

# Nostalgia, Solitude and Belonging in Teju Cole's *Open City*

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## Sammendrag

Denne masteren tar for seg hovedkarakteren i Teju Coles roman, *Open City*, først utgitt i USA i 2011. Denne karakteren heter Julius og han er også førstepersonsfortelleren i romanen. Dette betyr at handlingen og skildringene leseren får innsikt i er skildret gjennom Julius sitt perspektiv. Julius er en ung voksen immigrant som bor i New York City, men som har en bostedsbakgrunn fra Afrika. Han har en mor fra Tyskland og en far fra Afrika, hvilket betyr at hans kulturelle bakgrunn er sammensatt. Det jeg diskuterer og undersøker i min oppgave er hvordan ulike temaer som nostalgi, ensomhet og tilhørighet er fremstilt gjennom Julius, hvordan han også kan anses å representere en moderne manns følelser og opplevelser fordi det er en kobling mellom fiksjon og virkelighet, og hvordan han kan anses å være en upålitelig forteller som er såpass preget av sin egen fortid at han har undertrykt emosjonelt vanskelige deler av den som han blir konfrontert med i nåtiden. Jeg undersøker hvordan Julius kan anses å preges av refleksiv nostalgi og hvordan han har et ambivalent forhold til sin egen fortid. Hans refleksive nostalgi viser seg, med tanke på min tolkning av karakteren, etter hvert å være rettet mot *nåtiden* i form av en sidelengs nostalgi som verken er rettet direkte mot fortid eller fremtid. Dette er eksemplifisert gjennom å vise til hvordan andre karakterer og hans møte med dem belyser ulike aspekter ved Julius og hans personlighet, i tillegg til hvordan sanselige inntrykk og opplevelser kan bringe fortiden inn i fremtiden og påvirke ham. Videre diskuterer jeg hvordan jeg anser Julius å uttrykke ensomhet; en ensomhet som ikke kan dempes av mennesker han har rundt seg. Hans sammensatthet er belyst og diskutert å være polyfonisk, i likhet med verket i sin helhet, og dette forsterker hans gjennomgående ensomhet. Julius rømmer til stadighet fra sin virkelighet og utfordringer i form av gåturer som ikke alltid har noe formål, der hans tanker og sinn også vandrer, mellom ulike tider, steder og episoder. Dette belyser hvordan han kan bli ansett å være en fugueur. Julius sin ofte lite målrettede vandring kan være motivert av at han føler en utilhørighet til samfunnet han lever i og at han derfor er på søken etter noen eller noe å føle tilhørighet til. Han er på søken etter sin identitet. I sin helhet kan karakteren Julius anses å være et ”loiterly” subjekt og jeg vil vise til hvordan han passer inn i visse karakteristikk av et slikt subjekt. Til slutt vil jeg vise til hvordan Julius sin troverdighet svekkes drastisk når leseren, som får lov til å utforske Julius sitt åpne sinn sammen med romanens utvikling, oppdager sammen med Julius at deler av hans fortid er fortrent. Dette viser hvordan han kan ha tatt på seg rollen som helt i sin egen historie selv om han kanskje egentlig er skurken. Etter nøye lesning av romanen utallige ganger vil jeg som leser argumentere for at historien fortalt av Julius om hans egne opplevelser påvirker meg i den forstand at jeg får tilgang til hans åpne sinn, som i stor grad kan sammenlignes med mitt eget, eller hvem som helst sitt. Derfor *føler* jeg med denne karakteren, tolker han og gjenkjenner og ser hans skjulte nostalgi som er vanskelig å få øye på umiddelbart, hans ensomhet og hans følelse av ikke å finne sin plass. Handlingens fremdriv er ikke særlig progressivt, men heller rettet i ulike retninger kontinuerlig, noe som gjør at jeg bedre forstår menneskets komplekse forhold mellom fortid og fremtid, og hvordan vi konstant påvirkes av, og faller tilbake til, ulike minner, og hvordan dette er skildret gjennom Julius. Jeg vil derfor argumentere for at denne romanen kan gi oss en viktig innsikt i en moderne immigrants sinn og at mine diskusjoner i denne oppgaven belyser temaer som er svært viktige i dagens globaliserte verden.

## Abstract

This master thesis concerns the main character in Teju Cole's *Open City*, first published in the United States of America in 2011. The character is called Julius and is also the first person narrator in the novel. This means that the actions and depictions visible to the reader are revealed through Julius' perspective. Julius is a young adult immigrant living in New York City, but his past home was Africa. He has a German mother and an African father, meaning that his cultural background is complex. What I am discussing in my thesis is the way various themes such as nostalgia, solitude and belonging are depicted through Julius, how he can be seen as to represent a modern man's feelings and experiences because there is a link between fiction and reality, and how he can be seen as an unreliable narrator that is affected by his past to an extent where he has repressed elements of his past that are confronting him in the future. I am investigating how Julius can be seen to be experiencing reflective nostalgia and how he has an ambivalent relationship to his own past. His reflective nostalgia can be seen, in my interpretation of the character after exploring him, to be directed towards the *presence* in understanding his nostalgia to be sideways directed and neither towards the past, nor the future. This is exemplified by showing to how other characters and Julius' encounter with them illuminate various aspects of Julius and his characteristics, in addition to how sensory impressions and experiences can bring the past into the presence and affect him. Moreover, I discuss how I perceive Julius to express solitude; a solitude that cannot be minimized by people surrounding him. His complexity is elucidated and discussed to be polyphonic, similarly to the work in its totality, and this amplifies his consistent solitude. Julius continuously flees from his reality and challenges by walking aimlessly, and his mind also wanders in these walks, between times, places and episodes. This illuminates how he can be seen to be a fugueur. Julius' frequently aimless wandering may be motivated by his feelings of a non-belonging to the society where he lives and that he therefore searches for something or someone to feel belonging to. He is searching for his identity. In his totality this character can be seen as a "loiterly subject" and I will show to how he fits into certain characteristics of this subject. Finally, I will point to how Julius' credibility is drastically weakened when the reader, who is allowed to explore Julius' open mind together with the development of the novel, discovers together with Julius that aspects of his past are repressed. This shows how he may have taken on the role as the hero of his own story when he might in fact be the villain. After careful and detailed reading of the novel countless times I, as a reader, will argue that the story told by Julius including his experiences affects me to the extent that I get access to his open mind, which to a great extent can be compared to my own mind, or anybody's. Therefore, I *feel* with this character, interpret him and recognise and notice his hidden nostalgia, which is difficult to spot immediately, his solitude and his sense of not finding his place. The plot's development is not particularly progressive, but rather directed in different directions continuously, which makes me better understand the complex relationship between humans' past and present, and how we are constantly affected by, and falls back to, our memories, and how this is represented through Julius. I therefore want to argue that this novel can give us an important insight into a modern immigrant's mind and that my discussions in this thesis illuminate themes and topics that are crucially important in today's globalised world.

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For my *Ádám*

## Introduction

Teju Cole's novel *Open City* was first published in the USA in 2011, and it is a recent fictional novel about a young Nigerian doctor, Julius. The novel represents this character's life in New York City, and the reader can follow him through his experiences, observations, utterances, wanderings and reflections throughout the novel. The plot is not particularly progressive and much emphasis is given to detailed depictions of his thoughts about his past, and an historical past. Julius continuously observes, comments on and reflects upon other immigrants and other characters whom he encounter. His experiences in the present are often taking him back to the past in his mind, letting the reader into his reflections upon his past as well as other's pasts. There is not much previous scholarship written on this novel. Most of the writings on the novel are reviews and I have also found an article by Pieter Vermeulen called "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's *Open City* and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism" (2013) that concerns some aspects of the novel that I will take into consideration in my thesis. Despite little scholarship, the novel did receive great reviews and won a number of awards after its publication. I therefore found it even more interesting to work with this novel and decided to write about it in three chapters of close reading further explained below. In the second part of the introduction I have also included longer passages from the novel to give the reader of my thesis a sense of how tangled it all is represented, but the chapters try to separate this tangledness. The final part of the introduction sums up the content of the three chapters in short and involves some overall thoughts about my thesis.

The focus in this thesis is on Julius. Julius is the first person narrative voice in the novel and this means that he is given power considering what is revealed to the reader and what is not. Simultaneously, the reader is encouraged to interpret the story. What I personally find interesting is the way Julius continuously is taken back to the past due to present experiences, sensory impressions and encounters with other major and minor characters. At

times, he also wanders away from reality. Sometimes his mental wanderings involve longing, and sometimes they are described to tell a story about a topic, theme or way of thinking. Interestingly, when the longing aspect is involved, it does not concern a clear longing for home, but rather for a time passed and for a belonging in the present that in the course of the novel never arises. This is an important way that memory and nostalgia are depicted and they further lead to the themes of solitude and belonging.

The thesis is consequently divided into three chapters where the first chapter concerns nostalgia, the second solitude, and the third belonging. The way Julius thinks and remembers is depicted through his words, either his own or when others' are retold, and careful elaborations of thoughts. Together, all of these depictions contribute to the creation and portrayal of Julius as a whole. I will look into the elements supporting and creating this character to try to explain and better understand him, how nostalgia is represented through him, and how the themes of solitude and belonging are conveyed through him.

I will argue that Julius' narrative can be understood to fit what Svetlana Boym discusses in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) as a subjective, reflective "nostalgic narrative" (50). I will in this connection look into the wanderings that are taking place in Julius' mind and try to understand why, how and when he is wandering in order to try to understand how nostalgia and remembering, as well as solitude and belonging, are depicted. Thus, the focus in the first chapter of this thesis is on nostalgia and how Julius's mind and memory are represented to the reader. I have chosen to focus on what Boym calls "reflective nostalgia" that "thrives in *algia*" (6) because I believe Julius' nostalgia precisely thrives in longing itself rather than a "restorative" one that "stresses *nostos*" (6). Boym also writes about nostalgia in general and includes a definition that I will use as a basis when discussing Julius' nostalgia in my thesis: "Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a



home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (1).

I will also suggest that nostalgia does not necessarily have to concern a longing for home only, but rather for something lost, something one once has held dear, someone one has loved or a precious memory of what has taken place earlier in time. I will try to show how this can be seen in Julius by showing to examples of him thinking of the past and his past loved ones without much comments on whether he actually longs for them. Rather, we see a struggle to deal with this longing that is difficult to spot and describe. This is due to his reactions after having re-experienced the past through memories and having thought of the past due to present triggers that evokes the past to return to him. Few comments are left to the reader about his emotions involved in his remembering.

I will discuss how nostalgia can possibly concern and be directed toward an undetermined and unspecified time and place, and be considered to regard longing for a different dimension, meaning a place that is not specified or perhaps does not exist or has never existed. The reason why I want to discuss these various aspects of nostalgia with Julius as a focal point is because I believe that this type of longing is in fact experienced by many people living in the world today, especially in a globalised world with a lot of migration. Nostalgia can be longing both for home and a homeland, for a memory or memories, a loved one or a place to belong, experienced in one's everyday life through remembering caused by experiences taking place in the present. I will also shed light on how Julius' wanderings might be triggered by his loneliness, amplify his solitude and also symbolise a search for belonging that he simply never finds. I will try to show how his wanderings, in mind and by foot, underscore him trying to escape from non-belonging and loneliness, but also how the wanderings emphasize his solitude and his fugueurness, how his mind wanders and, as mentioned, how his thoughts, remembering and nostalgia are revealed to the reader. I will

argue for Julius' subjective narrative to reveal a reflective nostalgia that might be difficult to spot and that I will refer to as "hidden" due to its fragmental appearance and unclear inclusion of longing for Africa, Julius' home from the past.

In the first chapter, I will explore Julius' reflective nostalgia, which Boym says "is more oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself," that it "cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space" and that it "can be ironic and humorous" (49). I will try to show how Julius' hidden nostalgia corresponds to Boym's characteristics of reflective nostalgia, for instance in how Julius remembers a treasured moment with his grandmother in great detail. I will also try to argue for this type of nostalgia, and nostalgia in general, to concern more than a longing for home, "mythical" or not, told through an "ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary" narrative (50). I will show to how Julius does not express clearly that he longs for home and that when he leaves Africa, he breaks with it, possibly because he is running away from dealing with the loss of his father and the poor relationship to his mother.

By looking into Julius' reflective nostalgic narrative, what is told through it, how aspects of the character are revealed and what aspects are revealed, I will try to discuss how he can be understood as a whole in the sense of representing something more than just a fictional first person narrator. I will do this by looking into how the representation of his mind and pieces of shattered, fragmented nostalgia is revealed to the reader, what these depictions might suggest and by considering him as "created" by elements or pieces. The elements I will focus on are other characters and triggers causing his mind to wander in time and space. I will try to argue for Julius being a whole created by illuminating, metonymically functioning elements.

In *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1998), metonymy is defined as: "A figure of speech in which the name of an attribute or a thing is substituted for the thing

itself” (510). I will discuss the functions of some chosen characters to bring forth various aspects of Julius. These characters can be looked upon as illuminating figures functioning as catalysts that bring out different attributes of Julius. I consider these characters to function, in a transferred understanding, as spatial representations of Julius as a whole due to associations revealed and triggered by them and due to what is told through them. By spatial, I mean that I will focus on the characters functions when thinking in a transferred, associative manner about them. I will look at them as “figures of speech” allowing aspects of Julius to come through and I will explain in the first chapter which aspects of Julius they illuminate and create associations to, and how they contribute to create a kind of “wholeness” of Julius. I will also look into how other triggers of memory, such as sensory impressions, initiate remembering.

The second chapter concerns the theme of solitude based on how it is conveyed to the reader, through Julius’ narrative voice. I understand him to represent a man searching for something that he can never find: he wanders physically and mentally back in time and to other dimensions where time and space are blurry, he remains solitary in the crowds and he can never find true belonging. I will focus on his wanderings, fleeing and fugueurness in the second chapter, and also look into how he, when seen as a whole, can be understood to be a compound created of various fragmentary pieces or elements. This will be discussed in the light of Bakhtin’s theories on polyphony. I will use Bakhtin’s ideas to show how the reader is invited to a dialogue with Julius and also how the structure of *Open City* fits the features of a polyphonic work.

I will also focus on how Julius says that he experiences solitude from the very beginning of the novel to the very end. He feels in the end as if he was in “God’s arms, and in the company of many hundreds of others, as the orchestra had sailed toward the coda, and brought us all to an impossible elation” (255). Then, standing on the fire escape, he “faced

solitude of a rare purity” (255). I will discuss possible reasons for his experienced solitude in the second chapter as well as show examples of when he feels solitary, how it is revealed to the reader and how his solitude can support him being a fugueur, wanting to escape and never finding belonging, nor a way out of the, as mentioned early in the novel, “solitary territory [his] mind had been crisscrossing” (12).

Suggesting that Julius can be defined as a “fugueur,” defined in Ian Hacking’s book *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (2002), means that he possesses fugueuristic characteristics and it can be seen in his aimless wandering (50). I will work with Hacking’s definition of a fugueur that, amongst other characteristics that will be discussed in the second chapter, involves the following: “A fugueur is someone who leaves home or a place of work...” and the “prototypical” fugueur is “curiously powerless” in his or her daily life (50). Further, a fugueur can go out on rather aimless wanderings and experience these wanderings almost like a mental attack, where the reason for walking and the actions taking place are almost lost to the victim when returning (50-60). When transferring such an understanding of a fugueur to Julius, we see how he in several cases feels abruptly brought back to reality after a longer physical, and mental, wandering, and how he feels like past and present merge when he wanders.

The third and final chapter concerns the struggles Julius experiences in the everlasting search for belonging. In the first part of the chapter, I will also focus on Julius’ nostalgia, but more in connection to his identity based mainly on Andreea Deciu Ritivoi’s book *Yesterday’s Self - Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*. Some discussions will also be based on Hans Georg Gadamer’s theories on hermeneutics. Further in this chapter, I will discuss and show examples of how Julius’s identification of other immigrants and his recognition of “colour” in order to show how he is searching for people to relate to.

In the last part of the third chapter, I will try to show how Julius can be seen as a “loiterly subject” represented in “loiterly literature,” both concepts elaborated on by Ross Chambers in *Loiterature* (1999) (8, 56). I will try to show how *Open City* fits into this type of blurred literary genre and how Julius, when analysed and discussed as a whole, fits into certain aspects of a loiterly subject, and also how the work in its totality can be seen as a loiterly work of art. Seeing Julius and the novel as loiterly means that there is an underlying criticism of modernity involved in the representation, and I will try to show how it might be directed towards the irony of the “openness” of New York City, as well as the some universal struggles of the modern immigrant’s life.

Finally, in the conclusion I will try to explain why Julius might be considered to be an unreliable narrator. I will also try to explain my understanding of how Julius as a whole, representing a fictional, though realistic, man living in New York City in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is created the way he is and what message that sends to me as a reader. The ending of the novel also emphasises my concluding arguments because the novel ends in the open, and the story is created by many fragmentary stories, elements and pieces, which create the wholeness completed with the open ending. I will claim that this ending supports my claim that the whole novel written in a reflective nostalgic narrative; created by fragmentary elements, leaps in time, memories, other characters, many voices, reflections, stories, times, with a fragmented, humorous, shattered narrative voice. The narration and the fragments serve the message of ambiguity, solitude, dis-belonging and an everlasting search for belonging. Moreover, the novel can be understood to be a loitering literary work and Julius to be a loiterly subject. This means that the novel can be understood to serve as implicitly critical, but also as a wandering novel that is “just loitering.” This will be discussed in the conclusion as a point of ambiguity.

In this part of the introduction I will look into the ending of the novel because I will not reflect upon it to a great extent in the chapters of my thesis. Still, I believe it is important for the reader of this thesis to understand how the open ending is represented in a tangled manner, and how it does not really end in a conclusion putting the whole meaning of the work together. Julius does not find belonging and he flees all the way to the end. Thus, my discussions of various aspects of this character are only emphasised in the ending where everything ends in the open and many things are left uncommented. I will therefore give a shortened resume of the ending of the novel with some comments here:

Julius buys a ticket to a Mahler concert and follows Mahler on an emotional and mental journey (250-51). He says that: “it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city, and enter into all-white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no discomfort to the whites in them” (251-52). His feeling of standing out in the sense of being coloured is emphasised: “The only thing odd, to some of them, is seeing me, young and black, in my seat or at the concession stand” (252). The way that silence is taking over the noise he dislikes in the city can also be seen: “The silence became total...and the music began” (252). Julius is then taken onto a journey together with the music: “The first movement of the Ninth Symphony is like a great ship shipping out of port...” (252). The importance of music and how it carries him away to a different dimension, in mind, is evident: “I was listening, as always, both with my mind and with my body...” (252). He stresses how Mahler is “communicating” (252) to him and moves into telling how other similar performers with “names that had, in the fifteen years since I came to the United States, come to mean so much to me, each name connected to a specific mood and inflection – balanced, extreme, sentimental, pained, consoling – on the symphony’s vast score” (252-53). In the final movement of the symphony Julius feels as if he can “detect the hundreds of private thoughts, of the people in the auditorium with [him]” (253). He then moves back in

time, reflecting: “How strange it was that, almost a hundred years ago, right there in Manhattan...” (253).

Further on, as he experiences the final movement in this intense way revealed to the reader, he sees an old woman. I will claim that his search for belonging is then emphasized in a distinct manner when he says that it was as if “I was down there with my oma, and the sweep of the music was pushing us gently forward as I escorted her out into the darkness” (253). The figurative language used to convey the dreamy-like action taking place in Julius’ mind when seeing a woman resembling his grandmother further emphasises how his mind works, how it wanders due to triggers in the actuality of the present and how it is personal and at times almost surreal: “As she drifted to the entrance and out of sight, in her gracefulness she resembled nothing so much as a boat departing country lake early in the morning, which, to those still standing on the shore, appears not to sail but to dissolve into the substance of the fog” (253-54). Julius then talks about Mahler’s death, and then: “The music stopped. Perfect silence in the hall...and the auditorium exploded with applause” (254). The reason why I include this concert and details from the depictions of it is because the open ending I want to point out is happening, possibly as a response to, or at least right after, the concert is finished. I consider this to emphasise Julius’ characteristics of avoidance of emotionally challenging experiences that I will discuss in my thesis, and the fact that he flees at this point in the novel illuminates that he does not change throughout the novel, but he remains a character unable to deal with the difficult reality and he flees from it instead.

Julius flees the concert hall and literally ends up out in the open, under the rain, on a fire escape and he does not realising what he is doing, supporting him entering a fugue state, until after it has already happened. The action seems to be a mental attack where he is not aware of his own actions:

Only when the door clicked behind me did I realize what I had done. I had used the emergency exit, which led directly from the fourth tier to the fire escape outside the building. The heavy metallic door that had just slammed shut had no external handle: I was locked out. There was no respite from the rain and the wind because I had also left my umbrella in the concert hall. And, added to all this was the fact that I was standing not on an exit staircase, as I had hoped, but on a flimsy fire escape, locked out on the unlit side of Carnegie Hall on a stormy evening. It was a situation of unimprovable comedy. (255)

Not only is it interesting to see how this flight toward the very end of the novel supports Julius being a fugueur, but also how he flees in response to an emotionally overwhelming experience of seeing an old lady who reminds him of his grandmother. I will try to explain more carefully how Julius throughout the novel keeps fleeing from reality and people to whom he could have come close. He also dwells in memories coming back to him, but avoids commenting on longing in a detailed manner and thus, he does not clearly acknowledge his reflective nostalgia. This results in nostalgia being fragmented and difficult to spot, and in him experiencing a solitude throughout that he never gets rid of. I will return to this scene in the second chapter.

Julius never manages to feel content and to take responsibility for his own actions. The most evident example of him repressing a disturbing memory is when he does not acknowledge to have raped his childhood girlfriend, Moji Kasali. She is a character first introduced when they meet as adults and Julius claims to have forgotten her, but then “the memory was restored” (156). However, it turns out later, also toward the end of the novel, that his memory was not restored after all. In fact, Julius represses this memory and does not respond to being told about it. Rather, his mind immediately wanders and a suspicion develops within the reader that he is not a completely reliable narrator, and that he has a



fragmentary, ironic narrative voice. Julius reflects, towards the very end of the novel, on the contrasts between heroes and villains and how we are all playing the hero of our own stories. I will try to show how Julius might be talking about himself in these reflections. I will argue that the ironic aspect of the whole story, and therefore also Julius as a whole, is emphasised here when he mentions how he is used to hearing bad stories and seeing through them when working with his patients as a psychiatrist. I quote this passage at length:

Each person must, on some level take himself as the calibration point for normalcy, must assume that the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque to him. Perhaps this is what we mean by sanity: that, whatever our self-admitted eccentricities might be, we are not the villains of our own stories. In fact, it is quite the contrary: we play, and only play, the hero, and in the swirl of other people's stories, insofar as those stories concern us all, we are never less than heroic...And so, what does it mean when, in someone else's version, I am the villain? I am only too familiar with bad stories – badly imagined, or badly told – because I hear them frequently from patients. I know the tells of those who blame others, those who are unable to see that they themselves, and not the others, are the common thread in all their bad relationships. There are characteristics that reveal the essential falsehood of such narratives. But what Moji had said to me that morning, before I left John's place, and gone up on the George Washington Bridge, and walked the few miles back home, had nothing in common with such stories. She had said it as if, with all of her being, she were certain of its accuracy. (243-44)

Julius might have played the hero throughout the story, when he is in fact the villain. He seems to claim that what Moji tells him is only a "bad story," and his lack of self-examination is emphasised in the passage above. This may indicate how the whole story, told from his perspective, might not always represent the truth, but rather his version of the truth that he has

constructed because it is easier for him to live with than the actual truth and the unpleasant events of his past, that he struggles to carry with him in the present. The unpleasant past causes him to reflect upon his family, for instance, with mixed emotions and to avoid acknowledging the guilt he should have felt when seeing Moji again, had he admitted to having forced himself on her.

When looking into Julius as a “figurative whole,” the themes of solitude and belonging also shines through as important themes, evident and included from the beginning to the end of the novel. Already on the very first page of the novel, Julius refers to his walking as “aimless” (3) and he says that he “had fallen into the habit of watching bird migrations” (3). I believe that the focal aspects of my thesis are relevant and visible already from the beginning due to the aimless wandering supporting him being a fugueur and his fleeing, and that he expresses that he is “amazed” by the birds’ natural immigration, which can be seen to stand in contrast to the unnatural human migration. The novel evolves around Julius’ thoughts, memories, encounters, observations and physical and mental flights. He continues to flee from difficulties and closeness and eventually he ends up in the concert hall, then flees from it and ends up in the open air of the, ironically so-called, *Open City*. The irony of the title of the novel becomes evident to the reader when understanding that Julius never does find his place, but that he rather continues to flee all the way to the end.

After Julius experiences what he calls “solitude of rare purity” after the Mahler concert (255), there is a lot of symbolism included in the final pages. Julius manages to find a door that takes him back inside, but before entering it, he notices the stars and reflects upon them:

Stars! I hadn’t thought I would be able to see them, not with the light pollution perpetually wreathing the city, and not on a night on which it had been

raining...Wonderful stars, a distant cloud of fireflies: but I felt in my body what my eyes could not grasp, which was that their true nature was the persisting visual echo of something that was already in the past...But in the dark spaces between the dead, shining stars were stars I could not see, stars that still existed, and were giving out light that hadn't reached me yet...To look into those dark spaces was to have a direct glimpse of the future...I wished I could meet the unseen starlight halfway, starlight that was unreachable because my entire being was caught up in a blind spot...My hands held metal, my eyes starlight, and it was as though I had come so close to something that it had fallen out of focus, or fallen so far away from it that it had faded away. (256-57).

Julius expresses feeling “caught up in a blind spot,” possibly indicating that he cannot run away from his life completely and into the starlight which can symbolise hope.

The final scene depicted in the novel concerns how Julius, “instead of going home” (257), “intended to see the water” (257) and therefore he ends up on a boat. This is his final wandering or final detour in the novel. He still acknowledges to the reader that he feels solitary; the cruise organiser is “sensing [his] solitude” (258) and leaves Julius to himself. When being on this boat, Julius moves back to reflecting upon birds and creates a circular plot. This time, however, it regards birds' deaths (258). He mentions how the light from a lighthouse originally in the place of the Statue of Liberty guided “fatally disoriented birds” (258) into Manhattan's harbour. Many of these birds died. In this anecdote, defined in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1998) as: “a brief account of or a story about an individual or an incident” with, commonly, “a specific importance” (39), the reader is told how close the link between life and death is, and how close Julius is to death when being on the boat. Finally, these birds can be linked to humans and the human condition of life because he reflects upon how things would be if the situation were turned upside-down.

Julius imagines a switch of positions between the birds and the humans in the beginning of the novel, and in the end he mentions that scientists decided that all these birds “would be retained in the service of science” and “be sent to the Washington National Museum” (259). They could then deliver “detailed reports on each death, including the species of the bird, date, hour of striking, number striking, number killed, direction and force of the wind, character of the weather, and general remarks” (259). The last sentence in the novel is the following: “On the morning of October 13, for example, 175 wrens had been gathered in, all dead of the impact, although the night just passed hadn’t been particularly windy or dark” (259). There are many ways to interpret the ending, but I choose to look at this final anecdote as symbolising Julius’ desperation and feeling of hopelessness. He ends up on the boat where the thoughts of the bird appear to him, because he avoids going home after the experience of the Mahler concert. Moreover, the multiple bird deaths are not easy to understand or explain because there had not been a particularly dangerous night. This might be transferred to thinking about Julius as reflecting upon life itself and how it is both fragile and complex. His desire to see the water may also emphasise this.

To bring this introduction to an end, I will again remind my reader that this thesis is divided into three chapters of close reading. The first chapter concern Julius’ nostalgia that I will argue to be reflective and sideways directed, and it also includes discussions about how Julius, when seen as a metonymical whole, is “created” by various elements, such as other characters, functioning to illuminate various aspects of him. Triggers to cause his remembering are also discussed. The second chapter concerns Julius’ solitude. A connection between reality and fiction is discussed, Julius and the novel as “polyphonic wholes” are explored, and finally, how Julius can be seen to be a fugueur. In the third chapter, Julius’ reflective nostalgia in connection to his identity is looked into. In the last part of the third

chapter, the concepts of “loiterature” and the “loiterly subject” are discussed and applied to Julius and *Open City*.

I have chosen to discuss various aspects of this novel and Julius through close reading in order to try to show how Julius might be representing a modern young immigrant living in the modern New York City. By being let into his open mind, I, as a reader, am allowed to explore *with* Julius. I can therefore better understand how the novel serves to depict concerns of a modern human being in general, and an immigrant in particular. The way we bring our pasts with us in the present and how we are affected by our pasts is illuminated. Moreover, the way Julius undergoes a solitary existence and feels a non-belonging to society causing him to flee, further emphasises how it might be difficult to live in an open city where you do not have people close to you and where people with many different cultural backgrounds are living together in a “melting pot.” The way the novel ends in the open serves to possibly suggest that there is no overall message of the novel; rather, the reader is allowed to explore Julius’ open mind, and this mind could be anybody’s mind. I therefore found it interesting to explore my understandings of Julius’ actions, reflections, remembering and his depictions given throughout the novel and investigate them further. This resulted in the three chapters to come and a conclusion where the ambiguity of the story in its totality as well as Julius are discussed and reflected upon.

## Chapter 1

### Nostalgia

#### Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction, Svetlana Boym writes about nostalgia and various aspects of it in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). This chapter concerns memory and nostalgia in general in order to give a basis of discussion for the focus area in the chapter; namely what Boym calls “reflective nostalgia” (49). As mentioned, in the introduction of her book, Boym defines nostalgia in the following way: “Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (1 Introduction). I will try to show in this chapter how Julius is expressing longing and nostalgia, but I will also suggest that he does not clearly express a longing for home, nor does he romanticise the past or Africa, where he grew up. The memories included from the past are often not memories of happiness and joy, but rather more serious incidents that it would be unlikely to long for, and yet they can be understood as a kind of cherished “shattered fragments of memory” (49) characteristic of what Boym calls “reflective nostalgia” (49).

#### Nostalgia

Julius’ nostalgia fits in many ways into Boym’s characteristics of reflective nostalgia, which has been defined in the introduction. The aspects of this type that are most interesting to Julius’ nostalgia are what concerns historical and individual time, the irrevocability of the past and human finitude, individual and cultural memory, that it cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space, and that it can be ironic and humorous (49). Moreover,

Julius' narrative can be understood, at least to some extent, to be a reflective narrative, meaning that it is "more oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself" (49) and that it is "ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary" (50). Julius never expresses a wish to return to Africa; rather he breaks from Africa after he finishes school there and his relationship to his mother is destroyed, which will be further elaborated on below.

However, I suggest that Boym's definitions and discussions of nostalgia can be even further expanded and that nostalgia can be understood as a broader concept also involving longing for a particular memory, a person whom one has loved or something else, not necessarily home only, that has occurred in the past. This fits into a more general understanding of the concept of nostalgia commonly used in today's language and world. We tend to think of nostalgia in the present modern time involves longing for positive memories, a positive day, a good hour, a nice sensory impression, a good emotional feeling, or to people one has loved or been close to. Nostalgia in the way I personally understand it does not necessarily involve a longing for a particular place or to one's family, it can also be a longing for an unspecific place or time or a moment of happiness that remains as a memory of something good in one's mind.

For instance, Julius expresses pain and feeling hurt in the process of breaking up with his ex-girlfriend, Nadège, but deals with this pain by fleeing and letting his mind wander to multiple topics and lines of thought. Another example of the complexity of his past in Africa and therefore to Africa as a country to long for as a past home, is that he explains in detail how he breaks with Africa and moves to America to study without telling the parents, after having experienced the Nigerian Military School there, which was his father's idea. He also explains how his relationship to his mother is complicated and broken, that his mother, too, "could never belong" (77) in Nigeria. All of these examples, and many more, can support his

nostalgia to be complex, reflective, shattered and fragmented, and possibly also directed toward something and someone to love and be close to that he can never find, nor choose to pursue. Julius avoids making close friendships and maintain contact or further develop friendships or relationships with people he meets. Also, he constantly flees and wanders and this escaping can be seen as a reaction of not being able to handle reality.

Despite Julius' possibly doubtful reliability that will be discussed in the concluding part of the thesis, the way he talks and thinks about the past, both when it regards his own childhood in Africa as well as previous experiences and history elsewhere, represents a thinking, reflective human mind carrying both a personal past and a collective past in the present. Much of the interpretation of the possible responses to his remembering are left to the reader to make, because the reader is invited to think and reflect upon what is being told all the way to the end of the novel where no concluding answer is given to why the stories are included. I have chosen to look into some minor and major characters Julius talks to, about, and reflects upon to emphasise how various aspects of his character are illuminated through them. This can also support the idea that his narrative is a reflective nostalgic one because they are included in a fragmentary manner, shedding light on various memories, emotions and other characteristics to create Julius as a whole.

There is a fragmented, shattered or hidden nostalgia in his remembering, which is caused by his leaving Africa and moving to America, and by carrying a mixed cultural background from his German mother and his African father. He is carrying a colourful past with him, and therefore he does not feel a longing directed specifically towards the past and Africa, *nor* does he feel belonging in America, and therefore his nostalgia is shattered and directed in an unspecified direction and toward something that he never finds or chose to leave behind.



## Julius' Nostalgia

Julius sometimes talks about his past in Africa, for instance when he mentions that: “My attending NMS, the Nigerian Military School in Zaria, was my father’s idea” (76). Still, a particular longing for the past or Africa as a home is often not clearly expressed, as is evident here. It appears as if there is an underlying desire to get away from home ever since the time of his school attendance to NMS. Thus, the irony in the title of the novel, *Open City*, is evident throughout the novel; America is considered to be the open land of freedom according to the American Dream, but Julius does not really find a belonging there, nor to his past home of Africa. This might explain why he does not long for home, but rather away or to someone he once held dear, such as his mother before their relationship turned bad, to his ex-girlfriend Nadège to feel loved, or to his roots, explaining the motif for his desperate search for his grandmother. (This will be elaborated on further in the final chapter concerning the theme of belonging in general and Julius’ travel to Brussels in a desperate search for her in particular).

Julius says in the very beginning of the novel that he has developed a habit of walking and that: “These walks, a counterpoint to my busy days at the hospital, steadily lengthened, taking me farther and farther afield each time, so that I often found myself at quite a distance from home late at night, and was compelled to return home by subway” (3). His walks can be seen as flights from reality and thus support him being a “fugueur,” who, according to Ian Hacking’s definition of the term, amongst other characteristics that will be discussed in the second chapter, involves the following ones: “A fugueur is someone who leaves home or a place of work...” and the “prototypical” fugueur is “curiously powerless” in his or her daily life (50). Further, as mentioned in the introduction, a fugueur can go out on rather aimless wanderings and experience these wanderings almost like a mental attack, where the reason for walking and the actions taking place are nigh lost to the victim when returning (50-60). In fact, Julius already on the very first page of the novel calls his own wandering “aimless” (3).

On one of these habitual walks he says that: “thoughts of my grandmother returned” (34) and this particular walk is made right after he has worked on a study concerning “the onset of depression” (33). Thoughts of his grandmother are also appearing to him on the previous pages after he experiences racism from two children who are asking him if he is a “gangster” due to his skin colour (31-32). After the incident with the children he says that:

I had a moment of illumination just then, a feeling that my oma (as I am accustomed to calling my maternal grandmother) should see me again, or that I should make the effort to see her, if she was still in the world, if she was in a nursing home somewhere in Brussels. (32)

This can be seen as a mental escape from the harassment he experiences, and that he is thinking about the grandmother because he longs for her, although he does not particularly express longing, rather he says that he *thinks* of her. Thus, this can be seen as a “fragmented” (Boym 50) longing for a loved family member from the past, but not from his past homeland, which is Africa.

When he is walking, his mind is wandering as well and this can be seen in how Julius moves directly on to talking about his mother after thoughts of his grandmother have reappeared: “My mother and I had become estranged from each other when I was seventeen, just before I left for America” (34). He then goes on to elaborate on the past with his parents and his grandmother. Reflective thoughts about the parents and a particular memory of his grandmother visiting them in Africa are then included. No particular present happening or sensory impression seems to trigger this memory, but they return to him when walking.

In this particular memorisation, Julius says that he tends to connect his estrangement from his mother “to [his] mother’s estrangement from her own mother” (34). This can be seen as what I will call “hidden” nostalgia, meaning a fragmentary and complex, reflective nostalgia as mentioned in the introduction. The way he remembers and returns to a memory is

evident in the depiction of a day spent with Julius's mother, father and oma following these reflective thoughts. Amongst other important elements in the retold memory the reader can see hidden nostalgia revealed in the memorisation, and I therefore include the passage almost in full:

That day, I treasured the silence I shared with Oma (her hand on my shoulder, kneading it); my parents were gone an hour, and in that hour we two communed almost wordlessly, simply waiting, sensitive to the wind in the trees nearby, watching the lizards scuttle over the smaller rock formations that pushed through the earth like prehistoric eggs, listening to the thrum of motorcycles on the narrow road some two hundred yards away. When my mother and father came back down, winded, flushed, pleased, they marveled about their experiences. About ours, Oma and I could say nothing, because what it was had been without words. Afterward...it was as though she hadn't ever come to Nigeria at all...As far as I could tell, she had returned to Belgium. And it was in Belgium that I imagined her now...I had hoped a normal relationship between her and the rest of my family would begin. But it wasn't meant to be... (35)

These thoughts illuminate the fact that Julius is thinking about his family and that a longing for closeness and belonging to them can be a motive for his search for his grandmother. The reader also understands that his nostalgia does not fit into what Boym calls "restorative nostalgia," which "puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps" (41). There is no lost home where the grandmother belongs or might live, if alive, anymore. Julius places her in Brussels where he last knew she was. The desperateness and hopelessness in the particular memory, the vulnerability felt for his lost past, the longing for a family connection, the processing of it, and the carrying along of the past can thus be understood as reflective nostalgia because it "dwells in *algia*, in longing and

loss” 41). I will suggest that it is moreover hidden, because Julius does not explicitly express that he is longing for the past or his family.

It appears as if Julius breaks with Africa and leaves the country after attending the Nigerian Military School, yet this can be seen as an escape from the difficulties and lost relations in Africa more than a joyful moving on to the land of The American Dream. NMS turns out to be a “turning point” for Julius (77) and it will be elaborated on even further in the third chapter. It did provide him with freedom from his family and possibly made him run away to America: “The end of my time at the school coincided with the end of my time in Nigeria” (84). He had secretly applied to colleges in America and this marks the beginning of his constant fleeing. His motive for applying to colleges in America might be that he wanted to get away from the difficulties he experienced with his family.

Boym says that: “Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways” (2). Julius is not longing for times past, not times to come, but rather to times, places and spaces that never existed and for a belonging and close relations that he never finds, nor ever had. His response to being lost is his “aimless wandering” (3). This can be seen as a response to him struggling to feel content because he struggles to find his place in the present due to the broken past and the uncertain future and his non-belonging to anywhere or anyone anymore. This can explain his “fugueness,” or his entering a “fugue state.” The word “fugue” is, in psychiatry, defined as: “A flight from one's own identity, often involving travel to some unconsciously desired locality” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). According to this definition, the way Julius wanders, both mentally and physically, can be understood as his escaping and fleeing from his own identity, and the immigrant identity will be discussed further in the last chapter. The way he loses track of time and place when wandering deep into

his mind and how he wanders aimlessly, can also be better understood when looking at this definition.

Sometimes his dreamy fugue state of mind can take him to highly interesting places and spaces. It is not revealed that Julius longs for the time of his childhood, and rather, it appears as if he tries to *find* something to long for or a time to romanticise. Boym discusses a paradoxical aspect of nostalgia when she suggests that “longing can make us more empathetic toward fellow humans, yet in the moment we try to repair longing with belonging, the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity, we often part ways and put an end to mutual understanding...” (3-4). Julius might be trying to repair longing with belonging, but he never succeeds in doing so. Thus, I will claim that he never feels truly content.

### Metonymy: Associations

The novel is in a sense created of small fragments of past, present, and other characters, and together they function as pieces of a puzzle that is never completed. Rather, these elements together represent aspects and parts of Julius’ mind and characteristics, meaning that they involve an aspect of association. “Metonymy” is in a rhetoric sense a “figure of speech” where “a word or a phrase denoting property or something associated with it” is involved (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Moreover, it refers to “the process of semantic association involved in producing and understanding metonymy” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The association involved “is typically by contiguity rather than similarity” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). I will suggest some other characters function literally as “figures of speech” illuminating various aspects of Julius as a whole, and that they can be understood to function as catalyst voices to support and create Julius’ wholeness. Their functions expand exceedingly from their presence alone, and to functioning to associatively illuminate various aspects of Julius. Much about Julius’ way of thinking, associating and remembering is revealed through

other characters and thus, they serve as catalytic elements to reveal aspects of him as a whole. These fragments illuminate associations to different parts of him, and stories about remembering, past, history, depression and other topics are told through them. They can therefore be thought of as metonymical figures.

Roman Jakobson has also written about metonymy in ways I consider relevant to the discussions of Julius. Jakobson says that: “it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called Realist trend...the Realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synechdochic details” (130). This also supports the genre of loiterature, which will be discussed more carefully in the third chapter. What the reader knows, is that Julius constantly shifts focus of narrative plot between times, places and topics, and he makes digressions continuously in the novel. They might not always have synechdochic functions, but they still deviate from the plot, in time or topic, and these digressions involving Julius’ nostalgia and characteristics to be appearing in a fragmented, somewhat hidden manner. The reader must look for elements of Julius found in other characters with metonymical functions and other triggers of memory to try to understand what he remembers and reflects upon.

I consider these characters to function, in a developed understanding, as partial representations of Julius as a whole, due to associations revealed and triggered by them and due to what is told through them. I will also explain below which aspects of Julius they illuminate and create associations to. The characters I have chosen to focus on are Professor Saito, Julius’s old teacher, Nadège, Julius’s ex-girlfriend, an unnamed cripple and some blind people who are identified, and V., Julius’s patient. I have chosen to leave out another important character illuminating Julius’s unreliability, Moji, his childhood friend, because she will be included separately in the conclusion.

## Professor Saito

The first character of importance is Julius's old teacher, Professor Saito. The reader is able to follow the Professor, as he is represented through the narrative voice, all the way from Julius' memories of their first meetings to the Professor's death. There are aspects of reflective nostalgia that are illuminated through this character because he escapes to the past due to fragmented and complex longing for it. Moreover, Julius' remembering of their past is revealed as well as his difficulties in handling the pain caused by the Professor's death in the present. I will suggest that Professor Saito reveals a way of understanding memory itself and the act of remembering and memorising, to illuminate a contrast between an "old-fashioned" man and modern society. He contributes to bringing forth characteristics of Julius, such as his difficulties in having close relations. The Professor experiences reflective nostalgia and thus functions as an element illuminating Julius' difficulties in coping with the present.

Professor Saito can be understood to experience nostalgia fitting to Boym's definition: "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (1). Professor Saito talks about the act of memorisation in the past in a romanticised manner, for instance when he talks about memorising poems: "During the war, he said, I committed many poems to memory...I need only the environment created by the poems. Just one or two lines, like a little hook...and that's enough to snag everything, what the poem says, what it means. Everything follows the hook" (13-14). Professor Saito then talks about how memorisation was a helpful skill before, claiming that he does not believe people memorise like he did back then anymore. Professor Saito functions metonymically as a figure of memory who contributes to shed light on Julius' struggle to fit in and find his place in the present and his past.

The Professor holds on to the past in the present and has an easy access to it because of the “hooks,” and that can be understood as a way of representing a longing for another time that might not be spotted immediately. Boym gives a possible explanation to why nostalgia can be difficult to discover and this may explain why the Professor and Julius, living in New York City in the 21st century, find it hard to feel content and feel the way they do:

I realized that nostalgia goes beyond individual psychology. At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a longing for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. (Boym, 2001 xv)

Not only does the Professor hold on to the past as a kind of rebellion against the modern idea of time, but this can also be transferred to regard Julius. I will suggest that he not only rebels against a modern idea of time, but that he also resents some of the characteristics of the society where he lives. I will therefore suggest that Julius can be looked upon as what Ross Chambers calls a “loiterly subject” (*Loiterature* 56). When the character is analysed and discussed as a whole, he fits into certain aspects of a loiterly subject. According to Chambers, a loiterly subject, exemplified in Jaques Tati’s persona, Monsieur Hulot or mon Oncle, which Chambers considers to fit the characteristics of such as subject, is:

amiable, eccentric, well-meaning, avuncular, but out of synch with the patterns and rhythms of modernity and hovering a bit anxiously on its edges. He is neither rejected by modern life (which just doesn’t have much of a place for him) nor explicitly and trenchantly critical of it (although everything about his personality expresses mute, implied criticism)...and there is something solitary about most loiterly subjects. (56)



Thus, Professor Saito illuminates the characteristics Julius possesses as a loiterly subject in the implied criticism of modern life. The loiterly subject and loiterature will be returned to and explored in the third chapter.

The first time Julius visits Professor Saito is when Julius cannot find quietness due to the New York Marathon and therefore chooses to pay him a visit. Julius is fleeing from the noise of the city that he dislikes and into a different atmosphere where conversing and thinking about the past is in focus. Julius says the following about their conversations: “In these conversations, as I now recall them, he did almost all the talking. I learned the art of listening from him, and the ability to trace out a story from what was omitted” (9). There are several interesting elements in this sentence. First, Julius admits to retelling the conversations from a position later in time and as he then remembers them, and therefore the reliability in the narrative voice can be questioned. Also, he claims that he learned the art of listening from Professor Saito and to trace the untold stories in the ones told. I will suggest that this invites the reader in turn to appreciate the art of listening, in this case to the narrative voice, and also to try to detect the untold in the story told by Julius. This also illuminates the importance of the act of reading.

Julius, as the narrative voice possessing power, says that his “presence energized [Saito]” (12). This is told as a fact, but the reader cannot know whether the statement is true or not. Moreover, the fact that Julius considers himself to be energising company may indicate that Julius thinks highly of himself or lacks the ability to evaluate his own characteristics because the professor’s opinion on this is not given. Julius’s difficulties with opening up is also revealed to the reader in the depictions of this meeting with the Professor when he tells him a bit about his walks “and wanted to tell him more but didn’t have quite the right purchase on what it was I was trying to say about the solitary territory my mind had been crisscrossing. So I told him about one of my recent cases” (12). Julius’s weakness of

allowing deep emotions to come through can be seen here because he admits to avoid talking about something difficult and chooses a case instead. This weakness may not have been revealed to the same extent if Professor Saito had not been included and described as a man to whom Julius feels a close relation, and therefore the purpose of the Professor becomes clearer.

Through the interaction with Professor Saito, the importance of music in connection to memory is also revealed and brought to light. Music can take Julius back in time and away in mind, and does so on multiple occasions throughout the novel. The link between music and memory is revealed through Professor Saito's words when he talks about his tutor at Peterhouse, Chadwick: "...it was he who first taught me the value of memory, and how to think of it as mental music, a setting to iambs and trochees" (14). The comparison of memory as "mental music" and "a setting to iambs and trochees" can be understood as a request to think of memory as something with rhythm consisting of a "metrical foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable" and a trochee, which is a "metrical foot containing a stressed, followed by an unstressed, syllable" (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* 408, 948). This comparison does not mean that memory *is* music, rather, it emphasises how memory and music can be compared due to their common dreaminess, rhythms and that they both can take a person away in mind into a different dimension. Thus, this comparison is a metaphoric comparison illuminating the transferability of linking one concept to another and to make associations according to the concept of metonymy. The direction of remembering and nostalgia does not have to be to a specific time or place, but rather what Boym calls "sideways," in the sense of being directed to a different dimension (xiv).

If memory is thought of in this way, the reader may better understand the way in which memory is a combination of various rhythms and syllables, meaning that it is complex; happening in the present, but concerning the past. Life is given to memory in the sense of

rhythm and pattern and one might be able to return to memories and memorisations when hearing musical “hooks”. Moreover, the importance of music in general and in relation to memory is emphasised. Boym also writes about music in connection to memory and nostalgia, in a way that suits the figure of Professor Saito and how Julius can flee when hearing music when she writes: “The music of home, whether a rustic cantilena or a pop song, is the permanent accompaniment of nostalgia – its ineffable charm that makes the nostalgic tear-eyed and tongue-tied and often clouds critical reflections on the subject” (4). This “music of home” is, as mentioned above, a metaphor indicating that the longing for home and what it represents affects the longing individual emotionally.

Also, by assigning a specific music to home in a transferred meaning, Boym emphasises how one associates certain sensory impressions with the ones characteristic of, and known from, home, whatever or whomever that “home” may be. This can be understood as music, or something known from home, that is being experienced in the present having the power to take a person back in time, in mind. The reader is allowed into how Julius both experiences hearing music and how he is affected by it. There are many examples of how Julius is strongly affected by music, but I will only focus on a few to illuminate various aspects of it.

One example is when he hears Mahler’s music in a record shop and it causes him “subliminally” to become “swaddled” in “private darkness” and entering a “trance” (17). He then describes how listening to this music makes him feel:

I sat on one of the hard benches near the listening stations, and sank into reverie, and followed Mahler through drunkenness, longing, bombast, youth (with its fading), and beauty (with its fading). Then came the final movement, “*Der Abschied*,” the Farewell, and Mahler, where he would ordinarily indicate the tempo, had marked it *schwer*, difficult. (17)

The reader is let into how Julius is emotionally affected when hearing this music and how he feels as if he is joining Mahler on his journey. It is also, in respect of nostalgia, important to notice how he feels as if he is even longing together with Mahler. Lastly, Julius says that he enters a “trance” when hearing this music, and which I will suggest indicates him *escaping* to music and entering a state of fugueness. Julius is again strongly affected by Mahler’s music toward the very end of the novel, but this experience will be discussed later in the thesis.

Julius also refers to Professor Saito’s remembering as a “reverie,” indicating a dreaming aspect, and explains how his remembering takes him away from the misery of his reality and the present conditions of his life: “His reverie took him out of the everyday, away from the blankets and the bag of urine” (14). This might however also be the case for Julius when remembering, but he uses another character to help him convey it. Julius is escaping from his work and his actual life when wandering, similarly to how Professor Saito is escaping from his sickness.

At the end of this first visit to Professor Saito, Julius returns to the streets and descriptions of the weather changes, as well as noise are included, possibly to intensify his mood: “the wind had become colder, the air brighter, and the cheer from the crowd steady and loud” (14). He is abruptly drawn back to the noise of the runners and reality. He meets one runner whom he pities, but only talks about the weather and crowds with him because the private thoughts are deflected (15). To Julius, the situation changes and he ends up pitying himself due to his solitude when he says: “It was I, no less solitary than he but having made the lesser use of the morning, who was to be pitied” (15-16). This self-pity is felt right after having spoken to Professor Saito, and it appears to be a reaction to him having entered the world of the Professor’s mind, and then abruptly drawn out of it. There are also other aspects of Julius shown through this scene with the runner that will be discussed in the third chapter. When Julius talks to Professor Saito, the metonymical function of this character as a figure of

remembering comes through and sheds light on aspects of Julius as a figure of modernity, living in a noisy reality that he is constantly fleeing away from.

## Nadège

Nadège is Julius's ex-girlfriend and she functions as a figure illuminating Julius's difficulties in handling pain and closeness. Moreover, Julius hints at a reflective nostalgia felt for her when remembering her, thinking about her and talking about her because she is someone he used to love in the past. He does not express it directly, but the reader can witness a clear battle within Julius concerning how to handle the break-up and in how he retells the story about the final break-up telephone call emphasising how he struggles to handle the pain of losing her. Thus, she functions as a character showing to Julius's reflective nostalgia because she is a figure representing "longing and loss" for and of the past (41).

Their final phone call is depicted along with, or together with, depictions about noisy women protesters and pleasant thoughts about a friend and jazz. This emphasises how Julius chooses to avoid things that hurt and the messiness involved in it. He says that the conversation he were to have with her interrupted the pleasant thoughts he had when he talked to his friend, that her "strained voice" stood "in counterpoint with the protesters" and that they had uttered the words of trying to work things out being distanced from each other, but these words had been said "without meaning" (24). Further on, he talks about how he cannot imagine her face and that all the noise faded until her voice was the only sound left: "I tried to imagine her in that crowd, but no image came to mind, nor could I picture her face as it would be if she'd been in the room with me" (24). By telling the story about the break up in this manner, Julius shows the reader that he struggles to handle the pain, and it may also indicate how the painful break up created a noisy chaos inside his head. He longs for *their* past and struggles to let go of it. If Boym's definition of nostalgia is expanded to concern more than longing for "home,"

the reader can understand that Julius' nostalgia is even broader because he also longs for his lost love.

Thoughts of Nadège can also take Julius back in time, and one example of this is in the beginning of chapter five, when Julius says that he saw: "a link between her and another girl I'd once known. That other girl had been hidden in my memory for more than twenty-five years; to suddenly remember her, and instantly tie her to Nadège, was a shock" (60). He explains that the link concerning Nadège's limp and the other, blurred and forgotten woman's connection to this was that she had polio. Nadège functions as a character to illuminate how Julius is struggling to handle a fragmentally, shattered and lost past, and the way Julius makes this rather irrational link shows how he searches for the past in the present, and how the past keeps returning to him sporadically.

## Others

Julius' reflective nostalgic narrative is fragmentary and often involves anecdotes. One seemingly such "random" story is given when he says he sees a cripple, then one blind man and then another blind man, and the story is given right after the painful break-up. Julius then says he saw that the second blind man "climbed the stairs out into the light" and that he "got the idea that some of the things I was seeing around me were under the aegis of Obatala, the demiurge charged by Olodumare with the formation of humans from clay" (25). Interesting here is how he mentions that Obatala did well in the task of creating humans until he started drinking. This may symbolise Julius turning to drinking or a state of blurriness after addressing the painful break up with, and the loss of, Nadège. His way of coping through fleeing and that he is in fact a fugueur on an aimless *mental* wandering is emphasised. Thus, I am let into a struggling human mind through these narrative "mind runs."

V.

The reason why V., Julius's patient, is important is because Julius talks about the conversations he has had with her in a detailed manner, revealing how she feels as if she is carrying the troubling past with her in the present and how this is making her feel depressed. She might function as a figure of a troubled mind, similar to Julius' mind. When this character is introduced in the novel, Julius utters the following about her: "I remembered a book I had wanted to look at for a long time: a book of historical biography by one of my patients" (25) and then he introduces her by elaborating on her case: "When I began treating her for depression at the beginning of last year,..." (26). The narrative voice lets V. put words to how she is carrying the past with her in the present: "And it's not in the past, it is still with us today; at least, it's still with me" (27). The reader can also in many cases see how Julius carries his past with him and also how he reflects upon a collective, historical past.

V. can be seen as a character illuminating Julius' own difficulties, concerns and difficult emotions because toward the end of the novel, his unreliability and lack of self-examination is revealed. It turns out that he has repressed the memory of raping Moji and thus his role as a hero turns. Julius reflects upon who the hero and the villain of our stories are and the "falsehood" of his patient's narratives, which turns out to possibly regard his own narrative as well:

And so, what does it mean when, in someone else's version, I am the villain? I am only too familiar with bad stories – badly imagined, or badly told – because I hear them frequently from patients. I know the tells of those who blame others... There are characteristic tics that reveal the essential falsehood of such narratives. (243)

This will be looked further into in the conclusion of the thesis. V. functions as a figure to give the reader an insight into what kinds of concerns and problems Julius' patients are dealing with, but the reader can also understand, due to the upside-down turning of truth and

falsehood toward the end of the novel, that he might not be true to his own problems and struggles. The fact that he is not admitting to Moji or to himself to have committed the sexual assault she claims he has and fails to respond to it, indicates that Julius might be the one needing a psychologist, or how ironic it is that he is supposed to help others sort out their mental struggles when he cannot figure out his own. Thus, V. functions as a character to illuminate the “ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary” (Boym 50) aspects of the reflective nostalgic narrative.

## Triggers

Julius’s remembering often happens when he is walking, and the walking away from reality thus becomes a literal image of his escaping from difficulties. In one case he explains how he enters a “sonic fugue” when his mind wanders alone. He states the following when reading in the dark before going to sleep: “In that sonic fugue, I recalled St. Augustine, and his astonishment at St. Ambrose, who was reputed to have found a way to read without sounding out the words” (5). He then further moves on to the changed views upon the idea of reading and that “a book suggests conversation” (5). This “sonic fugue” is thus an image of a flight that takes place in his mind and causes his memory to flourish, in this case about St. Augustine’s writings.

When Julius wakes up the next morning, he says that his “mind raced around itself, remembering fragments of dreams or pieces of the book I had been reading before I fell asleep. It was to break the monotony of those evenings that, two or three days each week after work, and on at least one of the weekend days, I went out walking” (6). This can be understood as one of the motifs for Julius’s wandering. Moreover, the fleeing state he enters when wandering, in mind or physically, is supported by his claim that he wants to “break” with evenings as these and thus wander. Also, the close link between his wandering mind and



his wandering body is intensified. The book he is reading before sleeping functions as a trigger for remembering St. Augustine's writings, but more importantly the fugue state that he is in when reading, sleeping and waking up triggers reflection and escape.

Another, more concrete trigger is music, as mentioned above in the part concerning Professor Saito. Julius begins on one occasion to acclimatise to the Mahler's symphony and to "enter the strange hues of its world" (16). Julius explains that: "It happened subliminally, but before long, I was rapt and might have, for all the world, been swaddled in a private darkness" (17). Then, he refers to the new state that he finds himself in as a "trance" (17). This is highly interesting because it supports the idea of him entering into a "sonic fugue" state even further. In addition, it intensifies the function and power of music to him. The strong emotional effect of music is also evident in the way he describes the experience of hearing this symphony when he sinks into "reverie," similar to Saito, when sitting on a hard bench that stands in contrast to his massive emotional journey where he: "followed Mahler through drunkenness, longing, bombast, youth (with its fading), and beauty (with its fading)..." (17). He is emotionally overtaken by the music, but still he finds it difficult to surrender to it completely in that public place. He runs to the train and the song follows him home, causing him to feel like his "memory was overwhelmed" (17). Julius is clearly strongly affected by hearing this symphony and it continues to affect him the following day. The next day, he wanders, possibly also as a response to his experience of being emotionally overwhelmed.

The movie theatre and a movie Julius is watching in the theatre also function as triggers of childhood memories and the way it is depicted shows evidence of loitering. Julius notices that the others around him, the audience, are mostly coloured, and he is watching *The Last King of Scotland* (29). When watching this movie, Julius's mind suddenly wanders to his childhood and memories of watching *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* with his cousins. He remembers the violence in this movie and says that: "the victims in *Rise and Fall* looked like

our fathers and uncles, with their safari suits, afros, and shiny foreheads. The cities in which this mayhem played out looked like our own city..." (30). This can be understood as him watching his own family and city suffer in an abstract way, and thus feeling the pain experienced by the victims to a greater extent. Also, the historical past is returning to him when being in the movie theatre: "...Idi Amin murdered some 300,000 Ugandans during his rule..." (30). Historical violence and concern for Africans are elaborated on here, and the way that he draws links to the past might serve as evidence of his complex, hidden nostalgia, expressed through a sense of despair against violence experienced by fellow Africans.

The American Folk Art Museum also functions as a trigger of the past in the novel because it is made to preserve and represent history and thus, experiencing the museum makes Julius feel like he walks into the past. Boym writes that: "In the mid-nineteenth century, nostalgia became institutionalized in national and provincial museums and urban memorials. The past was no longer unknown or unknowable" (15). Julius experiences the museum as a place of quietness and his mind wanders when walking in the museum. Boym discusses Baudelaire's theories about modern art, which I also consider to be relevant when trying to understand the importance of the museum and artistic forms. She writes that: "For Baudelaire, art gives new enchantment to the disenchanting modern world. Memory and imagination, perception and experience are intimately connected" (22). This can be relevant in the sense that Julius is taken away in mind when experiencing the art and the quietness in the museum.

Julius states that: "The sense of having wandered into the past was complete once I reached the third floor of the museum" and that "[a]s I contemplated the silent world before me, I thought of the many romantic ideas attached to blindness...Homer's blindness, many believe, is a kind of spiritual channel, a shortcut to the gifts of memory and of prophesy" (36, 37). Julius feels as if he enters the past in the present and the museum can be understood as a

figurative image of a time preserver because history can be seen in the present. Julius also reflects upon blindness when he is situated in the museum and it is depicted as if the quietness and silence he finds in the museum allows his mind to flourish.

After having said this, Julius moves into a personal memory of a blind man in Lagos from his childhood (37). Julius says that when this man “sang his songs, he left each person with the feeling that, in hearing him, they had somehow touched the numinous” (36-7). The triggering function of the museum as a gateway to memory is thus intensified. Julius is taken back in time to when he saw this man and says that: “I remember (or imagine that I remember) his large yellow eyes...” (37). The difficulties in remembering with an exactness is emphasised and also the sacredness of the blind man’s singing. Julius claims to have experienced it, but the reader cannot know for sure whether this actually happened or if Julius imagines having experienced it.

Lastly, Julius reveals how the images makes him lose track of time and that he “fell deep into their world, as if all the time between them and me had somehow vanished, so that when the guard came up to me to say the museum was closing, I forgot how to speak and simply looked at him” (40). This indicates that he enters a fugue state in the sense of experiencing a mental “attack” (Hacking 34) when being in the museum. He loses track of, and perspective on, time, and is abruptly drawn back to the reality when spoken to by the guard. I find it interesting how the reader is allowed to follow him on this journey and how he loses track of time, feels as if a leap in time between past and present vanishes and he feels as if he returns “from a great distance” (40) when he exits the dreamy state he enters in the museum. His careful elaborations and memorisation taking place in the museum is revealed to me as a reader as well, and I will argue that he is allowing memories to reappear due to the quietness he experiences in the museum that stands in contrast to the world outside. Thus, the

museum becomes a figurative place of quietness causing his mind to wander and it therefore functions as a trigger for remembering and to emphasise the way in which Julius remembers.

## Conclusion

Julius's nostalgia fits Boym's characteristics of reflective nostalgia, and his narrative voice can be seen as a reflective nostalgic one due to how the wholeness of Julius and his remembering are constructed by fragmented elements supporting and creating him as a whole. Moreover, his longing is directed toward an unspecified time and place; it is complex and concerns a lost love, lost times and simply a place to belong, which indicates his nostalgia to be directed "sideways," because exactly what he longs for, and in which direction his nostalgia is directed, is difficult to say. He does not have a romanticised past to hold on to, and he does not express clearly that he is longing for his past home. Julius longs for "elsewhere" and to *belong*, but he struggles to achieve this because he is not staying in reality; he chooses to flee from it, but in his fleeing, fragmentary depicted elements from the past are seen.

## Chapter 2

### Solitude

#### Introduction

In this chapter I will try to show how Julius and the story in its totality, created and supported by fragmentary, appearing voices, elements, and incidents evoking associations. I will also look into how Julius can be understood as a polyphonic whole represented in a fictional novel, and that there is a link between fiction and reality inviting the reader to interpret this character. This link is discussed by Marielle Macé and will be elaborated on in the beginning of this chapter. I will then discuss examples of Julius' acknowledgements of a motive for escaping reality and how it affects him, how he struggles to open up to other characters, and how he is affected by music in order to show the importance of elements such as these to intensify Julius' characteristics. Mikhail Bakhtin's theories on "polyphony" are relevant to the totality of Julius and the story as well as to the musical aspect, and Bakhtin's theories will be discussed in the part of the chapter called "Polyphony." Lastly, I will look further into Julius' aimless wanderings and how they contribute to creating him as a "fugueur" more than a "flâneur." These terms are defined by Ian Hacking in his book *Mad Travelers – Reflections of the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (1998), and Pieter Vermeulen also discusses this in his article "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's *Open City* and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism."

The overall focus in the chapter will be the theme of solitude. I will try to show how Julius is represented as a solitary character by showing how he avoids making close connections and friendships, how he is walking away from his life when wandering aimlessly and entering a fugue state, and by discussing how he might be in an everlasting search for something that it appears he never finds. I will suggest that he might be searching for a place

to belong, but that he remains solitary and never finds his place. The flat, nonchalant tone set in depictions of scenery and surroundings, and the way Julius leaves both his hidden nostalgia and his searching uncommented, in many cases emphasise the fact that he remains solitary and longs for something that is difficult to define and understand. He continues to wander, to flee from reality and to escape into a trance-like fugue state throughout the novel, and he struggles to share the feelings of solitude with other characters. Therefore, it is the reader who is invited to respond to his feelings of solitude and to try to understand the complexity of Julius and the story in their “wholenesses.”

### Solitude in Fictional Reading and Reality

In Marielle Macé’s article, “Ways of Reading, Modes of Being” (2013), she explains how fiction and reality are connected when she claims that:

We encounter, rather, forms intrinsic to life itself, impulses, images, and ways of being that circulate between subjects and works, revealing, activating, and affecting them. Reading is not a separate activity, functioning in competition with life, but one of the daily means by which we give our existence form, flavour, even style.

(213)

Therefore, we may, as readers, recognize and be affected by the sense of solitude Julius conveys experiencing. It can then be understood, due to the form in which the story of Julius is written, how he functions as a representation of a solitary individual living in New York City in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Julius is a reflective nostalgic narrator portraying his story in a fragmented, shattered manner and including aspects of solitary emotions. We can understand and even experience *with him*, the sense of feeling solitary, lost and alone despite physically being surrounded by others.

One example of this is given quite early in the novel, when he expresses how he feels when walking in the busy parts of the city: “the impress of these countless faces did nothing to assuage my feelings of isolation; if anything, it intensified them” (6). The reader may as a response to his expression of heightened feelings of solitude or isolation when physically being surrounded by others, understand that his solitude is personal and thus, it cannot be minimalized by the multiple faces around him. His solitude can therefore be understood to be found within him and to originate in something more personal, such as his hidden nostalgia or the feeling of being basically alone and feeling like an outsider due to lack of people close to him and people who love him.

Julius is continuously wandering and when walking, he enters a different state of mind. He says that: “One night, I simply went on and on, walking all the way down to Houston Street...and found myself in a state of disorienting fatigue” (6) and he also explains how walks like this one affects him: “That night I took the subway home, and instead of falling asleep immediately, I lay in bed, too tired to release myself from wakefulness, and I rehearsed in the dark the numerous incidents and sights I had encountered while roaming...” (6). The reader is allowed to enter a different reality and is therefore likely to respond to it in the sense of understanding Julius further. Macé gives a possible explanation to how this can happen because she claims that when reading, we “expose, determine, and form ourselves as subjects in every practice, as we establish ourselves through our way of life, ahead of the self, in realities outside our own domain, but which become part of our own private realm” (220). This may help us understand Julius’ reality, which is “outside our own domain” and follow him on his wanderings, be they physical or mental. Julius is lying alone in bed struggling to sleep and his mind is wandering back, trying to organise the previous impulses he has encountered. In this case he is physically alone, but he, as shown above, also feels alone when he is actually not.

Macé also discusses the reader's experience in regard to solitude when she refers to the French writer Pascal Quignard, who is "especially attentive to the reader's unique solitude: he describes a combination of escape, silence, and abandonment, with the reader alone and 'dwelling in his book,' starved for intimacy and the sensation of self" (225). When reading the story about Julius and the way he escapes in the sense of walking and fleeing, the reader, escaping to the book and Julius' story, is likely to follow Julius on his wanderings and also in his search for a sense of self. His search for identity and self can be seen in his reflective nostalgia. His intensified feelings of isolation amongst others serves as evidence of him not feeling content with himself and this is illustrated by how he describes that he has gotten a habit of going on "evening walks" (3) where his wandering is "aimless" (3) already on the very first page of the novel. Shortly after, a possible motive for wandering is given when he explains that he is walking in order to "break the monotony" (6) of the evenings of reading and mind wandering between a dreamy state and reality. He also describes how the walks sooth him as they are "a release from the tightly regulated mental environment of work, and once I discovered them as therapy..." (7). His indirect criticism of his stressful everyday life and his motive for walking are depicted here. Moreover, as Macé claims above, the reader can, when reading Julius' depictions of therapeutic walks and also experience self-searching in the process of reading.

Image-rich language also contributes to underline how Julius is feeling solitary among others. A detailed description shows how his solitude is personal and intensified by being surrounded by people:

Aboveground I was with thousands of others in their solitude, but in the subway, standing close to strangers, jostling them and being jostled by them for space and breathing room, all of us re-enacting unacknowledged traumas, the solitude intensified. (7)



The subway functions as an image of how Julius is turning to personal solitude more easily when he is among others, whom he has also assigned solitude to, as if he knows that they are feeling a similar personal solitude as him. Moreover, the fact that he calls the other “strangers” sheds light to how he feels as if he cannot share his solitude with them in order to lighten it. He says that he can choose what to do, where to go and what to see, and that the streets “served as a welcome” to “freedom” in contrast to the subway stations which “served as recurring motives in my aimless progress” (7). Julius comments on how he sees people “hurrying down into underground chambers” and that it is “perpetually strange” to him and he feels like “all of the human race were rushing, pushed by a counterinstinctive death drive, into movable catacombs” (7). This also shows that Julius possesses characteristics of the loiterly subject such as being critical to the rushing people and feeling solitary, and this will be discussed explicitly in the last chapter.

Julius is however not really alone. He has friends and relations to people that he mentions sporadically in the novel, and some of them have been discussed in the preceding chapter. As a reader of how he talks about, talks to and encounters these other characters, I will suggest that he struggles to develop close relations to anyone else in the novel and that this may intensify his solitude further. Also, he consequently avoids to maintain relations that are initiated when the other character is getting too close to him in one way or another, or when aspects of pain are involved.

One of the characters Julius mentions a lot, but fails to get too close to is the previously discussed character, Professor Junichiro Saito. In this chapter I will focus on different characteristics of Julius that are made clearer through this character, now regarding solitude. Julius says the following:

I told him a little about my walks, and wanted to tell him more but didn't have quite the right purchase on what it was I was trying to say about the solitary territory my mind had been crisscrossing. So I told him about one of my recent cases. (12)

Not only is Julius revealing to the reader that he urges to talk to the Professor about his feelings of solitude, but he also admits to how he finds it difficult and I consider his actions to indicate that he is choosing the easy way out. Julius continuously avoids sharing his concerns with others and he therefore keeps his solitary feelings to himself.

Moreover, towards the end of the depictions of their relation, Professor Saito is dying and Julius avoids visiting him before it is too late, saying: "Avoiding the drama of death, its unpleasantness, had been my inadvertent idea in not going there" (183). Julius's characteristics of avoidance of things he experience as emotionally challenging are emphasised through this character. Julius' reactions to sorrow and pain are also revealed to the reader in connection to the Professor's death, and this is shown through his reflections: "perhaps I had overvalued the friendship, and the importance of it had been mine alone," but he concludes that it is "the shock" speaking to him (184). In his dealing with the loss, Julius reaches out to Nadège, his ex-girlfriend, but when he realises that she has already moved on he feels that "[s]o many griefs interfered with each other" and he turns to music and puts on "Bach's Coffee Cantata," but in his sorrow, not even music helps him because he feels like he is "insensible" to it (185). Julius then starts walking and ends up in Chinatown.

Another character illuminating aspects of Julius' personality is a prisoner that he visits. The prisoner functions to show how Julius avoids further developing relations. He visits this prisoner and talks a lot with him, promises to return, but never does. Julius comments on his own personality and how he falls in love with an idea of himself that he cannot live up to. The prisoner tells him a story and Julius says that: "I told the story to Nadège on our way back into Manhattan that day. Perhaps she fell in love with the idea of

myself that I presented in that story. I was the listener, the compassionate African who paid attention to the details of someone else's life and struggle. I had fallen in love with that idea of myself" (70). Again this supports Julius wanting to develop close relations and share emotions, but he struggles to do so. Also, it may hint to how Julius wishes to possess different characteristics, such as humbleness and humaneness, and that he thinks this might have changed things with his lost love, Nadège. Following the admission of falling in love with this idea of himself, he reflects upon whether he might have missed something that resulted in the ending of their relationship. Thus, the vulnerable and reflective character acknowledging deep, personal and difficult feelings shines through, but only for a second.

### Forms of Conveying Solitude as a Theme

There are several stylistic devices that function as illuminating elements to amplify Julius, his mood, his emotions, his concerns and his longing and sense of non-belonging resulting in solitude and hopelessness. Tone is one of these and it will be discussed here together with symbolism. I will also include evidence of created contrasts to illuminate the complexity of his solitude.

Symbolism refers to the usage of "an object...which represents or 'stands for' something else" (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms* 885). Tone is defined as the following:

The reflection of a writer's attitude (especially towards his readers), manner, mood and moral outlook in his work; even, perhaps, the way his personality pervades the work. The counterpart of tone of voice in speech, which may be friendly, detached, pompous, officious, intimate, bantering and so forth. (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms* 920)

There are many ways, also exceeding the ways given in the definition of tone, that a tone of the work, a particular incident, the plot in its wholeness and Julius as a character, are implied

and given to the reader. The tone can be understood to fit Julius' various moods and actions and I will claim that the dominating tone in the novel is flat, nonchalant and affectless.

I will focus on some examples to show how the tone is set in the novel. The first is when Julius struggles to respond emotionally to realising that his neighbour has passed away. He comforts himself by thinking about the fact that he has not spoken to the husband of the dead wife since before she passed and he says that: "I felt a certain sense of relief at this, which was taken over almost immediately by shame. But even that feeling subsided; much too quickly, now that I think of it" (21). He acknowledges here to fail to feel bad about not having realised that she has passed and by trying to comfort himself with thinking about how he has not seen the neighbours in a long time. Julius admits to feeling a hint of shame, but then this feeling passes quickly, and his characteristics of not dealing with emotional disturbances are thus his characteristics of avoidance intensifies a flat, affectless tone. Moreover, this example shows that he is not involving himself with his neighbours and that he lives in a solitary manner without creating relations to the people living next to him, and his attitude of unknowingness directed toward his neighbour signals the tone.

The surroundings he describes sometimes fit his mood and therefore these depictions also contribute to create the tone, as for example here: "On an afternoon of heavy rain when ginkgo leaves were piled ankle-deep across the sidewalk looking like thousands of little yellow creatures freshly fallen from the sky, I went out walking" (33). Not only does the including of the "heavy rain" contribute to create a solitary tone, but also this description is given as an introductory sentence to the third chapter and may therefore function as a response to the ending of the previous chapter. The action of the last part of that chapter is that Julius experiences racism from two kids due to his skin colour. After the incident, which he leaves uncommented, he has "a moment of illumination" (32) and feels like "my oma (as I am accustomed to calling my maternal grandmother) should see me again, or that I should

make the effort to see her...” (32). It appears as if he is searching, in his mind, for some support, but instead of facing it, he turns to thoughts about his grandmother, and a tone of flatness due to avoidance and non-response, at least emotionally, is again emphasised.

The fact that Julius wanders away from his difficulties and reality that he struggles to cope with and feel content with, further supports a flat tone in regard to emotional response. His wanderings function as a counterpoint to the busy days at the hospital, and one day, after a “difficult day at the inpatient unit” (43), Julius experiences a “heavy mood” (43) settling on him. He then responds to this mood by starting a longer walk where he ends up lost “out in the brisk marine air” and he “could find neither a way into the building [of Trinity Church] nor anyone to help [him]” (51). He then feels “lulled by the sea air” and thinks that it “would be good...to stand for a while on the waterline” (51). The waterline may symbolise a different dimension, openness, something unknown or somewhere else. Instead of sharing his “heavy mood” with anyone, he walks alone on a therapeutic walk and his characteristics of an inability to seek comfort in other characters instead emphasises an avoiding tone. After this happening, Julius feels “as though the entire world had fallen away” and he says: “I was strangely comforted to find myself alone in this way in the heart of the city” (52). Water thus becomes a symbol of regeneration that can soothe Julius in his complete solitude and he even utters that he wants to “slip gently” into it, possibly as an easy escape when considering how he faces the water when walking away from actual emotional difficulties (56).

Another stylistic device used to illuminate Julius’ solitude is contrasts. Above, Julius feels solitude in the crowds and he feels strangely comforted by it. A contrast between solitude and togetherness is created and the ambiguity of his experience of solitude is intensified. Julius feels alone in the crowds and when physically being alone, and the feelings of solitude does not immediately evoke positive associations. Still, evidence of how Julius appreciates solitude and quietness is given when he visits a gallery and says the following:

“The silence was even more profound, I thought, when I stood alone in the gallery, when the private world of the artist was total in its quietness” (38). There is a visible contrast between togetherness and its noise which is unappreciated by Julius, and aloneness, privacy, quietness and solitude.

Yet another symbol used to convey the theme of Julius’ solitude is music. This is because music has the ability to affect Julius’ emotions and through careful depictions of how Julius experiences music, the reader is let into his personal solitude. Throughout the novel, Julius continues to be strongly affected by music, and music can take him to places in his mind where his emotions are heightened and therefore also, in some cases, where his feelings of solitude are illuminated. As mentioned when discussing Professor Saito earlier, the Professor refers to the value of thinking of memory as “mental music” (14), and when understood in an associative way, this can mean appreciating the rhythm and complexity of it.

An example of this is given when Julius is overwhelmed by the opening of Mahler’s late symphony and he escapes into a “trance,” similar to how he enters a different state when wandering, where he follows Mahler on his emotional journey. Julius’ emotional journey can then again be followed by the reader, and thus, we are allowed to experience his “private darkness” and his unique solitude (17). I quote the passage at length:

It happened subliminally, but before long, I was rapt and might have, for all the world, been swaddled in private darkness. In this trance, I continued to move from one row of compact discs to another, thumbing through plastic cases, magazines, and printed scores, and listening as one movement of the Viennese chinoiserie succeeded another. On hearing Christa Ludwig’s voice, in the second movement, a song about the loneliness of the autumn, I recognized the recording as the famous one conducted by Otto Klemperer in 1964. With that awareness came another: that all I had to do was bide my time, and wait for the emotional core of the work, which Mahler had put in

the final movement of the symphony. I sat on one of the hard benches near the listening stations, and sank into reverie, and followed Mahler through his drunkenness, longing, bombast, youth (with its fading). Then came the final movement, “*Der Abschied*,” the Farewell, and Mahler, where he could ordinarily indicate the tempo, had marked it *schwer*, difficult. (17)

Interestingly, Julius includes details of how the music affects him in the sense of enabling him to wander with Mahler “through his drunkenness” and “longing,” and that he enters a trance when hearing the music. Julius also expresses how he can “acclimatize to the music” (16) and “enter the strange hues of its world” (16). This illuminates how Julius is escaping to music and how it invites him to enter a world outside *his* domain, similarly to how the reader can enter Julius’ world when reading about how he is affected by hearing the symphony. Mahler’s symphony is polyphonic in the sense of being created by simultaneous tones and sounds because in regard to music, “polyphony” refers to “the simultaneous and harmonious combination of a number of individual melodic lines; the style of composition in which melodic lines are combined in this way” (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and Julius can also be analysed as a “polyphonic whole,” meaning that there are many voices and elements creating him.

## Polyphony

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin discusses the concept of polyphony in textual context. He is an important thinker who developed theories on concepts relevant to my investigation of Julius in many ways. I will look further into some chosen concepts that he defines in order to show how Julius can be understood as a whole created by elements supporting and creating him. Julius can also be seen as a part of the whole of the novel. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist have written about Bakhtin’s theories, and in their glossary, they explain how

Bakhtin claims that there can be “no actual monologue,” (Emerson and Holquist, 1990 426) but that everything is part of a greater whole.

The first definition that will be taken into consideration is of the term “dialogism” (426), which can also be connected to Macé’s thinking of how the reader is invited into Julius’ reality. Emerson and Holquist mentions how Bakhtin has defined “dialogism:”

Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of the greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. (426)

Bakhtin’s definition of this term concerns language primarily, but I will try discuss a possible broader understanding of this term. When reading the story told through Julius’ narrative voice, the reader is invited into a dialogue with him. Moreover, when considering Julius as a whole created by fragmental elements, he can be considered to be a character involving “polyphony.”

In *Dialogue and Critical Discourse* (1997), Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson contribute with discussions of Bakhtin’s theories and definitions and their complexities. They say that Bakhtin distinguishes between “heteroglossia” and “polyphony,” and that polyphony “pertains to a specific sense of truth coupled with a specific relation of author to heroes” (258). A polyphonic work stands in contrast to a “monologic” work where “only the author has the direct power to mean” (259). In a polyphonic work, the reader is asked to engage directly with the ideas of characters, much as the reader engages with the ideas of the author (259). Not only is the author important, but also: “In a polyphonic work, plot...is...the way of setting up the dialogues, and...is, when taken as a whole from the beginning of the work to the end, merely the record of whatever happened to result from the great dialogues and free utterances (or actions) of the characters” (260). I will suggest that *Open City* fits into these



characteristics. This is because it is constructed from Julius' depictions of various events, its plot takes place in various times and places, and its structure is therefore seemingly random, jumping between times and places through Julius' narrative voice.

The structure of the novel also supports my claim that Julius never finds true belonging and therefore remains solitary because his solitude is evident and expressed from the beginning to the end. According to Bakhtin's theories, "A closely related consequence of polyphony is that the work lacks *structure* in the usual sense, that is, a pattern designed to be contemplated (after the process of reading is over) synchronically" (Morson and Emerson 260). As discussed in the first chapter, Julius wanders not only physically, but also figuratively back in time, and this affects the structure in that it moves in time and place and does not evolve chronologically all the time. I will suggest that the way the novel is built up and the way Julius wanders in narration between various instances, characters, experiences, times and utterances support the idea that the novel is a polyphonic work of art.

Morson and Emerson further say about the alternative structure of a polyphonic work, that: "Instead of structure, polyphony depends on and preserves the 'eventness' of each event, its open-endedness in its own present moment" (260). The whole novel reflects this non-structural way of proceeding, and the ending can support this theory even further. It is open in the sense that Julius finds himself fleeing out of the concert hall where he has heard Mahler's music once again, and he finds himself locked outside on the fire escape where he faces "solitude of rare purity" (255). Thus, Julius' solitude remains toward the end of the novel and Julius does not evolve toward a more content character, but continues to flee, all the way to the end.

## The Fugueur vs. The Flâneur

I will also suggest that Julius can be seen as a fugueur, much because of how he wanders and the way his wandering is depicted. I will use Ian Hacking's definitions of a fugueur in my discussions, but first, I will look into Pieter Vermeulen's discussions of the novel in "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's *Open City* and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism" (2013) in regard to this concept. Vermeulen claims that: "As the novel progresses, its apparent celebration of the exemplary cosmopolitan figure of the *flâneur* makes way for the decidedly less glamorous figure of the *fugueur*" (Vermeulen 40). As discussed above, Julius might not be a fugueur to its full definition, but he may also possess some characteristics of the flâneur. Still, I agree with Vermeulen in that when following Julius through the novel and looking at him as a whole after having read the whole story, he can be understood to belong to the characteristics of a fugueur rather than a flâneur and we see several examples of this in the text.

Julius' wanderings illustrate a description of suffering from an "attack" resulting in spontaneous walks, and one example is given already on the very first page of the novel where Julius is telling about his evening walks: "These walks, a counterpoint to my busy days at the hospital, steadily lengthened, taking me farther and farther afield each time, so that I often found myself at quite a distance from home late at night..." (3). The contrast here is interesting, and the word "counterpoint" may be one of the keys to unlocking the character's otherwise monotonous tone of description. In music "counterpoint" generally refers to the relationship between themes, and the "relationship between two or more voices that are independent in contour and rhythm, and interdependent in harmony" (*New World Encyclopedia*). If we bring this over into a reading of Julius' narrative, the counterpoint may serve not only to depict the contrast between the busy workday and the evening walks, but perhaps also between these walks as a kind of continuation of his own immigration and what

he calls “the miracle of natural immigration” (4) when referring to the miracle of bird migration. A contrast between natural and unnatural migration is created in this figurative language and it may serve to convey how human migration is not as natural as bird migration, but also to emphasise that even the birds are “solitary” (4) in their crowd.

The many-voicedness involved in the definition of counterpoint may be linked to Bakhtin’s definition of polyphony in the sense of how more voices or elements are functioning together to create a whole and this link is emphasised in the following example where Vermeulen mentions the contrast between Julius’ walks and the busy days at the hospital, and says the following: “While the latter are associated with tight regulation, perfection, and competence, the trope of the ‘counterpoint’ suggests that the complement of the nightly walks helps to compose Julius’s life into a harmonious, polyphonic whole” (Vermeulen 46). Still, I will suggest that Julius’ life never becomes a harmonious, polyphonic whole because he never finds what he is really looking for and he is not a dynamic character evolving into something else than what he started out as. Instead, the walks may function as therapy.

The contrasts and complexities that are formed contribute to helping the reader understand Julius’s solitude even further because they emphasize how the aimless, escaping walks are helping Julius to achieve harmony and a connectedness in a “polyphonic whole,” even though he is mentally more alone when walking. Polyphony can, additionally to Bakhtin’s definitions discussed above, be understood according to a musical definition, meaning that “two or more tones sound simultaneously” and it is “usually associated with counterpoint” (<https://global.britannica.com/art/polyphony-music>). Thus, these contrasts and counterpoints contribute to emphasise the complexity of Julius’s solitude. His motif for walking is conveyed, and the contrasts between the present, everyday life in the big city and his personal solitude are intensified. Julius remains a wandering, solitary fugueur.

Ian Hacking elaborates on the concept of the fugueur in *Mad Travelers – Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (1998). Similarly to how nostalgia was originally looked upon as a disease, it is also possible to look upon aimless wandering as a mental illness. Hacking discusses a patient defined as “the first fugueur,” named Albert (Hacking 7). Albert “traveled obsessively, bewitched, often without identity papers and sometimes without identity, not knowing who he was or why he travelled...” (7) Some of the characteristics depicted in Albert can be seen in Julius and the way he wanders as well. In describing Albert’s condition, Hacking writes the following:

He traveled obsessively, bewitched, often without identity papers and sometimes without identity, not knowing who he was or why he travelled, and knowing only where he was going next. When he “came to” he had little recollection of where he had been, but under hypnosis he would recall lost weekends or lost years. (7)

Hacking moves on to saying that in 1887, “mad travel” became a “specific, diagnosable type of insanity” (8). Julius is walking aimlessly throughout the novel and as mentioned above, he defines his wandering as “aimless” already on the very first page of *Open City* (3). As a reader, it is difficult to prove Julius’ wandering to support all the characteristics of Albert’s walking. Still, evidence of Julius walking without any particular aim in mind and continuing to walk for longer periods are given, as well as how he experiences his walks as “therapy” (7).

Julius is not only walking physically, but he is also wandering mentally. Whether the fugueur described by Hacking is doing this is difficult to say. Julius describes entering a “trance” (17) when hearing Mahler’s music and a trance may support him being a fugueur because it is a different state of mind where reality might be difficult to grasp and rather, Julius follows Mahler on an emotional journey in this trance state, and this experience takes place when he is walking aimlessly. Thus, his mental wanderings are strongly connected to his physical ones. After this musical experience, he says that the activities of the following

day were given “new intensity” (17) and this can support him being affected by it, not by crying, similarly to Albert, but by *sensing* in a heightened manner.

Hacking says that the fugueur was “sober, clean, respectable...” and “by no means permanently destitute” (27). Julius is a working, young adult, seemingly functional and he is not wandering, either physically or mentally, when affected by drugs or alcohol. The fugueur stand in contrast to the “flâneur,” which is “the intensely curious stroller, the traveler untroubled by time, who notices everything” (28). Julius can also fit into some of these characteristics in that he notices a lot, but he tends to fall back to memories and dwell upon these when walking, and this could also mean that he is not attentive to what is really taking place around him in the time of walking. One example of this is when he walks out on a night of heavy rain and he says that he “went out, umbrella in hand, with the idea that I might walk through Central Park, and on to the area just south of it, and as I entered the park, thoughts of my grandmother returned” (33-34). Julius is then returning to a memory of the past and the reader is left in the dark to what is taking place around him in the actual time of walking; for all I know, so might he be.

Hacking includes the ordinary meaning of the word “fugue,” which means “flight” (28). I have tried to show how Julius is fleeing from reality and this suggests that he is a fleeing character, a fugueur, even further. It is not explicitly given what he is searching for or why he is fleeing, but in the example given above where thoughts of his grandmother returns when he walks, it is reasonable to think that he might be searching for some clearance of the past, or a belonging that he cannot find in the present. This may be further seen in how he feels solitary when surrounded by countless faces, because in the end, his walking might be initiated by a personal searching for family and belonging, and thus, strangers cannot minimalize his feelings of solitude.

Hacking describes Albert's journeys as "obsessive," "uncontrollable" and "systematically pointless" (30). He also mentions how a "fugueur remembers where he has been, pretty well. He has an irresistible desire to travel without any loss of consciousness or any of the usual stigmata of hysteria" (47), not like a fugue where "there is no memory of the act at all" (47) after it has taken place. Julius depicts however, that when he reenters reality after walking, "it was with the feeling of someone who had returned from a great distance" (49). This suggests that he loses track of time and place and entering a trance state where parts are lost or confusion is experienced. Also, it signals how he escapes in his mind to a different dimension and therefore he feels like he returns from somewhere far when his mental wandering ends.

I will consequently suggest that Julius fits the definitions of a fugueur as "someone who leaves home or place of work..." and who "returns home but sooner or later a new attack provokes a new escapade" (Hacking 50). Lastly, the fugueur has to have a "household" (50) meaning a home or a place to live. Julius fits into these characteristics in the definitions. Moreover, when looking into examples from Albert's travels, similarities can be seen in Julius' walks. I will include a passage from Albert's utterances here that can be compared to how Julius depicts a wandering where he ends up in a museum. Albert gives detailed descriptions of the surroundings, of the changes in his mind and mood in this passage through vivid, image-rich language and also expresses a possible longing or a reflective nostalgia for the past due to the thoughts given of his mother that appear to him. I quote this passage at length:

"I saw," he said, "the leaves of the trees fading, all nature invaded by a fog; the road was desolate. I had no strength, I was in pain, and I began to cry. I thought of my poor mother, telling myself that if she had lived I would have gone to the fair. I told myself that the trip I had undertaken was the cause of my misery. At this moment I thought

neither of M. Pitres, nor of the aim of my journey, nor of you, nor of who was in the hospital. A good woman seeing my tears and my distress invited me into her house in order to comfort me. I refused. She brought me a glass of sweetened water. I don't know if I thanked her. After drinking, I wiped my face and left, without knowing where I was going or what was the point of my trip. I was very unhappy. When, a kilometer later, my sadness disappeared, and I was once again contented, I began to sing, recalling perfectly the promise I had made to go to Libourne. (156).

One example of Julius' walking that fits into many of the characteristics of Albert's depictions of his wandering, is when Julius describes walking and ending up in the American Folk Art Museum. In this particular wandering, Julius enters a park and begins to walk south, "on Sheep Meadow" (35). He then describes the atmosphere around him: "The wind picked up, and water poured down into the sodden ground in fine, incessant needles..." (35). He continues to describe the physical surroundings and then he says that: "When I turned around, I saw that I was at the entryway of the American Folk Art Museum. Never having visited before, I went in" (36). His entering the museum seems rather random or impulsive, and this compares to how Albert made promises of travelling to new places and therefore he simply travelled. Evidence of Julius' mental wandering when being in the museum is also given in these depictions: "As I contemplated the silent world before me, I thought of the many romantic ideas attached to blindness" (37). The trancelike state is also evident because he says that he loses "all track of time before these images" (39) and eventually, when he is brought back to reality by the museum guard telling him that he has to leave because they are closing, he "forgot how to speak and simply looked at him" (40). Shortly after, Julius wants to go home with a taxi, but struggles to remember his address (40). This entire episode and the way he depicts it many similarities to Albert's way of describing his experiences and to Hacking's characteristics of a fugueur.

## Conclusion

I will therefore suggest that Julius as a whole can be seen as a wandering character, not unlike a fugueur, and I will also suggest that his motive for wandering is to break with the everyday life, as well as to search for something that can provide him what he is looking for in the sense of belonging. Moreover, his wandering functions to release his feelings of solitude and aloneness. As seen in this chapter, Julius experiences solitary feelings, also when he is in the middle of a crowd. The reader is also allowed to *experience* his feelings of solitude and therefore understand how they can be intensified because he does not have anyone to share these emotions with, or he chooses not to open up to anyone about them. Rather, he wanders and reflects. As a reflection of Marielle Macé suggestion of a link between fiction and reality, I, as a reader, understand the depictions of Julius' solitude to represent difficult feelings that can also be experienced by *any* human being.



## Chapter 3

### Belonging

#### Introduction

In this chapter a link between reflective nostalgia and the immigrant identity will be given, as well as theories on the immigrant identity in general. I will also discuss how Julius might be considered to be a “loiterly subject” represented in “loiterly literature” and how this gives more intention and meaning to the depictions of his actions, thoughts, remembering and search for self because Ross Chambers claims that a loiterly work of art can be loitering with “intent” (Chambers, 1999 56,8,9). Also, Julius’s difficulties in fitting in and therefore in finding his identity may be intensified by his underlying criticism of society, which is another feature of the loiterly subject. The reason why I wanted to focus on belonging in the final chapter of my thesis is because I will suggest that Julius is struggling to find belonging in the modern society where he lives and I will explore how his hidden reflective nostalgia may emphasise his search for somewhere to belong further because his nostalgia might even be directed towards the present and something, someone or somewhere to belong to due to his shattered past. I will the link between nostalgia and the immigrant identity and show examples of how Julius is searching for his identity in other immigrants and “colour.” I will then consider his travel to Brussels in a search for his grandmother because I consider it as an important image of his search for self.

#### Julius’ Nostalgia and Immigrant Identity

I will claim that Julius fits into certain characteristics that make it credible to understand him as an immigrant struggling with his own identity and also experiences reflective nostalgia grounded in his ambivalent relation to his past and to his family. His difficulties in separating

between the past and the present, as well as living in the present with his past are evident in the novel. This, in turn, also affects his identity in the sense that he searches for who he really is when searching for a belonging to someone and someplace in the past, which he never finds in the present. Interestingly, Julius comments on how he experiences his past at a late point in the novel, and the complexity of it as well as his difficulties with it are revealed to the reader. I quote the passage at length:

We experience life as a continuity, and only after it falls away, after it becomes the past, do we see its discontinuities. The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing, in which significant persons and events float. Nigeria was like that for me: mostly forgotten, except for those few things that I remembered with an outsize intensity. These were the things that had solidified in my mind by reiteration, that recurred in dreams and daily thoughts: certain faces, certain conversations, which, taken as a group, represented a secure version of the past that I had been constructing since 1992. But there was another, irruptive, sense of things past. The sudden reencounter, in the present, of something or someone long forgotten, some part of myself I had relegated to childhood and to Africa (155-56).

Several interesting aspects of Julius' thinking and reflections are revealed in this passage. Also, the way he possesses characteristics belonging to a person experiencing, and struggling with, the construction of the self and the past can be seen. He reveals how triggers can take him back in time, how he constructs his own past, also indicating his own identity, and how aspects of the past that are forgotten can reappear. The way he portrays Nigeria also gives evidence of his past home being abandoned, but how elements remembered still can affect him immensely. This emphasises the critical and complex relation he has to his own past, which belongs to a different country and some family members that he has left behind.

Julius's mixed background, due to his German mother and his African father, may intensify his feeling of non-belonging, his difficulties in fitting in, him struggling to feel in touch both with his family and the city of New York, and taken together, this results in him feeling solitary, lost, and never being able to find his place. This can also be transferred to an understanding of struggle to find his identity. The immigrant identity and the difficulties in moving from one country to another are discussed in Andreea Deciu Ritivoi's book, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity* (2002). She introduces questions such as: "If we can start fresh elsewhere – and there are numerous indications that many of us can – is it reasonable to believe that we belong someplace?" (3) I will try to explain that the answer to this question is complex and that the search for belonging taking place within Julius is not necessarily for a specific place, but rather a state of mind where he can feel content.

Ritivoi says that "The method I employ to analyse the relation between nostalgia and adjustment is informed by the basic principles of hermeneutics" (5). Hans Georg Gadamer developed theories on the term of "hermeneutics" that are closely linked to Martin Heidegger's understanding of the term, and which Chris Lawn tries to explain in his book called *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2006). Important in Gadamer's definition of hermeneutics, Lawn says, is that we cannot understand anything, or enter a dialogue similar to the one Mikhail Bakhtin talks about that has been discussed, without bringing with us our previous understandings: "Heidegger's basic point is that before we actually interpret the world we need to be aware of the fact that certain things cannot themselves be interpreted subjectively as they are those very things on which interpretations depend" (54) and further, "Heidegger seeks to show that the conditions that make thought itself possible are not self-generated but are put in place long before we engage in acts of introspection" (54). These are two important factors also dominating Gadamer's definitions of hermeneutics. Ritivoi says that she uses the basic principles of hermeneutics to analyse the link between nostalgia and

adjustment. The ways she does that will be discussed below along with my understandings of the basic principles of hermeneutics and the relation between these two concepts.

Ritivoi reflects upon certain aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics such as how "hermeneutics can also be seen as a more general methodology defined by coherence and justifiability..." (5). She points to how "Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics is a broad theory of the subject, which emphasizes its historical situatedness and cultural belongingness" (5) and that our "fore-meanings" (5) will sometimes be brought into a process of understanding, and our "experiences (our historical life)" brought to the encounter with a new phenomena of any kind where a process of understanding is initiated (5). I will link this to Julius and the experience of an immigrant in the process of understanding a new culture. Can anyone really start "fresh" anywhere or will we always bring previous experiences and our previous self with us?

I believe we do, and that the reader is allowed to see that so does Julius. It is reflected in how he is continuously drawn back to the past in the present due to triggers and reoccurring memories, and how he experiences that "there was another, irruptive, sense of things past. The sudden reencounter, in the present, of something or someone long forgotten, some part of myself I had relegated to childhood and to Africa" (156). Julius expresses how the few things he remembers with great intensity from the past reoccurs in "dreams and daily thoughts" and that they represent "a secure version of the past" that he has been "constructing." These factors all function as evidence of him not only carrying the past with him when living in the present, but he also admits to the great extent to which it affects him (155-56). Julius goes on an aimless search for his grandmother in Brussels, and thoughts of her reappear to him from time to time, such as when entering Central Park on one of his walks and he says, "thoughts of my grandmother returned" (34) for no apparent reason. The grandmother is only one element that he carries with him from the past, but along with other people, experiences and

memories, it functions as an indication of him being strongly affected by previous experiences in the encountering with the current one; existing in the big city.

Ritivoi's concept of nostalgia can be compared to Boym's discussions of the concept, but Ritivoi focuses mainly on nostalgia in connection to the immigrant identity. She says that: "I see nostalgia as a defence mechanism designed to maintain a stable identity by providing continuity among various stages in a person's life" (9-10). Julius says in the passage above that: "We experience life as a continuity, and only after it falls away, after it becomes the past, do we see its discontinuities" (155). In this utterance, Julius talks almost as if he is watching his own life from the outside, and I therefore consider this comment to function as a critique of how we fail to maintain the continuity in our lives when it changes. It possibly also indicates how he thinks he fails to adapt, develop and live in the present without being drawn back to the past too much. His nostalgia can therefore be understood as a defence mechanism to provide, if not fully, a sense of continuity to his life better than he manages to do with the way he chooses to live his life. On the concept of nostalgia, Ritivoi also says that we "leave a lot of things behind, but we all bring along a sense of who we are" and that "[a]djustment can begin when the immigrants realize what is at stake – their self – and realize what is at stake when nostalgia focuses their attentions on their life stories and themselves as the protagonists of these stories" (10). When remembering how Julius reflects upon the relationship of the hero and villain mentioned in the introduction, the reader of this thesis might understand that Julius is not true to himself and that might be a reason to suspect that he also struggles to find belonging and his place.

Julius does function seemingly well in the society in the sense that he has a job, he has some friends and he does not comment too vividly on any struggles to assimilate to the American society. On the other hand, his difficulties in remaining and really *existing* in his current life, and experiencing meaning and development of his self in it, are evident in his

longing and constant escaping as well as in how he avoids making close connections to people. Ritivoi refers to sociologist Fred Davis' theories, where Davis says that when nostalgia is released from the negative connotations, it can be defined as:

an effort to discover meaning in one's life, to understand oneself better by making comparisons between the past and the present, and thus integrating experiences into a larger schema of meaning...Nostalgia, therefore, can be a reflexive stance, a vantage point from which we make sense of our experience and identity. (29)

One example illustrating how Julius searches for meaning in the present due to past experiences is given after thoughts of his grandmother returns. These thoughts develop into a depiction of a treasured memory with his grandmother concluding with a wish to find her, but that he cannot ask his mother about his grandmother's whereabouts because of their poor relation (34-35). Julius also experiences rain in Brussels and it becomes "like a distant, drawn-out echo of that earlier childhood rain" (136). Julius gives a representation of an experience of heavy rain in his childhood and remembers that he stole Coke. He says that this story, "attached to that childhood rain was finished with, and of no import to the present," but still, he cannot "stand Coke" (136). This illustrates how he tries to break with the past and leave it behind, but it is still vividly with him in the present.

### Julius' Recognition of "Colour"

Julius constantly recognises and seeks "colourness," in the sense of ethnic communities, and other people of colour throughout the novel. A possible explanation for this can be found in another immigrant's story and memoir, which is included in Ritivoi's book, and which can be closely connected to Julius' story. This immigrant's name is Vera Calin, a Jewish Romanian writer who immigrated to the United States in the mid-1970s (124). There are several aspects about Calin that can be linked to Julius, but I have chosen to focus on how she has developed

a “mechanism of identification” in order to cope with the experience of non-belonging and alienation, isolation and distance from both the past and the present home (125). I quote a passage given by Ritivoi about Calin’s mechanism of identification below:

Attentively, she observes other immigrants around her, striving to detect their “mechanisms of survival.” Her hermeneutic efforts, obviously, are biased from the outset by the implicit assumption that one’s self in a new frame of reference, the country of immigration, is somehow threatened. Calin develops a full-fledged system for comprehending and explaining diasporic profiles: She searches for hidden, secret biographies, the story *before* one’s departure from the old country, convinced that an immigrant must necessarily carry along the treasure (or burden) of an intimate, authentic self, demanding constant care and protection.” (126)

I will suggest that this might be the same mechanism Julius has developed and that he therefore continuously observes, identifies and dwells upon other immigrants.

Ritivoi argues that Calin cannot truly identify the other immigrants and expect that their current actions are caused by previous experiences, but this also illuminates the hopelessness in this mechanism. Julius claims that several immigrants are telling their stories to him, but whether they are true or not, or whether their current actions and situations are determined by their previous experiences that they all carry with them as their *pasts*, is left to the reader to evaluate. Calin for her part finally realises that “Identification with others fails to provide her with any insights into her own situation,” (129) and this might be the case for Julius as well. Still, Julius continues to search and he continues to flee. He might be searching for belonging in the sense of understanding who he is, but also trying to link past with present in order to create a new identity in the process this creating requires. Examples of Julius’ identifications and experiences of other people of colour and “colourness,” and how it affects him, will be given below.

One example is given when he takes a detour on a Monday night and ends up in Harlem. An old man greets him and he then lets the reader in to how he experiences this encounter:

I (thinking for a moment that he was someone I surely knew, or once knew, or had seen before, and quickly abandoning each idea in turn; and then fearing that the speed of these mental disassociations might knock me off my stride) returned his silent greeting. I turned around to see his black cowl melt into an unlit doorway. In the Harlem night, there were no whites (18).

The inclusion in the narrative of his wandering in Harlem, his misrecognition and the statement of no difference in skin colour in the Harlem night are all part of the anecdote-like detour to Harlem. The reader suspects that he is trying to find belonging in an “area of colour” and that he tries to identify the old man. As “a brief account of or a story about an individual or an incident” this anecdote can be looked at as a synecdoche, meaning: “A figure of speech in which the part stands for the whole, and thus something else is understood within the thing mentioned” (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* 39,890). When considering this story to function as a synecdoche, I can interpret it as supporting Julius’ search for a place to belong and someone to relate to in order to understand himself better, similar to how Calin when she used the mechanism of identification. Also, the way Julius experiences Harlem and this man can be compared to the way that other characters, triggers, experiences and concrete sensory impressions are functioning in the novel to construct Julius as a whole, in this case to emphasise his aspects of searching for belonging and recognition. Interestingly, Julius wanders and ends up in Harlem without intending to do so, or at least without acknowledging the intention of it, strengthening his aspects of being a fugueur.

Julius continuously recognises, comments on, thinks about and converses with other people of colour. Sometimes this involves longer elaborations on them and sometimes there



are only small comments left to the reader, indicating that he is in fact noticing them. The first example of a seemingly unimportant recognition is when he visits Professor Saito for the first time in the present of the novel's plot when the New York Marathon is taking place and he says that: "I saw the runners-up dash through, two black men. Kenyans, I guessed" (12). The reader is left with this comment on the black runners and nothing more, which invites us to wonder why the comment is even included. My suggestion is that Julius recognises other people of colour continuously because he tries to identify them in order to learn more about himself. Ritivoi states about Calin that: "Identification with other fails to provide her with any insights into her own situation" (129), and Julius' recognitions and observations might not help him as he hopes.

Another, similar guessing of a person's cultural background is made after Julius leaves Professor Saito after their first meeting. Julius says the following about a man he notices: "From his features, I guessed he was Mexican or Central American" (15). They walked together for a while, "finding [themselves] moving at the same pace and in the same direction" (15). This can be interpreted to indicate that Julius feels some kind of connection to the man. He is a runner in the New York Marathon, and what is interesting about this is that Julius pities this man because there "were no friends or family present to celebrate his achievement" (15). This can be understood of a compassion for this man, whom Julius does not know or have any relation to. A similar mechanism as the one explained in regard to Calin can be seen when Julius suddenly acknowledges that: "I saw the situation more clearly. It was I, no less solitary than he but having made the lesser use of the morning, who was to be pitied" (15-16). This indicates that Julius is trying to draw a link between the runner and himself because they are both immigrants, and he also supplements the runner with feelings of solitude. Thus, Julius applies characteristics to him and invents parts of a biology for him, like Calin said she did, in saying that the man has no one there to celebrate his achievement.

Julius makes another observation of people of colour when he is going to the movie theatre: “The ticket buyers were young, many of them black, and dressed in hip clothes. There were some Asians, too, Latinos, immigrant New Yorkers of indeterminate ethnic background” (28). Julius then says that he “sat alone” (29) in “the great cave of the theatre,” surrounded by “strangers” (29). He points out the fact that the audience consists mostly of people of colour, but still, he feels alone. This scene functions as an image of him not feeling a belonging to the immigrants, nor to the New Yorkers, and it emphasises how Julius finds himself somehow in between two countries, two times, two homes and two identities.

Julius not only recognises other foreigners, but he is also at a point recognised by one. The guard from the museum which draws him back to reality when telling him that they are closing recognises Julius at a later point in time: “You don’t recognize me, he said, raising his eyebrows. I noticed you at the museum, about a week ago...” (53). Julius gives an impression that he does not recognise him and that he does not want to talk to him. He then thinks of the cab driver who took him home from the museum who said: “hey – I’m African just like you” and he felt like the museum guard “was making a similar claim” (53). Julius’s response to this approach shows that Julius does not appreciate that he is considered to be a “brother” to other unfamiliar Africans, and he claims that the guard was asking a “sexual question” (54), which can indicate how Julius feels uncomfortable by the guard’s approach. As I reader, I understand Julius’ actions to suggest that he might not feel like a proper African and therefore he does not appreciate the immediate acknowledgements he gets just because of his ethnicity.

Various life stories of other immigrants are also told throughout the novel. One example is when Julius suddenly moves to a story about a Haitian man: “In early December, I met a Haitian man in the underground catacombs of Penn Station...” (70). He then tells Julius the story about his life. Stories and characters like this man are included so that their stories can be told through Julius’s narrative voice, his conversations and observations, and thoughts,

as they are revealed to the reader. A possible reason for this might be to illuminate how every individual living in the city, especially with a different cultural background, is carrying a story and a past with them.

It is also interesting to look into how Julius expresses concerns for other Africans, how he partly considers himself to belong to the African people, and how he is mistreated due to his skin colour. This sheds light on Ritivoi's claim that immigrant often share ambivalent feelings and that: "Ambivalence is not only an important psychological component of the adjustment process, but also a logical consequence of the representational mechanisms of the exile" (136). In Julius' reflections and remembering when watching a movie about Idi Amin in the movie theatre, memory leads to memory and he says the following: "While watching the film, I recalled an uncomfortable meeting I'd had one evening, in an opulent house in a suburb of Madison a few years before" (30). Julius' host when he was a medical student, Dr. Gupta said that he wanted to spit when thinking about Africans (30). Julius then says that he felt an anger that he "couldn't help feeling" (30) because it was partly directed at him, "the only other African in the room" (30). Dr. Gupta generalises Africans and directs his anger towards them all, which in turn makes Julius feel angry. Moreover, Julius expresses that he "wished to believe that things were not as bad as they seemed" (31). The emotional engagement Julius feels and expresses when watching the movie is interesting for the reader to be let in to because it confirms his feeling of pride of, and belonging to, Africans, at least to some extent.

After the movie experience, Julius walks out into "warm air" (31) and experiences racism from two kids, a girl and a boy of thirteen and ten respectively. They ask him in a scoffing manner if he is a gangster (31). Due to the fact that this incident of racism comes from two kids further emphasises the unfairness in it. They might be too young to really understand the consequences of it, but still, they make jokes about Julius being a gangster due

to his skin colour. The girl says: “He’s black...but he’s not dressed like a gangster” (32). The incident is insulting and they are playing with words of racism while their parents are standing “oblivious” twenty yards away (31). This incident is left without comment from the narrator, and the reader is left to interpret how it affects Julius. I read the incident as insulting and hurting to Julius, and his tendency to move away from such difficulties is again proven in this case. He flees, mentally, to “a moment of illumination” (31) and thinks of his grandmother. He considers walking physically, “but the uptown train arrived” (31). I find this interesting because it emphasises the way in which Julius continuously avoids difficulties. Moreover, because this unpleasant incident involves an act of racism due to him being black, the fact that he flees in mind to thoughts about his grandmother and that he maybe “should make the effort to see her” (31) illuminates how his nostalgia functions as a mechanism to cope with difficulties experienced in the presence and how he searches for belonging in an abstract way when he experiences being treated as a foreigner, but he might not be longing for a romanticised past, because he admits to his own past being difficult and that he breaks with it when leaving Nigeria for America in a representation of a memory revealing this, already mentioned, turning point in his life.

Julius’ ambivalent relation to his own past is amplified in the chapter placed right before he travels to Brussels, on his longest voyage and most concrete search throughout the novel. This turning point involves Julius’ attending the Nigerian Military School, losing his father, returning to school to deal with the loss and then abandoning Nigeria for college in America that he applies to behind his mother’s back. Julius explains how he wanted to feel “some sense of belonging” after the loss of his father, and how he found it in “labor” at NMS (81). I understand the way Julius carefully depicts this time in his life to suggest that he tries to make sense of his past experiences and identity. The way he breaks with Nigeria and his mother abruptly may emphasise how he tries to break with his past and his past self, but the

fact that he dwells upon this time in these depictions also illuminates how his past experiences are still with him.

Julius tells the reader how his father was diagnosed with tuberculosis and that their relatives, his father's in particular, "were hysterical, too present, too eager to help and demonstrate their grief, but my mother and I encountered them with stoicism" (78). Julius moves on to explaining how his mother's and Julius' stoicism was "disunited" because they did not talk much to each other. To react with stoicism might be understood as a defence mechanism due to difficulties in handling grief, and Julius and his mother had a "bad silence" between them that turned into a "rift that wouldn't heal" (81). A constrained relationship to his mother is revealed to the reader. In retrospect, Julius says: "If I hadn't forced myself back into the normal life of school, I might have sunk" (84). I understand this to indicate how he dealt with the loss and the relationship to his mother by running away from it in the sense of engaging in labour at school. After finishing at NMS, he flees further; all the way to America where thoughts of the past keep haunting him. Julius' complex longing is therefore emphasised because the perfect image of his previous home is shattered to pieces and he does not have anyplace or anyone that he can even romanticise in his head to return to. His hidden reflective nostalgia occurs in non-direct ways and it is difficult for him to long for the past as it was because it was not a perfect image of happiness. Rather, he might be trying to create a better future, or even a better present.

As a final understanding of nostalgia, Ritivoi says that: "nostalgia is a genuine *pharmakos*, both medicine and poison: It can express alienation, or it can replenish and rebuttress our sense of identity by consolidating the ties with our history" (39). Julius is in touch with his history, but he was somehow alienated to Nigeria in his past and is still alienated in the present because he does not create or maintain many close connections and he

keeps fleeing from reality. Julius explains to the reader how he also felt detached to Nigeria due to his name:

The name Julius linked me to another place and was, with my passport and my skin color, one of the intensifiers of my sense of being different, of being set apart, in Nigeria. I had Yoruba middle name, Olatubosun, which I never used. That name surprised me a little each time I saw it on my passport or birth certificate, like something that belonged to someone else but had been long held in my keeping. Being Julius in everyday life thus confirmed me in my not being fully Nigerian. (78)

I believe that Julius feels neither fully Nigerian, nor fully German. Julius does not embrace America fully and he expresses an underlying critique of the American culture that I will look further into the next part of the chapter. In “Nostalgia and its Discontents” Svetlana Boy, says that “reflective nostalgia fears return” with “passion” (15) and I believe Julius feels as if he has nothing to return to. I will suggest that his complicated past makes him unsure of where he can find belonging in Nigeria, and that his search in the present for “colourness,” and his grandmother in particular, emphasises how he still searches for a sense of belonging.

### Julius as a Loiterly Subject in a Loiterly Novel

I will suggest that Julius can be understood, at least to a certain extent, to be a “loiterly subject,” a term discussed and explained in *Loiterature* (1999) by Ross Chambers (56). I will also suggest that *Open City* can be considered as “loiterly literature” (8) because it fits into Chambers’ definition of the blurriness of this genre. As previously discussed, Julius can be seen as a wandering fugueur in a novel moving between times, places and topics, and that also supports how loiterature’s “art lies not in not moving, but in moving without going anywhere in particular, and indeed in moving without knowing – or maybe pretending not to know – where it’s going” (10). The direction both of Julius’ wanderings and the novel, which ends in

the open, is not clear and this might be intentional because: “The trick of loiterly narrative is so to question the conventionality of beginnings and ending that the alleged story becomes all middle” (21). Even though Julius might be understood to try to move towards something because he expresses hidden reflective nostalgia indicating that he is searching for belonging, it appears as if he never finds it or reaches his destination. Thus, the work and Julius as a whole wanders from the beginning to the end and the entire novel becomes “middle.”

A loiterly subject, according to Chambers, can be:

amiable, eccentric, well-meaning, avuncular, but out of synch with the patterns and rhythms of modernity and hovering a bit anxiously on its edges. He is neither rejected by modern life (which just doesn't have much of a place for him) nor explicitly and trenchantly critical of it (although everything about his personality expresses mute, implied criticism)...and there is something solitary about most loiterly subjects. (56)

Chambers attaches these characteristics to Jacques Tati's persona, Monsieur Hulot or mon Oncle and claims this persona to be “a good first approximation of the loiterly subject” (56). Julius is not avuncular, nor has he “friends out of [his] own ilk” so that he always has “someone,” but he is “amiable” because he refuses warmth and friendliness. Also, despite having a job and functioning seemingly well in society, he constantly escapes from it and this might function as a hidden critique of the society. Moreover, Julius feels solitary in the crowds and continues to feel solitary throughout the novel all the way to the very end where he experiences “solitude of rare purity” (255). Ritivoi explains how Calin, whom I have shown in some aspects can be linked to Julius and his experiences, also fits into the description of a loiterly subject given above:

When Calin is willing to pay attention to her new surroundings, what she sees in an inferno of speed and kitsch, people leading a barbaric, dehumanized existence,

perpetually rushing toward some obscure, insignificant destination. She is a drastic critic of the American way. (137).

Moreover, Chambers says, “Loitering tends to blur the distinctions on which social order depends – between innocence and guilt, between the good citizen enjoying a moment’s respite and the seedy character who may just be taking the sun on his bench or idling in that shady doorway...It blurs categories...” (8). What I find most suitable to Julius, after having read the novel several times and looked closely to him as a whole, is however how loiterly literature:

casts serious doubt on the values the good citizens hold dear – values like discipline, method, organization, rationality, productivity, and, above all, work – but it does so in the guise of innocence and, more particularly, insignificant or frivolous entertainment: a mere passing of time in idle observations or witty remarks, now this, now that, like the philosopher pursuing his ideas as he sits daydreaming on his bench. Or like the poet mooching along, his idleness a contrast to the busy street, going to the bank and the bookstore, doing this, then that. (9).

The way Julius wanders and moves from place to place, from thought to thought, and how he pursues his family history without any good chances of finding anything or to find his grandmother may support a reading of Julius as a loiterly subject in a loiterly novel. I will suggest that his trip to Brussels functions as a symbolic, non-rational and non-productive voyage where Julius spends a lot of time “doing this, then that.”

Ian Hacking states that: “The ‘voyage’ is our metaphor for self-discovery” (28). I will suggest that Julius’ trip to Brussels is the “voyage” of most importance in regard to his search for belonging and self because he travels to Brussels spontaneously, spending all his holiday time and actually flees from work and order, just like Chambers’ loiterly subjects. There are, similarly to how other elements support and create Julius as a whole, various other characters



and happenings on this trip that are interesting to look into when trying to understand Julius as a loiterly subject. I will focus on some characters and aspects of the trip that I consider relevant in this discussion.

The first character in focus is the woman sitting next to Julius on the airplane to Brussels, Dr. Maillotte. Through their carefully depicted conversations, various topics such as race, peoples and history are discussed. She says that Brussels is “color-blind in a way the U.S. is not” (89), which supports the novel to fit into the loiterly genre because of the critique of America in regard to openness is reflected upon. Moreover, Julius also depicts how she falls into her memory and how the past girl-version of her is still evident in the present woman remembering: “Then she went on, falling deeper, it seemed, into her memory, telling me about her days as a young girl, how difficult things had been during the war...her decision to go into medicine...Somehow, as she spoke, I could still see in her that resolute girl” (90). Julius is following her remembering and linking the past to the present.

Julius’ difficulties in opening up are also shown through the way he fails to respond honestly to a personal question given by Dr. Maillotte. He asks her about her children and so on and thus raises personal questions to that she responds to, but when she asks a returning one to Julius, “...why Brussels?” his response is the following: “I smiled. Cozumel was the other possibility, I said, but I don’t know how to dive” (93). He then moves away from the subject in question and avoids honesty and shows his “amiable” characteristics by refusing to develop an honest friendship. The reader knows that Julius is not telling the truth and that he creates a distance between them already at this point of their acquaintance.

When Julius arrives in Brussels, Mayken, the woman who owns the apartment he is to live in, picks him up at the airport to drive him to his destination. When driving, Julius starts to fantasise about Dr. Maillotte, and his thoughts move on to other characters as well:

I saw her at fifteen, in September 1944, sitting on a rampart in the Brussels sun, delirious with happiness at the invaders' retreat. I saw Junichiro Saito on the same day, aged thirty-one or thirty-two, unhappy, in internment, in an arid room in a fenced compound in Idaho, far away from his books. Out there on that same day, also, were all four of my own grandparents: the Nigerians, the Germans. Three were by now gone for sure. But what of the fourth, my oma? (96)

The reader is here let into how Julius' mind wanders and how the underlying search for belonging and wanting to find his grandmother is continuously appearing to Julius. Also, the reader understands that Julius holds his grandmother dear. The memory previously reflected upon of the two of them sharing treasured silence together, supports her being an important part of Julius' past, affecting his present existence similarly to what Ritivoi states. His grandmother might be involved in one of the "few things that [Julius] remembered with an outsize intensity" (155) and "recurred with an outsize intensity," (156) possibly also further explaining why he goes to Brussels.

Julius remembers his first visit to Brussels when seeing the "Novotel Hotel" (96) and shows critical reflection upon his past, as discussed by Ritivoi, in that he reflects upon how "ideal it had all seemed back then...that first experience of Europe" (96). Julius moves on to depicting some of Brussels history, and how it "might have been reduced to rubble" (97) had it not been declared an "open city" by Brussels's rulers during the Second World War in order to exempt it from bombardment (97). The fragility of the city and the preservation of history are illuminated in these reflections and the same fragility may be found in the preservation of Julius' mind and memories. Also, the way he carries history, both personal and collective, with him, serves to confirm what Ritivoi says in her book about how nostalgia can be defined as "an effort to discover meaning in one's life, to understand oneself better by making comparisons between the past and the present, and thus integrating experiences into a larger

schema of meaning..." (29). Julius reflects upon his past experience in Brussels and how it had "seemed so easy" before, possibly in contrast to how he experiences Brussels with its multicultural centre on this journey, where he feels lost at times and arrives without knowing where to even begin looking for his grandmother.

The ambiguity of Julius' approach when he meets new characters supports the amiable characteristics in Chambers' descriptions of a loiterly subject because it serves to emphasise how he starts creating friendships and relations, but then he moves away from them when they start to develop. Another character Julius meets in Brussels illustrates this: Julius visits an Internet and telephone shop in order to find out more about where his grandmother might be, and there he meets Farouq from Tétouan, who works there. In his first greeting, Julius says: "How are you doing, my brother?" (101). In Julius' reflections upon this greeting, he wonders why he said it (102). He gives careful depictions of Farouq, their conversations, their encounters, and there are multiple topics that are revealed through Farouq, many of them intellectual ones. I will not look into this character in great detail, but leave him by claiming that some of the most important aspects he sheds light on are the following: Julius' approach involving "aggressive familiarity" (102) when he tries to make a friend, how Julius expects him not to be too intellectual at first, that they discuss the fear of the other, which is a crucially important topic in today's world of immigration, how they discuss that avoidance and isolation "from all loyalties" (107) seemed to be the only way to avoid violence, and how, in the very end of the mentioning of Farouq, Julius declares him as "one of the thwarted ones" (129). He does not maintain contact with him. Again, Julius' avoidance of friendliness and difficulties in handling it are amplified.

Another important character to illuminate Julius characteristics and avoidance of closeness is a Czech woman he meets at a café in Grand Sablon one afternoon. Chambers includes a quote from Denis Diderot where Diderot talks about a place where he hangs out,

where his mind wanders and how he takes “refuge” in a café when it is cold or wet; all this supports characteristics of a fugueur as well, and Diderot says:

Come rain or shine, my custom is to go for a stroll in the Palais-Royal every afternoon at about five. I’m the person you see always sitting alone on the bench in the allée d’Argenson, my mind elsewhere. I hold discussions with myself on politics, love, taste or philosophy, and let my thoughts wander in complete abandon, leaving them free to follow the very first idea that comes along...If it is too cold or wet, I take refuge in the café de la Régence...” (5).

Julius is also taking refuge in a café right after acknowledging the fact that his “sense of being entirely alone in the city” intensifies and that he continues to wander “aimlessly,” causing him to end up in this café (108). The Czech woman he meets in this café becomes Julius’ first sexual partner after Nadège, and when describing the afternoon, Julius compares it to a “dream,” indicating how he escapes the hurt from Nadège with this woman. After their intercourse, Julius claims to have forgotten her name and depicts his leaving as follows: “Wordlessly, I got dressed, but this time the silence was wreathed with smiles. I kissed her on the neck again, and left” (110). There is a shift in tone and he claims rarely to have seen Brussels so “generous” (111) as when entering the park again. Julius appears to be experiencing mixed emotions. He feels “lightness” and “gratitude,” but also a “faint sorrow” (111). This again emphasises Julius’ difficulties in handling emotionally affecting happenings, encounters and says that he “returned to my solitude” after the incident (111). Though Julius claims that it was a good way to move on from Nadège, his actions reveal the struggles he experiences with this. It does not help to replace longing with superficial relations, and the way he claims to return to his solitude emphasises this fact.

Julius says about the people in Brussels that: “There were many people, more than I had seen in other European cities, who gave the impression of having just arrived from a sun-

suffused elsewhere” (97-98). This intensifies how he simply wanders and observes, feeling like he experiences the city from a distance. He moves on to talking about all the people of colour he sees in the city centre and that there seemed to be a large number of people from “some part of Africa” (98). The reader is experiencing the city together with Julius and is therefore following his line of thinking and his observations carefully. After acknowledging that there are high numbers of people of colour in the centre, he moves on to talking about racism and crime. This can also function as a critique of the modern, globalized world with lots of immigration, supporting an underlying, loiterly critique seen in Julius’ depictions.

The negative side effects of immigration are discussed, too, and Julius mentions how some political parties tried to cater to voter discontent about immigration. He says that: “The country was in the grip of uncertainties – the sense of anomie was apparent even to a visitor” (100). Still, with Julius being there on Christmas Eve, he reveals the comfort he finds in being in Brussels: “I was there, it seemed to me, to no purpose, unless being together in the same country, as I and my oma now were (if, that is, she were still alive), was, by itself, a comfort” (101). He feels soothed by thinking about that he might be in the same country as his grandmother, so the tone changes to a more optimistic tone which is then again set back when the following part of the chapter continues as follows: “In those first few day in Brussels, I made some desultory efforts to find her” (101). The word “desultory” emphasises the hopelessness in the search. It also shows how the trip to Brussels might be nothing more but another, slightly bigger, search for the self and for belonging to something personified in his grandmother. The impulsiveness in his journey is evident because he goes there without knowing if the goal of his journey, his grandmother, is even alive. Again, this is a characteristics belonging to a loiterly subject.

Julius says that: “Every now and then, looking into the faces of the women huddled at the tram stops, I imagined that one of them might be my oma,” but then he says that “I could

recognize the nostalgic wish-fulfillment fantasy at work” (115). The way he both reveals how he is constantly looking for his grandmother and that he imagines elderly women to be his grandmother, as well as acknowledging that this way of thinking supports a hopeful fantasy that could soothe his longing is interesting because it reveals that he is in fact a critical subject, and that his repressed memories and understandings might be defence mechanisms to cope with existing in a solitary existence of today’s world where he struggles to find his place. It can also be linked to what Boym claims when she says that: “The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future” (8). Julius romanticises aspects of the past, most strongly his grandmother and one treasured memory of them sharing silence, but because the rest of his past is ambivalent, he may have given a stronger romantic aspect to this particular memory because there is not much else from his past in Africa that he can romanticise.

Julius admits to having poor chances at finding his roots and that the motive for traveling to Brussels might be grounded in a search for his family history:

I had almost nothing to go on, and my search, of my poor effort could be called by that term, became insubstantial and expressed itself only as the faint memory of the day she had visited Olumo Rock with us in Nigeria...I began to wonder if Brussels hadn’t somehow drawn me to itself for reasons more opaque than I suspected, that the paths I mindlessly followed through the city followed a logic irrelevant to my family history.  
(115-16)

This emphasises how he acknowledges the hopelessness in his search and that he is in fact looking for his family history, possibly in order to learn more about his identity.

In the final depictions of his stay in Brussels, Julius’ mind flees between happiness and sadness and he reflects, “that we were subject to this constant struggle to modulate the internal environment, this endless being tossed about like a cloud” (146). This can be

broadened to concern the external environment where we are situated as well. Julius finally lies naked in bed and continues to reflect, but the unfulfilled search is left uncommented, once again, while the heavy rain outside the apartment may emphasise a certain sadness experienced by Julius. This feeling of being “tossed about” can also be linked to what Boym calls “[t]he imperative of a contemporary nostalgic,” which means “to be homesick and sick of home – occasionally at the same time” (18). It can also be connected to the ambivalent emotions experienced by immigrants.

Lastly, the way detailed depictions of Julius’ fleeing mind between various topics of politics, history, past, future and many others, discussed and revealed through others and through his narrative wandering, echoes characteristics of loiterature:

Critical as it may well be behind its entertaining façade, loiterly writing disarms criticism of itself by presenting a moving target, shifting as its own divided attention constantly shifts. Thus what looked for a moment like an acerbic observation or an implied objection may be instantly displaced by another thought, or a weak pun, or a curious anecdote. (Chambers 9)

## Conclusion

The reader is let into the ambiguity and fleetingness of Julius’s mind and that is also how we are allowed insights into his experiences of hidden nostalgia and search for belonging and identity, as well as how we learn about his feelings of solitude. The jumping from one thought to another and Julius’ aimless wandering from place to place strongly fit the characteristics of loiterature discussed above. Loiterly texts are moreover “...sites of endless *intersection*, and consequently their narrator’s attention is always divided between one thing and some other thing, always ready and willing to be distracted” (9). Chambers also explains that the maxim of loiterature is the following: “Since digression can happen, it should” (11). I will suggest

that Julius' narrative voice consistently is shifting attention between times, places and topics and that the many digressions included function as evidence of the novel possessing important characteristics of a loiterly work of art. Chambers also says that: "loiterature is inevitably a critical genre: it's loitering with intent" (9). This makes Julius' loitering intentional; giving more meaning to his loiterly actions and abbreviations and therefore the reader is also invited to interpret all the little pieces of the big puzzle personified in Julius. Lastly, Julius' search for belonging possibly initiated by his hidden reflective nostalgia and his feelings of not fitting into society emphasises the credibility in thinking that Julius is searching for his identity because he struggles to know where to feel belonging, and it is also difficult to say in which direction his *longing* is directed. This supports how Julius is struggling to deal with the complexities of his immigrant identity in the modern world of today and why he feels nostalgic, why he feels solitary, why he flees and eventually that he does experience a non-belonging.



## Conclusion

As previously mentioned, Julius says the following about the hero and villain topic: “we are not the villains of our own stories. In fact, it is quite the contrary: we play, and only play, the hero, and in the swirl of other people’s stories, insofar as those stories concern us at all, we are never less than heroic” (243). Julius might play the hero in the story because it is easier than to admit faults and to be the villain. This can be seen in how he constantly avoids difficulties and close relations and how he chooses to move away from people whom he could have gotten closer to.

The act of playing something that he is actually not indicates that the reliability of his narrative is questionable. In *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge writes about unreliable narrators and says: “The point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter” (155). I will claim that there is a gap between how things appear in Julius’ depictions and how things really are, as well as a gap between the fictionally represented story of this character and the reader’s reality. This claim is underscored because Julius’ reflections, shown to the reader, are not always in harmony with his actions or what the reader learns about him from other characters or incidents.

The strongest evidence of his narrative unreliability and the fact that he might not be true to himself nor me as a reader is when I realise, seemingly together with Julius, that he has actually forced himself on his childhood friend, Moji Kasali. Julius has repressed this memory despite him being the villain of this rape, and not the victim, which could have explained repression due to trauma. In the first mentioned meeting with her, he says that: “I didn’t recognize her” (158). The scene is depicted as follows and I quote it at length:

An old friend came to me out of this latter past, a friend, or rather an acquaintance whom memory now made convenient to think of as a friend, so that what seemed to

have vanished entirely existed once again. She appeared (apparition was precisely what came to mind) to me in a grocery store in Union Square late in January. I didn't recognize her, and she followed me for a while, tracing my steps around the aisles, to give me an opportunity to make the first move. It was only when I noticed that I was being shadowed, and was beginning to adjust my body into that sceptical awareness, that she came right up to where I was standing, in front of a display of carrots and radishes. She said a bright hello, waved, and addressed me by my full name, smiling. It was clear she expected me to remember her. I didn't. She looked Yoruba, with a slight slant to her eyes and an elegant swoop to the jaw, and it was clear from the accent that that was where I should look for the connection between us. But I failed to find it. At the same moment that I confessed to having blanked out on who she was, she accused me of just that, a serious accusation, but jocularly expressed. She couldn't believe I had forgotten her, and she said my name several times in quick succession, as if to chide me. My lighthearted apology masked the irritation I suddenly felt. I feared for a moment that she would overextend the charade, and make me cajole her into saying who she was, but she introduced herself, and the memory was restored: Moji Kasali (156).

Julius says he does not recognise her, but when he says that she is “an acquaintance whom memory now made convenient to think of as a friend,” this indicates that he knows her, but has chosen to forget her and what happened between them because this is easier than to live with the guilt. Again, Julius takes the easiest way out, similar to how he avoids other characters and actions that involve emotional challenges throughout the novel. Moreover, the fact that he uses the word “apparition,” which can also mean “The supernatural appearance of invisible beings” (*Oxford English Dictionary*), when describing how he experiences to see her again, emphasises how she returns from somewhere deep in his memory and how he has

“buried” her in his mind. Julius uses another word evoking ghostly associations when he describes how he feels as if he is being “shadowed” by her. He has deliberately chosen to forget her and the rape and now, both Moji and the episode, exist somewhere buried in the back of his mind. Thus, her reappearance involves an emotionally difficult acknowledgment of an aspect of his past, and this encounter also emphasises the complexity of bringing one’s past to the present.

Julius admits to experiencing a failure of recognition and he feels irritated by her. He also fantasises about how she might have had a crush on him when they were younger, glorifying himself when he has in fact caused her immense trauma. This also indicates how he has created a different image of the past reality in order to cope with it more easily. Julius leaves the reader with this introductory passage of their first meeting after childhood, and then he does not comment on her again until they meet at a late point in the novel. Moji then tells him about the rape that had occurred many years earlier. He is incapable of responding in a humble or understanding way to it. Rather, he does not say anything when she asks: “Will you say something?” (245), or at least his response is not revealed to the reader. Julius instead continues his narration with describing that other people wakes up and starts to move around at the party they are attending when their conversation takes place. Further, he escapes to his mind and thinks about Camus, the French philosopher, author and journalist (246).

Towards the very end of the novel, he reflects upon what she told him and again avoids taking the blame for it:

And so, what does it mean when, in someone else’s version, I am the villain? I am only too familiar with bad stories – badly imagined, or badly told – because I hear them frequently from patients. I know the tells of those who blame others, those who are unable to see that they themselves, and not the others, are the common thread in all their bad relationships. There are characteristic tics that reveal the essential falsehood

of such narratives. But what Moji had said to me that morning, before I left John's place, and gone up the George Washington Bridge, and walked the few miles back home, had nothing in common with such stories. She had said it as if, with all of her being, she were certain of its accuracy (243-4)

There are a lot of interesting elements to discuss in this quote. Julius's personality, unreliability and the fact that he struggles to see his own story from the outside become evident. As a reader I have to take a stand as to whether I should believe him or what Moji tells him. Moreover, a great irony of the whole novel becomes visible: Julius is working as a psychiatrist analysing people every day, but he fails to analyse himself. He is in a cowardly manner not managing to respond to what Moji tells him. Also, the reader is left with millions of questions about which memories told throughout the novel from the past that are real and which are not. The doubt concerning Julius as a narrator makes the reader wonder if the novel as a whole is about how uncertain and fragile everything and everyone are, and the complexity of the connection between past and present.

Ritivoi discusses how we are in charge of choosing what we want to remember and bring with us from the past, and how this in turn creates the self: "...we remember some aspects of our past and forget others, and the selection of aspects is what constitutes the self" (122). This indicates how Julius' repression of the incident with Moji supports his self to have taken an easy way out and therefore also that he lives without being able fully to take responsibility of his own actions. This further supports my reading of how he struggles to handle pain, for instance concerning the break-up with Nadège, and that he avoids close connections throughout and remains solitary. Earlier I linked Julius to Vera Calin in some aspects of their immigrant experiences, and I will link them together in one more aspect regarding solitude. Ritivoi says that Calin's nostalgia "grounds her so much in a symbolic 'elsewhere,' that her life is lived in extreme solitude and melancholy." (122). Julius also

appears to be searching for an “elsewhere,” but his problem seems to be that he cannot find out where that place actually is because it is not his past he is nostalgic for. Instead, as I have argued, he simply longs for someplace to belong and someone to love and feel connected to in order to create meaning in his life and develop his self.

Ritivoi also refers to Vladimir Nabokov’s main character in *Pnin* with the same name, and explains how “Pnin fakes an interest in adjustment and assimilation, when in fact he is too committed to his memories of departed friends and family to be really interested in the present or his immediate setting.” (122). Julius is participating in his life in the sense that he has a job, he has some friends, and he is no less of an American than African or German, but still, his aimless wandering and searching suggest that he is not feeling fully content with the life he is living in America. Like Pnin, he is not really *present* in his life.

Ritivoi also, in regard to Calin, explains how immigration is: “an alienating experience, inasmuch as it gradually isolates the subject, distancing her from both places at once...To remember the old country, the old way of life, then, becomes a matter of commitment and responsibility toward the self, not toward a place” (125). This could be a possible explanation to why Julius remembers, at least certain aspects of the past, with great intensity, and that the past occurs to him in daily thoughts. Also, the alienation and distance from both places are evident because Julius does not know where to feel belonging. He feels distanced from Nigeria when he is there, carrying the alienating name, Julius, and he does not acknowledge his African middle name. This functions as a symbol of his alienation, but most importantly, it can be seen as a way he feels most solitary in the middle of the crowd.

There is one more aspect of Ritivoi’s discussions that I will include here. She says: “I have defined nostalgia as an interpretive stance in which a person is aware of the element of discordance in her life” (165). The line from Ritivoi bears on Julius how there is also discordance in his life. It appears as if he struggles to figure out how to improve it. Moreover,

Calin “is alone beyond isolation: She has very few social ties, but more importantly, the details of everyday life no longer add up to creating a sense of *familiarity*. Every single daily incident occurs against the backdrop of an absence, the forlorn existence from *before*” (138). This “familiarity” echoes Julius’ search in Brussels.

I have also discussed how Julius might be considered to be a loiterly subject because he fits characteristics of a loiterly subject such as amiability, possibly explaining why Julius remains solitary and without close ties, and therefore he might also be searching for his grandmother. He does not know if she is even alive and the probability of actually finding her is rather small. Julius may therefore consider this journey to be “safe” and not overwhelmingly emotional. I have also shown how Julius is portrayed in a loiterly work. One of the characteristics of loiterly literature is that it is critical. Julius expresses a criticism of the society in which he lives especially the noisiness of it, and claims to appreciate silence instead. This can be compared to how Calin experiences her new surroundings in that she sees “an inferno of speed and kitsch, people leading a barbaric, dehumanized existence, perpetually rushing toward some obscure, insignificant destination. She is a drastic critic of the American way” (136). The way Julius feels disconnected to the people around him and wanders away from society also signals an underlying criticism.

Teju Cole himself has explained in an interview titled “An Immigrant’s Quest For Identity In The ‘Open City’” what he intended with calling the novel *Open City* in that he:

wanted to evoke that sense of invasion but a quiet invasion. But on the other hand, I wanted to suggest openness. We talk about open-minded and open-hearted and I like this word, this openness. Julius goes around and he really is – he’s open, he is permeable, he’s a bit porous to what’s going on in the city. (1)

Julius might therefore also simply represent a loiterly subject observing, experiencing and taking in what is going on around him, even though my discussions of him are exploring his actions, depictions, thoughts and remembering to contain a deeper meaning.

Moreover, the interviewer in “An Immigrant’s Quest For Identity” suggests that “it seems as though the story is basically an unwinding of the identity of a person who knows a lot about a lot of things, but I’m not so clear that he knows so much about himself.” (1) Cole then responds saying that he “really wanted to explore a mind – not Julius’s mind, but a mind like ours. You and me and everybody, a mind that’s always taking things in, but that’s no guarantee against self-deception” (1). I will therefore suggest that no matter what kind of character or man Julius might represent, the reader walks and sees with him in his loitering and nostalgia and is therefore allowed to explore his mind as well as his or her own. I also get the impression as a reader that Julius does not know so much about himself and that he therefore seeks to find out more about his identity and that this motivates his walking, his search for roots and belonging and his everlasting solitude.

Finally, Kaoru Miyazawa says in her essay “The More She Longs for Home, the Farther Away it Appears – A paradox of Nostalgia in a Fulani Immigrant Girl’s Life” that:

We need to open ourselves to diverse memories of home and engage in collective critical examinations of those memories and the construction of future visions of homes. This should lead us not only toward the future but also to fresh memories, new homes to long for, and above all, a new sense of belonging (71).

I will suggest that Julius longs for a place to belong that he cannot find, possibly because he finds himself in between two cultures. He mentions that he constructs his own past similar to what Miyazawa says above, but whether there is a deeper meaning behind the story portrayed in this novel or not is left to the reader to evaluate. I will argue, that, as Marielle Macé says; there is a link between fiction and reality and I am therefore, as a reader, greatly affected by

having been let into Julius' "open mind" and following him on his voyage, physical and mental, between times, places, ambiguous emotions and reflections.

My close reading and discussions of the novel add deeper meanings to Julius' narrative representation of this character's story. As Cole says, he intended to explore an open mind like anybody's, but because he explores Julius' mind in *Open City*, the link between fiction and reality discussed by Macé indicates that the reader is invited to be affected by what he or she is reading and to supplement meaning to Julius's actions, depictions and remembering. The reader is invited to a dialogue with the novel, as discussed previously in regard to the theories of Bakhtin and thus I consider my interpretations of Julius and the novel in their totalities to be my response in this dialogue. The novel might "just be loitering," it may serve an underlying critique or it may just simply explore an open mind. No matter how one chooses to understand it, I will argue that my discussions and interpretations of Julius based on his narrative representation of this character may serve to show how I, as a reader of this novel engaging in a dialogue with it, responds to the novel and shows how I am affected by it and how I can even explore my own open mind together with Julius. This allows me to see and reflect upon what I interpret to be Julius's hidden nostalgia, his solitude, his difficulties in fitting in and finding his place to belong and how he experiences living in the "open city" of New York.

Julius, similar to Vladimir Nabokov's Pnin, remains a kind of "misfit" in society and continues to walk away from reality and flee, mentally and physically, throughout. After having carefully explored his reflective nostalgia, which intensifies his feelings of non-belonging and solitude, I now understand Svetlana Boym's "sideways" directed nostalgia to involve an aspect of standing on the side and longing for something in the *present*. Because I am let into Julius' open mind, I am also allowed and encouraged to experience a search for *something* in the present that is difficult to put words to together with Julius, and I can



therefore better understand the struggles of living in today's modern, globalized world, as an immigrant who is torn between various places and spaces of belonging. Moreover, I believe that every human being experiences solitude and a search for one's place in the world, and therefore it has been extremely interesting for me to follow Julius's journey. The open ending emphasises that there must not be a fixed answer to where a journey like Julius' ends, but rather that we always carry the past with us in the present and that it continues to affect us throughout our lives.

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