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Representation of women in writings of John Maxwell Coetzee

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Abstract

African literature has provided the actual representation of post-colonial reflection. Among these writers the name of the Coetzee is enumerated with golden words. Coetzee is a writer with profound thoughts. His works explore history and reflect reality, which has important research significance. The ecological view reflected in his works is concrete, systematic and complete. He awakens people's reflection on ecological integrity through the natural as well as ecological disaster. The endurance plight of vulnerable groups and races, and the displacement of human spirit described in his works. He also enlightens people to exploit and use natural resources in a controlled way, pay attention to the internal repair of social and spiritual system. As per Coetzee, the women have remained the most victim in the hands of men. In the structure of colonialism, the rape, subjugation and suffering were loaded in the fate of women.

Keywords: Women, rape, sufferings

Introduction

Everything influences and changes everything over the time. Whenever there is transition, different shades of changes hover around it. The history of South African is no more exception from these changes which are evident in writings of John Maxwell Coetzee. As a postmodernist/postcolonial writer, Coetzee investigates how colonialism and its aftermath have affected the representation of women. His upbringing in between the two countries as born in Cape Town in 1940 and educated in South Africa and the United States, Coetzee feels himself as marginalized like blacks or white women in South Africa. Hence, by placing the protagonist at marginalized place in his novels, Coetzee tries to show his presence and whose sensitivity to the colonial history of his native country confronts the reader towards the reality. The portrayal of characters in the works of African writers of prose reveals a preference for male characters as protagonists while female characters are often depicted as victimised characters. The feeling of alienation in his own country has forced him to give the voice to voiceless in his novels. He employs various strategies to highlight the idea of change as reflected in the experience of his characters and narrators as well as the respective roles of the writer and reader in his work in order to promote a more progressive society.

The novels of Coetzee are set in apartheid climate and Disgrace is set in post-apartheid South Africa. Even though apartheid has legally ended, its legacy still haunts the country. Like the new global constitution has given men and women equal rights but still women are marginalized. Coetzee re-constructs histories through marginalized voices which are neglected and oppressed. In this way, Coetzee breaks the official historical discourse. In South Africa, non-whites and white women are marginalized and long-deprived of voices to express themselves. After the end of apartheid, the blacks have returned to the centre of power from voiceless status. In a male-dominated society, women are bound to lose their voices. Whenever, the existence of women is at the matter of debate, feminist narratology makes its presence by drawing their struggle against an existing male tradition. In this struggle, women often use male weapons and transform them. In order to reveal the different positions of women in apartheid to post-apartheid period he has enfolded the narrative of coloniser and colonized attitudes in his writings. In this way narrative technique is not secondary but a primary tool of novel. With the employment of right narrative technique only the writer would be able to convey his ideas to the readers.

Narrative technique is the base for writers, without which they can write nothing relevant. From the journey of 'Foe' to 'Disgrace' the characters actively assist in voicing the struggles of a variety of people searching for acceptance and assertion of their identities. But as the demand of the title in order to show the feminist perspectives we will summarize two women characters; Susan Barton from Foe and Lucy Lurie from Disgrace. Before analysing the comparative study in regards to Coetzee's evolution in narrative techniques first we have to analyse the context in which both the novels are written. Foe is a novel written by J. M. Coetzee in 1986, and it builds on Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe from 1719. In Coetzee's novel, the female character, Susan Barton and the black slave (Friday) are treated as less valuable due to gender and skin colour respectively. They are 'Others' in terms of the white man as norm. Susan is white, but she is a woman, which gives her a position as "in-between" in the society of the enlightenment. On the other hand, in 1994 when the South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has created the equal wall for colonizer and colonized; a transition to a new enlightened order takes a new shape as country started suffering with reverse racial tolerance, consequently both stand against each other and make the situation worse. Therefore, the oppositional force of history is germinated the seed of Disgrace in 1999. Character is a person who plays the central role between the narrator and narratee who discloses the entire activity of the novel from his words or actions either the narration in first person or third person. Characters include main and supporting characters but both have their own position which is most remarkably noticed in Coetzee's novels Foe and Disgrace. The inherent ambiguous tension in the white woman's positions in both the novels Foe and Disgrace who are simultaneously a colonizer and a colonized. In order to more evolve woman's position, Coetzee draw comparing Lucy-Lurie though minor in position but her silence has become the voice of South African society with first person narrator, protagonist or the main character Susan Barton but at the marginal position in the novel Foe. The main protagonist of the plot is Susan Barton. Susan in Foe starts out as a first-person narrator but soon is subjected to being a castaway, marginalised by her fellow shipmates. Although liminal narrators have specific qualities which set them apart, individual differentiation is possible while focalisation and ascription also play a role.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the representation of women in the writings of John Maxwell Coetzee.

Methodology

The researcher used both primary and secondary sources in this study. The researcher conducted a close analysis of both primary and secondary texts, journals, critical essays and studies on the depiction of women characters in relation to aspects of culture, education and power.

Justification of the study

Historically, the dominant role of patriarchy was generally evident until the close of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, there are numerous examples of challenges to the ruling gender divisions that disempowered women. Writing offered opportunities to explore the injustice and cruelty endured by women, but it was also a space to

imagine a different kind of society in which women's lives might be improved, and men's dominant role(s) contested. In the eighteenth century, novelists, poets, playwrights, and other social commentators and political writers were beginning to suggest that the two sexes were complementary rather than opposition. Ironically, women's roles were increasingly celebrated in the same moment that more rigid notions of what was deemed appropriate behaviour were adopted: women were adoring mothers, caring wives, and domestic angels; those who fell short of this ideal were to be despised as whores. In contrast, men occupied the public sphere and enjoyed both economic independence and commodified ownership of their wives. Curiously, men often enjoyed other women in extra-marital affairs; such was the hypocritical double-standard of Victorian patriarchy.

- **Rape:** It is not exaggeration to say that South Africa has remained fertile in rape statistics. The main reason behind this rape is apartheid as it has made rapists bold to legitimise their sexual hunt on marginalised sections of women. Indeed, it was not allowed officially in post-apartheid climate. However, the segregated laws make South American place fertile for commuting rape on the basis of race. The humanitarian news organisation (IRIN) claims that 500,000 rapes are committed annually in South Africa. The main tool for commenting rape in South Africa was race and power. Keeping in view, Maier, S. L, (2008) reported that South Africa is the world's rape capital. South Africa has reported the highest incidents of child sexual abuse in the entire world with more than 2000 sexual assaults cases against children. Besides, the evidence reported in the sexual violence cases suggest that these serious psychological and physical consequences have taken place on part of victim. In addition to this, the world history has reported that colonialism, postcolonialism, apartheid and post-apartheid has remained rich in rape episodes.
- **Subjection despite endurance:** In this brutal era, rape was used as a tool for getting revenge of vested interests. In majority of these cases, it has been seen political in nature. This influences some women's choices, in that the woman might have capacity for a position of power, however, she may opt not to reveal this for fear of reprisal. In this way, the woman penalties personal empowerment in order to be seen as conforming to cultural expectations of her community and to be accepted. The depiction of women portrayed in the texts that were used for this study has revealed that women are still subjected to a culture that negates their capacity for high levels of participation in society. However, these texts have also revealed that more and more women are gaining awareness of their oppression and choosing to resist it.

Conclusion

Coetzee is a writer with profound thoughts. His works explore history and reflect reality, which has important research significance. The ecological view reflected in his works is concrete, systematic and complete. He awakens people's reflection on ecological integrity through the natural ecological disaster, the endurance plight of vulnerable groups and races, and the displacement of human spirit described in his works. He also enlightens people to

exploit and use natural resources in a controlled way, pay attention to the internal repair of social and spiritual system, so as to return to ecological health and grow, survive and live in a harmonious natural, social and spiritual atmosphere. As per Coetzee, the women have remained the most victim in the hands of men. In the structure of colonialism, the rape, suggestion and suffering were loaded in the fate of women.

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