

David Iurie in disgrace by j. m. coetzee

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



In *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee we are introduced to David Lurie, the protagonist and narrator of this novel. David Lurie is a 52-year-old divorced man, who lives in Cape Town, South Africa, as a respected romantic poetry professor at a university. His life is full of sexual, non-committed relationships. After being accused of inappropriate behavior with a student, Lurie loses his job at the university and must move in with his daughter, Lucy, in the country. Throughout the novel we see many references to animals, especially in relation to Lurie.

Because he is the narrator of the novel, these animal references lead the reader to believe Lurie is describing himself through these animals. Lurie uses descriptions of animals as a way to describe how he feels about himself. We see Lurie go from a sexually charged predator, to a strange beast who has been hunted, to a dog-man, and then finally to a helpless dog who is ready to be put out of his misery. David Lurie is a predator at the beginning of the novel. He is a man searching for sex, and for the most part he is successful at it.

His first sexual interest he introduces us to is Soraya, a prostitute who he has been going to see for a long time. Lurie describes them having sex by comparing them to snakes engaged in intercourse, "lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest" (Coetzee 5). Being the narrator, this shows the reader how David views himself, as well as Soraya, as cold, scary, almost evil, creatures, like snakes. Snakes give off a very negative emotion because they are dangerous animals, and this comparison leads us to believe David too must be a dangerous animal.

Soraya eventually tries to cut ties with David, but David being the predator he cannot let his prey go. He is able to find Soraya's home phone number and when he calls her she is livid he would cross that line. " But then, what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen's nest, into the home of her cubs? " (Coetzee 10). Soraya is a mother, and feels like David calling her home is going to be a threat to her family, especially her children. The next instance where we see David describing himself as a predator is during his first sexual encounter with his student, Melanie.

David is very persistent in sleeping with Melanie, and once he has finally chased her down he describes the experience as " like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck" (Coetzee 25). He is well aware by making this statement that Melanie does not want to be in this situation with him, but he does not care, he has been chasing this prey for too long to just let it go. This is not the last time David engages Melanie regardless of her strong reluctance however, and Melanie eventually has enough and reports Lurie to the University where he teaches.

David Lurie goes from being the predator, to now being the one who is being chased. He is being chased by the University committee who is investigating David's indiscretions with Melanie. The committee is described by Lurie as " hunters who have cornered a strange beast and do not know how to finish it off. " (Coetzee 56). The tables have turned and Lurie is now this strange beast that has been hunted down. David refuses to apologize however, and instead loses his job.

Lurie could have simply said sorry for his actions and he would have had a chance to keep his position at the University, but in his mind he did not do

anything wrong. He compares himself to an old neighbor's dog, saying that every time a "bitch" would be in the yard the dog would become so excitable that he could not be controlled. The dog was not allowed to go through with his natural desires, which caused the dog to act strange and just run around the garden "with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide. (Coetzee 69). David sees himself in this dog, he is being punished and being told he is not allowed to do something that feels so natural to him. He says that the dog would have preferred to be shot over being denied its natural urges. David chose to be shot (lose his job) when he refuses to express that he did anything wrong by sleeping with Melanie. After losing his job David must go live with his daughter, Lucy, out in the country.

While living with Lucy, David goes through a lot, and through helping take care of her dogs we see a softer side of him through his descriptions of these dogs. "The dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted," (Coetzee 146) Lurie says. He cares about the dogs because he too feels unwanted. "Well, now he has become a dog-man." (Coetzee 146) David is one with these dogs, abandoned and miserable, unable to live the lives they want to be living. The dogs and David are trapped out in the country on a farm just waiting for the end.

David finally does give up and we see this through his decision to put down the dog that he had become very close to, Driepoot, the young dog David "has come to feel a particular fondness for" (Coetzee 214-215). David had bonded with Driepoot, even signing his Opera to the dog at one point. He felt sorry for Driepoot, he felt very much like the dog. In the end of the novel, by choosing Driepoot to be put down "a (his, the dog's) time must come, it

cannot be evaded” and carries the dog, “ the one who likes music” (Coetzee 219), to Bev where he will be killed.

In the last sentence of the novel David states that he is “ giving him up” (Coetzee 220), which is essentially David stating that he is the one giving up. Like Driepoot, David Lurie is being put out of his misery. David Lurie’s life goes through dramatic changes throughout the novel *Disgrace*. A once respected professor, he becomes “ a mad old man who sits among the dogs singing to himself. ” (Coetzee 218). Lurie uses descriptions of animals as a way to describe how he feels about himself.

He goes from a predator whose main focus in life is satisfying his sexual desires, to a man who feels like a ‘ strange beast’ that has been hunted by the University. David then turns to his daughter’s farm where he begins working with dogs and we see a softer David Lurie, a man who feels like the abandoned dogs who are waiting for their end to come. By the end of *Disgrace* we see that David is ready to accept his own end, he wants to be put out of his misery just like he does for the dog he has bonded so much with. Works Cited Coetzee, J. M. *Disgrace*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print.