

Disgrace of Boundaries: On Daoism in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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Abstract: So far, many articles have been published worldwide on J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* from different angles to delimit and dig out the deep meanings hidden in the novel. Undeniably, those articles are reasonable in their own terms, but meanwhile when coming together they appear a little bit chaotic. What all of them have in common is the setting of certain boundaries. This paper adopts a Daoist perspective and focuses on Daoist ideas, which are beyond any man-made boundary, in Lurie's sexual life, attitudes and actions towards animals and thoughts on literary creation. No matter whether on the levels of content, idea or narration, the novel *Disgrace* reveals that all the disgraces result from the setting of boundaries, and the ideal of living in this world is to live beyond all the set boundaries, in tune with the natural Dao.

Keywords: *Disgrace*, sexual life, attitude towards animals, creation of works, Dao

1. Introduction

Born and raised in South Africa, where apartheid and racial oppression used to be prevalent, it is almost impossible for J. M. Coetzee to be immune to the influence of the South African politics. To a certain degree, his novels “respond to the oppressive practices that have pervaded South African life for hundreds of years” (Gallagher, 1991, p. x), though he himself always insists on the independence of literature. Benita Parry, however, believes she identifies in Coetzee's works “a writing practice that diverts and disperses the engagement with political conditions it also inscribes, while remaining... ‘ethically saturated’” (Parry, 1993, p. 20). But I feel Parry can be partially wrong, for she fails to see the multiple qualities in Coetzee's works. As single and original as they can be, those works are actually “located in the nexus of history and text; that is, they explore the tension between these polarities” (Attwell, 1993, pp. 2-3). Read from one direction, Coetzee's novels offer “a critique of various modes of writing” (Dovey, 1988, p. 11), from another, “a radical critique of language,... challenging our right to such things as epistemological certitude” (Huggan & Watson, 1996, p. 5). That is to say, his works refuse any fixed designation, which is almost always within a man-made boundary of this kind or that.

Among Coetzee's novels, *Disgrace* is a typically critical one, and has attracted much academic attention both at home in South Africa and abroad. In China, many a scholar has interpreted the novel from the perspective of post-colonialism. The question is: why post-colonialism? Before answering this question, I think there is a need to figure out what is colonialism and what is post-colonialism. Many theorists have touched upon the two concepts, but here let me just offer my own understanding. Simply speaking, colonialism is about one country exploiting and oppressing another, while post-colonialism is quite similar, for it is just an updated colonialism, though it is mostly ongoing implicitly in the form of political, economical

and cultural control, penetration and exploitation. Since different kinds of post-colonialist theories were once very popular in China, relevant theorists as Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri C. Spivak have been household names to Chinese scholars. No matter whether in the fields of literary theory, cultural study or literary critique, post-colonialism still holds its place, so no wonder so many Chinese scholars read *Disgrace* in the light of post-colonialism. However, here comes another question, what's the point? Can we make a difference? What is certain is that J. M. Coetzee will never let his works become the tools of any ideology, for he is well aware that an ideal world is yet to come, but certainly not right here right now, at least not unless everyone understands what his works truly implicate.

Disgrace, like any other J. M. Coetzee's fiction, is by no means an easy book to read. The beginning of the novel mainly deals with the David Lurie's sex problem, for which he at first frequented a prostitute, and then had an improper sexual relationship with his young student, resulting in his being fired. He had to leave Cape Town and went to the countryside to stay with his daughter on a small farm. The real tragedy happened there. His daughter was gang raped by three black men, and meanwhile he was badly hurt, both physically and spiritually. He and his daughter differed much in the treatment of this tragedy, which made his situation even worse. The last part of the novel is mainly about their treatment of the tragedy, his writing of a chamber opera, and his treatment of animals, especially dogs. The plot of the novel is not very clear, and the whole story is rather controversial. No wonder there have been quite different interpretations of *Disgrace* worldwide.

Of course, in China, there are interpretations of *Disgrace* from other perspectives, such as narrative, movie adaptation, social mechanism, the clash of civilizations, forgiveness and reconciliation, morality and overstepping the boundary, among which "the price for overstepping the boundary" is an arch perspective. At least, the perspective of post-colonialism can be covered, to exploit is to overstep the boundary. As for the price, it's hard to say, for not every overstepping the boundary needs to pay the price and paying the price does not always mean overstepping a certain boundary. Actually, it seems that all the other perspectives can be included by the perspective of overstepping the boundary: in narrative, there can be the overstepping of focalization; movie adaptation is an overstepping of the text and medium; the clash of civilizations is an overstepping of a certain civilization; forgiveness and reconciliation is about how to deal with the overstepping of a certain boundary and the morality perspective is about the overstepping of certain moral codes.

Relatively speaking, the perspective of overstepping the boundary is universal, for to a certain extent, it's safe to claim that all human knowledge is based on the setting of boundaries. The development of human civilization depends on the continual overstepping of the old boundaries and the setting of new boundaries, the process of which is endless. In terms of the above mentioned, I find that overstepping the boundary is a key concept in the study of *Disgrace*. EBSCO data base has kept in store about 40 articles published abroad on the interpretation of *Disgrace*, which are about different levels and dimensions (See Appendix). After further reading and thinking, I find that all those articles can also be included by the perspective of overstepping the boundary. This classification would be as follows (as shown in the Appendix): 1. The boundary between man and woman cannot be overstepped if not for mutual love or in lawful marriage. Such articles focus on the topic of raping, like what

happened to Lurie's student Melanie and his daughter Lucy; 2. The boundary of grace and disgrace is hard to set. These articles focus on our understanding of grace and disgrace; 3. What is the boundary between the human beings and animals? What has given mankind the right to harm, kill or eat the animals or even destroy the environment? 4. Tragedies happen because of the racial boundary. In South Africa, there used to be apartheid, under which the whites were superior to the blacks. But after the ending of the apartheid, there seemed to be a reversal of the racial status, as happened to Lurie and his daughter Lucy. Some scholars pointed out that the tragedy happened not just because Lurie was a white man, but also because he was actually a Jew; 5. The boundary between the past and the present may help us understand the influence of the masters like Byron and Wordsworth; 6. When it comes to the writing practice of Lurie, there exists a boundary between the real life and that of art; 7. Language boundary sometimes is too hard to overstep, and the overstepping of this kind between different classes of people may have caused much trouble; 8. Civilization sets a boundary while human desire always wants to overstep it; 9. The strongest and most dangerous boundary is the boundary between the self and the other, which can mean the other people, the other being, or the other thought or the other way of thinking.

The nine boundaries mentioned above have covered almost all the articles about *Disgrace*, and in a sense, doing research itself is the setting of a certain boundary. We set the boundary to be overstepped, while overstepping the boundary should be punished, which seems rather absurd. At least, it is not always the case as depicted in *Disgrace*. In the novel, there do exist many kinds of boundaries. For example, Peru overstepped the boundary of master and servant, but instead of getting punished, he eventually obtained more property, even his own master; Lurie overstepped the boundary of the reality and art, but he did not make much progress in his writing. Actually, we don't necessarily pay the price for overstepping the boundary, for it's not where the real problem lies. From the novel, it's safe to argue that the real problem lies in the action of setting the boundary, from which all the troubles come. Zhuang-Tzu thought that the world is actually a whole with no boundary at all, and said in his book that "there is no boundary between different things, for all of them are connected to each other and belong to a prime whole, but it's a pity that only the wise know about it." (Zhao, 2012, p. 101) Therefore all the boundaries are set by the human beings, and in the novel Coetzee actually points out that the feeling of disgrace comes from the setting of the boundary. Starting from this, we can read the novel in a new and different way, and we may dig out some aura of Dao hidden in, between or beyond the text of *Disgrace*.

2. Dao of Sex

As depicted in Coetzee's novels, characters like Friday, Michael K, Mrs. Curren, Dostoyevsky and Paul may live a different life under different circumstances, however, they do have something in common, that is, they all try to live a relatively independent life. Though they live within many man-made boundaries, they never stop trying to overstep the boundaries, which they feel should not exist at all. Others may feel they need to pay the price, but I feel this kind of action, with their unique understanding of the set boundaries, is actually how Dao, which pays no heed to any boundary, presents itself. The life of Lurie in *Disgrace* is just like this, for

it very well presents Dao in sex, nature and literary creation.

As an explicit clue for the development of *Disgrace*, the sex life of Lurie runs throughout the novel. Many scholars in China have realized this and more or less mentioned it in their relevant articles, among which Changcai Zhou's (2004) "Sex has shocked the world", and Chong Zhang's "The Price of Overstepping the Boundary" are two typical examples. From decent sex to degraded sex and finally to sexual crime, it seems that Lurie's sex in the novel follows the track of a downward movement. Near the end of the novel, Lurie's life was far from beautiful and enjoyable. At first, Lurie had his normal married life, in which sex is decent and lawful. After the divorce, he feels that "he has solved the problem of sex rather well" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 1), for he could frequent a prostitute called Soraya. After a failed arrangement, Lurie tried to invade Soraya's private life, and then he found out that she was not professional and she did it as a part-time job so that she could earn some extra money. Soraya was certainly offended by Lurie's action and decided to leave Lurie's life for good, after which "without the Thursday interludes the week is as featureless as a desert" (p. 11). Then he met his new temptation, his student Melanie Isaacs, who had a young and sexy body. After two attempts, he succeeded in seducing the girl, and "on the living-room floor, to the sound of rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her". During the whole process, she didn't fight back, but neither did she offer herself: "though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into black oblivion" (p. 19). It's hard to fairly and objectively judge this sex, since according to the novel it's "not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (p. 25). Nonetheless, morally, Lurie deserved reproach and punishment, for he took advantage of his girl student, and thus after being exposed he had to face the consequence of his action. He refused to listen to the committee and make a public apology, which cost his teaching position and made him leave Cape Town and go to his daughter's farm to live there for a while.

As far as sex is concerned, generally, we tend to feel that Lurie's life was going from bad to worse, for he didn't just fail to enjoy normal couple sex, but he couldn't enjoy prostitution and even had sex with his student Melanie. What is even worse, he lost his teaching position and had to seek shelter in his daughter's farm. The worst happened there: his daughter Lucy was gang raped by three black men and he himself was badly hurt, suffering both physically and psychologically. The problem is not exactly how bad his life was, but a deeper one: why do we feel that Lurie's life was going from bad to worse? What is the standard for this judgment? How can we justify this standard? The answers to these questions can lead us closer to the essence of living in this world.

Most of the Chinese are familiar with Taiji Figure, in which Yin and Yang hug each other forming an inseparable whole. This is the Dao that can keep everything in harmony. Lao Tzu said, "Dao begets one, one begets two, two begets three, and three begets everything. Yin and Yang harmoniously combined forms everything" (Zhao, 2012, p. 47). Neither Yang nor Yin can exist independently. In China, there has been a binary system all along, like heaven and earth, tough and tender, hot and cold, high and low. In the Western world, deconstruction philosophy has a tendency of deconstructing the binary system in terms of ontology and methodology; however, in reality, no matter whether in the fields of natural sciences or in the field of humanities and liberal arts, the existence of the binary system is undeniable. It's safe to

argue that being slides between the binary poles, but the existence of the binary system itself is reasonable. According to the Chinese Daoist philosophy, man is Yang while woman is Yin. Since it is in accordance with Dao that Yin and Yang should co-exist harmoniously, it's better for the Yin and Yang to hug and support each other, which is well illustrated in sex, during which woman is Yin while man is Yang. So it is natural for a man and a woman to have sex. What's the point of repudiating certain sexual behavior?

What is the standard for the judgment of human sexual behavior? The standard varies in different countries and different historical periods, but it has always been there, setting the boundary, overstepping which will result in reproach or even punishment, both physical and psychological. Since naturally there has never been any boundary, the judgment of sexual behavior is actually cultural or social intervention of human instinct rather than a scientific and objective assessment. In *Disgrace*, Lurie thought that sex was human instinct, not to be judged, the idea of which is in accordance with Daoism. But we tend to interfere with instincts, not just human instincts but also animal instincts. He gave an example of dogs. Like human being, dogs also had sexual desires, which human beings tend to dislike so much so that when a male dog's sexual desire is aroused, men tend to whip it so hard that "at the smell of a bitch it would chase around the garden with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide." To Lurie, it's totally unfair, for "no animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts" (p. 90). A reader can obviously feel he is but defending his own taking advantage of his girl student, but what is undeniable is that what he said is still reasonable.

To a certain extent, human beings treat each other worse than what they do to the dogs. In human society, power is everywhere, not just in politics or all kinds of institutions, but also in language, knowledge, culture and so on. Sex is one of the basic instincts, yet in the human society it has been part of a big hierarchy system, within all kinds of man-made boundaries, which helps maintain the running of the man-made hierarchical world. Looking at Lurie's life in the hierarchy system, it's no wonder that we feel his life is going from bad to worse. Even he himself felt that it was unimaginable to have sex with Bev, a middle-aged woman of no charm, "with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck", hence "never did he dream he would sleep with a Bev" (p. 149), but it seems that this is what he has to "get used to, this and even less than this" (p. 150).

Studying Lurie's sex in the discourse of the Western theories, one can read the violence in the light of post-colonialism or feminism, but the real problem is: is there a way out? With the existence of the hierarchy system, it's impossible to put an end to the violence growing so well in the human society, because there is still a long way to go before human beings can put an end to all forms of hierarchy systems. Hence, which many scholars read the power of politics and history in the novel and shudder but there is little they can do to make a difference. Lurie had his own idea about his life. As to sex, he felt it came from Eros, and he "became a servant of Eros." (p. 52) His idea is neither logical nor lawful, but is in tune with Dao, an ideal and natural way of being in this world. No man or woman should live alone, for Yin and Yang are supposed to be together harmoniously. Under the influence of different theories, we may read different meanings in Lurie's sex, but those meanings do not naturally exist in sex; they are actually how power and social mechanisms express themselves via our mouths or pens. Only when we realize this can we begin to understand *Disgrace*.

3. Dao of Animals

Lurie's sex is one of the key elements of *Disgrace*, but some other elements, such as the lives of animals, literary creation, and so on, are also very important. In Coetzee's fiction, the topic of animals has been reiterated, showing his compassion to the animals' lives, thus his profound animal complex. But sometimes the readers can also feel the fictional characters are helpless, though they do try to help or save the animals. In *The Master of Petersburg*, when Dostoyevsky heard the howling of a dog, he did not try to do anything at first, for "let the dog-father, whoever he is, go out in the cold and dark and gather in his arms his gross, smelly child." But then he still decided to go and help the dog, though he didn't understand his decision and action, yet "as long as he expects what he does not expect, what he does not expect will not come." (Coetzee, 1994, p. 80) It seems in the action of helping the dog he was answering to a higher call. In *Elizabeth Costello*, Costello claimed that she was a vegetarian and she was against the killing of animals and eating their meat. To her, the mass killing of animals is just like the holocaust done by the Third Reich, or even worse (Coetzee, 2003, p. 63).

Similarly, in *Disgrace*, Lucy felt there was no difference between the human life and animal life: "There is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals." (p. 74) Lurie also showed great sympathy towards animals. When Petrus wanted to kill two sheep for his party, Lurie felt uneasy. How could he feel so when the killing and cooking of animals for receiving the guests has always been so ordinary? After much thinking, he decided to take action. At first, "he unties them and tugs them over to the damside, where there is abundant grass." (p. 123) Maybe at least the sheep could enjoy the rest of their time. Could he save them? "He has thought of buying the sheep from Petrus. But what will that accomplish? Petrus will only use the money to buy new slaughter-animals." (p. 126) It seems there is little he can do in a world where the sheep are "destined since birth for the butcher's knife. Sheep do not own themselves, do not own their lives. They exist to be used, every ounce of them, their flesh to be eaten, their bones to be crushed and fed to poultry." (p. 123) Even if we study this problem from the perspective of eco-criticism, is there a way out? Certainly not, for in the human hierarchy world, there is no hope for the animals to earn their equal rights to live. At last, Lurie could only give up.

Living at his daughter's house, Lurie felt he had little to attend to, so he decided to do some volunteer work for Bev in her animal clinic, where he witnessed the miserable lives of the animals, and also participated in the painless killing of those unwanted animals and the incineration of their bodies. He felt especially disgusted at the treatment of the dead bodies, "The workmen began to beat the bags with backs of their shovels before loading them, to break the rigid limbs. It was then that he intervened and took over the job himself" (pp. 144-145). Derek Attridge, a renowned scholar, elaborated on this matter in depth. To him, "this degree of attention to the corpses is excessive by any rational accounting" (Attridge, 2004, p. 186). He has got to the depth of this matter: "If there is a political challenge staged in this novel, and in all Coetzee's novels to date, it is to find a way of building a new, just state that is not founded on the elimination of unpredictability, singularity, excess" (Attridge, 2004, p. 191). Some scholars in China read in the novel a need to protect the eco-system and stop killing animals. But it still seems that Attridge is closer to the ultimate truth of this matter, for after

all, human intervention, abiding by man-made rules within certain boundaries, is the root of all the problems on the earth, but what a pity Attridge did not point it out explicitly in his work.

To Zhuang Tzu, Dao is everywhere; one may feel Dao in “mole crickets and ants”, “millet grain”, “brick tiles” or even “excrement” (Zhao, 2012, p. 249). Likewise, there is certainly Dao in each and every animal. According to Buddhist doctrines, every being is born equal. It is also true of Daoism, since the hierarchy system, consisting of all kinds of boundaries, is man-made, without which there will be no hierarchy world, and every being is certainly equal. Human beings created so many myths and legends in order to build a hierarchical world, which maintains its order through designating being as high or low, noble or humble. Living in the hierarchy world, people tend to take the hierarchy system for granted, and even believe it is natural, though it can't be more unnatural. In this context, all the animals and plants are but raw materials to be used by human beings. It seems justified for us to exploit the natural world at will. How can we expect animal lives to be respected in this hierarchy human world? According to Lao Tzu, “Human follows land, land follows sky, sky follows Daoism, Daoism follows nature.” (Zhao, 2012, p. 29) To Daoism, being natural is the best way of being. Our man-made hierarchy system is far from natural, but human beings have been blinded by it for so long a time that we tend to ignore the truly natural world permeated by Dao. However, in this man-made hierarchy world, some can see through the fog of hierarchy system and reach the true being. Lurie, as depicted in the novel, is such a figure.

Dao is beyond our language, which is the carrier of human civilization and helps construct the human hierarchy world. With his special pursuit of Dao, Lurie could go beyond all man-made boundaries of rules and see the absurdity in the ordinary killing of animals. Killing sheep and cooking them to receive the guests seems normal, not something to be critiqued, but Lurie could see otherwise and showed enough respect to the sheep and even tried to save them. What's more, he showed respect to every single animal, which got him trapped in a predicament, in which he was no longer able to take action. The predicament is not just his, but also everyone's, as long as he can see through the fog of the man-made boundaries of the hierarchy world but feels meanwhile there is little he can do to make a difference

Lurie's respect towards the animals does not just lie in the saving of the sheep, but also his treatment of the dead bodies of the animals, as mentioned above, which truly testifies to his moral level. As far as death is concerned, what we can see most is the cold number in various kinds of media, but who cares for the tragic living condition of the individual related? In the human hierarchical world, it is always the case that we set certain boundaries and check whether human beings or other things can fit in. Things that don't fit in will be discarded. Human beings that don't fit in will either be thrown into prisons or madhouses. The problem is not how miserable the situation is, but why do we need to set the boundary? Can we put an end to the setting of boundaries? What a shame that we even have boundaries for both the living and the dead! How can this be natural?

To every living being, what is the most difficult to understand is life and death, for which reason there is forever a question like “To be or not to be?” After all, the dead can never come back, so life can only be a one-way trip. According to Daoism, life is Yang and death is Yin, which help form two worlds. What is life? What is death? Zhuang Tzu explained it this way: “Life is the gathering of Qi while death is the dispersing of Qi, and the two processes are in

support of each other, co-existing harmoniously. We have no need for worrying about life or death, for life and death, just like everything else, are inter-related and inter-connected whole” (Zhao, 2012, p. 244). In *Disgrace*, Lurie took to one particular dog, as depicted in the novel, “of the dogs in the holding pens, there is one he has come to feel a particular fondness for” (Coetzee, 2000, p. 214). He couldn’t give it up, for he liked the dog very much. Only at the end of the novel did he come to understand death, which is not just an end, but also a new beginning: “Are you giving him up?” “Yes, I am giving him up” (Coetzee, 2000, p. 220). Seeing through the Dao of life and death, Lurie could treat death at ease, like what Zhuang Tzu did when his wife died, singing while striking the basin. (Zhao, 2012, p. 215). Through his beloved dog’s death, Lurie is one more step closer to Dao, especially Dao concerning animals, and life and death.

4. The Dao of Literary Creation

Dao is beyond language, yet Dao can be represented in language, just like Dao in the works of Zhuang Tzu and Lao Tzu, as well as Dao in the description of Lurie’s sex and his perception of animals. As a scholar, Lurie’s perception of Dao also has much to do with his literary creation, which almost runs through the whole novel. Many a scholar has paid due attention to it and illustrated it from different angles. For some, such as Zembylas Michalinos (2009), Rachell McCoppin (2011) and Derek Attridge (2004), Lurie’s literary creation implicates Coetzee’s own writing or the calling for the other. For others like Patrick Hayes (2010) and Jane Poyner (2009), in the context of postmodernism, meaning is no longer fixed, and language seems incapable of conveying certain ideas, so much so that Lurie found it so hard to go on with his writing... What those scholars said is reasonable, but still there seems some distance from what it truly means. What does Coetzee think about it? He thinks that “all autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography.” (Coetzee, 1992, p. 191) Therefore, whatever one writes down embodies the inclinations of the writer, or to be more exact, reflects what and who the writer is. Lurie’s writing has much to do with his real life and his own perception of this world. Then what is the meaning of Lurie’s literary creation? In the novel, like many other characters in Coetzee’s novels, Lurie always found it so hard to capture and fixate any meaning. Could he express the meaning or did the meaning express itself through his mouth and pen? And how is Dao related?

At first, Lurie wanted to write about the Young Byron in Italy, young, sexy, free, easy-going, like Yong Liu in ancient China or Thomas in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Later he found he could not move on with his writing, maybe because he himself was no longer young. Then he decided not to write about the living Byron, but the dead one in hell, with his lover calling, “Come to me, mio Byron...come to me, love me” (Coetzee, 2000, p. 185). Lurie’s writing did not go smoothly, and sometimes he could write nothing. At last, he tended to give up his own controlling of writing, yet he found words naturally came to him. To Attridge, this way of writing was showing respect to the other; he thinks that being ethical means “being responsible for the other and assuming the other’s needs, affirming them, sustaining them, being prepared to give up my own wants and satisfactions for the sake of the other” (Attridge, 2004, p. 124). When encountering the other, one should not try to control the

other, but instead let the other in and influence himself. It seems that this is a better way to be original. But there is also some danger in so doing, what if the other hurts or even destroys? This question can be better answered according to Daoist ideas, for one does not need to give up himself, but co-exist with the other harmoniously, just like Yin and Yang. In this way, it's not hard to understand Byron's sex or the calling of Teresa. What is more difficult to understand is the changing of Lurie's attitude towards his writing. Why did he give up his active writing and instead wait for some kind of inspiration?

In Coetzee's novels, there is no lack of waiting, like the waiting in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, or Dostoyevsky's waiting for his step-son's soul in *The Master of Petersburg*, which seems a parody of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, for after all, Coetzee has been greatly influenced by Beckett. Coetzee's has his own understanding of waiting, "as long as he expects what he does not expect, what he does not expect will not come" (Coetzee, 1994, p. 80). In other words, we cannot wait intentionally. It reminds us of what Zhuang Tzu said, "Lieh Tzu could ride the wind and fly, free and elegant". It seems so, but Lieh Tzu had to ride the wind so that he could fly, so his freedom and elegance are limited. The real freedom is to go beyond any rule or any boundary, hence "the real noble one can forget even himself, the one who truly sees through everything does not in the least care for any accomplishment and the spiritually perfect one will never pursue any fame" (Zhao, 2012, p. 91). Here the rule or boundary is man-made, and what we need is to return to the natural Dao. Though being covert and hidden, Dao is actually everywhere. We can't feel the being of Dao only because we have been blinded by the man-made hierarchy system of this world for such a long time. Therefore, the real waiting has to go unintentionally, for intention will cut off the connection between human beings and Dao. Maybe without being fully aware, Coetzee actually presented Daoist writing in his novels.

In *Disgrace*, Lurie found it was hard for him to go on with his writing, but it was not because he became less productive, but because he was pursuing something deeper, like Dao, so that he could express what is beyond language. He could only do it unintentionally. It is said that the Bible was written in the same way as the writer began to write when possessed by the Holy Spirit. Then it's not hard to understand why he could write so smoothly after giving up conscious control of his writing because then Dao could work through him: "But by steps, as he begins to live his days more fully with Teresa and the dead Byron, it becomes clear that purloined songs will not be good enough, that the two will demand a music of their own. And, astonishingly, in dribs and drabs, the music comes. Sometimes the contour of a phrase occurs to him before he has a hint of what the words themselves will be; sometimes the words call forth the cadence; sometimes the shade of a melody, having hovered for days on the edge of hearing, unfolds and blessedly reveals itself. As the action begins to unwind, furthermore, it calls up of its own accord modulations and transitions that he feels in his blood even when he has not the musical resources to realize them" (pp. 183-184). Lurie was shocked by how the Dao worked in his literary writing, "so this is art, he thinks, and this is how it does its work! How strange! How fascinating!" (p. 185)

However, till the end of the novel, Lurie still failed to accomplish his writing. He felt a little disappointed: "His hopes must be more temperate: that somewhere from amidst the welter of sound there will dart up, like a bird, a single authentic note of immortal longing. As for recognizing it, he will leave that to the scholars of the future, if there are still scholars by

then. For he will not hear the note himself, when it comes, if it comes — he knows too much about art and the ways of art to expect that” (p. 214). According to Zhuang Tzu, Dao is beyond language, but the paradox is that it is represented in language, so it is possible that language and what is beyond language can also co-exist harmoniously like Yin and Yang, inside each other, inseparable.

What kind of state is this? As depicted in the novel, “in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reined back, like a fish on a line” (p. 185). The voice is like Dao in language, which exists there but cannot be dug out and exposed or expressed explicitly. Daoist state is the highest state of any art, which is the most natural, the problem is few artifacts can reach Daoist state. No wonder it is so hard for Lurie, a man trapped in the uncountable boundaries of this man-made hierarchy world, to pursue a writing reaching this state.

5. Conclusion

As an old Chinese saying goes, “Nothing can be accomplished without norms or standards”, which points out the importance of setting the boundary. The theme of boundary can almost cover all the articles on *Disgrace*. It seems that the overstepping of the boundary results in all kinds of disgrace, which I believe is many readers’ understanding of the novel *Disgrace*. However, can this kind of understanding itself be the origin of disgrace? To be more exact, it is quite likely that disgrace actually comes from the action of setting the boundary. Most probably this is what J. M. Coetzee implicates in *Disgrace*. Boundary has always been set by human beings, and has never been in tune with natural Dao. Though we have to admit the necessity of boundary-setting in the maintenance of the human world, we should never forget that boundary is man-made, not natural, and it’s more than ok for us to ignore the man-made boundaries, for each and every boundary is made to be overstepped. Therefore, the disgrace does not come from the action of overstepping the boundary, but the action of setting the boundary or the wrong perception of the boundary if one fails to realize that boundary is to be overstepped.

The true freedom is to go beyond all the man-made boundaries and be in tune with Dao. Dao is everywhere, but we can only feel it when forgetting all the man-made boundaries. Then even the dog can feel the Dao in art: “The dog is fascinated by the sound of the banjo. When he strums the strings, the dog sits up, cocks its head, listens. When he hums Teresa’s line, and the humming begins to swell with feeling, the dog smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too, or howling” (p. 215). At that moment, Lurie felt the piercing of Dao and thus dissipating of any boundary, the boundary between life and art or even the boundary between animals and human beings: “Would he dare to do that: bring a dog into the piece, allow it to loose its own lament to the heavens between the strophes of lovelorn Teresa’s? Why not? Surely, in a work that will never be performed, all things are permitted?” (p. 215)

Admittedly, *Disgrace* has rich connotations, covering themes of race, gender, ecology, history, politics and so on while at the same time going beyond any set values. Hence the set values with certain boundaries cannot convey all that the novel implicates, especially when it comes to the elusive topics of Lurie’s sex, how he treated animals and his literary creations. What makes it so difficult to understand is Dao, which is beyond all the boundaries that actually

caused all kinds of disgrace in *Disgrace*, and even in the whole human civilization. What is the best stance to take so that one can live in accordance with Dao? In *Disgrace*, Lucy shows us the best way of being in this world: “Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity” (p. 205). Lucy’s stance towards living in this world is Daoistic, as mentioned by Lao-Tzu, “Everything comes from being, and being comes from nothingness” (Zhao, 2012, p. 45).

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Appendix: Dimensions of Setting and Overstepping of Boundaries as Reflected in Sources from EBSCO

1. Sex	<p>Boehmer, Elleke. (2002). Not saying sorry, not speaking rain: Gender implications in <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies</i>, 4(3), 342-351.</p> <p>Cornwell, Gareth. (2002). Realism, rape, and J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Critique</i>, 43(4), 307.</p> <p>Graham, Lucy Valerie. (2003). Reading the unspeakable: Rape in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Journal of Southern African Studies</i>, 29(2), 433.</p> <p>Mardorossian, Carine M. (2011). Rape and the violence of representation in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 42(4), 72-83.</p> <p>Ogden, Benjamin. (2011). Reconcile, reconciled: A new reading of reconciliation in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Ariel</i>, 42(3/4), 301-314.</p> <p>van Wyk Smith, M. (2014). Rape and the foundation of nations in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>English in Africa</i>, 41(1), 13-34.</p>
2. Grace	<p>Kosew, Sue. (2003). The politics of shame and redemption in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Research in African Literatures. Summer</i>, 34(2), 155.</p> <p>Sarvan, Charles. (2004). <i>Disgrace: A path to grace?</i> [J]. <i>World Literature Today</i>, 78(1), 26-29.</p> <p>van Wyk Smith, M. (2014). Rape and the foundation of nations in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>English in Africa</i>, 41(1), 13-34.</p>
3. Human Beings and Animals	<p>Donovan, Josephine. (2011). Aestheticizing animal cruelty. <i>College Literature</i>, 38(4), 202-217.</p> <p>Randall, Don. (2007). The community of sentient beings: J. M. Coetzee’s ecology in <i>Disgrace</i> and <i>Elizabeth Costello</i>. <i>English Studies in Canada</i>, 33(1/2), 209-225.</p> <p>Rohman, Carrie. (2014). No higher life: Bio-aesthetics in J. M. Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Modern Fiction Studies</i>, 60(3), 562-578.</p> <p>Woodward, Wendy. (2010). Persian sheep, hawksbill turtles and vodsels: The ethics of eating in some contemporary narratives. <i>Australian Literary Studies</i>, 25(2), 48-59.</p>

4. Race	<p>BANDICI, Adina. (2015). Whites as victims of racial discrimination in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies</i>, 7(13), 35-40.</p> <p>Graham, Lucy Valerie. (2003). Reading the unspeakable: Rape in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Journal of Southern African Studies</i>, 29(2), 433.</p> <p>Mardorossian, Carine M. (2011). Rape and the violence of representation in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 42(4), 72-83.</p> <p>Roy, Sohinee. (2012). Speaking with a forked tongue: <i>Disgrace</i> and the irony of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. <i>Modern Fiction Studies</i>, 58 (4), 699-722.</p> <p>Segall, Kimberly Wedeven. (2005). Pursuing ghosts: The traumatic sublime in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 36(4), 40-54.</p> <p>Silverstein, Stephen. (2011). The discourse of Jewish difference in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Jewish Social Studies</i>, 17(2), 80-100.</p> <p>van Wyk Smith, M. (2014). Rape and the foundation of nations in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>English in Africa</i>, 41(1), 13-34.</p> <p>Zembylas, Michalinos. (2009). Bearing witness to the ethics and politics of suffering: J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>, inconsolable mourning, and the task of educators. <i>Studies in Philosophy & Education</i>, 28(3), 223-237.</p>
5. Past and Present	<p>Beard, Margot. (2007). Lessons from the dead masters: Wordsworth and Byron in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>English in Africa</i>, 34(1), 59-77.</p> <p>Easton, Kai. (2007). Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>: Byron in Italy and the Eastern Cape c. 1820. <i>Journal of Commonwealth Literature</i>, 42(3), 113-130.</p> <p>Stratton, Florence. (2002). Imperial fictions: J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Ariel</i>, 33(3/4), 83-104.</p>
6. Real Life and Art	<p>Cornwell, Gareth. (2002). Realism, rape, and J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Critique</i>, 43(4), 307.</p> <p>Marais, Mike. (2006). J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i> and the task of the imagination. <i>Journal of Modern Literature</i>, 29(2), 75-93.</p> <p>Mardorossian, Carine M. (2011). Rape and the violence of representation in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 42(4), 72-83.</p> <p>Segall, Kimberly Wedeven. (2005). Pursuing ghosts: The traumatic sublime in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 36(4), 40-54.</p>
7. Language	<p>Mardorossian, Carine M. (2011). Rape and the violence of representation in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 42(4), 72-83.</p> <p>Roy, Sohinee. (2012). Speaking with a forked tongue: <i>Disgrace</i> and the irony of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. <i>Modern Fiction Studies</i>, 58(4), 699-722.</p> <p>Yeoh, Gilbert. (2004). Negotiating foundations: Nation, homeland and land in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Ariel</i>, 35(3/4), 1-38.</p>

<p>8. Civiliza- tion and Desires</p>	<p>Anker, Elizabeth S. (2008). Human rights, social justice, and J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Modern Fiction Studies</i>, 54(2), 233-267.</p> <p>Kelly, Michelle. (2015). Playing it by the book: The rule of law in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 46(1), 160-178.</p> <p>Kissack, Mike & Titlestad, Michael. (2005). The dynamics of discontent: Containing desire and aggression in Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>African Identities</i>, 3(1), 51-67.</p> <p>Nagy, Rosemary. (2004). The ambiguities of reconciliation and responsibility in South Africa. <i>Political Studies</i>, 52(4), 709-727.</p> <p>Ogden, Benjamin. (2011). Reconcile, reconciled: A new reading of reconciliation in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. <i>Ariel</i>, 42(3/4), 301-314.</p>
<p>9. Self and Other</p>	<p>Faber, Alyda. (2009). The post-secular poetics and ethics of exposure in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Literature & Theology</i>, 23(3), 303-316.</p> <p>Haley, Madigan. (2015). Marginal figures and the ethos of the global novel. [J]. <i>Novel: A Forum on Fiction</i>, 48(1), 103-121.</p> <p>McCoppin, Rachell. (2011). Acceptance of the other: Reconciliation in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Atenea</i>, 31(1/2), 53-65.</p> <p>Meljac, Eric. (2011). Love and <i>Disgrace</i>: Reading Coetzee in the light (and love) of Barthes. [J]. <i>Journal of Modern Literature</i>, 34(3), 149-161.</p> <p>Nashef, Hania A. M. (2011). Baal and Thoth: Unwelcome apparitions in J. M. Coetzee's <i>The Master of Petersburg</i> and <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Ariel</i>, 41(3/4), 191-206.</p> <p>Randall, Don. (2007). The community of sentient beings: J. M. Coetzee's ecology in <i>Disgrace</i> and Elizabeth Costello. [J]. <i>English Studies in Canada</i>, 33(1/2), 209-225.</p> <p>Segall, Kimberly Wedeven. (2005). Pursuing ghosts: The traumatic sublime in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>. [J]. <i>Research in African Literatures</i>, 36(4), 40-54.</p> <p>Zembylas, Michalinos. (2009). Bearing witness to the ethics and politics of suffering: J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>, inconsolable mourning, and the task of educators. [J]. <i>Studies in Philosophy & Education</i>, 28(3), 223-237.</p>