

**The Poetics of Polyphonic Discourses:
A Critical Reading of J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace***

Subhajit Bhadra

Asst. Professor, Department of English, Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon, (Assam) India

The aim of this paper is to provide a critical reading of J.M. Coetzee's Booker winning novel *Disgrace* and to show how a variety of discourses merge within its textual universe that in term points towards its intrinsic strength. However, for the sake of critical convenience and also for a sustained focus, I have basically attempted to discuss four discourses contesting within the textual domain of *Disgrace*. These are: - (a) Post Colonial discourse (b) Patriarchal discourse (c) Moral and ethical discourse and (d) Aesthetic discourse.

In order to add strength to my arguments, I have made an attempt in this paper to balance theoretical standpoints with adequate textual reference. Though the central argument of the paper borrows its contours from the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the novel as a contesting site of multiple voices, yet there has also been an attempt here to incorporate and critically analyze other theoretical standpoints in context of the text. However, it is not a theoretical paper as there has been a conscious attempt to critically examine every theoretical perspective in light of the text.

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* was published in the last decade of the twentieth century when a number of critics as well

as thinkers were deliberating upon the possible and probable demise of the novel as a literary genre. In fact, V.S. Naipaul, one of the most celebrated and distinguished writer who is also a Nobel Laureate went to the extent of declaring the death of the novel but the irony lies in the fact that Naipaul himself subsequently wrote two novels titled *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*. *Disgrace* was published in 1999 which fetched the prestigious Booker Prize to J.M. Coetzee for the second time and it was basically because of the international popularity and world wide acclaim generated by the novel which ultimately witnessed Coetzee claiming the much deserved Nobel Prize in 2003. The harsh criticism that followed in South Africa after the publication of *Disgrace* compelled its author to leave for Australia and subsequently settle there. *Disgrace* is not only a powerful novel that provides a political critique of contemporary South Africa, but it is also an extremely rich novel of ideas and that is why it would not be an exaggeration to state that the novel is both Coetzee's masterpiece and swansong. Within the textual universe of the novel, a variety of discourses contest with each other, without canceling out each other and this in turn tempts one to view the novel as a poetics of polyphonic discourses that generates a

number of relevant debates and concerns.

The Russian critical thinker Mikhail Bakhtin was the first to consider the novel as a serious literary genre and he was also one of the foremost earlier thinkers who proved that the novel form was capable of engaging the attention and concentration of serious academicians. Bakhtin formulated his view on polyphony and carnivalesque in his celebrated book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929), the ideas of which were subsequently revised and expanded in *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963) and *Rabelais and his World* (1966). Bakhtin, as Rene Wellek argues in one of his essays, combines "...acumen, analytical power and historical eradication..." Bakhtin points out that Dostoevsky created a radically unique kind of novel he calls "polyphonic" i.e., it consists of independent voices which are fully equal, become subjects of their own right and do not serve the ideological position of the author. Bakhtin asserts – "In this actively polyglot world, completely new relationships are established between language and its object (that is, the real world) – and this is fraught with enormous consequences for all the already completed genres that had been formed during eras of closed and deaf monoglossia. In contrast to other major genres, the novel emerged and matured precisely when intense activation of external and internal polyglossia was at the peak of its activity; this is its native element. The novel could therefore assume leadership in the process of developing and

renewing literature in its linguistic and stylistic dimension". (*Epic and Novel*, 12) The assertion brings to light Bakhtin's preference of the novel as a unique literary genre that is capable of doing justice to the variety of linguistic and stylistic registers embedded within the texture and the structure of the narrative. The novel, for Bakhtin, turned out to be a form that could incorporate within its fabric, a number of different competing discourses, that he calls "polyphonic", which has, in turn, lent a valuable critical and analytical perspective to subsequent academicians and critics. As Michael Holquist points out – "The simultaneity of these dialogues is merely a particular instance of the larger polyphony of social and discursive forces which Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia." Heteroglossia is a situation, the situation of a subject surrounded by the myriad responses he or she might make within a particular point, but anyone of which must be framed in a specific discourse selected from the tering thousands available. Heteroglossia is a way of conceiving the world as made up of rolling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct markers. These features are never purely formal, for each has association with it a set of distinctive values and presuppositions " (*Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, 63)

As argued by Bakhtin and pointed out by Holquist the polyphonic voices in the novel contain various discourses, and each discourse has its own point of view, register, nuance and of course, a site of power. Since the history of human civilization down the ages, various

discourses have established themselves as potent forces during different periods and each discourse carries with it a distinctive set of values and site of power. It should always be kept in mind that discourse is inextricably related to power – politics and in fact, it can be asserted without any reluctance that each discourse uses a particular language to exercise power and thereby dominate a subjugate other discourses as ideologies as groups. In the recent years, discourse has gained importance through at least two different, simultaneous developments in the general theorizing of knowledge and a broadening of perspective in linguistics. Michael Foucault, the celebrated French intellectual historian signaled a seminal shift in epistemology through his unique theorizing of knowledge. As pointed out by Brown and Yule – “The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of purpose on functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs.” (Brown and Yule 1983:1) Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland also point out the pertinent perspective that Bakhtin brought to light.

“For Mikhail Bakhtin, all discourse is multi voiced, as all words and utterances echo other words and utterances derived from the historical, cultural and genetic heritage of the speaker and from the ways these words and utterances have been previously interpreted. In a broader sense then, ‘voices’ can be interpreted as discourses – positions, ideologies or stances that speakers and listeners take

in particular instances of co –constructed interaction.” (Jaworski and Coupland 1999:9)

Thus it is seen from above arguments how the novel as a literary genre becomes a site for contesting discourses and it becomes a hugely enriching experience when one applies Bakhtin’s formulation of polyphonic discourse in context of a densely textured novel like *Disgrace* which problematizes our understanding of every given value.

II

Looked at critically, *Disgrace* is a treasure trove for the post colonial critics but it should be borne in mind that a hackneyed or a unilayered post colonial perspective can cause massive injustice to the richness of the text that questions and often subverts many of the received assumptions associated with this specific theoretical discipline. Every text has a context of its own, a trajectory of its own and also a uniquely designed intention of its own. J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer have a unique place in the canon of the literature of the African Continent as they have to write within and from a context where the blacks have been at the receiving ends through a larger historical span. Both Coetzee and Gordimer because of their white identity already and always exhibit a tendency in their work to appear neutral, not to take sides. This however, contributes both to their strength and weakness as creative writers as they suffer from the anxiety of representation because more often than not they are unsure of their politics. While it is an accepted fact that J.M. Coetzee has been

less overtly political in his writings in comparison to Nadine Gordimer, it is this very political tentativeness that has defined and also in a way formulated and determined Coetzee's creative universe. He has always been more than eager to depict the bleak reality of his country beginning from his debut work *Dusklands* to the most recent of his publications *summertime*. Coetzee has ruthlessly and almost clinically depicted the darker and malicious designs of white racism during the apartheid in novels like *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* where the blacks were brutally dominated and tortured by the oppressed machinery of the whites. It should be kept in mind that South Africa never underwent formal colonization like the other African countries where oppression was the legal right of the white westerns. But South Africa had a long history of apartheid – a form of racial segregation that witnessed the utter deprivation and dehumanization of the blacks by the whites. *Disgrace* marks a conspicuous departure from the stereotyped and received postcolonial contours as it reverses the colonizer/colonized equation within the changed historical context of South Africa and the novel also interrogates certain set assumptions associated with post colonialism.

David Lurie, the central protagonist of the novel around whose fate the entire plot revolves behaves like a typical representative of the white western who has constructed a stereotyped image of the "Other" in his mind. Lurie teaches communications in a Technical University in Cape Town, has an

impulsive sexual affair with a black student Melanie Isaac and when the affair becomes publicly known, Lurie is asked to seek unconditional apology to save his job which he eventually refuses to do, loses his job, retreats into the rural where his daughter from the first marriage Lucy supposedly runs an autonomous farm, is subsequently beaten by a group of black rogues, sees his own daughter being gang raped and ultimately lives an animal existence in utter disgrace. David Lurie epitomizes the typical traits of the white colonial master both in his behaviour and action – such as seeing and framing the "Other" (in this context the blacks) in a derogatory manner, using abusive and offensive language while describing the "Other", an insistence on reinforcing the white western ethos wherever he goes, a stubborn refusal to understand the importance of dialogue with the "Other", a ruthless urge to dominate and subjugate the "Other" and an almost pathological disdain for everything related to and associated with the "Other". The postcolonial discourse in *Disgrace* becomes interesting as a result of the consistent clash between David Lurie's painful discovery of the fact that he has turned out to be the very "Other" that he always disdains in the changed political scenario of contemporary South Africa and his stubbornly foolish refusal to understand and accept this fact. When David Lurie withdraws to the rural location where his daughter Lucy ruins a farm he surprisingly discovers that a change in location also changes his identity. As Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani argue in their essay

“Crosscurrents, Crosstalk; Race, ‘Post Coloniality and the politics of Location’ – “...We would argue that the nation of the ‘post colonial’ is last understood in context of a rigorous politics of location, of a rigorous conjuncturalism. There are, then, moments and spaces in which subjects are ‘driven to grasp’ their positioning and subjecthood as ‘postcolonial’; yet there are other contexts in which, to use the term as the organizing principle of one’s analysis, is precisely to ‘fail to grasp the specificity’ of the location or the moment.”

Because of a twist in history David Lurie suddenly finds himself in a state from where he can only “look back in anger” as all his colonial pride and ego become meaningless. Petrus, a black farmer who helps Lurie’s daughter Lucy to manage here firm suddenly threatens to become the master that first dismays and then enrages David Lurie. When Lucy asks her father to help Petrus, he immediately retorts “Give Petrus a hand. I like that I like the historical piquancy. Will he pay me a wage for my labour, do you think?”(77). It is nothing but the anguish and disdain of the white master who is historically trained and privileged to dominate, to subjugate, to extract labour from the black without giving him the proper and due wage, who must degrade and dehumanize the black as the “Other” for the glorification of the self. Lurie here voices the collective anguish of the entire white population who find themselves at the receiving end because of the inevitable change in power equation in South Africa brought about by the April 1994 election. When David Lurie is singled by the black rogues he

finds the very marker of his colonial identity under threat,” He looks at himself in a mirror. Brown ash, all that is left of his hair, coats his scalp and forehead.” (97) Even when his own daughter has been raped in front of his eyes, he realizes that he still has been lucky to have escaped with a little, but this is only a momentary realization as the white colonizer is ingrained in his whole being. There is a German name Ettinger in the country who is one of the last sentinels of the white colonial pride as he held a licenced gun in his hand which is ineffective anyway. The readers are informed the “Ettinger is a surely old man who speaks English with a marked German accent. His wife is dead, his children have gone back to Germany, he is the only left in Africa”. (100) David Lurie’s psyche is so enmeshed in the white colonial vision that his every discourse is replete with a stubborn refusal to reach to the “Other”. When Bill Show, a black neighbour offers help to Lurie after the shattering violence unleashed upon him and his daughter by a group of black rogues, David Lurie behaves like a typical white westerner who always views the black man with disgust, and dismay. Lurie says, “Not one of them you can trust.” (109)

In contrast to David Lurie’s typical gesture of a white colonial master, his daughter Lucy provides a counter – discourse to white colonial ethos in *Disgrace* as she refuses to lodge an official complain against the wrong doers. It is not that Lucy is foolish in her behaviour, in fact, she is wiser than David Lurie as she understands and acknowledges that the days of the white

colonial master ruling over their slaves are over. When Lurie keeps on pestering her to lodge an official complaint, she replies “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. It is my business, mine alone.” (112). In answer to Lurie’s further interrogation “This place being what?” (112), Lucy replies “This place being South Africa.” (112). Lucy not only seems to contradict and counteract Lurie’s typical colonial discourse, she also challenges the white man’s stupidity arrogance devoid of any sting. The equation between the master and the slave is reversed by Lucy when she articulates the simple but horrifying fact (horrifying to the white western represented by David Lurie in *Disgrace*) to Lurie “I can’t order Petrus about. He is his own master.” (114) David Lurie also gradually realizes that history has turned towards a different direction when he thinks –

“In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one’s temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place. But though Petrus is paid a wage, Petrus is no longer, strictly speaking, hired help. It is hard to say what Petrus, strictly speaking... he sells his labour under contract, unwritten contract, and that contract makes no provision for dismissal on grounds of suspicion. It is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it and Petrus that he knows it.” (116-117)

Language plays a pivotal role in the postcolonial theoretical domain as it

becomes both a marker and a preserver of identity. As Dennis Walder points out in his book *Post – Colonial Literatures in English*, “In the history of colonialism and decolonization, the literary dimension is apparent not only in the themes and preoccupations of literary producers, but also and more profoundly in their chosen medium.” (42) David Lurie at least moves towards a road to realization when he thinks “He would not mind hearing Petrus’s story one day. But preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa.” (117) David Lurie’s paranoia regarding the future plight of his race is articulated when he thinks, “Petrus has a vision of the future in which people like Lucy have no place.”(118) There is an important feature in the standard post colonial discourse which brings to light how the white colonizer imagines and constructs territories through stereotypical preordained nations about the imagined space. Ania Loomba effectively and succinctly argues in her book *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* –

“The construction of racial differences had to do both with the nature of the societies which Europeans visited, the class of people who were being observed, as well as whether trade or settlement was the objective of the visitors. The crucial point is that such constructions were based on certain observed features, the imperatives of the colonists, and preconceptions about the natives.” (109-110)

David Lurie reinforces the same colonial discourse when the readers come across the sentence “To Rosalind in darkest Africa.” (121) Lurie envisions a future when his race will again dominate the so called inferior races but as he indulges in such an imagined utopia, he also laments the collapse of the colonial “grand narrative” – “By the time the big words come back reconstructed, purified, fit to be trusted once more, he will be long dead.” (129) When Lucy accepts Petrus as her protector and subsequently declares her intention of atoning of r the crimes of her race by marrying Petrus, David Lurie is reduced to the stature of a mute spectator . It is a historical irony when a black man becomes a white woman’s protector and Lucy articulates a spine – chilling truth to her father when she says “It was history speaking through them ... 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 ancestors.” (156) David Lurie turns out to be the slave and he colonized as he gradually loses all the markers of his typical colonial identity. Lurie says, “yes, agree, 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. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.”(205)

Lucy however behaves more maturely as she not only accepts and acknowledges the defeat of her race, but also exhibits a positive sign of reconciliation when she decides to give birth to the child born out of a forced liaison with a black person or a group of black persons. Thus J.M. Coetzee does not facilitate a stereotyped

or straight forward understanding of post colonial concerns in *Disgrace*, rather his credit lies in problematizing the contours of post colonialism and as Lucy moves toward an unknown future, the novel also points toward a post – apartheid South Africa that has no place for any display of white colonial aggression.

III

The second most important discourse that finds a prominent place in the novel is the patriarchal discourse which is inextricably related to the feminist and the lesbian discourse as well. David Lurie voices a typical patriarchal discourse when he tells Melanie “I don’t collect pictures. I don’t collect women” (29) That Lurie thinks of objects and women as parts of the same category is a case in point of his patriarchal attitude and in fact, he really does not collect women, he simply uses and abuses them, a statement that can be substantiated by the proof of his two failed marriages and countless sexual liaisons. David Lurie again behaves like a typical patriarchal figure who only subjugates women and partakes in gross physical pleasure of the female body when he unashamedly declares “I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty – year old divorce at a base end. I become a servant of eras.” (52) During the course of his trial regarding his affair with Melanie, Lurie consistently keeps on validating male desire as a given license and thereby he reinforces the patriarchal discourse. Patriarchy has always been interested in constructing women from its own point of view and it is patriarchy that has been responsible for the suppression,

oppression and marginalization of women down the ages. The body of the woman has always been an object of male gaze and it is seen in *Disgrace* that David Lurie's male gaze devours the body of his own daughter Lucy –

“A year has passed, and she has put on weight. Her hips and breasts are now (he searches for the best word) ample. comfortably barefoot, she comes to greet him, holding her arms wide, embracing him, kissing him on the cheek.” (59) In fact, Lucy seems to titillate Lurie without she being aware of this fact. David feels an irresistible desire surging within him when he sees Lucy approaching him – “A long time since he last lived with a woman. He will have to mind his manner, he will have to be neat.

Ample is a kind word for Lucy. Soon she will be positively heavy. Letting herself go, as happens when one withdraws from the field of love.” (Page 65)

Thus the body of the woman consistently occupies in David Lurie's male gaze as well as in his fantasy – because he seems to renew his existence only through bodily encounters with women. Lurie equates a woman's beauty with the shape of the body she possesses and he says “because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.”(16)

Londa Schiebinger rightly points out in the introduction to her book, *Feminism and the Body*

“A central principle of feminist theory has been to recognize that gender differences are not fixed in the character of the species but arise from specific histories and from specific division of labour and power between the sexes. By the same token, it is important to look at the specific history forming feminist body studies and accounting for its theoretical structure. (1)

Lurie is a typical representative of patriarchal ethos who keeps on constructing conditioning and even configuring the body of the woman to subjugate and colonize them. David Lurie gives vent to typical male anxiety which can also be interpreted from the Freudian Psychoanalytical perspective when he says “The truth is, they wanted me castrated.”(66)

Allied to the patriarchal discourse embedded within the texture of the novel, there runs the parallel discourse on lesbianism and feminism in *Disgrace* which both problematize and enrich our understanding of Coetzee poetics. Since the inception of human civilization same – sex loves and same sex relations have been viewed with suspicion, intolerance, arrogance, insensibility and in fact, disdain. Same – sex love has always existed within the margins, in the so – called “sub - altern” zone, outside the domain of normal everyday lives where heterosexuality prevails. Patriarchy has always tried to strangulate, stifle the voice of same – sex love which poses threat to the very ethos and normative yardsticks upon which the structure of

patriarchal edifice rests. However, in the last two decades, writers, thinkers and activists all over the world have exhibited an increasing awareness and concern love that has in turn, resulted in a major shift in the social perception regarding same sex love.

Noami Holoch and Joan Nestle convincingly argues in the introduction to their book, *The Vintage Book of International Lesbian Fiction* –

“While the word lesbian is not global its use and significance, it is clear, as these stories show, that emotional and sexual intimacies between woman do indeed exist throughout the world. Although most of the authors included here write out of a constant connection to a lesbian sense of self, few extremely powerful works in this volume, deep rooted in specific cultures and embodying lesbian themes, were written by authors who do not define themselves as lesbian.”(xiii)

The lesbian discourse in *Disgrace* becomes significant from three perspectives –

- a) The authorial perspective of J.M. Coetzee whose gender rules out any direct identification with lesbianism.
- b) The non – western perspective of a white writer in terms of location who is deeply steeped in the western cultural and aesthetic tradition.
- c) The patriarchal perspective of David Lurie who finds it difficult to come to terms with his daughter’s sexual orientation.

However, Lucy’s relation with Helen also brings to light another crucial dimension of lesbianism which is generally brushed aside by the accepted patriarchal hegemony that seeks to validate only heterosexual relations as normal. David Lurie’s hypersensitive mind finds it quite difficult to analyze the nature of Helen – Lucy relationship.

“...Is his presence here keeping the two of them apart? Would they dare to share a bed while he was in the house? If the bed creaked in the night, would they be embarrassed? Embarrassed enough to stop? But what does he know about what women do together? May be women do not need to make beds creak. And what does he know about these two in particular, Lucy and Helen? Perhaps they sleep together merely as children do, cuddling, touching, giggling, reliving girlhood – sisters more than lovers. Sharing a bed, sharing a bathtub, baking gingerbed cookies, trying on each others’ clothes. Sapphie love.: an excuse for putting on weight.”

As Lucy’s body gradually turns out to be a typical male destination, she becomes a mere apology becomes a mere apology to her earlier self and it is precisely the way patriarchal structure dwarfs and erases the identity of a woman. As Lucy decides to move under the wings of Petrus for protection who grants her the states of his third wife, her subjugation becomes complete. In this specific context, *Disgrace* exhibits how a woman also turns out to be an accomplice who

both authenticates and vindicates patriarchal discourse. Lucy's own words lend credibility to this observation –

“Objectively I am a woman alone. I have not brothers. I have a father, but his is far away and anyhow powerless in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn for protection, for patronage ... Petrus may not be a big man but he is big enough for someone small like me??”

However, a feminist reading of *Disgrace* would reveal not only the pattern of patriarchal discourse reinforced through the text, but also the subversive design that the author might or might not have intended. Coetzee is not a self-avowed politically conscious writer like Nadina Gordimer, but it would provide an innocent reading of *Disgrace* from the point of view of a woman. As Lynne Pearce convincingly agrees in her book, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* –

“To reflect upon the constraints, conditions and expectations imposed upon each and every one of us when we undertake to read a text as a woman / as a feminist is in itself a profoundly political act, and however much we are forced to laugh at our efforts to protect our ethical integrity it is, in my opinion, a useful form of intellectual narcissism.” (Pearce, 41)

The strength of *Disgrace* emanates from the fact that as it seeks to validate the patriarchal discourse through the character of David Lurie, it also provides

a counter – narrative through Lucy even though she ultimately conform and confirms the same.

IV

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* subtly juxtaposes the moral and ethical discourse that are reflected and refracted through David Lurie's liaison with his student Melanie, his defiant attitude towards the trial and his lackadaisical attitude towards his responsibilities as a teacher. When David Lurie first brings to bed his student Melanie, he is pricked in his conscience as he becomes conscious of his ethical responsibility as a teacher – “No matter what passes between them now, they will have to meet again as teacher and pupil. Is he prepared for that?” (12) Melanie remains absent from the number of academic classes conducted by David Lurie on the pretext of drama rehearsal, but Lurie, in spite of knowing his moral and ethical obligations as a teacher keeps on marking her present in the register book and Lurie is again pricked in his conscience for his act.

“She is behaving badly, getting away with too much; she is learning to exploit him and will probably exploit him further. But if she has got away with much, he has got away with more; if she is behaving badly, he has behaved worse. To the extent that they are together, if they are together, he is the one who leads, she the one who follows. Let him not forget that.” (28)

When Melanie attends David Lurie's class long with one of her boyfriends he not only finds it objectionable like any other teacher under such circumstances would find, he also becomes assertive about his own ethical duty that his profession demands. He tells Melanie –

“I have obligations to my students, all of them. What your friend does off campus is his own business. But I can't have him disrupting my classes. Tell him that, from me.”
(34)

David Lurie's ironic moral/ ethical standpoint stems from the face he is implicated in the some irresponsible and ethically intolerable action for which he scolds Melanie as he has maligned the generally accepted sacrosanct relation between a teacher and a student. In fact, he pleads guilty before the trial committee and he does not display any tinge of remorse or self – pity as he tells “There are more important things in life than being prudent.” (49)

The moral and ethical discourse in *Disgrace* remains inclusive as David Lurie shows a reverse gesture when he visits Melanie's home to seek forgiveness from her parents and sister which he eventually does and Coetzee's credit lies in the fact that has not passed any moral judgment anywhere in the novel.

V

David Lurie is not only an academician who takes delight in the domain of arts and letters, his life is also inextricably related to art and at times he confuses art as reality and reality as art. Looked at

from such a perspective, Lurie behaves like a typical aesthete for whom everything can be subordinated to the alter of art. He plans writing an opera on Bryon whose bohemian and promiscuous lifestyle somehow mirrors Lurie's life. Lurie revels in the delight of books and he equates the joy of love with the joy of reading poetry –

“But in my experience poetry speaks to you either at first sight or not at all. A flash of revelation and a flash of response. Like lightning. Like falling in love.”(13)

Lurie provides a brilliant aesthetic discourse on his favorite poet William Wordsworth in context of the poet's *The Prelude*, to which his students react with only utter silence, not in applause or admiration, but in boredom and lack of interest.

However David Lurie's intended project of writing an opera on Bryon comes to a halt as his life moves through darker trajectories that almost pulls him out of the comfortably complacent aesthetic realm which he mentally inhabits in David Lurie's aesthetic discourse is also enmeshed in his patriarchal discourse when he decides to critically examine Byron's relation with his mistress. Teresa. As Lurie contemplates upon the possibility of writing a chamber opera based on Byron's relation with Teresa, he thinks,

“Can he find it in his heart to love this plain, ordinary woman? Can he love her enough to write a music for her? If he cannot, what is left for him?”

Lurie arrives at the following conclusion regarding Teresa which bring to light his patriarchal bias –

“Bryon’s love is all that sets her apart: without him she is nothing: a woman past her prime , without prospect, living out her days in a dull provincial town, exchanging visits with women – friends, massaging her father’s leg when they give him pain, sleeping alone.” (182)

By the time David Lurie becomes aware of his limitations as a human being after the brutal rape of his daughter, an incident that subsequently triggers a lot of major shifts in his life, his dream of writing the opera remains a mirage. The aesthete in David Lurie is subdued, submerged if not dead because of the grim reality around him and the aesthetic discourse in *Disgrace* remains myriad that in turn radiates a glow of its own.

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VI

In conclusion, it can be argued that the novelistic strength of *Disgrace* stems from J.M Coetzee’s remarkable success in blending a variety of discourses within the texture and structure of the novel that is significant not only from generic point of view, but also from historical point of view. Milan Kundera makes a remarkable observation in his book *The Art of the Novel* (1986) –

“The sole raison d’être of a novel is to discover what only the novel can discover. A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral.”
(Kundera, 5-6)

Disgrace does “...discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence...” as J.M. Coetzee creates an unforgettable poetics of polyphonic discourses which problematize our understanding of many received notions about identity, postcoloniality, patriarchy, lesbianism, ethics, morality, art and above all life, that itself is the biggest and most complex polyphonic discourse.