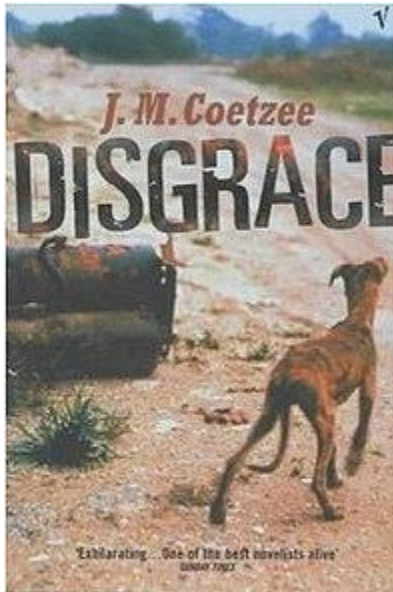


Sexual Exploitation in John Maxwell Coetzee's *Disgrace*

Dr. T. Deivasigamani and A. Saravanan



Courtesy: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disgrace>

Abstract

This paper entitled “Sexual Exploitation in John Maxwell Coetzee’s *Disgrace*.” The Nobel Laureate John Maxwell Coetzee is a South African novelist. He is a unique white writer taking up the theme on the relationship of history, identity, and subalternity of women. His all works opposes the socio-political ethos of the power blocks of South Africa. *Disgrace* is told from the viewpoint of David Lurie and David Lucy who fall a prey to the cruel evil and trauma of exile from which both of them struggle to recover at all. This paper focuses on how women characters exploited by patriarchal society and how they overcome from their harassment, atrocities, and oppressions in *Disgrace*.

Keywords: Identity, Socio-political, Trauma of exile, Struggle, Harassment, Atrocities.

Introduction

John Maxwell Coetzee is one of the most important and prominent writer in the contemporary, Post-apartheid South Africa. He is a novelist, essayist, linguist, literary critic, and translator. He was born in Cape Town, South Africa, and became an Australian citizen from 2006.

He has written thirteen novels and *Disgrace* is his eighth novel. Isidore Diala comments that J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, and André Brink are "three of South Africa's most distinguished white writers, all with definite anti-apartheid commitment" (59). In the history of South Africa, writers have exerted the acid test of white liberal sensibility in the year of colonial and apartheid. While they have faced more complex issues by preferentially chosen the theme of realism, reconcile fiction. In this connection, the eighty-two-year-old Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer was attacked in her home by four black men in 2006.

Coetzee

Coetzee is also one of the strongest voices against apartheid and issues of the subaltern. He has been one of Gordimer's peers that has occupied second place. He draws on emotional issues of common people from the human experience in *Disgrace*. It adds another layer of traumatic situation as to how the dominating power of makes and their sexual desires would write the reality of South African writer Coetzee's works of fiction. For Coetzee is a overt committed Nobel Prize writer, his writing characteristically different from the use realism in mainstream South African literature. In the postmodern era, *Disgrace* is one of the finest novels.

In Coetzee novels' the major characters take the role of the subaltern, isolation, and sexual exploitation. These characters push that characteristically skilful use of juxtaposition to look at some of the complicated issues that spring from subalternity, and the existence of the people of South Africa, particularly through the ways female characters treat as canonization. He employs his words by indirect involvement in deeply with philosophical, political, intellectual, and aesthetic issues. The atmosphere affects one's actions, attitudes, and identity. This shows an ingrained attitude to masculinity in opposition to femininity.

Focus of This Paper

This paper deals how women treated as a subaltern in the novel *Disgrace*. when they become the subaltern that controlled by the torture of the physically as well as mentally, either in the form of the law or the history created and recorded by the authority. It also deals with the different reactions against those major characters, especially while women character confronting the role of becoming the subaltern which includes the resistance of the people of blacks and redemption and the re-identification of the whites.

Disgrace

J.M. Coetzee is one of the controversial men in South African during both apartheid and post-apartheid movements in which colonized people. His novel *Disgrace* shows how class subalternity and injustice happened from imperialism and corrupt system of South Africa. The works of J.M. Coetzee are the concept of double colonization and marginalization that can be seen in the post-colonial subalternization. Because of his life begins with an African society, experienced and saw different problems of people. In this novel, the main character David Lurie is attracted by the readers and their positive attitude compels the readers to read this novel, *Disgrace*.

Professor David Lurie and Byron's character Lucifer

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The fifty-two-year-old, twice divorced, Professor David Lurie specialized in modern languages and literature, academic scholar, who teaches communications at the Technical University in Cape Town. He has published three books, and wants to write *Byron in Italy*, a concept on love between the sexes in the form of a chamber opera, an instinctual paradigm of Byronic desire. Coetzee plays with a relationship between the story of Lurie in *Disgrace* and Byron's character Lucifer in the poem "Lara." After divorced, he satisfies his sexual desires after divorced Soraya, a slim, tall, and dark prostitute, believes his life is comfortable, if somewhat passionless, and considers himself happy life. She has paid a half money from her professional to Discreet Escorts, which is an agency, in the rest of time. She lives respectable life with husband and children in Atholine. Every Thursday at two p.m., he meets her as customary visits to punctually. Soraya's mother is ill. So, she has left the agency to break her from within the agency. Even then he tracks her real name, address, and telephone number. After he telephones, she replied: "I don't know who you are are.' She says. 'You are harassing me in my own house. I demand you will never phone me here again, never'" (9-10).

Melanie Isaacs

In the meantime, David Lurie conveys his idea of passivity to his student, Melanie Isaacs. She is twenty-year-old, wants to study a diploma in theatre. Indeed, he invited her for an outing with an affair, when she is thirty-two-year younger than him, her silence is emblematic of him, in light of his own abuse of a student, Melaine: "Not rape, not quite that but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25). The phrase expresses how Melanie feels about her inter action with his Professor David Lurie. After some time, the lust leads most likely due to the involvement in the student's parents, Mr. Melaine Isaacs. He pinpoints that the parents put our children in hands of Professors with trust but "we were sending our daughter into a nest" (38). When Melanie files a complaint about David under the article 3.1 of University's code in the Vice-Rectors office, which deals with harassment of students by teachers, he has to appear before the committee.

YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA!

In the University campus, "YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA" (43), was written in the pamphlet. He was very proud to agree his mistake and he did not apologize for his misbehaved to the disciplinary committee, Melanie Isaac's family, and public. The human beings categorize by making two groups, which is majority and minority based on social hierarchy system. For this reason, majority of the committee members wanted to rescue him like temporary suspension: "They do not want to see him begging in the streets. They want him back in classroom" (52), but Lurie did not want their consistent. He took all the charges against him. This acceptance was reflected on newspaper as sensational news: "'Professor on sex charge,' it is headed . . . is slated to appear before a disciplinary board on a charge of sexual harassment" (46). The incident led to resign his job of college. His ex-wife Rosalind also became angry with him the reason for his stubborn attitude. He did not want any sympathy and mercy, after leaving his job he desired to go his daughter's place in Salem, the Eastern Cape in South Africa.

Metonymically, David Lurie enjoyed changes of avoiding city and college life to a rural area life of his daughter's farm. The dystopia vision of modern is, post-apartheid South Africa.

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Lucy

Lucy is a lesbian, had her own farm, her livelihood was selling her produce of flowers and vegetables in the weekend in Grahamstown and had dogs on her farmland. Later, the farm was looked after by the native black African, Petrus. Lucy had kept different species like Bull terriers, Dobermans, German Shepherds, Rottweiler's, and Ridgebacks. In nearby farm, a white woman, Bev Shaw is living around as a very unattractive woman who runs a dog clinic.

One day the quiet life implodes the absence of Petrus, and in the presence of David Lurie, Lucy was brutally raped by two men and a boy who are black African natives. They met Lucy and Lurie coming a walk. They requested Lucy for help. They narrated the situation with highly seriousness of an accident happened at Erasmuskraal being without facility. Lucy became sympathetic to them to give the permission to enter her home for the purpose of doing telephone:

To the men she says: 'What do you want?'

The young one speaks. 'We must telephone.'

Why must you telephone?'

'His sister - he gestures vaguely behind him - 'is having an accident'

'An accident?'

'Yes, very bad.'

What kind of accident?'

'A baby.'

'His sister is having a baby?'

'Yes'

'Where are you from?'

'From Erasmuskraal.' (92)

No such accident happened at Erasmuskraal. Suddenly, they overpowered Lucy and Lurie was hammered, locked inside the lavatory, and liquid hot acid was poured on his face. The faithful dogs for her security were killed by them with the action of disgrace. They escaped from Lucy's home Lurie's car before the leaving that place. The three rapists are living on this earth with roaming their filthy legs.

Democratic laws and values have been paralysed like toys in the hands powerful blacks, though he realizes the dystrophic vision of modern, begins the period of post-apartheid, South Africa. The whites have to fear the majority black race. The demonstration of power of one group overcomes the helpless of the other group. Lucy did not complain about the three rapists because of subaltern atmosphere. She complains only about stolen goods and car to police. Petrus invited both Lucy and Lurie to his party. In the party, one of the rapists, young boy Pollux, participated, and was accused in front of blacks by Lurie, and ready to telephone police. According to Carine M. Mardorossian:

Readers are encouraged to rethink not just the assumptions through which black on white rape is viewed but also the deeply radicalized way in which rape is naturalized precisely as a black on white crime (thus decriminalizing white on white sexual violence). (74)

Common Bonds of Suffering

All the women characters from different backgrounds in the novel suffered and they are united in a common bond oppressed, suppressed, and helpless. At the ending of the book, the author attempts to bridge the gap between subalternization of women and colonization thus opens up a new way of resistance. To attempt to seduce Melanie, caricature David tells her: “. . . a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone” (16); later on, he thinks, after his daughter’s rape: “Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin; more of a blow” (105).

With *Disgrace*, the situation of Lucy becoming pregnant because of rape manages to weave about the relationships between human beings, and the problems of human inequality, though David is in the house with his daughter, Lucy, when the event of rape occurs and, also he is locked in the bathroom, hampered by the walls separating them. This sense of failure to protect Lucy contributes to increased tension in the relationship between David Lurie and Lucy. He imagines the afternoon of the farm attack and gang-rape: “having visions of his daughter calling for help” (103), and dreaming of a “a bed of blood, a bath of blood” (159). He visualizes the event of the rape:

Lucy was frightened, frightened near to death. Her voice choked, she could not breathe, her limbs went numb. *This is not happening*, she said to herself as the men forced her down; *it is just a dream, a nightmare*. While the men, for their part, drank up her fear; revealed in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror. *Call your dogs!* They said to her, Go on, call your dogs! No dogs! Then let us show you dogs! (160)

Certainly, after the attackers have left with the household foods, David’s car, and damage in their wake, she makes it clear to her father that her story is “alone” “My child, my child!” he says, holding out his arms to her. When she does not come, he puts aside his blanket, stands up, and takes her in his arms. In his embrace she is stiff as a pole, yielding nothing” (99). In this end of the line, “yielding nothing” defines the difficulty in her story; in fact, from the limited point of view, the reader truly cannot access her story.

Like a Dog

Lurie became the assistant of Bev Shaw’s animal welfare clinic. His daughter’s after the incident she did not go to Saturday market, disliked public appearance, has become pregnant by the rape of those black native African, replied in ambiguous manner concerning her health. Petrus wanted to marry David Lurie’s daughter, Lucy. She agrees the exchange of her land to him for his offering. For her security except her home, Lucy will give everything to him. This is her resolution:

‘Like a dog.’
‘yes, like a dog.’ (205)

Lurie feels with Melanie’s father, Melanie Isaacs, only after Lucy’s rape. He wants to apology and also to tell Isaacs what is ‘on his heart.’ While he was knee in front of Melanie’s mother and her younger sister, kept such a distance. In the following words which utterly highlighted from David Lurie before Mr. Isaac, father of Melanie, during his meeting at George:

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In my own terms, I am being punished for what happened between myself and your daughter. I am such into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself. It is not a punishment, I have refused, I do not murmur against it. On the contrary, I am living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being. (172)

Lucy became the victim of these circumstances. They were voiceless and helpless in the present political and social context. After the incident Lucy spoke very little with her father, Lurie. Lucy accepted her fate honestly. She takes a shocking decision joining the erosion of values and through her willingness to marry Petrus for seeking a new accommodation and just recalls the old days. She says:

Propose the following. Say I accept his protection If he wants me to be known as his third wife, so be it. As his concubine, ditto. But then the child becomes his too. The child becomes part of his family I will become a tenant on his land. (204)

Physical suffering pops up through the novel. It seems that nobody escapes without some serious psychologised wounds. The two wives of Petrus have seen the world only through in order to take the lens given by him, who are only passive objects. Lucy has ready to join in the group as his subaltern third wife. According to Bonnici says: "Further, she refuses abortion and accepts the child from the rape...becomes his subaltern third wife" (89).

Conclusion

In South Africa, subaltern people especially women were marginalized based on the ground of race, gender, social class, and regional status. Some examples are in *Disgrace*; unwillingly, Soraya who works as prostitute, Melanie Issac who is abused by her professor Lurie, Bev Shaw who is worked as dog keeper with low status in society, Lucy who loses her freedom and land. Lack of communication is among Lucy and her father Lurie and it is shown his embrace.

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