



HOW DO WE LOCATE J. M. COETZEE IN HIS NOVELS? A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MAN AND HIS ART IN TWO OF HIS NOVELS

Dan Chima Amadiⁱ

Dr., Directorate of General Studies,
Federal University of Technology,
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

Abstract:

John Maxwell Coetzee is one of the leading writers writing in English. As a novelist, critic, academic and translator, Coetzee has firmly established his reputation which culminated in his being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003. Coetzee is a great delight in his works, but critics do not feel he takes criticism of his works lightly. The thrust of this study is an attempt to take a closer look at his works and to see how his training has influenced and helped to shape his art in two of his novels: *The Life and Times of Michael K.* and *Disgrace*.

Keywords: John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Life and Times of Michael K.*, *Disgrace*

Introduction

As a writer, the training of J. M. Coetzee has a lot of influence on him. His two degrees in English and Mathematics coerce him into the form his art takes. Yet they provide the profound background to re-read and understand his works and in a way lay the foundations that confound his critics. Julian Gitzen says that: “*Each of his works, to date, is dominated by a single consciousness, and his characters are distinguished by a punctilious exactitude of expression*”. Any critic would give that to his background in Mathematics. Although a recluse and a man who shuns publicity, Coetzee has always wanted to enter the world stage, to shirk off him all tags of localization. That should not surprise anyone because that is the ambition of any good writer; to be read beyond his homeland. Coetzee made this clear in an interview he granted to Tony Morphet in *Tri Quarterly* when he asked why it should be his fate to be consistently labeled a “South African novelist”.

Julian Gitzen believes the tag South African novelist re-echoes because:

ⁱ Correspondence: email danamadi2009@yahoo.com

“He was born in Cape Town and that to date at least half of his fiction is set in South Africa. Also his work often treats race relations and the conflicts that arise when territorial or cultural boundaries are crossed. Coetzee may be forgiven some exasperation, however, because the themes of his novels are universal rather than provincial; and his fictional characters might, and indeed do, dwell in a multitude of locales. Repeatedly his novels focus upon the processes by which history is made and recorded, emphasizing how history is registered in human consciousness through the medium of language” (1)

Previous works on the writings of Coetzee concentrate very much on his writings; and that is how it should be if critics must be seen to be relevant and for literature to serve its purpose. However, we need to spare a thought about the man that the whole controversy revolves; his nature and what makes him tick. As art is not too far from the one that produces it, we might understand Coetzee better if we look closely at his life too. The thrust of this paper then is on the man J.M. Coetzee, his art and how his training, private life have helped to shape his art.

Coetzee does not believe that literature can save mankind but can help in promoting noble ideals. His great imaginative talent and his consistency of purpose mark him out as a writer the world cannot ignore. As Michael S. Kochin submits: *“Coetzee has in his fiction critically explored the notion that literature as we know it can promote human ideals. His work constitutes a radical challenge to our learned prejudice that Western high culture can help twenty-first century men and women find a human life together. Coetzee criticizes Western high culture from within: His essays reveal him as a penetrating critic of great figures of modernist fiction such as Robert Musil”*.

As a personality, Coetzee cuts the figure of a man who devotes all his energies to his art, even if it would give the world confusing signals. But his works are indeed in a class of their own which his nature bellies. For Simon Willis:

*“J. M. Coetzee cuts a surprisingly dashing figure in person. Speaking last week at the University of East Anglia, as part of UEA’S new writing season, Coetzee took to the stage with a loose walk, even a subtle swagger, in a perfectly pressed suit. He spoke on censorship, and then gave readings from two of his early novels, *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). His delivery was nuanced and witty, albeit with a sense of private restraint. At one point in the evening, I even saw him laugh.”*

Coetzee’s opinion on the varied nature of his work has been taken up by his critics whom he always suspects. He gives a clear signal that he doubts their mission and that he has no intention of cutting a close intimacy: *“I cannot find in myself to align myself with the*

ensor-the dark suited, bald-headed figure, with his pursed lips and his red pen". When he talks about the censor, his reactions are laced with investigative words and red lined suspicion. He thinks that the censor friend is: *"like being intimate with someone who does not love you". In a cynical tone, he calls them "guardians of the Republic of Letter - - - book reviewers"*. Simon Willis believes Coetzee over- reacts to criticism.

It also worries a critic like H. van der Menve Scholz, a professor at the University of Cape Town where Coetzee once taught, and Anna M. Louw, also a novelist in the city of Australia where Coetzee also resides; whom Coetzee subtly refers to. Since the reports of the critics are positive, Willis then wonders where Coetzee builds his grouse. Willis opines:

"So how did it feel for a writer who once said that he considered it, a badge of honour to have a book banned in South Africa to find out that the state's literary representatives – his unloving readers – were actually on his side? How are we to interpret the disclaim and sarcasm that spiked Coetzee's voice as he quoted those lines?" (2)

Willis' submission is that Coetzee is not used to taking criticism kindly and when he gets one, his reaction may be over-stretched.

On racism in South Africa, Coetzee holds all whites accountable for the injustice blacks suffered for those years. He finds himself in a difficult situation when he explains the complicity of all whites:

"Passively, in an audacious and well-planned crime against Africa, Afrikaners the whites of South Africa participated, in various degrees, actively or as a self-defining group distinguished themselves in the commission of that crime. Thereby they lent their names to it. It will be a long time before they have the moral authority to withdraw that brand mark --- is it in my power to withdraw from the gang? I think not ---- more important, is it my heart's desire to be counted apart? Not really. Furthermore – and this is an afterthought – I would regard it as morally questionable to write something like the second part of Duskland – a fiction, note – from a position that is not historically complicity." (Attwell Doubling 342-343)

On the resignation from social caste a writer belongs in South Africa, or indeed any part of the world, he makes it clear that it is an impossible attempt to accomplish. Although he himself has tried to use white women to show that the burden of life could tilt, by making them to be victims of the black male and even compliant to emerging black power, he sees it as his own attempt towards a symbolic resignation from a caste he was born into. This conflict of identify, crisis of class and the position of a writer are central to Coetzee's art. At a more personal level, he takes it as almost divine truth when he says:

“The masters, in South Africa, form a closed hereditary caste. Every one born with a white skin is born into the caste. Since there is no way of escaping the skin you are born with (can the leopard change its spots?), you cannot resign from the caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic resignation, but short of actually shaking the dust of the country off your feet, there is no way of actually doing it.” (Attwell Doubling (96)

In agreeing with the above, Fiona Probyn stretches the imagination in a critical study of three of Coetzee’s novels: *In the Heart of the Country* (1979), *Foe* (1986) and *Age of Iron* (1990). Probyn concludes that Coetzee does prove a symbolic resignation by using the white women in those novels to reverse a stereotyped white male dominance in conventional South African Literature. Probyn sees it as finished writing as Coetzee himself agrees. She believes that Coetzee *“speaks of himself rather than for himself”*. In evaluating the works of Coetzee from the finished perspective, Probyn argues:

“Coetzee sees himself ‘without authority’ because the type of authority associated with his position as a white male in South Africa is one whose authoritarian connotations he rejects and, throughout his novels, attempts to dismantle. He does not see himself as an author who commands words (the ‘specter’ is ‘blind’, nor necessarily as an author who has spanned considerable critical interest in the area of postcolonial, postmodern and South African Literature); Coetzee is a writer who is conscious of the ways in which writing itself is inextricably bound up with power. Coetzee represents his marginality, his “writing without authority”, in the characters of his white women narrators who construct “their” texts” (Oristory, Probyn 2)

Coetzee’s *White Writing* deserves a critical study because it serves as a compass to navigate his works. In his Magnum opus, Coetzee takes a close study of the failure of the pastoral, conventional novel in South Africa and he beams his light on a future attempt to subvert it, which might lead to an emergence of the ‘triumphant’ baby. He says of it:

“Our ears today are finely attuned to modes of silence ---Our craft is all in reading the other gaps, inverses, undersides; the veiled; the dark, the buried, the feminine; alter ties ---it is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn” (81)

Coetzee’s preference for feminine instead of feminism is clear. Probyn believes that feminized version offers a better option, which precludes rivalry and the attendant implication for the state, truth and realism. Coetzee’s feminized version sounds ambiguous

which is a castration of the master symbol that the white authority represents. Coetzee makes it clearer when he says: *“there are many authoritarian societies on earth, but Afrikanerdom strikes one as a society in which castration is allotted a particularly blatant role”*. (Attwell Doubling 374) Thus, Coetzee tries to feminize the enemy, the Afrikaner power, the white dominance and their overwhelming role.

Coetzee is not likely to win much converts in feminists who see his attempt as a valorization of weakness, who see feminism as a long drawn battle, an attempt to torpedo phallogocentrism and replace it with their own brand of order, a ‘little phallus’ or becoming a man.

Although Coetzee’s work is not cashing in on the dissension in feminist world, his position has been sufficiently made ambivalent and this has helped protect him from vituperative feminist inquiry.

One important conclusion which many reach after reading the novels of Coetzee is that they possess the characteristics of allegories or parables. Coetzee himself admits that because of the condition posed by state censorship, critics usually brand such literature as allegory. The stigmatization is a plus for Coetzee who is seen as having traversed conventions, banality and the elementary stages that destroy the good purpose and status of some works of art. Agreeing with this, Clive Barnett says further that: *“In reviews, Coetzee is positioned both as part of a tradition of committed anti-apartheid writing, but also as a writer whose work succeeds in escaping the conventions of political fiction and thus elevating itself to the status of art”*. (291)

In the same breathe, J. Kramer believes that Coetzee is a more accomplished writer than Andre’ Brink because while the former takes his time, weighing the full import of words, in skilled meticulous fashion, the latter glosses or ‘writes fast’ (25) Coetzee is seen as a first rate craftsman and his work is imbued with ‘artistic purpose’. It is the same yardstick that is used to judge the work of Nadine Gordimer, *My Sons Story*. When compared with Coetzee’s *Age of Iron*, Gordimer’s art is considered weighed down because of her ever obtruding political commitment. Thus, G. Annan in his review rates Gordimer’s *My Son’s Story* low when he says: *“it is a good read and good journalism. It informs and explains. But it’s too banal and too explicit to be good art”* (8-10). This is a kind of scathing critical comment never made on the works of Coetzee. Except of course when Coetzee begins experimentation by re-writing Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* as *Foe* and Dostoevsky’s *The Devils in the Master of Petersburg* does he meet with stiff criticism. D.J. Enright says it is *“a static and anemic affair, despite the elegance of the writing”* (18-20). For Z. Zinik, *The Master of Petersburg* is a mere ‘literary pastiche’ (19) of the novel of Dostoevsky.

Looking at critics' opinion and Coetzee's literary approach and style of writing, he is often compared with writers like Kafka, Conrad and Nabokor. It might not be too difficult to identify the age in South Africa in which Coetzee writes about. One can also figure out a consistent desire to represent all shades of opinion and diverse locations, characters that are capable of being found in any society. When he writes about oppression, he portrays it as phasal, time bound and even doomed. It is this kind of artistic mission that conveys the impression that his novels are anti-apartheid prone and post-apartheid narratives.

In all, J.M. Coetzee is the author of twelve novels: *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Life and Times of Michael K.* (1983), *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Disgrace* (1999), *Elizabeth Costell* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). He has also written two non- fictions: *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*, autobiography, *Provincial Life 11* (2002). His other non-fiction include *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters from South Africa* (1988), *Doubling the Point: Essays and Censorship* (1996), *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays, 1986 – 1999* (2002) and *Inner Working*. He has also done some translations and introductions to books: *Landscape with Flowers: Poetry from the Netherlands* by J.M. Coetzee (2004), *Introduction to Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (Oxford World Classics), *Introduction to Brighton Rock* by Graham Green (Penguin Classics) and *Introduction to Dangling Man* by Saul Bellow (Penguin Classics).

Life and Times of Michael K.

It is Coetzee's fourth novel and included in the cast which B. Parry describes as "*Powerful moral critique of apartheid*" (19). For Irving Howe's review, the novel is about the theme of South African writer hemmed-in, in the apartheid enclave:

"A great commanding subject hunts the South African imagination; yet this subject can also turn into a kind of tyranny, close, oppressive, even destructive. Imagine what it must be like to live as a serious writer in South Africa; an endless clamour of news about racial injustice, the feeling that one's life is mortgaged to a society gone rotten with hatred, an indignation that fear that one's anger may overwhelm and destroy one's fiction. And except for silence or emigration, there can be no relief." (35-36)

The story of Michael K. is one of progressive suffering of a character who is not identified with any race. The reader is led to believe that he is a black who is manipulated by the great and unyielding South African oppressive system. D.J. Enright sees his travails as "passive suffering" (1037). What makes the life of Michael K. objectionable is the unheroic

nature of his portrayal. Coetzee's creation fails to represent the black South African people under apartheid. Gordimer says the novel evokes a: *"revulsion against all political and revolutionary solutions"* (3-4). She thinks Coetzee deliberately refuses to prop up an active black presence in South Africa and that a political solution is the answer to the crisis in the region under apartheid. D.A.N. Jones takes up Coetzee for not reflecting the true spirit of blacks in that society as of the time: *"surely he does not represent the spirit of Africa? I see no point in this prolonged tale of woe."* (17-18)

A white South African writer like Coetzee is caught between expectations of the majority black population and the endorsement of international audience. His use of allegories tend to push him into universalism but some critics like Shrimpton think: *"Coetzee's urge to allegorize intrudes upon his narrative gifts"* (43) Cynthia Ozick in her review of *The Life and Times of Michael K.* sees the attempt by the Doctor to read through the compact posture of Michael as an unnecessarily self-indulgent mission and a watering down of the *"authentic inner dialogue"*(1) She says that: 'the doctor's commentary is superfluous; he thickens the clear tongue of the novel by naming it's *"message"* and thumping out ironies' (28). By seeing the doctor's intervention as redundant, Ozick's opinion paints the impression that Coetzee did not look at that flaw after creating the character. But Michael K. is real enough, dynamic enough to fight the great power that confronts him; although not towering enough, and clearly not in the region of great characters.

Coetzee's characterization of Michael K. is in line with his approach in most of his novels. He does not come out to criticize his characters gravely and this is characteristic of most of his novels. This creates the impression of passive commitment to moral and politic issues which unsettle his critics. This much can be said of *Disgrace*, his ninth novel. For Clive Barnett:

"This difficulty in pinning down the political perspective of Coetzee's novels is in no small part a deliberate effect. Political and ethical ambivalence is a theme of all of his fiction. Coetzee steadfastly refuses to provide authoritative interpretations of his novels or to reduce them to political statements. In interviews, he cultivates a careful resistance to the standard gestures of the writer's political responsibility. In his critical essays he has explicitly marked his distance from instrumentalist conceptions of writing, and from understandings of the subordinate relation of fiction to history which have shaped the realist esthetics of mainstream oppositional South African Literature." (297)

Coetzee kick-starts the crisis in South Africa by showing the stages of violence which go on progressively. Michael K. is for three years without a job after leaving Parks and Gardens, a division of the Municipal Services of the city of Cape Town as Gardener grade 3

(b). His preoccupation then is to look at his hands and lying on his bed. He takes up a job as a night attendant at the public lavatories on Green Market Square. But trouble for him is not yet over:

“On his way home from work one Friday he was set upon in a subway by two men who beat him, took his watch, his money and his shoes, and left him lying stunned with a slash across his arm, a dislocated thumb and two broken ribs. After this incident he quit night work and returned to Parks and Gardens, where he rose slowly in the service to become Gardener grade 1” (4)

His mother’s unusual summon makes him run to her rescue and there bigger woes await him. He moves from this crisis to trying to support his mother, a task that takes almost a life time. His mother’s swelling legs and arms, the callousness of the nurses and the sight of victims of violence all combine to unnerve him. His mother’s tears make the burden difficult to bear, and when he asks for a wheel chair to assist her to the bus stop he is turned down. Trying to keep his job and take care of his mother are difficult tasks:

“One evening the buses from sea point did not run at all and he had to spend the night in her room sleeping on the mat with his coat on. In the middle of the night he woke chilled to the bone. Unable to sleep, to leave because of the curfew, he sat shivering on the chair till daylight while his mother groaned and snored” (7).

The life of Anna K, Michael K’s mother, is anything but happiness. Born in a farm in the district of Prince Albert, her father, a habitual drunk, had no steady job and her mother whom she helped with her laundry job also worked in some kitchens, from where they moved to Odudtshoon where Anna got a little education. She went through marriages but only Michael K. is left with her. Poverty assails her everywhere and when it is raining, she pushes an old towel against *“the door to keep water from seeping in. The room smelled of Dettol and talcum powder”*. I feel like a toad under a stone living here’ she whispered. *“I can’t wait till August”*.

The lot of Michael K. and his mother would have improved if the former has a discerning eye and any vision in him. He accepts all her mother’s plan without question, including relocation to the countryside without enquiries on how they will survive. It is perhaps this aspect of his character that the critics of Coetzee find uneasy about this uninspiring hero:

“She expected Michael to ask how she could believe that a small country town would take to its bosom two strangers, one of them an old woman in bad health. She had even prepared an answer. But not an instant did Michael doubt her. Just as he had believed through all the years in Huis Norenius that his mother had left him there for a reason which, if at first dark, would in the end become clear, so now he accepted without question the wisdom of her plan for them”(9)

Some of Michael K’s action could be interpreted as plain stupid. Everyone he encounters sees this limpid aspect of his character. Little wonder then that when his mother finally dies, the hospital authorities cremate her without his consent and Michael K. does nothing.

K. and his mother’s condition are not alleviated because of the apartheid laws of South Africa. To leave the Cape peninsula, they need both a police permit and to book a reservation for at least two months in advance. The booking clerk even tells him not to mention his mother’s ill health as it does not constitute special grounds. The interminable wait turns Michael K into a vagrant and he begins to wonder the streets.

The intermittent outbreak of violence and shooting make the situation most intolerable. Looting of houses and shops makes security agents more aggressive. The insecurity and economic blockage of South Africa have increased the level of hunger and sporadic looting of shops is everywhere a common feature in that country. Even women are not left out in the ugly incident and those that loot and fail to run fast are shot dead by security agents. Hoodlums and the destitute roam the central district begging or stealing and when it begins to rain, they take refuge at corridors of public buildings.

Anna K. maintains her respect for the Buhrmanns. She has worked for: *‘such nice people!’* (14) as she calls them. When their house is battered, she says: *“I don’t know how they are going to get over it”* (14). She is worried how the mess would be cleaned. But K’s concern is about the welfare of his mother, not for the old people’s sake. For this, while on the way to the country side, he annexes the old people’s bathroom: *“Just for a night or two; he pleaded with his mother, ‘so that you can have a chance to sleep by yourself. Till we know what we are going to do. I’ll move a divan into the bathroom. In the morning, I’ll put everything back. I promise they will never know”* (15).

K’s insensitivity reaches a heroic crescendo when he shows his mother a picture of a gleaning flank of roast port garnished with cherries and pineapple rings and set off with a bowl of raspberries and cream and a gooseberry tart: *“People don’t eat like that anymore; his mother said’*. He disagreed. *‘The pigs don’t know there is a war on. Food keeps growing. Someone has to eat it”* (16). By calling whites pineapples and pigs, he is obviously echoing the disdain

of other blacks over their style of living in a country ravaged by hunger and violence, a case where some are living in penury while others revel in opulence.

When K. makes bold to ask for a permit that is never to come, the rude policewoman makes him see he is a Kaffir. They will not give him a permit to travel even if his mother is dying until he has a reservation. He is given another form to fill: *"Already applied for the permit!"* (19) When K. tells her it is for the eighteenth of August, a month away and his mother's condition is getting worse, the policewoman tells him the permit will be sent to his address when ready. K. counters and:

"The policewoman slapped the counter to still him. 'Don't waste my time. I am telling you for the last time, if the permit is granted the permit will come! Don't you see all these people waiting? Don't you understand? Are you an idiot? Next'. She braced herself against the counter and glared pointedly over K's shoulder: 'Yes, you. Next!'" (20)

Although K. does not bulge, he is still powerless before the force the policewoman is representing. K. takes his fate in his own hands like very many blacks who eventually paid the ultimate prize. At the check point, the policeman wants to enforce the law. A motorcyclist explains to him what is obtainable within the iron curtain:

"You can't travel outside the peninsula without a permit. Go to the check point and show them your permit and your papers. And listen to me: you want to stop on the expressway; you pull fifty meters off the road. That's the regulation: fifty meters either side. Anything nearer, you can get shot, no warning, no question asked. Understand?" (22)

This is a police state. The police corporal makes it very clear to him: *"Have you got a permit, Yes or No?"* demanded the corporal in command. *"I don't care who you are, who your mother is, if you haven't got a permit you can't leave the area, finished"*. (23)

This situation cannot be managed and K. wheels back but not to safety. They are constantly attacked by thieves. Yet their suffering does not close Mrs. Anna K.'s generosity. For instance, she gives each of the three children on their way to church a coin, including the one that holds her hand.

The number of personnel in the South African hospitals is not enough. The result is that those few on duty work themselves lame. One of them complains as K. mounts pressure:

"When I come off duty I am so tired I can't eat. I just fall asleep with my shoes on. I am just one person. Not two, not three-one. Do you understand that, or is it too difficult to understand? K. looked away. 'Sorry', he mumbled, not knowing what else to say, and returned to the yard." (28)

K. is an unfeeling and hard cut young man. When his mother dies, he accepts her cremated ashes without tears. He does not miss her. His concern is how to survive, how to eat. His capacity to endure pain is beyond compare. He could live in holes, tree trunks and can eat almost anything:

"He slept at the roadside and woke wet with dew. Before him the road wound upward into the mist. Birds flitted from bush to bush, their chirping muffled. He carried the suitcase on a stick over his shoulder. He had not eaten for two days; however, there seemed no limit to his endurance". (K 35)

The problems of the people are often compounded by security agents. The soldiers take over personal belongings and frighten the victims with guns:

"What do you think the war is for', said the soldier, parodying the movements of K's mouth. 'Thief. Watch it. You could be lying in the bush with flies all over you. Don't you tell me about war'. He pointed his gun at the box of ashes. 'Show me', he said." (37)

He only lets K. go after giving him a tip from his own mother's purse *"Tip', he said,. Buy yourself an ice-cream". (38)*

Yet there is a limit to K.'s endurance. After his capture and detention at the labour camp, K. musters courage to confront the task master, the overseer:

"Why have I got to work here?' K. said. His head swam; the words seemed to echo from far away. The overseer shrugged. 'Just do what you are told', he said. He raised his stick and prodded K. in the chest. K. picked up his shovel." (42)

From here, he becomes a scavenger with no faith, no will of his own and no belief. He roams and lives off the land, eating anything that comes his way. But to the grandson of the Visagie, a white, K. is not ready to serve:

"The grandson, stripped to the waist and sweating, came to meet him.

'Very good', he said. 'Can you clean them quickly?' I would appreciate that. K held up the four birds, their feet together in a tangle of claws. There was a pearl of blood at the beak of one of the sparrows. 'So small you don't taste it as it goes down', he said. 'You wouldn't get yourself dirty, not even your little fingers'. 'What the hell does that mean?' said the Visagie grandson. 'What the fuck do you mean? If you want to say something, say it. Put those things down, I'll take care of them!' So K. laid the four birds down on the stop at the front door and departed.'"(63).

Not only this, K. refuses to go to Prince Albert for the Visagie grandson and when he does, it is to bolt with his list and forty rand notes. Coetzee has been criticized for the unheroic actions of K. and it is not without reasons. K. in the novel has demonstrated enough weak power and lack of vision to support this charge. For instance, he wanders aimlessly as the author observes:

"He did not know what was going to happen. The story of his life had never been an interesting one'; there had usually been someone to tell him what to do next; now there was no one, and the best thing seemed to be to wait." (K. 67)

This kind of characterization in a serious political situation is too academic to satisfy yearning political zeal. In many ways, K's life is most unsatisfactory as his life causes bewilderment instead of pity or love. To use K. to represent the teeming black population in South Africa with K's already displaying uninspiring character is clearly a political obituary and Coetzee takes serious bashing as a result.

K. does not have women friends. His inclination is not towards their friendship. Organized living is beyond him. Even in the resettlement camps where there are teeming women and children, he still keeps to himself. At the camp, he is incapable of understanding the complacent psychology of the inmates:

"Jakkalsdrift is your place of abode now. Welcome. You leave your place of abode, they pick you up, you are a vagrant. No place of abode. First time, Jakkalsdrift, second time, Brandvlei. You want to go to Brandvlei, penal servitude, hard labour, brickfields, guards with whips?, --- where do you want to go anyway?' He dropped his voice. 'You want to go to the mountain?'"(K 78)

The grouse of the inmates is on the type of wage they receive. It is hardly enough to feed the family for a job that is very arduous. Sometimes blacks conspire so that they will not die of exhaustion. Robert advises Michael:

"Before you break your back, my friend", he said 'remember what they pay you. You get standard wage, one rand a day. I get one rand fifty because I have dependants. So don't kill yourself. Go and take a pee. You've been in hospital, you are not well.'" (K 81)

When the money is paid, the shop owners at Prince Albert extort it from blacks by hiking the prices of goods. The practice is also to discourage blacks from buying because they breed disease, are unhygienic and lack morals. They only need black cheap labour at Jakkalsdrif and not the menace they cause. The pastor preaches submission and resignation:

"Let peace enter our hearts again, O Lord, and grant it to us to return to our homes cherishing bitterness against no man, resolved to live together the fellowship in Thy name, obeying thy commandments" (83)

For K, he attends this service not out of religious zeal or communion spirit but to fill a vacuum in his life. Then he slips off Jakkalsdrif and wanders about aimlessly:

"He strolled down the Jakkalsdrif-river till the wire and the huts and the pump were out of sight. Then he lay down in the warm grey sand with his beret over his face and fell asleep. He woke sweating. He lifted the beret and squinted into the sun. Striking all the colours of the rainbow from his eyelashes, it filled the sky. I am like an ant that does not know where its hole is, he thought. He dug his hands into the sand and let it pour through his fingers over and over again." (K. 83)

His life is redoubled meaninglessness. Yet despite his lack of hope, K. is still humane and generous. He gives half his pay to Robert and carries the rest half in his pocket. Robert himself wonders about K's ever tendency to want to sleep:

"I have never seen anyone as asleep as you", he says. 'I'm sick, I can't work'; K tells the guard. 'Suit yourself but you won't be paid', the guard says." (84)

K prepares to take his destiny in his own hands by leaving the camp:

"I don't need to eat all the time. When I need to eat, I'll work" (85)

His philosophy amuses the guard. K. dares the guard on what he will do if he seeks his liberty without his permission:

*"And if I climb the fence? What will you do if I climb the fence?"
'You climb the fence and I'll shoot twice, so don't try'" (85)*

The language of the white farmer offends K.:

"Where were you brought up, monkey?" shouted the farmer. 'Cut low, cut clean'. He took the sickle from K's hand, pushed him aside, gathered the next tuft of Lucerne, and cut it clean and low.

'See?' he shouted. K. nodded.

'Then do it, man, do it', he shouted. K. bent and sawed the next tuft off close to the earth."(87)

The situation at the resettlement camp at Jakkalsdrift is excruciating. Since they are under suspension, they must be made to understand they are neither wanted nor trusted. When security agents raid camps, they turn them into chaos, with dogs and heavily armed operatives to beat those who could pose a threat. Even radios are confiscated to prevent black communities from reaching the outside world. The camp guards are not left out since to harass them is to empower them to do the same to blacks:

"What are we keeping here in our backyard' he shouted. 'A nest of criminals and saboteurs and idlers! And you! The two of you! You eat and sleep and get fat and from one day to the next you don't know where the people are, you are supposed to be guarding! What do you think you are doing here, running a holiday camp? It is a work camp, man! It's a camp to teach lazy people to work! Work! And if they don't work, we close the camp! We close it down and chase these vagrants away! Get out and don't come back! You've had your chance." (91)

The position of the South African white authorities can clearly be seen from the language of the blood officer who is commanding the raid of the camp.

In the camp, what the authorities want for blacks can be seen in the kind of commendation which the farmer gives to K. The whites do not want blacks to move beyond menial jobs:

"Once the farmer took K. aside, gave him a cigarette, and commended him. 'You have a feel for wire', he said. 'You should go into fencing. There will always be a need for good fencers in this country, no matter what. If you carry stock, you need fences: it's as simple as that'" . (95)

The people the fences should protect are whites. It is also to protect whites from the increasing violence. If K. remains a fencer, the whites need him. J.M. Coetzee plays on the

parasite symbol which the police captain talks about. The novelist challenges the South African government on the role and usefulness of the camp resettlement. Who is the parasite, the people or the government who uses the camps to extort forced labour? Who is actually the host and who is the parasite, he asks.

“What if the host were far outnumbered by the parasites, the parasites of idleness and the other secret parasites in the army and the police force and the schools and factories and offices, the parasites of the heart? Could the parasites then still be called parasites? Parasites too had flesh and substance; parasites too could be preyed upon. Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared a parasite on the town or the town a parasite on the camp depended on no more than on who made his voice heard loudest.” (116)

The minority whites cannot call the black majority parasites because they are preying on the choicest part of the black lands, their economy and political system. They have turned the host people into beggars when they are the prey and parasite. It is a very logical symbolism and Coetzee has earned a political mark. His allegorical approach though subtly rendered is a major gash on the apartheid policy of South Africa:

“I live in the veld” (120),

K. replies to a question about the address of his abode:

“I live nowhere” (120).

The police men do not believe him as they do not believe most blacks:

‘Spread out!’ one of them shouted. ‘I want the whole area searched! We are looking for footpaths, we are looking for holes and tunnels, we are looking for any kind of storage site.’”(121)

When the police feed k., it is for him to get enough strength so as to help them track down other dissident blacks:

“Ask him again”, said the officer, turning away. ‘Keep asking him. Ask him when his friends are coming. Ask him when they were last here. See if he’s got a tongue. See if he is such an idiot as he looks.” (122)

Coetzee through K. makes a prophetic statement about what lies in store for the apartheid regime. It will come to an end:

“Every grain of this earth will be washed clean by the rain, he told himself, and dried by the sun and scotched by the wind, before the seasons turn again. There will be not a grain left bearing my marks, just as my mother has now, after her season in the earth, been washed clean, blown about, and drawn up into the leaves of grass”. (124)

K. is like Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* when it comes to flying. But unlike Bigger who is a bully, K. is harmless:

‘The music made me restless’, he said. ‘I used to fidget; I couldn’t think my own thoughts’. ‘And what were the thoughts you wanted to think?’ He said, ‘I used to think about flying. I always wanted to fly. I used to stretch out my arms and think I was flying over the fences and between the houses. I flew low over people’s heads, but they couldn’t see me. When they switched on the music I became too restless to do it, to fly’. (133)

The police want to hold Michael K. responsible for the terrorist attacks on vital installations. All these he knows nothing about. They have changed his name to Michaels and despite all his pleas; he is still branded a terrorist. Both Noel and the doctor are poles apart on what to do with him: *‘I am not in the war’*, he tells them (138). The doctor tries to argue with Noel to frame a report as no reasonable one can be extracted from K., but that is recrimination of an innocent man. In a way, K. is made to suffer for the collective terrorist attacks on the apartheid regime. The doctor makes a case for him:

“He is a simpleton, and not even an interesting simpleton. He is a poor helpless soul who has been permitted to wonder out on to the battlefield of life, if I may use that word, the battlefield of life, when he should have been shut away in an institution with high walls, stuffing cushions or watering the flower-beds. Listen to one, Noel; I have a serious request to make. Let him go. Don’t try beating a story out of him” (141)

Obviously, the interrogators want to use K. to reach the terrorists whom they believe he has links with. But as it is, they want to hold him for a collective act committed. The doctor sums up K’s life thus:

“No papers, no money, no family, no friends, no sense of who you are. The obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy”. (142)

Then he makes out what one may call the soul of apartheid:

“The laws are made of iron, Michaels, I hope you are learning that. No matter how thin you make yourself, they will not relax. There is no home made for the universal souls, except perhaps in Antarctica or on the high seas”. (151)

Coetzee wants his readers to see that not all agents of apartheid are inhuman. He makes it very clear in Major Noel. He is more of a representative. Deep down, he is a different person. At sixty, he is thinking of resigning, particularly as his widowed daughter wants him to come and live with her at Gordon’s Bay. He makes a realistic statement about a regime that is running against the current and the official in its employ: *“You need an iron man to run an iron camp. I am not that kind of man I could not disagree. Not being iron is his greatest virtue”*. (154)

Coetzee wants the world to see that insensitivity is not the best option as the doctor has observed. The Major tells the doctor why apartheid is in place: *“We are fighting this war”, Noel said, ‘so that minorities will have a say in their destinies”*. (157)

In book three, Coetzee takes the reader through what life will be after apartheid, how people of all races will live and feel for each other. It is a time to share, when K. asks for water:

“The man shook his head. ‘Wine we have got, milk we have got, two kinds of milk’ –casually he indicated the woman with the baby – ‘but water, no, my friend. I regret there is no water in this place. Tomorrow, I promise. Tomorrow will be a new day. Tomorrow you will have everything you need to make a new man of you”. (175)

In the beach, Coetzee uses the inter-racial sex to show what life will be after apartheid. It will be true jollity.

3. Disgrace

Recent evaluation of J.M. Coetzee’s works reveal political commitment which his critics have denied in his works. Some believe that Disgrace, his ninth novel even fuel racial sentiment which obviously may not be the intention of the author. As a work of art, Disgrace is out to address the post-apartheid era, a world where whites are no longer in control. The protagonist, David Lurie is anything but a shining example. At the age of 52, he is already divorced twice and demoted from the rank of professor of modern languages to adjunct professor of communications where he teaches one poetry course a year at Cape Technical University, South Africa.

Since he is incapable of keeping a woman at home, he finds his sexual satisfactions in prostitutes. The key prostitute he uses later rejects him and David could not find satisfaction in subsequent girls sent by the “hostels service”. Then David Lurie runs into Melanie Isaacs, a young girl in his class and he logs in, “mildly smitten” as he says. The affair is brief and temperate but brings trouble to David as well. Melanie’s boyfriend takes David head-on and Melanie in an attempt to sever her relationship, reports the matter to the authorities. Her father is called in. Before the disciplinary committee, David admits he is answering the call of Eros, but he is unrepentant despite all efforts to save him and he has no choice but to resign.

David heads for his daughter’s holdings where she is gang raped by three black men, and David is unable to prevent it. He tries all he can to pull her out of the farm but Lucy does not bulge. Lucy is lonely after losing her lover, Helen and needs the company and protection of her black neighbours. David falls again into adultery with Bev, Lucy’s friend and an animal manager. Peggy Lindsey in reviewing the novel comments:

“By chronicling the consequences of one man’s abuses of and fall from power, Coetzee creates a story of both universal and regional significance. On the one hand, David is ascertain type who contemptuous of others, uses his position to take what he wants and to justify the taking. But longer hold the power they once did. He’s forced to rethink his entire world at an age when he believes he’s too old to change and, in fact, should have a right not to”. (2)

Coetzee from the onset makes his point that the situation is not the same as the story of the Life and Times of K. The position has changed for whites. They are no longer the ones giving violence; they are at the receiving end. David articulates it well after his resignation:

“Have just traveled up from Cape Town. There are times when I feel anxious about my daughter all alone here. It is very isolated. ‘Yes’, says Petrus. ‘It is dangerous’. He pauses. ‘Everything is dangerous today. But here it is all right, I think’. And he gives another smile.”(64).

Petrus does not give his white listeners the impression that he is completely sure. And when Lucy is gang-raped; including one of Petrus’ brothers in –law, both Lucy and her father still cannot trust him. On the day she is raped, he does not report for duty as usual, a situation that is very suspicious. Yet Lucy does not press charges and she even agrees to keep the baby, a product of the rape to the discomfiture of her father. David Lurie tries to rouse his daughter to the true realities and to reject her complacent posture:

“Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?” (112) ‘You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again’’. (133)

Lurie’s problem is that he still lives in a decaying edifice, the past which apartheid represents. His feeling of racial superiority and inability to read the handwriting on the wall are the real reasons why he continues to plunge into greater disgrace. Coetzee’s chronology of his misdeeds is worthy of note, he: *“existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores”* (7) Peggy Lindsey offers an explanation for the real mission of Coetzee in the novel:

“True, this story is bleak - - - Coetzee offers no happy quick fix for this post-apartheid South Africa where white men who arm themselves and build security fences are expected to get a bullet in the back eventually and solitary white women are brutalized. And David’s rise from disgrace is by no means complete. He has fallen far enough that he can no longer make a life as he did before. But the story offers a slight glimpse of self-redemption, a sense that David is not completely broken. And the tiny bit of dignity David retains implies a slight hope that if one such as David – he of the upper echelons of race and education in the old South Africa – can find meaning in life again, then perhaps the disgrace of apartheid can evolve into something better as well’’. (2)

Coetzee’s fight against apartheid is in line with his father’s posture which earned him a sack from the South African racist government. The novelist was only eight years old when his father was fired and he continued with his sheep farm. The family later moved to Worcester, a provincial farm. It is perhaps this experience that has continued in the son.

David’s visit to Melanie’s parents and his refusal to offer an apology for his indiscretion defy rational analysis. The committee’s efforts to save his job and still present a good report to the university authorities are graceful efforts indeed, at least if only it could save a colleague. But David’s sense of justice is flawed: *“I won’t do it. I appeared before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse”* (58)

David Lurie creates the impression that he does not know when he is right or wrong. His inability to see no validity in an earlier plea, that has no nexus with the crime being considered and the need to show remorse are good reasons why he should be punished. David prefers to leave his position in disgrace than offer an apology, a situation that reduces

him to the level of a dog attendant in Bev's dog clinic. David's adultery with Bev shows he has no morality and sense of decency, above all an impression is created that he learns nothing from his past mistakes. What would happen if Bev's husband discovers that David Lurie is having an affair with his wife and in her clinic? What would be Lucy's reaction and how would Bev, Lucy and the husband relate?

"Lucy appears more realistic than her father, David Lurie. Both father and daughter are not poles apart in ethics and morality. As a lesbian, she is not an ideal woman and her acceptance of her violation with calm is in line with her father's flawed judgment: 'What if that is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying?'" (158)

Isidore Diala believes that Coetzee gets it all wrong:

"But if Lucy's mode of engagement with history is Coetzee's valid paradigm for whites' negotiation for a precarious foothold in post-apartheid South Africa, then his conception of their fall from grace evokes near absolute depravity". (60)

In a sense, Coetzee has a word for whites. He tells them that it is no longer business as usual. They must start all over again as blacks have taken over. Their position is demotion from authority to servitude. They must see white collapse in the language of Lucy: *"It is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity". (205)*

To establish the level of violence in South Africa, the idea that blacks are in control and they are aided by the police, Ettinger: *"...a surly old man who speaks English with a marked German accent"* (100) brings the message home to both Lucy and her father. His statement confirms that emigration of whites in South Africa has begun. Ettinger is the only one left in Africa of his family:

"Yes, I never go anywhere without my beretta", he observes once they are on the Grahamstown road. He parts the holster at his hip. 'The best is, you save yourself, because the police are not going to save you, not anymore, you can be sure.

Is Ettinger right? If he had had a gun, would he have saved Lucy? He doubts it. If he had had a gun he would probably be dead now, he and Lucy both" (100).

Coetzee is now an Australian citizen. The question is, did he leave South Africa because of possible black reprisal action after the collapse of Apartheid? When apartheid was at its peak, blacks were at the receiving end. With its collapse, the heat is turned on whites. At the height of her lamentation after the rape, Lucy is brooding and in tears. David comes to console her. This discussion shows that whites are now receiving what blacks had been getting:

"This is not an easy thing to talk about", he says, "but have you seen a doctor?" She sits up and blows her nose. "I saw my GP last night"

'And is he taking care of all eventualities?' 'She', she says. 'She, not he. No' – and now there is a crack of anger in her voice- 'How can she? How can a doctor take care of all eventualities? Have some sense'.

He gets up. If she chooses to be irritable, then he can be irritable too. 'I'm sorry I asked', he says."(105)

Lucy's saucy language irritates her father, but that is not all. She hardly addresses him better than that. David occupies a low position in his daughter's esteem. She does not defer to him; she talks to him as a superior to an inferior person. David's acquiescence is an acceptance of his degeneration.

In elevating blacks in status in his novels, Coetzee also aspires to probe their nature which can be found in all men. By x –raying the nature of David Lurie, a white, he explains that there can be bestialities in all men. Through Petrus, a black peasant, he continues this exploration. He has both admirable and objectionable natures. David observes these natures, noting it could be found in all races:

"What appeals to him in Petrus is his face, his face and his hands. If there is such a thing as honest toil, then Petrus bears its marks. A man of patience, energy, resilience. A peasant, a paysan, a man of the country. A plotter and a schemer and no doubt a liar too, like peasants everywhere, honest toil and honest cunning". (117)

By implying that Petrus is unreliable, Coetzee is not evaluating it from the angle of race; he is probing peasants in all societies. Although it is a uniquely South African story, it has universal application. It is this universalism in the art of Coetzee that draws universal appeal. Coetzee is skeptical about human nature, in both white and black. He does not even believe that the overthrow of white minority rule will usher in the desired justice and good governance. He even doubts the post- apartheid security forces. Andrew O' Hehir agrees with this when he says:

"In his sober, searing and even cynical little book "Disgrace", J.M. Coetzee tells us something we all suspect and fear that political change can do almost nothing to eliminate human misery. What it can do, he suggests, is to reorder it a little and half-accidentally introduce a few new varieties. This view should not surprise any of the great South Africa novelist's readers ---- "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" (1)

Petrus does not assist Lucy and her father to get at the rapists. He prefers lukewarm withdrawal while the culprits escape justice. And even during the party in his house when David sights one of the rapists, he does nothing. David and Lucy's entrance at the party provokes a stir, even a violation. Lucy's brittle nature has been smashed by the rape. There seems racial undertone in Petrus' protection of the youths. Petrus tells David that the youths cannot go to jail even when arrested. His evasive answers infuriate him: *"I know, I know. He is just a youth, he cannot go to jail, that is the law, you cannot put a youth in jail, you must let him go!"* (118)

Petrus later comments imply complicity and assurance that the deed will not be repeated, despite David's protestations:

"'Lucy is safe here,' he announces suddenly.

'It is all right. You can leave her, she is safe'.

'But she is not safe, Petrus! Clearly, she is not safe. You know what happened here on the twenty-first'.

'Yes. I know what happened. But now it is all right?'

'Who says it is all right?'

'I say'." (138)

Bev also trusts Petrus in a way that David could not understand. David summarizes his daughter's ordeal in this language: *"It was history speaking through them", he offers at last. 'A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestor"* (156)

It is David coming to full realization that it is injustice turning out itself, now creating new victims. Before he leaves his daughter's holdings, he is thoroughly fed up with their quarrel over Lucy's inertia, her refusal to press charges, Petrus' unreliability and the idea that his presence is no longer desirable. Andrew O' Helir sums up David state of mind at the end of the novel thus: *"If David actually reclaims some dignity by the end of "Disgrace", it is only because he gives up everything, gives up more than a dog ever could-his daughter, his ideas about*

justice and language, his dream of the opera on Byron and even the dying animals he has learned to love without reservation, with thought of himself" (4)

Lucy's sexual liberalism can be explained in the unreliability of all men. It is perhaps what turns her into a lesbian. White or black, she believes that the concept of sex for men is to kill a woman and not to get real sexual satisfaction from her. She sees sex as dislike or hatred, a desire to turn a woman into an object, to use her and then dump her. In her replies to her father, she does not hide this hatred and suspicion. But what makes her case pathetic is that she feels there is no escape and that the phallic will has taken over. To see sex or rape as murder, Lucy is suggesting that no legal action can expiate the act. It is no use punishing the rapist. Her refusal to press charges suggests that to co-operate and leave him with his conscience is a more rewarding act. Is Lucy seeking a religious course to report her violation?

"Hatred --- when it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me anymore. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in, exiting afterwards -- leaving the body behind covered in blood-doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?" (158)

When David wants to know if her reaction would have been different if she had been raped by white men, Lucy argues that she would still feel the same way, white or black. Then she shocks her father: *'I think of you as one of the three Chimpanzees, the one with his paws over his eyes' (161).*

The condescension of Lucy reaches its peak when she agrees to marry Petrus with her pregnancy and to be his third wife. She does not want to sleep with him but to shelter under his wing. Petrus tells David that: *'A woman must be marry' (202).* It shows his illiteracy and a subtle threat that Lucy either accepts or faces the consequences. Lucy's explanations worries David and reap at his racist sentiments, practically speaking: *'There is only Petrus left. Petrus may not be a big man but he is big enough for someone small like me. And at least I know Petrus. I have no illusions about him. I know what I would be letting myself in for'.* (204).

Lucy agrees to give up the land, the title deeds but not the house: *'I will become a tenant on his land' (204),* she says. It is difficult to see the line of thought of Lucy except that of a woman who has reduced her existence to the level of a dog. Black supremacy in South Africa, to my mind does not include the depersonalization of whites. There is something

unsettling as we come to the end of *Disgrace*. One feels he has thoroughly enjoyed the story but is not sufficiently carried along, in what Elizabeth Lowry evaluates as:

“In spite of its naturalistic setting, the schematic organization of Disgrace works against a ‘realistic’ reading—in Coetzee’s phrase, it operates in terms of its own paradigms and myths” of these, the most powerful are ones that Coetzee has used before to describe the colonial situation: the unnatural parent – child and male-female bonds, in which the normal ties of affection are fraying or already severed” (6)

Both Petrus and Pollux, one of the rapists, are symbolic figures in the novel. Petrus has a gold commercial soul that is almost unfigurative except we analyse his needs. He barely demonstrates excitement and when he does, it is in a Machiavellian way. Although he works for Lucy and even wants to marry her, there is no evidence that he truly loves her. His only objective is the total possession of Lucy and her property in a progressive and unrelenting fashion. He uses Pollux to dehumanize her and having won his way, he tightens his grips as a tiger would the neck of a goat. Petrus is an example of a primitive paternalism while Pollux is his instrument, the anvil he uses to crush the head of his victims. Lowry says that:

“The truth is that there are two patriarchs in Disgrace: that Petrus represents a force for oppression without pity as great, potentially, as David Lurie. Lurie has made use of Soraya and Melanie, but there is a lethal symmetry in the fact that his own daughter is used in turn and becomes a chattel of the Petrus clan—a by owner, without a voice --- what Disgrace finally shows us is the promised victory of one expansionist force over another, with women as pawns, the objects of punitive violence” (11)

Evaluating the overall reading of *Disgrace* reveals varied reactions- for Michael Heyns, it is “liberal funk”. Dan Roodt has forewarned white South Africans to be prepared to atone for the ills of the past, represented by apartheid. Michael Marais’s review is interesting:

“Without offering a political programme, Disgrace therefore does imply what is needed if one is to address the endless struggle for affirmation that determines colonial and post-colonial history. It proposes a renegotiation of interpersonal relations which would install respect for the otherness of other beings and thereby obviate the possibility of violence”. (38)

Criticism of literature has always stressed that it is not enough to simulate the ills in a society. It is good to chronicle what is objectionable, but art, a good art, should point the way

forward. If this yardstick is used, it is a minus for this great work, *Disgrace*. Coetzee in other words, should put forward an alternative political programme and not just condemn what is on ground.

David's prudish analysis of Lucy's intransigence in the aftermath of her rape may foreground Coetzee's consistent ambivalence. If David cannot save himself at his academic trial and even Lucy from the gang that comes to rape his daughter, how can he protect her from future attack? By holding on to this, Coetzee is saying that the change in baton does not necessarily guarantee a safe South Africa.

Michael Morais believes it is not possible to have an ethical action in both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The collapse of political morality in South Africa is also the collapse of ethical reality. Jane Taylor argues that

"Disgrace considers the failure of a Western liberal tradition premised upon an 18th – century model of philosophical sympathy that is at the same time at the heart of commodity culture, a culture which contradictorily holds as sacred the absolute rights of the individual and the absolute value of private property." (25)

Considered from all angles, there is a consensus even among the critics of Coetzee that he is a very good writer. Elizabeth Lowry's submission will be accepted by many of his readers, particularly of *Disgrace*: "*Disgrace is the best novel Coetzee has written. It is a chilling, spare book, the book of a mature writer who has refined his textual obsessions to produce an exact, effective prose and condensed his thematic concern with authority into a deceptively simple story of family life*" (3).

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Dan Chima Amadi
HOW DO WE LOCATE J. M. COETZEE IN HIS NOVELS?
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MAN AND HIS ART IN TWO OF HIS NOVELS

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