One of the central features of postmodernism is the attention it devotes to fictionality. Fictionality refers to the condition of being fictional, that is to say, the condition of being constructed, narrated, mediated. Fiction, no doubt, is always all these things, which means that the represented world is always framed, presented to us from the perspective of another. The narrative space in fiction is as much occupied by the socio-political-historical and cultural spaces as much as it is defined by stylistic features. Postmodern fiction in general, among its many other characteristics is marked by an interest in metafiction, which is to define it simply, “fiction about fiction.” Coetzee makes us aware of the constructed nature of his fiction by employing metafictional strategies of narration. The narrative space in two of Coetzee’s texts under consideration is greatly occupied by the metafictional strategy of intertextuality while the third is distinguished by multiple narrative versions, another feature of a postmodern work.

“A text is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,” writes Barthes in *Image-Music- Text* (1977: 146). As a recognized term, intertextuality ranges from direct, conscious citation by one author of another, to an
assimilation of certain methodological approaches, to much more elusive uses, relying on subtle allusions, intentionally interwoven by the author and echoes of which the author may or may not be aware. In Coetzee’s early fiction in general, we come across the strategy of multiple narrative voice, parody, intertextuality, diverse versions of the same incident and the play of language. On a thematic level while the narrative space in these works is occupied by a chain of events related to racism and apartheid, occurring in space and time, and involving human agency and intention, the textual strategy offers metafictional methods to articulate the social and political issues in South Africa.

Julia Kristeva in “The Word, Dialogue and Novel” notes that “each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. Any text …is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, any text is the absorption and transformation of another”(37). As per Kristeva’s definition of intertextuality all writings must be considered as a major form of inter-art or intertext. In this respect, any work of art does not emerge from nothingness, but rather interacts with, rewrites or parodies other texts. Coetzee’s Life and Times of Michael K and Disgrace provide examples of this complex phenomenon of intertextuality as defined by Kristeva. In these novels Coetzee alludes to implicitly other texts thereby creating a sort of dialectic relationship between his texts and his sources. Coetzee’s metafictional palimpsests reveal the literary endurance of Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and the Romantic poets. In Life and Times of Michael K for instance, the intertextual echoes of Kafka and Beckett prompt the reader to reflect on man’s inherent desire for freedom and identity and of the challenge he
throws at the State to subvert power and political authority. In *Disgrace*, the Romantic movement, closely associated with European culture, is reinterpreted against the context of a South African setting; the whole question of racism and power equations are understood from a different point of view, focalized through David Lurie who bears temperamental allegiance to William Wordsworth and Lord Byron. Lurie arrives at new understandings of the consequences of racism, of repentance and of retribution through his literary involvement with the Romantic masters.

In intertextuality as a feature of postmodern metafictional narrative strategy, Coetzee discovered a groundbreaking formal innovation that he could use both in his personal life and in his fiction, to mediate his own perceptions of South African situation. Coetzee subverts traditional realistic novel forms as he makes use of intertextual strategies and multiple narrative voices to self-reflexively comment on the nature of fiction and fiction writing. This may be the reason that prompted David Attwell in *J.M. Coetzee* (1993), to describe Coetzee’s writings as “situational metafiction.” Without doubt, the critic scholar is pointing out how the reader becomes aware of the ontological status of the intertextual references, stratas of meaning and metafictional stratagems that Coetzee experiments with along with his incisive commentary of the South African situation. The varied techniques can be assumed to be the result of authorial intent and purpose, thereby providing implicit comments on his oeuvre while at the same time disavowing authorial control bound as it is with South Africa’s unique political and colonial situation. The adoption of postmodernist narrative strategies makes sense in the political climate of late twentieth century
South Africa with its literary censorship rules, and control of all forms of public expression. The metafictional postmodern strategies of Coetzee politicize interpretation in such a way that the act of reading reenacts the political process the fiction represents, namely, colonisation and its repercussions on African space and its natives. This is true of all the works under reference. Thus intertextuality in the hands of Coetzee becomes both a postmodern game and a strategy of protest.

A distinguishing feature of the postmodernist text is its inclination to question and problematise the authority of narrative. The authority of the narrative is problematised when the implied author constructed in the text proves to be an unreliable narrator or an anti-hero. In ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee,’ the second novella of Dusklands, Coetzee blends the perspectives of multiple points of view, all more or less fallible or unreliable, with the self-reflexivity, uncertainties, and questioning we encounter in postmodernist narrative techniques. Coetzee composes ‘The Narrative’ into various subtexts, three of which narrate different versions of the same event. On a macroscopic level Coetzee’s text could be read as a collection of the different re-elaborations of the original (fictional) deposition given by Jacobus Coetzee and going beyond that, as a rewriting of the historical document compiled by him. Here, the privileged discourse of the narrator that subordinates all other discourses in the text is replaced by an unreliable narrator or multiple discourses. Consequently, authorial authority is displaced and instead becomes a role to be inferred by the reader reading the text. The reader is not presented to the one unified, coherent and absolute truth but must now take on the role of determining the plurality of meaning in the text.
From the time when Coetzee inaugurated his literary career with novels like *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country*, he has proved to be a keen observer of South Africa. The oppression of the black majority enacted by the government of South Africa and enforced with brutality by its police force presented to its writers an almost unique ethical and aesthetic challenge. Potential censorship, the extent to which writing can or should be seen as an intervention in the political sphere, the ethical responsibility of the representation of the struggle for democracy and its consequences; the ethical legitimacy of writing at all in a society in such urgent need of reform; all of these challenges exerted a weight on South African literature during the period of apartheid.

While analyzing the narrative space in Coetzee, one must simultaneously explore these cultural and intellectual spaces prevailing in South Africa during Coetzee’s days. Coetzee, like any other sensitive writer, was aware that apartheid has placed certain restrictions on novel writing in South Africa. In this situation, the most salient challenge becomes that of writing literature which deals with the political, yet is not limited by it. It may be assumed that it is this difficulty in direct representation that prompts Coetzee, among other motives, to venture into postmodernist narrative strategies. Coetzee as a public intellectual was aware of the 1963 *The Publications and Entertainment Act* passed by the South African government that made it possible to ban not only works which were considered blasphemous or obscene but also any work which as Coetzee’s contemporary, Nadine Gordimer observes, “brings any section of the inhabitants into ridicule or contempt, is harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants; is prejudicial to the
safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order” *Essential Gesture*, 61). Hence it is only natural that Coetzee should seek narrative methods that escaped such legislative acts to register his protest on the South African situation. The narrative strategies experimented by Coetzee calls for a wider understanding of politics than one which deals only with chains and prison bars; the attempt is also to engage with the complexities of human life and society. An instance of this is *Life and Times of Michael K* which addresses the minimalist approach adopted by the marginalized and deprived in South African society to come to terms with the history of the times. In this text Coetzee employs echoes of Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett as well as different narrative perspectives to comment on the racial politics of South Africa.

In this context, it is worth noting the position taken by Nadine Gordimer. Throughout the apartheid period, Gordimer regularly published essays and articles condemning censorship. She calls for writing, especially writing in situations of oppression and injustice, to resist the temptation of becoming merely propaganda. In *The Essential Gesture* she writes that “a writer has to reserve the right to tell the truth as he sees it, in his own words, without being accused of letting the side down”(283). For Coetzee, ‘the right to tell the truth’ involved manipulating a narrative space that deals with the complex historical and material realities that underlie the colonisation process. This narrative space takes into consideration the complex interaction between history and ‘truth’ in fiction. ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee,’ for instance is intensely self reflexive while at the same time laying claim to historical events in such a manner that it problematises the relationship of history
to reality and of reality to language, finally exposing history as a human construct. This work may be described as an experiment in historiographic metafiction, a genre, which Linda Hutcheon has classified as a perfect example of postmodernist literature,

In Coetzee’s treatment of ‘official’ history and the historical character Jacobus Coetzee in ‘The Narrative,’ we come across narrative methods that point to his experiments with postmodern narrative techniques. This novella fits the description of an ontological ‘scandal’ by giving alternative histories claiming as the author does in the Preface to have restored ‘what had been lost or suppressed’. In this novella, the reliability of official history is questioned. To do so, Coetzee places under erasure some of the objects/events of the fictional world, first projecting a set of affairs, and then denying or rescinding it. Coetzee thus, in keeping with the Derridian tradition of postmodernism, destabilizes the world created in the text and lays bare the processes by which the reader constructs the fictional worlds. An analysis of Coetzee’s use of repetitive strategies in this text is highly revealing in this context.

In ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ the issue of repetition becomes fundamental from a structural point of view. Coetzee composes this novella into various subtexts, three of which narrate different versions of the same event. In one sense it is the original account given by Jacobus Coetzee about the colonial explorations of discovery in the wilds of Africa. While creating in the reader the illusion of truth with this account, the writer Coetzee goes on to give two other re-elaborations of the same account, thereby providing a rewriting of the original version. Through this peculiar structure, the novella seems to parody the pseudo
scientific methods adopted by Van Riebeeck Society, South Africa’s most important historical society entrusted with the compilation and the reprinting of catalogues and historical narratives of all kinds, on which Coetzee’s text actually draws.

The narrative structure consisting of multiple subtexts has important repercussions on a thematic level, since it enables the author Coetzee to question the notion of historical truth, at the same time implicitly denouncing the Society’s claim to be delivering the truth about South Africa and its inhabitants. The title ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ is immediately followed by the words ‘Edited, with an Afterword, S.J.Coeztee. Translated by J.M. Coetzee.’ After this, there is an epigraph from Gustave Flaubert, the father of European Realism — ‘What is important is the philosophy of history’(53) — which being isolated from the rest of the novel can be identified as a further subtext of the novella. This brief quotation, together with the title of the novel, hints at the way the text as a whole works.

After this subtext, we have the ‘Translator’s Preface.’ This ‘translator,’ in spite of sharing his name with the author of the novel, may be seen as another of the fictitious characters created by J. M. Coetzee as author. In fact, although Coetzee as author might have actually produced his own translation of the deposition inserted in the novella, (altering it, no doubt, for his own ends), the fact that he is ‘written’ in a work of fiction and that he presents different personal characteristics from the flesh and blood J.M.Coeztee, (for example, a father who, instead of being an attorney like the real Zacharias Coetzee, was a lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch (53) turns him into a fictional character.
Hence, this translator — who in the Preface introduces the three main documents of the novella, whereupon he disappears completely from the rest of the narration — while being considered as one of the author’s personas, could be best described as the first extra-heterodiegetic narrator of the novella, and exemplifies Barthes’s notion of the death of the author. According to Barthes, at the moment he begins to write, the author himself becomes a product of language, losing his identity and simply becoming the one who says ‘I’, the subject who exists only in the speech act that defines him and who exists as such only in so far as he speaks (1984: 191; 1968: 492). Looked at this way, the identification of the actual author of Coetzee’s text becomes difficult. It is the implications and problems of these particular elements that gives room to Coetzee the writer to experiment with the postmodern narrative strategy of multiple perspectives.

The first document — (The Narrative) — is presented by Coetzee as author, as a translation from the Dutch into English made by J. M. Coetzee as translator and first degree narrator. As a second degree intra-homodiegetic narrator is Jacobus Coetzee, the protagonist. In this section, the reader is confronted with the subjective narration of Jacobus, who relates everything through internal focalisation, and therefore presents the reader a narrative characterized by his distorted perception of reality. After this document, which corresponds to the central and most extensive part of the novella, comes the second document: the ‘Afterword’ by S.J Coetzee. This, the reader is told, is a translation from Afrikaans into English made by the first narrator-translator. After this we have a page of ‘endnotes’ which Dr.S.J.Coetzee - the intra-
heterodiegetic narrator of the Afterword, who in an attempt to give an illusion of objectivity, describes Jacobus’s journey using the third person singular—allegedly inserted in his text. These ‘endnotes’ are given the status of a further subtext by the author and well separated from the rest of the text, as also by presenting many imprecise and misleading references. They expose the fact that the version of truth propounded by Afrikaner institutions such as the Van Riebeeck Society and Stellenbosch University is a mere forgery.

Immediately afterwards, Coetzee the writer introduces the third document of the novella, the ‘Appendix.’ This is by the first degree narrator as a translation he allegedly made from the Dutch of the Deposition, which dictated by Jacobus Coetzee himself, would have been given by the governor to the higher officials (123). This Deposition is not actually written by Jacobus, who is illiterate, but instead by ‘a castle hack, who heard out Coetzee’s story with the impatience of a bureaucrat and jotted down some hasty précis for the Governor’s desk’ (108). Jacobus nonetheless puts his signature at the end of the document: ‘X’ (125). This, in one special sense, brings up the issue of the identity of the ‘author’ of the Deposition. J. M. Coetzee, the author, is here bringing up the question as to whether the reader can actually identify the author of the novella. If the translator’s Preface presents the ‘Narrative’ and the ‘Deposition’ as texts written by Jacobus Coetzee, the reader later discovers that this is not in fact the case and that someone else (a bureaucrat scribe of the company), wrote these texts for him. It appears therefore that the signatory and author do not coincide and the reader is forced to identify, even in the fictitious world of the novella, more than one author.
The issue of the signatory’s identity is problematic. ‘X’ does not even represent an entire name, but merely a single letter. Immediately after this sign, the clause ‘this mark was made by the narrator in my presence, O.M. Berg, Councillor and Secretary’ is inserted (125). But this qualification, which implicates yet another individual, fails to properly identify the person who signed ‘X’ as the narrator. The problematisation of the representation of reality through the presence of a host of narrators, is evident here.

In ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee,’ just as Coetzee the writer experiments with multiple narrations and narrators, the representation of reality is also presented through different versions of the same incident. As an example of the different versions of the same events creating a narrative paradox can be cited the description of the ‘double’ death of Klawer. Klawer is the only servant who does not desert Jacobus when he decides to leave the Hottentot village. Initially, Coetzee’s protagonist narrates how the servant died crossing the watercourse (93). Immediately afterwards, however, Jacobus carries on his narration using the first person plural, thus giving the impression that he is still in the company of his servant (93). After this description the reader is confronted with a second version of Klawer’s death. According to this version Klawer, paralysed after having crossed the river, died at some point after Jacobus abandoned him in a cave (95). This creates narrative unreliability and what results is further confusion of what events have actually happened and what have not — nothing is corrected or clarified at all by the author.
The impossibility of the two versions of the incident of Klawer’s death being simultaneously true forcibly shifts the reader’s attention to the constructedness of the events and the craftedness of the descriptions, as well as of the author’s sovereign power to do whatever he pleases with the narrative. It is a moment when the author J. M. Coetzee reinforces his stamp on the novel. Doing so illustrates the roles this kind of conscious “constructedness” and “craftedness” play in Coetzee’s writing, in terms of conveying the story or stories that make up the novel. The craftedness makes clear that Coetzee is playing with narration in the world of fiction.

Likewise, if we consider what is narrated in ‘The Narrative’ as the real journey of Jacobus, the fact that several events are omitted in the following documents such as the ‘Afterword’ expose the white authority’s censorship of news, which, if divulged, would discredit not only Jacobus but the entire dominant class of South Africa to which he belongs. A man like Jacobus, who has committed ignominious crimes, is therefore eulogized in official and public documents because he discovered the giraffe (108), he is described as a God (116) and in spite of his insanity, the ‘Afterword,’

…ventures to present a more complete and therefore more just view of Jacobus Coetzee. It is a work of piety but also a work of history; a work of piety towards an ancestor and one of the founders of our people, a work which offers the evidence of history to correct certain anti-heroic distortions that have been creeping into our conception of the great age of exploration when the white man first made contact with the native people of our interior. (108)
This hypothesis which is one amongst the many, could find confirmation in the translator’s words in the Preface, where he admits that he ‘restored two or three brief passages omitted from his father’s edition (55). The changes the translator refers to could therefore correspond to the elaborations Jacobus makes of the servant’s death which, together with the description of the massacre of the Namaquas, is quietly dropped in the remaining documents in order not to damage the reputation of someone defined in the Afterword as an ‘extraordinary man’ (121).

These repetitions whether it is of multiple narrative voices or of events may clearly be seen as the author’s attempt to break the realist illusion and as a reminder that the reader is dealing with a work of fiction. Upsetting narrative expectations by bringing in contradictory versions into the narrative space is a ploy employed by Coetzee to discuss on parallel lines, the notion of the provisional nature of history and reality. ‘The Narrative’ identifies itself as a postmodernist work by demonstrating that past events can be altered; that history can get rewritten, remade; that history is fiction. Through the falsification of documents and personages, into which he inserts himself, Coetzee is playing on the multilayered relationship between fiction and history, as official “truth” is called into question. It exemplifies what he observed in “The Novel Today,” of how, “a novel evolves its own paradigms and myths . . . perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history”(1987: 3).

As is evident from the narration in ‘The Narrative,’ a key feature of postmodernism is the challenge of absolutes and the emphasis on relativity. Postmodernism suggests that there are many ways in which to
view people, situations and events and that the privileging of one viewpoint is always at the expense of the valuing of others. In postmodern narrative accounts, double or multiple narrators introduce an almost mechanical repetition of the story through another voice or point of view. In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the narration progresses through different narrative perspectives highlighting the plurality of views a postmodern text demands. Michael K’s story is recounted from different narrative angles depending on who narrates and from where.

The novel incorporates extradiegetic and intradiegetic features, or as Gerard Genette elaborates in *Narrative Discourse* (1980), homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrative voices. Consisting of three parts, the first and third parts in *Life and Times* are presented to the reader by a heterodiegetic narrator. This narrator introduces the story of Michael K, the thirty one year old gardener, born with a hare lip and a mind that is “not quick” (4). In the second part of the novel, the reader encounters a homodiegetic narrator, the Medical Officer of the rehabilitation camp to which K has been brought by the police after removing him away from the Visagie farm. The Medical Officer is very interested in K and moved by his plight. The medical officer as a homodiegetic narrator construes and translates the increasingly abusive terms of the apartheid state by attempting to interpret K, his actions and his rejection of everything the State provides. He categorizes Michael K as “an original soul . . . untouched by doctrine, untouched by history . . . evading the peace and the war . . . drifting through time, observing the seasons, no more trying to change the course of history than a grain of sand does”(151). He flatters himself by claiming that he is
“the only one who sees you [Michael K] for the original soul you are. I am the only one who cares for you. I alone see you as … a human soul above and beneath classification (151). Through these references the Medical Officer seems to present K as a transcendental being, may be because K represents a different mode of existence. But the reader can never attribute transcendental qualities to K. The whole novel is scattered with incidents that show K as the internal focaliser, with his own chain of thoughts and definite philosophy of existence. Viewed from this perspective, the medical officer becomes a sort of unreliable narrator. Finally, in the third part of the novel, again narrated by a heterodiegetic narrator, Michael K is back in Cape Town and goes back to his mother’s old apartment. The various narrative voices are Coetzee’s attempts at amplifying the theme of apartheid and resistance discussed in the novel. It also serves to take up from another angle, the question of veracity of ‘truth’ and representation discussed so convincingly by Coetzee in ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee.’

In Disgrace the reader witnesses the curious case of the voice of narration overlapping with the point of view of the focalizer. This blend is in turn is overcoded by the implied authorial voice thereby creating an atmosphere of narrative destabilization. A subtle, multilayered story, Disgrace succeeds in building successive layers of meaning with an apparently simple narrative technique. Using David Lurie as the internal focalizer, Coetzee develops the controversial issue of how the blacks and minority whites strike out an equation in restive post apartheid South Africa. It also brings out the racist attitudes the whites still retain about the blacks. Being a character inside the story, David Lurie can be viewed
as an internal focalizer as defined by Genette in *Narrative Discourse* (189). The term focalizer seems particularly appropriate because it contains the notion of focus, which indicates the narrative choice to highlight a certain thing rather than another. It helps Coetzee to problematize the point of view presented in the novel. Though the narration progresses through free indirect discourse, we find Lurie’s point of view intruding into the way the reader perceives the turn of events in the novel. The reader is drawn into the story and invited to co-experience what it is like to be a participant — one particular participant — in the unfolding events. The reader becomes intimately familiar with Lurie's desires, passions, and discourse. Coetzee’s decision to use this technique of internal focalization gives his audience access to not only Lurie's spoken words but also his unspoken thoughts. It leads to a natural identification with the character.

David Lurie filters everything through the eyes of a white middle-aged male. Coetzee makes available several other layers of fallible filters in Lurie. Being a white patriarchal male is one of the filters through which Lurie examines his relationship with women, especially Suraya and Melanie. The double standards adopted by the white male while laisoning with colored females becomes clearly evident as Lurie is presented both as the perpetrator and the narrator of his actions. The social and political discourse in apartheid South Africa, associated with the rape of colored women by white men, can be read into with the help of this method of narrative focalization. As much as the reader becomes privileged to perceive the thoughts and feelings of the character who acts as a focalizer, he also suffers a handicap in never getting to know the
thoughts and feelings of the victims themselves ‘from the inside’. The fact that Lurie’s gaze is also that of the colonizer is betrayed by the thoughts that pass through his mind in dealing with Petrus and other blacks. The filter of racist supremacy prompts him to view the world on his terms. As the narration progresses the reader is able to detect a heightening of Lurie’s awareness of his black neighbours and his own growing helplessness in dictating terms in inter-racial relationships.

The method of internal focalization serves to amplify the critique of racism and patriarchy that underlie the novel. It also allows Coetzee to compel the reader in collaborating with the construction of the narrative as the textual phenomena becomes a sharable experience linked to interpretive conventions. The text transforms itself into a narrative where the meaning lie outside the text, in the space between the text and happenings in the lived space of the society. The subtle narrative destabilization that sets in undermines the relations of distance and normativity initially set up in the reading pact at the beginning of the text. The impermanence within the structure of the narrative is achieved thus through internal focalization. The reader is not presented to the one unified, coherent and absolute truth, but is made to take on the role of determining the plurality of meaning in the text.

As is evident, Coetzee's narrative strategy in *Disgrace* destabilizes reading expectations. Such destabilization opens up a space for the reader to examine Coetzee's fiction as texts that allow for interplay between character, reader, and author; the texts function dialogically in the Bakhtinean sense, performing various positions rather than presenting one controlling subjectivity.
Intertextuality as a postmodern metafictional narrative practice is employed by Coetzee with great effect in *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace*. In “Colonialism and the Novels of J. M. Coetzee,” Stephen Watson observes that “all of Europe … has gone into the making of Coetzee” (377). Coetzee himself acknowledges the extent to which he has been influenced by European and North American literature, particularly modernist writing. In 1993, he wrote a deeply appreciative and personal homage to several European and American modernist writers, including Rilke, Musil, Pound, Faulkner, Ford, Kafka and Beckett. Coetzee’s “Homage” opens with a carefully worded yet striking declaration: “This is about some of the writers without whom I would not be the person I am, writers without whom I would, in a certain sense, not exist. An acknowledgement, therefore, of literary paternity” (1993: 5).

Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka are Coetzee’s most important literary precursors, a fact acknowledged in “Homage.” They are always, without doubt, hidden subtexts in Coetzee’s works. They are powerful presences in his fiction, shaping as they have the modern and postmodern awareness that alienation from self is an inseparable part of alienation from the simple exercise of political authority.

In *Life and Times*, Coetzee makes use of the postmodern technique of intertextuality to discuss the political and social atmosphere of his country. If in *Disgrace*, David Lurie the protagonist narrator is guided by the principles of the Romantic masters, in *Life and Times* the author Coetzee’s literary influences become evident. It is with reference to Franz Kafka’s short story the 'The Hunger Artist'(1922), that Coetzee has said in *Doubling the Point*: “What engaged me then and engages me
still in Kafka is an intensity, a pressure of writing that, as I have said, pushes at the limits of language… what is interesting is the liberating possibility Kafka opens up” (198). Likewise, Patricia Merivale refers to the postmodern intertextual strategy of ‘palimpsest’ in her reflections of the Kafka element in *Life and Times*. In her article "Audible Palimpsests: Coetzee's Kafka,” she speaks of the “tectonic plates of Kafkan episodes that slide across each other, submerged yet legible, underneath Coetzee’s text”(160).

Coetzee’s works are like Kafka’s spare, lucid and powerful in style. Like Kafka they treat the bewilderment of the harassed and lonely individual in a hostile world. Many of Kafka’s characters define themselves through choices of living, and as we can see, choose to be individuals apart from their communities and insist on remaining true to their natures. This theme is echoed in the life of Coetzee’s Michael K also. Michael K, like Kafka’s characters is an isolated individual, his life punctuated by institutions of confinement and imprisonment. Coetzee places K, who is disenchanted with the food of the ‘civil’ society, in existentialist desolation, similar to what we encounter in Kafka's story, ‘Hunger Artist.’

Kafka explores two of the basic elements of existentialism in this short story: the freedom to decide and the freedom to exist on one’s own terms. Existentialism which attempts to explain the logic and concept of self and the awareness thereof, conveys the notion that life is not bound by society’s standards or what appears to be acceptable in the eyes of others. Rather, identity or truth is more a matter of personal decision. Kafka’s ‘Hunger Artist’ describes the act — and predicament — of a hunger artist, a
professional faster. The hunger artist would fast for days at a time, attracting
large crowds at carnivals with his ability to do without nourishment. In
many ways he was admired for an apparent sacrifice. But with time the
crowds dwindled and the hunger artist no longer attracted carnival guests.
But he was able to clear his mind and sit for countless hours contemplating
his existence or being. Negative enlightenment of absurdity had come to
him, a presence that would reveal to him more than the common man could
possibly understand. He had succeeded in separating his body and mind.
While denying his body food, his thought would thrive, which in his mind
was a great success. What brought him satisfaction was not so much his art
but his ability to discipline himself and enjoy existence of self rather than
what society would consider living. Perhaps the most peculiar statement the
artist makes is his reasoning of fasting; that any food he ever tried did not
bring fulfillment or satisfaction. It was not that food literally failed to bring a
pleasant taste or that he really disliked anything he had tried; instead he
speaks symbolically. An ordinary person relies on food as a means of
survival and at times simply for pleasure. Because he had been enlightened,
he needed more than tangible food to survive. He needed food for his
thought. With his priorities in place he denied his body of what it longed for
in order to satisfy his existence. His existence was his inner being as
opposed to his physical self. Having learned to let himself go, the artist led a
life many would conclude is not worth living as well as being embarrassing.
He later dies in his cage by voluntarily starving himself. Authentic
existence is the act of being true to one’s nature; life is not bound by
societies’ standards or what appears to be acceptable in the eyes of others.
Instead, identity or truth is, “more a matter of decision than discovery. This
conviction of truth, therefore, is a decision of heart and will.
K’s prodigious capacity for survival in spartan settings and circumstances can be seen in relation to Kafka’s hunger artist. As a hunger artist, Michael K shapes his being by negating it, by living minimally, by accepting no food in a South Africa torn apart by apartheid. Coetzee has profoundly altered Kafka's story in *Life and Times of Michael K*. Besides shifting the geographical locality and substituting K in place of the vainglorious artiste Künstler, the reader finds himself with a human being reduced to its simplest and thinnest through voluntary starvation. Voluntary fasting enables K to slip between the wires which surround the camps, become part of the landscape, to be "lost" in the Karoo, to survive even where pumps break down, spooning water onto his plants with a teaspoon. Coetzee's novel is an experiment in how far can a human being be reduced and remain human, in times of political and social conflict.

When Kafka's hunger artist dies, he confesses why he has fasted all his life — because he never found the food which he enjoyed. In contrast to Kafka’s existential implication, that it is impossible in this world to find ‘the food that the Hunger Artist liked’ Coetzee’s political and ideological point regarding the self imposed starvation of Michael K is that Michael needs for his sustenance explicitly that food which he is free to grow for himself. Michael K at one stage says: "He had no appetite; eating, picking up things and forcing them down his gullet into his body, seemed a strange activity" (164). When Michael K arrives in the internment camp in Kenilworth, the penultimate station of his nomadic wanderings through South Africa, he looks like a skeleton: "The prisoner didn't complain," say his warders, "he said he was fine, he had
always been thin" (178). The camp doctor screams at them: "Can't you tell the difference between a thin man and a skeleton?" (178). The doctor in the internment camp in Kenilworth attempts to sum up Michael K's starvation as follows:

I asked myself: why will this man not eat, when he is plainly starving? Then, as I watched you day after day I slowly began to understand the truth: that you were crying secretly, unknown to your conscious self (forgive the term), for a different kind of food, food that no camp could supply. (224)

Like Kafka's hero, Michael K fasts because he "never found the food which he enjoyed." That engenders the question: “What the hell is your kind of food?” (198). The camp doctor asks: "Why? Are you fasting? Is this a protest fast? Is that what it is? What are you protesting against? Do you want your freedom?" (198). It is true not only for Kafka's hunger artist but also for Michael K, that he has to hold his ground against a world of laws and regulations. For K, living in forced confinement, unable to exercise his free will is similar to a death like existence. Refusing food offered by a hypocritical society is one way in which he can counter the superficial concerns of the apartheid society. Freedom is the only medicine that can quell the pangs of bondage in K.

The hunger artist's decision to keep himself locked inside a cage in Kafka is an exercise in existentialist freedom. The artist is not trapped or confined to the cage by coercion. He is inside the cage by choice. Not physically free, he finds in being stationary and in fasting, a routine, to bring contemplative freedom. Even in the end when his performance was
no longer popular, he continued to fast. This freedom to fast seemed as though it could run on forever. Constantly searching for more, he was never completely satisfied. While searching for more, he could only ask himself ‘why stop now’ “since he felt that there were no limits to his capacity for fasting” (395). Kafka successfully uses existentialism in this work to portray how an individual comes to terms with being and nothingness in order to become more than what they were.

Michael K too desires his freedom to think and exist in his own terms. He feels enclosed in a different kind of cage. The longing to escape from regimented institutions that seek control and contain the individual is evident in K’s actions. As representative of the segregated and marginalized, he strives to sidestep the history of the times by escaping to the veldt and cultivating the land and living off the land in his own terms. The voluntary silences he maintains in society are simultaneously active moments of contemplative thought. In his own fashion, through contemplative silence and starvation, K fights the battle against the centuries of subjugation and oppression that is the fate of his country. Through passive existence and resistance, K reminds us of characters that people the world of Franz Kafka. Exposing one’s body to voluntary starvation is Michael K’s method of satyagraha, a mode of non-violent political agitation against racism and segregation. It is an ethico-political strategy directed against political injustice and violence. It is K’s method of fighting against prejudice and social injustice. It gives the individual mastery over his own life, provides him with a mode of conflict resolution that does not rely on institutional methods over which
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his control is lost. Like in Kafka, K’s fasting also reminds us of how the authority of the state disturbs the life of an individual.

Coetzee has made a calculated use of Kafkaesque theme of existentialism to underline the philosophy that animates *Life and Times*. The intertextual overtones serve to amplify the existentialist ideology that Michael K exudes. Coetzee’s Michael K, like the Kafkaesque character, demonstrate that to a large degree, individuals are masters of their own destiny, that they could transcend their social conditioning, and that biological and psychological forces acting upon them will not leave them a machine that acted its life out according to a set plan. Coetzee, like Kafka, seems to believe that social stigmas should not deter an individual in his search for freedom and identity. True freedom is strictly an inner concept leaving room for the individual to live and think as what is revealed to be true. Freedom calls for one to create his or her own values. This allows a person to be his own guide to personal being. Existence is a matter of self revelation as both Coetzee and Kafka prove through their respective works.

In terms of intertextuality, echoes of Samuel Beckett are visible in *Life and Times of Michael K* besides that of Kafka. A thoroughly intertextual character, Michael K can simultaneously be read as a reconfiguration of Kafka's *Hunger Artist* and Beckett's *Molloy* (1951). Coetzee, in fact has engaged with Beckett in an academic context, having written a doctoral thesis and several essays on Beckett. His comments on Beckett often reflect an engagement with his precursor at a more personal level:
Beckett has meant a great deal to me in my own writing — that must be obvious. He is a clear influence on my prose. Most writers absorb influence through their skin. With me there has been a more conscious process of absorption. Or shall I say, my linguistic training enabled me to see the effects I was undergoing with a degree of consciousness. The essay I wrote on Beckett’s style aren’t only academic exercises, in the colloquial sense of the word. They are also attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett’s that I wanted to make my own. (Doubling the Point: 25)

The ‘secret’ that Coetzee speaks of may definitely have to do with more than stylistic influence; the sense of alienation at being a white writer in apartheid South Africa may also have drawn him closer to the Beckettian world. In the brief third-person autobiography in Doubling the Point (391-5), Coetzee portrays himself as someone who, because of his racial and social marginality, is able to express himself only from a position of radical alienation. While the sense of inability and impotence in Beckett arises largely out of existential alienation, in Coetzee it stems from social marginalization. Coetzee's profound sense of marginality within South Africa emerges not only from his being a minority white South African, but also, it becomes evident, from his experience of alienation from the dominant Afrikaner nationalism of his early boyhood.

In Life and Times we find a highly self conscious rewriting of Beckett as Coetzee adopts the Beckettian principles of minimalism and indeterminacy to the South African context. K’s social situation in South
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Africa parallels the plight of Beckett's protagonists. Beckett’s novel trilogy — *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951) and *The Unnamable* (1953) — find many a thematic and ideological intertextual parallel in *Life and Times*. Coetzee has successfully managed to transplant Beckett’s metaphysical and epistemological paradigms and Kafkaesque angst into a relevant South African political reality in this work. The influence of Beckett can be seen in Michael K’s alienation and a gradual withdrawal into his own self. K chooses the asocial and apolitical mode that is often the choice made by Beckettian characters. In the Beckettian world, the characters are lonely selves trying to cope with a grim universe whereas in Coetzee’s novel it is the political conditions and racial marginalization that create an element of dread and anxiety.

On a thematic level Coetzee seems to have “picked up” many general features from Beckett’s work. Beckett has always had a “tramp” theme in his work. Tramps have been the main characters in a large part of his work, from the novels *Mercier and Camier* (1974) and *Molloy* to his most famous play *Waiting for Godot* (1952). The same can be said for Coetzee. Although Coetzee is less explicit about his fascination with the ‘tramp’ as protagonist, it is clearly present in the majority of his work, his early novels in particular. In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the protagonist K is a man who, like so many of Beckett’s protagonists, sets off on a journey without knowing his exact destination. He is forced to live off whatever he finds and has no real home. Coetzee had a different, more overtly political motive while creating the character of Michael K, as he symbolises the marginalised and dispossessed sections of society.
The narrative of *Life and Times of Michael K* can be read as K’s odyssey as he tries to take his mother’s ashes to Prince Albert and eke out a minimal existence amid societal constraints. It is Michael K’s desire to live outside of history, a history that is of oppression and colonisation. He identifies with neither the white oppressor nor the black oppressed. His wish is to stay outside the categories imposed by the State. He does not want to be part of a regimented society, but it seems he has no choice. Having grown up in the city, where the native population is kept in ghettos, Michael K found it emotionally difficult to survive in an environment dictated by apartheid strictures. The feeling of being an outsider is accentuated all the more because of his skin colour and he feels that his roots must lie in the vast stretches of land outside the big city. His move to the country, and the death of his mother along the way, brings forth a determination to voluntarily exclude himself from society and history. K is tempted to escape from the South African historical process into a Beckettian state of nothingness. Relinquishing the history of segregation, and yet facing the impossibility of being a historical zero, K acquires the politically efficacious state of a minimal historical being.

All these various lines of thought are captured in the novel. During K's first stay on the Visagie farm, he imagines that he is finally living “in a pocket outside time” (60). During his second stay, on his return to the farm, K experiences moments in which he sees himself “living beyond the reach of calendar and clock in a blessedly neglected corner” (116). These lines indicate that the attraction of Beckett's aesthetics of nothingness for Coetzee lies in K’s capacity to be adapted
into a paradigm of historical insulation and escape. However, the impossibility of escape into a state of absolute nothingness is also registered in the novel. Despite being immersed in the seeming Beckettian nothingness of the mountains, K cannot escape history entirely: “Straining his eyes he could sometimes make out the dot of a vehicle crawling down the main street of the toy town on the plain below” (66). The “dot” of the vehicle is the minimal, irreducible trace of history and civilization in K's life. Beckett's aesthetics of nothingness ultimately does not translate for Coetzee into a paradigm of historical zero but rather into the historical tension and dilemma of moral obligation despite socio-political impotence and disqualification.

Michael K's notion of a minimal historical self has distinct origins in the Beckett trilogy, particularly *Molloy*. Michael K can be seen as Coetzee’s version of Beckett’s Molloy. They both trudge around the land alone, initially driven by a strong attachment to their mother and without a clear destination. Molloy is the prototypical minimal self, a being in whom negation and relinquishment are at work at all possible planes of existence. In his body, senses, appetite, locomotion, possessions, knowledge, certainty, speech, social stature, Molloy experiences reduction, diminishment, decline and deterioration with unvarying consistency. As Molloy recognizes, “the most you can hope is to be a little less, in the end, the creature you were in the beginning, and the middle” (32).

K also knows what it is like to operate at the level of the minimal. On all possible levels of existence — the self, body, appetite, sexual desire, needs, wants, daily activities, possessions, thoughts,
consciousness, speech, his engagement with history, politics and ideology — this becomes evident. The medical officer's characterization of K as “the obscurest of the obscure,” with “no papers, no money; no family, no friends, no sense of who you are” (142) is a reformulation from *Molloy* of the police sergeant’s “discovery that [Molloy] had no papers . . ., nor any occupation, nor any domicile, that [his] surname escaped [him]” (22). Coetzee consciously echoes Beckett's trademark reiteration of the negative. K's minimal being is further underscored by Coetzee's use of metaphors connoting smallness. K is variously referred to as “a little old man” (129), “a pebble” (135), “an insect” (135), “an ant”” (83), “a termite” (66), “a little speck” (7) “a mouse” (136), “a snail” (112), “a parasite dozing in the gut” (116) and “an earthworm” (182). The portrait of negation is also evident in many of the activities of K. In the veldt, Michael K digs a hole in the ground to sleep and hide in, and later he isolates himself further in a mountain cave, “becoming smaller and harder and drier every day” (67). Coetzee makes use of entropism to reveal how humanity can be reduced to an extreme form of reductionism that disenchantment with the politics of marginalisation brings about.

While Molloy does nothing but talk, Michael K is mute and silent most of the time. He refuses to communicate or explain himself. K cannot even articulate “himself to himself” (110), believing that inside was “a gap, a hole, a darkness... into which it was useless to pour words.” This can be seen as another instance of reductionism: a symptomatic expression of the refusal to use language that has been polluted by the colonizer.
Coetzee adapts Beckett's concept of a minimal being into the context of South Africa and envisions a political function for such a being. Against the inevitability of history, ideology and politics in South Africa, the minimal being has the capacity to limit and even at some points relinquish his participation in "camps." K, like Molloy, falls into a state of thing like existence at the resettlement camp:

K brought his mattress out and lay next to the hut in the shade with an arm over his face while the camp lived its life around him. He lay so still that the smaller children, having first kept their distance, next tried to rouse him, and, when he would not be roused, incorporated his body into the game. They clambered over him and fell as if he were part of the earth. Still hiding his face, he rolled over and found that he could doze even with little bodies riding on his back.

He found unexpected pleasure in these games. (84)

Here, the reader finds K’s state of consciousness to be a minimal one. K is willing to severely reduce his state of active existence in such a manner that he is able to exist in a pleasurable state of indifference to human activity and history. It is while K is at the camp that he learns to train his body to be satisfied with minimum wants. K instinctively understands that a minimum appetite will free him from work and thus from exploitation of the rehabilitation camp. As he retorts to the guard, "I don't need to eat all the time. When I need to eat, I'll work (85)." He is aware, nevertheless, that the freedom he enjoys can never be absolute. Though he cannot practically survive without food, he has the freedom to choose when and whether he wants to eat. There were times when K “...felt
hungry but did nothing about it. Instead of listening to the crying of his body, he tried to listen to the great silence about him"(66). K thus comes across as a minimal being who enjoys the freedom to keep oneself away from the exigencies of segregation politics and apartheid history, one whose tendency is to relinquish rather than acquire, a person who would let go rather than possess. K's minimal needs enable him to exercise freedom of retaining control over his involvement in history. For example, at the close of the novel, K thinks: "I have become an object of charity.... Everywhere I go there are people waiting to exercise their forms of charity on me" (181). But K intends to elude this objectification of the self: "I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity too"(182). K's refusal to accept patronizing charity recalls Molloy's diatribe against the social worker who offers him food while he is in prison:

Let me tell you this, when social workers offer you, free gratis for nothing, something to hinder you from swooning, which with them is an obsession, it is useless to recoil, they will pursue you to the ends of the earth, the vomitory in their hands. Against the charitable gesture there is no defence, that I know of. You sink your head, you put out your hands all trembling and twined together and you say, Thank you, thank you lady, thank you kind lady. To him who has nothing it is forbidden not to relish filth. (Molloy: 24)

Though Molloy despairs at ever eluding these persistent social workers who "pursue you to the ends of the earth," at one point he successfully
refuses the charity of a woman at the beach: "I think one of them one day, detaching herself from her companions, came and offered me something to eat and then I looked at her in silence, until she went away" (Molloy, 75). In a parallel scene in Coetzee's novel, K returns to the coastal Sea Point and is charitably offered food by a group of loitering derelicts who decide to "adopt" him. Though K accepts some of the food they offer, the head-guy, "December," realizes: "It is difficult to be kind . . . to a person who wants nothing" (179). The physical, emotional and mental isolation of K is conveyed through the minimalism that K enforces upon himself. The desolation he feels is the consequence of his separateness from the mainstream society in South Africa.

Coetzee rewrites the Beckettian situation of "him who has nothing" into the "person who wants nothing," positively revaluing the concept of a self with minimal needs. Such a self is able to deny more effectively the objectifying effects of both charities and camps exercised upon it, retaining its agency in historical participation. The idea of minimalism explored by Beckett can thus be found to have an intertextual parallel in Coetzee’s Life and Times. Though K’s apolitical concerns and antipathy to life are specifically related to his position as a colored person in South Africa, one can read it in the larger context of the ‘universal human condition’ that animates Beckett’s. The typical Beckettian does not seek his identity, he flees from it; his quest is for anonymity, for self-annihilation. He is usually crushed by the burden of consciousness. Coetzee’s K however translates the predicaments of the Beckettian heroes to script his own definition of history and personal life in his own terms.
In *Disgrace*, the relationship between Lurie and the Romantic poets is based on influence and identification. Differently put, the impact of the Romantic poets on Lurie goes beyond the literary and aesthetic function of art in general to the adoption of their ideas and views about ideals in life, and the resultant reorientation of one’s views on interpersonal relationships in terms of self and the sensibilities and complexities of the respective era. The use of intertextuality in *Disgrace* helps Coetzee to establish a link between the world of the novel and its sources, so as to comment on the transitional phase of post apartheid South Africa. It leads to questions about the effectiveness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) set up by the Government of National Unity to help deal with the racial atrocities that happened under apartheid. The TRC's hearings were intended to reach beyond the limitations of secular law by exploring new potentials for forgiveness and national reconciliation. This secular legislation highlighted how an almost scriptural understanding is required to understand what it takes to heal a nation. The Luries’ public and private experiences of shame and violation and the efforts at asking for forgiveness and reparation etched by Coetzee in *Disgrace* through intertextual narrative strategy provide depth to the novel.

Central to the debate on intertextuality is the association made between the protagonist, David Lurie, and the English Romantic poets, Byron and Wordsworth. For David Lurie, an arrogant, self-centered, intellectual snob, violence and racial-tension are issues he initially prefers to deliberately ignore. He is skeptical too of the ‘rationalisation’ policies being implemented in the post apartheid society of his country.
Fifty two years old, he is a professor at the Technical University of Cape Town and an expert of the Romantic poets; yet is reduced to teaching introductory courses in Communications, because the University changed its emphasis from liberal arts to that of technical education — something which he despises. This change makes him lose a certain amount of interest in being a professor; he spends much of his class time trying futilely to teach his students about the Romantic poets. He may pontificate to the class, but the empathetic imagination, a vital Romantic component is lacking in him. Among the books that Lurie has published during the course of his career is one on Wordsworth, called *Wordsworth and the Burden of the Past*. Believing himself to be a sort of an authority on Byron, Lurie is also in the process of “working on Byron,” and ‘on his time in Italy’.

Coetzee’s use of the Romantic poets William Wordsworth and Lord Byron in *Disgrace* leads us to investigate the deeper implications and significance of Romanticism and of the Wordsworthian and the Byronic in the novel. Emphasis is placed on some specifically Romantic ideas to focus on the ways in which Coetzee uses Wordsworth and Byron to highlight the troubled theme of forgiveness and reconciliation that Truth and Reconciliation Commission set out to address in post apartheid South Africa. Coetzee has deliberately yoked two apparently contrasting poets from the High Romantic period in order to emphasize ways in which, despite the differences between them and the vast cultural and historical differences between nineteenth-century Europe and late twentieth-century South Africa, these poets served to imaginatively highlight the paradoxes underlying human relations. By juxtaposing
Wordsworth and Byron against the life of David and Lucy Lurie, Coetzee brings to focus the paradoxical oppositions which lie at the heart of a fully experienced life in post apartheid South Africa.

The association between contemporary South Africa and the Romantic period in England can be traced in the novel in an implicit way. The troubled early decades of nineteenth-century Europe, with their questioning and rejection of centuries old power structures and authority figures, can speak to modern day South Africans. Similar to the post apartheid era, the Romantic period was also a turbulent and a transitional era. Politically speaking, it is connected with the revolutionary and radical spirit of the French Revolution: “Marked by the declaration of The Rights of Man and the storming of the Bastille to release imprisoned political offenders, [it] evoked enthusiastic support from English liberals and radicals alike” (Abrams, Norton 1). Socially, it witnessed the change from an agricultural society, where the power and wealth were in the hand of landowners, to an industrial community, in which the working-class took the political, economic and social lead.

In a broader sense, in South Africa the boundaries of everything was witnessing a change and the whites were left with no other choice, but yield to the winds of political and social change, and give up everything and accept the new rules of the political game. The conflict during this period resulted in violence and human rights abuses from all sides. No section of society escaped these abuses. This is what Lurie too finds himself in.

Lurie, at the beginning, displays a total lack of psychological and emotional involvement in everything around him and looks to Europe as
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the centre of reference and his feelings and experiences of life are structured by the poetic discourses of the eighteenth century England. He believes in the European Enlightenment’s legacy of the autonomy of the individual. European Enlightenment, of which Romanticism is a part, championed the legacy of the autonomy of the human subject, with each individual being conceived of as a living consciousness separated totally from every other consciousness. Lurie pays close attention to Kant and Rousseau’s concept of the celebration of individuality as self sufficiency and freedom and prefers a state of existence that is free of social dictates and norms.

Coetzee exposes Lurie and his subjective consciousness to a racially splintered South Africa and forces the reader to examine him in terms of a complex network of sexual, racial, ethnic, familial, colonial, political, institutional, and cultural identifications. Though subjectivity is about the autonomy of the individual, it does not develop on its own terms. As twentieth century cultural criticism argues, subjectivity is produced through historical relationships and is the effect of discourses of power and knowledge. The political process involved in sanitizing South Africa of racism and apartheid catches up with Lurie and leads him to examine his notion of subjectivity and value systems. Empathy and sympathetic imagination are new experiences to Lurie. The notion of the sympathetic imagination which has its roots in Romanticism connotes inhabiting another in order to understand or interpret. The eighteenth century notions of sensibility, sympathy, and compassion are repeatedly invoked as David Lurie self consciously reassesses his personal and social equations and develops an ethical response to the instrumentalist
logic of autonomous individuality. The method of intertextuality thus takes up a discussion of the link, the cultural movement of Romanticism has on its apogee, a minority white university professor in South Africa. The mental trauma engendered in the personal experience of racialised rape encourages Lurie to exhibit traits of empathy and understanding, qualities, hitherto alien to him.

Sympathetic imagination, a social facet, encourages good citizenship and allows humankind to behave in humane ways. It counters one’s private desire for mastery and balances self-interest with self sacrifice; the sympathetic imagination helps others attain their goals and places others’ needs alongside one’s own selfishness. Coetzee tasks his protagonist with the ethical obligation of developing a sympathetic imagination and places his protagonist in positions which seemingly enable precisely such a growth. This faculty of sympathetic empathy and imagination is the need of the hour in a changing South Africa. It is this intertextual parallel foregrounding the subject of rape that is pursued in Disgrace.

David Lurie initially conceives of himself as an individual who is free to realize his every desire even if this means violating the rights of other individuals. In the opening pages of the novel, David Lurie is depicted as a monad divorced totally from other beings and thus incapable of sympathizing with them. For Lurie, women first occupy a position of subjugation as is demonstrated by his interactions with Soraya, a prostitute and Melanie Issacs, his student at the university. The intellectual and emotional proclivities of David Lurie are dominated by the philosophy of Byron and Wordsworth. Lurie misreads Byron as a
mere seducer and subconsciously takes him as a model in his escapades with women. He reads Byron’s creation, *Lara*, not only as an alter-ego of Byron but also of himself. Like Byron, Lurie does not seek in women passion and mutuality, but to exercise his male power on them. For him, sex is not a shared feeling and experience between a couple, but ‘a problem that has to be solved’ (1). Lurie brings Byron to his aid to defend his ethical lapse as a teacher. These characteristics make him resemble Byron and also his heroes. While pursuing Melanie, his student, he uses Melanie’s own weakness and inexperience in telling her that “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone… she has a duty to share it” (16). He uses poets and poetry merely as a means to seduce Melanie. Lurie also does not view his forced physical assault of Melanie as rape though he knows that it is “undesired, nevertheless, to the core” (25). Lurie’s behaviour, in many ways thus resembles Byron and his heroes.

Women are nothing but objects of conquest to this teacher of the liberal arts. David does not accept his mislaid passions for what they are: he is driven by egotistical views of himself as the seducer, and is willing to bend any moral or ethical code to perpetuate this view. He repeatedly suggests that the act of indiscretion against Melanie was the result of an overwhelming external force outside his control – “he is in the grip of something” (18) – rather than a self-initiated assault for which he is personally responsible. Likewise, Lurie’s concern with passion, both his awareness of the waning possibilities of sexual passion or the more aesthetic “literary passions” that he quizzes Melanie about (13), is a deeply Byronic concern. The lay person’s idea of Byron – handsome libertine, disgraced outcast, gloomy, a rebellious satirist, author of works
like *Cain, Lara, Mazeppa, Don Juan*, all of whose eponymous heroes are thought to be autobiographically revealing – finds a parallel in “mad, bad and dangerous to know” phrase which Lucy Lurie teasingly uses to describe her father (77). Byron's self exile was part of his perceived 'disgrace', as Lurie reminds his students, by stating that "[Byron] went to Italy to escape a scandal [which] affected not only Byron's life but the way in which his poems were received by the public”(’92). Lurie too, as the novel progresses finds himself in his daughter’s farm after facing the public scandal involving the seduction and rape of Melanie. Coetzee has thus grounded Lurie in Byron's character and his 'disgraceful' situation.

The gang rape of Lurie’s daughter Lucy, which serves as a structural parallel in the novel to Lurie's rape of Melanie Isaacs, is the mechanism through which Coetzee challenges his protagonist's assumption of autonomy and the careless freedom with which it invests him. Bodily violation of Lucy shakes Lurie to the core and he is suddenly confronted with the changing racial equation in South Africa. After describing Lucy as "the object of a crime," Lurie asks her whether she is "trying to remind" him "Of what women undergo at the hands of men" (111). Later, Coetzee has him reflect as follows: "he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?" (160). The rape symbolically throws up several issues. Importantly, Lurie is incarcerated in the toilet of his daughter's homestead while she is being raped and therefore does not witness her violation. Afterwards, Lucy rejects Lurie’s gestures of sympathy because she feels that he cannot "begin to know" what has happened to her. Lurie
knows what it is like to be a rapist, but does not know what it is like to be a rape victim. This is what he has to discover in the course of the novel despite his conviction that he is too old and set in his ways to learn anything new (2, 49, 66, 77). Once Lurie succeeds in loosing himself by occupying Lucy's position, like a writer, he attempts to put himself in the situation, one that he has occupied as the male perpetrator of rape and tries to dissolve the clear boundaries of identity between himself and the men who rape Lucy. The imaginative task that Coetzee assigns his protagonist is to learn "to be the woman." In learning 'to be a woman,' Lurie also learns to understand the position of all marginalized in his country. In arriving at this insight, Coetzee prompts Lurie to experience the notion of the sympathetic imagination.

When the rape victim happens to be his daughter, Lurie finds himself adopting, not the viewpoint of perpetrator or voyeur, but that of the helpless and the trodden, a position involving weakness and suffering. Understanding Lucy’s experience means putting himself in a weaker position, one of submission, not dominance. While recognizing the violence performed on Lucy’s body as rape, Lurie does not initially identify the similarities between his actions and those of Lucy’s rapists and is unable to categorize himself as a rapist. Lurie’s concern for Lucy in the aftermath of her rape can be contrasted to his lack of concern for the women he sexually exploits: Melanie Isaacs, his student, and Soraya, a prostitute. While Lurie believes that Lucy’s rapists represent a “history of wrong” (156), he is initially blind to the history of his own actions as was made evident during his disciplinary hearing following his
harassment of Melanie when all the while he continued to claim that he simply “became a servant of Eros” (52-3).

The historical overtone of the incident involving Melanie, a colored, is evident. In Lurie, Coetzee no doubt, is implicitly presenting a figure who participates in the historical sexual exploitation of colored women by white men. Coetzee here actively challenges Lurie’s perspective and subverts the “black peril” narrative by depicting “white peril” in the figure of David Lurie, who like Byron, had seen himself as a servant of desire; immensely superior in his passions and wholly manipulated by his uncontrollable impulses. By constructing a parallel between the two rape scenes in the novel, Coetzee thus places his protagonist in a number of roles and positions which are ironic reversals of those he has previously occupied. In so doing, the writer introduces his protagonist to realms of experience from which he has previously been excluded. Coetzee makes Lurie experience intense psychological conflict through placing him in the position of victim. This experience is essential for a person before he can activate the sympathetic side of his personality. He must undergo the same fire of experience that others have suffered before he can begin to sympathize with them. The rape of his daughter Lucy brings upon him a transformation that paves the way for a review of and an empathetic understanding of the reality of post apartheid South Africa and of the marginalized sections of society.

Wordsworth’s poetry is frequently concerned with questions of “otherness.” The poetry of the 1790s constantly focuses on the outcasts and the marginalized and the very real difficulties entailed in bridging the divide between middle-class poet and these figures. The Romantics,
writing in the wake of the French Revolution, were as concerned with the competing values of desire and responsibility, or, in the terms of the period – rights and duties – as they were with defending art against the demands of a growing instrumentalism in human relations and the growth of capitalist values. As the narration progresses, Lurie re-evaluates his identification with Wordsworth and Byron in a manner that helps him reorganize his relationship with the marginalised Others’ in post apartheid South African society.

The Romantics all held that the imagination is the source of empathy and, hence, creativity. Shelley’s words ring out from 1821: “A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination”(233-4). Coetzee seems to suggest that sympathetic imagination, unique to the romantic stream of thought, starts burning in Lurie, transforming the way he perceives himself and the changes in his nation. Lurie recognizes that his own privileged position and his daughter’s position are at stake in this new South Africa. By coming to understand his own ineffectuality and helplessness in alleviating Lucy’s present dilemma, Lurie learns to re-assess his situation in a society that had privileged him but that now challenge his claim to power. In this reassessment of his fallen position begins his emotional transformation.

In *Disgrace*, Romanticism is thus seen to be not simply a euro-centric throwback, something to be rejected out of hand in post colonial South Africa. Instead, Coetzee addresses a major proposition of
Romanticism — the essential nature of the creative imagination, as the only means to enter the experience of another, of overcoming the atomistic isolation of the individual from the rest of creation. Coetzee utilizes *Disgrace*’s allusion to Romantic ideas and poets to define the character of Lurie and to comment on the transitional phase of South African society. Lurie’s views of women and desire are can be seen compatible to that of Byron. Coetzee initially presents Lurie as a person who prefers to live more in abstract thought than in concrete experience. As a minority white, Lurie in the beginning faces an emotional disconnect with the mainstream South African society. In a country where the majority of people speak Xhosa, and where the culture is predominantly African, Lurie’s academic pursuits in opera and philosophy does not really matter. In depicting the personal crisis that Lurie undergoes after his daughter is raped, Coetzee allows the reader to probe the implications of racialised rape in South Africa. A subtext of the how racial reconciliation can be brought out can be read into in the experiences of a transformed Lurie. The backlash of racial tensions which Lurie and his daughter face is a pointer to the questionable success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s efforts at buying peace in post apartheid Africa.

Lurie’s insights about his deviant behavior, his attempt at asking the forgiveness of the Issacs,’ his daughter Lucy’s decision to bear the racially mixed child, can all be construed as attempts by the white minority at forgiveness and reconciliation that the times and government demand. Coetzee seems to be of the view that forgiveness and reconciliation is a difficult task to achieve as it is bound up with issues
that are philosophical, sociological and psychological. Reconciliation, as Coetzee has realized, engenders several meanings. It can simply mean co-existence or it can mean dialogue, remorse, apology, forgiveness and healing. The nineteenth century cultural movement of Romanticism, with its principle of sympathetic imagination becomes significant in this context. The newly awakened imaginative faculty enables Lurie to understand that true reconciliation is about constructing relationships in a way that allows everyone, both blacks and whites, to move forward without any rancour. The spirit of sympathetic imagination allows Lurie to recognize the moral worth and dignity of others. It compels him to acknowledge that only on terms of mutual respect can the white settler survive in the new South Africa. Coetzee through Lurie stresses that both political and societal reconciliation can be affected only through the difficult process of community and individual reconciliation.

Coetzee utilizes Byron, Wordsworth, Beckett and Kafka in his texts to comment on the South Africa of his times. The narrative space in Coetzee, as can be seen, is interlaced with postmodern textual strategies that function to act as subtexts for a subtle commentary on the social and political situation in South Africa. In Coetzee metafictional elements become the textual undercurrent shaping the style and essence of the text. It also becomes evident that he employs these narrative devices to complicate and disrupt the possibility of singular interpretations. In the process they become distinctive works of art. Coetzee deliberately constructs his fiction in a manner that provokes multiple responses to his texts. It can be viewed as a ploy to protect his works from the damaging consequences of political and literary censorship. In many a
way, Coetzee’s metafictional stratagems provoke thoughtfulness, dislodge the apathetic reader from his comfortable yet worn-out assumptions, and propel him to see with acuteness the disturbing reality within which we live.

Clearly, the use of intertextuality helps in highlighting the dominant themes of the novels. The intertextual references, allusions and citations are not the outcome of Coetzee’s lack of inspiration or imagination, but rather a way to engage in dialogue with these source texts as well as to reveal their underlying ideologies and how they get translated in a racially torn South Africa. His strategy of rereading, reconsidering, rewriting and borrowing from texts that are considered part of the European canonical heritage serves to subvert these texts and through them the whole discursive field within which these texts have been produced, operated and transmitted. This subversive strategy does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but to evolve textual strategies which continually expose and erode at the same time the dominant discourse.

The aim of using intertextuality was not to stimulate comparison but to disseminate ideas, to encourage people to think and thereby to lead them to question the status quo. Intertextuality becomes, for Coetzee a method to express a strong political statement. He wields it both as a political tool and a cultural weapon, both as a way of participating in the struggle against apartheid and in the creation of a distinctly South African voice of protest. The use of intertextuality announces also the participation of these texts in the discursive space of a culture. Coetzee’s texts are situated within the history and society of South Africa; in this
sense the text creates an intertextual space as it engages in a dialogue with the social and political happenings of a nation. The writer participates in the history of a nation by transforming through intertextual mode, the linear history into oblique abstractions.

The imaginative engagement with social and political interests that literature affords is convincingly underlined with the help of these narrative strategies. Coetzee’s works can be seen as cultural forms that challenge, reflect and mediate on the relations between dominance and subordination — a regular feature of imperialism in all its hydra headed varieties. A text is a social text interconnected with all the other texts in the world. Here the affairs and experiences of Michael K along with his philosophy of life are generated not just out of a South African apartheid context; it is something that can be experienced in far away England or wherever the human situation finds itself confronted in the chains of bondage. Coetzee’s self acknowledged influence of his literary precursors speaks of the intertextual binds that prevail in the world of literature. Coetzee’s postmodern strategies also highlight the nature of the representation of reality adopted by individual writers.