Passages to and from India

Narrative Discourse and Cultural Identity in
A Passage to India and The Impressionist

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Acknowledgements

This master's thesis on E. M. Forster's A Passage to India and Hari Kunzru's The Impressionist has allowed me to nurture two of my recurrent literary interests over the last years: English literature from or about India combined with E. M. Forster. These authors have written novels that are a pleasure to read at the same time as they deal with issues relevant far beyond a master student's reading room.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Presenting the Thesis

The basis for this thesis is E. M. Forster's A Passage to India and Hari Kunzru's The Impressionist. Forster's novel was published in 1924 and Kunzru's in 2002, but although written almost eighty years apart, they describe the same epoch in British and Indian history. Their stories describe journeys and characters who travel, and are set in India, England, and Africa. Simplifying to the extreme, one novel describes a journey to India and the other one a journey from India. The common denominator for both stories is the mix between English characters and English culture on one hand and inhabitants of British colonies and their culture on the other. The interplay between these against the backdrop of British imperialism, as reflected in the chosen texts, is the foundation for this thesis.

The primary aim with this thesis is to show how A Passage to India and The Impressionist both can benefit from being read together. Forster's novel is by now a classic in British literature, whereas Kunzru's is almost brand new. Despite their difference in age, their thematic similarities are noteworthy. A second aim is to provide a reading of The Impressionist which includes the novel in a tradition of British colonial and postcolonial literature. A third aim is to confirm that Forster's novel still has the ability to communicate with a modern audience. Even though A Passage to India is eighty years old, the content and style of this remarkable novel are still interesting and relevant.

The course "Representations of India in British Fiction" provided the first idea of combining an analysis of A Passage to India with an analysis of The Impressionist. Both Forster's and Kunzru's novels were on the reading list of that course, in addition to other authors like Rudyard Kipling and Salman Rushdie. The course thus suggested a tradition going from classical authors like Forster and Kipling, continuing via Rushdie to Kunzru.

Kunzru's novel may in some respects be seen as a synthesis of the previous three; a reading of The Impressionist reveals echoes of previous colonial and postcolonial literature.

E. M. Forster was born in London in 1879, educated at Cambridge (Classics), and is the author of six novels, two volumes of short stories, two collections of essays, and various critical works including the well known Aspects of the Novel (1927). A Passage to India is his most acclaimed novel; others include A Room With a View (1908), Howard's End (1910), and the posthumously published Maurice (completed in 1914, published in 1971). At Cambridge, Forster got acquainted with several Indian students, one of whom arranged for Forster to work in India after completing his degree. Forster spent his first period of time in India in 1912, providing the initial impulses for A Passage to India, and later a second period in 1921. He began writing the novel already in 1913 (Stallybrass 11), but left it unfinished until well after his second stay in India. During the First World War, Forster spent three years in Alexandria working for The Red Cross. This experience provided him with further impressions of the Arabic world; "Egypt = India + water and – idolatry" (qtd. in Stallybrass 13). Forster struggled with completing the novel, but when it finally was ready for publication, he summarised the process thus: "Points: two longish visits to India: saw not only Anglo-India but also Mohammedans and Hindus. Not 'gorgeous' East, but real East – complex, mystic: treatment largely humourous [sic]" (qtd. in Stallybrass 21).

Hari Kunzru was born in 1969, educated at Oxford and Warwick universities (Literature and Philosophy), and currently lives in London. He has worked as a journalist and an editor of magazines. The Impressionist was his first novel and has secured him several prizes; other writings include the novel Transmission (2004) and a recent collection of short stories. The author is of mixed British and Indian ancestry, a fact that has influenced his writing: "I have worried in the past that I've not felt anchored to things, not felt committed" (qtd. in "Hari Kunzru"). Exploring the legacies of colonialism and empire is an important

factor in Kunzru's writings, combined with "the impact of today's globalised world on the formation of individual identities" ("Hari Kunzru").

1.2 Theory

Looking at the contemporary political debate, nothing seems to be more important than where you are, where you come from, and how this has affected you as a person and a citizen. Michel Foucault, in an essay titled "Of Other Spaces," writes that

> we are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (22)

Both Forster and Kunzru seem aware of this juxtaposition, of comparing and contrasting different places and spaces. They describe a time when the world due to colonisation and improved means of communication got smaller, and their protagonists travel across the globe. Foucault's thoughts on simultaneity and juxtaposition are echoed in the discussion of intertextuality in the third part of this theoretical section, and together they provide the basis for reading Forster's and Kunzru's novels together.

The novels thematise the project of British imperialism and colonialism. The characters are placed within the colonial system and in various ways relate to this: they conform to, oppose, or ignore Britain's role as the "superpower" of the 1910s and -20s. Although Forster and Kunzru both are English and writing in (or from) England, keeping a postcolonial focus in mind is essential because of the novels' content and implications for questions of representation and knowledge. A short survey of postcolonial theories and concepts to be utilised is therefore included in the first part of this theoretical section.

The novels invite the reader to reflection on the relationship between identity and the places and social circumstances a person exists within. Where in the world the characters are

situated, where they come from, and how they travel are central issues when trying to understand the novels. Cultural identity is a key concept, in addition to awareness of the novels' narrative space. Wesley Kort, in his Place and Space in Modern Fiction, states that "places in narrative have force and meaning; they are related to human values and beliefs; and they are part of a larger human world" (11). The second part of the theoretical section tries to pinpoint the term cultural identity, in order to establish a working definition for this thesis.

1.2.1 Postcolonialism

Postcolonial theory is important in order to discuss and gain an understanding of both Forster's and Kunzru's novels. The terms imperialism, colonialism and postcolonialism will be much used in this thesis to describe the relationships between England and the colonies, and between English persons and inhabitants of the former or present colonies of England. They are difficult to define, as they have a tendency to mean different things in different contexts, and the aim is here to circle in a "working definition" for this thesis. Postcolonial theory sometimes tends to have an ideological character, corresponding to the theorist's political position. The intention of this thesis is to avoid any commitment to a certain political agenda and treat the theory as objectively as possible.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines imperialism in general terms as "the principle or spirit of empire; advocacy of what are held to be imperial interests." In British history, the term implies activities aimed at securing British trade interests and the gradual integration of different parts of the Empire into a single coherent state ("Imperialism"). Continuing with the term colonialism, The Oxford English Dictionary defines it either as "the practice or manner of things colonial," or as a way of describing "an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak peoples by a large power" ("Colonialism"). Edward Said offers the following definitions in Culture and Imperialism:

> 'Imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism,' which is almost

> always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlers on distant territory. (8)

Said defines imperialism as an ideology, setting up the foundation for practical colonialism.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin argue in Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts that colonialism developed alongside capitalism, establishing a hierarchic system of economic exchange with the colonised countries as suppliers of raw materials to the "burgeoning economies of the colonial powers" (46). Thus the term colonialism can be used "back to the Incas and forward to the Indonesian occupation of East-Timor," although we mainly understand it as describing the actions of the European colonial powers from the Renaissance and onwards (188). Ania Loomba neatly sums this up, writing that "colonialism [is] the forcible takeover of land and economy, and, in the case of European colonialism, a restructuring of non-capitalist economies in order to fuel European capitalism" (23).

Post-colonialism, then, could most easily be defined as that which comes after colonialism. That defines the term chronologically, as the period after the point in time where a colony gained independence from the colonial power. This understanding of the term was, however, only common until the late seventies, when critics started to use the term in discussions of the cultural effects of imperialism and colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 186). Whether the term is spelled post-colonialism or postcolonialism suggests this distinction between a chronological use of the term and one focussing on the cultural effects of colonialism. The latter meaning would free the term of restrictions connected to describing only what happened after independence, and extend its use to all effects of and reactions to colonialism, whether they occur before or after independence. Ania Loomba suggests that it is "helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (16).

The danger when using terms like colonialism and postcolonialism to describe actions and ideologies is that of generalising too much: “all ‘subordinating’ discourses and practices are not the same either over time or across the globe” (Loomba 17). This shows postcolonial theory’s debt to Marxist thought and materialist criticism. Crucial when discussing imperialism, colonialism and postcolonialism is to constantly keep in mind the importance of location: different colonised countries have had different relations with their respective colonial powers, and the reactions to that colonialism have taken different shapes. Postcolonialism is about language and texts, but it is also about the material conditions of actual persons in actual places. This significant facet of postcolonialism is relevant when discussing the narrative space established in the two novels, noticing how the authors use locations and places to add meaning to the actions and events described.

While postcolonial theory rests heavily on Marxist perspectives, it was also indebted to post-structuralism, with its focus on discourses and discourse analysis. Edward Said, in his influential Orientalism, uses Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse to chart the unequal relationship between England and France and their colonies, and more generally to understand the “West’s” relationship with the “East.” This use of discourse builds on Foucault’s theories on knowledge and power (Foucault, “Orders of Discourse”). The argument is complete with Antonio Gramsci’s term hegemony, used by both Foucault and Said, and described by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin as “domination by consent” (116). Thus colonialism is the discourse, the system of knowledge, established by the colonial power and brought upon the colonies by this colonial power’s hegemonic position. Postcolonialism assumes the role of a counter-discourse, a struggle against the dominant discourse suppressing the native inhabitants of the colonies and maintaining the current system.

This is where Homi K. Bhabha enters the debate with a development of Said’s theories, especially on the question of representation in connection with the political effects of

discourse. One of the main goals of a colonial discourse, according to Bhabha, is to set up a distinction between "us" and "them" to justify the unequal hierarchy between the colonial power and the colonised areas, between the colonisers and the colonised subjects (Bhabha 70). In Bhabha's phrase, Said "rightly rejects the notion of Orientalism as the misrepresentation of an Oriental essence" (72), but instead runs the risk of establishing a new essence by not taking proper consideration to the play between representation, knowledge and power in the colonial discourse (Bhabha 72). Said writes that "the Orient at large… vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty" (qtd. in Bhabha 73). This Bhabha develops within a conceptual framework borrowed from psychoanalytic theory; he sees the Orient as a scene of fantasy, not only a place in reality, something which has consequences for the establishment and political manipulation of the "other" in the colonial discourse.

In Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin discuss whether the literary period of Modernism, during which Forster's A Passage to India is written, partly is a response to the encounter with Africa and other so-called primitive cultures. The "scramble for Africa" and colonial enterprises in other parts of the world brought art and handicraft to Europe, thereby introducing societies that were seen as preserved at an earlier stage in their development, showing "primitive and aboriginal impulses common to all people" (144). This, they argue, provided the modernist aesthetics with new impulses reflected in the art of the period. On the other hand, the discoveries were also linked to fear, to an image of these societies as the other side of the cultivated European societies – as exemplified in novels like Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

In postcolonial literature, however, there has been a reaction against the cultural essentialism that Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest characterised the modernist period. Postcolonial literature is instead characterised by awareness of the questions of representation,

identification, and subjectification. Postcolonial theory with its base in poststructuralism has already been discussed, and has been a major influence since the seventies. Ambivalence, the relationship between the particular and the general, and a critical attitude towards "grand narratives" of race, gender, class, and nationality are frequent in contemporary literature (Bhabha 174). In Bhabha's words, "the postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres" (Bhabha 173).

1.2.2 Cultural identity

Important for the discussion of A Passage to India and The Impressionist is a narrowing down of the term identity, especially of cultural identity. The concept is hard to define, and the aim is to suggest some aspects to be used in this thesis, rather than giving a general definition. Stuart Hall argues in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" that identity is always positioned, always in context, "constituted within, not outside, representation" (110). Post-structuralist theory sees identity not as inherent in the individual human being, but as part of the discourse and thus fundamentally unstable. Identity can be seen as a human being's "positionings" within the discourse. A hegemonic power or institution establishes the possible positions available within a discourse, and thus sets up the rules available for human beings to define themselves in accordance with. Therefore, the colonial discourse has the power not only over the colonisers, but also over the colonial subjects and the way they define themselves. This is where the above mentioned "domination by consent" enters again: the discourse not only defines the people of the West as supreme and powerful, it also makes the people of the East see themselves as "others" (Hall 117). Identity is closely connected with representation, knowledge, and power.

In order to elaborate Stuart Hall's view on cultural identity, it is useful first of all to take a look at Edward Said's attempt at pinpointing the term "culture." Said writes in The World, the Text and the Critic, that culture may

> suggest an environment, process, and hegemony in which individuals (in their private circumstances) and their works are embedded, as well as overseen at the top by a superstructure and at the base by a whole series of methodological attitudes. It is in culture that we can seek out the range of meanings and ideas conveyed by the phrases *belonging to* or *in a* place, being *at home in a place*. (8)

Said sees culture as something that one belongs to and as something that one possesses; culture sets up a boundary defining what is outside and what is inside. This gives culture the power to authorise and to validate actions, events and persons; culture dominates from above without necessarily being available to everyone "at the bottom" (Said, World/Text/Critic 9). Culture as "a system of discriminations and evaluations" is backed up by dominant forces in a society or a state, supporting the inclusions and exclusions sanctioned by culture (Said, World/Text/Critic 11-12). Correspondingly, with so strong forces in terms of inclusion and exclusion, there is almost unavoidably also a system of resistance towards culture. Whether this is for religious, political, or social reasons, some individuals or groups are in an oppositional position (Said, World/Text/Critic 14). This notion fits in well with the Foucauldian notions of discourse and counter-discourses discussed above, except that it is taken one step further: discourses are not only in the language, but are also something human beings may have attachments to.

Stuart Hall describes two possible definitions of cultural identity, one that can be seen as essentialist and one that can be considered as constructivist. The essentialist definition sees cultural identity as something already given, hidden inside the members of a group of people with shared history and ancestry: "a collective true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves'" (Hall 110-111). It can provide a frame of reference for those wishing to explore their history and ancestry, and be the basis of a group identity

related to these findings. This view of cultural identity thus implies "a recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity" (Hall 112).

Stuart Hall's second and constructivist view of cultural identity seeks to counter the essentialist one's tendency to create neat patterns and structures. Contrary to the first view, the second focuses on the differences and ruptures that necessarily have been throughout history, and argues that it is impossible to see a set of qualities and historical events as a sign of the cultural identity of a group:

> Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation … Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall 112).

When there is no fixed past, no scheme that you can adopt, then each individual has to find his own place in the system. Cultural identity is created more than it is discovered, and it is being created now, not only in the past.

This idea of culture not as static, but as being constantly created, has also been explored by Homi K. Bhabha, most notably in his influential essay collection The Location of Culture. Instead of accepting the distinction between "us" and "them" in the colonial situation automatically, Bhabha argues that the interesting point is what happens when the culture(s) of the colonisers and the culture(s) of the colonised subjects meet: "the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" (Bhabha 67). Bhabha does not see colonialism simply as the coloniser's oppression of the colonised, but instead as interplay between domination and resistance.

Bhabha's views on anxiety in the colonial situation leads to a fundamental ambivalence in colonial discourse, reflected in his writings on fixity, stereotypes and mimicry. Fixity describes the coloniser's objective, a stable representation of the colonised, and the stereotype is his major discursive strategy. The stereotype is "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 66). The stereotype's ambivalence allows it to be repeated in changing circumstances without losing its defining power: it fixes the colonised subjects' identity and denies them any possibility of change. To keep the colonial subject in the "correct" position within the colonial hierarchy, the coloniser uses the stereotype to represent the "other": "by 'knowing' the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate" (Bhabha 83).

Mimicry is connected with the question of representing otherness in the colonial discourse. Bhabha uses mimicry about the process of making the colonised subject "almost the same [as the coloniser], but not quite" (86): the colonised subject is supposed to behave in a way that the coloniser approves of, but at the same time keep up the difference necessary to maintain the hierarchical colonial discourse. The colonial subject imitates the coloniser in order to meet this demand, but this imitation may include an element of ironic mockery, and thus of resistance towards the coloniser. Mimicry is the compromise between a demand for stability and "the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history" (Bhabha 86).

Following these questions of stereotype and mimicry, of identification and imitation, is Bhabha's use of the uncanny, presented in his essay "Articulating the Archaic." The term is borrowed from Sigmund Freud, who in an essay titled "The Uncanny" describes it as "that species of the frightening that that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). Bhabha uses the concept to describe the colonial situation and the representation of cultural difference: the interplay between what is known and possible to

represent on one hand versus the unknown and the seemingly non-sensical on the other, that which is beyond representation and experience. This is again the ambivalence of the colonial situation. Both the coloniser and the colonised are involved in the colonial discourse, thus making it fundamentally unstable – at least as seen from the coloniser's perspective – and the uncanny is a reaction to this ambivalence.

1.2.3 Intertextuality

Both A Passage to India and The Impressionist may benefit from being read in light of other texts. There are interesting links between A Passage to India and previous texts, between A Passage to India and The Impressionist, and finally also between The Impressionist and several previous colonial authors besides Forster, such as Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad. It is therefore necessary to establish an understanding of the concept of intertextuality in order to expand the discussion of Forster's and Kunzru's novels.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines intertextuality as "the need for one text to be read in the light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other texts" ("Intertextuality"). Intertextuality may operate on the conscious or unconscious level in the author's mind; or rather it may operate in the mind of the reader of a certain text. Julia Kristeva describes intertextuality as the transportation of one or more systems of signs into another (15), writing that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). She uses Bakhtin's idea of the novel's dialogism, "the novel's openendedness and plasticity, its ability to incorporate other genres into its own discourse" (Lothe, "Cumulative Intertextuality" 179). By juxtaposing texts instead of seeing them as succeeding one another, "diachrony is transformed into synchrony, and in light if this transformation, linear history appears as abstraction" (Kristeva 65). This process of reading texts in light of other texts creates a fundamental ambivalence; the joining of sign systems relativises the texts in question and destabilises their meaning (Kristeva 73).

The term palimpsest can be used in connection with colonialism, combining the discussions of colonialism, intertextuality, and space. It was originally used for "a parchment on which several inscriptions had been made after earlier ones had been erased" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 174). However, there are still traces of the earlier texts that have been overwritten, thus letting older texts be visible through the newer ones. Translated into culture, palimpsests may be a way of describing how cultural expressions of the past are still visible through newer or contemporary expressions. A text may be written in such a way that it shows echoes of other texts and other cultural expressions. If the colonised land is a text, then colonialism and the colonial power erase this text and rewrite it in its own way. There are nevertheless often traceable features of the previous text, of previous uses of the land:

> Mapping, naming, fictional and non-fictional narratives create multiple and sometimes conflicting accretions which become the dense text that constitute place … Empty space becomes place through language, in the process of being written and named. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 175)

Thus imperialism becomes a palimpsest, where the freshest layer of the text is that of the imperial power, and the echoes from the past, the still traceable erased layers, are those of the colonised land and the colonised population. Colonialism, or rather the establishment of a colonial discourse, is a process of rewriting and overwriting, of setting up new cultural horizons replacing those of the indigenous populations.

1.3 Methodology

After a theoretical introduction, it is time to briefly discuss the method used when writing this thesis and outline the structure of the rest of the thesis. The main part of the thesis consists of two analyses, one for A Passage to India and one for The Impressionist, with special regard to selected aspects of narratology and the theoretical foundation established in this introduction. The analyses focus on colonial discourse and cultural identity reflected in the texts in relation to the narrators, the characters, and the main themes of the novels. The conceptual framework

of the analyses is drawn from the field of postcolonial theory, and they will also investigate the question of representing the "other" in the colonial situation. In the first section of this introductory chapter, the quotation from Michel Foucault describes the current age as one of juxtaposition and of simultaneity. This idea is also found in Julia Kristeva's article on intertextuality; reading these authors together reveals an interesting relationship between the synchrony of the novels' settings as opposed to the diachrony of their time of production.

When preparing this thesis, some articles on hermeneutics have been important in the reflections on my methodological approach. Jon Wetlesen's article "Samtaler med tekster i lys av Gadamers hermeneutikk" ["Conversations with texts in light of Gadamer's hermeneutics"] discusses Hans-Georg Gadamer's monumental Truth and Method from 1960. Jean Starobinski's essay "The Interpreter's Progress" from 1970 is an exemplary reading of a text by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Wetlesen summarises and explains Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics" and discusses how a text can be read and interpreted based on Gadamer's theories. Starobinski uses an extract from Rousseau as a practical demonstration in outlining a theory of interpretation.

Gadamer's approach rests on the foundation that when we read and interpret a text or some other cultural product, we understand the text within our own "horizon"; we take some things for granted and use them as preconditions for our interpretation. What Gadamer calls "prejudices," our previous knowledge activated when meeting a literary work, is a necessary part of our analysis. Gadamer further supposes that the meaning of the text primarily rests in the text itself, and that its meaning concerns what is displayed in the text. Understanding the original meaning of the author is at best difficult and at worst impossible; thus the main point in an interpretation is the reader's understanding of the text (Wetlesen 220-221). My own position as a reader of Forster's and Kunzru's novels is that of a person with no firsthand

experience of India or of the colonial system. Instead, I read the texts from a contemporary perspective, expecting an outcome relevant for a reader of today.

The literary quality of both novels to be analysed in this thesis has been questioned. A Passage to India is by some critics seen as Forster's failure, and The Impressionist was ambiguously received. By making them the object of our investigation, however, we begin with a basic assumption that they are good. This is what Gadamer calls "the fore-conception of completeness": "only what really constitutes a unity of meaning is intelligible" (Gadamer 293-294). An interpreter assumes that the text expresses a meaning and gives a true or valid answer to one or more questions (Wetlesen 230). This assumption is the basis for my initial questions about possible links between Forster's and Kunzru's novels and the wish to explore their positions within their respective literary periods: I expect an answer from the novels.

Gadamer uses the idea of a conversation between the reader and the text to describe the interpretative process. It is important and relevant to ask contemporary questions when reading a text, not necessarily limited to the possible questions that were known to the author (Wetlesen 229). Both Gadamer and Starobinski use the hermeneutic circle to explain their interpretative activities. The first step is choosing an object to interpret, and according to Starobinski, this choice is seldom a coincidence. An object is chosen because it still has something to say to us; we expect an outcome (Starobinski 228). Interpreting a text means moving back and forth between the whole and the individual parts of the text; we start with a "prejudice" that we seek to confirm, but our prejudices are revaluated when meeting "obstacles" in the texts (Starobinski 224). I began writing this thesis with a sense of familiarity between Forster's and Kunzru's novels, seeking an explanation to that feeling. I had at first only a vague idea about the reasons for that familiarity, but have during the analyses gradually gained a deeper understanding of the links between the two novels.

A successful interpretation of meaningful objects cannot rest on scientific laws and facts, but rests instead on the inner coherence of the final analysis and its accordance with the object. The hermeneutic circle returns to its initial position, but with new knowledge gained on the way, both of the initial position itself and of the process undergone on the way (Starobinski 228-229; Wetlesen 236). Starobinski argues that when a text has been analysed, when we have discussed and explained its meaning, then this text is an integrated part of our prejudice when meeting a new text to interpret:

> Once explained, the object is subsumed; it ceases to be simply an illustration and application of a pre-existing method and becomes an integral part of learned discourse. It provides an opportunity for the transformation of methodological principles through practice, so that in the end the interpreted object becomes yet another element in the interpreting discourse. It is no longer an enigma to be deciphered and becomes in its turn an instrument of deciphering. (224-225)

This view can be used on the two novels in this thesis as well: the analysis of A Passage to India may function as a tool in the analysis of The Impressionist, and vice versa. Seeing the two texts together furthers the understanding of both texts and suggests an interesting relationship between their literary periods as well.

The two novels differ as regards the available amounts of secondary literature. There is no previous academic criticism concerning The Impressionist; the only writing that has been done on the novel is for the most part reviews in newspapers and magazines. This is a great contrast to A Passage to India, which during the eighty years after its publication has been subjected to substantial amounts of academic criticism. With Forster, the sheer amount of criticism is a serious problem when trying to get an overview of previous interpretations, and there has been a need for concentration and selection. The minimal amount of criticism on The Impressionist may also be a challenge when analysing the novel, but it may result in an analysis resting on its own to a larger extent than the analysis of A Passage to India. With regard to A Passage to India, the selection of secondary sources has been important when establishing my analysis of the novel. With regard to The Impressionist, the novel's reviews

have been important starting points, although they are very short and have no opportunity to go beyond the book's surface (if, indeed, there is anything at all beyond that surface).

The process of writing this thesis began with the course "Representations of India in British Fiction," providing the inspiration for reading A Passage to India and The Impressionist together. This course focussed on the fictional representation of British colonies in general and India in particular. Next in the writing process came the establishment of a tentative project statement and a theoretical foundation. The main focus when starting to read theory was places and narrative space in the novels; a theorist like Wesley Kort was important at this stage, in addition to postcolonial theorists. While writing the analyses, however, the main focus shifted from place and space to the novels' postcolonial dimensions, highlighting instead colonial discourse and cultural identity. The analysis of The Impressionist was written first, initiated by work conducted during the course "Representations of India in British Fiction." This novel is less complex than Forster's, and the analysis of Kunzru's novel provided a means of selecting aspects to comment when writing the analysis of A Passage to India. Both analyses were later extended with necessary comments on each novel's distinctive features. The last part of the process has been to write the comparative discussion based on the preceding analyses. There are many more elements of the novels that could have been commented upon, but the main focus of the comparative chapter is to look at the novels' similarities and differences.

Next in the thesis comes one analytical chapter for each of the novels to be discussed. Each analysis opens with a general introduction, where elements including the novels' structure, narration, and main themes are identified and commented upon. The chapter on A Passage to India is further divided into three sections: one discussing colonialism in the novel, one focussing on personal relations and identity in the colonial situation, and finally one commenting on the spiritual aspects of the novel. The chapter on The Impressionist is divided

into two sections: one discussing colonialism and one discussing personal and cultural identity in the novel. The structure and content of the chapters differ, as the two novels demand a different critical focus. Their common features will be discussed in a comparative analysis, comprising the last and concluding chapter.

2 A Passage to India

2.1 Introducing the novel

A Passage to India is a remarkable and diverse novel which resists easy interpretations. It is by now a classic novel from the period of High Modernism, written by an author who also resists easy categorisation. The novel is on one level a political story, on another level a story about friendship and love, and on a third level a story searching for truth and knowledge in the spheres of religion and spirituality. This chapter opens with a discussion of the novel's structure and narration and of Forster's connection with Modernism. The chapter is further divided into three sections, where each section focuses on one of the main dimensions of the novel (political, personal, and spiritual), but also aims at seeing the three in combination. The narrator's role, the novel's ideals, and the presentation of colonialism, cultural identity, and space are important elements in my analysis of A Passage to India.

2.1.1 Structure

Giving an outline what this novel is all about is difficult. A resume trying to sum up the events taking place would miss many aspects of the novel, especially the spiritual dimension of the same events. One could say that the novel is about a young woman, Adela, going to Chandrapore in India to meet her fiancé, Ronny, accompanied by her soon-to-be mother-in-law, Mrs. Moore. They are included in the town's British Club, they meet an Indian doctor named Aziz and an English teacher named Fielding, and various social events take place. The central incident of the novel is an expedition to the Marabar caves, just outside Chandrapore, initiated and planned by Aziz. This is where most things go wrong, and Adela accuses Aziz of rape. The subsequent trial polarises the Chandrapore society; the English and the Indian milieus stand strongly against each other. Eventually, Adela drops the charges against Aziz, breaks the engagement with Ronny, and leaves town. This is a résumé placing A Passage to

India in line with some of Forster's previous novels, where a romantic plot is at the heart of the story – with colonial politics as an extra dimension.

Another tentative summary could focus on the relationship between Aziz and Fielding: two men from different cultures meet, become friends, experience various obstacles in their relationship, and are eventually separated by strong politically, culturally and heterosexually normative forces in the society around them. A third possibility could be something like this: Mrs. Moore, a religious woman, travels to India, meets the cultural and religious diversity of that country, discovers that Christianity is inadequate, and dies. The first alternative would place Adela in the role of a protagonist, the second one Aziz/Fielding, and the third one Mrs. Moore. Reading the story with regard to different characters changes the reader's perception of the story and affects the way in which he or she understands the novel.

Although the novel is complex, there are certain things one knows for a fact about A Passage to India. The novel discusses Indians and Anglo-Indians, and the interplay between these two groups is described as strongly polarised. This suggests a political reading of the novel. Second, the novel contains a number of (more or less romantic) relationships, which are possible to read as exploring the conditions for friendship and love in these characters' circumstances. Finally, the novel is divided into three parts named "Mosque," "Caves," and "Temple" respectively. Especially the titles of the first and last parts suggest that looking for a religious or spiritual dimension in the novel is plausible.

The novel contains political, personal, and religious themes intertwined, and the problem of limiting this chapter becomes obvious. A Passage to India has been object of much criticism since its publication. The first responses to the novel treated it most of all as a political novel, followed by discussions whether the text gave a "fair" impression of the Indian question (Stallybrass 22). Liberal humanism has been another prominent concept associated with Forster, seeing in this novel a political vision in line with Forster's non-

fictional writings. Forster criticism changed drastically with the posthumous publication of Maurice and several short stories with a more or less explicit homosexual theme. These stories made it both interesting and legitimate to pose questions about sexuality and sexual identity also in Forster's other novels – like A Passage to India. My analysis uses this new wave of criticism to discuss the relationship between Aziz and Fielding.

Common for several threads of the novel's themes is the centrality of the cave incident. The events taking place before and during this excursion are reverberating throughout the whole novel. On the social level, they display the social hierarchy and structures of Chandrapore and initiate the "clash" between the town's English and Indian milieus. On a personal level, the various relationships in the novel go through their most difficult period during and after this excursion. Finally, on the religious level, the echo and especially Mrs. Moore's experiences in the cave are important. Is it really important to know what happened in the cave? Was Adela assaulted by Aziz, or did she have some sort of dream where he assaulted her? Yet an answer to this question is not really essential for discussing the various effects of the cave incident.

A Passage to India hardly seems realistic; it is not easy to imagine this plot having taken place "in real life." The arranging of a story's events to create a plot is necessarily artificial, and the narrator actually comments on this: "Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence" (Forster 145).[1] I agree with Peter Burra, who in his introduction to the novel writes that "Mr. Forster contrives his plot only for the purpose of developing his characters, and makes it serve them, at whatever cost to probability" (323). Burra's introduction was praised by Forster as a rare occasion of being understood, and Forster wrote in an introduction to the novel that his main purpose of

[1] References to A Passage to India are henceforth indicated with the abbreviation PI.

the novel "was not political, was not even sociological" (317). Looking for the real world in A Passage to India may therefore be futile, the novel does not seem to attempt at realism, and in doing so one might miss the point. The real is an illusion, and those who look for "the real thing" (like the "real India") is mocked by the narrator.

The novel is a careful construction and an unusually ambitious project. Peter Burra's reading of the novel focuses on Forster's "clues and chains," his rhythm, and his "leit-motifs" (Burra 324). With Burra's words, the framework of A Passage to India rests heavily on "buildings and places and the names of places – such places as can be appropriately associated with a recurring idea, and this take on significance as symbols" (325). The narrator's aim seems to be to discover a truth, to investigate some potentially significant phenomenon, not just "telling a story." The novel resembles a hermeneutic project, creating a story and arranging a plot to understand – what? The relationship between England and India? The possibilities of friendship and love across barriers of race and culture? The meeting of religions? These questions will form the basis for my discussion of A Passage to India.

2.1.2 Narration

While discussing A Passage to India's plot and themes, it is also necessary to take a look at its narrator. The narrator could have been labelled "omniscient," but, as Jonathan Culler notices, this term is problematic; a description of the narrator's position is better than just applying such a wide term as "omniscient" to the novel (Culler 22). How much does the narrator know, and how much does he choose to disclose for the reader? The narrative voice in A Passage to India is personal and very much present in the story. The narrator not only refers the events and the characters' thoughts, but comments on them as well. The voice is almost like that of a teacher, telling about and explaining the events taking place, sometimes mild and humorous, other times ironic and even quite sarcastic. One glimpse of the connection between the narrator and his reader, or the narratee, is seen in the "Dear Reader" explaining Mrs. Moore's

thoughts (PI 213). Another glimpse is a small sentence describing a religious ceremony in the "Temple" part: "this approaching triumph of India was a muddle (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form" (PI 282, emphasis added).

The role of the narrator contributes to seeing the novel as a construction: the reader is made to reflect on the telling of the story in addition to the story itself. It is difficult just to be caught up in the characters and events and register them automatically; the novel supposes an active reader on par with the narrator. It is useful to differentiate between different diegetic levels in the novel (Lothe, Fiksjon og film [Fiction and Film] 53-55). The first and highest, extradiegetic level contains the narrator and the "Dear Reader;" the narrator addresses the reader and seems conscious of being the one who tells the story. The narrator is most visible in the introductory chapters and when introducing new characters to the story. These sections are points at which the act of storytelling becomes most visible; the narrator outlines the location of the story and the background for the events to be described and gives the reader necessary information to read and interpret the story. At the next diegetic level we find the novel's characters and the actual story. The narrator moves freely between the different locations of the story and the minds of the characters; the focalisation point is not the same throughout. This two-fold structure, with the narrator existing on one level and the story on another, underlines the reader's role as an observer. He or she is not supposed to identify with one character, but to follow the narrator instead, in order to share his vision.

In addition to the narrator, the novel's implied author is also noteworthy. According to Lothe, the implied author is a construction, an image which the reader extracts from all the text's components (Fiksjon og film 32). It thus becomes a way of describing the text's intention, the point from which characters and events are evaluated and judgments are passed. In A Passage to India, the norms and values established by the text seem to correspond with those of the narrator. It is most often possible to tell whether the characters' actions are

approved or disapproved of by the narrator. The reader sees that the Turtons and Burtons misbehave, and he or she understands that Ronny's complacency regarding British rule in India is not the optimal attitude. The narrator's ideals are not necessarily those of the characters, the ideal is sometimes very far from the novel's reality, and with this particular narrator's personal style the discrepancy becomes more obvious.

The novel's ideals sometimes are a bit difficult to pinpoint. Betty Jay, in her guide to Forster criticism, discusses whether it is possible to see any kind of unity in the novel at all (56). Several theorists have approached the novel with a formal rather than a thematic perspective, focussing on the novel's structure and language. They find a text characterised by indeterminacy and negation; considering "the significance of gaps, fissures, absences and exclusions" in the text, they provide "a means of understanding … not only the formal properties of the narrative, but also the wider signifying process in which it engages" (Jay 57). One frequent example is the description of Chandrapore in the very first chapter of the novel: "Except for the Marabar Caves – and they are twenty miles off – the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary … scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish [the river] deposits so freely … never large or beautiful" (PI 31). Another often quoted example is Godbole's description of the Marabar Caves, eliminating every possibility for greatness in them: they are neither large nor particularly beautiful or holy (PI 92).

The character of professor Godbole seems to represent this inability or unwillingness to be clear and precise. In the above mentioned discussion about the Marabar caves, Aziz tries to extract information from Godbole about caves, but fails:

> Aziz realized that [Godbole] was keeping back something about the caves … The dialogue remained light and friendly, and Adela had no conception of its underdrift. She did not know that the comparatively simple mind of the Mohammedan was encountering Ancient Night … [Aziz] was handling a human toy that refused to work – he knew that much … On [Aziz] chattered, defeated at every move by an opponent who would not even admit that a move had been made. (PI 92)

This conversation could be read simply as a friendly confrontation between Islam and Hinduism, or instead between a relatively rational ways of thought against the incomprehensibility of the "Ancient Night." The narrator's lacking description of Chandrapore and Godbole's unwillingness to describe the Marabar Caves suggest an inability to represent the specifically Indian. Since India is difficult to represent in the English language, the novel presents only a list of what the city is not and of what the caves are not. This is a challenge for the narrator, and the question of representing "otherness" will be dealt with in the following sections of this chapter as well.

While the narrator is visible in the text, it is easy to let him merge into the person E. M. Forster performing the actual writing. This narrative flexibility and range add to the novel's continuing appeal; the feeling a reader gets of closeness between the narrator and the author. Due to the narrative technique employed, Forster's voice (or at least a voice the reader believes to be Forster's) is audible through the text. This aspect of A Passage to India supports the hermeneutic project mentioned above: the novel is an attempt at reaching an understanding, not necessarily a factual description of "life, as it was in India 80 years ago."

The idea of the novel as a process echoes Walt Whitman's poem "Passage to India," from which the novel borrows its title. Whitman's poem is an ode, singing about the new wonders of the world. He was inspired by three events signifying society's progress and technical achievement: the Suez Canal, the completion of the railroad across the USA, and the cable crossing the Atlantic Ocean. According to the editors of the Whitman collection, Whitman sees in these events "a path created anew by modern technology, which supplies a basis for new and more harmonious social relationships and a new religion" (Whitman, A Passage to India 244). There is an idea of joining the old world and the new; the effort of explorers combines different parts of the world. The second last stanza of Whitman's poem resembles the narrator's aim in Forster's A Passage to India:

> Sail forth – steer for the deep waters only,
> Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
> For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
> And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all. (Whitman, A Passage to India 242)

The narrator of A Passage to India is also in deep water. The novel is an ambitious project, trying to unite many complicated themes within its limits. The narrative wants to go "where mariner has not yet dared to go," seeking nothing less than new insight.

2.1.3 Forster's Modernism

Forster's relationship to the modernist period has been much discussed. Was he a modernist, was he a remnant of a previous era, or was he rather in a niche of his own? Judith Scherer Herz opens her book A Passage to India: Nation and Narration with this question. A Passage to India was published in the period of high Modernism, contemporary authors writing in English include T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce. In Herz' words:

> A Passage to India … may at first glance have seemed rather old-fashioned compared to the new fictions of Joyce and Woolf, for Forster's writing carries the history of the English novel – tea parties, picnics, will the engaged couple marry? – close to its surface. Yet it brings together parts of that tradition that rarely have been linked … But it is the novel's mingling of those vastly different modes and voices, and in its bleak, unnerving vision, that its peculiar modernity – and its essential antimodernism – can be found. (9)

Herz contrasts Forster's form with his novels' themes: whereas the former points backwards to older literature, the latter point towards Modernism. It is true that Forster's earlier novels bear a stronger resemblance to older literature; "he seemed to be working in the realist tradition of the English novel and for the most part in the comic, ironic mode presided over by Meredith's muse" (Herz 4). He elided categorisation, however, and with the publication of A Passage to India it became even more difficult to define him.

Forster does not employ the same experimental techniques as Woolf and Joyce, but was nevertheless "bored … by the tiresomeness and conventionalities of fiction form;" he praises Woolf's "wonderful new method," but it was not for him (qtd. in Herz 5). A Passage

to India, then, is remarkable in the sense that it reminds us of these conventionalities of fiction, but does not carry their normal limitations. The novel's narrator has an extremely free position, the plot is not restricted to realistic events, and the themes span from the traditional "will they get married?" to the vastness and incomprehensibility of the universe.

Some elements in A Passage to India keep recurring and build a pattern: the caves, the echo, descriptions of India, and the discussions of England as compared to or opposed to India. These elements acquire a symbolic quality, thus pointing beyond their objective or purely factual meaning and supporting the novel's web of themes. This is a new example of Forster's Modernism:

> [The new novel] was less concerned than its predecessors with telling a story sequentially and delineating character vertically from birth to death; it was more willing to fragment narrative and to chop up experience into small blocks of time, connected through repeated images and symbols rather than exterior events. (Melvin J. Friedman 453)

This view supports the notion of seeing Forster as a conscious creator of plot, rather than a factual referent. When reading a novel like A Passage to India, concepts like "rhythm" and "pattern" become important in the analysis, pointing towards the novel's less overt structures.

One last feature of Forster's Modernism is the awareness of his own position as an author and a teller of stories, as shown in the self-reflective mode of writing employed in A Passage to India. It is tempting to read a small conversation between Fielding and McBryde as a clue to a deeper understanding of the text. This is what happens right after the alleged attack on Adela in the cave, when Fielding goes to McBryde's office to gather more information about Aziz's whereabouts:

> [Fielding:] "I only wanted to ask her whether [Adela] is certain, dead certain, that it was Aziz who followed her into the cave."
> [McBryde:] "Possibly my wife might ask her that much."
> [Fielding:] "But I wanted to ask her, I want someone who believes in him to ask her."
> [McBryde:] "What difference does that make?"
> [Fielding:] "She is among people who disbelieve in Indians."

> [McBryde:] "Well, she tells her own story, doesn't she?"
> [Fielding:] "I know, but she tells it to you." (PI 179)

Fielding's point is that different ways of telling a story results in different interpretations of that story. This relativises the act of telling; the context and the persons involved are important, not only the actual events. A novel is also "victim" of this relativity: A Passage to India is Forster's story, told in the early twenties. Contextualising the novel is an answer to those critics dismissing the novel as a product of Forster's own time or seeing the novel as an example of a racist, sexist, or imperialist novel (like Hubel or Silver). The indefinite article in the novel's title may be a further hint: this is the story of one passage to India, among many other possible passages to India. This relativism is a typical feature of Modernism; in Michael Bell's words, "the question of interpretation lies at [Modernism's] heart" (9). Theorists like Marx (on social and economic processes), Freud (on the consciousness), and Nietzsche (on metaphysics) each transformed their field of knowledge, "turning human life into a fundamentally hermeneutic activity" (Bell 9). In this respect, Forster too is truly a modernist.

2.2 Goodwill, culture, and intelligence: colonialism in A Passage to India

The setting and plot of A Passage to India make a discussion of British colonialism reflected in the text both interesting and necessary. The novel contains a number of characters involved in administering British interests in India, as well as Indians meeting the colonial system, creating a social space which is different from Forster's previous novels in terms of geography, ethnicity, religion, and culture. This chapter will focus on the political dimension of Anglo-Indians meeting Indians in A Passage to India, on the "clash" of England against India, and on colonial discourse reflected in the novel. The colonial system is vigorously defended by some characters and contested by others. It affects all characters, with a few possible exceptions, and their relations and reactions to the colonial discourse with its "do's" and "don'ts" is the main topic of this chapter.

Is this text a colonial text, or is it anti-colonial? Does the novel show an author trapped in the colonial discourse of the 1920s, or instead one who is able to see beyond the dominant forces of that time and observe the system from the outside? Linking a discussion of the characters' actions to the person E. M. Forster is obviously neither fortunate nor possible, and this analysis will be based on the text and not on Forster's own experiences in India. Another initial question to ask might be whether the novel's criticism now is too obvious; whether the period between the novel's time of publication and our time has proven Forster to be right in criticising the colonial system, hence making a discussion of the same criticism superfluous. All these questions may be wrong: if the narrative's aim is an investigation of a subject in order to understand more, the reader should do the same. The hermeneutic approach described in the introduction may just as well be applied to the author; neither he nor the reader can avoid prejudices. The process of understanding A Passage to India does not necessarily have to end in a judgment of the colonial system per se.

2.2.1 Colonialism

In order to discuss colonialism in the novel, it is useful first of all to take a look at its central characters. They serve different purposes, and each character adds important elements to the story. Through the figure of Adela, "a woman not yet incorporated into the Anglo-Indian ideologies of attitude and lifestyle," the author can "test all of the boundaries of the structure of this society including imperial policy, economics, sexuality, and culture" (Jay 114). Adding Mrs. Moore to the equation, Forster uses "her wisdom of life experience … to deconstruct the imperial cant her son conveniently uses to dismiss the situation in India" (Jay 114). Aziz contributes with the views and opinions of an "informed Indian." He has studied in England as well as read widely about Indian history. Fielding is critical towards the colonial system, befriends Aziz and other Indian characters, and is in opposition to the "correct" English

behaviour of the other colonial servants in Chandrapore. All this combines into a novel enabling Forster to explore "the ideology and ethics of colonization" (Jay 114).

Many of the novel's characters, especially among the British, seem to assume that the Indians would not manage on their own. This is typical for the early twentieth century, but is nevertheless revealing of these characters' views on the non-British population in India and other colonies. Ronny reacts thus to a day of negotiations in preparation for a religious holiday: "[he] had not disliked this day, for it proved that the British were necessary to India; there would certainly have been bloodshed without them … [he] was here not to be pleasant but to keep the peace" (PI 110). Another example is Fielding engaging in a discussion about the justification for English rule in India. Fielding is disinclined to give the expected answer: "England holds India for her good" (PI 124). These examples demonstrate how colonial servants in Chandrapore see the hierarchy between English and Indians.

The novel's narrator, however, is just like Fielding disinclined to support these opinions. They are expressed by the "Turtons and Burtons" and by Ronny, but neither of them carry much credibility; the leading officials with their experience are mocked, and Ronny is described as naïve. Although the novel is notoriously elusive, there are glimpses of an ideal, or at least there are values that are put forward as positive. This is a passage seen through Fielding's mind: "The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence – a creed ill suited to Chandrapore, but he had come out too late to lose it" (PI 80). Fielding has been described as Forster's mouthpiece, and conveys the position some critics associate with Forster himself. Whether Forster thought like Fielding is not too relevant to our discussion, but the novel's norm system, the implied author, seems to support Fielding and Mrs. Moore. The insights put forward as positive are often seen through their eyes and connected to their values and reactions to the events taking place.

The novel is a fictional demonstration of the interplay between domination and resistance in the colonial situation, but rather than showing obvious situations and feeding the reader with clear-cut arguments, the narrative handles this interplay more indirectly. There is always the gentle irony and the underlying awareness that this is a story and not the reality; neither side comes out as the hero in the end. Resistance against the colonial system exists both on the British and the Indian sides of the conflict. Adela and Mrs. Moore react against the British community's attitudes towards Indians, but are dismissed as inexperienced newcomers. Mrs. Moore will soon be leaving India and consequently is not too important, but Ronny does not want Adela to think too much on these issues: "it would be tiresome if she started crooked over the native question" (PI 52). He tries to make Adela conform with the British club's expectations to one of their members' fiancé. The theory is that a person arriving in India necessarily succumbs to the colonial administrators' way of seeing things ("I am told we all get rude after a year" (PI 157)), but she is determined to avoid this. Fielding is an example of a character not following this rule, but he seems to react just as much against the British community as in favour of the Indian. Another reason for his independent position is his insistence on "travelling light;" he does not want to be too attached to his surroundings, there cannot be too much tying him down and reducing his freedom.

Most of the Indian characters seem to behave the way the British would like them to, and in case they do not, they are dismissed by the British as incompetent or unable to follow instructions. There are also blatant misunderstandings due to lack of information and a will to communicate; Aziz and the collar stud is one obvious example. There are, however, exceptions to the well behaved Indians, but they are of the more indirect sort. When Aziz meets Fielding in the last section of the book, his greeting is described like this: "Aziz sketched a comic salaam; like all Indians, he was skilled in the slighter impertinences. 'I tremble, I obey,' the gesture said, and it was no lost upon Fielding" (PI 296). These "slighter

impertinences" seem to be a way in which an Indian can show resistance towards the British without risking too much. This resembles Bhabha's term mimicry, seeing the Indians as acting "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86). Mimicry creates an ironic ambivalence between what the coloniser expects and what the colonised subject actually performs, an ambivalence silently undermining the authority of the coloniser. It supposes a more or less conscious act from the colonised subject, seeing himself as subjected to the coloniser but not conforming to this subjugated position.

The ultimate incident to demonstrate the British power over India is the trial scene. The rhetoric surrounding the alleged attack on Adela is designed to evoke compassion for the poor victim and her almost equally poor fiancé on the one hand, and outrage on behalf of the British population in India on the other. The text echoes the 1857 mutiny and the brutality of those historic confrontations. The "Turtons and Burtons," however, seem to have learned nothing, and want a strong and powerful response to the Adela/Aziz-incident. Adela breaks with the expectations to her on several levels during her stay in India: she wants to meet Indians, she takes part in an expedition led by an Indian man, she is suspected of having had some sort of intimate physical contact with this Indian man, and during the trial she eventually steps back and admits that she has been wrong. All this, albeit unconsciously or unwillingly done by Adela, contributes to undermining the authority of the colonial administration in Chandrapore and elsewhere. The fact that Aziz is not convicted is seen as a victory by the Indian community and a failure by the English; the fact that he is innocent does not seem to matter much. The reader knows that Aziz is innocent, though, and this knowledge adds an extra dimension to all the subsequent events: the narrator's criticism of the colonial system, his exposition of the dubious foundation for British power, becomes even more obvious when the reader is given this piece of information.

One of the most interesting and important questions that comes to mind when reading A Passage to India is the problem of representing the "other" of the colonial discourse, which in this case is the non-European population in India. Forster had close Indian friends, travelled in India, and worked in India. He thus had certain knowledge about the continent and about the colonial administration. His perspective is nevertheless that of the European observer. This concern is reflected by critics claiming that A Passage to India is biased, seeing the novel itself as part of the colonial discourse it seeks to criticise. One response to this objection to Forster's novel has already been discussed: it can be read as a hermeneutic project aiming at understanding the colonial situation, rather than mapping the colonial realities. Another interesting response is Charu Malik's, who uses the punkah wallah as a starting point for discussing the novels omissions and "blank spaces," thus providing a possible explanation to the problem of representing otherness.

In the article "To Express the Subject of Friendship: Masculine Desire and Colonialism in A Passage to India," Malik uses the figure of the punkah wallah at the courtroom as a foundation for analysing the relationship between the English and the Indian in A Passage to India. This is the novel's description of the man pulling the courtroom's fan:

> Almost naked, and splendidly formed, he sat on a raised platform near the back, in the middle of the central gangway, and he caught [Adela's] attention as she came in, and he seemed to control the proceedings. He had the strength and beauty that sometimes come to flower in Indians of low birth … Pulling the rope towards him, relaxing it rhythmically, sending swirls of air over others, receiving none himself, he seemed apart from human destinies, a male Fate, a winnover of souls. (PI 220-221)

His lack of interest and his aloofness disturbs Adela, and sends her in the direction of acknowledging her mistake and thus acquitting Aziz from the charges against him:

> The punkah wallah disrupts the entire legal proceedings, which had been largely initiated so that the English could damn and convict as criminal an Indian, a conviction that would legitimize and prove their moral superiority to rule over the natives of India. (PI 222)

As a servant in the courtroom, the punkah wallah is within the system of British domination, at the same time as he seems completely indifferent to this fact. He does not speak, he does not act, and he does not take part in the proceedings in any other way than providing a stirring of the air. I agree with Malik's observation that "through his physical perfection, his aloofness, his non-Anglicised person, [the punkah wallah] denies [colonial] authority in his refusal to mimic and in his lack of aggression" (222).

While all other characters in the novel are placed within the binary opposition English/Indian, the punkah wallah and the temple servitor in the final section of the novel stand on the outside. These characters are silent and their stories are not told. One of the characteristics of colonialism, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, is the establishment of a system of economic exchange between the (European) imperial powers and their respective colonies. This system creates also a relationship between the population of the imperial power and the population of the colony. It would be natural, then, that fiction dealing with a colony, especially fiction critical to colonialism, tried to represent the population of that colony and explain their living conditions to the home public. The narrator in A Passage to India, however, refrains from doing this with the punkah wallah and the temple servitor:

> To imagine fictionally this colonial space – different from, yet essential to, the formation and identity of empire – without turning his own novel into an imperialist narrative, Forster desists from speaking for the punkah wallah, even at the price of leaving his story untold. In A Passage to India, we witness moments that the text refuses to master, disrupting the plenitude of representation and allowing difference to seep up to the surface. (Malik 223)

By telling their story, the narrator would have needed to give them a place within the colonial system and to "imagine" them from his European position, thus continuing the tradition of seeing the Indian as exotic and upholding the suppressive discourse.

Malik argues convincingly for seeing the punkah wallah and the temple servitor as the best examples of the novel's "others," the Indian population. In his reading, A Passage to India avoids representing the "other," but instead "leave[s] gaps in representation for

'otherness' to show through" (223). Expanding this discussion, it suggests where the narrator draws the line between the domestic and the exotic, the well known and the foreign. To the British in Chandrapore and at Mau, the punkah wallah and the temple servitor are the story's most foreign and incomprehensible ones. Not speaking on behalf of the punkah wallah thus means not translating him into a "western" story about India. This argument, however, implies that the rest of the characters in some way or another take part in the colonial discourse. Some of them work for the British (like Aziz), some have their education from England (like Hamidullah or the lawyers), and some are granted a position in society or a space to function within by the British administration (like the Nawab). Many of the Indian characters and the events taking place in India are comprehensible in a Western perspective because they are part of a colonial discourse defined and structured by the West. On the other hand, the narrator's gaze reveals a deep fascination for these two characters; their physical beauty as well as their indifference to the Western presence is underlined.

2.2.2 Cultural identity

In A Passage to India, everyone appears to speak willingly about the English or the Indian character. It seems as if they all have an opinion about what is means to be English or to be Indian, or at least as if it is possible to pinpoint what these terms mean. Being part of a group, or alternatively breaking out from a group, is a crucial element in how the novel's characters define themselves (or, to be more specific, at least in how the narrative defines the characters). One example is Hamidullah, Aziz's friend, talking about his own group: "'You mustn't put off what you thing right,' said Hamidullah. 'That is why India is in such a plight, because we put off things'" (PI 37). Another example is the Nawab Bahadur exclaiming "Oh, superstition is terrible, terrible! Oh, it is the great defect in our Indian character!" (PI 107). A third example is Ronny talking about the Indians: "Incredible, aren't they, even the best of them? … You've had to do with three sets of Indians today, the Bhattacharyas, Aziz, and this

chap [the Nawab], and it really isn't a coincidence that they've all let you down" (PI 111). Most of the characters in the novel appear to know both the other group and themselves. Does this add to the novel's artificiality and decrease the level of realism? The reader sometimes gets the same feeling as when reading Ibsen; the characters talk well-articulately about their lives and their existential problems, not at all demonstrating the search for words and stuttering that one could expect from a similar real-life conversation.

It is logical that a person's belonging to a group becomes more apparent when contrasted with another group, and the novel thematises this belonging (or non-belonging). The Anglo-Indian community is portrayed as being in sharp contrast to the Indian community in Chandrapore, which is clear already from the very first description of the Civil Station:

> As for the Civil Station itself, it provokes no emotion. It charms not, neither does it repel. It is sensibly planned, with a redbrick Club on its brow, and further back a grocer's and a cemetery, and the bungalows are disposed along roads that intersect at right angles. It has nothing hideous in it, and only the view is beautiful; it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky. (PI 32)

It is not charming and not hideous, it has roads at right angles; the reader imagines a formal, bureaucratic, and perhaps slightly dull group of people, at a safe distance from the city of Chandrapore with its native Indian inhabitants.

Newcomers in Chandrapore are expected to join the club and to keep their behaviour and opinions within the club's established norms. Mrs. Moore visiting a mosque and establishing contact with a Moslem is a breach of etiquette, and Adela's wish to see the "real" India is another one. The club as a whole seems to be inscribed with a set of opinions, although each member sometimes has another version of those opinions: "Individually it knew better; as a club it declined to change" (PI 83). Individual members of the club behave as they wish, but as soon as something happens, like Adela's alleged rape, they are all expected to "form the ranks:" "The man who doesn't toe the line is lost … If you leave the line, you leave a gap in the line" (PI 180).

Members of the Indian community also see themselves in opposition to the Anglo-Indians in Chandrapore, most obviously when it comes to the trial scene. Mahmoud Ali, Aziz's lawyer, states that "I am not defending a case, nor are you [the judge] trying one, we are both of us slaves" (PI 227). There are, however, fractions within the Indian community, especially between the Hindus and the Moslems of the story. When talking about Godbole's illness being treated by Dr. Panna Lal, Aziz remarks "oh yes, both Hindus; there we have it; they hang together like flies and keep everything in the dark" (PI 118). During the trial all the suspicion and lack of trust among the Indians is put aside when meeting a common enemy.

The novel's characters are in a community requiring conformity. You are expected to stick to your group; if you do not, you are "not pukka," and consequently cannot be trusted. Fielding is not pukka, Adela ends up being not pukka, and Mrs. Moore fraternises with "the enemy," but is to a certain degree excused because of her age and her imminent return to England. The novel thematises the positions of individuals versus groups and of individuals in groups. It further seems to establish the idea of conforming as something negative. The characters in favour of sticking to a group, like Ronny or the Turtons, are disapproved of by the narrator, and the characters trying to choose their own paths, like Fielding and Mrs. Moore, earn the narrator's respect. One example is when Adela tries to speak her own opinion about muddles and her environment tries to force her into her group: "I dislike them not because I'm English, but from my own personal point of view" (PI 86). She tries to not to be an English person, but to be an individual. Another example is Mr. Harris' reaction during the trip in the Nawab Bahadur's car: "When English and Indians were both present, he grew self-conscious, because he did not know to whom he belonged. For a little he was vexed by opposite currents in his blood, then they blended, and he belonged to no one but himself" (PI 106). Possible exceptions to this conformity are dismissed in one way or another, adding to

the novel's pessimism: Adela (disgraced), Mrs. Moore (dies), Fielding (returns to England), and Aziz (succumbs and moves to a Moslem state).

Some characters in the narrative are allowed to occupy an in-between position, neither quite English nor quite Indian in their behaviour. Adela is one candidate, but is ultimately seen as too naïve to manoeuvre in both the English and the Indian circles. Mrs. Moore is another, beginning in the Mosque and continuing during the excursion to the caves. She is by Aziz described as an "Oriental;" they are both able to spot goodwill and sympathy across barriers of race and culture. Fielding is a third candidate, but for different reasons: he behaves well towards the Indians because of his political and ethical standards. Common for Mrs. Moore, Aziz, and Fielding is their ability (at least most of the time) to step out of their expected positions and see beyond the stereotypes that otherwise dominate. Seen from the British Club, the Indians are fixed, to borrow Bhabha's term. In order to maintain the colonial discourse, they speak and act towards India and Indians as if they already know them. The stereotypical attitude towards Indians legitimises the British Club's behaviour, even though the Indians not always behave as expected. One simple example is Aziz addressing Mrs. Moore in the mosque: according to Ronny, Aziz is Indian and thus by definition impudent, therefore Mrs. Moore ought to have dismissed him.

After a discussion of the relationship between individuals and groups in A Passage to India, one might ask whether this novel supports the essentialist or the constructivist one of Stuart Hall's different ways of describing cultural identity. The answer is probably neither. The characters are mostly structured in groups according to their ethnic origin, with a few slightly on the side or in-between. The narrative, however, seems to reject the idea of defining oneself in relation to a group at all. The values put forward as positive are instead individuality and the ability to think for oneself. Again, Fielding's attitude seems closest to

that of the narrator: “the world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence” (PI 80).

2.3 Muddle with a colonial twist: personal relations in A Passage to India

Moving from characters in groups to characters as individuals, refreshing a well known Forster term might as well be the first step. For any reader of Forster’s novels, “muddle” should be a familiar concept. It signifies the situation a character ends up in when he or she is in some sort of trouble, and confusion or other reasons prevent this character from seeing the truth. Lucy Honeychurch was in a muddle in A Room with a View, struggling to decide which man to marry; and Maurice Hall was in a muddle in Maurice, torn between society’s expectations and his love for another man. In A Passage to India, most characters are in some sort of muddle. Adela is definitely up to her neck in it, trying to decide whether to marry Ronny or not. Aziz and Fielding are also in a muddle; the sometimes heated circumstances prevent them from seeing which things are important and which are not in their relation. Mrs. Moore is in a muddle, but her muddle is of the more spiritual sort and will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter. The complicating factor in this novel, in contrast to Forster’s previous novels, is of course the colonial setting.

Space is an interesting object of study in all Forster’s novels. The importance of personal relations is common for many Forster novels, and relations are stimulated and challenged by the places at which the novels’ events take place. In Forster’s “Italian” novels, Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with a View, Forster sees possibilities in the Italian landscape not found in England: England is confining and impersonal, whereas Italy stimulates emotions and personal relations which in turn are brought home to challenge existing social structures and prejudices. In A Room with a View, there is a gradual “orientalisation” of the world demonstrated by the Alan sisters’ travel plans to Italy, Greece, and Constantinople. If Italy, then, is a positive influence on personal relationships, one should

think India was even more of the same, but India is a rather different story. Instead of Florence stimulating Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson to fall in love, Chandrapore and the Marabar Caves destroy Adela's and Ronny's relationship. Italy is unconventional, but ultimately safe, whereas India is threatening and unsafe.

In A Passage to India, the mosque, the caves, and the temple challenge social and personal relations and push the novel's plot forward. The mosque signals the close friendship between Aziz and Mrs. Moore and the subsequent contact between the two ladies and Chandrapore's Indian community. The caves are important both regarding the novel's social, political and religious themes. The temple is the final meeting place of Fielding and Aziz, and reintroduces Godbole with his religious and philosophical contributions to the story.

There are a number of interesting relationships in the novel, and this section will focus on selected aspects in the relationships between Adela and Ronny, between Adela and Aziz, between Mrs. Moore and Aziz, and finally between Fielding and Aziz. The focus of this section will be the relationships in view of the novel's setting in a colonised country, the novel's political project, and the effects these factors have on the characters.

2.3.1 Relationships

Bearing in mind the discussion of group identity from the previous section on colonialism, it is interesting to ask whether the characters in A Passage to India represent themselves as individuals or whether they mainly are types representing their groups. Is Ronny a character in his own right, or is he simply a member of the British administration in India? Is Aziz a "round" character, to use the still helpful term coined by Forster in Aspects of the novel, or is he only meant to represent distinctive traits of the Indian as appearing in contact with the Anglo-Indians? The answer is probably a bit of both: characters are in some situations meant to signal the group as a whole, but in other situations to show their personalities. This is connected with the question of representation in general as discussed in the previous chapter:

the narrator is necessarily unable to authentically represent the "other" of the colonial discourse or to convey the totality of the colonial situation.

The novel shows numerous examples of the change characters undergo when coming to India. After having spent some time in India, the British change in the way they behave towards each other and towards the native population. There is a division between the newcomers in India and those who have been there for many years; the first are not socialised into the "proper" way of seeing or doing things, whereas the latter have the routine and experience needed in order to know how to behave and to act in any situation – especially situations including Indians. When the Nawab Bahadur's car has crashed, Ronny took control "after the moment's pause that he permitted himself before taking charge of a situation" (PI 103). On another occasion, he states that "no one can even begin to think of knowing this country until he has been in it twenty years" (PI 50), affirming the Collector's experience and wisdom. This commonly held view leads to a strong hierarchy among the British in Chandrapore; Ronny is clearly above his mother and Adela, yet he is near the bottom compared to the other British colonial administrators in the town.

The relation between Ronny and Adela is the one setting the whole novel off; their intention of getting to know each other better before announcing an engagement is the reason for Adela and Mrs. Moore coming to India. Ronny's and Adela's relationship seems rather anaemic; there are not many sparks between them. They met in the British Lake District, suggesting a relationship on level with the English countryside in terms of wildness. The contrast to India, a land where "the countryside [is] too vast to admit of excellence" (PI 101), is enormous. This affects their sense of perspective:

> Experience, not character, divided them; they were not dissimilar, as humans go; indeed, when compared with the people who stood nearest to them in point of space they became practically identical. The Bhil who was holding an officer's polo pony, the Eurasian who drove the Nawab Bahadur's car, the Nawab Bahadur himself, the Nawab Bahadur's debauched grandson – none would have examined a difficulty so frankly and coolly. (PI 100-101)

Within the home sphere in England, they each have their defining characteristics leading to a spark of romance and a tentative engagement. In India, however, they both fall within the same Anglo-Indian group and their individuality fades away. The places they exist at influence their identity and their relationship, and function as signals to the reader. Later, Adela remarks that they have been "awfully British" (PI 100) about the whole thing, thus underlining the discrepancy between their actions and their surroundings – and also this "British" method's inadequacy when meeting India.

Although the cave incident puts a severe strain on Ronny's and Adela's relationship, their mutual understanding lasts until the trial. Ronny maintains the engagement as long as Adela is seen as Aziz's victim: Adela is an icon of the English woman, and he is an icon of the Firm Colonial Officer enduring painful circumstances to uphold the civilising mission. When she admits being wrong, however, she leaves what McBryde calls a gap in the line. She distances herself from the Anglo-Indian community and destroys the possibility to punish an Indian and demonstrate the power of the British administration's judicial system: "All her friends around her, the entire British Raj [pushes] her forward. She stops, sends the whole thing to smithereens" (PI 251). She sets herself on the outside of her group; Ronny cannot do the same by upholding the engagement with a "persona non grata," and consequently breaks up with her. Ronny seems to be more or less the same person afterwards, but Adela is changed: "Although her hard schoolmistressy manner remained, she was no longer examining life, but being examined by it; she had become a real person" (PI 245). She retreats to Hampstead, and the circle seems closed: from the tranquil Lake District to the mysterious Indian Marabar Caves, and finally back to an orderly London suburb.

Adela's relationship to Aziz is victim of her wish to see the "real India." She eagerly accepts the opportunities to meet him in social settings, and is at first delighted by the chance to learn more about India: "she accepted everything Aziz said as true verbally. In her

ignorance, she regarded him as 'India,' and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India" (PI 89). They do not have much in common, and a reader may suspect Aziz of being friendly towards Adela for political reasons. She represents the "masters" in India and it is tactical to humour her, but otherwise he only expresses affection for Fielding and Mrs. Moore (Jay 117). There seems to be no physical attraction between them; Aziz sees Adela as too plain, and Adela does not seem to think about sex at all. They wander off alone during the cave expedition and with the question of whether Adela loves Ronny in her mind, she enquires about Aziz's marriage:

> What a handsome little Oriental he was, and no doubt his wife and children were beautiful too, for people usually get what they already possess … Probably this man had several wives – Mohannedans always insist on their full four, according to Mrs. Turton. And, having no one else to speak to on that eternal rock, she gave rein to the subject of marriage and said in her honest, decent, inquisitive way: "Have you one wife or more than one?" (PI 163-164)

This extract establishes that Adela has her information about Moslem's from Mrs. Turton, and as Mrs. Turton does not seem reliable elsewhere, this is another example of Adela's naivety in her wish to learn about India. Thinking about her relationship with Ronny, she compares it with Aziz': she finds Aziz attractive, but fails to recognise this feeling through the barriers of different races and the colonial system. Her question about the number of wives effectively establishes Aziz as the "other" in their relationship; Adela sees him as someone fundamentally different from herself (Jay 117). Aziz's shocked reaction confirms that he catches this underlying attitude in her question: "to ask an educated Indian Moslem how many wives he has – appalling, hideous" (PI 164).

Contrary to Adela and Aziz, Mrs. Moore and Aziz establish an affectionate relationship, or at least they feel genuine affection and sympathy for each other. They meet for the first time in the mosque which Mrs. Moore visits during a performance of the play Cousin Kate at the British club. Aziz has been snubbed by his English boss, and wants "to escape from the net and be back among manners and gestures that he knew" (PI 40). He gets

tired when walking home, and enters the mosque to rest. Aziz enters the space of the mosque to find peace; Mrs. Moore leaves the social space of the British seeking an alternative. They are bound "by an ability to recognise and appreciate friendliness in a stranger; and by a willingness to transcend social, cultural, and religious compartments" (Kort 79). They meet again at Fielding's party, and for the last time during the cave expedition. She behaves kindly towards him, unlike everything expected from an English woman towards an Indian man, and he can relate to her without the restraints of colonial politics. After the alleged assault on Adela, she is convinced that Aziz is innocent and clearly says so, but is seen as gradually more confused and introvert. At the trial, she becomes almost a goddess. She is chanted to by the Indian crowd outside the courtroom: if she were there, she would speak the truth and solve the tense situation. By this time, however, she has already died at sea.

The last relationship to be commented upon is the one between Fielding and Aziz. This has been much debated in the body of critical work on Forster, and it became even more interesting after the posthumous publication of Maurice, with its suggestion of possible homosexual themes in other Forster works. Aziz and Fielding seem to have an immediate sympathy for each other, seen for the first time when Aziz pretends to have a spare collar stud for Fielding before the party at the college. Another example is Aziz showing Fielding the picture of his dead wife, and a third is Fielding's firm support for Aziz when Aziz is arrested, despite reactions both from the English and the Indian communities.

The strong undercurrent of affection between them has been taken to signalise a relationship going beyond that of traditional heterosexual male friends. Their relationship is put forward as a possible way out of the tense colonial situation. If these two men are able to become friends and maintain a friendship, then their nations should manage the same:

> A Passage to India implies that a shift in the paradigm, which privileges heterosexuality as "normal," to include same-sex relationships could help eliminate the structure of dominance prevalent in the meeting of two races. The friendship between Aziz and Fielding, with its coded pattern of erotic attraction,

> may be seen to present an instance of deviant, socially disapproved desire as the basis for new, free nations, which, for many modern nations, necessarily means independence form the yoke of colonial rule. (Malik 231)

Aziz's and Fielding's affection cut across the traditional power structure in Chandrapore, establishing a new alliance between an Indian and an English man. They try to see each other as individuals, not as representatives for their respective groups. The society around them, however, opposes their friendship: Mrs. Turton characterises Fielding as "not pukka" (PI 49) and Aziz is looked upon with suspicion because of his relationships with the English. The friendship between Aziz and Fielding undermines the colonial discourse, leading both into trouble with their respective groups.

Aziz's and Fielding's relationship connects to a homosexual undercurrent also noticeable in the narrator's fascination by the punkah puller and the temple servitor. Teresa Hubel and Malik see these two silent figures as symbols of the narrator's affections for India. Hubel argues that the punkah puller and the temple servitor are sites "where the discourse of power and knowledge are pronounced" (359). These men are described as strong and beautiful, enigmatically controlling their situation and their surroundings: "these two masculine figures function as the embodiment of their author's feelings about India, about India's attractions and its relationship to the West" (Hubel 359). The descriptions of these men's bodies, combined with the affectionate relationship between Aziz and Fielding, contribute to a homoerotic undercurrent in the novel; the narrator's gaze is male and possibly homosexual.

The relationship between Fielding and Aziz is contrasted with relationships including women. Theresa Hubel opens her essay "Liberal Imperialism as a Passage to India" with the observation that Forster is hard on women. Hubel sees the novel as "a novel principally about men, about their attempts to reach across continents, across cultures, across race in order to understand an even to love one another" (352). In A Passage to India, women seem to

function as obstacles to this potential union; they spoil the friendship between men. This connects to Malik's argument of seeing the friendship of men as a possibility to unite nations, but with a negative twist. Hubel criticises A Passage to India for not portraying the women in the colonial situation positively. In my opinion, she accuses the novel for not presenting a complete picture of the colonial situation, something which is not the novel's intention.

The novel contains several examples of the dubious role of women, particularly wives. Fielding observes that "it is possible to keep in with Indians and Englishmen, but that he who would also keep in with Englishwomen must drop the Indians. The two wouldn't combine" (PI 80). The English Woman becomes an institution among Anglo-Indians in the novel, and has to be protected at any cost. For this she earns the narrator's resentment and ridicule. Hubel argues that the English women seem more responsible than the English men for the racial situation in India, and also that they force Aziz and Fielding to choose sides (354). It is partly due to their marriages that Aziz and Fielding no longer can be friends; they have no arena in which their wives can be included in a cross-cultural relationship: "All [their] stupid misunderstandings had been cleared up, but socially they had no meeting-place" (PI 312). I disagree with Hubel in interpreting the novel's attitude towards women as a homosexual author's indifference towards women as such. It is more relevant to see the novel's presentation of women as problematising the stereotypical, heterosexual social conventions of the colonial situation. Colonial discourse governs all areas of life, including the relationship between women and men. Also in this respect Aziz and Fielding challenge the norms.

Forster's novel investigates the possibilities of personal relationships and love (at least between men), and also of their potential to change society and promote a union between different races and nations. A recurrent theme in several of Forster's novel is precisely the role of sexuality as "a potentially destabilizing force that undermines class and convention" (Martin and Piggford 13). In the last section, Aziz and Fielding meet again and resolve their

differences. Their conclusion, however, is ironic: freeing such a diverse community as India from the British and creating an Indian nation is impossible. They imagine a utopia where existing restrictions are gone and they can be friends, but "not yet" and "not there" (PI 316).

Forster borrowed the title for his own novel from Walt Whitman's poem "Passage to India." Combining Whitman and Forster, it is interesting to take a look at another Whitman poem to illuminate the discussion of A Passage to India. This is the fourth poem from Whitman's cycle "Live Oak With Moss":

> THIS moment as I sit alone, yearning and pensive, it seems to me there are
> other men, in other lands, yearning and pensive.
> It seems to me I can look over and behold them, in Germany, France,
> Spain--or far away in China, India or Russia--talking other dialects,
>
> And it seems to me if I could know those men I should love them as I love
> menin my own lands,
> It seems to me they are as wise, beautiful, benevolent, as many in my own lands;
> O I think we should be brethren--I think I should be happy with them. (2098-99)

It is clear that Forster read Whitman, and in my reading of A Passage to India, this Whitman poem shares the narrator's vision. The poem's "I" is a man dreaming about a world where all men can be brothers, and where all men can be as close as men in his own land are. The poem suggests that good forces in all countries can unite and bring about change; A Passage to India has shown two men that may be part of such a project.

2.3.2 Characters and places

One of the novel's recurrent questions concerns the relationship between characters and places. How does the place you exist/live in affect you as a person and a citizen? Several of the characters have an opinion about this question. One example is McBryde, who in a conversation with Fielding states that a person's birthplace is a defining characteristic: "All unfortunate natives are criminal at heart, for the simple reason that they live south of latitude 30. They are not to blame, they have not a dog's chance – we should be like them if we settled here" (PI 176). This is another example, describing the break-up after Fielding's party:

> Everyone was cross or wretched. It was as if irritation exuded from the very soil. Could one have been so petty on a Scotch moor or an Italian alp? Fielding wondered afterwards. There seemed no reserve of tranquillity to draw upon in India. Either none, or else tranquillity swallowed up everything, as it appeared to do for professor Godbole. (PI 95)

The text establishes a relation between a place and a character's state of mind; and a character reacts differently according to his or her location.

The previous section focused on how certain places, like the mosque, the caves, and the temple, are used to challenge social norms and structures. This point can be taken one step further: places in this novel carry meaning, they are used as tools by the narrator to symbolise certain qualities in characters or relationships. Adela and Ronnie met in the Lake District, one of the most idyllic and tranquil parts of England, and break up their relationship after the cave incident in India. After the turmoil in Chandrapore, Adela retreats to Hampstead. The Lake District and Hampstead signal the vision of "good old England," the uncomplicated life far away from everything exotic and colonial.

Forster's earlier novels also demonstrate this technique. Gail Fincham, in her essay "Space and Place in the Novels of E. M. Forster," sees in several Forster novels "a pattern of constriction and expansion – containerised space versus free space" (1). In A Room with a View, Florence and Italy are presented as sites of a more emotional and affective society than the English, stimulating love and companionship instead of insisting on social conventions. Howard's End uses the house with the same name as the central motif of the novel. Wesley Kort sees this as a common tool in Forster's narratives:

> Personal spaces, such as Howards End or the Schlegel home in London, not only acquire qualities from the persons who inhabit them but also bring out those qualities. Mutuality is created between a dwelling and its inhabitants that, while it has first of all a physical character, is spiritual as well. (84)

Thus, when the narrator in A Passage to India describes a place, he also draws a connection to the characters occupying that place and uses the place as part of his characterisation.

However, I agree with Fincham in not recognising the same clear cut distinction between containerised space and free space in A Passage to India. This novel is on the other hand characterised by an "experience of space [becoming] increasingly fraught for both author and fictional protagonists. … The forces of capitalism and imperialism crowd out the possibilities of the liberal humanist world-view" (2). A Passage to India no longer shows a possible way out of a confining situation, there is no escape like George and Lucy's honeymoon in Florence or Maurice and Alec's disappearance from a society hostile to their love.

In A Passage to India, there is an opposition between the safe, well known England and the exotic, mystic India. A strange passage in the novel, however, is where the narrator, when discussing Fielding's travels, proclaims the "Mediterranean as the human norm." Places near or around the Mediterranean Ocean seem to occupy a privileged position. When characters travel to or from England, the narrator comments on the in-between places they pass on their way. He mentions Aden, the Suez Canal, and Venice. The Suez Canal is presented as the gateway to Asia and the Far East; this canal is also used in Whitman's "Passage to India," describing the opening of the Suez Canal as one of the new wonders of the world. These in-between places seem to function as a middle position between England and India; they are removed from England, but still comprehensible to an Englishman. They seem to prepare the characters for India and the mystic Orient, or for the return to a safe home in Europe and England. One of the novel's ideals is connected to "culture, goodwill, and intelligence," and now the Mediterranean is another.

2.4 The peace that passeth understanding: spirituality in A Passage to India

In the novel's treatment of the political and the personal, there is a conflict between the ideals of "goodwill, culture, and intelligence" on the one hand and the rather harsh colonial realities on the other. Also when it comes to the spiritual and religious dimension of A Passage to India, there is opposition between East and West, between England and India. Christianity is

juxtaposed with Hinduism and Islam, against the immensity and incomprehensibility of the Indian subcontinent. In previous sections of this chapter, it has been possible to register optimism and hope for the future; when it comes to the religious aspect, however, the novel is characterised by a gloomier tone. There is much previous criticism on the spirituality of A Passage to India, but the focus in this section, as in the previous two, will be on colonialism and identity, on the question of representation, and the novel as a process of understanding.

What, if anything, does the narrative renders incomprehensible? Where is the narrator in trouble; what is he not able to communicate to the reader? India might be one part of the answer; Indians, at least some of them, another part; the Marabar Caves and the horrible echo within them, that affects Mrs. Moore so strongly, a third. When reading A Passage to India, the reader gets a feeling of a narrator with a vision, just like some of his characters. In the previous sections of this chapter, Fielding and his ideals have been closest to those of the narrator. When it comes to the spiritual and religious dimensions of the novel, it may be time to look more closely at Mrs. Moore and professor Godbole.

Peter Burra compares Mrs. Moore to other prominent Forster figures, finding a pattern in her behaviour that corresponds to for instance Emerson senior in A Room with a View and Mrs. Wilcox in Howard's End:

> Mr. Forster introduces … what one can only describe as an elemental character; one who sees straight through perplexities and complications, who is utterly percipient of the reality behind appearances, both in matters of general truth and of incidents in the story. Their greater wisdom, their particular knowledge, put into ironic contrast the errors and illusions of the rest. (Burra 328)

This observation corresponds well with the discoveries in previous sections of this chapter. Mrs. Moore functions as a contrast to her son, to Adela, and to Aziz, questioning their positions and the truths they advocate. She is thus on the narrator's side when it comes to discovering the follies and inconsistencies of the colonial system in Chandrapore. Also during the trial, when she is invoked as a witness and her image to the crowd takes on the quality of a

Hindu goddess, Mrs. Moore is seen as one who always tells the truth: “she would have proved [Aziz’] innocence, she was on our side, she was poor Indians’ friend” (PI 226).

Mrs. Moore is a religious woman, but exits the novel disillusioned and confused. At the beginning of the novel, she is presented as a warm-hearted and kind elderly lady who takes care of Adela in her efforts to find her own path through life and marriage. She intuitively recognises kindness in others, as demonstrated when meeting Aziz. She believes in God and uses her religion as guide when meeting India: “God has put us on earth to love our neighbours and to show it, and He is omnipresent, even in India, to se how we are succeeding” (PI 70). This is the ideal, but then the Indian reality enters and disturbs her mind:

> She found [God] increasingly difficult to avoid as she grew older, and He had been constantly in her thought since she entered India, though oddly enough He satisfied her less. She must needs pronounce His name frequently, as the greatest she knew, yet she had never found it less efficacious. Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence. (PI 71)

The diversity of India starts troubling her. The feeling increases until reaching a climax in the cave, where she panics: “for an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo” (PI 158).

The echo has a severely disturbing effect on Mrs. Moore, and she deteriorates after the cave incident. Her echo is described as meaningless and impossible to interpret:

> The echo … is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. “Boum” is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or “bou-oum”, or “ou-boum” – utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce “boum”. (PI 159)

The echo gradually undermines everything Mrs. Moore hitherto has believed in: “Pathos, piety, courage – they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value” (PI 160). The echo renders everything meaningless, even Mrs. Moore’s religion. This has been described in linguistic terms:

> The monotonous "echo" cuts off signifiers (the words the visitors of the Caves call out) from signifieds (the meaning they seem to expect), leaving the signifiers to float meaninglessly. It does so by taking a sound that could have signified something and replacing it with a sound that cannot have any signified whatever. Reference is impossible because the sign itself has been rendered incomplete, there is only babble … about to be sucked back into some sort of primal linguistic void. (Jay 111)

Language implodes when the meeting the echo, and the narrator tries to convey the destruction of expected structures of meaning. Mrs. Moore's experience in the caves is the point to which everything else in the novel is compared. This is the novel's "ground zero," the one incident affecting the reader's understanding of the rest of the novel.

Up to this point, the novel could have been read as a relatively peaceful meeting of three large religions: the Christian Mrs. Moore, the Moslem Aziz, and the Hindu professor Godbole. India may be a place with too much spirituality, but nevertheless people seem to find comfort and support in their religious activities. All these characters are, however, at some point rendered meaningless. Mrs. Moore descends into confusion, Aziz dreams of reviving the past glory of India's previous Moslem rulers, and Godbole, at least as observed from the European position, is amusing but incomprehensible. Religion is more or less seen as a social activity, depending on tradition and culture. Against this backdrop, the destructive power of the "ou-boum" enters the story.

The term uncanny describes this opposition between the familiar and the "knowable" on one hand, versus the incomprehensibility of India on the other. The uncanny is, as described in the introduction, "that species of the frightening that that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 124). India itself may be in this category: the novel opens in the British milieu at Chandrapore, where the established truths guide the Britons in how to behave and how to rule India. These are, however, undermined by the narrative and rendered superficial and wrong. What was familiar, India as seen from the British perspective, becomes unfamiliar upon meeting the "ou-boum" of the caves. Religion

suffers the same fate, at least to Mrs. Moore: her once familiar Christian religion breaks down when exposed to experiences so fundamentally different from all her previous ones.

This actualises yet again the question of representing otherness, of describing the specifically Indian in this narrative. How is a narrator to represent the unknown, the "other" of the colonial discourse? One answer is Malik's: he sees in A Passage to India, exemplified by the punkah puller in the courtroom, a narrative that opens up spaces for difference, openings where it is allowed to be different which are not necessarily filled. The Marabar Caves' mysterious form and lack of content express this difference: their elusiveness and lack of meaningful characteristics comprise everything that is incomprehensible about India, and they pose the novel's greatest challenge to established colonial authority. The narrator's attempt at a textual rendering of the echo is significant, but necessarily doomed to fail.

In the previous sections of this chapter, Fielding was suggested as Forster's mouthpiece. Perhaps is Godbole a better candidate, with his unwillingness to be specific and his seeming aversion against giving definite answers: "nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else" (PI 101). Are the systems of representation presented so profoundly different that it is impossible to step over the barriers? Is this why Mrs. Moore dies? She steps out of the western, Christian perspective upon hearing the echo, and instead enters the "other," the incomprehensible. It may have become impossible for her to step back and re-enter her old life in England. She is nevertheless present in the last part of the story as well, both through her children Stella and Ralph as well as through Godbole: "he remembered a wasp seen he forgot where" (PI 283), alluding to the wasp Mrs. Moore sees in the novel's first section. There is a connection between them; they both know the Marabar caves.

One of the novel's ideals is summed up in Fielding's phrase "goodwill, culture, and intelligence;" another in the description of "the Mediterranean as the human norm." A third

significant phrase is “the Peace that Passeth understanding,” mentioned during the party celebrating Aziz’s acquittal (PI 251). This phrase is also used in T. S. Eliot’s comment to The Waste Land, describing the last line of his poem: “Shantih, shantih, shantih” (Eliot 2160). Eliot looked to Hindu mythology to find a suitable conclusion to his monumental poem; a simple “amen” at the end of a poem like that would not be sufficient. In Eastern religion he found something impossible to express in Western terms, a notion characteristic for the Modernist period. The last line in Eliot’s poem signals a hope or desire for a place with peace beyond language and conventions. The danger here, as Sara Suleri points out, is to reduce India to a symbol of “something the Western mind must learn about itself” (108). A Passage to India read as a description of India runs the danger of falling into that category, but the novel read as a hermeneutic project struggles to avoid that error.

2.5 Coda

The analysis of A Passage to India has shown an ambitious and multifaceted novel approaching the colonial situation through the fictional city of Chandrapore in India. The novel has several themes intertwined, operating both on a political, personal, and spiritual level, and each part of my analysis has focussed on one of the novel’s ideals. The novel’s narrator is an extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator with a clear voice visible through the text. The reflective mode of writing employed suggests a narrator searching for truth, not just presenting facts. The novel’s placement in a literary period has been much debated, but with some qualifications A Passage to India is a modernist novel, most importantly because of the hermeneutic approach to the act of storytelling.

On the political level, my reading concentrated on Fielding’s hope for a world in which culture, goodwill, and intelligence will prosper. The narrative rejects the group thinking prevalent in most situations, and instead supports individuality. One of the most important questions raised by the novel concerns the representation of the “other” of the colonial

situation, in this novel the Indian population. The text solves this problem by stepping back from the attempt at describing all Indian characters, as demonstrated with the punkah wallah. The novel shows a colonial discourse embracing all other areas of life, but this figure is silent.

Most of the novel's characters are in a "muddle" with regard to their personal relations, and their situation is highlighted by pressure from the colonial discourse. The relationship between Aziz and Fielding is particularly interesting, since it seems to subvert the traditional racist, heteronormative structures of power in Chandrapore. Places are an important tool in the novel's discussion of England versus India. They are used both as a means of characterisation and as sites for challenging social norms and structures, most prominently demonstrated by the mosque, the caves, and the temple.

The spiritual dimension of A Passage to India centres on Mrs. Moore and professor Godbole. Mrs. Moore is a speaker of truth, she signals wisdom and insight, but is ultimately rendered incapable of crossing the threshold between the well known and the foreign, the English and the Indian systems of representation. Professor Godbole is an enigmatic figure, which ultimately is incomprehensible to a Western observer. In Fincham's words, "every conversation in which Godbole participates exemplifies [the] non-coincidence of (Western) signifier with (Indian) signified" (13) – Godbole and the narrator simply do not speak the same language.

3 The Impressionist

3.1 Introducing the novel

The Impressionist by Hari Kunzru is at first glance a historical novel about a young man searching to find his niche in the world, but it is also a conscious and intelligent play with the novel genre. The novel displays unusual diversity as far as presentation the protagonist's experiences are concerned; there are hilariously funny episodes coupled with deeply satiric ones. My analysis connects to this diversity and playfulness. The analysis opens with an introduction to the novel discussing its structure and narration, trying to utilise the novel's fragmented appearance. The reader's expectations to a colonial novel are systematically reversed, alluding to the "groundwork" laid in previous colonial literature such as Forster's A Passage to India. Through a wide variety of places, relations, and events, the novel poses the question of how personal identity is formed and maintained. The analysis will combine these two main elements, colonialism and identity, with focus on to the colonial space in which the protagonist manoeuvres. Space is important when discussing a postcolonial novel like Kunzru's, and this particular narrative gives ample opportunity for such reflections.

3.1.1 Structure

The Impressionist is a novel in six relatively independent chapters, following a man from conception and birth until his mid-twenties. The reader is introduced to Pran, an illegitimate child being born and raised in a high caste family in Agra, and his subsequent dismissal from the family upon the discovery of his illegitimacy. He is the son of an English man and an Indian woman and in most respects a mix of the two cultures. Contrary to E. M. Forster, Kunzru describes a passage away from India. After his dismissal, Pran travels through India, continues to England, and eventually ends up in Africa.

The reader follows the protagonist under different names through widely different situations: as the youth Pran Nath in the upper class family of his assumed father, as the

prostitute Rukshana, as “Pretty Bobby” in the streets of Bombay, and finally as Jonathan Bridgeman as British public school pupil and later Oxford student and anthropologist. In this analysis the novel’s protagonist will be referred to with all his different names, but most often as Pran. Between some chapters most of his characteristics change, and the reader is made to reflect on what, if anything, the protagonist brings with him from one section to the next, and whether he actually is the same character throughout the whole novel. Why has the author chosen to write a novel that is so diverse and with a protagonist in such shifting circumstances? Could this be seen as a collection of separate short stories instead, or is there something in the novel connecting the protagonist’s shifting appearances and various milieus?

One way of using this fragmentation constructively is to see the novel as a picaresque. Following the definition in Encyclopaedia Britannica, the protagonist in a picaresque usually

> drifts from place to place and from one social milieu to another in his effort to survive … The picaro wanders about and has adventures among people from all social classes and professions, often just barely escaping punishment for his own lying, cheating, and stealing. He is a casteless outsider who feels inwardly unrestrained by prevailing social codes and mores, and he conforms outwardly to them only when it serves his own ends. (“Picaresque”)

This definition accurately describes Pran’s adventures in The Impressionist. He gains access to as different situations as a high-caste Agra family, a British missionary station in Bombay, the court of the princely state of Fatehpur, and the English educational system; from the beggars in Agra to the professors of Oxford. Pran creates new versions of himself to fit in in new situations, but everywhere he is an outsider. In Agra he is an illegitimate son, in Bombay he is an atheist at a missionary station, and at Oxford he is a man without connections (which is seen as very suspect by his fellow Oxonians). At several moments in the story he is in deep trouble, and escapes just by sheer luck and coincidences, like the dismissal from his father’s house forcing him to beg or the riots in Bombay when the real Jonathan Bridgeman is killed. He does not seem too preoccupied with evaluating the moral standards of his actions; Pran appears as profoundly self-centred and focussed on his own interests. A reader does not spot

much regret in Pran for the way young Pran behaves towards servants in his father's house or for taking over Jonathan Bridgeman's life.

What, then, is the point of this wandering? Pran's experiences correspond with another feature of the picaresque, again using the Encyclopaedia Britannica's definition:

> The picaro's narrative becomes in effect an ironic or satirical survey of the hypocrisies and corruptions of society, while also offering the reader a rich mine of observations concerning people in low or humble walks of life ("Picaresque").

Through Pran's journey, The Impressionist presents both the far corners and the centre of the British Empire. His early life in India and his experiences in Professor Chapel's expedition to Africa represent the "outskirts" of civilisation, his student life at Oxford the centre. The novel's picaresque form gives an impression of the British colonial experience from both the colonisers' and the colonised subjects' point of view. Its episodic structure contributes to the variety of situations presented and a diverse image of the colonial society. Reading the novel as a picaresque gives thus a stronger focus on society rather than on the protagonist.

The picaresque is a story in which the picaro himself is not necessarily the story's main point. An alternative way of seeing The Impressionist would be to read the novel as a Bildungsroman, "the folklore tale of the dunce who goes out into the world seeking adventure and learns wisdom the hard way" ("Bildungsroman"). One reviewer sees this novel as a "Bildungsroman with a Hindu twist" (Taitz), following Pran through all his incarnations. The Bildungsroman, however, would imply a stronger focus on the protagonist's moral and spiritual development, and the reader would expect a hero who learns his lesson. Any learning is hard to spot with Pran; it is highly dubious whether he has developed as a person or learned anything at all when the novel ends. This is again typical of the genre: "unlike the idealistic knight-errant hero … the picaro is a cynical and amoral rascal who, if given half a chance, would rather live by his wits than by honourable work" ("Picaresque").

The fragmented structure of a picaresque is an inheritance from an earlier stage of the novel's development: "in its episodic structure the picaresque novel resembles the long, rambling romances of medieval chivalry, to which it provided the first realistic counterpart" ("Picaresque"). There are famous picaresques in earlier literature, Don Quixote perhaps being the most prominent example, but the general impression is somewhat different in The Impressionist: instead of a knight, there is an illegitimate Indian boy; instead of a princess to woe, there is a shallow daughter of a professor; instead of windmills to combat, there are sedated tigers. This novel is thus a postcolonial variant on the picaresque, outwardly conforming to its basic structure, but with all the elements changed. Rudyard Kipling's Kim shares some of The Impressionist's features, among them the presentation of Indian society from the bottom and the cultural diversity described in the mingling of a wide variety of characters and events. Kunzru's epigraph from Kim shows a dept to this previous novel, but in The Impressionist the story is reversed; instead of Kim's wonder at the Indian society, there is Pran's wonder at the English. The novel's picaresque form thus supports both the question of British colonialism, comprising the first main section of this chapter, and the question of the protagonist's identity, constituting the second main section of this chapter.

3.1.2 Narration

Already from The Impressionist's first chapter, the reader understands that this is not a solid and serious novel in the tradition of Kipling and Conrad. The novel opens with Ronald Forrester's wandering in the desert, describing his "pink perspiring face" (Kunzru 3)[2] and his wish to see a country with no trees (IM 5). During the flood that suddenly arises out of nowhere, Forrester takes refuge in a cave with Amrita, who also arose out of nowhere and whom Forrester ends up being seduced by. The next morning Forrester panics, runs out of the cave and into the water desperately seeking something familiar, "lets out an incoherent cry and hails [a tree] like a cab and jumps on it and is swept away" (IM 16). This is a highly

[2] References to The Impressionist are henceforth indicated by the abbreviation IM.

irreverential description of a colonial officer, compared to for instance the way Kipling describes Creighton in Kim.

The narrator in The Impressionist is a third-person narrator, with a narrative voice very much present in the text. This narrator too could have been labelled "omniscient," but as noted in the previous chapter, this term is equally problematic here. Introducing new places and characters, the narrative voice speaks with authority and apparent insight, presenting things "as they are," but not necessarily focussing on the most obvious characteristics of the characters or places. Sometimes undertaking a mock-academic manner, the narrator is more or less gently being funny on expense of what is portrayed; he is not necessarily portraying the characters with their best interests in mind. This is one example from a scene where Major Privett-Clampe enters a bedroom to have intercourse with Pran as Rukshana:

> [Major Privett-Clampe's] joy at the happy occasion overflows altogether. Waving his arms in a windmilling mad-conductor motion, he bounds forward across the room. Delicacy suggests that this juncture might be suitable for a short survey of the history and geography of the principality of Fatehpur, a fascinating subject which has largely escaped the attentions of scholars of the Punjab. (IM 94)

The academic language, the understatements, and the gentle scholarly tone of this section stand in sharp contrast to the rather harsh events that are actually taking place. This is one of the places Forster's narrator comes into mind, with the mild irony and humorous style, which suggest as much as they describe.

The narrator of The Impressionist tells the story of Pran and his adventures, the places he sees and the characters he meets, but also functions as a filter between the reader and the story. The narrator is visible not only in choice of style and tone, but also in small comments to the story. One illustrative example is this little frustration: "An objective observer (here, as is so often the case, sadly lacking) might observe" (IM 57). In sections like these, The Impressionist's narrator resembles that of Forster's A Passage to India, suggesting an extradiegetic level also in The Impressionist. Another author frequently mentioned in

connection with Kunzru is Salman Rushdie, also a postcolonial author with India as his originating perspective. The narrative style in some sections, the astrologer present at Pran's birth, the abundance of details, and the adventurous action echoes a novel like Rushdie's Midnight's Children.

One of the most interesting features of The Impressionist is the difference between its setting and time of production. It is set in a period where the British Empire was strong, at the same time as it is written in 2002 with so much information available about the weaknesses of that empire. This creates an irony in the narration of the story: the reader registers the events portrayed in the novel, at the same time as he has access to more information about the same events. The novel has lots of comic elements, but in order to catch the satire, the reader must understand this discrepancy between what is narrated and what was actually taking place during the imperialist era. The question is, then, whether the narrator also is situated in 1920, or whether he is placed near the novel's time of production. A narrator not situated in the same temporal plane as the story would imply an extradiegetic level and an implicit understanding between the narrator and his narratee. The story seems to be directed at someone who actually catches the above mentioned discrepancy and is able to understand the irony in what is being told – thus supporting an extradiegetic level.

3.1.3 Literary periods

The Impressionist's reviewers seem unanimous in placing the novel in a literary tradition also including Forster, Kipling and Conrad. One reviewer even goes as far as to see the novel as a speculation on what could have happened if Adela and Aziz had consummated their love in the cave. He sees "the ghost of E. M. Forster" in the novel, and wonders if the result could have been Pran, a mix between East and West (Kipen). The reviewers focus on imperialism, race, and the question of identity when presenting the novel. They are not on line as to

whether Kunzru's mock-ironic style is successful or just superficial, but seem to agree that this way of treating British imperialism is at least very promising.

The period, in which Kunzru writes is more difficult to describe than Forster's modernist period, mainly because this is the period of today; the neat categorisations and structures of literary epochs are most often only visible in retrospect. Postmodernism is one possible term, seeing contemporary literature as a reaction to or development of the modernist period. According to Michael Bell, "the change from Modernism to postmodernism is not a difference in metaphysics so much as a different stage in the digestion of the same metaphysics" (9). This would mean seeing Forster and Kunzru at different stages of the same process; characteristics from the modernist period could also be found in recent literature. The term postmodernism, however, is so elusive that it may be more confusing than helpful, and it is better instead to take a look at The Impressionist's most prominent features.

The narrator's ironic distance is one element: as a historical novel, The Impressionist keeps a clear distance between the narrative and the actual events described. This novel is a story told by a narrator who does not pretend to give a factual or realistic story of a man in India born one hundred years ago. In this respect, the novel can be read in the same way as A Passage to India. On the other hand, the two novels differ on the ideals presented in the texts. The narrator of The Impressionist, or at least the novel's implied author, would be far from suggesting a totalising explanation of "life, the universe and everything." On the contrary, one of the novel's most predominant features is the randomness of Pran's experiences and the following relativity when it comes to questions of norms and values. Bhabha sees current postcolonial literature as preoccupied with "the construction of culture and the invention of tradition" (172), a feature very much present in The Impressionist.

3.2 "The Savage Follies of Empire"[3]: colonialism in The Impressionist

The narrative space established in The Impressionist is diverse; travelling in India, England, and Africa, our protagonist enters different geographical areas and different layers of society in each chapter. The geographical basis for the narrative is divided into three main categories: India (Agra, Amritsar, Bombay, Fatehpur), England (London, the public school, Oxford), and Africa. Pran travels from the outskirts of Empire to the centre, and then back to another outskirt. The novel shows awareness of space, and explicitly uses the term "palimpsest," suggesting the ascription of meaning to places. Ultimately, the common denominator for all locations is that they are within the British Empire.

The first section of this chapter has shown that The Impressionist can be read as a picaresque novel, with Pran as the picaro. The novel tells a story which shows various aspects of British colonialism, but in a humorous style; Kunzru exaggerates to make his point about the colonial experience. The representation of some of the characters in the novel is so absurd and so extremely unrealistic that the narrator must have done it deliberately and consciously. In a picaresque, the focus is more on the society being portrayed than on the protagonist, which sets the starting point for a discussion of the novel's treatment of colonial politics.

3.2.1 Colonialism

Edward Said's Orientalism was briefly presented in the introduction to this thesis, but when discussing The Impressionist, it is interesting to take a closer look at Said's distinctions between different types of orientalism. These two texts are not necessarily completely compatible: fiction is one thing and theory is another, their objectives and modes of writing are very different. Nevertheless, Said's work can illuminate my discussion of colonialism in The Impressionist and help structure this chapter. Said establishes a three part definition of "orientalism," where each part is echoed in The Impressionist and helps clarify the postcolonial reading of this novel.

[3] Quoted from Janet Maslin's review of The Impressionist.

First, according to Said, “orientalism” can be seen as an academic concept: any scholar teaching, writing or researching about the Orient, independent of any specific fields of study, would be an orientalist, and his field orientalism (Said, Orientalism 2). In The Impressionist, it is possible to read professor Chapel and his anthropological studies of the Fotse people in Africa in light of this definition. Jonathan is led into the anthropology lessons of Professor Chapel at Oxford, where the professor teaches his students how to map an unknown country, with his own expeditions to the Fotse in Africa as an example. This results in exaggerated and absurd descriptions of Chapel’s lectures and his business in Africa. The whole Fo-business, about how the Fotse people arrange the inheritance when someone dies, is a parody on what the world looks like from an Oxford college.

Professor Chapel is one of the scholars laying down the ground-work for colonialism, who provide the scientific knowledge about the colonies on which the government can base its rule. An important element of colonialism is to gather information about the potential or existing colonies, and Pran does his bit: he is supposed to count the Fotse for tax reasons. One element of the definition of colonialism was the inclusion of a colonised country in the capitalist system of economic exchange; building roads in the Fotse country and counting the people in Africa for tax reasons is one part of that project. The reader would expect serious dealings with foreign countries, but instead gets a more or less crazy professor with strange compulsions, who leads an expedition which turns out to be disastrous. The narrator comments the colonial system by parodying it.

Said’s second meaning of the term “orientalism” is a more general one: it is “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’.” This establishes a basic distinction between East and West, setting “the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind’” (Said, Orientalism 2-3).

Elements in The Impressionist can be read as variations on this definition: one is “The Agra Post and Telegraph Club,” where characters of mixed British-Indian origin meet, but do not manage to fit in with either milieu; another is the MacFarlane’s differing experiences in India, her positive and including, his negative and prejudicial.

One place where the difference between East and West is demonstrated is in the chapter titled “Pretty Bobby.” The protagonist uses the name Robert and is in the care of Reverend and Mrs. Macfarlane, a couple running a missionary station in Bombay. His abilities to manoeuvre on the Bombay streets are impressive; he earns a living by performing services to various characters in his local community and blends in in most situations. This section can be read with Rudyard Kipling’s Kim in mind, there is a resemblance between Robert and Kim in the way they embrace the cultural diversity of India and find their way through the bottom layers of society.

In this chapter, the narrator gives a long introduction to the Macfarlanes’ way into their service in India. The most noticeable feature of Reverend Macfarlane is his insistence on the supreme status of everything English/Western and Christian, in addition to his moral stubbornness. With Mrs. Macfarlane, it is her journey from Scotland to Bombay; her conversion from scepticism and fear of India, to her embracing the culture and becoming gradually more assimilated into it. First, she saw Bombay and “the Orient” (IM 216) as a “nightmarish place” (IM 217), but eventually she changed her mind, starting “to marvel at how full this world was, how full of things she understood nothing about” (IM 218).

The Macfarlane’s differing attitudes towards India have created a severe breach between them, effectively symbolised by the brick wall in the back yard of the missionary station dividing their home into two separate spheres. Bobby, however, is able to move back and forth across this wall. If the wall symbolises the different attitude of the Macfarlanes to India, then Bobby is the one who can navigate between the two. This chapter is one of several

places where the concepts “Orient” and “Occident” are used in the novel. The Orient is for example described in this way through the eyes of Mrs. Macfarlane: “Her image of the Orient was vague in the extreme, a misty vision of palm trees and coconuts and brightly dressed women” (IM 216). The Occident (that is, the West) is later described through Pran, when arriving in England as Jonathan Bridgeman: “Ah, the mystic Occident! Land of wool and cabbage and lecherous round-eyed girls!” (IM 289). The text thus establishes the East and the West, the Orient and the Occident, as opposites. Just as Bobby could manoeuvre between Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane, he later manoeuvres between the East and the West, between his Indian self and his English appearance.

Pran’s manoeuvres are relatively successful until he embarks on Professor Chapel’s expedition to Africa. Both Jonathan and Mrs. Macfarlane are afraid when entering the colonies, he in Africa and she in India; they are not at all aware or certain of their alleged superior position. This is in sharp contrast to the reverend Macfarlane’s thoughts about the English obligation to rule the lesser developed parts of the world, “the white man’s burden.” Although Pran as Jonathan ends up on the dominating side of the colonial hierarchy, he is not comfortable in this position. Especially after arriving in Africa, he feels uneasy by being in a position where he is expected to “command.” He fears (or perhaps hopes) to be revealed as a fraud, and is on several occasions tempted by the thought of letting down his mask.

Returning to Edward Said and his Orientalism, his third meaning of the term “orientalism” is a historically and materially defined one which was also mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Said is here using poststructuralist theories on discourse analysis:

> Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism, as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Orientalism 3).

Said thus uses orientalism about the discourse that enabled Britain to dominate and govern the colonies. Examples of this domination in The Impressionist are Major Privett-Clampe's role as Britain's supervisor in the government of Fatehpur and Chapel's expedition to Africa, mapping the unknown country to explore its possibilities for British economic benefit.

The mechanics of the British colonial project are clearly visible in the Rukshana chapter, where many incidents are so exaggerated and portrayed in such sharp contrast to expectations created by traditional colonial literature that they are close to the burlesque: Major and Mrs. Privett-Clampe (their ill-matched marriage, Pran's recitations for the Major while the Major masturbates), the Prince (his roaring when successful in bed), and the hunting episode (the feathers from dead birds cascading down, the unwelcome diarrhoea, the sedated tigers). This is not at all a glorious Britain ruling India in a manner suitable for an imperial power. On the contrary, it is decadent and undignified; the people are victims of sad backgrounds and unable to fulfil their duties. In this chapter are some of the best (that is, the funniest) examples of the novel's somewhat mocking attitude to British colonial rule. The various plots trying to undermine Major Privett-Clampe's position are hilarious and the narrative style full of understatements. The Major is the British representative in Fatehpur, with great influence over the future of the princely state; the figure presented in the novel is far from the capable and ambitious type usually found in colonial literature.

Another side of British domination in India appears after Pran's escape from Fatehpur, when he enters Amritsar right after the massacre where hundreds of Indians were shot and killed. The irony in this chapter is striking, as when the narrator describes the general in command's foundation for his strict policy:

> The General thought of his bullets in pedagogical terms. Ethically, the dark-skinned races are like children, and the General was fulfilling the primary duty of the white man in Asia, which is to say that he was laying down a clear line. His bullets were reminders of the meaning of law. Repeat after me. (PI 183)

From the massacre, the narrative proceeds to the "crawling orders," that is the order telling every Indian man to crawl past a specific distance of a street where an English lady had been attacked. As in A Passage to India, the women have no formal part in the colonial system, but they are nevertheless there: "These memsahibs [have] been elevated by their plight. It connects them to history, to their grandmothers of the Mutiny, to the symbolic destiny of the Englishwoman in tropical climes, which is to make do, to endure" (187).

In the novel, colonialism in India and colonialism in Africa in theory is the same business, but the narrative shows colonialism at different stages. The Fotse country is just about to be discovered, whereas India already has an extensive system of British government. The expedition to Africa, where Pran as Jonathan follows professor Chapel on a field trip to the Fotse country can be read in light of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The similarities include the expedition's journey up the river, the trade station they eventually arrive at, and not to mention the man they meet at this trade station: Short (a pun on Conrad's Kurtz?), a degenerate drunkard who inhabits a house which used to be a church. By invoking Conrad's novel, the reader remembers the image of Africa as a dark continent, of Africa as the opposite of the civilised Europe, a place of the unknown. The result is again a rather different story. The "Imperial River Club" near the port is shabby, the expedition up the river to the Fotse country is by most standards a failure, and the natives do not behave as they were expected to.

There is a nice irony in the fact that the colonised subject, Pran, ends up going to Africa as a coloniser. When Jonathan came to England, he took notes on the way the English behaved; in the end, he takes notes about the Fotse. He is not too pleased about this himself; he follows the professor only because he is in love with Star Chapel, and tries to ignore the fact that the whole project makes him uneasy. Jonathan enters the expedition to Africa because of Star; Major Privett-Clampe entered the Indian service because of a sneeze: there are no noble motives for colonial service, only (fatal) coincidences. On the whole, colonialism

in The Impressionist is a rather sad story – at least if the ambition is effective and strong government.

3.2.2 Cultural identity

Connected to the theme of imperialism is the question of cultural identity: what, if anything constitutes an English person and what constitutes an Indian or an African? How is it possible to represent a person and his identity, and how is it possible to represent "the other," the foreign culture you meet when you go beyond your own environment? Contrary to A Passage to India, this novel begins in India and has "the Orient" as its originating perspective; most events are seen from Pran's point if view. The different perspective results in a story where the English culture is the foreign one, and the narrator uses this to present many observations on English people and customs. This is also enforced by Pran's strong wish to appear English, and the narrative follows him in his explorations of the English. From the "Pretty Bobby"-chapter and onwards, Pran takes notes to record his observations on Englishness. His assumption seems to be that English cultural identity can be crammed into notebooks and utilised whenever needed.

The moment Pran as Jonathan sees England for the first time, coming there by boat, he is struck by awe:

> To people around him this has meaning. Only now does he realize that though he has studied England obsessively, he has never really believed in it. The place has always retained an abstract quality, like a philosophical hypothesis or a problem in geometry (IM 293).

Up to this point, England has been only a place of fantasy for Pran, something to imagine but not quite to believe. This reaction corresponds to that of Mrs. Macfarlane, but the opposite way: to her, India was the fantastic and unbelievable and Scotland the safe and well known.

Through his encounters with English characters and institutions in India, Pran has acquired an idea of British culture, seeing it as something fixed and stable that exists "back home" in England. To use Stuart Hall's terminology, the English identity is, for the English

people abroad, essentialist. They seem to believe in an innate Englishness that they are part of and that shapes their selves, even though they are far away from their homes. When coming to England, Jonathan sees that

> everywhere [he] finds the originals of copies he has grown up with, all the absurdities of British India restored to sense by their natural environment. Here dark suits and high collars are the right thing to wear. Here thick black doors lead away from the electric streets into cluttered drawing rooms, with narrow windows to frame squares of cold watery London light (IM 299).

Here Jonathan does the sort of mapping which most often is associated with the English when they go abroad. He needs to discover the English culture in order to fit in, and he uses an anthropological approach to becoming English. It is as if the English culture is deconstructed: it is rendered meaningless by being divided into its smallest meaningful units to the extent that these units become meaningless. One example is the passage in the "Pretty Bobby"-chapter on how English people smell, which to our hero seems important to imitate in his effort to enter the English milieus in Bombay.

It is tempting to read professor Chapel's compulsions as small allusions to the randomness with which certain habits and impressions are made more important than others. He usually whistles "Ode to Joy" in the cheese shop to remember an intimate moment in 1899, and feels a need to fondle a dark-haired person every time he enters Barabbas college because of a memory from 1902; his habits seem to have come into existence for a reason, but after a while they appear meaningless. Combine professor Chapel's oddities with Jonathan's wonder at the British obsession with lawns, and a pattern of culture as arbitrary appears; the original reasons for the existing habits and procedures which the British export may be random and insignificant compared to the habits' present weight. This underlines the idea that anyone in power has the right to define what others must see as important – even lawns.

When discussing cultural identity, it is necessary to take a look at the characters' opinions on race. The themes of race and the pureness of race pervade the whole novel, used

as a tool to define identity in the system of colonial domination and power. The first example is Pran's assumed father, a Kashmiri Pandit who belongs to the highest caste in India. This man's fear of being contaminated by the lower castes seems almost hysterical, and is the reason why Pran is dismissed so completely when his mixed origin is discovered. Pran's mixed origin is further commented upon in the descriptions of "The Agra Post and Telegraph Club", which Pran seeks out when looking for help. The "blackie-whites" (IM 46) in the club try as hard as they can to be English, but fail on subtle details that distinguish them from the "real" English, like wearing hats indoors and the fabric of the women's dresses.

Already in the descriptions of "The Agra Post and Telegraph Club," the narrator refers to the "biologists and evangelists [that] made everyone scared of black blood" (IM 48), thus pointing to reverend MacFarlane and his measuring of skulls. This episode is yet another possibility comment on the foundation for British domination over India, and also in this passage the narrator's irony is very much present:

> It turns out that through the incontrovertible methodology of science, craniometry has revealed the foundation of British imperial domination of the world. The scale of cranial capacities can … be extended to show how differences in brain size correspond exactly to degree of civilization and capacity for rational thought throughout the world. (197)

This is of course funny because a reader in 2002 understands that craniometry is not considered particularly scientific anymore. Craniometry was an attempt to prove the superiority of the British in biological terms, and also an attempt at defining identity: if your skull looks like this, then your mind functions like that. The foundation for craniometry is also found, although metaphorically, in Dr. Noble and his orchids. Dr. Noble talks about hybridisation, about the mixing of different types of flowers and about the "essential nature" of plants. They cannot be mixed successfully, because their "essential natures" are different – "were there none, the flowers would lose their identities in a hybrid swarm, and nature would be in a desperate mess" (IM 310).

One last example of the obsession with race is Pran as Jonathan Bridgeman's own horror of the thought of Star Chapel engaging with a black man. In addition to his jealousy, this horror shows that Jonathan has adopted the British colonial system's contempt for mixing different races; he has become assimilated into the ruling system. This idea of pureness, the measuring of skulls and the dangers in mixing different races, is yet another method of exerting domination for the British. It is a way of categorising human beings and defining identity that underlines the differences between the English and the Indian, and reflects the alleged supremacy of the British.

3.2.3 Places and their meaning

On several occasions the novel deals with meaning attached to places and how this meaning has come into being. One of the first examples is Amritsar, where Pran arrives right after escaping from the court at Fatehpur: "Terrible things happened here. Horrors. The place bears its memories near the surface … All around the city, memories" (IM 181). The term palimpsest is used in the description of professor Chapel and his daily routines. His way of subscribing meaning to places where he has had certain experiences is again something that is exaggerated into absurdity, but nevertheless interesting:

> To a mind like Professor Chapel's, places quickly take on a cluttered quality. When somewhere reminds one of something, and all it takes is an action, a smell, a word or a snatch of music to bring the old feeling back in full, it is often tempting to perform the action, say the word … to help things along. (IM 369)

One of the reasons for Chapel to enter his expeditions to Africa is to get away from all this. He needs to be somewhere without memories, without all these previous experiences, and Africa provides a blank space where he can relax.

Homi Bhabha's notion of the uncanny can be used when a place is not what a person expects, when there is a discrepancy between the expected and the reality. When Pran arrives in England, it is as if he is stepping into a fantasy. Contrary to traditional colonial novels, where India and the Orient was the exotic and unfamiliar place, this novel reverses the picture

and describes England as the unfamiliar. Several times in Oxford, Pran notices an "insubstantial" quality to the city. When travelling from England to France, he starts feeling uneasy, and he eventually panics. He realises that he in France is foreign both as Pran and as Jonathan Bridgeman, and this gets worse when approaching Africa. The panic follows him the whole way to Africa, and renders him unable to fulfil his duties for the expedition. He experienced the uncanniness when coming to England, and it returns when meeting Africa: "Objects that England made familiar, ledgers and ink pads and uniforms, have been thrown back into strangeness" (425). This is echoed in the Fotse's notion of the outside world as "upside down" and possessed by evil spirits. The expedition to Africa is the culmination of Pran's wandering through the British Empire, turning traditional colonial literature "upside down" as well: the novel has consistently torn apart the image of England as a powerful and capable colonial governor, and reversed the expected presentations of cultural identity.

3.3 "Karma Chameleon?"[4]: identity in The Impressionist

One of the important questions in the novel concerns Pran's personal identity. This was the most frequent of the reviewers' questions when reading The Impressionist. Several of the reviewers expressed doubt as to whether it is possible to see Pran as one character at all, since he changes so completely from one chapter to the next. Pran is "changing identity as often as socks," as one reviewer puts it (Maslin); another one sees Pran as "fading away in the fog of identity" (Zulfikar Abbany). My hypothesis when reading the novel connects to this doubt: I propose that the space for Pran's personality in The Impressionist is minimal; the protagonist is so controlled by forces in the society around him that it is hard to spot a personality at all.

All chapters in the novel in one way or another deal with Pran's mixed background and his otherness in relation to characters and situations around him. Pran has in each chapter some characters that appear closer to him than others, but whether he actually learns to know

[4] Quoted from Daniel Mendelsohn's review of The Impressionist.

them or have any affection for them is unclear. This section will discuss Pran's identity and look at some of Pran's relationships in more detail, while also keeping in mind the postcolonial perspective: Pran is in all his incarnations a character originating as a colonised subject, and carries this luggage with him as he travels around the British Empire.

3.3.1 Pran's identity

When reading The Impressionist as a picaresque, with focus more on the society portrayed than on the protagonist himself, it is not necessarily essential to see Pran as a complete character, or, with E. M. Forster's terminology, as a "round" character. Nevertheless, a reader is made to wonder: is Pran the same character in all his impressions? Does he have a personality at all, or is he at the bottom empty, like the impressionist in Paris who scares Pran with his blankness between each impression? These questions are put forward already in the motto from Kipling's Kim in the beginning of the novel:

> Remember, I can change swiftly. It will all be as it was when I first spoke to thee under Zam-Zammath the great gun –
>
> As a boy in the dress of white men – when I first went to the Wonder House. And a second time thou wast a Hindu. What shall the third incarnation be?

Kunzru has chosen two quotations from Kim that focus on Kim's ability to change his appearance, but also one that alludes to the British presence in India with its mentioning of "Zam-Zammath the great gun." The second part of the motto mentions Kim's shift from appearing as a white boy to appearing as a Hindu; just like Pran he is in the between-position where he is neither one nor the other and no one quite knows who he is.

Race is an important factor in understanding Pran's position in the world. This was discussed in the previous section on a more general level, but is also interesting when analysing Pran's relations to the characters close to him. Several times in the course of the novel, the characters meeting Pran experience uneasiness or confusion; they see him and register his appearance, but there is something more to him that makes them doubt this

impression. With the words of Rev. Macfarlane: “despite his fair skin and noble looks the child had a taint of blood” (234). This confusing impression echoes an anxiety in the colonial situation, as discussed in the theoretical introduction: the coloniser secretly fears that the difference between him and the colonised subjects is not that substantial after all, thus removing his claim of the superior position. Pran’s ability to blend in as English is a threat to the established hierarchy.

The idea of tainted blood shows how the society at that time viewed the relationship between different races: a strong hierarchy with the European on top, maintained by science (like craniometry). Pran is a victim of what Homi Bhabha refers to as fixity; he is trapped in a stereotype, and escapes one stereotype only to be caught in another. Fixity is the coloniser’s aim and it is in his interest to maintain stereotypes that build the colonial hierarchy and diminish the chance of moving around in society. Pran, however, challenges this wish for stability. He tries to blend in as English, but the uncertainty surrounding him leads people who meet him to mistrust him. They mistake his earnest wish to be English; they believe he is making fun of them by imitating them. He is a man with no history and connections, but nevertheless behaves as if he had plenty of both. This is again an idea from Bhabha: mimicry as a threat and a means of resistance towards the coloniser.

The group of characters surrounding Pran changes for each chapter, with only a few characters appearing in more than one. To a large extent, Pran “uses” people without seeming to develop very strong affections for them, which is characteristic for a picaro. This behaviour is partly no surprise, as with Major Privett-Clampe, but is partly also a bit strange, as with Mrs. Macfarlane. Pran has only a few relationships that affect him beyond the mere superficial and occasional. One of them is Lily Parry, a girl he meets in the “Pretty Bobby”-chapter. He thinks he is in love, and does his best to convince her of his feelings. The irony in this situation eventually becomes apparent: after having spent so much energy on flirting with

her, Robert discovers that Lily Parry too is a "half-and-half." What is worse, she recognises Robert as another:

> "You're very good. Very convincing. You can fool them" – waving a hand in the direction of the members' enclosure – "but I'm different." … As she talks, her voice, her clipped English accent that is so very like his own, has changed, slipping, thickening, warming. All the Northern ice and suet falling away. (IM 265)

They are both products of a wish to become as English as possible and of a conviction that it is possible to appear English, although you do not meet the established criteria for that Englishness: "Stitch a personality together. Calico arms. Wooden head. A hat and a set of overheard opinions" (IM 250).

Although Pran and Lily do not believe in their own creations, the "real" English believe them: "They hear an accent and see a face and a set of clothes, and put them together into a person" (IM 245). Both Pran and Lily are creatures of surface; their behaviour establishes them as members of a certain group, but their inner lives – if such a thing exists – remain hidden. The novel discusses this point during the Lily Parry-incident:

> So Bobby is a creature of surface. Tissue paper held up to the sun. He hints at transparency, as if on the other side, on the inside, there is something to be discovered. Maybe there is, maybe not. Maybe instead of imagining depth, all the people who do not know him should accept that Bobby's skin is not a boundary between things but the thing itself, a screen on which certain effects take place. (IM 250)

The idea of seeing a person as surface alone is a fascinating thought: what you see is what you get. It is far from the ideal of a rounded character developing throughout a novel; instead the focus is on appearance.

What Robert seeks, in this story and in all his other personal relationships, is uncertain. Does he see it as a result in itself to appear English, or has he a higher ambition with all his efforts? He is at various points dissatisfied with his life, but does little or nothing to change his lifestyle. He seems certain that he likes Lily Parry, but as soon as she starts

questioning him on why he follows her, he has no good answer. Lily Parry was no success, but with the next one, Paul Gertler, there seems to be a stronger connection.

Pran as Jonathan Bridgeman meets Paul Gertler when entering a British boarding school. The school is meant to prepare Jonathan for further studies at Oxford, as a compensation for his incomplete education from the colonies. Gertler is a Jew and a Communist, and does his best to lead his own life, thus behaving totally opposite of Jonathan. Jonathan uses the period at Chopham Hall for extensive studies of English behaviour and does his best to fill in the white spaces on his social map of England. Jonathan wants to help when Gertler is expelled on basis of a false accusation, but fails: "he should be blending in with the background, not sticking his neck out for no reason" (IM 329). He fears the consequences too much to dare help Gertler, but feels an unexpected wish to reveal his secret, "to give [Gertler] something true to go away with" (IM 329). Jonathan is too afraid to do even this, and ends up saying nothing and feeling utterly alone. This episode makes the reader wonder whether there actually might be some deeper emotions in Jonathan after all; perhaps he is able to develop feelings for another human being. Gertler is the closest thing he has come to a true friend, but social conventions prevent Jonathan from reaching out.

Jonathan meets Gertler once more. While at Oxford, Jonathan joins a group of politically interested students with their sympathies on the far right of the political spectre. During one of their demonstrations in London, he meets Paul Gertler, who leads a communist group fighting Jonathan's group. They see each other, and Jonathan is again shattered:

> What began on the day of Paul's expulsion has been completed: the long, slow process of betrayal. He wants to run back and tell him that he did not mean it, that he does not hate him, or want him to die or disappear. *It was a disguise, Paul, it was only a game*. … Loneliness crushes him like a physical weight. (IM 385)

The relationship between Jonathan and Gertler is the saddest one in the novel. Perhaps this can be read in light of a homosexual theme: the one relationship which brings Jonathan on the verge of revealing his secrets and opening up to another human being is to a man. Perhaps

Jonathan sees the relation to another man as more relaxed and not so strictly governed by conventions as the relationship to a girl would have been, giving him a larger space to manoeuvre within. But why does he run away from Gertler at the demonstration? He is still too afraid to risk not conforming to his milieu's expectations and demands.

Meeting Star Chapel for the first time is an experience similar to that of meeting Lily Parry, and the narrator falls into clichés: "a string section materializes in [Pran's] forebrain, drenching him in grand and stylized emotion" (IM 349). Again, the question is why he is so fascinated by her. To Jonathan, Star is "quintessentially English" (IM 350): "She is Elgar and tea roses. She is rolling green fields with drystone boundary walls, she is willow trees, fruit cup, sunset … The pattern, the type, the very essence of the English girl" (IM 349). This time he has better chances of getting access to her life, but it not successful until he starts attending her father's lectures. Again Jonathan is faking in the sense that he for social purposes engages in something he does not really seem too interested in. The catastrophe is near, however, and she lets him down. This is Star's impression of Pran, explaining why they will not marry: "I feel I know all there is about you … You're very sweet, but you're exactly like everybody else. You do the same things as everybody else and you say the same things as everybody else" (IM 415).

It turns out that she is looking for the opposite of what Jonathan is now, and that he probably would have been much more successful with her as an earlier version of himself. She wants "passion, primitive emotions … to be in contact with the origin of things" (IM 415). Therefore, she turns to the bohemians in London and the "Negroes" in Paris, looking for that which she does not find in Jonathan and her traditional Oxford life. The irony here is obvious: a previous version of Jonathan would have corresponded with Star's definition of the exotic, whereas he is too caught up in building an English image to catch her interest. They see each other as stereotypes, not being able to go beneath the surface. These relationships all

exemplify Pran's problem: his identity is based on the external, on a way to dress, talk, and behave. To him, "identity is as much performance as essence" (Mars-Jones). The project of becoming English makes him so preoccupied with the surface that his soul disappears.

3.3.2 Identity as construction

To a large extent, Pran can be said to take the identity from his surroundings, being defined by his circumstances more than having his own predefined identity. Being in a discourse defined and dominated by English colonialism, he takes on identities that are in accordance with this: he is shaped by Privett-Clampe, by the Macfarlanes, and by his teachers in England. All the way he has to conform to structures where the English are in power. This exemplifies one of Stuart Hall's points: the colonial discourse has the power also over the colonial subjects and the way they define themselves. One example is Jonathan's reaction when deciding that he will follow Professor Chapel to Africa: "It is like staring into the toilet-bowl, looking at what he has expelled from himself" (IM 381). Pran has carefully tried to get rid of all his "Indianness," seeing it as inferior and unwanted; now he must face his second class position in relation to the British once more.

Does Pran have an independent identity at all, or does he only exists when he is relating to other characters? This question is actually posed explicitly in the novel: "In the brief minutes before Willis comes in and starts clearing up there is a blankness, a suggestion that Bridgeman, like a forest tree, exists only when being observed" (IM 347). In another chapter, Pran is said to "coincide with his shadow" (IM 317). He is seen as a character who always adjusts to the situation he appears in and who does his best to behave exactly as expected in that situation. His project is to fill in white spaces of the social map of England and behave accordingly.

The whole novel is a fictional dramatisation of Stuart Hall's second and post-structuralist view of cultural identity. It is related to the essentialist one, discussed above in

connection with the British identity, but seeks to problematise its tendency to create neat patterns and structures. On the contrary, it focuses on the differences and ruptures that necessarily have been throughout history, and argues that it is impossible to see a set of qualities and historical events as sign of the cultural identity of a group. Cultural identity is created more than it is discovered, and it is being created now, not only in the past:

> Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Hall 112)

When there is no fixed past, no scheme that you can adopt, then each individual has to find his own place in the system. The Impressionist shows a wish to get outside of this system: Professor Chapel wants to go to Africa and get out of his ordinary life with all his compulsions, and Forrester wants to see a land without trees. The character starting as Pran and ending without an identity in the African desert has, until the last scene, had to position himself in the narrative of British colonialism, taking up various roles on his way. When the novel ends, this is over: in the beginning there was Pran's father in the desert, in the end Pran too is in the desert, outside of civilization.

Being in the desert is connected with the idea of being outside of society, where society cannot reach you. It is the "other" in relation to everything which is humanly constructed, a notion also found in Michael Oondatje's novel The English Patient. That which can be described as social space is predominant in The Impressionist and poses a challenge when looking for that which goes beyond social conventions and relations. Pran's father came to the desert seeking a land with no trees, something to fill a gap in his life:

> Forrester came to this country precisely because it has no trees. Back at his station, sitting on the veranda of the Government Bungalow, he had the perverse idea that treelessness might make for a restful tour. Now he is here he does not like it. This is desolate country. Even the shooting is desultory. … Amid all this desiccation he feels uncomfortable, dislocated. (IM 4)

This uneasiness grows on him, until the caravan escorting Amrita, Pran's mother, appears out of nowhere. When the flood comes, the two seek refuge in a cave and have sex: "By the last time the fire has guttered, and sweat and dust has turned their skins to an identical red-brown colour. The colour of the earth" (IM 15). Pran's father wanted to get out of his previous life, but this episode in the desert leaves him confused: "he has changed everything in his life and cannot see where it will lead" (IM 16). His answer is to escape into the river, and he drowns.

Finn Skårderud, in his book Uro [Unrest], writes about the desert and about being in a desert. As a concept, the desert is obvious, he writes, and continues:

> Ørkenen er å komme nærmere seg selv. Noen vil si at å komme nærmere seg selv, er godt, og at det er viktig av og til å få kjenne på den indre roen som blir fremmet av den ytre roen. Andre vil si at å komme nærmere seg selv, er å bli overlatt til sin verste fiende … Reisens fortrinn er å kunne se sin egen hverdag utenfra … Ørkenen er et godt sted for å ordne opp i størrelsesforholdene. (423)
>
> The desert means coming closer to oneself. Some would say that coming closer to oneself is positive, and that it sometimes is important to feel the inner calmness promoted by the outer calmness. Others would say that coming closer to oneself means being left to one's worst enemy... The advantage of travel is to see one's everyday life from the outside... The desert is a suitable place to sort out the proportions. (My translation)

Vast and empty, the desert is outside of representation because there is nothing to represent. This draws Pran's father to the desert, and explains why Pran himself finds the desert a relief.

In the last section of the last chapter, Jonathan is walking beside a caravan of camels in the desert. Now he is referred to only as "he" and seems to have lost his identity completely. He has been in the Fotse cave for several days, has been searched for sorcery, and found to be "clean." The old man in the Fotse cave saw Pran as possessed by an evil European spirit, but was tricked by his external appearance: there is finally someone who sees Pran and recognises him as non-European, non-white. Pran first panics at the idea of having the spirit drawn out of him: "if you draw out this spirit, there will be nothing left" (IM 476). This fear was also demonstrated when Pran as Jonathan saw the impressionist in Paris. The final stage of the cleansing process is to mark Pran:

> One by one the brands are placed on his body: at the small of his back, at the nape of his neck, his thighs, shoulders and chest, orientating him, linking him irrevocably to the time and the place these marks are being made, so that wherever he may drift or fall asleep, he will always be in relation to this instant (IM 477).

Something has finally marked him; "space and time are fixed [in Pran's skin] so its owner will never lose his way" (IM 477). Is this a way of saying that he has found himself? He has been running for a long time, fearing that there will be no one there when he stops running. This passage relates to the constructivist way of describing identity: it sees identity as historically defined, connected with a person's geographical and chronological position, and now Pran has been "historicised."

After this process in the Fotse cave, Pran seems to wander off into the desert. This final section in the desert is also illuminated by a passage in Skårderud's Uro; a desert can serve more than one purpose:

> Landskap er til å speile seg i. Vi søker ikke nødvendigvis de mest harmoniske stedene. Kontrasten kan bli for sterk i forhold til hvordan vi selv har det. Å søke ørkenen kan være å søke bekreftelsen mer enn oppmuntringen. Å speile seg i sanden og se det ørkenaktige i en selv, kan være en god bekreftelse fordi man ser et samlet bilde. (424)
>
> Landscapes can mirror the self. We do not necessarily seek the most harmonious places. The contrast may become too fundamental compared to our own state of being. Seeking the desert may imply seeking confirmation more than encouragement. Mirroring oneself in the sand and observing one's own desertlike qualities may be a positive confirmation, because one sees a complete picture. (My translation)

Being in the desert, Pran is able to shut out everything else: "Now the journey is everything. He has no thought of arriving anywhere" (IM 481). Is this a happy ending, or is it an expression of resignation? Has he reached a state of peace? The ending is ambiguous; the reader does not know where Pran is now or what he will do next. Now he at least is outside of civilization, he is no longer within the sphere of British colonialism and no longer has to define himself in relation to the English or any other conventions. The question is, then, is it possible to define him at all?

3.4 Coda

The Impressionist is a diverse and seemingly fragmented novel, but it starts to make sense when read as a picaresque. In a picaresque, the portrayal of society is equally important to the portrayal of the protagonist, and through Pran's wanderings, The Impressionist creates an image of many parts of the British Empire. The narrator, however, reverses the traditional way of describing the colonial enterprise, and creates an ironic mock version of earlier novels like Forster's. The novel's time of production could justify calling it a postmodern novel, but the novel's setting and thematic content suggest instead describing the novel as postcolonial.

My reading of the novel's colonial dimension has used Edward Said's definition of "orientalism" to show how The Impressionist reverses the established way of describing the Orient. The novel describes both colonial field work as well as academic "research" on the colonies, but neither is portrayed positively. Pran begins his life as a colonised subject and through many coincidences end up as a coloniser himself, but is unable to feel confident in the alleged superior position. He tries to break the code of Englishness, but his approach is only seemingly successful. He is so preoccupied with society's expectations to his behaviour that his own personality disappears in his attempt at becoming English. Personal and cultural identity is a construction, not essence: "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall 112).

This novel too, as did A Passage to India, consciously uses descriptions of places and the creation of narrative space. The ultimate distinction is between places in society and places outside of society, represented by the desert. The novel originates in India and has England as its "orient," the tables are turned compared to previous literature dealing with the colonies. Place and space are linked to characterisation and identity and constitute an important part of the narrative.

4 Conclusion: the epoch of juxtaposition

Extracts from Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva in the introduction to this thesis set the starting point for this comparative reading of E. M. Forster's A Passage to India and Hari Kunzru's The Impressionist. Foucault focused on the development from a chronological way of describing history and events to an increased attention to spatiality, to the world as a network which everyone is positioned within. Juxtaposition and contemporaneity thus become important, instead of distance and chronological succession. This idea of juxtaposition was also found in Kristeva's thoughts on intertextuality, and together they form the theoretical basis for reading Forster's and Kunzru's novels together. Intertextuality, Kristeva wrote, means a focus on synchrony instead of diachrony. This reading of Forster and Kunzru places their texts side by side, although written eighty years apart: by juxtaposing the novels, both texts are made unstable, setting them "in play" and opening up a new space for interpretation. The objective of this comparative chapter is to highlight the most interesting features common for the novels and show some benefits from reading them together. This concluding chapter builds on and sums up the previous analyses.

The novels' structural similarities are first and foremost connected to their setting and their dealing with British imperialism and colonialism. The narrative technique employed leads to an awareness of society and political issues in addition to the descriptions of the characters' actions and thoughts. The main characteristics of A Passage to India are the novel as a process of understanding and its visionary aspect. The Impressionist's main characteristic is the diversity created by the protagonist's shifting appearances and circumstances, resulting in a portrayal of society just as much as the protagonist.

The novels' narrators have similarities; their free position and their way of both presenting and commenting on the respective stories are common for Forster and Kunzru.

Both narrators could easily have been labelled “omniscient,” they have access to information which they never could have gained by observation alone. Culler discusses whether the term “telepathic” could replace “omniscient,” and is to a certain extent right with regards to Forster’s and Kunzru’s novels. Both terms, however, suggest the existence of some sort of essence: they suggest that the story has an independent existence which the narrator observes when creating his plot. They suggest that there are elements which the narrator has access to, but chooses not to disclose to the reader. This is not compatible with seeing the narrator as a conscious creator of the plot, an important feature both in Forster’s and Kunzru’s novel.

The imperialist or colonial discourse, as reflected in A Passage to India and The Impressionist, is a major theme in this thesis. E. M. Forster, a well-situated English academic, has been accused of both imperialism and racism in his descriptions of India and the native population, but my analysis has shown an alternative reading on this point, focussing instead on what the narrator does not attempt at: representing the most incomprehensible characters. Had it not been for the fact that Hari Kunzru is also British and born in England, The Impressionist would have been a good example of the empire writing back at the imperial centre. The Impressionist could nevertheless be seen as a sharp elbow to other colonial literature, with its somewhat irreverential use of classic British authors dealing with the colonial system; Forster is one example, but also Kipling and Conrad have been alluded to. There are thus intertextual reasons for reading these two novels together in addition to the thematic ones; this thesis both juxtaposes the novels as well as sees one succeeding the other.

Both novels deal with how characters relate and react to the colonial discourse. In Homi Bhabha’s words, the objective of colonial discourse is “to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (70). Further, the colonial discourse “produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely

knowable and visible" (Bhabha 70-71). A Passage to India shows the British system of domination and government from the perspective of newly arrived English ladies; The Impressionist shows the same system from the perspective of the subordinate positions of a rajah's prostitute and a street-boy in Bombay. In addition, Kunzru's novel shows colonialism at various stages; at the time of these novels' setting, British attitude and behaviour in India and in Africa are not the same. Central characters in both novels take part in the colonial system and have in various degrees adopted its way of seeing the native population of the colonies. Characters representing the "natives," like Aziz and Pran, are nevertheless represented through the eyes of a British narrator. Both novels show the hierarchy in the colonial society, even though several characters try to resist this categorisation.

Bhabha uses the term "fantasy" when describing the creation of this new reality constituted by the colonial discourse, "the subject's desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division" (Bhabha 75). The stereotype is one of the most important mechanisms in the establishment of a colonial discourse, where it functions as a means of holding on to a version of reality that can be exploited politically. In both novels, several characters seem to float between being "flat" and "round" characters; this may be a result of the stereotypical form of representation demonstrated in the texts. Ronny and Adela are flat characters to the extent that they function as representatives of the English in India and express attitudes and ideas that are typical for a relatively inexperienced civil servant and his newly arrived fiancée. At the same time they have personalities and an inner life; the reader takes part in their reflections on love and marriage. The character starting as Pran is in most of his incarnations a stereotype; he shifts from one to another several times during the novel in his efforts to fit in.

The two texts may be read as opposites: we have in one novel a passage to India, and in the other a passage away from India. This leads to a fundamental difference with regard to

which culture they describe as the exotic one: A Passage to India has England as its originating culture, whereas The Impressionist uses the setting of Pran's paternal family as its starting point. This is visible in the narrators' representation of the "other" of the colonial discourse: Forster's novel has India as its "other," whereas Kunzru's describes the English culture as the foreign one. In this thesis, this reversal is one of the most important reasons to read the novels together. In traditional colonial literature, a text would present a setting and a culture that was seen as exotic and unknown by an English or Western audience, but with The Impressionist, Kunzru does the opposite. Borrowing a "Fotse" term from the novel, Kunzru presents the world as "upside down."

This reversal is visible in the novels' implicit presentations of cultural identity. To the English or Indians in Chandrapore and to the professors of Cambridge, cultural identity is essentialist in Stuart Hall's terminology. It is fixed and stable, something that can be discussed and studied. They suppose that a group has some sort of innate cultural identity, and that this identity shapes the individuals of that group. The novels' actions undermine this assumption, although Forster's perhaps in a less obvious manner than Kunzru's. In this case, it is a bit difficult to establish the narrator's position in A Passage to India: would he be in favour of the essentialist or the constructivist view on cultural identity? Seeing the novel as a hermeneutic process suggests a narrator trying to understand the Indian culture, seeing it as something different from the English. The novel's vision of goodwill, culture, and intelligence also suggests that the English and Indian cultures are considered as separate entities which eventually should develop a closer affinity or melt together. The novel may on the other hand be reductionist in the sense that it assumes a common ground through which the Indian and the English can build a future. In The Impressionist, the narrator's presentation of cultural identity corresponds to Hall's constructivist way of seeing the concept: both cultural and individual identity is just as much performance as essence.

The introduction to this thesis mentioned briefly Sigmund Freud's description of the "uncanny" as "that species of the frightening that that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). Freud opens his essay "The Uncanny" with an etymological survey of different uses of the term uncanny, or "unheimlich" in the original German version. The German terms "heimlich" and "unheimlich" enable a layer of meaning that is lost in the English translation. Building on Freud's essay, there is a development in the term uncanny starting with that which is "heimlich," the "homely" or the familiar, also suggesting something hidden, secret or taken for granted – "what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 124). The opposite to "heimlich" is in some respects "unheimlich," that which is no longer hidden or secret, but in other contexts the opposite is the uncanny, belonging to "the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (Freud 123).This division between the known and the unknown, the safe and the frightening is used by Homi Bhabha in his essay "Articulating the Archaic." Here is Bhabha's description of culture and cultural authority:

> Culture is *heimlich*, with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives, its homologous empty time, its seriality, its progress, its customs and coherence. But cultural authority is also *unheimlich*, for to be distinctive, significatory, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated, interdisciplinary, intertextual, international, inter-racial. (Bhabha 136-137)

The conceptual pair of "heimlich" and "unheimlich" is here used to illustrate the postcolonial situation, describing on the one hand the static and "ideal" vision of culture and on the other hand the chaotic, complex, and non-static reality.

This double nature of the term culture illuminates the discussion of A Passage to India and The Impressionist. As long as the novels' characters are in their own environment and surrounded by "their own," then they are safe; they have control over their own life, knowing what to do in most situations and avoiding the rest. This is symptomatic for the first part of A Passage to India, before the cave incident, and for Pran's situation before his dismissal from

home in The Impressionist. In these initial situations, the events which take place are expected and manageable for the characters involved. There are, however, places and situations which disrupt this stability. In The Impressionist, Pran and his biological father are victims of a breakdown in the desert, and in A Passage to India, the cave episode functions as a tool for going beyond the ordinary social structures of Chandrapore.

In this reading of the novels, one of the main points is precisely this situation where the expected disappears, when the established narratives of a culture disintegrate and the characters are "lost." The characters are thrown out of the coherence given by norms and values within their social group and have to look beyond the safe and well known. Their initial relatively peaceful state of mind depends on factors that are "heimlich," they are homely as well as secret, the characters are not necessarily conscious of these factors' existence. The actions of the two novels display the thin line between order and chaos, between the "heimlich" and the "unheimlich." The situations get uncanny and frightening when the familiar becomes unfamiliar. This is visible in Mrs. Moore's changing view on Christianity, first providing support and comfort, but later dismissed after meeting the echo; in Adela's attitude towards India, developing from fascination to fear; and in Pran's carelessness developing into panic upon realising that he too may be just as blank as the impressionist in Paris is between each impression.

In both novels, there are sites where the order breaks down, places where ordinary social structures and norms are challenged and their weaknesses are displayed. In A Passage to India, this happens in the Marabar caves; the events that take place in these caves affect all characters profoundly and change their view on both themselves and their place in society. In addition to the caves, the Indian landscape in itself is rendered uncanny; it is unfamiliar and difficult to comprehend for the novel's Western characters. In The Impressionist, this too is reversed: with a protagonist who originates in India, the English landscape is the uncanny.

London and Oxford are described as incomprehensible to the protagonist in much the same way as the Indian landscape is to Adela. Both Pran and Adela try to understand, but never manage to go beyond the surface and the mere conventional. In Forster's novel, other characters than the protagonists contribute to a deeper understanding of the situation, like Mrs. Moore and professor Godbole. In Kunzru's novel, these other characters are presented as ridiculous: professor Chapel and reverend Macfarlane, who are both in positions of moral authority, are more or less insane.

These places where order breaks down could, with a term borrowed from Foucault, be called heterotopias. Foucault describes heterotopias as "real places … which are something like counter-sites … in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24). In Susan Stanford Friedman's words, heterotopias "bring into focus the interrelationship of other spaces and 'slices of time' as structures of the social order" (199). The Marabar Caves are one possible heterotopia. Within the limits of A Passage to India, the caves contain India itself; they represent the mysticism and incomprehensibility which the English experience when trying to grasp that which is not already assimilated into the colonial discourse. Being important on so many of the novel's thematic levels, the caves have both a physical presence and a spiritual influence, demonstrated in the English ladies' fascination and Godbole's inability to describe their characteristics satisfyingly. In The Impressionist, several places could be suggested to fit with this description, among them the boarding school where Pran is enrolled when arriving in England. This is the school of his biological father, a school educating colonial officers who are supposed to continue Britain's colonising mission. The school represents not only itself as a place for learning, but signals qualities of the society in which it functions as well.

Space is important on several levels in both novels. One aspect of the novels' treatment of space is simply that different places, distances, travels, and crossings of borders

is a way of demonstrating internal and psychological borders; as Susan Stanford Friedman writes, "identity is unthinkable without borders" (196). By juxtaposing and contrasting places, the narrators manage to discuss and visualise concepts which could otherwise have been more difficult to assimilate into a plot. Perhaps this is one reason why both novels have been ambiguously received: among the more sceptical critics, the focus has been on the chronology and logics of the novels' plots, which means a focus on temporality. A Passage to India has in some critical moments a rather strained plot, and it is highly relevant to discuss whether The Impressionist has a coherent plot at all. These questions could be wrong, provided the novels instead anticipate a focus on space. My analyses have shown that both narrators use space as an important part of the narrative, and both texts welcome Susan Stanford Friedman's claim for a "revisioning of space in narrative poetics [which] can lead to a new understanding of how space and time interact as constitutive components of a story" (195).

Space is a factor which helps connect the two novels across the time span between their production and publication. Forster's novel is part of a modernist project trying to grasp the new reality created by England's colonial expansion. This expansion brought home impulses that provided the modernist author with a whole range of impulses, which gradually were reflected in literature of the time. Forster shows a will to problematise the colonial project, discussing its consequences for questions of value, identity, and culture. In Foucault's words, one of structuralism's characteristics is "the effort to establish, between elements that could have been connected on a temporal axis, an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other – that makes them appear … as a sort of configuration" (22). This is true both of Forster and Kunzru, showing that they share a focus on spatiality. Forster anticipates the focus on space in later postcolonial literature, where the world is seen as large network rather than separate cultures. The authors'

treatment of space is thus an element which shows a connection, a development from Modernism to postcolonialism.

The influences of the different literary periods in which the novels are produced also become obvious in the novels' ideals. When reading A Passage to India, the reader gets a clear impression of a novel and a narrator with a vision; "the early century Modernists are distinguished precisely by the earnestness of their resolve" (Levenson 5). Several possible ideals were suggested in the analysis, both with regard to the political, personal, and spiritual dimensions of the text. There seems to be some sort of fundament for the narrator's judgments, a base that would make the world better if only everybody could know it and agree with it. This is not the case in The Impressionist. The basis for moral judgments performed by the implied author is at best unclear and at worst non-existent. This corresponds with the constructivist way of seeing identity and cultural authority: what is the fundament in a situation where everything is contextual and depends on the circumstances?

Forster wrote A Passage to India in the modernist period, and many features of this period are reflected in the novel. One element pointing backwards, however, may be the belief in some sort of common ground for humanity reflected in passages like the claim for "goodwill, culture, and intelligence." Kunzru's period is harder to define, but The Impressionist's constructivism and subsequent focus on context is characteristic, combined with its fundamental irony and the resulting impression of a narrative without deeper values and a protagonist not quite in focus. There is no more an obvious position from which valid and moral judgments can be passed. When Kunzru wrote his novel, the era of grand narratives was over; Kunzru instead presents a series of small ones. Postmodern is one possible term for Kunzru's period, but postcolonial is perhaps a more manageable one. Michael Bell suggests that one characteristic of the modernist period is the search for meaning, whereas a possible characteristic for the postcolonial period is the creation of meaning (22). The aim of Forster's

narrative, then, is to find meaning, whereas Kunzru's characters have to create their own meaning: Forster's humanism meets Kunzru's relativism.

A main point in my analysis of A Passage to India was to read the novel as a process, as a hermeneutic project aiming at a better understanding of the colonial situation. The focus in the analysis of The Impressionist was its mockery and reversal of traditional colonial literature. Instead of India as the foreign culture, England becomes the mystic and unknown. In Pran's efforts to become as English as possible, the English culture is deconstructed into tiny details, which taken one by one appears meaningless. This perspective is interesting not only when linked to novels like Forster's, but also in urging the reader to reflect on all the silent knowledge forming the everyday life of an individual. If Forster's project was a process of understanding, then Kunzru's project may be a process of alienation; juxtaposing the two novels stimulates the reading of both. The relevance of A Passage to India is confirmed by the mere fact that it may be seen as commented upon by a new novel. By being exposed to a satiric version of itself in the form of The Impressionist, the themes and motifs of A Passage to India become clearer; by contrasting the two novels, their thematic similarities become more visible. The former accentuates the novels' synchrony, the latter their diachrony.

My readings of A Passage to India and The Impressionist have shown two novels dealing with the colonial system, with identity, and with space. The novels describe places of fantasy and places of reality, places within the colonial society and outside of that society. They are constructed around a series of oppositions: home and abroad, domestic and exotic, safe and threatening, "heimlich" and "unheimlich." It is time to reintroduce Michel Foucault's poignant words from the introduction to this thesis: "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed." Forster and Kunzru juxtapose the Orient and the Occident, the colonial outskirts and the imperial centre, thematising the effects of colonialism on personal and cultural

identity. The representation of the exotic Orient and the domestic Occident depends on the observing eye, and these novels give each their answer. Different as they are, both novels have their primary focus on spatiality instead of chronology, demanding an extension of the terminology of traditional narrative analysis mostly preoccupied with time and plot. Forster's spatiality anticipates postcolonial literature's presentation of the world as a grid, in Foucault's words "a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein."

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