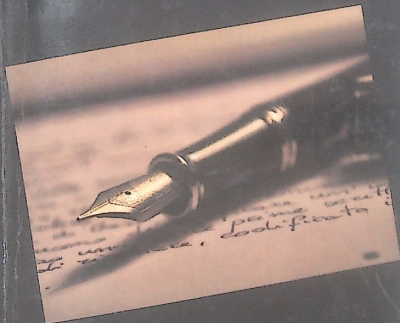




LAUREATES ON CULTURE, RELIGION AND POLITICS



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Edited by Dr. Ganjalwad Bhagwan D

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J.M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*: A JOURNEY FROM SIN TO SALVATION

Shilpa Shendge-Patil

Gramin Mahavidhyalaya, Mukhed.

Among the major South African writers J. M. Coetzee has perhaps been unique in his unwillingness to write directly about life under apartheid. Of his earlier books, only the 1990 novel "Age of Iron" was set in a recognizable national present and even there he concentrated less on politics than on his cancer-stricken heroine's preparations for death. He has experimented with historical fiction and postmodern pastiche and has even, in the 1983 novel "Life & Times of Michael K," written something like a fable. His country's disgrace has always figured in his work, but, as you might expect from someone who wrote a dissertation on Beckett, it has most often figured obliquely.

In *Disgrace*, a Cape Town literature professor, Coetzee's central character believes that "for a man of his age, 52, twice divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well." That's the novel's first sentence, and it tells us that David Lurie hasn't solved the problem at all. This is simply the status quo whose rupture will produce a story. The commas are lovely in the way that they parse out his situation, bracketing off "to his mind" in order to suggest the limits of his solution, his regular Thursday afternoons with Soraya of Discreet Escorts.

She goes slack but not silent, and so comes Lurie's disgrace. After the uproar of faculty committees and reporters' flashbulbs has passed, he takes refuge with his daughter, Lucy, on her smallholding in the countryside of the eastern Cape. Lucy runs a kennel and grows and sells produce and flowers at a weekly market; she is, he concludes, "no longer a child playing at farming but a solid countrywoman, a boervrou." Lucy lives alone, helped only by a man named Petrus: once her employee but now, in the new South Africa, simply -- that is, not at all simply -- her neighbor and "co-proprietor." "I feel anxious about my daughter all alone here," Lurie tells him. But although Petrus says that "everything is dangerous today," he adds that "here it is



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