Appendix

Telephonic Interview with Dr. Amos Oz

0n 26 March 2012

Research Supervisor: Dr. S. Prabahar

Research Scholar: C. Josephine Gladys

Research Supervisor: Hallo Sir, Good evening

Dr. Amos Oz: Good Evening

Research Supervisor: I am Dr. Prabahar, Professor of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

Dr. Amos Oz: Yes, how are you?

Research Supervisor: Fine Sir. How are you?

Dr. Amos Oz: Not bad. Thank you.

Research Supervisor: Its nice to talk to you.

Dr. Amos Oz: Thank you

Research Supervisor: Miss. Josephine Gladys, Research scholar, has been working on your fiction for the last two years and she is yet to submit her dissertation. Before that we thought, a personal interview with you will be quite useful to clarify our findings.

Dr. Amos Oz: Very well, I can give her fifteen minutes.

Research Supervisor: Okey Sir. Thank you very much. I shall give the phone to Gladys.
Researcher: Sir, I have selected your novels, *My Michael, The Hill of Evil Counsel, To Know a Woman, Fima and Don’t Call it Night*. Having read all these novels, I find your novels are mainly autobiographical. Do you agree with this Sir?

Dr. Amos Oz: **Well, my novels are primarily about families. If I have to say in one word, what all my work is about, families; if you give me two words, I would say, unhappy families.**

Supervisor: Sir, in that sense, can we call all your works are semi-autobiographical that deal with your personal experiences?

Dr. Amos Oz: **Everything that I have ever written is autobiographical, but not confessional.**

Researcher: Your works sound more philosophical than socio-political. Though it is from socio-political scenario, it has a sort of a philosophical outlook. How do you respond to this Sir?

Dr. Amos Oz: **It is a very good distinction. In a big ground, the setting is socio-political but the novels are more philosophical and more human in a general way. I don’t write direct political message in my novels; the characters are set politics, but the novel has no political position.**

Researcher: Hence, can we consider your works to be existential works – Existential philosophy being dominated?

Dr. Amos Oz: **Yes, yes, I think you are on the right track.**

Researcher: So, which existentialist do you get along with, Sir? Can we consider you as a Kierkegaardian, Satrian, or Burbur?

Dr. Amos Oz: **Primarily, Albert Camus.**
Researcher: Being a member of peace movement in Jerusalem, don’t you think that Arabs and Jews can live together happily in Jerusalem?

Dr. Amos Oz: I think Arabs and Jews should divide the country into two states, Israel and Palestine. I think the territories occupied by Israel should become the state of Palestine; the independent state of Palestine and the two states should co-exist peacefully like good neighbours.

Researcher: Your works present specifically the existential struggle of a Jew in Jerusalem. They also prove to be the microcosm of the entire cosmos, which is not constrained to any time or space.

Dr. Amos Oz: It is a good definition.

Researcher: What is your opinion about the nothing ness and worthlessness of life in Jerusalem and in your characters?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, my characters are struggling to find some meaning to their life, and not to be into nihilism and to emptiness. They maintain that a certain pursuit of happiness in difficult conditions is a sufficient cause to stay alive.

Researcher: What about the identity crisis in your characters?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, everyone of my novel is about the personal crisis which is very often a reflection of a social crisis. In my novels, the personal crisis of Fima, of Hannah in My Michael, of Yoel in To Know a Woman and in the other novels that the personal crisis is a very open part of a broader social crisis.

Researcher: How do you consider your works to be feminist works when we consider them to be either postmodern or existential?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, I prefer you call them existential rather than postmodern.
Supervisor: Could you please enumerate this?

Dr. Amos Oz: **My prime concern is not to shut a literary form and create new forms.**

My prime concern is on the loneliness of the human being in difficult social circumstances.

Researcher: But, your works are highly fragmented, your characters are fragmented; and also you are self-expressive or self-reflective. So why can’t you be considered a postmodern writer?

Dr. Amos Oz: **Well, I think postmodernism is very much about an intention to invent new literary forms and I am less interested in inventing new literary form, then I am exploiting the old forms and creating something new out of the old literary forms.**

Researcher: Well, when you call your writings to be feminist writings, what do you exactly mean by that?

Dr. Amos Oz: **Well, my writing is very much about woman and about the struggle of woman for self definition and for self determination. Hannah in My Michael, is a woman struggling to be found herself in a very difficult circumstances.**

Researcher: Jewish community being a patriarchal community and Jewish religion being a patriarchal religion, how do you project all your women characters to be dominant characters and they take the upper hand in the family but not in the society – Your comments please Sir.

Dr. Amos Oz: **Very often, even in a very patriarchal society like the Jewish society and the other patriarchal societies, when it comes to the intimacy of the family, women have the upper hand. Women control the actual rhythm of**
the family, the actual phase of the family. This happens in many patriarchal societies and this happens in the Jewish society.

Researcher: Sir, hailing from a community where Jews and Arabs living together, why do you always write on the characters who are Jewish; why do you talk less about the Arabs in the society?

Dr. Amos Oz: Because I don’t know enough about the intimate life of an Arab family. I have never been inside the bed room of an Arab family. I have decided never to write about the family where I have not seen the bedroom, where I have not seen the intimacy of life.

Supervisor: By the way Sir, your characters are mainly wanderers and how do you consider this term – Jew as a Wanderer?

Dr. Amos Oz: Jews have been homeless for more than two thousand years. They were guests and visitors always and almost unwanted guests among the other nations. In the state of Israel, for the first time in two thousand years, the Jews are at home, but still have many characteristics of wanderers.

Researcher: If this is the case, do you find any double alienation in your women characters Sir?

Dr. Amos Oz: Yes. The women are alienated twice. They are alienated as Jews and they are alienated as women.

Researcher: So can we compare the Jewish women to African women or to any other under privileged societies?
Dr. Amos Oz: In a general way, you can compare any under privileged to one another. But I am more interested in the differences than in the common denominations. I am a novelist and not a sociologist.

Researcher: Well, but your works are always socio-political in its concern. But we find it more philosophical and psychological. Where do you take your stand? Do you want to call yourself a philosopher or do you want to call yourself a socio-politician?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, you know, I am a story teller. My philosophy and my sociological and my political views really have a place in my writings. But first and foremost I am a story teller and I regard myself as a story teller and not as a philosopher, as a story teller and not as a sociologist.

Researcher: So Sir, being historical fiction, can we also brand your works to be postmodern works?

Dr. Amos Oz: It is only postmodern in the sense, that it is preserving certain distance from the historical events.

Researcher: What is your opinion about the ideologies of Martin Buber, the Jewish existentialist?

Dr. Amos Oz: Martin Buber is very close to my heart and had influenced on my works especially his ideas about the crucial importance of the dialogue between individuals, between I and you, between myself and yourself.

Researcher: What is your comment on his religious existentialism?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, I am fascinated by his religious existentialism but I am not a religious man, I am a secular man.
Researcher: With whom do you identify yourself more among the existentialists whom I consider closer to your ideologies? – Kierkegaard, Sartre, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

Dr. Amos Oz: First and foremost Albert Camus. Among the names which you mentioned the closest to my heart is Heidegger.

Researcher: Sir, your characters fall into four categories. Either they escape from the reality or they succumb to the situation or they find meaning in their life or they just remain with no changes in their life. What do you really want the society to be?

Dr. Amos Oz: I want people to listen to one another and I write about people who really don’t listen to one another. I think that the ideal of a good society is a society in which people really listen to one another.

Researcher: What do you comment on the phrase, “Biography as Fiction”?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, to me biography and fiction are one and the same. I use my biographical experiences as a material for my novels and stories.

Researcher: Sir, when you say ‘imagining the other’, in most of the interviews you talk about that, what do you want to comment on this statement with relation to existentialism or with relation to feminism?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, those, as a feminist or as an existentialist, I believe it is categorical that we listen to the other very carefully and imagine the other. I think imagining the other is an ethical need. I think people who are not imagining the other are less good people than people who imagine the other. I think imagining the other is the prime ethical need.
Researcher: When you call your works to be feminist works, what is your opinion about the ideas of Simon de Beauvoir? Do you take the ideologies of Simon de Beauvoir into your works?

Dr. Amos Oz: Yes, I consider Simon de Beauvoir is one of my influences.

Researcher: Do you go along with Sartre?

Dr. Amos Oz: Only a part of it, but this is a complicated question because to explain what exactly I exactly take from Sartre and what I don’t take from Sartre, I will need to give you a long lecture which I cannot do it at the moment.

Supervisor: Existential feminism – What do you want to say about this?

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, in relationship to my works, I write about women who are lonely at times and struggling to get free out of their loneliness and reach the outer world or go into the alienated world. This is my existential feminism.

Researcher: When you present your landscapes of Jerusalem, it is found to be a cultural metaphor. It is always a negative attitude towards Jerusalem that you project. What do you comment on this?

Dr. Amos Oz: Jerusalem is always the city of extremes. It is a city of prophecy, it is a city of religious fanaticism, it is the city of extremes. In the life of Hannah, Jerusalem becomes a neuro to the complicated psyche of Hannah. In the life of Fima, Jerusalem becomes a neuro to the complicated psyche of Fima.

Researcher: What is your comment on time and space as an existential construct?

Dr. Amos Oz: All I can say is that you can never write a novel without the construct of time and space. There is no novel out of time and space and this includes my novel. This, in my view, is elementary for the art of a novel.
Researcher: What is the role of Jerusalem in your novels?

Dr. Amos Oz: Most of my characters are Jerusalemites and most of my novels are set in Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is where I was born and where I grew up and Jerusalem to me presents a whole spectrum of human verity; a conglomerate of paradoxes and absurdities and extremes.

Researcher: Can you comment on this statement Sir? – The disintegration of personality results in the disintegration of the outer world or the disintegration of the outer world results in the disintegration of the personality.

Dr. Amos Oz: Yes, I think it is a very interesting observation.

Researcher: Thank you so much Sir.

Dr. Amos Oz: Well, I thank you for your very good questions. I wish you much much success in your thesis and I would be grateful if you send me a copy of your thesis, so that I could read it.

Researcher: Sure Sir. Thank you so much for the time that you have spared and for the valuable comments to my outlook.

Dr. Amos Oz: Thank you and much success with your thesis. All the best.
Dear Josephine,

Thank you very much for the lovely letter you wrote me. I remember the phone interview we had a year ago, and I’m glad to know that my works are an inspiration for you and that you even translated some sections into Tamil.

Will you be kind enough to send me some of your Tamil translation for my archives? I hope one day we will have a chance to meet and once again thank you for your greetings.

Best Wishes,

[Signature]
Dear Ms. Gladys,

Thank you for your beautiful letter, thank you for your greetings for the Kafka Prize and above all thank you for your translation written in such a marvelous calligraphy. I couldn’t read the translation, unfortunately, but I am very pleased with the sentences you have selected to translate. Your Calligraphy is probably the nicest I have ever seen. I do hope that you and I shall have an opportunity to meet one day.

Thank you again and best wishes,

Amos Oz.
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Finding Appease in Disability with reference to Amos Oz's *My Michael*

C. Josephine Gladys*

This paper examines the paradoxes involved in living with "disability," arguing that such paradoxes arise from a complex interaction among a set of habitually expressed oppressions. The arguments are primarily based on one female character who finds comfort in her physical, emotional as well as social disabilities. Amos Oz' Hannah, in *My Michael* is a character who hunts and finds various escape roots and thereby continues to stay back in the state of disability.

Amos Oz born on 4 May 1939 in Jerusalem, is an Israeli novelist, short story writer and essayist. *My Michael* (1968), is a metaphor for the state of discontent between Hannah and her husband Michael Gonen, and the decline of their marriage. It is also a metaphor for the underlying theme of discord within the state of Israel during the 1950s. The Israeli writers of the literary generation prior to Oz wrote literature

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that was strongly allied to the goals and ideals of the Zionist state. Oz consciously rebels against this mode by writing literature that expresses more ambivalence and nuanced attitudes, both towards the Zionist ideology and the reality of life in Israel.

Amos Oz is fixed as a disability writer and his work *My Michael* as an effective disability fiction. Disability fiction is important because these narratives shape the material world, inform human relations, mould our sense of who we and our fellow human beings are. *My Michael* is a story where two characters deal in different ways with crisis in their lives and marriage. Hannah is the narrator, and the reader views her marriage through her blurred eyes, whether through her dreams or wakeful moments. In this regard Hannah is considered a disabled character. She finds herself comfortable to remain a disabled person in the domestic and social spheres in which she exists. Incompleteness of women, her self, her desires, her expectations, her anticipations, her hopes and dreams, her longings and visions, her unidentified women- identity and more than all these, it is the inability of the world to accept her ‘inability’ makes her ‘disabled’ in other phases of her life like physical, emotional and psychological - all interconnected to one another.- and it is this point where the women find appease in disability and Amos oz’ Hannah in *My Michael* is not an exception.

This paper focuses on the three major ‘disabling agents’ that Hannah finds and in which she stays comfortable. She finds her own ‘escape roots’ and that ultimately results in the outcome which proves her to be a disabled character. Throughout the novel, Oz intensely brings out the struggle of Hannah in various phases of her life with Michael, her husband and her son Yair. Hannah, who yearns for excitement, draws on her rich store of childhood memories and often escapes into a dream world. Michael, hard-working and pragmatic,
remains a geologist, firmly connected to the earth. As the marriage and Hannah’s sanity deteriorate, the author’s use of symbols gives depth and universality to the story.

Hannah presents herself as physically weak. It is very obvious that she prefers to remain in her sickness so that she is able to escape from the responsibilities as a mother, as a wife and also as a graduate student. Hannah, has given up her literature studies upon her marriage, soon finds married life—and Michael himself—to be tedious. She says: "Growing into one another. Helplessly coalescing. I can’t explain. Even words against me. What a deception, Michael. What a despicable snare. I’m worn out. Oh, to sleep and sleep.” (228). This continues to be the state of Hannah, where she never wants to enter the world of reality and she remains unwilling to take up her responsibility both within the domestic as well as in the personal world of hers. It is only Michael and the maid who take up the responsibility to do all the household works and give Hannah a perfect freedom who continues to be in her bed with all ease.

Hannah thus, finds appease in her state of physical illness. Even as a mother she finds escape roots to skip her duties as a mother. After their child is born, a year after the marriage, it is Michael who usually takes care of him and washes his diapers. Hannah, mired in depression, says she is: "contracted, withdrawn into myself as though I had lost a tiny jewel on the sea bed.” Gradually, she becomes more and more unstable, more and more depressed and hysterical, until she makes herself ill, a condition which she sees, ironically, as offering her some freedom. “I had lost my powers of alchemy, the ability to make my dreams carry me over the dividing line between sleeping and waking,” she explains. Despite Hannah’s self-pity and hysteria, Michael, the logical, reliable, unexciting husband retains his composure.
The dissatisfaction in Hannah becomes yet another disabling agent. Her pessimistic outlook towards life and holding on to the negatives and darker side of life become an escape route which ultimately gives her an escape from the relationship commitments. She finds her husband disinteresting though when she was a graduate in the college she fell for Michael and it was she who willingly accepted Michael as her man for life. Her sense of possessiveness is seen obviously whenever she refers to her husband as “My Michael”. Gradually her love and hold for Michael seem to be fading which ultimately bestows a perfect dissatisfaction.

While one of Michael’s friends sees him to be ‘the man’, Hannah shows her total discontent through her word in the conversation:

I (Hannah) said : Strong, sensible men are my favorite people. I’d like to meet a strong, sensible man someday.

Yardena said : Micha, you’re great. I’ve never met anybody as clever or sweet as you. (214)

In this state she finds a sort of a comfort in giving up her relationships and frees herself from the commitments that are demanded out of her as a mother or as a spouse. While she gives up her commitment, her expectations seem to be unfulfilled. Her son even at a very early age responds to his father rather than to her which irritates her to the core and she prefers to hold on to the darker side of life by shutting herself inside her room when Michael and Yair play the fun outside her room. “Michael tried approaching him... Yair cried out with joy. I did not like the way the child looked when he was so bursting with joy” (84). Though her escape from
her commitments led to a devastating outcome she does not bother, instead remains to hold on to the dissatisfying agents in life and continue to find escape from the commitments and she openly declares:

My husband and I are like two strangers who happen to meet.... Both embarrassed, reading each other’s mind, conscious of an uneasy, embarrassing intimacy, wearily groping for the right tone in which to address each other now (224).

This sort of relationship authenticates that both of their hearts continue to beat as two. When the novel ends Hannah says: “I bid him farewell. I am not involved. I have given in.... I am not with you. We are two people, not one.... Fare you well.” (250-251). This sort of an indifference and dissatisfaction towards life and relationships kept her at ease with no commitments.

One but the final disabling aspect in Hannah’s life is her fear for the past. She prefers to stay back in the world of dreams which keeps her away from the world of reality. Hannah prefers to live in her dreams so that she is totally out of the world which she considers to be a world which fails to give her needs and desires. This makes Hannah to willingly accept the fear and her dream world. Perfect comfort and ease is enjoyed in her disability and it is obvious, from the beginning of the novel, Hannah never seems to take any pain to come out of such disabilities. She readily acknowledges her state of living when she tells:

I would still wake before dawn, wide open to the evil voices and the recurrent nightmare which took on progressive, inexhaustible nuances. Sometimes a war. Sometimes a flood.
A railway disaster. Being lost. Always I was rescued by powerful men, who saved me only to betray and abuse me. (227)

Hannah often imagines a glass dome over herself and her family. She remembers, as a child, dominating Arab twins in her neighborhood, and she now fears they will wreak vengeance on her. Her platonic relationship with an innocent orthodox teenager turns into a power struggle, and she creates a new personality—that of Yvonne Azulai, a young woman who leads an exciting life. Even the changing seasons often parallel Hannah’s state of mind.

*My Michael* moves back and forth, in time, from Hannah’s dream state to her moments of acute awareness which is more the exact situation that prevails in today’s world where people are no more fixed to a standard of their own. She likes the thought of having power, even if it is a power controlled by illness. She feels comfortable to remain a disabled one, to enjoy what she exactly wants. When she takes up a new job, she enjoys it: “I enjoy my new work, and particularly because of the endless fascination …” (231). Reality seems bitter to Hannah and therefore she finds her own escape roots and continues in her state of disability where the world around her accepts her condition and sanctions her to move in her own way as she wishes it to be.

This extraordinary novel by Amos Oz seems to be a haunting love story. This is because of Hannah’s tempestuous fantasy life encroaches upon reality. She finds comfort and peace in her physical illness, dissatisfaction and her fears. She finds escape routes not to come out of such disabilities but the escape routes that she finds for herself makes her stay back with a disability. Ultimately she is out of her responsibilities and also she never hesitates to be away from the relationship
commitments and thus she alienates herself completely from the world of reality. Though the novel is set in Jerusalem about fifty years ago, the issues with which these characters are dealing are as pertinent today as they were then, and the emotional implications are as affecting. Psychologically true, the novel achieves rare universality.

Reference
