CHAPTER THREE
Chapter 3

SHIFTING ZONES OF POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

“The exercise of power is determined by thousands of interactions between the world of the powerful and that of the powerless, all the more so because these worlds are never divided by a sharp line: everyone has a small part of himself in both.”

~Vaclav Havel

According to Michel Foucault:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization: as the process which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or even reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.

(History of Sexuality: An Introduction 92)

The dynamics of power and powerlessness are not absolute in the sense that they are always vulnerable to change, sometimes even without any conscious efforts to bring about that change. Power structures never remain static as power is not something that can be held or possessed by someone; it comes into being only when it is “exercised” to achieve certain specific desirable or undesirable aims. Power never exists in a society in equitable proportions, but always remains in disequilibrium giving one set of people control who are called powerful, over the other set of people who are thus called powerless. However, nobody can be absolutely powerless, and
hence none is absolutely powerful. Even the meekest, the lowest, and the most outclassed in the society do have some power if they know how to exercise it. That is what Coetzee focuses on in his novels: the exercised as well as the unexercised power held by an individual or a group of individuals, or the state. Professor Robert Boyers has rightly called him the “anatomist of power” (mostly in the context of colonizer versus colonized, or oppressor versus oppressed) while awarding him an honorary doctorate from the Skidmore College in New York in 1996 (qtd. in Kennemeyer 487) because Coetzee’s narrative subject always “resides within a web of dangerously consequential connections defined by relations of power in a society in contradictory stages of casting off colonial yoke” (Attwell 25).

Power can be exercised visibly or invisibly. Visibly it takes the form of force, violence, torture, exploitation, and oppression; and invisibly that of ideology, opinion, hegemony, propaganda, etc. Power is closely related to privilege, that is why in order to empower the marginalized sections of the society, governments and states often try to give them certain privileges to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots. The concept of power holds central position in disciplines like Sociology and Political Science as all the theories of power are prominently found to be propounded to serve the mentioned areas or fields of study by renowned philosophers and thinkers like Nicollo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Max Weber, Robert Dahl, Steven Lukes, etc. To contain all its theories in a nutshell, the gist of the concept lies in the fact that “From its genesis in Hobbes to its maturation in Lukes, the concept of power is primarily of something which denies, forestalls, represses, prevents.” (Clegg 156).

It was Michael Foucault who extended the concept of power to other fields of social sciences and humanities (Sadan 37). Moreover, the concept is popularized in literature with the onset and spread of postcolonial studies since the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is one based solely on power and cannot be explained without analyzing the power relationships between the two or for that reason between any two groups of individuals categorized by anything – race, religion, region, gender, caste, class, or ethnicity. Hence every society – pre-colonial, colonial, or postcolonial – tends to be divided between powerful and powerless on multiple bases. It is only that this division becomes exceptionally sharp and visible when it comes to colonial era as power is the only rule observed under Colonialism since “colonial relationships were often relationships of power between what the
colonizers saw as the privileged ‘enlightened’, ‘civilized’, ‘rational’ and ‘advanced’ colonizer and the subaltern ‘barbaric’, ‘superstitious’, ‘backward’ colonized” (Clarke 138). However, in any power structure, no one is absolutely free and independent, neither the powerful, nor the powerless as J. M. Coetzee himself says in *Doubling the Point* (1992): “In a society of masters and slaves, no one is free. The slave is not free, because he is not his own master; the master is not free, because he cannot do without the slave.” (96).

Coetzee, in his novels, juggles with these ever present but ever changing power equilibriums by using both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa as a backdrop, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. He depicts social, political, as well as familial power structures as power is inherently exercised at all levels, in each and every human relationship or interaction. But it is difficult to assign him a particular position regarding his sympathies with either the powerless or the powerful as he merely depicts situations often without taking sides with any one or sometimes appears to be ambivalent because he listens to all the voices – powerful as well as powerless – as his mouthpiece Elizabeth Costello in the eponymous work says: “I am open to all voices, not just the voices of the murdered and violated… if it is their murderers and violators who choose to summon me instead, to use me and speak through me, I will not close my ears to them, I will not judge them.” (204). His ambivalent position and his ‘apolitical’ stance, this lack of judgement on his part, is what he is often criticized for.

His first novel *Dusklands* (1974), that consists of two separate novellas “The Vietnam project” and “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee”, clearly associates power with violence and oppression, exposing “the cruelty involved in various forms of conquest” (Summertime 58), confirming what lies at the core of Machiavelli’s concern with power i.e. “the hard core of power is violence and to exercise power is often to bring violence to bear on someone else’s person or possessions” (Wolin 220). Most of his works project power as such. The breach between the powerful and the powerless is very wide here, as in various other works too, with no hope for reconciliation between the two, be it between the Americans and the Vietnamese in *The Vietnam Project*, between the Dutch colonizers and the Namaquas of South Africa (the Hottentots) in *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*, between Magda and her
black servants in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), or between the imaginary ‘barbarians’ and the colonial settlers and agents in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980).

Eugene Dawn, the man commissioned to prepare the Vietnam report in *The Vietnam Project*, gives a good insight into where the roots of power lie and how power is created or destroyed in a society while dealing with the myths and the idea of “countermyth” as he evaluates:

The myths of a tribe are the fictions it coins to maintain its powers. The answer to a myth of force is not necessarily counterforce, for if the myth predicts counterforce, counterforce reinforces the myth. The science of mythography teaches us that a subtler counter is to subvert and revise the myth. The highest propaganda is the propagation of a new mythology. (24-25)

Propaganda and mythologies are both the tools of hegemonic power used to control the masses and to mobilize the public opinion as well as to reinforce a particular ideology so as to deprive the masses of their free and individual will. According to some hegemonic approaches to power, it is “the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have … to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires.” (Lukes 23) War is also a manifestation of power often raged by the powerful against the powerless to keep them in their place as Eugene Dawn unravels in his proposed Vietnam Report: “we have justified the elimination of enemy villages by calling them armed strongholds, when the true value of the operations lay in demonstrating to the absent VC menfolk just how vulnerable their homes and families were” (22). It intends to suppress not only the apparently present threat to the power structures that give one set of people privilege over the other, but any potential for resistance against such power status quos. Power and resistance exist side by side according to Michael Foucault (*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, 1984*); one cannot exist without the other. Resistance shows the latent power of those deemed powerless against the apparently powerful, causing friction between the two. Power is mostly, in the first place, exercised invisibly through indoctrination of masses by using propaganda as a cover to the real motives and intentions to keep people unaware of their exploitation by
those who happen to hold ‘power’ as Noam Chomsky points out in his *Power Systems* (2013):

A decent propaganda system does not announce its principles or intentions…

If you tell people, “This is what you have to think,” then they understand: this is what power wants us to think. And then may find a way out of it. It’s harder to extricate yourself from a system of unstated presuppositions than it is from explicitly stated doctrine. That’s the way a good propaganda system will operate. (102).

It is only when people become conscious of their such invisible exploitation and start resisting it that power openly manifests itself in the form of all kinds of violence – arrests, torture, killings – resulting in a full-fledged war sometimes that has far reaching effects on the collective as well as individual psyche of the people, depriving them all of their essential humanness whether they are the perpetrators, the victims, or the spectators.

While *The Vietnam Project* projects the horrors of war indirectly through the images or photographs possessed by Eugene Dawn with the help of which he has to prepare his commissioned report, *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* exposes those horrors directly through the confrontation between the ‘civilized’ white colonial settlers and the ‘savage’ black Hottentots and Namaquas, the latter been hunted like beasts by the former. Though separate and independent of each other, both the narratives are connected through the thread of colonialism suggesting that it is an unending phenomenon having been continued through the ages. They are similar in the sense that “Both tales deal with aggression and the ways in which a dominant group is prepared to impose its authority on other cultures, even though it may entail premeditated mass murder.” (Kennemeyer 238). Under Colonialism, power has been a visible presence all the time, initially robbing people of their material possessions, but gradually leading to deprive them of their culture and identity – their way of life – to smooth and strengthen the control over them by forcing them into mental slavery so that there remains no threat of their claiming back their losses. This process is aptly described by Z. Bauman:
Power moved from the distant horizon into the very centre of daily life. Its object, previously the goods possessed and produced by the subject, was now the subject himself, his daily rhythm, his time, his bodily actions, his mode of life. The power reached now towards the body and the soul of its subjects. It wished to regulate, to legislate, to tell the right from the wrong, the norm from the deviance, the ought from the is. It wanted to impose one ubiquitous pattern of normality and eliminate everything and everybody which the pattern could not fit. (Bauman 40-41)

People like Klawer, “master’s tame hotnot” (92), born out of such slavery for whom “the habit of obedience” (88) is not easy to break. They become so trained and accustomed to it that they cannot think about disobeying their ‘master’ even when they have the chance and freedom to do so. They are left with nothing of their own – no will to assert their will. When everyone left the master, i.e. Jacobus Coetzee, during his sojourn in the land of Namaquas owing to his sudden illness where he went in search of ivory, it is Klawer upon whose services he can still rely. While the other servants (or slaves) stayed back with their people as an expression of their rebellion against slavery and to enjoy their newly found freedom, he alone returned with the master to continue as a slave.

Jacobus Coetzee’s helplessness during his stay in the land of Namaquas and his humiliation at the hands of the same Hottentots whom he considered nothing but savages suitable only for slavery registers the reversal of power relations between the blacks and the whites showing that the power has nothing to do with the skin colour or the degree of ‘civilization’ but it is a situational phenomenon, prone to change any minute proving that it lies not in the individuals but in situations and it is controlling situations that gives one power. Foucault says in The History of Sexuality:

Power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And “Power,” insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these
mobilities … power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (93).

However, Jacobus Coetzee’s violent rebuttal to this humiliation when he returns to take revenge and wipes away the whole village with the help of “gun” (a sign of civilization!) mercilessly killing each and everyone does show that power indeed lies in technological advancement and that it makes one more merciless and hence more inhuman – worse than the so-called savages. Against such inhumanity and violence, the savagery of the savages can be questioned as he himself analyses:

But were they true savages, these Namaqua Hottentots? Why had they nursed me? Why had they let me go? Why had they not killed me? … Savagery was a way of life based on disdain for the value of human life and sensual delight in the pain of others. What evidence of disdain for life or delight in pain could I point to in their treatment of me? (97).

He (Jacobus Coetzee) then concludes: “The Namaqua, I decided, were not true savages. Even I knew more about savagery than they.” (98). The true savagery rather shows up itself in the cold-blooded murders of the Hottentots intended just to teach them a lesson for their trifling behavior with a “white man” who considered himself their “god”, and their disobedience to their ‘master’ against their age long slavery, humiliation, exploitation, and oppression at the hands of the same colonial masters.

The relation between Eugene Dawn and (fictional) Coetzee (the man under whose supervision Dawn is to prepare his report on Vietnam), on the other hand, shows that power is not something that exists or fought for only in between the opposite sides, i.e. the blacks and the whites, or the colonizer and the colonized, but it creates hierarchies on the same side too, in each and every relationship. Dawn and Coetzee both belong to the colonizing Empire, are engaged in the same project, but Dawn is helpless before Coetzee who silences his voice by rejecting his nakedly honest report just because it tells the truth so straightforwardly whereas “he wants it blander” (1). His powerlessness before his superior is evident from his following
words: “Here I am under the thumb of a manager, a type before whom my first
instinct is to crawl.” (1). It is perhaps this suppression by Coetzee of his instinct to tell
the truth, his having not allowed to exercise his free will in the matter, the weight of
obedience and subservience, the sense of helplessness and powerlessness, that play a
major role in his dejection and mental instability and disorientation by the end of the
narrative that finally culminates in the abominable act of his having stabbed his five
year old son; as in the mental institution where he is eventually put afterward, he is
still obsessed with the idea of telling the truth: “Perhaps one of these days, when I am
feeling better, I will sit down with a block of paper and build for a second time all the
sentences, erect with the power of their truth, that constituted my part in the New Life
Project, the part that Coetzee dared not submit.” (46-47).

This retrospection on the part of characters is what adds Postcolonial
ambiance to Coetzee’s writing that are always tinged with the sense of guilt and
complicity on account of having belonged to the white (colonial) race. Though he
appears ambivalent sometimes, calling ‘others’ with the names ascribed by their
oppressors such as ‘barbarians’, ‘savages’, etc., he seems to be mocking the same
notion the very next moment by adding irony to it or giving reasons for them being so
as in The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee or in Waiting for the Barbarians (1980). The
whole narrative describes Hottentots mostly in a negative light as savage, vagrant,
lazy, etc., but in the Afterword, Coetzee has clearly and justly pointed out as to who is
actually responsible for making them so: “It is well known that tobacco and brandy
were instrumental in corrupting Hottentot culture. For these luxuries the Hottentots
traded away their wealth in cattle and sheep, reducing themselves to a race of thieves,
vagrants, and beggars.” (114). There is no doubt about who could have introduced
these luxuries to such nomadic tribes or intrigued them to get away with their wealth
other than the ‘civilized’ white man. Coetzee also very candidly stripped the concept
of “white man’s burden” of all its glory and glamour as he points out:

While our missionaries are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization,
social order, and happiness, they are by the most unexceptionable means
extending British interests, British influence, and the British Empire. … Yes:
the savage must clothe his nakedness and till the earth because Manchester
exports cotton drawers and Birmingham ploughshares. We hunt in vain for a British exporter of the virtues of humility, respect, and diligence. (111)

_In the Heart of the Country_ (1977), Coetzee’s second novel, deals specifically with the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. Though all relationships based on any factor – caste, class, race, gender, region, religion – are in a way power relationships, power is most explicitly the organizing factor in the colonizer-colonized nexus. It tells the story of the downfall of a powerful patriarch, a white colonial settler, and his spinster daughter Magda’s loneliness owing to the lack of any equal or reciprocal company on their secluded farm that eventually leads to her mental breakdown. Narrative is in the form of a monologue by Magda who in order to add some substance to her insubstantial life imagines and re-imagines a number of incidents often blurring the line between real and fictional. She is trapped on the farm with people with whom she cannot have an equal footing: her father, the patriarch, being above her, and her servants being below her. Utterly neglected by her father and despised and mistrusted by her servants on account of being one of the whites responsible for their slavery, she does not have the sense of belongingness with anyone which she craves for all her life.

This novel depicts the scene of the declining colonial power allegorized in the character of Magda’s father who from being a powerful colonial patriarch whose every word used to be an order that no one dared to disobey comes down to a sickening old man after having wounded by the rifle shot fired by Magda as a revenge for ignoring her as well as a punishment for getting into illicit relationship with Hendrik’s young wife Klien-Anna. After living his last days on the mercy of others in a state of utter helplessness, being dependent on others even for his very private jobs, unable to move from the pool (made on his bed) of blood and puss oozing from the wound and his other body wastes that made him unbearably stinking, he succumbs to his fatal injury dying in a state of absolute powerlessness, deprived even of a proper burial afterward. His death finally turns the wheel of power on the farm bringing complete reversal of power relations with Magda being no more able to command respect or obedience from her servants (Hendrik and Anna). They now become dominating rather than being dominated by the ‘white master’ so much so that
Hendrik even goes to the extent of raping Magda for not being able to pay their salary after her father’s death.

It shows the extent of power reversal that even after being raped, Magda tries to reconcile with Hendrik and Klein-Anna rather than retaliating, more so because they are the only human presence left on the farm beside her and the only people on the earth she has known. Though not explicitly mentioned here, it echoes Coetzee’s most recurring theme found all through his oeuvre: paying for the crimes committed in the past i.e. under Colonialism, mostly by those not directly involved in the crime but complicit because they were committed in their name, as stated by Mrs. Curren in the *Age of Iron* (1990): “A crime was committed long ago. … So long ago that I was born into it. … Like every crime it had its price…. Though it was not a crime I asked to be committed, it was committed in my name.” (164). The same idea echoes in *Disgrace* (1999) as Lucy tries to explain things to her father after her rape by three unknown black men: “what if that is the price one has to pay for staying on? … they see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors.” (158). The idea found its most complete and clear expression in the *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007): “the generation of white South Africans to which I belong, and the next generation, and perhaps the generation after that too, will go bowed under the shame of the crimes that were committed in their name.” (44).

Coetzee’s conscience is strongly tinged with the sense of guilt and complicity and of responsibility to pay for the past atrocities committed by his white race upon the blacks, a thing that he is unable to escape all through his life and the same is reflected in his writings. He has been very conscious of the vast history of oppression associated with the skin colour that he is born into (that one cannot escape) though he has no share in the crime, his sympathies rather lying with the other side, the oppressed one, against his own race. But he knows well that “he must be a simpleton, in need of protection, if he imagines he can get by on the basis of straight looks and honourable dealings when the ground beneath his feet is soaked with blood and the vast backward depth of history rings with shouts of anger.” (*Youth* 17). His condition or position in South Africa has been exactly the same as described by Nadine Gordimer in *The Essential Gesture* (1988): “our skin-colour labeled us as oppressors to the blacks and our views labeled us as traitors to the whites.” (32).
Hendrik’s act of dressing in the robes and shoes of his dead master clearly indicates the complete turning-around of the things on the farm, implying the end of Colonization leading to complete takeover of the power by the former powerless subjects. He is no more the obedient meek slave or servant that Magda has known, but rather the master to whom she has to submit now instead. However, she sincerely wants to get out of the hierarchy created by the long colonial subjugation by making herself available to him “randily, humiliatingly and fervently sexually” like a slave as commented by Andre P. Brink in his review of the novel that appeared in Rapport (South African Sunday paper) of 9 October 1977 (qtd. in Kennemeyer 304), but the emotional or mental breach extending over centuries of segregation and oppression is too wide to be bridged by her efforts. Her sexual relation with Hendrik fails to provide her any emotional support because of the lack of compassion and attachment on his part. She, like Coetzee, suffers their (Hendrik’s and his wife Klein-Anna’s) mistrust because of her white skin that renders it impossible for her to be regarded as an individual in isolation with the gang of oppressors to which she belongs by birth and which she cannot alter irrespective of all her shouting as she asserts: “I am not simply one of the whites, I am I! I am I, not a people.” (128).

Power, leading to social hierarchies, is thus shown as an alienating force in the novel. It can only rule people but cannot win them, and as soon as it dwindles, everything falls apart and turns topsy-turvy, forcing its perpetrators to pay either in the form of physical or mental suffering. Magda’s mental disorientation towards the end of the novel while left alone on the farm all by herself, deserted by her servants, shows the extent of harm done by Colonization to the whites themselves suggesting that power does not ruin only one-dimensionally, that one’s skin colour cannot save one from suffering and victimization, or that skin colour has actually no role to play, it is all about “power”. Caleb Rosado has tackled this issue in detail in his article “The Undergirding factor is POWER: Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism” as he comments: “Racism (and sexism) are not about color or gender; they are about Power! They can thus afflict anyone of any gender, color, community, culture, or country, who craves power above the need to respect the Other. At the heart of Racism (as well as sexism) lies the concept of group competition, the quest for power.” (6). According to him, “the problem is not skin color, but systems that perpetrate evil against others and then justify that evil by blaming the victim.” (4).
is all the game of stereotyping in order to prove one group of people inferior to others so that their exploitation can be justified by rendering them incapable of ruling themselves and thus fit to be ruled by others or by projecting them as a threat to the “civilized” society to keep them under the thumb of those who consider themselves as superior, more capable of benefiting the humanity though in effect they do most harm to it by implementing their selfish motives. This stereotyping can be done on the basis of anything – race, religion, caste, class, or gender – which are nothing but just the excuses picked up on the basis of “Otherness” only.

Coetzee’s third novel _Waiting for the Barbarians_ (1980) is full of violence and torture employed as tools of exerting power over others, the powerless. Novel is set in a timeless, spaceless, and nameless zone that lends it a universal and allegorical character. The novel shows how lies are created in order to terrify people so as to ensure and strengthen their allegiances to the Empire creating a need for it to exist thus giving it power over people. Noam Chomsky effectively unveils these dialectics of power in his _Understanding Power_ (2002):

That’s the standard way you cloak and protect power: you make it look mysterious and secret, above the ordinary person – otherwise why should anybody accept it? Well, they are willing to accept it out of fear that some great enemies are about to destroy them, and because of that they’ll cede their authority to the Lord, or the King, or the President or something (that something being Empire here), just to protect themselves. That’s the way governments work – that’s the way _any_ system of power works. (11).

It is how power creates power by manipulating things and creating fictitious situations in which ‘others’ are construed as powerless to defend themselves since the situation created is in control of its creators and, therefore, to their advantage. That the anticipated “barbarian uprising” that lies at the core of the novel with all other events branching from it is just a figment of the mind of colonials can be perceived in the very beginning by the fact that the news about it comes from the distant Empire: “last year stories began to reach us from the capital of unrest among the barbarians.” (8). If
it had been a real threat, the news would have reached the Empire from the settlement rather than vice-versa.

The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* who narrates all the incidents possesses Coetzee’s own ambivalence as he is the one belonging to the Empire itself, appointed by it as a part of the colonial machinery, but not ready to become a part of the injustices, the violence, and the tortures perpetrated by the special agents of the Empire, the men from Third Bureau represented by Colonel Joll and his regiment, upon the harmless natives in the name of beating truth out of them about the expected barbarian unrest postulated by the colonial empire. The plot goes in a complete circle first witnessing his downfall from the powerful magisterial position (as the supreme authority in the frontier settlement) after being declared a traitor by his own people and then again assuming his previous role towards the end of the novel as truth (that there are no barbarians and therefore no barbarian threat) wins over the lies of anticipated threats about them when they do not materialize because “they are in truth an ideological convenience, like the ‘black peril’ that for years was the subject of dread in white South Africa.” (Kennemeyer 336). It clearly draws parallels with the condition of South Africa despite all the ambiguity lent to the novel because of the non-specificity of the time and space in which the events are shown to take place. Coetzee has made every effort for not to be labeled as a South African writer, as a writer from a colony, in hopes of acquiring a universal character and citizenship, but it is impossible for him to escape South African reality because as Breyten Breytenbach says: “To be an African is not a choice, it is a condition” (qtd. in *Stranger Shores* 306), and one cannot change one’s condition as easily as one’s choices. However, though this ambiguous unspecific setting of the novel could not hide Coetzee’s South African essence, it has been successful in making the novel a universal allegory “through which the events assume relevance to other countries and events.” (Kennemeyer 336).

The barbarian girl left in the town from amongst the prisoners brought by Colonel Joll becomes the source of misery for Magistrate who takes a liking for her, initially having drawn to her in his curiosity to know what went on in the torture chamber between the prisoners and the men of Empire, the torturers, as he was not admitted to the privacy of the room where Colonel Joll carried all types of torments upon the prisoners caught just out of his fancies under special “emergency powers”
under the pretext of investigating about the looming barbarian threat. He gives refuge to the ‘barbarian’ girl tortured and injured badly by the ‘civilized’ white men from Empire, seeking access to her body in return just to read the signs of tortures inscribed on it in order to understand both the girl as well as her tormentors. But the girl’s silence does not help him much and he finally decides to return her to her people in order to earn back the goodwill of the natives (the barbarians), to establish the order disturbed by Joll’s ruthless actions, to return the town to smooth functioning as it was before Joll’s arrival, as well as a token of love and affection towards the girl who remains only a mystery to her: “patching up relations between the men of the future and the men of the past, returning, with apologies, a body we have sucked dry – a go-between, a jackal of Empire in sheep’s clothing!” (79). However, this move for reconciliation is treated as a treason on his part (he being accused of supplying information to the enemy under the pretext of returning the girl) by the colonial authorities above him and brings about his downfall as he is immediately arrested by Colonel Joll who came and took charge of the town in his absence. His torture and humiliation at the hands of his own people again proves the fact that power does not lie in one’s skin colour or racial identity, that it is not the skin colour that actually divides people but the ideologies, the way of thinking, the way of perceiving things that puts people against one another.

“Power speaks only to power” (Dusklands 3), says Coetzee. Power pays no attention to powerless as they are too harmless to be a threat. It takes notice only when it sees some counterforce (counter power) that poses threat to its existence, that it becomes violent when it is resisted. That is why it is only the Magistrate who has to suffer at the hands of the people from Third Bureau because he is the only one who shows compassion towards the oppressed and dares to speak against the atrocities committed to them whereas others witness the same things silently. These silent spectators are no threat to the power as they do not resist it, though they held as much (latent) power as the Magistrate to stand up against the suffering of others. But as W. B. E. DuBois, the great American writer and sociologist, says in his book The Souls of Black Folk that “at the back of the problem of race and color lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen.” (qtd. in Rosado 8), the problem is that
nobody wants to come out of the comfort zone, but rather try to secure their comfort at the cost of suffering, oppression, and humiliation of their fellow beings. They succumb to and collude with the prevalent power structures as long as it does not affect them, or give them certain privileges against others, turning an indifferent eye to what it might be doing to others – the underprivileged, the marginalized. Coetzee constantly questions the complicity of such (voluntarily) silent spectators in the ongoing oppression of the powerless, silenced subjects. Their powerlessness, in a way, can be attributed to the lack of support from their fellow human beings who help maintain the power status quo rather than disrupting them to set free those subjugated by them for the sake of the shared humanity.

This need to speak up for the colonized, the deprived, the marginalized, the silenced – in a word the powerless – is what constitutes the concerns of Postcolonial writings, all these being addressed by the postcolonial writers. Though Coetzee often expresses his aversion to be tagged as a postcolonial writer, some of his novels such as this (Waiting for the Barbarians) and Foe (1986) are explicitly postcolonial as they question the colonial point of view regarding the “Other”, and highlight the patterns of injustices and oppression speaking on behalf of the powerless and questioning the humanity of those in power. Coetzee, through the Magistrate here, tells us who the real barbarians are and how those in power shrink the choices for the powerless, compelling them either to submit to the fate devised for them by the powerful or to resist them standing up to fight for their lost power or freedom. While talking to the young officer arrived from the Empire about the barbarians, when Magistrate is told about the ‘general offensive’ to be taken against the barbarians to push them further into the mountains, he retorts: “The people we call barbarians are nomads, they migrate between the lowlands and the uplands every year, that is their way of life. They will never permit themselves to be bottled up in the mountains.” (54), and to this the young man replied: “But surely, if we are to be frank, that is what war is about: compelling a choice on someone who would not otherwise make it.” (54). This is how the powerless are forced to live according to the choices of the powerful – forced through violence and torture (or war) if the hegemonic control fails to do so.

The novel by focusing on the signs (of torture) on the body of the barbarian girl tries to lay bare what goes on in a torture chamber as well as to understand its mechanics – the mechanics of power – since the relationship in a torture room is of
absolute power and powerlessness, where even the right to remain silent (silence being the only way left to the victims to resist the powerful) is encroached upon by the torturers whose purpose is to make the subject speak or to “confess” in their terminology to the allegations (right or wrong) forced upon them. Relations in the torture room in fact “provide a metaphor, bare and extreme, for relations between authoritarianism and its victims. In the torture room unlimited force is exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purpose, if not of destroying him, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him.” (Doubling the Point 363). The novel is described by Coetzee himself as “a novel about the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience.” (Doubling the Point 363), who like Coetzee does not want to be written into a history of violence but is unable to distance himself from it being a part of the colonial machinery.

“The function of the writer”, according to Jean Paul Sartre, “is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it is all about.” (“What is Literature?” 24) so as to make them realize, in the words of Breyten Breytenbach, that “We are all guilty.” (312). That is what writers like Coetzee try to accomplish by peeping and probing into things, sights, and places that are forbidden or inaccessible to all except those involved therein such as the prisons, the torture rooms, or in a broader sense the invisible or hidden structures of power that render others as powerless. “The very fact that certain topics are forbidden creates an unnatural concentration upon them”, says Coetzee (Doubling the Point 300). This is what makes South African literature concentrated around the themes of violence and torture that goes on behind the walls, beyond the common man’s sight and hearing, against the common man’s sanction to it. This is what any literature aspires to do: to illuminate the dark corners of the society in which it generates so that nobody can plead innocence or ignorance on account of being unaware of the sufferings of their fellow beings, to prick the collective conscience of the masses in order to awake it.

Coetzee’s Foe (1986), widely regarded as a postcolonial rewriting of the famous colonial text Robinson Crusoe (1986) by Daniel Defoe, is a digression in the sense that it has nothing to do directly with the South African ethos, but its master-slave theme eventually connect it to the country that has been an epitome of such
distorted human relations, mutilated Friday at once being a representative figure of all the lost and silenced souls under colonialism as well as a symbol of resistance against the colonial forces manifested in his impenetrable silence that renders others’ story incomplete in spite of all their efforts. Coetzee strips Defoe’s Crusoe (‘Cruso’ here) of all colonial glorification of being an intelligent, independent, self-reliant, and self-sufficient entity, capable of devising a life of comfort and abundance even on a lonely, uninhabited, abandoned island. Intrusion of a woman (Susan Barton) as another castaway on the island marks the end of Cruso’s unquestioned and unresisted power and authority. He is not the only one on the island now who ‘speaks’ or who ‘can’ speak: “After years of unquestioned and solitary master, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman.” (25). She adds the most natural dimension to the story hitherto absent, i.e. the man-woman relationship. While Defoe’s novel projects Crusoe as a god – all too strong and self-sufficient to need anybody – giving no space to ordinary human needs as significant as sex, Coetzee’s revision shows him as an ordinary human being who has had some needs for gratification of which he has to depend on the ‘other’; who falls ill, and grows weak and old like any other human being needing to be taken care of by others. He neither has the exceptional insight like Defoe’s Crusoe to save any tools from the shipwreck that may be of any help to make life easy on the island, nor he is so industrious to have any such skills as Defoe’s ‘god of small things’ possesses who is an all-rounder craftsman to carve excellent instruments and objects with his own hands with the help of his ‘saved’ tools to enable him to live a normal, comfortable life even as a castaway on an extremely remote unknown island.

Susan, Coetzee’s revisionary insertion into Defoe’s plot (as ‘woman’ has no presence there) questions Cruso’s right over the island: “The island was Cruso’s (yet by what right?...)” (51), as well as his story about the ‘silent’ mutilated Friday whose tongue has been cut out. Friday’s slavery here is not shown as voluntary as in Defoe. He stands for all those silenced by the colonialism (specially the blacks of South Africa), his mutilation being symbolic of the irrevocable loss caused by colonial oppression and exploitation, a loss that is beyond anybody’s power to recover. Above all the interpretations and possibilities that Cruso tells about the loss of Friday’s tongue, Susan does not rule out the possibility of doubting Cruso himself for committing the said atrocity as she babbles before the silent Friday in order to know
the truth to be told in her story that she wants to get published after returning to England with Friday, Cruso having died on the way on the ship that rescued them: “how did you come to lose your tongue? Your master says the slavers cut it out; but I have never heard of such a practice, nor did I ever meet a slave in Brazil who was dumb. Is the truth that your master cut it out himself and blamed the slavers?” (84). But since Friday has no tongue now, nor he knows any other way to communicate, there is no way to know the exact truth about it, and hence to complete Susan’s narrative.

Coetzee’s novel is truly postcolonial in the sense that it is more concerned with the story of Friday, the slave, than of Cruso, the master. It revolves around the silence of Friday, his lost tongue, making endless efforts to dig out the truth behind it and the extent of the loss suffered by him, and, by extension, by all the powerless colonized subjects who have been silenced over the centuries of slavery, their histories been obliterated forever by those in power to write the history, since histories have always been written from the perspective of those powerful enough to define the situations and thus always consist of one-sided versions. Coetzee has taken upon himself the task of telling the untold version, the other side of the story as he clearly does in the Dusklands that actually is a rewriting of the accounts of early travelers in the Cape, the early colonial expeditions involving his ancestors which Coetzee came across in the British Museum as J. C. Kennemeyer (Coetzee’s only biographer) comments in his biography: “That dramatic tale of power hunger and violence that the hack writer in castle did not write down, thus becomes the actual matter of ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’, which in reality is a rewriting of the original ‘Relaas’, with the emphasis on what really happened.” (21).

Cruso’s illness and his approaching old age leading to his weakness, marking the end of his glorious past (though not so glorious as in Defoe) is symbolic of dwindling colonial power and authority as he is regarded as the most representative ideal colonial figure in English literature. He, like Magda’s father in In the Heart of the Country, is now under others’ command rather than commanding others, and that ‘other’ too being a ‘woman’ (a universally colonized subject – powerless and subjugated, often regarded as a lesser human being under patriarchy) provides a metaphor for the changing power-relations between the colonizer and the colonized, the master and the slave, or the powerful and the powerless. His barren terraces
waiting for someone to bring seeds to be planted therein also provide hint for some positive change to come, kindling hope for improvement in the condition, in a way paving and preparing way for a new productive and fruitful system to replace the old barren one for which the ground has been prepared by Cruso himself: “The planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed. I only clear the ground for them.” (33). It hints towards the nearing end of the colonialism and the emergence of a system that will be beneficial. The barrenness having associated with colonialism here shows the fruitlessness of the system, the harmful effects of its oppressive strategies that could yield nothing except destruction. An unjust system can bear no fruits finally leading to infertility, as slavery, by depriving people of their freedom both in thought and action and hampering the potential for development in people for coming to the forefront. Susan calling his terraces as tombs, “The farther I journey from his terraces, the less they seem to me like fields waiting to be planted, the more like tombs” (83), again conjures the image of colonialism having died, buried, entombed!

*Foe* showcases the questions regarding power and authority of the author to present facts or fiction in the story closely linking them with the freedom or choice to have his/her own way, and the pressures that an author has to undergo while narrating a story to make it interesting and desirable at the cost of the truth he/she wants to tell. He/she is often forced to fabricate things, to make additions or subtractions, by some outside authority. The novel makes a clear case against the unlimited power of censorship in South Africa that all writers there (cultural ones particularly) including Coetzee have had to face, though Coetzee never has had the honour of getting any of his books banned because, in his own words, his books have been “too indirect in their approach, too rarefied, to be considered a threat to the order.” (*Doubling the Point* 298). The problem is underlined here, in Coetzee’s famous indirect fashion, through Susan’s efforts to get her story published without having it altered as suggested by Mr. Foe (the fictional Defoe) who is intent to mould story according to his choice. He wants to make her story revolve around her quest for her long lost daughter, whereas for Susan, the story she wants to tell in her book is actually about the island, Cruso, and above all Friday, having no space to mention her daughter, or anything about her life before her having washed ashore on Cruso’s island as a castaway. She is “a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story
according to her own desire.” (Foe 131). And her desire is to tell only the truth – “what really happened” – a concern Coetzee is obsessed with all through his oeuvre.

The novel also deals with power associated with the inherent racial hierarchies, the power attributed to a particular race over the other that is rendered inferior for no reason other than the colour of their skin. Nothing is powerful or powerless in itself, we attribute certain characteristics to them to categorize them as such. Caleb Rosado explains this practice or tendency, devoid of any rationale or logical basis, with the example of a piece of cloth. According to him, the same piece of cloth can be made into a handkerchief, an object associated with menial tasks such as wiping sweat, blowing nose, etc., a thing that you can just use and throw; whereas the same piece of cloth if made into a flag is revered as a national symbol and identity for which people can even lay their lives. Of course, there are things in between such as a shirt or a blouse used both for protecting and celebrating our bodies (5). Similarly, he continues to remark: “We have relegated some people to be the handkerchiefs of life, and others to be the blouses and shirts, all the while securing a prominent place for those whom we chose to celebrate as flags.” (5). However, such a hierarchical categorization needs some pretext and, thus, is always done by making race, colour, gender, or caste as a basis to disguise the real reasons: the reasons of power and privilege. The meaning does not lie in cloth, colour, or gender. It is we who impregnate them with certain meanings in order to get some privileges while depriving others of the same.

Foe exhibits how deeply these meanings and places that we give to things in relation with one another are imbibed in our psyche, consciously or unconsciously, that we follow them even in the absence of any established social order to reinforce them. Though there is no social order on the island since there exists no society, Cruso being the only inhabitant, devoid of any human company and thus in dire need for it, still he does not treat Friday as an equal human being capable of providing him the social brotherhood only because he happens to be from an “inferior” race, and hence takes him as a slave for granted rather than as a friend or companion. If it is because Cruso arrives first on the island and thus claims it as his, taking the later comers as his subordinate, since it is the only possible rule that can be discerned by Cruso’s becoming master automatically and Friday a slave, why he does not treat Susan the same way who arrives even much later, and who being a woman is even
weaker (physically) than Friday and thus easier to be taken control of or to be subjugated to his will? Moreover, by what right does Susan take Friday as her servant too and herself as the lady as she says: “but then I reminded myself of how free the ladies of Bahia were before their servants.” (14). Why does she readily put herself on Cruso’s side than on Friday when she arrived on the island in a condition worse than that of Friday, devastated by the shipwreck? Could she have behaved the same if she had been black like Friday rather than white like Cruso? Had Friday belonged to the white race, or had Susan belonged to the black race, could the story been the same? All this makes it clear that it is not the social order that defines us or our behaviour, it is rather we who create and define the social order to create the zones of power and powerlessness. Those who create such power structures and social hierarchy are clever enough to generally take such things as basis for defining or justifying their bigotry which are beyond people’s control such as caste, race, gender, etc, so that it would not be easy to change these power status quos.

Coetzee’s most famous novel Disgrace (1999) is the one that explicitly shows the changing scenario of South Africa in the post-apartheid era, leading to great shift in power relations between the whites and the blacks, the settlers and the natives, or the (former) colonizer and the colonized. It shows new generation, represented through the character of Lucy (daughter of a white settler), to be more receptive of the new order than the older one, represented by her father David Lurie, the protagonist of the novel, a professor of English studies who suffers disgrace on account of a sexual scandal with one of his black students (a girl younger than even his daughter) Melanie Isaacs. Gerald Kaufman, one of the judges in the jury that chose Disgrace for the 1999 Booker Prize described it as “an allegory about what is happening to the human race in the post-colonial era” as well as “a millennial book, because it takes us through the 20th century into a new century into which the source of power is shifting away from Western Europe.” (qtd. in Sarah Lyall). The book also, to some extent, sheds light on the double standards (a marked feature of the modern contemporary world) devised always to the advantage of powerful ones to persecute the powerless for the very same things that the powerful regard themselves entitled to do without any fear of repercussions.

While sexually exploiting his student Melanie, Lurie tries to justify it as his right by declaring it as a duty for women to share the bounty that they possess
because, as per his views, “Beauty does not own itself” (16). He takes advantage of his position of power accorded due to being a teacher and never regrets for it, not even after being put to trial where instead of repenting, he rather declares himself as “enriched by the experience” (56) when questioned by the press reporters regarding the whole thing. But he no more thinks the same way when his own daughter is raped, an act corresponding to his own act of taking advantage of Melanie. Both episodes occur in a white-versus-black nexus, but with a reversal of identities between the victims and the perpetrators implying the reversal of power relations in post-apartheid or post-colonial situation. The same Lurie who, in his own case, contended that “No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts” (90) is the one now who is most keen to subject the perpetrators to punishment though Lucy sees it as a price for being allowed to live on a land that belongs not to her as she believes that “the new South Africa is ruled by new ethos, and that black people expect a certain sacrifice from her” (518). Lurie’s changing attitude quite shows the double standard for judging the same crime by whites and blacks differently. The word “Violation” never comes to his mind while violating Melanie repeatedly (though he clearly knows all the time that he is forcing himself upon her taking advantage of his position) which he now wants Petrus to acknowledge regarding Lucy’s rape as he doubts him to be complicit in the whole matter because the young boy, one of the party of three assailants who committed the crime, happens to be a relative of Petrus.

Lurie lives under the colonial hangover until “the day of testing” (94) comes. It is after Lucy’s rape wherein he experiences an acute helplessness that he comes to realize that the “Things have changed” (105) and looks backward to compare the change:

In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one’s temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place. But though Petrus is paid a wage, Petrus is no longer, strictly speaking, hired help. It is hard to say what Petrus is, strictly speaking. The word that seems to serve best, however, is neighbor. … It is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it. (116-17)
The word “neighbor” here holds significance as it implies “equality of status” to some extent. It implies a notable upward vertical shift in position for Petrus who has been a servant earlier working on Lucy’s farm as “hired” labour. However, in the ‘new world’ created after the end of colonialism in South Africa defined as “A land in the process of being repossessed, its heirs quietly announcing themselves. A land taken by force, used, despoiled, spoiled, abandoned in its barren late years” (Age of Iron 25), Lurie finds himself confused about the place of Petrus (the blacks) vis-à-vis himself (i.e. the whites) since the old hierarchies no more hold their sway and Petrus is well aware about the changed scenario. He is no more afraid of his erstwhile ‘masters’ or humbled before them. He is now in a position rather to offer them protection under him and that’s too on his own terms and conditions.

In Disgrace, power relations are shown almost becoming topsy-turvy. The boy (black of course), one of the offenders in Lucy’s rape case, freely wanders without any fear of being subjected to any trial or punishment and Lurie cannot even “order him off the property” as “it’s not in (his) power” (200) anymore. Lucy’s rape itself is a manifestation of the reversal of power structures. Moreover, the traditional roles of the South Africa are reversed and Petrus becomes co-owner of the smallholding, whereas Lurie from time to time, in a further reversal of the earlier master-slave relationship, is in Petrus’s employ and helps him to the farm. Petrus is not required to answer for each and everything as he is “entitled to his silence” (116) now unlike under the colonial regime where one must speak if power commands, particularly under the pressure of torture that aims to break the will to resist, and silence being a form of resistance under such circumstances, one is not entitled even to hold the silence. In Coetzee, silence is, most of the times, employed more as an expression of power than powerlessness – power to keep from baring one’s soul before others.

There is decline in Lurie’s power as a man (his dwindling sexual drive leading him to think even about getting castrated just like Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians feels), as a patriarch (no more entitled to play the role of authoritative father), and most of all as a white colonial settler (no power over his black subjects now). Though it takes time for Lurie to accept this new order, he finally comes to terms with it bringing about a complete transformation, from a man selfish enough to violate the dignity of another human being in the name of ‘the rights of desire’, a man “not prepared to be reformed” (77), to a man reformed enough to take care of the
honour and dignity of the corpses of dogs put to death on Bev Shaw’s clinic. It is Lucy (and her rape) who brings him out of his delusion to face the reality of the changed times, it is she who deprives him of the right to have power to interfere or impose his choices on others as she vehemently asserts: “This is my life. I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, …As for Petrus, he is not some hired labourer whom I can sack because in my opinion he is mixed up with the wrong people. That’s all gone, gone with the wind.” (133). That is how he comes to realize that “Between Lucy’s generation and mine a curtain seems to have fallen. I didn’t even notice when it fell” (210).

However, the thing stressed regarding the changed order wherever it occurs in Coetzee’s works is the purposive difference in the exercise of power. Whereas the earlier power relations were purely the relations of power – powerful taking advantage of powerless – just because of their privileged position, the latter (reversed) power relations have an added dimension to it – the tinge of revenge – the historical dimension. They are no more regarded simply as a manifestation of pure power, but as a backlash for the long history of oppression, exploitation, colonization, violence, and injustices perpetuated against the blacks by the whites, against the colonized by the colonizer, or simply against the powerless by the powerful, as Lurie himself comments (in the context of Lucy’s rape): “It was history speaking through them. A history of wrong. It may have seemed personal but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors.” (156).

_Disgrace_ is the novel that brought most severe criticism against Coetzee. For making black assailants to rape a white woman in the emerging post-apartheid South African society, he has been accused of deliberately arousing old racist fears and racial tensions, ruling out the possibilities of ‘civilized reconciliation’ between the blacks and the whites. The novel is regarded by many a critics as “racist” (for its black characters not being as fully drawn as white ones) confirming to the fears of white population of a backlash from the blacks in the aftermath to the colonial subjugation and slavery, showcasing “the near-barbaric post-colonial demands of black Africans” as Jakes Gerwel (an official in Nelson Mandela’s government and a former professor) writes in an article in _Rapport_ of 13 February 2000 (qtd. in Kennemeyer 530). ANC (the African National Congress) accused Coetzee of depicting ‘as brutally as he can’ the whites’ ‘perception of the post-apartheid black
man’ and of being “more concerned about the rights of animals than of humans” regarding the novel’s subplot where Lurie works in an animal shelter (Kennemeyer 529). This allegation stands true to some extent as Coetzee seems to be ‘more direct’ in ridiculing the violence against animals (as in Elizabeth Costello, 2003) than the violence against human beings. This may be because in the case of human beings he might have divided feelings, divided allegiances (owing to his ambivalent position?) just as he has ‘divided feelings’ regarding Israel/Palestine issue as he himself says in a letter to Paul Auster (a writer and a friend of him) while discussing the issue. The fact that his sense of justice can at times be marred by his personal attachments and allegiances is revealed by Coetzee himself in the letter as he comments: “I have Jewish friends to whom the fate of the state of Israel means a great deal. If I have to choose between my friends and the principle of historical justice, I am afraid to say I choose my friends.” (Here and Now 147).

However, despite all his ambivalence, Coetzee is always keen to discover and expose the zones of power and powerlessness, and their interchangeability, their potential to transform from one into the other. “He had a well-developed sense of the ridiculous and acute insight into power dynamics between people” (Kennemeyer 103) that enables him to dissect the same in his works. His works lay open the ‘inner workings’ of people’s hearts and minds, but from an objective standpoint. He always maintains distance with his characters, observing them objectively in an uninvolved manner. He is there but at same time not there as his biographer comments: “Coetzee is ever the outsider, contemplating and judging as an observer, without taking an active part.” (Kennemeyer 87). He prefers, like Michael K (the protagonist of his novel Life and times of Michael K, 1983) to be “out of the camps, out of all the camps at the same time”– that is “enough of an achievement” for him – to be “neither locked up nor standing guard at the gate.” (Michael K 182). However, his characters often betray their creator who is trying to hide behind them, showing the very ambivalence and the sense of historical guilt that he suffers because of being a “white” as well as a “South African” that he has always been trying to shake off. He regards South Africa as an “albatross” around his neck, because of the weight of consciousness that he feels due to his colonial legacy, that he has to carry all his life.

Coetzee is a very complex and unique writer owing to his equivocalness on account of being a white outwardly (racial basis) but a non-white inwardly
(ideological basis). Bernard Levin in his London Sunday Times review of Waiting for the Barbarians writes: “I have never known an author so willing to bare his own back to his own rod, to declare himself at once part of suffering humanity and of that which makes it suffer.” This double stance at once is the thing that accords multiple interpretations to his works, along with his objectivity, distant perspective, and indirectness lending an allegorical character to almost his every work. His characters can at once be taken as stereotypes as well as individuals gripped in overpowering situations fighting continuously to overcome them. Being part of allegories (intentional or unintentional), his characters have symbolic values and their fates or circumstances possess deep under-the-surface meanings such as Magistrate’s and Lurie’s increasing inability to satiate their sexual drive signify the declining power of the phallus, the most powerful and archetypal symbol of power and dominance. The phallus can no longer exercise its power over the “others” in spite of having the desire to do so, symbolizing the decline of colonizer’s power over the colonized.

Race is the organizational basis for power relations in Coetzee’s works since almost all his works correspond to the South African situation caught in a racial conflict between white minority and the black majority with an unnatural pattern of power concentration. However, as David Attwell observes, “Coetzee’s emphasis on race and colonialism seems to have been the result of biographical accident rather than the product of a desire for accurate historical representation.” (25). Racial aspect is so strong in South Africa that it leaves no scope for themes other than violence, discrimination, oppression, conflict, etc., all revolving around the concept of power – power-obsession, power-delusion, power disequilibrium, power-deficiency – all responsible for creating the biggest problems in the human world. But in spite of being greatly concerned with the situation of South Africa and being mournful for it, Coetzee’s works do not offer any solution to alter it, they suggest no way to come out of this labyrinth of power and powerlessness owing to the Coetzee’s ‘apolitical’ stance under which he rejects the maneuvers of both the parties, keeping himself aloof from both the sides of the conflict. That’s what makes his writings a manifestation of “his complicated postcoloniality” (4) in the words of Attwell. However, how being ‘apolitical’ can also be a “political” decision in itself is a different story just as “unbelief is a belief” (Elizabeth Costello 201).
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