

**LUCIFER AND LUCY: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL STUDY OF  
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DAVID AND  
LUCY IN J. M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE***

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**Abstract :**

Post apartheid South Africa is not only the setting but the very fabric of J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999). Still the novel turns away from common discourses while forming narratives of rape incidents and father- daughter relationship; the later at a very subtle level. David Lurie the father and Lucy the daughter are struggling hard to interpret and cope up with the changing power dynamics in South Africa after the official demolition of Apartheid system. The parent-child relationship between David and Lucy is actually getting deformed and reformed while the two are combating on other fronts of their life. J. M. Coetzee has maintained fine balance between many elements at different levels: like using the witnessing part of David's self as the narrator and David himself as the focaliser of the novel; using the city and country side of South Africa as setting, letting the action of the novel emerge out of two rape incidents. The writer has shown utmost commitment towards the prophecy and rhythm of the novel. The relationship between David and Lucy stuns the readers in an inexplicable way. David, like 'Lucifer' is isolated and acts out of impulse and not principle; whereas Lucy has formed her own ideology and acts out of it without compromise. They, together, shatter our speculations about their reactions. The present research paper is an attempt to explore this relationship using different psychoanalytical and developmental psychological theories. This will make the experience of the readers more enriching.

**Keywords :** parent-child relationship, parenting, attachment, engrossment, stages of child development, developmental psychology, apartheid.

**“Romance fails us and so do friendships, but the relationship of parent and child, less noisy than all the others, remains indelible and indestructible, the strongest relationship on earth”**

**- Theodore Reik**

**Introduction**

The protagonist of the Booker winning novel *Disgrace* (1999), Prof. David Lurie is “a slave to Eros”. He is twice married and divorced. Once he was very handsome which could be ‘counted on the level of magnetism’ (Coetzee:

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1999:07) and it never failed on women. This is how he lived for decades and it remained the backbone of his life. At the opening of the novel David Lurie is fifty two year old professor of Communication at the Technical University of Cape and a true scholar of Romantic poetry. The narrator initiates him in the narrative as a womaniser who has lived since childhood among women including mother, aunts and sisters who were later replaced by wives, mistresses and a daughter. The narrator is frank while telling readers, "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." (07). When his contract with a prostitute called Soraya is broken, he turns to Melanie, one of his students of Romantic Poetry course. He gets into it as an easy-to-in-easy-to-out affair which later turns so sour that he is denounced and summoned before a committee of inquiry. He accepts the charges of sexual harassment but refuses to repent publicly. As a result he resigns the job and goes to live with his daughter Lucy who lives in a farmhouse on her 6 hectore land in the village of Salem situated in the Eastern Cape. This refuge in his daughter's village life gives David Lurie some release from temptation. This overt tranquillity is charged and is affected at the core by the changing power structures in the country.

David and Lucy become victim to a savage attack one day. They are robbed, their car is stolen and above all Lucy is raped. Now, on the background of the aftermath of the attack and rapidly changing power politics of South Africa the relationship between David and Lucy turns and twists. It takes a form that is alien at prima facie, but pregnant with possibilities of further positive developments.

### Discussion

Parent-child relationship is the most fundamental and impactful of all human relations. Relationship is defined by *Webster's Dictionary* as "a close association between two individuals by blood or marriage" and *Encyclopaedia of Children's Health* defines parent-child relationship as "A combination of behaviours, feelings, and expectations that are unique to a particular parent and a particular child. The relationship involves the full extent of a child's development." H. Rudolf Schaffer (2006) brings to notice that relationships are not directly perceived but inferred by the overt behaviour of people towards each other. There run three main plots in *Disgrace* that are organically infused into each other and surrender genuinely to the central prophecy of the novel: 1. Life of David Lurie 2. Life of Lucy Lurie 3. Story of Teresa, Byron's last mistress. These three plots, especially the first two plots

run on the mature background of post apartheid South Africa. The relationship between Lucy and David represent the brokenness of human relationships in the postmodern era. Any human relationship does not function in void but it affects and gets affected by smaller and larger contexts.

Unlike earlier psychological and psychoanalytical theories of psychosexual development of child Developmental Psychology proposes that parents and children affect each other throughout the life span. Parents play major role in the development of child not only to a certain age but till the death. Considering the failure

of a single theory to cover all aspects of human development Henry W. Maier in his book, *Three Theories of Child Development* (1965) has compiled three major theories regarding human development put forth by Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson and Robert Sears who talk about intellectual, affective and behavioural development of a child. Erikson has given eight stages of psychosocial development. Each stage has a crisis to resolve, and successful resolution leads to feelings of increased competency. The following table will summarize these stages well.

STAGE	AGE (IN YEARS)	CRISIS	POSITIVE OUTCOME (VIRTUE)	NEGATIVE OUTCOME
1	0 To 1	Trust Vs Mistrust	Hope	Sensory Distortion/Withdrawal
2	2 To 3	Autonomy Vs Shame /Doubt	Will	Impulsivity/ Compulsion
3	4 To 6	Initiative Vs Guilt	Purpose Direction	Ruthlessness/ Inhibition
4	7 To 12	Industry Vs Inferiority	Competence & Method	Narrow virtuosity/inertia
5	13 to 19	Identity Vs Role Confusion	Fidelity & Devotion	Fanaticism Repudiation
6	20 to 34	Intimacy Vs Isolation	Love & Affiliation	Promiscuity exclusivity
7	35 To 65	Generativity Vs Stagnation	Care & Production	Overextension Rejectivity
8	65 +	Integrity Vs Despair	Wisdom & Renunciation	Presumption/Disdain

***Erikson's Psychosocial Stages***

***(Based on Erikson's psychosocial theory summary diagram as found on [businessballs.com](http://businessballs.com))***

Lucy is 20 years old. According to Erikson's theory she has overcome the battle between identity and role confusion of the fifth stage and is about to enter the sixth stage where the combat will be between intimacy and isolation. David divorces Lucy's mother Evelina. Evelina marries another man and moves to Holland along with her new husband and Lucy. Lucy does not get along with her stepfather so she starts living separately. She joins hippie culture and with a group travels to Eastern Cape. She falls in love with the land and with David's assistance buys 6 hector land in the village of Salem in Eastern Cape, the black majority part of South Africa, with a wish to farm that land properly.

The phase that Lucy is in is the phase of lifelong commitments like marriage, procreation, fullest participation in the society, healthy development of offspring, etc. The sense of solidarity gets improved. The individual has to overcome the inclination for social distance, repudiation (dishonour) of others. Failure in doing so leads to isolation. Lucy has formed her identity on her own. Considering the conditions in the family she could have easily stumbled into the valley of identity crisis but she did not. Despite being a daughter of city people including university professor father, she chooses to become a peasant. She toils the land, harvests flowers and vegetables and sells them into the local market. With the help of an assistant named Petrus who later becomes her partner, she

makes her place into the market and the community. Lucy projects independence in everything. She rejects physical intimacy with men and chooses to live with Helen. When David comes to live with Lucy he observes this development in her:

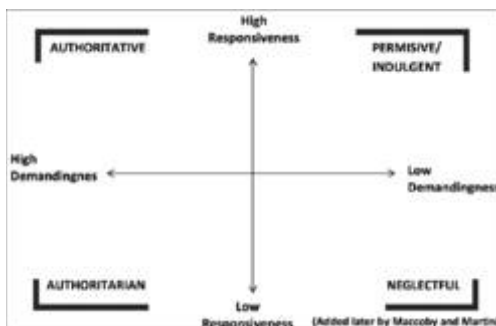
As a child Lucy had been quiet and self-effacing, observing him but never as far as he knew, judging him. Now in her middle twenties, she has begun to separate. The dogs, the gardening, the astrology books, the asexual clothes: in each he recognizes a statement of independence, considered, purposeful. The turn away from me too. Making her own life. Coming out of his shadow. Good! He approves! (88-89)

Lucy projects great confidence and individuality in all decisions and actions still she lives in harmony with the community in Salem. People there appreciate her for being a strong woman. The question here is what role David plays as a father to this independent daughter to gain this identity. He himself gives the answer.

Dogs and a gun; bread in the oven and a crop in the earth. Curious that he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share. (61)

Considering the two aspects of parenting behaviour- warmth and demand, Diana Baumrind, a well-known clinical and developmental psychologist has identified

four parenting styles: Authoritarian, Authoritative, Neglectful and Indulgent. Authoritarian parents are not responsive but demanding. They use restrictive methods in order to socialize their children. On the other hand, Authoritative parents are less demanding and more responsive. They understand their children's feelings and teach them to regulate those feelings. They achieve the delicate balance between autonomy and warmth to be given to children. Indulgent parents are very warm but not at all demanding with their children. They allow self-regulation and avoid confrontation. On the extreme end where there is absence of both warmth and demand is Neglectful parenting style. They are not involved and interested in their children's lives. If we put these parenting styles on a scale measuring their demandingness and responsiveness, then it can be put in a diagram in the following way:



***Baumrind's 3 Parenting Styles Model  
(Figure 1.1 Baumrind's Parenting  
Styles Adopted from Positive-  
Parenting-Ally.Com)***

It is not an easy task to put David Lurie on these yardsticks of parenting styles. Considering his temperament, he can be called a neglectful father. He is a slave to Eros and that has so far been backbone of his life. Controlling instincts and getting bound by social and familial responsibilities is not his religion. But whenever Lucy is in need of help, he is there. It is David who helps Lucy to buy the land and get settled in Salem. When he leaves Cape Town, he chooses to go to Lucy. Even Rosalind, David's second former wife and now a mentor, agrees that there is quite good bonding between him and Lucy. David is not at all demanding but his responsiveness is not absolute either. Lucy has lived away from David since she was six years old. Though she has not received physical intimacy from her father, it is also evident that he feels responsible towards her. That is why he feels guilty that he could not save his daughter from the attack and the rape. He wants to save her from further attacks and arrange her resettlement in Holland using all the resources he has in hand. He is truly worried when Lucy decides not to leave the farm. But eventually, he supports her decision and stands by her.

The parent-child relationship between David and Lucy never looks strong overtly. It gets broken and shaken further after the savage attack on them. It

completes David's predicament of a disgraceful life. In his own words, "I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself" (172). He wants to help Lucy; take her away from the devastating and dangerous situation that she is putting herself into. However, Lucy rejects to be controlled by him. Lucy calls him 'David' in the novel; not papa or daddy. She does not expect him to be her 'father'. Rather she does not want it. So at the very end of the novel David leaves her home and rents another house in the vicinity. She welcomes him as a visitor but David accepts this visitorship as "a new footing, a new start" (218).

Carl Jung's concept of 'Father Archetype' can help to understand the other side of this relationship. How Lucy does feel or think about and react to her relationship with her father? The protagonist and focaliser of the novel is Prof. David Lurie. Coetzee has used the narrator with an absolute intelligence. The narrator is truly committed to the focaliser. It is one of the many elements that make this novel a breath catching read. So we come to know what Lucy thinks or feels through David; through what she says to him and her actions that David witnesses.

There are two rape incidents in the novel. The first happens in the beginning. David Lurie takes privilege of his position in the university and pulls one of his students

named Melanie into a series of sexual intercourses. The affair becomes notorious in the campus. He loses his position in the university. This puts David into the void of disgrace. He goes to Salem, situated in Eastern Cape, to live with Lucy, his daughter. As a violent representation of changing power structures in South Africa, they are attacked by three black young men. They are not only robbed off their valuables but their dogs are killed and Lucy is raped. Lucy files an official complaint but only of the robbery and not the rape. David asks Lucy again and again to give a reason for this but she refuses. She wants David to see through the things to understand the core of the problem. She thinks that being a white person she is paying a kind of tax for staying back and the rapists are some tax collectors.

Lucy is not ready to leave the farm and is not talking openly about it with David so one night David writes a note to Lucy, "You wish to humble yourself before the history. But the road you are following is the wrong one. It will strip you of all honour; you will not be able to live with yourself. I plead with you, listen to me. Your father" (160). As an answer to this Lucy writes,

Yes the road I am following maybe the wrong one. But if I leave the farm now I will leave defeated, and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life.

I cannot be the child for ever.  
 You cannot be a father for ever. I  
 know you mean well, but you are  
 not the guide I need, not at this time.  
 (161)

Lucy here is not referring to her physical father but she is referring to the 'father archetype', father-*imago*. Whatever power a father has over his children is derived from this archetype which according to Carl Jung is a part of the universal unconsciousness. Here Lucy, instead of realising, is denying the power of her father. It is because their relationship has been coloured by the small and large context in which they are operating. Jungian Psychoanalyst Samuels writes in the forward of *Post-Jungian Critics*:

“Rather it is in the intensity of affective response to any given image or situation that we find what is archetypal. This can be something very small scale, not coming in a pre-packaged archetypal or mythic form. What stirs you at an archetypal level depends on you and where you sit and how you look at things and on your personal history. The archetypal therefore can be relative, contextual and personal. This reframing of archetypal theory as a theory of affects is something that has not yet reached conservative academic Jungians.” [xiv]

David wants Lucy to put the charges of rape against the culprits, leave the farm and get settled at some safer place. Lucy not only denies David's advice but also rejects to accept him as a father at least into the given situation. She thinks he is actually failing to decipher the situation and her decision. What stuns Lucy more in the rape is the hatred involved. Other things were expected she says. She does not see the rape as a crime against her as an individual. She interprets it with reference to the revolution happening in the country. For her, the act of being raped is like paying tax for staying back. But she is afraid that it will happen again; that those men will come back. When she looks for options, she thinks it is practical to marry fifty two year old Petrus than to be under David's protection. David does not approve her decision but she explains it to him:

Objectively I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. I have a father but he is far away and anyhow powerless in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn for patronage? ... Petrus may not be a big man but he is big enough for someone small like me. And at least I know Petrus. I have no illusions about him. (204)

Another reason why she does not find David a valid patronage to turn to is that he himself is a culprit of a rape. He

forces himself on Melanie. After their second intercourse at Metanie's place the narrator, who is no one else but the witnessing part of David's self, says, "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25) Lucy understands it was a rape. When finally she breaks down and talks to David about her fears. She says, "You are a man, you ought to know. When you trap her, hold her down, get under you... isn't it a bit like killing? ... Doesn't it feel like murder?" (158). Lucy has her own perception of the world and life and she is fully committed to it. And she denies to accept the advice and patronage of the father who himself is a culprit of the same kind of crime. This balances the action of the novel in a mesmerising way.

In the fourth chapter of the novel David Lurie, while discussing the following lines from canto XVIII of Byron's poem "Lara", talks about Lucifer.

He stood a stranger in this breathing world,  
An erring spirit from another hurled;  
A thing of dark imaginings, that shaped  
By choice the perils he by chance  
escaped (32)

He explains to the students that this 'erring star' is Lucifer who tried to surpass God and so was thrown out of the heaven to the earth. "He does not act on principle

but on impulse, and the source of his impulse is dark to him... his madness was not of head but heart" (33). This explanation was not addressed to the whole class but to Melanie. Lucifer is a metaphor used here for David who acts on impulse and is trapped in the world which sounds alien to him. It is as if the writer is guiding us to judge David on valid lines. The major role of the father archetype is to stand between the child and the mother; to set the constraint. In David's case it seems that the father archetype has not got activated and so the father does not have any control over him. That is why he is compared with Lucifer who acts on impulse and the source of that impulse is unknown darkness. Does it not indicate the absence of father figure in his life? Another role of father figure is to connect the child with the society otherwise the child is pushed into isolation. David like Lucifer is absolutely isolated from the world around, "He stood a stranger in this breathing world" (32). Now, on the same line of signification how can we put Lucy at the correct position? Lucy is the daughter of Prof. David Lurie who teaches Romantic poetry in Technical University of Cape and whose master has been Wordsworth. Wordsworth has written five "Lucy Poems". But Lucy in this novel is more like St. Lucy than Lucy in these poems. *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, which



defines Lucifer as the fallen angel or Satan, defines Lucy in the following way:

It is said that a nobleman wanted to marry her for the beauty of her eyes; so she tore them out and gave them to him saying, "Now let me live to God." The story says that her eyesight was restored; but the rejected lover accused her of "faith in Christ," and she was martyred by a sword thrust into her neck. St. Lucy is represented in art carrying a palm branch, and bearing a platter with two eyes on it.

Lucy, with her asexual cloths and attempt to create a utopian world of her own in the soil of Salem reflects St. Lucy. Even after being raped she does not want to avenge the culprits. She perceives everything around her in a very saint like manner. She is sacrificing for the sins she has not committed but she is wise enough to see that she owes a responsibility. She even wants David to see things clearly. She says,

You do not see this, and I do not know what more I can do to make you see. It is as if you have chosen deliberately to sit in a corner where the rays of the sun do not shine. I think of you as one of the three chimpanzees, the one with the paws over his eyes. (161).

She becomes pregnant from 'that day' but she wants to keep the baby. She considers that baby not a punishment but a way to get rooted once again in the soil she loved a lot. After all the child is "a child of the earth" (216). When David asks her if she will be able to love the child she says, "Love will grow- one can trust Mother Nature for that. I am determined to be a good mother, David. A good mother and a good person. You should try to be a good person too." (216). David is sure that he could not be a good father and is doubtful of being a good grandfather, but he is determined to imbibe new virtues required to become a good grandfather. And being a scholar of literature, he decides to turn to Victor Hugo's poetry for that.

We inherit something from our parents that forms a foundation from which we explore the whole net of human relationships. With our experience of life and the world this foundation is deformed and reformed. Out of this foundation operates later our relationship with our children. Meanwhile, our relationship with our parents goes through stages and phases which are charged with many dilemmas and conflicts. Most of us fail to forgive and accept our parents until we have children of our own. So, the cycle completes and continues further. The same happens with David and Lucy. Throughout the novel,

Lucy and David are adamant and refuse to transform into something that is not true to their character. But the last chapters ensure that there is a change; a subtle one and towards something positive with some dark shades though.

### **Conclusion :**

So the relationship between David Lurie and Lucy operates in the context of changing power structures and different revolutions in post-apartheid South Africa. David who himself has lived in the absence of father fails to be a good father to Lucy. This slave of Eros is doomed to a disgraceful life. He cannot be put under the category of a single parenting style. When it comes to giving freedom to children, he is an indulgent parent. However, when it comes to be responsive, he is sometimes neglectful and sometimes authoritative. He could not live with his daughter for a longer time. This might have emotionally separated her from her father but it did not make her asocial. She has neither been pushed into the valley of identity crisis. In fact, she has created a strong identity in the community which is later shaken and broken due to the political upheavals happening in the post-apartheid South Africa. Of course, Sophie is the daughter of history. The novel presents three generations of parent-child relationship. The past has been referred symbolically and the hints have been sowed at the end

of the novel towards the birth of a Baby; baby born out of the hatred of black person and guilt of a white lady. Still it is hoped that things will change once the baby is born. David and Lucy represent Lucifer and St. Lucy which provides a good the line of interpreting these characters which are otherwise very perplexing. This biblical connotation hints at writer's wish that the readers should sympathise with the father and the daughter. That is why may be the title of the novel is not *Disgust* but *Disgrace*.

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