across the color line and therefore could break up and divide families (114-119).

Ross claims that industrialists and Transvaal farmers who voted for this government wanted cheap and disciplined black labor which they soon would get. Movement of Africans across the nation also soon became controlled and restricted and they had to carry a ‘reference book’ (a form of identification document). This book held information about employment history and what kind of residence rights they had. African education was also brought under state control in order to spread apartheid messages. The essence was that African education should be limited to the most basic skills needed to labor under white supervision (116-121).
This unjust and violent system soon led to demonstrations, arrests and shootings, like the massacre in Sharpeville in 1960 when 69 people, mostly armed with stones, were killed by the police. This massacre also, indirectly, led to Nelson Mandela’s imprisonment for treason. Mandela was, according to Ross, volunteer-in-chief for ANC’s defiance campaign against the unjust laws that were introduced by the National Party as early as in 1952. The incident in Sharpeville, however, made Mandela and other ANC leaders leave the country in order to gather support. While other leaders remained in exile, Mandela returned and was arrested in 1963 for his rebellion against the government. 31 years later, Mandela became South Africa’s first president, after spending a long time in prison. His inauguration marked a new, democratic chapter in South Africa’s history and nearly five decades of apartheid had come to an end (122-131,185; 196).

1.3 Theory

This section will present some general postcolonial theory along with theories on content based instruction.

1.3.1 Postcolonial Theory

Edward Said is a prominent figure in the field of postcolonialism and his work with the Orient made him draw the conclusion that Asia is called the East because it is located east of Europe, which is seen as the West. Said, as cited by Peter Barry in Beginning Theory (2009), argues that the West is seen as the norm against which the East is measured. The people from the East are according to Said described in a certain way that is satisfactory to a westernized view. That generally means that Eastern people and their behavior are seen as different. They are, for instance, described as people driven by emotions rather than logic along with characteristics such as cruelty, decadence, laziness and sensuality. Said is also aware that such traits are just as common in the West, only that they will not admit them. Said further emphasizes that if one is wearing Eurocentric glasses when viewing other areas of the world; one might see things that are not necessarily there. Istanbul can for instance be seen as an exotic and sensual city shrouded with mysticism since it is different than most western cities. The locals of Istanbul may not agree with this view however (186-187).

Kwame Anthony Appiah argues in a similar way to Said’s Oriental theories when he is approaching postcolonialism in Africa. Appiah, as cited by Ania Loomba in Colonialism/Postcolonialism (1998), emphasizes that a relatively small group of writers and
thinkers, who are trained in writing and thinking in a western way, are creating a specific view of Africa, or as he himself would put it: “In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa” (246). This quote really highlights a lot of those elements which I find interesting and that are problematic about colonialism and its far-reaching effects where white/West is over-privileged and others/East are under-privileged. That is, that the Africa which is presented and portrayed by Westerners is something constructed and artificial and not representative of the culture that many of those who actually live there normally would adhere to, unless it was the norm with which everything was measured. Because once it is seen as the norm most people have to abide by and adapt to its standards in order to reach different places in society.

Barry also discusses the effect of such a western measuring rod: “white, Eurocentric norms and practices are being promoted by a sleight of hand to this elevated status, and all others correspondingly relegated to subsidiary, marginalized roles” (186). Barry and Appiah both give examples of a similar western shadow that overshadows other cultures. This has led to a notion among some postcolonial writers and critics like Frantz Fanon to aim to “reclaim the past”. He argues that one does not need to be European in order to be accepted and Barry explains this phenomena in the following way: “post colonialist writers evoke or create a pre-colonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status of their countries” (187). Since the colonized population finds that the colonizers have tainted their country and culture and made them behave in ways that are unnatural for them; the colonized yearns for an earlier (pre-colonial) version of the country and the culture, before the colonizers arrived and changed the rules.

In his book *Postcolonialism* (2003), Robert J. C. Young, points to a 1940’s novel when he gives an example of how such a reclamation could transpire. The novel’s protagonist embarks on a journey from New York to Africa and out on the open sea he decides to throw away all of his books. Afterwards he feels complete freedom as he realizes that he did not only throw away the books, but also the western knowledge and cultural restrictions that they symbolized (20). He is therefore reclaiming his past, in a sense, since he travels to Africa as a non-westerner, free from the restrictions of the West.

A difficult aspect of reclaiming the past is what language to use in doing so. Some postcolonial writers have, according to Barry, concluded that the colonizers’ language is permanently tainted and should not be used. Although at the same time one might want to reach as many ears as possible, which could be more difficult when using a local tongue
(188). This is also something that Loomba brings to light: “In what voices do the colonised speak? – their own, or in accents borrowed from their masters? Is the project of recovering the ‘subaltern’ best served by locating her separateness from dominant culture, or by highlighting the extent to which she moulded even those processes and cultures which subjugated her?” (231). Loomba here discusses the difficulties with languages and to what extent you should re-create your society. Should everything be altered just because you want to get as far away from the past as possible or by recognizing that some things are what they are, a part of your heritage for good or bad, and make the best of it? The presence of the past and how one should deal with it is also something that McLeod is concerned with regarding a psychological aspect of postcolonialism. He argues that such an approach seeks not only to understand different cultures but also the connection between the past and the present and that the dismembered past is needed to understand the trauma of the present (201).

1.3.2 Content-Based Instruction

This section aims to clarify what content-based instruction is as a theory and how fiction can be used in language learning. I will show through previous research that Disgrace is well suited for content-based instruction and that such a methodical approach would be both a refreshing and a beneficial learning experience for the pupils. The theory of content-based instruction, (or CBI for short), revolves around language acquisition according to Stephen B. Stryker and Betty Lou Leaver. Stryker and Leaver compare in their book Content-Based Instruction in foreign language education (1997) language learning to bike riding. They argue that the knowledge is easiest acquired by doing it instead of learning the theory around it. The latter is something that they emphasize is most often the traditional way of learning a second language, whereas the philosophy of CBI rather aims to empower students into becoming independent learners by actually using the language. They also state that CBI is more of a philosophy than a methodology so there is no one formula but rather a refreshing alternative to more linguistically driven curricula (3).

Stryker and Leaver emphasize that there has been a movement in language education over the last couple of decades from the study about language towards a focus on how language can be used as a tool for communication. In actual practice however, most foreign language courses continue to follow a grammatical-structural or skill-based orientation according to Stryker and Leaver. So what CBI is aiming for is the shift towards learning language through content (6).
One such way is through theme-based approaches. Stryker and Leaver argue that these approaches have existed in foreign language education for a long period of time and that they are usually used as supplementary activities in the classroom to interrupt the systematic study of grammar. The difference with CBI is that these interruptions with readings and other activities take on more than just a supplementary role and instead become a central aspect. So as Stryker and Leaver emphasize: “in these cases the entire course is designed around in-depth study of topics such as a country’s economy, political system, family structure, or the role of women in the society. Instead of being add-ons to a course based on the study of grammar, the study of grammar in these courses becomes linked to, defined by, and dependent upon the topics.” (4). This quote summarizes the concept of theme-based approaches in a good way and shows that language can be acquired by more means than through traditional grammar-based education.

I find that CBI is useful to my essay in particular since it helps me centre the language teaching around the book and its themes, instead of focusing on the language first. We will come back to CBI in the analysis part alongside more concrete examples to the classroom.

2. Analysis

2.1 Postcolonial Analysis of the Characters in Disgrace

Before I start with the analysis I would like to point out some minor details about Disgrace. One of which has to do with how Coetzee writes. He does not always bother to describe the skin color of his characters, which is very refreshing since it often is irrelevant. Although, when analyzing the novel from a post-apartheid view it can also be a predicament at times since skin color can be essential for analyzing characters’ intents with the things they say. I simply wanted to share this information now in order to prevent any misunderstanding as to why I occasionally later on try to establish characters’ skin color. It is also to clear out any misunderstandings as to why I refer to characters as “probably white” et cetera.

The other detail is in regards to my analysis of the characters. It was sometimes difficult to separate the analysis between the characters and chapters, since they often interact with each other, and that is why some of David’s analysis occurs in Lucy’s chapter.

2.1.1 David Lurie

I have chosen to use two sub-categorizes to clarify the changing society seen through the character of David.
2.1.1.1 A Changing Society: Emigration and Violence

The most common way that Disgrace portrays a shifting South African society is through the many references to emigration and violence. Concerning emigration the destination is often other countries that adhere to a westernized culture now that South Africa is moving away from the same. They are of different ages, but what all the characters who talk about emigrating have in common is that they are all white, most likely. The first of these hints can be found after only eight pages of reading Disgrace and at that time David is out dining with a new secretary in his department. The dialogue between David and the secretary, Dawn, shows that she believes that South Africa has changed for the worse.

For the past three years she and her husband have had their name on a list at the New Zealand consulate, to emigrate. You people had it easier. I mean, whatever the rights and the wrongs of the situation, at least you knew where you were.’ ‘You people?’ he says. ‘What people?’ ‘I mean your generation. Now people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It’s anarchy. (8-9)

There are three things that I want to highlight about this passage. Primarily, the fact that Dawn has plans to leave for New Zealand now that South Africa gives an impression of disarray or even anarchy and secondly, that Dawn finds herself to be of a different generation than David, who given his age of 52 most likely is older than her. This provides an example of someone who is younger yet still has a bleak way of viewing modern South Africa. Thirdly, the passage also hits an historical note when it mentions apartheid’s misdoings and that regardless of right or wrong everyone knew their places back then. This is probably only something someone who is white would say and the only difference might be that the blindfold that the white people have had on has now been removed and now everyone suffers the same treatment.

The thought of emigration is, as mentioned above, something that occurs from time to time in Disgrace. The fact that it does so often has something to do with the ongoing almost anarchic state that South Africa has sunk into. Criminality, corruption and lack of police protection make many of the characters take action into their own hands or think about leaving. After the hate crime that David and Lucy are victims of, he proposes to send Lucy away to Holland, out of harm’s way. He finds this idea preferable to the insecurity of staying at the farm and mentions it twice as a way out (157; 204).
Another example of both emigration and South African violence is provided when the characters, the day after the attack, receive aid from their friendly neighbor Ettinger, who is portrayed in the following manner: “His wife is dead, his children have gone back to Germany, he is the only one left in Africa.” He also says the following regarding criminality: “I never go anywhere without my Beretta,’ he observes once they are on the Grahamstown road. He pats the holster at his hip. ‘The best is, you save yourself, because the police are not going to save you, not any more, you can be sure.’ (100)”. Old Ettinger gives additional fuel to the bleak way of viewing new South Africa as a lawless country. He also seems to think that the police protection was better during apartheid.

Perhaps the current police force fails in protecting everyone as opposed to only protecting some of the citizens. Ross also discusses this phenomenon during apartheid. During the 1980’s, the police was more often used as a paramilitary force to crush resistance rather than maintaining law and order. Furthermore, only some 6 % of the police force was engaged in solving crimes and they focused on solving crimes against the white population (151). This gives further fuel to the notion that both Dawn and Ettinger most likely are white and that they used to belong to those 6 % that were helped by the police. That is why they now feel that the environment is less safe since they used to belong to the privileged few. However, the passage also refers to Ettinger’s children who have gone back to Germany. I presume that they are younger or at least the same age as David so emigration might have something to do with age, since Dawn is also younger than David. Thus far it seems as if it is the younger generation who is more likely to leave, due to an unsafe environment.

Another aspect of emigration is that these characters do not necessarily have to have been to countries like New Zealand or Germany, but they still think that it might be preferable to staying in South Africa. I believe that this shows a Eurocentric way of viewing the world. They, David included, look at the situation with westernized eyes and cannot adjust to postcolonial South Africa. In a sense they are also reclaiming their past, or rather hoping to recreate their past. They have never been colonized so they cannot reclaim the past but they have lost their footing. The world that they were raised in is gone so they search for a similar culture in a more western country, such as New Zealand.

Dawn’s reason for leaving the country seems to have more to do with the high crime rate, however, but there might also be a covert cultural aspect. I reach this conclusion because of the destination; otherwise why not move to Mozambique which probably has more geological similarities. This could infer that culture is much more important for characters like Dawn than where she comes from. Dawn might be of the understanding that where one
lives comes second to how one lives and western beliefs like honor, privilege and security are not to be without.

To return to the examples of violence, however, this next excerpt is from right after the attack when David reassures himself that he and Lucy can count themselves lucky to be alive. The reason is that these things happen every hour and minute somewhere in the country, which makes David reach the following conclusion:

A risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold to the theory and to the comforts of the theory. 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. (98)

In this section I think David is on to something really interesting, a circulatory system where everything that goes around comes around, and that he really hopes that this is the case, because otherwise it is absurd to think that a supposedly civilized country has this much criminal activity; enough to make anyone go mad. Incidentally, and quite ironically at the same time, his own home in Cape Town is being robbed when all of this takes place in Eastern Cape. When David heads back there he thinks the following: “Though well fortified by most standards, the house has stood empty for months: too much to hope for that it will not have been visited.” (176). This is also a bleak way to view the society, the odds that your house has been robbed during your vacation is higher than the opposite scenario. His thoughts then continue further in this manner;

He wanders through the house taking a census of his losses. His bedroom has been ransacked, the cupboards yawn bare. His sound equipment is gone, his tapes and records, his computer equipment. In his study the desk and filing cabinet have been broken open; papers are scattered everywhere. The kitchen has been thoroughly stripped: cutlery, crockery, smaller appliances. His liquor store is gone. Even the cupboard that had held canned food is empty. No ordinary burglary. A raiding party moving in, cleaning out the site, retreating laden with bags, boxes, suitcases. Booty; war reparations; another incident in the great campaign of redistribution. Who is at this time wearing his shoes? (176)
What I find most interesting about this passage is that David refers to this burglary as a raiding party that has taken everything, regardless of value it seems. David’s thoughts on this matter are similar to his chain of thoughts regarding the South African circulatory system where it is dangerous to own anything and that everything belongs to everyone, so that everyone can be happy for a while. Especially the last sentence in the excerpt above shows a form of spreading of the wealth, when David is wondering who at this time is walking around in the shoes he used to own. Also the phrase “war reparations” is interesting and implies a reference to the past. Perhaps David thinks that life during apartheid was war-like and that situations like these, which currently occur all around the country, comes along with the new found peace as a way of repaying for the misdoings of apartheid. This could also be seen as though the raiding party is reclaiming their past, they are setting the record straight as to who owned what before the “colonizers” began to separate people.

Throughout Disgrace the protagonist David also has many flashing thoughts where he remembers aspects of the past and compares it to the present. This time he remembers the past because he is furious and only a minute ago resorted to violence. He has just beaten one of the three accomplices that took part in the crime against him and Lucy when this transpires:

‘He was staring at you through the window. Are you aware of that?’ ‘He is disturbed. A disturbed child.’ ‘Is that an excuse? An excuse for what he did to you?’ Lucy’s lips move, but he cannot hear what she says. ‘I don’t trust him,’ he goes on. ‘He is shifty. He is like a jackal sniffing around, looking for mischief. In the old days we had a word for people like him. Deficient. Mentally deficient. Morally deficient. He should be in an institution.’ ‘That is reckless talk, David. If you want to think like that, please keep it to yourself.’ (208)

David is at this point making a reference to a time where people that were different could get locked up in facilities. Government that treat people in such a manner probably remind most people of Nazi Germany, which makes most people shiver by the very thought of it, like Lucy does. David, in this example however, is rather agreeing with this old belief and finds that this disturbed or deficient child should be sent away to an institution for the things he has done. This could be seen as a clear example showing that David has been damaged by his time and generation. That the psychological repercussions by a system and a dismembered past like that of apartheid could leave long lasting scars on its citizens.

During the attack on David’s person in Eastern Cape he also thinks about the low value education has in his current predicament and in this kind of society. “He speaks Italian,
he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa” (95). The essence of this sentence is that here on the South African countryside and in the midst of danger it matters little to know about Italian music or French art and similar things that are David’s cup of tea. My interpretation of this is that out here most of his qualities come second to good old-fashioned labor and working with your hands and perhaps also the ability to protect what is yours and David has somehow grown out of South Africa. His abilities are less important than they used to be and now they probably would fit better somewhere else.

Another thing I observed in this example is the choice of words “darkest Africa” which I find symbolizes more than just the countryside compared to city life. The same phrase is used when David composes a dispatch to his ex-wife, who at that time is scouting in Madagascar for the travel agency where she works. That dispatch is entitled “To Rosalind in darkest Africa” and points to the fact that she is exploring unknown territory (120-121). I think the intent of the phrase is similar in both examples and that David suggests by using the phrase that there is something new to explore. This could go hand in hand with Said’s theories of the mystique that shrouds the other culture, when watching it with Eurocentric glasses, as cited in Barry (186-187). That the phrase refers to something unexplored and dangerous, a return of the old perhaps, where noble civilization and European culture are somewhat insignificant in new South Africa.

2.1.1.2 A Changing Society: Interactions with Petrus and the Isaacs

As mentioned in the Theory section, postcolonial societies can have difficulties in choosing what language to use and that becomes evident when David and Petrus watches a soccer game, that David does not understand language wise: “The commentary alternates between Sotho and Xhosa, languages of which he understands not a word” (75). Both of these languages, according to Ross, hail from old African chiefdoms with the same names that were annexed by the British in the mid-19th century and especially the Sotho people were sent to work in the newfound diamond mines (55; 64). This also highlights the power shift that South Africa is undergoing because by using these languages instead of English, on a presumable national broadcast, is to send a statement similar to that which Fanon is describing as reclaiming the past. Later on David also wonders about what part English plays nowadays:

He would not mind hearing Petrus’s story one day. But preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost
their articulations, their articulateness, their articulatedness. Like a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud, the language has stiffened. Pressed into the mould of English, Petrus’s story would come out arthritic, bygone. (117).

Here even David, of an older generation and illiterate in Xhosa and Sotho, is aware of the changes and even admits them. Perhaps English has run its course in South Africa. By admitting that he might also come to realize that it might not only be the language that has held South Africa back and from which it now is liberating itself from. And perhaps it would not be so bad to turn a new sheet over.

Xhosa appears again later on when David is piecing together the script of a small chamber opera that he is working on and is surprised to be away while doing so: “Will this be where the dark trio are at last brought to life: not in Cape Town but in old Kaffraria?” (122). Kaffraria, which is the word that stands out, originates from the Arabic word kafir, which means infidel according to the annotations by Cary Henson in the 1999 edition of *Disgrace*. However in South Africa the word is rather used as a racial slur for the black population. Kaffraria is the name of an old province which was largely inhabited by Xhosa, which was incorporated into the Cape Province by the British in 1865 after conflicts between Xhosa and the settlers. (3) The fact that David uses it as some sort of an ironic, geographical joke to himself shows that Kaffraria is probably the old name of the province where he currently resides. It is also a somewhat insensitive play on words which shows that David is not only educated in his country’s colonial history, but he is also familiar with racial slurs and insensitivities which points to the fact of a former educated, white privilege.

Further changes in the South African society become evident when David and Petrus are working together on the local market:

As for the actual trading, there is little for him to do. Petrus is the one who swiftly and efficiently lays out their wares, the one who knows the prices, takes the money, makes the change. Petrus is in fact the one who does the work, while he sits and warms his hands. Just like the old days: *baas en Klaas*. Except that he does not presume to give Petrus orders. (116)

“Baas en klaas” is Afrikaans and means boss and worker according to the annotations by Cary Henson in the 1999 edition of *Disgrace* (3). That means that what David is referring to in this section are the days of apartheid, where people like Petrus used to work for bosses like David.
That was the structured order in those days which is shown by the fact that David would no longer dream of giving Petrus orders.

The next couple of examples also have to do with Petrus. David is now becoming increasingly suspicious towards Petrus’s involvement in the whole incident with Lucy and himself: “It is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it.” (117). David is now showing signs of awareness towards this new world they are living in, but in the next passage also some remorse over some of the lost benefits from the old world, which he thinks would have been useful in order to find out what it is that Petrus is hiding:

Did Petrus know in advance what they were planning? In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one’s temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place. But though Petrus is paid a wage, Petrus is no longer, strictly speaking, hired help. It is hard to say what Petrus is, strictly speaking. The word that seems to serve best, however, is neighbour. (116)

David’s fear for his daughter and frustration over not knowing the truth behind the attack is now making him miss parts of apartheid and he would actually want some of the benefits back. David admits in this passage that during apartheid, white people could do pretty much what they wanted and if the hired help was a disappointment they could easily be replaced. This is a further example of the changing society that is taking place around them and the rights that Africans now have. After all, it was only a decade ago that workers had to carry a “reference book” that showed employment history and where they were allowed to live, as Ross reminds us (119).

The business with Petrus and the inevitable confrontation between him and David also make them fall into a cultural and historical dispute: “You come to look after your child. I also look after my child.’ ‘Your child? Now he is your child, this Pollux?’ ‘Yes. He is a child. He is my family, my people.’ So that is it. No more lies. My people. As naked an answer as he could wish. Well, Lucy is his people.” (201). The dialogue continues and when Petrus thinks it is over, David takes the opportunity to be philosophical: “On the contrary, it is just beginning. It will go on long after I am dead and you are dead.”” (202). David is here referring to the cultural differences, meaning that they are far from over which is a bleak way of viewing the most recent past, the healing process and the future of South Africa. It is also a similar statement to that which Ross mentioned when he claimed that the inauguration of
Mandela only hid the scars temporarily and that much remains to be done (196). These examples also highlight that both Petrus and David are protecting their kin. Petrus and David’s conversation and the cultural differences between them can be said to reach its climax when Petrus offers to marry David’s daughter:

I will marry.’ ‘You will marry whom?’ ‘I will marry Lucy.’ He cannot believe his ears. So this is it, that is what all the shadow-boxing was for: this bid, this blow! And here stands Petrus foursquare, puffing on the empty pipe, waiting for a response. ‘You will marry Lucy,’ he says carefully. ‘Explain to me what you mean. No, wait, rather don’t explain. This is not something I want to hear. This is not how we do things.’ We: he is on the point of saying, We Westerners. ‘Yes, I can see, I can see,’ says Petrus. He is positively chuckling. ‘But I tell you, then you tell Lucy. Then it is over, all this badness.’ ‘Lucy does not want to marry. Does not want to marry a man. It is not an option she will consider. I can’t make myself clearer than that. She wants to live her own life.’ ‘Yes, I know,’ says Petrus. And perhaps he does indeed know. He would be a fool to underestimate Petrus. ‘But here’, says Petrus, ‘it is dangerous, too dangerous. A woman must be marry.’ (202)

It is truly a cultural clash that they have reached at this point. Petrus is of the belief that a woman must have a man for protection, which is opposite of what David thinks. David is also close to blurting out, or at least thinks it, that Westerners do not have several wives which Petrus has. This further demonstrates Petrus pre-colonial way of living. He is probably aware of the fact that Lucy is homosexual yet finds it irrelevant, since he is not marrying for a western sense of love. He is only interested in Lucy’s land. Petrus, who seems to have a pre-colonial belief, probably thinks it a waste to let Lucy as a lone, homosexual woman own that land, because out here a woman must be married, as he points out. I also find that another aspect of this dialogue is the play on the western tradition of asking a father for the daughter’s hand. This, however, is not what happens because Petrus is the one in power so he need not ask. He is demanding instead of asking and therefore he also tramples on David’s honor.

McLeod argues that one way to psychologically heal is to remember the past, however dark, which might be what David does in his own way when he is ironizing over the past from time to time and marginalizing old prejudices, as in this next example. David is at this point watching Melanie Isaac, the student he has an affair with, rehearse a school play. The play is set in a hair salon in Johannesburg and is a comedy about the new South Africa. The play leads David to some quite characteristic and somewhat indifferent thoughts on modern South
Africa, indifferent in the sense that he does not seem to care for either side, neither the national healing process nor the old unequal beliefs. He attends the play because of Melanie and not for the story which he probably finds uninteresting, because as he pointed out to Petrus, these troubles will continue long after they are gone, regardless of comic school plays: “On stage a hairdresser, flamboyantly gay, attends to two clients, one black, one white. Patter passes among the three of them: jokes, insults. Catharsis seems to be the presiding principle: all the coarse old prejudices brought into the light of day and washed away in gales of laughter” (23). That short passage sums up the past and the present quite brilliantly I think and highlights the fact that South Africa, through many different means, is undergoing changes.

Another way in which the novel shows that South Africa is in the process of change is through the representation of the economic situation. For instance, there are examples of black families like that of Melanie Isaac’s, who are probably better-off because they have adopted the ways of the west: “They are teetotal, clearly. He should have thought of that. A tight little petit-bourgeois household, frugal, prudent. The car washed, the lawn mowed, savings in the bank. All their resources concentrated on launching the two jewel daughters into the future:” (168). This further shows the extent of postcolonialism as it highlights a family who has adopted the western ways and therefore has savings in the bank and a middle class home.

This puts the Isaacs and Petrus on opposite sides of one and other and together they symbolize the past and the present. In the past one had to adopt the western ways in order to make something out of oneself, which Mr. Isaac is a good example of. For him that adoption yielded results and he has a car and a house to show for it. However, by comparing Mr. Isaacs to Petrus one can also discern the economic change that has taken place in South Africa. It suddenly becomes clear that Petrus follows another path than Mr. Isaac does, but he is all the same doing well, which might had been improbable some years ago. One aspect of change is therefore that new ways for prosperity has opened up in South Africa and especially, prosperity for black people!

2.1.2 Lucy Lurie

Similar subcategories to that of chapter 2.1.1 are used in this chapter about Lucy.

2.1.2.1 A Changing Society: Violence

Violence becomes a key part in showing South African change even when Lucy acts as the agent. This next example refers to the attack on her person: “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.’ ‘This place being what?’ ‘This place being South Africa.’ (112)’. In this example Lucy points to the fact that South Africa, at this time, cannot be compared to any other place, at least not any western place, where rules are abided and justice is carried out.

Here, in this South African society, one is forced to look out for oneself, which most characters in *Disgrace* have figured out. The only real exception to this is David who at times has blinders on. David often seems to be disconnected to South Africa, as if he is still viewing the country in a Eurocentric light and most examples point to the fact that this is no longer accurate. It is as if he does not want to let go of his beloved European cultural ideas and stoop to, what in his mind, is the low cultural level of (South) African culture. He does not want to strictly concern himself with the most basic things in life; things that should be taken for granted, as they once had done and in a sense I think he misses the excess; to enjoy life, instead of just living it whilst struggling, and to have too much of some things.

Coetzee sometimes connects the plot with historical symbolism, as he did with Kaffraria, to show aspects of South Africa and the following excerpt is another of such an example. With the attack on her person in mind Lucy touches on something historical, namely the dark past of South Africa:

‘It was so personal,’ she says. ‘It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was . . . expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them.’ He waits for more, but there is no more, for the moment. ‘It was history speaking through them,’ he offers at last. ‘A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors.’ (156)

David is in this example trying to comfort her by saying that it really had nothing to do with her as a person but rather her heritage and the misdoings of those who came before her. As the dialogue continues, Lucy also reaches such a conclusion:

‘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? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves.’ (158)
At this time Lucy is onto something interesting and similar to that David recently referred to, namely that it all has to do with the past and that the rape was them collecting for old misdoings. As if they were taking revenge on someone who is white by physically raping them, because of the “colonial rape” that the white population has sustained on them, their ancestors and their country throughout history and apartheid. So if Lucy had not been white it may not have happened that way, which also David becomes aware of: “‘If they had been white you wouldn’t talk about them in this way,’ he says. ‘If they had been white thugs from Despatch, for instance.’ ‘Wouldn’t I?’ ‘No, you wouldn’t. I am not blaming you, that is not the point. But it is something new you are talking about. Slavery. They want you for their slave.’ ‘Not slavery. Subjection. Subjugation.’” (159). This further shows that it might have been more than an ordinary crime. They wanted revenge and to cite David, subjugation.

As the scene continues, David says: “I must say the following. You are on the brink of a dangerous error. You wish to humble yourself before history. But the road you are following is the wrong one. It will strip you of all honour; you will not be able to live with yourself. I plead with you, listen to me.” (160). David tries to show Lucy that honor and similar values are important and that there are boundaries for how much one can sacrifice before losing oneself. Lucy’s response to this is that even if it is wrong she still cannot leave because that would render her defeated. She also claims that David is not the right guide for her right now and that he resembles one of the three chimpanzees, the one with paws over his eyes (161). Here even Lucy addresses the issue of David not seeing the world in its true light and that he is somehow disconnected from South Africa.

In these examples the differences between the old and the young also becomes clearer. David and Ettinger are probably most concerned with losing pride and honor and argue that Lucy, and perhaps that entire generation, is headed in the wrong path. Lucy claims that even if that is so, that is the only path available. I find this to be a metaphor for South Africa and the future. Lucy disagrees with David and tries to tell him that there is more than pride and honor.

2.1.2.2 A Changing Society: Interactions with Petrus

The differences between father and daughter are many in Disgrace and one such difference, rendering her chapter shorter than his, is that you never know her inner thoughts as opposed to David, whose interior life we are privy to as readers. While this provides fewer examples of Lucy’s own thoughts, it is not really a problem, since Lucy is portrayed as the kind of person who speaks her mind freely. Her general view of the world and her personality also gives the impression of someone who has adapted to the new South Africa, making her different from
David who often feels a bit out of place. This is also an impressive feat since many of the most horrible things that happen in Disgrace befall her and not David. Other differences derive from the fact that he lives in the city, and she does not. Most often the clash is of a cultural nature, however, since David is much more culturally westernized. In the novel, a common way of portraying Lucy as down-to-earth appears through dialogues she has with her father about Petrus. The following dialogue is one such example which also shows David’s and Lucy’s differences in opinion:

‘Petrus is a pennypincher. In the old days it would have been an ox’ ‘I’m not sure I like the way he does things – bringing the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with the people who are going to eat them.’ ‘What would you prefer? That the slaughtering be done in an abattoir, so that you needn’t think about it?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Wake up, David. This is the country. This is Africa.’ (124)

I find that this is a clash between the old and the new, where Lucy points out that David is naïve. David wants the food but not the mental picture of where it comes from. Lucy also points out that in the old days it would have been an ox which makes this an example of how Petrus is honoring the pre-colonial ways of life, which Lucy has no troubles with. This is Africa after all, as she points out. David on the other hand seems repulsed by this idea and would rather remain ignorant to such dealings. David approaches this from a Eurocentric, western perspective and finds it absurd to acquaint the guests with the food.

By observing these dialogues about Petrus, one becomes further aware of the economic change that has taken place in South Africa.

Will he pay me a wage for my labour, do you think?’ ‘Ask him. I’m sure he will. He got a Land Affairs grant earlier this year, enough to buy a hectare and a bit from me. I didn’t tell you? The boundary line goes through the dam. We share the dam. Everything from there to the fence is his. He has a cow that will calve in the spring. He has two wives, or a wife and a girlfriend. If he has played his cards right he could get a second grant to put up a house; then he can move out of the stable. By Eastern Cape standards he is a man of substance. Ask him to pay you. He can afford it. I’m not sure I can afford him any more.’ (77)

The boss/worker relationship that we came in contact with earlier now seems reversed. David might come to work for Petrus who has become a man of substance in the province. David used to be such a man of substance but he has fallen down on the social ladder and now Petrus
can afford him, instead of the other way around. There are also mentions of grants which really put change in focus since Africans used to be forbidden from owning land and now perhaps Petrus is up for a second grant and might also get his hands on Lucy’s farm:

In any event, it is not me he is after, he is after the farm. The farm is my dowry.’ ‘But this is preposterous, Lucy! He is already married! In fact, you told me there are two wives. How can you even contemplate it?’ ‘I don’t believe you get the point, David. Petrus is not offering me a church wedding followed by a honeymoon on the Wild Coast. He is offering an alliance, a deal. I contribute the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection, I am fair game.’ ‘And that isn’t blackmail? (203)

This passage further highlights the fact that the South African countryside in many regards is moving away from western ways, where this serves as an almost medieval example of a proposed vassalage relationship. Lucy is also aware of this when she is saying that there will be no honeymoons or festivities, just a way of surviving, which becomes even clearer as the dialogue continues: “Objectively I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. 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? To Ettinger? It is just a matter of time before Ettinger is found with a bullet in his back.” (204). This further shows the lawlessness of South Africa. People take what they can get in the vast circulatory system which almost resembles Darwinism; survival of the fittest and those that adapt and little room for those that do not “evolve”, like David. Lucy is also portraying David as powerless in these matters, which resembles his own conclusion from the attack earlier; that his more cultivated abilities probably would serve him better elsewhere, in a more European cultural environment. That might be why he offers to send Lucy to Holland because he thinks of her as similar to him, when she in fact is almost his complete opposite.

The ending of this section is an ironic twist that started with David who considered working for Petrus, who has done work for Lucy. Although at the end of it all Lucy becomes a tenant on Petrus’s land, which used to be hers, and this is done for protection: “But then the child becomes his too. The child becomes part of his family. As for the land, say I will sign the land over to him as long as the house remains mine. I will become a tenant on his land.’ ‘A bywoner.’ ‘A bywoner.’” (204). A bywoner is a tenant-farmer in Afrikaans according to the annotations by Cary Henson in the 1999 edition of Disgrace (5). The relationship for these characters is therefore reversed from when we got to know them in the beginning of Disgrace,
where Lucy now works on Petrus’s land and pays rent to him. When Lucy and David discuss this marriage and living proposal one is yet again reminded of this society’s changes:

‘How humiliating,’ he says finally. ‘Such high hopes, and to end like this.’ ‘Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not without nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.’ ‘Like a dog.’ ‘Yes, like a dog.’ (205)

Lucy is here on to something which resembles the thought that David has had regarding circulation: At one time the white people in South Africa were rich and had everything at the expense of the poor black labor. Although now, with democracy, everyone is entitled to the country’s riches and in order for everyone to have a piece of the pie, the white population has to give some of it up and start anew together with South Africa as a whole. Lucy is thereby acting like a sort of vanguard for unselfish white behavior by following the new postcolonial South Africa, setting aside things like honor. Honor is also something that primarily the wealthy and privileged are concerned with but it comes second to survival. First you have to acquire the most basic things in life and Lucy is here trying to secure her own, and her future child’s, survival.

To her, pride and honor would only hurt her chances of that. David on the other hand still views the world with his Eurocentric glasses, in which he still has his old privileges intact and expects nothing less. He has therefore not understood that his honor and pride more often hurt him than it does him good throughout the book. I think that David does not really mind that South Africa is changing from apartheid, but he does mind that he is the one having to give something up. Up until recently he had somehow been unaffected by the changes and he might even have saluted them, since his life remained the same.

In the end however, I think that Lucy’s nature reaches David on some level as he compliments her: “But you go ahead. You are well on the way.’ A good person. Not a bad resolution to make, in dark times.” (216). My interpretation is that David learns through Lucy that sacrifice is a necessity if this country is going to heal. I also think that David on some level wishes that he too could be more like his daughter and one hope that he has learned something during his journey or rather, during his fall from grace.
2.2 Analysis of How to Use the Novel in the ESL Classroom

My primary intention with using this novel in the English classroom was to use it across the curriculum, rather than as a mere language tool. This approach goes hand in hand with the philosophy of content-based instruction and the theme-based approach of the same since *Disgrace* is a novel. Stryker and Leaver would classify it as a theme-based approach since reading *Disgrace* is a grammar-disrupting activity, which is a central aspect of language acquisition according to CBI. I would argue that the novel is also educational and a good addition to other subjects that deal with some of the many social and cultural aspects that surfaces in *Disgrace*. It would, for instance, be a handy supplement across the curricula when students are familiarizing themselves with African history, culture and colonialism in other subjects, such as History.

That such a cross-curricula approach would be a good way to work towards becomes further evident through LGR 11, which in the English section highlights the ability to: “reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used.” (32). *Disgrace* gives ample opportunities to reflect upon living conditions in post-apartheid South Africa, both in the countryside and in the city. The novel also provides the pupils with an example of an English speaking area and a former colony that has different social and cultural standards than other areas and former colonies, such as Canada. So by reading *Disgrace* in English and combining its central themes with the knowledge they have in other subjects the pupils are provided with a fuller picture of the situation as well as being able to find it more rewarding in accordance to LGR 11 and CBI.

*Disgrace* also offers many usages specifically for the English classroom as well as across the curriculum. Firstly, it is written by a Nobel Prize awarded author which offers the students a good example of the written language as well as an adequate challenge in interpreting it. LGR 11 also states that pupils in years 7-9 should be receptive to: “How texts and spoken language can be varied for different purposes and contexts.” (34). This is something that can be found in *Disgrace*, since Coetzee alters the language depending on what context he is aiming at. He even mixes English with other languages such as Afrikaans and German at times to set certain moods or to portray characters in certain ways. This is also educational for the pupils since it highlights ways to use the language to say more than what is necessarily written and therefore it also becomes a good exercise in the ability to read between the lines.
Languages and South Africa is also a complex phenomenon which could lead to an interesting discussion in class. Because within the compound of South African language a complex mixture of colonialism, status, class, identity, tradition and history can be found. So an open discussion in English in class concerning why Coetzee uses Xhosa, Afrikaans, words derived from German or the dialect of Kaaps at times would be a good exercise in the verbal use of English as well as the ability to see hidden messages about society in the text.

As a more tangible approach one could use *Disgrace* as a way of learning new words in English. The pupils could choose English words from the novel which they found to be difficult and then the class could do something with them together. One could do a short test with these words or integrate them by writing a short story about something else. That way the pupils could get experience in how to use these words in other self-selected scenarios so that they could remember them more easily. And an important part of being fluent in a language derives from having a large vocabulary to draw from.

The pupils could also be tasked with other assignments such as handing in a book review of *Disgrace*, or use it as a comparison to another novel. The other novel could be the pupil’s choice as long as they could motivate why that might be an interesting comparison to draw et cetera. Such a comparison could involve a tale from other British colonies, a tale about South Africa during apartheid or perhaps by using a black and/or female narrator in post-apartheid South Africa or other English speaking areas with a colonial past. This exercise would further show how cultural and social living standards are different in different times as well as in different parts of the world. An alternative to a book review could also be to task them with writing a prequel or a sequel to the story instead. That might be a more preferable and enjoyable task in the pupils’ minds as well as it would yield a similar result, namely an exercise in how to use the written language as a tool to reach a certain goal or content. There are also theatrical opportunities that one could use instead of more classical approaches with grammar tests and so on. The pupils could for instance be placed in groups and present, film or play out different scenes from the book. This would serve as an exercise in the verbal use of English as well as the ability to speak in front of a crowd; but might also be a more joyful learning experience.

You could also use *Disgrace* as a way to practice spoken English in small discussion groups. This is also something that LGR 11 states that pupils should be trained in: “Language strategies to contribute to and actively participate in conversations by taking the initiative in interaction, giving confirmation, putting follow-up questions, taking the initiative to raise new issues and also concluding conversations.” (35). By applying this method of small groups one
could call forth their own cross-curriculum knowledge from other subjects and let them discuss different aspects of *Disgrace*. Why did David refer to that or why did Lucy say this in that manner and how does Coetzee portray apartheid in this section and so on. The teacher’s input in these sessions could also be kept at a minimum since the essence is to let the pupils discuss it amongst themselves. After everyone has participated in these small sessions, a large class discussion could summarize the findings. That way everyone can take part of the discussions that each group had.

Potential usages of the novel are many and I think that by applying CBI one also offers a way to keep the pupils interested. That way they use English to solve actual tasks instead of learning irregular verbs for a test result. There are times when such a grammatical-structural method is useful as well but continual use may have the risk of causing the pupils to lose interest, whereas CBI tries to keep the pupils motivated and stimulated so that the knowledge will stay with them even after class.

### 3. Conclusion

An interesting thing I found about *Disgrace* is that Coetzee portrays the violence in South Africa with such a crude clarity and also often with such a high amount of indifference, that it strikes me that much of the violence from *Disgrace* must be gathered from real life in South Africa and that it must be almost commonplace there. South Africa seems to be a hard place to live in so perhaps one has to distance oneself with irony, common logic and indifference otherwise one could go mad, which David at one point also points out. He is, for instance, not remotely surprised that his home has suffered a break-in and he often portrays things with irony. The criminal aspect, however, is probably something that has to do with the history of South Africa, given that it has had violent demonstrations and in many ways a criminal state for many years, so crime may have become commonplace. One should bear in mind, however, that it is only a story with fictional characters, so the amount of parallels one can draw to actual society is naturally limited.

Some characters in *Disgrace* represent a view of a South Africa that is changing for the worse, but they are almost exclusively white. I doubt that Petrus, who is currently doing well by Eastern Cape standards or Mr. Isaacs, thinks that it was better some decades ago. So what we really are seeing in *Disgrace* is the white population falling from power and losing their privileges in the process. The realization that this takes place all around these characters also leads to a feeling of bitterness for many of the involved. Almost every character in
*Disgrace* that speaks of South African society speaks ill of it, but these characters are also almost exclusively white. The black characters rarely speak of the society’s structure or any thought of emigration, which leads me to think that they are content with the situation.

These more bitter characters compare South Africa to a time when they had privileges and the rest of the population did not. Their take on the changes is therefore a rather subjective and unfair one. David’s house has been robbed, he has been attacked and he has in general lost everything. Lucy speaks of starting over from the ground up since she also has lost close to everything. Even more minor characters like Dawn speaks of moving away, something that Ettinger’s children already have done and Ettinger himself might end up killed one of these days, according to Lucy (204). In reality, however, South Africa has taken several steps towards a more equal and democratic society but *Disgrace* is showing that even such a good turn of events can have a downside for the people who end up in-between, which on some level the white population do. This is understandable, in a way, since *Disgrace* focuses on the previously privileged and “wealthy”, white characters and it is their wealth that now is being redistributed for the good of all. Petrus is a character that ends up with more possessions than he started out with for instance, as he reclaims his past.

I would say that bitterness is a key word in the novel and an impression that many characters convey. Because at times *Disgrace* is more of a grand revenge saga taking place, as Lucy’s rape is an example of. David also touches on this subject when he refers to Lucy’s rape as something coming down from the ancestors. So bitterness is probably something that can be found on either side. The three criminals that attacked Lucy and David were probably tinged by earlier encounters with white people and perhaps bitter over apartheid’s misdoings. Perhaps they took revenge for injustices that they had been through during apartheid. So the novel illustrates, in a sense, the saying “what goes around comes around”. Lucy also circles around this idea when she says that maybe it is not so bad to start anew.

This also brings out some generational differences that I have observed. Lucy is more perceptive to new South Africa than David is, even though her suffering has been more palpable than his. Older white people like David and Ettinger portray a much more bitter view of the society than Lucy or Petrus does. David has some rather extreme opinions every now and then and even though he is a tarnished person, he is not altogether bad. I think that reflects how damaged his generation has become by such a long exposure to apartheid’s messages. That is why David makes references to institutions that lock people up, how troublesome workers got replaced and why Ettinger no longer cares for the police force. Lucy, on the other hand, is not fond of such mentioning so there seems to be a generational gap.
Lucy’s generation, who intends on staying in South Africa and considers it their cultural as well as geographical home, seems to be generally warmer and more humble, a more hard-working, salt-of-the-earth kind of generation, with the exception of those involved in criminal activities or those, like Dawn, who wants to leave. Those like Lucy do not complain about their situation but rather bears down and makes the best of the situation, for the good of tomorrow.

*Disgrace* also offers a variety of opportunities to teach English in the classroom, as I have tried to show in chapter 2.2. It can be used to educate and train the pupils in many different written and oral activities. Examples of such activities could be book reviews, vocabulary tests, small/large discussion groups and theatrical performances in front of the class, all derived from essential parts of the novel. By also applying the philosophy of a content-based instruction, the hope is to further increase the pupils’ learning experience and to keep them interested in the process. The novel’s theme also works well with cross-curricula collaboration with other subjects, such as the social sciences.
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