

DISGRACE

screenplay by  
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based on the novel by  
J.M. Coetzee

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FADE IN:

EXT. TABLE MOUNTAIN FROM SEA -- DAY 1

In the late afternoon light the mountain is in silhouette, so that the city itself is almost invisible in the haze beneath it. A primitive animal resting by the sea. Very quietly we hear the overture to Gluck's 'Orpheus and Eurydice'. The TITLES begin.

EXT. CAPETOWN (AERIAL SHOT) -- DAY 2

Closer to the mountain now. It is bleak and grey, with tiny shrubs clinging to the sheer side for the meager nourishment they offer. Moving from shadow into sunlight the CAMERA picks out the contours of the stone, until finally it comes clear of the rock to reveal sprawled around the mountain like a cloak, the City of Capetown, a huge ungainly smear of roads and houses with the natural harbor of Table Bay and the ocean beyond. Finally the CAMERA comes to rest on the red tiled roofs of the University Campus laid out like a toy Roman Forum under the fold's of Devil's Peak.

INT. HALLWAY WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 3

Close shot of a key sliding into a front door lock and the door opens. A pair of scuffed blue shoes cross the narrow hallway towards the bedroom. We hear a small bag being dropped on the floor as a mobile phone chants the opening to 'The Flight of the Bumble Bee'.

EXT. PLAZA CAPE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY -- DAY 4

The plaza is dominated by a classical columned building with a broad flight of stone steps leading down, in stages, to rugby fields below. Behind it rises the mountain. It is a break between classes and students are moving between buildings, small groups of conversations forming, dissolving and reforming. The CAMERA finds a man coming down the steps through the young crowds. Moving confidently, unnoticed by the students around him, DAVID LURIE does not look his fifty years. Hair pushed back from his face, he is carrying an old briefcase and a bundle of papers in his hands. A white student, ABIE (19) is running to catch up with him.

DAVID

Not now Abie, I'm going home, leave it in the cubby hole.

ABIE

But Sir.

DAVID

The hole, Abie.

ABIE watches DAVID disappear among the crowd.

INT. BEDROOM WINDSOR MANSIONS -- AFTERNOON 5

A red silk dressing gown is draped across the neatly made bed. The room is empty but through a crack in the door we can see someone moving about, talking on a mobile. This is SOROYA (32), of Indian origin, slightly built and pretty.

SOROYA

No, I know, but he has his special instruction today so he has to be picked up at five. Yes...yes.

(laughs)

Thank you, and don't forget to take a snack he'll be hungry... Don't worry I'll be there. Bye.

She clicks off the phone.

EXT. CAR PARK CAPE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY -- DAY 6

DAVID unlocks the door of a BLACK TOYOTA COROLLA throws his case and papers onto the passenger seat and slides onto the drivers seat.

INT. BATHROOM WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 7

SOROYA looks at herself in the harsh light of the mirror. She slips the mobile into her bag and pushes her hair back from her face.

EXT. RHODES DRIVE CAPETOWN -- DAY 8

The TOYOTA COROLLA noses out into the busy afternoon traffic heading towards Eastern Boulevard.

INT. BATHROOM WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 9

Low angle CLOSE shot of a shower jet as the water shoots out.

EXT. WINDSOR MANSIONS APARTMENTS -- DAY 10

The TOYOTA turns into the underground car park of the APARTMENT BLOCK.

INT. UNDERGROUND CAR PARK, WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 11

DAVID parks the car. A young black BOY dressed in shorts, JIMMY (20's) walks towards him as he gets out.

JIMMY

Afternoon Mr Lurie.

DAVID throws him the keys.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

She'll be ready by five o'clock.

DAVID

How's the reading?

JIMMY

He's one hell of dumb bastard that David Copperfield.

DAVID smiles as he moves through the doorway towards the elevator area.

INT. ELEVATOR WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 12

DAVID stands in the lift with an ELDERLY LADY until the door opens and he steps out. She stares after him, but the doors close on her.

INT. CORRIDOR WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 13

DAVID walks past a series of identical doorways until he stops at one which is open. He pushes it wider and enters.

INT. HALLWAY WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 14

DAVID loosens his tie, and puts his briefcase behind the door.

SOROYA (O.S.)

I'm in the bathroom. How was your day?

He moves through the pale coloured sitting room towards the bedroom. A single bottle of whiskey (half empty) and two glasses are placed on a side table. DAVID helps himself to a drink.

DAVID

Unbearable. We are the bored leading the bored. I have no interest in their course, they have no interest in their course and we are both rapidly losing the ability to dissemble.

SOROYA

What?

DAVID

Never mind.

He crosses into the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 15

The curtains are closed and the bedside lights are on. DAVID sits on the bed and sips the whiskey.

SOROYA

So?

DAVID

What does 'So'? Mean?

SOROYA appears in the doorway, she is wearing the red silk dressing gown which floats loosely around her.

SOROYA

Lucy.

DAVID

What about her?

He starts to take off his tie.

SOROYA

Did you manage to write to her?

She kneels on the bed behind him and starts to massage his shoulders.

DAVID

Nearly. Thank you. That feels good.

(smiles)

You feel good.

SOROYA

What does 'nearly' mean?

DAVID

It means I wrote half a letter then  
I tore it up.

SOROYA

Poor David, who'd be a father.

DAVID

I think I've forgotten how to be  
one. I can't seem to find the tone  
of voice.

She kisses the back of his neck, then round onto his ear.

SOROYA

Let's see if I can remind you how it  
all begins.

She slides her hands down the front of his shirt and starts  
to undo his trousers.

INT. UNDERGROUND CAR PARK -- DAY

16

The TOYOTA is clean the doors are open and music is blaring  
out of the speaker system. JIMMY is sitting reading.

INT. BEDROOM WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY

17

CLOSE on SOROYA'S HAND twisted in with DAVID'S, she is  
lying on his chest, her hand looks small almost childish  
in his as we move up to their faces. She lifts her head  
to look at him.

SOROYA

We have to go.

DAVID

I know.

She gets up, picking up the dressing gown and goes into  
the bathroom and turns on the shower.

DAVID picks up his WATCH which is on the bedside table,  
looks at it and then slowly sits up. He reaches out for  
his jacket and pulls out his wallet.

SOROYA

Is Jimmy washing your car?

DAVID

Yes.

SOROYA

You pay him too much.

DAVID

He amuses me.

SOROYA

For money.

DAVID

Maybe that's what I like about it.

He pulls out four banknotes , and after a moment's hesitation adds a fifth.

INT. CORRIDOR WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY

18

SOROYA opens the door and DAVID who is now dressed again is ready to leave.

SOROYA

Write to Lucy. She's your child.  
Don't be apart from her.

DAVID

I will, although I'm not sure she'd agree with you.

SOROYA

See you next Thursday.

DAVID

Bye.

As he goes SOROYA closes the door.

INT. BEDROOM WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY

19

SOROYA comes briskly into the bedroom. She collects the money which is under the pillow checks it and then starts to strip the bed.

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

20

CLOSE on a pile of ESSAYS dumped on a desk. The room is bare and undecorated. The STUDENTS: AFRICAN, COLOURED, and WHITE are in their late teens and early twenties sitting at desks. There is a WHITEBOARD at one end of the room. DAVID is moving through the class briskly handing back written work.

DAVID

Andrew, try using a quotation once in a while, it may convince the examiner you've read something. Megan fair, Amanda better, David, if you're going to copy someone else's work try dating someone with higher grades. Melanie there's an 'e' in Shelley, otherwise not bad...

MELANIE ISAACS is eighteen, pretty with pale brown skin and short hair, she takes her paper and looks through it.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Geoff, give out the rest please.

GEOFF a thin blonde boy starts to call out the rest of the names. DAVID scrawls BYRON in large red letters on the board. He chucks the pen onto the desk and turns to the class.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Overrated by his contemporaries,  
underrated by history. What can you tell me about him?

Three hands go up.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Geoff.

GEOFF

He did it with his sister.

DAVID

Thank you, Geoff....Abie?

ABIE

He did it with everybody else as well.

General laughter.

DAVID

Well since it's his love life that seems to enthrall you we shall start with a late work, Don Juan. Turn to page 223 in your poetry books.

(opening book)

This was written after Byron had been divorced by his wife, driven from England suspected of unmentionable crimes, one of which Geoff has so neatly characterized as 'doing it with his sister'. And ended up in Italy where he lead a life of civilized debauchery.

Close on DAVID as he reads the page.

INT. OPERA -- NIGHT

21

MUSIC LOUD. It is the overture to an ARIA. The CAMERA is sweeping over the heads of the audience in a small classical opera house. The music is powerful, shocking and emotional, as the CAMERA, in a bravura movement, glides over the conductor and the orchestra in the pit and onto the wooden floor of the stage and up the red and richly costumed 18th Century body of a SINGER. He is masked, but as we reach his face the mask is pulled aside to reveal a further mask, this one of greasepaint, as BYRON begins the ARIA.

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

22

SILENCE. VERY CLOSE on a COMPUTER SCREEN, TYPE RACKING THROUGH FRAME: "BYRON IN ITALY - An opera in three acts by David Lurie". THEN TYPING: Scene One: A Venetian Brothel...

ANGLE ON

DAVID with a whiskey beside him is sitting at the computer. The music continues as he types. The living room has two large leather sofas and a glass table covered with small piles of books.

Through a narrow archway we can see the kitchen and the dining room.

NB. The opera which will recur throughout the film is not real, nor is it wholly fantastical. It is DAVID imagining a possible end to the work that he is writing. It takes place in a classical opera house and the design is all in red.

That is to say set and costumes are all different shades of the same colour. The opera that we see pantomimes the story of the aging Byron's seduction and abandonment of the teenage Teresa GUCCIOLI under the eyes of her elderly husband.

EXT. UNIVERSITY COMMON ROOM -- NIGHT

23

An ugly bare room with plastic armchairs and tables. A faculty 'party' in progress, about fifty people from the teaching and administrative staff. DAVID carrying a drink moves through the group and is accosted by DAN HAKIM, the Head of Media Studies, an energetic man in his mid forties. Next to them stands JULIE, late 20's with blonde spiky hair.

HAKIM

David, been trying to catch up with you. The curriculum committee were wondering if you could handle an extra course. It's right up your street, a comparative study on film adaptations of classic novels.

DAVID

Is that my street? I'm not sure it's even my city Hakim.

HAKIM

Think about it.

(turning to her)

Have you met Julie, my new assistant, just started work in the office. Julie Christy, David Lurie. Natural History keep trying to poach him for their dinosaur collection.

(sees a colleague)

Michael, congratulations on the challenge cup...

HAKIM pushes into the crush leaving DAVID and JULIE.

DAVID

(light)

'McCabe and Mrs Miller', that's when I fell.

JULIE

I'm a 'y', I'm afraid. Christy with a 'y' not an 'ie'.

DAVID

Well what's a vowel between friends.

JULIE

You live near the University?

DAVID

Just down there. You?

JULIE

Out by Dendra Heights. It's like living in Moscow. Kids?

DAVID

A daughter, but she's grown up now.



JULIE

It's different now, people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It's anarchy. How can you bring up children when there's anarchy all around you? You're divorced, right?

DAVID

Yes. I am.

JULIE

Everyone here seems to be divorced. I feel like some kind of freak just because I have a husband.

She looks round at the faculty staff.

EXT. STREETS, CAPETOWN -- NIGHT

24

BYRON ARIA CONTINUES DAVID alone in his car moving through a street crowded with bars and clubs whose YOUNG CUSTOMERS spill out into the street. There is a sense of a vibrant pulsing exciting world that he is excluded from. No one pays any attention to him.

INT. OPERA -- NIGHT

25

The CAMERA pulls up to show BYRON surrounded by Venetian Courtesans all dressed in shades of crimson. He at least is the centre of attention. One of the courtesans MARIA, kneels before him

MARIA

(singing)

Lord, I have no words, this body is my verse...

He reaches out towards her and pulls her towards him as the others press around him.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

26

Close on the COMPUTER SCREEN: " MARIA: Lord, I have no words, this body is my verse....." ON DAVID as he stops typing. He has heard something. We may not register it but it is the "Ting" of the Microwave. He goes into the kitchen takes a ready cooked 'gourmet style' meal out of it. It's hot. The microwave is the only innovation in a kitchen that seems otherwise to be twenty years old. He gets a plate and starts to peel open the packet.

EXT. GREEN MARKET SQUARE, CAPETOWN -- DAY

27

A crowded market set in a main square in the centre of the city. It is crammed with stalls selling tourist African souvenirs from all over the continent. Beads, jewelry, carvings, leatherwork etc. DAVID is crossing the square carrying a bag of GROCERIES. Down one of the narrow rows of stalls he catches sight of SOROYA. She is bartering over a piece of JEWELRY with a YOUNG TRADER, she shakes her head laughing at the price and moves on. DAVID tries to get to her but the busy market is made up of narrow lanes of stalls and tourists crowd him. He loses sight of SOROYA then pushing through the lanes he sees her again this time near the edge of the crush crossing the street.

He pushes through the crowd but as he gets to the edge of the market she is gone again, but he runs towards the street where he saw her headed.

EXT. GEORGE STREET, CAPETOWN -- DAY 28

DAVID turns a corner to see SOROYA going into a restaurant whose proudly documented name is 'CAPTAIN DOREGO'S FISH INN'. He is about to follow when he sees that she is with two YOUNG BOYS aged six and four. They are olive skinned and have their mother's thick and lustrous black hair.

EXT. FISH INN -- DAY 29

DAVID stands watching SOROYA and the TWO BOYS through the glass front of the restaurant as they are seated by a THIN YOUNG WAITER carrying menus. As she settles the children SOROYA looks up and sees DAVID standing at the window holding his shopping. He tries to wave but she looks away and sits down with her back to him.

INT. CLASSROOM CAPE TECH -- AFTERNOON 30

DAVID is sitting at his desk as MELANIE stands reading to the class from DON JUAN. DAVID isn't listening, he checks his watch.

MELANIE

A minute passed, and she had been  
all tears/And tenderness, and infancy;  
but now/She stood as one who  
championed human fears - /Pale, statue  
like and stern she woo'd the blow;

A DISTANT BELL rings and the class immediately starts to gather their papers.

DAVID

(in a hurry)  
Thank you Melanie.  
(to class)  
Don't forget tomorrow's Friday and  
I'll expect your work by midday.

MELANIE sits down a little disappointed by the lack of comment.

ABIE

Sir?

DAVID

Not now Abie.

He is already heading out of the room.

INT. CORRIDOR CAPE TECH -- AFTERNOON 31

DAVID moving quickly with his papers. He passes JULIE among the students.

JULIE

Mr Lurie?

She watches him as he disappears round the corner of the corridor.

INT. UNDERGROUND CAR PARK, WINDSOR MANSIONS -- AFTERNOON 32

DAVID'S TOYOTA pulls into the car park. JIMMY is washing another car. He waves across to him.

INT. CORRIDOR WINDSOR MANSIONS -- DAY 33

DAVID makes his way along the corridor, he is carrying a bunch of blue flowers wrapped in brown paper. He reaches the door. It is locked, he knocks, then again more ungently. The door opens, a PALE LOOKING GIRL with RED LIPSTICK is standing there.

PALE LOOKING GIRL  
In a hurry are you?

DAVID  
I'm sorry I was looking for Soroya?

PALE LOOKING GIRL  
Come in.

She ushers him in.

INT. HALLWAY WINDSOR MANSIONS -- AFTERNOON 34

DAVID enters. Although it is exactly the same as before it feels different without SOROYA, somehow sleazier.

PALE LOOKING GIRL  
Soroya has had to go away I'm afraid.  
The Agency sent me instead.

She is wearing a black leather miniskirt and a T-shirt.

DAVID  
Away? Why? I mean, what's the matter?

PALE LOOKING GIRL  
I think it's her mother. She's ill.

DAVID  
I'm sorry.

PALE LOOKING GIRL  
So, what do you do then?

DAVID looks at her puzzled.

DAVID  
Oh, import export.

PALE LOOKING GIRL  
That's what James Bond used to say.

DAVID  
What?

PALE LOOKING GIRL  
Import Export, he was a spy of course but he couldn't say that. So he says: "Import Export", in the books anyway.

She slips off her T-shirt.

PALE LOOKING GIRL (CONT'D)

Will you just give me a minute.  
They didn't give me much warning.

DAVID

No, you go ahead.

She disappears into the bathroom. DAVID take three notes out of his wallet and places them on the bed. He leaves.

INT. CORRIDOR CAPE TECH -- DAY

35

DAVID is talking on a payphone as STUDENTS move around him between classes.

DAVID

(slowly at first)

Well if you can't give me a number  
can you get a message to her.....  
But there has to be a some way of  
contacting her. No, no, I'm not  
saying I was dissatisfied it's just  
that I was expecting Soroya, S-O-R-O-  
Y-A. Yes. No I'm not looking for  
someone like her, I'm looking for  
her?

He listens for a moment then slams the phone down.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE -- DAY

36

The CAMERA moves across the empty sitting room. From the bedroom we hear the sounds of very noisy love making. Yelping, screeching which gradually subsides and there is a shriek of horror!

JULIE

Oh my god is that the time. The  
kids'll be back any minute and I  
haven't got their tea.

JULIE appears barefoot but dressed and grabbing her underwear and shoes.

DAVID

Take something from the fridge?

JULIE

No thanks. Unless you have a secret  
passion for Jumbo Chicken Nuggets.  
I'll pick something up on the way.  
Bloody hell.

(hopping about  
trying to put her  
shoes on)

I'm sorry but I didn't....well you  
know.

On DAVID as he sits in bed listening to the front door slam, his eyes close and he sinks back on the pillow.

INT. LECTURE HALL CAPE TECH -- DAY

37

DAVID is standing by a narrow desk, in front of him is a steeply raked auditorium with about thirty students scattered across the room.

There is an untidy air of concentration, notebooks and papers spread across the desks. Although there are some students from his class, most of the faces we do not recognise.

DAVID

And where should we look to find  
that moment when gesture failed and  
that first idea demanded articulation?

The camera moves across the faces, listening, taking notes among them we notice MELANIE from DAVID'S class who is writing furiously.

DAVID (CONT'D)

What forced us as a species into the  
construction of a shared vocabulary?  
Surely it was not the presence of  
danger, the sighting of prey or even  
the stirring of desire. Every species  
manages these basic survival  
necessities without recourse to any  
complex communication structure.

INT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

38

A small street corner market. DAVID is packing his purchases into a PLASTIC SHOPPING BAG as the checkout girl processes his card. At another aisle he sees the back of a GIRL buying cigarettes. The ASSISTANT serving her is looking exasperated. At first we do not recognise her but it is MELANIE, from the class, dressed in black jeans with a thin halter style top and a short jacket.

MELANIE

And what are those?

SHOP ASSISTANT

Marlboro?

MELANIE

No next to them.

SHOP ASSISTANT

Marlboro lights.

MELANIE

Are they strong? I mean have you  
ever tried them. Oh God, I can't  
decide. I'll take them.

SHOP ASSISTANT

The lights.

MELANIE

No that one, thank you.  
(to the queue behind)  
Sorry.

She pays, gathering up a heavy bag of books and notes and heads out of the shop. DAVID follows.

EXT. STREET -- DAY

39

As he comes out DAVID looks for her and sees her a little way ahead. He catches her up.

DAVID

Melanie?  
(she turns)  
Hello.

MELANIE

Oh, hello, Mr Lurie.

DAVID

I thought you didn't smoke?

MELANIE

(looking at the  
cigarettes)  
Oh no! They're for a play.

DAVID

Really?

MELANIE

My character's supposed to smoke and  
the director says I have to practice.  
I tried the herbal ones. They made  
me feel sick and he said the smoke  
looked wrong.

DAVID

Sounds bad. So, do you live around  
here?

MELANIE

(indicating)  
Down there, across the line. I share  
a flat with my cousin.

They have reached the parting of the ways.

DAVID

Look, I live just up there. Can I  
invite you in for a drink?  
(she smiles)  
I could carry your bag?

MELANIE

OK, thanks Mr Lurie. But I have to  
be back by seven thirty.

He takes her bag.

EXT. STREET NR DAVID'S HOUSE -- DAY

40

DAVID and MELANIE walking up a wooded path below the  
University.

DAVID

Are you from Capetown?

MELANIE

No, we're from George. On the Eastern  
Cape. My dad teaches school there.

DAVID

And your cousin?

MELANIE

She's an apothecary in town.

They cross together, a CAR passes them and DAVID unthinkingly puts out his arm to protect her, as with a child.

INT. KITCHEN DAVID'S APT. -- DAY

41

DAVID pulls the cork out of a bottle of white wine, and picks up two glasses. And moves through to the sitting room, MELANIE is standing near the door, the light behind her, looking very beautiful.

DAVID

Are you enjoying the course this term?

MELANIE

I like Blake. And the Wonderhorn stuff. Not so crazy about Wordsworth.

DAVID

You shouldn't say that to me. I've written a book about him.

MELANIE

(politely)  
Maybe he'll grow on me.

DAVID

Maybe.

He hands her a glass.

DAVID (CONT'D)

In my experience poetry is like falling in love, it's first sight or not at all. Have you ever written any?

MELANIE

(smiles)  
At school. I wasn't very good. Unrequited passions mainly.

DAVID

Always a good place to start. Look, I'm going to throw some supper together. Will you join me. Very simple.

She considers.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Come on. Say yes, I used to be a smoker, I could give you a few tips!

INT. KITCHEN DAVID'S APT. -- NIGHT

42

DAVID is opening a can of anchovies. Behind him a pan of water is boiling. We can hear that MELANIE is on the phone next door sitting on the sofa with her back to the kitchen.

MELANIE (O.S.)

No don't be silly, I won't, I'll be back before then. OK. See you.