

**BODY FETISHISM: J M COETZEE'S *DISGRACE* AS A REVELATORY STORY****Steve U. Omagu**

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[steviedearie@yahoo.com](mailto:steviedearie@yahoo.com)**Abstract**

Every writer fetishises with some themes; that is to say, some writers pay excessive devotion to certain thematic preoccupations and these are seemingly recurrent in the course of an author's writing which eventual becomes his fetish. For a seasoned writer like John Michael Coetzee, in the course of his expansive writing history, one of his dominant discursive fascination amongst others has been with -the body-human and nonhuman. This paper dismantles and deconstructs the body as handled by Coetzee in *Disgrace* (1999) under binaries like human/animal body in the throes of pain/pleasure; the body as a signification of freedom/oppression; expression/repression; victim/victimizer, power/powerlessness; self/other; black/white; normalcy/abnormality; desire/love, male/female, consequently revealing certain societal experiences like black racism and corrective rape in the contemporary South African society. The paper uses Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) focally, to demonstrate a comingling of the novelist's fascination or fetishisms to human and animal bodies to accentuate and reveal diverse intimations of human and animal conditions in South Africa and the world.

**Keywords:** The body, Fetishism, J M Coetzee, *Disgrace*, South Africa

**Introduction**

Every writer has a preoccupation that gradually builds into obsession or fixation. The writer is not individuated but operates within the principles and norms of a lived society; and in turn the society influences the writer, the reader and the texts in a combinatorial process of meaning making. The writer grows under several socialization processes which places certain responsibilities on the writer as an individual of a society, consequently, the writer's fascinations are borne out of these different personal and societal experiences; these defines the writer and apparently adjudged the writer a serious and an important one. Hence, the more expansive a writer's corpus, the more lucid one can indicate the writer's fetishism or fascination.

For J M Coetzee, the body, be it human or animal is not a tabula rasa but rather a

montage of diverse signification. Coetzee argues this in *Foe* thus, “[his] is a place where bodies are their own signs”(157). This calls for a double scrutiny and interrogation of the body as an extended metaphor of the strictures and structures of the South African state. The ubiquity of the body becomes a melting pot of paradoxes highlighting apartheid and post apartheid complicity of both white and black inhuman rule. Also, Coetzee uses several bodily communicative imageries to capture the body as a vehicle of storytelling whereby the body becomes a montage of voices and meaning.

Indeed, Coetzee presents the body as an organic embodiment of meaning-making organism working together to represent physical and psychological disabilities, traumas and mutilation of humans and nonhuman bodies. Because no writer exists in a vacuum, the body in Coetzeean works is further used as a vehicle for reinventing the

blurred spectra of discontent in the discourse of South African history. By so doing, Coetzee recreates history by foreshadowing past and present ills by both black and white of the South African society. Also, this work seeks to explore the works of Coetzee as he uses the body as an agency of signification whereby inundation of diverse philosophizing on different subjects like sex, violence, power, history, prostitution, victimization, race and the future of South Africa are described and analyzed.

What is inarguably significant about Coetzee might not be the copious works produced, but his unique craftsmanship and he uses his inimitable style to treat diverse themes in the course of the gamut fiction and nonfiction produced. Coetzee also argues about the recurrent treatment of the meaningfulness of the body as a medium of truth telling. Therefore the body becomes a significant epicenter in literature as Coetzee uses the body as a special character in the discursive unearthing of morbid and taboo subjects in South African literature. In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee observes that, 'The body is not "that which is not" and the proof that *it is* is in the pain that it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt... it is not that one grants the authority of the suffering body: the suffering takes this authority: that is its power' (248). This engages the reader in diverse ideological parameters or reinterpretations bearing on the signification of the how and why Coetzee fetishizes human and animal bodies. Hughes Conrad Lawrence Marquard argues on the importance of the body in the discourse of Coetzeean works thus:

The body in Coetzee is an expressive body that speaks with a powerful voice, an utterance that further defamiliarises the reader...the body is illusive and enigmatic...not meaningless...it holds a strong significance at many levels in the prose (9)

Fetishism as a concept is replete in several discourses like Cultural Studies, Psychoanalysis, Arts and some Social Sciences. Be it body, object or commodity fetish, the central focal point is fixation. I am arguing for an engagement with the concept of fetishism that recognizes the fact that a person spends too much time doing, thinking or writing about a particular thing or an "extravagant devotion" (*Merriam-Webster*) to an idea; not only a paraphilic diagnosis as projected in Freudian psychology. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines Fetishism as an "excessive attachment or regard". Elankathiaravan, B. A and Kalaichelvi, in their article "Fetishism in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarian*" argue for an understanding of systemic fetishism as, "an item possessing some sacred, magical...power. It is like an icon but different. Like an icon a fetish is also an object, person, concept, theory or philosophy" (215). Therefore the concept of the body becomes pivotal as the hub of J M Coetzee works. The reality of Coetzee's fetishism according to Jon Stratton is the "fixity of the social real [as being] achieved through the repetition of writing" (31) - a writing which depicts the body as a systematized world of signs.

Hence, this paper draws attention to Coetzee's fascination for the bodies of human and animal characters. These readings give vents to multifaceted levels of the philosophies of life and living, existence and death. Jean Baudrillard succinctly observes that the "the more the system is systematized, the more the fetishist fascination is reinforced" (14). Therefore, South Africa has undergone several systematized encumbrances from black and white in apartheid and post apartheid era as their historicities are captured persistently in Coetzee's works.

It would be totally erroneous to opine that Coetzee fictions as well as his fetishism are easily "analyzable"; it also complex to typify Coetzee's fiction into one neat category. His protracted literary life is a potential interpretive journey, his style is a medley of modernism, realism, post modernism

drawing from allegory, intersecting fiction and non-fiction with bare-skin realisms as seen in *Disgrace*. It is observed that Coetzee embodies the body in his fiction with literal, metaphorical, symbolic, allegorical and allusive meaning as deduced right from his first novel *Duskland* (1974) to *Childhood of Jesus* (2013) so as to extrapolate human conditions. Indeed, James Wood is of the opinion that:

There are few writers in English who equal this South African writer's intelligence. And few are as bleak, as painfully, repetitively honest. Coetzee returns to the same pain as if a joint were being broken again and again in the same place. Yet, somewhat unfair thoughts are stirred by *Disgrace* which is a very good novel, almost too good a novel. It knows its limits and lives within wary self-governance. It is truthful, sparse and compelling, often moving, thematically legible: that is to say, it does not overflow interpretation. (2)

Being a white writer in South Africa during the pre and post apartheid era can be very complicated and tasking but his painful repetitiveness in his charting the pain, violence and race is over emphasized. There are several body motif and metaphors generated by the mutilated and violated body; consequently, Coetzee also expresses characters relationship with their body and of human and animal bodies around them. These "bodily communications" argue for diverse socio-political, cultural, and economic readings of the South African society as a microcosm of some African countries. Therefore, the body becomes a vehicle heavily anchored to convey on several levels the burdens of South Africa.

It is pertinent to note that, Coetzee's fictions implicate all but distances itself from providing solutions. Regardless of animal or human body, this paper seeks to express the inhumanities that surround man and animal existence in South Africa in

particular and the world in general. He concretely x-ray human and animal morbidity, disfigurement and violence to foreground the dystopia of the past and forewarns the South African future. Finally, this paper foregrounds the complex issue of cohabitation between blacks, coloured and white, as well as intricately depicting and revealing the body as a site of power struggle, marginality, homophobia and racial subjugation.

### Scripting the Human Body

The apartheid era like most tyrannical, totalitarian and autocratic regimes created diverse ways for creativity. The South African government in order to maintain the reign of powers over its subjects institutionalized systemic censorship to ensure that writers write what the government wants. Writers were faced with the challenge of passing across their messages without bringing the law to their doorsteps or restricting their genius. Many writers faced dire consequences for their "stubbornness": several writers were incarcerated, others had their books banned and others fled the country either through self exile or government imposed exiles. While others were even murdered, Steve Biko was alleged to have been murdered and his torture is believed to be captured in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarian* (1987).

Therefore, these limitations by the state security apparatuses encouraged the South African writer to be robustly creative and innovative in their writings. Some liberal writers like Breyten Breytenbach, Alex la Guma and Nadine Gordimer were more realistic and their writings were protest inclined and as such encountered some confrontation with the law. Writers like Coetzee, embroiled their writing in ways that seemingly elude the aggressions of the censorship board. It was believed that no one could escape the madness of the censorship, but Rita Scholtz, a hench-woman of the censorship board observes that Coetzee's works are emblematic of "aesthetic literariness and elusiveness" (15) and this judgment fails to unearth the veneer of the hidden codes of scripting the body with

racism, violence and pain inherent in Coetzee's literatures.

Therefore, Coetzee's fixation on the human body was also to evade the shackles of censorship and the apparatuses of power during the apartheid era. Hence, the human body becomes a trajectory where the inhumanity, disillusionment of the South African experience are scripted in vibrant but elusive forms like allegory, metaphor, symbolism, metonymy and other literary techniques that tends to masks the author's engagements. At a point, the human body becomes a cogent part of characterization, a visible and vibrant character that speaks and act out a prescribed position.

Because of the convoluted nature of his writing, J. M. Coetzee's oeuvres have garnered several intimations, re-readings, mis-readings and over-reading of his nuanced style of writing. One of the major focus of Coetzee's writing that has been relegated is his portrayal of the body-human or non-human- in the throes of pain, repression, desire, love, denial, violation, deformity or disfigurement. Indeed, many of Coetzee's characters bear vivid pain or "deformity" in one way or the other. They apparently portrayed possessing one form of physical or psychological ailment that transmute into some form of sickness, disease, illness, devilry or disfigurement. We can roughly ascribe his major characters with some of these bodily communications thus: in *Duskland* (1974), Eugene Dawn is psychopathic and sociopathic while Jacobus Coetzee is a schizophrenic megalomania. In *Heart of the Country* (1977), Magda is depicted as a mad spinster; in *Foe* (1986) we have the castrated and "tongueless" Friday. Meanwhile, in *Waiting for the Barbarian* (1980) Colonel Joll is a sadist who enjoys torturing his victims. *Life and Times of Michael K*, (1983) depict Michael K as a club footed and hair-lipped reject of the society. Also, Elizabeth Curren's body is cancer infested in *Age of Iron* (1990); in *Disgrace* (1999), we have the libidinal Prof David Lurie; the senile Elizabeth in

*Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and the amputee Paul Rayment in *Slowman* (2005). In fact, Coetzee's rich imagination portrays deformed, diseases and symbolic characters whose bodies become variegated testament of their society and era.

Apart from evading the shackles of censorship by burying fictional meaning in bodily communications, Coetzee sometimes presents bodily tropes of jagged pain; violence and unhappiness drawn from his own personal experiences meld his fiction to his realities thereby making the body both an integral intercourse of expressive and repressive meaning. To put it badly for instance, Coetzee brutally expresses as well as represses his personal nightmare through the portrayal of these characters. For instance, Billy O'Callaghan speculates that: Elizabeth Curren's cancer and attitude in *Age of Iron* is likened to that of Coetzee's own wife, Phillipa Jubber; meanwhile, Gisela, Coetzee's daughter inherits Magda's illness in, *In the Heart of the Country*; while Nicholas, his deceased son is linked to Pavel, Dostoevsky step-son in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994). Indeed, *The Evening Standard* asserts that Coetzee's biographer J C Kannemeyer writes of Coetzee's misfortune and the amazement that "someone could experience so much unhappiness and yet sustain himself and continue to work" (2). In the same vein, Martin Woessner in "The Writing of Life" hypothesizes that Dawn's quarrel with his wife and her infidelity in *Duskland* are personally drawn from Coetzee's own marriage, Woessner claims that though these are contained in the manuscript but are omitted in the published work. Woessner (2016) further asserts that, "Coetzee carries the banner for the relentless artistry of subtraction" (9). Therefore the body becomes palimpsest of rewriting personal and by so doing subtract and transplant reality to fiction and vice versa. Indeed, David Attwell buttress the fact that "Coetzee's writing is a huge existential enterprise, grounded in fictionalized autobiography" (12). Coetzee himself accentuates this position of 'deletion' and blurring the lines between fiction and reality by proclaiming: "All autobiography is

storytelling, all writing is autobiography” (*Doubling the Point* 22). This tapestry shows that Coetzee's life has been intensely touched with catastrophe and he stylishly fetishizes his pain into the large body of his oeuvres.

However, it is not a chance occurrence when Coetzee uses the body in his work but it becomes commonplace that Coetzee articulates displacement, dispossession, subordination, inanity and sexuality by concealing and revealing personal, racial, national, and universal pains of the society. Despite his personal sorrows, Coetzee is strongly committed to propagating and representing issues of the body, with its frailty, suffering, pain and violation acting as a conscience clock to the vicious trappings of the old and the new South Africa. He stresses the import of using the body thus:

If I look back over my fiction, I see a single standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not 'that which is not', and the proof that it is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trails of doubt. (one cannot get away with such crudeness in fiction) let me put it badly: in south Africa, it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore the body ... a single standard set up and that standard is the body. (*Interview: Autobiography and Confession*, 248)

This single standard of scripting the body is cogently captured in his most controversial novel *Disgrace*. The novel begins with a geriatric white professor who assumes he has tackled the issue of sex by having a weekly rendezvous with a black prostitute. In his weekly visits, Professor David Lurie age 52 draws the reader to warp labyrinths of sex—a recurrent fetish of Coetzee's. Superficially, one will assume that Coetzee spends ample time actually engage in the discussion of sex but this is not an

excremental sex of the pornographic type but rather an implicating and edifying sexual intercourse with diverse intersections and intimations. For his lack of discretion, Lurie is rejected by the prostitute he visits and the need for sex resurfaced. To assuage his sexual needs, Lurie gets sexually involved with one of his coloured student.

Sex in *Disgrace* is a serious business, we have some sex and sexing in the novel and each tells a different story. David Lurie is constantly thinking of sex like a teenager and this makes one to come to the understanding that sex in itself is not a problem but how one goes about thinking and having it that culminate into it being a problem.

Apart from his sexual intensity, Lurie is an intense man in many ramifications: “he lives within his income, within his temperament, within his emotional means. Is he happy By most measurements, yes, he believes he is” (*Disgrace*, 2). The intensity to which he pursues his sexual needs is expressed from the very beginning and he blames his sexual needs on his long history of being surrounded by women thus:

Childhood was spent in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sisters fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives and daughter. The company of women made him a lover of women, and to an extent, a womanizer... 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).

Right from his infancy, his company is with women, his is culpable for his unbridled lust by his own making not by the society's but by what Camille Pagila observes to be “a failure of social conditioning”(3). This is an individual conditioning that even the society cannot instill. It is that conscience clock, that repressiveness that ticks against societal vices. Instead of conditioning his desires, he allows it to run amok because.

Lurie's supposed remedy for his sexual problem is to make do with prostitutes. Sex with one of the prostitutes, Soraya is equated to that of the snake "lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at it hottest" (3). Here, we perceive the absence of true passion of which Lurie, a connoisseur of sex craves for, instead, we see aphysical, emotional and spiritual distancing that is associated with prostitution as commercialism, commodification, transactional and even capitalistic. Even though Lurie "likes giving her presents"(5), this does not alter their relationship of buying and selling but rather shunts David perception of himself as a "performer". Soraya's rejection deflates Lurie's ego and leads to the assumption that sex bought is transient and unfulfilling. On the other hand, sex with Melaine though forceful communicates a greater danger, joy, achievement, fulfillment and even shame because it is something stolen yet very enjoyable in spite of the currency of disgrace. Sex becomes a vehicle of historical edifice expressing the negotiation of power/powerlessness of women. For instance, Soraya's rejection of Lurie projects women assertiveness even as prostitute - "a commodity" paid for.

It is pertinent to note that, during the colonial era, the black South African woman is valueless and treated a little better than an animal. Coetzee vividly captures this in *Duskland* thus:

Dutch girls carry an aura of property with them. They are first of all property themselves; whereas a wild Bushman girl is tied to nothing. She may be alive but she is as good as dead. She has seen you kill the men that represented power to her... you have become power itself and she nothing, a rag you wipe yourself and throw away she is completely disposable. She is something for nothing, she can kick and scream but she lost. That is the freedom she offers, the freedom of

the abandoned. She has no attachment, not even the well-known attachment to life. She is the ultimate love you have borne your own desires alienated in a foreign body and pegged out waiting for your pleasure. (69)

This juxtaposition of Dutch girls against the black female body is clear enough stressing that sex is always about power. The black body in the post apartheid South Africa is no longer insignificant unlike in the Colonial apartheid era but comprehensively important because of the aura of power the race commands. Jon Stratton avers that, "the mistake is to assume, as did Freud, that individuals have a libidinal drive which is not affected in its degree by the society in which they live". Therefore, the colonial, apartheid era and the post-apartheid period are heavily marked by an epochal transformation in sexuality, violence and bodily communications. These differences Coetzee aptly captures in *Disgrace* in his constant referral to "the old days" (116) which is better seen as a "hangover from the past" (40). Lurie's failure to recognize and take seriously the sociopolitical changes and the attendant realities act as the springboard to his disgrace. Consequently, "Sex [becomes] political" (Gayle Rubin, 3); also Paglia opines that "sex is power" (5); "Identity is power" (7) and Coetzee is fully aware of these theses. Apart from displaying sex between people of colour; Coetzee uses these inter-racial sexual metaphors to historicize the issues of female sexuality, political and racial manifestations in South Africa.

Most of Coetzee's works have been evaluated under the rubrics of female sexuality. Indeed, female critics claim he objectifies women in a rather reductionist way. The female bodies he writes of are symbolic and equally maligned in one way or the other. Based on the foregoing, there are six graphic exploration of sexual act in *Disgrace* and they all give vents to diverse readings. The first is that of first Soraya- the prostitute- the panacea to Lurie's robust lust. The second Soraya is a replacement that is sexual incapable and Lurie quickly rejects her. The Sorayas are merely a

means to an end; they are viewed as commodities and objectified as such. The name Soraya becomes synonymous with prostitution, "Soraya has become, it seems, a popular nom de commerce"(8). The third sexual act is Lurie's mis/adventure with Dawn, a secretary in his department: the sex is bad, Lurie avoids her and this hurts her feelings. Here, we see repression and expression in the part of Lurie and Dawn respectively. Dawn is married and expresses her sexual liberality by engaging in consensual sex; on the other hand, Lurie feels repressed because sex with Dawn unsatiated; with Dawn, Lurie ruminates over castration. Dawn further opens Lurie's mind to the issues of aging and death. The poor sex with Dawn also act as a harbinger of what to come which eventually prompted Lurie to look for avenues to satisfy himself. "Sex" with Melaine has polyphonic undertones of the rebirth of desire, the diatribes of politics, racial and scholastic readings. The rape of Lucy by black marauders carries the mark of violence against race, homophobia and lesbianism.

The sixth sexual act is that of Lurie with Bev Shaw: it focuses on Coetzee moralizing and philosophizing on the issue of sex. Here, Coetzee proposes that sex is fraught with symbols of what Paglia refers to as the "...representational, ritualistic acting of vanished realities... human beings are the only creatures in whom consciousness is so entangled with animal instinct... there can never be a purely physical or anxiety-free sexual encounter" ( 5-6). The sex between Lurie and Bev shows the freedom and the animalistic nature of sex especially within the institution of marriage. Coetzee is indirectly claiming that sex is repressed and expressed in marriage and this institution has gradually degenerated into a façade. To support this point, Imraan Coovadia, noted that Coetzee's Biographer J C Kannemeyer once writes of Coetzee having a wife swap with one of his colleagues during his time at University of Cape Town. However, Mike Marias sums up Lurie's disposition as

"conceiving himself as an individual who is free to realize his every desire even if this means violating the right of other individuals" (3). These "self veiled images" replete in Coetzee's work tends to draws out Coetzee's fixation with the idea of sex on different bodily, mental, emotional and social levels. These sexual strings if to be forever remembered argued Friedrich Nietzsche must, "be burnt in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory" (Horrel,3). The physical and the psychological torture, sex, violence and other traumas of which Coetzee's characters pass through accentuate their body scripting myriad of purpose.

One most topical re-reading of *Disgrace* (1999) is hinged on the "sex/rape" of Melaine and the rape of Lucy. Georgina Horrel in "One Settler, One Bullet and the New South Africa" strongly stressed this position: "The novel is written from Lurie's perspective, but it is Lucy who lies at the most crucial moment of violent inscription in the text. It is on and through her body that the terms for white remembering are sketched (3). Hornell further contends that there are gaps in *Disgrace* "which nonetheless gestures unmistakably to the inscription of guilt on gendered body. The body is a suitable site for the inscription of guilt as well as an apt place for the exacting of penalty, is by no means an unwritten text". This truism of Coetzee's indebtedness to the body has gathered substance right from his early writings to "become a tablet, notepad, for the text which must be obeyed for debts to be paid" (Horrell, 6).

The body in pain and the body violated become elaborate mediums of education. For instance, Colonel Joll in *Waiting for the Barbarian* displays white supremacy by writing pains on the barbarian girl thus:

First my leg was badly broken, then my eyes, "it was a fork, a kind of fork with only two teeth. There were little knobs on the teeth to make them blunt. They put it in the coal till it was hot, then they touched you with it, to burn you, the man brought it very close to my face and makes me look at it. They

held my eyelids open I could not see,  
that is where the iron touched me".  
(*Waiting for the Barbarian*, 41).

Here, Coetzee situates pain as a tool oppressor willfully use. Both white and blacks employ violence, torture and brutality to maintain or check resistance or rebellion. Apart from deforming the barbarian girl, Colonel Joll emphasizes the strictness the empire- any state, empire, country black or white employ to stymied rebellion. The dynamic nature of pain, torture and violence on the body is also represented in *Disgrace* though not as graphic as in Coetzee's other texts. Coetzee shows a commanding drama of power reversal and the attendant realities that come with sociopolitical changes. The fragmented body and psyche pivotal in the discourse of *Disgrace* pans out in two episodes of rape: Lurie's "rape" of Melaine and that of the black marauders of Lurie's daughter- Lucy. These acts of rape, sex and sexuality happen in a racially altered times in South Africa giving the body a responsibility as an "active signifier" in scripting socio-political issues and other trappings to demonstrate hegemony of power.

### The subject of animal lives

Coetzee is continuously fascinated with the subject of animals. This fetishism for animal lives and death is a recurrent position in the works of Coetzee. In J M Coetzee's previous works like *Boyhood* and *Elizabeth Costello*, the characters of his mother and Elizabeth Costello echo important aspects of animal life and death. Elizabeth Costello is presumably Coetzee's alter ego, pays attention to the affairs of animals to show how heavily significant our interactions, treatment and representation of animal is and should be. In fact Coetzee, through the lens of Elizabeth Costello likened animal slaughterhouses to Nazi butchery. In one of Costello's lectures she stresses:

Let me say it openly: we are

surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, live stocks ceaselessly for the purpose of killing them... *how we treat animals is of no importance except insofar as being cruel to animals may accustom us to being cruel to men.* (119-120).

Coetzee has always operated under the minimalistic tendency of which less means more and this is cogently captured in the sermonizing of Elizabeth Costello above about the enterprise of animal rights. Costello like Coetzee believes that the poor handling and treatment of animals is tantamount to the poor treatment and handling of our fellow humans. Richard Alan Northover observes that even though Costello, a Socratic figure is far more outspoken and blatant than Coetzee on some important issues but Coetzee's view is closely linked to that of Elizabeth Costello (3). This further meld the figures of Coetzee and Costello in one combinatorial unity as earlier stated, in the topical discourse of animal body.

One dimension for the elaborate use of animals in Coetzee's works appears to be that of which the treatment and the image of animal are representational of the silence and voicelessness of the repressed and the powerless. Animals like dogs and other domesticated animals are protectors of the powerless and vulnerable of the society. They are also used as pets and pacifiers as seen in the case of Lucy. As Lurie flees to Lucy for succor in a smallholding in "Salem on the Grahamstown-Kenton road in the Eastern Cape" (9); Lurie realizes that his daughter Lucy alone; lives a simple life, has no mate (male/female- even Helen, Lucy's lesbian partner is away and Lucy's mother has left the country). Lurie comes to the realization that "dogs still mean something" (60). She is surrounded by black folks and uses the dogs as protector. The watchdogs show Lucy's helpless disposition as a defenseless white



woman farmer in a post apartheid South Africa and heightens the lawless state of affairs “in a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man”(110).

Animals, especially dogs are pivotal in the discourse of the novel *Disgrace*. Apart from protecting the defenseless and being company to a lonely Lucy the dogs meld into everything and every situations “they [dogs] are part of the furniture, part of the alarm system. They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things” (*Disgrace*, 78). In spite of their loyal protective cover, animals are taken for granted. Coetzee depart from a national usefulness of dogs as protector in times of violence to a personal and individualistic importance of dogs.

Many animals are referred to in *Disgrace*; apart from Lucy's dogs and the sheep Petrus acquired for the feast, there are several other animal metaphors strewn everywhere in the novel. Early in the novel, Lurie's compares sex with Soraya as that of snakes. This appears strange as snakes suggest a dangerous and depressing imagery. But the long and languid nature of snake sex appears to recreate the abundant and the sense of abandonment that the Sorayas of the past-pre-colonial, colonial, and apartheid times-connote. He further alluded to David being a predators, vixens and cubs at different times even though David is white, rich and a professor. At one point, David is a “strange beast” (56), another, “like a dog” (205). This shifting body metaphor can also be historicized under racial lenses depicting the shifting societal etiquettes even in sex and other matters.

David's disposition towards animals at the beginning is strained. When his daughter suggests he works for the animal welfare he objects:

I am sorry my child, I just find it hard to whip up an interest in the subject. It's admirable, what you do, what she does, but to me animal-welfare people are bit like Christians of a

certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat. (73)

It is clear from this conversation that he has no respect for animals or indulges in this kind of humanistic principle, but not so long after this, we find Lurie asleep in Katy's kernel. Surprisingly too, he volunteers to work with Bev Shaw at the animal welfare clinic. Also, while working there, he empathizes with the animals in their suffering and in addition contemplates on bring a dog into his musicals. He is fond of animals even when they are dead; he grows genuinely caring towards animal and this translate to his own redemption. Lurie spends money extravagantly on animals (211) which reflects his change of attitude towards animals. Hence, Coetzee succeeds in provoking us to reexamine our biases against animals. Above all his fetishisation with animals in his works especially in *Disgrace* is to question our inner self on what it means to be human; and through recognizing our kinship with animals we ascertain our humanity “not as a lord of creation but as one remarkable kind of creation amongst many” (Northover, 270).

### **Disgrace as revelatory**

Coetzee's *Disgrace* demystifies diverse sociopolitical constructions across racial, homophobic and socio-political curtains. These revelations are palimpsests that aid in the understanding of the novel's responsiveness to the society. One of the key revelations is theracial discrimination by blacks over their white counterpart. According to Phil Van Schalkwyk, “South African writers of all colour have been expected to write about apartheid and racial injustice” (10-11). Because the discursive options are minimal, Coetzee like most white writers of his era wrote extensively of the oppressiveness of racial discrimination. *Disgrace*, unlike his other works openly condemn the new racism- black racism in South Africa. Blacks can be adjudged racist because they have the political power and by this simple possession of the apparatuses of

power, a new form of racism is born.

In *Disgrace*, the reader comes across a repetitive idea of this form of racism, “all things are possible these days” (3) and other suggestive innuendos like, “not in our days” (89), “that's no joke in these days” (51) “these are puritanical times” (66) and everything is dangerous today (64) and the old prejudices brought into the light of day (23) are all emblematic of racial constructions that Coetzee did little to hide but rather gives vent to while juxtaposing the old and the new verities of the South African society

Derek Attridge opines that right from the beginning, the novel is 'concerned with “these days” in South Africa, with changed surroundings, a new mentality, different way of doing things. In the spheres of both religion and sex, passion and commitment appear to be giving way to organization and efficiency' (165). Also notable is the reversal of power with blacks maintaining power and upturning white certainties in all ramifications even in academics. For instance, in David Lurie's workplace at the University, he encounters a transformation that altered his relevance as white and privileged. David's ex wife is also quick to remind him of the realities of post apartheid South Africa when she warns him, “don't expect sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age” (44). This hints at the bitterness of the white South African who has been politically and ideologically displaced; and all their initial privileges lost to the great rationalization (167). Most telling is David Lurie's humbled defiance and comical presentation of his situation as, “a figure from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and up cast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron” (95). This represents the fears of David Lurie and most white South Africans at the comprehension of black ascendancy to power in South Africa.

New racial fears are also made concrete by

the shaming and disgrace of David Lurie and the rape of Lucy. David Lurie believes that his case of sexual harassment has racial undertone and the panel is more of a kangaroo court that was mainly there to pass judgment against a “colleague in a cold formalistic way” (51). This is Coetzee's rebuke of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) procedures. Consequently, Coetzee is revealing that, “There is a difference between pleading guilty to a charge and admitting you were wrong” (54). Coetzee encourages the reader to pass a bill of no confidence on Lurie's committee and on the TRC for demanding public confession against private repentance and penance. He believes that the spectacle of public confession takes away the genuineness in the whole TRC proposition; this is revealed to mean a criticism of ANC policies (Attridge, 165).

Another revelatory labyrinth in the novel is that of land and the struggle for ownership. For most African societies, land carries a significance that goes beyond the physical; hence land becomes a symbolic entity. Historically, most African countries that white colonizers decide to become permanent residence are always fraught with some challenges of who owns what. Lucy is in the countryside “because she loves the land and the old, *landliche* way of life. If that way of life is doomed, what is left for her to love (113). In *Disgrace* the farm's location serves to foreground the inescapable experiences of the past, using the setting of the farm as a threatening and potentially dangerous space where the “self” encounters the “other”, thereby establishing a state of transition, submission and potentially, also transformation (Smit-Marias and Wenzel: 4). Therefore, *Disgrace* is a Plaasroman (farm novel) that goes beyond the general construction of farm literature to show that, apart from the political shift there is an inundation in the transfer and reconstruction of the structures, ideals and privileges between white and black.

Post apartheid period has registered several attacks on white South African farmers especially those in rural areas like Lucy. In a

2014 report, “The reality of farm tortures in south Africa” these predominantly white “victims are often restrained, harmed with weapons such as machetes and pitchforks, burned with boiling water or hot irons, dragged behind vehicles and shot. Female victims are often raped during attacks” (cited in Andrew Bolt's “Why is This Silence Over South Africa's Lethal Racism”<sup>3</sup>).

Coetzee uses the anxiety created by power reversal to reveal that land reclamation and violence are means of which black power is asserted in a post apartheid South Africa. Indeed, the character of Lucy's neighbour Petrus undergoes a transformation in that from the beginning, he is servant farmhand cum- dogman and politely described as Lucy's assistant. He is a weather-beaten man of “patience, energy and resilience” (117). Petrus undergoes an upswing transformation that bespeaks of renegotiating or toppling the grand structure of apartheid on the issues of marriage, land and other socio-economic issues. Petrus' new found power amplifies tremendously and finally he becomes “his own master” (114) after the rape of Lucy. He becomes very powerful and even opt to marry Lucy and be her protector. Lurie notices this change in Petrus and believe it to be new standards of the new South Africa. Lurie bluntly tells Bev Shaw that, “Petrus in my opinion, is itching for Lucy to pull out... it may not be his brainchild, but he certainly turned a blind eye, he certainly didn't warn us, he certainly took care not to be in the vicinity” (140). These certainties or assumptions become possibilities as seen in the self-exiled and exodus of white South Africans likes Coetzee immediately after the end of apartheid.

Another issue raised by Coetzee in *Disgrace* is moral uprightness. Coetzee mulls on the issue of marital fidelity, prostitution and lesbianism predict and reveals the upsurge of these thematic preoccupations. Lesbianism is new in the corpus of Coetzee's works. Coetzee questions the idea of homosexuality in

South Africa by interrogating the society's position about homosexuality especially lesbianism. A pertinent reading of Lucy's rape is that of corrective rape: a form of rape geared towards punishing perceived abnormal behavior and to reinforce societal norms (Martin, A et al, 5). It is also key to stress that sometimes these cases are borne out of homophobia and sexuality rather than race. According to Nkepile Mabuse in “Horrors of South Africa's Corrective Rape”, there are some men-folk who believe corrective rapes tend to fix the sexual aberration and are general caused by “drawing moral conclusions” therefore resulting in the believe in a sexual reorientation. Lucy's rape carries convoluted readings because apart from the fact that she is white, she is also a lesbian. Even when she pleads with the father to avoid reading the rape as racial; his father is of the assumption that Lucy believes she is paying for all the years of white inhumanity to blacks. Athol Fugard expresses his outrage in the same vein, “we are to accept the rape of a white woman as gesture to all the evil that we did in the past. That is a load of bullshit. That white women are going to accept being raped as penance for what was done in the past Jesus. It is an expression of a very morbid phenomenon, very morbid. (Attridge, 164). David re-echoes the morbidity of Lucy's case by stating, “No wonder they [lesbians] are so vehement against rape...raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow. Did they know what they were up to, those men Had the word got around ”(105).

Rather than reading the rape of Lucy as racial it is also proper to read her rape as corrective rape because she argues that as such. On the case of Lucy's rape, Lurie could have become intractable and narrow minded to assume that everything is about race or colour. Lucy could have been raped for many reasons not merely because she is white. Lucy tries to wrestle her father out of his racial thinking by stressing:

This has nothing to do with you, David. You want to know why I have not laid a particular charge with the police...the reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is

a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not... Stop it David! I don't want to hear of this talk of plagues and fires. I am not trying to save my skin. If that is what you think, *you miss the point entirely*...No you keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can't help you. (112)

Though disgrace is David's story but trying to write a woman's story and experiences is what Lucy is vehemently against. Just because the rapist are blacks does not certainly makes the raping racial. Carine Mardorossian keenly observes that Coetzee takes a horrific scene of violence and urges readers to view it not as the black hole of analysis, but as an opportunity to overhaul normative approaches to rape, justice, and human relationships. Readers are encouraged to rethink not just the assumptions through which black on white rape is viewed (Lucy's decision alone certainly urges them to do that) but also the deeply racialized way in which rape is naturalized precisely as a black on white crime. This is a vibrant appeal that is in itself reconciliatory and avoiding the one track reading that makes for the generality of several mis-readings of *Disgrace*.

In fact the idea of corrective rape cuts across racial barriers, blacks as well as whites have been raped accordingly and it is becoming very alarming because of the repeated and widespread nature of it. In this vein, Siphokazi Mithathi, South African director of Human Right Watch observes, "We have failed to make it understood that there is price for rape. Sexism is still deeply embedded here. There is still a strong sense among men that they have power over women, women's bodies and there is also a strong sense that there's not going to be consequences because most often there are no consequences"(*Indian Express*: 3). Therefore, Coetzee projects amongst other

ideas that some rape are systemic i.e be it corrective rape or otherwise, these cases are emblematic of a sickened system.

Another revelation demonstrated in the novel is that of reconciliation-the most positive image generated in the novel. Though Coetzee presents us with sexual liberties from both blacks and white frontiers but Lucy becomes a matrix of unification. Coetzee's empathy for dogs reveals his transformation from disgrace to redemption. Towards the end of the novel, we notice Coetzee and Petrus working together on the farm enforcing mutual respect for each other in spite of the historical piquancy. This is symbolic of the future of South Africa fraught with distrust. Coetzee presents us with personal reconciliation against group reconciliation as oppose to the demands of TRC. Another reconciliatory idea is that of Lurie going to the Isaacs to seek for forgiveness, though one can question his motive but his actions seems honourable.

### Conclusion

This paper looks at human and nonhuman body representation and how the novel *Disgrace* reveals certainties and probabilities in the post apartheid South Africa. The certainties are violence, rape, race, animal treatment and gender while the probabilities are hinged on what are the reasons for the perpetration of social vices in South Africa. The paper dissects and addresses genderized, racialized and violated body by showcasing repression and expression simultaneously. In the wake of this, the scripting of rape is heavily demystified and juxtaposed along colour lines. First, David Lurie tries to express racial sentiment for his daughter's rape by three black men but refuses to see anything wrong with his sexual relation with his student Melaine. In fact the male characters as fathers and workers (David Lurie, Petrus and Mr Isaac) generated different viewpoints to the reading of the various violations on the female body. Coetzee expects diverse readings just like various characters view the violated body differently: David see it as personal and racial; Petrus is silent on the issue while Mr Isaac merely moralizes. Therefore, this paper tries

to show the duality or rather the multiplicity of reading the body while stressing that there is no singularity or completeness in the reading of the body in the works of Coetzee.

Also, this paper brings to fore Coetzee's standpoint on corrective rape: the paper projects that Lucy's rape is more akin to her being a lesbian than being white. Pollux stands for the phallic- the black penis which is both symbolic and mythic to the rape issues in South Africa and Coetzee is wont to hint at it. This paper's position on corrective is heavily stressed and should be keenly considered in reading the rape of Lucy. Consequently, Coetzee warns the system for its laxity towards hate crime, violence and rape yet appeals for effective punitive measures for perpetrators.

Finally, Coetzee's most controversial novel has several palimpsests embedded in reading the body of humans and animals on the altar of correctness under the following topical issues: rape, violence, gender, race, inequality, land, exile, victimization, disgrace, empathy, salvation, and reconciliation. Coetzee's omission encourages participatory reading which is by its very nature salutary; hence, using the body motif, this paper moralizes and philosophizes on the issues of sex, animal ethics, aging, prostitution and betrayal. On the whole, the novel *Disgrace* calls for the protection and a better treatment of humans and non humans in all situations and all societies.

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