THE PLACE OF THE OTHER: ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

The God of Small Things is essentially about the *place* of the Other. Roy's text poses several questions, all of which cathect into the theme of Othering. These questions are: Who is the Other? Who is the foreigner? What are the (dis)locations of the foreigner and the Other? What is the duty towards the Other? In this essay, I shall deal specifically with the modes of Othering; that is, the processes by which the Other comes to be formed, if at all. In the second section of the essay, I shall analyse how Roy poses the distinction between the Other and the foreigner, and modulates the theme of the psychic states of "foreignness" and "Otherness" into the larger *social* theme of hospitality towards the foreigner and the Other.

The process of Othering in Roy's novel takes a particular sequence. (1) The twins deny otherness through a process of incorporation. (2) With the process of incorporation, the Desire-of-the-Mother is encoded. (3) The absence of the *Name*-of-the-Father (as Roy's novel clearly suggests, since the name remains unknown) marks the denial of the entire chain of signification. (4) The Name-of-the-Father returns with a vengeance in the same passage where the Mother reasserts her love for the children. (5). The Desire-of-the-Mother is now punished with the banishment of Estha to the Father. (6) In the most tragic event in the lives of the twins (and especially in the case of Estha), the return-of-the-Father occurs *immediately after he has consigned A-Father(figure) – Velutha – to death and oblivion.*

Roy's emphasis on the psycho-monism of Estha and Rahel conforms to a state approximating to Jacques Lacan's Imaginary. In the Lacanian Imaginary the infant looking into the mirror seizes upon resemblances in order to merge the otherness of the Other into itself (Lacan, *Ecrits*: 1-7). This forms an "Ideal-I" that "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a *fictional direction,* which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone" (*Ecrits*: 2, emphasis added). More significantly, Lacan argues:

> [The mirror-stage is the] polar relation, by which the specular image ... is linked as a unifier to all the imaginary elements of what is called the fragmented body, provides a couple that is prepared not only by a natural conformity of developed structure to serve as a homologue for the Mother/child symbolic relation. (*Ecrits*: 196)

Therefore, the Imaginary, as Jacqueline Rose points out, is a state where mis-recognition forms the very basis of subjectivity (Rose, *Sexuality*: 175). It is also important to note that, for Lacan, the Other is *constitutive* of the subject itself (at

least initially). Lacan writes: "What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question" (*Ecrits*: 86). Later, Lacan adds: "The Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks with him who hears, *that which is said by being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken*" (*Ecrits:* 141, emphasis added). The Other is denied through an *incorporation* into the self.

Roy's mapping of the location and formation of this constitutive Other, paradoxically begins not with similarities but with difference. This strategy is crucial because it enables Roy to emphasise (a) the psychological unity of the twins and (b) that this state of unity and similarity is fictional and based on a flawed mis-recognition. Roy begins by stating the indisputable distinction between the twins. She writes: "They never did look much like each other, Estha and Rahel..." (2). After this emphasis on the Otherness of the two to each other, Roy sets out the terms of the relationship, a situation which corresponds to the Lacanian Imaginary in its emphasis on the delusional state of the twins' subjectivity. Roy writes:

> In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Every-thing was For Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate but with joint identities. (2)

This suggests the mis-recognised state of the Imaginary. In this the souls are twinned, like mirror-images, but are in actuality separate. This delusion of togetherness, of being/incorporating the Other that Estha and Rahel experience is the very foundation of their subjectivity. Roy emphasises the dream-like, delusional early life ("when memory had only just begun") when she describes Rahel as "remembering" Estha's dream and his *unshared*, individual/private experience in Abhilash Talkies (2-3, 119, 199), or when Rahel sees Estha as a "part of [herself]" (163-4). Later, Roy writes: "for them there was no each, no Other" (225), thus underlining the fictional monism. As in the Lacanian Imaginary, for Estha and Rahel their subjectivity is based on the false assumption that they resemble each other (and therefore there is "no Other", as Roy puts it). Estha and Rahel negate the otherness of the Other by locating only resemblances (where none exist). The sharing of dreams and memories of incidents that were not shared is what may be termed a "compound Imaginary". Not only do Estha and Rahel believe that they are a *part of each other*, but they are also certain that they share a consciousness. The effect of this compound Imaginary is essentially a psychologising of somatic experience.

During childhood each twin sees the Other as part of her/him-self, as we have already noted. As adults the compound Imaginary has some deleterious effects. Larry McCaslin notes that the adult Rahel has something missing from her personality. For instance, her eyes "behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching ... a boat in the river" (19). There is a disquieting silence in her. Roy elaborates on Rahel's psychology when she describes "a *hollow* [in Rahel] where Estha's words had been ... the *emptiness* in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together" (19-20, emphasis added). Roy is here indicating the persistence of the delusional Imaginary in the adult. What makes Rahel the fully-Other, the incomprehensible Other *to* Larry is an absence *in* her, the direct result of her persistent delusion that Estha is a part of her-self, a part that has gone missing. The hollow in Rahel, and the persistence of Estha's silence in Rahel approximates to the Lacanian Imaginary. What Rahel seeks in her speech is Estha's response. In the compound Imaginary which is their subjectivity, the "emptiness" and "quietness" are a strange response to *each other's* unspoken speech. The absence of Estha leaves Rahel's subjectivity incomplete, and therefore unable to be any-thing other than the Other to the world. The delusional state of having the Other "inside" one-self makes the twins fully Other in the "real" world. To word it differently, Estha and Rahel will be the Other to the entire world precisely because they have never been the Other to each other: they have never separated. Therefore, the growing apart/up of the twins does not alter the Imaginary. Indeed the tragic flaw of the twins is that the compound Imaginary is the *only* state they inhabit.

This damaged state of affairs has another dimension. Lacan argues that the Imaginary also encodes the Desire-of-the-Mother. The Name/No-of-the-Father (Lacan's pun on the French terms) defers the fulfilment of this Desire (*Ecrits*: 200).[1] The Name-of-the-Father is precisely that: a Name that functions as a

[1] Lacan argues that the Name-of-the-Father is essential for the subject. The absence of the Name-of-the-Father (what Lacan terms "foreclosure") "opens up [the hole] in the signified" (*Ecrits*: 215, 217). That is, the absence of the Name-of-the-Father as a fundamental signifier unravels the entire chain/process of signification. It is the expulsion of the notion/image/signifier from the unconscious itself. Lacan further argues that the Name-of-the-Father can be "called" by the subject "simply by a real father, not necessarily by the subject's own father, but by A-Father...this A-Father must attain that place to which the subject was unable to call him before. It is enough that this A-Father should be situated in a third position in some relation based on the imaginary dyad..." (*Ecrits*: 217). For Estha and Rahel the Name-of-the-Father works as a charm, a Name to be invoked – for love, for memory, or as the Law. The A-Father is also part of the elaborate delusion into which the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man and Velutha enter. The tragedy of the twins' lives is that

signifier, as a Law. The Name-of-the-Father is invoked as a Law to treat a recalcitrant child, or to curb the Desire-of-the-Mother. The Name-of-the-Father represents authority and, in Lacan, the Symbolic. Indeed, it is what makes the Symbolic possible (*Ecrits*: 217-221). Elaborating on the Mother/Father role Lacan writes:

> We should concern ourselves not only with the way in which the mother accommodates herself to the person of the father, but also with the way she takes his speech, the word (*mot*), let us say, of his authority, in other words, of the place that she reserves for the Name-of-the-Father in the promulgation of the law. (*Ecrits*: 218)

However, for the twins it is not so simple. The *letter* of the "Name" is itself not known, as we shall see. The Father himself does not appear. The absence of even the signifier, as Lacan argues (see note **1**) opens up a psychotic space. To complicate matters Roy's compound Imaginary works with the Name-of-the-Father as *both* absence and presence. As the twins grow, they are made to understand that their mother *stands in* for the father.

> "Everybody says that children need a Baba. And I say no. Not my children. D'you know why?"
> Two heads nodded.
> "Why. Tell me," Ammu said.
> And not together, but almost, Esthappen and Rahel said: "Because you're our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double."
> "More than Double," Ammu said. "So remember what I told you. People's feelings are precious. And when you disobey me in Public, *every*body gets the wrong impression." (149, emphasis in original)

The twins' love for their mother, reciprocated in equal measure, now conflates the mother with the Father. This results in yet another problem for Estha-Rahel: the question of obedience. In the above passage Ammu refers to herself as both the subject of desire and the threatening Father-figure. Ammu by "doubling" her love has inscribed her name/love over the absent Father.

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having thus far denied the Other, the Other now returns in the worst form possible: the return of the Father, the ejection of the Mother, and the "killing" of the A-Father.

This situation is fraught with danger for the twins: not only has the mother, *in one single moment*, restated her "double" love, she has also invoked the Father/Other. For, as Lacan has argued, the Name-of-the-Father should attain the place of the Other (*Ecrits*: 217-221). The mother is thus a sign for the presence of the Father, and, ironically, highlights the palpable absence of the Father. Thus, in a version of the Imaginary, the Mother merges with the Father here: yet another act of mis-recognition. Then, the reference to "correct" behaviour and obedience specifically conjures up the Father's absence, but a Father *all the same*. A further step in the reiteration of the compound Imaginary occurs during and after the "Terror". Ammu, preparing to send Estha away, says: "Maybe a boy does need a Baba" (31, 302). Estha, who has already been told that his mother is *both* mother and Father is suddenly presented with a new situation. As a punishment for whatever he may have done (and punishment is what even the grown-up Estha-Rahel believe they have earned, 191, 328), he is wrenched away from his mother. He is sent away to his Baba, to a Father who has been present not even in/as a *Name*. Thus the ominous note of Ammu's threat proves true: he has disobeyed Ammu, and therefore has demonstrated the need for the Father. In a sense, Estha believes that he has fulfilled people's expectations by betraying his mother.

This situation is a reworking of the compound Imaginary. The Father is the absent presence in the twins' lives. When, for instance, Rahel suggests that Ammu should marry the Orangedrink Lemondrink man (112), she is attempting to fill the gap of the Father, to what Lacan terms "A-Father" (*Ecrits*: 217). The Name-of-the-Father – not known yet, which is why Estha writes his name as "Esthappen Unknown", since Ammu has not yet decided on her surname (156-7) – is the omniscient Name. Like a palimpsest whose earlier writing has remained partially visible, the Father patrols the boundaries of the twins' horizons (as Ammu's speech, quoted above, reveals). The Name-of-the-Father thus literally defers the fulfilment of the Desire-of-the-Mother. Here the mother has been suddenly abstracted out of the Imaginary – when the Name-of-the-Father returns with a vengeance. For Estha this marks a great disjunction: his Desire-of-the-Mother has been punished by his Father (who has re-entered his life). Their identification of Ammu as their Mother *and* Father is also a delusion, very similar to their incorporation of each other into their self. Estha's "discovery" of the Father alters his perception of the Mother-in-the-Father and Father-in-the-Mother. The vacillation between absent Father/present Mother and later vice versa is the extremity of his compound Imaginary. After Lacan, we know that the absence of the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father results in a breakdown of the process of signification. Up to this point Estha-Rahel have no signification. The attempted "calling up" of A-Father also fails. And Estha's return to the Father is the enforced

clash between the delusional and the new Symbolic. Years later, the absent Name-of-the-Father recurs differently. When Estha is "re-Returned" to Ayemenem their father writes them a letter. Here is Roy's description of the situation: "It [the letter] was written in a slanting, feminine, convent school hand, but the signature underneath was their father's. Or at least the name was. Rahel wouldn't have recognized the signature" (9). The illegibility of the signature is the partial erasure of the Name-of-the-Father.

For Estha at least the Imaginary does persist. As Estha grows up in his Father's house the Mother (Ammu) is still the subject of his desire. This compound Imaginary has a peculiar twist: the delusion coils in on itself. Delusion (1): the mirror-image that Estha lives with is Rahel (itself a homologue for the Mother/Child symbolic bond). This coils into delusion (2) - the mirror-image becomes the mother, as Rahel merges into the mother. That is, the mirror-image of Estha's childhood merges with that of his absent mother. The concluding section suggests the doubling of the Lacanian Imaginary. What occurs is a re-incorporation (if it was ever "outside") of the Mother into the Self through what is already a mis-recognised mirror-image. Estha "fulfils" his desire of the mother by substitution - incorporating his constitutive Other instead of the Mother. I suggest that this is a doubling of the Imaginary because Rahel's separateness is *not* acknowledged. Further, this separateness is itself merged with the fully-Other Mother (fully-Other, because Estha by being sent away to his Father has been alienated from the mother). This situation corresponds to what Lacan says about the metaphor and substitution: "the metaphor that substitutes this Name [-of-the-Father] in the place first symbolized by the operation of the absence of the mother" (*Ecrits*: 200). Thus a double delusion of incorporation, which, for Estha, is identity itself. Here are the passages that invite this reading of the "doubled" Imaginary:

> He sat even straighter. Still, he could see her. Grown into their mother's skin ... Their beautiful mother's mouth (300)

And, as reiteration:

> Twenty-three years later, Rahel, dark woman in a yellow T-shirt, turns to Estha in the dark...
>
> She whispers.
>
> She moves her mouth.
>
> Their beautiful mother's mouth. (327)

In the absence of the Name-of-the-Father, in the absence of the "real" mother, the Imaginary works its pernicious influence. Thus the "love laws" are about not loving your mother, and also about not loving your sister in the "name-of-your-mother". The obvious result of the compound Imaginary is the annihilation of Estha's personality and subjectivity. Trapped in the "identity" of Estha-Rahel and traumatised by the never-to-be-fulfilled Desire-of-the-Mother, Estha is essentially the Imaginary unlimited. The concluding act of incest only reinforces the Lacanian Imaginary for it transforms the homologous relation of Mother/Child into an actuality in a cruelly twisted inversion.

To summarise the sequence with which Roy's psychodynamics of Othering proceeds: (1) In the Imaginary that is the site of their subjectivity, each twin sees her/his sibling as a part of her/him-self; (2) Within this situation of "incorporated" Other, there is also the Desire-of-the-Mother; (3) the Desire-of-the-Mother is to be deferred by the Name/No-of-the-Father; (4) the Mother herself merges with the Father(figure) and "doubles" her love *as well as* the threat of the Symbolic by invoking the Name-of-the-(absent)-Father. (5) The return of the Father brings in the Other in a manner that inflicts the maximum damage: for the Other returns at the very moment that Estha and Rahel have "killed" A-Father (Velutha).

I would like to suggest, further, that Estha's testimony against Velutha is precisely the act that "kills" A-Father and heralds the return of the Other. Estha and Rahel, one notes, see Velutha as A-Father. In addition, the two treat Velutha's house *as their own* (190, 212-4) – something that Ammu warns them against doing (220). In his testimony against Velutha, Estha is supposed to indict Velutha for having kidnapped them; that is, for having made them *hostages* in the History House. The only word that Estha has to utter in his indictment is "Yes". Later, even as an adult, this word remains stuck *inside him.* Roy writes: "The word Estha's octopus couldn't get at: *Yes.* Hoovering didn't seem to help. It was lodged there, deep inside some fold or furrow..."(32). This is a haunting, a twisted cryptonymy which translates (a) A-Father into kidnapper, (b) resurrects the Other/Father as a result. This is a cryptonymy because Estha's reassuring words to Rahel after he has testified against Velutha brings to the surface a faceless figure with a fictitious name. Roy writes: "Estha whispered something into Rahel's ear. 'You were right. It wasn't him. It was Urumban'... They were handed over to their mother fast asleep, floating on this fiction" (320). Urumban: a fictitious name and person who is used to alleviate the guilt that Estha and Rahel feel for having betrayed Velutha, their A-Father. Urumban is part of the elaborate cryptonymy that haunts the twins. Rather than *take the name* of Velutha for themselves, they use a false name in its *place.* Further, by admitting it is Velutha-as-kidnapper and by not using any other name in the testimony, Estha rejects the very (delusional, fictitious) patronymy that

has given them so much security and pleasure. The affirmation of the name-of-Velutha is, paradoxically and tragically, the denial of his being A-Father. The affirmation-cum-denial of this patronymy in the police station is the moment at which the thus far absent Name-of-the-Father returns as the Other. What is interesting is the degree to which the issue of the name/letter of the "Father" figures here. First, there is the absence of the Name-of-the-Father. Then, having substituted the Father with A-Father (Velutha) they deny even this name and substitute, albeit for themselves, a fictitious name (Urumban) in its stead. Finally, I suggest that this Othering modulates into a question of hospitality for several reasons. Velutha, A-Father(figure) to the twins, *hosts* the children in his house, *as a father*. When they reject him, brand him the Other with Estha's "yes", they bring back the Father. This unequal exchange where the gift of hospitality that Velutha offers is reciprocated with betrayal and an affirmation-which-is-a-denial (as I have suggested above), is the moment at which the theme of host/guest and the Other begins. This occurs because the removal of Velutha (and the topoi associated with him) from their lives does not give them alternative spaces. In fact, it is with this act of affirmation-denial that the twins and Ammu lose all their "Locusts Stand I", their place as hosts, as family. Estha's "return" to his Father is the situation of a new host: a host who is the Other/Father. Thus the return of the Father is the creation and delineation of a new space of hospitality where the Father is the Other, and the son having lost his "place" (where he was host/family, and treated as such by Velutha) is now the Other too. After this act the principal people involved begin to look for *places* that will not make them or treat them as the Other. Ammu searches for suitable jobs that will enable her to bring Estha *back*, so that they can all be together: "We'll have our *own house*", as Ammu says (325, emphasis added). The loss of name and the gaining of a name is, therefore, not simply a question of identity. It is also a question of location, a question of relationships and a question of hospitality. It is the movement of the patronym, of language (Estha's "Yes") between the poles of host/enemy, family/foreigner and self/Other that marks the novel. It is to this question of hospitality that I shall now turn.

II

Simultaneous with the Othering within the subject, Roy's novel also thematises the question of the fully-Other and the foreigner. In fact, the theme of the Other cannot be read independent of the themes of the foreigner and hospitality in the novel. The foreigner, as Jacques Derrida demonstrates, begins by questioning the authority of the chief/father/master (*Hospitality*: 5-6). Also, it is the foreigner to whom one addresses the first question: who are you, where have you come from, what is your name? (*Hospitality:* 27). The principal difference between the

foreigner and the absolute Other, Derrida argues, is that unlike the foreigner, the absolute Other "cannot have a name or family name" (*Hospitality*: 25). Further, the question of the foreigner is also the question of hospitality. Derrida writes:

> [A]bsolute hospitality requires that I open up my house and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place that I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. - Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (25)

Derrida then goes on to ask: "is hospitality rendered, is it given to the other before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject, legal subject and subject nameable by their family name, etc?" (*Hospitality*: 29). The absolute law of hospitality demands the complete effacement of status as a foreigner. These are the central questions that Roy's text throws up.

Roy's novel is essentially a novel about revenants: ghosts who begin by coming back, of foreigners who begin by returning, and of foreigners-as-Others and of Others-as-foreigners, and those who by the very act of returning become foreigners or Others. The very opening of the novel suggests the theme: Rahel *returns* to Ayemenem. As the narrative proceeds, we have a host of returnees and returns. First, there is the stranger-woman at Sophie Mol's burial (4-5). Estha is returned to his father (9), and then "re-Returned" (9). Father Mulligan returns to Madras, and breaks Baby Kochamma's heart (24). Sophie Mol herself is only "visiting" (4). Ammu gets married because she does not want to return to Ayemenem (39). After her marriage fails she makes an "unwelcome" return to Ayemenem (42). The white man of History House does not return to England, and "goes native" (52-3). When Velutha returns to Ayemenem after four years, he is unwelcome to the other workers in Mammachi's pickle factory (77). CORRECTED Baby Kochamma has herself returned to Ayemenem after a period abroad. The stay abroad does not alleviate her love for Father Mulligan, and instead, is more in love (26). Chacko emigrates to Canada (18) and Margaret returns to England, wrecked by Sophie's death (264). Ammu's ex-husband emigrates to Australia, and suggests that he may never return to India (9). In addition to these returns there are versions of returns and foreignness. The Orangedrink Lemondrink man hints darkly to Estha that he may return for Estha

(109-110). There is a passing reference to America's uninvited and therefore "foreign" presence in Vietnam (35). Margaret is the English mother and therefore the true foreigner in the house (5). Ammu's husband belonged to a family who "had emigrated to Calcutta from East Bengal after the Partition" (39). After the Indo-Chinese war breaks out, several families are evacuated from Assam, thus consigning them to the status as "refugees", essentially interlopers/foreigners (40).

However, these returns apart, there are several moments where the question of the foreigner's/Other's arrival/return become central. At Sophie Mol's burial Ammu, Estha and Rahel, though part of the same family are "made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them" (95). The spatial distancing is a separation/severance of relationships itself. This is a fundamental violation of the laws of hospitality. For, not only are Ammu and the twins treated as foreigners (though even foreigners have a right to hospitality), they are treated as the absolute Other, with no family (name) or identity. The famous Roy-ism "Locusts Stand I" (57) – a version of standing, of "siting" - is precisely the question of the foreigner's location. This "Locusts stand I" is what Ammu loses first with her divorce and then with the death of Sophie Mol (328). Suddenly the hosts (since Ammu and the twins, by being part of the family, are actually hosts to Margaret and Sophie Mol, who come from "abroad") are transformed into Others. Margaret at the burial is seen as part of the family, and Ammu as the excluded Other. Hospitality is thus not extended to people who were once the hosts themselves. The arrival (and death) of the foreigner transforms the host (Ammu, the twins) into the enemy, the Other. This is a critical point.

After Estha "re-Returns" to Ayemenem he is almost a stranger, as Comrade Pillai realises (14). Rahel has no friends at school (17). Ammu, in Ayemenem after her divorce, lives in the "penumbral shadows between two worlds, just beyond the grasp of their power" (44). The entire Ayemenem Christian community is, in a sense, foreign, since after their conversion (during the Raj), they have no caste (74). Such examples of foreignness could be multiplied. Ammu and Velutha are on opposite sides of the caste barrier. Arguably, they are foreigners to each other. Velutha's caste makes him a foreigner, and thus he is not allowed/hosted inside the Ayemenem house (77). Ammu warns the twins not to enter his house (220). Further, ever since her ignominious return to Ayemenem, Ammu herself is a stranger. These two strangers take to each other. And, as Roy points out, "history's fiends" claim them (177). These "fiends" patrol the threshold that separates "Us" from "Them", classes, castes and social strata. It is both ironic and fitting that two strangers – Ammu and Velutha - should be "hosted" by/in the History House (225, 338-9). It was in this house that the white man had been hosted, offered hospitality as to a foreigner by India, and, as a result, gone native. The white man's ruined house – rejected by all as "haunted' – provides the roof, shelter and therefore a

hospitality that Ayemenem and its residents would never offer to either Ammu or Velutha, or the two of them together. This is a hospitality that is extended with no questions asked, where genealogies, caste identities and names are ignored. The hospitality offered by Ammu and Velutha to each other is also unconditional, and constitutes a social critique in Roy's novel. By taking up hospitality in a third or neutral space, but still within perimeters delineated by social norms, Ammu and Velutha have also transgressed the laws of hospitality (one that Ayemenem does/does not offer). It is also the History House to which the twins (with Sophie Mol, though she does not make the crossing) flee when they feel unwanted. It is to be "a home away from home" (264), a very important description that suggests the theme of hospitality. The History House is a sanctuary, it offers unconditional hospitality to those who have been relegated to the status of "foreigners" or even "Others". The History House is thus the most important topos in the novel since it is here that conventional categories of Us/them, and insider/foreigner are rejected in favour of the absolute law of hospitality.

Then, Ammu and the twins are "transgressors", since they "crossed into forbidden territory" (31). They thus enter as uninvited foreigners. This not only transgresses into forbidden territory – demarcated by caste, family, class - but also the very condition of hospitality. The foreigner (Ammu) alters the rules of the family/community (the Love Laws). The relationship of brother-sister is itself altered when Rahel returns, as a foreigner, to Aymenem (328). The "strangers who had met in a chance encounter" (327) are no strangers now. Thus any otherness of the foreigner is denied, the identity forgotten. Roy's social critique extends here to the theme of "appropriate" hospitality. Velutha too alters the "ethos" of hospitality: he entertains the twins in his house (190, 212-4). This is again an important point. Like the History House which is rejected as "haunted", the house/topos of the lower-caste Velutha is denied the right to even *offer* hospitality. As Derrida points out, there can be no hospitality without sovereignty over one's house (*Hospitality*: 55). Here Velutha, sovereign within his space, is able to reject social norms of who should/should not be hosted. He therefore offers unquestioning hospitality to the children of the upper caste/class Ammu. Ironically, the police believe that the twins had been held kidnapped and hostage by Velutha, and he is accused/punished for being their *unsanctioned/unapproved* host (314-15).

Chacko and the others also transgress the laws of hospitality. First Kochu Maria tells Estha: "Tell your mother to take you to your father's house. There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren't your beds. This isn't *your* house" (83, emphasis in original). They are also told that they "have no right to be" in the house (45). The question of belongingness apart, the suggestion here is that Estha and Rahel are guests, and unwanted guests at that. Kochu Maria's diatribe is an

instance of "hostpitality" (Derrida's portmanteau term that reveals the etymological ambivalence of *hostis* as "enemy" and "guest", *Hospitality*, 45): a hostile intent that transgresses the law of hospitality to people who are themselves hosts. Ammu and the twins thus become unwanted foreigners in the family, because the foreigner/stranger is understood "on the basis of the circumscribed field of ethos or ethics, of habitat...of objective morality, especially in the three instances [of] the family, bourgeois or civil society" (*Hospitality*: 45). Later, after Sophie Mol's death Margaret believes Estha is responsible for the tragedy (264). Chacko, caught in his grief, also transgresses the law of hospitality. He shouts at Ammu to leave *his* house (225, 302). Chacko has used his sovereign power over the space of his house not to offer hospitality but to transform "family" into the Other. Since Ammu and the children have no "name" or genealogy (with Ammu's divorce) Chacko has treated them as the absolute Other (who, as we have seen in Derrida, has no name or social/family status/name). Worse, the children do not have a father's house to go to. "D'you think he may have lost our address?", Rahel asks (221) in a question that reflects the loss of any habitat, family name and identity. Suddenly they are the foreigners. It is the absence of any fixed address – and therefore being forced to accept the position of the absolute Other – that drives the twins into the one place (other than Velutha's) that dos not question their right to hospitality (the History House). An inanimate, empty object – the History House – and Velutha's house are the only two topoi that offer unconditional hospitality. This is Roy's ironic comment: the only places that offer unconditional hospitality to the Other and the foreigner are non-places, rejected by convention as haunted, impure and therefore not for "us". These non-places are the only place for the Other.

Further, Estha and Rahel suffer because Ammu dies elsewhere, in a nondescript lodge that they do not know (111). They cannot, therefore even mourn her because mourning requires a site, a determinable topos (*Hospitality*: 111). Derrida writes about death: "the visibility of the tomb would have been able to reappropriate the foreigner...the dead one remains all the more foreign in a foreign land in that there is no manifest grave" (113). So what her death achieves is the absolute foreignness of Ammu (and, ironically, her foreignness to her twins too). Roy's description of the effect of Ammu's death invites this reading of the impossibility of mourning in the absence of a site of mourning. Roy writes in a supremely spatial image: "She [Ammu] left them [the twins] behind, spinning in the dark, with no moorings, in a place with no foundation" (191-2). This is Roy's great irony: Ammu – a part of the family – has become foreign with her death. Sophie Mol (the foreigner), with her elaborate burial has been appropriated, because everyone mourns her (7, 15-16, 267). Though she has at least a partial "foreign element" (since Margaret is English) in her, she has become "family" with

her death and the appropriation of her death/identity as a *family* death, a family member's death. Ammu, on the other hand, is banished to the outside even in her death. Taking the question of the foreigner another step, Rahel and Estha become displaced others precisely because they have two nostalgias (and two guilts. The major guilt, of course, is the one they share with Ammu: that they had "loved a man to death", 324). They return, with a perverse nostalgia, to the place where at least some of their buried dead lie (Ayemenem). And there is a reference to the History House, to objects buried there and so on (127). What is buried, in the form of the wristwatch is the innocence, the "end of living" (321). And Velutha, who the twins have in a sense, "buried" is "dumped" in a pauper's pit (321). Like Ammu and unlike Sophie Mol, Velutha too has left behind no icons of his burial site. There is no way anyone can mourn or remember ("memorialise", if the pun be allowed) Velutha since there is no identifiable *space* of his burial. Roy therefore comments that Margaret Kochamma had no memory of Velutha at all, since "he left no footprints in the sand" (264-5).

Then there is the question of the twins' "mother tongue". The mother tongue is that ultimate homeland, their last resting place. The mother tongue, as Derrida points out, is the "house that never leaves us, the fantasy of property that...would give place to the most inalienable place...an immobile home since it moves about with us" (*Hospitality*: 89). Estha's loss of language (10-13) - maybe a "mother tongue"? - is precisely the culmination of the loss of habitat, of home and of identity (since there is no identity without language). We have already noted how in the Imaginary Estha and Rahel share memories and a secret language (of silence, to take recourse to a cliché). The shared memories are archives (since the act of archivisation is an act of committing to memory, and vice versa), particularly archives of a shared tragedy. The Ayemenem house is the archive (for there is no archive without a topos as Derrida points out in *Archive Fever*, 2-3). The return of Rahel as a foreigner is a return to this archive. This is an archive where the Imaginary had once given them *a* subjectivity. The "reading" or "opening-up" of the archive takes place in Estha's room. And here the essence of the loss of identity, of foreignness, and the *space* of archives is clearly visible. Roy notes that the room where the incest occurs, Estha's room, was "Ammu's room. Once". And further: "The room had kept its secrets" (91). The secret is the archive, the work of mourning that is impossible, and the impossibility of ever belonging. And this "condition" of impossible mourning, I suggest, is the essence of the novel.

Roy's novel thus problematises the question of the Other. The persistence of the Imaginary, the subjectivity based on a mis-recognition, the compound Imaginary that rules Estha's life (and, to a certain extent, Rahel's) and the question

of the duties owed a foreigner/Other are the central themes that Roy's incredibly rich text offers.

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