Chapter 1

Introduction

The past excludes legend: one can’t make pure clay of time’s mud. There is no life that can be recaptured wholly; as it was. Which is to say that all biography is ultimately fiction.

- Malamud (Dubin’s Lives 20)

The present thesis Biography as Fiction: A Postmodern Reading of Amos Oz’ Select Works attempts to read and analyze the works of Amos Oz as existential - postmodern writings. By exploring the significance of the time, space, characters and narrative pattern of Oz’ writings, the researcher tries to locate and identify Amos Oz, the Hebrew literary and political writer, as an existential postmodern writer. Postmodernism is the most significant and noticeable descendent of existentialism in continental philosophy. Postmodernism, in general, reassesses and interprets all human experiences with the aid of methods taken from historical and anthropological studies and literary criticism.

The commonalities that lie between both existential and postmodern theories are always the centre of focus for researchers. Johannes Willem Bertens, Professor of American Studies at the University of Utrecht, in his The Idea of the Postmodern: A History quotes Spanos, who authenticates that postmodernism has its roots from existentialism. In his article published in the journal Boundary 2, Bertens states:

Spanos first develops his claim that ‘the postmodern imagination… is an existential imagination’. This imagination, which he sees at work in Sartre, Beckett, Ionescu, Genet, Frisch, and Thomas Pynchon, is governed by the impulse ‘to engage literature in an ontological
dialogue with the world on behalf of the recovery of the authentic historicity of modern man. ... This ‘postmodern anti-literature of the absurd’ employs an ‘aesthetic of de-composition’ that reveals to us ‘the primordial not-at-home, where dread, as Kierkegaard and Heidegger and Sartre and Tillich tell us, becomes not just the agency of despair but also and simultaneously of hope, that is, of freedom and infinite possibility’ … Spanos still equates ‘postmodern’ with ‘post-modern,’ suggesting a periodized post-modernism that has its roots in Kierkegaard and Heidegger. (47-9)

Pertinently, the goals, attitudes, methods and challenges of both existentialism and postmodernism have their common trends. Literatures produced in the modern era have been influenced by the tenets of existentialism and postmodernism. Both existentialism and postmodernism is established clearly as a way of life.

The present analysis provides scope to establish Oz’ works to be fictional biographies. In presenting biographies as fiction, Oz’ works represent reality with the fictional essence. Self expressiveness, an important aspect of postmodernism often prompts the author to reveal oneself by presenting the facts blended with fiction. Present literary exponents term the novels with self expressive anecdotes as bio-fiction. Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian academician working in the fields of literary theory and criticism, opera, and Canadian Studies, in A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction, refers to “historiographic metafiction” where she argues that the linking of the “fictious” to the “realistic” or “historical” is the typical characteristics of the postmodern novel. Linda Hutcheon defines this category as “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (10).
Oz’ presentation of facts blended with personal and historical experiences, makes the text intensely self-reflexive. And so, his texts become postmodern by personal, socio-political and historical influences. Due to these reasons, his texts can also be considered as fictional biographies.

Significantly, the related terms such as autobiografiction, autofiction and biofiction vary with their own differences in delineating the subjectivity of an author. As Professor Max Saunders of the King's College English department, in his *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* records that, “Martin Middeke uses (and perhaps coined) the term ‘biofiction’ to identify a strand of postmodern writing which falls within Linda Hutcheon’s category of historiographic metafiction, but which is specially concerned with literary biography” (15). As observed by Martin Middeke, who is a Professor of English Literature at Augsburg University, Germany, biofiction tells true stories in dialogue rich formats reflecting the reality. Martin Middeke, in his “Introduction” to *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama*, states that, “Works of contemporary biofiction are highly intertextual and interauthorial writings; they refer back to texts and discourses of earlier periods and, at the same time, comment on the present reception of these works by making past authors and present authors and readers interact in the process of interpretation” (18). The politics, religion and society of a particular community form the core for biofiction. Biography written as fiction or biofiction is neither autofiction nor autobiografiction. Biofiction does something more than what a biography could do.

Ellen Rees, Associate Professor of Ibsen Studies at the University of Oslo's Centre for Ibsen Studies, in the article, “Body, Corpus, and Corpse Delineating Henrik Ibsen in A. S. Byatt’s *The Biographer’s Tale*”, states:
More recently scholars have set out to create typologies of the various subgenres that problematize and experiment with the hybridization of fact and fiction … Such works often overtly thematizes the traditional distinction between the factual and the fictional. This type of writing has been classified variously as ‘fictional biography’, ‘biofiction’, ‘fictional metabiography’, ‘the biographical novel’, and ‘biographical fiction’. (155)

Subsequently, in creating literature, the author includes autobiography, biography, fiction, experiences, memoirs, history, culture, religion and politics.

Apart from considering any literary work of art as a product of author’s imagination, it has brought in a need to analyze the work from psychological, sociological, historical and political perspectives. In so doing, the need to study the text from a theoretical angle becomes an important element in the study of literature. In this regard, it is significant to quote Yuko Yamade, a socio-political and philosophical writer, remarks in his article, “Auto/Bio/Fiction in Migrant Women’s Writings in Quebec: Regine Robin’s La Quebecoise and L’immense fatigue des pierres”, about the characteristics of biography in its various forms. He states:

Autobiography itself has expanded as literary genre, especially since in the last two decades of the twentieth century … Régine Robin[a historian, novelist, translator and professor of sociology] … has created a new writing style, somewhere between autobiography and fictional stories, which she calls “bio-fiction.”... Within her new invention, which she calls biofiction, she combines these characteristics of autofiction as a narrative of reality; that is, in her writings, subjectivity and otherness always coexist. (235-37)
Yuko Yamade, in his article, quotes Lecarme’s definition of autofiction. He states that, “Autofiction is not opposite to autobiography… Autofiction can become an unleashed autobiography… Autofiction is a sort of reconfiguration of the self, and it dismantles as well as constructs itself” (qtd. Yamade, 237). Both autofiction and autobiography have their similarities yet autofiction is identified to have given a free rein to autobiography.

Similarly, Cora Kaplan, Honorary Professor of English at Queen Mary, University of London and Professor Emeritus of English at Southampton University, in Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism states that, “Biofiction, the term coined to describe the hybrid genre, can be interpreted in various ways, as highlighting the tension between biography and fiction, as well as marking the overlapping between them” (65). Incidentally, since the history of Jews is traced from the seventeenth century BC starting with Abraham, their forefather, Jewish history records their exiles, wars and wanderings. The literature produced by the native Jewish writers in Israel reflects the Jewish history, tradition and culture. The overlapping of history and biography has become an inevitable state for Hebrew writers.

Statistically, Israel has the highest literacy rate in South West Asia. Steven K. Baum, a genocide scholar, in his Antisemitism Explained, establishes the fact about the literary status of the Israeli Jews around the world. Steven K. Baum declares that, “Isn’t this the Israel with the highest literacy rate in South West Asia …Israel, that ranks third in university degrees, producing more Nobel laureates than Spain?” (174). Authentically, though a small body of literature is published in other languages, such as Arabic and English, Israeli literature is primarily poetry and prose written in Hebrew, as part of the renaissance of Hebrew as a spoken language since mid nineteenth century. The Hebrew literary works mainly present the socio-political
history of Israel. Though characters and settings are from Jerusalem, Hebrew literature presents the fragmented life of Jews, on anti-semitism, and the Holocaust. Howard Fast (1914 – 2003), an American novelist and television writer, in his *The Jews Story of a People* elaborates on the historical tradition that has been cherished about the Land of Israel. He affirms:

The Land of Israel, *Eretz-Yisrael*, is as old as time and man’s memory and man’s written history, and the place where the first true alphabet was formed, so that men might put down their memories, and possibly the place where the first walled town was raised up by man. And paradoxically, it was the land of Israel long before the barbarian chariot-warriors … invaded and conquered it. (23)

According to the argument of Howard Fast, it becomes a necessary factor to analyze the aspects of time and space pertaining to Jerusalem. Jewish literature in Israel always reflects the political turmoil and the sad plight of the Jews living in Israel. Jewish characters in literature are presented with a certain air of Jewish heritage and tradition, and they serve as links in the thousand-year long chain of Jewish tradition and culture. Writers of Hebrew Literature focus their works on Jewish imagery and themes. Through the presentation of reality in literature, Hebrew literature becomes a historical record of Jewish community. Jewish literature can also be considered a documentary presentation of Jews and Jerusalem. Therefore, an analysis of the aspects of time and space remains an imperative parameter of the study of Jewish literature.

Oz’ fictional works are based only in Jerusalem, and they focus on the emotional and psychological traumas experienced by Jews due to their deport to other nations around the world and their return to Israel. In this regard, time and space
becomes the major existential construct in Oz’ writings. Oz acknowledges this idea in his telephonic interview with the researcher and her supervisor. To a query about his opinion on time and space as an existential construct, Oz asserts that, “All that I can say is, you cannot write a novel without constructing time and space. There is no novel without time or space and this includes my novels. This for me is the elementary art of the novel” (Interview). He further states, “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 have grown up and Jerusalem to me represents a whole spectrum of human variety; a conglomerate of paradoxes and absurdities and extremes” (Interview). In this manner, Oz’ works are identified to be time and space restricted bio-fiction blended with many universal aspects of human life.

Hebrew literature consists of ancient, medieval, and modern writings in the Hebrew language. It is one of the primary forms of Jewish literature, though there have been cases of literature written in Hebrew by non-Jews. Israel’s Hebrew literature, a product of socio-political turmoil, a tool for cultural assertion and a personalized document of tormented collective psyche of Jews, is bound up with questions of identity and self-understanding. Oz, in Jews and Words, the work which is co-authored with his daughter, Fania Oz, claims that, “Jewish community has always hinged on uttered and written words, on an expanding maze of interpretations, debates, and disagreements, and on a unique human rapport. … Ours is not a bloodline but a textline” (1). Oz’ firm declaration about their culture evidently proves that Jewish culture gains more importance in the spiritual and secular texts.

Resultantly, Hebrew literature reflects tensions between the binaries of tradition and modern processes of secularization, homeland and exile, and hegemonic culture and ethnic peripheries. The New Wave Israeli Fiction began in the late 1950s.
Modern Hebrew authors include Kahana-Carmon (1926-), Sami Michael (1926-), Aharon Appelfeld (1932-), Yaakov Shabtai (1934 - 81), Ruth Almog (1936-), Savyon Liebrecht (1948-), Meir Shalev (1948-), David Grossman (1954-), Zeruya Shalev (1959-) and Amalia Etgar Keret (1967-). Some of the well known Hebrew poets include Dan Pagis (1930 - 86), David Avidan (1934 - 95), Dalia Ravikovitch (1936 - 2005), Meir Wieseltier (1941- ), Erez Biton (1942- ), Yona Wallach (1944 - 85), Maya Bejerano (1949- ), and Ronny Someck (1951- ). The well known and popular Israeli authors are Ephraim Kishon (1924 - 2005), Yaakov Shabtai, A. B. Yehoshua (1936-), Amos Oz (1939-), Yehoshua Sobol (1939-), Irit Linur (1961-) and Etgar Keret. Their works have been translated into other languages and attained international recognition. In recent years, thousands of new books, both translations from other languages and original works by Israeli authors, are published in Hebrew each year.

Writers, namely A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz and Aharon Appelfeld drift from the rigid political past and identify themselves with the present Israeli secular situation of compromise. They are heavily influenced by the surrealism of writers like Agnon and Franz Kafka. These writers voice their concerns about Zionism and Israel’s attitude towards their Arab neighbours. Hebrew literature continues to build upon surrealist and experimental trends. The new generation novelists explore the personal conflicts between parents and children, and the social conflicts such as rejection of sacred ideals of Judaism and Zionism. The modern Jewish writers deal with the Holocaust, gender issues and the conflict between Israelis and Arabs.

David Remnick, an American journalist, writer, and magazine editor reports about the four leading novelists in Israel. Oz, Aharon Appelfeld, A. B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman are all on the political left, supporting a Palestinian state, but they
are distinguished by different emphasis in their writing: Appelfeld by his memories of genocidal anti-Semitism in Europe; Grossman by his empathy with the Palestinians in journalistic accounts such as “The Yellow Wind”; Yehoshua by his connection to the non-European Jews, the Sephardim of North Africa and the Arab countries; and Oz by his personalized liberal Zionism. Of the four, Oz is the most renowned author for being a teller of tales and political artist.

Robert Alter, an American Professor of Hebrew language and comparative literature at the University of California, in the introduction to Oz’ article, “Before His Time”, proclaims that, “A prolific and precocious writer, Amos Oz (born 1939) had established himself as an important figure in Israeli fiction before he was thirty. He and A.B. Yehoshua are the two leading writers in what the critic Gershon Shaked has called the New Wave in Israeli Fiction” (329). Amos Oz has gained a prominent place in Hebrew literature as a political writer as well as a literary colossal.

Amos Oz, who was born as Amos Klausner in Jerusalem on 6 May 1939, grew up in 1940s Jerusalem. His parents, Yehuda Arie and Fania Mussman, came from Eastern Europe, in the nineteen-thirties, speaking Yiddish, Russian, Ukrainian, and German. In Jerusalem, Oz’ parents spoke Hebrew with their son, Russian when there were secrets to keep. As recorded by Oz in his autobiography, A Tale of Love and Darkness, Oz “wanted to grow up to be a book”. (254) After his mother’s suicide, when he was 14, he rebelled against everything by changing his surname from Klausner, which claimed him for Jerusalem’s intellectual aristocracy, to Oz, meaning strength and has gone to live on a kibbutz. He has stayed on Kibbutz Hulda for thirty one years, marrying Nily, daughter of the kibbutz librarian. The kibbutz has given up on him ever being a useful labourer, and sent him to study literature so that he could teach it. As a result, he has published his first book, Where the Jackals Howl in 1965.
Oz has divided his time between writing and teaching. He teaches at Ben Gurion University, Bersheeva. Oz has been a visiting Fellow at Oxford University, Writer-in-residence at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has published thirteen novels, four collections of short stories and novellas, seven books of essays, an autobiography and a children’s book. Oz has also published more than five hundred articles and essays on the subject of Israeli-Arab conflict. His works have been translated and published in more than forty two languages in thirty five countries. Many of his stories are set either on the Kibbutz or in Jerusalem. His stories are known to challenge the notion of order and decency in both locations. Of the nature of his writing, in an interview, “The Spirit Level - Amos Oz writes the story of Israel”, with David Remnick, an American journalist, writer, and magazine editor, Oz underscores:

I am a committed “provincial.” I am hardly ignorant of other literatures, but I am obsessed primarily with the storytellers, essayists, and poets who wrote in modern Hebrew and gave shape to cultural Zionism. This probably would be my subject. I wouldn’t be writing about the desert or the starry nights of the country. To some extent, as a reader I have some problems—and this is not a professional category and I wouldn’t use it in my capacity as a professor of literature in the classroom—I have a certain problem with indoors literature. . . . So much of what I have to tell has to do with the open, the desert, the field, a kind of arid mountains around Jerusalem, the neighborhoods, the street, the garden, the kibbutz. I would feel claustrophobic.

Apparently, Oz reveals his firm conviction to write only on the landscape of Jerusalem and about Jews.
Oz is an ardent admirer of Václav Havel, a Czech playwright, essayist, poet, dissident and politician. Oz often proclaims that his novels are experiments in verse and they are sometimes in epistolary narrative which are ultimately an in-depth meditation on families. He has rooted his writing in the tempestuous history of his homeland. Through his writing, both fiction and non-fiction, Oz makes use of images to examine human nature, recognize human frailty but glorify social variety. Oz consistently makes the plea for an end to ambivalence, for a dialogue, and for channelling of passions towards faith in the future. With an economy of words, Oz presents the people of Israel, its political tribulations and biblical landscape. His characters are torn between forces and conflicts of motives, their own desires and social reality, irrational impulses and obsessions and need for stability. Although the collective physical and social structure of the kibbutz are well defined and drawn in his stories, Oz concentrates mostly on the fate of the individuals, their drives, ambitions, and idiosyncrasies.

However, Oz has dealt with various subjects about life, politics, and religion. He writes about the evil effects that war and Holocaust have had on people’s psyche, but he has never written about war. Oz fought in the 1967, Six-Day War (June 5th – 10th), and in the Yom Kippur war in 1973, and both gave him a gut hatred for war and fighting. A couple of months after the 1967 war, in an article "Land of our Forefathers" to the Labour newspaper Davar, he has called the government to begin immediate negotiations for the West Bank and Gaza. As a result of his views, often trenchantly expressed, he has been called a traitor, been assaulted and received death threats.

In his political career, Oz is a founding member of the Peace Now Movement in 1977 and has advocated the idea of an exchange of land for peace. Stan Persky, a
Canadian writer and Philosophy instructor, in his *Reading the 21st Century: Books of the Decade, 2000-2009*, records David Remnick’s interview with Oz where Oz declares his opinion about war and fighting. Oz asserts that, “I am not a pacifist in terms of turning the other cheek. …I think the ultimate evil in the world is aggression, and aggression sometimes must be repelled by force” (102). An extensive analysis of Oz’ political writings prove that Oz suggests compromise regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

To his credit, Oz has received many honours and awards. Till 2014, he has won 76 awards including many honours and doctorates. To list a few of them, he has won Holon Municipal Prize for Literature (1965), Brenner Prize for Literature (1976), Ze’ev Award for Children’s Literature (1978), Bernstein Prize for Literature (1983), Bialik Prize for Literature (1986), Prix Femina (1988), Wingate Prize (1988), Peace Prize at Frankfurt International Book Fair (1992), Luchs Prize (1993), Hamoré Prize (1993), Maurice A. Stiller Prize for Literature (1994), Blue Cobra Award (1997), Israel Prize for Literature (1998), Wizo-France award for Israeli Literature (2003), International “Ovidius Literary Prize” (2004), Catalonia International Prize (2004), Goethe Prize (2005), National Jewish Book Award (2006), Prince Of Asturias Prize’ Spain (2007), Napoli Prize (2010), Franz Kafka (2013), Newman Prize for Literature (2013) and many more honorary doctorates, awards and honours adds to his credit both in his literary and political career.

Oz, a prolific writer, is constituted by variegated submissions in literature. As mentioned, he has published political essays, novels, novella, and short stories. He gives reasons for shifting to different genres in literature to his interviewer Shusha Guppy in her interview, “Amos Oz, The Art of Fiction”, published in, *The Paris Review Daily*. Oz speaks out that:
I needed quick satisfaction. I was very young and didn’t have the patience and wisdom to play long games. I decided to write short stories, because it is a craft that gets you there in a short time. I could work on a story in my head, then sit down and write it in one day. Incidentally, I can no longer do this. I have a different pace”.

*Rhyming Life and Death* sounds like a cacophony of voices. Two of his novels have eponymous characters. Michael and Fima are the protagonists of his works upon whom the works are named. His autobiography *Tale of Love and Darkness* is a history narrated in which he makes a clear record of the war-torn Jerusalem. His *The Hill of Evil Counsel* is a trilogy wherein three stories are closely linked to one another. His poetic authority could be identified in many of his writings.

Oz’ works are a fusion of Jerusalem’s history and his imaginative narration. Oz identifies himself to be a story teller. He creates characters, family and society from his own imagination. The characters constantly shift from the real world to the world of dreams and imagination. Such oscillation in Oz’ fictional characters and their life, in an uncertain condition, lead to the complexity in understanding the narration of the author.

In this context, Oz’ writings do not follow the traditional pattern of story telling. In Oz’ words, his stories are not confessional but autobiographical. He writes his own experiences which are either lived or shared. He shares the bitter experiences that he has undergone in his life only because he is born a Jew. His works are not just stories of a person or chronological records of events, but they are intellectual discussions on the issues and crisis of modern man and society. They are novels which deal with socio-political life in the realistic idea or sense. The concepts in his writings are his own experiences of life, love and truth.
The researcher finds it more appropriate to consider Oz’ works as postmodern works. Dick Hebdige, an expatriate British media theorist and sociologist, in his *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*, highlights the key factors of postmodern literature. He elaborates that:

> When it becomes possible for people to describe as ‘postmodernism’ … the ‘predicament’ of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase of commodity fetishism, a fascination for images, codes and styles, a process of culture, political or existential fragmentation and/or crisis, the ‘de-centering’ of the subject, an ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’, the replacement of unitary power/discourse formations, the ‘implosion of meaning’, the collapse of cultural hierarchies, the dread engendered by the threat of nuclear self-destruction … a sense (depending on who you read) of ‘placelessness’ or the abandonment of placelessness… when it becomes possible to describe all these things as ‘postmodern’ … then it’s clear we are in the presence of a buzzword. (181-2)

Such an elaborate idea of Hebdige on postmodernism, gives firm scope to analyse Oz’ works as postmodern. In so doing, it is also apparent that Oz’ narrative pattern could be identified as petit narration. The over lapping of reality and the text incessantly takes place in all his writings. Fragmentation, fascination for images, intertextuality and paranoia are found in abundance in all his works. The collapse of cultural hierarchy in its various forms is identified to be yet another dominant feature in his stories. Oz in his works, thus, never fails to bring in the continuity between the real world and the fictional world.
The present thesis on Amos Oz focuses on existential postmodern politics of subjectivity by analyzing his novels. My Michael (1968), The Hill of Evil Counsel (1976), To Know a Woman (1989), Fima (1991), Don’t Call It Night (1994), and Rhyming Life and Death (2002), his autobiography A Tale of Love and Darkness (2007), his short story collection Scenes from Village Life (2009) and his essay collection Israel, Palatine and Peace (1995) are taken for critical scrutiny. Oz’ fiction is established as culturally significant works since they are reflections of his psyche and culture beyond time and space.

Oz is one of the first voices of conscience that advocate compromise between Israel and Palestine, to end the socio-political and territorial problems. Oz’ In the Land of Israel (1983), The Slopes of Lebanon (1989), Under the Blazing Light (1995), and Israel, Palestine and Peace: Essays (1995) are some of his collections of essays where he deals with the Israel – Palestinian issues. As a founding member of the Peace Now movement, Oz has spent over thirty-five years speaking out on this issue, and all his powerful essays and speeches span an important and formative period for understanding the present political and spatial tension and crisis. Whether Oz is discoursing on the role of writers in society or recalling his grandmother’s death in the context of the language’s veracity; examining the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a tragicomedy or questioning the Zionist dream, he remains trenchant and unflinching in this moving portrait of the divided land.

In this context, a brief outline of Oz’ works which the researcher has chosen is highlighted. My Michael (1968), the work chosen for study, has been selected by Bertelsmann international publishers’ panel of judges and its readers’ club as one of the hundred greatest novels of the twentieth century. Hannah, the narrator of the story, tells of how she met Michael, an unassuming geology student who becomes her
husband, and of their life in Jerusalem in the 1950s. They are both too young and so not emotionally prepared for marriage. Limited financially, lonely and uninterested in her immediate world, Hannah is forced to abandon her study of literature while Michael goes on, in his prosaic way, to become a university lecturer and to fight in the Arab-Israeli war.

*My Michael* is known for Oz's strident lyricism as Hannah's bipolar tendencies take her in and out of feverish fantasies about a pair of twins she knew in her youth. In his introduction to the new edition of *My Michael*, written more than forty years after the book's original appearance, Oz describes how Hannah, his intelligent, bored and increasingly unstable narrator, would dictate the words that make up her story to him.

*The Hill of Evil Counsel* (1976) is a book of three well knit and interlinked stories of the personal imaginative narrative of Oz. He has re-created the twilight world of Jerusalem during the fading days of the British Mandate. In these three closely linked stories, Oz vividly evokes the stifling atmosphere of impending crisis as real personalities rub shoulders with fictional characters whose hopes and fears are hauntingly portrayed.

*In the Land of Israel* (1983) is a record of talks that Amos Oz has had with workers, soldiers, religious zealots, aging pioneers, new immigrants, desperate Arabs, and visionaries, throughout Israel and the West Bank in the early 1980s. Oz questions them about Israel’s past, present and future and has recorded what he has heard, along with his observations and reflections. This work of Oz has, thus, become a classic insider’s view of a land whose complex past and troubled present make for an uncertain future.
To Know a Woman (1989) is a provocative look into the mind of a 49-year-old former Israeli espionage agent who retired following the accidental death of his wife, Oz's compelling psychological study raises metaphysical questions but provides no easy answers. Respected in the secret service for his methodical working technique and self-control, Yoel Ravid attempts to confront the unresolved issues of his marriage while remembering, almost despite himself, the rare, unexpected moments when the blackness of existence was momentarily illuminated. Fragments of memories and dreams - hallucinatory, mysterious - invade the ordered pattern of Yoel's daily routine. While Yoel beds his next-door neighbour, he tries to understand and protect his fragile teenage daughter. His inner life becomes more and more fevered, until turning down a summons from his former boss. Recurrent references to incidents in Yoel's past that are never explained give To Know a Woman a lifelike credibility, but may disappoint readers who enjoy a story with revelations and closure. Yet, Oz touches a universal chord in one man's anguished search for meaning in a country that is a microcosm of a chaotic, dangerous world.

Fima (1991) is about Fima, a receptionist in a gynecological clinic, who lives in Jerusalem, but feels he ought to be somewhere else. In his life, he has had secret love affairs, good ideas, and written a book of poems that aroused expectations. He has questions about the purpose of the universe and the broken state of Jerusalem. However, his constant desire to pen his unfulfilled longings of all sorts remains a failure all through the life of Fima. With wit and insight, Oz portrays a man who represents a generation who dreams noble dreams but end up doing nothing.

Don't Call It Night (1994) is set at Tel-Kedar, a settlement in the Negev desert. The plot revolves around the long time love affair between Theo, a sixty-year-old civil engineer, and Noa, a young school teacher which has been slowly disintegrating.
When a pupil dies under difficult circumstances, the couple and the entire town are thrown into turmoil. Oz, through the plot and characters, explores with brilliant insight the possibilities and limits of love and tolerance among the people in Tel-Kedar.

*A Tale of Love and Darkness* (2002) is a tragic, comic and incomparable autobiographical epic and it is the story of the birth of a nation, spanning several generations. Between 2002 and 2012, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* is translated into twenty-nine languages, wins more than ten awards in nine countries and sells over one million copies. Love and darkness are just two of the powerful forces that run through Oz's extraordinary, moving story. He takes the readers on a seductive journey through his childhood and adolescence, along Jerusalem's war-torn streets in the 1940s and '50s, and into the infernal marriage between his fussy, logical father, and his dreamy, romantic mother. Oz' story dives into the hundred and twenty years of his family history and paradoxes, the saga of a Jewish love-hate affair with Europe that sweeps from Vilna and Odessa, via Poland and Prague, to Israel.

*Rhyming Life and Death* (2007) is a short, sardonic self-interrogation on the business of being a writer. In this deft, masterly book, Oz turns his attention toward his profession, writing. The plot is all about an eight hours experience in the life of an author. The setting is in Tel Aviv, a stifling, hot night. The unnamed protagonist, referred as Author, a literary celebrity, without any appellation reads from his new book. As his attention wanders, he begins to invent lives for the strangers he sees around him. One life story builds on another, and Author finds himself unexpectedly involved with his creations.

*Scenes from Village Life* (2009) is a novel-in-stories. It is a brilliant, unsettling glimpse of what goes on beneath the surface of everyday life. *Scenes from Village*
Life is a parable for Israel. Carolyn See, an adjunct Professor of English at the University of California comments on, Scenes from Village Life as, “Dark challenges in a seemingly peaceful world”. The work is a heavy dose of magical realism: missing relatives, strangers who appear out of nowhere and end up in bed with somebody’s mom, unnamed dogs that follow a narrator at a distance of thirty feet for no particular reason, and many mysterious corridors that lead nowhere.

Jews and Words (2012) authored by Amos Oz and his daughter Fania Oz-Salzberger, who is a historian, roam the gamut of Jewish history to explain the integral relationship of Jews and words. Through a blend of storytelling and scholarship, conversation and argument, father and daughter tell the tales behind Judaism’s most enduring names, adages, disputes, texts, and quips. These words, the authors argue, compose the chain connecting Abraham with the Jews of every subsequent generation. Framing the discussion within such topics as continuity, women, timeless, and individualism, Oz and Fania deftly engage Jewish personalities across the ages, from the unnamed, possibly female author of Song of Songs through obscure Talmudists to contemporary writers. They suggest that Jewish continuity, even Jewish uniqueness, depends not on central places, monuments, heroic personalities, or rituals but rather on written words and an ongoing debate between the generations. Full of learning, lyricism, and humour, Jews and Words offers an extraordinary tour of the words at the heart of Jewish culture. [Hereafter be referred as Michael, Hill, Land, Woman, Night, Tale, Rhyming, Scenes, and Jews respectively]

After having studied the texts carefully, the researcher formulates the following hypotheses.
• Oz’ writings are self-expressive and he blends history and subjectivity.

• Oz reflects the ideas of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre and other existentialists. In Oz’ works; the turbulent state of existence in the modern society is highlighted with his personal existential dilemma.

• Oz’ works share with his readers, his personal experiences that are either lived or shared.

• Oz being an existential thinker presents specifically the existential struggle of a Jew in Jerusalem. Oz’ works prove to be the microcosm of the entire cosmos which is not constrained by any time or space.

• Oz’ works articulate the ideas of nothingness and worthlessness of life.

• Amidst the chaos and confusions prevalent in the Jewish world and the world in common, Oz suggests different routes to live through the existing socio-cultural paradigm of the contemporary world.

• Oz narrates stories from a sociological cultural perspective interlinking with philosophical and psychological ideas. Identity crisis in its various forms has been projected as the primary theme in Oz’ fictional psyche.

• Oz, as a postmodernist, in his fiction does not give importance to the plot structure and therefore, his narratives are non-linear, fragmented, and lack temporal coherence; he uses images from day-to-day life to explain his characters and situations.

• Oz finds certainty amidst uncertain situations and a sort of harmony in the highly fragmented families and individuals.

The present thesis is divided into five chapters. Having made an extensive introductory note on Oz’ fiction, the second chapter, “Time and Space – An Existential Construct”, progresses into a definitive cultural digression where place
becomes a metaphor. Israel’s freedom was proclaimed on May 14, 1948. Jews living in various diaspora have long aspired to return to Zion, the Land of Israel. Jews from around the world have brought their cultural and religious traditions with them, creating a melting pot of Jewish customs and beliefs.

In its cultural perspective, Jerusalem has been identified as a metaphor for existential fragmentation as represented by the uprooted family, multiculturality and religious animosity. While presenting the existing paradigm of Jewish culture and life in Jerusalem, Oz presents a microcosm of the modern world which, in turn, makes the characters and settings personal and universal. An extensive analysis of the history of Jerusalem and its journey towards modernity remains the crux of arguments in this chapter.

The second chapter is confined to certain aspects pertaining to Jews and Jerusalem. Jerusalem is established as the city of extremes and Jews as wanderers. The identity crisis of Jews has been caused because of the physical space, Jerusalem. Highlight is given to the multicultural and multi religious background that creates both uniqueness and uproar in the place since Jewish ethnicity, nationality and religion are powerfully interconnected. The discussions are based on the importance of religion, culture and politics. To substantiate the arguments in this chapter, discussions are made with special reference to Oz’ novels Hill, Fima, Michael, his autobiography Tale, his short story collection Scenes and his political essay collection Peace.

Jews, throughout the history have been known as people with extreme physical charm, good education, and people of religion. Oz, in his Tale, firmly establishes that, “We had a terrible sense of modesty. We were buried under a mountain of shame and fear” (Tale 188). Even in Diaspora, Jews maintain the
uniqueness and credibility of their religion and culture. The evils of Holocaust, anti-semitism, crusades and genocides have been endured by the Jews for many years. In all their suffering, their hope to have a land of their own has never been vanished. Oz in his essay, “Has Israel Altered Its Vision?” included in Peace provides a detailed note on Jews. He writes:

Through centuries of scattered existence in several diasporas, Jewish communities everywhere developed highly advanced and sometimes highly sophisticated voluntary systems of social welfare, dealing not only with material needs but with communal activity designed to drive away loneliness, alienation and mental suffering. Despite extreme poverty, diaspora Jewish communities did not let an individual die of starvation or remain illiterate; a net of voluntary taxation was stretched out to support the poor, the aged and the crippled. Education was regarded on religious grounds as basic human right and a prime social duty. … Incidentally, one of the social duties assumed by traditional Jewish communities was never to leave a young woman without a bridegroom or a young man without a bride, which is more than any contemporary socialism can claim for itself. … While toiling on the land, in terrible suffering and hardship, they ‘educated’ themselves, ‘enlightened’ themselves and ‘healed’ themselves. (Peace 6-7)

The educated, enlightened and healed Jewish community proved their splendor and the will to survive when they established a land of their own. Stacy Perman, a journalist, in her e-book Spies, Inc.: Business Innovation from Israel’s Master of Espionage, declares that, when Israel was established as a country it has
been a, “piece of real estate, the country called Israel was hardly much of a prize. Barren and impoverished, with a paucity of natural resources, the small slice of land” (n. p.).

The land with no support from the world, a desert piece of real estate, with no natural resources, no infrastructures, being surrounded by enemies, in a few years has become a land of beauty and fertility. The worth and capability of Jews have always been proved throughout the history. Oz in his telephonic interview with the researcher and her supervisor discusses that, “Jerusalem is always a city of the extremes. It is a city of prophecy. It is a city of religious fanaticism; it is a city of extremes” (Interview). Stephen J. Binzhe, a Catholic biblical scholar, psychotherapist, popular speaker, and award-winning author, in his Jerusalem, the Holy City, quotes what rabbis tell about Jerusalem. He quotes, “Ten portions of beauty, God gave to the world; nine to Jerusalem and one to the remainder. Ten portions of sorrow, God gave to the world; nine to Jerusalem and one for the rest of mankind” (3).

Accordingly, Jerusalem is a place with natural beauty and it is a place soaked in bloodshed and war. It is a land of promise and a land of anxiety. The land is Holy but it is a land which is the most detested. The people belong and they do not belong to the place. Love and hatred go hand in hand in the hearts of Jerusalemites and Palestinians because of the partition of the land. Oz in his article, “Clearing the Minefields of the Heart”, included in Peace demonstrates:

Both hatred and love stand between Israelis and Palestinians. The hatred is the result of many years of unrelenting fighting – fighting which came as result of the love which binds them and us to the same homeland. Nothing in the world can undo the love which both nations harbour for their mutual homeland. Both peoples have already proved
this love, through sacrifice as well as through memory and adherence.

(Peace 128)

Hence, the spatial and territorial problems have been the reason for many battles fought through out the past decades as recorded in the Jewish history. The city has been constantly built, destroyed and rebuilt several times by different rulers. According to Eric H. Cline, an author, historian, archaeologist, and professor of ancient history and archaeology, in Jerusalem Besieged, records that during the long history of Jerusalem, “the so-called City of Peace” has been “destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, attacked an additional 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times” (2). As a result, it has become a land of war and blood.

Chapter three, “Dread and Anxiety: The Maze of Life”, delineates the existential aspects of human life. The inevitable chaos in the modern world and its effects on the life of an individual are studied. The discussions are supported with the arguments of existentialists like Blaise Pascal, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Bubur, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The researcher, in this chapter describes the existential tensions that prevail in the modern world by analyzing the characters who are considered to be the representatives of modern men. This chapter also concentrates on the different routes that individuals choose to live their lives. As Oz presents a philosophical outlook towards life, the study of the fictional characters of Oz has also become idealistic.

In this chapter, characters from the novels Michael, Woman, Night and Fima are chosen for study. Oz’ characters are only Jews. The traumatic experiences of Jews are found explicit in his characters. Almost all his characters wander in constant search of something. They do not know what they are searching for. Accordingly, most of his characters are left in chaos and perplexity. The unresolved search of every
Jew, as presented by Oz, proves the common metaphor used for the Jews: “Jew a wanderer”. Right from the biblical times, Jews have always been wanderers. Though they have always hoped for a come back, their struggle to own a homeland of their own still remains an uncertainty. They have always longed for a come back to their Promised Land, Jerusalem, but at the same time they do have a tendency to cling on to their land of exile. In presenting characters with such mixed emotions, Oz’ works are more philosophical than socio-political. In his telephonic interview with the researcher and her supervisor, Oz acknowledges that, “In big ground, the setting is socio-political but the novels are more philosophical and more human in a general way. I do not write direct political message in my novels. The characters set politics, but the novel has no political position” (Interview).

In this regard, Oz is identified to be an existentialist. The uncertainty, the chaos, the anxiety, the search for meaning out of meaninglessness, and the absurdity are some of the common traits of existentialism. Existentialism is a term that belongs to intellectual history. John Blackham, a British humanist philosopher, writer and educationalist, in his *Six Existentialist Thinkers*, documents that, “Existentialism goes back to the beginning of philosophy and appeals to all men to awaken from their dogmatic slumbers and discover what it means to become a human being” (152). If anyone would trace back the literary history, the great novelists are philosophical novelists. Albert Camus, a French author, journalist and philosopher, in his *Myth of Sisyphus*, gives a list of philosophers who have been great novelists. They are, “Balzac, Sade, Melville, Stendhal, Dostoievsky, Proust, Malraux, Kafka, to cite but a few” (98). Camus sets forth the idea about how such authors would consider any work of art. “They consider the outcome of an often unexpressed philosophy, its
illustrations and its consummations” (98). Incidentally, Oz has been authentically established as an existential philosopher and a story teller.

Due to these diverse views within existentialism, while fixing Oz as an existentialist, it becomes necessary to highlight the facets of existentialism that he emphasizes. Being a Jewish story teller, who shares only the Jewish experiences, Oz is compelled in every way to touch the existential aspects of life. It is because the mere existence in itself has become a facet of highlight for every Jew. Dread and anxiety, chaos and hopelessness, and uncertainty and absurdity are inseparable emotions in Jewish living. These emotions are found to be the key factors of existentialism. The choices made by the characters of Oz are different. Their attitudes towards place and living are diverse. Their desires and dreams are shattered and torn. There has always been a need for struggle and scuffle to exist. Wandering in search of a place has become their characteristic trait. Jews have also become a symbol of chaos and ramble. This results in identifying Jews as people of no land.

The aftermath of the Holocaust and anti-semitism damaged the psyche of every Jewish individual. Due to such commotions and combats, Jews tend to lack a sense of belonging either with place or people. Along the years, their sufferings are constantly due to the ethnic, religious and cultural practices and stands, in which Jews were never willing to draw closer to any compromise. So, the life of every Jew seems to be crammed with nothingness and so existence becomes meaningless.

The next chapter, “Text as Medium”, concentrates on the important components of postmodernism. The existential ideas that are discussed in the previous chapter would facilitate the further arguments. Mick Cooper, a counselling psychologist, in his foreword to Post-existentialism and the Psychological Therapies: Towards a Therapy without foundations by Del Loewenthal, states:
Yet existentialism, too, has the potential to do violence to the very existence that it strives to retrieve. When it calls, for instance, for human beings to “stand naked in the storm of life” or to courageously mark out their individuality by facing their ownmost being-towards-death, it risks re-introducing the very same system of norms, expectations, and “truths” that it had set out to overcome. In this respect, post-modernism can be understood as existentialism turned back on itself. It is a way of thinking about human being that consistently strives to side-step the pull towards systematization and reification – existential or otherwise. Post-modern thought challenges us to stay open to the unpredictability and ineffability of being-in-the-world: to an otherness that can never be defined. (n.p.)

The extensive study on the existential aspects in his works would thereby, facilitate the further scrutiny of Oz’ narration as postmodern in this chapter. Components such as fragmentation, fascination for images, self-reflexivity, meta-narrative, and the collapse of cultural hierarchy in Oz’ works are discussed in detail. Fragmentation in narration helps Oz to bring out the fragmentation of socio-political and cultural construct as revealed in the depiction of families and dialogues. Oz presents the socio-political conflicts through contemporary incidents and images relevant in Jerusalem. Similarly, the researcher in the fourth chapter highlights the cultural hierarchy and the unavoidable political changes in the tradition of Jews. To substantiate the arguments in this regard, Oz’ Rhyming, Michael, Fima, Night, Hill, and Tale are given primary importance.

With this introductory note, the researcher in the proceeding chapters would locate Amos Oz as an existential – postmodernist through different perspectives. A detailed analysis on the time and space, as an existential construct in Jerusalem forms the crux of discussion in the next chapter.