To Duncan Garland and Alastair Macrae Glass
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 A COMMON GROUND: COETZEE AND RUSHDIE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 SHAME AND DISGRACE (A CLOSE ANALYSIS)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical Sketch</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis explores the background of two of the most important writers of contemporary fiction, J.M. Coetzee and Salman Rushdie, as well as a close analysis of a major work from both authors: Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* (1983) and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999). I have also tried to investigate the ways in which Rushdie and Coetzee, both writers in exile, have imagined the society in turmoil: in the case of Rushdie, it is the creation of Pakistan and that nation’s early tumultuous years, while Coetzee’s *Disgrace* is a critique of the discursive practices (both private and public) of the new South Africa and a lamentation on the post-apartheid state’s inability to reconcile the past with the present.

Using a close analysis of parts of both *Shame* and *Disgrace*, I have tried to focus on the social and political context of these particular historical moments. In *Shame*, the Rushdie/narrator figure reflects on the role of the migrant and the right to speak for the postcolonial nation; in *Disgrace*, the protagonist represents the “old” South Africa and the presence of confession, redemption, and complicity in white South African identity.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work. It’s a picture dating from 1946 of a house into which, at the time of its taking, I had not yet been born. The house is rather peculiar—a three-storeyed gabled affair with tiled roofs and round towers in two corners, each wearing a pointy tiled hat. ‘The past is a foreign country,’ goes the famous opening sentence of L.P Hartley’s novel *The Go-Between*, ‘they do things differently there.’ But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it’s my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.

—Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

Reproduced above, the first paragraph of “Imaginary Homelands,” Salman Rushdie’s opening essay in the collection of writing and criticism that bears the same name, touches on three of the themes that pervade Rushdie’s fiction and non-fiction: the role of space, the on-going contestation over the notion of cultural identity, and the definition of national roots. While Rushdie refrains from engaging in a textual analysis of the photograph—here he sticks largely with description—he does explain the visceral effect that the photograph has upon him: it serves as a utopian vision that elicits in Rushdie the belief that something lost and foreign can still be home, despite the “mists” of time that remove one from one’s past (9). Later in “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie recounts his visit as an adult to the home shown in the photograph; he states that he was shocked at the brilliance of the colors because “they had seeped out of my mind’s eye” and, in beautiful sequence, expresses awe at the current “vividness of the red tiles, the yellow-edged green of cactus-leaves, the brilliance of bougainvillea creeper.” It was at this point, Rushdie writes, that “Midnight’s Children was really born; a fact that he readily admits “is probably not too romantic” to claim (9).

As a reader of Rushdie’s greater oeuvre, one is led, at the opening of “Imaginary Homelands”, to read how the image of Rushdie’s former boyhood residence, while monochromatic and two-dimensional as it may be when it’s in the form of an old photo, works as
a larger metaphor for the homes depicted in his fiction: the photograph is a portal that transports the viewer to a place where the outlines are waiting to be filled in by intricate textures and unexpected shades.

This phenomenon also occurs with the locales featured at the opening of Rushdie’s novels, through which Rushdie’s multi-leveled narratives first pull the reader: in *Shame*, the ‘Oriental-gothic’ childhood home of Omar Khayyam is an “improbable mansion which was too large for its rooms to be counted,” a seeming entry point stage prop for the fantastical opening of Rushdie’s vivisection of the almost-Pakistan, yet it is also the place to which Khayyam returns for one-half of the narrative’s violent conclusion (3); in *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha drop to earth, both finding refuge (albeit briefly) in the postcard-perfect seaside English cottage before their improbable partnership is severed; in *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie’s ode to the metropolis where he was born, the sprawling reaches of the city are treated with the kind of ambiguous affection that one might bestow upon a former home from which one was forced to leave. Even in *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*, Rushdie’s elegant and all-too-often overlooked portrait of Sandinista-era Nicaragua — a book that I will refer to later in this essay — homes frame the spaces depicted in Rushdie’s reportage: he opens by describing “the big house next door” to his own small flat in London: Hope Somoza, the wife of the brutal dictator of Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, was the owner of the house, and her occasional parties would leave the street “jammed solid with Rolls-Royce, Mercedes Benz and Jaguar Limousines” (3). As Rushdie drily notes, Hope’s husband had taken a mistress back in Managua, Nicaragua, so she “was no doubt trying to keep her spirits up” (3).

Although looking at homes as a motif within Rushdie’s narrative strategy is just one potential lever into his novels, it does work effectively as a transition into the notion of “roots” as
the figurative association of “home” in his work. In *Shame*, the narrative is spotted with authorial interjections that deal with what the authorial voice—which, while aware of the problematic nature of the label, I will from this point on refer to as the Rushdie figure—terms as “this immigrant business” (84). Notably, in a subsequent passage from *Shame*, this “Rushdie figure” refers to his “lost” childhood home in Bombay. Moreover, as I mention throughout this thesis, while the narrator’s identity is never revealed, the biographical details line up with Rushdie’s own life; thus while there is no way to call the essayistic portions of *Shame* a direct reflection of Rushdie’s own experience or opinions, I argue that this figure is at least designed to make the reader reflect on the authorship of these particular sections of the novel.

Moreover, while the main thread of the narrative in *Shame* is concerned with an alternative history of that colonial/fundamentalist creation, Pakistan. In this Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, the controversial leader who was slain less than two years ago, reemerges as the fictional “Virgin Ironpants”, and the turmoil that followed partition—a construct hastily thrown together by the Governor General of India, Lord Louis Mountbatten, in a month—and the subsequent bloody creation of Pakistan, where hundreds of thousands of Indian Muslims, Hindu, and Sikhs died in the cross-border traffic, is re-imagined as a national fairytale. The interjections from the Rushdie-figure are essayistic in form and style, tracing a more personal narrative: he begins one section by stating that he is “an emigrant from one country, India, and a newcomer in two (“England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will”) and that he has a theory that the resentment which so often comes against immigrants is the product of jealousy: for it is the immigrant who has achieved “the conquest of the force of gravity” (23). There is a primordial desire, the Rushdie figure argues, that drives all men to envy birds that have been released from the earth to fly. In an earlier passage, the Rushdie-figure states, “I, too,
am a translated man. I have been **borne across**. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion . . . that something can also be gained” (23).

I am comparing gravity with belonging. Both phenomena observably exist: my feet stay on the ground, and I have never been angrier than I was on the day my father told me he had sold my childhood home in Bombay. But neither is understood. We know the force of gravity, but not its origins; and to explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places. (23)

The parameters of the Rushdie figure’s argument are clear: to belong, or to succumb to gravity, is a limiting way of being, yet it is also inherent in how one imagines the relationship to a place or home. The Rushdie figure argues that the language used to describe this relationship—the figurative “gnarled growths sprouting” out from the feet to secure one to a particular location—is what keeps one trapped in the “failed dialectic”—to use Dick Penner’s interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy—of the permanently rooted (14). In *Countries of the Mind—The fiction of J.M. Coetzee*, Penner argues that Coetzee’s characters are in a perpetual state of disconnection with those around them, unable to engage in a meaningful dialogue that will allow them to break out of the cyclical, ultimately destructive modes of behavior/thinking in which they are stuck. In *Shame*, the crux of the Rushdie figure’s rhetoric is that being affixed to one specific locale is the result of a conservative myth restricting the migrant to a similar “failed dialectic.” However, another reading of the static position of the migrant as presented by the Rushdie figure in *Shame*, could lead to the conclusion that it is a matter of the privileges of a particular class—economic resources, access to particular languages, and a specific array of cultural capital—that allow the kind of movement envisioned in the Rushdie figure’s migrant utopia. For the inverse of this position on “roots,” Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* offers both the dystopia of the rootless migrant in transit and a revision of the white man’s burden.
Antigua] was settled by human rubbish from Europe, who used enslaved but noble and exalted human beings from Africa (all masters of every stripe are rubbish, and all slaves of every stripe are noble and exalted, there can be no question about this) to satisfy their desire for wealth and power, to feel better about their own miserable existence, so that they could be less lonely and empty—a European disease. . . . (81)

Even the briefest consideration of space, identity, and roots in Rushdie’s fiction opens up an area to explore the ways in which he interrogates many of the same themes as those dealt with in the work of other contemporary postcolonial writers. For reasons I will explain later in the paper, I argue that J.M. Coetzee, a fellow Booker-Prize winner and writer-in-exile, who has also investigated notions of home, belonging, and the contestation over cultural and national “selfhood”—in his native South Africa, England, the United States and later in Australia—is a useful point of comparison for Rushdie. In Doubling the Point, the comprehensive volume of essays and interviews collected by David Atwell, Coetzee writes on a multitude of subjects including a Roland Barthes-like analysis of rugby, a series of interviews where Coetzee considers the writer’s public role, and a reflection on his (Coetzee’s) own graduate work on Samuel Beckett. Yet it is in the self-reflexive, self-reflective consideration of his own position as a white South African through which Coetzee, in Doubling the Point, begins to probe at many of the ideas that I see as central to both Rushdie and Coetzee’s fiction and non-fiction. Considering the role of language as a marker of difference in South African society, Coetzee points out the ineffectiveness of broad terms used to group the diverse spectrum of peoples in the postcolonial world.

What am I, then, in this ethnic-linguistic sense? I am one of many people in this country (South Africa) who have become detached from their ethnic roots, whether those roots were in Dutch South Africa or Indonesia or Britain or Greece or wherever, and have joined a pool of no recognizable ethnos whose language of exchange is English. These people are not, strictly speaking, “English South Africans,” since a large proportion of them—myself included—are not of British ancestry. (117)
Alongside this exploration of identity and roots in South Africa, J.M Coetzee has continually returned to overt ethical propositions: particularly, the nature of complicity in post-apartheid South Africa. If Rushdie is engaged with the voice, or voices, of the “other”—his characters representing a dazzlingly vibrant cast drawn from all classes and backgrounds—then one might argue that Coetzee turns his lens most often to the master in the master/slave dynamic. And while many critics are quick to identify the bleak landscapes and depressing predicaments in which Coetzee places his characters, there remains hope and redemption—an issue I will return to when discussing Disgrace later in this essay—in his narratives. Even in the midst of South Africa’s s rotten apartheid years, the much-maligned protagonist of Disgrace, David Lurie, acknowledges that in “the whole wretched business, there was something doing its best to flower” (31). Furthermore, while we might look at the Rushdie figure in Shame to see evidence of a more personal authorial voice and instead face the unreliable narrator, Coetzee’s oft-quoted directive on how one might read texts—and in fact how one reads the author in the text—locates identity as phenomena-in-flux, suggesting that any lucid separation between author, narrator, and protagonist is an effort in futility because

in a larger sense all writing is autobiography: everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it. The real question is: This massive autobiographical writing-enterprise that fills a life, this enterprise of self-construction (shades of Tristram Shandy!)—does it yield only fictions? Or rather, among the fictions of the self, the versions of the self, that it yields, are there any that are truer than others? How do I know when I have the truth about myself? (117)

Asides from the fore-mentioned intersection of space, identity, and roots in Coetzee and Rushdie’s fiction and non-fiction, there is another theme that I will use to link the work of J.M Coetzee and Salman Rushdie: the omnipotent, omniscient presence of shame. In Coetzee’s writing, the presence of shame is clear: it is a shame shared by a generation of South Africans for whom, as Coetzee states, apartheid was created and who “were meant to benefit the most from
it.” In Rushdie’s writing, shame may have a less specific home, but that does not make it any less pervasive. In *Shame*, Sufiya Zinobia’s shame comes to embody the sins of all Pakistan, from the hasty colonial construction to the present day corruption. It is truly a universal shame:

the plague of shame— in which I insist on including the unfelt shame of those around her— as well as the unceasing shame of her own existence, and of her hacked-off hair— the plague, I say, spread rapidly through that tragic being whose chief defining characteristic was her excessive sensitivity to the bacilli of humiliation. (141)
CHAPTER 2
A COMMON GROUND: COETZEE AND RUSHDIE

Few contemporary writers of fiction have established the international literary reputation, courted the sort of critical praise, and created the kind of controversy as J.M. Coetzee and Salman Rushdie. Two of the most widely acclaimed writers to emerge in literary fiction in the last 20 years, Coetzee and Rushdie represent particular modes of the postcolonial writer in exile. Yet to attempt to link Coetzee and Rushdie requires a critical exploration that goes beyond their respective prominence or the “postcolonial” tag that ultimately allows them, at least on the most superficial level, to be referred to in the same breath.

While locating Coetzee and Rushdie in terms of the numerous postcolonial writers who have emerged from the more recent former European colonies is not a problem in itself, these two authors have a relationship to the postcolonial world that sets them apart from a large number of other postcolonial writers. It is not just their education at elite institutions and their time working and studying in the metropole—a number of other postcolonial writers, from the Caribbean’s Jean Rhys to Canada’s Michael Ondaatje, have also had similar experiences, while many more have had as turbulent a relationship with their countries of birth, including, perhaps most famously, V.S. Naipaul—few others have as relentlessly interrogated the multiple identities, role of space in conceiving home and abroad, and concept of roots as these two—to use Rushdie’s term—“borne across” writers.

In his essay, “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist,” Rushdie addresses the problem of the commonly used tags of “commonwealth” and, by extension, postcolonial literature. During the 1980s, when a number of writers from Commonwealth nations—including the Indian writer Anita Desai, Australia’s Patrick White, the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and Canadian novelist Aritha van Herk—gained international recognition, both popular media
and critics within the academy sought to label this new wave of writers and the texts they produced.

The nearest I could get to a definition sounded distinctly patronizing: ‘Commonwealth literature’, it appears, is that body of writing created, I think, in the English language, by persons who are not themselves white Britons, or Irish, or citizens of the United States of America. It is also uncertain whether black Americans are citizens of this bizarre Commonwealth or not. Probably not. It is also uncertain whether citizens of Commonwealth countries writing in languages other than English—Hindi, for example—or who switched out of English, like Ngugi, are permitted into the club or asked to keep out. (63)

More than 25 years later, these issues are still central to conceptualizing the idea of the postcolonial. The idea of Commonwealth writers and writing remains, to use Benedict Anderson’s famous label, an “imagined community,” but one to which a number of the apparent members—like Rushdie, for example—feel an openly ambiguous relationship. In the case of J.M Coetzee, whose whiteness marks him as an “other” to black writers from South Africa writing in English, on receiving the Nobel Prize for literature Coetzee argued that he feels his own “roots” lie not in the country of his birth, but in the literature and philosophy of his ancestors’ home nations, stating that “my intellectual allegiances are clearly European, not African” (23). This does not mean that Coetzee is not critical of the canon’s authority; in an interview after receiving the Nobel Prize, Coetzee expressed ambivalence towards the concept of the public intellectual as defined by literary prizes: “In its conception the literature prize belongs to days when a writer could still be thought of as, by virtue of his or her occupation, a sage, someone with no institutional affiliations who could offer an authoritative word on our times as well as on our moral life . . .” (23).

There is no denying the importance of the contribution that Coetzee and Rushdie—through fiction and non-fiction—have made to world literature; furthermore, both writers have moved readily through a variety of diverse public outlets to present their work: newspaper
editorials, documentary filmmaking, reviewing and translating literature, essays, journalism, public lectures, and assorted prestigious teaching appointments. However, the ways that Coetzee and Rushdie have inhabited their position as prominent fiction writers has differed greatly — while Rushdie has embraced the public sphere, becoming as much a type of literary public intellectual as an author, Coetzee has remained somewhat on the periphery, reluctant to attend to the trappings of literary celebrity, teaching at a university in Cape Town until, several years ago, he immigrated from South Africa to Adelaide, Australia, where he acquired citizenship and a new main setting for his latest books. However, it must also be noted that the attempt to make a simple and ultimately false binary with Coetzee and Rushdie — the reclusive, fastidious prose master and the vibrant, literary rock star, respectively — is reductive for both writers.

Indeed, it is perhaps much easier to identify how, as writers, Coetzee and Rushdie differ. In terms of style and narrative strategy, there are, of course, stark contrasts: in *Disgrace* (1999), arguably Coetzee’s most widely-read and critically acclaimed novel, the gritty subject matter—an aging lothario professor is forced from his job, seeks refuge with his daughter at her small farm (where tragic and incredibly violent events follow)—is dealt with in a largely sober, realist fashion. *Midnight’s Children*, widely considered to be Rushdie’s masterpiece, sees the magic realist narrative mode of South American stylists like Gabriel Garcia Marquez incorporated and then expanded to include the history of Hindu oral folklore, intertwined pop-culture references, and postmodern temporal shifts.

Before exploring Coetzee and Rushdie’s stylistic choices, and examining the ways they have engaged with the interaction of political theory and space—issues that appear as a perpetual thematic preoccupation in the writing of many “postcolonial” writers—it may be worth looking at how both authors’ backgrounds inform the politics of their works and how particular
biographical details have served as subject matter. Moreover, in Rushdie and Coetzee, we have writers who are not only using the language of the colonizer—it is worth noting that they are both fluent in their respective “native” tongues—but have demonstrated a relish for the English language, an issue that I will return to in a later section of this paper.

Like Salman Rushdie, J.M. Coetzee spent his very early childhood in a country on the brink of a complete social upheaval. Born in Cape Town in 1940, just eight years before the Afrikaner Nasionale Party took control and put apartheid into state-sanctioned practice, Coetzee grew up in a privileged, upper-middle class environment: Coetzee’s father was a lawyer—although he practiced only intermittently and was a relative anomaly due to his anti-apartheid views—and his mother was a primary school teacher. While Coetzee’s surname comes from one of the founding families of European South Africa—his Calvinist Afrikaner ancestors were amongst the earliest Dutch settlers—Coetzee has stated that his parents had a greater affinity for British culture than their Afrikaner heritage: a preference exercised through both his parents’ educational and social choices: Coetzee was educated at a Catholic school, which was highly unusual for someone from an Afrikaans-speaking background. Asides from his distance from the Dutch Reformed Church—ensured by Coetzee’s parents’ liberal views and preference for Catholic education—language was also a way that his upbringing allowed him the position as an “other” even while in a politically (if not culturally) elite class: he spoke English at home with his immediate family, but conversed in Afrikaans with his extended family; the protagonist of Boyhood, the book that some critics claim as Coetzee’s first “semi-memoir”, shares many of these same experiences, albeit in a third-person narrative form.

Upon completing his undergraduate work and Master’s degree at the University of Cape Town, where he received his B.A in English and mathematics in 1961 and an M.A in English in
1963, Coetzee left South Africa for London to work as an IBM computer programmer. Taking part in what is largely a commonwealth tradition, Coetzee joined the endless line of whites from the former European colonies (mainly Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) who travel to the United Kingdom and hope, if not for better employment and educational conditions, for the chance to experience a semblance of their imagined European lives. While South Africa excluded themselves from the commonwealth (by way of republicanism), South Africans join Australians and New Zealanders in ‘banding together’ in the United Kingdom. This concept of the ‘overseas experience’ runs deep in New Zealand, South Africa and Australia; the concept of ‘England as home’ retains major cultural significance in these countries. The narrator of *Youth-Scenes from Provincial Life II* is an economically privileged white whose initial glimpse of social change in South Africa causes him to flee to London. As in the style of his first memoir, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*, Coetzee chose to narrate *Youth* in the third-person, adding narrative aloofness to what was already a significant temporal distance. After three years of employment in England, Coetzee moved to the United States and the University of Texas at Austin to commence his PhD study in English language and literature. In Austin Coetzee supplemented his Fulbright scholarship by teaching freshmen courses in English. Of his teaching experience as a graduate student, Coetzee conveys less than fond memories in the essay, “Remembering Texas,” where he states that “the students I taught in my composition classes might as well have been Trobriand Islanders, so inaccessible to me were their culture, their recreations, their animating ideas” (53). Despite the disconnection from his students, Coetzee has spoken fondly of his time in Austin, where, in 1969, he completed his doctoral dissertation: “The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis.” Shortly afterwards Coetzee took up a position at the State University of New York as an assistant professor of English and
began work on the two novellas that comprise *Dusklands* (1974). The two narratives of *Dusklands* expose the mechanism of empire in separate historical periods and provide the original example of what would become a continuation of Coetzee’s fictional project: the interrogation of the individual in violent and dislocated societies.

Like J.M Coetzee, Rushdie was born into a family that enjoyed a certain degree of economic and cultural capital. The son of a successful Muslim businessman, Anis Ahmed Rushdie, and his wife, Negin, Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in the year India gained independence from the British Empire (1947), and was subsequently educated at a British mission school. Rushdie’s early years also contain another similarity to those of Coetzee’s youth: In *Salman Rushdie*, Catherine Cundy claims that Rushdie’s “family spoke the Muslim language of Urdu, but Rushdie learnt English from the age of five in English-medium schools and was encouraged by his parents to use English at home as the language of everyday discourse” (1). Cundy goes on to claim that this created a “dual consciousness” and “linguistic division” that was subsequently the source of “much of the versatility and play in Rushdie’s use of English in his fiction” (1). At age 14, Rushdie was sent from Bombay to Rugby, one of England’s most exclusive “public” schools, before embarking on a short-lived career as an actor in London and then a longer tenure as a copywriter for advertising giants, Ogilvy. It was during this time that Rushdie began work on his first published novel, *Grimus* (1975), a freewheeling fantasy that incorporated Rushdie’s fascination with Hindu, Christian, and Norse mythologies: all themes that he would return to in later works.

The similarities of Coetzee and Rushdie’s early years set up certain foundational comparisons: their shared “alien” status as English speakers from non-English speaking backgrounds (both encouraged into this position by their parents); their split national identities—
Coetzee as an Afrikaner whose family didn’t support the apartheid regime and whose father was reprimanded for his apartheid views; Rushdie as a Muslim born into the majority Hindu state of India, whose family relocated from Bombay to Pakistan after partition; and their experiences living in the metropole—both writers worked for major multinational companies, expressed a discomfort with the position of being ‘not quite’ British, and reassessed their national identity in the face of the mash-up of cultures in London. However, embarking on a survey of the entirety of Rushdie and Coetzee’s fiction and non-fiction is far too an ambitious project for this thesis; instead, I have chosen to focus on one work from each author—Rushdie’s *Shame* and Coetzee’s *Disgrace*—that deal with the themes that I identified in the introduction: the imagined spaces of the postcolonial; the tension of national and cultural identity in “transitional” societies; and the contestation over the concept of roots, and whom has ownership over these roots.
Holland may not be the most exciting of places to live, but at least it doesn’t breed nightmares.

—J.M. Coetzee, Disgrace

I may be such a person. Pakistan may be such a country.

—Salman Rushdie, Shame

Martin Amis, in the introduction to his collected essays, The War against Cliché, expressed the opinion that the only efficient way to proceed in criticism is by starting with the quotation. Then let us, for a moment, examine these two quotations taken free of context from J.M Coetzee’s Disgrace (1999) and Salman Rushdie’s Shame, respectively. In the first quotation, an elegant and understated assessment of white flight from South Africa, the protagonist of Disgrace is speaking of the suggestion that he makes to his daughter who has been brutalized by rape: she can leave for one of the colonial fatherlands of South Africa, and begin her life as a shared language expat, a comfortable life as being Dutch but not quite, and free of all the horrors that have plagued post-apartheid South Africa. The sentence, which is a simple expression of a father’s desire to start anew, speaks volumes to the rest of the themes of Disgrace: who exactly are the white South Africans and what is their role in this new version of the republic, where the retreat of the British Empire—the unexpected results within the Second Boer War made the British rooinecks quickly lose their taste for fighting for a land occupied by Afrikaner farmers, many of whom clung to a manifest destiny-like ideology and fought on despite the presence of concentration camps and the vastly superior, if only in terms of arms and numbers, British military—left a vacuum that was later filled by the overtly racist and separatist Afrikaner National party. Over forty years later, the new Afrikaner-led government of South Africa, taking their lead from Britain’s traditional divide and conquer approach to local politics, implemented
the social, political, and judicial structure called apartheid. The quote from *Shame* refers to the Rushdie figure’s concept of the migrant—and, indeed, the migrant as writer—and how Pakistan epitomizes what happens when a nation starts afresh, and is free in theory if not in fact from “history, from memory, from Time”: the separation from such elements that, at least in one sense, Rushdie argues is part an experience that opens up the possibility of rootlessness, where the individual is no longer bound to the nation (85).

Both Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Rushdie’s *Shame* are, primarily, novels about places and the nations that surround and embody these places. Moreover, the places depicted in these fictions are in transition. The country in *Shame*, Rushdie’s “almost” Pakistan, is, through a series of military coups, assassinations, and political corruption, becoming a nation where shame is an inherent part of the country’s construction. In Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, the reader is introduced to post-apartheid South Africa, a country where the fresh sins of the past have created the conditions for the present. The fortified suburban homes in which privileged whites have for decades retired within, and where the black majority has not only assumed political power — and all the problems within that role — but is facing the reality of sharing in responsibility for South Africa’s astronomically high rates of rape and other forms of violent crime. The protagonist of *Disgrace*, David Lurie, reflects upon the ultimately material basis of crime in the new Republic of South Africa and how it is

> a risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold to the theory and the comforts of theory. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too. (98)

Coetzee’s introduces Lurie as he contemplates the efficiency and satisfaction he has found in a sexual relationship with a colored prostitute, Soraya. Lurie is reveling in the smooth,
emotionless economics of their relationship, and the effortlessness with which he can exchange weekly bouts of sexual satisfaction for cash. Lurie seeks out the kind of autonomy and agency that he does not have in his vocation; although Lurie is a tenured professor at a university in Cape Town, his position, and indeed his kind, are being phased out: while he is able to teach a course on the romantic poets, his primary role is to teach in the newly minted communications department. It is under these conditions that Lurie embarks on an affair with a student, Melani, which ends in Lurie’s resignation/dismissal from the university, after he refuses to apologize for his affair. On being hounded by the media and ostracized by the few friends he has left, Lurie takes leave to his daughter, Lucy, and the farm in a remote part of the Eastern Cape, where she shares land with Petrus, an African laborer turned farm manager. One day, Lucy and David return from a walk and are brutally attacked by three young African men. The dogs that Lucy keeps outside are murdered; the house is ransacked and David’s car is stolen; David is set on fire; Lucy is gang-raped by all three of the intruders.

The attack, coming as it does shortly after David’s arrival, reinforces in him the idea that Lucy can never be safe. Initially, David is concerned that Lucy will not leave the farm; however, he soon learns not only does Lucy plan to stay living on the farm, but also that she will not report the rape to the police. As in David’s fore-mentioned analysis of the lack of “things” in social circulation has led to a barbarous pirate culture—where “things” are acquired by force—a change in the “rules” of the new South Africa stretch from the micro—including the university’s compulsion to hear David confess for the sin of his affair with a student—to the macro-level: how the individual deals with the state. On pestering Lucy for an answer about why she won’t initiate an investigation into her rape, his daughter explains that the new South Africa is not the
place for transparency and the rule of law, but rather a place where one must pay for historical ills before all else.

The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.’

‘This place being what?’

‘This place being South Africa.’ (112)

Lucy’s reaction to her rape and the attack upon her property is worth thinking about as a companion to David’s own reaction to the circumstances of his “trial” at the university. In light of the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, where those who committed crimes—police beatings, false accusations—under the auspices of the apartheid regime could receive a pardon in exchange for full and vivid confessions in front of the victim and the victim’s family, the nature of how the individual articulates guilt and accusation in contemporary South African society was irrevocably altered. It is in the aftermath of Lucy’s rape that the narrative’s seemingly disparate strands—David’s resignation from his university post due to his dalliance with a female student and Lucy’s attempt to negotiate her position on the farm—begin to come together in the novel’s eponymous theme: how one measures disgrace, and the weight of personal and collective historical complicity. While David refuses to be socialized into the discursive practices of the new South Africa, Lucy is not only ready to acknowledge the collective historical toll of apartheid for whites in the republic—something that David also concedes—but to take on the role of the scapegoat and pay for the sins of white South Africans.

She broods a long while before she answers. ‘But isn’t there another way of looking at it, David? What if… what if that is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps this what they tell themselves. (158)
Lucy’s decision—to accept the role of the scapegoat and in some way sacrifice, or at least appear to sacrifice, for the actions of others—is echoed in David’s earlier consideration of the role of the scapegoat, and how its historical basis is tied in with belief in a higher, metaphysical power.

With the removal of uniform belief in an omniscient, omnipotent god, the process of assigning guilt and the performance of “cleansing” took on a more materialist emphasis. Once again, the reader of Disgrace can return to the Truth and Reconciliation commission hearings as a theoretical framework for reading these segments of the narrative: while the hearings brought the worst of recent South African history to the surface, allowing naming of acts that had up until then been silenced by the regime, there was no one—scapegoat or otherwise—who was required to pay the price. We might now begin to imagine how David and Lucy see South Africa’s incredibly high rates of violent and crime in the post-apartheid era not as an exercise in wealth redistribution or the apex of revenge culture, but the search for someone (or many) to bear the brunt of an immeasurable hurt.

Scapegoating worked in practice while it still had religious power behind it. You loaded the sins of the city on to the goat’s back and drove it out, and the city was cleansed. It worked because everyone knew how to read the ritual, including the gods. Then the gods died, and all of a sudden you had to cleanse the city without divine help. Real actions were demanded instead of symbolism. The censor was born, in the Roman sense. Watchfulness became the watchword: the watchfulness of all over all. Purgation was replaced by the purge. (91)

Salman Rushdie’s Shame is, inexplicably, both an expansive, magic realist narrative that evokes the broad range of characters and lyrical word play that marks the best of Rushdie’s fiction and an exploration of the brutal post-partition history of Pakistan. The feature of Shame that I wish to explore here, however, is the role of the unnamed narrator—presumably, due to certain biographical similarities, Rushdie—and how the essayistic tone and form trumps the illustrative fictional narrative in delivering the basis of one of the novel’s suggestions: that Pakistan is both the anonymous subject of the novel and the target of the novelist’s scorn. Yet, in
undermining the assumption that this novel is about Pakistan, Rushdie filters the narrative of *Shame* through a “generalized” framework of a post-revolutionary former colonial societies through the power struggles of Raza Hyder (based upon former Pakistani military-backed dictator, Zia ul-Haq) and Iskander Harappa (the executed Pakistani Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto).

While there are a number of facets of *Shame* to examine, including the activities of the on-again, off-again protagonist, the doctor Omar Khayyam Shakil, I will stay close to the interludes of the novel’s unnamed narrator who, in the early stages of what is a densely packed narrative, describes the locale in which the novel’s action occurs, stating that

> the country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centring to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (22)

So while there remains a “wink/nudge” approach to Rushdie’s profile of Pakistan—and, of course, there are enough “fictional” details within the narrative that line up with historical events that make it relatively easy to argue that while this might not be Pakistan, it is a *kind of* Pakistan—the larger argument in *Shame*, at least in regards to the unnamed narrator’s position, is over the nature of writing a story of a nation from the position of the migrant, from the local who has moved or is in the process of moving (Rushdie’s prototypical immigrant). The Rushdie figure considers the many strains of colonial discourse—such as the sober assessments of the local economies, the travelogues of colonial agents on the edges of a British Empire, those lucky few who gather comfort from a sun that never sets on the Union Jack, and anthropological studies of the natives and their behaviors—and the “locals” who were willing to contest, if not always directly, the dominant story of the nation. Yet in the case of Pakistan, a country that only existed after the lobbying of Muslim Indian and Hindu Indian leaders and intellectuals and the
resultant imperial British decree, the contestation over who has the right to speak on the history of the post-colonial nation, and ask

who commandeered the job of rewriting history?—The immigrants, the mohajirs. In what languages?—Urdu and English, both imported tongues, although one travelled less distance than the other. It is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed. (86)

The notion of language is also an extremely crucial element of Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. Lurie, a professor of literature now employed to primarily teach communications within a newly renovated department at a university in Cape Town, repeatedly expresses dismay in the inability of the English language to adequately convey meaning or communicate between groups who possess different languages in South Africa. In Lurie’s view, it is not that English is no longer the primary choice as an avenue for discourse and dialogue in the new South Africa; it is that English is tied to a failed project—the colonizing project—which has led to this moment in South Africa’s history: where the after-effects of apartheid are clearly measurable violence abounds, white guilt is heavy, and resentment is strong for both blacks and whites — and the main outlet for grievances (the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings) failed to excise the poison of South Africa’s original sin.

During the attack on Lucy, Lurie is impotent in the face of the physical superiority and sheer brutality of the assailants; however, despite his physical inability to respond to the attackers and protect his daughters, it is not his lack of strength or the prone position in which he is left that first strikes Lurie’s consciousness. Instead, it is language and the way that the European languages that he has mastered—the key pieces in his educational and social toolkit—are useless when dealing with the blowback from a regime of imperialism and ethnic segregation designed by those who brought European languages to the African continent in the first place. Furthermore, Lurie’s failings lead him to imagine himself as a colonial matron on the edge of a
barbarous empire, where the natives are preparing to mount the kind of savagery that haunts the deepest fears of the colonist. While Lurie’s visions are certainly the product of the profound psychological distress of being witness—if not by seeing, then at least by being present in the house—to his daughter’s rape, there is also a deeper historical consideration of the native bringing about every colonist’s worst nightmare in the way that Lurie sees the violence that has come to his daughter’s farmhouse, a facet that is accentuated by the third-person narrative of the novel, and the observation that

he speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron. Mission work: what has it left behind, that huge enterprise of upliftment? Nothing that he can see. (95)

Lurie’s meditation on all the failings of English as the language for the new South Africa does not, however, stop after the attack has stopped; rather, the English language becomes a metaphor for the place of whites in South African society as a whole, demonstrating how the place of whites in the future of the new South Africa is unstable and, in fact, the position they once held is now merely a remnant of the past. Thus, in this way, Disgrace might be read both as a commentary on the state of South Africa today, in regards to the residual violence and the inability to reconcile the present with the past, and also a relentless eulogy for South Africa’s whites: particularly those who belong to Lurie’s baby boomer generation. Shortly after Lucy’s rape, Lurie becomes convinced that Petrus, Lucy’s farm manager, was aware of facts about the attack that he was not sharing either with the police or with Lurie himself. Lurie’s suspicions are heightened when he and Lucy attend a party hosted by Petrus, who is incidentally celebrating the slow encroachment he is making into taking almost full possession of Lucy’s farm, and Lurie identifies one of the rapists. Later on, as Lurie works the farm with Petrus, he becomes increasingly agitated by Petrus’s inability to give a “straight answer” to any of the questions that
Lurie poses. After venting his frustration upon Petrus, Lurie turns his anger upon the English language and how it has become an ineffective tool for pinning down any “truths” in a society where language has historically been one of the crucial markers of the master/slave dynamic; it may also be worth noting here that only India has more official languages than South Africa.

Furthermore, Lurie’s criticism of English as South Africa’s lingua franca, particularly between Afrikaans speakers and speakers of Xhosa and Zulu, which encompass the three most common languages in South Africa, articulates both the limits of the language and the historical ruptures in South Africa as a post-colonial nation. Moreover, Dick Penner’s assessment of Coetzee’s characters as being caught in a failed dialectic and unable to communicate with others is particularly apt when considering David Lurie’s failed relationships: with the prostitute, Soraya; with his daughter, Lucy; with his first wife; and, finally, with Petrus.

He would not mind hearing Petrus’s story one day. But preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost their articulations, their articulateness, their articulatedness. Like a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud, the language has stiffened. Pressed into the mould of English, Petrus’s story would come out arthritic, bygone. (117)

In *Shame*, the Rushdie-figure discusses language as a Foucauldian power relationship, questioning who has the right to speak about the nation and the nation’s history. In this case, it is not a mere question of which language should be employed—the Rushdie-figure has already identified the fact that it was Urdu and English (“both imported tongues”) that were used in the post-partition foundation of Pakistan—rather, it is about who can speak about and for Pakistan. Furthermore, Rushdie explores the origins of the country’s name and how its construction it is an acronym born out of the northern section of the British Raj: Punjab, Afghania, Kashmir, Sindh, and Balochistan.

So it was a word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a
palimpsest of the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. (85-86)

Earlier on in the novel, the Rushdie-figure had wondered that despite the connections he felt to a country in which he no longer resided:

Can only the dead speak? I tell myself that this will be a novel of leavetaking, my last words on the East from which, many years ago, I began to come loose. I do not always believe myself when I say this. It is a part of the world to which, whether I like it or not, I am still joined, if only by elastic bands. (22)

The dead in this case are not restricted to those generations who have gone before; they are also those who, like the Rushdie-figure, have left the nation but retain ties through the invisible bonds that the Rushdie-figure has such difficulty explaining. Although the Rushdie-figure claims that he will no longer write about “the East”, the reader knows that this cannot be true—throughout the essayistic sections of the novel, the Rushdie-figure becomes further entrenched in articulating his relationship to the country of his birth (India) and the place where he spent at least part of his childhood (Pakistan); a region of the world that had, for over 400 years, a significant British presence.

If language is one of the elements that we can investigate in finding shared themes in Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Rushdie’s *Shame*, then the way that “home” is written in both novels provides an insight into both authors’ interrogation of the post-colonial condition. Throughout *Shame* the Rushdie-figure attempts to deal with how the migrant is conceptualizes the notion of home and, indeed, if home even exists after one has made the shift across nations. In this attempt by the Rushdie-figure to theorize the state of the migrant in transit, there are shades of the concepts that underline Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*; and although Anderson argues that the concept of the nation has often been constructed for overtly political and military means—by creating a sense of unity, macro-cultural traditions, such as national holidays and a
shared sense of the nation’s founding moment, as well as the writing of a history amongst disparate groups who had previously divided along religious, language, and ethnic/tribal lines—in Rushdie’s *Shame* the reader is shown the working mechanism of how the migrant imagines his home.

As for me: I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change. And to come back to the ‘roots’ idea, I should say that I haven’t managed to shake myself free of it completely. Sometimes I do see myself as a tree, even, rather grandly, as the ash Yggdrasil, the mythical world-tree of Norse legend. (86)

Moreover, while Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities are most often constructed by those within the borders of the nation, the Rushdie-figure in *Shame* is intent on conveying how the migrant might imagine his “roots” from afar. This imagining, the Rushdie-figure suggests, is in itself a type of writing, as it is the editing process—“what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change”—that defines the nation’s historical discourse. But the problem, as we see in both *Shame* and *Disgrace*, is that the nation has an underlying stain: in the case of Coetzee’s South Africa it is the trace of apartheid and the (seemingly) irresolvable differences that continue keep, as in the translation of the Dutch term itself, the people in a state of “separateness” despite the dismantling of the formal structure of the political and social policy; in Rushdie’s fictionalized Pakistan, it is the remnants of unchecked corruption that elicit a sense of shame.

Yet while the new South Africa is presented as an insulated world—the only overt references to other nations comes through the opera about Lord Byron’s mistress that Lurie is in the process of writing and his fore-mentioned insistence that he will pay for Lucy to relocate overseas (specifically Holland)—the Rushdie-figure who is, by his own description, a man “borne across,” gives examples of how the shame of Pakistan is not necessarily a homegrown
phenomenon. In the chapter “A Necklace of Shoes”, the Rushdie-figure recalls a dinner conversation he had with an unnamed senior British diplomat who claims that the West should support Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, the President of Pakistan who, after engineering a political coup, ordered the execution of the Pakistani Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The diplomat’s reason is that any support of ul-Haq, whose execution of Bhutto and repressive control of the country provoked international condemnation, was the West’s only appropriate action because ul-Haq, against the advice of several cabinet members, had provided support for the Mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet Union. After the Rushdie-figure conveys his displeasure at this kind of attitude, the diplomat’s wife asks him, “‘Tell me, why don’t people in Pakistan get rid of Zia in, you know, the usual way?’”(22) Stepping back into the direct narrative of Shame, the narrator responds to this interaction with one of the novel’s most haunting lines: “Shame, dear reader, is not the exclusive property of the east” (22).

While this use of “real life” historical figures is absent in Disgrace—the Rushdie-figure’s journalistic eye for these interactions is one of the most compelling features of Shame—Coetzee uses David Lurie’s predicament as a disgraced middle-class academic to explore the economic and general social conditions of the new South Africa, as well as provide the kinds of details of everyday life in the republic that are not shown on television reports or newspaper features. After returning to Cape Town for the first time after his stay with Lucy, Lurie is shocked to find that his hometown—the place, indeed, where he might claim his “roots”, stake his national and cultural identity—is in the process of not gradual but speedy transformation.

He has been away less than three months, yet in that time the shanty settlements have crossed the highway and spread east of the airport. The stream of cars has to slow down while a child with a stick herds a stray cow off the road. Inexorably, he thinks, the country is coming to the city. Soon there will be cattle again on Rondebosch Common; soon history will have come full circle. (175)
As throughout Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*, the question of how national identity and “roots” are imagined in contemporary society relates back to a sense of history—both on a collective and personal level. The spaces that are imagined in *Disgrace* and *Shame*—fictional versions of South Africa and Pakistan—are part of the novelists’ articulation of one interpretation of history: in both cases, a national history of violence. And even in Lurie’s forementioned dismay of what is a “ruralization” of what was once South Africa’s most cosmopolitan metropolis, there remains the realization that this fate was in some way predestined; a feeling that is foreshadowed in one of the novel’s most memorable exchanges in *Disgrace*. After much prodding, Lucy decides to speak to her father about the possible motivations behind her rape. Lurie turns to South Africa’s history as a way of explaining the tragic events that they both endured.

[Lurie] waits for more, but there is no more, for the moment. ‘It was history speaking through them,’ he offers at last. ‘A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors.’ (156)
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher Garland was educated at the University of Auckland (New Zealand), where he received a Bachelor of Arts in English and film, television and media studies. After completing his honour’s year in sociology at the University of Virginia, he returned to New Zealand to write his master’s thesis. After graduating with a Master of Arts in sociology (first class honours), Garland received his Master of Arts in English from the University of Florida in 2009.