



Redefining Lesbian Characteristics of Lucy in Coetzee's *Disgrace*: A Postmodern Study

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Abstract. Lesbian characteristics have varied from generations based on its definition. In this postmodern era, many writers are triggered to expose the shift of lesbian characteristics in several literary works, one of them is *Disgrace* by Coetzee. Lucy was the main object of research in which the researchers compiled data of her activities, conducts, and thoughts as the main data. The secondary data of lesbianism were utilized in differentiating the definition of lesbian in terms of its characteristics. Thus this research was aimed at finding the definition of new lesbian characteristics portrayed in Lucy. The result of this research was at first she was resistance of masculine domination, mating with woman and owning dogs then she transformed into her decision in camouflage marriage and pregnancy. Two main reasons were her indeterminacy and selflessness.

Keywords: Lesbian Characteristics · post-modern characteristics · *Disgrace* · Lucy

1 Introduction

Being considered as controversial by critics and all alike, *Disgrace* had confronted many sectors of belief in South Africa's 1999 post-apartheid life in terms of the post-colonization and postmodernist perspectives [1]. With a long-serving apartheid, an era of racist ways of life, South Africa had been acknowledged as the portrayal of the true place where rapes, struggles, and vivid lesbian conduct. The last part, vivid lesbian conduct, is successfully covered in sophisticated manner where the lesbian is being shown as rebellion toward male domination [2] this literary work.

The lesbian here is undergone in a very complex image but surely interesting when it deals with a woman, named Lucy. Even though, it cannot be seen obviously that Lucy is declared as lesbian in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, but from the vivid characteristics of her can be perfectly intended of its word 'Lesbian' since being a lesbian or gay needs no reclaim of its fully-mentioned 'Lesbian' or 'Gay' [3] in any circumstance [4]. The more important in understanding Lesbianism can be looked forward in an open-minded society [4] or else the accused lesbian will have a social punishment as tribute to the collective unconscious [5] truth of sexual favor instead of individual choice, indeed one would try to show or to hide it [4] in order to correspond toward what had been coined by Jung's collective unconscious of male domination [2].

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Being a lesbian is not that easy and simple, as above mentioned, one should try to decide her position in terms of showing power or of defending herself from the outside attack [7] in easier word: whether to oppose or to hide. Even in the open-minded society, a lesbian needs to consolidate properly in ways she performs her choice. This issue raised in Coetzee's *Disgrace*.

This sophisticated and complex work of John Maxwell Coetzee or famous with J.M. Coetzee brings many characters in *Disgrace* with each problem but for the sake of the depth of the essay, this paper limits the discussion only on Lucy Lurie, as the daughter of the main character named David Lurie, as a girl presumed to undergo lesbian characteristics. Lucy Lurie, born from educated family, lives on a farm of Eastern Cape [8]. She who is portrayed from white-skin family enjoys her cozy, simple, and quiet life far from the family and friends she knew in her neighborhood. Lucy is the only character in *Disgrace* who undergoes some covered lesbian characteristics.

The lesbian and lesbianism discussed previously would have not been sufficient before it is deepened with the postmodern issue. The issue raised is still in the perspective of lesbian conduct. The redefining means to deconstruct the idea of lesbian is only dealt with genitals or sexual conduct, but there is a particularity [9] in contrary of universality of thoughts in ways lesbian must be analyzed because universality of lesbian characteristics focuses on genitals and non-heterosexual conduct. This creates ambiguity in definition since its definition is going back to several years back before the era of second-wave movement in Feminism occurred. The ambiguity results indeterminacy [10] in practicality of defining lesbian characteristic. After deciding focus and limitation of research, this paper is aimed at redefining lesbian of Lucy in Coetzee's *Disgrace* from the postmodern study.

2 Literary Theory

2.1 The Emergence and Early Definition of Lesbian

One lesbian identity would be classified as the traditional version of lesbianism as a disease/sickness, a sin, or a 'sorry-state' [6]. For a woman living in the male-supremacist, capitalist, racist, and misogynist like in South Africa, to be a lesbian can be an act of resistance [11]. The resistance occurred of many reasons since decades ago in lands of this earth, as quoted by Rich in Clarke:

"...Before any kind of feminist movement existed, or could exist, lesbians existed: women who loved women, who refused to comply with behavior demanded of women, who refused to define themselves in relation to men. Those women, our fore Sisters, millions whose names we do not know, were tortured and burned as witches, slandered in religious and later in 'scientific' tracts, portrayed in art and literature as bizarre, amoral, destructive, decadent women. For a long time, the lesbian has been a personification of feminine evil" [12].

From the quotation above, it can be vividly seen that male domination resulted resistance. That also shows the strong definition of lesbian, the first is a woman who

loves another woman and this is the grand definition of lesbian. This definition then is classified into another softer definition by adding romance and etc.

Naturally lesbian was fought by society at that time, even by women themselves. As a result, lesbians were secretly engaged and being undercover. They had radar to monitor 'friends' or 'allies'. The term witches was also as a weapon to eliminate the numbers of lesbians at that time. Because of the definition, 'women who loved another women,' lesbians tried to divert their conduct, therefore they would not be punished with the 'scientific' tracts. Thus, new definitions were arisen.

2.2 The Modern Definition of Lesbian

The historical origins of modern Western lesbian identities are ambiguous [13], when western women portrayed as open-minded societies and they are more prone to showing their identity, it would be tripled or quadrupled in terms of the willingness to identify themselves for 'lesbian' in close-minded societies. Some historian experts have traced the roots of modern identities in romantic friendships, Boston marriages, passing women, bulldykes, butches and femmes and numerous other identifications [13, 14]. These relationships were defined as 'lesbian' based on a totality of experience rather than specific genital or romantic encounters [13]. On the other hand, early sexologists focused mainly on masculine traits and psychological 'inversion' in defining criteria for the label 'lesbian'. These changes of different masculine behavior among women increased as feminist ideology and the women's liberation movement started to obtain credence [14].

The spread of early lesbian activity within the feminist movement resulted in the emergence of the political ideologies and practices which characterized the 'Lesbian Nation' movement in the 1970s [15–17]. The shape of 'lesbian' is now based less on the possibility of physical sex between women, and more on a complex of social behaviors, traits, and attitudes [18, 19]. However, like other identities in contemporary society, definitions of lesbian identity are multiple, shifting and continually subject to reconceptualization based on the cultures, contexts and experiences of both individual lesbian women and lesbians as a social group [20, 21] The multiple, shifting, and reconstructed definitions of lesbian identity enforce the writer to choose the definition from the object of the research, Lucy Lurie. Moreover, Lucy also needs to be analyzed individually and as a partner/group as her relation with Helen.

2.3 The Social Punishment for Lesbian in South Africa

In South Africa, no woman is safe from violence. There are an estimated 500,000 rapes, hundreds of murders and countless beatings carried out every year. The most alarming fact rises that almost half of all South African women would be raped during their lifetime. This shameful record of male domination and violence has helped build an increasingly brutal and oppressive culture, in which women are forced to conform to gender stereotypes or suffer the consequences. As part of this oppression, the country is now witnessing a backlash of crimes targeted specifically at lesbian women, who are perceived as representing a direct and specific threat to the status quo [22]. This violence

often takes the form of 'corrective' rape [23] – a way of punishing and 'curing' women of their sexual orientation.

As presented previously that the accused lesbian might have been burned to death as the punishment by labeling her as witch. In this subchapter, the writer intends to single out the punishment for lesbians in South Africa. The punishment is applied in many places out of downtown of Cape Town. By the phrase 'corrective rape' [23] many people rape a woman indicated or thought as lesbian in order to cure her. This rape sometimes ends with ditching the body of the raped girl as a symbol of reminder to other lesbian to behave/act normally as real woman. This act of violence is performed by some attackers who are the lesbian's friends, families, neighbors, or people who know the victim. This violent act leaves a terror for lesbian who is covering herself since she is afraid of being revealed and gang raped to death.

3 Discussion

3.1 Lucy's Lesbian Characteristics before Raped

This chapter will focus on Lucy's lesbian characteristics before she is raped. This chapter will be divided into two subchapters: Lucy's decision to live on a farm and Lucy's preference.

3.1.1 Lucy's Decision to Live on a Farm

As a young woman who lives far away from the separated parent, Lucy has been living in the suburb farm Eastern Cape Town for six years. As a child Lucy had been quiet and self-effacing, observing him, judging him [8]. From this quotation, it is obvious that the relation of daughter and father is not as well-built as other families. She unwillingly follows what her father asks. As all readers know, the rebellion of parent's decision to separate has brought Lucy to live on Farm. Lucy is a typically a girl who hates oppression or it can be said Lucy does not enjoy masculine domination [2] to occur. Bourdieu stated that being included, as man or woman, in the object that one is trying to comprehend; we have embodied the historical structures of the masculine order in the form of unconscious schemes of perception and appreciation. When one tries to understand masculine domination, it is therefore likely to resort to modes of thought that are the product of domination [2]. The structure in society is sharpened with masculine domination so as the result of it, Lucy decided to move in her community, together they tried to 'conquer' the land and leaving the masculine domination behind by 'starting' a new life.

The commune [8], which she joined in, was the answer for her who had the intention of being 'accepted' because no one knew that she was into a woman. In a commune as well, she could gather with girls at her age to participate in peddling leather and making pottery [8]. Hiding the trait is her temporary way out in order to keep herself of being rebel [11] since she still cannot do resistance on heterosexual-life openly.

The Eastern Cape border [8] has been depicted as a historical conflict between the whites (colonizers) and the indigenous black population or colonized [1]. There is a contestation of controlling the Eastern Cape during apartheid and post-apartheid era.

The area's name is pretty famous for literary work lovers, Salem [8] of Grahamstown. Its name where Lucy lives is meant 'peace' [12], fortunately the area which is not made up name. [12] suggests that the name presumably had a religious implication and brought the hope for God's blessing and protection in the face of dangers threatening the survival of the townsfolk. Based on this idea, Lucy sets a hope for God's blessing in starting 'new life.' New Life here means not only life far from family, but also life in new way she likes (with a company of a woman as the protector even they are surrounded with Black native South African). From the two reasons above, the writer comes with a result of Lucy's lesbian characteristic: resistance of masculine domination.

3.1.2 Lucy's Preference

In this subchapter, there are two main purposes of discussion; the first is Lucy's preference of living with Helen and the second is Lucy's preference to take care dogs. The first preference of Lucy is staying or starting a life with Helen. Her relation with Helen started when the commune breaks so Lucy and Helen decide to live together [8]. Coetzee portrays Helen as a large, sad-looking woman with a deep voice and a bad skin, older than Lucy. Lurie, Lucy's father assumes of Helen and Lucy sleep together merely as children do, cuddling, touching, giggling, reliving girlhood - sisters more than lovers like sharing a bed, sharing a bathtub, baking gingerbread cookies, trying on each other's clothes. Sapphic love: an excuse for putting on weight. It means that Lucy's father suspects Helen and Lucy of having an affair. It can be understood from the assumption above. It is strengthened with 'Sapphic love' [24] which becomes an allusion of Sappho [24], a Greek lyric poet born in Lesbos about the middle of the 7th century B.C., transcribed loving, impassioned love poems, mostly to women and Sappho is considered to be the famous non-heterosexual or lesbian poet.

From the paragraph upon, it may become more accepted when the paper is claimed to have mentioned Lucy in vividly owning lesbian characteristics. In Jung's archetype [25] Helen is imaged to have high Animus. According to Jung in Ewen, Animus is the male archetype in woman. It predisposes woman to understand the nature of man, is powerful, and compensates for the sentimental female persona [25]. The woman who suppresses her animus in a misguided attempt to appear extremely feminine will be troubled by spells of intense stubbornness [5]. This quotation from Carl Gustav Jung simply responds what happens to Lucy of her stubbornness. Helen is relatively calm since she can accept her animus but she pays the acceptance to the same gender as her, but Lucy is still clouded by her unhappy past and it affects much of her life. It becomes a crucial part of deciding Lucy in having lesbian characteristic.

The second preference of Lucy is taking care of dogs. She mentioned the more dogs, the more deterrence [8]. She mentioned it in full awareness, especially when Helen has gone to Johannesburg. Taking care of dogs is least thing that actually a woman of her age may do, she must have taken care of a man to prolong her life. Because she is assumed to be lesbian thus, choosing a life with a man is something impossible. Lucy thinks, dogs can be friends in any circumstance and so many important other functions. It is in line with Shell's statement, "Dogs, they say, provide pleasure, companionship, and protection, or the feeling of being secure. Pets provide an excuse for exercise and a stimulus to meet people. Pets help people to deal with the loss by death of a friend

or relative; moreover, pets are beneficial in many methods of psychotherapy and family therapy” [27]. Based on Shell’s idea, pleasure may be provided with dogs as creatures that can be told to do something as we know in many porn industries, the usage of dogs to satisfy the lesbian audiences are varied. The lesbians are more prone to enjoying dogs versus women [28].

In terms of commodification, dogs may be functioned as male or female, they can be dressed as the owner wants. Dogs are commoditized in order to be ordered and functioned as harmless companion. In lesbian community, dogs are sexless and harmless to lesbian [27]. This becomes another reason why Lucy, despite of security reason uttered by her to her father, loves taking care of dogs, as stated below;

The dogs are excited to see her: Dobermanns, German Shepherds, ridgebacks, bull terriers, Rottweilers. ‘Watchdogs, all of them,’ she says. ‘Working dogs, on short contracts: two weeks, one week, sometimes just a weekend. The pets tend to come in during the summer holidays [8].

From the above quotation, it can be vividly understood that even the dogs are excited to meet Lucy. Pets, especially dogs, are more sensitive to people who intend bad things to them, it means Lucy treats the dogs with passion. By mentioning those two reasons, choosing dogs as companion can be an output as the lesbian characteristics found in Lucy.

3.2 Lucy’s Lesbian Characteristic After Raped

This chapter will focus on Lucy’s lesbian characteristics after she is raped. This chapter will be divided into two subchapters: Lucy faces corrective rape and Lucy’s Defensive Action of the Possible Corrective Rape in the Future.

3.2.1 Lucy Faces Corrective Rape

Lucy decided to go out the house when she was in her mid-twenties [8] which means she is around her 31 years old when the rape occurs. There are many causes of rape happened to Lucy, the first is the way she chooses her clothes, asexual ones, or commonly known as unisex clothes. These easy-to-wear and easy-to-clean outfits are the remarks of lesbian in the presentation. The second is the unwillingness to marry a guy makes people in South Africa presume that she is not into man. The third is her female partner who is presumed as her spouse. These reasons result in a corrective rape happened to Lucy.

In South Africa, no woman is safe from violence, even Lucy has chosen the place named Salem of Grahamstown – which is considered peace [12] and hope for God’s blessing and protection in the face of dangers threatening the survival of the townfolk [12], with an estimated 500,000 rapes, hundreds of murders and countless beatings carried out every year [29]. These occurrences of violence often ended with death of lesbian. This becomes the reason why Lucy and Helen are so against the rape; they mention that raping lesbian is worse than raping a virgin [8]. This action of being vehement toward raping lesbian may provide a fact that they can be considered as the ones who do that or they are the activists who are fighting against it, but the complexity

of their position is based on their decision on living together and many other proofs stated previously.

Lucy has been in a rape as a victim many times, in a little town. This rape is not conducted individually but somehow it is done in group or ‘gang rape’ [26] by three black men. This conduct, In South Africa, has been implemented to women or girls who have declared vividly that they are lesbian or to those who are thought or assumed to be lesbian. South African men consider this gang rape as a corrective rape [23] for only to lesbian or women considered, assumed, thought, behaved, or dressed like lesbian. This act of violence is performed by some attackers who are the lesbian’s friends, families, neighbors, or people who know the victim [22]. In Lucy’s case, the rapists are those who are working with her. Those, who of course know how Lucy behaves and dresses in her life. This violent act leaves a terror for lesbian who is covering herself since she is afraid of being revealed and gang raped to death. From this information can provide and proof that Lucy must be lesbian.

3.2.2 Lucy’s Defensive Action of the Possible Corrective Rape in the Future

Before starting to describe Lucy’s defensive action, it is better to highlight David’s suggestion to Lucy of preventing another same corrective rape happened to her again is by moving to another place, outside South Africa, vividly saying to Holland. He even will be paying any expenses occur. Holland is chosen by David is merely because same-sex marriage [30] was started to be rung before 1990, Holland was the paradise for Gays and Lesbians. The response of Lucy is still pretty strong to object her father’s idea: “To begin with, you don’t understand what happened to me that day. You are concerned for my sake, which I appreciate, you think you understand, but finally you don’t. Because you can’t” [8]. From the statement upon, Lucy shows a great anger and regret.

There is a famous saying from Petrus, Lucy’s assistant; a woman must marry [8] because if she does not, it will be dangerous, dangerous for her. Petrus proposes a protection by marrying Lucy. This proposition is well-accepted by Lucy and she tries to convince her father. As it is stated in the novel,

“I don’t believe you get the point, David. Petrus is not offering me a church wedding followed by a honeymoon on the Wild Coast. He is offering an alliance, a deal. I contribute the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection, I am fair game” [8].

From the above statement, Lucy has taken a way out of camouflage [22]. Camouflage here is means Lucy is still keeping her identity of being Lesbian but she has no longer afraid of being gang raped. In this hidden cover under the armpit of Petrus, she can ‘play’ a role in participating of a family [30]. Participating here means cover in order to gain power. She is now safe from a prolonged-corrective-gang-rape from black native people surrounding her. An outmost cover in Lucy’s defensive action is her surrender in pregnancy. Pregnancy in Lesbian can be considered as her readiness to be in parenthood [32]. For many lesbian and bisexual women, starting a family is a rewarding and life changing experience.

From the discussion above, it can be notified that Lucy has many lesbian characteristics: Resistance of masculine domination, living together with Helen, taking care of

dogs, being gang raped by three native black men as corrective rape, and deciding to marry Petrus as the camouflage of lesbian.

3.3 Postmodern Characteristics from Lucy's Lesbian Characteristics

The Lesbian characteristic of Lucy has shifted from the progressive lesbian [32] into camouflage lesbian. This shift of characteristics is ruptures [10] of well-shaped-lesbian characteristics. The two ambiguities [10] found in Lucy's lesbian characteristics are, the first is marrying her own assistant (a native man having already 2 wives) and the second is deciding to get pregnant. These two ambiguities of lesbian characteristics are basically considered as postmodern characteristic, in Hassan's statement: Indeterminacy here includes all manner of ambiguities, ruptures, and displacements affecting knowledge and society.

The second postmodern characteristic of Lucy's lesbian characteristic is the lessening or losing of masculine domination resistance which she always conducted in her past, especially toward her father. The main reason found above when Lucy leaves her father's house was her resistance of masculine domination [2]. This, based on postmodern characteristic coined by Hassan, is considered as selflessness, where the readers cannot trace the power shown by Lucy in her past life. The loss of self [10] is one of the focuses in selflessness.

4 Conclusion

This paper has found several characteristics of Lucy's lesbianism such as Resistance of masculine domination, living together with Helen, taking care of dogs, being gang raped by three native black men as corrective rape, and deciding to marry Petrus as the camouflage of lesbian. By understanding the Lesbian characteristics from Lucy, it can be concluded that Lucy is the real lesbian even though the terms could not be vividly seen from Coetzee's *Disgrace*. These Lesbian characteristics from Lucy have been changed and shifted due to several reasons. The shifting and change found therefore analyzed through postmodern elements. There are two postmodern characteristics in Lucy's lesbianism, the first is indeterminacy and the second is selflessness.

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