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Midlife Crisis or Male Wound?

A Psychoanalytical Study of the Protagonist's Behaviour

as Midlife Crisis

in

J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of the Novel	4
Theories of midlife crisis	5
Self questioning and ambition	12
Increased or decreased sexual desire	15
Loneliness	17
Insomnia	18
Age, a fact	18
Trauma	20
A critique of the idea of midlife crisis	22
Conclusion	23
Bibliography	25

Introduction

Disgrace is a novel written by James M Coetzee. He is a recipient of many prestigious literary awards, recently including the Nobel Prize for literature. The main character of the novel is a professor who is entering middle-age and is feeling deeply frustrated about his own life. Other issues, such as social relationships, race, gender and the political situation in South Africa are embedded into the main plot of the novel, adding a deeper dimension to the plot of the book. This work, like other works by the same author, has become an important voice in political debates and in the cultural opinion of South Africa, as it highlights the serious predicaments and problems of an apartheid system. As such, Coetzee has created a narrative that dissects the status quo of South Africa into a range of topics, many of which are quite troublesome. Coetzee, according to Tiffin, is dealing with an ambivalent postcolonial site where "... decolonization is process. Not arrival" (Tiffin 17). Like other works of post-colonial literature, the aspect of a collision between the cultures of the west and the third world acts as a backdrop to the novel itself.

The serious consideration of the circumstances in South Africa by a white, privileged author like Coetzee is generated by his concerns for a people that is no longer European, but not yet African, "as it embodies the conflicts and contradictions of marginality, race, gender, ethics, law, justice and other values by which society governs itself" (Rath 1). The poor, black man's revenge upon white colonial power during the collapse of the apartheid system is a theme that has been emphasized by many critics. The message: the colonized overcome the colonizer at this particular time of transition in South Africa. The author is describing a situation where a transition from an apartheid system to a less unequal system is taking place, and this is intertwined with his presentation of day-to-day violence taking place in South Africa.

Some reviewers highlight the moral questions raised by the life story of David Lurie, the disgraced professor. He is a white man who has abused the power vested in his position as a professor in order to sexually abuse one of his own students. Later, he becomes witness to his own daughter being attacked and raped by three black men. Every reader, irrespective of nationality, can appreciate the moral dilemma thus facing David Lurie. David Lurie not only destroys the moral foundation of our discourse, but he also provokes the "hostile reaction of South Africa, The professor's mind contains all the elegant refinements of Britain's

Oxford dons, refinements that have become irrelevant to the new South Africa and his students” (Alan A. & Stone M. D. 2). The understanding of Coetzee of a specific, and often tumultuous time in the history of his own country, makes *Disgrace* “a collection which traverses the territory between criticism, fiction and philosophy” (Fick 1). Most of the comments that have been made about *Disgrace* are of a highly politicized quality, but there is still one strong psychological aspect of the novel that has been left out by all but a few critics, and in only one case is the almost incestuous behaviour of David Lurie being put into question.

The idea of a clash between the old and the new nations of South Africa is presented through the difference between the individual-based society which David and his daughter and are representing, versus the tribal society of South Africa. This engages us in reading the novel, looking at ourselves and thinking about the balance between personal and collective rules.

In this essay I will try to argue for my hypothesis that David Lurie is suffering from midlife crisis. I will present theories of midlife crisis and compare the typical symptoms to David’s pattern of behaviour and his reactions. A great number of articles from the Internet are used and quotations are taken from valid sources, such as books and dissertations found in Internet bases. Midlife crisis is a common phenomenon for both women and men but I will refer to definitions of midlife crisis symptoms for men. I will also rely on psychoanalytic terms and theories by Freud and other psychologists who developed the idea of midlife crisis and mostly the theories of Elliot Jaques. Some counselling psychological theories are also used to define and describe the process of midlife crisis.

Summary of the novel

The main character of the novel is David Lurie, a 52-year-old professor at the Technical University of Cape Town in South Africa. He is an acclaimed expert on Romantic poetry. He has a dream of writing his own opera, but he spends most of his time seducing women and looking for sexual relationships. David has been divorced twice and has been living alone during the recent years of his life, but he is fond of establishing relationships with beautiful young women. His last love affair with one of his students, Melanie Isaacs, a 19 year-old, leads to the main conflict in this fiction and David being dismissed from his job as a university teacher.

A committee of inquiry is set up to conduct a hearing against him. David pleads guilty to everything stated in the written complaint against him without even reading it through. This proves unsatisfactory for committee. David neither accepts counselling, suggested by the committee, nor does he express any repentance for his act. He asserts that there is no reason to lie and that he does not have any regrets, saying that he is beyond the reach of counselling. The issue soon becomes a public matter, and it ends in David's resignation from the university. He escapes to his daughter, who runs a farm in the countryside. He starts to do volunteer work at her local welfare veterinary clinic and kennel. There, we as readers, get a greater appreciation of the complexities of daily life of the people of South Africa, where there is a great deal of danger and violence stemming from social conflicts caused by an apartheid system. His own picture of the country is shattered when his daughter is attacked by three black men. When he awakens from unconsciousness, he realizes that Lucy has been raped and that her dogs have been shot. The reaction of his daughter and her strategy for survival by choosing to carry on living in Salem becomes very complicated for him to understand, and his relationship to his daughter quickly starts to suffer. It is hard for David to accept the pregnancy of his daughter, and she flatly rejects any thought of abortion. Petrus, the black man who has been working for Lucy since the period before the abolishment of apartheid, has recently strengthened his influence in Salem. Seeing that she is clearly in need and looking to possess her and her properties, he offers to take Lucy as his third wife. Lucy, who is very desperate, realizes that this could make for a fresh start for her, and that she would gain both protection and security from the deal. David makes an effort to stop her, but his arguments fall on deaf ears. He understands that she takes both the rape and the marriage as some kind of atonement for the historical guilt of her ancestors. David as a father has been unsuccessful in helping his daughter through her trauma, and he is excluded from her future decision-making. He returns to his home town, but he is never able to return to normal life the way it was before the time of the scandal.

Theories of midlife crisis

*Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.*

Dante

The lines above capture the sense of despair that David Lurie very well may be feeling at various times throughout the novel. Dante and Shakespeare are two oft-quoted writers whose texts and monologues are used by analysts to describe the transition to midlife. Some researchers have used their works to point out that both biological and psychological factors play important roles in altering the levels of mood following transition to midlife. Reading the poem above by Dante we find similarities between feelings of melancholy and sadness which can be felt by men not just in his time but also in the minds of men and women of our time; lost in the dark forest of life, experienced by men hundreds years ago, is like the described feeling by the middle aged men of our time who have participated in the recent research-studies. Midlife is a transition period from youth to old age and has received a good deal of attention in the last few decades due to psychological knowledge in western countries. This came about since the ideas of individualism have paid more regard to human beings as individuals and not as a collective. Modern psychological knowledge has studied and defined different phases in human being's life cycle to understand the concept of mind. Introducing some basic definitions about these phases, using therapeutic methods by which I am going to study David Lurie's psychological phase, demands an understanding of the human being and the structure of her psyche. Old scriptures from almost 2500 years ago from Hebraic, Chinese and Greece civilisations tell us about the importance of understanding the development of humankind although the attitude towards ageing at that time which can be different from ours.

During the last century, understanding of the development of the human mind from birth to death has been studied by many psychologists, including the father of psychoanalysis, Freud, as well as Carl Jung and his theories of the predictable stages in life. They made radical statements regarding the predictable stages in life and tried to define the psychological essence of the human mind. Freud worked mostly on understanding the first half of life and Jung worked mostly on the second half of life. Basically, they had the same statement about the development of ego, but Jung never completely embraced the sexual theory and abandoned the meanders of the psychosexuality of Freud and established ideas about process of the individuation and the "self", the union of conscious and unconscious and as well as archetypes. Some of these ideas had a revolutionary role for psychology and are important to understand as the base for a later outlook on mankind in therapeutic methods as well as new dimensions on new definitions. These theories are built like stone upon stone, understanding one is dependent on understanding the previous theory. One of these basic ideas is the concept

of “pleasure principle” by Sigmund Freud which illustrates the interplay of society’s rules and human instincts and the way they impact each other.

Freud proposed three structures which help define the human psyche; the id, ego and superego. Id is the selfish, primitive and childish pleasure, starting with at by a two-term relationship between infant and mother. We are born almost entirely helpless, wholly reliant on the care of our parents or a member of the species for our survival. The close relationship between the child with the body of the mother creates an unconscious desire within the child for sexual union with the mother, while at the same time, the bond between mother and child is a matter of life and death for the child. According to Freud, the symbiotic dependence between mother and child is an origin of conflicts between the instinctive desire of the individual and the laws and customs of society, which are in part designed to keep sexual relationships within reasonable bounds. Egelton’s analysis of the pleasure principle theory can be summarized as thus: ... “the boy’s close involvement with his mother’s body leads him to an unconscious desire for sexual union with her, whereas the girl who has been similarly bound up with the mother and whose first desire is therefore always homosexual, begins to turn her libido towards the father” (Egelton 134). At the next stage, the child starts to form a bond with the father in addition to the mother. This is a triangle relationship, consisting of the child and both parents. This directs the libido of the child towards to the mother, causing “Oedipus complex”, and provides a starting point for understanding society at large. The child learns to obey orders and customs and learns to adjust himself/herself to them. This is what is called the “reality principle”, and is the beginning of morality, conscience, law and all forms of social and religious authority. “The imagined prohibition of incest by the father is symbolic of all of the higher authority to be encountered later in life: “... the child begins to form what Freud calls its ‘superego’, the awesome, punitive vice of conscience within it” (Egelton 136). The impulses of the id must somehow be contained in a civilized society. We, as individuals, learn to press and modify the pleasure principle in favour of the reality principle, otherwise we may not be accepted in society. The ego uses this mechanism to protect the individual feelings of guilt, embarrassment and shame which often accompany anxiety. The ego is the moderator between instinct and the standard of good and bad or right and wrong. The ego balances the id and the superego, which is the ideal persona that every individual strives to become, a person who can adapt him or herself to the rules prevailing in society and to be accepted and respected by other members of society.

Whereas Freud emphasised the importance of childhood, Jung was devoted to examining adulthood. The idea of a union between the conscious and unconscious was made by Freud and became one of the basic components of psychoanalysis. Jung developed this idea towards a more global perspective. Unlike Freud, who based his theory on Western culture, Jung expanded on that idea by also studying non-Western cultures. He integrated his findings into a new, more global theory. He generally worked on “self” by studying the life stages. Midlife is one of these stages identified by Jung, not directly as a period of crisis, but as a period of reawakening and as a normal part of maturing. Achieving a high point of conscious development makes an ego separate from the self, this is what Jung calls coming to self, while at birth, self and ego are united and the level of consciousness is low. Jung argues that the first half of life involves striving for accomplishments and achievements, the acquisition of material things and usually the creation of a family, reaching for personal power and developing maturity. In the second half of life, individuals begin to re-think their lives, going back over the past, wondering where they went wrong, why they missed this or that golden opportunity and mourning lost relationships and loves. The person should also handle the painful feeling of fear of dying and learn to accept death. This produces a feeling of anxiety that forces a person out onto new paths. Jung’s view of the matter is mostly positive. To cope with all one’s troubles in midlife is a natural phase in a man’s life; it is necessary but uncomfortable. This is comparable to approaching puberty and measuring the values in one’s life, choosing a path and a character as an adult. But this anxiety in the second half of life is about looking backward and not forward, re-evaluating and trying to correct mistakes that one has made and reaching personal power in the short time that remains (Winther 1-5).

Coping with death anxiety is an important aspect in successfully transitioning to midlife, and this is as such relevant to David Lurie in *Disgrace*. Death is an important subject to many psychologists, and death is specifically addressed in the well-known work of Elliot Jaques, *Death and Midlife Crisis*. He describes death as a horrifying shadow that approaches the person in midlife crisis, causing much distress. He refers to the attitude of Freud towards life and death:

“at the stage of infancy a child experiences the anxiety of the setting of his survival being dependent on his external objects (mother) and on the balance of power of the life and death instincts. ... ‘we were prepared to maintain that death was the necessary outcome of life’. . . No-one believes in his own death ... In the unconscious everyone is convinced of his own immortality” (Jaques 505-07).

Jaques studied unconscious and defensive behaviour in 310 painters, composers, poets, writers and sculptors, artists all of whom were of undoubted artistic greatness or genius. In this particular group, he found that the period between 40 and 44 years of age was useful in predicting the future happiness and well-being of the artist. He related his finding to the idea of the artist finally fully facing (and possibly embracing) the prospect of ageing with full force at that particular age. Thereby Jaques strengthens the idea of a midlife crisis. Factors that predispose for a midlife crisis would be traumatic experiences, be they physical or emotional, or whether or not the person has been able to achieve a successful, material or occupational life prior to reaching middle age. Men who had experienced more trauma in their lives, or had been unable to establish a stable life before reaching middle age, seemed less prepared for midlife, and in many cases, subsequent psychological disturbance or depressive breakdown would prevent them from enjoying their maturity.

The developing period of artists in Jaques' work is divided into two essential periods; "early adulthood" and "mature adulthood". He argues that "early adult idealism is built upon the use of unconscious denial and manic defences as normal processes of defence against two fundamental features of human life –the inevitableness of eventual death, and the existence of the destructive impulses inside each person" (Jaques 506). Jaques draws from the observations that he made studying the works of artists in their twenties and thirties. Jaques observed that in those works, the creative process seemed to be an unconscious effort, but as the artist later grew more mature, the creative process would become more of a conscious effort, an externalizing process. Jaques named this idea "sculpted creativity". According to Jaques, "sculpted creativity" means that the work of the artist is about removing a feeling from one's "inner" to one's "outer". Similarly, Freud wrote about externalizing an inner chaos by giving it an existence independently of oneself. The difference is that Freud considers the artistic product to be the end product, while Jaques considers the externalizing process to be the essence of work itself. The externalizing process is about working over, modifying and elaborating the inner turmoil and transforming it into an artistic product, spending an undefined period of time doing so. In early adulthood, the work and the creativity of the artist is mainly driven by the work of the unconscious. With the first half of life being over, the artist as an adult recognizes his or her own mortality and that the time left in their lives is finite. This gives the artist a new sense of urgency in their work. Other changes, like children leaving home, people changing jobs, possible infirmity and taking care of elderly parents, also become important to address, forcing a re-evaluation of the goals of the artist.

Coping with all these changes creates a need for externalizing, and this process is definitively conscious (Jaques 505).

To achieve a mature and independent adulthood, generally with an established family life and occupation, middle-aged individuals have to go through a period of disorganization of personal values first, and they have to make intensive changes in their 'self'. “. . . the paradox is that of entering the prime of life, the stage of fulfillment, but at the same time the prime and fulfillment are dated. Death lies beyond” (Jaques 506). By fearing death, we react defensively by developing an unconscious wish for becoming immortal ourselves. Our minds react against death, and we build mental patterns to moderate the confusion and anxiety awareness of death brings us, as in the two subchapters “Unconscious meaning of death” and “Denial of death” in the research essay by Jaques. He asserts that ideas of immortality is a response to the unconscious and inner conflict between death. Here we can find remarkable similarities to the behaviour of David Lurie.

Through treatment of some of his patients, Jaques finds fear of death a common theme and a general pattern causing psychological change. The fact is that in midlife, nobody stands between the person and death. On the contrary, the person has itself become a barrier between his or her children and their perception of death. By becoming a barrier for their children, the creativity of the artist is sparked in a new way, as new mental patterns are needed to create the illusion of being able to escape death. Such defensive obsessional mechanisms, as described in the following quotation, are part and parcel of the minds of modern human beings. These patterns can all be traced in the behavior of David, and I will show some examples further on in my essay:

The compulsive attempts, in many men and women reaching middle age, to remain young, the hypochondriacal concern over health and appearance, the emergence of sexual promiscuity in order to prove youth and potency, the hollowness and lack of genuine enjoyment of life, and the frequency of religious concern are familiar patterns. They are attempts at a race against time Retreat from psychic reality encourages intellectual dishonesty and a weakening of moral fibre and of courage. Increasing feelings of ruthlessness, concealing pangs of envy- or self-effacing humbleness and weakness, concealing fantasies of omnipotence-are symptomatic of such change (Jaques 511).

These reactions are defensive, and sometimes they can cause bad dreams, feelings of loneliness and thoughts of suicide. Different personalities react differently, but the fact is that creating enjoyment is a necessary tool to survive deep depression.

The fear of dying gives stimulus to the earlier named reactions. One works through the depressive position of the state of midlife crisis and unconsciously

regains the primitive sense of wholeness- of the goodness of himself and of his objects. The person feels more balanced, but not easily passed through the midlife crisis. . . . it is essentially a period of purgatory – of anguish and depression. (Jaques 512)

As opposed to Jung, crises related to ageing are definitively a matter of fact for Jaques. The person in midlife crisis has a great need to feel integration with both the internal and the external world. Through “sculpted creativity”, the artist expresses this need, within inspiration flowing from inside to outside, constantly repeating, again and again, as in a cycle. To the artist in midlife, the idea of achieving more than what is possible becomes important. The artist mind weaves past desires and will together with the present. With time being limited, the frustration experienced by the artist when facing the impossible can result in certain typical forms of creative behavior, such as thoughts of living on in our own children, our possessions or creative works, if not in immortality itself. By analyzing this form of creativity, Jaques opens up for discussion about whether or not our unconscious is aware of death. He concludes that the unconscious is not aware of death per se, but that there are unconscious experiences akin to those which later appear in consciousness as notions of death. His patients’ cases of midlife crisis are used to explain how dangerous elements of reality and fearing of death are woven together and send a threatening message to the brain of the dreamer and make him/her anxious.

In a presentation about different theories about midlife and men, the work of Daniel J. Levinson, 1978 has to be mentioned. His research is also based on a study of 40 men from two categories of workers and managers in different periods of life. He defines different patterns of development in the life cycle of the men after age 20. Freud, Jung, Jaques and Erikson are the psychologists and psychoanalysts that he refers to, but he has a specific definition of the presentation of a life cycle and the transitions from one psychological phase to another. He defines the different periods in a life cycle for a man and none of them are alike. Every period is a unique situation and the way every individual goes through them is impacted by the world outside and the psyche of the individual. There are polarities in the developing life cycle of every individual. Norms and values are compacted in different polarities such as: individual/ collective-polarity, young/old- polarity, mortal/ immortal-polarity and also destroying /creating, masculine /feminine, dependence/ independence polarities.

In his research Levinson observes the way of balancing between the two sides of each polarity, how they are worked out in different periods of life and the impact of that on the men’s self-image. The world outside; cultural norms and values and the world inside a man;

biological and psychological strengths affect the two sides of the polarities in which a man, as a member of society orientates himself. It should be emphasized that Levinson saw each polarity in his theory (e.g. integrity vs. despair), not as a "one side must win" battle, but rather as a necessary tension inherent in that stage of human development, through which struggle an individual would become a more integrated and whole human being. As Levinson noted "It is important to remember that conflict and tension are sources of growth, strength, and commitment" (Levinson 106). According to Levinson, percent of those studied went through a time of personal crisis and re-evaluation during this mid-life transition. The twenty percent that did not encounter a struggle were in a state of denial and would go through this transition later (Anderson 3). As mentioned earlier, depending on the personal experiences and childhood of a man, reactions in transition to different periods can vary and that, in turn, affects the daily life of a man; for example, a person who has experienced some kind of trauma is more prone to experience midlife crisis than a person who has had a more stable life.

The concept of midlife crisis is a common term today and there are counselling methods and theories used by psychologists and counsellors in which there are psychoanalytical foundations. Some typical effects of this mental disorder are insomnia, daydreaming, irritability, unexpected anger, self-questioning, loss of perspective and responsibility, misusing alcohol, drugs, food or other compulsions, sexual affairs, especially with someone much younger, greatly decreased or increased sexual desire (libido) and greatly decreased or increased ambition depending on the person's character and the personal capacities. According to Jaques "The crisis may express itself in three different ways; the creative career may simply come to an end, either in a drying-up of creative work, or in actual death" (Jaques 505).

Self-questioning and ambition

The person who suffers from midlife crisis has a disordered inner life which typifies itself as dissatisfaction with life. A feeling of pointlessness and restlessness or boredom with things or people that one has previously held great interest in becomes overwhelming. Questioning the meaning of life and decisions made years before, along with confusion about who you are and where your life is going makes one want to do something adventurous and completely different (Coleman 2). Self-questioning is one of the symptoms of midlife crisis

for David Lurie that become apparent both before and after David's affair is revealed. The following quotation describes David's unhappiness:

He is in good health, his mind is clear. By profession he is, or has been, a scholar, and scholarship still engages, intermittently, the core of him. Is he happy? By most measurements, yes, he believes he is. However, he has not forgotten the last chorus of Oedipus: Call no man happy until he is dead (2).

David does not know whether he is happy. There is no clear answer to the question and his dissatisfaction with life is described by this question. A desire for death prevails within the last sentence of the quote above. Also, while he is staying with his daughter, he explains to her the mental doubt he is surrounded by:

'Have you left the university for good?' 'I have resigned. I was asked to resign.'
'Will you miss it?' 'Will I miss it? I don't know. I was no great shakes as a teacher. I was having less and less rapport, I found, with my students. What I had to say they didn't care to hear. So perhaps I won't miss it. [Perhaps] I'll enjoy my release' (63).

David does not see his job as something meaningful and has not been feeling any interaction between himself and the students during his years of work as a teacher. He is been aware of that all the time and does not seem to feel sorry about the incident. Choosing the word "perhaps" tells us about his self-questioning. What he wants is to make a decision; to stay and work or to quit, but a system of self-defence must be involved in the way he makes choices in his life in order to feel happy and to cope with life's circumstances. David's dissatisfaction with an empty life gives him his insatiable desire for having young girlfriends. "All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continually to fill" (Eagelton 105). Finding the lack in David's life which causes these desires is not so easy, but there are signs in his conversations with his daughter and ex-wife, such as: his extreme interest in the nostalgic time of Byron, finding different kinds of comments about love, intimacy between generations, his philosophical arguments for defending himself before the committee.

When his affair with the student is discovered, he behaves as if he is bored; he has not even read Ms Isaac's statement when he gets to the hearing, and in the end he is fired from his job. The scandal makes David realize that he can not endure the chores of daily life anymore; he has failed to adjust himself to his environment for some time and this becomes the turning-point in his life. His escape from reality or responsibility is interplayed with his increased or decreased ambition of writing his own opera:

The truth is, he is tired of criticism, tired of prose measured by the yard. What he wants to write is music: *Byron in Italy*, a meditation on love between the sexes in the form of chamber operaHe has never been much of a teacher. he is more out of place than ever. But then, so are other of his colleagues from the old days, burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they are set to perform. he has no respect for the material he teaches, he makes no impression on his students (4).

He does not feel like a participant at work anymore. As a result, his ambition to work is lowered and the only reason that gets him up in the morning is that work provides him with a livelihood, “also because it teaches him humility, brings it home to him who he is in the world” (5). He is unable to communicate with his students in an interactive way, “. . . . he makes no impression on his students. They look through him when he speaks, forget his name Their indifference galls him more than he will admit. Nevertheless he fulfils to the letter his obligations toward them, their parents and the state” (4). He is escaping from his different realities to a dream of writing his own opera. Before the scandal is revealed, he is used to his daily work-routines, his ambition of writing is kept on a level with a “dream”. He never gets around to writing his opera, but after the scandal when he loses everything in his life, he finds a kind of peace in reading and writing poetry. Communicating with literature of the previous century, finding a literary equivalent and identifying himself with a famous poet from the eighteenth century, who is respected in the literary world, allows him to enter a fantasy world and imagine an ideal reality in order to escape the actual unpleasant reality.

Eagleton’s study of Lacan about the mechanism of language can be related to David’s wish to express himself through literature and writing. Eagleton states that the world of language is empty and our desire and imagination are like objects that fill it. “. . . . words are an instrument to become a prey to desire; . . . the absence of the real objects which signs designate, the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others” (Eagleton 145). He also refers to Freud’s statement; “primary depression of desire makes us what we are” and language as an endless process of difference and absence for a child who is not able to possess anything in its fullness, language lets a child “move from one signifier to another, along a linguistic chain which is a metaphorical world, meaning will be produced.” This principal explains David’s wish to write as a function for fulfilling his desire in his state of life. The similarity between David and Byron, a romantic poet who also experienced a scandalous love life, is found in the world of language; through obsessive reading about Byron, David consoles himself with an escape to poetry and literature.

There is another function of language that is used in psychotherapy which is writing as a process of removing disorder from the inside to the outside of one's mind. An externalizing process that Freud exhorted in his psychoanalytic ideas: "Write it, write it, put it down in black and white ... get it out, produce it, make something of it – outside you, that is: give it an existence independently of you" (Jaques 503). David's escape from daily life to a world of literature is a way of externalizing his crisis, writing enables him to distance himself from his inner chaos and it brings about his increased ambition to write.

Increased or decreased sexual desires

Middle age means both biological changes in the body as well as changes in social conventions. By approaching every particular age in our life circle we are expected to act in a certain way. For example, a middle-aged man is supposed to either be interested in being with women of almost the same age or, to solve the problem of loneliness, to establish a long-term relationship. Far from that, David's occasional, temporary sexual gratifications seem to fill up his single life and it does not matter whether these women are prostitutes, the wives of colleagues or tourists. But there are moments when his restlessness is revealed. "A man of the city, at home amid a flux of bodies where Eros stalks and glances flash like arrows. . . . He is all for double lives, triple lives, lives lived for compartments" (6). "In the field of sex his temperament, though intense, has never been passionate" (2). David lives a double life that indicates that he does not play within the framework of convention and he has to make a secret of his love affair. Analysing David through Freud's "pleasure principle" presented earlier in my essay, page 7, David's ego as a moderator between his id (his instincts and impulses) and his superego (conventions in society) has failed him. David's impulses are of short duration and are the master of him. They push him into an unreal world of daydreams and soon he has a more selfish, egocentric and subjective manner. He is actually trapped in this behaviour without being able to have control over it, becoming obsessed by women, following them and if necessary, even paying a detective agency to track them down, as he does with Soraya.

His obsessional sexual fantasies about women crops up repeatedly throughout the novel like day-dreams; "Her hips are as slim as a twelve-year-olds." or; "A *child!* he thinks: *No more than a child! What am I doing?* Yet his heart lurches with desire" (19-20). Melanie's body reminds him of that of a child and he enjoys that feeling but also wonders about why he does. In the conversation between David and Melanie about literature, a memory of having

sex with Melanie floods back to David: “. . . the moment on the floor when he forced the sweater up and exposed her neat, perfect little breasts” (23). This is not the only instance in the novel where we see that David is unable to control his sexual fantasies - this is also a kind of unconscious pleasure that crops up in the novel and has the character of paedophilia. For example, when David is on his way home and is feeling depressed, a group of children pass him. He greets them and they greet him back. Just a few minutes later when they have passed by, this thought goes through David’s mind: “Without warning a memory of the girl comes back: of her neat little breasts with their upstanding nipples, of her smooth flat belly. A ripple of desire passes through him. Evidently, whatever it was, is not over yet” (65). Even when David meets Melanie’s sister at their home to apologize, after all the controversy, he is unable to control his fantasies about her.

Some psychologists believe that a person in continuing crisis may go on repeating unhelpful patterns of behaviour or be subjected to physical health problems, while other people in crisis may decide to end it all and change the situation. In David’s case we know that his relationship with his daughter and wives has failed. Over time, with a feeling of dissatisfaction, he develops an inner disorder that disturbs his roles as teacher, lover and father. Sometimes these roles have become overlapped and he doesn’t limit himself inside the boundaries. His need to find a lasting relationship turns him into a constant love-seeker over the years. David’s understanding of his decreased sexual desire within himself is what he calls “servant of Eros”, when he tries to argue with the committee of inquiry, but instead he acts like he is God of Eros. A servant of love should obey love based on mutual gratification, but he ignores Melanie’s reactions and acts as an obsessed man by pursuing her, as would a hunter. He is, instead, just a servant of his own instinct while Melanie is lying in his daughter’s bed and does not seem to enjoy the sex act he imposes on her.

Sometimes a person in midlife crisis attempts a race against time: “. . . retreat from psychic reality encourages intellectual dishonesty, and a weakening of moral fibre and of courage, increase in arrogance, and ruthlessness” (Jaques 511). Sexual integration with a young body has the psychological effect of making a middle-aged man feel younger. This is a compulsive action due to the balance between two directions of young /old polarity. As I quoted Levinson on page 11, masculine/ feminine- polarity and young/ old-polarity are two important polarities that are intertwined with orientation of a man in his different stages of life. There are different patterns that interplay with each other. Sexual potency, for example, is associated with the masculine category and that, in the highest degree, is connected to being young and healthy and far from death. In an unconscious way many men in midlife want to

feel younger through doing things which remind them of being young, while they identify themselves as men in midlife (Levinson 243). Evading the awareness of death puts a man in midlife crisis into a pattern of defensive deeds in the area of sexual behaviour. Life impulse and the awareness of the start of the ending process of life are two strong and equal powers that make the two sides of the life /death-polarity mentioned earlier to counteract against each other in order to distance the fear of death. This self-image keeps David away from the reality of becoming older and not younger and he feels further away from death.

Loneliness

Louise Hawkley and John Cacioppo, two directors of social psychology at the University of Chicago have made many observations about the correlation between middle-age and lonely people, published in *Life*. They write that midlife loneliness is a killer and loneliness leads to very negative physiological effects on middle-aged bodies. Lonely people identify more sources of chronic stress. Even when faced with similar challenges, they appear more helpless and threatened. Their blood samples have more of the hormone epinephrine flowing; this is the chemical that the human body produces by 'fight or flight' situations and with ageing this psychological toll becomes more apparent. Living alone is not the same as feeling lonely. David's feeling of loneliness and unhappiness must have a deep connection to his broken family life and this can be one reason for his restlessness which is caused by his loneliness. His relationship is good neither with his daughter nor with his ex-wives. This experience of loneliness becomes very clear later while he is living with his daughter in the countryside. Even if they have lived together physically for a while, each of them lives in their own separate worlds emotionally. Looking at how David handles this feeling, shows his pattern of behaviour which is recognizable, through the strengths he possesses; literature and attracting women. He can attract women and this becomes an unconscious struggle with his inner boredom. Actually, his loneliness is the reason for his pattern of behaviour.

Theories of love and brain activities by Helen Fisher, an anthropologist, would explain this. She names two factors; timing and loneliness for establishing romantic love which both match David and how he behaves when he is alone and desperate (Fisher 3-4). David's actual timing for finding happiness in his sexual relationships is remarkable for the period before and after the scandal; when he is bored and lonely as a university teacher before the scandal, he pursues younger and more attractive women. After the scandal, when he is dismissed, depressed and isolated, he deals with his loneliness again by sleeping with whoever he can

get. Bev, a friend of Lucy's, the only person in the novel. David has an intimate and friendly relationship with, is an unattractive woman who he has derogatory attitude towards, but the events around him during and after the attack, are like a new trauma for him. His lonely and desperate situation makes him receptive to an unexpected sex affair, even though he, paradoxically, thinks that she is a "dumpy little woman with an ugly voice"

Insomnia

David receives and reads the confidential notification from the university. His reaction shows the level of stress he is living under. He is unprepared for what the note will read when he opens it, and he is so physically and emotionally affected by what the note reads that he shuts himself in his office. This is a primitive defensive reaction: "He reads it, his heart hammering unpleasantly. Halfway through, his concentration fails. He gets up, locks the door of his office, . . . trying to imagine what has happened (39). He leaves in a fury (41). His alertness and readiness to act in the face of threat reveals the presence of an inner fear within David. Whether this affects his sleep or not is hard to say. We do know enough to state that he feels bad about the situation, as he has prepared himself very well before attending the committee hearing. "He does not feel nervous. On the contrary, he feels quite sure of himself. His heart beats evenly, he slept well. Vanity, he thinks, the dangerous vanity of the gambler" (47).

Even if David has slept well the night before the hearing, there is some sense of doubt in him. But insomnia appears later when he lives with his daughter. The symptom of approaching crisis is obvious; "He wishes he could sleep. But he is cold, and not sleepy at all, ... He is reading Byron's letters of 1820. Fat, middle aged at thirty-two his complacent, short-legged mistress, and her suave, malevolent husband. He reads on past midnight, yet even so cannot get to sleep" (87). David is unable to fall asleep and reading about Byron gives him a sense of peace.

Age, a fact

"After a certain age, all affairs are serious, like heart attacks" (42). This quote is David's first comment about the seriousness of age in an affair when he discusses his problem with his lawyer. David obviously becomes aware of how often people start to point out his age to him after revealing the love affair. David is perceived as behaving insanely and irrationally. One of those around him who considers him to be out of his mind, and who is

ignoring the social-cultural context he should live within, is Rosalind. She takes on an ironic tone when she talking to him, but he never answers back at her offensively. Perhaps he agrees with her, to an extent. Rosalind believes him to be a hedonist who wants to enjoy his life. She has to remind him of his age:

You're what- fifty-two? Do you think a young girl finds any pleasure in going to bed with a man of that age? Do you think she finds it good to watch you in the middle of your? ...

He is silent.

Don't expect sympathy from me, David, and don't expect sympathy from anyone else either. No sympathy, no mercy, not in these days and this age. ... You are too old to be meddling with other people's children. You should have expected the worst (44-45).

His ex-wife blames him, as well as people around him. She reminds him five times of his age in this little dialogue with him, but David's only reaction is this sentence: "You haven't asked whether I loved her. Aren't you supposed to ask that as well?" David tries to leave the subject of age and talks instead about loving her. He wants to prove the origin of his feeling (love) in his heart and not just his sexual desire, but his declaration of the whole thing as something spiritual is turned upside-down by Rosalind, who describes it as something disgraceful and vulgar for his age.

Apart from social factors, there are biological reasons for understanding someone in a particular context. "Testosterone levels gradually decrease from the late 20s, and by the time a man reaches 80 they will be at pre-puberty levels. However, unlike oestrogen in women, there is no sudden, measurable drop in testosterone in men in middle age, and often the testosterone levels of men complaining of andropausal symptoms can still be measured as normal" (O' Neil, 3). But normally by age forty, many men feel a decrease in their sexual potency and this fits in well with the picture of David and his age. Later in the novel there is a confession about a longing for his lost youth, and he once more identifies with Byron's scandals and sighs: "In adultery, all the tedium of marriage rediscovered, 'I have always looked to thirty as the barrier to any real or fierce delight in the passions. 'He sighs again'" (87). Age thirty is regarded with fierce delight by David, but that period has long passed for him. Some part of him is still clinging to his lost youth.

Increasing length of life in modern societies is a reason for late adulthood according to Jim Conway. We increasingly seek new ways to stay young, improve the quality of our lives, especially among older people. There are influences hidden in norms and values which cause a person to handle these biological changes in a certain way. Levinson defines this attempt through the old/young –polarity. This is given below from a Swedish source.

“Every form of polarity exists in the self, and it is being worked on by the self during the course of time. It also exists within society and is being modified by society itself ... Consider, for example, the young/ old polarity! The perception made by an American man of what it means to be young or old is shaped by cultural symbols or pictures, through education and work, ... It is hard to incorporate this polarity into the self when the external world is drawing such a sharp divide between being either young or old, and is thus making being anything except young such scary prospect for the individual” (Levinson 343, my own translation).

David attempts to adjust himself to the rules of society by accepting that he is no longer a young man. This process starts when he leaves everything behind and moves to his daughter: “A long time since he last lived with a woman. He will have to mind his manners; he will have to be neat” (65). He starts to see himself in the same way that people around him do: “ I am not complaining. One can not plead guilty to charges of turpitude and expect a flood of sympathy in return. Not after a certain age. After a certain age one is simply no longer appealing, and that’s that. One just has to buckle down and live out the rest of one’s life” (67). This process reaches a different stage later, following the attack made by the three black men, when David finally experiences a sense of emptiness. “For the first time he has a taste of what it is like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future. . . . he feels his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop” (107). Letting go of the thought of pursuing women emphasises his fatherly manner. He attempts to help Lucy and this can be seen as a result of how well he is handling his crisis. His transition to his new state of mind, to becoming a middle aged man, is metaphorically illustrated when David digs a hole and buries the dogs’ corpses. While silence and distance prevail in the relationship between father and daughter, the old David is also buried.

Trauma

Some kind of trauma in a man’s earlier life is a key factor in developing middle age crisis. Many sources report experiencing midlife crises, and depending on different personalities, different triggering factors have been important; such as experiences in one’s life and chemical and hormonal changes. According to Jean Coleman, symptoms of midlife crisis usually appear in the late fifties or even earlier, “depending on predisposing events earlier in life or a trauma experienced in life.” The same statement is the conclusion of Elliot Jaques who believes that the quality of one’s early life is an important factor predicting how successfully a person will handle emotional and existential difficulties when he or she is approaching midlife.

A person who reaches mid-life, either without having successfully established himself in marital and occupational life, or having established himself by means of manic activity and denial with consequent emotional impoverishment, is badly prepared for meeting the demands of middle age, . . . will likely be experienced as a period of psychological disturbance and depressive breakdown (Jaques 511).

By reading the novel, David's marital and occupational life can be traced: his daughter is from his first marriage and is now over twenty years old. This means that he had trouble in his first marriage in his thirties which led to his divorce. The breakdown of his second marriage occurred eight years ago when he was 44 years old. This is the typical period for men in midlife crisis . Finding the meaning of life, depending on earlier experiences, is crucial in helping how smoothly one moves through the transitional period. We are also presented with some information about his upbringing: "He himself has no son. His childhood was spent in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sisters fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives, a daughter. The company of women made of him a lover of women and, to an extent, a womanizer" (7). This tells us of the unusually close presence of women during his upbringing and indirectly, of the absence of men. One can question why he failed twice in his marriages and why he never reaches his daughter emotionally or why he is obsessed by women. There are many signs, but no apparent evidence, of trauma.

Nowhere in the novel can one know whether he has seen his father or not. He also does not have many male friends to whom he can talk when he has problems. The only person who he can really talk to is Rosalind. They talk about all of the details of his conflict with the committee, although her tone is very sharp and unfriendly. There is also a colleague, Hakim, who David plays tennis with sometimes. "He has known Hakim for years, they used to play tennis . . . but he is in no mood now for male chumminess" (42). Hakim seems to be the only male friend he spends time with. The word "now" in the sentence can indicate the grade of their friendship. They have been able to talk about personal issues, but not now, at that moment, in the heat of the scandal. Colleagues can also be competitors. It is only in the company of a real friend one can confess to one's own deficiencies, admitting oneself to be disgraced.

The most obvious reasons for David's problems are the lack of a father-figure, being a failure in both of his marriages and the sudden loss of his mother. Reaching such a conclusion is possible by reading between the lines and by interpretation. There is not a clear description of these facts in the novel. His life has made him a solitary man and he has kept his soul lonely. During his crisis he acts and reacts all depending on his own weaknesses and strengths.

With his height, his good bones, his olive skin, his flowing hair, he could always count on a degree of magnetism. If he looked at woman in a certain way . . . she would return his look, rely on that. That was how he lived: for years, for decades, that was the backbone of his life. Then one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost. If he wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her: often, in one way or another, to buy her (7).

David's weakness of character is not explicitly described, but one of his strengths is his ability to attract women, partly because of his good looks and partly because he seems to be very familiar with women. The suddenness of the change mentioned in the quote above can certainly be thought of as traumatic for David. Has he lost his mother during this period or something similar? The reader is not to know.

A critique of the idea of midlife crisis

There are psychologists who challenge the existence of midlife crisis altogether. One study found that 23 percent of participants had what they called a "midlife crisis" but in digging deeper, only one-third of those (i.e. 8 percent of the total) said the crisis was associated with realizations about ageing. The majority had gone through major life experiences or transitions such as divorce or loss of a job in middle age and described them as a "midlife crisis" (Gen 433-440). The criticism holds that while all of these events can be traumatic themselves, the associated reactions of grief can be indistinguishable from depression, and that these upheavals are not unique to middle age, and it is difficult to distinguish them from the other kinds of crises. They point out that people are likely to experience crises in their 20's and 30's and these experiences are not unique for middle age, but according to Levinson 20 percent of the men who participated in the survey and who denied experience of a crisis will go through it later. This will be between the ages 40 and 60, the range of midlife, since 80 percent have already gone through a midlife crisis.

One another study by Kerby Anderson agrees with Levinson's descriptive study of life cycle and men, but he points out that Levinson's assumption can't be normative. As a Christian, for example, he rejects a deterministic model which predicts that everyone will go through a certain stage.

Christians . . . who have come to terms with their own morality and the mortality of their loved ones can face death and agree with the apostle Paul that it is better 'to be absent from the body and present with the Lord.' Likewise, people who have come to grips with their place in the world may not face a wrenching mid-life crisis (Kerby 3).

Different cultures and religions impact the members of society in the same way that our youth-orientated society does. Our needs and desires are mostly formed outside us and they differ from one culture or group of people to another.

In Michael P. Farrell and Stanley D. Rosenberg's research work from 1981 the method of earlier research is questioned and they argue for experiences of men related to their psychological characteristics and their life circumstances. They don't find evidence of a universal midlife crisis in men. Why midlife is interesting today is because of the lengthening of the average life span, the shift away from a child-centered society, the shift of attention to adulthood and perhaps the women's movement which has made men more self-conscious. There is a wide range of variation that makes every case complex and unique. Facts such as stress, impact of family relationships, changing relationships between men and their parents are the areas a man should handle. Some men do appear to reach a state of crisis, but others seem to thrive. They also speculate that just as adolescents represented ". . . a collective totem in the sixties and early seventies- embodying identity issues, rebelliousness, and fears of loss of control- so do the middle aged now symbolize our concerns about staleness, atrophy, and meaning (Farrell & Rosenberg (preface) VII).

Conclusion:

"Midlife is the old age of youth and the youth of old age". (proverb)

The great thing about *Disgrace* is that it opens different subjects for discussion and presents a wide aspect of human nature and how it interplays with the rules and customs of a culture. This interplay is something that we, as readers, can recognize and identify with, especially men. Unconscious reactions in David's behaviour during the process of revealing his affair and his resignation from the university reminds me of some cases of midlife crisis that I personally have had experience of. This resulted in building up my hypothesis that David Lurie suffers from a midlife crisis. My deeper study about general symptoms of midlife crisis showed that there are critics who dismiss age as a reason behind midlife crisis and those who do support age as a crucial fact. I have presented both theories briefly and my focus is on theories for midlife crisis. Definitions about midlife crisis are based on some earlier theories such as pleasure principle and defence mechanisms by Freud and transition theory by Jung which I presented briefly for understanding my two essential sources where I found support for my hypothesis are research works of Elliot Jaques and Daniel J. Levinson, both based on studies done on people in transition periods. The data collected included such things as

divorce, depression and mental instability, suicide and sometimes death, as a reaction of going through midlife crisis. Jaques' conclusion is fear of death as a reason for male crisis and unconscious defensive reactions, while Levinson points out the developing process of male life circle within the transition process. He presents the idea of polarities by which men can orientate themselves as individuals in every new period of life. One's self-image is a result of identifying oneself through two poles of a polarity.

Psychologists today apply these basic theories to our youth-oriented society where the feeling of loneliness is an effect of that, as soon as we approach midlife and are not young and efficient anymore. Negative attitudes towards ageing together with biological changes in the body make many men feel a loss of masculinity and confusion about their future role when they become old. Loneliness is an important theme in David's life which is not named concretely as a problem anywhere in the novel, but it manifests itself in David's manner of handling it. David has a symbiotic relationship to women. He enjoys them, loves them, adores them and at the same time he can also insult them. His pattern of behaviour can be interpreted as a reckless escape from his loneliness.

The arguments about age are the strongest proofs in my essay and the relevance between David's age and his dilemma were strengthened by how many times people reminded him of it, until he started to see himself as others perceived him. David's day-dreaming and self-questioning, his need to initiate new sexual relationships or love-affairs, his ambition to write his own opera as a comforting project to escape to, all are woven into a psychological sphere, and all are signs of midlife crisis.

I have succeeded in showing that David's inner life contains a conflict. It is about disorder in roles and rules that have worked earlier to some extent, but he must now reorder them to a new system of values that he can set store by during the second half of his life. David is not a happy man and he unconsciously tries to avoid becoming old when he knows that he is approaching the beginning of the end of life. Pursuing young girls confirms his wish to stay young and to distance himself from the fear of death. My attempt to find experience of a trauma in David's life did not end in a definitive answer, but it was also difficult to state the lack of trauma in his life. There are questions that can be raised but can never be answered clearly, for instance; did the lack of a father-figure during his years of growing up have an impact on David? Or to what degree were his two divorces turning-points in his life? Also, how did the loss of his mother affect him?

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