



Artistic Values in J.M.Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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ABSTRACT

Art is a product of a human mind to convey a select idea or emotion in a conducive form of the artist. Selectivity is the key factor of an art because the artist, in order to convey his intention clearly, selects the idea or the subject and the style with due care. The artist, then, attends to the clarity of his creation. If he fails in clarity, the purpose of his creation will be lost. Hence, he applies his intelligence to shape and hove for accuracy. Later, he integrates the subject and style to present it beautifully to the reader or audience. Thus, art conveys the taste of an artist. J M Coetzee, a Noble Prize winner, is a South African writer. He uses various narrative techniques in his text to make the reader engaging. Literature is an evergreen art, thanks to the writers like him who show novelty in every work they write. *Disgrace* is his most famous novel for which he has been awarded with the Booker Prize. This paper discusses the basic artistic values and tries to trace down it from the novel *Disgrace*.

Keywords: Artistic values, exposition, symbols, narration and myth

INTRODUCTION

The creation of an artist has to be recreated by the reader or spectator to understand and appreciate it. It is considered that any work of art is complete on its own. It has the harmony in it so one cannot alter with addition and subtraction with it which may lead to destruction of it. Art has that finality which is not possessed by science. Science consents the alteration in order to grow as well as glow for centuries to come. Sometimes, the work of art may be irrelevant from the life of the spectator. Unfamiliar ideas, affairs and emotions can, in all possibility, emerge as dominant elements shut off from human interests. Here, art expects the spectator or the reader to exalt from the





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ordinary and enter into its own sphere. Hence, art need not reflect or 'imitate' life. It can become a dream as both art and dream are expressions of emotions and thus, symbolic. Anyhow, one cannot accept the consideration of art as a dream because art is a conscious attempt to present the emotions, may be, symbolically but dream remains unconscious. Some consider art as illusion but it is revelation of reality. The aspects of strangeness and other-worldliness of an art cannot hold the artist responsible. It is the artist's imagination that reveals itself and he revels in it.

Faculty of imagination is greater in artists than in ordinary men. Therefore, the spectator has to free his mind from all his impediments to comprehend the artist. Art becomes an expression also. Art is essentially a form of expression is a common notion; it may be a symbol and when it is so, it implies four factors: the symbol, the person who makes the symbol, the person who interprets it and an image of feeling of which symbol is an expression. Art expresses feeling also and it expresses pleasure, unpleasure, sadness, happiness, disgust, terror, grief and depression. Art communicates feelings of an artist through certain external signs. The signs may be words, paint, music, etc., for example lyrical poetry of Wordsworth. *Daffodils*, Wordsworth describes a routine action of appreciating beauty. Sometimes he remains without thinking and at some other times he is 'pensive' when the poet is in such an unhappy mood the happy daffodils flashes through his mind and opens his 'inward eye to get a spiritual vision which later becomes bliss'. Now the daffodils have become an ideal company and so his heart starts to dance along with the cheerful daffodils. Therefore, art is an expression of intense feeling which makes the artist restless until the feelings take the form of art. When art becomes objectification of subject or subjective reality it projects virtue.

Literature is one of the forms of art is different from other forms such as painting and music because its emphases on thought content. Music and painting can create a mood but cannot arise any thought. Since art is the virtue of the intellect, it demands to communicate with the entire universe. For example, Shakespeare entertains as well as portrays with great insight human psychology, human impulses and motivations. His characters are easily comprehensible because they reflect actual human beings. Bernard Shaw pictures social evils and drives to reform the society. Charles Dickens also attacks the social evils of his time.

Victor Hugo, Maxim Gorki, Bulzac Tolstoy, Keats, Tennyson, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrance, T.S.Eliot and many other literary personalities are glorified even today, because of their sublimity. Longinus finds five principle sources of the sublime: grandeur of thought, capacity for strong emotion, appropriate use of figures, nobility of diction and dignity of composition. These five can be brought together with the comment of language. Grandeur of thought for Longinus is the stately thoughts of the lofty minds.

Aristotle's 'cathartic effect' as well as Longinus's 'capacity for strong emotion' aim at moral upliftment of the reader or spectator. Appropriate use of figure of speech elevates the style of writers. The chief figures that Longinus consider have the capacity of sublimity are: rhetorical question, asyndeton, hyperbaton and periphrasis. These can produce grandeur by satisfying a basic demand of human nature as one hears something new from the routine and at the end it gives a pleasant surprise and these figures Longinus thinks, "is effective only when it appears in disguise". Therefore, dignity of composition can exalt the soul and sway the heart of men with its natural power of persuasion and pleasure. Quintilian asserts that style is the product of both nature and art. It prefers language of daily life. Since, his treatise is primarily prose, like Aristotle he trusts in everyday subject and language of daily life. However, by language of daily life, he does not mean the language of the masses. He prefers the language of educated men. Therefore, the insistence lays on choice of words and their arrangement. Only when the words are chosen carefully they can be arranged properly. Apart from popular words of common usage of educated men newly coined words may be used where the popular words cannot serve the purpose but sparingly. Archaic words can also be used to impart dignity to style.



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Rhythmic prose is different from rhythm of verse where each line has a metrical composition. In prose, the rhythm is subtle. Longinus and Quintilian were ruling English literary trends until the romantic emergence. Romantics brought changes and developed literature on the whole. They opposed all regimentation in literature and proposed to 'please always and please all'. Wordsworth and Coleridge ascertained that language of the middle and the lower classes can provide poetic pleasure. Wordsworth considers the language of the layman is more permanent and philosophical. Wordsworth accepts that good prose can also sound as poetry because common men cannot spare time for metrical composition.

John Maxwell Coetzee, South African writer, literary critic, essayist, linguist and translator, was born in 1940 at Cape Town. He is the son of Zacharias Coetzee who was an attorney and partly government employee and Vera Coetzee, a school teacher. Having born in an educated family, his family members talk only in English but Coetzee, inspired by his mother tongue, speaks Afrikaans with other relatives. He studied at St Joseph's College and completed his bachelor of arts with honors in English and Mathematics from University of Cape Town. He moved to the University of Adelaide in Australia where he is currently working as a professor of English now. Coetzee, being a prolific writer, introduces himself as a writer to the literary world with his first novel *Dusklands* (1974). In the year 2003, to glorify literary contribution, he was honoured with the Nobel Prize for Literature. Coetzee in his novels delves into the themes of racism, imperialism, colonial impacts on culture and the sufferings of groundlings. Coetzee, interested in politics, projects the limitations of African society in his novels and criticizes them with his literary talents.

Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999) traces the life of David Lurie, the protagonist, professor of English, a twice divorced man. The novel exhibits the inordinate sexual desires of David who seduces his own student, Melanie and is expelled from his institution. The setting of the novels is the country land of Salem in Eastern Cape where the cruel apartheid system prevails all over the land. Lucy, the daughter of David Lurie who lives in Salem, a village of Eastern Cape, is brutally gang raped by three strangers. Moreover, they severely attacked David and loot everything from their home. When policemen investigate Lucy about the incident, she shadows the rape event and only tells about her and robbery. After this event, there is a rift between the father- daughter relationship. David starts to spend his time with Bev Shaw, the friend of his daughter, in her Animal Welfare Clinic.

Later, David repents to Mr. Issac, father of Melanie, for seducing his daughter. In the meantime, David comes to know that Petrus, neighbour of Lucy, is the one who has assigned the strangers to molest his daughter in order to occupy her land as well as marry her. David smites Pollux, one of the strangers and reason for his daughter's pregnancy. At end of the novel, David accepts his life as disgraced and he does not want to change it anyway. He continues his job in the Animal Welfare Clinic. The sub plot of the novel deals with David's project on the love affairs of Byron and his mistress Teresa Guiccioli.

Coetzee uses Oedipus myth as exposition to introduce the background of the story. Coetzee uses exposition in *Disgrace* as a literary device in order to introduce backdrop details on characters, events, settings and other information to the readers. Coetzee pictures one Professor David Lurie to take advantage of one of his students and so disgraced to calamity. David is considered as a fallen angel as he has been thrown out from the university. He is compared to Lucifer and he would have been apologized by the committee if he had asked for it. His racist thought never let him to ask apology and accepts his fall. As Oedipus, he has been arrogant during the liaison and he is self-centric egoist person. Being a Professor, he failed to be professional but romantic which leads to his tragic fall. Every Thursday afternoon, he visits Soraya, a prostitute. Though the sexual relationship is complacent, he never tries to change his temperament, especially his sexual temperament.

David is employed at the Cape Technical University teaching Romantic poets initially and now teaches communication skills. He has published three books on Opera, Eros (God of love) and Wordsworth. Opera is a musical drama set for singers and instrumentalists; Eros is a God of love, son of Aphrodite; Wordsworth is a



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romantic poet and the writing the history of Wordsworth projects the degradation of a romantic poet to historian as he teaches communication skills. Through this Coetzee establishes Lurie's temperament, not an effective teacher because of his sluggishness. He gloats even at the time of inquiry which leads to his resignation. At the end of the novel he becomes undignified. David Lurie drives home the humiliation of David. His degradation, thus conceived by Coetzee is not lesser than Oedipus. Coetzee undertakes the myth of Origen to underline the character of Coetzee and his disgrace. Origen in *Ecclesiastical History* 6.8 of Eusebius mentions Origen's castration. He was a theologian who taught women Greek literature to support his family.

David Lurie is faithless and self-indulgent. His relationship with Soraya breaks up immediately after Lurie meets Soraya's family that is Soraya with her two children. His snake totem does not leave him ideal. He picks up a relationship with Dawn, another prostitute. Unable to forget Soraya or having expected Soraya in Dawn, Lurie cuts a sorry face in sexual relationship with Dawn. He is scolded by Dawn and her masturbation at the end of intercourse makes him repulsive. Coetzee analysis his mind,

He ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself? Not the most graceful of solutions, but then ageing is not a graceful business. A clearing of the decks, at least, so that one can turn one's mind to the proper business of the old: preparing to die. (Coetzee 9)

Impotent and ineffective but an insatiate David Lurie selects his student Melanie as the next tool for his sexual escapade. This poor and unethical move has ensued the loss of her playful smile "The pentameter, whose cadence once served so well to oil the serpent's words, now only estranges." (Coetzee 16) The rhythmical and metrical pattern of language that has served as a cadence, as a tone, to seduce girls now has turned out to be disaffected. It is an extension of snake totem and concentration of Origen. The words once lit up the emotions of, now estranges in spite of that Lurie's temperament never changes. The seduction process continues in the classroom also a simple thought. A man looking at Alps mountain becomes a complicated imagery.

Lurie teaches *The Prelude Book six* that talks about the early literary face of simplicity of Wordsworth. Critics consider the first face as glorious because of Wordsworth's inductive surrender to nature. Face of the mountain that has taken Wordsworth over to different worlds of thought, is the theme in the class of David Lurie. Mont Blanc, a potential World Heritage Site known for its unique beauty. The meaning of Mont Blanc is White Mountain. A simple idea of Wordsworth that the scenic beauty of nature, Mont Blanc, the white mountain takes Wordsworth to different worlds is speculated for a long time in the class room by David Lurie: Especially an ordinary verb Usurp meaning take over, is meditated throughout, to suggest Melanie that like Mont Blanc, she takes Lurie over to distant spheres of the cosmos. David Lurie conveys that 'mere sense-image' of Melanie imports to his memory the 'great archetype' and 'pure ideas'. The sense-image is related to 'being in love' and students are advised to keep the sense-image 'alive in the archetypal, goddess like form'. In yet another class, David gives a lecture on Byron. Here, Coetzee prefigures the fate of David Lurie as Byron. Byron did face many allegations for his affairs. He had his affair with Mary, wife of the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and with Claire Clairmont, a stepsister of Mary. Even Byron involved affair with his own half-sister Augusta and others named Lady Oxford, Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Byron whose name was Anne Isabella Milbanke.

As Byron had too many affairs so does David Lurie. He is twice- divorced; he has affairs with Soraya, Dawn, Melanie Issac and Bev Shaw. Being highly impulsive, David has little concern for morality. He wants to understand and sympathize Byron. Unconsciously in the course of lecture David speaks about solitude. His unethical temperament leaves him shameless and so he never admits his rape nor eager to hear the verdict of the inquiry committee. David escapes to the town of Salem, Eastern Cape. There, Coetzee parallels Melanie's rape to the gang rape of Lucy, David's daughter. David is attacked and the rape becomes a privacy matter for Lucy. By saying the rape can be brought to the public notice in another time, in another place, Lucy refers to Melanie's rape. Lucy goes to the extent of marrying Petrus who is doubted to have relationship with the attackers. Thus, Coetzee proves the





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distinction in cultural assimilation of the city 'Cape Town' and the village "Salem, Eastern Cape". The alterity becomes a very powerful mode of transferring Coetzee's ideas as the novel progresses to the end. Many pages are dedicated to opera now the story is not about Byron but about Teresa, Byron's old lover. Gradually the elegy becomes comic as David's life has turned from romantic to tragic.

Coetzee mentions the Casanova myth when David Lurie receives a letter during his final face of tenure in the university. Unable to control his sexual desire David Lurie has an affair with his own student Melanie Isaac. It is soon learnt by her lover Ryan and her parents. They complain to the university authorities that David Lurie has raped Melanie. When the inquiry goes on, the university advises David Lurie to undertake counseling. A pamphlet is issued in due course.

On campus it is Rape Awareness Week. Women Against Rape, WAR, announces a twenty-four-hour vigil in solidarity with 'recent victims'. A pamphlet is slipped under his door: 'WOMEN SPEAK OUT'. Scrawled in pencil at the bottom is a message: 'YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA'. (Coetzee 43)

Coetzee mentions Casanova who is more than a womanizer of Venice. A good example of Casanova is 'Don Juan', a Spanish legend popular for his seduction. David Lurie is no less a Casanova than a Don Juan through whom Coetzee demonstrates the sin of womanizing. David Lurie is forced to resign and at the end of the novel he becomes an employer of Bev Shaw's Animal Welfare Club. David Lurie is the architect of his own destiny - the Disgrace caused to him because he failed to realize the moral truth that womanizing is a sin. Coetzee's narrative techniques of using exposition and myth add artistic values to the novel *Disgrace*.

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