

TRAUMA AND THE ETHICAL DILEMMA IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF
SMALL THINGS

Sarah Young Longworth

A Thesis Submitted to the
University of North Carolina Wilmington in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English
University of North Carolina Wilmington

2006

Approved by

Advisory Committee

Meghan M. Sweeney

Cara Cilano

Lewis Walker

Chair

Accepted by

Robert Roer

Dean, Graduate School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| ABSTRACT..... | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | v |
| DEDICATION..... | vi |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1. EVIDENCE OF TRAUMA IN ROY’S NOVEL | 7 |
| CHAPTER 2. INCEST AND HEALING..... | 22 |
| CHAPTER 3. THE ETHICAL DILEMMA | 36 |
| WORKS CITED | 48 |

ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy's novel, The God of Small Things, is notable for its complex narrative technique, particularly its elaborate narrative structure and its treatment of perspective. The novel contains several layers of narratives, including two dominant narratives and numerous subordinate narratives. Roy deliberately manipulates these narratives so that the two dominant narratives converge at the moments of two sexual transgressions of societal rules regarding appropriate sexual conduct. While the novel explicitly describes the tragic outcome of Ammu and Velutha's inter-caste affair, it leaves the future of Estha and Rahel's incest ambiguous. Critics frequently disagree over whether or not the novel's outlook is pessimistic or optimistic about the future of society's responses to such violations of social codes, and often do so specifically in terms of the twins' incest. In light of such interpretations, contemporary trauma theory reveals how, when viewed as a trauma narrative, the novel may be best read, not merely as either a pessimistic or optimistic commentary, but as a warning that even though societal influences can perpetuate trauma and, thus, create the perception of inevitability, the future is not predetermined. The novel accomplishes this goal, specifically, by assuming the form of a trauma narrative. The narrative style, for instance, replicates the nature of trauma for readers to experience secondhand. Most importantly, the novel presents readers with an ethical dilemma and encourages a response from readers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Cara Cilano for introducing me to Arundhati Roy's profound and life-changing novel more than three years ago when I was still an undergraduate at UNCW. Her commitment to intellectual curiosity and her infectious enthusiasm about literature have been truly inspiring. I cannot adequately express how grateful I am for the valuable insights, support, and advice she has given me while writing this thesis.

Many thanks go to Dr. Lewis Walker, who has been an encouraging professor, advisor, and support system, especially over the past two years. I am blessed to have had the chance to work with him so closely on this thesis. He has taught me a great deal about literature and what it means to be a scholar. I will miss his humorous anecdotes immensely.

I would also like to thank Dr. Meghan Sweeney for serving on my thesis committee and for introducing me to a wide range of scholarship on trauma theory and Roy's novel.

Additionally, I am indebted to The Graduate School for funding my participation at the 15th Annual Postcolonial and British Commonwealth Conference so that I could present this research, the English Department, and all of my previous graduate and undergraduate professors at UNCW.

Most of all, I could not have completed this thesis without the emotional support of my family who has patiently witnessed its development over the past three years through my incessant (and often unsolicited) discussions of this powerful novel.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving husband, Matthew, who is also my best friend and number one fan; and to my mother, Rose Anne; my grandmother; Margaret; and my Aunt Donna, who have been by my side, and sacrificed unconditionally throughout all the stages of my life to watch me succeed. This thesis is also dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, the late George Henry Young I, the greatest man I have ever known. These five people constitute my “nuclear” family, and without them, I would never have “made it.”

INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel, The God of Small Things (1997), is often commended for its multilayered, intricately-woven narrative structure that explores the equally complex relationship between trauma, memory, and history. Though the novel consists of numerous levels of narratives established over a broad period of time, ranging from ancient history to the novel's present time, it alternates primarily between two dominant narratives through the use of flashbacks. The first of these two narratives, the novel's frame story, covers a twenty-four hour period that is marked by Rahel's return to Kerala, the southwest region of India, from the United States in 1992. The second of these narratives, the main embedded narrative, spans the two-week period that begins the day Sophie Mol arrives in India during December of 1969 and ends a few days after she drowns in the Meenachal River. What makes this narrative structure unique, however, is not that it merely alternates between the two contrasting narratives, but the manner in which these narratives finally converge.

The God of Small Things begins with its frame narrative and ends with a flashback from the other dominant narrative; thus, at first glance, the novel seems to travel backwards into time. However, it soon becomes evident that these two narratives have different temporal directions. The frame story, for instance, begins with Rahel's return to Ayemenem to see Estha and ends with their act of incest. Therefore, the temporal direction of the frame story is linear, or chronological. The main embedded narrative, in contrast, is nonlinear. This narrative begins with the Sophie Mol's funeral, travels freely both forward and backwards throughout its two-week time constraints, and ends with Ammu and Velutha's inter-caste affair. If this embedded narrative were linear like the frame story, it would begin with the car ride to Cochin to meet Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma at the airport, and end when Estha is "Returned" to his

father in Calcutta. Instead of allowing these two narratives to flow in their seemingly natural temporal directions, Roy strategically chooses to manipulate them so that the two narratives end with comparable scenes. That is, both narratives end with scenes containing serious transgressions of the rules that dictate acceptable social behavior and “lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (Roy 33), which the novel refers to as the “Love Laws.”

With this deliberate parallel between the two dominant narratives in mind, the last word of the novel, “Tomorrow” (Roy 321), seems to be a profound commentary on the circumstances of these two transgressions. Because Ammu and Velutha “knew that things could change in a day,” “they extracted only one promise from each other” (Roy 321). Therefore, the last sentence of the novel is Ammu’s one-word promise to return to Velutha again the next night if circumstances permit. Roy’s conclusion has been the subject of much debate amongst critics of The God of Small Things. Some critics view the promise of “tomorrow” as optimistic and propose that it suggests the future’s potential to be more accepting of inter-caste relationships like Ammu and Velutha’s.¹ Other critics, however, point out that because the last scene immediately follows Estha and Rahel’s incest, and because readers have already witnessed the tragic fate of Ammu and Velutha’s inter-caste relationship, “tomorrow” is a dismal reminder as to what happens to those who transgress the Love Laws.² For this last group of critics, “tomorrow” implies an equally tragic future for Estha and Rahel.

Although Roy finally allows the two main narratives of The God of Small Things to converge at the precise moments when the characters transgress the Love Laws, neither of the transgressions come as a surprise to readers. The narrator hints at the ending of the embedded narrative throughout the novel, and as early as the first chapter, so that it is no longer a matter of discovering what happens to Ammu and Velutha, but how it happens. Likewise, the outcome of

the frame story does not come as a complete shock to readers because Roy subtly sets her readers up to expect and perhaps even desire the twins' union by the end of the novel, despite any reservations readers may have about the incest taboo and their already having witnessed the brutal consequences of Ammu and Velutha's affair. For instance, Roy frequently narrates The God of Small Things from a childlike perspective believed to be the "voice" of either Rahel and/or Estha at any given time, in order to emphasize the twins' limited understanding of the events in the novel, and to contrast the consequences of their childhood traumas, silence and emptiness, with their vulnerability and innocence as children. This technique is especially useful because it positions readers in the mindsets of the seven-year-old twins and establishes them as victims. Thus, when readers witness throughout the course of the narrative how the adult characters misunderstand and mistreat the twins, and with no one left to comfort them at the end of the novel, readers may see Estha and Rahel's eventual incest as a necessary and a mode of healing and perhaps even ethical.

It is not surprising, then, that the twins' incest is the focus of much attention amongst critics of The God of Small Things. For the most part, these critics unanimously agree that the twins' incest is inevitable, though they do so by pursuing different angles of a similar argument. These angles include, but are not limited to, the argument that the incest is a form of healing or an expression of the repressed, that it represents a love more pure than that of the other relationships in the novel, and that Indian society, as it is portrayed in Roy's fiction, leaves the twins with few options for emotional connection with other characters.³ What all of these interpretations have in common is that each accounts for the twins' traumatic past, acknowledges their victimization, and thus sympathizes with their need for emotional connection, support, and healing. Further, these readings of the novel suggest that healing from trauma is more vital than

adherence to man-made social boundaries. For the above reasons, I propose that reading The God of Small Things in light of developments in the increasingly popular trauma theory opens the novel up to additional interpretations regarding the connection between these two intersecting narratives and the significance of Estha and Rahel's incest. Specifically, such a reading of the novel reveals that the perception of the incest as inevitable is only accurate insofar as the circumstances dictate its necessity. Although these circumstances may seem predetermined, this is, too, merely an illusion.

Although trauma theory is said to have begun with Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet's studies of hysteria, when literary critics speak of "contemporary" trauma theory, they refer to investigations into how the psychological effects of traumatic experiences emerge throughout literature. Specifically, these psychological effects include the symptoms of a fairly recently acknowledged mental condition called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When the American Psychological Association first recognized PTSD in the third edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) (1980), it "included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stressed syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes" (Caruth, Explorations 3). While PTSD as a diagnosis was originally reserved primarily for combat victims of the Vietnam War, the inclusion of PTSD in the DSM-III has since "provided a category of diagnosis so powerful that [...] suddenly responses not only to combat and to natural catastrophes but also to rape, child abuse, and a number of other violent occurrences have been understood in terms of PTSD, and diagnoses of some dissociative disorders have also been switched to that of trauma" (Caruth, Explorations 3). Cathy Caruth provides the following basic definition of trauma: "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the

response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance and other intrusive phenomena” (Unclaimed 11). The keystones of this definition are that the response to trauma is both delayed (a phenomenon that Freud calls latency) and intrusive (that is, it interrupts the victim’s ability to live in the present). Further, as Judith Lewis Herman explains, “Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory. Moreover, traumatic events may sever these normally integrated functions from one another” (34). The result of this “severing” is that trauma victims behave “as though their nervous systems have been disconnected from the [psychological] present” (Herman 35), and their memory of the trauma remains unintegrated, thus making the past functionally inaccessible. While these characteristics of trauma are exhibited primarily in individuals, trauma theory is also largely connected to historical, cultural, and mass traumas, such as the Holocaust.

Based on these new discoveries into trauma’s inner workings, Laurie Vickory asserts that the goal of much recently published literature is to “help readers to access traumatic experience,” particularly through the use of fictional trauma narratives (1). However, Vickory also points out that the authors of such narratives do more than simply write about trauma: “They [also] internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures” (3). In the first chapter of her text, Vickory establishes several broad aims and characteristics of trauma narratives. The most crucial of these is that they “raise important questions and responsibilities associated with the writing and reading of trauma as they position their readers in ethical dilemmas analogous to those of trauma survivors” (1). Arundhati Roy’s novel meets all of the above criteria distinctive to trauma narratives. Roy’s combination of narrative techniques works to recreate the experience of trauma so that readers can better understand the damaging psychological effects it has on Estha and Rahel. Therefore,

when Roy finally allows the two dominant narratives to converge with two different transgressions of the Love Laws, she challenges readers to grapple with an ethical dilemma of their own. That is, Roy asks readers to reconcile their loyalties to social orders, such as the Love Laws of their own communities, with their conflicting sympathies for both sets of characters.

To illustrate the precise nature of this ethical dilemma and how trauma theory can be used to reveal it in Roy's novel, I have divided this thesis into three chapters. Chapter One describes three main categories of traumatic symptoms and examines their presence in The God of Small Things on the level of the characters and the stylistic features of the novel. Chapter two is an investigation into the twins' incest and offers an explanation as to how this act may be viewed as both a necessary and an ethical means of healing from trauma. Chapter Three extends this discussion of the novel from its focus on the effects of trauma on individuals, Estha and Rahel, to a broader societal and historical perspective that illuminates ways in which totalizing classification systems like the Love Laws can perpetuate trauma, despite their intentions of maintaining order.

CHAPTER 1. EVIDENCE OF TRAUMA IN ROY'S NOVEL

Perhaps the most distinguishing and recognizable feature of a typical trauma narrative is the how the text itself outwardly exhibits symptoms of trauma. This is because one of the many goals of a trauma narrative is to recreate the trauma for readers to experience secondhand. As a result, such texts often reject the stylistic features found in traditional novels. The God of Small Things, for instance, upsets the orderly chronology and the consistent narrative voice often found in conventional novels. It aims to, first, disorient readers, and then to invite them to become as actively involved in the process of integrating the interconnected narrative layers and blurred perspectives as the characters in the novel. Above all, however, the narration attempts to reproduce the nature of the twins' trauma to position readers in the mindsets of traumatized children, so that when they commit incest as adults, readers will be more apt to take into consideration how their traumatic childhoods contributed to this event.

In Trauma and Recovery, Judith Lewis Herman offers a basic classification system for the symptoms of trauma, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. She attributes the range of symptoms to "three main categories": hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction (35). After a traumatic experience, hyperarousal occurs when "the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment" (35). This is evident in The God of Small Things when Estha worries that the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, who molests him at the Abhilash Talkies, will come find him at Paradise Pickles to harm him again. It is his fear of the return of danger that causes Estha to think "Two Thoughts":

(a) Anything can happen to Anyone.

and

(b) It's best to be prepared. (Roy 186, emphasis Roy's)

Estha's second thought, specifically, causes him to persuade Rahel to transport supplies to the History House across the river as a means of escape from the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. As he stirs a "batch of freshly boiled (illegal) banana jam," Estha realizes that the "Orangedrink Lemondrink man could walk in any minute" (185). There is further evidence of Estha's hyperarousal symptoms when he and Rahel take the boat they find to Velutha's house for repairs. As the twins wait for Velutha to return home, Velutha's brother, Kuttappen, entertains them by filling them with hope that their boat can be fixed and by warning them about the river's potential danger in a playful manner. The narrator then comments, "Temporarily, for a few happy moments, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man shut his yellow smile and went away. Fear sank and settled at the bottom of the deep water. Sleeping a dog's sleep. Ready to rise and murk things at a moment's notice" (202). Here, even though Estha is distracted from the threat of returning danger on a conscious level, the narrator explains that, subconsciously, his body is still in a state of perpetual alert and that his happiness will soon be interrupted and replaced by fear once again. In this way, hyperarousal and the second category of traumatic symptoms, intrusion, are closely related.

Herman defines intrusion as a symptom that "reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment" (35). She explains, "Long after the danger is in past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts" (37). Intrusion is the most obvious category of PTSD symptoms in The God of Small Things. A prime example of this is when Rahel observes an eccentric woman sitting on a train in Grand Central Station, New York, who distracts Rahel from the "other, more terrible thing that haunted her" (Roy 70). Collectively, what haunts Rahel is the fragmented memories of her trauma—that is, the

occurrence and consequences of Velutha's death—and they are intrusive because they interfere with her ability to participate in intimate relationships, as evident in her failed marriage to Larry McCaslin, as well as her ability to interact effectively in social settings, which results in her expulsions from several boarding schools.

Herman describes the third category of symptoms, constriction, as “the numbing response of surrender” (35). This is evident at the end of the novel when Estha finally agrees with Rahel that it is not Velutha they see the police officers attack at the History House. Earlier, as the twins watch the officers handcuff Velutha's mangled body, Rahel informs Estha that she is certain it is not Velutha, but his imaginary “twin brother. Urumban. From Kochi”(Roy 295). The narrator explains that Estha is initially reluctant and “unwilling to seek refuge in fiction” (304). This all changes when Baby Kochamma succeeds in coercing Estha into condemning his innocent friend, Velutha, as he lay dying in the police station. As a result of the guilt he feels for betraying an innocent man whom he loves, afterwards, he “whispered something in Rahel's ear. ‘You were right. It wasn't him. It was Urumban’” (304). The narrator notes that the twins are then “handed over to their mother fast asleep, floating on this fiction” (304). Although Mini Chandy claims that when Estha finally agrees with Rahel it is only to appease his “guilty conscience” (90), it is more likely that the trauma finally becomes too much for Estha to bear and he subconsciously surrenders to it by dissociating from reality.

To varying extents, as in the previous examples, the characters in The God Small Things, particularly Estha and Rahel, exhibit PTSD symptoms from all three categories. However, it is the novel's structural and stylistic characteristics, rather than its content alone, that solidify its status as a trauma narrative by taking on the characteristics of traumatic experience. These stylistic characteristics include two significant features of Roy's novel that have been the focus

of much critical examination: the crisscrossing of the two main narratives amidst the layers of subordinate narratives and the blurring of the perspectives within them.

As mentioned previously, the main narrative in The God of Small Things is the one that is set in the novel's present time, 1992, and takes place in Kerala, India. Rahel has recently returned from the United States after Baby Kochamma sends her a letter informing her that Estha has been Re-Returned to the Ayemenem House. It is also at this point in the story that Roy chooses to open the novel. In the first chapter alone, the narrative repeatedly alternates between the present time and multiple subordinate narratives: the two weeks marked by the onset and consequences of the "Terror" (i.e. Sophie Mol's drowning, Velutha's death, Ammu's exile, etc.), the time period after the "Terror" and after Estha is Returned to his father in Calcutta, and a brief history of Baby Kochamma's relationship with Father Mulligan long before the twins were born. The chapter concludes, however, with an intrusion from the non-participant narrator, who explains to readers the complexity of the story's narrative structure. The narrator first admits, "In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem" (32). However, the narrator also acknowledges,

Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago.
Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before
the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the
Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian bishops
murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea, with coiled
serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in the tangled beards. It
could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and

seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag. That it really began when the Love Laws were made. (33)

Here, the narrator offers that while the story may be said to begin in 1969 when the twins' trauma first occurs, it is also possible to view the story as beginning long ago, when Indian society as a whole determined which romantic and platonic love relationships and behaviors are socially acceptable. The narrator suggests this possibility because it is the perpetual transgression of these rules that ultimately lead to the Ipe family's demise in the novel. Each character's reactions to these transgressions cumulatively contribute to the "Terror" and eventually, to Estha and Rahel's incest. Therefore, the narrator urges that any narrative of the twins' incest should also acknowledge that the formation of the society's Love Laws, which were originally intended to maintain social order, also work to perpetuate trauma.

The God of Small Things, then, is a trauma narrative on at least two different levels. First, in an immediate individual sense, it is a narrative of the traumas its characters experience during the subordinate narratives. Second, on a broader, historical level, it is the cultural product of a country with a traumatic history. As the narrator acknowledges at the end of chapter one, the story she tells in The God of Small Things is too complex to neatly reconstruct using more conventional, perhaps chronological, forms.⁴ The first goal of a trauma narrative is to recount the trauma, but because the different levels of trauma at work within this novel are inextricably connected, it is difficult for the narrator to determine where to begin telling this story. At first, each chapter of the novel begins either with the dominant or main subordinate narrative, but the chapters also consist of multiple space breaks indicating transitions between these and other narratives. A few examples of these additional narratives include Baby Kochamma's relationship with Father Mulligan, Pappachi's mother, Ammu's failed marriage to the twins' father, Chacko's

failed marriage to Margaret Kochamma, and a brief history of Christianity and communism in Kerala.

This sense of disorientation in the narration, though, is a crucial part of recreating the trauma, and is prevalent in many other trauma narratives. Vickory explains that such stylistic devices work to actively involve readers in the process of “reconstruct[ing] experience and retelling as trauma writers expose them to a variety of voices, subject positionings, and symbolizing that highlight the chaotic and disorienting aspects as well as representational possibilities or approximations” (Vickory 27). Indeed, the embedded narratives in The God of Small Things emerge from the two central narratives in a way that resembles the intrusive symptoms of trauma and also demands that readers actively keep track of the time shifts and their implications in the novel. For instance, the second chapter, titled “Pappachi’s Moth,” is technically the chronological beginning of the main embedded narrative. It describes the “skyblue day in December sixty-nine” when Chacko, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, and the twins drive to Cochin to see The Sound of Music and to pick up Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma from the airport. This particular car ride is significant because it is at this point in the novel that the narrator reveals the emotional tension between Chacko and Ammu, Rahel announces that she has seen Velutha at the march, and Baby Kochamma is harassed by one of the other marchers. In order to present readers with enough background information to gain a clear understanding of the events that ensue during this road trip, the narrator must constantly interrupt the chronology of that story with other narratives containing additional sorts of histories. For readers to better understand Ammu’s resentment towards Chacko’s status at Paradise Pickles, it is crucial to understand the consequences of Ammu’s divorce and subsequent return to Ayemenem where she has no “Locusts Stand I.” For readers to better understand the significance of Velutha’s role in

the march and his later relationship with Ammu, it is imperative that they also understand the history of Christianity and communism in Kerala. While traumatized people attempt to live their lives in the present, intrusive memories of their traumas interfere and keep them psychologically in the past. Similarly, the narrative structure of The God of Small Things and its individual chapters is constantly pulled in different temporal directions because of intrusive, but necessary, subordinate narratives. Additionally, there is no set pattern that dictates the frequency of the intrusions. This seemingly random quality makes the narrative even more closely resemble the nature of traumatic memory.

Another of the significant stylistic features of Roy's novel that mimics the nature of trauma is its complicated treatment of perspective. While most critics point out that the story is told by an intrusive third-person omniscient narrator, some note that the novel is most closely representative of Rahel's perspective in the story, and still others go so far as to refer to Rahel as the novel's protagonist. Roni Natov, for instance, indirectly refers to Rahel as a narrator by crediting her with the reconstruction of their traumatic memories. Natov states, "As she [Rahel] tells the story of the etiology of Estha's silence, retrospectively, she unravels the pivotal incidents that engendered Estha's current restlessness" (192, emphasis mine). Natov does, however, simultaneously acknowledge the emergence of other perspectives in the novel: "So Rahel guides us into the story of their past, though for intimate moments of passion and intense, formative experience we are taken, at times by Estha, at times by each of the family members, inside the imagination so that by the time the novel ends, we understand the inevitability of the destruction of the family" (193, emphasis mine). This sort of interpretation is only partially accurate. While it is true that those other powerful perspectives do emerge, sometimes unpredictably, the actual telling of the story, with the exception of characters' dialogue and

occasional italicized thoughts, is performed solely by a distinct, unidentifiable narrator. Natov's interpretation, however, attributes the act of narrating to the individual characters.

This tendency of critics to label Rahel as a narrator may be a result of their observation that it is Rahel who performs actions that are most like the protagonists of more conventional novels. For instance, it is Rahel's return to Ayemenem that marks the occasion for the telling of this story. It is also Rahel who serves as the main character of the frame narrative in the sense that it is her emotions that the narrator presents readers with most frequently during these sections of the novel. However, The God of Small Things is not a conventional novel, as can be seen in the previous discussion of its narrative structure.

Nonetheless, critics like Natov continually attribute at least part of the novel's narration to Rahel. Sheena Patchay even proposes that the narrative represents Rahel's reconstruction of what the novel refers to as the "unofficial version" of the family's history. This critic optimistically adds, "She [Rahel] tells the story that Ammu could not tell because of the way in which she is ostracized by her family and the police" (Patchay 153). This particular reading of the novel suggests that even though Ammu and Velutha's relationship has a tragic ending, they are ultimately vindicated through Ammu's daughter who is able to set the record straight. This type of reading is much like those of critics who view the last line of the novel, simply "Tomorrow" (Roy 321), as optimistic. For example, Aïda Balvannanadhan asserts, "Rahel's remembering return Estha to his mind at the end of the narrative and also change the tragic end of the mother's love story to a promise of continuation" (105-06). While it is true that prior to Rahel's arrival in Ayemenem, "[i]t had been quiet in Estha's head," and that when Rahel returns, "[t]he world, locked out for years, suddenly floated in" (Roy 16), Estha does not appear returned to his mind when the narrator describes how he then "squatted on his haunches and rocked

himself in the rain” (16). Significantly, Balvannanadhan’s previous statement refers to “the end of the narrative,” which describes the twins’ incest. At this point in the novel, however, there is no evidence of any change in Estha’s psychological state. The narrator mentions “[o]nly that they held each other close, long after it was over” (Roy 311) and reverts to a flashback from the main subordinate narrative occurring in 1969.

Numerous other critics have interpreted the last line of the novel less optimistically. Urbashi Barat, for example, observes of the ending and its narrative structure,

Thus it is that the novel ends not with Rahel and Estha but with Ammu and Velutha, with two consecutive accounts of forbidden relationships in reverse chronology. Each becomes an image of the other: each is as doomed as the other: and with the reversal of the conventional order of narration, it is obvious that the present can only lead to the past, that the only possible future is a version of the past. (90-91)

Although Barat agrees that the word “tomorrow” does suggest a promise of continuation, she views any such continuation as doomed. Barat reiterates this interpretation when she writes, “Grief and separation will inevitably be the end of forbidden relationships” (95), and in direct opposition to Balvannanadhan, “There is no victory-in-defeat for the characters in Roy’s novel” (97). Barat’s insights provide a valuable contrast to overly optimistic readings like Balvannanadhan’s because they raise vital questions about the causes of such a polarity amongst the two camps of critics. One possible explanation for both the critics’ tendency to label the characters as narrators of their own stories and to read the ending so positively is that some readers of The God of Small Things may desire some consolation that the many injustices in the novel will result in some sort of favorable outcome, however limited.

This disagreement amongst the critics may be better understood in terms of trauma theory, specifically Herman's three "stages of recovery." The first of these stages consists of removing the victim from any direct or perceived threat of danger and establishing both a physical and emotional sense of safety. Herman refers to the second stage as "remembrance and mourning." Appropriately, in this stage, the victim "tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story" (Herman 175). Once the victim has accomplished this task, the third stage of recovery is to "reconnect" with society. In order to do so, the survivor "must develop a new self" (Herman 196). Herman explains that the survivor's "relationships have been tested and forever changed by the trauma; now she must develop new relationships" (196). Although all each of these three stages are necessary steps of the healing process, it is the second stage that best explains why some critics of The God of Small Things desire to view Rahel as the novel's primary narrator.

In addition to Herman's "stages of recovery," she asserts, "The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own story" (133). This need for empowerment during recovery is necessary because "[a]t the moment of trauma the victim is utterly helpless" (Herman 137). By granting Rahel the power to narrate her own story (as well as Ammu and Velutha's), readers subconsciously attempt to aid her in the healing process. Critic Hema R. Nair, for instance, perceives the novel's narrative structure as follows: "Through the device of reversals, repetitions, returns, and rewinds, Rahel (re)members the past totally and with clarity" (55). True, the narrator does comment on the twins' adult perceptions of the "Terror" in contrast to their childhood views of the situation. For instance, the narrator comments towards the end of the novel, "It took the twins years to understand Ammu's part in

what had happened. At Sophie Mol's funeral and in the days before Estha was Returned, they saw her swollen eyes, and with the self-centeredness of children, held themselves wholly culpable for her grief" (Roy 307). Remarks like this one, however, do not provide sufficient evidence of the healing process. In this specific instance, there is evidence that the twins now realize that they are not the only "guilty" party, but they do not see how they were really the "victims, not the perpetrators" (Roy 182, emphasis Roy's) of the trauma. Until the twins do understand this, they are still in the second stage of recovery. For this reason, even though the narrator presents readers with Rahel's remembrances of the trauma in the form of exposition from a non-participant narrator, dialogue, and italicized thoughts throughout the novel, Nair's claim that "Rahel (re)members the past totally and with clarity" is a stretch, at best.

Certainly, the narrator of The God of Small Things does provide readers with insights into Rahel's memories throughout the novel. For instance, in the second chapter of the novel, the narrator tells the story of the car ride to Cochin in 1969, including a description of Ammu's harsh reaction after Rahel insists that she sees Velutha at the march. After a space break, indicating a shift forward in chronology, the narrator remarks,

Years later, on a crisp fall morning in upstate New York, on a Sunday train from Grand Central to Croton Harmon, it suddenly came back to Rahel. That expression on Ammu's face. Like a rogue piece in a puzzle. Like a question mark that drifted through the pages of a book and never settled at the end of a sentence. That hard marble look look in Ammu's eyes. The glisten of perspiration on her upper lip. And the chill of that sudden hurt silence. What had it all meant? (Roy 69)

Here, the narrator tells us in her own words what Rahel remembers of the previous story. Significantly, through the use of the word “suddenly,” the narrator makes it clear that it is not Rahel who has just described the car ride to Cochin. However, it is easy to see why readers may perceive Rahel to be the teller of this story. The narrator often poses questions that Rahel might ask, but they are questions to which an omniscient narrator should already know the answers. For instance, in the previous quotation, the narrator asks, “What had it all meant?” Additionally, in the flashback that describes the car ride, the narrator asks, “Why was Ammu so angry? About what?” (Roy 69). Because an omniscient narrator would already know why Ammu was angry, for example, the use of questions like these makes it difficult to determine if the narrator is an intrusive non-participant narrator, or if it is at least partially Rahel who tells the story.

At other times in the novel, though, it is much more obvious that Rahel is not the narrator. The most significant of the many examples throughout the text is the final love scene between Ammu and Velutha. This scene consists of numerous intimate details of the lovers’ relationship that are impossible for any other character in the novel to know: “She unbuttoned her shirt. They stood there. Skin to skin. Her brownness against his blackness. Her softness against his hardness. Her nut-brown breasts (that wouldn’t support a toothbrush) against his smooth ebony chest” (Roy 316-17). It is impossible for any other character to narrate this scene because the only two witnesses, Ammu and Velutha themselves, are both deceased. Also, the narration indicates knowledge of a prior scene in which Ammu stands in the bathroom of the Ayemenem House, completely alone with the door locked, privately examining her body by placing toothbrushes under her breasts to see if they will stay. While it may be argued that the love scene between Ammu and Velutha is really the twins’, or Rahel’s, imaginative attempt to make sense of Ammu and Velutha’s relationship, if this were the case, the twins’ narration

would not include the reference to the toothbrush. Indeed, the only possible narrator of this novel, especially this particular scene, is an omniscient non-participant narrator.

One feasible explanation for the blurring of these perspectives in The God of Small Things is that the book, as a trauma narrative, attempts to “internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience” (Vickory 3). When the narration in this novel appears to be Rahel’s, it is often because the narrator assumes a child-like perspective.⁵ For example, at the Abhilash Talkies when Estha is molested, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, tells him, “Now if you’ll kindly hold this for me” (Roy 98). The narrator then describes the man “handing Estha his penis through his soft white muslin dhoti” and remarks, “Estha held it because he had to” (Roy 98). Viewing this scene from an adult perspective, readers understand that Estha does not necessarily have to do as he is told. There are several possibilities for what Estha could do instead. He could attempt to refuse, scream for help, or even try to run away. Roni Natov observes, “Because children are so vulnerable, their perceptions and experiences so little validated, it is rather easy for adults to betray them, sometimes consciously, sometimes without intention” (194). Although the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’s betrayal of Estha is positively intentional, the vulnerability and innocence to which Natov alludes is still a critical element of the narrator’s childlike tone in this passage. Of course, the narrator is well aware of the alternative actions Estha could take to try to prevent this traumatic event from taking place, but Estha is a young and innocent child who trusts every adult in the novel. Even the twins’ mother is aware that the innocence in both of her children is potentially dangerous: “Ammu loved her children (of course), but their wide-eyed vulnerability and their willingness to love people who didn’t really love them exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them—just as an education, a protection” (Roy 42). When describing the scene with Estha and the Orangedrink

Lemondrink Man, then, the narrator may assume a childlike perspective to encourage readers to sympathize with the twins at the end of the novel when they commit incest.⁶ By the end of the novel, when the incest occurs, Estha's transgression of the Love Laws seems less severe—more understandable—because we see how severely he was robbed of his innocence as a child.

There is yet another reason why The God of Small Things uses childlike perspectives in the narration. According to trauma theory, because “[t]raumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images,” they often “resemble the memories of young children” (Herman 38). This is evident in the novel when Rahel occasionally remembers simply the image and sensation of “A sourmetal smell, like steel bus rails, and the smell of the bus conductor's hands from holding them. A young man with an old man's mouth” (Roy 70, emphasis Roy's). Also, because images of trauma are pre-narrative and unintegrated, Rahel often “wondered why it was that when she thought of home it was always in the colors of the dark, oiled wood of boats, and the empty cores of tongues of flame that flickered in brass lamps” (Roy 70). In this way, by employing childlike perceptions frequently throughout the novel, the narration encourages readers to sympathize with the twins at the end of the novel, despite any beliefs readers may have about the immorality of incest. For the same reason, it also mimics the nature of traumatic memory for readers to experience secondhand.

Certainly, The God of Small Things deviates from the forms used in other, more conventional, novels. It makes use of a complicated narrative structure with multiple layers of crisscrossing narratives and rejects any set pattern or chronology. It does not possess a typical protagonist or hero, and its shifts in perspective are often blurred and express child-like points of view, all the while being told by a single non-participant omniscient narrator who makes it

difficult to tell whose viewpoint the narrator is presenting. All of these characteristics of the novel are in some way related to its role as a trauma narrative. The narrative structure imitates intrusive trauma symptoms and the childlike perceptions represent the nature of pre-narrative, unintegrated traumatic memories. Additionally, victims of trauma “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth, Explorations 5). For this reason, the story is narrated by an omniscient non-participant narrator because this is the only sort of narrator who would have access to those specific memories from which trauma has disconnected the characters, as well as the historical perspective and implications of the trauma. This unlimited insight is crucial because it is through the narrator’s ability to move freely between varying sorts of memories and histories, including those that have not yet been processed in the minds of the twins, that readers begin to consider the necessity of the incest at the end of the novel.

CHAPTER 2: INCEST AND HEALING

Clearly, it is understandable why readers and critics might perceive Rahel as the narrator of at least part of The God of Small Things. In addition to the characteristics of the narration that contribute to this misconception, for Rahel to narrate her own story would suggest that she is actively engaged in the healing process as soon she arrives in Ayemenem and the novel begins. However, as I have already demonstrated, this is not the case, at least not in terms of the narrative style of the novel, which in itself does not display any such evidence of healing for the twins. Nonetheless, healing is a possibility for Estha and Rahel in other aspects of the novel, such as in the act of incest itself, which certainly depends on the narrative style to encourage readers to consider whether incest is an ethical form of coping with trauma. By demonstrating how the twins' are fixated in the psychological past as a result of unprocessed traumatic memories, the narrator establishes the necessity of the twins being able to "work through" their traumas. However, because of Estha's silence, they are unable to discuss their feelings verbally with each other, or with a therapist. The latter is even more of an impossibility for the twins because to even consider treating themselves to the "self-indulgence" of therapy would pose an ethical dilemma—that is, they would have to choose either to pursue their own psychological healing or to remain loyal to Velutha's memory.

Trauma theory maintains that for traumatized people, "It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma" (Herman 37). This aspect of trauma is demonstrated in the novel by the frame narrative's attempts to move forward into the present despite constant interruptions, or intrusions, from the subordinate narratives, especially that which traces the traumatic two-week period that leads up to what the novel terms the "Terror." In The God of Small Things, Rahel's toy wristwatch is a symbol of this characteristic of traumatic experience. The plastic watch

always displays the same time, “ten to two,” because its hands are painted on it. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator explains, “One of her [Rahel’s] ambitions was to own a watch on which she could change the time whenever she wanted to (which according to her was what Time was meant for in the first place)” (Roy 37). Rahel’s desire to manipulate time assumes crucial significance during the scene that takes place at the Hotel Sea Queen in Cochin.

After he is molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, that same night, Estha approaches the door to the hotel room that Rahel and their Uncle Chacko share. Rahel immediately senses Estha’s presence and opens the door for him before he even knocks. She is able to do so because Estha and Rahel share an intense emotional bond that is reminiscent of telepathy. For this reason, as children, the twins always “thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us” (Roy 4). This emotional connection provides them access to each other’s individual memories, but it also exposes Rahel to Estha’s trauma and makes her a sort of secondary victim. Because no one else senses their pain, Estha and Rahel lie together at the Hotel Sea Queen as each other’s only source of comfort. Significantly, in the last line of this chapter, the narrator remarks, “The time was ten to two.” Because “[t]raumatic memories are frozen in time” (12), when Rahel returns to the Meenachal River twenty-three years later and views the History House, where she and her brother once “learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws” (54), the narrator comments, “Something lay buried in the ground. Under grass. Under twenty-three years of June rain. A small forgotten thing. Nothing that the world would miss. A child’s plastic wristwatch with the time painted on it. Ten to two, it said” (121). According to trauma theory, until the twins are able to “work-through” these traumatic memories, it will always be “ten to two.”⁷

Unfortunately, the prospect of “working through” their traumas poses a unique problem for Estha, especially, because he has not spoken for twenty-three years. Shortly after Baby Kochamma coerces him into confirming the accusations against his innocent friend Velutha at the police station, “Childhood tiptoed out” of Estha, and “Silence slid in like a bolt” (303). Because traumatic memories are unintegrated and, thus, pre-narrative, recovery demands that the survivor begin to narrate “the story of the trauma,” “so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life story” (Herman 175). Therefore, Rahel’s goal as a witness is to help him assign language to his grief so that he can eventually narrate it.

Because Estha either cannot or will not speak to anyone, not even Rahel, the twins must find some other means of helping Estha communicate his grief and for Rahel to bear witness to it. When the adult Rahel watches her brother change clothes, she notices a raindrop that “glistened on the end of Estha’s earlobe. Thick, silver in the light, like a heavy bead of mercury,” so she “Touched it. Took it away” (Roy 89). Here, the raindrop is a tangible symbol of the traumas that consistently burden Estha, the cause of his silence. By touching the water droplet and removing it from his flesh, Rahel attempts to relieve Estha of some of his cumbersome grief, but Estha does not acknowledge her gesture. Instead, “He retreated into further stillness. As though his body had the power to snatch its senses inwards [...] away from the surface of his skin, into some more inaccessible recess” (Roy 89). Estha’s unresponsiveness reflects the severity of his traumas, which are too deep in his consciousness and which have been neglected far too long for Rahel’s superficial touching of his flesh. This level of communication is not enough to resolve a twenty-three-year-old trauma like Estha’s, which requires more intimate communication. Interestingly, the comparison of the water droplet on Estha’s earlobe to a “heavy bead of mercury” has profound significance. Mercury is well-known to be a poisonous

metal, but it has also occasionally been used for medicinal purposes, such as in the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. The contradiction in this image, then, clearly foreshadows the twins' incest. Even though the twins may have the potential to heal through incest, the act is nonetheless a violation of the Love Laws, and could potentially be met with tragic consequences.

According to Vickory, trauma narratives "enact the directing outward of an inward, silent process to witnesses, both within and outside the texts" (3). This is precisely what Estha and Rahel do through the act of incest. Judith Lewis Herman explains how

In situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection. Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. (52)

For Estha, his mother, Ammu, should be his first source of comfort, for there is no more secure place for a child than his mother's womb. However, Estha is "Returned" to his father immediately after the "Terror," and is consequently separated from his mother and the rest of his family. When his father finally "Re>Returns" Estha to Ayemenem, Ammu is dead, and Estha is permanently deprived of his opportunity to grieve in the security of his mother's metaphorical womb. As a result, his silent guilt over betraying Velutha becomes an all-encompassing silence, and he withdraws from all personal relationships. This is only the case, however, until Rahel returns to Ayemenem from the United States.

During the two weeks leading up the “Terror,” Ammu is hardly a comfort to Estha at all. She does not sense how the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man has harmed her young son. As Ammu leads Estha and Rahel out of the theater, she stops to ask the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man where she might find a taxi to take them to their hotel. While the emotional bond Rahel shares with her brother enables her to sense “something about the steady gaze in which he [the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man] held her” (Roy 106), Ammu is oblivious to the trauma Estha has just experienced.⁸ Rahel responds to the situation as follows: “She turned around to look at Estha” (106), as if to confirm her suspicions, and then “backed away from the hairy man” (106). Ammu, though, remarks to Baby Kochamma after the brief conversation, “Sweet chap, that Orangedrink Lemondrink fellow” and “He doesn’t look it, but he was surprisingly sweet with Estha” (106). Ammu’s misreading of the situation hurts Estha. From this point on, he constantly worries that if the Orangedrink Lemondrink man were to hunt him down at Paradise Pickles, “Ammu would offer him pineapple juice. With ice” (188). Estha feels that his mother’s inability to sense what has happened is a subtle form of betrayal, but at the same time, he fears that “if Ammu found out about what he had done with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, she’d love him less as well. Very much less” (108).⁹ Therefore, Rahel is the only form of comfort Estha has left. It is she who understands him and lies with him at the Hotel Sea Queen that night. Interestingly, the intrusive narrator foreshadows the outcome of the frame narrative when she says at this point in the embedded narrative that the twins lay there together “not wholly unaware of the hint of doom and all that waited in the wings for them” (116). It is this particular night, especially, that contributes to the twins’ incest at the end of the novel, in that the latter scene may be seen as an attempt to relive that same feeling of comfort they shared that night at the Hotel Sea Queen.

While Rahel is certainly Estha's sole source of comfort during the weeks leading up to the "Terror," Estha is Rahel's first, and perhaps only, source of comfort throughout the entire novel. This is especially evident when Rahel watches her brother undress after walking in the rain during the main narrative in 1992. The narrator explains how

Rahel watched [Estha] with the curiosity of a mother watching her wet child. A sister a brother. A woman a man. A twin a twin. She flew these several kites at once. He was a naked stranger met in a chance encounter. He was the one that she had known before Life began. The one who had once led her (swimming) through their mother's lovely cunt. Both things unbearable in their polarity. In their irreconcilable far-apartness. (89)

This passage demonstrates that Rahel knew her brother long before they were even officially born. Not only did they cohabit in their mother's womb, but Rahel looked to Estha for guidance and comfort as early as during the actual birthing process.

The previous passage is also important because it articulates the complexity of the twins' relationship and the implications of their incest. First, Estha and Rahel are brother and sister, for whom the Love Laws prohibit any sexual relationship, but they are also dizygotic twins who share an emotional bond few other people in society can understand. This intimate connection existed even before they were born and became subject to the Love Laws. At the same time, this passage also indicates that the way Rahel watches Estha is with utmost curiosity and nostalgia for her childhood innocence. As children, Estha and Rahel "had never been shy of each other's bodies, but they had never been old enough (together) to know what shyness was" (88). When Rahel watches Estha undress, she has not seen his body since he was a child. Now, when she looks at him, she is not lusting, but searching "her brother's nakedness for signs of herself. In

the shape of his knees. The arch of his instep. The slope of his shoulders. The angle at which the rest of his arm met his elbow. The way his toe-nails tipped upwards at the ends. The sculpted hollows on either side of his taut, beautiful buns” (88). Although this final observation may be construed as though Rahel is, in fact, lusting after Estha’s body in a sexual manner, the narrator immediately adds, “Men’s bums never grow up. Like school satchels, they evoke in an instant memories of childhood” (88-89). This is significant because Rahel’s observation about Estha’s buttocks is not adult lust, but a desperate attempt to identify in his adult body the body she remembers as her first source of comfort as a child.

Indeed, the twins rediscover the comfort they once found in each other, for not long after the previous passage in terms of the chronology of the frame narrative, Estha and Rahel commit incest. The narrator describes this scene in such a way that is not focused on their sexual relationship, but their emotional bond and the effects it has on their traumas:

There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi’s book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings. Except perhaps that no Watcher watched through Rahel’s eyes. No one stared out of a window at the sea. Or a boat in the river. Or a passerby in the mist in a hat. Except perhaps that it was a little cold. A little wet. But very quiet the Air. But what was there to say? Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat. Only that a hard honey-colored shoulder had teethmarks on it. Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief. (310-11)

This description of the twins' sexual encounter is much different than the one between Ammu and Veltuha that soon follows, and which I have described previously. This scene is void of any explicit details. Instead, it is vague and consists of metaphors that merely strongly imply a sexual encounter. For instance, the image of the "stacked spoons" suggests the interlocking of bodies during intercourse. At the same time, it also indicates that the twins have reclaimed their joint identity, which was damaged after Estha was "Returned" to Calcutta to live with his father following the "Terror." The narrator prepares for this scene early in the novel when she says, "That the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies" (21). There is further evidence of this return to a joint identity when the narrator uses the indefinite article to describe "a lovely throat" (311) in the long passage above. By refusing to indicate from whose throat the "snuffle" originates, the narrator allows for the possibility that, as they lie together, there are no longer two distinct throats, but a single throat that they now share.

The twins' reconnection, rather than their lust for each other, is the primary focus of this scene. In fact, the only substantial evidence of their sexual encounter is that the narrator adds to this passage in a separate paragraph, "Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (311).

Even though the twins' actions are a violation of the Love Laws, the narrator wants readers to understand the nature of their incest. While the incest is comforting and has the potential to help them heal from their traumas, the narrator also refers to it as an expression of "hideous grief" and supports this claim by describing the "teethmarks" on "a honey-colored shoulder." This image indicates that their incest is a painful experience, which is crucial to the narrator's goal of convincing readers that the incest is an alternative form of a trauma narrative, because even

though the act of narrating trauma is recuperative, it also “plunges the survivor into profound grief” (Herman 187). Pointing out this characteristic of the twins’ incest also encourages readers to sympathize with Estha and Rahel for feeling as though they had no other choice but to violate the Love Laws in order to begin the healing process.

Despite the pain and grief the twins experience through their incest, the narrator emphasizes how it constitutes a “working through” of trauma. For instance, the comfort they find in this act enables Rahel to partake in an intimate relationship, which she has been unable to do previously. When Rahel is married to Larry McCaslin, she is emotionally disconnected, especially when they have sex. Even though Larry loves Rahel, “when they made love he was offended by her eyes. They behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching. Looking out of the window at the sea. At a boat in the river. Or a passerby in the mist in a hat” (20). Larry and Rahel’s relationship is doomed because he cannot understand the nature of Rahel’s childhood traumas. He is incapable of recognizing that what he “saw in Rahel’s eyes was [...] a hollow where Estha’s words had been. He couldn’t be expected to understand that” (20). Larry and Rahel’s marriage does not fail because Larry is a bad husband, but because Rahel’s traumas prevent her from interacting with others in a socially productive manner. In order for Rahel to have a productive intimate relationship, then, she must find a way to emotionally reconnect to another person so that her eyes no longer behave as though they are watching for someone else. As demonstrated in the long passage above, Rahel finds this in her sexual encounter with her brother.

By occasionally referring to Estha and Rahel as “Quietness and Emptiness” rather than by their real names, especially as they commit incest, the narrator encourages readers to sympathize with them, rather than condemn them for their actions (Natov 202). Because these

alternative names for the twins are one-word summaries of their multiple trauma symptoms, Roy asks readers to consider whether their incest might be necessary form of the recovery process for Estha and Rahel. Roy also does this by demonstrating how their relationship is not lustful, but tender and affectionate. Critics have even noted that the twins' "incestuous union is as natural and as loving as marriage, which is sanctioned and praised by a society that finds incest repellent and sinful" (Barat 86). By the end of the novel, readers may be so emotionally connected to Rahel and Estha that it is difficult for them to expect Roy to deprive the twins of what might be the only remaining possibility for emotional connection and healing from their traumas.

Of course, some readers may be more hesitant to accept the twins' incest as an ethical and alternative means of coping with trauma. Such readers may ask why the twins could not simply seek psychiatric treatment. For these readers, Roy offers the following explanation in the form of a description of the twins:

A pair of actors trapped in a recondite play with no hint of plot or narrative [...] Unable somehow to change plays. Or purchase, for a fee, some cheap brand of exorcism from a counselor with a fancy degree, who would sit them down and say, in one of many ways: "You're not the Sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You were the victims, not the perpetrators." It would have helped if they could have made that crossing. If only they could have worn, even temporarily, the tragic hood of victimhood. Then they would have been able to put a face on it, and conjure up fury at what had happened. Or seek redress. And eventually, perhaps, exorcize the memories that haunted them. (182)

The reason Estha and Rahel cannot seek counseling for their grief is because to do so, would be to claim status as the victims of the “Terror.” The twins feel as though identifying themselves as victims would be disrespectful to Velutha, whom they believe to be the only true victim of the tragedy.

According to trauma theory, victims of trauma are often “reluctant to give up symptoms such as nightmares or flashbacks, because they have acquired important meaning. The symptoms may be a symbolic means of keeping faith with a lost person, a substitute for mourning, or an expression of unresolved guilt” (Herman 183).¹⁰ Certainly, Estha and Rahel are hesitant to identify themselves as victims because they feel guilty and ashamed of their own contribution to Velutha’s death. The narrator explains in yet another intrusive commentary,

Had they [the twins] been tricked into condemnation? In a way, yes, but it wasn’t as simple as that. They both knew that they had been given a choice. And how quick they had been in the choosing! They hadn’t given it more than a second of thought before they looked up and said (not together, but almost) “Save Ammu.”
Save us. Save our mother. (Roy 302)

The twins’ refusal to claim their victim status may be an unconscious attempt to punish themselves in order to “keep faith” with Velutha’s memory. Of course, readers can see that because the twins are merely children when they make the decision to falsely condemn Velutha in order to protect themselves and their mother, they should not be held accountable for their actions. Readers understand that they should not have been put in the position to have had to make such a decision at such a young age in the first place. Instead, readers may be tempted to place the majority, if not all, of the blame on Baby Kochamma for putting her own niece and nephew in this situation merely to save her own name. The original police report that Baby

Kochamma files before the children are found accuses Velutha of kidnapping and murder, but once the twins inform the police that “they had gone of their own volition” (298) and that Sophie Mol’s death was accidental, the police threaten Baby Kochamma with “lodging a false F.I.R. Criminal offense” (299). This provokes Baby Kochamma to attempt to protect herself at the twins’ and Velutha’s expense.

Even though the twins are aware that “there were several other perpetrators (besides themselves) that day” (Roy 182), they are either unable or unwilling to acknowledge that there was more than one victim. While the twins, as adults, are equally aware of Baby Kochamma’s coercive influence, they feel they must take responsibility for their own contribution. This is because when trauma survivors “have themselves harmed others, either in desperation of the moment or in the slow degradation of captivity,” even though they “may come to understand that these violations of the relationship were committed under extreme circumstances, this understanding does not fully resolve the profound feelings of guilt and shame” (Herman 192). Trauma causes victims to feel entirely helpless, so by viewing themselves as at least partially responsible for Velutha’s death and accepting the resulting “guilt and shame” Herman describes, the twins resist such feelings of helplessness in an attempt to reclaim some control over their circumstances.

Numerous critics have previously suggested that the twins’ incest is inevitable based on the lack of healthy examples upon which the twins might model their own relationship. Barat, for instance, observes that because “every relationship they [the twins] see and experience, every relationship in their history, has been flawed, unhappy, doomed; [it is] little wonder, then, that they themselves cannot enter into one with any hope of fulfillment” (87). However, Barat takes this idea further when she states, “In a world in which socially accepted forms of love remain

only forms without substance, true love can find expression only in unacceptable relationships” (93). Although a “relationship may be broken down by the pressures of the community, [...] love itself does not die, [...] [but] finds expression elsewhere, perhaps in another such relationship” (Barat 97). The defiant nature of forbidden relationships leads Barat to conclude, “Forbidden relationships become the only way to achieve selfhood for the oppressed, the deprived, the powerless” (91). Despite this perceived inevitability of the twins’ incest, trauma theory suggests that their actions are also an outward attempt to reclaim some sense of control over their trauma. At the end of the novel, the twins defiantly claim authority over their actions. Repeatedly throughout the frame narrative, the narrator reminds readers that the twins are now of “a viable die-able age,” which implies that they are old enough to be justifiably held accountable for their decisions. Together, they choose to break the Love Laws by committing incest.

Their choice, however, is quite limited and may also be an illusion. Cara Cilano points out this thematic “façade of choice” (150) in the context of Ammu’s assertion “that choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name didn’t give a woman much of a choice” (Roy 37). Cilano states that Ammu “has no real choice in either the marriage or the naming instances because her gender identity already operates within predetermined limits” (150). Likewise, the twins do not have “much of a choice” when it comes to their incest. Given their limited agency during the “Terror,” their “choice” as adults is to either suffer from their traumas alone, or to defy the Love Laws in order to grieve together and eventually “work through” their traumas.

Whether or not the twins’ actions are an ethical form of coping with their trauma is debatable, but Roy certainly encourages readers to consider this possibility. The narrative structure of the novel contributes to the potential of such a reading because, by placing Ammu and Velutha’s love scene right after the twins’, Roy promotes a comparison of the two scenes.

Whereas what Ammu and Velutha share is pleasurable and lustful, Estha and Rahel's love scene is as excruciatingly painful as it is comforting. Theirs is a last resort for the release of a necessary expression of grief. As mentioned previously, because Estha is unable to speak, the twins must find some other method to communicate their trauma without feeling as though they are betraying Velutha yet again. In this way, the act of incest constitutes Estha and Rahel's response to one of many ethical dilemmas that are typically depicted in trauma narratives: "the unremitting problem of how not to betray the past" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 27, emphasis Caruth's). In fact, the incest itself serves as an alternative form of a trauma narrative in the novel and is a first step toward healing for the twins.

CHAPTER 3: THE ETHICAL DILEMMA

The pattern of vicious transference of blame and resentment in The God of Small Things is yet another characteristic of the novel that is crucial to trauma narratives. One of the main goals of such texts is to demonstrate how “trauma reproduces itself if left unattended” (Vickory 3). Roy reveals in her novel how the various traumas in this family’s history all contribute to its tragic ending, including the twins’ incest. Despite critics’ perceptions of the incest as inevitable, the twins do have the potential to end to their own contribution to this pattern of transference if they are able to “work through” their traumas. The previous chapter demonstrates how this may only be possible through their violation of the Love Laws. This is because, according to Judith Lewis Herman and Maurice Halbwachs, in addition to narrating one’s trauma, a relational dimension must be met to achieve full recovery. While Herman explicates the necessity of interpersonal relationships, emotional support, and witnessing, Halbwachs goes so far as to say that without social relationships, one does not even have access to their memories at all. These two theories both justify why the twins’ incest may be necessary for their own healing and for the benefit of society. Regardless of whether or not it can be justified, the necessity of the incest certainly poses an ethical dilemma for Estha and Rahel. It is this ethical dilemma that constitutes the most important goal of a trauma narrative, not as it pertains to the characters in the novel, but to the readers who must, by the end of the novel, reconcile their conflicting loyalties to social orders with their new understanding of inner workings of traumatic experience.

Through the numerous layers of crisscrossing narratives, the narrator reveals how Pappachi’s moth causes him to begrudge his wife, Mammachi, her success. When her violin instructor informs him that Mammachi is “exceptionally talented and in his opinion, potentially concert class,” Pappachi puts an end to her lessons (Roy 49). More unfortunate, though, is that

when the overwhelming demand for Mammachi's pickles and jams leads her to produce them commercially, the narrator explains that Pappachi is jealous of "the attention his wife was suddenly getting," and responds by "beat[ing] her with a brass flower vase" more often than he had previously (46-47). Pappachi's resentment about his moth leads him to take his bitterness out on his wife, but the transference does not end there.

When Chacko witnesses one of these beatings, he threatens his father and demands that he stop. This, in turn, provokes Mammachi to focus all of her attention and love on her son. However, even though Chacko "needed his mother's adoration," and even insisted upon it, he also "despised her for it and punished her in secret ways" (236). When Chacko falls in love with Margaret Kochamma, it is because she treats him in a way that is completely unlike how Mammachi treats him. Margaret Kochamma does not dote on Chacko the way his mother does. After their divorce, though, Chacko takes his pain out on his mother in numerous ways, but the "worst and most mortifying of all was when he reminisced about Margaret Kochamma. He spoke of her often and with peculiar pride. As though he admired her for having divorced him" (236). Mammachi's reaction to these sorts of comments is that "she would flinch as though he had denigrated her instead of himself" (236). Of course, one can only imagine how Mammachi's excessive adoration toward Chacko affected their daughter, Ammu, who marries the first man who proposes to her just to "escap[e] the clutches of her ill-tempered father, and bitter, long-suffering mother" (38). In these examples, it is evident that Pappachi's disappointment about his moth persists in his resentment towards Mammachi and that he passes his bitterness on to his children. The narrator of the novel even remarks, "Pappachi's Moth was held responsible for his black moods and sudden bouts of temper. Its pernicious ghost—gray, furry and with unusually dense dorsal tufts—haunted every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and his children

and his children's children" (Roy 48). Indeed, Pappachi's moth becomes a recurring symbol associated with Rahel's jealousy of the superfluous attention the adults in the novel pay Sophie Mol, which is also one of several reasons for the twins' decision to run away to the History House.

Similar to how Barat observes that love survives in other relationships even after it is "broken down by the pressures of the community" (97), trauma will also live on in the lives of others if it is not successfully integrated into the victim's life story. Estha and Rahel are not only the next generation of a family infected with inherited traumas, but victims of new traumas of their own. This is why it is imperative that Estha and Rahel find a way to narrate their grief so they can initiate the healing and integration processes and finally put an end to this pattern of transference.

While the act of narrating traumatic memories brings victims a step closer to healing, Herman notes that "reconstructing the trauma does not address the social or relational dimension of the traumatic experience. It is a necessary part of the recovery process, but it is not sufficient. Unless the relational aspect of the trauma is also addressed, even the limited goal of relieving intrusive symptoms may remain out of reach" (Herman 183). Herman states that "recovery is possible only 'within the context of relationships'" (22). For this reason, incest is the most effective means of healing for the twins. Because of their hybridity, and as a result of their mother's divorce and her affair with Velutha, the children are marginalized and deprived of all relationships within Indian society. The possibility of any successful relationships outside of Indian society is equally out of the question, as demonstrated with Rahel's failed marriage to an American.

Unfortunately, in order for either of the twins to successfully re-enter society and heal from their traumas, they must have access to the memories of their traumatic past. According to Maurice Halbwachs, “[i]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (qtd. in Olick 334). Halbwachs illuminates this idea when he writes, “there is thus no point in seeking where . . . [memories] are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled by me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any given time give me the means to reconstruct them” (qtd. in Olick 335). While the integration of memories may be a purely individual experience, Halbwachs believes that this relational aspect is nonnegotiable when it comes to accessing them. In fact, Halbwachs argues that “it is impossible for individuals to remember any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts” (Olick 334). This is especially true for trauma victims, who depend on witnesses within such social groups to validate the “truth” and “authenticity” of the narratives of their experiences. Halbwach’s theories of collective memory certainly attest to the difficulties Estha and Rahel face when dealing with their traumas. Because the twins are marginalized and have been separated from one another for twenty-three years, they belong to no social group that can provide them with access to any coherent memories of their traumas. Instead, the memories that forcibly emerge throughout the different layers of the novel’s narratives are fragmented, incomplete. Therefore, when juxtaposed with trauma theory, Halbwach’s notions of collective memory further substantiate the twins’ incest as the only effective method for them to meet both the relational and narrative aspects of the recovery process.

Halbwach’s theories also support one of the novel’s most important goals as a trauma narrative. That is, such texts “are often concerned with human-made traumatic situations and are

implicit critiques of the ways social, economic, and political structures can create and perpetuate trauma” (Vickory 4). Aïda Balvannanadhan, for instance, views the novel as a “commentary on the right to love, on the necessity to transgress certain laws that meddle with the very happiness of people in the name of religion or social order” (105). Although several critics have arrived at similar interpretations, many have also pointed out that in her commentary, Roy “refuses to either justify or pass judgments against these love relationships” (Chandy 91). Instead, what Roy accomplishes in the novel is that she presents readers with an ethical dilemma. Roy challenges her readers to question their loyalty to social orders, like the Love Laws regulating their own communities, while at the same time, sympathizing with the actions of both sets of characters: Estha and Rahel, and Ammu and Velutha. This is perhaps the most crucial aspect of a trauma narrative because it solicits a reaction from readers.

The Love Laws in The God of Small Things are a human-made convention with the purpose of maintaining order in and ensuring the protection of the society through the regulation of sexual, romantic, and platonic love relationships. However, when the characters in the novel transgress these laws, the result is the loss of two lives, Ammu’s exile and subsequent death, Estha’s silence, Rahel’s inability to engage in intimate, socially acceptable relationships, and the writing-over of the “Unofficial” version of the “Terror.” The consequences of the transgressions, then, are proof that the Love Laws have failed to maintain order in society or to protect its people. Instead, these rules actually perpetuate feelings of resentment and bitterness when they prevent desire from being fulfilled. Baby Kochamma, for instance, is especially bitter towards Ammu because of her own forbidden desire for Father Mulligan, which contributes to her involvement in the “Terror.”

Despite the potential for Estha and Rahel to heal through the act of incest, the novel's last line, "Tomorrow," makes readers wary of the future consequences of their actions. Because readers have already witnessed the tragic outcome of Ammu and Velutha's affair, "one shudders to think of the kind of retribution that the twins would have to face" (Chandy 91). In fact, the twins' transgression of the Love Laws might even be viewed as doubly severe because of their marginal status in the community. They are, at least in Baby Kochamma's eyes, "doomed, fatherless waifs," "Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry" (Roy 44), and are the children of a "divorced daughter from a intercommunity love marriage" (45, emphasis Roy's). If Baby Kochamma's perceptions of Estha and Rahel are in any way representative of what even part of the community also feels towards the twins, then one might conclude that their own defiance of the Love Laws might be met with an even harsher reaction.

Baby Kochamma, the twins' own great aunt, has no justifiable reason to be bitter towards Estha and Rahel when they are innocent children, but she still "grudged them their memories of high happiness" from simple pleasures, and "most of all, she grudged them the comfort they drew from each other. She expected from them some token of unhappiness. At the very least" (Roy 45). Baby Kochamma resents the twins because she holds them responsible for their mother's behaviors the same way she holds Velutha responsible for the actions of the man who harasses her at the march. Again, if the rest of society were to view the twins as accountable for Ammu and Velutha's prior transgression of the Love Laws, as Baby Kochamma does, then it is possible that the twins' punishment for their transgression would be even more tragic and brutal.

Although the Love Laws demand strict adherence to a classification of which relationships are acceptable and which are not, as evident in The God of Small Things, some

things defy absolute classification. This idea is one of the many recurring themes of the novel. For example, the twins are marginalized because they are “Half-Hindu Hybrids,” and Mammachi’s banana jam is “banned because according to their [the Food Service Organization’s] specifications it was neither jam nor jelly. Too thin for jelly and too thick for jam. An ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency” (Roy 30-31). Pappachi’s moth is yet another example of this problem: “His life’s greatest setback was not having had the moth that he had discovered named after him” (48). While Pappachi believes he has discovered a new species, it is “finally [...] identified as a slightly unusual race of a well-known species” (48). The narrator explains, though, “The real blow came twelve years later, when, as a consequence of a radical taxonomic reshuffle, lepidopterists decided that Pappachi’s moth was in fact a separate species and genus hitherto unknown to science” (48). Sadly, Pappachi’s moth was named after another entomologist because Pappachi had already retired from the profession. Through the symbol of Pappachi’s moth, the novel demonstrates a crucial truth about human-made classification systems—that is, they are not absolute, but adjustable, and are subject to “reshuffling” at any time.

While this interpretation of The God of Small Things indicates that the novel is critical of the Love Laws, it does not imply that the novel promotes the complete dismissal of such social rules. This reading of the novel does, however, expose how incest may be an imperative stage of the healing process for Estha and Rahel. This is largely due to the traumas they experience in the novel but also to the ambiguous nature of their relationship. The complexity of the multiple ways they are connected means that any ethical or moral evaluation of their incest should acknowledge that their relationship defies “either/or” classification. While Cara Cilano observes that “gaps exist where the Love Laws do not fully determine any given moment in which they

manifest themselves,” and that “a character’s social positions may be potentially contradictory”(148), there are also “overlaps” between the multiple contradictory relational roles the Love Laws might assign to an individual. These overlaps are problematic when it comes to evaluating the severity of the twins’ transgression because it is difficult to distinguish which set(s) of roles Estha and Rahel are enacting as they commit incest.

While The God of Small Things may not propose that incest should be socially acceptable in all circumstances, what it does advocate is that society, and the individuals within it, should seriously reconsider their reactions to instances when people, objects, or ideas fail to fit neatly into such classification systems. The novel reveals how humans tend to become so accustomed to the ways in which society operates that they often resist change. At Pappachi’s funeral, for instance, Ammu explains to the twins that even though Pappachi physically abused her during their marriage, “Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him” (49). Ammu adeptly observes, “human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to. You only had to look around you, Ammu said, to see that beatings with brass vases were the least of them” (49). Specifically, the narrator explains that the Love Laws were created thousands of years ago and, by the end of the novel, she reveals that they no longer adequately serve their intended purpose. Further, the novel demonstrates how totalizing classification systems of any kind can have the potential to perpetuate trauma and fear due to “Man’s subliminal urge to destroy what he [...] [can] neither subdue nor deify” and “human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly” (Roy 292-93). This reading of the novel also has profound implications for critics’ perception of the twins’ incest as inescapable. Indeed, the twins’ incest does appear to be predetermined given the circumstances in the novel that work to perpetuate their traumas and to

further isolate them from other characters, but Roy illuminates through the symbol of Pappachi's moth, especially, that this inevitability may be an illusion. If the Love laws were revised to accommodate unclassifiable relationships like Estha and Rahel's, or Ammu and Velutha's, then the "Terror" would not ensue and there would be no need for the twins to heal from trauma through their incest.¹¹

Although the set of Love Laws mentioned in The God of Small Things are specific to Indian society, the ethical dilemma that readers face as a result of reading this novel is certainly applicable to any society. Cathy Caruth explains that "the impact of the traumatic event lies [...] in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time (Caruth, Explorations 9). Additionally, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own [...] [and] is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's trauma" (Caruth, Unclaimed 24). While critics often consider The God of Small Things to be simply a commentary on the injustice of the Love Laws and other traumas represented in the novel, I propose that it is also designed to encourage readers to consider how they, too, might be implicated in the characters' traumas.

To gain a better understanding of this ethical dilemma, we can extend Herman's theories about the importance of the relational aspects of the psychological healing process from the realm of the individual to the broader societal realm that Halbwachs describes. What we find is that Roy uses complicated narrative techniques to achieve at least two goals. First, she forces her readers to act as secondary witnesses of the twins' trauma by replicating the fragmented nature of traumatic memory with the constant crisscrossing of the multiple narrative layers. The embedded narratives that make up these layers reveal the external societal forces that work against the twins and contribute to their trauma and the necessity of their incest. While Roy's

narrator acknowledges Kerala's traumatic history in terms of the introduction of Marxism, colonization, and Christianity, she also urges readers to consider other possible sources of historical trauma that transcend these fairly modern socio-political and religious systems as they exist in India. Namely, in the first chapter, the narrator proposes that while the story she is about to tell may begin when Sophie Mol arrives in India, it could also be said to begin when the Love Laws were established. The second goal that Roy's narrative structure accomplishes, in terms of the novel's ending, is that it asks readers to witness the two transgressions of the Love Laws consecutively, to consider how they are related, and more importantly, to recognize how the same socially determined classification systems that expect readers to condemn Estha and Rahel's incest also contribute to its necessity and the illusion of its inevitability. Sadly, even if the narrator can convince readers to sympathize with the twins and to accept it as a necessary for the twins' healing, unless society also becomes more open to the possibility of finding healing in unlikely and previously forbidden places, the twins' last ditch effort to heal and prevent their own transference of trauma, will likely be done in vain. The last word of the novel, then, may be neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but a reminder that even when societal forces give the illusion of predetermination and work to limit the agency of individuals, the fate of "tomorrow" is nevertheless uncertain.

NOTES

¹ See Balvannanadhan and Patchay. I discuss these two critics more thoroughly on pp. 14-15 of this thesis.

² See, specifically, Barat, Chandy, and Natov.

³ See, particularly, Barat, Chandy, and Natov.

⁴ The text of The God of Small Things provides no clues as to the narrator's gender. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the narrator as a female.

⁵ For a thorough analysis of the childlike perspectives in Roy's novel, see Roni Natov's "The Contemporary Child in Adult Literature" in The Poetics of Childhood. New York: Routledge, 2003. 191-203.

⁶ R.S. Sharma and Shashi Bala Talwar, also acknowledge what they refer to as an "authoritative controlling agent" in Roy's narration, but offer an interesting examination of what they believe to be an inappropriate and inconsistent use of childlike perspectives throughout the novel. See their chapter on "Point of View and Consciousness" in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: Critique and Commentary, Creative Books, New Delhi, 1998. 32-41.

⁷ Dominick LaCapra offers a thorough explanation of the process of "working-through" trauma and distinguishes it from "acting out." See "Trauma, Absence, Loss." Critical Inquiry 25.4 (1992): 696-727.

⁸ Natov attributes Ammu and Rahel's differing responses to the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man in this same scene to the "intuitive nature of children revealing how innocence, unmarred by the infected systems of adult society without full awareness, speaks truth to power" (196).

⁹ Natov also suggests that Ammu's comment about the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man is a form of betrayal and notes that it causes Estha to feel "unsafe and further isolated" (196).

¹⁰This is especially prominent in the narratives of Holocaust survivors. See Vickory p. 8.

¹¹ Cilano more thoroughly discusses the complexity of Ammu and Velutha's relationship, given their multiple and contradictory social positions and identities. See especially pp. 146-148.

WORKS CITED

- Balvannanadhan, Aida. "Re-Membering Personal History in The God of Small Things." Commonwealth Essays and Studies. 25.1(2002): 97-106.
- Barat, Urbashi. "History, Community and Forbidden Relationships in The God of Small Things." Arundhati Roy: The Novelist Extraordinary. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige, 1999. 84-99.
- Caruth, Cathy. Introductions. Trauma: Explorations in Memory. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 3-60.
- , Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Chandy, Mini. "The Love Laws." Explorations: Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. Eds. Indira Bhatt and Indira Nityanandam. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999. 83-91.
- Cilano, Cara. "'Obscured by History's Blinkers': Placing Agency and Identity within the Global and the Local in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things." Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies 8.1-2 (2001): 143-61.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. Trauma and Recovery. New York: Basic, 1992.
- Nair, R. Hema. "Remembrance of Things Past: A Reading of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things." CIEFL Bulletin. 9.2(1998): 49-56.
- Natov, Roni. "The God of Small Things: Language, Childhood, and the Genesis of Trauma." The Poetics of Childhood. New York: Routledge, 2003. 191-203.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." Sociological Theory 17.3 (1999): 333-348.

Patchay, Sheena. "Pickled Histories, Bottled Stories: Recuperative Narratives in The God of Small Things." Journal of Literary Studies. 17.3-4(2001): 145-60.

Roy, Arundhati. The God of Small Things. New York: Harper, 1997.

Vickory, Laurie. Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2002.