

## Rehabilitating & Divulging the Whiteness in the Post – Apartheid in J.M.Coetzee’s Disgrace

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The present paper attempts to analyze the uncanny perspectives of the racial discriminatory movement “Post Apartheid” which stormed South Africa . J.M.Coetzee’s Disgrace is the major platform which unearthed the myth of Afrikaner. This paper also figures out the radical elements in the Post – Colonial world which are carried out in Europe as well as in South Africa. An attempt has been made to focus on the radical elements like alienation , anxiety , nostalgia , acculturation , hybridity , creoles and also to compare and contrast their specific preferences.*

### **Keywords:**

Post Colonialism ; Post – Apartheid ;South Africa ; Diaspora ; Acculturation ; Blacks ; Whites ; Corruption; Hybridity ; Creoles ; Nostalgia ; Afrikaner

John Maxwell Coetzee is the most towering novelist , literary critic as well as a translator who won the Booker Prize Twice and was awarded the 2003 Nobel prize in literature . Coetzee was born in Cape Town, South Africa, on 9 February 1940. He was a son of a sheep farmer .J.M COETZEE has carved a niche from himself on the international literary scene . Writing in a country where banning and exile was a common reality for writers till recently , Coetzee’s work unites the aesthetic and the political dimensions. He is an iconoclast and his work epitomizes that how a novel could be modern , post modern ,avantgarde , meta fictional and at the same time political and historical. He was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Booker-McConnell Prize (making literary history by winning twice), Central News Agency (CNA) Literary Award, the Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the

Individual in Society, and the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003."When some men suffer unjustly . . . it is the fate of those who witness their suffering to suffer the shame of it." This observation by the Magistrate in J. M. Coetzee's 1980 novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, may well serve as an epigraph.

Stephen Watson Observes That “ All Europe” Has Gone Into The Making Of Coetzee.He acknowledges the impact of Ezra pound , William Faulkner , Sameul Beckett on his work.Coetzee forcefully asserts that these writers “ taught me to hear , feel , write”. Franz Kafka too has a telling and profound influence on Coetzee which shaped his works - he himself adds “ As a writer I am not worthy to loose the latchet [ strap] of Kafka’s shoe”. For Coetzee Afrikaner means white settler . In his work boyhood Coetzee feels repelled from the Afrikaner culture .Speaking afrikaans for him is like speaking like “ a whipped slave”.This is the second book by this author (after "Life and Times of Michael K") where man is broken down almost to nothing before he finds some tiny measure of redemption in his forced acceptance of the realities of life and death.Taking a line from Coetzee’s own reading of Dostoevsky - “ true confession ....comes from faith and grace” Atwell exclaims the word “GRACE” – is a word that evidently shadows a novel called *disgrace*. Disgrace by J.M. Coetzee is the winner of the 1999 Booker Prize award which is a bleak tale of human and animal misery in post-apartheid South Africa. Written with austere clarity , Disgrace explores the downfall of one man and dramatizes with unforgettable, almost unbearable vividness the plight of South Africa-a country caught in the chaotic aftermath of the overthrow of Apartheid. Disgrace is Coetzee's first book to deal explicitly with post-apartheid South Africa, and



the picture it paints is a cheerless one that will comfort no one, no matter what race, nationality or viewpoint.

In both books a man is broken down almost to nothing before he finds some tiny measure of redemption in his forced acceptance of the realities of life and death. Disgrace was made into a film in 2008, directed by Steve Jacobs and starring John Malkovich. Disgrace is written in the present tense and its title denotes a continuing condition. Disgrace continues and so do the characters' lives. The books remain unresolved and unfinished.

## DISGRACE AS A POST COLONIAL NOVEL

Viewed in the light of post-apartheid era of South Africa – the term “post colonial” signifies “the post independence period” in the history of a colonized nation as it “deals with effects of colonization on cultures and societies”. Post Colonial Literatures seek to explore the interaction between the European nations and the people they colonized. “POST COLONIALISM” as a theory referred to set off “theoretical approaches” focusing on the aftermath of colonization. Post Colonialists seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. Post Colonialism is an “ideologically Emancipatory” concept in the present era of several “post” because it makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that we were made to be taken for granted”.

## DISGRACE AS A POST - APARTHEID NOVEL

According to Adam Mars-Jones, writing in *The Guardian*, “[a]ny novel set in post-apartheid South Africa is fated to be read as a political portrait, but the fascination of *Disgrace* is the way it both encourages and contests such a reading by holding extreme alternatives in tension. Salvation, ruin.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Disgrace is a troubling work, of troubled people in troubled times. Ill-equipped or unwilling to face the new realities of post-apartheid South Africa, Lurie and his daughter nevertheless try to find their place in it. In

Coetzee's fiction the stark and beautiful South African countryside has always played a half-allegorical role as both a destructive and a regenerative environment.

J M Coetzee's novel powerfully portrays the devastating aftermath of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Apartheid stood for a policy between the governing white minority population and the non white majority population. After the national party victory in the 1948 elections, apartheid became the governing political policy for South Africa until the early 1990's. The inequalities as well as hostilities between the white and the black South Africans continue to exist. The novel responds to the Oppressive practices that have pervaded s-A life for 100 of years. DISGRACE is set in post apartheid South Africa. It is a poignant tale of a white woman who lives an independent life, she rejects the conventional gender role by renouncing heterosexuality but she becomes the victim of the gang rape. DISGRACE is the first significant statement from an established South African writer on this flaming aspect of post-apartheid 1994 South Africa. It obliquely deals with the iconic experience of the 1990's Contextual reconciliation, its dilemmas, compromises. A 2006 poll of "literary luminaries" by *The Observer* newspaper named the work as the "greatest novel of the last 25 years" of British, Irish or Commonwealth origin in years between 1980 and 2005 <sup>[2]</sup>

Coetzee casts doubt on the possibility of ever achieving closure on a painful past of ever in a secular society and in language – adequately saying sorry. Disgrace highlights the brutalities of the long oppressed blacks against the once authoritative white. Lucy and David Lurie represent the whites who are helpless in the face of the cruelties and bestialities of the black community. Coetzee writes: 'Human society has created language in order that we may communicate our thoughts, feelings, and intentions to each other.' His own opinion, which he does not air, is that the origins of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul.<sup>[3]</sup>



APARTHEID was the policy of racial discrimination and segregation against blacks during the white regime in south Africa. It was institutionalised by law and subverted the very idea of democratic governance .As a result of it , the blacks proclaimed an end to apartheid with the release of the African leader Nelson Mandela from the prison and the legalization of black African political organizations. Though the novel is sparse in style, it covers a number of topics: personal shame, the subjugation of women, a changing country, animal rights, and romantic poetry and its symbolism.<sup>[4]</sup>

The novel deals with the problems and difficulties confronting the white community in South Africa , a community that remained that supreme authority for several decades and stands marginalized in the present context.

Disgrace is a terribly dark book. The rape is discreetly handled, but there is a great deal of unpleasantness that is described quite closely. Any novel set in post-apartheid South Africa is fated to be read as a political portrait, but the fascination of Disgrace - a somewhat perverse fascination, as some will feel, is the way it both encourages and contests such a reading by holding extreme alternatives in tension, salvation, ruin.<sup>[5]</sup> In the new South Africa, violence is unleashed in new ways, and Lurie and his daughter become victims. The novel presents a bleak look of the country. This sentence also describes Coetzee's notion of life in the new South Africa, where, as he portrays it, brutal tyranny has been replaced by brutal anarchy."One gets used to things getting harder; one ceases to be surprised that what used to be as hard as hard can be grows harder yet,"<sup>[6]</sup> The core concern of the Disgrace is the delineation of "Human Pain", "weakness" and the inevitable torture ". In Post Apartheid South Africa, the blacks have started turning hostile . It is because the decolonisation is not an easy process . Being " violent" , " difficult" and "ugly" Coetzee lucidly and powerfully depicts " the plight of the marginalised in the society by exposing human cruelty and insensitivity."<sup>[7]</sup>Coetzee through disgrace stretches human predicament to its limits and

makes it counter the ruthless " arbitrariness of history" .

Ariel Dorfman Chileannovelist remarked " Coetzee strips bare the human contemporary condition . He explores the very bleak landscape of the human soul in our times and does so with .. radiance , luminosity, tenderness". The rape of Lucy represents the chaos and turmoil of the Post Apartheid South-Africa where all values are shifting .Coetzee's response has been to expose and subvert national myths of history , as well to create alternative narratives , stories to hold up against the nightmare of south African history.

Avoiding the authoritative voice of History , Coetzee presents us with a story whcih gives us an elusive , ambiguous , yet melodious account of South-Africa. Coetzee's novel responds to the discursive practices of South-Africa. Those practices in turn are influenced by a complex mix of material realities , psychological states & metaphysical beliefs. Coetzee's novel rests on the possibility of exposing a false history and exploring an alternative story. Contemporary South African literature has been produced within historical practices that more would agree are obviously unjust and oppressive , publically immoral . South-Africa 'is a country whose history can be deliberately constructed to maintain white supremacy.

Coetzee's Disgrace emerges as a powerful post apartheid text lucidly about the problems faced by the whites in South-Africa with portraying how virtues like individual dignity , self respect , honour – freedom are trampled .

## CONCLUSION

Racial Discrimination surfaces where people of different races live together but " South Africa is the only place which has the terrible and unique distinction of proclaiming racial segregation as a fundamental doctrine enforced by legislation". "South-Africa Is A White Man's Country" became the dictum of Apartheid . Apartheid breeds a climate of intolerance and a social system that turned out

to be an economic disaster. Coetzee in “Doubling The Point” describes the South-African Literature as “a less than fully human literature , unnaturally pre – occupied with power and torsions of power” The dehumanizing effect of apartheid forms the crux of his fiction and non – fiction .In coetzee’s work Race exists as an absent signifier . He does not present the binary division of black and white but focuses on the psyche of the oppressor as well as the oppressed.His novels repeatedly emphasizes the Physical and Psychological trauma generated by apartheid. Its physical Manifestaton is the brutal maiming [ wounding ] of the victimized.

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