

Mourning and Female Resilience: A Posthumanist Reading of Lucy in *Disgrace*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Lucy Lurie's response to sexual assault in [Coetzee's \(2010\) *Disgrace*](#), focusing on her decision to remain on her farm and her interactions with the natural environment. Employing posthuman feminist theory, the study explores how Lucy's engagement with non-human entities—such as caring for animals and cultivating the land—serves as a means of processing trauma. These actions reflect a departure from traditional, anthropocentric approaches to trauma recovery, suggesting an alternative pathway that emphasizes interconnectedness with the more-than-human world. The paper argues that Lucy's silence and non-verbal practices represent a form of resistance and resilience, challenging patriarchal and colonial narratives. Through this lens, the novel grants Lucy a distinct voice—not through conventional dialogue, but through her embodied actions and choices. This narrative approach proposes an alternative framework for women to navigate trauma and sexual violence, emphasizing non-verbal, embodied forms of expression and healing. Through this lens, *Disgrace* offers insights into how posthumanist perspectives can inform understandings of female subjectivity and trauma in literature.

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Contribution/Originality: This study is one of the very few that examines [Coetzee's \(2010\) *Disgrace*](#) through posthuman feminist theory. Its primary contribution is the finding that Lucy Lurie's silence and embodied practices—such as caring for animals and cultivating the land—reveal an alternative mode of resilience that challenges anthropocentric and patriarchal narratives, while offering new insights into female subjectivity.

1. Introduction

This section adopts a three-level theoretical framework to examine trauma and resilience in *Disgrace*. It begins by reassessing classical trauma theories to expose the limits of anthropocentric, language-based models. It then introduces Braidotti's (2021) posthuman feminism as an ethical alternative grounded in embodied, more-than-human subjectivity. Finally, it turns to the text, analyzing how Lucy's engagement with animals, land, and silence enacts a posthuman ethics of survival.

Anthropocentrism and patriarchal structures are deeply intertwined within the Western intellectual tradition, collectively forming the foundational roots of systemic oppression. As Braidotti (2021) argues, Enlightenment humanism constructed the European white male as the universal subject, establishing a standard by which all forms of being are measured. This argument resonates with Lloyd's (2002), critique of the "Man of Reason" and aligns with Beck's (2007), notion of methodological nationalism, which together expose how this paradigm marginalizes women, LGBTQ+ communities, Black people, Indigenous populations, and nonhuman entities by casting them as "others" and denying their subjectivity and ontological value. Collins (2022) and Sylvia (2015) further expose how this "over-represented" subject legitimizes both epistemic and physical violence against sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others through species hierarchies and colonial logics. The collusion between patriarchy and anthropocentrism ultimately leads to the negation of *Zoe*—the diversity of life—and reduces nonhuman nature to an exploitable resource.

Braidotti's (2021) posthuman feminism constitutes a critical response to the entanglement of anthropocentrism and patriarchy. She advocates gender cartography as a methodological tool to map the experiences of marginalized subjects and to expose how power operates within the context of posthuman convergence (Braidotti, 2021). At the core of her theory lies a decisive break from human exceptionalism: by emphasizing the self-organizing force of *Zoe* and interspecies connectivity, Braidotti (2021) builds upon Bennett's (2010) concept of "vibrant matter" and develops the notion of "nonanthropomorphic subjectivity," repositioning the human within a symbiotic network involving animals, technologies, and planetary forces (Braidotti, 2021, p. 115). Most notably, she redefines the posthuman subject as follows:

Posthuman bodies are co-constructed through relations with non-human agents and practices of the organic kind - zoe (animals, plants, other species) - but also with planetary or terrestrial forces (geo) and with non-organic (techno-mediated) factors through links to networks, platforms, algorithms, etc. It bears repeating that there is no foregone conclusion about what posthuman subjects constructed in zoegeo-techno-mediated alliances are capable of becoming. Those patterns of transformation need to be discussed and negotiated collectively. (Braidotti, 2021, p. 116)

This argument not only deconstructs the anthropocentric binary oppositions between human and nonhuman, nature and culture, but also expands the scope of feminist justice to include ecological and technological domains. It calls for an ethical and political framework grounded in posthumanist thought, one that activates the political potential of posthuman ethics from the marginalized position of those who have not been fully recognized as human.

[Braidotti's \(2021\)](#) critique of self-centred individualism and her stress on relationality reconfigure agency as no longer an exclusive human attribute. Building on this, my analysis underscores the inseparability of nature and culture, as well as of the human and the nonhuman, in *Disgrace*. Situated within the fraught context of South Africa's transition from apartheid (1948-1994) to post-apartheid—a period marked by violence, instability, and profound suffering—this study re-examines the novel through a posthumanist lens. In doing so, it foregrounds the novel's representation of the traumatized subject while shifting critical attention to vitality and generative potential as capacities shared by human and nonhuman matter, thereby offering a more nuanced account of how subjectivity responds to trauma.

Conducting a critical analysis of this kind necessitates a methodological approach that draws upon multiple theoretical perspectives, most notably trauma theory and posthumanism. The discussion begins by outlining central concepts in trauma studies, with particular attention to debates on the (un)representability of trauma, including the crisis of witnessing and the limits of articulating trauma through language. These theories effectively analyze how Lucy's trauma is obscured by the intersecting violence of race and gender under anthropocentric patriarchy, as the social structures of post-apartheid South Africa—rooted in colonial hierarchies and patriarchal control—deny her a legitimate voice to articulate her suffering. The humanist presuppositions of trauma theory, aligned with anthropocentric patriarchy's elevation of human reason and male dominance, reinforce the assumption that language (a tool of dominant power) is central to trauma repair, thus limiting its capacity to explain Lucy's unique healing path. To fully interpret her trauma narrative, this study incorporates posthuman feminism, which challenges anthropocentric patriarchy by highlighting the agency of nonhuman others (such as her dog kennel, the land, and animals). By situating Lucy's trauma within a posthuman critical theory, this analysis reveals how her symbiosis with nonhuman entities disrupts the anthropocentric patriarchy's obfuscation of her pain, offering an alternative paradigm for trauma reconstruction through relational coexistence with the more-than-human world.

To contextualize the discussion, a brief overview of *Disgrace* helps to illustrate how trauma manifests differently across its characters. [Coetzee's \(2010\)](#) novel *Disgrace* is set in post-apartheid South Africa, a society still deeply marked by the lingering effects of colonial power structures, racial tensions, and gender inequality. The narrative follows David Lurie, a white university professor who is forced to resign after engaging in an inappropriate sexual relationship with a female student and subsequently refusing to show remorse. Following his dismissal, Lurie retreats to the rural outskirts of Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, where his daughter Lucy lives alone, managing a small farm, growing flowers and vegetables, and raising dogs. She maintains a working relationship with her Black neighbor Petrus and, having returned from the Netherlands due to a strained relationship with her stepfather, is implied to have had intimate relationships with women, suggesting a queer orientation.

Shortly after Lurie's arrival, the farm is violently attacked by three Black men: Lurie is assaulted and locked in the bathroom, nearly all the dogs are shot, and Lucy is subjected to sexual violence while her father is powerless to intervene. In the aftermath of this traumatic event, Lucy refuses to press charges or identify the perpetrators, choosing instead to report only the theft of property. She also makes the controversial decision to remain on the farm, expressing willingness to become Petrus's second wife in exchange for protection and continued access to land.

Furthermore, she declines to terminate the pregnancy resulting from the assault, accepting the birth of a mixed-race child as part of her new reality. Throughout these developments, Lucy continues to maintain the farm and prepare for the child's arrival. These intersecting events form the novel's central articulation of disgrace, a term that functions on multiple levels: it refers both to David's personal downfall caused by his abuse of power, and to Lucy's profound humiliation and suffering within a landscape shaped by racialized violence, gendered oppression, and postcolonial negotiation for survival.

In *Disgrace*, the reader's access to Lucy's subjectivity is entirely mediated through David Lurie's perspective, which exposes the limitations of a patriarchal and humanist epistemology when confronted with non-normative female agency. David never truly understands Lucy—neither her choices, nor her sexuality, nor her silence. His attempt to grasp her same-sex relationship with Helen is marked by aesthetic and heteronormative judgment: "*Helen is a large, sad-looking woman with a deep voice and a bad skin, older than Lucy. He has never been able to understand what Lucy sees in her; privately he wishes Lucy would find, or be found by, someone better*" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 60). David reduces Lucy's desire to an error in taste, a deviation from normative ideals of love and companionship. This failure is not an isolated instance but symptomatic of a broader epistemological limitation that cannot accommodate desires and identities beyond the heteropatriarchal frame.

When Bev Shaw, a friend of Lucy's who runs an animal welfare clinic in the countryside, suggests that Lucy chose to live with him, David responds evasively: "*She also chose a certain surround, a certain horizon...*" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 161). His vague rhetoric reveals a deeper ignorance: David does not know—and does not attempt to understand—why Lucy returned to South Africa in the first place. His account of Lucy is fragmented, shaped by the boundaries of what he finds intelligible. In contrast, Bev displays greater understanding of Lucy's position, especially after the sexual assault: "*Women are adaptable. Lucy is adaptable. And she is young. She lives closer to the ground than you. Than either of us*" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 210). Bev perceives forms of resilience in Lucy that remain invisible to David. This moment underscores the ontological divide between Lucy and David—one that he is only beginning to sense but remains unable to bridge.

The extent of this epistemological rupture becomes most visible during their emotionally fraught confrontation. Pressed by David for clarity, Lucy ultimately withdraws: "*I can't talk any more, David, I just can't... I know I am not being clear. I wish I could explain. But I can't. Because of who you are and who I am, I can't. I'm sorry*" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 155). Her refusal to explain is not a failure of communication, but a rejection of Enlightenment rationalism with its demand for confession, coherence, and transparency. David, "*sitting in a corner,*" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 161) remains confined within his own interpretive framework, unwilling to step out of it. He becomes emblematic of an obsolete authority—one incapable of truly seeing or hearing the other. Lucy's silence, then, is not passivity, but a form of political resistance. Her refusal to be rendered legible enacts a different kind of agency, one that resists translation into patriarchal terms.

Another powerful instance of epistemological failure arises when David tries to understand why Lucy refuses to report the sexual assault to the authorities. Convinced that her silence must signify either fear or guilt, David frames the incident within a

narrative of trauma, moral retribution, and historical reckoning. However, Lucy resists his interpretive impositions. When David likens the assault to “*plagues and fires*” (Coetzee, 2010, p. 112), implying divine punishment or a redemptive crisis, Lucy interrupts: “*Stop it, David! I don't want to hear this talk of plagues and fires. I am not just trying to save my skin. If that is what you think, you miss the point entirely.*” David continues to press her: “*Then help me. Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?*” (Coetzee, 2010, p. 112) Lucy's reply is forceful and categorical: “*No. You keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don't act in terms of abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can't help you*” (Coetzee, 2010, p. 112). Such epistemological failure not only exposes the limits of language-centered trauma theory but also urges a reconsideration of alternative forms of coping. In what follows, I turn to Lucy's embodied and ecological attachments as a posthuman alternative to trauma narration.

David remains fundamentally unable to comprehend Lucy's decisions in the aftermath of her sexual assault—her refusal to report the crime, her decision to remain on the farm, and ultimately, her choice to keep the child. As İbrişim (2021) argues, David embodies the modern, autonomous rational subject who interprets trauma through the lens of articulation, resolution, and moral intelligibility. For him, recovery must follow a recognizable path of confession and control. Lucy, however, rejects this model; her response is marked by silence, physical endurance, and an embodied commitment to the land and to life itself. Though David initially perceives her choices as signs of paralysis or moral confusion, Lucy's continued labor and quiet determination contradict such assumptions. Lucy's form of survival resists traditional frameworks of trauma theory and instead aligns with a posthuman feminist ethic. Her redemption does not emerge through speech or normative justice but through an ongoing, grounded mode of being that persists despite violence and incomprehension. Lucy's decision to continue farming, her ethical relation to the animals, and her silent acceptance of a hybrid future illustrate what Braidotti (2019, p. 7) calls “*affirmative ethics.*” These will be discussed in detail in the next section.

This study begins by examining Caruth's (2016) theory of trauma as a temporally deferred and structurally unassimilable experience that escapes full representation. Felman and Laub's (1992) theory of witnessing further highlights the survivor's dilemma—where the need to testify confronts the impossibility of full articulation. Lucy's silence and her refusal of legal redress thus reflect an alternative, embodied response to trauma. To explore this further, the chapter turns to posthuman feminist theory, arguing that Lucy's relational ties to land, animals, and ecological rhythms constitute a reparative mode of becoming that moves beyond the limits of representational discourse.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study seeks to explore Lucy Lurie's response to trauma in Coetzee's (2010) *Disgrace*, focusing on how her silence, refusal of legal recourse, and embodied practices on the farm challenge conventional narratives of victimhood and recovery. By examining her interactions with animals, land, and the rural environment, the research highlights how Lucy's trajectory departs from anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigms of healing.

The objective of this study is to demonstrate how Lucy's choices exemplify a posthuman form of resilience that redefines female subjectivity beyond juridical or linguistic frameworks. In doing so, the research contributes to rethinking trauma and resilience in literature, proposing an alternative framework that emphasizes relationality, material practices, and the ethics of becoming-with the more-than-human world.

2. Theoretical Framework

Trauma theory has been instrumental in elucidating the representational features of Lucy's post-assault condition, particularly her silence, disorientation, and temporal disjunction. [Caruth's \(2016\)](#) notion of trauma as an unassimilable event returning belatedly through fragmented expression underscores the difficulty of articulating traumatic experience, while [Felman's \(1992\)](#) concept of the crisis of witnessing highlights the ethical and institutional failures that prevent marginalized subjects from having their suffering validated within dominant discursive systems. These perspectives help explain Lucy's refusal to testify or seek juridical resolution, and why her trauma manifests in silence and embodied withdrawal. Yet, while trauma theory illuminates the representational impasse of violence, it offers limited resources for envisioning how subjects like Lucy might actively reconstitute meaning, agency, or resilience.

It is precisely at this juncture that posthuman feminist theory becomes pertinent. [Braidotti \(2021\)](#) reconceptualizes subjectivity not as a rational, autonomous, self-contained entity, but as a fluid and relational process embedded in symbiotic exchanges with non-human life forms (*zoe-life*). Within this framework, Lucy's decision to remain on the farm, refuse legal recourse, and carry to term the child conceived through rape cannot be reduced to maternal submission or sacrificial endurance. Instead, it enacts what [Braidotti \(2019\)](#) terms generativity: a forward-looking, life-affirming praxis that reconfigures trauma through continuity with land, animals, and community. By rejecting punitive or escapist responses, Lucy embodies a posthuman resilience that resists both anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigms of healing, and instead cultivates an ethics of becoming-with others—human and more-than-human alike.

3. Methods

First, this paper employs a close textual analysis of [Coetzee's \(2010\)](#) *Disgrace*, focusing particularly on the representation of Lucy Lurie's post-assault experience. Key narrative elements such as her silence, her decision to remain on the farm, and her interactions with animals and the land are examined to uncover the implicit and explicit ways in which trauma and resilience are articulated in the novel.

Next, to frame Lucy's experience, the research integrates trauma theory, especially its emphasis on belatedness, unspeakability, and the crisis of witnessing, to analyze how her silence and embodied withdrawal resist conventional forms of testimony and juridical recognition.

Then, the study employs posthuman feminist theory as its primary interpretive lens, particularly the concepts of generativity, relationality, and becoming-with. This theoretical framework allows for an exploration of how Lucy's subjectivity is reshaped through her engagement with non-human entities, departing from anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigms of healing.

Subsequently, a comparative reading strategy is adopted to highlight the tension between trauma theory's focus on the irrepresentability of violence and posthuman feminism's affirmative ethics. This approach illustrates how the novel moves beyond diagnosing trauma to proposing alternative modes of resilience rooted in ecological and interspecies relationality.

Furthermore, the analysis is situated within the broader cultural and philosophical discourses surrounding gender, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. By foregrounding Lucy's refusal of legal justice and her non-verbal practices of care, the study contextualizes her trajectory as both a critique of dominant trauma narratives and a reconfiguration of female subjectivity in literature.

Finally, the research engages with existing scholarship on *Disgrace* and posthumanism, synthesizing critical debates to situate its contribution. Through this integrated approach, the study not only offers a re-reading of Lucy's character but also proposes a methodological model for examining trauma, resilience, and subjectivity through posthuman feminist ethics.

4. Findings

Lucy Lurie's post-trauma experience in *Disgrace* demonstrates a radical departure from conventional narratives of victimhood and juridical redress. Her refusal to testify or pursue punitive justice redefines silence as an act of resistance, subverting patriarchal and colonial frameworks that demand confession, speech, or retribution.

Beyond silence, Lucy embraces a generative mode of resilience through her maternal decision and her embodied practices of care—tending to animals, cultivating the land, and sustaining life on the farm. These actions reveal that recovery is not predicated on transcending trauma but on cultivating continuity and affirming relational bonds.

Ultimately, Lucy's trajectory articulates a posthuman feminist ethics that decenters the autonomous subject in favor of relationality and ecological entanglement. By foregrounding embodied endurance and interspecies care, *Disgrace* reimagines female resilience not as redemption or transcendence but as an ethical becoming-with that challenges humanist and patriarchal paradigms of trauma.

This study has traced how trauma theory illuminates the silences and representational limits surrounding Lucy's post-assault experience, while posthuman feminism provides a framework to reinterpret those silences as acts of generativity and resilience. By combining close textual analysis with comparative theoretical perspectives, the findings reveal that Lucy's refusal of juridical redress, her embodied practices of care, and her ecological entanglements reconfigure female subjectivity beyond anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigms. This trajectory lays the groundwork for a broader discussion of how *Disgrace* articulates an ethics of becoming-with those challenges dominant narratives of trauma and recovery.

After Lucy's experience of sexual violence, she remains silent for a significant period, refusing to disclose any details or engage in discussion with her father. This prolonged silence is not simply an act of avoidance, but rather reflects the structural nature of trauma as theorized by Caruth (2016). David, Lucy's father, attempts to rationalize her behavior by telling himself: "He tells himself that he must be patient, that Lucy is still

living in the shadow of the attack... What if, after an attack like that, one is never oneself again?" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 124). His reflection implicitly acknowledges the psychic dislocation caused by trauma—an experience that, as Caruth (2016) argues, is not fully grasped in the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly in disruptive, fragmented forms. Caruth (2016) defines trauma as an event that is not assimilated as it happens, but rather one that imposes itself again later, breaking the subject's capacity to form a coherent narrative or stable identity.

This delayed return is exemplified when Lucy unexpectedly speaks about the assault during a car ride home from the police station. She says: *"It was so personal... It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was... expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them... That doesn't make it easier. The shock simply doesn't go away. The shock of being hated, I mean. In the act"* (Coetzee, 2010, p. 165). Her language is marked by ellipses, syntactic breaks, and emotional confusion, reflecting a profound rupture between experience and understanding. Crucially, Lucy does not describe the physical assault itself, but dwells instead on the incomprehensible intensity of hatred she felt. According to Caruth (2016), such indirectness is not a failure to speak, but a structural symptom of trauma's irrepresentability. Trauma cannot be fully symbolized or narrated because its essence lies in what escapes cognition—what remains unassimilated at the moment of impact.

In this context, Lucy's speech becomes a site where trauma is registered not through explicit recounting but through gaps, questions, and unresolved affect. Her insistence on the lingering shock and her inability to understand the perpetrators' hatred illustrate how traumatic experience resists integration into coherent discourse. The scene thus embodies both the belatedness and irrepresentability of trauma: Lucy's trauma does not return as a clear memory but as a fragmented and emotionally charged articulation that gestures toward the limits of language in the face of overwhelming psychic violence.

Viewed through the lens of trauma theory, Lucy's fragmented articulation of her sexual assault in the Eastern Cape reflects the irrepresentability of traumatic experience. Rather than recounting the assault in detail, Lucy fixates on the emotional residue of the event—particularly the shock of being the object of inexplicable and deeply personal hatred. According to Caruth (2016), trauma is not fully experienced in the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly, often in indirect or fragmented forms, disrupting the subject's capacity for coherent narrative. Lucy's discourse exemplifies this delayed return: she speaks not of the physical violation itself, which she refers to only obliquely, but of the incomprehensible emotional violence embedded in the act. Her repeated reference to shock and her questioning of the perpetrators' hatred signals the traumatic rupture in meaning, a disjunction between experience and understanding that defies symbolic resolution. Within Caruth's (2016) framework, Lucy's trauma cannot be directly represented because its core lies in what escapes cognition at the moment of impact. Her speech, marked by ellipsis and emotional disorientation, becomes a site where trauma manifests not through direct description, but through silence, belated questioning, and unresolved affect. This indirectness is not a failure to articulate, but rather a structural symptom of trauma itself, revealing the limits of language in the face of overwhelming psychic violence.

Following the sexual assault, Lucy's psychological disintegration becomes increasingly visible through her behavioral withdrawal and corporeal stagnation. Although she initially manages the aftermath with outward calmness, the internal rupture is starkly

signaled in her question to David: “*Why did they hate me so?*” (Coetzee, 2010, p. 165). This brief but haunting utterance conveys the deep incomprehensibility of the violence and Lucy’s struggle to render meaning from it—a struggle that marks the beginning of her psychic fragmentation. As time passes, she withdraws from ordinary social life and seeks refuge in the natural rhythms of land and animal care, spending prolonged hours in the garden and the company of her cat and the surviving bulldog, Katy. Yet these gestures of continuity coexist with signs of profound inertia and despair. Coetzee (2010) describes her as follows: “*She sits in her housecoat and slippers with yesterday’s newspaper on her lap. Her hair hangs lank; she is overweight in a slack, unhealthy way. More and more she has begun to look like one of those women who shuffle around the corridors of nursing homes whispering to themselves*” (Coetzee, 2010, p. 205). This vivid portrayal not only signals the deterioration of her physical condition but also metaphorically evokes a slow descent into an interior void—a suspended state of trauma that resists resolution, verbalization, or even temporal progression.

This constellation of behaviors—silence, fragmentation, and embodied withdrawal—resonates with Caruth’s (2016) theory of trauma, which emphasizes the unassimilable nature of traumatic experience and its belated return in distorted or non-linear forms. Caruth (2016) argues that trauma cannot be fully integrated into consciousness at the time of its occurrence, and thus resurfaces belatedly in indirect, often fragmentary expressions. Lucy’s refusal to articulate the defilement, her minimal communication, and her retreat into wordless routines reflect this delayed and disjointed mode of response. Her inability to articulate the assault through coherent narrative exemplifies trauma’s resistance to rational explanation and its intrusion into the present as unresolved. However, while Caruth’s (2016) theory illuminates the psychic disjunction at the heart of Lucy’s silence, it remains limited in accounting for her embodied turn toward care, endurance, and regeneration. Her decisions to stay on the land, tend to animals, and eventually accept motherhood point to a form of agency that surpasses psychic rupture and narrative impossibility. At this juncture, Braidotti’s (2021) posthuman feminist ethics becomes relevant. The following section will elaborate on how her framework helps to reconceptualize Lucy’s silent practices as generative and ethically situated forms of resilience.

In *Disgrace*, Lucy’s silence is neither a retreat into shame nor a simple avoidance strategy; it constitutes a deliberate repudiation of dominant regimes of witnessing. At the interpersonal level, David—both father and putative listener—fails to assume the ethical responsibility of witness. Approaching Lucy’s sexual violation through a framework of rationalism, anthropocentrism, and patriarchal order, he constrains his interpretation to moral judgment, historical atonement, and personal contrition, never reaching the affective depth or ethical complexity of her trauma. This failure exemplifies what Felman and Laub (1992) term the “*crisis of witnessing*.” For them, witnessing is not simply the act of narrating one’s traumatic experience; it also requires the ethical participation of a listener, whose engagement must resonate emotionally and structurally with the survivor’s account. When the listener refuses or lacks this capacity to respond, the process of witnessing collapses. David thus emerges as an incapacitated witness, unable to furnish an ethical space for the reception of Lucy’s suffering.

At the national level, South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) exposes a parallel crisis in the structures of witnessing. Grounded in verbal testimony, public confession, and official narration, the TRC presupposes that social repair can be achieved through spoken disclosure. Yet its rationalist appeal to universalist norms

marginalizes those experiences that cannot—or will not—be articulated, particularly the gender- and race-inflected traumas of female survivors of sexual violence (İbrişim, 2021). Lucy's refusal to file charges, pursue legal remedy, or insert her experience into the public record thus functions as a rejection of the TRC's patriarchal, state-sanctioned discourse and as an act of resistance to the power structures that such discourse sustains.

Confronted with the simultaneous failure of linguistic and institutional modes of redress, Lucy adopts a non-verbal response to trauma that embodies a posthuman feminist ethics. Her continued agricultural labor, attentive care for animals, and ultimate decision to carry to term the mixed-race child conceived through rape together constitute a form of embodied, silent witnessing. This witness does not rely on discursive articulation; rather, it is enacted through relational entanglements with more-than-human life, exemplifying an ethics of becoming grounded in corporeal practice. Posthuman feminist theory (Braidotti, 2013) insists that subjectivity emerges not from linguistic naming or rational self-verification, but through ongoing interactions within vulnerable multispecies communities. Accordingly, Lucy heals not by narrating her trauma, but by sustaining the web of life, re-establishing networks of care and order in the wake of violence. Her response thus transcends the logic of speech and radically reconfigures modern regimes of witnessing, offering a potent, ethically charged alternative to conventional trauma discourse.

What this article proposes is that Lucy works through her trauma by paying close attention to the ethical practice of "*generativity*" (Braidotti, 2019) and the nonhuman realm, instead of immersing herself in the traditional path to salvation.

Lucy's acceptance of motherhood transforms her trauma into a posthuman practice of care. In her conversation with her father, she states: "*Love will grow—you can trust nature. I am determined to be a good mother, David. A good mother and a good person*" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 216). This declaration indicates that her recovery does not stem from forgiveness of the perpetrators but from a renewed trust in the continuity of life and the rhythms of nature. Motherhood, in this context, is no longer reducible to the traditional gendered role of self-sacrifice; rather, it constitutes an affirmative, generative response through which Lucy reanchors her subjectivity in the aftermath of violence. This trajectory resonates with Braidotti's (2021) conceptualization of posthuman subjectivity, which is not predicated upon the restoration of a coherent past self but is enacted as a forward-looking, relational praxis rooted in entanglements with land, animals, and the wider community of life.

Thus, Lucy's embrace of motherhood is not merely a biological outcome but an ethical stance. It demonstrates that trauma can be reconfigured through generative care and cross-species relationality, rather than being confined within the binary logics of victimhood or gendered roles. Through symbiotic interaction with the land and non-human life, Lucy reconstructs a new form of subjectivity and agency—one that resists anthropocentric and patriarchal paradigms of healing and instead embodies a posthuman ethics of "*becoming-with*" others (Braidotti, 2021; Coetzee, 2010). In this way, her choice transcends the conventional paradigm of maternal sacrifice and manifests instead as a forward-looking, life-affirming praxis.

Following the armed intrusion and sexual assault on the farm, Lucy resolutely refuses to submit the case to the judicial system, opting instead to keep the violence within the

private sphere. She not only declines to press criminal charges against the three perpetrators but also permits the young assailant, Pollux, to remain on the farm under Petrus's supervision. Even when David discovers Pollux spying on Lucy while she bathes and attempts to intervene, Lucy resists allowing the situation to escalate, preventing her father from reinscribing the event through a punitive logic. While such decisions may appear incomprehensible, they in fact reveal her rejection of retribution and of the state's punitive mechanisms. As [Braidotti's \(2021\)](#) posthuman feminist theory suggests, Lucy's stance does not constitute forgiveness in the conventional sense, nor does it amount to moral endurance; rather, it reflects a conscious repudiation of linear retribution and anthropocentric penal rationalities. By allowing Pollux to remain, while maintaining coexistence through spatial separation and silence, Lucy enacts what [Braidotti \(2021\)](#) identifies as the ethical dimensions of generativity and relationality. In other words, Lucy's response challenges patriarchal and colonial juridical discourses that center narratives of victimhood and revenge, while simultaneously practicing a posthuman subjectivity grounded in generativity and relational entanglements. Her choice thus reconfigures trauma beyond the frameworks of law and discourse, transforming it instead into a forward-looking mode of survival ([Braidotti, 2021](#); [Coetzee, 2010](#)).

Rather than articulating her trauma through juridical language or symbolic confrontation, Lucy enacts a form of embodied, nonverbal recovery through the routines of daily life: cultivating the land, caring for animals, and persisting in place. Her toleration of Pollux is neither an act of forgetting nor conventional absolution, but a refusal to allow trauma to perpetuate itself through cycles of vengeance and victimhood. Within this ethical framework, Lucy does not seek redress through punishment, but accepts her woundedness as a condition from which new modes of existence can emerge. Her response constitutes a profound challenge to patriarchal scripts of retribution, colonial justice mechanisms, and humanist ideals of mastery and coherence. Ultimately, Lucy's actions model a posthuman feminist mode of self-reclamation—not a return to a prior state of wholeness, but the creation of an ethical and affective space for living on amid rupture.

In *Disgrace*, Lucy's path toward healing is not only grounded in her connection with the land and her generative ethical choices but also significantly shaped by her relationship with nonhuman animals, particularly the dog Katy. After experiencing sexual violence, Lucy explicitly chooses to "*start at ground level... with nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity. [...] Like a dog*" ([Coetzee, 2010, p. 205](#)). This self-identification with the condition of a dog—a being often marked by vulnerability and dispossession—signals her radical acceptance of powerlessness as the beginning of transformation. Rather than resisting this state, Lucy embraces it as an entry point into a new form of life, one that rejects domination and reclaims ethical being through humility and coexistence.

Katy, the bulldog, occupies a pivotal role within the posthuman relational network that sustains Lucy's embodied response to trauma. In a climactic scene involving Lucy and the bulldog, when Pollux intrudes on her privacy by voyeuristically observing her during a moment of vulnerability, Katy instinctively intervenes—lunging at the boy in an act of unprompted, protective force. While Lucy subsequently calms the dog and defuses the situation, the episode does more than affirm the animal's instinctual loyalty; it foregrounds the affective and ethical entanglement between the human and the nonhuman. Katy functions not merely as a domestic animal, but as a co-constitutive

participant in what [Braidotti \(2021\)](#) terms a posthuman ecology of care—a material and affective assemblage in which interspecies interdependence enables alternative modes of resilience. The mutual attunement between Lucy and Katy reflects a reconfiguration of agency that resists anthropocentric mastery and instead privileges situated, embodied responsiveness. Through this encounter, Lucy enacts a form of posthuman ethics grounded not in juridical redress or symbolic articulation, but in multispecies solidarity, ethical restraint, and an expanded sense of shared vulnerability.

Thus, Lucy's interaction with animals—particularly her embodied, communicative relationship with Katy—becomes an essential medium for her post-traumatic transformation. Through this interspecies connection, she resituates herself in a world that is not governed by human hierarchies or revenge, but by care, presence, and shared vulnerability. In this sense, animals in *Disgrace* are not symbolic accessories but ethical companions in Lucy's journey toward posthuman redemption.

Lucy's post-traumatic recovery in *Disgrace* is deeply entangled with her embodied and affective connections to nonhuman animals, which exemplify the posthuman feminist ethics of relationality and care. "*She is sitting on the sofa ... playing with the cat [...] but the game is over now*" ([Coetzee, 2010, p. 165](#)). This seemingly mundane interaction represents a crucial moment in Lucy's healing process: a nonverbal, non-instrumental engagement with a nonhuman other. According to [Braidotti's \(2021\)](#) posthuman feminist theory, such moments of "zoe-centered" connectivity reflect an ethical framework grounded not in human rationality or moral redemption but in affective coexistence and embodied interdependence. The playful encounter allows Lucy to momentarily suspend the burdens of trauma, gendered violence, and legal failure, and to inhabit a space of mutual presence beyond language or symbolic justice. By engaging with the cat in this corporeal and spontaneous manner, Lucy performs what [Braidotti \(2021\)](#) terms "*generativity*"—a mode of becoming that affirms life through relational multiplicity. Thus, the scene articulates a shift from humanist paradigms of salvation toward a posthuman ethics of care, signaling Lucy's partial reconstitution of subjectivity through her embodied openness to nonhuman life.

Lucy's healing process is also grounded in her deepening relationship with the land, which functions not only as a material site of labor but as an ethical space of reconnection and continuity. In a quiet moment of observation, David sees her from a distance: "*He reaches the fence and stops. Lucy, with her back to him, has not yet noticed him. She is wearing a pale summer dress, boots, and a wide straw hat. As she bends over, clipping or pruning or tying, [...] Lucy straightens up, stretches, bends down again. Field-labour; peasant tasks, immemorial. His daughter is becoming a peasant. [...] With luck she will last a long time, long beyond him. When he is dead she will, with luck, still be here doing her ordinary tasks among the flowerbeds.*" ([Coetzee, 2010, p. 217](#)). This passage frames Lucy not as a victim in need of redemption, but as a figure of endurance and ecological embeddedness. Her repetitive, grounded actions—bending, clipping, working—symbolize an alternative form of agency rooted in what [Braidotti \(2021\)](#) terms "*becoming*": a mode of life that is entangled with the rhythms of the earth, beyond modernist ideals of mastery or transcendence. Rather than returning to legal or discursive structures to address her trauma, Lucy's immersion in the land allows her to reconstitute a post-traumatic identity through embodied care, temporal repetition, and symbiosis with nonhuman forces. Her healing is therefore not a restoration of prior identity, but a quiet, continual becoming-with the soil—a posthumanism feminist gesture of survival and resilience.

The redemptive power of Lucy's reconnection with the natural world is powerfully conveyed through a moment of poetic stillness, where her transformation becomes both visually and symbolically complete. The wind drops. There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged forever: *the gentle sun, the stillness of midafternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, [...] lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. [...] She is flushed from her labours and perhaps a little sunburnt. She looks, suddenly, the picture of health.* (Coetzee, 2010, p. 217). The scene, though presented through David's gaze, primarily highlights Lucy's healing from trauma and the quiet resilience she embodies. Her connection to the land, her bodily labor, and her acceptance of a new, grounded existence all coalesce into an image of recovery that is intimate and enduring. The stillness and harmony of the pastoral setting elevate Lucy from a position of trauma to one of elemental vitality. Her redemption is not articulated through speech or confrontation, but is instead inscribed in her embodied rhythm with the natural world. In this moment, the narrative affirms a mode of healing rooted in continuity, survival, and generative presence—an implicit resistance to violence through a deliberate act of living.

5. Conclusion

Lucy Lurie's post-violation experience in *Disgrace* resists the familiar arc of victimhood, confession, and cathartic recovery. Instead, her persistent silence, refusal of legal redress, and embodied commitment to the rhythms of rural life reveal a radical rethinking of how trauma can be lived and narrated. By choosing to remain on her farm, tending to dogs and working the land, Lucy disengages from anthropocentric paradigms of justice and selfhood, positioning herself within a more-than-human web of relational ethics.

Framed through Braidotti's (2021) posthuman feminist theory, Lucy's actions represent not a withdrawal into passivity but a generative mode of resilience that destabilizes conventional assumptions about gendered suffering and recovery. Her subjectivity is not static or sealed but porous, continuously negotiated through affective entanglements with soil, animals, and the resonant registers of silence—relations that, crucially, relegate the male witness David to the margins and lay bare the faltering authority of patriarchal discourse. This redefinition shifts the analytic lens from the humanist imperative to restore order or reassert an autonomous self toward a relational, processual ontology attuned to more-than-human solidarities.

Lucy's trajectory challenges the primacy of linguistic articulation in trauma discourse, advancing a non-verbal, materially grounded response that refuses both moral redemption and retaliatory justice. Unlike Butler's (2004) conceptualization of public mourning as a performative demand for political recognition, Lucy's mourning operates in a posthuman register—silent, material, and interspecies—enacted not through speech or protest but through daily acts of care for vulnerable lives, refusing visibility while remaining ethically potent. It is therefore neither private despair nor public spectacle, but an ethical stance that reclaims agency through embodied endurance. From the irrepresentability of trauma (Caruth, 2016; Felman & Laub, 1992) to the ethics of interspecies care (Braidotti, 2013), from Lucy's embodied resistance in the Pollux episode to her ecological embeddedness in land labor, this analysis has traced a multi-faceted reconfiguration of female resilience. Through Lucy's posthuman gestures of care

and survival, *Disgrace* reimagines female resilience not as transcendence over harm, but as a practice of becoming-with in the aftermath of violence.

Ultimately, this reading offers a critical intervention into both trauma theory and feminist literary studies by foregrounding how posthuman ethics can inform alternative models of subjectivity and healing. In doing so, it invites readers and scholars alike to reconfigure the ways we think about trauma—not as a rupture to be sutured, but as a site of ethical openness, material engagement, and the ongoing negotiation of being.

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