

Feminine Shame/Masculine Disgrace

A Literary Excursion through Gender and Embodied Emotion

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In both common everyday language and high theory one is liable to find in the meaning of shame the presence of disgrace. Yet this essay will argue that these two concepts are quite distinct and that there is a particular cultural articulation of shame and disgrace that runs counter to the normative understanding of their symbiotic unity. Specifically, I argue that the primary difference is that where shame is embodied, or an emotion fundamentally *of* the body, disgrace is facialised and thus able to rid itself of the body in its capacity as the privileged representative of the face. Disgrace contains within its discursive structure the promise of transcendence unavailable to shame because it is able to unburden itself of the restrictions of materiality. This distinction thus reveals itself to be gendered in character in its reprisal of the familiar Cartesian dialectic. In this sense, the cultural and metaphysical meaning of shame takes on a feminine character through its association with the body. This is further reinforced by the historical positioning of the female body as privileged representative of sexual shame. In the final part of the essay I draw from J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* as a text that makes visible the tension between shame and disgrace as one between immanent feminine shame and transcendent masculine disgrace.¹ In this instance, the literary text functions as a tangible demonstration of the gendered constellation of the two terms.

English-language speakers usually invoke shame and disgrace to mean the same thing; that is, a feeling of deficiency in the self which is entirely contingent upon the real or imagined presence of judging others. The dictionary definitions certainly *appear* to overlap: the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter OED) definition of disgrace (noun and verb forms) includes 'loss of general or public respect; ignominy, shame'; 'put to shame'; 'bring shame or discredit on'; and 'a cause of shame or reproach'.² Under 'shame' we find a far greater range of meanings and expressions, including 'disgrace; loss of esteem or reputation' 'infliction of disgrace or injury' and 'a person who or thing which is the cause or source of disgrace'.

And yet, even in the intermingling of shame and disgrace there is a curious and subtle difference to be observed, in the sense that disgrace acts as the messenger of shame, as that which 'brings', 'puts' or 'inflicts' shame upon a person. Moreover, when the fuller meanings of the two terms are taken into account, further qualifications can be discerned. Consider, for instance, the composition of disgrace as a despoiled externalised image and a demotion in public stature or rank in the following: 'loss of high favour or respect, downfall from a position of honour'; 'degrade from a position of honour'; 'Spoil the (esp. outward) grace of'; 'disfigure'. By contrast, shame, in the noun form, is described in explicitly emotional terms as the 'feeling of humiliation or distress arising from the consciousness of something dishonourable or ridiculous in one's own or another's behaviour or circumstances, or from a situation offensive to one's own or another's sense of propriety or decency'. In the verb form, the act of shaming means 'cause to feel shame', 'cause to feel or appear inferior in comparison'.

Nowhere do we find in any of the OED definitions of disgrace an indication that it is a *feeling*. Disgrace is brought from without ('put to shame'), or is directed outward from its source ('a person who or thing which is the cause or source of disgrace'). The disfigurement implicit in disgrace concerns only the external appearance or figure; to 'disfigure' is to spoil, deform or deface an *appearance*. These accretions of meaning lead me to surmise that the two terms are indicative of a variation in proximity to the self. On the one side, shame affixes to the ego, and on the other, disgrace claims the public persona, the outward-facing self visible to others. In describing shame as the 'mental picture of disgrace', Aristotle locates it in the ego, with disgrace as the public loss of the other's good opinion.³

While shame is an emotion, disgrace can be described as an ‘incorporeal event’ in proximity to the former. Disgrace is thus a transitive *external* event that disfigures outward appearance and reduces social station; it is also an incorporeal conduit for the autonomic affect of shame (for example, blushing). If shame appears in public, it does so through the body. Shame is experienced in and through the body—as a blush, a turning away of the head, a lowering of the eye—but disgrace is an incorporeal expression of disfigurement of the abstract face one turns toward others. Loss of face, or social standing, in this sense, is an ‘incorporeal transformation’, a statement in language attributable to a body that experiences a change in its state of affairs.⁴ As Deleuze and Guattari explain it, incorporeal transformations are statements that apply certain attributes to bodies:

Bodies have an age, they mature and grow old; but majority, retirement, any given age category, are incorporeal transformations that are immediately attributed to bodies in particular societies. ‘You are no longer a child’: this statement concerns an incorporeal transformation, even if it applies to bodies and inserts itself into their actions and passions.⁵

It is in this sense that disgrace is a transition or a temporal passage; it is a transitive effect. The ‘expression’ of disgrace transforms the elevated to the base. Where shame infects and spreads contagion through skin feeling (feeling ashamed of oneself and feeling ashamed on behalf of someone else are, as Sedgwick has demonstrated, proximate), disgrace traverses the edges of bodies in time.⁶ Disgrace is concerned with image management—as the progenitor of ‘public relations’—whereas shame exposes a vulnerability within personhood itself as that which ‘strikes deepest into the heart of man.’⁷ Shame ‘is the place where the *question* of identity arises most originarily and most relationally.’⁸ In this sense, shame reifies social disgrace *in the person* as an ontological quality.

The reason that shame is so wrenchingly painful is because it exposes an intractably flawed selfhood—a ‘true’ self, if you will. The link between shame and truth is conveyed in nineteenth-century naturalist Alexander von Humboldt’s description of the blush as a revelation of deceit: ‘How can those be trusted who know not how to blush?’⁹ Burgess (1839) narrates a similar tale of the role of the blush in exposing duplicity. He tells of his experience at a hypnotism demonstration given by French exponent of Animal Magnetism, Baron du Potet. After the Baron

pinches and pricks his participant's skin with pins, to show her insensibility as proof of her hypnotic state, a fly wanders across her face and the onlookers notice her cheek muscles move. The baron can't explain it and one disbelieving audience member suggests rather pointedly that the woman herself could perhaps explain the occurrence, whereupon, in Burgess' account, the Baron's female participant betrays the display as a trick—with a blush:

An intense blush, in which not only the face, but the neck, chest, and ears of the magnetised lady were engaged, immediately succeeded this remark; it was a satisfactory answer to the gentleman's charge of deception on the girl's part, and needs no further comment. It is another striking illustration of the soul and conscience being ever on the watch to side with truth and justice against the deceitfulness of the human heart.¹⁰

Thus, Burgess elaborates upon his notion of the 'True Blush' as the external disclosure of a private felony. This is why shaming the other is such a powerful mechanism for the regulation of social identity within unequal power structures. If shame (or shamelessness) can be found to reside within persons, quite apart from disgraceful actions, it then becomes bound to processes of social abjection (like racism, sexism and homophobia) justified on the basis of degeneracy as a constitutional characteristic; shame is thus an emotion which can be called upon to reveal the truth of the debased soul through the body.

In the dominant sexual narratives of Western culture, especially in psychoanalytic discourse, shame is ontologically buried in the female genitals as that which not only already is concealed (in comparison to the upstanding self-evident visibility of the penis) but also *ought* to be concealed. Freud's work is particularly enlightening because of the way it makes visible strongly held cultural beliefs about shame's sexed location: 'Shame, which is considered to be a feminine characteristic *par excellence* ... has as its purpose, we believe, concealment of genital deficiency.'¹¹ In addition, the *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* makes reference to the shameful status of the female genitals in declaring the word 'c**t ... a nasty name for a nasty thing', the typographic censorship via asterisk notwithstanding.¹² More recently, in a 2001 study on female genital slang terms used in Britain, Braun and Kitzinger found that, compared with male genitalia, 'female genitalia were significantly more likely to be described euphemistically', suggesting a persistent

attachment of the female genitals to shame.¹³ And, most recently, a furore erupted in US politics when the Michigan State representative Lisa Brown was barred from speaking on the floor of the State House when she invoked the word 'vagina' in a speech criticising further state regulation of abortion. House Speaker James Bolger justified his silencing of Brown on the grounds of 'lack of decorum'.¹⁴ But the seventeenth-century female-specific meaning of shame found in the OED is especially arresting. The noun form of shame contains the following definition: 'A woman's loss of chastity or a violation of her honour.' The question to be posed here is if shame and disgrace are so aligned, then why do we not find this definition under the latter term? I would suggest it is because central to the figuration of shame as feminine are Western cultural narratives obsessed with female chastity and sexual violation.

The violability or 'honour' of the female body has a quite particular historical relationship to shame. In her article 'The Shame of the *Rose*: A Paradox', Mary Flannery argues that medieval femininity was governed by, and valued according to, the concept of honour as the preservation of chastity.¹⁵ Shame was the barrier erected to protect female honour and prevent licentiousness, but the by-product of this alliance was that female honour also came to be defined by violability. Flannery turns to the thirteenth-century poem *Le Roman de la Rose* to illustrate the paradoxical relationship between the feminine imperative to maintain bodily honour and the masculine duty to vanquish it. For Flannery, the 'troubling treatment' of female shame in the poem puts women in a contradictory position, where they are 'expected to adhere to honourable ideals of female shamefastness while ideals of masculine behaviour read this shamefastness as something to be overcome—if necessary, through force'.¹⁶ Female restraint, the protection of her privates and her withdrawal into the private sphere was to be distinguished from masculine activity in the public sphere and aggressiveness.¹⁷ Flannery demonstrates that female genital shame and privacy are explicitly linked, so that for a medieval woman to occupy public space is to break the code of feminine propriety: 'only "shameless" or dishonourable women—women with little or no apparent sense of or sensitivity to shame—inhabit it'.¹⁸ The spurious 'protection' of privacy turns out not to be much of a protection at all, especially where medieval law was concerned:

According to medieval codes of law, rape and female honour *defined* each other. A woman could only be the victim of rape if she was 'honourable'—that is to say, if she was chaste. And an honourable woman was defined by her steadfast adherence to sexual continence, which could only be damaged against her will—that is to say, through rape.¹⁹

The terrible paradox to which Flannery refers is that if rapability defines honour, then it becomes impossible for women to uphold an honour already defined by its violation.

The construction of female honour evident in medieval rape law also automatically implies a distinction between women who do not defend their honour and those who do. In current terminology, this equates to a difference between 'sluts' and 'ladies'. Beverly Skeggs notes that the construction of the 'lady' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a classed one that coded white middle-class femininity as respectable.²⁰ As a 'classed sign', femininity was immersed in power relations and could be called upon in the service of marking out differences between self and other: 'Working-class women—both Black and White—were coded as the sexual and deviant other against which femininity was defined.'²¹ Feminine shame thus has a classed and raced dimension, in addition to the articulation of shame as a barrier to be broken down by masculine sexual activity, or, in Freudian terms, as the hollow space where a penis should be. The attachment of shame to abjected identity (for example the female-specific identity of the 'slut') invokes a timeless, eternal essence indelibly marked on the body. Disgrace, by contrast, is temporally dependent, and experienced as a public event. The downward slide from lady to slut is not simply a disgraceful fall from respectability, but is embodied as shame in the genitals themselves. Further, women who embody sexual deviance are already shamed by dint of their oppositional relation to respectable femininity, a shame that is cast as eternal and essential difference.

What I am particularly concerned with here is the shame of the other as an embodied difference that does not have the same claim to humanity and respect as disgrace. To be disgraced one must first occupy a position of honour, which is founded upon the principle of equality—to hold someone in high regard is to accept that person as possessing characteristics that one values in oneself. Given that virginity is a defining feature of femininity that is over-valued in female bodies—and

essential to the meaning of virile masculinity as the obstacle to be overcome—what we find is that there is a specific *heterosexual* organisation of desire that positions male and female bodies differently in relation to dishonour. This means that shame's gender-specific attachment to virginity is that which allows it to attach to the female body as the locus of its 'natural' habitat. Shame thus becomes a naturalised attribute of the female body not only because of its association with the body—signified in phallogentric Western thought as Woman—but also because of its connection to the eternal feminine defined through essential violability. Shame does not have quite the same intractable relationship to the male body, which is more culturally disposed to bearing the signs of disgrace.

Take, for instance, the public disgrace of former US president Bill Clinton, impeached on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice for asking intern Monica Lewinsky to lie about their extra-marital affair. Although Clinton was seen to disgrace the public office and offend public morality because of his perceived inability to control his wandering penis/cigar, this is countered by the culturally validated assumption that male promiscuity is not inherently shameful but is, in fact, valorised; it was not that the essential nature of the body itself defined his (in)capacity to represent the people, but *what he did* with it. Clinton could never have been a 'slut' or a 'whore' (derogatory epithets that are qualitatively inapplicable to heterosexual men in Western culture), but he was a man who disgraced himself through sexual licentiousness. The press pointedly drew attention to Clinton's capacious 'appetites' and his 'powerful and often successful urge to be all things to all people'.²² Clinton was characterised as 'the man who can eat an apple in one bite'.²³ Voters described him as a 'bad boy' and a 'rogue', language that carries the connotation of the charming ladies' man.²⁴ One columnist expressed pity for the 'likable and boyish President', while another suggested that voters perceived Clinton as the 'embattled underdog' whose history of philandering was no public secret.²⁵ It was Clinton's very expansiveness and ability to command respect—not his sex—that served as the foundation for his disgrace. In effect, Clinton was a great man with desires to match. Certainly he was disgraced by them, but whether he was shamed is a different matter.

On the one hand, Clinton represents the disgrace of a 'red-faced lech who can't keep it zipped', but on the other, he is also the embodiment of a culturally

sanctioned understanding of masculine virility which holds that it is in the nature of a penis to wander, often where it shouldn't!²⁶ His heterosexuality protected him from fully inhabiting the shameful body of the other—he was never completely abjected. Rather, the shame was referred, experienced as a violation of the public body and a blot on the American presidency. As one letter-writer put it, 'Clinton is a disgrace to the office; he should not be a representative of our country. I'm ashamed to say he is our president.'²⁷ In other words, Clinton 'fucked' the people metaphorically with his sexual disgrace—those in the anti-Clinton camp saw themselves carrying the President's shame. For those who were more supportive, the scandal was a sign of his humanity and right to sexual privacy. Comedian Jay Leno suggested at the time that it may have even boosted Clinton's ratings because of its humanising effect in making the President 'look like one of the people'.²⁸

In fact, this is exactly what happened to Australia's former prime minister, Kevin Rudd. In the lead-up to the federal election in 2007, the then Labor leader Rudd was discovered to have visited a New York strip club while opposition Foreign Affairs spokesman. The incident—in the tradition of attaching the 'gate' suffix to all disgraceful political incidents since Watergate—was to become jokingly known as 'Strippergate'. It is well documented in the press that the public exposure of Rudd's visit to a strip joint actually revitalised and improved his public image. Up until that point his persona had been perceived as overly austere and wholesome; the Australian public thus considered his indiscretion a humanising influence. In this sense, masculine disgrace (Strippergate) is experienced as a transitory slip in moral conduct, but feminine shame (being a slut) is embodied in the desiring vagina. Further, Rudd's disgrace appears as merely a contagious effect of the *real* site of shame: the stripper's exposed female body.

In the breathless verbiage of the indomitable detective Monsieur Jackal, *cherchez la femme*: 'look for the woman'. The phrase alludes to an exceptionalism by which the inscrutable or uncharacteristic actions of honourable men may in the final analysis be attributed to the irresistible allure of a woman. For both Clinton and Rudd, their disgrace was occasioned by Woman—or as Clinton declared, '*that woman*'—as the proper location of shame. As journalist Maureen Down wrote of Lewinsky and her infamous semen-stained dress, 'What kind of a girl saves such a

trophy, much less sends it to her mother for safekeeping?'²⁹ What kind of girl indeed?

These examples illustrate that the gendered contours of dishonour reveal that the source of a heterosexual man's shame is a woman, while the source of a woman's shame is her own body, its violability and secretiveness (for the penis is always already self-evidently on display). To put it bluntly, naked male desire is not shameful, *per se*, most simply because in a sexist culture, it's *expected*. Female desire, on the other hand, is more porous to shame. Male heterosexual desire enjoys the relative privacy of being a cultural given, but female desire is so laden with negativity and ambivalence that it feels the twist of shame to its core. The disgrace visited upon high profile men caught in brothels or strip clubs (with their 'pants down', as it were) passes and is forgiven—or at the very least understood as naturally belonging to the virile male body—as the headlines fade from view, but the shame of sex work, for example, perseveres in the irredeemable personage of the 'whore' and her brazenly unconcealed genitals.

—FEMININITY AND EMBODIED SHAME

I suggest that the feminised, or gendered, condition of shame lies in the being of a body for-the-other. I turn to Thomas Fuchs's 'corporealized body' as crucial to establish the distinction I wish to draw between the bodily materiality of feminine shame and the abstract disembodiment of masculine disgrace.³⁰ For Fuchs, shame arises when the prereflective continuity of the lived body—the imminent body that one lives through but does not think about—is broken by the unbidden appearance of the corporeal, self-aware body. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty, Fuchs argues that the experience of shame calls forth a 'body-for-others', in which one is made to recognise one's own body as an object for the other.³¹ One views one's body as though from the outside looking in. Fuchs makes an arresting and necessary intervention into the prior discussion on shame: shame is not only a *self*-conscious emotion, it is also *body*-conscious. There is a *bodiliness* of the self-as-other that one is made to feel in shame, which interposes upon the lived body. The jolt of corporealisation that shame induces replaces my body as a 'field of expression' with a 'foreign body' crudely objectified, sapped of its internal life and divested of transcendent possibility.³² When, in shame, the life of the prereflective lived-body

comes up against the intransigent, corporealised body-for-others, this violent discomfiture is revealed in expression, gesture and physiological change. In shame, the body forces an awareness in us of its presence: we may turn our eyes downward to avoid the searing look of contempt, or cover the face with our hands, avert the head or the body; we may hunch our shoulders, to make the body seem smaller, to shrink from the other's gaze; and we cannot help but notice the hot flush of colour on our cheeks, the sudden clamminess of hands, the race of heartbeat in the moment of shameful discovery. The intense awareness of embodiment in shame 'turns my hidden centrality inside out' and alienates my body from myself.³³ It performs an incredible feat of Cartesian proportions at the same time as it places the self most trenchantly within a body that wants nothing more than to disappear from view. The pain of shame as the 'incorporated gaze of the other' is explained through a jarring, abject positionality of 'this is me-this is not me'; the 'ashamed person *doubles* by perceiving herself from the outside'.³⁴

Fuchs's concept of 'corporealisation' has significant implications for a feminist or gendered reading of shame—such as is pertinent to the distinction between feminine shame and masculine disgrace—not least because Simone de Beauvoir had already explored this very conflict (between the lived and the corporealised body) as the generalised condition of female existence. Beauvoir could well have been talking about Fuchs's state of shame when she elaborates upon the painful, wrenching subjectivity of woman, imprisoned in an animal body that is nonetheless endowed with a capacity to extend itself existentially. It is the inessential, objectified, or 'corporealised', body that explains the problem of woman's paradoxical (in)existence, in which she 'assumes herself as both *self* and *other*'.³⁵ This theme has also been taken up by Iris Marion Young in her influential essay 'Throwing like a Girl', in which she argues that the modality of feminine bodily experience is structured by a paralysing conflict between the transcendental activity that characterises the lived body and the frustrated potentiality of a body drawn into itself in immanence. The central feature of this 'ambiguous transcendence' is the curtailment of possibilities in the world achievable by uninhibited intentionality expressed through directed and coordinated action.³⁶ This establishes an ambiguity about what the female subject can and cannot achieve, for in bodily existence 'an "I cannot" may appear to set limits to the "I can" ... By repressing or withholding its

own motile energy, feminine bodily existence frequently projects an “I can” and an “I cannot” with respect to the very same end’.³⁷

If the condition of shame outlined by Fuchs can be generalisable to the basic condition of feminine embodiment, as theorised by de Beauvoir and Young, then it provides a compelling explanation for Sandra Bartky’s postulate that women are ‘more prone’ to experiencing feelings of shame than men.³⁸ Bartky observes in women ‘a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy that, like the shame of embodiment, is profoundly disempowering; both reveal the “generalized condition of dishonour” which is women’s lot in sexist society’.³⁹ I would, however, modify Bartky’s assumption of an analogous relationship between subjective personal inadequacy and the shame of embodiment, given the phenomenological arguments provided by de Beauvoir and Young. If we accept their thesis that the body is fundamental to subjective experience then, logically, the shame of personal inadequacy described by Bartky cannot be disentangled from the shame of embodiment, for the subjective self is fundamentally embodied—that is, experienced and constituted through the lived body. To elaborate further, it is possible to think of ‘shame’ as the emotional materialisation of the crippling effects visited upon female subjective transcendental intentionality by the production of a body that is both mine and not-mine.

However, can it really be asserted that all women in sexist society experience their embodied existence so homogeneously? For instance, Bartky contrasts the learning behaviours of her female and male university students to make her point about female shame-proneness. Certainly, the female university student population is perhaps not a particularly representative cohort to be basing a generalisable theory of femininity upon, and one could question the motivations and wisdom of trying to pose a generalisable theory at all. It may also be said that for working-class women, it is the shame of being *unrespectable* that is the greater concern, and which inflects the way in which they embody their femininity.⁴⁰ The same can equally be said about race, sexuality and ability. However, I would attend to such concerns by saying that the long-held association of the female reproductive body with pre-human animality or sexuality is complicated, certainly, but *not erased* through its semiotic doubling in the bodies of working-class women and women of colour. I argue that sexual difference is *a*, but not the *only* or *preternatural*, central lens

through which we can view the distance between shame and disgrace. I suggest, given the historical connection between femininity and the body, that the female body is closer to the corporealising effects of shame than the male body, which is more prone to experiencing disgrace.

—EMBODIED SHAME IN J.M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*

Shame is an emotion with a peculiar textual energy that shares a certain importunate intimacy with the female body, in contrast to the disfiguring work of public disgrace. The narrative power of the gendering of disgrace and shame has a striking presence in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. A deconstructive reading of the text is able to show that the book cannot be understood to be conflating shame and disgrace when the gendered plot that underpins it performs the opposite. In this regard, I take issue with Kossew's contention that *Disgrace* is centrally about a tension between the publicity of shame/disgrace and the possibility of its negotiation through the ethical choices of the everyday.⁴¹ This reading enables Kossew to position 'public disgrace or shame' against 'the idea of individual grace or salvation'.⁴² Such a reading is problematic for two reasons. First, it fails to consider that the promise of salvation may already be a property of disgrace; second, by producing shame and disgrace as tautological it ignores the *analogic* relation between them that is clearly demonstrated in the contrast between Lucy's secret shame (her rape) and her father's public disgrace (his sexual harassment of a female student). I argue, to the contrary, that the central opposition organising the book is not between public and private, but embodied shame and facialised disgrace.

The novel is set in post-apartheid South Africa, but the way in which disgrace and shame interweave in the book reveal a plot that is ostensibly an allegory for race relations, narrativised through gender. As Sedgwick has demonstrated in her analysis of the discourse of rape employed in *Gone with the Wind*, a narrative focus on sexuality can work to obscure or conceal other 'symbolic fractures' in the text, such as race and class relations.⁴³ In the case of *Disgrace*, it is the reverse: the central thematic concern about race relations and post-apartheid reparation makes oblique the 'differentials of power' in gender upon which the text relies for its ethical teleology.⁴⁴ For this reason, the rape discourse in *Disgrace* is extremely problematic,

but it is precisely through this discourse, I argue, that embodied shame in the novel is materialised as feminine.

The protagonist, David Lurie, is a white university professor, expert on Byron, ageing cynic and a serial seducer of women, in an academic job he no longer cares for within an 'emasculated institution of learning'.⁴⁵ By page four, the institution is already allied with phallic feminists and castration anxiety, foreshadowing Lurie's impending struggle to claim his manhood against bureaucratic demands that it be renounced. The theme of white male emasculation resonates with the attempts at land redistribution by the African National Congress (ANC) and the land seizures by Mugabe. There are three central narrative arcs that punctuate the plot of *Disgrace*: David Lurie's disgrace as a man accused of sexual harassment; his white daughter Lucy's rape by black men who also disfigure Lurie by setting him alight; Lucy's decision to keep the baby conceived through rape coupled with Lurie's redemption through becoming the 'dog-man'.

Shame is glaringly present in *Disgrace*, insinuating itself into the bodies of the women, with (Lurie's) disgrace as its adjacent complement. Shame makes its first appearance in Melanie Isaacs, the student with whom Lurie will have an affair. Lurie invites her into his home: 'He stares, frankly ravished. She lowers her eyes', and leaves.⁴⁶ When they have sex for the first time, she averts her face; when next they meet, in the pouring rain, 'her face is flushed'; in class, she avoids his gaze—'her eyes meet his and in a flash see all. Confused, she drops her glance'; and in the final, not to mention disturbing, sex scene, 'all she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes'.⁴⁷ Shame first makes itself known in Melanie's body, reaching a disquieting intensity in the final sex scene, disturbing because it obliquely presents itself as the scene of rape:

She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes. She lets him lay her out on the bed and undress her: she even helps him, raising her arms and then her hips. Little shivers of cold run through her; as soon as she is bare, she slips under the quilted counterpane like a mole burrowing, and turns her back on him.

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nonetheless, 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.⁴⁸

There is no doubt, to my mind, that Lurie's negation—'not rape'—is the adjectival phrase that *removes* the ambiguity of a passage which cannot now be describing anything other than rape. At the same time, its correlate—'not quite that'—alters the definitive meaning of 'not' through the addition of the adverb 'quite', softening the tone and introducing doubt. By the close of the passage, one is left to wonder whether the word 'no' has any valency at all outside David Lurie's appropriation of it. This culmination of Lurie's flirtation with Melanie instantiates the gendered narrative structure of the book by establishing an irrevocable connection between rape, shame and the female body, and the masculine correlate of desire and disgrace.

After the seduction of Melanie, Lurie is hauled before a disciplinary panel, which tries to elicit from him a confession of moral guilt. Lurie refuses on the basis of protecting his private honour, arguing for a difference between a public admission of guilt and a confession of deep moral weakness: 'It reminds me too much of Mao's China,' he says to Lucy. 'Recantation, self-criticism, public apology. I'm old-fashioned, I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it.'⁴⁹ He goes on to blame this situation on a puritanical and castrating culture, with a refusal that evokes Derrida's criticism of the paradox of freedom of expression evident in democracy, which cannot guarantee the right of reply, though it commands that one must.⁵⁰ The subjective responsibility of democracy, then, is that the subject is obligated to provide an answer. Perhaps Lurie is resisting this compulsion by saying yes (I am guilty) *and* no (I am not morally culpable): 'Freedom of speech. Freedom to remain silent.'⁵¹

More than one literary critic has made note of the problematic gendering of silence in Coetzee's narrative. After her rape, Lucy refuses to bend to Lurie's coaxing to tell 'the whole story', deciding to keep on living in the place where the trauma happened, and resolutely claiming her pain as her own, in marked contrast to her father's sensational disgrace as a man whom she ironically dubs 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know'.⁵² Lucy responds sharply to her father's pleas to give the police a full account of her ordeal:

This has nothing to do with you, David. You want to know why I have not laid a particular charge with the police. I will tell you, as long as you agree

not to raise the subject again. 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.⁵³

Lucy explains that her reasoning is a refusal of the logic of salvation in favour of the painful labour of everyday living with the effects of trauma. Both Lucy and her father's refusals to speak to the police and the university committee is also suggestive of a failure of institutions to effect symbolic reparation. Elleke Boehmer understands Lucy's gesture as a resigned acceptance of the burden of historical violence through the body. Hence, according to Boehmer, 'Lucy, far more than Lurie, becomes *the* human body-in-pain of the text ... As a body she is the non-introspective arbiter of what it is to live the truth of the new South Africa. Even if willingly or unwittingly, she stages, with her sorriness, her pitifulness, an apologia.'⁵⁴ Paul Newman notes that the white male voice is privileged in Coetzee's narrative at the expense of the Other's silence, a problem of vocality which is not necessarily addressed by the 'valorised politics of *not* "speaking for" the Other'.⁵⁵ Both Lucy and Lurie, in their different ways, stage an apology without words, figured in the novel as the work of shame and disgrace—Lucy through her violated body, and Lurie through taking up an identification with the unwanted, uncared-for dogs he euthanases at Bev Shaw's clinic. The institutional requirement of confession could be read as having been substituted by Lucy's and Lurie's lived experience of shame and disgrace as *de facto* forms of apology. As Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness*, 'My shame is a confession'; that is, my shame is a confession of what I am, which is a being for the other.⁵⁶ It could be argued that Lurie never publicly confesses because he imagines his shame speaks his silence. But one might give pause to the question of whether Lurie is actually ashamed. Beneath his dissent lies the deeply problematic conviction that *he hasn't done anything wrong* and the equally problematic narrative defence of what should really be an indefensible crime. Yet because his crime of rape is hidden by ambiguity and negation, it ceases even to *be* a crime. In effect, his right to remain silent, his right to reject confession, is only made possible on the condition of Melanie's sacrificial silence engendered by shame. It is through Melanie's shame that Lurie can claim his humanity, as is made clear to him by a member of the university disciplinary panel: 'You may find this

hard to believe, David, but we around this table are not your enemies. We have our weak moments, all of us, we are only human.⁵⁷ Disgrace affords the opportunity of redemption, as Lucy attests when she tells her father that he has 'paid' his 'price'.⁵⁸ There is the sense here that to suffer disgrace is in itself to be redeemed, that disgrace presupposes a phoenix-like humanity, which rises from its own ashes.

Not only has Lurie's original crime (rape) become euphemised as 'sexual harassment' ('not quite' rape), but the violence of it remains unavowed for two reasons: first, because the shame of rape is projected onto Melanie (and her narrative double, Lucy), and second because the rape of his daughter Lucy is so horrifying and unambiguously violent that the white man's crime undergoes a double erasure through the projection of criminality onto the black rapist. Rape is imagined in the book in terms of degrees of harm: Melanie is merely undesirous and Lucy is brutally violated. 'Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow', Lurie muses in the wake of his lesbian daughter's rape, in what appears as another veiled comparison—was Melanie a virgin?⁵⁹

The scene of Lucy's rape is vastly different. Though we do not witness it—it is Lucy's dark secret to which neither we nor Lurie have access—we know that it is violent and hate-filled: she is pack-raped by a gang of three young black men while Lurie is powerless to save her, helpless and emasculated, having been set alight and locked in the toilet by the intruders. Lurie is disfigured in the process; he loses an ear. The disfigurement implied in 'disgrace' is literalised through Lurie's burned flesh and missing ear. His fate is reminiscent of Edward Rochester's sacrificial immolation for his past sins and bigamist desires in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rochester explains his sexual transgressions in the anxious language of the threat of contamination to white bourgeois purity:

It was a grovelling fashion of existence: I should never like to return to it. Hiring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading. I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Céline, Giacinta, and Clara.⁶⁰

Degradation is here explained as the contagious effects of class and race. Rochester's disgrace—that is, his slide from a position of social privilege—is only occasioned by the people with whom he consorts, especially his reviled 'Creole' wife Bertha, to

whom he refers as his 'disgusting secret'. The fire at Thornfield cleanses Rochester by removing the threat of contamination (Bertha dies) and the loss of his left hand and eyesight become his redemption for his past erotic misdeeds. Though Rochester is physically damaged, he never loses his privileged social status; his disgrace passes because the damage he suffers to his body becomes his redemption. Rochester invokes the white bourgeois family as a sacred barrier against the external contaminants of blackness and working-class femininity.

In *Disgrace*, Lurie's 'disgusting secret' (the rape of Melanie) is deferred onto the body of the black man (the rape of Lucy) who then becomes the bearer of disgust. White femininity is the paradoxical boundary concept for racial contamination *and* reparation. Lucy's decision to have the baby conceived from rape is symbolic of the selfless purity of the eternal feminine, which promises wholeness and completion. Lurie (the white man) is strangely distanced from the larger narrative of racial reconciliation and restitution. In reality, he gives up nothing. The obligation of reparation falls not to him but to the pregnant Lucy. The only attempt at atonement (for his own sins) that Lurie makes is with Melanie's father—a contract of apology and forgiveness enacted between men in a homosocial structure of relations that excludes Melanie herself.

The disfiguration of disgrace is, as I suggested earlier, both a moral punishment and its own reward. Lurie's public disgrace is also his penance, but the same cannot be said for shame. While *Disgrace* attempts to produce an equivalence in value between 'shame' and 'disgrace'—the book is reliant upon this one central dualism: 'Lucy's secret; his disgrace'⁶¹—its narrative organisation of gender conflicts with such naive isomorphism.

Lurie experiences his disgrace as the failure to control his rampant desire, yet he also positions that desire as the seat of his humanity. In one memorable passage, he explains his situation to Lucy through relating a story about a dog beaten by its owners for responding to its sexual instincts whenever a bitch on heat was near:

There was something so ignoble in the spectacle that I despaired. One can punish a dog, it seems to me, for an offence like chewing a slipper. A dog will accept the justice of that: a beating for a chewing. But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts ... What was ignoble about the Kenilworth spectacle was that the

poor dog had begun to hate its own nature. It no longer needed to be beaten. It was ready to punish itself. At that point it would have been better to shoot it.⁶²

Although Lurie identifies with the shamed dog, he's not actually dishonoured in the same way his daughter is; rather, his disgrace allows him to assume his humanity, however flawed or immoral it may appear to others. He retains trust in his desire as that which fundamentally makes him who he is, and which underpins his claim to have been 'enriched' by his string of sexual conquests.⁶³ His sexual liaison with ugly Bev Shaw ('poor Bev Shaw', loyal caretaker of the doomed dogs) appears as penance for his past misdeeds with better-looking women; indeed, his disgust for Bev is so pronounced as to suggest that he considers himself more debased through having sex with her than by his rape of Melanie. 'After the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs, this is what I have come to. This is what I will have to get used to, this and even less than this.'⁶⁴ Bev blushes at his attentions, presumably a sign of shame for her sexual arousal.

Through 'giving up' the dogs and giving up his desire (by fucking Bev Shaw), Lurie learns to love, but how far can that love extend when his own sexual violence remains unacknowledged by him? We do not know what or whom Melanie or Soraya love—they are the ciphers for Lurie's own torturous love affair with himself. As Newman points out, 'the focus on David Lurie's "ethical" suffering' prompts us to question Coetzee's privileging of 'the plight of white masculinity at the expense of the material suffering of women'.⁶⁵ If Lurie does suffer perpetrator shame, it is not because he empathically puts himself in Melanie's place. Rather, Lurie carries his disgrace in the shape of a dog. Being publicly disgraced for unwieldy passions is not the same as living shame materially, in and through the body-for-the-other. This is, I would argue, the primary problem in the text as one that narrates a tale of racial reconciliation through an all too familiar Cartesian plot. As Newman argues, Lurie's white masculine agency is problematically staged through the female body as the figurative ground of its possibility.⁶⁶ In fact, there are body-doubles everywhere. The women—Soraya, Melanie, Lucy, Bev—are the conduits for man's humanity and the source of both his disgrace and redemption: Lucy fulfils the dream of reparation in giving birth to a child of rape; Melanie forces Lurie's self-analysis by being the impetus for his disgrace; Bev and the dogs are the vehicles for his salvation through

degradation; Soraya has a material existence only as a figment of Lurie's desire. The bodies of others—dogs and women—carry the bodily burden of the white man's shame. Boehmer explains that the conditions under which Lurie's animal identification takes place do not hold the same promise of redemption for the women in the story. As she suggests, while a 'feminizing or animalizing atonement represents a meaningful recompense for a man' it is not so for a woman, 'always-already a creature of dumb animality' and for whom 'it is a matter of no change—a continuation of subjection which it would be preposterous to propose as redemptive'.⁶⁷

The female body, as Boehmer's argument suggests, is not only already animal, but also already shamed precisely because of its animal nature. Lurie only comes into contact with shame second-hand, through the animal bodies of others. The dog is a metaphor for his disgrace because it is not something he is able to materially embody, unlike his daughter's visceral shame. As Boehmer writes of Lucy's pain, 'the suffering she thus resolves bodily to endure is *her* suffering, not another's, not a dog's'.⁶⁸ Shame is so inextricably wedded to the raped female body in this story that it is prevented from attaching to white bourgeois masculinity. In fact, the event in which Lurie is burned and loses an ear actually has nothing to do with his disgrace, which was brought about by the sexual harassment case. The marks on Lurie's body are instead a contagious effect of Lucy's shame. When Lucy refuses to go into town after the rape, Lurie surmises it is '[b]ecause of the disgrace. Because of the shame.'⁶⁹ But he is wrong on this count. His daughter is shamed, not disgraced and, semiotically, they don't amount to the same thing. Unlike Lurie, who only experiences shame virally and second-hand, Lucy carries shame in her body, specifically in her vagina and pregnant womb. The necessarily heterosexualised 'family', the imperative of generation, functions as the narrative's salvational teleology. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Disgrace*, social restoration and new beginnings are brought about through a heterosexual familial contract. Lurie imagines it thus: 'The seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman's body, driving to bring the future into being.'⁷⁰ Family, futurity itself, is dependent on the rather arrogant, it must be said, actions of personified sperm which purifies the female body. It is not the sperm that feels shame. From fear of miscegenation and interracial rape to a biracial utopia brought about through reproduction, it is clear

that the family is absolutely central to the notion of unity. The sanctity of the family in this narrative expunges the shame of the female body through its transformation into a holy vessel.

In a rare moment of introspective self-analysis, Lurie asks himself ‘does he have it in him to be the woman?’⁷¹ The book has already given us the answer. The opposition of his disgrace to her shame tells us that he can never be the woman, for to feel the shame of femininity in the gendered hierarchy of difference that the narrative constructs, he must live in and through a female body.

—CONCLUSION

If shame *is* a feminised emotion, then it is because of the fundamental problem of feminine embodiment in a sexist society—as perpetually self-aware—from which it arises. Shame is the one emotion, above all others, that evokes the elemental female dilemma, outlined by de Beauvoir, of having a body that is experienced existentially as a body-for-others. In a sexist culture, shame insinuates itself into the biology of woman such as to make it appear an immutable aspect of female being.

The sexually specific phantasies of a phallogentric social imaginary produce the female body as the privileged site of shame and alibi for the herosexual male body’s sexual disgrace. In order to make visible the operations of gender upon the cultural production of shame, it must be detached from disgrace. The assumption of symbiotic unity in shame-disgrace is incapable of questioning the corporeal/incorporeal taxonomy upon which its coherence is propped. Thus, it is in severing this connection that we can begin to see the way in which disgrace conceals its parasitic dependence upon shame as its negative other. Through applying a gendered analysis, it can be seen that masculine disgrace is rhetorically produced through feminine shame by locating the cause of the former in the subjective position of the latter. This has the effect of absolving masculine interiority by locating shame outside the male subject. In this respect, disgrace is a de-subjectifying process in which shame is deferred and projected onto the objectified body of the other: it is what allows the masculine subject to claim a position of supreme objectivity. At the same time, it is productive of subjectivity insofar as the masculine subject attains its presence through the negation of its othered object. In Coetzee’s novel, David Lurie’s body undergoes a textual erasure, serving only as

witness to his public disgrace. By contrast, it is the two central women in *Disgrace*—Melanie and Lucy—who suffer the full force of embodied shame through rape, which is one of the starkest examples there is (along with slavery) of the shame in being a body-for-the-other.

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