

Post-Apartheid Power Reconfiguration: The Fall of White Power and the Rise of Black Agency in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

Qingdan Zhao

School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan University, Kunming, China
Email: 3417615563@qq.com

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Abstract

Drawing on Michel Foucault's analytics of power, this paper investigates the collapse of white hegemony and the rise of Black agency in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* through a tripartite inversion of power covering epistemic authority, sexual violence and land property. The analysis distinguishes Foucault's disciplinary power, sovereign power and biopower to interpret the power shifts in post-apartheid South Africa. David Lurie's Western literary knowledge once serves as a disciplinary tool to dominate his student Melanie, yet such white intellectual privilege is gradually replaced by Petrus's embodied rural experience. Lurie's discursive exploitation contrasts sharply with Lucy's gang rape, a typical manifestation of sovereign power that reverses colonial bodily oppression. Later, Petrus integrates disruptive sovereign violence into biopolitical governance and gains full ownership of the farm. The study concludes that the racial power transition portrayed in the novel does not mark the end of historical oppression. Instead, it forms a recurring cycle of domination, in which certain formerly marginalized groups inherit and reproduce the original logic of dispossession and control. This integrated Foucauldian framework fills the gap of fragmented theoretical application in existing studies of the novel.

Keywords

J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, Foucault, Power Inversion, Post-Apartheid South Africa

1. Introduction

J.M. Coetzee, a world-renowned South African novelist, is celebrated for his profound explorations of colonialism, apartheid, violence, guilt and human dignity

in works such as *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life & Times of Micheal K* and *Disgrace*. Coetzee (2000) occupies a peculiar position in the landscape of post-apartheid South African literature. Awarded the Booker Prize and subsequently contributing to Coetzee's Nobel Prize in Literature, the novel has generated both critical acclaim and intense controversy.

Set in post-apartheid South Africa in the mid-1990s, the novel depicts the gradual decline of white social status and the rising influence of Black local residents. David Lurie, a privileged white university professor, loses his reputable career and social standing after a sexual misconduct scandal. Forced into exile, he moves to his daughter Lucy's rural farm, where he once enjoyed unquestioned white superiority but now works as a humble manual laborer under the management of Petrus, a Black local farmer who gradually gains control of the land. As white dominance continues to fade, Lucy suffers violent assault by three Black youths yet chooses neither to flee nor to seek justice. Eventually, she relinquishes her land ownership to Petrus, resigning herself to a subordinate life on the property once entirely owned by white settlers.

Seven parts will be given to this paper. The first provides a brief introduction to the novel's historical backdrop and content. The second surveys existing scholarship, identifying research gap that this study addresses. The third elucidates Michel Foucault's theoretical framework on power relations. Parts four through six form the analytical core, investigating three domains where power undergoes radical inversion: first, the dismantling of David Lurie's intellectual hegemony in the university and the emerging of Petrus's expertise on the farm; second, sexual violence as the medium of power, reading both Lurie's "not-rape" of Melanie and Lucy's subsequent gang rape as bodily sites where dominance operates through violation; third, land and property in the post-apartheid transition, examining how redistributive reforms transfer ownership without disrupting the underlying structural logic of dispossession.

Together, the thesis concludes that the novel presents the post-apartheid moment not as the end of oppression in South Africa but as its historical cycle through new agents.

2. Literature Review

Since its publication in 1999, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* has attracted critical attention from diverse theoretical perspectives including postcolonial theory, feminist criticism, ethics, biopolitics, and spatial studies. The novel's ambiguous political stance and its unsettling portrayal of post-apartheid South Africa have made it a focal point for discussions about power, race, gender, and historical transition. This review surveys the existing scholarship along four thematic axes: power relations, gender and sexual violence, land and space, and animal ethics and biopolitics as below.

A substantial body of scholarship has approached *Disgrace* as a literary exploration of power dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa. Beyad and Keramatfar

(2018: p. 157) define the novel as “an interhuman drama where individuals’ relations with one another are sites of power struggles”, emphasizing how interpersonal encounters become microcosms of broader socio-political reconfiguration. Their analysis foregrounds the ways in which David Lurie’s fall from academic prestige and Lucy’s subordination to Petrus dramatize the erosion of white patriarchal privilege. Similarly, [Devaram and Gunasekaran \(2025: p. 552\)](#) examine the “negotiation of otherness, identity, and survival” in Coetzee’s post-apartheid narratives, arguing that Lucy’s refusal of legal recourse after her assault exemplifies “strategic unfreedom” ([Devaram & Gunasekaran, 2025: p. 571](#)), a form of survival that complicates liberal ideals of autonomy and reveals the paradox of “freedom” in the new dispensation.

Complementing these broad power analyses, several scholars have focused specifically on the racial dimension of power inversion in the novel. [Shi \(2012: pp. 52-56\)](#) contends that white South Africans, in the post-apartheid era, are subverted from their dominant, central position in discourse to become marginalized others, a reversal that the novel captures with unsettling precision. [Cornwell \(2002: p. 315\)](#) further nuances this reading by arguing that Melanie’s rape can “be informed not only by the power relations of patriarchy and the academy but also by those of race”, highlighting the layered intersections of power that the novel refuses to disentangle. [Mardorossian \(2011: p. 72\)](#) redefines the sexual violence in *Disgrace* as “a deeply discursive phenomenon shaped by racialized and class-based power structures”, shifting analytical focus from individual pathology to structural dynamics.

Despite the richness of these contributions, existing studies tend to treat power as an overarching thematic concern rather than as a systematic object of analysis. Even when scholars invoke specific theoretical frameworks: Cornwell’s reference to intersecting power relations, Mardorossian’s emphasis on discursive power structures. The application remains suggestive rather than sustained. Furthermore, while some studies acknowledge the Foucauldian resonance of Coetzee’s vision, the systematic deployment of Foucault’s conceptual apparatus to illuminate the novel’s representation of power inversion remains underdeveloped.

David Lurie’s “not-rape” of Melanie and Lucy’s gang rape have generated a robust body of feminist scholarship. [Graham \(2003: p. 438\)](#) offers one of the earliest and most influential feminist readings, arguing that the two rapes expose “power operating at the level of gender and at an institutional level”, and that the novel performs “a subversion of ‘black peril’ narrative” ([Graham, 2003: p. 437](#)) by refusing the colonial trope of the violated white woman. Graham’s analysis is significant for its insistence that Coetzee’s representation of interracial rape must be read against the history of racialized sexual discourse in South Africa, rather than as a simple allegory of black revenge.

[Barnard \(2013: p. 19\)](#) approaches the novel from a radical feminist perspective, reading *Disgrace* as “a deliberation on rape in all its complexity, articulating and commenting upon many of the positions typical of the radical feminism of the

seventies". She argues that Lucy's equation of heterosexual sex with "killing and hating women" (p. 19) evokes the radical feminist idea that men as a class subordinate women through the threat of rape, and that Lucy's subsequent acceptance of a subordinate position to Petrus "proves the power of rape in controlling women" (p. 19).

While these feminist interventions have significantly enriched our understanding of the novel's gender politics, they are marked by a persistent tension between reading sexual violence as allegory and reading it as material inscription on the female body. Graham and Barnard both gesture toward the political dimensions of rape without fully theorizing how the two incidents of sexual violence represent fundamentally different modalities of power: one operating through discourse and institutional authority, the other through the direct sovereign violence of the physical body.

The spatial and territorial dimensions of power in *Disgrace* have received increasing critical attention. Zhao (2022: pp. 163-166) frames the farm as a microcosmic site of power struggle, arguing that racial power traps both white colonial descendants and emergent Black subjects in an unfinished spatial-political conflict. This spatial analysis is complemented by scholarship that situates the novel within the South African literary tradition of the *plaasroman* (farm novel). As Hove (2022: pp. 1-13) demonstrates, Coetzee draws on this genre's anxieties about the rights of (white) ownership while subverting its conventions within a post-apartheid context, thereby platforming generational land ownership over colonial theft. The farm, in this reading, becomes a site where the history of colonial dispossession is both inscribed and contested.

Mishra (2025: p. 682) emphasizes that the change of land possession entails a subtle inversion of power, tracing how Petrus's gradual accumulation of land ownership mirrors and inverts the colonial logic of dispossession. This line of inquiry resonates with broader postcolonial scholarship on land and belonging in South African literature. The novel's engagement with land reform and the redistribution of property constitutes one of its most politically charged dimensions, raising uncomfortable questions about the relationship between ownership, restitution, and historical justice. However, existing spatial analyses have not fully integrated the land question with the novel's representations of epistemic and sexual power.

A significant strand of scholarship has examined the novel's treatment of human-animal relations, particularly the role of dogs and David Lurie's work at Bev Shaw's animal clinic. Barney (2016: abstract) offers a theoretically sophisticated reading that situates Lurie's "peculiar inability to grasp his increasing intimacy with animals" within the framework of biopolitics and the impersonal. He argues that *Disgrace* challenges traditional humanist power by replacing mastery and exclusion with 'impersonal vulnerability' shared between humans and animals (pp. 522-524). This reading represents one of the most sustained engagements with Foucauldian biopolitics in the critical literature on the novel.

Coleman (2009: pp. 617-637) similarly sees power in *Disgrace* as a dynamic interplay of racial, sexual, and interspecies forces, moving from competitive survival to an ethics of shared vulnerability between humans and animals. Gal (2008: p. 241) examines how animals, especially dogs, are used in J.M. Coetzee's celebrated novel, arguing that "the animal is used here as a surrogate medium which, by its innate innocence, displaces white guilt and racial violence into moral privilege in the field of animal welfare". A more critical perspective is offered by Brings (2024: p. 133), who argues that "the uncritical discourse of animal welfare in the postcolony exposes its explicit ties to apartheid governing and its rhetorical legacy". Reading *Disgrace* against "the rhetoric of euthanasia by animal welfare organizations" (p. 133), Brings (2024: pp. 133-156) contends that the purportedly humane ideologies of animal welfare in support of euthanasia signal an investment in nation-building in which the animal is ultimately disposable.

While this biopolitical and animal-centric scholarship offers valuable insights into the novel's ethical dimensions, the connections between the novel's animal ethics and its representation of post-apartheid power inversion remain underexplored.

Existing scholarship has examined power in *Disgrace* from multiple angles, including racial inversion, gendered violence, spatial politics, biopolitics, but these analyses remain fragmented. References to Foucault are sporadic and unsystematic.

It seems that little study has undertaken a tripartite analysis that integrates epistemic authority, sexual violence, and land property within a unified Foucauldian framework. Consequently, the relationship between the mechanism of power and the identity of its agents remains undertheorized. Grounded in Foucault's concepts of power-knowledge, biopower, and sovereign versus disciplinary power, this thesis examines the tripartite inversion of power in *Disgrace*. It demonstrates that in post-apartheid South Africa, power is shifted from whites to blacks, and the later in return oppress the former.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Michel Foucault's analytics of power, specifically power-knowledge, sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower, to examine the tripartite inversion in *Disgrace*. Foucault (1990) conceptualizes power not as a repressive, top-down force possessed by a sovereign, but as productive and relational, circulating through networks of discourse and social relations (*Discipline and Punish*, 1990). This relational view illuminates how David Lurie's epistemic authority, which is rooted in Western literary discourse, gradually yields to Petrus's pragmatic, embodied knowledge, revealing power as a field of contestation rather than static possession.

Central to this analysis is Foucault's (1995) thesis on power-knowledge (*pouvoir-savoir*), which posits that power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined: "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the

same time power relations” (*Discipline and Punish*, 1995). Lurie’s professorial authority exemplifies this nexus: his command of Romantic poetry functions as a regime of truth that justifies his sexual conduct until the university committee’s disciplinary discourse dismantles it.

For analyzing sexual violence, this thesis employs Foucault’s (1990) distinction between disciplinary power and sovereign power. Disciplinary power operates through institutions, norms, and confession. Through the mechanism, Lurie’s affair with Melanie is processed (*The History of Sexuality*, 1990). In contrast, sovereign power manifests as the direct right “to take life or let live,” exercised through brute force upon the body (*Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France*, Foucault, 2003b). Lucy’s gang rape represents this sovereign modality: the reduction of the body to what Agamben (1998), building on Foucault, terms “bare life” as a territorial inscription, reversing the colonial violence historically enacted upon black bodies. The concept of bare life is introduced here to supplement Foucault’s account of sovereign power, as Agamben’s formulation specifically addresses the condition of being reduced to pure biological existence stripped of legal and political protection, a condition that precisely captures Lucy’s state during and after the assault.

Finally, Foucault’s 1977-1978 lectures *Security, Territory, Population* provide the theoretical lens for interpreting the novel’s land question. The shift from sovereign seizure to governmental management of populations and territory clarifies how Petrus’s accumulation of property replicates the structural logic of dispossession rather than transcending it. Together, these concepts demonstrate that post-apartheid transition in *Disgrace* constitutes not liberation but a historical cycle of oppression wherein the formerly oppressed adopt the mechanisms of domination.

4. The Inversion of Epistemic Authority

As a white male intellectual with discursive power at a South African university, Lurie deploys literature, aesthetics and intellectual authority set by western societies to rationalize his sexual urges and seduce his student. When he first invites Melanie to his home, he deploys the rhetoric of Byron and the rights of Eros to dissolve her capacity to refuse: “A woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it” (Coetzee, 2000: p. 16). The sentence performs a double act of power. Lexically, it borrows the prestige of Romantic idealism to construct beauty as a communal possession, thereby stripping Melanie of sovereignty over her own body. Grammatically, the impersonal assertion conceals the coercive demand beneath a universal moral claim.

From a Foucauldian perspective, this seemingly aesthetic pronouncement functions not as a neutral observation about beauty, but as a disciplinary mechanism that seeks to construct and enforce a norm governing female bodies and their social utility. For Foucault, normalization is a key operation of modern disciplinary power. Unlike sovereign power, the norm “brings with it a principle of both qual-

ification and correction. The norm's function is not to exclude and reject. Rather, it is always linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project" (Foucault, 2003a: p. 50). David's statement enacts precisely this logic of positing an optimal model. He declares what a woman's beauty is ("does not belong to her alone") and, consequently, what a woman must do ("she has a duty to share it"). The statement thereby constructs a normative framework that defines "normal" female conduct of sharing her beauty and implicitly renders any refusal to comply as selfish or unnatural. By claiming that beauty is "part of the bounty she brings into the world," David frames female attractiveness as a collective resource rather than an aspect of personal autonomy, thereby transforming an individual attribute into a social obligation. The operation of disciplinary normalization is even more crucial. Foucault calls it "normalizing judgment" which compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, and ultimately corrects individuals according to established norms. David's rhetoric embodies this normalizing gaze directed at Melanie's body. His words do not explicitly threaten or command; instead, they invoke a putative ethical duty that Melanie, as a beautiful woman, is expected to internalize and obey. By defining female beauty as a public good requiring distribution, David effectively denies Melanie the right to withhold consent, positioning her resistance not as legitimate self-determination but as a failure to fulfill her "duty." The exploitation on Melanie is implicit but powerful because it is realized through structural oppression rather than violence.

However, even in the university the sexual privileges of the patriarchal white elite are beginning to lose their hold. After the scandal of David's rape of Melanie becomes public, the student anti-rape organization WAR slips a note under his office door bearing the words: "YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA. (Coetzee, 2000: p. 43)" The epithet "Casanova" is devastatingly ironic: David has constructed his entire identity around a Byronic self-image, viewing his sexual pursuit of Melanie not as violation but as a poetic, almost tragicomic affair of desire. He cloaks his predation in the antiquated language of romance, passion, and masculine artistic license inherited from the white patriarchal tradition that once went unquestioned. Yet WAR's note dismantles this self-justifying mythology. By calling him Casanova, they do not debate his romanticism; they declare it obsolete. The phrase performs a linguistic dispossession: it strips David of his intellectual pretensions and renames him not as a lover, but as a caricature, or a fading archetype whose performative gallantry is now legible to all as entitlement and abuse. In the transformed moral landscape of post-apartheid South Africa, the old Romantic vocabulary of individual transcendence and erotic heroism no longer commands respect. WAR's note announces that the white patriarchal privilege David once wore as a cloak of aesthetic sophistication has been exposed as a tattered remnant, and his days, as empowered white male, are unequivocally over.

If Western hegemonic knowledge has lost its absolute authority at the university, then on the farm, a more radical inversion takes place: the white man's book civilization is not merely displaced but dismantled by the black man's indigenous

survival practices. After Lucy's rape, Lurie's faith in Western legal rationality has been completely shattered by the black man's indigenous survival practices. After Lucy's rape, Lurie wants to resort to the law, but Lucy rejects his proposal. The neighbors around them also lead Lurie to trust Petrus. In the end, Petrus puts forward the idea of marrying Lucy. Lurie finds it utterly inconceivable, but Petrus gives his reasons: "But here," "it is dangerous, too dangerous. A woman must be marry" (Coetzee, 2000: p. 202). "Here" does not merely refer to the farm, but to the entire post-apartheid condition in which the old liberal order of white South Africa has been unmasked as impotent: the police, the law, the rational protocols of justice that Lurie clings to are, in Petrus's world, hollow fictions that offer no actual protection. Crucially, the repetition of "dangerous" shifts the register from abstract fear to concrete, embodied reality that Lucy has already experienced in her violation. Petrus's subsequent prescription, "A woman must be marry," speaks from within an indigenous, communal logic that does not recognize the autonomous, rights-bearing individual of Western humanism. For Petrus, marriage is not a romantic or moral ideal but a survival mechanism and a land-tenure strategy; it is the only available social structure capable of inserting a solitary white woman into the protective web of black kinship and patriarchal brokerage.

The epistemic inversion is complete when David, despite his intellectual resistance, finds himself unable to produce a counter-argument that carries weight in this new reality. His appeals to "justice" are met not with rebuttal but with the sheer practical force of Petrus's logic, which has already proven itself more effective in securing Lucy's physical survival. In Foucauldian terms, what we witness here is not merely the replacement of one regime of truth by another, but the active subordination of the former to the latter. David's Western knowledge system does not simply fade into irrelevance; it is forcibly decentered and compelled to recognize its own inadequacy. He is reduced to a passive observer as Petrus's epistemic framework, rooted in kinship, and territorial control, defines the terms of existence on the farm. David's eventual silence in the face of Petrus's proposals signifies more than personal defeat; it marks the moment when the white intellectual's interpretive authority is fully inverted, subjugated by a black man's practical knowledge that now dictates how survival itself is to be understood and achieved. Thus, Petrus's utterance reveals the reality in post-apartheid South Africa: justice has been displaced by security, and security can only be purchased through the surrender of selfhood to the black's authority.

The inversion of epistemic authority is therefore not a passive transition but an active, hierarchical reordering in which the colonizer's knowledge is not merely set aside but forcibly subordinated to the colonized's, which mirrors, in the domain of knowledge, the broader reconfiguration of power that the novel traces across sexual and territorial registers.

5. The Inversion of Sexual Violence

David Lurie's exploitation of Melanie operates through discourse. His romantic

rhetoric normalizes predation, and the university hearing subjects him to a disciplinary regime of confession. Yet David's refusal to perform the required contrition exposes the limits of this disciplinary power; it can censure but cannot reform him. The hearing remains, for David, an institutional ritual that fails to penetrate his interiority. This failure, however, marks only the attenuation of white patriarchal power in the domain of discourse, not its decisive inversion.

The decisive inversion occurs not in the university but on Lucy's body. The three black men who invade Lucy's farm and rape her operate through an entirely different register of power. This register is not disciplinary normalization but sovereign violence. Where disciplinary power works through norms, surveillance, and confession to produce docile subjects, sovereign power acts directly on the body with brutal immediacy. Foucault (2003b) distinguishes sovereign power as the right "to take life or let live" (*Society Must Be Defended*, p. 241), a power that inscribes its dominion through force rather than discourse. Although the three attackers do not exercise formal state authority, Foucault's concept of sovereign power is applied here in a metaphorical and expanded sense to describe violence that operates outside legal mediation, directly on the body, and that claims territorial dominion through physical inscription—a usage consistent with Foucault's own discussion of sovereign power as a modality that can be exercised by non-state actors in contexts of colonial and postcolonial violence. Lucy's rape exemplifies this modality. She is reduced to "bare life", a condition of pure biological existence stripped of legal and social protection. The rapists do not seek to extract a confession, to reform her, or to integrate her into a normative order; they mark her body as territory to be conquered.

The spatial logic of the attack confirms this reading. David is set alight and locked in the lavatory, confined to the most abject space of the house, rendered impotent and reduced to auditory witness of his daughter's violation. The intruders occupy the domestic centre, the bedroom, where the rape occurs. This spatial distribution is precise. The white owner is expelled from control and confined to a space of waste, while the black intruders assert dominion over the symbolic and physical heart of the property. The female body, in this configuration, becomes an extension of the violated land, a territory to be entered, occupied, and marked. The rape is thus not merely a sexual crime but a territorial inscription, a sovereign act that reverses the colonial logic by which white settlers once marked black bodies and black land as subject to white will.

The historical irony is stark. The reduction of a racial other to "thing" was precisely the logic that white settlers applied to black bodies under apartheid and colonialism. Now the mechanism is reversed. The same sovereign violence that once inscribed whiteness as mastery now inscribes blackness as the new territorial claim. The rapists operate not as individuals with personal motives but, within this interpretive only, as agents of a collective historical reckoning, though the novel pointedly leaves their actual motives, their relationship to Petrus, and their political consciousness unresolved. This reading is offered as one possible inter-

pretation, not as the novel's definitive statement. Their violence performs what the law formally prohibits but history has rendered a brutal and contested logic of historical reversal. This is not justice, but it is, within the novel's moral universe, one possible articulation of the brutal logic of historical reversal.

The inversion of power inscribed on female bodies reaches its most disturbing articulation when Lucy interprets her rape as a form of material restitution:

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? (Coetzee, 2000: p. 158).

The economic metaphors, debt, tax, payment, recast sexual violence as a transaction in a long-overdue account of racial and territorial expropriation. Lucy's framing is significant not because it is objectively "correct", but because it represents her internalization of the new power order. She does not interpret the rape as an act of random brutality or personal hatred; she reads it as a price exacted for her continued presence on the land. In doing so, she accepts the rapists' implicit claim that her occupancy is contingent, conditional, and must be "paid for" in the currency of her body. This is the ultimate inversion. The white woman's body, once the symbolic prize of colonial protection and racial purity, becomes the medium through which historical debt is settled.

Where David's sexual misconduct remained trapped within a discourse of individual morality and institutional discipline, Lucy's rape explodes that frame. It is not processed through confession, judgment, or reformation; it is simply inscribed on her body as an irreversible fact. The rapists do not ask her to acknowledge guilt, to repent, or to change her behaviour; they assert their power through the sheer fact of having penetrated and marked her. This is sovereign power in its purest form. The power that operates without discourse, without justification, without the mediating machinery of law or morality. It is the power that simply takes.

Crucially, however, this sovereign violence, while inverting the racial hierarchy of bodily vulnerability, does not itself establish a new order. The rapists disappear after the attack. They leave no program of governance, no alternative social arrangement. Their violence is destructive but not constructive; it undoes the old order without building a new one. This is precisely where Petrus enters. He absorbs the aftermath of the sovereign violence into his own governmental logic. He offers Lucy "protection," incorporates the young attacker Pollux, revealed to be his relative, into his household, and ultimately consolidates his territorial control through marriage and land transfer. Although the novel leaves Petrus's prior knowledge of or complicity in the attack deliberately ambiguous, this sequence suggests that the sovereign violence of the rape thus serves as the precondition for Petrus's biopolitical governance. It destabilizes the old white ownership, creates a vacuum of security that only Petrus can fill, and prepares the ground for the in-

version of land property that the next section will trace. It is important to note, however, that the novel never confirms whether Petrus orchestrated the attack or merely capitalized on its aftermath; the casual link between the assault and Petrus' rise is an interpretive inference drawn from the novel's narrative structure, not a factual claim explicitly supported by the text.

In this sense, the inversion of sexual violence is twofold. First, the white female body, once the protected symbol of colonial racial order, becomes the primary site upon which black sovereign violence inscribes new territorial claims. Second, this bodily inscription is not an end in itself but a necessary precursor to the broader reconfiguration of power. It breaks the old order so that a new one, Petrus's order of kinship, land accumulation, and patriarchal governance, can be installed. The body is not merely a personal or psychological entity; it is a political geography on which the history of South Africa is violently written and rewritten.

6. The Inversion of Land Property

David and Lucy, descendants of former colonizers, long held possession of farmland and wielded dominion over both the land and Indigenous Black residents. The violent farm invasion by three Black men marks a turning point in land tenure and power dynamics. When Petrus manoeuvres strategically and Lucy surrenders her land rights in exchange for personal safety, the complete reversal of power between the White and Black orders is finalized.

Initially, Lucy linguistically constructs the hierarchy on the farm. Two sentences spoken by Lucy when she introduces Petrus to her father are particularly revealing: "Petrus is my new assistant (Coetzee, 2000: p. 62)," and "Petrus, come in, meet my father" (Coetzee, 2000: p. 64). The first sentence operates through the grammar of possession and functional classification. The possessive pronoun "my" asserts a proprietary relationship: Petrus belongs to Lucy within the framework of the farm's economy. He is not a neighbour, a co-worker, or a partner but an extension of her will, defined by his utility to her. The word "assistant" further cements this hierarchy. It designates someone who helps a principal, who carries out tasks devised by another, who lacks autonomous authority. Strikingly, Lucy herself struggles with terminology only moments later, starting to say "co-proprietor" before correcting herself to "co-operator" (Coetzee, 2000: p. 62). The slip and its retraction expose the linguistic limit that liberal goodwill cannot cross: the white owner simply cannot bring herself to name the black labourer as a fellow proprietor, because the legal and historical reality of the land militates against it. By settling on "assistant," Lucy inscribes Petrus into a master-servant discourse that the post-apartheid legal order supposedly dismantled but that persists in the grain of daily speech.

The second sentence is an imperative that enacts spatial and social command. The use of the bare first name in direct address, without any title or honorific, reproduces the casual paternalism of the old colonial farm. Lucy summons Petrus as one summons a child or a servant; there is no request, no modal softening

(“could you,” “would you like to”), only the plain expectation of obedience. The instruction “come in” draws a spatial boundary: Petrus is outside the domestic interior until permitted entry by the white proprietor. The house, the symbolic heart of the property, is Lucy’s space; Petrus can enter it only on her terms. Finally, the phrase “meet my father” positions David as the figure to whom Petrus must present himself, reinforcing a generational and racial patriarchy in which the white male visitor is the ultimate arbiter of worth. In Foucauldian terms, these words are not merely communicative; they are a procedure of subjection—a discursive practice that produces the subjects it names, allocating Petrus a place at the bottom of a hierarchy that appears natural but is in fact continuously manufactured through such everyday rituals of address.

However, the farm invasion, as discussed in the previous section, fundamentally destabilizes this hierarchy. In the aftermath, Petrus’s strategy for acquiring land ownership operates not through the direct sovereign violence of the attackers, but through a biopolitical governmentality anchored in land and lineage. After the attack, Petrus has acquired land of his own, secured a state grant to build a larger house with a satellite dish, and began to fence off his property. David watches with growing unease: “Petrus would like to take over Lucy’s land. Then he would like to have Ettinger’s too, or enough of it to run a herd on” (Coetzee, 2000: p. 117). Here the ambition of Petrus is shown in two aspects. On one hand, he is not satisfied with just Lucy’s land; he also wants to acquire Ettinger’s too. On the other hand, Petrus does not merely want land in the abstract; he wants a contiguous, productive territory capable of sustaining a herd. The herd is significant: it is not a subsistence garden but a capital-producing asset, the marker of a substantial landowner. In this single sentence, Petrus is revealed not as a passive beneficiary of history but as an agent actively planning a spatial reordering of the farm’s landscape.

For Foucault, the classical sovereign exercised power primarily over a territory and its resources. In the shift toward governmentality, power begins to concern itself with population rather than the simple possession of land. Petrus’s plan seems a deliberate reversion to the sovereign logic. The object of his desire is the earth itself: Lucy’s land and Ettinger’s land. His interest in Lucy’s body (through marriage) and her future child is ultimately subordinated to this territorial end; the child will anchor his claim to the soil. The fact that he eyes Ettinger’s land, a neighbouring white-owned property, indicates a programme of expansion that mirrors, in reverse, the colonial practice of encroaching on black land.

However, Petrus’s power is not exercised through overt violence but through economic accumulation and the manipulation of social dependencies. He offers Lucy “protection”, a word that slides between care and coercion. When David confronts him about the presence of the young attacker Pollux, who turns out to be a relative, Petrus deflects with the language of communal obligation: “He is my people” (Coetzee, 2000: p. 130). By absorbing the very agents of violence into his household, Petrus transforms sovereign disruption into a governmental order. He

does not simply take the land; he manages the population on it, incorporating Lucy, her unborn child, and even the memory of the attack into a new network of patriarchal security.

Crucially, the novel never resolves whether Petrus orchestrated the attack or whether Pollux's presence in his household is a matter of kinship obligation rather than conspiracy. This ambiguity is central to the novel's political complexity: Petrus's rise could be read as opportunistic pragmatism or as calculated strategy. The causal link between the assault and Petrus's subsequent land acquisition is suggested by narrative sequence but left deliberately indeterminate.

The ultimate inversion of property occurs when Lucy announces her decision to sign the farm over to Petrus and to become his "third wife": "I will be a tenant on his land" (Coetzee, 2000: p. 203). The word "tenant" is the crucial legal designation: a tenant holds no ownership; a tenant occupies land by the permission of another; a tenant pays rent, whether in money, labour, or submission. The final phrase, "his land," seals the reversal. The possessive pronoun "his" no longer refers to an abstract legal entity but to Petrus, the man who began as a kennel-dweller and now stands as the sovereign of the territory.

In this exchange, the entire edifice of post-Enlightenment property rights collapses. The land is no longer a commodity held by an individual under a system of civil law; it reverts to a territorial fief, held by a patriarchal sovereign whose authority rests on control over women's bodies, reproductive capacity, and the implicit threat of violence. Lucy's pregnancy, the result of the rape, is absorbed into this new order as a seal of continuity: the child will belong to Petrus's lineage, anchoring the land transfer in blood. Petrus emerges not as a fellow citizen in a liberal democracy but as a lord over a new territory, his sovereignty modelled directly on the old colonial template.

The structural homology between the old and new orders demands explicit articulation. Under apartheid, white colonizers acquired black land through violence, legitimized their claim through legal instruments, and maintained control through the subordination of black labour and the control of black mobility and kinship. Petrus's ascension replicates this pattern point by point. The sovereign violence of the three rapists functions as the initial act of dispossession, mirroring the colonial conquest that first seized the land from indigenous inhabitants. Petrus then legalizes this violent seizure through the apparatus of the post-apartheid state, securing grants and formal title, just as the colonial state once ratified land grabs through legislative fiat. Finally, he consolidates his control through the regulation of Lucy's body and reproductive future, a mechanism that reproduces the colonial practice of controlling indigenous populations through kinship manipulation and patriarchal authority. The actors have changed, but the logic of dispossession remains intact.

7. Conclusion

Centered on Foucault's theories of power-knowledge, sovereign power and bi-

opower, this thesis analyzes three interwoven reversals of domination in Coetzee's *Disgrace*: the collapse of white epistemic privilege, racial inversion of sexual bodily violence, and the transfer of farm land ownership.

Lurie's Romantic literary discourse once sustains his disciplinary control over Melanie, yet Western intellectual authority is gradually overtaken by Petrus's practical survival knowledge. Differentiating disciplinary regulation and raw sovereign force, the paper contrasts Lurie's institutional censure with Lucy's violent gang rape, an act of territorial marking that reverses colonial bodily oppression but only destabilizes white rule without constructing a new order. Petrus subsequently absorbs this chaotic sovereign violence into biopolitical governance, securing land and Lucy's submission through kinship and conditional protection. His territorial expansion replicates the colonial logic of dispossession, merely shifting power from white settlers to certain Black rural agents such as Petrus, though the novel leaves open whether this represents a unified racial projects or opportunistic rise of one individual.

Overall, the novel does not depict post-apartheid transition as genuine liberation. Instead, it illustrates a cyclical repetition of oppression, where the mechanisms of domination persist despite changed racial power holders. This unified Foucauldian framework remedies fragmentation in existing scholarship, while the animal clinic's shared vulnerability hints at a fragile ethical alternative to endless hierarchy. This research's reliance on Western critical theory leaves room for further studies incorporating indigenous land philosophies and deeper biopolitical readings of human-animal relations.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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