



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**DECODING SILENCE IN THE AISLE OF POWER ACQUISITION IN COETZEE'S *DISGRACE* AND KING'S *GERALD'S GAMES***Manshi^{1*} Palak Arora²^{1*}(Ph.D. Scholar, Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan.)²(Assistant Professor, GLA University, UP.)Emails : Manshiyadav807@gmail.com ; Palak.ar96@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10104>**ABSTRACT**

'Silence' refers to the forbearance from ambient audible sounds and writings. In a rhetorical context, silence can be seen as a gesture of the 'pregnant pause', where the moment of silence denotes the omission of noise and signifies a space left for ponderous thoughts. Silence itself is an expression well described by authors like Thomas Hardy, Maya Angelou, J.M. Coetzee, Stephen King, and Jay Asher. Since, the concept of silence is intertwined with violating women's honour, it finds its expression in the form of psychological trauma and incomprehensible emotions. In *Disgrace*, J.M Coetzee shatters the premonitions expected of women in a situation of brutal rape by depicting the power of silence to venture out for new options through Lucy's portrayal. Unlike Coetzee, Stephen King, in his novel *Gerald's Game*, portrays its offset by critiquing Jessie's silence, which thrust her into hard times.



This paper aims to explore the nuances of silence in the selected novels of Coetzee and King and also tries to highlight the relation of silence with resilience as well as power acquisition associated with a promise of comfort.

Keywords: *Silence, Nuances, Rape, Power Acquisition, Pregnant Pause*

**INTRODUCTION**

Dignity and indignation are two sides of the same coin as every time you flip, whichever side shows up comes with its repercussions. When these terms found themselves related to women, the implications become even more vital. While in *Disgrace*, we saw a striking contrast between both the genders' views on sex and its nature being perverse for men as Lurie defends citing the case of a dog, "A dog will accept the justice of that: a beating for a chewing. But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts" (Coetzee 90). To which Lucy counters, saying:

"So, males must be allowed to follow their instincts unchecked? Is that the moral?" (Coetzee 90)

Ambiguity is at the core of instinctual drives in both the genders and its very nature of unchecked explicit projection by the male fraternity by and large in the society. Coetzee has portrayed a world in Cape Town and a split opposite of it in Grahamstown. While David Lurie, a 52 years old Professor, thought that he had solved the problem of sex rather well (Coetzee 1) coz there was a time when "with his height, his good bones, his olive skin, his flowing hair, he could always count on a degree of magnetism. If he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look, he could rely on that. That was how he lived; for years, for decades, that was the backbone of his life (Coetzee 7).

"Then one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled. If he wanted a woman, he had to learn to pursue her" (Coetzee 7). Now, the case was such that his magnetism was falling off, but the whimsical desire for women is skyrocketed, followed

by his loneliness and instinct drives. Demeaning his existence to throwing erotic glances on his students and the worst being a sexual predator, David Lurie turns out to be a man of satanic school. Accordingly, Coetzee carves out each intricacy of Lurie's alleged assault with such detail as to counter him for his moves by his daughter Lucy's rapists, and also in *Gerald's Games*, King has presented this very rapacious dichotomy amid Jessie's father and husband. Bridging the gap between these two works is the women's standing with patience for years in a world claiming to be feminist but still draws a veil over child and women sexual abuse.

Lucy and Jessie are the two major protagonists whose silence harbors fear and power, both as the end result. Having a psychic link between these two women protagonists, there are layerings of power acquisition and a promise of comfort even when it is coming with the forbearance of *forever silence*, incognizant of the terms this promise lays for Jessie. How in facade of a happy and successful marriage patriarchal terrors are inescapable in Jessie's case whereas Lucy out of her obligation for the land found herself in a situation where, what happened to her was purely a private matter, *it is my business, mine alone.* (Coetzee, 112). Misogyny is one thing that is made part of a women's life, ensuring her that it's the only way to hide the insecurities, a psychological makeup of its own kind, no matter how hard women try to mend ways out of annihilation. Where Jessie was all for confirming the ways of life lead for women by a society that internalise shame and self-effacing feelings in her, Lucy evidently adds up to this life theorizing by not revolting to an outrageous act of rape. Though, as the narrative was progressing, Lucy isn't



looking traumatized but rather a woman who is more aware of the current situation where silence was her tool because *“as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place, it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone. This place being what? This place being South Africa.”* (Coetzee 112)

Although complacency is a matter of another world where we saw Lucy in the start, but with time her silence was grasping the footholds of the place where she was living. Still having the choice with her that any point of time would be the last on the farm as David was persistently nudging her to leave the place at once due to their vulnerability. Being a father, David left no stone unturned in trying to drag his daughter away from the farm by planning on her part:

“Lucy, I am in the process of selling the house in Cape Town. I am prepared to send you to Holland. Alternatively, I am prepared to give you whatever you need to set yourself up again somewhere safer than here. Think about it.” (Coetzee 204) However, it was Lucy's silence over the matter that was frantically agonizing him as a father, despite the very facet of the silence being a manipulated move to survive and acquire whatsoever left power of hers at the place. In alignment to this Jessie's silence was traumatizing her and keeping her away from self-actualization as the promise of comfort from Gerald was gradually putting her on a domestic slack. As its rightly said in *The Bonds of Love*, *“What we shall see, especially in voluntary submission to erotic domination, is a paradox in which the individual tries to achieve freedom through slavery, release*

through submission to control” (Benjamin, 52), correspondingly Jessie was trying to find liberation in the fetters of silence. She was caught up in the web of self-defiance, in which she deliberately viewed her father's reflection in the conscious imagery of her husband (Manshi 2020). Though Lucy and Jessie silenced themselves against the laid codes of feminism, the former was still standstill on her grounds to achieve power over her supposed land even if it meant to agree to otherwise non-agreeable premises.

In the hazy times of the 90s when women were choosing career over domestic life and self-fulfilment over being expectant, Lucy as a silenced protagonist chose to bore the fruits that a heinous act planted in her, besides her writhing in pain, citing her father that *“I am a woman, David. Do you think I hate children? Should I choose against the child because of who its father is?”* (Coetzee 198). This seemingly enticing view of maternity has to go through the hardwired brain of an independent woman whose priority is to set rules for herself amid the chaos the world threw on her. However, Jessie wasn't that well acquainted in terms of choosing, as the very first seed sown in her was of silence as redemption from a quandary in life. For which Thompson wrote in *Rituals of Male Violence* that *“women raised in the 1950s and 60s, the legally and socially validated mystique makes, for Jessie, ‘chains in her own mind and spirit. They are chains of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts, of incomplete truths and unreal choices”*.

Jessie was stuck in false living models where subjugation to atrocities and silence over assault are the only ways of living. Keeping up with an immacu-



late home and being a dutiful wife and mother is what is expected from a woman, where she benignly kept her energies to her family alone, fending off her from herself. As if domesticity wasn't enough to her shut her energies down, in Jessie's case, those tangible handcuffs also served as a symbolic representation of the shackles in which Jessie's father tied her down, the shackles of silence while he was vetting his corporeal appetite. *"He did something like this to her during the eclipse, a thing she supposes the whining Cult-of-Selfers, the Live-in-the-Pasters like Ruth and Nora, would call child abuse"* (King 141), oblivion was the only option left to her at the time forcing her to choke her emotions and stand up with silenced lips, those lips which earlier wore lipstick inscribed with "DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL" (King 144) on it. In Lucy's case, the situation might be termed as esoteric, owing to the lineage the place carries and the inhabitant's *"honest toil and honest cunning"* (Coetzee, 117), making the whole schema convoluted though seemingly it was simple. Lucy was seeking reconciliation on her part by paying the price of rape and remaining silenced on the vestiges of an atrocious violation. Silence through victimization of a sexual assault is at the core of both Jessie and Lucy's life though the former is a ploy at the hand of punctured psychology for women and later being an aware victim of a crime with its historical repercussions. A silence that came with bondage of forever emotional seclusion. Beneath the striking element of psychological trauma and its trigger and retrieval dichotomy in Jessie Burlingame's case, rather her complacency was the thing that was majorly talked about whilst this research paper tries to bring out the power acquisition

dynamic amid this whole façade of silence put forth in the form of a trauma.

Moreover, her act of silence was triggered by a *"deep sense of stigmatization that may cause child abuse survivors to participate in activities that reinforce low self-worth"* (Bonnie Kessler and Kathleen Bieschke). Even once, Jessie was on the verge of almost breaking her silence in a female activist group against child sex abuse, where she was sitting in a circle with twenty women while they *"joined hands and shared a moment of silence at the beginning of the session"* (King 92) she soon realized that hushing and breaking out here alone is the agenda, although this group does not promote to bring out any of those secrets by the victims in the daylight across the law. Indeed, it was the silence in the room that whispered insurmountable burden of truth on her, amid which she survived tight-lipped through her life. There she heard, *Stories of suffering, surviving, and surpassing are personal experience stories which speak initially of a deep pain, a frustration, an anguish sensed as being linked to the sexual. They speak of a silence and a secrecy which may need to be broken. They are stories which tell of a need for action — something must be done; a pain must be transcended. There is a move from suffering, secrecy, and an often-felt sense of victimization towards a major change...Often harboured within is an epiphany, a crucial turning point marked by a radical consciousness raising"* (Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories* (50)). Surpassing numerous spheres in life does she landed upon that bed that physically handcuffed her. However, emotionally and psychologically liberated her of her years-long and painstaking silence.

POWER ACQUISITION



"Power is a process that weaves its way through embodied, passionate social life and everything in its wake. Sexual stories live in this flow of power. The power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process"

~ Kenneth Plummer (*Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change, And Social Worlds*)

Commencing a journey of personal salvation, Lucy (neither Lucy Lurie) and Jessie (nor Jessie Burlingame or Mrs. Burlingame) strive to propagate their lives with or without man and children. Embracing just their own selves as Lucy being a lesbian and Jessie exclaiming, *"if I never go to bed with another man, I will be absolutely delighted"* (King 371). A cursory glance at the head of all the brewing tensions showed them the lightened path to liberate themselves, a way to acquire power for their own selves after all the bruises life slashed on them. While, the wisdom of breaking her silence and venturing out with life dawned at *"Jessie Mahout Burlingame, also known as The Amazing Gingerbread Girl, the last wonder of a dubious age, survivor of the day the sun had gone out, now handcuffed to the bed and able to run no more."* (King 95) where fighting back for life was the only option left to her. Therefore, she made sure that when she got out of bed, the sun should shine, and the eclipse would be no more because she had already learned the lesson to leave the puritanical Goodwife Burlingame behind. From an instinctive blow in Gerald's abdomen for incapacitating him and nearly surviving a marital rape to indulging in her mental monologues and conscience, Jessie showed her the way to acquiesce that she was not the one to be blamed. Seemingly, her earlier monologue to be

more temporal for the abuser, i.e., Tom Mahout (her father): *"Poor, poor man. All that pain, and over what? A sexual accident about as serious as a stubbed toe"*, she instructed herself through the voice of Ruth Neary saying *"Quit it"*. Coming out of the *dark well* victorious and freed of the crippled psychology Jessie acquire power by narrating her story to Ruth, the psychologist she abandoned years ago, to give a befitting reply to her years' long silenced subjugation. Luckily, by the end of Stephan King's *Gerald's Game* we got to see a protagonist well established and psychologically balanced, albeit in JM Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Lucy being the female lead, subdues all the chances of starting anew and made silence her way of life. According to Benita Parry *"that portentous silence signifying what cannot be spoken"* (45). The alarming historical contingencies fashioned Lucy's silence, which she adheres with consent to keep track on her political standing in South Africa as an independent woman. Though her life being hers alone, as she says: *"What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself- not to you, not to anyone else"* (Coetzee 133). It still inadvertently got amalgamated with the ways of the world in which she lived and aspired to live after the attack too.

Her silence was not the meek silence but of a tigress who wants to protect her land at all costs and desires to have her territory secluded. Nevertheless, as a father, David tried his level best to protect her from falling in *"brink of a dangerous error"* (Coetzee 160). Lucy being more of a self-governing woman, found the prospects laid by her father hard to accept, so she clears her stand for



once and for all: "David, I can't run my life according to whether or not you like what I do. Not anymore. You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character; I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions." (Coetzee 198). Striking a straight blow at his tender heart and raising a toast for herself, Lucy emerges out as a woman of substance perfectly aware of the larger picture she is a part of and saving her day with whatever best she could acquire.

CONCLUSION

Discerning the novels of all of their intricate details is a tiresome job. Therefore, in this research paper, the focussed area remains limited to analysing power acquisition, which crosses over the aisle of silence. Lucy and Jessie were women of their own kind shackled by society in the fetters of silence but, in the end, emerges out triumphant.

Therefore, playing this rat and cat chase all the while in life and blaming either of the sexes had led the world nowhere. Though sexual assault stays the most heinous of all crimes, but awareness and right education is one thing that holds power to change this whole paradigm. To which Bell Hooks suggests a more reasonable and realistic solution, i.e. "Gender Mutuality," neither objectifying either gender nor laying burdens for adhering to particular codes of conduct, where understanding and consent rules over monopoly. Shifting the dichotomy of si-

lence and power acquisition to a rather sensible and sensitive approach, where men weren't fed with control freak mentality and women weren't silenced for fear of shame.

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