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硕士学位论文

后殖民语境下的浪漫主义困境:
《耻》中通过阅读与写作的自我身份寻求

The Dilemma of Romanticism in the Postcolonial Context:

Self-Identity Quest Through Reading and Writing in

Disgrace

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Abstract

As the most successful work of J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* has attracted lots of attention at home and abroad since its publication in 1991. Many scholars have done profound studies about its multiple features, among which the most attractive and popular perspective is the postcolonial point of view. Based on previous studies, this thesis intends to apply postcolonial theory to study the protagonist's quest for self-identity. Taking the romantic text as an entry point, with the analysis of Lurie's identity dilemmas, the thesis aims to contend the romantic reading as the foundation of Lurie's self-identity construction, and the romantic writing as the demonstration of his self-identity deconstruction.

Disgrace mainly deals with the protagonist's self-quest experience in the postcolonial background. Lurie, as a white professor ingrained with western ideology, cannot adapt himself to the post-Apartheid context, thus trapped in several dilemmas. In terms of love, he claims himself to be pursuing nature rather than violating others; confronting the public, he refuses to confess his sin but defends his principle; to his family, he is an outsider rather a protector; with animals, he serves as a savior, while being laughed at as a loser. Through these dilemmas, Lurie loses his self-identity.

This thesis studies the protagonist's self-identity quest from a postcolonial perspective. The first chapter provides the theoretical framework centered on "Subject-Object", which introduces the implications and relations of "Subject-Object" in the category of Identity, Romantic Consciousness and Postcolonialism. Chapter two offers a meticulous analysis of Lurie's identity dilemmas. Then in Chapter three, with a focused interpretation of poetry, it is demonstrated that Lurie's identity construction is based on Eurocentrism represented by Romanticism, and therefore the roots of his dilemmas are traced to his ingrained ideology of the Other and his neglect of the contextual differences. The fourth chapter focuses on the presentation of Lurie's self-identity deconstruction through his opera writing. The dissolution of his identity based on Romanticism implies that in the postcolonial context, Romanticism is destined to decline in its power to influence the individual quest for self-identity.

Key Words: *Disgrace*; Postcolonialism; Romanticism; identity

摘要

作为南非当代作家库切迄今为止最具影响力的作品,《耻》自 1991 年出版后就受到国内外学界的广泛关注。众多东西方学者已经对该小说所呈现的多样化主题进行了研究,其中小说包含的后殖民因素得到了最多关注。基于已有的各类研究,本文致力于借用后殖民理论分析小说主人公卢里对个人身份的探索,以浪漫主义文本为切入点,结合对卢里多重身份困境的分析,提出浪漫主义阅读是卢里构建个人身份的基础,而浪漫主义书写最终成为卢里个人身份解构的展现。

《耻》主要围绕卢里在后殖民背景下的生活境遇展开叙述。卢里作为一个深受西方浪漫主义思想指引的大学教授,无法适应后种族隔离时代的新环境而身陷诸多困境之中。在爱情方面,他不顾性骚扰对梅拉妮的伤害,而自诩追求本性;面对公众,他坚决不肯忏悔,坚持自己的原则;在家庭中,他本想做一个保护者,却最终成为一个局外人;在与动物的关系中,他自认为是动物的拯救者,却被他人嘲笑成落魄的疯子。可以说,这一系列的困境使卢里逐渐丧失了对自我身份的认同。

本文从后殖民视角出发对《耻》中主人公的自我身份探寻主题展开研究。第一章以“主体与客体”为中心搭建理论框架,分别阐述“主体与客体”在身份认同、浪漫主义、后殖民主义三个范畴内的含义与关联。第二章则细致分析主人公在后殖民语境下所面临的多重身份认同困境。接着第三章中,通过对浪漫主义诗歌的解读,本文剖析出主人公个人身份建构的基础是以浪漫主义为代表的西方中心主义意识形态,从而解答了卢里个人身份困境的根源在于其根深蒂固的他者思想,以及对社会语境变迁的忽视。第四章则重点阐述主人公通过浪漫主义戏剧书写对建立于西方中心主义意识形态之上的个人身份的解构。卢里依靠浪漫主义意识形态所建立的个人身份在后殖民语境下面临消解,这体现出在后殖民语境下,浪漫主义意识形态注定无法成为主人公建立个人身份的基础。

关键词: 《耻》 后殖民主义 浪漫主义 身份认同

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Introduction

John Maxwell Coetzee, born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1940, is a famous contemporary novelist. He left for England in the late 1960s and after his doctorate study in the US and many years away from the country, he went back to South Africa and served as a professor of English literature at the University of Cape Town. His boyhood experience and his teaching days in South Africa gave him chances to witness the history of Apartheid, which is a notorious institutionalized system of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa between 1948 and 1991. Besides that, Coetzee's grandparents are Boers from the Netherlands, who used to belong to the ruling class of South Africa by promoting racial segregation policy. The special colonist background and a half-century history of Apartheid provided him with numerous inspirations for his subsequent writing career.

His first book *Dusklands* was published in 1974 in South Africa. Since then, his fiction has attracted attention at home and abroad as well as earned him various awards. *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) wins the principal literary award of South Africa, the CNA Prize and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) receives international notice. His reputation is confirmed by *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), which wins him the Booker Prize of Great Britain. It is followed by *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), and *Disgrace* (1999), the last of which again wins the Booker Prize. Coetzee is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature of 2003 for his works "seize the fire of human nature in weakness and failure" with "their well-crafted composition, poignant dialogue and analytical brilliance" (Cai 98). His works, by investigating the racial problems in postcolonial South Africa with penetrating critiques of colonialism, express his humanist concerns and worries about the restoration of culture identity and modern people's dreary souls (99). These achievements establish Coetzee's position in South African literature as a distinguished novelist. Coetzee, together with Nadine Gordimer, another Nobel laureate, is seen as the Gemini among South Africa's contemporary writers. Along with his rising reputation and worldwide attention, studies of Coetzee's novels have emerged rapidly and profusely. *Disgrace* as one of his winning entities has especially

received critical attention for nearly twenty years, and further studies on this novel still attract attention today.

Critics unanimously regard Coetzee as a postcolonial writer. In the *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, Elleke Boehmer classifies postcolonial literature in three groups, including female writings, indigenous writings, and migrant or diasporic writings, as “their situation is increasingly regarded as representative, if not ironic, of postcolonial writing in general” (Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* 214). Here “diasporic” writers mainly refer to those who are from the pre-colonial countries or the third world countries with disorientation of their cultural identity. On account of Coetzee’s international wanderings, he belongs to the third group. As Boehmer illustrates, “from the late 1980s and into the twenty-first century many writers’ geographic and cultural affiliations became more divided, displaced, and uncertain” (225). Though born in South Africa, Coetzee moves to England in his twenties, where he acquires western education and establishes his worldview and ideology. Meanwhile, Coetzee feels ashamed of his family for the atrocities done to the colonized people. Therefore, he can neither give up his national bonding nor conceal his admiration for western civilization. Trapped within his cultural identity dilemma, Coetzee starts his diasporic life and migrates from one country to another. From England, he moves to America for his doctorate study, and then he goes back to South Africa. Now, he has migrated to Australia. Coetzee’s diasporic trait shapes his works with preeminent postcolonial complexion.

Besides the author’s peregrination around the world with his cultural identity confusion, the contents of Coetzee’s fictions also demand attention. Coetzee’s life experience and comprehensive knowledge of postcolonial South Africa contribute to his vivid and distinctive descriptions. Through his stories, social issues, racial conflicts and cultural destructions all can be unveiled explicitly, which inspires numerous insightful critiques. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for instance, is regarded as a “political thriller”, which discusses the conflicts between the civilized people and the savages. In *The Age of Iron*, Coetzee gives a lively description of the tragic racial conflict caused by personal hatred and ruthless reality. Since late 1990s when Mandela won the election and established the new democratic government, the racial segregation system in the “Age of Iron” has finally become history. Another fiction *Life & Times of Michael K*, which takes the colonial past of South Africa as the

prototype, pictures a fictional era full of grief and misery, through which Coetzee encourages people to introspect the devastated colonial history.

Disgrace presents the changes in South Africa after the “Age of Iron”, a new age after the miserable Apartheid, when social issues are supposed to be solved and racial conflicts are supposed to be over. However, the images presented by Coetzee are baffling and discomfoting, covering a man’s individual resistance to the collective system, the gap between father and daughter caused by value conflicts, the rampant crimes and inefficient police, the difficulty in dissolving the racial diaphragm and the individual struggle for freedom under the pressure of history. These images unmask the reality with brutal racial conflicts and serious social issues in the postcolonial South Africa. As Boehmer points out, “postcolonial literature should be generally defined as something which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is a writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives” (227). On account of the contents of Coetzee’s fictions, a postcolonial perspective should be an appropriate approach for critical interpretations of Coetzee and his *Disgrace*.

Critically speaking, Coetzee’s works are engaged with several distinctive features. First, they mark the presence of the intense confrontation with reality through a description of the tragic consequences of South African segregation policy. On one hand, with English as mother tongue and western ideology as educational foundation, Coetzee shares an identity with the western whites. On the other hand, living as a white South African, he is immeasurably influenced by the Apartheid policy, which makes him engaged in a sympathetic perception towards the fate of the local blacks; therefore, he is caught in an awkward position by the double identity, which stimulates him to express poignant introspections and humane concerns over the consequences of South African segregation through his literary creations. Second, “anti-hero” characters are centered in his stories. His protagonists are usually set apart from the mainstream society, which is a reflection of Coetzee’s humane concerns of the marginalized groups and individual destiny in history. His protagonists always succeed in achieving spiritual redemption through their miserable suffering with deprivation of dignity. Third, Coetzee’s metaphorical expressions focus on his thinking about human survival through the violence and death resulted from social indifference and human inner desolation. Last, his works are marked with a concise,

delicate and exquisite writing style. His writings are smoothly and poetically constructed with simple and penetrating expressions; as critics comment, Coetzee is essentially a poet for his works have strong rhythm and poetic appeal.

The main plot of *Disgrace* has two parts. The first part introduces the protagonist, the divorced fifty-two-year-old white professor David Lurie who teaches communication and language in the Technology College of Cape Town. Lurie used to have a regular relationship with a prostitute named Soraya; however, after he accidentally discovers that Soraya also leads a decent life with a husband and two sons, he is abandoned by Soraya. As a solitary romantic person, it is hard for him to subdue the inner passion and desire for love and youth; hence he seduces his non-white student Melanie and tries to possess her against her will. On account of this scandal, Lurie is complained against and dismissed from the university. Though advised to make a heartfelt public confession to maintain his job, Lurie refuses to do it for his contempt for the formalities. The second part of the novel tells the story of Lurie leaving Cape Town and visiting his daughter Lucy whose homestead is located in the remote rural area of East Cape. Soon after, one night, three black men rob Lucy's house, and Lucy is gang-raped while Lurie is attacked and burned badly. Haunted by nightmares and illusions, Lurie tries to persuade his daughter to leave for Europe, but Lucy firmly insists on staying on the farm. At the end of the story, Lucy is pregnant, and in exchange for the local blacks' protection, she accepts her black neighbor Petrus' marriage proposal to be his third wife with her land as a dowry. Lurie ends up being a helper in an animal shelter disposing of dead dogs' bodies. He dreams to write a successful opera based on Byron's story to regain his professional reputation, while after the shock on the farm, he loses his orientation on his opera, leaving it as a freestyle fragmented composition. As last, he dwells in the small town near Lucy's farm and serves as a "dog man" who transports the dead dogs' bodies to cremation.

Since *Disgrace* was published, scholars at home and abroad have done abundant researches on it from the postcolonial perspective. When it first comes out in South Africa, it is remarked as a controversial novel for "Coetzee's emphasis on the Eastern Cape, and supposedly on its atavistic tendencies, seems to many readers to be a deliberate de-privileging of the country's efforts to reconstruct itself through rational negotiation" (Attwell 11). The author is believed to criticize the university following

the neo-liberal path of corporatization and to show the whites' guilty conscience from Lucy's acquiescent response to the violent crime. By listing six controversial connections between *Disgrace* and South African reality, David Attwell argues in defense that Coetzee's real intention is misdirected by some critics. Coetzee believes, "making sense of life inside a book is different from making sense of real life—not more difficult or less difficult, just different" (9). By quoting this remark, Attwell points out that since readers could not fully understand Lurie's situation and his disgrace correctly, they can only blame Coetzee's judgments on the policy superficially. He hopes that the readers can regard *Disgrace* as a story "built around reversals and some ironic juxtapositions" (12). These reversals should engage the readers with the historical context and make them realize that "Lurie is very much a product of the past", "an anachronism", that he is dragged to the present by violent events (12). Therefore, "living beyond one's time" should be the root of his tragedy. Coetzee's ambition is beyond the exposure and deprecation of the existing social structure and political order, but to criticize the situation of reversal, which indicates the failure to terminate the binary-oppositional social construction. In "Gone for Good—Coetzee's *Disgrace*", Ian Glenn states, "Coetzee, in his presentation of violent crime of South Africa, becomes what Jeffrey Alexander in his works on cultural trauma calls a 'carrier' of trauma by which he characterizes Coetzee as liberal Afro-pessimism, which limits his treatment of key themes in ways which date the novel" (Glenn 79). This "Afro-pessimism" reveals a pessimistic point of view that national liberation movement is not a progress of society, but a retrogression of civilization. Therefore, Coetzee's themes should be interpreted with the historical context, and the "trauma" Coetzee carries in the postcolonial context is represented by the protagonist Lurie's identity dilemma.

Many Chinese scholars also air their opinions on the postcolonial study of *Disgrace*, and mainly regard it as a political novel. Zhang Chong proposes that Coetzee has expressed his deep concerns for the consequences caused by the colonialism to the colonist and their offspring in South Africa (86). Wang Lili has compared the novel to "a lamentation of colonialism", she claims that the novel is "a complaint of racial hatred caused by colonialism and social unrest with morality and personality distorted which offers a guidance for people to explore the causes of pain and consequences, as well as the destinies of South Africans in the postcolonial era"

(162). Some researchers criticize “the other” in discourse from the postcolonial perspective. Cai Tongqing and Yan Xiaojun believe that since the era of segregation has passed, the blacks need to establish their own discourse to confirm their authority. To reconstruct their own discourse, first the blacks must deconstruct the western discourse, the essence of which is western centrism. Without the consciousness of “other”, the subjective consciousness of “self” cannot be established. In this binary-oppositional relationship, the dominant side is centered and empowered; whereas the subordinate side is marginalized and oppressed since their images are shaped by the dominant side. In *Disgrace*, the rape and robbery in the black-white racial category are implications that the blacks intend to articulate them as the masters in South Africa, while the whites become the inferior ones. Therefore, in the story, Lucy who pursues “the self”, ultimately becomes the heroine with a bright future; yet Lurie as a representative of the colonial master with “psychological resistance” to the postcolonial society, stubbornly turns down the opportunity to “repent” and only ends as “an old abandoned dog”. Though the postcolonial society filled with racial revenge and class inequality seems to copy the colonial pattern, some critics view the political issue in this novel in a positive way for it is still possible for racial reconciliation. In *Disgrace*, though Lucy cannot change the fact of being the victim of sexual violence, she can choose to forgive the crime. As critics say, “As long as people forgive the grudge of the past, it is possible for them to achieve a new cultural identity which transcends race, gender, culture, and history” (Yan and Dong 84).

Besides the critiques on history and politics, many scholars focus on the themes of this novel. In regard of the theme, in the article “The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”, Sue Kossew proposes, “*Disgrace* is a complex exploration of the collision between private and public worlds; intellect and body; desire and love; and public disgrace or shame and the idea of individual grace or salvation” (156). Based on a definition Coetzee provides, “Grace: a condition in which the truth can be told clearly, without blindness” (Doubling 392), Kossew argues, “*Disgrace* is a novel in which bodies are very strongly linked to power, desire, and disgrace” (156). This argument can be evidenced by the plot and themes of this novel. From the beginning, Lurie’s scandal drives him to “fall from grace”, and then Lucy’s rape on her farm is an exertion of power in hatred and violence. Ultimately, with mercy, Lurie acquires a spiritual reflection through his physical suffering.

Besides these themes, trauma is another perspective critics adopt. In light of the trauma theory, Alice Britton proposes a bold interpretation in “Death and J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”, claiming that “after the brutal, racially motivated attack, David Lurie and his daughter Lucy become as evanescent as the dead, and like the dead, they cannot speak because they have no selves to speak” (478). Her interpretation can be evidenced by the psychological torture and the devastated illusions Lurie experiences after the attack. “No self to speak” indicates the identity deprivation of the whites in the postcolonial background.

Besides the postcolonial perspective, ideological points of view such as romantic ideology and humanist ideology also attract many scholars’ attention. They notice the explicit connections between the protagonist Lurie and the romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Byron. It is believed that in the text, Wordsworth’s romantic pursuit of the purity and sublimity of nature is shaken by the postcolonial reality. Also, with Byron’s poetry, the author alludes to Lurie’s personal love affair and Lucy’s tragedy. In terms of the romantic perspective, romantic elements such as poetry, opera and animals have been fully interpreted in many professional essays. Based on the animal-writing theory, in “The Dog Man: Becoming Animal in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”, Tom Herron elaborates that the massive depiction of animals in *Disgrace* does not intend for “a manifesto of animal rights”, but reveals “a more obviously weighty ethical and political matters, namely the ‘white dilemma’ in post-apartheid South Africa” (468). In his opinion, the depiction of the dogs insinuates the ethical and political issue that Lurie’s transmutation from “a man ‘so corroded with skepticism’” to one that “considers so seriously the lives, deaths and passage of souls and fellow disgraced beings” shows the author’s purpose to demonstrate Lurie’s ethical sublimation (489). In “Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”, Derek Attridge from a historical point of view argues, against the background of South Africa, the opera and dogs are implicit metaphors in politics and their existence represents a Utopian state of grace (2000). In “Coetzee, Controversy and *Disgrace*”, David Attwell presents that Lurie’s reorganization of the opera is a reflection of his psychological transmutation. The fact that he chooses to write about Teresa finally implies “his sympathies have clearly moved and he now seeks to write from the feminine subject-position”, which brings feminism into discussion (13).

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