

Remembrance of Homes Past

The narration of memory in

Baumgartner's Bombay, The Bus Stopped and

The God of Small Things

Kristin Nord Hicks



University of Bergen
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Department of Foreign Languages

Home.

A word that, in English or Danish, is spoken with a final clamping down of the lips, like windows shutting, as if what was contained was nothing but space; there is a movement like that of a possessive child gathering his toys in his arms: home; and that, in Hindi or Urdu, is spoken with a soft expulsion of breath, the lips opening like doors, a moving out from the rasp that catches in the throat to the final roll of the tongue:
ghar.

Ghar is also house.

(Khair 195)

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Abstract

Romaner fra de såkalte samveldelandene blir gjerne lest med et fokus på hvordan de tar til motmele mot de dominante strukturer den forhenværende kolonimakt har etterlatt seg på alle samfunnsnivåer, og slik også i enkeltmenneskets forståelse av verden. Det fokuseres på deres lokalitet og deres ”genuine”, ”ikke-vestlige” stemme. De tre romanene som figurerer i denne avhandlingen, *Baumgartner’s Bombay* av Anita Desai, *The Bus Stopped* av Tabish Khair, og *Guden for små ting* av Arundhati Roy, representerer alle på sitt vis slike stemmer.

Denne avhandlingen tar likevel utgangspunkt i en lesning som heller i en annen retning – et valg som springer ut fra et sterkt ønske om å lese romanene fra et perspektiv som ikke nødvendigvis er det som uunngåelig assosieres med dem. Romanene bærer hvert sitt vitnesbyrd til historiske traumer, som del av det som omgir de fiktive karakterenes personlige minner. Fortellingene blir slik på sine ulike måter stemmer som gir liv til minner både på makro og mikronivå.

Minner og hukommelse står sentralt i mine lesninger, slik de også er kategorier som gjennomsyrrer de tre fortellingene, og derfor gjør dem til, blant annet, historier om sorg og tap. Hukommelsen, og dens rolle som mellomledd mellom fortid og nåtid, og minnenes rolle som bindeledd mellom de faktiske forhold og vår opplevelse av dem, er det som strukturerer fortellerform og estetisk uttrykk i bøkene. Utgangspunktet mitt er å gå inn i hvordan disse fortellingene bringer minner til live, hvordan de utbroderer fortidens makt, og på hvilken måte de illustrerer et budskap om at hukommelse er en høyst ustabil, men likevel ufravikelig, link mellom oss og vår egen fortid.

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Kristin Nord Hicks

P r e f a c e

How small the cosmos (a kangaroo's pouch would hold it),
how paltry and puny in comparison to human consciousness,
to a single individual recollection, and its expression in words!

(Nabokov 24)

Like all other journeys, the journey of life has a site of origin and a site of termination.

However viewed or experienced, linear or circular, short or long, it is a journey open for stops along the way. We are able to fill all those places where we might choose to stop for a while with experience, memory and meaning. And in the same way as we fill the place, the place fills us. This results in potential reciprocity, and is the reason for the conceptual delineation made between place and space. One is a location, the other is a location layered with personal attachments or experiences. In Cathy Turner's words: the "[u]se of the terms 'place' and 'space' lacks absolute consistency within theoretical discourse" (373), and I will here operate with an understanding that builds on several conceptualisations, but mainly those found in Turner's work¹. I have tried to be consistent in differentiating between *place*, which is often understood as impersonal, and holds value as an ordering system of material coordinates, and *space*, which is subjectively and inter-subjectively experienced, a place filled with layers of meaning and history (Turner 373-4).

As already apparent, notions of journeys and spaces occupy a central place in this thesis. However, my work is not an examination of the terms per se, but rather an exploration

¹ Though Turner's terms primarily belong to the field of performance theory, I find them pertinent as they connect place and space with the terms *haunting* and *ghost* which will be relevant in later chapters when discussing the relations between space and memory. Turner's terms build on de Certeau's, but also link to other understandings. My own coherent use of the terms has at times been challenging because I quote writers who operate with different delineations.

of their connection to another concept: *memory*. My main concern is to explore how the concept of memory unfolds through the narration of memories, and how the threefold relationship memory, the remembered and the one remembering, is given narrative form. In this thesis I am therefore preoccupied with analyzing how the narratives of the primary texts, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) by Anita Desai, *The Bus Stopped* (2004) by Tabish Khair, and *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, render the process and experience of remembering. The gap between different places and different times is repeatedly a source to loss for the novels' characters, but as we will see in the following, memory is pivotal in bridging the gap. Memory is the key to any understanding of the self, because it is the tool by which the self can create links between its present and its history. The narrative renderings of these links are therefore curious mixtures of all kinds of memories, and can tell us a lot more about the one remembering than is known to himself. This is because memory is not only operating from the conscious, but also from the unconscious. Though the literary refractions cannot in any way be claimed to be the same as memory's functions in real life, they share certain aspects and terminology – mainly due to literature's imitative function. It is therefore necessary to keep in mind that we are continuously concerned with the literary manifestations of memory in this thesis.

Furthermore, it is my intention to shed light on how memory is determined by and devoted to certain spaces. This relates specifically to the location of *home*: both as the geographical materiality of a house, and as an abstraction. This dual function of home is especially relevant to the literary refractions of memory and the narration of the past in these three novels. The house occupies a central role in all three narratives, and due to its connection to the concept of home, it will be explored in detail for its ambiguity. The exploration of the intimate domestic sphere entails readings of literal and figurative use of concepts such as *house*, *habits*, and *walls*, in relation to the narration of the past.

I have selected the primary material on the basis of their dealings with the past in the present. They are chosen not only because they portray memory and mnemonic triggers and traces in different ways, but also because they show certain similarities. Through my investigation of the connection between past and present, I aim to look at various narrative delineations: memory as a key to preserve and enjoy the past, or as a means to avoid confronting the present. The narrators of *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *The Bus Stopped* are so fixed on the past that reliving memory comes to replace living experience, which in turn results in petrification and obsession with the past. The narration of *The God of Small Things* follows a structure that mirrors the fragmented and non-chronological order of memory itself.

Throughout this thesis we witness the narrative renderings of memory's multilayered and unreliable side. Memories are portrayed as sporadic, unstable, agent and context dependent. Moreover, all the narratives can be seen to show that the role of memory in narration at best is complex and ambiguous, but that memory, however unstable, is crucial in the narration of a life. Bridging spatial and temporal gaps, it also holds the power to soothe that which memory always entails: *loss*.

The structure of this paper is thematic and the three novels will be dealt with according to the focus of the chapter rather than being handled separately. The first chapter includes introductions to most of the relevant concepts and terms that figure throughout the thesis. It also seeks to establish the tonality of the paper, an approach that responds to the material itself. In this chapter a structuring line is drawn between home and memory and the various concepts attached to these terms feature as appropriate, though they are not easily disentangled. The choice of theorists includes John Berger, Henry Bergson, and Marcel Proust. I have chosen Berger specifically because of his lyrical understanding of home, time and space, and because he is acknowledged as an inspirational voice in both *The Bus Stopped* and *The God of Small Things*. Bergson is a natural choice due to his seminal understanding of

time, and contributions to the phenomenology of memory. The choice of Proust stems from the literature itself: an imperative to read Proust is located in the narrative of *The Bus Stopped*, and I have followed this suggestion so as to ‘let the literature speak’. Proust’s take on memory is of course also interesting and highly relevant because it deals with aspects of memory that is beyond conscious control. This chapter will also deal briefly with theories on the Indian English novel and postcolonial perspectives.

Chapter two, “Imprisoning Memories”, probes deeper into the nature of memory and its connection to place and space. It explores what memory houses for the characters of the three narratives, and what kind of bearing it has on their lives. It delves into what the houses of their pasts look like, and how home is constructed through memory. It suggests that the power of the past is such that memory in fact encloses the characters in its folds, to the point of imprisonment. To assist my readings I include Berger, but I add Paul Ricoeur and his understanding of memory and imagination, as well as Gaston Bachelard and his “poetics of space”.

Chapter three, “Looking and Seeing in the Mirror of Memory”, deals with how the fixation on the past in fact obscures what the character see, both in the present and the past, and how the position of the one remembering is in a way double, a position of being simultaneously perceiver and perceived. It looks at how memories are recalled, and the struggle with laying the past to rest. The chapter suggests a figurative link between mirror and memory, and includes Michel Foucault’s theoretical reflections on the concept of the mirror.

In the final chapter we return to memory’s connection to loss, and the impossibility or paradox of the past as “the presence of the absent”. My readings connect the way memory works to the way we relate to memory. The extensive use of the past in the narration of a present gives these three novels an element of *haunting*, not only in the plot, but also for the

reader – who experiences to be haunted by the narratives. The final chapter considers such “haunting” in a broader perspective.

As a quick note on the locality of the novels, I need mention that they most likely will be labelled into the category of postcolonial literature. This due to the fact that their creators either live in, or come from, the former British colony of India. This in turn means that we deal with the so-called Indian English (IE) novel or Indian writing in English (IWE)². While I acknowledge the relevance and potential of a postcolonial approach for the three novels, I will here focus on the themes outlined above. This is due to a belief that what marks these novels to the reader is first and foremost not their specific locality, but their universality; they are rooted in place, but speak of experiences that apply to all human beings. In specific this relates to the feeling of loss, and of being lost, of recalling and being revisited by the past. The picture these narratives paint of memory is one which labours under no illusion concerning the force and emotional strength of the past. These narratives all bear in them the unsettling power of memory and how, through it, the past can speak so directly to the present that the narratives almost become elegies of loss.

² IWE seems to be the older term, and is found in for instance Maggie Butcher (1983). The term IE literature appears to be a more recent designation, and can be located in U. M. Nanavati and C. Kar Prafulla (2000), or Makarand Paranjape (2000).

Chapter 1

The House of Memory

For both the houses border the heart of a space that does not easily lend itself to translation. It is a space of many shades of skin, many dialects and languages spoken by servants and family members; a space of people, memories and practises that see no need to be called by another name.

(Khair 5)

Introduction

I would like to start off with a short, proper introduction to the plot and characters of the novels in question. *Baumgartner's Bombay* is set in the present, but revealingly, more than half of its content is concerned with narrating the past. The influence of lost time on the present is rendered in various ways. The novel's protagonist, Hugo Baumgartner, is a Jew who grows up in Germany during the pre-war years, and witnesses the deterioration of his family, and his father's suicide. Leaving for India to escape persecution and death, he unwillingly parts from his mother, who chooses to stay behind and later dies in a camp. Residing in India for close to fifty years, Baumgartner has but a few close connections, and spends his old age in the company of his cats and his memories. His is a painful narrative, and it seems as though he is continuously rejected and feeds his happiness on a few, well-kept memories of his connection with his long absent mother. In one sense he is indistinct, in another sense he is inescapably standing out, a *firanghi*, a foreigner (Desai 19-21, 190, 206, 222), never truly finding a place to call his home. In search of a sense of belonging he consults his memory to find an answer he will never get, to a question he cannot stop asking; can he ever be at home and at peace anywhere?

The Bus Stopped is a narrative of a different kind. While the structure of *Baumgartner's Bombay* is almost clear cut into chapters of present and of past, *The Bus Stopped* deals with the past in a manner that is not as easily categorized. This novel has a different structure: not only does it have more than one narrator, it is also structured into two

parts of narration: a frame story, and a main part consisting of multiple journeys, told from inside a bus. The frame story has one narrator, who largely reflects on his homes and houses of the past. The journey narrative, however, is divided into a number of vignettes, which alternate between the point of view of the bus driver, Mangal Singh, and the stories of his passengers. They are all on a journey that eventually leads home, either physically or spiritually. The lives of the passengers, viewed in the specific moment of transition they share during the bus ride – are told through other specific moments of their lives. The memories evoked show us stories of lives being lived. Each life is represented through seemingly coincidental images or memories, somehow connected to the journey of the bus. The stories thus also allegorize how the present is only a preliminary stop on the continuous travel of our life, from the past through the fleeting present, into the future.

Parallel to these stories is the quest of the bus driver, who is searching for the perfect memory: “[t]his is a ritual with Mangal Singh, this slow sweep of the faces of his passengers for the mind to store, to italicize, to recall this trip by” (Khair 117). His self declared talent is to notice the small things in life, and make them stand out as gems. In order to remember each travel he collects, selects, and polishes one memory that for him is the key to remember that one specific trip. This project betrays a belief that memory works according to will, and that it can be mastered. The narrative however, shows a different perspective on memory and its workings – a perspective which comes to have a haunting effect. My analysis will mainly concern itself with the narrative of Mangal Singh, and briefly that of the frame narrator.

The third novel is *The God of Small Things*. In this novel the past not only haunts the protagonists – the memories of the past are so powerful and devastating that they engulf and define entire lives. The past lurks in all things and can be unleashed by any random sensory trigger. It is acutely present in everything, but moreover, the memory of the past seems to substitute the actual past (Roy 17, 253). This is truly a narrative of loss. The protagonists are

the dizygotic twins Rahel and Estha, whom we meet at two different points in their lives: first, when they are seven, then after a series of dramatic events including violence, trauma, and separation, at their re-union at the age of thirty-one. The twins lose their friend and father-figure Velutha to the brute force of history (the police killing an untouchable), their cousin Sophie Mol to the force of nature (drowning in a river), their innocence and their childhood, and most destructive of all, they lose each other (a separation forced by their uncle, father of the drowned Sophie). In this narrative the memory of loss feeds on the ones remembering to the point that it appropriates their lives. As such, the role of the past is mirrored in the novel's structure. The past is not relegated to its own chapters, nor is it delegated to the act of remembering. Rather, the same way that the past seeps into the minds of the protagonists, it seeps into the narrative of the present to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what is past and what is present. The novel starts with Rahel's return to a house that was once called home. In the course of the narrative we learn that the return to the house is an attempt to lay the past to rest, and that the house in fact was never experienced like a home other than in name. The return is that of Rahel to Estha, as that of the migrant to a lost home. André Aciman, reflecting on how places disappear from us and we from them, claims that the search for something that has stayed the same (here: the special twin bond), is typical of those "who have lost everything, including their roots and their ability to grow new ones" (21). The totality of the twins' loss includes losing sight of a meaningful reality, and Rahel's return to Estha is thus bound up in the fact that neither of them alone can puzzle events or memories together and make sense of them. In order to re-constitute the world they need to re(-)member (with) each other. When their souls "attach" to each other and connect as one again, they will be able to cope with memory in a more complete manner, and attempt to find meaning in their lives. Drawing on such geographically and culturally different parts of the world, the novels all still speak a language that we do not only recognize, but which

makes us ache with the pain of loss they describe, and wonder what memories constitute the walls of our own homes.

The History House

The House of History is in a way our access point to reflect upon the locality of the three novels in this thesis. Why read three Indian English novels through the lens of memory and the past? Why not read novels from some other part of the world, or simply British or American novels? To that question there can be many answers. Mine is this: chance brought me there, reading enhanced and enchanted me, and work convinced me.

The History House is a phrase figuring in *The God of Small Things*, and reads like an analogy of India as a postcolonial nation. It carries with it an understanding of India's place in its own history, and the role of the English in this matter. Though it is portrayed as a physical house, its function in this section of the thesis is metaphorical. As a representative of the forces that rule society, the History House speaks of the individual versus society, and the colonized versus the colonizer, or in the novel's own words: the "Big God [that] howl[s] like a hot wind, and demand[s] obeisance" and the "Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited) [that in turn] [comes] away cauterized" (Roy 20)³. Perhaps this constant awareness of, and play with the balance between the Indian and the English, or the Self and the Other, is what gives these novels their curious focus on the past in the present; how the past is negotiated into its place in the contemporary. The shared feature of having a colonial past perhaps gives these narratives an additional awareness of the past being lost, yet remaining a haunting presence, and of the past always being a puzzle of complex and interactive elements

³ Julie Mullaney in *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things* argues that the History House "functions to give voice to the double trauma of colonization ... the colonial project could and was also experienced as a trauma for the colonizing *as well as* the colonized culture" (45-6). She goes on to suggest that the novel focuses on the "intimate histories of conflict, desire, and rearrangement [that] are denied a place and a relation to those recognized and linear arrangements of events in that which we conventionally call 'History'" (47).

that influence the present in a myriad of ways. So, of course, India's past as a colonial nation is an aspect of the novels' common past that is present in the narratives, and most clearly in *The Bus Stopped* and *The God of Small Things*. Though they are post-colonial voices, this does not mean that they have to be read through the paradigm of the postcolonial.

Concerning the particularity of the Indian English novel, Makarand Paranjape argues that:

While [it] is still debated, its scope has widened in recent years ... IE fiction refers to not just the work of Indian citizens, but of writers of Indian origin or affiliation. All of this considerably enriches its domain, making it truly an inter-cultural literature. At one end it appears to merge indistinguishably with other Indian literatures, while at the other it joins equally effortlessly in the main currents of international literatures in English.

(125)

Furthermore, as Paranjape also points out – IE literature should be considered an independent literature to be assessed on its own terms. In this sense one could suggest that the IE occupies a place within the colonial space. We talk about region in order to distinguish between different localities within the colonial space (i.e. India, South Africa, Australia etc.) but this does, as mentioned, not necessarily extend the reading of that space into a postcolonial one. The soil that the novels grow out of determines the nutrition their roots are given, but above ground all sprouts are developed from humanity's sun and water – the various aspects of the human condition.

There is proof on the pages for he who seeks it, to claim that these are regional novels, i.e. they must be read with a focus on the particularity of their locality, but I borrow the words of Eudora Welty who says that: "Regional" I think, is a careless term, as well as a

condescending one, because what it does is fail to differentiate between the localized raw material of life and its outcome as art” (132). She further claims that regional is an outsider’s term because to the author himself, he is “simply writing about life” and that:

It may well be said that all work springing out ... from its native soil has certain things in common. But what signifies is that these are not the little things that it takes a fine-tooth critic to search out, but the great things, that could not be missed or mistaken, for they are the beacon lights of literature. (ibid.)

The novels in question actively and passively deal with a colonial past and the memory and bearing of this. However, as the structure of my thesis reflects, I suggest that that although literatures may have their own local particularity, history and issues, they are always within the domain of Literature. This is, in my opinion, synonymous with literature’s universal facet. Each local place is also part of a global world, and so I find it pertinent to propose that the novels as hand be read as “glocal” – both in their universality and their locality. Because, after all, which place in the world is not a result of its far and immediate past? My focus is not on how the novels speak to, against or with their past – but on how they speak of the *relationship* between past and present.

I want to briefly enter another house with a different history before we move on: namely the house of academia and the history of scholarship on these novels. The oldest novel, *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, published in 1988, has naturally been subject to a variety of scholarly approaches, spanning from cross-cultural understandings to Holocaust related readings. *The God of Small Things* has similarly received a fair deal of critical attention, notably in three fields: the postcolonial, the exotic and on two accounts of controversy. The

controversy relates to the rendering of communist movements and leaders in Kerala⁴, and the sexual content of the novel and its dealings with cross-caste relationships⁵. *The Bus Stopped* is a more recent novel, published in 2004, and criticism has been hard to find. What has been written of it is, again, related to the postcolonial, but also the cosmopolitan. As I have indicated already, however, my own focus is a little different, and takes into consideration conceptualizations that may be broader.

The Houses of Our Past

One of these conceptualizations has to do with home. “Home” has its etymology from Old English *hām*, which in turn is of high German origin, *Heim*, or old Norse *Heimr* ("OED").

This gives us an opportunity to connect home to the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich*, and draw lines to both the familiar or known, and the unfamiliar or, indeed, the uncanny⁶. Concepts of home are furthermore indisputably connected to culture, and its idea pertains to all cultures.

This means that there must be both a local and a universal side to the term.

To illustrate this difference I borrow the words of writer Xiaolu Guo whose protagonist explains the Chinese word for home as “家(jia) for ‘home’ and ‘family’ and sometimes including ‘house’” (125):

家, a roof on top, then some legs and arms inside. When you write this character down, you can feel those legs and arms move around underneath the roof. Home, is a dwelling house for the family to live.

⁴ I quote Mullaney on this point: “Roy’s representation and alleged denigration of the communist leader, E.M.S. Namboodiripad” (69) was the object of massive critic from left-wing Indian critics and Marxists.

⁵ A case was made against Roy, and criminal proceedings filed on the charges of corrupting public morality (Mullaney 70).

⁶ The ambiguous nature of the home and the house recurs in later chapters.

But English, it's different ... It seems that 'family' doesn't mean a place ... I keep telling you I need a home. Your face look gloomy, and seem disappointed that you cannot make me happy.

'But I am your home,' you say.

'Yes, but you always move around, and you don't want to live in this house'... 'So that mean we can't have a home together,' I confirm.

'No, I didn't say that,' you say.

You look distant to me. (126)

A saying goes that "home is where the heart is". Relating to either the loving or the longing of the heart, this expression posits the ideal that anyone who either loves or longs for something is bound to feel "at home" somewhere or with someone. This definition of home is inextricably connected to a sense of belonging: either through love, longing, or both. It further untangles the concept of home from the physical space of a house. John Berger claims that in fact, "home has little to do with a building. The roof over the head, the four walls, have become, as it were, secular: independent from what is kept in the heart and is sacred" (63). This opens up for an imagined home of sorts.

As we see in the brief excerpt above, a home where the heart is seems in part to be a culture or gender dependent view. He, an English man, understands home as a spiritual unit based on love and passion. She, a Chinese woman, does not find this sufficient: home to her includes a house, stability and family – and love as a possible addition. Amongst other ways of conceiving the idea of home, the concept may thus also be understood as the physical habitation of a dwelling, the geographical location of one's origin, or a family and a household. Berger claims that "[o]riginally home meant the center of the world – not in a

geographical, but in an ontological sense” (55) because it was a centre of gravity keeping the surrounding fragmentary chaos at bay and behind imagined boundaries. Home in this sense is a space from which the world is constructed, within the frames of the intimate or domestic sphere. This connects home to unity and the primary internalizing process of childrearing. From this centre a safe area of home is constructed. Simultaneously, boundaries into areas which are not home, where we might feel fragmented, alienated or lost, are arranged. This is not only to create a space in the world we can call ours, but it is also part of the necessary socializing process out of the family and into society – crossing the border between Self and Other, the familiar and unfamiliar.

This is also why, as Berger puts it, “as soon as very early childhood is over, the house can never again be home” (67). The unit of the home fractures, and the sense of wholeness experienced in a childhood home is lost. In attempts to regain access to the homes or the houses of our pasts, we attempt to conjure up that which only exists in our memories, mementoes of that which was. In *The Bus Stopped*, for instance, the protagonist retains an image of the home unit, despite knowing that it is lost to time: “[t]his house is the house of my parents. This house is simply house. Home. Ghar. There are times when I feel that this is the only home I have ever known, will ever know. No matter where I go, no matter how many years I stay away, this will be home” (4).

The past can be unlocked by conscious recollection of memories, but it might also be invoked by involuntary memories triggered by what David Gross, in his reading of Proust, calls “some incidental sensation, some unintended (often non-visual) impression in the present” (377). Or in Proust’s own description: “the sensation[s] which I had once experienced ... had, recurring a moment ago ... been waiting in their place – from which with imperious suddenness a chance happening had caused them to emerge” (Proust 193).

Sometimes, however, home is neither of the above. What about those who have no protected

family area of love, support and safety? What about those who have no houses to dwell in? The dispossessed are in no less need of physical habitation or the comforting concept of homes and belonging as are the privileged. Berger claims that “to the underprivileged, home is represented, not by a house but by a practise or set of practises” (64). Perhaps this is where we can reach an agreement of what a home is, or can be, in its most basic sense.

The emphasis on sets of practises brings us to another of the concepts that will be recurring in the thesis: *habits*. Home can, in Berger’s words, be constructed by means of reiteration: “by turning in circles the displaced preserve their identity and improvise a shelter. Built of what? Of habits, I think, of the raw material of repetition” (ibid.). What these repetitions offer is permanence. There is a kind of stability in habit that offers safety. Which habits induce such building material? Is home the repetition of love? Not necessarily. There are loveless homes. Is home the repetition of family relationships and interaction patterns? Perhaps. By creating offspring we repeat a habit of our species, and by acting out the roles of a family we copy the social structure of our society. This makes us part of a unity, we belong, we experience a sense of home. Is home the repetition of a memory, or a repetition of our idea of home? Yes, even without physical walls to surround us, we create *in* our memory and *from* our memories walls of personal value that safeguard us from the outside world. Berger specifies this as: “[t]he habits imply words, jokes, opinions, gestures, actions, even the way one wears a hat. Physical objects and places ... supply the scene, the site of the habit, yet it is not they but the habit which protects” (ibid.). In our repetition of that which means something to us, our habits become the core of our home.

Memory is moreover the texture of those habits which constitute our homes. The construction of what we can call “invisible, intangible, and biographical” (ibid.) walls is continuous. Memories and mementoes are repeated and continually renewed. It is a way of making interaction between the past, present and future active and reciprocal. In this

understanding time is continuous; always ongoing and interactive. Even if something is finished, or not yet experienced, time in an individual's mind is structured through his or her memories, and is therefore never chronologically ordered. This is why, even after the home has dissolved, a recollection of these constitutive memories may trigger an experienced spiritual return to that lost home. In this way each home is not a dwelling, it is, in Berger's words, "the untold story of a life being lived" (ibid.). The conceptualizations of walls and the concepts of time are highly relevant to my discussion, and will be explored in greater detail in later chapters.

What Memory Houses

Home consequently has a double existence: in the world and in our minds. This means that though it is more or less rooted in a physical place, the imagined home can defy the limits of time and place, and follow the mind(s) in which it was created. A memory or imagined home however, often tends to become static, so that if one should happen to return to the physical home one would find the correspondence between it and the remembered one to be corrupted. This has (at least) two possible explanations, illustrated by the following passage from *The God of Small Things*:

Years later, when Rahel returned to the river, it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed.

Both things had happened.

It had shrunk. And she had grown. (118)

While the memory becomes static, the dwelling and its physical and social surroundings change, so that when the migrant returns he finds home an entirely different structure from his memory of it. The second reason is that the migrant himself changes. According to Berger, “[e]very migrant knows in his heart of hearts that it is impossible to return. Even if he is physically able to return, he does not truly return, because he himself has been so deeply changed by his emigration” (67), or in the words of the exile, “even if I don’t disappear from a place, places disappear from me” (Aciman 21)⁷. Thus, a migrant cannot return to his position in the remembered home, and the memory is either discarded and forgotten, or desperately preserved and mourned. These two actions; the preservation or idealization of the past, alongside the mourning of memory as a loss, will figure in chapter three, where they become part of the discussion on memory, perception and imagination.

Memory in itself is of course also a complex matter. A quick historical sketch delineates the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century as a dividing line in types of approaches to memory and habit. Prior to this, views were dominantly focused on memory as a (store)house in which every memory had its place. Hence the (still) often used metonymical relationship of memory to (storage-) house, with descriptive terminology such as rooms, corridors, doors, windows, handles and the like⁸. We find this link between memory and the house also in the novels in question, in their semantics as well as at the level of plot. St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, describes the structure as: “[i]n memory everything is presented separately, according to its category ... All these sensations are retained in the great storehouse of the memory, which in some indescribable way secretes them in its folds”

(6). In an article on the history of memory and habit in Western thought, David Gross

⁷ This ambiguity towards change is described vividly in accounts of exile. In my choice to focus on home rather than exile, I touch merely briefly upon the exilic feeling of loss, because of its connection to the loss of the past. The quote by André Aciman (“Shadow Cities”) comes from the collection *Letters of Transit – Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language and Loss*. I mention it here because a few of the reflections from the collection will feature in later chapters.

⁸ See Roediger quoted in Sutton: “There is continuity too in metaphors for the spatial organization of memory as containing rooms, palaces, or purses, as a bottle or dictionary, as tape recorder or junk box” (9).

explains how for decades, the function of memory played a great role in the individual's orientation in society, education and personal moral. Mnemonic training was valued as it created habits which in turn were considered positive in the development of the adult citizen (Gross 369).

In the course of incipient modernity however, a different set of values usurped the throne habit had held in virtue. In this new, modern view, Henri Bergson can be seen as a girder, due to his theories on time and memory. The time concept developed by Bergson distinguished between clock-time and what he called *durée* or duration. These terms corresponded with other ideas of his era, and reflected the difference between the public and the private, and the self's various realizations and depths. Duration as a term sought to explain the complex, philosophical understanding of how time was experienced for the individual, and how it could not be measured by the detached, mechanical pace of clock-time. Bergson's understanding of time was typical of the modern interest in consciousness, time and memory, and can be seen as an example of modernity's scepticism to habit. Bergson operated with the idea that the past could survive under two distinct forms: what he called "motor mechanisms" (habits) and "independent recollections" (78). Habit in the traditional sense was synonymous with virtue and maturity.

However, in the course of the nineteenth century, this understanding changed. Habit had turned into a way of masking a "fear of life" or "a measure of protection from anxiety" (Gross 372). The habitual self became perceived as a falsity, concealing a true self. Gross goes on to note that Bergson's view on habit was that it violated "the unique nature of the memory" (375). I contest this view on habit in chapter two, however, and my reading of the three novels will show habit to hold different qualities. However intriguing Bergson's ideas on memory are, suffice it perhaps here to say that he explored the mind's conscious retrieval of memories, and showed how the retrieval process to a large degree was determined by the

individual's "attention to life", and what to him/her was significant or "useful" in understandings of present situations. What was not included in his theory were memories not called forward to fulfil a purpose – memories in control of themselves, beyond the control of the conscious mind and what Gross calls the criterion of utility (ibid.).

This kind of memory was addressed in a novelistic manner by Marcel Proust, who fused Bergson's two categories into one, which he labelled *mémoire volontaire* or voluntary memory, and then added a new category by the name of *mémoire involontaire* – involuntary memory. In order to unlock an understanding of these terms, I lean on Gross' reading of Proust⁹. Proust was concerned with the deepest levels of memory, those located in the unconscious (Gross 377). The difference between the voluntary and involuntary memory is that the first follows an instrumental structure of association based on logic and similarity, while the second is so deeply buried in the mind that when it is triggered into consciousness it creates a sort of shock effect. It is therefore crucial that the memories be forgotten or lost in order to be regained. When they so re-emerge they are accompanied by everything that was present in the moment they were "conceived". In Proust's own words: "if the setting of sensations in which they are preserved be recaptured, they acquire in turn the same power of expelling everything that is incompatible with them, of installing alone in us *the self that originally lived them*" (qtd. in Gross 378). The effect of such resurfacing of memory can perhaps be compared to opening a long sealed container. When the lid is removed, a breath of the past emanates and flows over the self, giving the individual an experience of going back in time. The quote further addresses another point of Proust's theory, namely the manner in which the involuntary memories are activated. Proust believed that memories are triggered

⁹ This is mainly due to the enormity of Proust's work. I will however, try to use Proust directly where I can, through a few selected excerpts from *Remembrance of Things Past*, the part which today is entitled *The Way by Swann's*. My fuller understanding of his arguments must however be developed through a secondary reading.

primarily by incidental sensations in the present, which somehow make the forgotten memory step forward and announce itself along with the past it belongs to.

The effect of this is that although the past is always already lost, the individual mind possesses keys to unlock remnants of the past and activate them in the present – allowing the past its haunting presence. Emilienne Baneth-Nouailhetas, who represents the only theoretical approach to *The God of Small Things* related to memory that I have been able to locate, writes that: “[t]he narrative is precisely the tool through which the inchoate mass of recollections come together to produce a whole, a relation to time, and memory-driven meaning” (55). This could, in my view, be said of all three narratives, and show how memory can be seen as what Diane Thompson calls “a dominant means of organizing [the] novel[s’] artistic system[s], structurally, aesthetically and semantically” (Thompson 1)¹⁰. This can further assist in our understanding of the structure of the novels: the “construct[ion] along the lines of mnemonic processes, relying on echoes, associations and imagery” and the “narration[’s] focus... on the inarticulate sense of recollection” (Baneth-Nouailhetas 55). Their narrative descriptions are, in other words, multilayered and inconsistent, reflecting the structure of memory and its fragmented bearing on life.

Understanding the obsession with the past in these three novels finally entails an acknowledgement of the presence of the absent. Aristotle wrote that “[a]ll memory is of the past” (qtd. in Ricœur 6), and likewise Platonic theory emphasizes that the memory image is a phenomenon of the “presence of an absent thing” (ibid.). Because the past is always already lost, a memory is no more than an interpretation of the lost space, built on perception and conception. This recollection process is infused with people’s strive for meaning. The current set of knowledge and experience, and the cognitive schematic structures that systematise

¹⁰ Thompson’s words relate to *The Brothers Karamazov*, and her reading of it, with focus on the poetics of memory. My approach being similar, and the description fitting my reading, I have chosen to re-appropriate Thompson’s words.

knowledge into meaningful patterns, impact on what and how we remember. The following chapter presents my readings of how the three core processes of memory – encoding, storage and recall – manifest themselves in the narratives, and how they are seen to be coloured by the perception and interpretation of the self remembering.

Chapter 2

Imprisoning Memories

With that gun, with that shot, the memory came back to him of how he had lain face down on the polished parquet floor of the Berlin flat. Hammering his heels and howling in outrage because his father ... refused indignantly to take him along to the races ... Thirty years [it] had taken ... and now here he was at the races. Papa, he wanted to shout, Papa, what do you think? He wanted to lift his arms and wave – and he did, exuberantly – Papa, do you see me here, at the races?

(Desai 193)

Meticulously Remembered

At a basic level memory is both the power of remembering and the memories recalled by this act. Paul Ricoeur suggests that “[m]emory in the singular is a capacity, an effectuation; [while] memories are in the plural: we have memories” (22)¹¹. Outside the literary context, memory is perceived as a faculty of the mind that allows us to perceive time. Memory is of something absent, something that has been, and it creates in us a sense of passing time, a sense of time lived but now lost to us. Ricoeur claims that “we have no other resource, concerning our reference to the past, except memory itself” (21). The existence of time through memory is closely interrelated to memory’s representation of the past. This is claimed to be either semantic (truth seeking) or episodic (experience related) (Sutton 3, 4). I argue that these are not mutually exclusive categories, and that we witness a continuous interrelationship and active negotiation between them in the narrative renderings we explore.

The bus driver Mangal Singh, of *The Bus Stopped*, declares himself to have been a once aspiring writer. His days consist of driving a private bus between two Indian cities, and during these rides he spends his time taking in images of what he passes, and storing them

¹¹ In his phenomenology of memory Ricoeur concerns himself with what there is memory of, and whose memory it is. He connects this with the terms *history* and *forgetfulness*, and shows how what we call history is a biased product of carefully selected memories. For our purpose here, we will only borrow a few of his views on memory in seeking to illuminate its nature.

away in his memory. Large parts of his days seem devoted to reminiscing about his desires, desires which we soon discover are unobtainable, because their objects exist in the past. His true wishes once were to become a successful fiction writer, and to marry his cousin, Sunita. Unable to fulfil these desires, he clings to the memory of a time when these were still opportunities. Memory is thus soothing the realities of his current situation, and it becomes a project for Singh not to fill the pages of his memory, but to re-read them. The new impressions he takes in during his trips are however not attempts to forget the past; they are rather reinforcing the already existing memories. Early in the narrative, Singh declares that seeing life in still small images is not only his talent, it is what defines him as an individual:

Some people collect stamps or bottles or coins; he collects images, you have to collect something as worthless as images, don't you, no market value to them, and he has to collect them, nothing but them, images! images!, one from each trip of his life, thousands of them now, all meticulously remembered, just those single images, a colour, a scene, a face, an act italicized on the pages of memory. Not that he chooses the images consciously; that is simply the way his mind orders the seamless and yet unravelling days of his life. (Khair 12)

The passage serves to illustrate the rendering of memory as a depository, an album or book in which imprints can be stored. The narrator seems to be conscious of these facts, as he describes the absorption of images as an act of writing, of italicizing on pages. Needless to add is of course the fictional aspect of this act; the art of memory becomes artificial as Singh pictures himself the writer and director. Rather than simply truthfully storing the memories away as "snapshots" in an album, the narrative uncovers how agency enters the equation, and shows how memories are not once and for all stably ordered. What is unnoticed by Singh

himself is the instability of his ordering system, and his active participation in the selection process. Two descriptions stand out to prove him wrong when he claims that he does not choose the images consciously: the comparison to collecting stamps or coins, and the fact that they are “meticulously remembered”. The act of collecting already implies a choice, a conscious selection of a few from many (“OED”). The same concerns the descriptive “meticulously” – indicating a conscious and active way of performing a task. It thus seems that though Singh assumes this his natural given talent, it would appear to be more of a studied art: the choice of one impression to polish and glue to the pages of his collector’s album – to italicize in his mind, adding a special meaning and force to it that it could not have acquired on its own. He recasts the world through his own framework.

Also crucial to note is that memory of the past is not the past itself. Our memory consists of images of what we have seen and experienced and dreamt, images or imprints or echoes of the lived world. Socrates described this through a metaphor of a block of wax in our souls. Whatever remembered is seen as the imprint of that something in the block of wax; “[w]hatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image ... remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget” (qtd. in Ricoeur 9). However, this picture of memory is problematic in several ways, primarily Ricoeur says, because the idea of an imprint connects to “faithful resemblance,’ proper to eikastic art” (13) and poses the question of how truthful the impression or the memory is. He notes that “there can be a truthful or deceitful mimetic because there is between the *eikōn* [image] and the imprint a dialectic of accommodation, harmonization, or *adjustment* that can succeed or fail” (ibid.). This implies choice and action during the processing procedure. I propound that *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, *The Bus Stopped* and *The God of Small Things* all postulate this view of memory, as we will see shortly.

To Mangal Singh memory houses lost desires, but also hope of getting a second chance at obtaining these objects of desire. The past housed opportunities, and with these now vanished, Singh clings to the hope that there might still be traces left of them in the present. Each image or impression consequently becomes a fixation. He fixes his gaze upon it and constructs a trace between the impression and his pre-existing memories. The idea of a *trace* can be understood in various ways¹². Without taking into consideration all the varieties of delineation, I at present base my reading on the following understanding: the trace is a (continuous) “bridge across the temporal gap, causally connecting past and present” (Sutton 6), echoing what Proust describes as sensations that trigger the past. In a way it is logical that if we can operate with an understanding of an incidental connection (random sensory triggers), we can also operate with more or less non-incidental connections (traces) as well. The causal connection between past and present is either a surprising jump or a repeated pattern; which can be both trace and habit. British psychologist of memory, Fredric Bartlett, operates with the term trace, and claims that the memory traces should not be regarded as “complete, stored up somewhere, and then re-exited at some much later moment” (qtd. in Sutton 12). This seemingly contradicts Proust’s understanding (cf. stored away and revived), but as I see it, they are not contradictory, they are rather different attempts at describing the retrieval process of memory. Bartlett continues to describe traces as “interest-determined, interest-carried ... They live with our interests and with them they change” (ibid.). As we will see below, the narrative of *The Bus Stopped* is very much concerned with, and defined by, traces.

¹² Freud used the term in connection with psychoanalysis. In Derrida’s reading, Freud’s trace connects with layers of understanding and layers of text, and the palimpsest. The allegory of the “Magic Pad” is relevant, but cannot be taken into consideration at this point. Derrida’s own use of the term trace is “key concept” in his writing (Galpin). I will at this point retain as the understanding of *trace* a form of causal connection between past and present. I will return to Derrida briefly at a later point in this thesis.

Petrification

Perception and imagination, directed by emotion, serves to petrify memory in Singh's narrative. He builds the walls of his life by the daily habit of repeatedly studying his surroundings for images. Subsequently transforming these impressions into the trace of another imprint, he effectively occupies himself with reminiscing about his lost dreams. The present is thus read through a memory lens, and memory is traced and retraced until it is fixed into a habit or pattern. The first narrative portrayal of this is Singh's project during his every ride – finding the image to remember the trip by. The new impressions however, simply overlay traces of the old. This repetitive patterned storing of new impressions in memory is habitual with Singh. On occasion his cocky confidence even borders on hubris, as when he claims that “he allows himself to feel that he has seen it all, that he has seen them all” (142). Believing that he can fully control his gift of memory and apply it as he sees fit, his feet are brutally put back on the ground when he is finally presented with the image that he will not only remember, but that will haunt him and “fill up so much space in his imagination that the rest of the trip would be washed away from his memory. His mind, greedy author, italicized it on the pages of his memory” (160). The passage speaks for itself:

What Mangal Singh would remember most vividly about this trip were the two flies probing the concavities of the child's nostrils, impervious to the seething of life around them, impervious to the silence of death that sat like a blush on the dead child's face.
(163)

The realization that memory is out of his control comes during a split second: “[he] knows with certainty that whatever he does he will remember the trip by this. Not all memories are voluntary. Sometimes one has no choice but to remember” (150). The narrative, however,

drags on, and uses a total of seven vignettes to describe the first dawning realization into the final description of the memory-image (I cite the vignette in its totality): “[f]inally, it was simple: *Two flies probing the concavities of a dead child’s nostrils*” (165). The literary representation of memory finally proves itself to house a notion rather different from what it appears, literally, at first glance. The descriptions of memory-images draw, as we have seen, on the visual. In fact, the picture painted of memory at first seems to show that memory can be controlled and neatly ordered. However, through a series of literally visualized impressions, the narrative undoes our initial understanding, and exposes an image of memory that is shifting, unstable, agent and context dependent, and related to the perceptual. It conveys a conviction that memory is not only a conscious act, but rather a powerful force of the unconscious, governing what our consciousness is filled with. This is elucidated through both the way Singh’s vignettes are structured and told, and in the way they cease to exist at the very moment it becomes clear to him what the memory or image will be.

The second narrative representation of the habitual trace is sketched through Singh’s relationship with Sunita, the woman he is infatuated with. The descriptions of this relationship clearly illustrate Singh’s habitual relation to, and fixation with memory. His preserved image of Sunita overlays the new impressions; he can only recall their encounters now by “the colour of her bangles, the cup and the pattern of the cup, superficial images that have to stand in for what he dare not look for any longer” (136). The Sunita of present is not the Sunita of his dreams, nor the object of his desire. He reminisces about “the once attractive Sunita” (11) and angrily refuses to engage with the Sunita of real time: “short of breath now, unable to talk of anything but property and children ... she is a stickler for duty and decorum – but he knows that she is not listening to his reply ... for in her mind she is already walking back to her kitchen of greater concerns” (122). The impressions are described through Singh’s eyes, and all he can see is the past. His obliviousness of the present is satirically portrayed as he

comments on his inability to see, but without realizing the full extent of his own insight. In this moment of partial epiphany he “finally turns around ... [and] already knows what it is about. It is about his inability to see. All the images that are seared into his memory attest to that inability” (150). Stricken, he wishes that he had only been able to see, so that he would be able to forget. However, in the next sentence he again steps onto what we no longer simply can call memory trace, but more accurately, memory path. He fancies himself a writer transforming the situation from a simple impression to something worth storing: “[h]is mind ... italiciz[ing] them like a bad writer whose plain words are not sufficient to carry his meanings and stresses” (ibid.). The raw material of life is italicized, or emphasized; impressions serve chiefly as input on an already well-trodden path of other memories. The trace is re-traced until it becomes a habit, a trail, a routine.

The present as such is walled-in by the past, and acquisition of new impressions re-routed to the path leading backward. Nothing seems to break the orientation backward, nor open for a present contributing to new memories. This past that dominates the course of the present is attested in most of the narrative descriptions concerning Singh. Even his physical position in the bus leaves the imprisonment of the present clear: his seat is separated from the passenger section by “rods that have been painted yellow ... with a narrower strip of brown and then a thin layer of red at the bottom of each rod – so that they almost look like pencils” (13). The past announces itself: the impression of the pencil-rods activates the memory of his lost dream and this memory is repeated every time he looks at his cubicle: “[t]ypical, he thinks, typical that everything should conspire to remind him of his failures” (ibid.). His failed writer’s dream is awakened by a sensation, and revived by memory: so that “now he has to be penned in by these pencils that, like a writer’s pencil, empower him” (ibid.). Curiously, instead of mourning the failure, or resisting the grip of the past, the desire of again being given the opportunities of the past has been allowed a trace of hope in the present, so that

Singh sees “each trip [as] a narrative made of the criss-crossing of other stories that board his bus and then go on unconcerned” (ibid.). Even in his failure he, out of ignorance or conviction, retains a hope of return. Incapable of letting the author-identity go, he fancies himself to still be somewhat of a writer.

In chapter one, I referred to Bergson’s claim that habit violates the unique nature of memory, and similar scepticism which claimed that habits stifle creativity (Gross 372). *The Bus Stopped*, in my reading, goes far in the opposite direction, and comes close to in fact aligning habit with creativity. Singh’s visual sensation of pencil-like rods is at first not habitual, but as soon as the trace to his writer’s dream is established, Singh repeats the once novel memory until it becomes a routine. It can be claimed that this habit is destructive for Singh’s ability to impress new memories and sensations, and this point is addressed in the narrative. But does this make habit unconditionally negative? The problematic side of habit is apparent when we look at the “walls” of Singh’s life; they are constituted by habits of collecting, tracing and dreaming, and they stifle what he sees. Complexity arises, however, when we question the axiological side of habit. Per definition habit “promot[es] regularity, constancy, and predictability”, but is this synonymous with being “the enemy of life” (ibid.)? John Sutton suggests that if we cannot compare memory alone to a catalogue or storage house due to its instability and the subjective agency involved, scaffolding may be in order. Habitual uses of present resources are suggested as a means to “shape and anchor our versions of the past” (Sutton 17). So it seems that habit can contribute order to an otherwise chaotic structure or flow of memories. In fact it seems that if Singh’s life is built on an illusion, at least it contributes to give him hope and a sense of success. The habits allegedly hostile to creativity actually inspire him to imagine and create narrative traces between past and present. This passage illustrates:

A mud track cutting across the fields and on the track a man in shirt and dhoti pushing his cycle. His cycle laden with four startlingly white sacks, pregnant pouches hanging on both sides of the metal frame. They make him think of the maalik, husband of his second cousin, Sunita, whom he had once hope to marry, long ago, long long ago, they remind him of the maalik and his pregnant purses and he laughs out loud until tears come to his eyes. (41)

As the passage serves to show, images taken in are immediately re-directed into his thought pattern and traced to older memories. The loss Singh struggles to accept is stressed, Sunita was lost to him “*long ago, long long ago*” (my italics), but furthermore, there is a potential loss of pregnancy with Sunita, the lost chance of having children. Finally there is also the inability to access the “pregnant” purses that Sunita’s husband possesses. Her husband being his boss is the nadir for Singh; the girl, the money and the status is all lost to the past. It is thus not clear if the tears coming to his eyes are tears of joy or of pain. One point is clear however, it is remarkable how Singh’s imagination connects a man on a bicycle to these memories. I would therefore claim that the function of his memory is multilayered; it serves to petrify development and progress, fixating Singh’s view on the past, at the same time as it makes his imagination remarkably active and flexible.

The ambiguous relationship between memory and habit is also reflected in the narrative of *The God of Small Things*. The male twin, Estha, after being separated from his Ammu (i.e. mother) and sister, returned to his father, and then re-returned, has in the diegetic present regressed into a habitual, catatonic way of life. His actions revolve around a repetitive pattern; walking the fields, washing his clothes, and staying in his room. Memory houses guilt and separation and choreographs the daily reality. The guilt of having participated in a plot to frame his friend is the strongest: “[i]f you want to save [your selves and your mother] ... All

you have to do is say ‘Yes.’ (302). Estha even literally has the final word in betraying his friend and father-figure: “[t]he Inspector asked his question. Estha’s mouth said Yes. Childhood tiptoed out. Silence slid in like a bolt” (303). Indirectly, speech is what has initially severed almost all bonds to those he loves. The memory of guilty speech haunts Estha, and its consequence is that the redemptive action becomes its opposite: an act of silence. Speech is banished, and quietness becomes the reality of the present. This becomes the locus of habit for Estha. Arguably, habits in this narrative are neither creative nor stimulating. Their power is merely functional; they keep Estha alive in his sealed off container. Feeding on loss is, after all, also a way of feeding.

On a slightly different note, memory’s fixation, which we encountered in *The Bus Stopped*, also figures in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. Memory again houses something lost; this time a desire of a different kind – a desire for acceptance. When reality fails to provide Baumgartner with acceptance, he seeks back to a past when such a state was granted him. Memory then, presents no causal trace between present and past in the manner it does to Singh, who uses memory as a key to revive what is lost. For Baumgartner there are no bonds between the past and the present other than the involuntary memory jumps. The past is already lost. It cannot be revived. It can only be relived. Baumgartner’s memory houses the memories of his mother, who represents all that Baumgartner longs for but cannot obtain. The values that memory holds are so valuable that again we see the subject fixating on them instead of life, the acquisition of new sensations, and their transformation into memories. Memory seems again the house of loss.

Hugo Baumgartner does not suffer from the confusion described by Proust when diving into the well of the past. In Proust’s words the impressions from the past are diverse, “yet with this in common, that I experienced them at the present moment and at the same time in the context of a distant moment, so that the past was made to encroach upon the present and I

was made to doubt whether I was in the one or the other” (196). Baumgartner appears to have a clear distinction in his mind between his present and his past. This apprehension of what is gone and what is accessible in time is mirrored in the narrative structure. Baumgartner, when stirred by a memory, is not simply flushed by emotion and recollection – he delves into that moment of the past, and relives it in his mind, before at length returning to the present. This gives us the impression that even though he is very much aware of the now and the then, he is somehow haunted by the brute force and severe bearing of his memories. He seems unable to leave his past behind, to let it rest. The narrative in fact houses mostly Baumgartner’s memories of his past, and to him memory houses both his childhood and his experience of (not) belonging. Though his awareness of not belonging, even throughout childhood, is acute, he has in his memories of home a certain sense of unity and protection, represented by his mother, his *Mutti* (28). It becomes apparent that memory for Baumgartner houses not only positive, but negative and traumatic emotions, and not only is his past the direct cause of where he is at present, but the memory of that past continues to shape his entire life. The fixation lies in being unable to let the memories go, of being stuck on the same tracks, leading only backward in time. Whatever happens around him, Baumgartner has the escape of his house of memory.

According to Jacques Derrida we do not “apprehend the world directly, only retrospectively; our sense of that which is beyond ourselves is the product of previous memories, previous writings” (qtd. in Keep, McLaughlin and Parmar 1) so that these previous writings or traces “[supplement] perception before perception even appears to itself” (ibid.). This argument supports the reading of memory’s determining or imprisoning function in our primary texts. Perception is directed, as it were, by the paths made by the previous traces in the mind or soul of the one remembering (cf. Baumgartner and Singh). This claim extends as the condition of being: according to Derrida the only way we can experience the world is

through the traces of previous experiences and thoughts. These traces in turn form intricate webs or paths, which direct and determine the structure of all subsequent ideas and actions (Keep, McLaughlin and Parmar 2). If memory and perception are indeed structured by such directives, and in fact bound to already trodden paths, as the novels seem to suggest, what does this implicate in relation to choice, agency and development?

Ubiquitous

All three novels render an impression of memory's dependency and connection to the emotional. As there is no understanding of time without memory, there is no memory outside the concept of time. Likewise no memory is stored without there being some kind of emotion to activate our consciousness into selecting that experience as worthy of preserving, the same way as no rising emotion will pass without generating a memory to remind us of the emotion. This is why remembering can entail powerful emotional experiences and a sense of being momentarily present in the past. According to both Bergson and Proust we store all lived sensations as memories in respectively; "the realm of pure memory" (qtd. in Gross 374) or "an unknown region" (qtd. in Gross 378). The capacity of both these obscure vaults seems limitless when it comes to storage, but is not so intelligible when it comes to how and what is retrieved. Proust's idea was that the memories that surface from the deep well of memory might be activated by sensory stimuli which are closely related in nature to the sensory stimuli present at the time of the original preservation¹³. However, the individual experiencing the long forgotten memory coming forward might not be able to connect the link between the present and the past stimuli, so that the memory presenting itself seems utterly random and

¹³ The same goes for Bergson: "pure memories, as they become actual, tend to bring about, within the body, all the corresponding sensations" (130).

surprising. Although he consciously seeks and seems dependent on memories, Baumgartner is sometimes taken by surprise by such unsettling memories, which upset his habitual order.

I will consider in detail the first encounter we get with a sensation that resurrects the past for Baumgartner. The memory is invoked by a simple sight. No sound or smell is involved, neither speech nor action. The visual sensation of seeing a boy that he immediately recognizes as German, brings back to Baumgartner a flood of images and restores in him a feeling that he thought he had escaped; the acute feeling of otherness. Important to notice is that Baumgartner is a German Jew who has been living in India for fifty years, with little or no contact with his old home. The sight of the boy is so powerful that the rest of the scene is “wipe[d] out [of] its colours, its effects, leaving it dull, unworthy of notice. On it was imposed an image with a marvellous sharpness – the image of the boy” (20). The sight calls forth an extreme uneasiness in Baumgartner, which has its origin in the resurrection of a certain gaze¹⁴: the gaze of the other. Although he has never ceased to be a foreigner in India, Baumgartner has found peace in the familiarity and habit of everyday life, of blending into the anonymity of crowds. The sight of the German, however not a reciprocal gaze, unsettles Baumgartner and demolishes his fragile walls of stability and anonymity. He is immediately taken back to the feeling of being out-of-place that has haunted him throughout his life. This feeling connects very much to the gaze, as we understand from the detail through which the memories emerge: the eyes. His otherness is never put into words, it is always a matter of the gaze: “the eyes of the people who passed by glanced at him who was still strange and unfamiliar to them, and all said: *Firanghi*, foreigner” (19). His eyes are further the only thing that will eventually always make him stand out, if he would be able to change and transform any other part of his body: “[e]ven if he had used hair-dye and boot-polish, what could he

¹⁴ The gaze symbolically understood as holding a certain power over the gazed upon. The gaze representing the dominant, active subject or power, while the gazed upon represents the passive, subordinate in a dichotomous relationship.

have done about his eyes? It was not that they were blue – far from it; his mother ... had called them ‘dark eyes, *dunkle Augen*’, but Indians did not seem to think them so” (20). The memory of not belonging is stirred from its resting place and protrudes like a threat shaking the ground under Baumgartner’s feet. And once the first memory washes over him, the others come spilling out, like waves succeeding each other, drowning him in the rush of time:

That fair hair, that peeled flesh and the flash on the wrist – it was a certain type that Baumgartner had escaped, forgotten. Then why had this boy come after him, in lederhosen, in marching boots, striding over the mountains to the sound of the *Wandervogels Lied*? The *Lieder* and the campfire. The campfire and the beer. The beer and the yodelling. The yodelling and the marching. The marching and the shooting. The shooting and the killing. The killing and the killing and the killing. (21)

Memory houses a haunting sense of displacement for Hugo Baumgartner, a force so powerful that in fact he is struck dumb, both in his remembered childhood, and in the present re-experiencing the same sensations. We again observe fixation resulting in petrification, like we saw with Singh in *The Bus Stopped*.

Both voluntary and involuntary memories pervade all three narratives to such an extent that they are not only dominating in the plots, but characterise the way the stories of the characters are told. Baneth-Nouailhetas writes about *The God of Small Things* that memory is the motor of the story (65). I would like to transpose this description to all three narratives, but I do not fully agree with the way Baneth-Nouailhetas reads memory in *The God of Small Things*. This relates especially to her claim that: “the narration suggests that the memory of an emotion has to be purposefully selected and concentrated upon for it to survive: it is not the event itself, but the narrative of it, that colours its memory” (68). There are indeed instances

of conscious preservation in the narrative of *The God of Small Things*, like the way the twins store away memories of their mother and uncle like “precious beads on a (somewhat scanty) necklace” (60), or the way they retain the memory of the smells and noises of a trip to the cinema to see the *Sound of Music*, as a treasure (94). Baneth-Nouailhetas quite correctly exemplifies with these narrative selections. She further claims that a recollection does not necessarily entail the memory of the feeling connected to the episodic event, and that in order to revive the complete memory (episode and emotions) the twins must actively focus on the preservation of the memory as an entity. In her words former memories will be polluted by the dye of the later memories (Baneth-Nouailhetas 68). I will argue however, that, as the discussion on Proust and Bergson shows, any deeply buried memory will entail the complete surroundings at the point in time of its preservation.

The examples of conscious preservation are thus not representative for how memory is stored away in the narrative at large. A variety of examples contradict Baneth-Nouailhetas’ statement. Most of the memories kept by Rahel and Estha are not consciously treasured at the moment of their conception, yet burst with emotion when recalled. The strongest example is the incident of Velutha’s death; the episode is recalled by its specifics, such as surroundings and actions, but what pervades the memory and even lingers on in the characters after the recollection itself, are the emotions growing out of the scene:

In the back verandah of the History House, as the man they loved was smashed and broken ... [They] learned two new lessons.

Lesson Number One:

Blood barely shows on a Black Man. (Dum dum)

And

Lesson Number Two:

It smells though,

Sicksweet.

Like old roses on a breeze. (Dum dum) (293)

The smells and the noises come to represent feelings, even outside of the memento, transgressing its boundaries and spreading into their lives as a ubiquitous presence. The smell figures throughout the narrative: "[s]icksweet. Like old roses on a breeze" (8, 32, 54, 293), and "[a] sourmetal smell, like steel bus rails" (31, 70, 207, 294).

Estha's departure is another example of memories containing feelings despite lack of conscious preservation. The episode is recalled by the adult Estha, and though it is a deeply emotional departure – a child leaving his mother and twin sister to go into the unknown alone – it is portrayed in a somewhat barren manner, devoid of feelings, and mainly a listing of objects:

'Bye Estha. Godbless, Ammu's mouth had said. Ammu's trying-not-to-cry mouth. The last time he had seen her ... Rahel held by Ammu's hand ... Around them the hostling-justling crowd. Scurrying hurrying buying selling luggage trundling porter paying children shitting people spitting coming going begging bargaining reservation-checking.

Echoing stationsounds ...

Melted chocolates. Cigarette sweets.

Orangedrinks.

Lemondrinks.

CocaColaFantaicecreamsrosemilk.

Pink-skinned dolls. Rattles. Love-in-Tokyos. (284)

Though seemingly detached, this is on the contrary a suggestive portrayal of Estha's emotional state. The plain descriptions of what can be bought at the station are not simply a list of the surroundings. These images have been established throughout the narrative as connected with a wealth of emotions, and simply listing them evokes in the reader the previous reading, and thus instantly revives other diegetic descriptions. The orange and lemon drinks are connected with Estha's being abused in the cinema. Invoking this narrative image, echoes of other descriptions spring to mind, and the narrative plays on the reader's own memory: following the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man connection (104) is the "Love-in-Tokyo" or hair "fountain" image that links to Rahel's defence of Estha, and the ensuing emotional crisis she has after talking back to her mother in the cinema lobby (106-07)¹⁵. The narrative is in fact packed with examples of memories that are unconsciously stored away, but which retain a fullness of emotions as vivid recollections. These memory patterns and traces are scattered throughout *The God of Small Things*, and contribute to the novel's unusual handling of memory. The way words, sentences and parts of the plot are repeated or echoed in various circumstances makes the images accrete and develop toward a rich understanding. Every image comes to represent emotions rather than situations, and can thus transgress situational, temporal and mnemonic boundaries. The memories transgress all of these domains, and make it impossible for the characters to forget, but also to remember a complete picture of the past. This is also the reason why the twins experience memory and emotion as such haunting forces. Baneth-Nouailhetas rightly names this "the tyranny of memory" (56), but this tyranny takes its toll on the characters of all three narratives.

¹⁵ After Rahel has stood up to her mother in an attempt to defend her twin brother, this scene follows: "Rahel," Ammu said, 'do you realize what you have just done?' Frightened eyes and a fountain looked back at Ammu ... 'What?' Rahel said in the smallest voice she had. 'Realize what you've just done?' Ammu said. Frightened eyes and a fountain looked back at Ammu ... 'When you hurt people, they begin to love you less ... A cold moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts landed lightly on Rahel's heart. Where its icy legs touched her, she got goosebumps. Six goosebumps on her careless heart. A little less her Ammu loved her" (Roy 106,7).

A Rooted Space

As has already been indicated, the house of memory not only ties memory to a concept of home. The tyranny of memory moreover immures the characters in their past, and spins its threads into an intricate web that ensnares Baumgartner, Singh, Rahel and Estha into what can figuratively be called prisons of the past. Because their memories are fixated on objects of desire or loss, we as readers experience the focus on memory as strong, even obsessive. The memory traces reach out from the places of origin and design paths that reach widely into different places and temporalities.

Part of the human condition is the consciousness of, if not a home, then an origin, and this plays a pivotal role in the three narratives. Various theories advocate our primordial desire to return to this place of origin at different developmental or psychological stages of our lives. It seems a human desire to return. It is not surprising, of course, considering that in many cases, return involves some kind of regression or nostalgia, as seen in the case of the characters Baumgartner, Singh, Rahel and Estha. Should the memories not be of a positive character, the desire for return still involves something of the primordial. The longing for home is a universal matter, and part of a deeply anchored desire.

This returns us to the house, this ambiguous entity representing both home and origin, the space that is longed for. In a figurative reading, the house also comes to represent that which ties the characters to the past; the house as the house of memory, but also as a specific memory that the characters cannot forget. It roots their memories, and frames their understanding. The house is a lived space and a rooted place, with both physical foundations and mind-woven strings of attachment. To understand why the locality of the house is so intimately connected with memory, I borrow words from Bachelard, who, with reference to Rilke, reflects on the memory of the house, and how it is fictional in its nature. I quote this

passage at length since it bears directly on the coexistence, or collapse of the categories memory, perception and imagination, and because it speaks to the narrative material at hand:

If we have retained an element of dream in our memories, if we have gone beyond merely assembling exact recollections, bit by bit that house that was lost in the mists of time will appear from out the shadow. We do nothing to reorganize it; with intimacy it recovers its entity, in the mellowness and imprecision of the inner life ... Rilke ... speaks of the fusion of being with the lost house: 'I never saw this strange dwelling again. Indeed, as I see it now, the way it appeared to my child's eye, it is not a building, but is quite dissolved and distributed inside me: here one room, there another, and here a bit of corridor which, however, does not connect the two rooms, but is conserved in me in fragmentary form. Thus the whole thing is scattered about inside me, the rooms, the stairs that descended with such ceremonious slowness, other, narrow cages that mounted in a spiral movement, in the darkness of which we advanced like the blood in our veins.'

(57)

Remembered experience of a home is woven together with the memory of the physical reality of a house. Not only do we remember the house, the house inhabits memories, and memories inhabit the house. In this way the house becomes inextricably connected to the concept of memory. Not surprising, the house is thus often remembered as a living body. Memory and the house inhabit each other in the same way as blood inhabits veins. The memories of the house become one with the one remembering, and it comes to stand as a living entity. I return to the anthropomorphic aspect later in this chapter.

Thus, memory is indelibly connected to the houses of our past, and "[o]f course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed" (Bachelard 8). Imagining or

remembering any inhabited or lived space without involving memories, affections and emotional bonds is close to impossible. The strong emotional tie between house, home and the individual remembering is captivating for any reader of the three novels in question. As we read in *The Bus Stopped*:

[W]e have all returned home, or at least, to houses. I have the home of my memories ... It is through the windows of those helter-skelter rooms that I first saw the world ... those rooms that are all jumbled up ... as if in a house added to and demolished over the years, as if in one of those mental states (like dreaming or remembering or meditating) when there is a seamlessness in the way things flow backwards and forwards. My homes – fragile, confusing, monstrous – have not been contained by [the physical houses of my past], even though I have always borne their burden. (195, 96)

The houses of our past are thus both what we remember, and what we imagine. The narrator of the frame story of *The Bus Stopped* remembers “the two houses I grew up in, their scratched geography, their shadowed histories” and in a memory infused with emotion and imagination: “their many voices of noon and curtailment, evening and smokeliness” (3). The latter descriptions are a mix between remembered images and fiction. His imagination recreates what is left out by the place, what makes it a space; the experience of living in their “scratched geography”. This results in the words “curtailment” and “smokeliness”, which are attempts at capturing a feeling, an air, a memory of the whole sensation within one single word – which does not belong to the past nor the present, but to fiction. His memory of these houses contains everything from the physical material of which they were built, to his anthropomorphic recollection of them: “I walk through one of the houses – the white one –

with careful, muffled steps. The dust of my history lies heavily on this house. I do not wish to disturb these visible layers of accreted time” (ibid.). Notice the description of the manner of walking: the muffled steps indicate a presence in, but also a distance to the past, and an awareness that this is a revisiting. The narrator walks carefully so as not to disturb the dream-like state of the past and the layers of dust, and the passage consequently illustrates how the impasse of the past extends into the present.

The Prison of the Past

As for the narrator of the frame story of *The Bus Stopped*, two houses of the past also exist for the twin protagonists of *The God of Small Things*. One is the house in which they grow up, a house in which they never really do anything but dwell, in which they stay only at the mercy of their uncle, and within whose walls they never spin the fabric of belonging. The other is the History House, the house that rocks their dreams in its cradle, stores their love and their sorrow, and finally becomes the memory of the end of their childhood. It is a memory that haunts the twins’ existence from the day it is inscribed in their consciousness. Like for Baumgartner the memory of the past appropriates the present, and it does not allow for inscription of new memories. The characters of both *The God of Small Things* and *Baumgartner’s Bombay* are consequently disabled from living in the present. Their relationship to their memories is to some extent a reciprocal one; they feed on memory because they find it comforting, but memory also eats away at them, destroying prospects of really living. On this basis their relationship to memory can be described as an antibiosis perceived as a symbiosis.

The History House, or Kari Saipu’s house as it is known to the village, is not only the physical space of a house. It gets its name from the imagination of the narrators, Rahel and Estha, when their uncle, Chacko, tries to give them a sense of historical perspective. In order

to concretise to the seven year olds he “explained to them that history was an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside” and Rahel and Estha “had no doubt that the house Chacko meant was the house on the other side of the river ... Very few people had seen it. But the twins could picture it. The History House” (51). Evolving from a too literal understanding of the words of their uncle, the physical space of the house fast becomes a home remembered by the emotions connected with it, rather than only the geometrical reality of its walls. The narrative descriptions of the History House come to be determined by the memory of its lived space, as I will argue in the analysis of the passage following. I quote it at length because it is also a key passage in the novel.

The History House.

Whose doors were locked and windows open.

With cold stone floors and billowing, ship-shaped shadows on the walls ... Where, in the years that followed, the Terror (still-to-come) would be buried in a shallow grave ... White-walled once. Red-roofed. But painted in weather-colours now ... Making it look older than it really was. Like sunken treasure dredged up from the ocean bed. Whale-kissed and barnacled. Swaddled in silence. Breathing bubbles through its broken windows ... The rooms themselves were recessed, buried in shadow. The tiled roof swept down like the sides of an immense, upside-down boat. Rotting beams supported on once-white pillars had buckled at the center, leaving a yawning, gaping hole. A History-hole. A History-shaped Hole in the Universe. (290-91)

The History House is the site where childhood meets its brutal end for the protagonists of *The God of Small Things*. Here they become witnesses to their friend and father figure, the untouchable Velutha, being mutilated and murdered by the arm of the law. Directly prior to

this they are responsible for their cousin's drowning in the river they cross, without permission, in order to get to the History House. The house becomes connected with the memory of death, blood, water, and feelings of anxiety, fear and guilt. This is mirrored in the narrative. The quote above holds descriptions such as "ship-shaped shadows" and "a shallow grave", punning both on the adjective of the grave being located right beneath the surface, but also on the verb or noun "shallow(s)", being of the sea or river. It is "whale-kissed and barnacled" and "breathing bubbles". It looks like it has been "dredged up from the ocean bed", like a coffin being hoisted up from the depths of memory, the house represents a buried or drowned truth, but also a truth that entombs the characters. The severe drama of the memory screams out of the picture of the caved-in centre of the roof: "a yawning, gaping hole", and reveals to the reader the emotions this memory houses for the protagonists Rahel and Estha. Thus, Bachelard's words echo in our ears with a haunting effect: "the house holds childhood motionless 'in its arms'" (8). It also connects to the message of the story as a whole, the overpowering and total indifference of history and its workings on individual lives. History merely yawns at what is suffocating the subject.

The other house is peaceful in comparison, though it too, houses violent memories. This house does not seem to have stagnated in time. When Rahel returns years later, it is no longer the same house as it was during childhood. The once frequently used veranda is bare and unfurnished (4), and the house itself looks like an empty, decaying shell of its former self. Filth and dust seem to cover everything, though the house is still inhabited (84). This death of the spirit of both the house and its inhabitants is symbolized through the thick layer of grease, dust and "dead insects [that] lay in empty vases" (ibid.), alongside their grandaunt Baby Kochamma and her servant Kochu Maria, who are rendered as impassive, watching television. Rahel's return in the midst of the monsoon curiously links the description of the house to water, but in a different manner than the History House. This house is neither

drowned, nor drowning the person remembering it. The rain pouring down over it is experienced more like “gunfire” (4): perhaps ripping up other memories, but not pertaining to the feeling of always fighting to stay afloat. Note also that “[t]he old house on the hill wore its steep, gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat” (ibid.), a very different image than that of the History House which, far from wearing its roof, is closer to being trapped in it, like a giant boat is being forced over its head.

Another aspect worth noticing is that even though both houses carry traces of negative, traumatic memories, they also both have aspects of positive experiences. Julie Mullaney claims that both houses symbolize stagnation, and thus in my reading, also imprisonment, but that they simultaneously are “the sites where regeneration and renewal is sought” (47). There are differences between them, but in a way they can be claimed to be twin houses (Mullaney 45)¹⁶; one is quietness, the other emptiness – just like the twins themselves (Roy 20-21). They (the houses and the twins) contain rooms of positive memories, and rooms which house negative echoes. The houses are both sleeping, shallow graves that house violent memories but also moments of joy and life. The memories connected with each of the houses directly bear on the way they are portrayed in the narrative, and also give us a clear picture of their fundamental differences, and the emotional bearing they have on the characters.

The houses of our past and the memories of our past inhabit each other, and perhaps this is due to the fact that place in fiction is “the heart’s field” (Welty 118). Might this also be the reason why the houses of our past are described in almost anthropomorphic ways? According to Welty the house (already personified) “heals the hurt, soothes the outrage, fills the terrible vacuum that ... human beings make” (131). The house acts like a comforting and loyal friend and as Eva Hoffman says in her essay “The New Nomads”, “[i]t is because these things go so deep, because they are not only passed on to us but *are* us, that one’s original

¹⁶ Mullaney claims that both houses qualify for the description of ‘mausoleum’, and that the house is “a fitting twin for the haunted house of their childhood, ‘The History House’ (45).

home is a potent structure and force and that being uprooted from it is so painful” (50). The house of the past is a companion to the one remembering, though it is a companion that is not easily left behind. Its role is ambiguous, its roots both connect and fetter.

Returning to *The Bus Stopped* we peep in the windows of houses along the journeys described in this novel. The house is remembered like a being with personality and moods, and a life of its own. We see in the following passages how this takes its narrative form: in vignette nr.8 we read that: “the walls are still thin. They stretch like the membranes of your ear, fragile and more felt than seen ... Here the walls are membranes through whose tight secrecy permeates much that may only be heard, not seen” (Khair 30). In the same way as its inhabitants, the house itself can listen, and feel what is going on inside it, the way we can listen to our pulse and the workings of our body¹⁷. The memory of the house in the frame story is not frozen in time. It has been replaced with the new memory of the house as it has aged alongside the character remembering it: “[t]his house I still approach with something like a shout once a year. But the house no longer shouts back. Like an aged retainer, it smiles and grunts in reply” (4). In the same way that they both used to shout in young age, they are now both less vigorous; the narrator is still the younger of the two, and has kept “something like a shout”, while the house, like an aged person “smiles and grunts”. In the same way that they listen, feel and communicate, these houses moreover sometimes need rest: “the house is lying in the half-dusk, sleeping, breathing softly, the windows closed like eyelids” (14).

In the narratives of *The Bus Stopped* and *The God of Small Things*, the house is thus central to the memories of the past, and to the notion of home. Houses can, however, but do not have to be, synonymous with home. Bachelard writes that:

¹⁷ Cf. Rilke’s description, in the quote by Bachelard, of inhabiting the house like blood in veins, page 53.

[A]ll really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home ... the imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build 'walls' of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection ... the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams.

(5)

This observation posits that home is a concept that can be constructed from imagination and that its walls need only be illusory. Consequently home can be located in the reality of a house, but so strong is the force of the human mind, that considering itself sheltered, the home may well be no more than an assemblage of intangible walls. The concept of a framed illusion applies well to the exploration of home in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Here we also encounter two houses; one is the house of Hugo Baumgartner's childhood, and the other is the house in which he currently resides. However, the narrative also incorporates another kind of dwelling that Baumgartner literally cannot sidestep. The narrative renderings of this dwelling curiously address the issue of what constitutes a home, at the same time as they question the validity of Baumgartner's home. A family lives on the pavement next to his apartment house. Whenever entering or exiting the building, he is forced to acknowledge the presence of this dwelling and this family. At first glance the home seems as dissimilar to Baumgartner's as is possible, yet in a close reading there is something that seems to connect the two. In his regular passing Baumgartner notices that the family:

[W]orked constantly at reinforcing the shelter they had built here, flattening out packing-cases for walls and tin cans for the roof, attaching rags to the railing around

Hira Niwas [his house] and stretching them on to their own rooftop; yet it remained tremulously impermanent. (6)

Distancing himself from both the family and the shelter, Baumgartner does not try to “avoid contamination as the others did, but to hide his shame at being alive, fed, sheltered, privileged” (207). He thus establishes a gap between himself and the family, thinking himself privileged in having something they have not. What Baumgartner fails to see is that in fact his home is constructed in the same way as “the migrant[s]” (ibid.). The difference is one of degree, not kind; he does not build with packing-cases and tin cans, but with memories of another house, another time. The connection is further established through the descriptions of his home, as it comes across as just as “tremulously impermanent” as the street shelter. As we have seen, Baumgartner’s home provides some kind of comfort and safety, but the structure he has built is so fragile that it might fall at any second. The walls of Baumgartner’s home are thus also constantly reinforced. They are built out of basic habits, such as regular meals: “he ate, finding a great solace and comfort in the mouthfuls” (138), the smell of his cats: “it was to him a kind of fertiliser, with a fertilising action upon human behaviour. At least, it helped him to be comfortable, to survive, live, enjoy companionship” (148) and even the smell of himself: “Baumgartner rarely washed his clothes; they emanated a thick, cloudy odour that he himself found comforting in its familiarity” (6). The habits which make him happy, such as the smell and sight of the ocean: “Baumgartner did not turn towards the sea. That was for the evening ... for pleasure” (8) and “[w]hen they stepped out ... Baumgartner lifted his head and sniffed a bit. The magic moment had come: it was four a clock and at last the sea ... had stirred ... there was a quiver in the air, a scent of salt and freshness, and it was bearable again” (143) - are closely connected to another kind of habit which looms over his life, and makes shadows creep along his thin walls: the habitual fear and anxiety.

Baumgartner tries to create intangible walls to keep him safe. But what the walls are built to shelter him from is unclear. Is it the anguish of persecution catching up with him, the horror and terror of the Holocaust? Is it the foreignness of India? His own alienation? Using the memories of his childhood home to construct the walls of his home in India, results in the new home being no more than an extension of the old. This in turn means that his childhood fear of the long, dark staircase there has remained in him, lingering in the grown Baumgartner when ascending the staircase to his second home. Thus, home is unsettling in its ambiguity: at times it is his refuge (174), at other times it is more of a nightmare (179). The fear and lack of security that seem to have been present in his early years, despite moments of joy and safety, follow him from childhood into adulthood, and into his construction of the second home. Likewise, the shelter on the street makes Baumgartner uneasy: “[a]fter so many years and so many similar scenes ... It still brought out the prickle, those beads of sweat on his neck, and he walked by, hunching his shoulders protectively, fearing them” (8). The family seems to become an outside force ready to engulf his fragile security if they could, representing all that is threatening to Baumgartner: “[a]lthough he barely acknowledged this to himself, it was true that he had fears – nightmares – of them coming after him one night. Why should they not?” (145). This dread falls into place in his memory pattern, and again evokes the feeling of being unfavoured by the gaze: “[he had] more than they had or ever could buy – and he wondered what prevented them from grabbing him by his neck and stripping him in the dark ... and he felt their accusation whenever he passed” (ibid.). These fears are not simply random – they are habits, and constantly renewed. Fear of the family on the street, fear of other Europeans, fear of being wrong, talking the wrong language¹⁸, having the wrong opinions or dreams¹⁹,

¹⁸ “[U]ncertain as ever of which language to employ. After fifty years, still uncertain. Baumgartner, *du Dummkopf*” (Desai 6).

¹⁹ His friend, Lotte, asks him where he would go if he could choose. He answers Venice, but retreats “hurt” and “shamefacedly” when Lotte ridicules him with “volcanic laughter” for thinking he could ever be at home in such a place (Desai 81).

and fear of not being able to provide for his “family”: “Baumgartner’s face fell – was he [Farrokh, the owner] going to say the café would no longer supply scraps for Baumgartner’s cats? Would Baumgartner have to look elsewhere ... to keep his growing family fed and contented? This was a constantly renewed fear” (138). The habits that build up and the habits that tear down the walls of safety are always at work simultaneously. Perhaps this is the reason why the narration of Baumgartner’s existence reads as so unstable and insecure, and his moments of unreserved joy so ephemeral? In the end, his house cannot protect him. His fears of being wiped out from his own home, deleted from existence, are realized, only not in the manner he expects. The fear that has imprisoned him into the house of memory has kept the key to his door, and is thus able to, both figuratively and literally, enter the house where Baumgartner has been immured. A “ghost” from his past takes his life: it is not the fears of India, but the memory of an older and deeper fear, the fear of the Aryan German. It hunts him down, and steals his life in his own house.

The house, through its narrative descriptions, is rendered as the companion, the friend, the surrounding, and the remembered. It is always imagined to still the hunger for feeling safe. These houses however, fail to protect Baumgartner, Estha and Rahel. In *The Bus Stopped* on the other hand, there are various houses, and most of them seem to succeed at the sheltering function. They are also portrayed as the stable point of origin from which any journey starts, and they provide the imaginative material for the creation of new homes.

The soul maps of the characters are drawn by the memory traces that constitute the active links between their present and what remains significant from their past. In the map the road leading home is ever-present, though it may be no more than a frail path. The narratives of *The Bus Stopped*, *The God of Small Things* and *Baumgartner’s Bombay* portray home as a journey through emotions and experiences, where each stop along the way connects to the already existing memories in various manners. The memory traces accumulate and forge

paths, further directing memory toward the search for origin, home or understanding. The paths do not simply direct, however, and as this chapter has shown, they ensnare the characters to the point where memory's fixation not only results in petrification, but it actually imprisons the characters in the past. As the next chapter shows, the vision of the present is at best partial when the character's ossified gazes are locked on a retrospective horizon.

C h a p t e r 3

Looking and Seeing in the Mirror of Memory

Memory was that woman on the train. Insane in the way she sifted through dark things in a closet and emerged with the most unlikely ones – a fleeting look, a feeling. The smell of smoke. A windscreen wiper. A mother's marble eyes. Quite sane in the way she left huge tracts of darkness veiled. Unremembered.

(Roy 70,71)

Refracted Reflections

Memory's imprisonment not only carries structural implication for how the narratives are told, as we saw in the preceding chapter. It also deeply affects what the characters, and we, are allowed to see. In this chapter I focus on the question of looking and seeing, noticing how the character's fixation on certain memories obscures vision and perception, so that, in effect, looking is not the same as seeing.

One of the common denominators for the three narratives is the overrepresentation of the absent, the obsession with what is lost. The unresolved experiences from the past demand continued attention, and in this way what is absent becomes a haunting presence, and in fact an orchestrating principle for the novels: aesthetically, semantically and structurally. The unwilling separation of his childhood functions to preserve an unchanged or frozen image of the past for Baumgartner. For Singh, the desire to undo what is done functions as a means to redirect the stimuli of the present into traces of the idealized past, thus creating a wishful representation of what could have been. To Estha and Rahel the traumatic separation from each other functions as a way of throwing them into chaos, it represents loss of understanding and meaning. It is hard to remember other than in fragments, and without each other's company they cannot make a complete picture of their memories of the past. The past is fractured and partly forgotten. In all the narratives, the loss of what has been in the past, but

also of what the past represents (isolated episodes patched together into an idealized picture of the past, frozen in time) is mourned, but also sought, desired, daydreamt about.

This daydreaming entails also remembering one's self. In recalling a lost past, we encounter our self in the present at a previous stage of development. For Ammu, mother of the twins in *The God of Small Things*, looking at her current self at once activates an image representing the sum of antecedent stages, but also what is yet to come. Perception leads to conception and interpretation, resulting in transposing past through present, into future.

Ammu looked at herself in the long mirror on the bathroom door and the spectre of her future appeared in it to mock her. Pickled. Grey. Rheumy-eyed ... Ammu shivered. With that cold feeling on a hot afternoon that Life had been Lived. That her cup was full of dust ... Would future generations say, 'There was Ammu – Ammu Ipe. Married a Bengali. Went quite mad. Died young. In a cheap lodge somewhere.' ... Ammu gathered up her heavy hair, wrapped it around her face, and peered down the road to Age and Death through its parted strands. (211-13)

Staring into the mirror, Ammu's initial intention is to escape her twins' "proprietary handling of her" (211), as they are tracing the stretch marks on her belly, laying bare the visible traces of passing time. The mirror, however, offers no solace. Contemplating her own reflection she gradually strips out of her past and present, and her "skin ... flaked and shed like snow" (212). She now faces time she imagines to come in the mirror, but this future appears to be no more than the sum of layers of past accreting and cementing her in the frame where she feels trapped.

The mirror offers Ammu a double position of gazing and simultaneously being gazed upon. This makes her feel unsettled, and looking at her self initiates a reflection upon who

that self is. She looks at herself, “like a medieval executioner peering through the tilted eye-slits of his peaked black hood at the executionee” (213). The position of the perceiver/interpreter, and that of the perceived/interpreted are in a sense opposites; reality and reflection. Simultaneously they revolve around the same centre – the mirror surface – and are thus inextricably connected. Although there is a distance, and perhaps even dissonance between the two positions, they are connected as realizations of the self. Ammu’s position as interpreter is in the existing reality of the bathroom. The mirror offers only her reflection; as image as well as thought, yet both are representations of the place described by Michel Foucault as “there where I am not”. He calls the mirror a placeless place, a utopia, “an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent” (Foucault 4). In this respect, looking into the mirror means to look at the reflection (in Foucault’s words; the unreal) of our self (real²⁰), in the surface of the mirror. What we see in the surface appears to be the same as the corporeal reality, but is in fact our perception and interpretation of that reflected reality.

Like the mirror, memory too shows us no more than what we are able to see; either with our eyes or with our mind’s eye. Although both mirror and memory appear to show truthful images, they both provide images the way the viewer perceives them, and they both enable us to see ourselves there where we are absent. I will argue that in this respect, memory can be compared to the mirror. Thompson claims that “[w]hen a person remembers something, what he perceives in his mind is a present content which is unique and private to him. A memory of a past perception or experience is not the same thing as that original perception or experience, but a likeness of ... one’s view of that thing” (19). In the same manner what we see in the mirror is not the same as the original, but a “likeness” of our view

²⁰ The terms *unreal* and *real* are used by Foucault in the quote (Foucault 5), see my discussion on page 69.

of ourselves (a reflection and interpretation). Equally, mirror and memory in this way become the points through which reality can be reflected or refracted.

Foucault further notes that the mirror “makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault 5). If we transpose the concept of the “point over there” to memory in these narratives, we may recognize the duality of real/unreal echoed as seeing or perceiving oneself in the present and the past simultaneously. The past does not function as an independent instance (just as the reflection cannot); it depends on the existence of the present in order to be what it is: absent (but accessible). The dual position is thus perhaps both simultaneity and doubleness, fusion and confusion: it is the way two instances (past, present) are lived and relived simultaneously from one and the same position, in the mind of the one remembering facing the mirror of memory²¹.

The reflection evoked by looking through the lens of memory is furthermore a set of images or imprints, the result of recollection. The imprints however, are reflected through the “virtual point which is over there” (ibid.) – memory – and are thus situated somewhere between what they were at the point of preservation, and what we make of them from our position in a different point in time. These two (or more) understandings may merge, or collide, but they are central to the claim that memory is not truthful in the sense of representing things “the way they were”. Memories represent things the way they were understood and experienced by the perceiver at the time they happened, as well as how they are perceived in the light of retrospection. In other words, an imprint is what is perceived, experienced or understood in a certain way. To look can be a passive act; but to see involves

²¹ The mirror’s reflection demands mention of Lacan. However, Lacan’s theory will not be dealt with here, because the thesis concerns itself with memory and remembrance rather than the constitution of self as such. The mirror stage could fruitfully be applied in the reading of the mirror of memory, but unfortunately limitations must be made.

understanding and subjective action. Whatever seen is negotiated into its place as an imprint. Because it is imprinted in a certain way, it is logical that it must also re-emerge under certain conditions, in given lights or by specific illuminations. From its resting place in memory it may be evoked and seen again, thus re-negotiated into a different temporal and spatial situation.

What the characters see is determined by their present desires and feelings. These emotions saturate the perceiver's position, and alongside the characters' fixation with the past, directly affect what is seen. They all suffer from a wish to undo what is done, and Baumgartner and the twins furthermore carry the weight of a guilty conscience. The pain of the present colours the view of the past. The images recalled are seen as through Rahel's yellow-rimmed, red sunglasses, which "made the world look red" (Roy 37). The illumination is retrospective, Rahel peeps into the twilight with "the sun behind her" and what is seen becomes "angry-colored. The salted limes were red. The tender mangoes were red. The label cupboard was red. The dusty sunbeam (that Ousa never used) was red" (Roy 188). Because none of the characters can lay the past to rest, their view of it is coloured by the way it haunts them. This force is so strong that we can in fact describe it as obscuring rather than colouring perception.

Though they may read as chaotically and randomly ordered, the memories that figure in the narratives are part of the novels' structure. What they tell us is not only what is included in the narratives, but what is left out or forgotten by the characters. With reference to Bakhtin, Thompson claims that we forget or suppress negative traces and retain positive ones (25), but moreover that we "remember from ... [our] own past only that which has not ceased to be present for [us]" (Bakhtin qtd. in Thompson 24). Thus, whatever is remembered clings continually to our present life through the way we convert "our experiences into meaningful life patterns" (Thompson 25). We thus find that although the narratives present us with what

the characters see in the mirror of memory (the past), what we read is not what is absent, but the ways they deal with, and react to the presence of that absence.

Despite differences, the reflection point through which the past is seen is common to all the narratives: memory mirrors the reflection of the place the characters occupy in the diegetic present. They look at themselves in the present, but see themselves in the past. In this respect the memory of the past is, as the reflection in the mirror “at once absolutely real ... and absolutely unreal” (Foucault 5). Baumgartner, Singh, Estha and Rahel are able to look at themselves there where they are not: in lost time, in memory.

Looking

Sometimes to look is not the same as to see. Though all the characters of the three novels look into memory – the presence of the absent – they both look and see differently. It is on this note that we understand why Singh is unable to see, though he is looking, and thinks himself skilled at seeing and preserving. To see and to preserve are, however, not synonymous actions, and Singh’s problem is that he does not really see what is in front of him. His receptive surface is able to take in new impressions, but most of them are directly traced into the old memory pattern²². This is why he looks at, but does not see the bundle the tribal woman is carrying, because his mind reads the stimuli of the situation into the memory pattern of the conductor disobeying him. This is in turn all he is left seeing: “he failed to really see the tribal woman ... He only saw her as money that Shankar [the conductor] let slip into the maalik’s coffers. He did not even see what she was carrying. He saw it and did not see it” (Khair 146).

²² This also relates to what Derrida says about traces, see my discussion on page 45.

This is also the reason why an image of doves lifting from the road and settling down again becomes the memory-image of Sunita's smiling eyes and a flock of happiness lifting from them and never settling back (Khair 29), or the sight of a tree that can cure grief ends up on the pessimistic note that: "[n]ow we make our grief of concrete and cement, steel and iron: we inhabit its empty room" (66). The past's haunting effect is clear – Singh, consciously or not, actively engages the presence of the absent. New impressions serve to keep old experiences alive, and when he looks into the mirror of memory, the past "can freely combine with present events" (Thompson 23). This results in those "unexpected associations and striking juxtapositions" (ibid.) exemplified above, and illustrates how absence as orchestrating principle is echoed in the underlying script²³. Echoes of absence resound in all three narratives²⁴, emerging as haunting memories, or unexpected associations.

The narrative of *Baumgartner's Bombay* compares in some respects to Singh's, and especially in the way the present simply functions as a pretext to relive the absent. Baumgartner's narrative is a mixture of voluntary and involuntary memories. The mnemonic triggers are often portrayed as incidental, but the memory, once activated, goes on to become voluntary as it develops into "a series of sequential memories ... spun out into a narrative" (Thompson 22). Baumgartner's narratives are retrospective. Because of their elaborate scale these narratives tend to immerse the reader into reading the past as present. In the first transition from diegetic present to past, the shift is signalled. Chapter one ends with: "[o]ut of the grey wash, other images emerged" (Desai 22), while the next chapter begins with one

²³ I use the term *underlying script* here to bring attention to the different layers in the narratives and how they deal with memories in different ways. The layering and the idea of an *underlying script* can also be associated with the palimpsest. I will, however, not go into such a reading, though the imprinting, layering and echoes of memories could be examined from that perspective.

²⁴ The description of Estha in *The God of Small Things* in a way mirrors this echo. Like his own, unspeakable words, he seems "to an observer therefore, perhaps barely there" (Roy 13). Though seemingly not there, his presence is constant, echoed as a "quiet bubble floating on a sea of noise" (ibid.). Like the echo of absence, he is sometimes apparently absent, sometimes revealing his presence by emerging on the surface.

such specific image, in this case the image of Baumgartner's father: "[w]hen he walked, there was no obstacle" (23). Gradually the shifts become blurred, and it is difficult to see the links between the temporal jumps. Furthermore, it seems as though Baumgartner needs no reminder to start his retrospective narrative. After the first sensory impression has "let loose" the "flood of memories" (65), everything and nothing drag his thoughts back to the past. The diagnosis his friend Lotte, another German in India, sets for him, is telling when it comes to Baumgartner's receptive abilities. She thinks him "senile" because he cannot recall important events from their lives together in India (75, 78). Forgetfulness is, however, not what makes him unable to cope with her register of memories. It is the direction of his attention that has been turned backward all the time, rather than toward his surroundings, that is the locus of the oblivion. In this respect his narrative compares to Singh's: Baumgartner also makes unexpected associations and odd juxtapositions between impressions and imprints. For instance he glimpses the pale colour of Lotte's feet against the dark backdrop of the floor, and immediately traces the impression to the imprint of "his mother's cheek white under the black netting of the veil and fresh violets pinned to her little black cape for a Sunday morning walk" (75). He looks but does not see, what is present is re-directed to the memory of something absent.

The image chosen to portray Baumgartner's journey into India is revealing of his ties to the past. After a sea-journey, which, as it were, washes away the direct connection to home, he travels deeper into India by train. This is a journey bound by rails, symbolizing the ties between the memory of what is left behind and what is ahead. Baumgartner himself seems aware of the bond: "alongside the train was always the shadow of the past, of elsewhere, of what had been and *could never be abandoned* – an animal in its grey pelt, *keeping pace, clinging, refusing to part* ... it continued to chase the train, chase Baumgartner" (89, my emphasis). To Baumgartner the new life is always inferior to the old, everything must be

compared to what was, even his success at the race tracks as an adult in India becomes a faded substitution for what is the real desire – to go to the race tracks as a child in the company of his father (Desai 193)²⁵.

What Baumgartner looks at in the mirror of memory is various instances of the past, all connected in some way or other to the memory of the origin – Mutti. The memory of his mother is the only positive constant in a long life of disappointments, rejections and ambivalent experiences. Although initially not unconditionally positive, the imprints constituting the memory have been funnelled through a selection process which renders only the positive viable. This is why almost any memory is traced back to Mutti. It can also explain why Baumgartner manages to form a bond to Lotte, despite his general dysfunction in society. Lotte comes to represent a reflected image of Mutti, perhaps most clearly portrayed through the direct threads between past and present, represented by the terms of endearment both women use to address him: *Liebchen, Mein Häschen, Geliebter, du Dummkopf* (3, 28, 29, 70, 75, 77, 81, 98, 101, 164, 200, 208). Baumgartner does not see because he is not really looking. When he looks in the mirror what he sees is simply the absent. The memories of and from the past reign undisturbed in his recollection. The present is there, but is of no consequence. It is merely a backdrop to his memories, which Baumgartner uncritically immerses himself in. He is consequently portrayed as suffering from *accidie* – a melancholic withdrawal from the world (Hoffman 59), a symptom of his excessive desire for regression.

“No return. No return”

The desire in the present to remember an idealized and harmonic past, previous to Baumgartner’s point of “no return”, impacts on how he recalls the memories of his past. They are gathered around the origin, Mutti, and though they were not originally exclusively

²⁵ See the passage cited on page 34.

positive, they become so in retrospect. These memories are all that he can see, and he appears indifferent or oblivious to his own inability to see what surrounds him in the present. His obscured vision is also portrayed literally, (i.e. Desai 6, 9) his eyes are described as weak and old, and his neck “had long ago become set” (11), so that he cannot easily turn to look in a different direction. Anything too pressing in the diegetic present becomes opaque, blurred: “*Nacht und Nebel*. Night and Fog. Into which, once cast, there was no return. No return. No return” (119). This narrative description works on three levels. Being mainly a reference to the terror and horrors of the internment camps of the Holocaust, it represents Baumgartner’s loss of his father, who unable to forget Dachau, takes his own life. The phrase additionally symbolizes Baumgartner’s inability to see. The incessant retrospective focus casts a fog over his vision, and the shadows in his mind prevent him from seeing clearly. Together these two understandings combine in a third possible reading of the passage, namely that of Baumgartner’s personal inability to return – both to the home (or pre-Holocaust world) that once was, but also to the life of oblivion lead in India, previous to the moment when his psychological angst materializes, and marches into his life, in the shape of the young, Aryan German (Desai 20-21).

The repetitive style, briefly seen in the quote above (Desai 119), is moreover also common to the three novels. As we have already seen, the echoes symbolize absence’s ubiquitous presence. Through repetition habit gets a concrete expression in the structure of the narratives. However, repetition does not merely connect to habit, as seen in preceding chapters; it is also closely intertwined with perception. Reverberation then, is not only a way in which the underlying script surfaces every now and then. It also mirrors the way memories haunt the narratives, and furthermore echoes what can be called “the system of neuronically articulated articulations that are supposed to form the basic web of memory” (Baneth-Nouailhetas 60) – in other words, memory itself.

Childhood events and images haunt Baumgartner throughout adult life. His lack of vision, or obliviousness, is caused by the invariable source of illumination. There is only one light and one line of sight. It leads backward. Nursery rhymes and songs transgress temporal boundaries, and haunt him throughout the narrative at large. Like his images of the past, these rhymes are ambivalent. Though they at times sooth Baumgartner's feeling of loss and rejection, they also provoke uncertainty and ambiguity. Alongside the nursery rhymes there are other narrative repetitions that function in the same way. These are the ruthless, harsh words the character encounters again and again; *raus*, or get out: "[i]ndigestible, inedible Baumgartner ... *Raus* Baumgartner, out. Not fit for consumption, German or Hindi, human or divine ... unwanted. *Raus*, Baumgartner, *raus*" (190). The many echoes from his past resound in his present, and their persistent presence reveal the petrification and immobility of his predicament: he is alive, but attempting to "live, ostrich-like, under the sands of his illusions" (118). He clings to what can be recalled with as little pain as possible, namely memories of a "Germany [that] were still what he had known as a child and ... in that dream-country his mother continued to live the life they had lived together" (ibid.). The memories which are less painful seem to balance between recollection and confabulation²⁶, and the continual repetitions mirror both his stagnation, and inability to see.

While specific childhood memories constitute the echo that rings clearest in the narrative of *Baumgartner's Bombay*, the other narrative which similarly preserves a static image of the past is haunted in a slightly different way. Instead of specific mementoes, we find in the narrative of *The Bus Stopped* a mnemonic pattern of symbolic images, echoes

²⁶ "Confabulation" is chosen above "fabulation" here, as its use within psychiatry is considered relevant. In this sense it means to "fabricate imaginary experiences as compensation for loss of memory" ("OED"). Baumgartner's recollection balances between remembering and confabulating, but with a more distant relation to the element of fiction, which we inescapably encounter in "fabulation". Baumgartner's fusion of fact and imagination is illustrated in the following passage. Upon watching a woman he reflects that "she seemed to embody his German childhood – at least, he *chose* to see her as such an embodiment, it was so pleasant to do so, like humming a children's song" (Desai 127, my italics). Moreover, it illustrates his awareness of his own confabulation.

which also testify to the inability of letting go. The repeated is not an image or memory per se, but a mode, conveyed through a set of images. As above mentioned, one of these patterns is the juxtaposition of perception and memory, resulting in Singh seeing Sunita in most of his surrounding impressions of otherwise unrelated images.

A good illustration is the pregnancy image (Khair 24, 25, 41). The repetition of the pregnancy image as an anomaly²⁷ connects it with the image of the dead child, which is also perceived as an anomaly (a dead child should be buried, not carried around). Though otherwise unrelated to Sunita, the dead infant becomes so as the narrative reveals Singh's confessional thoughts on his relationship to his unrequited love: “[w]hat irritates him – though he does not realize it fully – is not his inability to restore their past in the present, but her ability to erase her past from her present” (135). He continues: “[h]e feels that something has been killed, *something defenceless like an infant*” (ibid., emphasis mine). This suggests a certain interplay between the remembered and the way it is interpreted in the present. The past haunts the present to the extent that Singh sees what he could have had with Sunita in all new impressions. The present however, also impacts on how Singh sees the past. He looks at a wishful representation of the past while he gazes into the mirror of memory. The awareness of the dissonance between fact and idealized image underlies Singh's recollections. Though he has a possessive relation to Sunita (“his *own* second cousin” (11, my emphasis), “the fat bastard, sleeping there, snoring with his arm around Sunita” (12)), it is also evident that she has in fact never really belonged to him, she is merely the woman “whom he had once *hoped* to marry” (41, emphasis mine). In fact, their relationship has only ever amounted to “hold[ing] ... hands surreptitiously and peck[ing] ... cheek[s] in hidden corners” (135). Nonetheless, the connection to Sunita is repeated like the heartbeat of Singh's story. This echo reverberates as his desperate cry to bury a past that he instead carries around like a dead

²⁷ See my discussion on page 43, “pregnant purses”.

infant. He is unable to see this, both literally and figuratively. Like the dead infant on the bus, he looks at, but does not see, his own “dead infant” – “[h]e saw it and did not see it. Sometimes, seeing is not enough” (146).

The mnemonic patterns and repetitions serve to a large degree to identify all the characters’ struggle with laying the past to rest. They mirror the structure of memory, and arguably make the reading of the narratives into a mnemonic exercise in itself (Baneth-Nouailhetas 60). As readers we have to puzzle together and place in time the torn off pieces of information which float freely in the recollections of the characters. We partake in the complex web of temporal fusion, and are caught in the vortex of unravelling memories.

Repetition signals the stagnation in memory-flow with Singh and Baumgartner, but in the narrative of *The God of Small Things* repetition suggests solution. The characters are imprisoned by memory threads spun out into an encapsulating web which disorients characters as well as readers. However, the traces which are repeated come to stand out in the otherwise overwhelming web. To the twins, childhood memories have appropriated everything, and they dominate the twins’ adult lives. During separation seeing has had no significance; they have both looked at the world and seen only that “[n]othing mattered much. [And that n]othing much mattered” (Roy 20). Although memory in this way stagnates, repeating itself over and over again in various instances and in various ways, never letting the characters go, it also ironically offers a way out of its own imprisoning walls: the repeated traces illuminate a path toward an exit or solution.

The twins’ re-union is a repetition of another transgressive union, that of Ammu and Velutha²⁸. Their illicit relationship gave rise to what have since become the memories that

²⁸ The two transgressions mirroring each other is for instance seen on page 310 and 320. First, the description of the twins’ union reads as follows: “[t]here is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next ... Except perhaps that it was a little cold. A little wet. But very quiet. The Air. But what was there to say?” Then, the following description from Ammu and Velutha’s transgressive act: “It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air. But what was there to say?”

haunt the twins. The repetition plays out not only structurally in plot which is repeated, but also semantically in the way sentences are repeated throughout the narrative, for instance: “[t]he emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other ... the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons” (Roy 21), and “Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons” (311). Aesthetically the repetitions manifest themselves for instance in how the descriptions of Rahel mirror those of her mother: like Ammu when she died Rahel is “a viable die-able age” (5, 88, 154, 310), she has “half-moons under her eyes” (5, 148), and in fact she seems to have “grown into the skin of her mother” (88, 283). The repetitions forge imprisoning patterns and traces, but they also lead up to the twins’ “salvation”. Through repeating the (hi)story itself (i.e. “once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (Roy 33, 168, 311)) their joint memories fall into place in their joint identity.

To loosen the grip of the past the twins must bridge the gap or the wound in their soul. What they have separately sought to forget or bury through wilfully neither looking nor seeing, must be acknowledged. Only through seeing what really happened, can they forget rather than repress. In *Arundhati Roy: Critical Perspectives* Murari Prasad writes of the relationship between Rahel and Estha that their incestuous re-union, “though shockingly transgressive, may be read in terms of psychic ‘re-memberment’” (16). This wording plays on the way that they (psychically) remember through becoming (physically) re-membered. This reading entails an understanding of the twins as constituting one self made up by two parts (or members): their separation thus comes to traumatize the twins’ unified self, and what they suffer is “de-memberment” (Prasad 16). Though their re-union is read as incestuous, it might also be read in an alternative manner. In Prasad’s words, their “transgressive re-union ... [becomes] the ‘self’s integration with its lost body” (17), and thus in a way legitimate or

understandable. The re-union also symbolizes the twins' only way of completely remembering their common past, and of altering the past from a haunting to a memory. The temporal distance (to the events) combined with the physical unity, re-establishes their ability to see.

With Rahel's return Estha's head fills with "the sound of passing trains" (Roy 16, 283), and the sound of the past is incessant. Being able to see each other again, perception gains importance, "[t]he world, locked out for years, suddenly flooded in" (16). Estha opens his eyes and "[f]rom where he sat ... Estha, without turning his head, could see [Rahel]" (283), and notices every little detail. Rahel also "turned her head and looked at him. He sat very straight. Waiting for the inspection" (ibid.). The chain of events finally unfolds in Estha's memory – he can see the past, simultaneously as he sees his adult sister at his side. Memory and perception thus merge, and looking at Rahel he sees Ammu, "he could see her. Grown into their mother's skin ... Her mouth ... A beautiful, hurt mouth. / Their mother's mouth, Estha thought. Ammu's mouth" (283, 284). Rahel on the other hand, also suddenly sees every detail with an intense focus, "[she] watched Estha with ... curiosity ... [a] raindrop glistened on [his] earlobe. Thick, silver in the light" (89), she sees him "[f]latmuscle, and honey-colored. Sea-secrets in his eyes. A silver raindrop on his ear" (216). While Estha confuses what he sees with what he remembers, Rahel sees that what is kept in her memory can be restored in front of her eyes. She sees home within her reach, and sees Estha both as "a stranger" and as "the one that she had known before Life began" (89, 310). In memory, unity is home, "[i]n those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun ... [They] thought of themselves ... with joint identities" (4, 5). The loss caused by separation is symbolized by a certain intangibility in their eyes. Estha has "sea-secrets" in his eyes. Rahel's look like they belong "to someone else. Someone watching. Looking out of the window at the sea. At a boat in the river" (20), and their "exasperating expression" is "a hollow, where

Estha's words had been" (ibid.). Vision is blurred by the incessant waves of memory which wash into their sea-filled eyes. They see nothing but sea until the moment when the haunting is challenged by addressing the memories and coming to terms with them. Only then does the sea retreat from their eyes ("there were tears" (311)) and vision is restored, "no Watcher watched through Rahel's eyes. No one stared out of a window at the sea. Or a boat in the river" (310). Through seeing and acknowledging the past they finally manage to come to terms it. Thus they are able to grieve what has haunted and imprisoned them for years.

Obscured

The memories in all three narratives are seen to be a mixture of recollection, fragmentary understanding and imagination, and therefore sometimes bordering on confabulation.

Baumgartner and Singh use memory as a tool to idealize the past so that it retains the essence of what they once experienced, and simultaneously remains open to being embroidered with the retrospective desires and losses of the present. Vision thus proves to have a clear impact on how the echoes function in the narratives. Lack of, or biased vision results in stagnation, while partial vision can lead to solution/salvation as we have seen with Estha and Rahel: memory finally turns from haunting, fragmentary bits into memories which must and can be grieved. Repetition offers change though it passes through stages of stagnation before getting there. In the narrative of *Baumgartner's Bombay* the repetitions result in a circular narrative composition: his lack of vision (or rather; interest and ability to see the present) results in his fixation with memory, and stagnation in the idealized past, and this promotes further indifference to the present. Thus the image of night and fog reoccurs, and obliviousness echoes through the narrative, "Baumgartner slept, in ignorance. Ignorance was, after all, his element. Ignorance was what he had made his own. It was his country, the one he lived in with familiarity and resignation and relief" (Desai 219). The obliviousness sedates the pain of

loss, and like the ring of a nursery song, lulls Baumgartner into his final sleep: “there was nothing to look at, it was all gone, and he shut his eyes, to receive the darkness that flooded in, poured in and filled the vacuum with the thick black ink of oblivion” (216). When he can no longer live under the sands of his illusions, when he is forced to see, he realizes that there is nothing for him to look at. He drowns in the dark maze of his mind, and seems content to no longer having to run, simultaneously from and toward the past which haunts him.

In *The Bus Stopped* Singh’s biased vision and confabulation have fixated his memory and resulted in his present petrification. The ending however, is open: there is no answer to how repetition and vision function. We know that they enter the level of stagnation in the idealized past, but one question remains: does his last impression succeed in breaking through the trace pattern and shake him out of his petrification, or is he now totally engulfed in frozen time, unable to see at all?

Obliviousness, forgetting, and confabulation are strategies for alleviating the pain of loss. They make the present less important, obscure the characters’ vision, and thus allow them to be engulfed by their chosen memories. Again we see how the need for harmony and meaning drives the characters to find ways of making what Thompson refers to as “meaningful life-patterns” or they “spin narrative[s] of sequential memories” (see pages 70 and 72). The desire for order in the inchoate mass of recollections is part of what structures the memory traces into paths. The avoidance techniques also show how the narratives are orchestrated through mnemonic echoes which resound not only in all layers of the narratives, but also further out to the reader who may hear these lamenting echoes resound in the maps/memories of his own soul.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: The Paradox

The Paradox

This thesis has connected memory to place and space, and to the intimate space of the domestic sphere. It has further suggested an inextricable bond that ties together the present site with the space of the past. Rahel, Estha, Baumgartner and Singh all wish to return to a place or a moment lost in time. This moment is in part involuntarily remembered, but also partially retained in memory by choice. It is consequently a fabricated entity dependent on the one remembering. Claiming the moment of the past to be a partial illusion, I extend this on the basis of the argument that though we look, we do not necessarily see, and posit that this space – between imagination and reality – contains what Cathy Turner calls “the area of accepted illusion” (381). The novels all portray a moment when everything is seemingly different and better than it is in the diegetic present. If the remembered is put into such a “frame” (Milner qtd. in Turner 381) what the characters see is also “framed”, and the fusion and confusion of memory and imagination is innate to the space of the (“framed”) past. Thus, “we create a space where we do not need to ask which elements we have invented and which we have found there” (Turner 382). In conclusion, it may be irrelevant to ask how much the telling of a story becomes the memory itself; what is relevant is why we cannot disrupt the link between the past and the present, and why memory is so stubbornly stuck in its old tracks.

The impossibility or paradox of the past, its elusive, slippery nature of being absent, simultaneously precise and persistent in its presence, suggests two things: the past is never lost, but it is also always already lost. Weaving together the threads from preceding chapters, it is possible to make certain claims about the area of accepted illusion – it is the lost moment conserved in memory. It is further also a moment paradoxically enhanced through its vagueness. As chapter three has argued, seeing is obscured by fixation, so although the characters are all looking, they are far from seeing what is really reflected in the mirror of

memory, namely their own obliviousness, forgetting and confabulation. What we can thus name blurred or partial perception in turn creates “shadows” or blanks which contribute to swathe the moment of the past in further cloudiness. The moment of the past consequently finds its expression in the opaque. In its evasiveness lies the key to resolve what Turner calls the “aspects of the world that do not conform to our imaginations” (ibid.). This is when the memory is experienced as “wrong”, or is simply forgotten (Khair 98; Roy 80-81; Desai 172). A transformation occurs: from a more or less detailed memory-image the remembered is turned into a symbol of something safe, known and stable. The moment of the past which we long for and in many ways come to idealize, is thus the safe haven of home, and remembrance is of homes past.

However, home has become a replica as we have encountered it in the novels: “the expression of the desire for home becomes a substitute for [the actual] home” (Seidel qtd. in Johannessen "Lonely" 59). More than anything, the idea of home is the memory-image of the lost past, what I have described as an idealization of the past, but which can also be conceived of as a fixation, petrification or paralysis. The following quote is helpful to meditate on these lost spaces and our relation to them:

Straus Park allowed me to place more than one film over the entire city of New York, the way certain guidebooks to Rome do. Along with each photograph of an ancient ruin comes a series of colored transparencies. When you place a transparency over the picture of the ruin, the missing or fallen parts suddenly reappear, showing you how the Forum and the Coliseum must have looked in their heyday ... But when you lift all the plastic sheets, all you see are today's ruins.
(Aciman 30-31)

Aciman's words illustrate the narrative structure in all three novels. The way they narrate memory seems to be captured by this image of the translucent layering. The narrative explorations portray the ruins of the characters' lives, as something desolate but also glorified in its originality. However, they also show the reader these ruins with various "transparencies" added or removed, so that in fact we read several versions of both past and present in different ways. I again evoke Turner's words, transposing her already transposed vocabulary to extend to my readings. In a way we are searching for the same, to find a vocabulary fit to describe the layered present. She suggests a vocabulary of fracture and absence, the vocabulary of archaeology. In many ways this is what I have already applied in this thesis, "strata, fragments, ruins, narratives, traces, monuments, past, and absence" (Turner 377). Considering past and present as layers of a life, we have followed these narratives in an excavation process, trying to uncover the "bleached bones of a story" (Roy 32). What the novels propound is that these bones not only erect the skeleton of the past, but they also scaffold the body of the present.

In unearthing these remains it is furthermore crucial to observe that the moment of the past is conceivable only through recalling both its temporal and spatial delineations. An aspect of the lost space, the *elsewhere*, is that it gradually loses its negative connotations. Through the narratives, memory's voice elucidates how reality's disappointments ineluctably increase the glory of the past, and how the twists and turns of the present make the past appear more stable. What remains after this polishing process of the memory, is the "past-as-wished-for" (Turner 378). The longing for the lost space thus transforms from the desire for the concrete home, to the abstract idea of elsewhere. The craving for home is primarily a yearning for a "state of being that precedes all other states" (Johannessen "Anatomy" 390), the origin. The confusion and conflation of times and spaces wipe out narrative distinctions of

here and there, now and then, and result in a discourse which mirrors memory itself.

Elsewhere is in other words both temporal and spatial, and consequently it is also “elsewhen”.

Thus it is that the desire for “the origin that lies elsewhere”, what is also known as the “exilic desire” (ibid.), can be transposed to the readings in this thesis. It is not a desire exclusive to the exile, it is a desire held by all that are lost or displaced. The twins of *The God of Small Things* are not in exile as such, they have both a home and houses, yet the narration portrays a longing for elsewhere and “elsewhen”. The same goes for Singh: *The Bus Stopped* portrays an excessive desire to return psychologically to a previous point in time, though he is not physically displaced. The fact that Singh’s home is the bus, a “small homebase on wheels” (Turner 389), suggests that his roots are attached to a mobile space and that displacement, if felt, would perhaps take on a different form. His home is perhaps the most ambiguously depicted of the encountered dwellings. A home on wheels implies that he is never physically fixed, but at the same time, the narrative renderings show that he is utterly fixated on, and fettered by, his memories. He longs for “elsewhen” rather than elsewhere. The third novel, *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, also presents the longing for the abstract elsewhere/when. Baumgartner’s narrative however, parts from the others in portraying the experiences and memories of the true exilic, and extends longing to the concrete location of an abandoned home.

Aciman’s image of transparencies moreover evokes another emphasis in this thesis, namely the *layers* of narration, time, place and memory. The “archaeological” readings have postulated that traces of the past in the present can be directly linked to larger structures located in deeper sedimentations. Be these layers of time, place or the mind, the narratives posit that there is a network of connections between them. My readings have suggested that these connections are reciprocal, and that the bond to the past is not possible to unravel. In

retaining its fettered grip the past effectively induces a haunting of the present²⁹. To haunt is understood to be “persistently and disturbingly present” (“OED”), and also to pervade or obsess, which ties in with the “present-ness” of the past as suggested by the novels themselves. The element of haunting complicates the relation between the layers of time, and challenges basic binary oppositions like past/present, present/absent and even alive/dead. The layers do not exist separately or independently, they pervade each other’s space and bleed into each other. Seeing the past through the translucent layer of the present makes the image of the past ambiguous. My readings have suggested that the image of the past is extensively coloured and obfuscated by the view from the present.

In *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, *The Bus Stopped* and *The God of Small Things* memory demands obedience and obeisance. It is so powerful that it easily appropriates the characters’ focus, and it cements individuals in their tracks, allowing them only restricted retrospective focus. Why is memory in other words so stubbornly stuck in old tracks? The implications of this paralyzing and fettering fixation appear to be no less than devastating. The obsessive retrospective focus can be read figuratively as an instance of keeping a wound open. While exploring the way memory and remembrance works for the individual, we must also consider and pursue its wider implications, and here a question ineluctably emerges. Does the postulation of memory’s and remembrance’s imprisoning function acquire meaning outside the novels themselves? Or, put more specifically: if a scar in an individual soul is like a wound that will not heal, what about the wounds in the collective soul?

Haunting not only signifies the individual being haunted by his own past, by spectres that refuse to let go, and which transgress the layers and boundaries of time and place. It also

²⁹ Related to *haunting* is *hauntology*. Though there are other sources to this term (Davies), Jacques Derrida’s understanding is the most known, and plays on the homonym (in French) *ontology*. He claims that *hauntology* surpasses the other term; the “logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than ontology or a thinking of Being ... It would harbour within itself ... eschatology and teleology themselves” (Derrida 10). This because it deals with both the being and the non-being, in addition to the return of a spectre, and questions time itself through dealing with the *present* and the *absent*, and that which is neither nor, here or there.

denotes how cultural, or collective, memory works³⁰. Cultural memory is in many ways what we call *history*. As opposed to individual memory, cultural memory retains in its store only that which is considered to be a collective historical experience worth remembering. It demands consensus and some kind of recording, and is not merely the sum of individual memories. According to Thompson, cultural forgetting also differs from individual forgetting; what disappears from cultural memory can be left out in two ways. Either it disintegrates due to temporary deactivation, what Thompson calls “benign neglect” (6), or it disappears as the result of enforced permanent erasure from the collective memory, “compulsory forgetting” (7). The memories that pass this selection process constitute the storage of cultural memory at any given time, and these are the memories that determine how we read our own history. Through consensus it gains precedence as the “official” collective memory. It can thus be seen as the result of intersubjective dialogues, or as manipulated or selected representative material.

In the same manner as individual memory is haunted by and haunting the past, cultural memory also undergoes a process of reciprocity. Thompson states that “under the influence of new texts (and codes), the old texts change, [and] a ‘displacement of significant and insignificant elements’ occurs. Conversely, old texts and their codes generate new ones” (6). These reciprocal processes underline how the collective present builds its self image on the collective image of the past. This in turn suggests that the concept of haunting rendered in the novels is indeed applicable in a wider context.

In “History is Your Own Heartbeat” Ashraf Rushdy touches on the question of wounds and trauma, and their effects on the present. His argument mainly relates to slavery,

³⁰ My approach to *cultural memory* builds on Thompson’s understanding in *The Brothers Karamazov and the Poetics of Memory*.

but it can be extended to that of historical wounds and their lasting effects, in general³¹. They are described as “not only or merely a metaphor, a sin, a cancer, a crime, or a shame, although it is also all of those things ... [It] is the family secret” (Rushdy 2). Rushdy claims that these wounds, or secrets, are symptoms of an inability to comprehend the function of the past (3). Applied to the three novels here, it seems the function of the past in the narratives is more than simply keeping it alive, or narrating its trauma. It is also central to understanding the present, and perhaps even the future. In Ammu’s mirror scene, which I focused on earlier in this thesis (see page 67), she creates the spectre of her future from understanding her present and her past. Uncannily the spectre becomes a prophecy, and the past appropriates everything which follows. Like Estha’s “octopus” in *The God of Small Things*, the past spreads its tentacles “along the insides of his skull, hovering the knolls and dells of his memory, dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue” (13), effectively “spreading its inky tranquilizer” (ibid.). More often than not, the past “*does not end*” (Felman qtd. in Rushdy 4).

To shed further light on the relation between the individual and the collective memory, I want to go into dialogue with Czeslaw Milosz’s Nobel Lecture from 1980³², which describes memory in relation to both the individual and the historical. He claims that collective memory – official history – faces what he considers to be a severe threat of manipulation. Because collective memory is continually changed by collective forgetting, “history is present but blurred”, and Milosz contemplates the consequences of this as follows:

³¹ Rushdy also relates his discussion to both Holocaust, (“[c]onsider another historical atrocity that haunts a different national imaginary. Intellectuals writing about the Holocaust have argued that it ‘functions as a cultural secret’ (3),) and to “[w]orld wars and international struggles ... historical sensibilities” (ibid.).

³² Milosz’s name was brought to my attention in a guest lecture at the University of Bergen. The speaker was Michael Parker, and the lecture titled “His Master’s Voice: the Impact of Czeslaw Milosz on Seamus Heaney’s Writings” (Sept 6, 2011). From the lecture I noted the key words: historical memory versus historical truth, loss of the childhood home’s sense of wholeness, personal witness alongside historical theme, and the “ghost life” of material objects. This made me want to look closer at what else Milosz might have written.

[T]he number of books in various languages which deny that the Holocaust ever took place, that it was invented by Jewish propaganda, has exceeded one hundred. If such an insanity is possible, is a complete loss of memory as a permanent state of mind improbable? (407)

Individual memory is thus not without relevance to collective memory. Individual memory is what Miłosz calls “our force” (408) to withstand the manipulative attempts to reduce history “to what appears on television, while the truth, as it is too complicated, will be buried in archives, if not totally annihilated” (ibid.). The individuals are the ones who enact memory: they are “no more than links between the past and the future” (Miłosz 409), but crucial links at that. They are the ones who must take the responsibility, the imperative to preserve the historical truth, with the power of their individual memories. They are the ones who must prevent any unrighteous collective forgetting. The novels I have explored are arguably embodiments of this imperative fulfilment. At the level of plot, this is seen in the way the characters remember. Their memories are embedded in certain societal wrongdoings which will not lay peacefully amongst their personal memories. For Baumgartner it is the memory of Nacht und Nebel, in *The God of Small Things* it is the History House and everything connected with it. In *The Bus Stopped*, it is a loss of traditional to modern society, but also the general tensions between Indian and English identities.

Further, the novels are in themselves a negotiation, a resistance to collective forgetting. The narrative of memory, the memory discourse is in itself a memory which voices what should not be forgotten. The novels all articulate certain collective traumas. In chapter one I claimed that despite sharing a history of a colonial past, and an Indian setting, these novels are not necessarily most rewardingly read through a postcolonial lens. However, as the readings have progressed, a slightly different focus has crystallized. Trauma is the wound that

will not heal, and what haunts individual and collective memory. More specifically, in their very different ways, the novels speak of the trauma of colonization. *The God of Small Things* is the novel that most explicitly deals with this wound. Not only through the allegory of the History House, but throughout the narrative, it posits that the conflict of the colonizer and the colonized never ends, that it cannot be laid to rest. It haunts the present in the manner of a ghost (Roy 189-91) and all-pervasively it seeps into its surroundings like “tea from a teabag” (33). Though more indirectly, *The Bus Stopped* also propounds an ongoing conflict with its locus in the same wound. This is delineated in the descriptions of language and prestige (Khair 41, 46, 49), but is also more directly addressed with reference to babu sentiment (98). However, my explorations were rooted in, and routed by, the knowledge that though these two novels share this focus, *Baumgartner’s Bombay* bears witness to a different collective wound. This narrative voices the remediless collective trauma of the Holocaust. I thus suggest that read together the three novels demonstrate that narratives of trauma extend to a number of disciplines such as the exilic or diasporic, and that they should therefore be read through the lens of memory and remembrance instead of conforming to a reading that posits their provenance as the most prominent feature. Milosz’s speculation that, “[i]t is possible that there is no other memory than the memory of wounds” (408), may be true of both individual and collective remembrance.

Finally, only one journey remains, I want to go back and take one last look at the narratives themselves. In contemplating the spaces surrounding him in his displacement, Aciman makes an observation that applies to *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, *The Bus Stopped* and *The God of Small Things*: he feels an urge to make any new place a “mirror – call it the mnemonic correlate” of other places, known or imagined (Aciman 29). Any new place becomes in effect a shadow of

his home city: “albeit an unreal Alexandria, an Alexandria that does not exist, that I’ve invented, or learned to cultivate in Rome as in Paris”, all other places are experienced as versions of that space, “reminding me of something that is not just elsewhere but that is perhaps more in me than it was ever out there, that it is, after all, perhaps just me, a me that is no less a figment of time than this city is a figment of space” (Aciman 34). This observation demonstrates what is so insistently conveyed in the three novels: the past does not end, it does not let go, and it will not rest. The past may be confined to certain temporal limits, but the very nature of remembering allows the past to oppose all boundaries. Memory constructs a spatio-temporal flow of its own; intermittent, discontinuous and association based, where past, present and future intermingle.

The twins in *The God of Small Things* find a grave for their dead, they make that impossible return to the moment in the past, in a blur of time and space, their union is once again enacted and separation dispersed. However, the return, seemingly laying the past to rest, comes at its own price:

Perhaps it’s true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house – the charred clock, the single photograph, the scorched furniture – must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for.

Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning.

Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story. (Roy 32)

In *The Bus Stopped*, Singh’s narrative remains unresolved. Does he bury his “dead child”, or has he only embalmed it in an eternal embrace? The larger narrative of this novel, the choir of

voices, sends a somewhat clearer message. In the words of the frame story narrator the persistent haunting is evident, “once again his father’s ghost, exorcised so many times, entering by his mouth” (Khair 60). Even if he seemingly manages to wrestle free from the grip of the past, it remains deep in him and returns, if at no other time, in his sleep:

It is a sleep full of sounds. Your father’s voice across a decade and three states, the sounds of your past and present, your reality and imagination, all mixed up with creaking beds, footsteps, dog howls, truck sounds, the drip-drip-drip of the tap. (94)

Baumgartner’s Bombay also retains the element of haunting, and seems to posit that the past can only find its grave in the grave of the character. In order to let go of the past, Baumgartner must also part with his life. They can only be buried together. His memories are his life. This novel, too, makes a connection between the memories of the past and the unconscious, as we saw in the quote above from *The Bus Stopped*. Sleep initially invites involuntary memories for Baumgartner as well, but finally offers the resort where past and present blur together.

Thus the words of his memories

[R]an into each other, became garbled. They made no sense. Nothing made sense. Germany there, India here – India there, Germany here. Impossible to capture, to hold, to read them, make sense of them. They all fell away from him, into an abyss. He saw them falling now, white shapes turning and turning, then going grey as the distance widened between them and him. He stood watching as they fell and floated, floated and fell, till they drifted out of sight, silently, and he was left on the edge, clutching his pyjamas, straining to look. (Desai 216)

The passage offers a more or less complete picture of the different aspects of memory and remembrance. Through my readings the narratives have shown the complexities and discrepancies of remembrance, faulty perception, and the power the past holds over the present. We strain to look for pieces of the past, floating around in the narratives, and in our lives, and realize how close to “impossible [they are] to capture, to hold, to read ...[and to] make sense of” (ibid.). Finally, as I said initially, all journeys have a site of origin and a site of termination, and as this thesis comes to its end, I look back to its beginning. In the same way we have seen past and present blur together, so do origin and end, and we come to reflect, as Baumgartner, Singh, Rahel and Estha, if making the impossible return is the ultimate end to our journey, and if remembrance is our means to get there.

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