A Hero in *Disgrace*

The Patterns of a Hero in David Lurie’s *Twist of Fate*

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Abstract

In this essay I look at J.M Coetzee’s *Disgrace* from a rather different perspective. I argue that, despite his less than heroic attributes, David Lurie is the protagonist of an adventure and follows Joseph Campbell’s pattern of the hero’s ditto. Furthermore, the goal of David Lurie’s journey lies in self-realization and self-reinvention, which is not typical for the hero’s journey. The Ultimate Boon is usually something else but different times call for different heroes. In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Derek Attridge suggests that David Lurie grows on the reader throughout the novel and is a better person at the end (Attridge 183). This indicates that David Lurie goes through a process personally that changes him in a positive direction. Besides Campbell’s theory, the theories of Propp and Stanford are presented and put to good use as theoretical background. Since this essay deals with both narratology and structuralism I provide short explanations of these two branches of literature criticism as presented in Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory*. I then discuss relevant passages from *Disgrace* in connection with the different stages of the hero’s journey as described by Campbell. I do so in the order they are presented in Campbell’s book.
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Introduction

What is a hero? Most people would probably not find that question very difficult to answer. Some would name a childhood role model, others would be more than happy to account for their favourite heroes on the big screen; one or two would even find it appropriate to refer to real life difference-makers such as Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King and a few would possibly refer to one of the famous heroes of literature, such as Ivanhoe or Odysseus. However, I strongly doubt that anyone would refer to David Lurie, the protagonist in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, but that is exactly what I do in this essay. David Lurie does not possess many qualities usually found in the prototypical hero, he has a questionable manner towards women to say the least and he spends quite some time surrendering to self pity. None of this appears to agree with the common perception of the hero; but again, what is a hero?

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), professor, lecturer and writer in the fields of mythology and religion, had lots of ideas about the hero in general, but about the pattern of the hero’s journey in particular. In his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* he states that mythology and its heroes are the same everywhere and that it simply changes costume depending on in which culture it is set (Campbell 4). He also recognises that the adventure of a hero follows basically the same pattern no matter which hero. His theory consists of three main stages; Departure, Initiation and Return, which all are divided into to several small categories and stages (Campbell 49-244). They all describe and depict various scenarios which are characteristic for the hero’s adventure. Sometimes there is more than one possible way for the hero to go, sometimes not. However, Campbell’s theory is built on examples from mythology and stories from all around the world and appears to apply wherever it is tried. David Lurie and *Disgrace* should be no exception, if Campbell’s theory is correct.

Moreover, W.B. Stanford has an interesting point of view on the hero’s development and adaptability in *The Ulysses Theme*: “On the one hand audiences and readers demand some novelty of style or intervention [...]. On the other hand, if an adaptor of the familiar legends goes too far in inventing new qualities or new adventures for the poetical heroes [...], he certainly is in danger of offending his audience” (Stanford 1-2). Consequently, even if authors stray away from certain aspects of the hero they are prone to stick with others just to keep an audience.

In *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry presents another type of schematic model over a similar hero myth constructed by Vladimir Propp and adopted by Claude Lévi-Strauss (Barry 226-228). The 31 functions of Propp’s theory are not too different from the scenarios and
stages presented in *The Hero with a Thousand faces*. This model is presented as belonging to Narratology, which means that it focuses on how the story is told (Barry 222-223). However, Narratology is originally a “branch of Structuralism” (Barry 222), which means it would be appropriate also to mention something about Structuralism. According to Barry, Structuralism is about “relating the text to some larger containing structure” (Barry 49) and gives a few examples thereof. The one most fitting to mention here would probably be “a projected model of an underlying universal narrative structure” (Barry 49), since I am using a model in shape of Campbell’s *The Stages of the Hero’s Journey*. Following Barry one would say that my essay is spanning over both Narratology and Structuralism, when investigating if Joseph Campbell’s pattern can be found in *Disgrace*.

Even though David Lurie does not appear to be very heroic, it is most certainly possible to call the chain of events in *Disgrace* an adventure. Therefore, the pattern of a hero should be detectable in his actions even if one has to apply a little imagination. Hence, I argue that; despite his less than heroic attributes, David Lurie is the protagonist of an adventure and follows Joseph Campbell’s pattern of the hero’s ditto. Furthermore, the goal of David Lurie’s journey lies in self realization and self reinvention. In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Derek Attridge states that: “Although he may have forfeited the reader’s moral sympathy early in the novel, he is far from being a dismissable figure at the end” (Attridge 183). This indicates that David Lurie goes through a process personally that changes him in a positive direction. He moves from being a self-centred womanizer to a person who does things out of empathy for others.

Even though the articles dealing with different issues of *Disgrace* are indeed many, they typically deal with things such as; romanticism (Easton, Beard), realism (Cornwell), rape (Valerie Graham) and animals (Herron). Since none of these issues are the focus of this essay, I will not discuss them further here. They are merely representing the vast scope of sources that are of no use to this essay; hence illustrating how narrow the subject of this essay is.

In the following section of this essay I discuss and describe the different stages of the hero’s adventure. I do so through giving a short explanation of the different features of each stage, such as common actions and frequent characters, and discussing them together with relevant and matching stages in *Disgrace*. Relevant, of course, may also be stages that cannot be found and if so, the significance of their not being represented.
The stages of the hero’s adventure

As mentioned in the introduction there are three main stages of the hero’s journey; Departure, Initiation and Return. Obviously it is beneficial to discuss first things first, which means this analysis starts with Departure.

**Departure**

How does the adventure begin? That is exactly what is explained in this first section. Departure is the stage when the hero leaves his conventional slumber to embark on his adventurous journey. The first sub-stage of Departure is called The Call to Adventure.

**The Call to Adventure**

Campbell uses The Frog King as his first example and lists “the herald” as an important feature for the adventure itself: “As a preliminary manifestation of the powers that are breaking into play, the frog, coming up as it were by miracle, can be termed the ‘herald’; the crisis of his appearance is the ‘call to adventure’” (Campbell 51). So when the conventional slumber of every day life is interrupted by this herald, it marks the beginning of the adventure. Furthermore, Campbell sums up the starting point of the adventure quite nicely in the following quote: “The adventure may begin as a mere blunder, as did that of the princess of the fairy tale; or still again, one may be only casually strolling, when some passing phenomenon catches the wondering eye and lures one away from the frequented paths of man” (Campbell 58).

In Disgrace there are two possible calls to adventure. The first is when David Lurie discovers that his regularly frequented prostitute Soraya leads a double life and runs into her on the street. Merely the fact that this incident is preceded by the words, “Then one Saturday morning everything changes.” (Coetzee 6), strongly suggests that the conventional slumber of David Lurie is interrupted and that change lies ahead. Soraya might not be the archetypical herald, nonetheless she qualifies under these circumstances.

The second possible call to adventure is the meeting with Melanie Isaacs: “He is returning home one Friday evening, taking the long route through the old college gardens, when he notices one of his students on the path ahead of him.” (Coetzee 11). There he is, just on his way home when something happens. The meeting is not bound to be out of the ordinary since they see each other in school quite often. However, the affair he has with Melanie proves to be anything but ordinary since it changes his life completely.
It is difficult to distinguish which one of those two is the more appropriate call since they both uphold great relevance. However, I would argue that the meeting with Soraya and the chain of events following it is the true call to adventure. The reason for that is in the opening line of *Disgrace*: “For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (Coetzee 1). It is obvious that sex is important to David Lurie and a significant part of his conventional slumber. When he loses Soraya due to their down-town encounter, he has to fill that void with someone else and that someone is ultimately Melanie Isaacs. Furthermore, that episode is linked with the words “everything changes” (Coetzee 6), which is a clear indication that the conventional slumber is altered or interrupted. Hence, Soraya is the Herald and she marks the Call to adventure.

**The Refusal of the Call**

Not every hero will answer the *Call to Adventure* and therefore it is not surprising to find a section called *The Refusal of the Call* in Campbell’s theory. The first lines of that section read as follows: “Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests.” (Campbell 59). This quote suggests the beginning of the second section of stage one called *The Refusal of the Call*. Campbell further claims that the refusal turns the adventure into something negative. The hero becomes a person in need of rescue and loses sight of the meaning of life: “All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration.” (Campbell 59). Thus, *The Refusal of the Call* is a possible end of the hero’s adventure.

This stage of the hero’s adventure is very interesting to discuss in relation to *Disgrace*. There is one highly significant refusal in *Disgrace* when David Lurie indeed refuses to abide by the guidelines provided by the university and therefore is disgraced. However, that refusal is rather a necessity for the continuing of the adventure than a refusal of the call. Had David Lurie not refused these guide lines he would have been reinstated at the university and continued his conventional slumber. Because he refuses one call he embraces another. Nevertheless, the other part of Campbell’s theory appears to be true when looking at David Lurie. The whole situation is indeed negative, at least to begin with, and David Lurie does become a person in need of help or rescue, which is offered to him from some of his colleagues. Still, the adventure does not end here, which means that David Lurie did not
refuse the call. On the contrary, he appears to deliberately put himself in a position where the only way to go is forward.

**Supernatural Aid**

Having taken up the call our hero may find himself in a position where he needs a bit of aid. The following quote is the start of the section *Supernatural Aid*: “For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass.” (Campbell 69). The trade mark here appears to be great powers in a less than impressive package that aid the hero on his journey. Even heroes that have refused the call might be aided by such forces, but *Supernatural Aid* is typically given to those who answer the call (Campbell73-74).

It is probably a bit harsh to compare an ex-wife to an old crone, but Rosalind is bound to be the closest thing to *Supernatural Aid* David Lurie gets. Although she may not be very supernatural, she is also the closest person in David’s life: “It reassures him that Rosalind still lives nearby: perhaps she feels the same way about him. Someone to count on when the worst arrives: the fall in the bathroom, the blood in the stool” (Coetzee 43). Normally the aid does not come from someone that close to the hero, but in *Disgrace* it is almost supernatural for David Lurie to be close to anyone. The women he encounters are brief relations at best and his only steady relation, if one could call it that, is with a prostitute. Furthermore, David Lurie appears to have no male friends and rejects Hakim when he tries to be one: “He has known Hakim for years, they used to play tennis together in his tennis-playing days, but he is in no mood now for male chumminess. He shrugs irritably, gets into his car” (Coetzee 42). It seems David Lurie has obvious intimacy problems, other than sex that is. Furthermore, the following words put even more emphasis on his intimacy issues: “He would like to spend an evening with her, perhaps even a whole night. But not the morning after. He knows too much about himself to subject her to a morning after, when he will be cold, surly, impatient to be alone” (Coetzee 2). Once again, other than sex, David has serious problems with intimacy and appears to be a loner. This is what makes his relation to Rosalind so special.

The fact that David Lurie is able to have some form of relationship with a woman without having sexual relations with her is extraordinary in itself. The one factor that seems to allow him to really have this relationship is time: “They have been apart for eight years; slowly, warily, they are growing to be friends again, of a sort. War veterans” (Coetzee 43).
She may not offer him amulets to bring with him on his journey, but she does give him a few well chosen words: “Don’t expect sympathy from me, David, and don’t expect sympathy from anyone else either. No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age. Everyone’s hand will be against you, and why not? Really, how could you?” (Coetzee 44). Despite the fact that she will not sympathise with him, she makes it clear that no one else will either and by doing so she lets him know she cares. Furthermore, she appears to be the one person that tells David what he needs to hear without caring whether he wants to hear it or not: “Am I allowed to tell you how stupid it looks? ‘No, you are not.’ ‘I will anyway. Stupid, and ugly too. I don’t know what you do about sex and I don’t want to know, but this is not the way to go about it’” (Coetzee 44). The aid Rosalind offers is not supernatural in the literal meaning of the word, but in the world of David Lurie it is as close to supernatural as it gets. It is aid represented by a non-sexual relationship with a woman that passes on advice on how he is not to lead his life. Hence, she is suggesting a change of ways that is clearly visible below. Hence, pushing him forward on his journey.

**The Crossing of the First Threshold**

*The Crossing of the First Threshold* is the next part of the *Departure* stage of the adventure: “With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance to the zone of magnified power.” (Campbell 77). Moreover, Campbell argues that this crossing of the threshold marks the difference between the adventure seeking hero, and the normal man who is satisfied with remaining within the conventional borders and limits. The hero will venture into the unknown whereas the normal man will not (Campbell 77-78).

As mentioned before, David Lurie refuses to abide by the guidelines suggested to him by his colleagues at the board hearing. Since this refusal is more or less synonymous with losing his job, it also, consequently, means he is leaving his old life behind and venturing into the unknown, just like a hero. A more conventional man would surely take the easy way out through abiding by the guidelines provided, but not David Lurie. What he does is simply to refuse to say he is sorry. He pleads guilty to the allegations against him but he will not say he is sorry for the abuse of power, at least according to Elleke Boehmer: “a hero, David Lurie, who notoriously refuses to say he’s sorry for the abuse of power” (Boehmer in Poyner 2006). This is highly significant since, as mentioned before, he puts himself in a position where the only way to go is forward, over the threshold.
The Belly of the Whale

Of course there are risks when our hero sets off into the unknown, for example falling into *The Belly of the Whale*. This stage is the second part of the threshold and the belly itself symbolises rebirth: “The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.” (Campbell 90). Campbell even goes as far as calling this part of the threshold “a form of self-annihilation” (Campbell 91). However, he also compares it to a worshiper entering a temple and points out that such entrances are often guarded by statues of mythic creatures, which represents the terrifying threshold guards in literature and fairy tales. The importance of the threshold guards lies in the way the person on the threshold perceives them. A hero would recognise their divine status, as opposed to seeing the devil in them and not being able to pass (Campbell 91-92).

This is a difficult stage to try to place in *Disgrace*. It is not by any standards obvious and I am not convinced that it even exists. At no point does David Lurie appear to have passed away. The reader is aware of the fact that he is alive all the time and at no instance is he “swallowed into the unknown” (Campbell 90). Furthermore, there is no clear reference to any threshold guards. In fact, David Lurie seems to be pretty clear about what he wants: “Once he has made up his mind to leave, there is little to hold him back” (Coetzee 59). The reason to have this quote here is to illustrate David Lurie’s determination once he has made up his mind. That is probably why no threshold guards can be found; David Lurie himself is his own threshold guard. Hence, once he has made his mind up he is over the threshold and not in the belly of the whale.

Initiation

Now, on the other side of the threshold, the adventure can continue with the next stage; *Initiation*.

The Road of Trials

The following words start off Campbell’s explanation of the first part of *Initiation, The Road of Trials*: “Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials.” (Campbell 97). *The Road of Trials* is exactly what it sounds like; the hero is put through a number of
different trials and difficult tasks. The hero often has to use the advice and tokens provided by the “supernatural helper” who appeared in the stage of *Supernatural Aid* (Campbell 97). Furthermore, this very stage is often linked to the hero descending into the depths of his own being, as a further trial (Campbell 98-101). Even if this stage is mostly about trials, there will also be “a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land” (Campbell 109).

The first real trial in *Disgrace* is when David Lurie is actually put before the school board at its hearing. It is rather obvious since it is an actual trial, in the word’s legal meaning.

However, the more interesting trials start when David seeks refuge at his daughter’s farm. Some of them are trivial in character, for example getting used to the dogs barking: “In the middle of the night he is woken by a flurry of barking” (Coetzee 67) or adjusting to the cold mornings in the countryside: “He has forgotten how cold winter mornings can be in the uplands of the Eastern Cape” (Coetzee 68).

There are others, of a more serious nature, such as him adapting to once again living with his daughter: “He is aware of her eyes on him as he eats. He must be careful: nothing so distasteful to a child as the workings of a parent’s body” (Coetzee 61). Furthermore, there is the perhaps greatest trial of them all; the assault on himself and the rape of his daughter. Apart from the physical damage such as “light burns” (Coetzee 101), the real trials appear to lie in the mental aftermath following the attack. David cannot seem to cope with his daughter’s way of handling the rape; her acting as if nothing has happened: “’You’re making a mistake,’ he says in a voice that is fast descending to a croak” (Coetzee 99). He has a dream about her when she calls him to save her, but it is rather clear she does not want to be saved: “’I’m sorry, I had a dream,’ he says. [...] ‘I thought you were calling me.’ Lucy shakes her head. ‘I wasn’t. Go to sleep now’” (Coetzee 103). The fact that she just wants to go on pretending as if nothing has happened is a great trial in itself: “’Be sensible, Lucy. Things have changed. We can’t just pick up where we left off.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Because it’s not a good idea. Because it’s not safe.’” (Coetzee 105).

However, the most compelling parallels to Campbell’s theory are the workings of David Lurie’s mind as a trial of its own. Before the attack, after being criticised by his daughter, he starts to look back at what put him in disgrace and consequently on Lucy’s farm; the affair with Melanie and his defence thereof: “I was a servant of Eros: that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? It was a god who acted through me. What vanity!” (Coetzee 89). He compares his inability to control his sexual urges to the life of a dog: “One can punish
a dog, it seems to me, for an offence like chewing a slipper. A dog will accept the justice of that: a beating for a chewing. But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts” (Coetzee 90). Although David Lurie understands and accepts his punishment, it is a trial for him since he was only following his instincts.

After the attack on them both, David is contemplating his daughter’s dilemma: “Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow” (Coetzee 105). Before this statement he also contemplates whether his daughter is lesbian or not: “Perhaps he is wrong to think of Lucy as homosexual. Perhaps she simply prefers female company” (Coetzee 104). This is a trial for David Lurie because he has a hard time understanding female homosexuality: “Sapphic love: an excuse for putting on weight” (Coetzee 86). It is also a trial because he understands the fact that the rape of a lesbian must hurt more.

However, David Lurie’s main concern is the fact that the balance of their relationship has shifted: “But he cannot fail to notice that for the second time in a day she has spoken to him as if to a child -- a child or an old man” (Coetzee 103-104). They are no longer father and daughter in the sense David is used to: “Sitting up in her borrowed nightdress, she confronts him, neck stiff, eyes glittering. Not her father’s little girl, not any longer” (Coetzee 105). In other words, David Lurie is living under his daughter’s roof on his daughter’s terms. That has to be a trial for every father.

**The Meeting With the Goddess**

*The Meeting with the Goddess* is the next step on the path of the hero. Campbell calls this phase “the ultimate adventure” and claims it “is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World” (Campbell 109). He also states that the goddess is to be found in every woman and that the meeting with her is a great test of the hero’s talent (Campbell 118).

If meetings with women are tests of the hero’s talent, David Lurie is failing those tests quite miserably. Even if he has, as mentioned before, “solved the problem of sex rather well” (Coetzee 1), it is still sex that casts him into disgrace. However, he expresses one rather interesting point of view regarding those meetings: “Every woman I have been close to has taught me something about myself. To that extent they have made me a better person” (Coetzee 70). Whether he has that same effect on those women is a question left unanswered.
Moreover, reuniting with his daughter also appears to be as great test for David Lurie. Both accepting her way of life and the fact that she is all grown up prove to be difficult for him to come to terms with. This reuniting of David and his daughter Lucy might actually represent the mystical marriage that Campbell discusses, especially when the following words are taken into consideration: “She becomes his second salvation, the bride of his youth reborn” (Coetzee 86).

Furthermore, the feelings David has towards his daughter could, to a point, be referred to as worshipping: “From the day his daughter was born he has felt for her nothing but the most spontaneous, most unstinting love” (Coetzee 76).

**Woman as a Temptress**

Then, another side of the female sex is introduced in *Woman as a Temptress*. Here, clear parallels to the Oedipal complex are drawn when Campbell talks about the marriage discussed above as “the hero’s total mastery of life; for the woman is life, the hero its knower and master” (Campbell 120). He claims that “the mother-destroyer” is the hero’s “inevitable bride” and “with that he knows that he and the father are one: he is in the father’s place” (Campbell 121). To me the reference to psychoanalysis cannot be any clearer.

David Lurie is sure tempted by a lot of women in his life. However, the one woman that stands out as *the* temptress has to be Melanie Isaacs. Whether she is his inevitable bride or not is somewhat unclear. Yet, of all the women he is tempted by she holds the highest significance since she casts him into disgrace.

However, Bev Shaw also deserves some recognition in this context. At first David Lurie does not think much of Bev: “He has not taken to Bev Shaw, a dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck” (Coetzee 72). He even goes as far as telling her the following: “At least I am out of the way of temptation” (Coetzee 148). Still, he ends up sleeping with her, describing their act with the words: “Without passion but without distaste either” (Coetzee 150). He even compares it to his affair with Melanie Isaacs: “After the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs, this is what I have come to” (Coetzee 150).

However, his self pity aside, he finds himself in the following scenario: “His thoughts go to Emma Bovary strutting before the mirror after her first big afternoon. *I have a lover! I have a lover!* sings Emma to herself” (Coetzee 150). He feels that he has done a good deed towards Bev and it makes him feel good; another sign of his changed persona. When compared to his previous conquests, and Campbell’s theory, this is something totally
different. With his womanizing ways he is used to being the “knower and master” (Campbell 120) of women, but this time he actually seems to be happy after sex with a woman “he has not taken to” (Coetzee 72). Temptation is clearly present, but perhaps in a different way than the one in Campbell’s theory.

**Atonement with the Father**

*Atonement with the Father* is somewhat ambivalent. It is of course possible to interpret the word atonement as compensation or apology towards the father figure but there is another way to interpret atonement. It is also possible to read the word as “at-one-ment” which would signify being at one with the father figure (Campbell 128). This father figure is commonly something frightening and can be represented by for example God. The hero must believe that the father is merciful rather than punishing in order reach this atonement (Campbell 128). Furthermore, the hero must be prepared to open up his soul to a great deal of pain before he can reach this atonement (Campbell 147).

It is rather difficult to find a father figure in *Disgrace*, other than David Lurie himself, that is. Moreover, the lack of religiousness in *Disgrace* makes it complicated to find a divine father figure. However, there is one rather significant apology towards a father in the novel; the one addressed to Mr Isaacs: “I apologize for the grief I have caused you and Mrs Isaacs. I ask for your pardon” (Coetzee 171). This apology is highly significant due to fact that David Lurie refused to apologize for his actions in a written statement, as suggested by the school board (Coetzee 58). Moreover, this one apology is in fact addressed to a man who does believe in God; Mr Isaacs: “The question is, what does God want from you, besides being very sorry? Have you any ideas, Mr Lurie?” (Coetzee 172). Still, when asked, David Lurie says that he is “not a believer” (Coetzee 172), and that he “will have to translate [...] God and God’s wishes” (Coetzee 172) into his “own terms” (Coetzee 172). He then explains to Mr Isaacs that he is “sunk into a state of disgrace” (Coetzee 172) and that he does not refuse the punishment, but rather that he is “living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace” (Coetzee 172). Mr Isaacs reply to David Lurie’s question whether this punishment “is enough for God” (Coetzee 172), is highly interesting: “I don’t know, Mr Lurie. Normally I would say, don’t ask me, ask God. But since you don’t pray, you have no way to ask God” (Coetzee 172). David Lurie does not pray which indicates that the one father he can seek atonement with, is the father of the person that has put him in disgrace; Mr Isaacs. Furthermore, he states
that particular intention rather clearly: “I came to George for one reason alone: to speak to you. I had been thinking about it for some time” (Coetzee 173).

Apotheosis

In Apotheosis the hero comes closer to divine status and is often compared to a God. Like a God he gets through great ordeals and makes his appearance in the hour of need (Campbell 150). Furthermore, it is not uncommon that our hero’s androgyny is brought into light and that both sides of the sex are highlighted and the traditional norms connected to the sex are questioned (Campbell 152-153).

The closest David Lurie gets to divine status might be as helper to Bev Shaw, who is, in a way, playing god by providing euthanasia for dogs. In addition to that, he is ushering the dogs on their final journey to the furnace because he objects to the way they are treated by the incinerator-staff: “After a while the workmen began to beat the bags with the backs of their shovels before loading them, to break the rigid limbs. It was then that he intervened and took over the job himself” (Coetzee 145). Furthermore, the following reflection also hints towards some measurement of the divine: “He may not be their saviour, the one for whom they are not too many, but he is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves” (Coetzee 146). Moreover, David Lurie’s identification with animals has something to do with Lucy’s rape. It is in connection to that rape that David Lurie starts to contemplate whether or not he does “have it in him to be the woman” (Coetzee 160). Laura Wright calls his attempt to picture himself in Lucy’s position unsuccessful but points out that the rape of his daughter makes him more prone to understand the situation of animals on the verge of death (Wright 102). Especially since he “forms a relationship” (Wright 102) with the two Persian sheep that Petrus will slaughter for his party. He is “inclined to eat them because, without any reason that he can discern ‘their lot has become important to him’” (Wright 102). This cannot be the same person who uttered: “Do I like animals? I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them” (Coetzee 81). The fact that David Lurie cares about dead dogs and sheep on their way to slaughter to the extent that he is willing to actually make an effort is a clear proof of his changed and improved personality. This change of personality might in fact be his Ultimate Boon.

The Ultimate Boon
The final part of *Initiation* is called *The Ultimate Boon* and is basically what it sounds like; the ultimate prize or blessing. However, *The Ultimate Boon* can be the end of the hero’s adventure. If the hero accomplishes everything in this stage, if his *Ultimate Boon* turn out to be everything he has searched for, the *Return* might be omitted (Campbell 172-192). It may also end here due to the glorious death of our hero and his God (Campbell 191). Ultimately this stage represents the completion of the journey and the beginning of the hero’s return (Campbell 193).

David Lurie’s Ultimate Boon might in fact be the better person he is becoming, even though he claims he does not want to: “only as long as I don’t have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed” (Coetzee 77). Nonetheless, he is gradually changing into someone quite different from the person he was when the reader first met him; selfish. David Lurie has an interesting view of this himself: “Curious that a man as selfish as he should be offering himself to the service of dead dogs. There must be other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world, or to an idea of the world” (Coetzee 146). Maybe there is a more productive way of giving oneself to the world; however, David Lurie appears to find it rather rewarding to offer his service to dead dogs: “Why has he taken on this job? [...] For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing” (Coetzee 146). David is now someone who does not only think about himself, but rather someone who cares for other beings without a personal agenda. It seems that he has found his place in the world and that makes him satisfied, while helping others. Furthermore, it appears that he has learnt that the world is about more than him; it is about the big picture and being a part of it.

*Return*

The following words are a description of the final stage of the hero’s journey; *Return*: “When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy” (Campbell 193). In this stage the hero will return and share his experience, help his fellow humans and contribute in general (Campbell 193). However, the first step of this stage is called *Refusal of the Return*.

*Refusal of the Return*
Much like the *Refusal of the Call*, *Refusal of the Return* can be the end of its stage. Yet, in this case it is only the end of the *Return*. The adventure is complete but the *Return* cannot progress if the hero refuses to return and contribute (Campbell 193-196). One way of refusal is when the hero, instead of returning and reuniting, distances himself even further from his fellow humans (Campbell 196).

If there is a refusal of David Lurie’s return, it is not he who refuses but rather the world he returns to. However, he does not appear to feel like home to begin with: “He re-enters Cape Town [...] So he is home again. It does not feel like a homecoming” (Coetzee 175). In addition to this, the once so familiar surroundings of his home are not very welcoming either: “The garden is overgrown, the mailbox stuffed tight with flyers, advertisements. [...] The bars over one of the back windows have been torn out of the wall [...] the windowpanes smashed [...] A mat of leaves and sand, blown in by the wind, has caked on the floor” (Coetzee 176). His house has been burgled and there is even a dead pigeon in his bathroom (Coetzee 176). Moreover, the university also refuses him; the name tag on his door is removed, his things are gone and young man has taken his place (Coetzee 177). However, the most obvious rejection the university offers seems to be this: “when he reaches the access barrier the machine will no longer accept his card” (Coetzee 177).

**The Magic Flight**

The next step of *Return, The Magic Flight*, appears to happen when the following scenario presents itself:

If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron. On the other hand, if the trophy has been attained against the opposition of its guardian, or if the hero’s wish to return to the world has been resented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively, often comical, pursuit. This flight may be complicated by marvels of magical obstruction and evasion. (Campbell 196-197)

Whether the hero is favoured by the gods or not appears to be the difference between a successful return and *The Magic Flight* (Campbell 196-197). Yet, it is the human who must come out victorious from this ordeal in order to cross this threshold of the *Return* (Campbell 207).
One rather obvious stage of flight occurs when David Lurie is at the theatre where Melanie Isaacs is performing. It starts off without problems since he has taken some precautions: “He arrives late, taking his seat just as the lights are dimming” (Coetzee 191). He even ponders upon the possibility of the two of them having another chance at romance: “Perhaps the trial was a trial for her too; perhaps she too has suffered, and come through. He wishes he could have a sign. If he had a sign he would know what to do” (Coetzee 191). What he would do if he had this sign is somewhat unclear, but his continued pondering at least points in a certain direction: “Without warning a memory comes back [...] of [...] a woman in her twenties travelling alone, a tourist from Germany, sunburnt and dusty. [...] he fed her, slept with her. He remembers her long, wiry legs; he remembers the softness of her hair” (Coetzee 191-92). This scenario is far too similar to the actions between him and Melanie to be a coincidence. Especially when one considers the following: “a stream of images pours down, images of women he has known on two continents [...] He holds his breath, willing the vision to continue” (Coetzee 192). Of all these women, or trophies, David Lurie has obtained, Melanie appears to be the one he has “attained against the opposition of its guardian” (Campbell 197). However, Melanie is not the trophy. She is mentioned here because of David Lurie’s way of treating women as trophies. Her guardian, her boyfriend, is also present at the theatre and makes David Lurie take flee: “Something raps him lightly on the head [...] a spitball of paper the size of a marble. He is the target no doubt about it. [...] Standing against the back wall is Ryan, the boyfriend [...] There is a little smile on his lips” (Coetzee 193). This episode ultimately makes David Lurie leave the theatre only to find his antagonist on the parking lot where the following warning is uttered: “‘Stay with your own kind. [...] ‘Let her alone, man! Melanie will spit in your eye if she sees you.’ [...] ‘Find yourself another life, prof. Believe me.’” (Coetzee 194). This is a rather comical episode as well as a clear example of flight caused by a guardian, even if this guardian is not preserving the Ultimate Boon.

Rescue from Without

However, no man does it all on his own, as will be shown in this section; Rescue from Without, which can be summarized as follows: “The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him” (Campbell 207). At this point, the hero typically lays his ego aside and is rescued because of that, instead of being caught during The Magic Flight (Campbell 216).
Interestingly enough, Melanie Isaacs’s boyfriend Ryan appears to be all the rescue David Lurie needs. As discussed above Ryan is instrumental in the comical version of The Magic Flight from the theatre. However, Ryan makes David Lurie flee in a direction which enables him to continue his new and improved life (see especially my section on the Ultimate Boon). Furthermore, it seems like he also makes David Lurie see things differently and even call the night they meet a “night of revelations” (Coetzee 194). In fact, this night also makes David Lurie look back in more than one way. After his meeting with Ryan, David picks up a prostitute and remembers how easy things used to be: “So this is all it takes!, he thinks. How could I ever have forgotten it?” (Coetzee 194). This is very similar to the beginning of the novel when David Lurie had a trouble free relationship with the prostitute Soraya (Coetzee 1). The interruption of that relationship was a turning point and his meeting with this other street girl and with Ryan is as well; it makes David Lurie lay his ego aside and go back to confront his daughter.

The Crossing of the Return Threshold

This help from without may be necessary to get to the next step; The Crossing of the Return Threshold: “This brings us to the final crisis of the round, to which the whole miraculous excursion has been but a prelude – that namely, of the paradoxical, supremely difficult threshold-crossing of the hero’s return from the mystic realm into the land of common day.” (Campbell 216). No matter in which manner the hero returns, he still has to climb that final threshold in order to re-adapt himself among the common people and confront society (Campbell 216). This adaption appears to be the hardest task for the hero to accomplish on his return: “How render back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark? How represent on a two-dimensional surface a three-dimensional form, or in a three-dimensional image a multi-dimensional meaning? (Campbell 218).

As previously discussed, David Lurie’s return is not a very triumphant one. The life he leads when the reader first meets him is not an option anymore. He even says to his ex-wife Rosalind that he is “not yet fit for society” (Coetzee 187). The question is; will he ever be? David Lurie is a changed person and not fit for society in the sense that he once was. Even if he claims that his life “is not thrown away” (Coetzee 189), his life will never be what is once was. However, he has found a new role as a caretaker of dead dogs and that has to qualify as adaption to his new life. Still, that is an adaption to a new life and not the re-adaption Campbell describes (Campbell 216). Therefore, David Lurie does not cross the Return
Threshold. However, he crosses some kind of threshold even if he does not cross this particular one; a threshold more similar to a mountain since it is something completely new.

**Master of the Two Worlds**

These words are a description of the chapter *Master of the Two Worlds* in Campbell’s book: “Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the casual deep and back – not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other – is the talent of the master” (Campbell 229). According to Campbell, the characteristics of this stage are hard to spot and very “elusive” (Campbell 229). Furthermore, Campbell states that this stage is present in most religions and often in connection with rebirth or revelations (Campbell 236).

The two most interesting aspects in Campbell’s theory when discussing *Disgrace* are rebirth and revelations. The revelation discussed in the section on Rescue from Without is an example of a travel in time as far as David Lurie’s mind is concerned. Furthermore, David Lurie is re-inventing himself when becoming a better person, which can be seen as a rebirth. Other than these two examples, this stage is, as Campbell puts it, very “elusive” (Campbell 229).

**Freedom to Live**

The last chapter of Campbell’s book describes what happens at the end of the hero’s journey: “What, now, is the result of the miraculous passage and return?” (Campbell 238). That is exactly what is discussed in the last chapter of *Return*. When our hero has settled in he will, and rightfully so, need Freedom to Live, which is the name of the final part of *Return*. Based on the hero’s persona, this final stage might look very different from one story to another: “A realization of the inevitable guilt of life may so sicken the heart that, like Hamlet [...], one may refuse to go on with it. On the other hand, like most of the rest of us, one may invent a false [...] image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world, not guilty as others are, but justified in one’s inevitable sinning because one represents the good” (Campbell 238). David Lurie’s idea of Freedom to Live seems to revolve around two things; the Byron opera and the dogs. David Lurie’s feelings regarding his job with the dogs are discussed in the section of this essay on the Ultimate Boon, where he is quoted on saying that he in fact does this work “for himself” or “his idea of the world” (Coetzee 146). The opera, on the other
hand, he describes as “just a hobby, something to dabble at” (Coetzee 189). No matter how differently he might describe these two occupations, the two of them combined is what makes up David’s day: “Sitting at his table in the dog-yard, he harkens to the sad, swooping curve of Teresa’s plea as she confronts the darkness” (Coetzee 213). He even goes as far as to ponder on the opportunity to use one of the dogs in his opera: “bring a dog into the piece, allow it to loose its own lament to the heavens between the strophes of lovelorn Teresa’s” (Coetzee 215). David Lurie has taken to one of the dogs in particular and the last thing that happens in Disgrace is the end of that dog’s life: “Bearing him in his arms like a lamb, he re-enters the surgery. ‘I thought you would save him for another week,’ says Bev Shaw. ‘Are you giving him up?’ ‘Yes, I am giving him up.’” (Coetzee 219). In this final action, David Lurie gives this dog ultimate freedom from his crippled life by assisting his death. By giving him up he is making a very unselfish sacrifice since this is his favourite dog, and he puts him down to ease his suffering. By doing so he frees himself in a way since he is now free of any selfish considerations towards any of the dogs.

Conclusion

After going through Disgrace with Campbell’s theory in mind I argue that David Lurie is a hero and follows Campbell’s pattern apart from a couple of stages. The first of those is The Belly of the Whale in which the hero, according to Campbell, is to disappear as if dead. I cannot find this stage in Disgrace. Secondly, there is the Return section. David Lurie does not make much of a return for a hero. As mentioned in my section on Refusal of the Return it is more like society refuses him. There might be a Magic Flight and a Rescue from Without but no crossing of The Return Threshold. These facts lead me to believe that he does not return in the sense that Campbell argues. Furthermore, there is the elusive Master of the Two Worlds stage. Some traces of it can be found in Disgrace but other than that it is elusive indeed. However, David Lurie does seem to find Freedom to Live. Other than the stages discussed above David Lurie follows the pattern of The Hero’s Journey almost without glitches. He answers The Call to Adventure, he goes through The Road of Trials, he reaches an Atonement with Melanie Isaacs’s Father and he obtains his Ultimate Boon; becoming a better person in the sense that he cares about others than himself. David Lurie becoming a better person through self-realization and self-reinvention is the other part of my argument. David Lurie goes from being a self-centred man with questionable morals to a man who takes care of dead dogs without gaining anything from it, except the opportunity to feel good about it. It also
seems that he realises that the world is about more than him; that there is a bigger picture. He even reflects upon the absurdity that a man as self-centred as him would take up this kind of work and he realises that he does it for his idea of the world and with the big picture in mind. In his vision it is perfectly alright to give dead dogs a more honourable last journey, no matter how tedious that task might be. David Lurie is indeed a hero as he does become a better person.
Bibliography


