

## Analysing Disgrace {CC-12}

### About J. M. Coetzee

Born in Cape Town, South Africa, on February 9, 1940, John Michael Coetzee studied first at Cape Town and later at the University of Texas at Austin, where he earned a Ph.D. degree in literature. In 1972 he returned to South Africa and joined the faculty of the University of Cape Town.

His works of fiction include *Dusklands*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which won South Africa's highest literary honor, the Central News Agency Literary Award, and the *Life and Times of Michael K.*, for which Coetzee was awarded his first Booker Prize in 1983. He has also published a memoir, *Boyhood: Scenes From a Provincial Life*, and several essays collections. He has won many other literary prizes including the Lannan Award for Fiction, the Jerusalem Prize and The Irish Times International Fiction Prize. In 1999 he again won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize for *Disgrace*, becoming the first author to win the award twice in its 31-year history.

Coetzee was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003 "who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider". In *Disgrace* Coetzee involves us in the struggle of a discredited university teacher to defend his own and his daughter's honour in the new circumstances that have arisen in South Africa after the collapse of white supremacy. The novel deals with a question that is central to his works: Is it possible to evade history?

**Theme :** The novel *Disgrace* is regarded as a documentary of Postcolonial feelings. Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonialism on culture and society; it addresses the subjects of post-colonial identity, culture, national, ethnic, gender, race, racism and their interactions in the development of a post-colonial society. The term 'Post-Colonial' is originally used by the historians to describe the period after colonization. In literary criticism, the term is used from 1970's to discuss the cultural, political and linguistic effects of colonialism.

*Disgrace* is the Man Booker Prize novel in which J.M.Coetzee demonstrates accuracy and searches for something that is problematic. It is published in 1999 and it is the first novel about the post-apartheid South Africa. Apart from his previous novels, this focuses mainly on the disgrace of whites when they lost their power. It revolves around fifty-two-year-old, **David Lurie**, who is the protagonist.

**Plot :** The character David is seeking to exploit others and he is the father of undisciplined daughter, Lucy. She is physically and ideologically distant from him. He has no connection with his former wives. This leads him to approach a prostitute named Soraya. He is dismissed from his professor job after seducing a student named Melanie Isaacs. Such events create much distance and separation between father and daughter.

The characters **Soraya** and **Melanie** are black and dark respectively, who describe the unfairness of colonialism. They portray the consequences of colonialism in the postcolonial society. The imperfection in relationship is depicted through the arrogance of whites, degradation of natives and oppression of women. Women, whether white or black, are still the victims of dislike.

**Characterization:** The characters are deep-rooted with the lack of communication. David is unwilling to talk but Melanie is the symbol of silence. Only David's own thoughts reveals Melanie's situation. These degraded girls are silent. The farmer, Petrus is impossible to understand and Lucy stops communicating with her father when he tries to comfort her after the seduction. This shows the voiceless state of the colonized people and the separation between blacks and whites.

In the post-apartheid world, there occurs a nature and balance of power. The transfer from Cape Town to the countryside makes David to enjoy changes without knowing the future dangers. After his arrival to his daughter's farm, he experiences various pathetic situations. He is set on fire, his car stolen and his daughter seduced. Such situations make him to realize the undesirable vision of modern, postapartheid South Africa.

The struggle for power begins and chaos becomes common. This leads to violence. Lucy refuses to punish the gang who seduced her. She also refuses to abort the child she impregnated because of the seduction. She gives her own land to the farmer, Petrus and becomes his third wife. This shows the shift of power. Lucy always considers the personal things but her father focuses on the social and political things. She understands the fate of the natives living in the country which is considered as a European homeland. Land ownership is the great political and strategic support of European Colonizers. The changeover of power shift is seen through property and sex.

In the beginning, Lucy is the landowner but her land passes on to a landless farmer, Petrus. So many changes occur in government policy. Petrus celebrates

in a party after knowing that a post-colonial era has begun. He is polite and clever and does all the chores. He fails to be in the place when the gang comes to seduce Lucy. He finds difficult to catch the gang when he is informed about the committed crime. As a white man, David thinks himself as an odd one, like Negroes used to feel in their own country when the white minority are dominant.

The downfall of colonizers portrays through the turnover of power in sex. David is highly satisfied with the company of Soraya in the beginning. He sees her as an object and spends most of his time with her. She is silent and weak. Later, she becomes a subject by making everything upside down. Melanie's reaction on her seduction is weak since she destroys the fame of college professor and disrupts his position. This is the most important feature in post-colonial literature where the white man is displaced with the displacement of Negroes in colonial times. This shows the destruction of white man by dislocation, non-identity and non-authenticity. Also there is a similarity between the predatory father David seducing twenty-year-old Melanie and his daughter's seduction by a gang in front of his eyes.

Thus, the native South Africans have to undergo suffering, injustice and degradation in order to stay alive during colonial and apartheid times. Whites have no choice in the post-apartheid era. This is the difference between Lucy and Lurie which troubles David's conscience. Lucy feels that she has to overcome this situation to continue her life but David pretends himself that moral principles will bring sequence to the nature of human. It is very difficult for Lucy to overcome all this because she is a lesbian and an independent girl. But her aim is to recollect the past and the survival to carry on with her life.

**Art of Fiction:** J.M Coetzee is master of the art of telling the stories. He makes the readers feeling immediately identified with the characters. In 'Disgrace', the writer puts us in the midst of an environment in which events are happening. The vivid description of college activities and the way in which students behave with their studies make us believe the scenes. They all look like the parts of our day-to-day life. It is all conveyed through third person narration.

Novels written by Coetzee are filled with irony and satire. His writings entertain the readers according to their intellectual heights. The visual metaphors used in narrating the scenes carry us at the place and in the time where characters of novel are struggling to live.

**Courtesy : Dr. Md. Ejaz Alam**