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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## David Lurie as a Byronic Hero in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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| ABSTRACT

The Nobel Prize winner J.M. Coetzee is known for addressing uncomfortable and unanswerable questions through his novels, often having autobiographical traces and staunch protagonists dwelling in solitude and emptiness. The protagonist of *Disgrace* is one such character who, in the face of both private and public ignominies, refuses to change his ideals that are fairly identical to the Romantic poet Lord Byron only to reject them in the end after his transformative exploits and emerge as a remorseful yet stolid hero. The novel's honest and relentless probing of character while keeping the impulses and crimes of passion and the inadequacies of justice at the focal point makes it a bleak allegorical work of brilliance. The multiple variations of disgraces mentioned in the novel tend to sublimate and synthesize the identity of David Lurie into a cathartic sense of dislodgement and to regenerate as a Romantic paralysis of the self. This paper aims to explore the influence of the Romantics on David Lurie, specifically the European Renaissance legacy of the autonomy of the individual, as well as the deliberate or unconscious similitudes with the Byronic hero archetype. It will also investigate the nature of the legacy of the Romantic self that David Lurie leaves behind and the role of imagination in addressing themes such as guilt, redemption, and alteration of realities.

| KEYWORDS

Byronic Hero, J.M Coetzee *Disgrace*, Romanticism, South African Literature, David Lurie

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### 1. Introduction

In J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, David Lurie's identity is more than a lonely white heterosexual man having no innate experiences of the oppressed, which had been distinctive in post-apartheid South Africa. His Romantic ideals form a translucent shield around him as he is found guilty, humiliated, and banished from his comfortable oblivious life in the middle of the novel, even if it is not so ironic for him to be a former Romantic scholar and his pursuits being thwarted like the disintegration of the pastoral dream in the latter half of the novel. In the 1983 novel *Life & Times of Michael K*, the protagonist directly faces the troubles of the apartheid only to escape to his homeland with his mother in a wheelbarrow and, in the end, according to Rita Barnard, "creates an unsustainable idyll... a vision of rural life without patriarchal and or colonial domination" (205). However, Coetzee takes an evasive stance towards familiar subjects of rape, violence, and sexual harassment by shifting the perspective of the country being the locus of old simplicities. There is an urgent crisis of definitions, relationships, and responsibilities at the heart of the novel but the candour representations and references to the Romantics from Wordsworth to Byron seem to drive the inner desire of the protagonist more than his refusal to capitulate to his offenses.

David Lurie is classified as a "Communications" professor in a technical university in Cape Town, providing a typical structure for an academic novel, and his sexual impulses leading to his downfall are to a great extent dissimilar to that of William Stoner (in *Stoner* 1972 who was a legendary figure in the English department of the University of Missouri despite severe oppositions and trials). But there are certain and very prominent tendencies borrowed from the archetypal Byronic figure that crystallize Coetzee's

underlying ideas of the failed dreams of “a self-described slave to Eros, torn between reason and desire, alienated to himself” (Meyers 334).

Through this paper, I will study the parallels between the Byronic hero in English Romanticism, the action of the story, and the character of David Lurie functioning not as an anti-hero in a highly charged political background but as a victim of his ideals wrapped in his hope of being a romantic authority both in university and his personal space. In this regard, I will expand on the comments that the “nature” Lurie is acquainted with or passionate about from his readings of Romantic poetry leads him to reject the literary models and be haunted by the memories of “a life and career based on ideas that turned out to be outmoded, outdated and irrelevant” (Cass 37).

## 2. The Function of the Imagination and Wordsworthian Influence

The first sentence of *Disgrace* sets the episodic visual tone of the novel. Written like vignettes introducing a man of 52 years of age, stripping in the very first paragraph in the chambers of his concubine, Soraya, for whom he “technically is old enough to be her father” (Coetzee 1). For a man following his temperament like a “Rule of St. Benedict” and knowing himself too much to engage in unwanted behaviour, the hard-set facts of his character are prepared to be thwarted as the rest of the narrative unfolds. In the first chapter itself, Coetzee expresses the brooding discontent of his protagonist for rational thought, who got “tired of criticism, tired of prose measured by the yard” and has no substantial impact on his students. This brings him to idealize the ballads of Byron, toying with his ambitious imagination of writing an opera on Byron’s scandalous affair with Teresa, Contessa Guiccioli, when he lived in Ravenna and worked on *Don Juan*.

Lurie sees himself as a rebel against academic conformity. Unlike Byron, who deviated from his intellectual pursuits to indulge in diversions such as fencing and boxing lessons, the theatre, demimondes, and gambling, Lurie, ironically, is a real scholar; he has written 3 books, one of which is a history of Wordsworth. Often quoting *The Prelude* in his class, a special-field course that he is allowed to teach once a year, and even attempting to seduce his student Melanie Isaacs by quoting Shakespeare’s sonnets fuels his delusions to usurp or dominate the many women in his life, not with irresistible passion but an unsentimental subjugation. Here, literature is his only source or means of seduction and, at the same time, his torment for having imagined himself separate and intellectually displaced in a supposed institution of reverence. This careless freedom and his monadic imagination, as argued by Mike Marais, serve as an undeniable mechanism through which “Coetzee challenges Lurie’s assumption of autonomy” by “structurally placing the gang rape of his daughter Lucy in parallel to Lurie’s rape of Melanie” (76). Coetzee assigns a task to the protagonist’s imagination that had been fleeting from one romance to another, to imagine “what women undergo at the hands of men” (Coetzee 111), and in so doing, he is allowed to sympathize not just with his daughter but his own actions.

His early influence on Wordsworth is evident through his passing remarks of devotion to his poetics and even referring to him as one of his masters, yet he purposely chose to spend his lonely idle hours “in the university library, reading all he can find on the wider Byron circle, adding to notes that already fill two fat files.” (Coetzee 11). Moreover, the subtle aspects of the Wordsworthian theme of “otherness” through the character of Lucy Lurie deeply reveal the pastoral alternate realities focusing on the outcasts, the marginalized, and the real difficulties in an idyllic setting. At the novel’s most extreme moment of catastrophe, when Lurie is locked in the lavatory, unable to protect his daughter from sexual violation, his anguished thoughts turn to his linguistic unpreparedness; the Romantic European languages of French and Italian cannot save him or his daughter while “the savages’ jaw away in their lingo” (Coetzee 95), once again questioning the scope of his intellectual endeavours and his inability to face nature in its raw predatory form.

In his paper, Jeffrey Cass talks about the “circumscribed limits to what we can discern about the Romantic sublime” (36), especially in terms of Lurie’s choice of explanation of the lines from book 6 of *Prelude* that suggests his apprehension of whether the purity of imagination can ever truly exist with the mundane. However, this constant “re-education” does not result in any transformation, as he refuses to yield to his undirected morality. Rather, real-life riddled with desires and duties “usurps upon” the imaginative, sometimes misleading or displacing its existence:

Yet we cannot live our daily lives in a realm of pure ideas cocooned from sense-experience. The question is not, how can we keep the imagination pure, protected from the onslaughts of reality? The question has to be, can we find a way for the two to coexist? Look at line 599. Wordsworth is writing about the limits of sense-perception. It is a theme we have touched on before. As the sense-organs reach the limit of their powers, their light begins to go out. Yet, at the moment of expiry, that light leaps up one last time like a candle-flame, giving us a glimpse of the invisible. (Coetzee 21)

Another reference to Wordsworth is particularly relevant- the name of his daughter Lucy which serves as a double pun reminiscent of the Luciferian fall that Wordsworth recounts in book 1 *Prelude* and also his *Lucy Poems* representative of the poet’s lost inspiration closely resembling Lurie’s distant relationship with his daughter who he now sees as a “statement of independence,

purposeful" (Coetzee 89) so much so that he approves of her, being an epitome of free will and self-sufficiency. Moreover, Lucy Lurie stands acutely parallel to Wordsworthian Lucy- raised by nature, harnessing the simple, accepting what cannot be known, and surviving in the memories of others. An indirect reference is pointed out by Mike Marais- "whilst Lucy is being raped, Lurie wonders in the lavatory if she is dead and, in so doing, he echoes the male speaker of the poem *Strange Fits of Passion* who, upon approaching Lucy's house, reflects as follows: "'O mercy! to myself I cried, / 'If Lucy should be dead'" (Wordsworth 11. 27-28)" (86) which raises the concern whether Lurie could ever separate himself from the literary imagination.

Towards the end of the novel, the imagination plays a crucial role in integrating Lurie's moral dilemmas. His "lyric impulse" enables him to lose himself in the existence of his daughter, he allows himself to discover what it would be like to have been raped by himself, and in so doing, he is able to sympathize with Melanie's father and ask for forgiveness. The relationship between the imagined and lived experience is far from neutral; one always stays dominant over the other in the novel, and thus Coetzee's creative invention to place Lurie in the context of Romantics is at the expense of tragic revelation and certain moments "that will not come unless the eye is half turned toward the great archetypes of the imagination we carry within us" (Coetzee 22).

### **3. Disillusions with Byron and Romantic Ideology**

A lot of critics express their abnegation in relation to the protagonist's association with his Romantic thought, in particular, CM Sheils, who considers Lurie's "otherness" as a lost sense of belongingness and his Romantic interests act as an "escape to the traditions of a European literary past" (40). However, the urbaneness of Cape Town and Lurie's preoccupations, keeping the new South Africa of 1997 in the background, is quite similar to Byron in his days of sophistication, establishing himself as both a poet and Lord when the French Revolution had overturned the old regime and with it its old certainties. The question that arises is whether Lurie partakes more from Byron's turpitude and false love for disjointed romances or revels in a misguided colonized idealization of the Europeans' oeuvre. By fusing two of the most contrasting Romantic poets into a character obsessed with youth, vitality, and beauty, Coetzee attempts to assemble a tragic conglomeration of the opposites: urban/provincial, critical/emotional, and moral/erotic.

Apart from being described as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know," (a phrase made popular by one of the many women Byron courted, Lady Caroline Lamb, and which is also teasingly used by Lucy to describe her father in the novel) the Byronic hero has certain attributes that form an archetype, extending back to the ages of Shakespeare and gothic. But in a traditional sense, Byron's characters like Sardanapalus, Juan, and Torquil are reserved with tendencies oscillating from heightened sensitivity to moral dissipation and, in the end, surpass their impulsive limitations to give way for purity of imagination and knowledge.

Lurie's concern which is mostly with the "waning possibilities of sexual passion and the more aesthetic literary passions, is a deeply Byronic concern" (Beard 62). In one of his lectures on *Lara*, Lurie raises the question about the nature of the character. In order to dodge the haughty yet accurate interpretation by Melanie's boyfriend, he narrowly identifies Lara with Lucifer at the same time, juxtaposes himself with Byron's character- "He (Lara) doesn't act on principle but on impulse, and the source of his impulses is dark to him," (Coetzee 39) while condoning the "mad heart" he also invites his students to understand and sympathize with the character even if he will be "condemned to solitude."

Before Lurie's flight to the country, which is far from a hurried or disgraced reaction, he ensures that he faces his shame with dignity. Rather than conform to the accepted practice of voluntary confession and express genuine remorse, he responds with silence and ultimately appears heroic in saying no to the State representatives. They can punish him, but they cannot control the freedom of his mind. Coetzee's depiction of the disciplinary hearing is more than derogatory, which suggests, according to Patrick Lenta, a capitalist corporation wherein "an increasingly regulatory and administrative system constraints and manipulates individuals through insidious techniques of normalization" (4-5).

In April 1816, Byron voluntarily left England to never return following the proliferating accusations of adultery, incest with his half-sister Augusta and mountainous debt. This self-exile was part of his realization that his freedom was not among the autocrats or the cultured society but in the "pathless woods" or by the "deep sea" (Byron lines 178, 181). Similarly, Lurie departs from the positive moralists' domain and sets foot into the uncharted manor of the innocent "boervrou." Here, his contemplation of Byron is melancholic, directly associating not with the artist or his artistic achievements but with his shortcomings. Reviewing Byron's letters of 1820, he mentions him as "fat, middle-aged at 32" living with his "short-legged mistress" (Coetzee 87) in Ravenna and imagines him to be a lonely unattractive lover in yet another of his failed romantic liaisons. Here, in the pastoral, Lurie is freer to follow his creative impulses than recreating his literary idols through scholarly apparatuses in uninspiring classrooms. His daily chores tending to his fatherly duties, like selling Lucy's vegetables at the farmer's market and working at the animal welfare centre, unknowingly deviates him from his mental abode of ideas. Consequently, country life became for him the reality principle that he regularly overlooked while following his Romantic sensibilities.

After the life-altering rape incident, which turned out to be a product of senseless vindictiveness and spite, many readers expect a turning point not just in perspectives but in the tonality of the narrative itself. What follows, according to Jeffrey Cass, is a “counter-sublime” (40) that subverts any notion of the Romantic ideal that Lurie has imagined for the world. We can also notice a parallel emerging from Lucy’s refusal to charge her attackers with Lurie’s earlier objection to confess his offenses. It calls into question whether the implications of “disgrace” are more befitting for the failed Romantic dilettante or for the innocent country girl who decides to acknowledge her misfortune by carrying the rapist’s child. The fact that her rapists freely roam about at parties while Lurie dealt with a proper tribunal for merely seducing a student confirms the inevitable disintegration of Lurie’s Romanticism. His incompetence and failure to convince his daughter to demand justice make him question his ability to be a paternal guide. The disturbing justification given by Lucy causes a shift in gender roles with her firm determination to stay on in the same community as she writes in her letter to David:

“I am not the person you know. I am a dead person, and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life. All I know is that I cannot go away. You do not see this, and I do not know what more I can do to make you see. It is as if you have chosen deliberately to sit in a corner where the rays of the sun do not shine. I think of you as one of the three chimpanzees, the one with his paws over his eyes. Yes, the road I am following may be the wrong one. But if I leave the farm now, I will leave defeated and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life. I cannot be a child forever. You cannot be a father forever. I know you mean well, but you are not the guide I need, not at this time.” (161)

Lurie is no longer interested in the subjects of desire and beauty after being permanently marked by the haunting incident. He even starts to think of Byron pushing himself “among the legions of countesses and kitchenmaids” (Coetzee 160), which could be considered rape by many. Furthermore, his project of writing about Byron in his middle age is marked by an astute change in his routine, “a man as selfish as he should be” (134) offers himself to the service of dead dogs.

The Romantics affirmed repeatedly that imagination is the source of empathy and creativity. In the same context, the imagined principle is hardly neglected. Coetzee deliberately toys with the imagination equipping Lurie to imagine “in his head Byron, alone on the stage... he is on the point of setting off for Greece. At the age of thirty-five, he has begun to understand that life is precious” (Coetzee 140). Here, he abandons Wordsworthian sublimity and his sensuous nature in favour of Byronic irony only to adopt, in the words of Jeffrey Cass, a kind of “numb, detached realism”:

“Putting Byron in a post-youth, the operatic format is not an attempt at high art or even mediocre research masquerading as avant-garde art; it’s kitsch, farce, the final diminution of the Romantic impulse... In the new South African order, Romantic sympathy of any kind has no place; indeed, the new order wants nothing of Lurie’s intellectual passions or emotional interests” (42)

Since he now lacks those books from the giant shelves and his notes from the cramped chambers of the city, he must strive to enter imaginatively into the heart of Byron and Teresa. Quoting Virgil’s *Aeneid* while lying next to Bev Shaw, Lurie intends to give voice to Byron’s heightened affective qualities till the time the music of the libretto “hovers somewhere on the horizon.” He must acquire the lyrical genius of his master as he mentions to Melanie’s father, Mr. Isaacs- “I lack the lyrical. I manage love too well. Even when I burn I don’t sing, if you understand me. For which I am sorry. I am sorry for what I took your daughter through” (Coetzee 171). Here, his melancholy is conveniently juxtaposed as “burning” in his inability to express himself creatively, which is why he can only engage in false ideals of grandiose projects on a historical figure while he thinks of himself as “obscure,” as a mere “figure from the margins of history,” a man involved in the lurid routine of “burning” unwanted corpses of dogs. He thinks of himself as *Harijan*, a word borrowed from the Hindu religion meaning- untouchable; he reduces himself to the bottom of the social hierarchy.

#### 4. Homecoming, Re-emergence and Re-education of the Romantic

Upon his return to Cape Town, Lurie distinguishes his life from “skulking about like a criminal” (178) to a “superannuated scholar, without hope, without prospect.” He comes home to a house with smashed windowpanes, his bedroom ransacked and some of his essential belongings like tapes, records, computer equipment, and kitchen supplies stolen. This physical loss echoes the perennial loss of his grace from the experiences at the farmhouse. The emptiness stretches beyond his psyche into the physical world, which is bereft of hope and reconciliation either with the past or with the present. His brief “spell with Lucy” (Coetzee 182) did not turn him into a country person, yet he cannot help but reminisce about “the duck family tacking about on the surface of the dam.” He considers his leaving as a “betrayal” for the dogs, who will be tossed in the fire “unmourned.” These subtle remembrances creep in to reacquaint him with the Romantic sublime he inadvertently disowned. When he is ignored by his neighbour and the assistant at the coffee shop, he swiftly turns his imagination, this time, towards Wordsworth and his description of his first stay in London (in *The Prelude*) watching a pantomime of ‘Jack, the Giant Killer.’ Lurie is by far honest enough to recognize that he has failed to learn from these great poets and his only solace is to embrace his own “spots of time” (Wordsworth line 208).

A large chunk of the final chapters is given to his Byron project, which is his opportunity to nurture his Romantic identification. At first, he conceived "a chamber-play about love and death" (Coetzee 184), about a passionate young woman's love for an older man "as an action with a complex, restless music behind it, sung in an English that tugs continually toward an imagined Italian." But as he ponders on this version, he is apprehensive about the portrayal of his heroine. He can create the words and music for Byron, but Teresa has unmatched qualities- "young, greedy, wilful, petulant", the kind of characteristics for which he has a challenging time tuning to his lushly autumnal music. The new Teresa, a "dumpy little widow", is, according to Mike Marais, a recreation of Lurie's sympathetic imagination in the context of his daughter- "Once Lurie succeeds in 'losing himself' by occupying Lucy's position, the opera changes" (77). The older, less sexualized version of Guiccioli presumably resembles his daughter and his omission of Byron, as argued by Marais, signifies a positive development in Lurie's personality. However, there is a striking discontent as he begins to develop his character further-

"The passage of time has not treated Teresa kindly. With her heavy bust, her stocky trunk, and her abbreviated legs, she looks more like a peasant, a Contadina, than an aristocrat. The complexion that Byron once so admired has turned hectic; in summer, she is overtaken with attacks of asthma that leave her heaving for breath" (Coetzee 185).

Her 'romantic' story is now subject to the passage of time, and Lurie reaffirms his convictions about whether this "plain ordinary woman" can ignite his love the same way Byron conflicted with his old philandering ways. This is the ultimate test of his empathetic imagination that has been possible only after the emotional intimacy with his daughter, suggesting her deep influence on his subconscious mind.

It is interesting to note that Lurie presents Byron as a ghost figure after spending so much of his time engrossed in his works, letters, and plays. The ghostly Byron's singing, which replies to Teresa's incessant cries, is faintly and "faltering" to the extent that

"Teresa has to sing his words back to him, helping him along breath by breath, drawing him back to life: her child, her boy. I am here, she sings, supporting him, saving him from going down. I am your source. Do you remember how together we visited the spring of Arqu?? Together, you and I. I was your Laura. Do you remember? That is how it must be from here on: Teresa giving voice to her lover, and he, the man in the ransacked house, giving voice to Teresa." (Coetzee 186)

His ardent lyrical efforts of "giving voice" closely resembles his task of convincing his daughter to raise her voice against the rapists. And here, in the mentioned passage, Teresa juxtaposes her position of lover to mother; she must nurse her love the way a mother nurses her child. "Holding tight to Teresa," Lurie sets to work on the opening pages of the libretto only to discard his original intention of using a piano and start fresh with his "odd little seven-stringed banjo" he bought for Lucy while the dead Byron waits for his resurrection with music. In this way, he and his daughter, Byron, and his mistress "symbolically fuse together" (Beard 73) as Lurie discovers his first true creative talent. He is gripped by his project, impassioned in ways unknown to the indifferent Lurie who spoke to Melanie of "literary passions" but knew not what they meant. He is finally acquiring that lyricism that he genuinely craved and lacked.

He marvels at his ability to produce something worthwhile with a little banjo, and he ponders on his own ghostly presence "six months ago," oscillating between unrestrained bodily pleasures and uninspired academic endeavours. "He is in the opera neither as Teresa nor as Byron nor even as some blending of the two: he is held in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings," writes Coetzee (186), and thus Lurie reacquaints himself to the Romantic ideals of transcendence, glorifying his sensual awareness of artistic freedom, accepting his emotional limitations, and celebrating imagination and creativity- "So this is art, he thinks, and this is how it does its work! How strange! How fascinating!" He is fascinated to the point of catching a plane to Italy and revisiting the spot in the forest where the "Englishman first lifted the skirts of his eighteen-year-old charmer" (Coetzee 187). Soon, Lurie introduces the character of Allegra, Byron's five-year-old daughter, as a "dark" voice, but his famous father "has had enough of life" and sings unwillingly and indifferently to a distant daughter alluding to his own relationship with Lucy.

The intimacy shared by Lurie and his ex-wife, Rosalind, is both peculiar and refreshing as it suggests that she knows him enough to understand his sexual "peccadilloes." However, after their conversion, he awakens his dead senses (like that of Byron in his libretto) to the possibility of a reunion between him and Melanie. He has not lost his Byronic stature of being able to rekindle burning affairs or settle unfinished romantic business. As soon as his thoughts go awry in the direction of the "unnatural acts" (Coetzee 191), he expresses the language of regret and of "sighs", claiming that the young and old together would always lead to inharmonious discord and the old cannot belong anywhere as long as youthful passions stay at the centre of the life stage.

He surreptitiously attends the play featuring Melanie and imagines her clothes burning off in some act so that he can dwindle away in his imaginative thoughts of the past, like the night when he had sex with Melanie in Lucy's old bedroom. As the attendees of the play enjoy and applaud the performance, he feels a fatherly pride towards Melanie and a resolute right to yell out "mine." He wonders about all the women he encountered in his lifetime. They are too many flashing before him like a "stream of images"

or "like leaves blown on the wind, pell-mell," while "he holds his breath, willing the vision to continue" (Coetzee 193). These images of things of the past are plunged into the ocean of his memory, and this makes him "enriched," and "like a flower blooming in his breast, his heart floods with thankfulness" for his ability to revel in the past and reach for the "spots of time" like Wordsworth. After his rough conversation with Melanie's boyfriend, with an injured ego, he revitalizes himself by picking up a young "streetwalker" for whom he feels "strangely protective." This symbolizes his repetitive sexual instinct to place himself as an authoritarian in both filial and romantic settings, and because he fails to fulfill his filial obligations, he lacks the vigour and consistency in his many romantic affairs to ever turn them into grand adventures of love.

Towards the end of the novel, when Lurie visits Lucy again, the true racial tensions begin to explode after Lurie learns about Lucy's pregnancy and one of the rapists, Pollux, staying with Petrus. When Petrus offers to marry Lucy and make her his third wife as part of his cunning plan to possess her farm, it is precisely at this moment that Lurie speaks up and calls out Pollux as "a dangerous child, a young thug, a jackal boy" and sets a mental and verbal boundary between westerners and colonized- "'This is not how we do things.' We: he is on the point of saying, We Westerners." (Coetzee 201)

But his authority diminishes in front of his daughter's stoic firmness. Her decision to accept Petrus' offer and keep her house as part of a deal suggests a bleak indebtedness, a price she has to pay for the atrocities of the past. As disturbing as it is, the ending reflects "rape as a debt to be paid in order to survive in the new order" (Cass 41), even if the new order has burnished its democratic credentials by overturning the categories of oppression that once caused the apartheid.

The sympathetic imagination that developed in Lurie overlooks the "disturbed" boy. Mad with rage, he assaults Pollux, and so does his dog, Katy, who rips his shirt and tugs at his arm, making him bleed and cry out in pain. The scene where Lucy emerges out in her wrapper to rescue Pollux only to reveal her breasts mistakenly becomes an ethical trajectory for Lurie as he recalls the moment when Lucy's breasts were like "rosebuds." In this manner, Coetzee stresses the themes of self-deceit and concealment. No matter how much Lurie tries to do the right thing or follow the redemptive path, his innate desire is to overpower, "usurp", and intrude, whether it is in Melanie's life or his daughter's. It is his passion, both aggressive and sexual, that ultimately estranges him further from his daughter.

It is not ironic that the last chapter of the novel begins with Teresa when the readers are led to believe that the Byron project got abandoned along the way, as Lurie mentioned it to Rosalind as "just a hobby, something to dabble at." However, it does not produce the thrill and consummation that he longed for.

"There is no action, no development, just a long, halting cantilena hurled by Teresa into the empty air, punctuated now and then with groans and sighs from Byron offstage. The husband and the rival mistress are forgotten; they might as well not exist... He has not the musical resources, the resources of energy, to raise Byron in Italy of the monotonous track on which it has been running since the start." (Coetzee 211)

As he realizes that his Romantic sentiments of creation and lyrical impulses are bound to grow feeble and before resigning from his "eccentric little chamber opera", he lends his hope to the future scholars who would recognize the "authentic note of immortal longing." This resignation is more of re-education as he chooses to move out of Lucy's place and rents a room nearby to stay close to her. His Banjo once played the music for Teresa, now strums for Driepoot, one of the dogs in the holding pens, who enjoys the sound more than Lurie himself- "When he hums Teresa's line, and the humming begins to swell with feeling, the dog smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too, or howling." In the end, he entertains the thoughts of welcoming virtues of equanimity, kindness, and patience as he lets go of the virtue of passion. For the first time, Lurie looks into the future, as abysmal as his present, thinking of himself as a lower-than-average grandfather, but this narrative achieves a point of stillness too, of Romantic sublimity, an image re-emerging to illumine Lurie's reading of Wordsworth: "the gentle sun, the stillness of midafternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, das ewig Weibliche, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat" (p. 217). He lacks the eye to appreciate rural life, and yet he catechizes himself as to whether it is "too late to educate the eye."

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude this paper, it is important to reinstate that Lurie's Romanticism was more than a Eurocentric throwback. It was his way of keeping up with himself and the world around him. It is a foreign concept, but the eccentricity associated with the foreign is what drives the action of the novel. Lurie's earlier intention at the start of the novel is to submit to the pleasure principle irrespective of the consequences as long as it fuels his excesses. But the most striking Byronic characteristics he inhabited were despondency, an acute misery in his heart, and the capability for deep and strong affection. The final page of the novel stands in conspicuous contrast to the first page, the same man who only knew how to solve the "problem of sex" redeems himself by solving the problem of rejected souls. The forbearance that constantly eluded him throughout his life found its way to his heart through the innocence of the animal world. The final scene involves him going away from his brooding classroom to an "ordinary room" where the souls

are yanked out of the body. His only social function is assisting Bev Shaw, the operator of an animal clinic, in these "killing sessions," a "a dog undertaker" (Coetzee 160). He accepts his final disgrace without scorn because he has learned "to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love" (217).

Although there is always a polarization between the ideals of Wordsworth and Byron, leading Lurie to favour one over the other but it also suggests, to some extent, a paradoxical and creative combination that underlines the thematic merging of the two Romantic poets. The passionate self-destructiveness of Byron and the lyrical simplicity of Wordsworth help him to sing his libretto with a more profound depth. In the concluding lines of his essay, Jeffrey Cass dismisses the scope for any "existential maturation" (43) for Lurie, and his tossing the dogs' corpses into flames provides "a bitter end of the Romantic sublime." However, I argue that Lurie reaches a conceptual breakthrough that at first rejects the Romantic but at the same time accepts the possibility of re-awakening and re-educating the mind through real experiences. The last line, where Lurie hands over his favourite dog for the surgery, reconciles him to the idea of giving up- giving up on grand notions about life and art, on the "throes of passion", similar to how Byron deliberately gave up his vocation as a poet and committed himself to the cause of Greek independence. In this manner, the novel seeks patterns and wholes to break the hard shell of the ego and anthropomorphism to form a collective holistic consciousness or, to put it in Lucy's words- "there is no higher life; this is the only life there is, which we share with the animals" (Coetzee 78).

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