

Almost the Same, but Not Quite:

The Intersection of Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in *Le Dictateur et le Hamac* and *The God of Small Things*

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Contents

Introduction	1
Part I:	
A Copy of a Copy of a Copy	4
La Chasse a l'Epsilon	7
The Best of All Possible Pereiras	11
The Men Behind the Curtain	14
Part II:	
The Love Laws	19
Caste Hindus and Caste Christians	22
A House Divided	26
nataS nI riehT seyE	31
Conclusion	36

Introduction

The nature of the relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism,¹ never terribly well-defined to begin with, is becoming more and more contested. As it does so, it is coming increasingly more to be seen as the problematic, complicated, and potentially contradictory intersection of two related but sometimes conflicting schools of thought, a shift in perspective that complicates the previously common perception of postcolonial studies as the child of deconstructionism.² This change in the academic perception of these two schools has led a number of potent critiques to be leveled against their intersection. Jace Weaver, for example, in his article "Indigenously and Indigenity," points out the irony of the fact that it is just at the moment when people of the third world are finding their voices and starting to assert their own subjectivity that postmodernism proclaims the end of subjectivity. Coincidence? Weaver thinks not: "By finding its theoretical roots in European intellectual discourse," he writes, "postcolonialism continues, by inadvertence, the philosophical hegemony of the West."³

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?", famously critiques deconstructionist theorists Michel Foucault and Deleuze, as well as deconstructionist philosophy as a whole, for its total ignorance of and unconscious (or perhaps even willful) attempt to systematically suppress, marginalize, and exclude the voice of the subaltern.⁴ However, she herself makes use of very Derridean methods in order to reach her famous conclusion that the subaltern cannot, in fact, speak. The ways in which postmodern and

The term "postmodernism" is bandied around in currently theory without any sort of agreed-upon definition. I use this term very broadly in the following essay because that is the way it is being used in much of the current discussion of its relation to postcolonialism (another ill-defined term). However, when I use it more specifically in reference to the two novels around which this essay centers, I am referring to the stylistic and philosophical aspects of postmodernism, the most important attributes of which (to this essay, at least) are self-aware narration and a deconstructionist understanding and use of language.

¹ Alessandrini 431.

² Weaver 225.

³ Spivak, 1988.

postcolonial theory interact are knotty and problematic, and the use of one to critique the other is even more so.

In my decision, therefore, to use Jacques Derrida's ideas of supplementation and iteration to perform a reading of two texts, one of which is overtly postcolonial and the other of which, despite not technically being a postcolonial text, deals with postcolonial issues, I am forced to take into account the much-debated relationship between postmodern and postcolonial theory. However, both Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Daniel Pennac's *Le Dictateur et le hamac* at once acknowledge and make use of postmodern theory; the confrontation between postmodernism and postcolonialism takes place within the texts, and, by examining the ways in which postmodern structures function within them, I hope to get at the heart of the critiques that these works perform, as well as the implications of these critiques for postcolonialism.

At the core of the loaded relationship between postcolonial and postmodern theory lies a tension between the Spivakian impossibility of speech and the necessity of a speech that allows and encourages political engagement. Carrie Noland, in her talk of 3/29/06 entitled "Red Front/Black Front: Aimé Césaire and the Affaire Aragon," addresses the tension between the danger of speaking to or for the colonial subject and the desire to use literature to engage with and disrupt established modes of speech. She effects a reconciliation of the poetic (or metaphoric) mission of a text with its political mission of dissent, speaking of a "pointing gesture" that occurs at the junction of these seemingly conflicting modes of speech. This gesture allows a text, by using metaphoric language which does not allow itself to be read referentially, to point at a need for political action and engagement with the structures of violent and exclusionary societal discourse. In this essay I will argue that such a gesture is also possible at the intersection of postcolonial and postmodern theory and prose; that the linguistic play that is

characteristic of so much postcolonial and postmodern prose serves to establish the text as not simply referential but also metaphorically signifying, a motion which then combines with the political engagement of postcolonial writing to execute Noland's "pointing gesture." Pointing, that is, both at the arbitrary structures of language (which in turn are the foundation for the structures of colonization) and at an impetus for action.

PART I

A Copy of a Copy of a Copy

A perfect imitation is no longer an imitation. If one eliminates the tiny difference that, in separating the imitation from the imitated, by that very fact refers to it, one would render the imitator absolutely different: the imitator would become another being no longer referring to the imitated. Imitation does not correspond to its essence, is not what it is—imitation—unless it is in some way at fault or rather in default. It is bad by nature. It is only good insofar as it is bad. Since (de)fault is inscribed within it, it has no nature; nothing properly its own. Derrida, *Dissemination*⁵

The framework at the core of Daniel Pennac's novel *Le Dictateur et le hamac* (The Dictator and the Hammock) is the story of the agoraphobic dictator of the tiny South American country of Teresina, Manuel Pereira da Ponte Martins, who, in order to escape his predicted dismemberment by a mob, gets himself replaced by a double, a *sosie*.⁶ This *sosie*, in turn, gets himself replaced by a *sosie*, and that *sosie* by two more *sosies*, until upon the real Pereira's return the person at the head of the country is a caricature bearing no real resemblance to the dictator who hired the first *sosie*. Pereira shoots the imposter, and is immediately dismembered by the adoring crowd. The self-consciousness, evident elsewhere in the text through the narrator's persistent use of the conditional tense as well as in his later insistence on his own role in the creation of fiction, of Pennac's use of this structure of copies of copies of copies puts the novel in dialogue with a configuration that is, according to Derrida, fundamental to the very structure

⁵ Derrida 139.

⁶ In this paper I have chosen to retain the French word "*sosie*" instead of using the English "double" to speak of the many replacements for Manuel Pereira da Ponte Martins. This choice is motivated by the fact that *sosie* refers specifically to the double of a person, his imitator; it combines the concept of a *doppelgänger* with a job description. "Double" sets up a binary structure, limiting the number of people involved to two. In using *sosie* I hope to refer to Pereira's replacements simply in light of the job they have been hired to do, separating this function from the other structures involved in the copying of copies. The relation between these two functions is something that I hope to clarify over the course of this paper.

of language: the privileging of the fully self-present and self-identified original. For an example of the hierarchical structure that results from this privileging, we turn to the philosopher whose theory of the forms, if it is not the basis of the valorization of the "original" over its copies in the Western tradition, is certainly a prime and important example of this system of values: Plato.

In his *Republic*, Plato proposes his theory of forms (best known as it is manifest in the allegory of the cave). According to this theory, when a carpenter constructs a bed the thing he has made is not an original entity, but a copy. In order for the carpenter to make the bed, he must first have had in his mind the idea of the bed, of which the actual bed that he has constructs is just a copy. But the idea that the carpenter has of the bed is, itself, a copy of the form of a bed, the idea of what it means to be a bed, the definition of a bed that exists independent of the carpenter in what Plato calls the world of forms.

Derrida articulates this hierarchy of copies that remove themselves progressively from the ideal, "real" thing as part of his deconstruction of the privileging of speech (*logos*) over the written word in *Dissemination*. He interrogates Plato's exploration of the Egyptian myth of Thoth, who invents writing and then presents it to Theuth, the god of *logos*, as a gift, claiming that it will act as an aid to memory. Thoth calls it a *pharmakon*, which is often translated as "medicine." However, *pharmakon* also means poison, and it is in this sense that Theuth understands writing; he sees it as a threat. He fears that, instead of supplementing memory, it will undermine it, causing people to write things down and then, thinking them safely preserved, forget them: "under pretext of supplementing memory, writing makes one even more forgetful; far from increasing knowledge, it diminishes it."⁷ The cult of *logos* relies upon the idea of presence—the originator of an utterance is its father, and, when the utterance is speech, its father is there to defend it, to explain his intention (which is seen as embodying the meaning of the

⁷ Derrida, *Dissemination* 100.

utterance). Writing, then, is orphaned speech; it functions in the absence of its father, and therefore its meaning, the author's intent, is inaccessible. However, according to Derrida, the ability to function in the radical absence both of sender and receiver is built into the very nature of the sign:

In order for my 'written communication' to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver . . . Such iterability . . . structures the mark of writing itself . . . A writing that is not structurally readable—iterable—beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing.⁸

Not only do we never have access to the intention of the originator of a written or spoken utterance (and nor does the originator herself—the passage of time and the variation of context means that we can never assume a unity of presence on her part, for she is never the same person as she was when she created the utterance), but the sign, in order to be a sign, must signify even in her absence and the absence of the receiver.

This necessary iterability also has implications for what happens to the sign when it is repeated (or iterated). It must, in order to be a sign, be repeatable in any infinite number of contexts. However, in each repetition the "meaning" of the mark is slightly different—and here we come across a contradiction. There must be what Derrida calls "a certain self-identity" of the mark in order for us to recognize it; however, this identity is always already polluted and ruptured: "the very iterability which constituted [the mark's] identity does not permit [it] ever to be a unity that is identical to itself."⁹ This seeming contradiction is essential to the nature of the sign. Derrida writes:

The structure of iteration . . . implies *both* identity *and* difference. Iteration in its 'purest' form—and it is always impure—contains *in itself* the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration.

⁸ Derrida, *Signature Event Context* 7.
⁹ Derrida *Signature Event Context* 10.

The iterability of an element divides its own identity a priori . . . it splits each element while constituting it, because it marks it with an articulatory break, that the remainder, although indispensable, is never that of a full or fulfilling presence; it is a differential structure escaping the logic of presence of the (simple or dialectical) opposition of presence and absence.⁰

This citation articulates the way in which difference is always already built into identity because of the very structure of iteration. The remainder it discusses represents the trace of difference, built into the structure of the sign, that is present alongside of identity, asserting itself with every iteration. In order for the sign to signify it must be iterable in that its identity is carried into any context and yet each context and each iteration is different; this difference, or remainder, is always already part of the sign. It manifests itself, in *Le Dictateur et le hamac*, as the epsilon.

La Chasse a l'Epsilon¹¹

Chaplin parle d'un concours organisé quelques années plus tot, un concours de sosies, a l'échelon national. On devait élire le meilleur sosie de Charlot. Des dizaines de candidate étaient venus de tous les Etats, avec le costume, la badine, les chausseures, la fausse moustache . . . Les épreuves éliminatoires avaient eu lieu a Santa Monica et la finale, ici, a Broadway.

Et Chaplin de conclure, sans rire:
Je suis arrivé troisième.

Chaplin speaks of a contest organized a few years ago, a look-alike contest on the national scale. The idea was to elect the best Charlie look-alike. Dozens of candidates had come from all the States, with the suit, the cane, the shoes, the fake moustache . . . The eliminatory round took place in Santa Monica and the finals here, on Broadway.

Says Chaplin in conclusion, no joke:
"I came in third."

¹⁰ Derrida *Signature Event Context* 53. This citation also points to Derrida's deconstruction of binary opposites. He believes that opposites must, by their very nature, stem from the same idea. For example, inside and outside both stem from the possibility of interiority, and where we place the boundary by which the two are defined is arbitrary; thus an examination of this arbitrary boundary allows us to see what, and how, our culture excludes. This is an idea to which we will return in our reading of *The God of Small Things*; however, here we will focus on the remainder that Derrida mentions above, and the central role that it plays in Pennac's use of the structure of iteration.

¹¹ "Hunting the Epsilon" (Pennac 59).

When Pereira decides to hire a *sosie*, the first thing we learn is that "le sosie lui ressemblait en tout point, autant qu'un homme peut ressembler a un autre homme, bien entendu, a epsilon près. Nul ne remarqua cet epsilon."¹³ This translates as: "the double resembled him in every particular, as much as one man can resemble another, of course; to the nearest epsilon. No one noticed this epsilon," but the phrase "a epsilon près" actually means something more like "to a T"—interestingly enough, another phrase in which a letter represents the remainder, the limit of identity, the at once residual and inherent difference between an original and its copy. Both of these phrases imply that there is a limit to identity in imitation. To use Derrida's terminology, an imitation is a repetition, a re-inscription of a signifier, and this signifier's identity is always deferred by the remainder that is already a part of it—here the epsilon. To return to the epigraph of this section, "A perfect imitation is no longer an imitation. If one eliminates the tiny difference that, in separating the imitation from the imitated, by that very fact refers to it, one would render the imitator absolutely different: the imitator would become another being no longer referring to the imitated." A sign cannot refer if it embodies identity, that is if it is identical to that to which it refers; in the same way, a double does not work as a double unless it retains the trace of otherness: "unless," writes Derrida, "it is in some way at fault or rather in default." If the double were the same as the original it would not be a double. In order, then, to provide himself with a functional *sosie*, Pereira must emphasize his own identity and the *sosie's* otherness. He does this when, as the final part of the *sosie's* "entraînement a balle réelle"

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Pennac 211. This story itself has been repeated by Dolly Parton, who has in several interviews told the story that she once entered an annual Halloween Dolly Parton look-alike contest in a club on Santa Monica Boulevard and was defeated.

¹³ Pennac 25.

(training at gunpoint)," he defies the *sosie* to, just for a moment, take himself for the dictator. The *sosie* babbles, "Je ne peux pas. Vous êtes vous... et je suis moi," ("I can't. You're you... and I'm me,") in response to which the dictator thinks, "tu as raison, tu ne me ressembles en rien," ("You're right, you're nothing like me,"—literally, "in no way do you resemble me,").¹⁴ However, this rule for the creation of a workable (and therefore non-identical) double is not the only force at work in this interaction between Pereira and his first *sosie*; this scene also demonstrates the fact that the *sosie* poses a threat to Pereira, to his very identity and originality.

However, before exploring the threat posed by the double to the original (and, as an extension, the threat that the *sosie* represents), I would first like to pause a moment in order to clarify the terminology used in this paper to describe the double, since we are now dealing with the related but not identical ideas of iteration and the supplement. First, I have been speaking of a double as a repetition of an original; however, it is precisely this notion of originality that Derrida deconstructs. At the very heart of the theory of iteration (if there can be said to be such a heart) is the idea that it is not a fixed, original meaning that is being iterated; the identity that is re-articulated and supplemented with every iteration is not fixed, but rather stems from the web of language of which the sign is part. The idea of the original is, in fact, undermined by the supplement. It certainly is problematic, therefore, for us to speak of a *sosie* as a repetition, with supplement, of the dictator (for, according to the Derridean model, as there is no original; since every repetition includes difference, the dictator's identity, too, must be fractured—as we will later see it to be). This brings me to my second point, which is that, while I have portrayed the dictator's *sosie* in *Le Dictateur et le hamac* as a "repetition" containing a supplemental difference, I have also portrayed him as being himself a supplement to an original. It is in this

¹⁴ Pennac 44.

¹⁵ Pennac 30.

capacity that he is able to enact the critique above, threatening the integrity of the "original." Both of these structures are at work in Pennac's text; the *sosie* not only carries with him the epsilon, the trace, that distinguishes him from Pereira; he also embodies it. There is a double portrayal of the hierarchical structure of copying. We will explore the implications of this double structure (in both senses) later; first, let us return to the problem, mentioned above, that the supplement poses for that which it supplements.

Derrida writes: "This process of substitution, which thus functions as a pure play of traces or supplements . . . which could be judged 'mad' since it can go on infinitely in the element of the linguistic permutation of substitutes, of substitutes for substitutes; this unleashed chain is nevertheless not lacking in violence."¹⁶ The supplement is not peaceful; it threatens and undermines the unity and identity of the original, showing it never to have been whole or original in the first place. Once added, it undermines the integrity of the original by forming with it a new whole, causing the original, when the supplement is removed, to be incomplete, unwhole—a process which undermines the very ideas of wholeness and originality by demonstrating that the original was neither of these things to begin with.

On Pereira's return home to find that, through a "play of traces and supplements," he has been replaced by a caricature of himself, Pennac writes:

Pereira n'aurait su dire si cet homme était une grossière ébauche de lui-même ou au contraire un portrait trop accompli, qui aurait passé le point de parfaite ressemblance pour basculer dans l'incontrôlable bourgeonnement de tous les possibles.¹⁷

Pereira wouldn't have been able to say if this man were a clumsy sketch of himself or, on the contrary, an overwrought portrait that would have passed the point of perfect resemblance to tip into the uncontrollable proliferation of endless possibilities.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Dissemination* 89.

¹⁷ Pennac 56-57.

We have here an example of the hierarchical valorization of presence. Through repeated copying, the copy has become further and further removed from the self-present original, to the point at which the original is no longer recognizable—that is to say, to the point at which resemblance is lost. However, Pennac also challenges this interpretation, offering us the Derridean interpretation by which the copy challenges and undermines not only the original itself, but the very idea of its originality. It is Pereira, now, whose identity is questioned. He is dismembered by a crowd that adores him—he becomes a shadow, a double, of the "real Pereira" whom he then assassinates. The plenitude of his identity—the idea that it is he that embodies it, or that it is some fixed or real thing—is overthrown. What's more, the reader is forced, in ways that we will interrogate in the next section, to acknowledge Pereira himself as a *sosie* of sorts.

The Best of all Possible Pereiras

Near the end of the novel, we learn the fates of the *sosies* who follow the defection of the first one (who is seduced by the cinema and runs off to America, first passing himself off as Charlie Chaplin, whose film *The Immigrant* has won his heart, and then being mistaken for and eventually working as a lighting double for Rudolph Valentino). The second *sosie*, seduced by the theater in the form of an actress who only plays Racine's Bérénice, has the good fortune to stumble upon a pair of twins, both of whom he trains to replace him and who then draw straws to see which one will play the dictator first. The twin who wins soon realizes that the real power lies not in the hands of the dictator but in those of the international corporations that are rapidly stripping the country of its natural resources. Of him Pennac writes: "Il aboutit très vite à la conclusion que le président—le vrai—n'exerce pas un pouvoir plus réel que le sien,"¹⁸ ("He very

¹⁸ Pennac 378

quickly arrived at the conclusion that the president—the real one—exercised a power that was no more real than his own"). The idea of the power of "the real" dictator, already undermined here, disintegrates even further after this *sosie* goes off to America to enter the business world, leaving in his (or rather Pereira's) place his twin brother, who turns out to be "de très loin le meilleur Pereira possible" ("by far the best possible Pereira").¹⁹ His excellence is not due to his external resemblance to Pereira (quite the opposite, in fact—it is he who is the caricature whom Pereira assassinates upon his return), but rather to the fact that he actually feels the connection to and concern for his people that the "real" Pereira only pretended to feel. Pereira earned the title of "the ear of the people," a title that is central to his grip on the hearts and minds of his subjects, through the daily custom letting the peasants line up and pretending to listen as, one by one, they tell him their concerns. A prominent part of the training that he gives his first *sosie* consists of instruction on how to pretend, believably, to be listening to the endless and uninteresting complaints of one's subjects. The last *sosie*, however, doesn't just pretend to listen; he actually listens. He demonstrates a real concern for the welfare of those entrusted to his care, and does his best, in light of the inevitable exploitation of his country's natural resources at the hands of external capitalist interests, to see to it that the greatest possible percentage of the proceeds of that exploitation finds its way back to the people. More importantly, however, he begins to instill in them a sense of ownership of the land, a sense to which Pereira had always appealed in his speeches but always undermined in actuality. Pereira's privilege as the top of the hierarchy of copies of copies is thus thoroughly undermined—he, Pereira, was not even the best Pereira possible, and, what's more, his last *sosie* succeeds in actually being what Pereira himself had only imitated.

¹⁹ Pennac 382.

This point is driven home by a revelation made at the very end of the novel by Pereira's childhood friend Eduardo Rist and the chief interpreter Manuel Callado Crespo to the last surviving *sosie*, the twin of the one whom Pereira assassinates. He left for America in search of power and money but is ultimately fired and, upon hearing of his brother's death, returns home to try to regain power by posing as the resurrected Pereira with the intention of leading a peasant rebellion to overthrow Rist, who has succeeded Pereira. The peasants, however, see through his act and he ends up at the mercy of Rist and Crespo, who then reveal to him that they have known all along that he was a *sosie* and that, moreover, he had not been hired by the president himself, but rather "n' [était] qu'une copie de copie de copie" ("was nothing but a copy of a copy of a copy"^{91,20} Furthermore, they explain that it was their idea, introduced in such a way that he thought he had come up with it himself, that Pereira hire the first *sosie*, and that they had disposed of all the following *sosies* by the same method "dès qu'ils commençaient à s'user," ("as soon as they started to wear out").²¹ In this way we discover that Pereira himself was as much a *sosie* as those he hired—he, too, was a puppet playing the role of a dictator.

However, unlike the previous example of the last *sosie* who managed to be what Pereira had only imitated, in this case it is not the supplement that challenges the original's originality, but rather an outside entity. Furthermore, we discover that the ultimate goal of their scheme, the objective that they hoped to achieve through their manipulations, was to transfer power to the people. We see here a return to something resembling an insistence on intention, a sort of return to the ideological belief in an origin of meaning, that presents us with a number of contradictions; contradictions that I will address in the next section.

⁹¹ Pennac 397. The fact that the peasants are able to identify this last remaining *sosie* as an impostor also speaks to the breakdown of the structure that Pereira and his *sosies* had taken for granted.

²¹ Pennac 401.

The Men Behind the Curtain

Entraînement a balle réel : être sosie, ça se désire ! Et un sosie, ça se remplace ! Il suffit d'avoir foi en la ressemblance.

Training at gunpoint: to be a double, you have to want it! And a double is replaceable! You just have to have faith in the resemblance.

Pennac, *Le Dictateur et le hamac*²²

The revelation of the inspiration behind the structure of the action of *Le Dictateur et le hamac* is really only the last in a series of points at which Pennac seems to double back on his deconstructionist critique. The first is a revelation of a different (although equally fatal) kind: the epiphany that the first *sosie* has, many years after emigrating to America, upon seeing Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator* for the first time, and which, in combination with his alcoholism, causes him to die in the theater, his face soaked with tears. While watching *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin's story of a barber who resembles a dictator "à l'épsilon près," the *sosie* is struck and shocked by the fact that in the ghetto in the film absolutely no one notices that the nameless barber looks exactly like the dictator Adenoid Hynkel. He thinks:

C'est ça. ! rien à voir ensemble . . . rien de rien ... deux types si différents qu'il ne viendrait à l'idée de personne de les comparer, le spectateur les voit *de l'int'* . . . *de l'intérieur*, tellement différents de l'intérieur, *en tant qu'hommes je veux dire* que, même s'ils se baladaient main dans la main avec une seule casquette pour leur deux têtes, personne ne remarquerait la ressemblance entre Hynkel et le barbier !²³

That's it! Nothing to do with each other . . . but nothing . . . two guys so different from each other that it would never occur to anyone to compare them, the viewer sees them *from ins* . . . *from inside*, so different inside *as men I mean* that, even if they went walking hand in hand with only one cap for their two heads, nobody would notice the resemblance between Hynkel and the barber!

²² Pennac 152.

²³ Pennac 303.

The fatal conclusion that the *sosie* draws from this revelation is that there is no more room for innocence, that he can no longer think of himself as a victim. To be a *sosie*, as Pereira told him, you have to want it. And thus, even as he realizes that he, like the barber in the film, has no name, he is struck down by his guilt over his personal complicity in the deaths that he caused at Pereira's command. And even if, in finding his personal accountability, the discovery of his namelessness robs the *sosie* of his individuality, this individuality is restored by Sonia, the young woman who works at the cinema where he dies and thinks of him as "mon individu unique," "my sole individual."²⁴ Pennac seems to resuscitate the idea of the original (or individual) and the importance of intention (or accountability for one's actions).

Here we return to the final revelation that Eduardo Rist and Manuel Callado Crespo were behind the replacement and displacement of Pereiras. They divulge that the ultimate goal of their manipulations was:

rendre le pouvoir au peuple, confier la clef de leur propre maison
tous les Néné Martins, a tous les Didi da Casa, et avec les clefs de
la maison la propriété de la terre, et avec la propriété de leur terre
le soin de veiller au sous-sol, et avec le souci du sous-sol,
l'obligation de résister aux appétits strangers . . .²⁵

to return power to the people, to entrust the key to their own house
to all the Néné Martins, to all the Didis da Casa, and with the keys
to the house the ownership of the land, and with the ownership of
their land the responsibility to look after the subsoil, and with the
care of the subsoil, the obligation to resist foreign appetites . . .

This revelation of the meaning behind the use of *cosies* betrays a usage of the traditional Western hierarchical structure (which was used to pull the wool over Pereira and his successors' eyes) Derrida's critique of which we examined earlier. More importantly, however, it shows that Rist and Crespo have made strategic use of the Derridean deconstruction of this system in order to

²⁴ Pennac 353.
²⁵ Pennac 405.

achieve what is essentially a goal dictated by Western ideology: democracy. Pennac attempts to rescue his insistence upon democracy by showing a simultaneous blossoming of a desire for democracy among the people, expressed by the poet Didi da Casa (to whom Rist and Crespo refer in the passage quoted above), who defends the plan developed by Rist and Crespo in his song: "Quand le perroquet répète/ N'est-ce pas sa voix qu'il exerce?" ("When the parrot repeats/ Isn't it his own voice that he uses?").²⁶ The popular uprising to which da Casa's song gives voice represents another model for political change: the revolutionary model. This model suggests the possibility of a movement on the part of a people, in this novel analogous to a colonized people, to reclaim ownership of their land and identity, which global colonial powers have threatened. However, this movement remains dependent upon help from outside; we are led to believe that da Casa's uprising is due at least in part to the influence of the final, "good" *sosie*, who was put in place by the invisible hand of the men behind the curtain.

These kinks in Pennac's application of theory—his resurrection of intention as the basis for the judgment of action and his resuscitation of democracy as saving force seem to end up reinforcing the linguistic and colonial structures that he attempts to critique. This impression is supported by the huge importance Pennac attributes to the creative power of the author and of fiction, a central aspect of the novel upon which I have chosen, perhaps problematically, not to concentrate. His emphasis on these creative powers is demonstrated in his narration of his own creation of the character of Sonia, the young American who discovers the first *sosie's* dead body. Pennac explains how he develops this character into someone whom his alter-ego author/narrator goes to meet and speak with about her past in research for the novel he, the narrator, is writing about a South American dictator. At the end of the novel, the narrator emphasizes his own power by reminding the reader that it was all invention, that Sonia is, first and foremost, "un

²⁶ Pennac 404.

personnage : rien que des mots," ("a character: nothing but words").²⁷ With self-conscious rhetorical tricks like these, Pennac's narrator draws attention to a fact that the novel never attempted to disguise, which is even included in the synopsis on the back of the Gallimard Poche edition: "c'est surtout l'histoire de l'auteur revant a cela dans son hamac," ("above all it's the story of the author dreaming of all that in his hammock"). Overall, *Le dictateur et le hamac* is a novel about an author.

Certainly there is a great deal of self-conscious irony and self-critique, as when, during the section which, as a recounting of the narrator's "actual" experiences in Brazil which led to his coming up with the idea for the novel, necessarily situates itself in a tradition of violent exoticizing colonial travel writings, of "le dormeur du sertão," ("the sleeper of the sertão"). *Le dormeur* is an academic who comes to South America to "bear witness," falls asleep in his hammock instead of listening to the people whose stories he has come to hear, and then goes back to Europe and writes a "factual" account of what he heard and witnessed. "Je dois a ce champion de `témoignage,'" writes Pennac, "ma vocation de romancier," ("It is to this champion of "bearing witness" that I owe my vocation of novelist").²⁸ Pennac's double usage of the hammock as the locus of both his own theoretical play and *le dormeur's* essentializing discourse represents an acknowledgement, on Pennac's part, of the violent literary tradition of *récits de voyage* (travel narratives) in which the novel situates itself. This same double layer of awareness, and even self-criticism, can be seen in Didi da Casa's insistence that the parrot in repeating still uses his own voice—an assertion that challenges my reading of Pennac's return to Western ideology.

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Pennac 409.

²⁸ Pennac 102.

However, Pennac's final revelation of the men behind the curtain and their intention in putting in motion of the whole Derridean play of substitutes undercuts the novel's self-aware critique. Pennac's ultimate insistence on the central role of Rist and Crespo, the revelation of which, by challenging the originality of the original Pereira as discussed above, is so important to the Derridean critique he performs, undermines his attempt at postcolonial engagement, robbing the already marginalized people of Teresina of agency and voice. The parrot uses his own voice, but he is still a parrot—ultimately and always a pet. And who listens to a parrot in a global culture that values non-orphaned speech over removed mimicry? Furthermore, Pennac's decision, in writing a novel in the conditional tense, to place the act of writerly creation firmly at the center of the novel relegates, once again, the subaltern voice to the margins.

But can the voice of the subaltern, as Spivak asks, ever be anywhere *but* the margins? In an attempt to deal with the unmovable boulder of the "no" with which Spivak responds to this question, I will explore, in the second part of this essay, the possibility of a literary motion to draw the reader's eye to the very margins that contain, in both senses of the word, this voice; a motion that, by literary means, deconstructs the foundation and processes of this act of exclusion.

PART II

The Love Laws

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is the story of the Ipe family, a clan of rich Syrian Christians who live in Ayemenem, a town in the Southwestern Indian state of Kerala. The Ipes, above all, are a family with a deep-seated problem with classification; a problem that, in a rigidly stratified society, leads them to break the Love Laws, "The laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much."²⁹ The central violation of the story is by Ammu (which simply means "mother" in Malayalam) and her two children, the fraternal twins Estha and Rahel, all of whom dare to love a Paravan, Velutha.³⁰ These infractions take different forms—the twins are simply guilty of a love that is blind to caste distinctions, while Ammu is guilty of the more concrete crime of sleeping with an Untouchable—but all are punished. Velutha, accused by the twins' grandaunt Baby Kochamma of having raped Ammu and kidnapped the twins, is brutally beaten by the police; this beating kills him, but not before the twins are forced by their manipulative grandaunt to back up her story, an act the guilt of which they carry for the rest of their lives. Ammu, having, as a woman, none of what her children call "Locusts Stand I," or *locus standi* (a legitimized claim to a place), is made to leave the house; Estha, too, is sent away. As Roy writes, "history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws."³¹

These laws, central to *The God of Small Things*, are representative of a rigid social structure that the characters of the novel transgress and the novel itself critiques. While

²⁹ Roy 33.

³⁰ Paravans are members of an untouchable caste. Most castes come with a job description; Paravans traditionally are those who are made to climb coconut trees to harvest the nuts.

³¹ Roy 54.

the Love Laws and the caste system are not the same thing, the laws certainly depend upon the classifications of the caste system, a structure established in the Rg Veda's explanation of the origin of man, the Purusasukta, or Hymn to Purusa (a name which simply means 'male person;' ³² here, the god from whose body man was made):

When they divided Purusa into how many portions did they
arrange him? What was his mouth? What his arms? What his
thighs and feet?

The brahmin was his mouth; his two arms made the ksatriya; his
two thighs the vaisya; and from his feet were made the sudra.³³

This structure, in establishing a physical hierarchy wherein the status of a varia is directly linked to the height on the body of the part of Purusa from which it is formed, initially suggests a reading by which it is compared to Plato's theory of the forms. The Brahmins are closest to the gods; they speak to the gods, and this speech constitutes an imitation of sorts, since language comes from the gods. With each step downward from the Brahmins, status and godliness decrease, ending with the Untouchables or Dalits, meaning the destroyed or oppressed, who are seen as casteless,³⁴ but still included in the caste system inasmuch as its rules govern their lives (and brutally punishes those who overstep its bounds, as Velutha so fatally learns).

The comparison of the caste system to the theory of the forms might seem problematic because of the fact that Hindu philosophy sees all people as made from the same divine body and yet seems to exclude the Untouchable castes. A discussion of the *karma* system might help clarify the comparison. According to Hinduism, all living beings (including not only Dalits but animals as well) accumulate *karma* according to the way they live their lives; this *karma* dictates

³² Zachner 10.

³³ Herman 52. The Brahmins are the educated varua (or class), often called the class of priests; Ksatriya means "warrior" or "soldier," Vaiyas are traditionally merchants or farmers, and those of the Sudra varua provide the menial labor.

³⁴ Michaels 159.

the form, and, if human, the caste they will take in their next life. The ultimate goal is to reach the state of *mokca*, or enlightenment; in this sense, all lives are hierarchically organized, flawed imitations of the fully realized and ideal being, with *karma* serving as a measure of the quality of one's imitation of this ideal. If we look at this structure from a Derridean standpoint, we see that Dalits therefore represent a threat to the higher castes according to the theory of supplements, inasmuch as they are visibly human, but not acknowledged as such by society. Their exclusion by a society that nevertheless needs them to do the jobs that "Touchable" Hindus are forbidden by Hindu law to do makes them a dangerous supplement that threatens the identity of that which excludes it. This threat is played out in *The God of Small Things*. The novel's events show Velutha to be more human than Baby Kochamma, whose vile and selfish actions result not only in the death of Velutha and the destruction of her own family, but also in her own decline; she ends up a solitary and paranoid TV addict. Velutha threatens not just the supposed superiority of the Ipe family, but its very identity, which he calls into question simply by showing himself to be human.

However, while this reading might help us to understand the threat that Velutha represents to the Ipe family, in order to perform it I had to establish an extremely problematic parallel; a parallel which relies upon a reading of the social system in India that is actually a Western, essentialist one. To represent the caste system as stemming directly from the Purusasukta is an oversimplification; the contemporary caste system is far more nuanced and bears the mark of numerous influences, most notably that of British colonization (in fact, as we will see, a simplistic and essentialist conception of the caste system is one of the legacies of this very colonization). So, while to use this basic structure as the root of my reading of *The God of Small Things* would allow me to perform a Derridean reading parallel to that in Part I, a more

nuanced discussion of the ways in which the caste system was used, changed, and enforced British colonization in light of Homi Bhabha's very Derridean theory of colonial mimicry will ultimately be far more fruitful.

Caste Hindus and Caste Christians³⁵

In his book on Hinduism, Axel Michaels explains that the caste system in actuality (as opposed to in theory) is very different from the traditional way in which it is understood by the West. While a relatively rigid system certainly does still exist (the government regulation of 1947 banning discrimination based on caste not actually having caused much change),³⁶ it has become, in the eyes of the West, something that it, according to Michaels, is not: "As soon as caste became 'typically Indian' he writes (meaning according to Western anthropologists), "it could be linked with all other distorting features ascribed to this country. It became the defining factor of Hinduism, its soul, its psychology."³⁷ It is in this limited sense, then, that Michaels writes that "the caste system is essentially a Western construct."³⁸ Gloria Goodwin Raheja rearticulates this idea: "The colonial imagination had seized upon caste identities as a means of understanding and controlling the Indian population."³⁹

This construct does not confine itself to the theoretical plane, but, as Raheja suggests, becomes essential to colonial control. British colonizers worked from this simplistic understanding of the system, ultimately changing the system and using it to serve their colonial purposes. They created handbooks detailing the "characteristics" of the different castes, a process that naturalized and explained away rebellion by classifying any caste that had risen

³⁵ Roy 71.

³⁶ Michaels 164.

³⁷ Michaels 163.

³⁸ Michaels 171.

³⁹ Raheja 495.

against the British as inherently "turbulent."⁴⁰ "The discursive reifications of caste, intimately tied to at their genesis to the politics of colonial rule," writes Raheja, "later became the foundation of much anthropological and historical writing on Indian society."⁴¹ Another example took place during the early stages of British rule when the colonial government approached the Zamindar class, which traditionally simply was a class of landowners, and gave them the power and duty to collect taxes. This caused the Zamindars' wealth and power to increase immensely, their influence far surpassing that of their previous role. What's more, this strategy also created, as the British had intended it to do, a sort of buffer class between the colonizers and the colonized, one which was dependent on the Raj for its wealth and influence. This example points at another aspect that Raheja underlines of colonial use of the caste system to maintain control: the participation of the Indian elite.⁴²

The Ipe family is not, in fact, Hindu (with the exception of the twins, whose position as "Half-Hindu Hybrids"⁴³ plays a part in their exclusion from the family). They belong to the group, constituting twenty percent of Kerala's population, of Syrian Christians, who believe themselves to be "descendants of the one hundred Brahmins whom St. Thomas the Apostle converted to Christianity when he traveled East after the Resurrection." However, they are still part of a society that judges them according to a strict social hierarchy; Baby Kochamma, for example, is extremely concerned about what will be thought of the family if news of the scandal gets out. They are aware of their place in the society (even no longer Hindu, they are aware of their Brahmin ancestry), and they, too, judge others by the laws of its hierarchy. No Untouchables are allowed in their house. The matriarch, Mammachi's outrage upon the

⁴⁰ Raheja 500.

⁴¹ Raheja 508.

⁴² Raheja 496.

⁴³ Roy 44.

⁴⁴ Roy 64.

revelation of Ammu and Velutha's affair is extremely violent; she attacks and spits in the face of Velutha's father, an "Old-World Paravan"⁴⁵ whose guilt and feelings of beholdenness exceed even his love for his son (he offers to kill Velutha with his own hands for his crime). Roy makes a point of demonstrating the degree to which the caste system dominates all members of society, even the non-Hindu ones, and, in doing so, also illustrates the ways in which the elite perpetuate the system's violences and the oppressed internalize them.

The novel's discussion of communism in Kerala also demonstrates the exploitation of the caste system by the Indian elite. Velutha is a card-carrying communist; however, because he is Untouchable yet has gained special privileges in the pickle factory by merit of his great skill as a carpenter, the other "Touchable" factory workers resent him. The local communist politician, Comrade Pillai, in trying to foment a rebellion in the pickle factory, sees Velutha as a hindrance to his winning the rest of the factory workers over; in this sense, Velutha's death "could be more profitable than his life had ever been."⁴⁶ He is therefore summarily abandoned by the Party for causing trouble by overstepping the bounds imposed upon him by his Untouchability. Communism, supposed to be the helper of the downtrodden (indeed, the workers' march that the Ipes witness on their way to pick up Sophie Mol, the twins' British cousin, at the airport has as its objective for Untouchable workers no longer to be called by their caste names), ends up playing into and reinforcing the caste system. Roy writes:

The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from *within* the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Roy 73.

⁴⁶ Roy 267.

⁴⁷ Roy 64.

The imported structure of communism in fact reinforces class stratification by making use of it, to the detriment of all involved; Comrade Pillai succeeds in causing a rebellion in Chacko's pickle factory once Velutha is out of the way, but this victory ends his career. Pillai, who, in the "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs" scheme of politics is Ayemenem's "professional omeleteer," ultimately breaks the eggs but burns the omelette.⁴⁸

Such a critique situates Roy's novel in what Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his article "Is the Post- in Postmodern the Post- in Postcolonial," identifies as the second wave of postcolonial literature. There are two waves of postcolonial literature within any colonized country. First, there is a wave which celebrates the nation through a nationalism which attempts to return to an unadulterated, precolonial identity. The second wave, however, rejects this new nationalism as well: "the novels of the second, postcolonial, stage are novels of delegitimation: they reject not only the Western *imperium* but also the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie."⁴⁹ Roy's critique of the caste system is thus twofold; it shows the caste structure to be a disruptive and harmful aspect of Indian society, in the perpetuation of which the Indian elite are implicated; however, it also demonstrates the ways in which this system was exploited and enforced by colonial and later political powers as a means of control. The tragic results of the infractions of the Love Laws that take place in *The God of Small Things* belie an interpretation of the caste system as rupturing Indian identity.

In the novel, the harmful effects of the fracturing of identity that results from the colonizers' exploitation of the caste system as a means of control take the form of houses. This effect is manifest on the largest scale by what the twins come to think of as the History House;

⁴⁸ Roy 266.

⁴⁹ Appiah 353.

an abandoned rubber plantation once owned by an Englishman "gone native;" "Ayemenem's own Kurtz."⁵⁰ The twins' Oxford-educated uncle, Chacko, tells Estha and Rahel that the Ipes are

a *family* of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away. He explain[s] that history [is] like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside.

. . . "But we can't go in," Chacko explain[s], "because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try to listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we can't understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that makes us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves."⁵¹

This exclusion from one's own history epitomizes the broader structure of exclusion that Roy establishes with the model of exclusion from the Ayemenem house. The house's inside represents a unified identity which is denied the Ipes, and this same structure of representation finds a mirror across the river in the ancestral seat of the Ipe family, the Ayemenem house, where the binary opposition of inside and outside, which represents the radical rupture in identity caused by British colonialism, is powerfully demonstrated.

A House Divided

In a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disoriented.

Homi Bhabha, "The World and the Home"⁵²

⁵⁰ Roy 51.

⁵¹ Roy 51-52.

⁵² Bhabha, 1992 141.

The God of Small Things centers around the effects of the rupture of identity cause by colonization, which cuts the colonial subject off from its past, the source of identity, while simultaneously enforcing a model of control which perpetually denies colonized peoples their subjecthood. In his piece "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" Homi Bhabha locates the cause of this rupture in the system of mimicry enforced by colonial powers. He argues that colonization enforces a system of control that requires the colonial subject to mimic the colonizer—the only valid identity, according to this system, is that of the colonizers, so the subject must mimic this identity in the hope of gaining personhood. However, this mimicry can never be perfect; in order for the colonizer to retain control, he must preserve the trace of otherness, which enables his domination. This structure mirrors the structure of supplementation we discussed in Part I; the necessity of the imperfect resemblance, the difference that is always already contained in identity in order for the sign to function, the importance that the *sosie* always retain the epsilon, the trace of otherness, which allowed him to function as a double. Here, we see the importance of the preservation of the epsilon in a colonial context: it enables colonial control. What's more, it is the impossibility of the perfect resemblance, which would allow the colonial subject full subjecthood, that creates the rupture in colonial identity with which Roy's novel deals.

Roy presents the caste system as a structure of deep-rooted discrimination, the colonial use of which employed the divisions already present to further breach identity, creating a structure of self-alienation and, ultimately, self-hatred. The British manipulated and enforced a rigid caste structure, transforming the slightly more flexible and far more complicated system that was in effect before their colonization and using it as a tool to create divisions in society (a process that we saw continued in Comerade Pillai's use of the system to pit castes against each

other in the name of Communism). We have already seen the structure of exclusion caused by this rupture of identity and its ensuing self-hatred to be represented by the History House Now let us turn to the location of the novel's play of identity on a smaller scale: the Ayemenem house.

More than serving to house a family, the Ayemenem house serves to exclude people. The person to whom it belongs at the end of the novel, Baby Kochamma, inherits it simply by "outliving everybody else;"⁵³ she has no real claim to it. As noted above, Untouchables are excluded from the house; Kochu Maria, the low-paid but "Touchable" Syrian Christian maid, acts as doorkeeper. Even Ammu, despite having been born and raised in the Ayemenem house, is still a barely tolerated guest. As a daughter, she has no "Locusts Stand I," (later, when Rahel returns to the Ayemenem house after her long absence, she is also without *locus standi*). She has no stake in the family pickle factory despite doing as much work there as her brother Chacko ("What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine," he says).⁵⁴ Both Ammu and, later, Rahel also have the added scandal of having been married and then divorced their husbands. The results of Ammu's failed marriage, Estha and Rahel, share her mother's unwelcomeness, with the added disgrace of being "Half-Hindu Hybrids." Baby Kochamma, feeling, as an unmarried daughter, the effects of scorn and exclusion herself, does her best to make Ammu and the twins feel as unwelcome as possible; "She was keen for them to realize that they (like herself) lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem house, their maternal grandmother's house, where they really had no right to be."⁵⁵

The twins grow up in a world in which love for them is always conditional; their childhood is overshadowed not only by the knowledge that they are in the Ayemenem house on sufferance, but also the knowledge that if they misbehave, their mother, as well as the rest of

⁵³ Roy 28.

⁵⁴ Roy 56.

⁵⁵ Roy 44.

their family, will love them "a little less."⁵⁶ The same is not true for their cousin, Sophie Mol, the daughter of Chacko and his British ex-wife, Margaret Kochamma, who arrives with her mother to spend Christmas in Ayemenem. The dichotomy in the way they are treated is demonstrated by the twins' thoughts in response to the film *The Sound of Music*, which the narrator expresses:

Oh Baron von Trapp, Baron von Trapp, could you love the little fellow with the orange in the smelly auditorium?

. . . And his twin sister? Tilting upwards with her fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo? Could you love her too?

Baron von Trapp had some questions of his own.

(a) *Are they clean white children?*

No. (*But Sophie Mol is.*)

(b) *Do they blow spit bubbles?*

Yes. (*But Sophie Mol doesn't.*)

(c) *Do they shiver their legs? Like clerks?*

Yes. (*But Sophie Mol doesn't.*)

(d) *Have they, either or both, ever held strangers' soo-soos?*

N . . . Nyes. (*But Sophie Mol hasn't.*)

"Then I'm sorry, Baron von Clapp-Trapp said. "It's out of the question. I cannot love them. I cannot be their Baba. Oh no." ⁵⁷

The twins, in their own minds and in those of their relatives, simply cannot live up to the standards for love. Sophie Mol, however, is welcomed into the Ayemenem house with much pomp and circumstance; a whole "Welcome Home, Our Sophie Mol" ceremony that is performed. Her coming is the culmination of "*What will Sophie Mol think?* week,"⁵⁸ and she arrives "hatted, bell-bottomed and Loved from the Beginning."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Roy 107.

⁵⁷ Roy 101-102. The mention of "holding strangers' soo-soos" and of the orange in Estha's hand refer to sexual abuse that Estha has just suffered in the movie theater. Here, again, the twins are unable, through no fault of their own, to meet the impossible standards established by the love laws; they are victims, yet they are forced to live with the culpability that the Love Laws impose on them. Since they are not "clean white children" like Sophie Mol, they cannot be loved by Baron von Trapp. Victimhood is another important subject in the novel, which, unfortunately, I am not able, here, to address.

⁵⁸ Roy 36.

⁵⁹ Roy 129.

This dichotomy shows us that the Love Laws "which lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much," are not simply a function of the caste system; they have been deeply affected by British colonization. The Ayemenem house is completely open to Sophie Mol, but Estha and Rahel, along with their divorced and "Locusts Stand I"-less mother as well as their unmarried baby grandaunt, will never be at home there. Mammachi, the widow of a knighted Imperial Entomologist, and Chacko, her Oxford-educated son are the only two with a legitimated claim to the house, and even they are never completely at home there (as we see demonstrated in Chacko's ultimate emigration to Canada). The lasting effects of colonization have made the Ipe family unwelcome in their own house; a fact which represents the way in which colonization robs its subjects of their own cohesive identity and any possibility of being "at home" with themselves, i.e. the possibility for self-love. The Ipes still bear the epsilon, the trace of Otherness; this trace takes the form of Pappachi's moth.

Pappachi, the twins' grandfather, was an Imperial Entomologist—he worked within the British system, hoping to achieve success by its standards. However, he ultimately failed; he discovered a new type of moth, only to be told that the moth was already classified. Years later, a taxonomic shuffle resulted in the moth being acknowledged as a separate species, but by then it was too late for Pappachi to assert his claim to the discovery. The moth, instead of bearing his name (which would represent his ultimate recognition by the system and success according to its rules), becomes a symbol of his failure: "Its pernicious ghost—gray, furry, and with unusually dense dorsal tufts—haunted every house he lived in. It tormented him and his children and his children's children."⁶⁰ This moth reappears time and again throughout the novel. Rahel comes up against the Love Laws that deny her unconditional love even from her mother when Ammu tells her that when Rahel misbehaves it makes her love her a little less; here Roy writes: "a cold

⁶⁰ Roy 48.

moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts landed 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."⁶¹ The system will not allow the Ipes to successfully mimic Britishness—the moth, the epsilon, is always with them—so they are forever excluded from unified identity.

nataS nI riehT seyE⁶²

In Part I we discussed the threat that the supplement poses to the original. Bhabha explores this threat in his own terms: the impossibility of successful mimicry, while it is a condition for colonial control, also shows that the premise upon which this control is based is faulty, threatening to undermine the very structure of colonial domination. In order for control to be maintained, colonizers must still somehow cause their subjects to retain the epsilon, the trace of otherness; for, if the mimicry were ever complete and the colonial subject allowed to be recognized as being just as human as the colonizers, then control would collapse. The possibility of perfect mimicry, which we are describing as unified identity, must always be dangled over the colonial subject's head but also always remain just out of reach. The subject must remain "Almost the same, *but not quite*."⁶³

Thus the systematic exclusion of the twins from the Ayemenem and History Houses establishes them as a threat to the structures of thought the buildings represent. The threat that they pose is manifest in the fact that, despite the epsilon, Pappachi's moth, which marks their failure to fulfill the requirements for love and inclusion; despite their exclusion and the rift that has been created by the imposition of their definition as outsiders, excluded from the home

⁶¹ Roy 107.

⁶² Roy 58.

⁶³ Bhabha 127.

which offers up the hope of unified identity, they have a unified identity as a pair. In a way, they *are* each other, thinking of themselves "together as Me, separately as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities."⁶⁴ The twins have an uncanny ability to communicate in code or even without speech; they can immediately communicate their distress with a look; but, what's more, they can feel one another's presence. One night when the twins were young, the family was staying in a hotel and the twins were separated; Rahel got out of bed to open the door for Estha without any sign that he would be on the other side, but on the other side he was. Rahel's return, twenty-three years after Estha was sent away, to Ayemenem brings a flood of new images into the cultivated stillness of Estha's mind, and he is immediately aware that she has returned. Rahel even "has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream."

However, this last passage continues, "She has other memories too that she has no right to have."⁶⁵ Estha and Rahel's unity is a transgression; one that is ultimately so threatening that they must be separated. If, as Bhabha discusses, colonial philosophy maintains that the only possibility of unified identity in the structure of Indian colonization is a British identity, or, on a grander scale, the identity of the British, then the twins' collective identity, which constitutes a wholeness which does not rely upon colonial mimicry, threatens the unified identity of the structure which excludes them, as we saw the *sosies* threaten the identity of the original dictator. Therefore the enforcers of this structure, and, more generally, of the Love Laws, must fracture this unity. History collects its dues under the guise of Baby Kochamma and the Touchable policemen who find and beat Velutha, and Ammu is made to leave her childhood home. Estha is returned to his father in Madras, separating the twins in a scene that, once again, demonstrates

⁶⁴ Roy 4-5.

⁶⁵ Roy 5.

the unity of their selves by showing the physical pain caused to Rahel by Estha's removal; as his train pulls out of the station, Rahel doubles over and screams and screams.⁶⁶

In the second plotline of *The God of Small Things*, which takes place twenty-three years later, they attempt to repair this rift; once again, they break the Love Laws in an act of rebellion that takes the form of incest. Estha, grown up, has retreated into complete silence; Rahel carries an emptiness in her eyes which is described as "a hollow where Estha's words had been"⁶⁷--each is made unwhole by the absence of the other. This loss is expressed in the fact that "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies."⁶⁸ The twins' attempt to reunify their identity is a literalization of this simile; they physically fit emptiness and silence together again in the hope of recreating something whole. However, they are attempting to piece back together something which has been irreparably severed; "what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief." In the face of this final transgression of the Love Laws, even language fails: "But what," asks the narrator, "was there to say?"⁶⁹ Throughout the novel the twins had shared a language that connected them; now the final impossibility of repairing their broken identity is manifest in this failure of language.

The explanation given for the necessity of the twins' separation, which also is an expression of the threat that they pose, is that they have "Satan in their eyes." This phrase recalls an earlier episode in which an English lady named Miss Mitten give the twins a children's book entitled *The Adventures of Susie Squirrel*. Insulted by a gift so childish compared to the Shakespeare and Kipling that they are used to (two interesting choices of author in their own

⁶⁶ Roy 309.

⁶⁷ Roy 20.

⁶⁸ Roy 20-21.

⁶⁹ Roy 310.

right), Estha and Rahel horrify Miss Mitten by reading the book to her backwards. The result is that:

Miss Mitten complained to Baby Kochamma about . . . [the twins] reading backwards. She told Baby Kochamma that she had seen Satan in their eyes. *nataS ni rieht seye*. They were made to write--*In future we will not read backwards. In future we will not read backwards.* A hundred times. Forwards. A few months later Miss Mitten was killed by a milk van in Holbart, across the road from a cricket oval. To the twins there was a hidden justice in the fact that the milkvan had been *reversing*.

7°

The twins' linguistic rebellion not only is potent enough to elicit punishment from the representative of the Queen's English, but also constitutes a real enough rebellion to provide them with some aptly named poetic justice.

This sort of rebellion, along with the punishment to which it gives rise, takes place throughout the novel. Both by the twins and the narrator play with the English language; they reverse words, break them apart, and reduce them to syllables and rearrange them. A barn owl becomes a "Bar Nowl;" the preacher's words at a funeral echo in the narration as "*Dus to dus to dus to dus to dus to dus;*" Rahel lies down for her "Afternoon Gnap."⁷¹ These rebellious uses of the English language, by pushing at and questioning its boundaries, challenge the wholeness of the English language itself. And linguistic structures are also colonial ones; that is to say that colonial control is linguistic in nature. In her article "The Ethical Subject of *The God of Small Things*," Janet Thormann argues that, in keeping with her interpretation of Lacan's theory by which "the moral law is the law of language," the fact that "the writing transgresses the laws of English, both in the style of narration and in the twins' uncanny ability to communicate with each other by talking backwards," means that, "since the laws of language are the laws of social

⁷⁰ Roy 58.

⁷¹ Roy 184, 9, 174.

exchange, the sensuous, vital, fresh writing itself takes on an ethical status as a reality capable of sustaining love of the other and of the self in a commitment to desire opposed to the power of global capitalism to regulate caste, children, and women."⁷²

In "Imaginary Homelands," Salman Rushdie writes of postcolonial authors:

we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; . . . it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.⁷³

This language play threatens the conceived integrity of the English language as it is used in England; it is English, yet not what is seen as *traditional* English, and therefore challenges and undermines the conception of what English is. This relationship can be seen as representative of the challenge that postcolonial literature, as a literature traditionally seen as "supplemental" to the body of literature of the colonizing culture, presents to the literature of that culture. And it is this very language, language imbued with both metaphorical and ethical status, that allows Carrie Noland's pointing gesture to take place at the juncture of poststructuralist linguistic theory postcolonial ethical concerns.

⁷² Thormann 299, 300.

⁷³ Rushdie 17.

Conclusion

Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one.

John Berger⁷⁴

We return, now, to *Le Dictateur et le hamac*. It is not a postcolonial text in the traditional sense; it was written by a French citizen. However, as a text written in a postcolonial world by a citizen of a country with no small colonial history, it must necessarily engage, on some level, with postcolonial issues. Furthermore, in his choice to write about a dictator in a South American "république bananière" ("banana republic"),⁷⁵ Pennac opens himself up to this sort of reading. With the middle section of the novel, in which the narrator tells stories of his own travels in South America as an explanation of the impetus for and source of the more overtly fictional story in which it is embedded, the novel situates itself in dialogue with a long tradition of French colonial "récits de voyage" ("travel journals"), which constitute a significant portion of the foundation upon which is based a long tradition of violently exoticist literature. He attempts to separate himself from this tradition through his mockery of "le dormeur du sertão" and his self-conscious discussion of the creative powers of fiction in the face of a loss of memory, an argument which, fittingly enough, recalls Thoth's advertisement of writing as an aid to memory, with the significant difference that Pennac's narrator does not use writing to access "true" memories, but rather to create something new. This writerly concentration means that the novel is ultimately oriented inward. What it is most interested in is itself.

So what does this inward orientation tell us about the critique that the novel executes? As we discussed before, *Le Dictateur et le hamac* performs a Derridean exploration of the structures of iteration and supplementation. This exploration is fruitful, leading through a structure in which the supplement challenges the originality of the supposed original. However, Pennac

⁷⁴ Cited by Arundhati Roy as the epigram to *The God of Small Things*.

⁷⁵ Pennac 11.

subsequently executes a problematic return to individuality, intentionality, and democracy. Such a movement certainly is reflective of a trend in postmodern philosophy; so often accused of nihilism, deconstructionist philosophers are then further criticized for their tendency to, like Derrida in his later years, eventually return to a position which favors a certain ethical viewpoint or plan of action. The critics who make these accusations forget that deconstructionism does not destroy meaning; it simply exposes the foundations, sometimes arbitrary, on which meaning is constructed. So, while I do not mean too harshly to critique Pennac's return to optimism, the novel's outspoken theoretical focus lacks a non-homogenizing discussion of the issues that are necessarily involved in a discussion of South American politics. Pennac's turn away from the theoretical critique he has so skillfully executed makes his work seem less than helpful. Without a sensitive political engagement, his novel seems unable to avoid simply reinforcing and perpetuating a Western perspective.

While it would be easy to say that that is all Pennac could possibly do, *The God of Small Things* shows us that it is possible to be not only explicitly and profoundly engaged in postcolonial political and social struggle, but also to be so without presenting an essentializing narrative or attempting to speak for the subaltern. Roy makes explicit her intention not to speak for anyone in the novel's epigraph, quoted above at the beginning to this section. She dives into the embattled intersection of postmodern and postcolonial theory, the critiques of which we briefly outlined in the introduction to this paper. The fact that Estha and Rahel's final attempt to re-form a unified identity seems ultimately to fail allows room for Roy's critique to function on a grander scale; she avoids the trap of ideology for ideology's sake which Pennac falls, and her insistence on the usefulness of writing and language as means to deconstruct the aspects of current global discourse that make it impossible to hear the subaltern gains more power for the

fact that it does not claim to find a mode of speech for the subaltern. Thus Roy executes Noland's "pointing gesture"--pointing at an intersection of theory and political engagement.

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