Space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning.
Henri Lefebvre, 1974

Space is a concept which is central to our understanding of the world. What the public generally understood by space was the common pictorial, musical, sculptural space. The sheer multiplicity of spaces in contemporary academic discourse is overwhelming: geographic space, urban space, architectural space, virtual space, cyberspace, body space, mental space, cognitive space, the space of flows, psychological space, dream space, symbolic space and so on, and the list is potentially endless. Space can be said to be a concept that is at once cultural, economic, political, semiotic and experiential, and in this sense it is an integral component of social interaction. This thesis takes its departure from Michael Foucault’s 1967 Berlin lecture observation: “the anxiety of our era has fundamentally to do with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time” (“Of Other Spaces”). Foucault goes on to explain space as a site of relations. Frederick Jameson refers to “that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern” while John Berger notes: “It is space, not time that hides consequences from us” (The Look of Things: 40). Recent interdisciplinary writings have attempted to integrate a broad array of
theoretical perspectives on space with an appreciation of the cultural and political economies of geographical landscapes and the politics of everyday life so that a foundational understanding of spatial theory is called for. Clearly, the issue of the conceptualization of space is of more than technical interest; it is one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world.

Debates concerning the nature, essence and the mode of existence of space date back to antiquity; namely, to treatises like the *Timaeus* of Plato, or to Socrates in his reflections on what the Greeks called *khora* (i.e."space"), or in the *Physics* of Aristotle (Book IV, Delta) in the definition of *topos* (i.e. place), or even in the later "geometrical conception of place" as "space qua extension" in the *Discourse on Place* of the 11th century Arab polymath Alhazen. In Isaac Newton's view, space was absolute — in the sense that it existed permanently and independently of whether there were any matter in space. Other natural philosophers, notably Gottfried Leibniz thought that space was a collection of relations between objects, given by their distance and direction from one another. Later, the metaphysician Immanuel Kant said that space was a way of organizing sensory phenomena, part of a systematic framework that humans use to structure all experiences. In *Critique of Pure Reason* he referred to space as being a subjective "pure a priori form of intuition" and hence an unavoidable contribution of our human faculties. To Kant, spatial ordering constituted an empirical form of knowledge. He had an absolute view of space and of its separation from time. Kant, in this manner, reduced spatiality to a mental construct, a way of thinking, an ideational process in which the image of
reality takes epistemological precedence over the tangible substance and appearance of the real world. The Kantian legacy of transcendental spatial idealism has been central to the modern discipline of geography since its origins in the late nineteenth century. The vision of human geography it induces is one in which the organization of space is projected from a mental ordering of phenomena, either intuitively given, or relativised into many different ‘ways of thinking.’

In Euclidean geometry, space involved abstract theorems – a container without content. But Space, as can be seen, is not an empty container within which human action takes place, or a mere stage on which the human drama unfolds. Rather, it is an actual force in the shaping of society and theory, and not a mere reflective mirror of society. Space in these terms can be said to be constitutive of social interaction. While space serves to define and refine society, society also invests space with practical, political, and philosophical meanings. The struggle for identity, for culture, for nation is also a struggle inscribed in space. Space gives rise to the manner in which this struggle is experienced as well as our experiences of being.

All observations beginning from Plato to the cultural theorists of the contemporary century point to the fact that there are a multiple number of spaces in practice — material space, social space, ideational space, absolute space, relational space, space of history and so on. There is no unspatialized reality. There are no aspatial social processes either. Even in the realm of pure abstraction, ideology, and representation, there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension. Space is not just a phenomenon existing in a substantial form as ‘concrete
spatialities.’ It is also present as a set of relations between individuals and groups, an ‘embodiment’ and medium of social life itself. It is a socially, politically and ideologically produced physical and mental construct — a process in short. It is simultaneously conceived, perceived and lived. A socio-geographical perspective, for instance, enables us to see how space is transformed according to human thinking and action. As this study will demonstrate through the textual analysis of J. M. Coetzee’s works, in the social production of spatiality, the spaces of nature and cognition are not only incorporated but also significantly transformed in the process. Likewise, in their appropriate interpretative context, both the material space of physical nature and the ideational space of human nature can be seen as being culturally and socially produced and reproduced. Each is sought to be understood, therefore as ontologically and epistemologically part of the spatiality of social life.

It is important to recognize that spaces are socially and culturally constructed and that many spaces may co-exist within the same physical space. It suggests the need to analyse how discourses and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are connected with particular spaces. Imperialism may be viewed as a spatial policy that has been shaped in a complex milieu of power struggles, conflicts of interest and contested meanings which extends across Europe and reaches from local to transnational policy arenas. Likewise, apartheid, a system of racial segregation, was an official spatial segregation policy enforced through legislation by the National Party governments in South Africa between 1948 and 1994 under which the rights of the majority non-white inhabitants were curtailed to maintain white supremacy and Afrikaner minority rule. Since
this study is concerned with the treatment of spatiality in a South African context, it is relevant to follow the spatial patterns followed by the racist society of South Africa.

Racial segregation in South Africa had begun in colonial times under Dutch and British rule. The new legislation enacted in the late nineteen forties classified inhabitants into four racial groups (“native,” “white,” “coloured,” and “Asian”), and residential areas were segregated, sometimes by means of forced removals. Non-white political representation was completely abolished in 1970, and starting in that year black people were deprived of their citizenship to legally become citizens of one of ten tribally based self-governing homelands called Bantustans. The government segregated education, medical care and other public services and provided black people with services inferior to those of white people. Apartheid sparked significant internal resistance and violence in South Africa. As unrest spread, state organisations responded with increasing repression and state-sponsored violence. The works of Coetzee discussed in this argument undertakes a definition of space taking into consideration the political, historical and ideological issues that until recently dictated the social and material/physical space of South Africa.

As the reality of the South African situation with its segregation policies makes evident, spatiality is an inescapable component of social life in that country. The texts discussed in this study – ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee,’ the second novella of Dusklands (1974), Life and Times of Michael K (1983) and Disgrace (1999), present a creative writer’s version of South Africa from the early colonial invasion in the eighteenth century through apartheid in the early nineteen eighties to the
post apartheid era of the late nineteen nineties. The analysis of Coetzee’s texts calls for a cultural, political and historical oriented understanding of the spatiality of social life represented through land and body in South Africa during these representative phases. The idea and theory of space in this analysis includes the imperialist socio-spatial practices, its embracing materiality, representation and imagination. Drawing from a variety of theoretical sources from critical geography, postcolonial theory and sociology, the argument advocates a political, ideological and historical understanding of the configuration of spatiality of the human body and land in South Africa. Social space in this presentation is simultaneously a field of action and a basis for action, on scales from the body to the geographic to the global. The historical, political and ideological spaces are viewed not as separate categories, but as interactive lines of forces in this analysis. The essence of this approach explores how particular ideologies create conditions for thought, communication and action, and how different configurations of power and rationality shape the contours of a nation. This cultural sociology of space in South Africa emphasises not only the material dimension of human agency but also the significance of power.

The world of Coetzee’s early works is the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. On the one hand space is non-geographical, in the sense that it is cultural and social. The body and land, on the other hand, is physical and geographical, the container-space of materiality. In the
early works of Coetzee, these two aspects are brought together, and social spaces become contact zones where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination. The ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations among colonizers and colonized, in terms of separateness, apartheid, co-presence, interaction and interlocking understandings and practice.

The twentieth century saw many different perspectives on the subject of spatiality. Some of the prominent names in this field include those of Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Michael Foucault and David Harvey. A brief review of some of the major theories of the twentieth century in the field of culture studies would enhance the understanding of spatial discourse.

The nineteen seventies had raised a call for the significant re-theorization of the spatiality of social life. The French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s *Production of Space* (1974) has been very influential in introducing a number of key concepts into spatial and geographical theory, perhaps the more significant being that of ‘social space.’ Lefebvre insists that space is not a vacuum merely *containing* other objects and practices: ‘space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning’ (1974: 154). Contrary to the idea that space is merely ‘an empty area’ that boxes things in, Lefebvre implores the reader to appreciate the built environment as being structured through social relationships. At the core of his project are the concepts of production and the act of producing space, leading to the premise that social space is a social product. By ‘production,’ the French Marxist philosopher argues
that humans create the space in which they make their lives; it is a project shaped by interests of classes, experts, the grassroots and other containing forces; a complex social construction based on values and the social production of meanings which affects spatial practices and perceptions.

Lefebvre’s ontology asserts a greater importance for space as being present and implicit in the acts of creation and being, whereby the process of life itself is inextricably linked with the production of different spaces. Since space is always produced by social practices it can always be deciphered for specific social meanings. Here Lefebvre draws on Marx’s view of the role of relations of production in society, applying Marx’s notion to the way that landscapes are altered by human productive practices. This dialectical view of space and society argues that every society produces its own distinctive form of space, from the ancient polis of the Greek world to the city-state of the Italian Renaissance, to the Bantustans in South Africa or the high-tech post modern cities of the present.

Forms of spatial organisation thus play a dominant role in shaping societies, determining the realms of mental space and physical space. Most spaces, writes Lefebvre, are “at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures” (85) and “any space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships” (82-3). Once we leave natural spaces, such as an uncultivated land, forests or heaths, we enter a world where space encounters the social relations of production. A natural forest path, for example, though it might appear to be an inherently natural space, assumes certain social characteristics once it is administered by the state.
or redesigned for visitors and tourists. It becomes a social space because of its relationship to factors such as economic development of a particular region or a national strategy for tourism. If part of the forest is given over for timber industry, then this again produces a very different form of social space.

South Africa serves as a fitting example of the complex and dialectical relationships that exist between politics, society and space. Colonial and apartheid governments undertook an ambitious experiment in racial segregation by the ordering of space and political economy to benefit the minority white population. Through legislation, ideological rationalization and violent political action, the organization of space in South Africa was reshaped starting from 1948 into a hierarchy of territorially segregated and tightly bounded areas. This was most clearly evidenced in the construction of the peripheral reservation areas called Bantustans that were intended to become separate locations for the majority African population. It has led to the creation of unjust geographies and functioned economically as enclosed labour reserves for the elite white minority. The Bantustans were discursively presented as separate territories that would best represent the cultural and political needs of the supposedly unique ethnic groupings that inhabited them. The actual goal of the apartheid state was to facilitate its own economic and political priorities. While the boundaries of the Bantustans have been effectively erased through their political reincorporation after 1993, it can be seen that the imprint of apartheid spatial planning remains upon the landscape and continues to shape many of the material realities experienced by rural residents.
Lefebvre’s comment on space as political and ideological construction in “Reflections on the Politics of Space,” is worth mentioning here:

Space has been shaped and moulded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies. There is an ideology of space. Why? Because space, which seems homogenous, which seems to be completely objective in its pure form… is a social product. The production of space can be likened to the production of any given particular type of merchandise. (1976: 31)

People create space; thus the production of space is an inherently political project in which space is a mediating force that integrates an infinite number of active and dynamic cultural processes.

Lefebvre visualizes a three-fold division of space. It enfolds the material, mental and lived spaces. Material space is experienced space and broadly refers to what people do in spaces (the space of experience and of perception open to physical touch and sensation). Representation of space (space as conceived and represented), are linked to official relations of production and order; this is space as perceived by planners, architects and governments, and is the dominant space in any society. Though abstract in nature, representations of space, like maps, diagrams and plans, are social and political in practice and constantly alter the production of space. Apartheid policies of South Africa are aimed at spatial containment in this manner. Representations of space modify the
special texture of a city or landscape according to certain ideologies, and are linked to codes and signs – for example, those used on a proposed redevelopment plan of a city site. *Representational spaces* (the lived space of sensations, the imagination, emotions and meanings incorporated into how we live day by day) embody space as imagined by inhabitants, and is often linked to artists and writers and to ‘the clandestine or underground side of social life’ (33). It refers to the ‘dominated… space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate’ (39). Representational spaces refuse the rational order and cool logic of representations of space; instead representational space is alive: it expresses itself through the clause of freedom of speech. Very often one is moved to consider the ways in which writers’ appropriate spaces dominated by official meanings, producing representational spaces with quite different meanings.

Lefebvre’s work sets out a framework for analyzing not only the ways in which space shapes social life (and vice versa), but also the ways in which power operates through spatial structures. Lefebvre’s work has thus influenced the development of a ‘socio-political’ dialectic, as Edward Soja terms it. In an examination of the works of J.M. Coetzee, this theory of space by Lefebvre becomes highly relevant.

Edward Soja is another key contributor to contemporary debates concerning spatiality. If Lefebvre speaks about social production of space, Edward Soja discusses space as a constructed cultural entity. He articulates the inseparability of space and society by coining the term ‘socio-spatial’ dialectic. In his 1989 groundbreaking work titled *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Geography,*
Edward Soja advanced a compelling argument for the primacy of spatial analysis in social theory with his “trialectics of spaciality.” His critical discourse introduced a new emphasis on spatial concepts and metaphors such as simultaneity, domain, horizontality, place, and heterotopia in attempts to counterbalance the previous dominance of temporal notions such as sequentiality, linearity, history, and utopia.

In Soja’s project, space is always a cultural, constructed entity. It is part of the general cultural web, and like any cultural entity, space is formed and changed, accepted or rejected. In modernism there are only two spaces, the conceived and the perceived space. But Soja, as a postmodern geographer puts another dimension to spatiality. He visualized another way by which postmodernists look at being and spatiality. ‘Thirdspace,’ as he terms it is defined as lived (emphasis, mine) space. Lived space embodies the real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices. As Soja describes it, this space is “directly lived,” the space of “inhabitants” and “users,” containing all other real and imagined spaces simultaneously. Actual social and spatial practices, the immediate material world of experience and realization—all are included in this.

Thus, Thirdspace is a mode of thinking about space that draws upon both the material and the mental spaces of perceived space and conceived space, but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning. It is simultaneously real and imagined and more. The contours of South Africa drawn by Coetzee, for instance, can be investigated and negotiated bearing this notion of thirdscape in mind.
David Harvey stresses that social relations are always spatial and exist within a certain produced framework of spatialities and that this framework consists of institutions understood as “produced spaces of a more or less durable sort” (1996: 122). Such spatialised institutions range from territories of control and surveillance to domains of organisation and administration, creating institutional environments within which symbolised spaces are produced and attributed meanings. David Harvey argues that power derives from the ability to turn space into place. Following Foucault, he sees space as a "metaphor for a site or container of power which usually constrains but sometimes liberates processes of becoming" (1989: 213). The South Africa of Michael K in Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K* with its policy of segregation practised in the administration of the state is definitely an instance of these spatial theories at work. It leads to the realization that spaces and places are not isolated and bounded entities, but material and symbolic constructions that work as meaningful and practical settings for social engineering.

In short, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and David Harvey among others, recognise the importance of the production of space through spatial practices. An understanding of the concept of space in this study utilizing the commentaries of these theorists fuses the several strands of production/construction of space — cultural, ideological, economic and political. Edward Soja mentions the longstanding tendency of Western social theory to take space for granted by constructing a perception of passivity of space as merely the stage upon which humanity forges its world through time. The longstanding separation of history from geography and the dominance of time over space have had the effect of
producing images of societies as being cut off from their material environment, “as if they were fashioned out of thin air.” In this deceptive light, the social appropriation of space, as well as the ways in which space acts upon society, appears as immaterial and irrelevant. By spatialising conventional narrative, Lefebvre, Soja and Harvey make an attempt to recompose the intellectual history of critical social theory that revolves around the dialectics of space and social being. All of them stress that politics and ideology are embedded in the social construction of human geographies. No doubt, manipulation of physical and human geographies has played a crucial role in the restructuring of and the early expansion of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both Soja and Lefebvre help to reveal the constructed, socially produced nature of spaces and the historicist examination of spatiality.

Matters of the concept of space permeate much of Foucault’s works. In Foucault, there is a crucial nexus that links space, knowledge, and power. For Foucault space is fundamental in any form of communal life just as it is fundamental in any exercise of power. The twentieth century is a time, Foucault insists, defined as much by the spatialization of social power as by the exploration of outer space, a time during which human beings are defined as much by their relation to space as to any other human being. Reasserting the significance of space Foucault speaks of how “a whole history remains to be written of spaces – which would at the same time be a history of powers — from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habit” (1980: 149). In “Of Other Spaces,” he notes:
The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side by side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (1986: 22)

Foucault here implies that he seeks to explore the concept of space in terms of social relationships between people and within groups of people. Similar to Lefebvre’s thought, Foucault calls attention to the actually lived and socially created spatiality as the habitus of social practices:

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live within a void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not super imposable on one another. (1986: 23)

Foucault explains that all spaces exist in a certain relation to each other and to the social structures of power. In an interview given in 1984, Foucault elaborates on how to conceive the organization of space in terms of politics. Foucault says: "Tactics and strategies deployed through implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organizations of domains could well make up a sort of geopolitics..."
As an example, Foucault (1984: 239-56) explains how during the 18th century, architecture reflected the aims and techniques of the government in power, how the organization of space was conceived in terms of politics. As per government rationale, a state will be well organized when a system of policing extends over the entire territory (1984: 241). Space, then, changed in importance: it was not about territory, which is already in possession, but about society. Space, then, can be important when it is used in and as power. It is here that his observation “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (1984: 252) becomes relevant to our understanding of Coetzee’s texts.

From architectural plans for asylums, hospitals and prisons, to the exclusion of the leper and the confinement of victims in the partitioned and quarantined plague town; from spatial distributions of knowledge to the position of geography as a discipline; to his suggestive comments on heterotopias, the spaces of libraries, of art and literature; analyses of town planning and urban health; and a whole host of other geographical issues, Foucault’s work was always filled with implications and insights concerning spatiality. An understanding of the segregation policies in South Africa can be better understood in the light of Foucault’s insights on power, space and knowledge.

In an interview with the editors of the journal *Hérodote*, Foucault explained that deciphering “discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through, and on the basis of relations of power” (*Power/Knowledge: 70*). For Foucault, space, knowledge and power are necessarily related, as he stated, it is somewhat arbitrary to try to
dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand” (1984: 246). In many places in Foucault, spatiality occurs as an integral part of a larger concern, a tool of analysis rather than merely an object of it.

Foucault's discussions of the Panopticon and ‘heterotopic’ spaces and the spatial and temporal distribution of individuals in power relations indicate that his analysis is related to space and its relation to power. One of the clearest examples of power-space, the panopticon is an ubiquitous form of monitoring and disciplining human behaviour, a kind of invisible fence that provides simultaneous surveillance and disciplinary power over certain groups of people, notably prisoners and students (1977: 195-228). The panopticon represents a system of centralized policing and exhaustive surveillance that makes all visible and is itself invisible. Practically, surveillance appears in many institutions, such as schools, media etc. for they produce supervision. Through surveillance, a massive state is placed under control, for the disciplinary power pierces into the bodies of its citizens to make them weak and submissive. In order to keep the society in control, the white gaze, for instance, serves as the invisible means of surveillance everywhere with its disciplinary power of white values. In the wake of apartheid system of racial and class discrimination, blacks and underprivileged South Africans suffered diverse forms of violence, ranging from the political, economic, cultural to the social. Surveillance and monitoring tactics to check and contain the majority were implemented through various legislative practices which had a
panopticon effect on the society. As a policy of double standards, apartheid appropriated violence and brute force through legal acts to sustain its ideological ethos of racial intolerance and class stratification. The South Africa portrayed in *Life and Times* is a telling instance of the panopticon effect at controlling people in their own social and material spaces.

This principle of surveillance and its effect on space is critical to modern power relations and in its establishing of institutions and the individualisation of people within. Surveillance thus becomes the governing theme of modern space, as the institution becomes central in the formation of power relations.

As spatial theorizing traditionally begins with the physical body, it seems reasonable that a development of spatio-textual reading practices should as well. It is important to remember, however, that it is not possible to recognize the body objectively. In this analysis of Coetzee’s representation of the soma, the body is considered more as a subject-effect than as a subject proper. It is neither a body-in-itself nor a body-for-itself. The body in Coetzee, it is argued, is more a historical materiality, an embodied being-in-the-world, constructed and realized within spatial and social practices to satisfy changing needs. There is no body as an entity prior to social coding and practices as Coetzee’s depiction of the white and coloured bodies imply. The body, in effect, is knowable only as a result of spatial practice, and spatial practice occurs only as a result of the structural formation of social space.

As bodies, human beings take up space, exist in locales, distribute collective bodies in particular zonings (nations, classes,
genders), desire one’s own bodied places, and place certain bodies in particular places for purposes of social control (prisons, exile, madhouses, rehabilitation camps, hospitals). It almost goes without saying that material bodies are those objects onto which are inscribed ontological status ascriptions such as race, sex and gender. It is thus the basis of the contention in the third chapter of this study that bodies are therefore not mere bodies with abilities, powers and constrictions; they are always spatialized. Spatialisation of the body is affected through segregation, zoning, distancing, exclusion, marginalization and all other terms implied by the term "apartheid." Discursive codes place racialization in the realm of the spatial.

Racialization of the body, as this study makes clear, entails notions of boundaries and separations: spatial assignments. Racialization inescapably is a bodied process; it makes its marks upon particular bodies. Bodies and spaces, both of which are simultaneously material and symbolic, are inextricably intertwined in the process of racialization; the bodies "belong" to particular locales and spaces inscribed with meanings. Racism as ideology is thus a social process of inventing values which are stamped upon, insinuated into embodied spaces. The national sphere naturalizes both space and the categorization of people into groups and provides a "natural" discourse of entitlements, rights, legitimization for citizens and at the same time provide powers to exclude "others." It is this particular angle that is explored through the selected works of Coetzee in the second and third chapter of this thesis.

Space can be seen as a text upon which histories and cultures are inscribed and interpreted. Against a background of imperialism, space
and land ownership can be seen prescribed in terms of race and power.
Space is about geography (the physical terrain); it is about the body and
self (another spatial configuration), it is about postmodern ontological
narrative art. Thus space has many dimensions. Colonialism can be
viewed as an experience of spatial confinement, of restraint and
prohibition, a narrow world of poverty, oppression, and subjugation. The
Manicheanism of the colonial world with its absolute difference between
the colonizer and colonized, which finds its apogee in apartheid is thus
clearly expressed in spatial realities. In the colonial world “space and the
politics of space ‘express’ social relationships and react against them”
(Lefebvre, 2003: 15). Extending this line of argument, Franz Fanon in
Black Skin, White Masks argues that because the socio-economic spatial
reality of the compartmentalized, divided colonial world can never mask
human realities, an examination of “the colonial world’s … ordering and
its geographical layout will allow us to mark out the lines on which a
decolonized society will be reorganized” (1968: 38-40). In other words,
since social relations are manifested in space, the Fanonian test can be
applied to the post-apartheid society of South Africa to see how the
country has been spatially reorganized. Disgrace, is taken up as a case
study of this aspect in this thesis.

Coetzee addresses the issue of decolonisation from another angle in
Disgrace. Addressing the politics of space, Fanon challenged the
newly independent nations to deal with the legacies of colonialism by
redistributing land and decentralizing political power, vertically and
horizontally, which are easily and comfortably non-racial. How far this
succeeds or gets implemented and at what cost is imaginatively etched by
Coetzee in the post apartheid South Africa presented in *Disgrace*. Since colonialism is about the expropriation of land space, it is immediately political and the task of reordering nation space is indeed an onerous task.

The category of space as this discussion makes clear is discursively produced and ordered. Just as spatial distinctions like 'West' and 'East' are racialized in their conception and application, so racial categories have been variously spatialized more or less since their inception into continental divides, national localities, and geographic regions. Racism become institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms. Thus, at the limit, apartheid space — so abnormal and seemingly unnatural can be seen to be the logical implication of racialized space throughout the legacy, colonial and post colonial, of the West's hidden hand of Reason. Conquering space implies ruling people. The conquest of racialized space was often promoted and rationalized in terms of spatial vacancy, of the land's emptiness or the emptying of human inhabitance. The drive to racialize populations rendered transparent the people so racialized; it left them ‘unseen,’ merely part of natural environment, to be cleared from the landscape - urban or rural - like debris.

South Africa provides a key example of the necessity of embracing geographical space to analyse spatial ordering. South Africa has encountered numerous social engineering projects (e.g. colonialism, apartheid, democratisation), all of which have profound spatial implications and left significant legacies on the geography, both human and physical. To sum up, the focus is on space in relation to society. All
phenomena occur over time, and thus have history, but they also happen in space, at particular places and so also have geography. Apartheid manipulated both society and space in South Africa, a spatial distancing that facilitated social distancing of whites from other non-racial groups.

Coetzee’s personal stance as a public intellectual and private citizen tempered through the lens of creative artistic vision deserves special attention. Though the works specifically analysed in this thesis are the second novella of *Dusklands* (1974) titled ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee,’ *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999), the themes of his other novels are also briefly introduced to get a better picture of the concerns of Coetzee as a white writer in a racist nation. To write under the sway of postcolonial imperatives has never been an easy task for South African writers particularly when the issues of gender, race and language are taken into serious consideration. The white privileged write either to problematize postcolonial relationships or to substantialize postcolonial predicaments in South Africa, say as J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer have done. Exposed to and educated by the dominant white culture, Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer are recognized as distinguished white South African writers who create ‘white writings’ to raise the question of social and political commitment and who, by implication, accuse the authorities for not being able to deliver promises.

J. M. COETZEE (1940 —)

The winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003 and as one of the three novelists to win the Booker Prize twice, as well as the recipient of a series of major South African and international literary prizes has earned J. M. Coetzee a reputation as one of the most important writers
living today. He is also one of South Africa’s most controversial literary figures. Even with only five of an entire corpus of fourteen novels being set in South Africa, they all, to a greater or lesser extent, address themes and issues pertinent to the postcolonial and apartheid situations: colonial discourse, the Other, racial segregation, censorship, banning and exile, police brutality and torture, South African liberalism and revolutionary activism, the place of women, the relationship of South African people to the land and, not the least, the ethico-politics of writing. As a white South African intellectual, Coetzee has deftly juggled his various roles as author, critic/public intellectual and citizen (or private individual with both rights, and obligations to society) with elan.

When Coetzee began to write in the nineteen seventies, he was one of the first South African novelists to act on the realisation that narrative is not ideologically neutral, but a product of history, interpenetrated with all sorts of subliminal cultural nuances. In his 1987 “Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech,” he described the literature of his homeland as “a literature in bondage.” No doubt, Coetzee is stressing the limitations of art in a society that was not free of the policy of apartheid. He is also hinting at the political burden that South African literature bears and the extent to which apartheid determines South African cultural production.

In the South Africa where Coetzee spent his formative years, black South Africans were denied all avenues of freedom. The racial history of the land has affected Coetzee’s writing in many ways because he too has been living the trauma and drama of the special circumstances in South Africa. Coetzee was aware that as an artist it is his duty to
Chapter 1

document oppression and to commemorate its victims. Literature could be used as “a weapon of struggle” in this endeavour. Unlike his contemporary, Nadine Gordimer who, for instance, has developed a sophisticated Lukacsian socialist realist model to represent the reality around her, Coetzee advocates speaking the truth of colonialist history through the very personal act of writing creatively utilising ‘anti-realist’ strategies. Both Coetzee and Gordimer are aware of the ideological role of the writer in South Africa. In her seminal essay “The Essential Gesture” Gordimer wrote: “The creative act is not pure. History evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it. […] the white writer’s task as ‘cultural worker’ is to raise the consciousness of white people, who, unlike himself, have not woken up” (285-6; 293).

Growing up in an English-speaking Afrikaans family in Cape Town and Worcester in South Africa during the height of the apartheid era, Coetzee faced problems of identity at an early age. As he explains in his autobiographical novel *Boyhood*:

> Because they speak English at home, because he always comes first in English at school, he thinks of himself as English. Though his surname is Afrikaans, though his father is more Afrikaans than English, though he himself speaks Afrikaans without an English accent, he could not pass for a moment as an Afrikaner. (124)

Despite the fact that Coetzee as a child saw himself as English, he felt excluded from complete identification in a country controlled by a regime founded on racial and cultural distinctions. His upbringing included racial stereotyping, but the notion that the English were “good,”
or that the coloured people were inferior, came into conflict with the world as he experienced it. After the Sharpeville crisis in South Africa in 1960, he spent ten years outside the country as a student, a lecturer, and an employee in a multi-national corporation. It developed in him a highly cosmopolitan outlook that tended to set him apart from most white South African writers. Indeed, he felt that his writing fit into no recognizably South African literary tradition and was more influenced by the vogue of postmodernist writing in Europe and America of the nineteen sixties. Coetzee at this stage demonstrated a strongly anti-imperialist commitment, prompted by opposition to the Vietnam War that shook America.

Coetzee's cosmopolitan outlook helped shape *Dusklands* (1974), the first of his many novels that deal with the theme of colonialism. It consists of two separate stories that skillfully interweave fact and fiction as it attempts to diagnose the sources of colonial violence. Coetzee scrutinizes here the analogy between the brutality that characterized the Dutch colonization of South Africa in the eighteenth century and the aggressive spirit of the American invasion in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. Exploring the theme of the western imperial imagination, the novel contrasts the experiences of Eugene Dawn, an American government official put in charge of the New Life project to transform Vietnamese society, who eventually goes insane, and the account of the travels of Jacobus Coetzee into the interior of the Cape in the eighteenth century. The two stories in *Dusklands*, ‘The Vietnam Project’ and ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee,’ are a response to the oppressive forces of
history that impressed themselves upon the social reality of USA and South Africa.

Colonialism as a regime of power was largely organized through spatiality and subjectivity: spaces to capture, subjects to control. The space of the European subject evolved through a kind of ‘mapping’ of the outside world and a cataloguing of ‘others’ who posed a potential threat to the social and psychic order. Eurocentric discourses and practices that were at once material/spatial and psychological were utilized for this purpose. Race thus became a visual marker of ‘difference’ leading to the formation of new socio-spatial equations in terms of both the body and land. In ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ the colonizer’s confrontation with the natives is imaginatively redrawn, highlighting the practical applications of this methodology. Coetzee manages to transform the colonizer’s narrative into a disturbing picture of how the land and body simultaneously bow to the superior weapon power and ideological stratagem of Western Imperialism. Space, in the sense of its impact on both the material and human geography is violently reset as the economic, cultural and political agendas of the Western powers come to bear upon an unsuspecting and naïve nation. Coetzee compels the reader to reconstruct the history, politics, ideology and power equations involved in the early colonialist enterprise. Territorial usurpation and human exploitation figure disturbingly in the spatial configuration brought about by the socio-political conflict of colonialism in early South African history. Coetzee also explores how the security of the social space depended on the ‘otherness’ of the Other. The publication of *Dusklands* caused a considerable stir in South African literary circles,
as the novel broke with many of the traditions of the colonial novel. It undermined the colonial conventions of literary realism and took the western vogue of exploration of the individual self to its extremes.

The publication of Coetzee's second novel, *In the Heart of the Country*, in 1976 develops the theme of the violence and alienation at the roots of western white colonialism through its protagonist, Magda. The novel is the first person account of this lonely white spinster and of her solitude and relationship with her father and native servant on an isolated Cape farm, sometime in the nineteenth century. Coetzee uses Magda to show the terrible effects that colonialism has on human nature. Black characters, virtually nonexistent in the traditional South African fiction, is brought to the centre stage of the heroine’s life as Coetzee intensely explores the operations of race and gender in this novel. The complex relationship that forms between the colonizer and colonized is explored here. The novel shows how the master/slave relationship is one where both are the masters and both are the slaves. Through Magda, the ‘mad, white colonial daughter’ who has given up “the fiction that is farming,” Coetzee constructs an Afrikaner who feels alienated in her own land. There are many allegorical features to this story, as it strips away the thin western veneer behind colonial society to reveal its culturally rootless quality.

In 1980 Coetzee published his third novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which continued his allegorical examination of the imperial theme through the eyes of a benevolent liberal imperial official on the frontier of an empire on the verge of collapse. Coetzee presents the Magistrate as the reluctant colonizer who can no longer bear the burden
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of an arbitrary historical role which condemns him to treat the ‘barbarian’ natives as ‘things.’ The magistrate comes across as a ‘colonist who refuses’ to colonize the ‘Other’ in the name of human justice. This work is an examination of the ramifications of colonization on a universal scale. Though set in a historical time, the action is supposed to take place in a politically significant space, the imperial frontier. The novel clearly embraces many themes at the heart of the South African condition, as well as universalizing the dilemma at the heart of imperial conquest generally. With this work, Coetzee was received as a writer who had, in some measure, stepped outside the tight limits of his own society, and his fourth novel, *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), was eagerly awaited.

*Lete and Times* marked in some respects a new departure for Coetzee, for the story had far more naturalistic qualities than his previous novels. The setting in Cape Town, in a near-future of riots and breakdown of law and order, had a strongly realistic quality and was undoubtedly shaped by the unrest in South Africa. The intellectual commitment to highlight, analyse and interrogate the dilemmas of South African socio-political reality makes itself evident in this work. The ‘spatial practices’ that resulted from the malevolent policy of apartheid affected the life of people like Michael K in such a manner that they were involuntarily forced to form new definitions of identity. K finds himself living, in what David Attwell (1993: 89) has termed the South Africa of the nineteen eighties, as the “historical cusp.” The social space that K inhabits with its atmosphere of violence, racial dissonance, political uprisings and guerilla warfare is the consequence of the state policy of
apartheid. In a highly politicized culture, the marginalized, whom K symbolises finds their existence highly traumatic. Through this work, Coetzee attempts to unravel the meaning of the last stages of colonialism in South Africa.

Like in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the question of the position of the ‘Other’ moves to the forefront in this novel too. The ‘Other’ can be said to be a byproduct of social spacing. In *Life and Times*, K’s story comes across as one that displays resistance to the fabrication and objectification of the Other. The marginalized Other, K, comes across as self assertive and self defined, unyielding to any type of colonisation, either mental or physical. The political, cultural and ideological meaning of restrictions that generate resistance is explored in this Booker Prize fiction.

Coetzee continued to explore themes of the colonizer and the colonized in *Foe* (1986), his reworking of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Coetzee’s female narrator, Susan Barton, comes to new conclusions about power and otherness and ultimately concludes that language can enslave as effectively as can chains. Like all of Coetzee's earlier works, *Foe* too retains a strong sense of its specifically South African origins, and has a sociopolitical subtext that runs along just below the surface of the narrative. The relationship between Susan and Friday, the black African allows Coetzee to consider analogously the history of all people who have been silenced, suppressed or misrepresented. Whereas *Foe* dealt with South African political issues symbolically, *Age of Iron* (1990) was Coetzee's first novel to address the South African political situation directly. Set in the tense, fearful Cape
Town of the middle nineteen eighties, during a state of emergency, when the South African government gave wide powers of arrest and imprisonment to the police force and the military, Mrs. Curren, a retired white teacher, dying of cancer, for the first time faces the reality of apartheid in her home country. Here, Coetzee focuses on the death throes of the apartheid system in South Africa. The apartheid’s structures of power and the deforming influence it has on its citizens get dissected through the lives of the many characters that crowd this novel. The internecine political intractability of the new emerging South Africa, coupled with the ignorance of the many whites like Mrs Curren to the conditions of blacks who live in the same city is focused here.

If in *Age of Iron* Coetzee deals directly with circumstances in contemporary South Africa, in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) he takes the reader to nineteenth century Russia of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. It is a work that comments on the fate of creative writing in a politically fraught social context. It reminds the reader of Coetzee’s own experiences as a writer in South Africa. In both *Age of Iron* and *Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee seems to point out that the network of power within the societies in question pervade and pervert every aspect of life, including art.

In 1999, with his novel *Disgrace*, Coetzee became the first writer to win the Man Booker Prize twice. As is evident in all the above discussed writings, Coetzee’s works reflect directly or indirectly the contemporary events unfolding in South Africa. The rapid, traumatic changes that have transformed contemporary South Africa inform the plot of *Disgrace* too. The narrative demonstrates how people emerging
from socio-political and economic domination reclaim their negotiating space for equity. David and Lucy Lurie, representing the Afrikaaner white minority in Africa are brought to a level of accepting responsibility for the crimes of their colonial past. The altered political and social space, with the atmosphere thick with discussions of the meanings of retribution, reconciliation and forgiveness circle the vortex of this novel.

Since the publication of *Disgrace*, Coetzee has resisted writing straight works of fiction and non-fiction, preferring instead to work across categories and genres in ways that generate ontological and epistemological questions for his readers. Coetzee’s ‘autobiographic trilogy’ *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997), *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* (2002), and *Summertime* (2009) are in a way ‘memoirs’ that provide, once again, insights into the South Africa of the writer’s times. *Boyhood* elects to speak of the young Coetzee in the third person. However, both *Boyhood* and *Youth* can be read either as memoirs as well as novels and their combination of fiction and biography serves to complicate an authoritative understanding of the author’s formative years in South Africa. In these works, veracity is something Coetzee seeks to problematize rather than produce.

His move to Australia in 2002 opened new possibilities for his writing. Although his interests have not changed, his method in dealing with his topics and the frame within which he presents and develops these have varied. His evolution as a novelist can be seen in line with the idea expressed by Salman Rushdie in ‘Imaginary Homelands.’ There, Rushdie said that literature “is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality” (1992: 15).Coetzee’s post-South African
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writings have become minimalist, self-reflective and more concerned with the micro-dramas of a unique novelistic sensibility.

Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons (2003), is a collection of essayistic short fiction masquerading as a novel. This work blurs the bounds of fiction and nonfiction while fuelling the author's exploration of urgent moral and aesthetic questions. The themes vary from the ethics of eating meat to the nature of the novel; from the study of humanities and religion to the essence of being a writer. The specters of the Holocaust and colonialism, of Greek mythology and Christian morality, and of Franz Kafka and the absurd, also haunt the novel, as Coetzee deftly weaves the intense contemplation of abstractions with the everyday life of an all-too-human body and mind.

Costello makes a surreal reappearance in Coetzee’s Slow Man (2005) too, which is about a recent amputee’s reluctance to accept his condition. It concerns Paul Rayment, a sixty year old Australian who loses a leg after being hit by a car. Paul is in fact a fictional character in the literary imagination of Elizabeth Costello. The metafictional narrative that follows, in which the text explores and abandons various fictional possibilities for Paul, brings the reader close to the creative dilemmas of Coetzee the artist. It encourages readers to (mis)identify Costello as Coetzee’s alter ego.

In Diary of a Bad Year (2007), Coetzee employs a literally split narrative technique, with the text on the page divided into concurrent storylines, the main story being the musings of an aging South African writer modelled on Coetzee himself. In this work also there is a radical confusion of the boundary between character and author. The central
figure who shares Coetzee’s initials is presented as having recently moved to Australia, and has even written some of the same books. The book takes the form of a series of essays on real subjects, from terrorism and Tony Blair to Tolstoy. But this is not a simply a collection of essays and the protagonist is not (quite) Coetzee. Coetzee does not consider himself a novelist brimming with fantasy in the style of Gabriel García Márquez. In this book Señor C says: “Once or twice in a lifetime I have known the flight of the soul that García Márquez describes” (192). Rather, Coetzee writes from an ethical and intellectual position, which has given a sombre tone to most of his novels. In this work, Coetzee makes unambiguous references to his South African background. Señor C says: “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 crimes that were committed in their name” (44).

It is the same feelings that Coetzee speaks of in *Youth* when he repeatedly makes reference to his shame at being a white South African — “South Africa is like an albatross around his neck” (101; 124). The ethical concerns of the writer whether in Africa or Australia is clearly evident here. It is the same ‘shame’ that is associated with the citizens of the countries that attacked Iraq and subscribed to Guantanamo Bay. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee denounces the situation of those “men in orange suits, shackled and hooded, shuffling about like zombies behind the barbed wire of Guantanamo Bay” (140) and also the less well-known situation of Australia’s refugees in Baxter detention Centre (113). It shows that his concern with the suffering of living creatures and with the
situations of injustice is not restricted to one geographical area or period, but rather encompasses many different parts of the world in different moments of history.

His ‘strong opinions’ on the state, on democracy, on terrorism, or on politics, elicit interest because in fact, Coetzee’s facet as a critic and a public intellectual and private citizen has always attracted great attention. It is worth mentioning a remark in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews (1992)*, where he famously claimed that: ‘All autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography’ (391). As readers we can make an attempt to discover more about his personality and his role as a novelist in South Africa from his fictional and non-fictional writings, since Coetzee is not inclined to talk about himself or defend his opinions openly.

In “An interview with J.M. Coetzee” given to Richard Begam, the writer confesses: “Yes, art is born out of burning issues, issues felt deeply, whether these issues are specific (political issues, for instance) or general (questions of life and birth, for instance) or internal to the medium…” (1992: 419- 31). With such an understanding of art, Coetzee, throughout his works, has been looking for a medium with which he could address South Africa’s anguish and oppose violence in meaningful ways. Acknowledging the urgency of South African realities, Coetzee as an academic, critic and author sees the South Africa and the discourses that have shaped its English literature as being inseparable from Western discourses, such as colonialism. This view is made clear in “Speaking J.M. Coetzee” with Stephen Watson: “I still tend to see the South African situation as only one manifestation of a wider historical
situation to do with colonialism, late colonialism, neo-colonialism” (23). In engaging with the political and social issues rending his native country, most obviously colonialism and its legacy of racial, sexual, and economic oppression, Coetzee has used a variety of formal devices that disrupt the realistic surface of the writing, reminding the reader forcibly of the conventionality of the fictional text and inhibiting any straightforward drawing of moral or political conclusions. Consequently, his work during the apartheid years was often found wanting when judged as a response to the South African situation, while Coetzee's own comments on his fiction and on the responsibility of the novelist sometimes has added fuel to the fire.

In his writings, it is evident that Coetzee treats colonial history as a discourse of power. Historical discourse has helped shape the dominant forms of novel writing in South Africa compelling the writer to support or reject the conventions this discourse has helped establish. In a public address in 1987 at South Africa on ‘The Novel Today’, Coetzee challenges the traditional ‘Grand Narrative of History’. Through what elsewhere he calls his ‘late-modernist’ mode rather than through realist modes typically associated with the historical novel, he envisages ‘ravelling’ rather than merely ‘supplementing’ history:

In times of intense ideological pressure like the present, when the space in which the novel and history normally co-exist like two cows on the same pasture, each minding its own business, is squeezed to almost nothing, the novel it seems to me, has two options: supplementary or rivalry. (3)
Throughout his works he has been expressing his conviction that literature has the power to rival the political, and not merely to respond to it. Coetzee believes that art should not be used as a tool in immediate ideological strife in terms imposed by the political. He insists that literature should protect and preserve its independent status and delineate the fields of contestation on its own terms. Sovereignty of literature is, in his view, the source of its enormous potential, of its power to stimulate not only resistance but real ethical transformations. In consequence, he emphasizes the potential of novelistic writing to draw on metafictional features, such as intertextuality, allegory or self referentiality, which bring about a multiplicity of meanings and perspectives on historical discourses. As he proposes:

[A] novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history (as a child’s school book is checkable by a school mistress). In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history- in other words, demythologizing history [...] a novel that is prepared to work itself and outside the terms of class conflict, race conflict, gender conflict or any of the other oppositions out of which history and historical disciplines erect themselves. (3)

These nonfictional statements on the relation between historical discourse and novel writing must be paid close attention to in trying to
understand the relation between literary representation and South African historical reality. Accordingly Coetzee’s fictions have been either evaluated as historically ‘escapist’ since they don’t refer to the particularities of South African history in an immediate and unambiguous way, or they are evaluated as artistically important since they represent South African society without sacrificing artistic nuance in favour of political slogan. Nevertheless, both perspectives assume South Africa to be a tangible entity.

Trying to understand Coetzee and his works also leads to a reflection of the role of art and the artist in society. The question of the writer’s accountability and how far and in what manner a writer can openly express his impressions and responses to the times he lives in has haunted Coetzee very much. Coetzee’s oblique observations on the difficulty that a writer faces in dealing with political systems or power structures can be seen scattered throughout his fictional and non-fictional writings. His writing suggests that private thoughts are not, as commonly held in Enlightenment discourse, free from policing/censoring. His writings can be seen as test grounds of how far one’s innermost thoughts and feelings can be brought acceptably into the public sphere. How far, Coetzee seems to ask tacitly, can one reveal one’s ‘darker side’ and remain within the bounds of the ethical and the political conundrum of South Africa.

Commitment to the socio-politico-historical reality has been, and continues to be, the forte of African novel in general, and South African novel in particular, since the 1950s. In the face of social exigencies and the gravity and intensity of socio-political vicissitudes emerges the
writer’s commitment to address the problems faced by his society and seek solutions thereby. Without doubt, a piece of literature is a social phenomenon in the sense that it does not grow from a vacuum; rather it is conditioned by the socio-economic and politico-historical circumstances of the time. The relationship between the two — art and society as we know, is a reciprocal one: art influences society and vice versa. Events in the history of a society, therefore, cannot but be a source of inspiration to its writers. Literature in this sense is considered to be an effective means of chronicling and analyzing societal problems and aspirations. Coetzee’s works exemplify this feature.

Coetzee has always guarded fiercely his license as an author to ‘write what he wants to write’ (*Doubling the Point*: 207), what he variously calls ‘demon-possession’ and ‘writing from the heart’. In this he has been guided by obligations to society (and regulated by state censorship under regimes like that of apartheid) and by self-regulation or self-censorship. ‘Truth’, the focus of Coetzee’s writing on all subjects can only be attained unconsciously, in this instance, through the creative writer's ‘demon-possession’ and ‘writing from the heart.’ The challenge for an artist, as Coetzee asserts in the same work, is “how not to play the game by the rules of the state, but how to establish one’s own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one’s own terms.” (364). Given the dilemmas of South African reality, the writer could not remain disinterested to the ruthlessness of the monolithic and authoritarian regime especially when the genesis of art is governed by the desire to engage, analyse and interrogate burning issues like violence and segregation.
The thesis also proposes to highlight Coetzee’s fiction as less concerned with absolute or historical ‘truths’ and more with the fictional truth as embodied in the narrative. Along with the ‘truth’ of history, his works can be seen to engage with a vast literary heritage while at the same time investigating power dynamics, political oppression and ethical responsibility of the creative artist.