

Non-Human Metaphors in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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Abstract

J.M. Coetzee is one of the most celebrated and studied novelists of the twenty first century. He was born on February 9 of 1940, to an attorney father and a school teacher mother. The South African environment in which Coetzee was raised profoundly shaped his works. He was the first writer who won the Booker Prize twice for his novels namely *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999). He was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 2003. He writes in the third person narrative and maintains a characteristic sense of distance even in the process of writing about his own life. Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of objects or idea that is used in the place of another to suggest a comparison between the two. *Disgrace* is the most celebrated novel written by J.M Coetzee. In *Disgrace*, he has used many animal metaphors to express his interest on Non-Human beings. His metaphors are predatory in nature in this novel. By using animal metaphors, J.M. Coetzee wants to compare the sufferings of animals to that of Human beings and to persuade the readers to give equal moral considerations for the life of Non-Human beings.

Keywords: Coetzee, *Disgrace*, Animals, Metaphor, Moral

Introduction

J.M. Coetzee is one of the most famous writers of the twenty first century. He was born in Cape Town, South Africa, on February 9 in 1940 to an attorney father and a school teacher mother. He was born in South Africa, educated there and in the United States and he recently became a citizen of Australia. He is the author of Eleven Novels and six of them were published in the shadow of apartheid in South Africa. His fictions and Essays explore the distorting effects of colonialism and

consistently pose questions about the nature of power, authority and the creative process. He was the first writer who won the Booker Prize twice for his novels, *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999) (Brian 1355). He was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 2003. He writes in the third person point of view and maintains a characteristic sense of distance even in the process of writing about his own life (Paul 7). Amy Gutmann in her forwarding for Coetzee's *The lives of animal* commented that his lectures focus on an important ethical issue that the treatment of animals by human being (3).

Metaphor- A Figurative Language

M.H Abrams defines a Figurative language is a conspicuous departure from what users of a language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard orders of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect' (96). Figurative speeches sometimes described as primarily poetic, but they are integral to the functioning of language and indispensable to all modes of discourse. Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of objects or idea that is used in the place of another to suggest a comparison between the two. It is an implied comparison. When the simile says that one thing is like another, the metaphor says that one thing is another. When metaphor has lost its identity as metaphor and fails to bring and picture to our mind, it is called a dead Metaphor. Eg. The hands of Clock. When there is more than one point of similarity in a metaphor, it is called a complex metaphor. Eg. He has a wild Stag's Foot. This metaphor suggests swiftness, daring and grace. When two or more images are worked out of one figure, it is called mixed metaphor. Eg. I smell a rat, I see it floating in the air but I intend to nip it in the bud.

Non- Human Metaphors in Disgrace

There are many animal metaphors used in *Disgrace* by J.M Coetzee. In this novel, J.M Coetzee has used many Non- Human metaphors to express his interest in animal life. His Metaphors in this novel are predatory in nature. In *Disgrace*, Animal metaphors play a prominent role throughout the novel. It tells the story of David Lurie, a professor of communication at the University of Cape Town. He was divorced twice and unsatisfied with his job. The disgrace came when he has affair with student, Issacs Melaine. He leaves Cape Town and his job as professor after a scandal with his student.

Lurie goes to the country and lives with his daughter, Lucy who runs a farm in the village. One day, Lucy and her father are attacked at her farm by three black youths. They rape Lucy and burn David's Face. After the attack, David is left alone by his daughter. David chooses to devote his time for the euthanized dogs. He became comfortable with rural life in the course of time and he is forced to come terms with the aftermath of an attack on the farm in which Lucy is raped and he is assaulted brutally.

The first part of the novel has a lot of Non- Human metaphors. The protagonist, David Lurie uses metaphors of predators and prey, especially in his sexual situations. David compares having sex with the prostitute Soraya to the snakes engaged in copulation. He describes his love making with

Soraya as similar to that of snakes. “Intercourse between Soraya and himself must be, he imagines, rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 3). This metaphor seems to be unusual as snakes evoke negative feelings because they are dangerous species.

The second Non-human metaphor appears at the end of first Chapter, When David Lurie acquires Soraya’s private contact numbers and calls her and wonders why Soraya is furious. He tries to pursue her but she breaks off all contact and demand that he will never seek her contact again. “But then what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen’s nest, into the home of her cubs?” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 10). Soraya has been described as a mother who wants to save her children so that David cannot do any harm to her children. David is presented as predator in this non-human metaphor.

There is an animal metaphor in the scene of intercourse between Melanie and David. David describes the intercourse as follows: ‘Not rape, not quite like that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go a slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit, when the jaws of the fox close on its neck’ (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 26). Melanie has been chased and she could not rescue herself and is now waiting until the rape is over. Melanie is compared with rabbit and David is compared to fox in this metaphor.

There is a predatory metaphor in the trial of David when he had been accused of immoral relationship with his student, Melanie. The reaction of the member of the committee is described from David’s viewpoint in the following way: ‘what does she see, when she looks at him, that keeps her at such a pitch of anger?, A shark among the helpless little fishes?’ (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 53). Melanie has been described as ‘poor little bird’ (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 32) and my ‘little dove’ (*Disgrace*, Coetzee 34). Melanie’s father also used Non-human metaphor to describe the situation in the university. He says ‘If we can’t trust the university, who can we trust? We never thought we were sending our daughter into a nest of vipers’. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 38). Here Melaine’s father compares the university to a nest of vipers.

There is the presence of animal imagery, when David is being questioned by university students after the hearing of David case. He is surrounded by students and reporters as if he is the hunted. ‘They circle around him like hunters who have cornered a strange beast and do not know how to finish if off’ (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 56). In this instance, David is presented as prey. David has been compared to a strange beast and people did not know the way to finish him.

The life of Lucy and David at Petrus land is compared to the life of dogs. Giving up the land and becoming Petrus’ third wife, have been presented as humiliating and equal to the life of a dog. Later, when David tries to explain to Lucy what happened at the university, stating that his ‘Case rests on the rights of desire’ (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 89). He uses a story from a past, of their neighbour’s dog that was punished every time he would get excited as bitch passed by:

‘One can punish a dog, it seems to me, for an offence like chewing a slipper. A dog will accept the justice of that: a beating for a chewing. But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts’. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 90).

Lurie thinks restraining of desires is wrong and he uses the example of the dog’s life as metaphor to justify his own case. It seems that in David’s world, there are two kinds of people: the predators and the prey.

Conclusion

All these metaphors have been common aspects with one another that they are all used in a negative context and most of them related to sex. They highlight the fact that David does not love Soraya and Melaine and his only aim is the satisfaction of sexual desire. In the described Metaphors, the animals are described as the suffering. J.M Coetzee wants to focus animal suffering in this novel. By comparing animals to human beings, J.M Coetzee tries to put human beings and Non-human beings on the same moral footing(qtd.in Tremaine 587). By these Metaphors, Coetzee persuades his readers to give equal consideration for the life of animal and their interests. He wants to create attitudinal change towards treating of animal by human beings.

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