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The Making of Rape Culture: Fault-lines in extant myth, literature, art, real life and justice

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Abstract

When a black or a white man rapes a woman, what are the possible ramifications of such an act? What happens if the victim is a white woman? What if it is a black woman? Examining various patterns of criminal behaviour towards women: this paper seeks to analyze a recent newspaper report and two novels, and draw attention to role played by older myths that feature in our cultural memory, which have been variously represented in art: painting, sculpture, and narrative. Through a detailed analysis spread across literatures, cinema, and contemporary, actual events, this paper endeavors to unravel what Rape Culture means, how it has been represented throughout the crisscrossing streams of mythology, literature, and art; and in the process, interrogating the very conceptualization of Justice.

Keywords: Rape culture; Doris Lessing; J. M. Coetzee; Struggle; Empowerment; Sexual Harassment; J

When a black or a white man rapes a woman, what are the possible ramifications of such an act? What happens if the victim is a white woman? What if it is a black woman? Rape has existed for a very long time and continues to happen in the everyday world inhabited by men and women across cultures. How do women deal with this in everyday life? How does society treat victims and perpetrators? These become important questions in a twenty first century world wherein women continue to face sexual violence in spite of the new spirit of protest by women which triggered off the "Me Too" movements worldwide. The MeToo movement that was triggered off for a second time in 2017, came a hundred years after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and is significant in the context of this paper because it draws attention to the way in which routine sexual predation by prominent public figures, usually male, was understood. The sexual harassment women faced from powerful males they interacted with was viewed as part of the process of women being in a sphere outside of their comfort zone in a testosterone- driven working environment.

In 2017, women in different parts of the world spoke up about the sexual harassment they had faced in public places of study and work, drawing attention to lifetimes of shame and silence. A pattern emerged suggesting that men in positions of power have tended to abuse their authority and that arguably, vulnerable women were either shamed into silence or humiliated in public. Examining such patterns of behavior: this paper would like to analyze a recent newspaper report and two novels, and draw attention to role played by older myths that feature in our cultural memory, which have been variously represented in art: painting, sculpture, and narrative.

We could for instance, examine the details around a series of paintings and sculptures famously titled The Rape of the Sabine Women, depicted and sculpted by artists in Europe from the 16th century onwards. (Giambologna (1583) has a famous marble sculpture depicting the rape, while Nicolas Poussin (1637) and Peter Paul Rubens (1637,) have paintings on the subject, among others. All these works draw their inspiration from an older narrative set in the ancient world that speaks about the abduction of the Sabine women. This is an early formative myth from Ancient Rome at a time when the city was being built and needed to be peopled, and draws attention to how a lot of our practices draw from thought processes, words and deeds rooted in cultural memory. In order to make possible the process of a growing community, it has always been desirable that both men and women play a vital role in the processes of procreation, since it is for the man to beget and for the woman to bear children. The absence of women among the conquering legionaries made it imperative for them to find women to further the processes of peopling the world.

The founders of the city sought to rectify the absence of women and began making arrangements by speaking to the Sabines, who were their neighbors. The Sabines refused to engage with them. Eventually, in order to people Rome, a festival was organized in which participating women arrived from different cities. During the festival, women from Sabine were abducted and when their men tried to intervene, they were fought off. The women, it must be assumed, were cajoled or coerced to settle down with Roman men. This event, which occurred in the mid-eighth century BCE became the subject matter of many canvases and sculptures in European traditions of art and sculpture. Why did painters and sculptors repeatedly engage with the story of the rape of the women of Sabine in their work? Does this not become a measure of how women were viewed in homosocial worlds, both ancient and modern, wherein they were for the most part second class citizens?

This event that allegedly took place in the ancient world, was recorded for posterity and retold over the centuries. What does this tell us about the perpetuity in which the idea of gender violence is assimilated into thought processes? Do art and literature, not carry forward the seeds of ideas?

Were we to follow Coetzee's narrative, it seems apparent that such is the case. David Lurie, the central male character in Coetzee's ***Disgrace***, recalls seeing a painting entitled The Rape of the Sabine Women in an art book in the library as a child puzzling over the word 'rape.' What sort of imprint is left upon the mind of the young David Lurie? Doesn't the idea of violence directed at women, through such graphic visuals, reinforce unequal and unfair cultural stereotypes on impressionable minds?

For a contemporary audience acquainted with the English language, the word 'rape' has a very specific implication, especially in the context of male and female bodies and it is this meaning that the paintingsand the sculptures evoke. Rape, especially in the here and now, means wrongful sexual violation, wherein consent to such an act has been denied. Rape is an ugly word and represents an act that is both violent and brutal. It is also a word that terrifies and strikes fear and these are the emotions we experience when we read the title and view these paintings and sculptures, in museums or in art books. Significantly, an engagement in tracing the origins of the word in Latin, would enable us to understand the context better.

The word rape has origins in Latinas 'rapere' which means abduction or kidnapping. In Greek 'rapere' means 'to steal.' It also borrows from the French rapir, implying seizing. By the time we move to the 16th Century CE, the word 'rape' has over the centuries taken on connotations of sexual violation, through means of abduction or forcible confinement. The titles of the paintings and sculptures continue to hint at the dark objectives behind the seizing or kidnapping of women, drawing attention to the planned and proposed sexual violence. The paintings foreground this violence and generate a sense of unease, reiterating for both male and female viewers that the culture ofrape has been insidiously practiced since very ancient times.

Painterly interpretation of the Rape of the Sabine women, on display in galleries worldwide, displays women in disarray, looking discommoded or in pain, while a few sinewy and muscular men seem to be in aggressive control. Looking at the mythological

interpretations offered by artists, for these are teaching tales, it is possible to collate stories from different cultures that colluded in the abduction of women. The Battle of Troy was fought over bringing back a reluctant Helen who had been abducted and kept captive as a young girl, long before her marriage to Menelaus. In the Indian epic, Ramayana, the arch-villain Ravana, desirous of her ever since he heard of her unparalleled beauty, abducts Sita. All versions of the Ramayana, original and abridged mention the travails of Sita, after her marriage to Rama. A married woman could be abducted and violated, irrespective of her rank or status, because she possessed little rights of her own, let alone rights over her body in patriarchal culture.

The story of birth of humans in the classical Greek tradition is about the rape of the nymph, Leda, by Jupiter, who dons the shape of a swan. While this rape is narrated joyously by William Butler Yeats, in his poem ***Leda and the Swan*** (1924) and remains part of university curricula, national museums, occupying pride of place in Budapest and Vienna, house sculptures that draw attention to similar forced intra-species encounters between animals and gods. While on the one hand the myths seem to suggest great continuities between humans and beasts, it is significant that the oppressors and perpetrators of gender violence continue to be male, while the victims are female subspecies, reinforcing hierarchies within culture.

Closer to our modern times, young women continue to be abducted, not only by the Sierra Lone, but also by aggressive predators usually male, in different parts of the world. In re-making sequels to ***Taken,*** Hollywood reinforces how trafficking of women for providing sexual pleasure, if not progeny, continues across cultures and retains a significant function in women's lives even in the twenty-first century. The recurrence of rape illustrates that the idea of rape remains deeply-embedded in all our cultures, different as they may have been once and heterogenous as they are today. As we move away from the superannuated realms of institutionalized faith, into a liberal, anonymous world, rape statistics seem to show an increase, rather than a cessation.

I am not really making out a case here for the hallowed history of religious sanctity, because I am not really sure whether it existed at all. I would also readily agree that mainstream religions all over the world allot aninferior status to both women and sexuality, so it becomes important to examine why despite the progress women have made legally,

socially, academically and politically, they continue to remain at the receiving end of what has been termed rape cultures.

'Rape Culture' is a term coined in the twentieth century and is also the title of a film made in 1975 and revised in 1983, that looks at the normalization of sexual violence against women. It is also important to draw attention to the fact that the idea of playful teasing continues to form part of the sexual dynamics between men and women, and the word eve-teasing usually worked to mask effectively the nature of the sexual harassment itself. Such terminology and the gender- blind usage of it continues to be the reason for ambivalent responses to aggression, in personal life, literature, and the laws.

Recently a black teen Chrystul Kizer was arrested and charged with life for killing Randy Volar, a knownwhite felon. This is yet another instance of the disturbing lacunae in criminal justice systems when women and men of color are involved. In the newspaper report that I first saw online on Dec 20, 2019 in *the mind unleashed.com*, mentioned how a (black girl) Chrystul Kizer was befriended at sixteen by Randall Volar (a white man) aged thirty-three on Facebook and sexually abused. Volar had been arrested in early 2018 on chargesof child enticement, using computers to facilitate a child sex crime. Photos and video evidence of himabusing multiple underage girls including Kizer was recovered. However, he was released the very nextday without bail, and this action allowed him to continue the abuse. In June 2018, Kizer shot him dead,set his body on fire and fled the scene in his BMW. She was found by police in nearby Milwaukee andclaimed that she killed him in self-defense.

Randy Volar, the adult male under discussion, was twice the age of the incarcerated teen. He had befriended her online and established a connection. He had succeeded in enticing her and photographic and video evidence of his abuse of several underage girls other than Kizer, had been made available to the court. Why did thecourt does not take this into cognizance? Is the court not supposed to examine evidence of such nature with the required gravitas? How is it that Volar was released without bail? Arguably, the thrust of the story itself would change considerably if the skin color of the participants were not mentioned. We could feel genuinely bewildered at this obvious failure of a process that is supposed to protect young people from predators.

What is more disturbing is that Chrystul is likely to be facing life in prison for killing a known pedophilewho both sex-trafficked and raped her. District Attorney Michael Graveley

who failed to bring Volar to justice, charged Chrystul with first degree murder, arguing that the killing was premeditated. Reading the report left me feeling outraged. Is this happening in America because being a woman is doubly complicated and jeopardized by the fact of being black, in the same way that being a man and being white is an indication of a double privilege? Why is the fact that Chrystul was underage when she met Volar not given enough weightage? Why is Volar's felony irrelevant and how was he allowed back into society without bail? Why is a blind eye being turned to the sexual trafficking that Volar was carrying out, with under-age teens? These reported details continue to disturb and highlight the gray areas that cloud fair and free lives for women and in some cases, men.

I would like to draw connections between this real case, set in contemporary America, and two inter-racial encounters in the fiction of Doris Lessing and J.M. Coetzee in order to analyze the tropes set in place by literary texts with regardto the representation of rape. Such an analysis, continues to reveal troubling insights, in the case of two novels set in Africa, namely, *The Grass is Singing (1950)* by Doris Lessing and *Disgrace (1999)* by J.M. Coetzee. In both novels, separated from each other by almost half a century, women are ostensibly victims of assault. In *The Grass is Singing*, a black man, who works on the farm murders the white woman Mary, whose husband owns the farm. There is little sympathy for the black men, the betrayed and bereaved husband, and even less sympathy for the white woman victim.

In *Disgrace,* a white professor at Cape Town University, David Lurie, forces himself into a sexual liaisonwith a student Melanie Isaac, and romanticizes his libido, making the female reader deeply uncomfortable with his insouciance regarding the way he has conducted himself. Melanie's complaint pushes the university committee to ask Lurie to step down when he refuses to accept that he has misused the power and authority vested in him and will not extend an apology. An unrepentant Lurie heads out to the country to visit his daughter Lucy, who lives on a farm and grows vegetables and breeds dogs. During his visit, Lucy is raped by three black intruders, becomes pregnant and decides tohave the baby.

The literary texts in both instances, I would like to show, highlights the extant values of rape culture embedded in culture, thereby drawing our attention to how the politics of power, control and vilification are endorsed unwittingly by fiction. Although both texts

attempt to generate disgust, and reflect grim forebodings they also reinforce older cultural constructions by recording extant patterns and practices.

Do *The Grass is Singing* and *Disgrace* through their exploration of sexual violence in the context of race, present this problem differently? *The Grass is Singing* opens at the moment of Mary's murder and retrospectively leads the reader tothe events that preceded it. Mary Turner and her husband Dick are white owners of a farm in Southern Rhodesia, occupying land that once belonged to the Mashona and Matabele tribes.

Mary Turner's married life in the country with Dick has not been a success. Unwilling to subject the land to aggressive cultivation, Dick Turner, despite his sensitivity to the environment remains an objectof contempt for his white peers. Unwilling to have children until they make sufficient money, the Turners don't have a family or much social interaction with other members of the white community. Their diurnal human interaction is with their black employees, particularly the men who help out on the field and do odd jobs around the house. Mary's savage treatment of the black worker mirrors the behavior of the white community of her times. Yet it is slowly replaced by the fear and desire that she develops for one of the black men who is sent by Dick to help her around the house. Moses is efficient and competent and finding Mary a little disoriented when she falls ill, begins to supervise her meals and her daily functioning.

Charlie Slatter, the man who has bought out the farm owned by the Turners arranges for them to go fora six-month vacation in England. On one visit to the Turners, he witnesses Moses's "surly indifference" (*The Grass is Singing*, 177.All future references will be mentioned as TGIS) and control over the kitchen supplies and asserts emphatically that "no woman knows how to handle niggers" (*TGIS,* p.174). Charlie Slatter is also extremely uncomfortable about Mary's coquettish behavior towards Moses. The new manager Marston, fresh from England, hired by Slatter to supervise the farm is startled to see Moses assisting Mary through the intimacies of dressing and undressing and completing her toilette, "surprised at one of the guarded, a white woman, so easily evading this barrier (*TGIS*, 186)."

Mary's acceptance of Moses, alternates between forbidden human contact with a black person, fear and desire. Unhinged by Dick's illness, Mary has a nightmare towards the end of the narrative, in whichMoses becomes an oppressive force, "He approached slowly, obscene and powerful, and it was not only he, but her father who was threatening her… and she could

smell. Not the native smell, but the unwashed smell of her father . . . It was the voice of the African she heard. He was comforting her because of Dick's death, consoling her protectively; but at the same time it was her father menacing and horrible, who touched her in desire." (*TGIS*, 165) It is as though Mary is trapped in a patriarchal bind wherein the control of the father, husband and forbidden lover over her remains paramount. She is unable to break free from this.

While Mary is haunted by inarticulable desires and fear, Moses takes on an 'easy, confident, bullying insolence, (167) which is noticed by the new manager who is aghast at the intimacy between Mary and Moses. Responding to this, Mary orders Moses to leave. Instead of leaving immediately Moses enquires if she is asking him to leave because of Marston, and if she is never coming back, and if Marston is leaving too. Oddly, Marston at this point has his arms around Mary and is comforting her.Moses is now firmly cast into the role of the threatening black male. When he is ordered to go, yet again by both Mary and Marston, the narrative voice concludes this incident ominously. "After a long,slow, evil look, the native went." (*TGIS*, 188) All that remains is for Moses to r e t u r n u n a n n o u n c e d and kill Mary.

Mary's killing is presented as a ritual tableau of expiation: "at the sight of him, her emotions unexpectedly shifted to create in her an extraordinary feeling of guilt; but towards him, to whom shehad been disloyal, and at the bidding of the Englishman....and then the bush avenged itself." (*TGIS*, 204--5). The guilt that Mary feels is with regard to what she sees as her betrayal of Moses.

Moses turns himself in, after waiting for the police to arrive on the farm. Does Lessing transfer the proverbial white man's burden supposedly shouldered by conscientious colonial administrators on toMary's shoulders? Does Lessing offer Mary's ritual killing as a blood sacrifice and as atonement for thesins of the British who ravaged and plundered Africa and enslaved its land and its people?

Moses, a handsome muscular black man, who has been captured and reduced to oppressive menial labor on a white man's farm, is rapidly transformed into a malevolent presence by the end of the novel. He emanates a threatening sexual energy and along with his enormous build is made to represent an ignoble savage. He becomes a threat to white

supremacy because he has been able to getMary on his side. After killing Mary, Moses ignores Dick Turner thinking dismissively of him as the "enemy whom he had outwitted" (TGIS, 206). Moses in "his final moment of triumph is compelled by the older rules of his tribe to surrender to a higher power armed with the satisfaction of his completed revenge."(TGIS, 206)

Mary's death becomes a sacrificial offering, one in which her guilt finds redemption. Yet, it is in vain, because Moses, the houseboy, awaits the coming of the policemen in order to turn himself in. The dead woman evokes only disgust and vicious grimaces from Slatter and Sergeant Denham, and Moses'crime is recorded as having been committed for Mary's jewelry. For the white men in control, the important thing was that although Mary Turner had let their side down, in her death, she had finally ceased to be a problem. Dick Turner becomes crazy by the end of the narrative, but he too is irrelevant in the schemeof things since he can neither control his wife nor be a successful farmer. In allowing the guilt of colonizing and destroying Southern Rhodesia and brutalizing its people to be expiated by the blood sacrifice of Mary Turner, ***The Grass is Singing*** draws attention to the continued devaluation of women's lives in patriarchal culture. Mary's violent death at the hands of a black man erases her identity as a small personal individual embedded within the inequities of racism and colonialism.

In *Disgrace*, David Lurie, is a professor of literature at Cape Town University. Lurie has been divorced twice and has an adult daughter. He lives by himself in an apartment on the university campus. WhenSoraya, the woman he has been meeting in a hotel room quits the escort service she was working for,he tracks her down and tries to establish contact with her. When she rebuffs him, he turns his attention towards women closer to his work space. Lurie enjoys his sexual liaisons, and is willing to teach the fictional Emma Bovary what "moderated bliss could be", "were she to come to Cape Town." (Disgrace, 6). *Madame Bovary* (1857), we must remember is Flaubert's heroine, the lustful housefrau who abandons husband and child in her unsatiated quest for other lovers. To his heroine, Flaubert appends a male trajectory of amour, while warning the reader of the danger represented by women who readily immerse themselves into romantic fictional readings at tremendous cost to real life.

Lurie fantasizes about his young women students, eventually controlling and manipulating Melanie Isaac, a student from George who has opted for a credit course with him. Inviting Melanie over to his house for a drink Lurie seduces her. Two and a half odd

years after the "Me Too" movement, it is not altogether difficult to identify Lurie as an entitled academic, who desires women, can pay for sexual favors and has little compunction in crossing the line, whether it is to stalk a sex worker who previously had consensual sex with him, or sexually coerce a student whom he is supposed to mentor, as part of his duties as a university professor.

Women should accept sexual overtures readily, he argues because "a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it. And what if I already share it? Then you should share it more widely." (*Disgrace*, 16) When his daughter Lucy asks why Melanie denounced him, Lurie responds: "She didn't say; I didn't have a chance to ask. She was in a difficult position. There was a young man, a lover or ex-lover, bullying her. There were the strains of the classroom. And then her parents got to hear and descended on Cape Town. The pressure became too much, I suppose." (*Disgrace*, 69)

Lurie is too self-centered to notice that Melanie is uncomfortable and has misgivings or that the pressure that became too much for Melanie may have been exerted upon her by him. For Lurie, the rules have changed and no one is following them, so he feels that introspecting about his behavior towards women or altering his way of thinking and functioning is not a requirement. If Lurie represents one end of the spectrum of patriarchal arrogance, his daughter Lucy, an extremely malleable young woman, is positioned in the narrative a being at the opposite end.

Lucy's response to Lurie is strangely far from indignant or outraged. Unlike the women who spoke up and called out their predators at the time of the MeToo movement, Lucy is of the opinion that affairs between professors and students go on all the time and prosecuting each case would decimate the profession. She tells him consolingly, "you've paid your price. Perhaps, looking back, she won't think too harshly of you. Women can be surprisingly forgiving"(*Disgrace,* 69).

In soft -pedaling an ugly situation for her father, Lucy's response is pacific. She directs little anger at her father while asserting that women can be surprisingly forgiving. She does not condone her father's affair and suggests he settle down in a relationship instead on preying on children. Yet the narrative voice continues to project Lurie's solipsistic version of

events. For instance, Lurie is curious about his daughter's sexuality, finding her attractive and lost to men because he is unable to wrap his head around her being a Lesbian. He attempts to pursue his academic ambition of writing a book on Byron's married mistress Teresa in Italy and when he enters into a casual relationship with Lucy's married friend 'dumpy', unattractive Bev Shaw, he wryly terms his coupling with her as a lowering of his standards.

In spite being on ethically unsound ground, Lurie continues to engage with women, recalling all the women he has made love to and who have thereby enriched him. He confesses: "He has always been drawn to women of wit. Wit and beauty. With the best will in the world he could not find wit in Melánie (*Disgrace*,78). He is also very clear that "dumpy little women with ugly voices deserve to be ignored" (*Disgrace*, 79). Yet, his reaction to his daughter's rape is one of indignance and righteousness. Why is this so? Are Lurie and Lucy following standard protocol in their responses?

Lucy is raped by three black men who come into her house on the pretext of needing to use her phone. Her house is burgled, her dogs are shot dead and when Lurie remonstrates, he is beaten up, locked in a bathroom, splashed with methylated spirits and set on fire. He recovers and heals, is shocked by the brutality his daughter is subjected to and appalled by her decision not to mention the gang rape. He would like to spirit her away from her home outside Salem on Eastern Cape and help her to settle in Holland. He views her refusal to speak about the rape as his disgrace. Lurie as a predator has a great sense of himself, and a very minimal sense of the women he has sexual encounters with. While he does not really rape women, he is exploitative and manipulative.

Lucy, deals with the gang rape she has been subjected to in an unexpected manner. She continues to be in extended shock, discovers that she is pregnant and decides to keep the baby, something that her father is unable to understand. She enters into a contract with a black neighbor agreeing to let him take her land, in return for protection and ownership of her house. She also doesn't mind being known as his third wife. Lucy's choices show that she has a forgiving nature, yet her recounting of the gang rape and her father's explanation of it remain chilling. " 'It was so personal,' she says. It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was . . . expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them.' '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.' 'That doesn't make it easier. The shock simply doesn't go away. The shock of being hated. I mean. In the act."(*Disgrace*, 156)

So somewhere in this very modern narrative, where rape is positioned within the bedrock of colonial privilege and race, history becomes an important marker. Lurie is the old alpha male enriching himself through all kinds of sexual encounters, paid, forced, legal, fantasized, remembered or forced, while women of all kinds run through his memory as if through a sieve.

He registers outrage when his daughter is raped by black men and is filled with great anger against them and physically berates the youngest of the three rapists when the latter turns up on Petrus' farm, although he has fewer compunctions about his own cavalier response to Melanie.

Lurie's racism reveals itself in his attitude to the black men around Lucy's farm. His response to them echoes the views of Charlie Slatter in *The Grass is Singing*. Like Slatter, Lurie is convinced that his daughter does not know how to deal with black men. While he talks airily about history and righting wrongs, he is aghast at Lucy's decision to keep the baby and not report the black men. He reprimands her, telling her that "If they had been white men you wouldn't talk about them in this way." (p.159). Is Lurie suggesting that his daughter would have sought punishment for her rapists if they had been white? Is there a presumed equality that Lurie imagines that exists between white women and white men? Why does Lurie overlook the double standard wherein sexual hierarchies come into effect even between men and women with the same skin color.

Both Lessing and Coetzee continue to endorse Fanon's perception that a white woman and a black man cannot have a normal relationship, although the original dynamics of such acculturation which Fanon drew our attention to should have ended with the establishment of new and free nations.

Eerily, Franz Fanon's words "I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine," (Black Skins, White Masks, 1952, p. 63) seem to be the motivating impulse behind the actions of Moses and the black men who rape Lacy. The black males in both narratives continue to wear white masks. Petrus, Lucy's neighbor, offers to marry her,

insisting that in his country women must marry. Although Lucy recognizes that the piece of land she owns is the dower he is after, she agrees to accept his offer for the security it will provide. Lucy's lesbian choices are rendered inconsequential in the onrush of the compulsory heterosexual codes her choice will make her follow.

Lucy's decision to keep the baby is forward looking, and her analysis that "Maybe for men, hating thewoman makes sex more exciting, "(p158) is perceptive. Yet her pragmatic explanation of the rape ordeal she goes through, is rather disturbing. "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?"(*Disgrace*, 158).

Rape is abhorrent and should never be rationalized in this manner. Coetzee's putting these words in Lucy's mouth and getting her to see parallels between this brutal act of violation and the fact of payingtax as a citizen, puts Lucy in the space of a sacrificial victim, not very different from Lessing's Mary Turner. Mary is ready to allow the bush take its vengeance by giving up her own life for the trespassescommitted against the black man by her entire community.

Lucy's willingness to condone rape as a form of necessary payment for continuing to stay on in a country she is not a native of, is yet another exercise in self-flagellation and banal pragmatism. Alpha men,such as Slatter and Lurie remain steadfastly misogynist and racist. Lurie berates himself for not having had the sense to have fathered a son and, in fact, rues the running out of his line.

Female characters in both novels, irrespective of race are shown as having far less power than men, both black and white. Though Lucy is not killed off and Melanie resumes her life, as women they still live within patriarchal cultures and continue to be governed by its rules. The two novels reiterate thatdespite modernity, women continue to be treated very shabbily by cultures that see them as serving particular purposes of mating and procreation, thereby reductively objectifying them. Modernity takes on a far more sinister role when it comes to questions of freedom and self-assertion available for women. Lessing and Coetzee's novels reveal that older roles and identities envisaged for women in much older contexts continue to dog their footsteps and trip them up in modern times. We have not moved away from cultural mores that existed

in those ancient times when Rome was a newly built city and women lived within tribes in which their lives were not of very much consequence.

When we move away from the art and literature that have failed us in their understanding and sensitivityto rape and turn to the world of jurisprudence and criminal justice, the answers do not get any better.The justice meted out to Chrystul Kizer is yet another illustration of a system gone awry, because alpha males in the private realm and in the public sphere preside over, police and manipulate the course of women's lives. These hierarchies of male power and female subjugation need to be pried apart. Could we do this by writing altogether different stories and painting and sculpting anew. We also need to rewrite our laws and sensitize men to gender and race differences from the time they are impressionable children. Above all, little girls must be taught to value themselves and not to offer themselves up so readily as sacrificial bait, however forgiving they may have been trained to be. The world must and can evolve into a better place once we take on the daunting but necessary task of questioning hackneyed myths and subjecting them to the post-mortem of analysis . We need to urgently reread and reinterpret these older stories and if need be, rewrite them anew for our times.

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BIO- NOTE

Ratna Raman is currently Professor of English at Sri Venkateswara College, Delhi. She is deeply interested in women's movements, nineteenth and twentieth century literature, modern poetry, the modern novel and Indian Classical Literature. Her book on Doris Lessing was brought out by Bloomsbury in March 2021,. She wrote a weekly column in the Tribune called Mind Your Language from November 2014 to March 2018. She has been a regular contributor to Hardnews on various contemporary affairs for well over a decade. She reads, reviews, travels, grows potted plants and is deeply interested in food and cultural practices. Her twelve year old blog *In the Midst of Life* can be accessed at ratnaraman.blogspot.in.