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The Failure of Fiction: Asexuality and J.M. Coetzee:

The 2003 press release for the Nobel Prize in Literature described J.M. Coetzee as a writer who has in “innumerable guises portrayed the surprising involvement of the outsider”. Coetzee's work represents a sustained engagement with the politics of representation and otherness, examining the repeated failure of society to engage in a reciprocal and sympathetic dialogue with the Other. Though the position of the Other is most often read and constructed in postcolonial terms in Coetzee's work, this paper will examine the ways in which otherness is constructed in terms of queerness and, more specifically, in terms of asexuality.

In particular, this paper will focus on the ways in which Lucy Lurie from *Disgrace* and Michael K. from *The Life & Times of Michael K.* are coded as asexual subjects, and the ways in which this positions them as social outsiders. In this reading, the dialogical breakdown in Coetzee's work between society and the Other represents the failure of a sex-centric and heteronormative worldview to understand the asexual subject. This implies that fiction itself, which is a form of dialogue, must also breakdown. In positioning the asexual subject as irreducibly Other to society, Coetzee suggests that a true dialogue with this subject is only possible if society abandons the sex-centric and heteronormative worldview.