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Course

Date

*Disgrace*

John Maxwell Coetzee is a real phenomenon of modern literature. He is considered a mysterious and frightening author, whose novels depict the essence of human nature. Each book of the writer is taken by readers around the world with an incredible enthusiasm. Joseph Maxwell Coetzee is a winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003 (Poyner 5). One of the most famous novels of the author is *Disgrace*. It became the key work in the writer's career and a denominator in all of his future creations. At first, it seems that it is easily readable. However, the novel is not frivolous. It makes the reader think and experience feelings regarding the style, plot, images, and paradoxes of the novel. The main theme of the book is the fragility of human existence.

The action of the novel takes place in South Africa. In the center of the story, there is an educated man, a professor named David Lurie. Despite the current career, David is overwhelmed by many doubts and endless loneliness. His wife has long abandoned him, and the daughter has become a lesbian and now lives on a secluded farm in the heart of South Africa. David Lurie teaches at the University of Cape Town trying to finish the dissertation and engaging in regular contacts with prostitutes. His feelings to the dark-skinned student become a fatal mistake of his life. When the academic council learns of David's passion, they immediately accused him of violence and even racism. It is a characteristic feature of Coetzee's works that with the exception of the novel *Disgrace*, the author does not differentiate heroes by the color of the skin. The

author usually divides protagonists into persecuted and persecutors, executioners and victims, fed and hungry, and eventually, free and non-free.

In this novel, the author has attacked the universities. Traditionally, they are considered bastions of knowledge and temples of wisdom and freedom. Coetzee has demonstrated that an institution or an organization cannot be freer than people. The author has depicted pettiness and hypocrisy of the professors who sensing the danger posed by the behavior of their colleagues expelled him/her. University professors teach morality, but their behavior is immoral. They teach freedom while they expel the one who declared a right to be free. The writer shows professors' snobbery and their confidence in infallibility.

Professor Lurie does not see anything wrong in his attraction to the student. According to him, they are only a man and a woman. He defends the right of relationship even if it threatens his dismissal from the university because of immoral behavior. Lurie refuses to play the role in a university play entitled *Disgrace and Repentance* assigned to him. The roles are distributed. However, the main actor does not appear on stage preferring to plead guilty in advance and simply disappears. According to David Lurie, people live in the era of precisianism. Personal life has become a public domain. Besides, curiosity has gained respectability. Modern people need the performance and a television show. However, the main character does not want to organize such a show for people.

David Lurie literally seeks safety from disgrace in flight leaving the city. The character moves to the city where his daughter lives. He relives a dishonor situation there. However, this time, his daughter Lucy becomes a victim. In the novel, all the story lines are circled. In South Africa, he is faced with the real cruelty and humiliation. When locals have raped his daughter

and beaten David almost to death, he is overwhelmed with despair generated by extreme disgrace.

In spite of the linear structure and slightly predictable storyline, the novel makes readers think. Although the main character does not always cause sympathy, his emotional quest and desperate struggle with loneliness make the novel ideologically holistic. Loneliness is the main feeling that is traced in the novel. In the book *Towards a Transcultural Future*, it is stated that “Void has been identified as central to Coetzee’s work” (Davis 41).

*Disgrace* instantly attracted the attention of critics. There are mixed feelings regarding the novel. In the book *Literature and Ethics*, it is affirmed that “Since its publications in 1999, *Disgrace* has provoked mixed reactions within and across both academic and political circles for its bleak depiction of postapartheid-era South Africa” (Jernigan 302). Coetzee’s previous novels were not subjected to mass attention. It might have been associated with the excessive complexity of the novels. Many of his works lack sincere feelings and emotions. In contrast to them, the novel *Disgrace* has true feelings, vivid characters, and a clear storyline. Despite the fact that the novel differs from the previous ones written by the author, it also has many similarities. A common feature of all his novels is the mood of the book. John Maxwell Coetzee does not give readers a chance to believe that everything will certainly end well. He leaves his characters as if in the middle of the path, and the open ending allows readers think independently, which hardship the characters may face in the future.

Joseph Maxwell Coetzee is a world famous writer, whose works are imbued with freedom and free from prejudice. *Disgrace* is one of the most famous works of the author. The protagonist is David Lurie. He is a middle-aged professor – a boring and unremarkable person,

who has lost reputation and performance because of the connection with the student. The fragility of human existence is the main theme raised by the author.