Chapter 3

Text versus Context: Space and Time in *The Room on the Roof* and *Vagrants in the Valley*

Ruskin did not feel at home in England. His yearning for the Indian atmosphere and the "human contact" in the company of Somi, Kishen and other Indian friends in the environs of Dehra Dun is projected in *The Room on the Roof* that he writes during the three and half years of stay there. It is a work, written in exile, which portrays the author's notion of place and belonging. A contextualist idea of the individual – the individual posited in the context of his human and non-human environment rather than in the Cartesian boundary of his self – is fused with the subjective concerns of place in Ruskin's attitude to the world. For him, space is invested with an animated subjectivity that works in horizontal relationship with his androgyny. The cessation of parental contact, his mother's separation and father's death, instilled in him a sense of lonely abjection that the non-human Nature helped him master in many ways. His father helped him attune his feelings to Nature in one such way, and in his absence, Ruskin's Oedipal drive is held in balance by the agency of the environment in the capacity of an imaginary correspondent of a tactile, physical care-giver. Nature assumes the role of the motherer and his libidinal desires are invested in an arboreal embodiment of the father.

Nature speaks to him in a perceptible way, the specificity of which requires that the anthropological unconscious is engendered by his corporeal experience of location and his father's presence in it. The Indian environment embodies such presence for him,
and the Hindu myth – in contrast to the West’s Cartesian concept of selfish
circumscription – contextualizes the self in the same manner in which the ecofeminist
philosopher, Jim Cheney, shows (117-134) tribal cultures contextualize discourse. That
the non-Western distinctiveness of such a myth entails his unconscious baggage and
informs the development of his consciousness ever after is testified by Ruskin’s myth-
making endeavour many years later when, in 1989, he writes “The Funeral”.

The lonely boy in the story, Ruskin’s projected self, is witnessing his father’s
funeral. When the coffin is lowered into the grave and covered up with earth, he consoles
himself with the idea that his father will soon grow out of the earth as a tree. The
cemetery where the funeral takes place is in a hill station on the Himalayas, probably in
Dehra Dun and its environs, where in a dried river bed Ruskin and his father once planted
trees together. The trees are still growing, just as his father will grow into one some day.
Although Aubrey’s funeral actually took place in Calcutta, faraway from the hill station,
which none bothered to take 10-year-old Ruskin to attend, the author’s contextualist
sense of being seeks to inter his father’s physical remains in a location infused with the
mythical textuality of his experiences that constitute his unconscious. Drawing on Native
American theorist Paula Gunn Allen’s ideas in The Sacred Hoop, Jim Cheney defines
contextualist myths as narratives that begin with “the inscribing of the nervous system in
the landscape” (Cheney 130), making the body “instrument of our knowledge in the
world” (130). In Ruskin’s inscription of the paternal body in the Dehra landscape we see
how the expression of desire is interwoven with geography: desire is located in the
conflation of self and place. The following lines from Ruskin’s Memoir stand as
discursive evidence of his physical desire for the Indian environment that stimulates the birth of *The Room on the Roof* during his stay in England:

> I did not belong to the bright lights of Piccadilly and Leicester Square; or, for that matter, to the apple orchards of Kent or the strawberry fields of Berkshire. I belonged very firmly, to peepal trees and mango groves; to sleepy little towns all over India; to hot sunshine, muddy canals, the pungent scent of marigolds; the hills of home; spicy odours, wet earth from summer rain, neem pods bursting; laughing brown faces; and the intimacy of human contact (*Memoir*, 155).

The distinctive Indian atmosphere in which he feels his self is dispersed is a contextualized identity that invokes Raja Rao’s mythopoeic textuality of the “sthalapurana” in *Kanthapura*. The “human contact” is “the inscribing of the nervous system” which is possible only in unconsciously interiorized landscapes. Displacement from such a context entails pathological syndromes that psychiatrist Harold Searles pointed out in *The Nonhuman Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia* (1960). He claimed that a disproportionate number of his schizophrenic patients came from homes in which they were denied the chance to relate to material things. Ruskin projects a symptomatic resistance to such a syndrome in Rusty’s aggressive disavowal of his guardian’s conscriptive laws in an attempt to dissolve the boundaries of the self and fuse with the space he identified with. I will explain the psychologically inflected postcolonial connotation of the act later. Here it suffices to say that Searles would have psychoanalyzed Ruskin’s confession quoted above as a hysterical symptom of exile, a more extreme version of which is dramatized in Rusty’s reversal of the violent act on John Harrison.

In the novel, Rusty’s first taste of spatial dispersion and “human contact” takes place in the introductory episode of the bicycle ride. The influence of William Saroyan
behind the conjuration of the scene is unmistakable. In Saroyan's *The Human Comedy*, Homer Macauley, the telegraph messenger, runs his errands on bicycle and hikes his brother, Ulysses, and friends home. Especially interesting is the occasion when Homer gives a ride to Ulysses on the frame and his friend Augustus (Augie) Gottlieb on the handlebar from the telegraph office to their respective homes. Ulysses, a small boy of 4, was lost watching the antics of Mr. Mechano. When he found everybody had left, and the evening street was almost deserted, the frightened boy ran crying for help. He came across Augie who was selling newspapers at the crossroads. Augie took him to his brother Homer at the telegraph office in the corner of the road. Ulysses was relieved of his anxieties to find his brother and Augie in time of distress. Homer's bicycle ride with them on such an occasion is meaningfully similar to the lonely boy Rusty's adventure on Somi's bicycle in heavy rain. Somi in the driving seat, Rusty on crossbar, Suri on handlebar, and Ranbir on the back carrier, the cycle wobbled fearfully as it raced down the incline of the hilly road on the foot of the Himalayas. It is a symbolic Gestalt, connoting a formidable and discreet act of fraternal sustenance in a world torn by strife and hostility. Ruskin could not ride bicycles with confidence and have had accidents that created in him a fear psychosis of the machine:

Bicycles were not really my forte and I had two accidents – one a collision with a bullock cart, and the other a tumble as I was trying to avoid Miss Kellner's rickshaw. On this latter occasion I broke my arm, and to spend most of the winter holidays with my arm in plaster (Memoir, 72-73).

This traumatic experience complicated his psychological fear of the machine, which acted as a symbolic bogey in his imagination since the bitter experience of racial hostility he suffered at the age of 11. A year or two before Independence he was physically assaulted for his European look by two Indian cyclists in Dehra Dun. The bicycle was
invested with the significance of superegoic police that prohibited his entry into a domain that he yearned to belong. It symbolized an instrument of abjection and therefore stood in ambivalent relationship with his subjectivity: he possessed a fear of and desire for the object. In *The Roof*, the bicycle becomes the site where he metaphorically negotiates his concerns of identity, balancing his fear and desire by framing ties of fraternity on the principles of libido-cultural economy. Rusty forges love and friendship upon the very object that symbolized his abjection.

The scenario of the bicycle ride had a similar psychological import for William Saroyan. He heard from his mother Takoohi that the Turks and the Kurds in Armenia were averse to the use of bicycles by Armenian Christian priests, because they thought it was a modern contraption created by the Devil. The author’s creation of the telegraph messenger’s bicycle is influenced by his belief that had there been anything similar to a bicycle in Mohammed’s time, he surely would have ridden it, because he too was a messenger who would have found the machine convenient for spreading the message of love economically and fast:

Mohammed was called the messenger, and as I have always associated that designation with telegraph messengers, I have put Mohammed on a bicycle, as I had been for three years at the postal telegraph office in Fresno, from 1921 through 1924 [...] (Saroyan *Where the Bones Go*, 19)

Unavailability of the machine made Mohammed a walking messenger, creating within the minds of orthodox Muslims a virtual anathema to the notion of messengers using bicycles. It was quite natural for William to have been influenced by the general Armenian rancour against the Turks and the Kurds whose murderous assaults on the Armenians made them leave the Caucasus. But William, like his father Armenak, is a preacher of love, a messenger of peace and brotherhood. He is concerned about fostering
hatred against his enemies. Like Ruskin, he negotiates his psychological anxieties of identity (in affective relationality to the Turks and the Kurds) on the principle of inclusivity marked by the integrationist icon of the bicycle. Homer, in his dream sequence, flies on his bicycle to overcome the human hurdle represented in the form of Byfield, the school athletic coach who discriminated against him for being poor. The bicycle becomes the instrument for eradicating differences among people and restoring a sense of egalitarianism in society. Because on it Homer ran his dream “two-twenty low hurdle race”, a symbolic quest to level with his peer Hubert Ackley, the snob sprinter favoured by coach Byfield for his elite descent. The dream race soon takes a broader and graver connotation: Homer finds Death running a bicycle ahead of him. The telegraph messenger carrying news of war casualties to soldiers’ mothers in Ithaca, he wished he could be a messenger of love and peace and defeat hatred that causes hostility and war among mankind.

Inherent in Homer’s bicycle ride is a sense of pain – carrying messages of death – that fashions his libidinal economy, that is to say, surplus enjoyment. Lacan’s usage of the term for this – “plus-de-jouir” – is ambiguous: It can mean “surplus of enjoyment” as well as “no (more) enjoyment”. According to Slavoj Zizek, “the surplus of enjoyment over mere pleasure is generated by the pleasure of the very opposite of pleasure – that is, pain. Pain generates surplus enjoyment via the magic reversal into itself by means of which the material texture of our expression of pain (the crying voice) gives rise to enjoyment” (156). When Homer rides Ulysses and Augie in his bicycle, he invests agency to the fantasmatic kernel of “surplus enjoyment” of his dream bicycle ride in a race against Byfield and Death. The psychological underpinnings of Rusty’s ride in
Somi’s bicycle entail jouissance or surplus enjoyment too, because the bicycle is unconsciously connected with the authorial memories of pain and fear I have referred to earlier. The fantasmatic content of Ruskin’s yearning for “human contact” (inscription of the body in nature) and dispersal of the self in the Indian context is structured on the principles of libidinal economy because he had been suffering pain in the deprivation of those privileges. A parallel pain-inducing imago of the bicycle floats up in an unconscious short circuit of connectivity to form the site of the agentive act of jouissance.

A libido economic dismantling of the Master-slave construct is symbolized further in the episode when Rusty is thrown into the gutter in Dehra Dun bazaar by speeding Somi in his bicycle and Rusty returns violence on his guardian and runs away from home for ever. Let me take up these two events to explain how postcolonialism, subjective “contextualization” and resultant jouissance are intertwined in Ruskin’s projection of identity-seeking concerns in The Room. But before advancing further on this project let me clarify what appears to be a colonial-postcolonial paradox when I refer to Ruskin’s subjectivization of nature in terms of his father’s impregnation of it.

I have pointed out how Aubrey’s life and death in India, in the service of the Raj, became an allegory of suffering partly at the hands of Indian environment for his symbolic complicity in trying to objectify a thing whose subjective energies proved ungovernable. I have supplied documentary evidences of the revolutionary act performed by the Indian atmosphere in emasculating the colonizers in the last chapter of my book. Aubrey might have realized the formidable agency of a tangible space that the colonists tried to map and passivize. Ruskin’s contextualist ethic is partly formulated by this Oedipal distress. Marnia Lazreg in her book Torture and the Twilight of Empire observes
that the French colonists felt the insuperable agency of the Algerian climate and turned it into a psychological ethic to vindicate their contextual belonging to the land during the anxieties of decolonization in 1954-62: “The physical beauty of Algeria anchored imperial identity in a tangible space implicitly deemed worth fighting for. Topography acted as a means of assimilating Algeria to France” (175). However, the downfall of the French in Algeria took place because even if they could relate to the non-human atmosphere of the place, they failed to consider the human Algerian denizens related to the same contextual network in equal terms. In the sense of both human and non-human contextualization, Ruskin and Rusty performed an act of assimilative postcolonization.

Rusty took the opportunity of his guardian’s absence one day to venture into Dehra Dun bazaar. In the convention of inscribing India as a bazaar in colonial discourse underlies a politico-racial wish to denigrate Eastern space and manufacture a rationale for the colonist’s civilizing mission. Contrary to this colonial motive, Rusty’s experience in Dehra bazaar that day was an epiphanic moment of self-realization, when the body’s desire for a tangible feeling of belonging was met. Somi in his speeding bicycle veered onto Rusty in a desperate bid to save himself crashing into Maharani, the cow, which, if exasperated, would have turned devastatingly berserk. Rusty was initially annoyed being knocked down into what he abhorred as a filthy gutter stinking of “bad vegetables and kitchen water”. Somi pulled him out of the mess and could not help laughing at the boy’s irritation at being bedraggled in what Rusty considered a squalor. To Somi it was “only cabbage water” and Rusty would be all right once his clothes dried up. Rusty, who had hitherto been accustomed to “the delicate scents of the missionary’s wife’s sweet peas and the occasional smell of bathroom disinfectant”, found physical contact with “real”
India temporarily egregious. His fantasy of the Indian bazaar as an exotic object had been an outsider’s point of view, unconsciously informed by the logocentric colonial rearing he received in his guardian’s ghetto. Although he had been curious all along to discover India in the bazaar, his first encounter with it produced a cultural shock. His immersion in the gutter was a symbolic act of ritual initiation into a space which turned out to be a subjective reality contrary to his predisposed notion of it as a passive, inscribable construct. An act of transition, the establishment of physical contact with reality, it defined subjectivity through the psychoanalytic principle of surplus pleasure. The initial shock generated a sense of pain similar to one the voodoo inflicts on his patient during exorcism. The expression of Rusty’s unyielding sternness in the face of Somi’s amiable gesture was expressive of the European boy’s apparent befuddlement:

“Well, I am sorry”, said Somi, extending his hand.

Rusty did not take the hand but, looking the other up and down, from turban to slippers, forced himself to say: “Get out of my way, please” (557).

The energy that the ego requires ("Rusty forced himself to say...") to guard the id from superegoic scrutiny during subjective transformation from one condition to another remains invisible in the form of a subjective pain just as excess energy in the form of latent heat makes transformation from one condition to another possible in nonhuman physical objects. Somi’s laughter is the resource of that excess energy that leads pain into a sense of jouissance: “His [Somi’s] laugh rang out merrily, and there was something about the laugh, some music in it perhaps, that touched a chord of gaiety in Rusty’s own heart” (557). The boy’s transformational confusion is symbolized by the enveloping smoke that emanated from the frying pan of the chaat shop. The process of initiation into a state of subjective, postcolonial contextualization of the self, which began with the
bicycle ride, is now expedited with the availability of excess energy. The transformation from a reflective, androcentric textuality into a sensual, pivotal contextuality is signified in Rusty’s almost passive submission to Somi’s wishes since the laughter. He is ushered into the world of physical contact and sensual pleasures. The imagery of the chaat (a fried and spicy, north Indian food made of potatoes) shop and the boy’s subsequent actions are fleshed out by the author in Levi Straussian terms of the “raw”, set against the “cooked” of Rusty’s ghettoized existence. The man preparing the chaat was “enveloped in rolls of glistening, oily flesh”. In the frying pan “sizzled a sea of fat” and with “deft, practiced fingers, he [the chaat man] moulded and flipped potato cakes in and out of the pan” (557). “Murmur of conversation” made the presence of many people felt. As Rusty sat on the floor tasting “tikkees” (potato cakes) from a “plate made of banana leaves”, with a mixed feeling of suspicion and curiosity, he watched his friend Somi sitting cross-legged beside him. “His skin was a golden brown, dark on his legs and arms but fair, very fair, where his shirt lay open. His hands were dirty; but eloquent. His eyes, deep brown and dreamy, had depth and roundness” (558). In a slight but obvious way, the author allows Rusty’s sensual perceptions delicately touch on the issue of colour that formulated the racial myth of alterity the European boy’s unconscious predispositions are tempered by. Somi is fair in those places which are not exposed to the rays of the tropical sun – an observation that might hint at dislodging the racial content in Rusty’s orientation to the world and rehabilitate the spatial factor instead. He overcomes the psychological barrier of race, signifying in the process that the knowledge of race relations is not derived from a given object race, but proceeds from the insight that race is a theoretical construct whose production (and very “taken-for-grantedness”) needs to be examined. An
intriguing example of how colour is co-opted as a psycho-somatic index of race to privilege the Master-slave hierarchy is pointed out to me by Professor Dickran Kouymjian, the Director of the Armenian Studies Programme at California State University in Fresno during my stint as a Faculty Adjunct there. An average Armenian resembles the colour of the unexposed parts of Somi’s body. But Armenian peasants and grape pickers who worked in the hot summer fields of Fresno had their colours burnt due to extended exposure of their skins to the sun. Racial politics in America during the early decades of the twentieth century made the Armenians worst sufferers in the hands of Anglo-Saxon settlers. Armenians with brown skins from the fields of Fresno were bruited about as American Indians in Hollywood movies to manufacture myths of Armenian marginality in a centripetal social matrix. Bob Carter points out how John Rex in Race Relations in Sociological Theory offers a similar assessment of racial politics in British society:

Rex is able to provide an account of the structural conditions that are favourable to the development of a race relations situation, identifying, for example, the role played by colonial relations in shaping the newly arrived migrants’ entry into the housing and employment market (Carter, 13).

Human colour is used as a textual logo, delinked from its contextual associations, to fabricate racial prejudices of domination around the world. Rusty’s observation of Somi’s physical aspects provides a notional shift from text to context. Mutation worked apace as Rusty “took the warm, muddy hand that Somi gave him”, “finished the tikee on his leaf, and accepted another”, overcame superegoic fears, and shunning egotistical affectations said: “How do you do, Somi, I am very pleased to meet you.” The course of
transformation reached a watershed on the day of Holi when Rusty went out with Ranbir to the bazaar and the countryside to immerse in colour.

The Hindu ritual of colour is celebrated to herald the advent of spring, one of the festivals that mark human contextualization in physical and spiritual forms. When Ranbir rubbed colour on Rusty’s cheeks and embraced him in the folds of love, the colours of nature and the current of her spirit flowed straight into him: “The infection of spring spread simultaneously through the world of man and the world of nature, and made them one” (567). Men and women sang and “their hands and fingers drummed the rhythms of spring” (567). The feeling of “human contact” and the contact between man and the nature of his belonging that Ruskin yearned for during his sojourn in England is projected in its effusive intensity in Rusty’s induction into nature on the day of spring festivities in “real” India. At the end of the day, Rusty and his friends lay down on the soft grass in the “cool dark silence of the jungle”. When the others slept Rusty stayed awake:

[He] was tired. He was hungry. He had lost his shirt and shoes, his feet were bruised, his body sore. It was only now, resting, that he noticed these things, for he had been caught up in the excitement of the colour game, overcome by an exhilaration he had never known. His fair hair was tousled and streaked with colour, and his eyes were wide with wonder. He was exhausted now, but he was happy.

He wanted this to go on for ever, this day of feverish emotion, this life in another world. He did not want to leave the forest; it was safe, its earth soothed him, gathered him in, so that the pain of his body became a pleasure [...] (568)

The pain was the cause of surplus pleasure or jouissance that the narrator mentions Rusty experienced in the form of “exhilaration” during the colour game. The body’s nervous system was so inscribed in nature that her jovial pulses flowed through its synapses to overwhelm sensations of pain with a libidinal economy comparable to the infant’s
pleasure in union with his mother(er). The pain of his guardian’s lashes that cut his bottom into a gory welt the previous evening was overwhelmed too. The boy who had tasted jouissance in contextual pleasures of the self had psychologically overcome the fears of his guardian’s textual prohibitions. The spring carnival was instrumental in leveling the Master-slave distinction by upending the boy’s sense of affiliation. When Rusty returned to his guardian’s house that night, it was difficult for the latter to recognize his painted features: “Wearing torn pyjamas he could, in the half light, have easily been mistaken for the sweeper boy or someone else’s servant”. Mr. Harrison shouted at him in “the tone reserved for the sweeper boy”. His ensuing tirade and thrashing of the boy was influenced by a self-reflexive frustration at not being able to contain Rusty’s contextual energy within the inchoate boundaries of English textuality.

Mr. Harrison called him “mongrel”, meaning that having Indian blood in his veins he showed invincible physical attraction towards his maternal context. In a paroxysm of rage, Harrison burst out at Rusty: “I’ve tried to bring you up as an Englishman, as your father would have wished. But, as you won’t have it our way, I’m telling you that he was about the only thing English about you. You are no better than the sweeper boy!” (571) An indirect reference to Rusty’s Indian descent on his mother’s side (because Rusty’s father was the “only thing English about him”) appeared momentarily to shock the boy’s sensibilities, but he soon discovered in his lineage a legitimate context for his libidinal inclinations. The knowledge of his liminal position in the logocentric political model of the Master-slave dyad provided grist to the psycho-social morality of contextual carnivalization: ‘Rusty flared into a temper, showing some spirit for the first time in his
life. “I’m no better than the sweeper boy, but I’m as good as him! I’m as good as you!
I’m as good as anyone!”’ (571)

Rusty had conquered his fears of the prohibitive John Harrison. The savour of the libidinal union and the knowledge of his mixed racial descent had empowered him to resist his guardian’s symbolic proscription. When Harrison made a painful cut on his cheek with the Malaccan cane, the overwhelming energy of jouissance stimulated Rusty into an aggressive reprisal. He bashed up his guardian and left the house for good. The mimetic nature of the reprisal and the psycho-pathology of violence that appeared to have triggered Rusty into performing the symbolic act of decolonization is Fanonian. In fact, Fanon filtered through Sartre’s lens would render a more discernible elucidation of Rusty’s aggression. Ruskin had suffered the pathological expressions of revolutionary nationalist terrorism that stemmed not from a conscious will for freedom and responsible political action but from a libidinal urge to inflict torture upon the torturer. When he created Rusty he took care to save the teenage hero from the indictment of exclusive psychopathy. If Rusty had found surplus energy to resist further colonization, he had been driven by a liberalizing urge to frame his contextual subjectivity. Ruskin had seen his father suffer from what can be called a contextual vendetta for his complicity with the textual motives of oppression. So Rusty’s symbolic act of decolonization should be read more as a critique of the colonizer’s suicidal tendencies rather than the colonized’s quest for retribution. The same contextual ethos informs Markham’s ordeals in Ruskin’s more recent work, “When Darkness Falls”. Markham, an Anglo-Indian soldier, who returns from the Burma War emotionally spent and physically maimed becomes instrumental in exploding the imperial myth by burning down the symbolic Empire Hotel. Rusty’s
violent act of emancipation can be read in terms of the ethics underpinning Markham’s sabotage. That is not to say, however, that Rusty, as an adolescent protagonist had completely emerged from a state of abjection that defined his psychic phase. He struggled against the forces of Oedipality; only the fear of castration now issued from a sense of decontextualization because with the shift in paradigm the location of the superego had changed as well. In an attempt to relate to his natural context, Rusty had assumed the role of his father in union with his mother. In a contextual paradigm both the male and the female were located in the androgynous body of nature.

At this point, I should mention that I have gone a little too far in equating Ruskin with Rusty. The Room, like most of the author’s fictional works, is a semi-autobiographical verbalization of the author’s desire for context. The desire is unsatisfiable in that it constitutes the psychic awareness of a natural “other”: through language the author awakens to his own participation in and distance from the organic world. Ruskin in his purely autobiographical references evinces unease about this dialectical tension between correspondence and otherness. If he desires for the inscription of the body in nature, he is also conscious of the repugnant acts of monkeys tearing his papers and books into shreds and his grandson’s guinepigs turning living rooms uninhabitable by their unsystematic defecations. If Rusty enjoyed the pulses of nature electrifying his senses during the rituals of Holi, he felt terribly lonely when that very night soaked in rain and shivering in cold he doubled up for comfort under a bench in the bazaar. He had fallen foul of his guardian and run away from home:

There was a hollow under the bench, and at first Rusty found it quite comfortable. But there was no grass and gradually the earth began to soften; soon he was on his hands and knees in a pool of muddy water, with the slush oozing up through his fingers and toes. Crouching there, wet and cold
and muddy, he was overcome by a feeling of helplessness and self-pity. Everyone and everything seemed to have turned against him; not only his people but also the bazaar and the chaat shop and even the elements.

If Rusty’s Oedipal desires are inscribed in non-human nature, they are also sustained by his objectification of human icons like John Harrison and Mrs. Meena Kapoor. In conceiving the character of Rusty’s guardian, Ruskin is influenced by both libidinal and material consciousness. John Harrison is an amalgam of Ruskin’s stepfather, Mr. Hari; his science teacher at Bishop Cotton School, Mr. Fischer, who meted out physical punishment to boys; and Dr. John Heppolette, Aunt Emily’s husband, who repudiated Ruskin’s connections with Indian friends and his nostalgic diary entries about India during his stay in Jersey. In his Memoir, Ruskin reflects that his stepfather had not been unkind or cruel to him, albeit he wished he had been so. During the 1950s, he maintained an Oedipal jealousy against his stepfather as Shakespeare’s Hamlet felt against his uncle for usurping his father’s role. Ruskin’s ego wished to connect his Oedipal urges towards the mother, and therefore envy of his stepfather, to plausible material causes which were absent. If Mr. Hari had been cruel to him, he would have reasons to hate him. The psychological component of Rusty’s relationship with his guardian is characterized by the author’s libidinal economy at the time of narration. I would, however, add here that Ruskin bears the unconscious impression of the Oedipal trauma to the present day, the expression of which can be read in subsequent works. It would be relevant to the present context to cite one of them, a short story that he wrote in the 1970s. In “The Job Well Done”, the first person narrator becomes an accomplice to the murder of his stepfather, Major Summerskill, in the hands of Dukhi, the old gardener. Summerskill, “a back-slapping man, who liked polo and pig-sticking” (Collected Fiction
is portrayed in contrast to the narrator's father who liked birds, trees and books. As a small boy, the narrator has inherited his father's disposition, likes reading books, sitting on banyan trees and watching pigeons drink from the old well in the garden. His stepfather scorns his reading habit and much to his and Dukhi's dislike wants the well in the garden to be covered up. The well had been a favourite spot of the boy's father: "He would often sit here in the evenings with a book in which he made drawings of birds and flowers and insects" (104). When Summerskill does not budge from his decision to cover up the well and reprimands Dukhi for having deferred the job, the latter pushes the boy's stepfather into the well; covers it with bricks; and decorates the lid with potted plants.

The boy and his gardener friend become happy. Ruskin's Oedipality and love for nature and gardeners associated with it are literalized in the story. The question of morality is evaded as the fantasmatic content of the boy's libidinal desire is draped in a mythical wonder: he imagines his stepfather disappearing into the well as "Alice disappearing down the rabbit hole" in Alice in Wonderland.

The psycho-pathological content of Rusty's attitude to his guardian – although slight in the verbal transference – is shaped by adolescent Rusty's hatred for Mr. Fisher. And its socio-political dimension is framed by Ruskin's dislike of Dr. Heppolette for the latter's colonial attitude. In configuring Rusty, Ruskin has equated abjection with colonial ghettoization. In contrast to his camaraderie with Indian friends, his incarcerated life in Harrison's house is symbolic abjection. His libidinal energies raged against Harrison's prohibition. The watershed mark in the socio-narrative of the text was reached when Somi led Rusty to stay in his house. The indignant forces of abjection in the adolescent psyche were now made manageable. Symptoms of the libidinal drive persisted
but the energy of the instinct did not flare into violent hysteries because Rusty had sensed a belonging and Ruskin had psychologically obviated the imperial cause of his father’s suffering.

The piquant condition of Rusty’s adolescent abjection had been tempered into a state of equilibrium. His sense of belonging in the company of Indian friends being restored, his fear of fragmentation was allayed and his desire for dependence on a prototypical human motherer became governable but not invisible. Rusty’s erotic desire for Kishen’s mother, Mrs. Meena Kapoor, constituted an Oedipal inclination in the boy whose parents were not present during the genetic phases of his psychological development to help him wean and graduate into a state of independence. Even in adolescents growing up in normal parental care, abjection occasions a revisitation of the Oedipal instinct. Rusty, who had not been taught the skills of repression in the abnormal state of parental absence, was supposed more likely to be vulnerable to the forces of abjection. Rusty’s sense of belonging and his almost self-willed skill in language became hard-owned tools of management. However, the formation of subjectivity through negotiation of the double-bind was deftly dramatized by the author who needed to employ his linguistic skills for a verbal projection of his own crises at the time of adolescence.

Ruskin was in his late teens when he wrote the bildungsroman. Ruskin’s authorial vocation and linguistic skill during this time acted as buffers to his libidinal self. He found his desires transferred into verbalized fantasies revolving around iconic figures of motherers, women much older to him and often sharing features with his childhood ayah whom he described in “My First Love” as a desirable object of erotic pleasure. As a child
of six, the author reflects, he took delight in his ayah rubbing his bottom with “rough and heavy hands”, scrubbing his back and tummy in the bathtub and pressing his face to her “great breasts”. She was heavy-set but from the child’s point of view “extremely handsome”, more so for her paan-stained mouth. When she engaged in an affair with the tonga driver, Bansi Lal, the child became sulky and showed signs of envy. This Oedipal desire for the motherer was revived during the adolescent days when Ruskin, on his return from England, came across Mrs. Singh – “an attractive woman in her thirties” – as his neighbour in Dehra’s Rajpur Road. Mrs. Singh smoked hookah. She and her son Anil, “a lollipop-sucking brat without any charm”, become Leela and her “spoilt” son Chandu in the short story “His Neighbour’s Wife” that Ruskin wrote towards the end of the 1950s. There is sizeable amount of autobiography in his fiction because for the author “it is easier to tell the truth by disguising it as a fiction” (The Lamp, “Introduction” x). According to this authorial principle of writing the self, Ruskin becomes Arun in the story and covets Leela who looks upon him – much younger to her in age – as brother. The author, however, satisfies Arun’s desire in the story by allowing him to have Leela as his wife. Mrs. Singh’s husband was a sub-inspector in the police who as Leela’s husband becomes an excise officer and the author gets him killed by a bootlegger to remove the superegoic prohibition in the verbal transcreation of his Oedipal instincts. In Rusty’s desire for Kishen’s mother, too, the paternal forces of restriction are significantly weakened with Kishen’s father turning into an alcoholic. Mrs. Kapoor is characterized by the paan-chewing habit of Ruskin’s ayah, and like Leela, who initially looked upon Arun as her younger brother, Mrs. Kapoor is showed to possess sibling affection for Rusty. But she, too, yields to Rusty’s erotic passion for her and kisses him full in the mouth, hidden
behind the bush during the picnic. A feeling of sulky languishment that Ruskin experienced at his ayah’s departure with Bansi Lal is reenacted in Rusty when Meena Kapoor went away to Delhi with her husband. It needs to be pointed out here that Meena Kapoor is not only a palimpsest of figures that attracted the adolescent author’s erotic desires as motherers. The desire for the motherer in adolescent abjection can work on the logic of substitution: a woman in the same age group of the abject can be substituted for a desirable object. Among other objects of pleasure in the authorial unconscious during this time was Raj, sister to Ruskin’s Punjabi friend, Ranbir, whom he befriended before leaving for England. The episode of Ruskin’s obsessive attention to Raj’s wounded foot and its psycho-literary transference in fiction I have explained in the next chapter. It would help readers after they have gone through it to realize how Ruskin’s obsession was translated into Rusty’s erotic inscriptions of Meena’s feet in *The Room*.

Rusty watched Meena’s long, slender feet. The slippers she wore consisted only of two straps that passed between her toes, and the backs of the slippers slapped against her heels like Somi’s, only the music – like the feet – was different …” (596)

Literary etiquette made the author keep the sexual allusion veiled with diacritical dots at the end of the passage.

The development of Ruskin’s aesthetic sensibilities as a writer during the youthful days of an identity-seeking quest for “human contact” and spatial belonging is explored in greater detail in the following chapter. The author’s sense of subjectivity toggles between the context and the text, between anthropocentrism and natural contact, between identity and alterity. This dynamic dialectic of a residential sense of place in aesthetic expression does not deny Northrop Frye’s claim that the goal of art is to “recapture, in full consciousness, that original lost sense of identity with our surroundings, where there
is nothing outside the mind of man, or something identical with the mind of man” (9).

But language has a unique potential of subverting the claims of “full consciousness” insofar as it is structured like the unconscious. The unconscious attributes a problematic dimension to consciousness in that the “lost sense of identity” being an androcentric mental construct is liable to inscribe non-human texts not with “full” but “fragmented” consciousness of libidinal and cultural economies of the human text. This is how, I have pointed out in the first chapter, fantasy structures underlying the surface text of consciousness problematize authorial intentions. It is the objective of the psychoanalytic critic to explode the gaps in what Frye claims to be the full authorial consciousness.

Searles’ diagnosis of schizophrenia in spatially displaced patients, although seems not to discard the viral agency of the context in the ailment, implicitly posits identity in relation to alterity in the very sense that displacement is an alterity that splits the schizophrenic mind. The principle of relativity inherent in the concept of identity works in moulding Ruskin’s aesthetic attitude to space. The primacy of human contact in such a sensibility is based on a notion of relationality that can diffuse into fantasmatic constructs of spatial empathies and pathetic fallacies. Contextuality tends to get defined as a Romantic perception in such aesthetic observations and corresponds with the sensual fantasies of the self. The subject-object dynamic of human perception has its verbal counterpart in what Frye calls the dialogic relation between the centripetal and centrifugal elements of the literary text. I have sought to situate Ruskin’s notion of subjectivity in the vortex of such correspondences in the next chapter. Here, however, I will further the analysis of the author’s aesthetic complements of the self poised between man and nature.
Rusty’s symbolic movement from text to context on the day of Holi is a watershed in the narrative progress of the novel. Ruskin’s desire for “human contact” in a specific, localized environment is concretized in Rusty’s participation in the rituals of Holi. The events of the festival constitute the “organizing centre” around which the idea of what Bakhtin calls the idyllic chronotope revolves. He describes the relationship between time and space in the idyll as:

An organic fastening-down, a grafting of life and events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one’s own home. Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world (Dialogic Imagination 225).

Holi conjures up the image of “folkloric time” in which the historicity of Ruskin’s sense of belonging (“Race did not make me an Indian. Religion did not make me an Indian. But history did”) survives. The Room becomes unrecognizable without its Indian and particularly Dehra Dun landscape of the 1950s, just as Thomas Hardy without Wessex, D. H. Lawrence without the Midlands, Willa Cather without the prairies, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay’s Pather Panchali (Song of the Road) without Nischindipur and Rumer Godden’s The River without the Bengal countryside beside the Ganges, and without their respective historical time frames, become insignificant. The importance of the connection between the Dehra Dun landscape and the narrative of the novel is similar to Goethe’s experience – Bakhtin points out – of understanding Odysse on his visit to Sicily:

Now that my mind is stored with images of all these coasts and promontories, gulls and bays, islands and headlands, rocky cliffs, fields, flower gardens, tended trees, festooned vines, mountains wreathed in clouds, eternally serene plains, and the all-encircling sea with its ever-
changing colours and moods, for the first time the Odyssey has become a living truth to me

Between Rusty’s ‘idyllic complex’ associated with space and Oedipal complex related to
“human contact” lies the relationship of empathy. Nature’s potential to complement
human drives works on the principle of contextual affiliations of iconic localization. For
example, Rusty’s Oedipal desires for Kishen’s mother get inscribed during her
metonymic absence in the non-human space that carries the memory of her presence. His
melancholic sense of fragmentation in the wake of Meena Kapoor’s departure is shared
by the storm clouds, the lightening, and the rain drops on the banyan leaves that continue
to bear the imaginary presence of the woman. Nature complements a human loss.

It was Suri’s farewell party. He was going off to a boarding school in Mussoorie.
Gorging on cream cakes and lemonade, Kishen had made himself sick. Rusty had helped
him back to his room. While Kishen lay on his bed, Rusty sat beside the window “gazing
blankly into the branches of the banyan tree” (626), thinking how far Meena had travelled
by then. Rusty had never seen the sky so black; it foreboded storm, one that expressed
“his innermost feelings”.

The tense sky shuddered. The blanket of black cloud groaned aloud and the air, which had been
still and sultry, trembled with electricity. Then the thunder gave a great clap, and all at once the
hailstones came clattering down on the corrugated iron roof (626).

The tense sky partook the tension of his own anxieties. The blanket of black cloud
groaned aloud, expressing the painful hysterics of Rusty’s subjective loss. The air, which
had been still and sultry, trembled with electricity. Rusty’s sense of a temporary loss –
hinted at by the initial stillness of the air – suddenly turned into a trepidation – the air
trembled – of ominous disaster. Like a visionary Romantic, perhaps, he could foresee the
fatal car accident that would take Meena Kapoor’s life. The pathos of his psychic trauma of fragmentation manifests itself in localized empathy. Rusty “liked to watch it [the rain] patterning on the leaves of the banyan tree”, signifying proclivities to place in a manner that evokes the images of the old peepul tree and the effusive mirth of children playing Holi in a village beside the Ganges in Jean Renoir’s cinematic rendition of Rumer Godden’s *The River* and Satyajit Ray’s scenic portrayal of drizzle on a village pond covered with lotus leaves in the filmic adaptation of Bibhuti Bhusan’s *Pather Panchali*.

Written in exile and informed by the trauma of dislocation and nationalist indignation, *The Room* dramatizes a dynamic process of evocation and dissolution of the feelings of contextuality in a way a Freudian child stages the symbolic “fort/da” game of appearance and disappearance of the motherer. No sooner had Rusty’s sense of union restored in the company of Meena and Kishen than it is frayed, first with the death of Meena and then with Kishen’s departure to his aunt’s place in Hardwar:

Kishen and I have been going down the river together, but I have been caught in the reeds and he has been swept onwards; and if I do catch up with him, it will not be the same, it might be sad ...

Kishen has gone, and part of my life has gone with him, and inside of me I am all lonely (632).

The loneliness is a psychotic symptom of exile, a fictionalization of the actual breach of contact with the author’s Dehra friends. Compensation is sought in tropical imagination of superimposing discursive ability on the landscape that has witnessed the leave taking. The result is pathetic fallacy. Like James Joyce in exile, the creator of Rusty realized “away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels”. True, exile had accentuated Ruskin’s sense of estrangement, but we will find a residue of the feeling till lingering in the creation of Rusty’s adventures in *Vagrants in the Valley*, which he undertook writing on his return to India. Presently, in *The Room*, Kishen’s departure is
followed by Somi’s. He was going to Amritsar for a few months. This leave-taking caused a greater heartache to Rusty because Somi was the last of his friends to go. Ruskin is investing his feelings of departure for England with a fictive semblance. The feeling of loneliness in a “foreign” country makes him reflect retrospectively on his decision to leave the place he identified with. His historical sense of contextual identity clashes with the notion of liminality and dislodges any sense of confidence that he wished to place on his decision. The indecisive confusion is the result of a self-other dynamic we find represented in Rusty’s insipid conversation with Somi on the occasion of the latter’s declaration of departure. The confidence with which Rusty broke away from his guardian – feeling psychologically secured in the knowledge of his hybridity – appeared to crumble in the face of estrangement. Rusty gulped down Mr. Kapoor’s left-over whisky to benumb his frazzled feelings. Suddenly there was a disjunction in the time-space continuum; the chronotope fell apart:

Time passed, but Rusty did not know it was passing. It was like living in a house near a river, and the river was always running past the house, on and away. But to Rusty, living in the house, there was no passing of the river; the water ran on, the river remained (640).

During his sojourn in England, Ruskin’s desire for the Indian context was influenced heavily by the scenic portrayal of Renoir’s adaptation (1951) of Rumer Godden’s *The River*. The embodiment of the landscape in Renoir’s portrayal was so vivid that Ruskin’s libidinal instinct drew fresh breath from it. The sense of place is so deeply entrenched in Godden’s novel that Renoir said that it would be impossible to turn it into a film anywhere else than in its actual setting and that he would forsake the venture should he required to shoot it in Hollywood. Ruskin’s memory of Indian experience in exile became so vivid that it is comparable to the expressionistic desire of Renoir’s imperative:
shoot the river in its naturalistic setting. Sensibilities shaped by Rabindranath Tagore's *Crescent Moon*, Kalidas's *The Cloud Messenger* and the influential orientation to nature that Aubrey imparted in him took a sharp edge. His adolescent desire for physical contact was invested with a fantasmatic content whose coordinates met at the human-nonhuman interface. His sensuality sought complements for human losses in nature. The pathetic disjunction between the river and her water was temporarily repaired as the monsoon rain poured on Rusty's dry vessel:

He threw off his clothes and ran naked on to the roof, and the wind sprang up and whipped the water across the body so that he writhed in ecstasy. The rain was more intoxicating than the alcohol, and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from shouting and dancing in mad abandon (641).

The principle of surplus pleasure continued to work in constituting the fantasmatic kernel of authorial jouissance. Ruskin made his alter-ego, Rusty, shiver in ecstasy by participating in yet another chronotopically distinctive ritual of identity formation – the advent of the North Indian Monsoon. But the ecstasy did not survive too long. The “depressing dampness” and the “sunless heat” of the rainy days were unbearable without the company of Somi, Kishen and Ranbir. This constant shift between senses of belonging and alienation is a concrete projection of the psychic debate that Ruskin had during the uncertain days of his life in the 1950s. Residual energy of the tension can be found in his later works as well.

Ruskin, however, did not allow Rusty to leave India. He made a bid to go to England but ended up discovering Kishen in Hardwar and together returned to Dehra. In my analysis of Ruskin's relationship with Azhar (name changed to Omar) in chapter five, I have shown how abjection draws two beings into confederacy when conventional
sociological normalcy fails to do so. In *The Room*, Rusty found in Kishen the same sort of company. Having an alcoholic for a father, Kishen was half abject from the beginning. When Mr. Kapoor remarried immediately after the death of Kishen’s mother, his abjection turned a full circle; he ran away from home. Rusty, who had been abject from the very beginning, cemented an unbreakable tie with him: a society by default. On the ferry boat cruising from Hardwar to the Dehra side of the Ganges, Rusty reflected what Kishen was to him:

He was sure of one thing, they were both refugees, refugees from the world [...] They were each other’s shelter, each other’s refuge. Kishen was a jungle divorced from the rest of mankind, and Rusty was the only one who understood him – because Rusty too was divorced from mankind. And theirs was a tie that would hold, because they were the only people who knew each other and loved each other (659).

However, it is interesting that the author of *The Roof*, who cemented a bond between two abject boys, should make their courses of life diverge in *Vagrants*. Kishen was restituted to the comfort of a middle class family of Mrs. Bhushan and her daughter Aruna while Rusty’s trajectory veered from indefinite wanderings with his Indian friends Devinder, Sudheer and even Goonga to newly discovered Anglo-Indian connections. It was significant that Ruskin during his own exile stopped Rusty from leaving India in *The Roof*, but after his decisive comeback made his alter-ego set out for England in the *Vagrants*. Ruskin’s sense of spatial belonging and his desire for an authorial vocation seemed to clash as historical eventualities in the 1950s India problematized contextual sensibilities by making their expressive modalities dependent on the commercial codes of capitalism for success. Returning to Dehra Dun in 1955 and embracing a dream of living as a freelance writer in English, Ruskin encountered a dismal situation. English language
fiction other than school and college books had scarcely any consumers in the country at that time. Although Ruskin’s stay in England was painful insofar as he suffered from the trauma of emotional displacement, it was, nevertheless, a professionally productive sojourn for the young author in the sense that he benefitted from his introduction to Diana Athill, the editor of his first publisher Andre Deutsch, and a coterie of literary mentors who peer reviewed his work. The painful detachment from the Indian context made his feelings of belonging more acute and the memory of his experiences more vivid. The content of his work was informed by the sentiments of dislocation while the commercial viability of it was engendered by an accessibility to print media occasioned by his stay in England. The dilemma between a sense of emotional unbelonging and the necessity of providing packaged exotica as grist to the western printing mill for survival as a writer made Ruskin’s life in England an actualized metaphor of the paradox of Toby Withers in Janet Frame’s novel The Edge of the Alphabet.

Toby, a Pakeha (white settler in New Zealand), travels to England with the hope of finding an authorial voice in what he thinks is the centre of the alphabet. Once there, he realizes, to his disappointment, that the locus of the centre is a chimera, suffers from an emotional bankruptcy and becomes increasingly dependent on his Pakeha experiences for the sustenance of his authorial self. Like Ruskin, who is neither British nor Indian, Toby Withers is a doubly displaced Pakeha, neither British nor Maori, occupying a space called “in between”, which according to Homi Bhabha “carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (38). The experiential demands of the situational context of the Indian “atmosphere” on the sensibilities of the autobiographical writer far outweighed any
feeling of commercial vantage that Ruskin’s authorial aspirations might have tasted in England.

Back in India at the end of the 1950s he was alarmed to find the Indian “atmosphere” changing, the socio-economic condition becoming more difficult for his aesthetic sensibilities to sustain in. Colonial rhetoric thrived on romancing the Indian space which to Ruskin, however, was an actually lived experience of pain and pleasure. The colonial attitude was a centric predisposition where the Indian text assumed a marginal position, whereas for Ruskin the Indian atmosphere was a pivotal context in which he was subsumed. The paradox lay in the change of the very “atmosphere” that the colonial discourses romanced with. It was unsettling for Ruskin because he had to negotiate with those changes, living them in actuality while trying jealously to resist the atmosphere from slipping away. His jealous guardianship would have been appropriated by western textualities had not the unconscious anxieties of his experiential paradoxes influenced his authorial vocation. That deep seated psychological angst is what I have set out to explore.

The psychological fear occasioned by the change in atmosphere was reflected in Rusty’s restive dithering in Vagrants. Rusty and Kishen trudged all the way from Hardwar to Dehra to find the room on the roof locked away by the proprietor for a future tenant. They had nowhere to stay. Rusty’s expectations of an independent standing in life – beginning as Kishen’s teacher and gradually forging ahead – had now suffered a setback. The prospect of sleeping under the open sky in the maidan (field) did not seem endearing:

Rusty gave a sigh of resignation and thought, a year ago when I ran away I slept in the maidan, and again I am going to sleep in the maidan. That’s called ‘Progress’ (680).
It is not unusual to read equivocation in the speaker’s usage of the word “Progress. Is he indignant to the idea of progress that endangers change in atmosphere or does he seem frustrated with the stalemate in his affairs due to a change in atmosphere? When he ran away from his guardian’s ghetto, emboldened by the support of Ranbir and Somi, Rusty embraced a notion of progress in relation to the contemporary state of the atmosphere. He had little idea that should the very condition in which he had effected a subjective advancement changes, the relative gain would recoil. Here the critic cannot avoid the imbroglio of the complex relation between the psychic patterns and material concerns of Rusty. Rusty’s attitude to the vicissitudes of fortune in *Vagrants* is intricately related with an ambivalent quest for material prospect that drove him seeking after his father’s legacy.

Search for a shelter led Rusty to the deserted St. Paul’s Church on the outskirts of Dehra. He felt sad for the abandoned place because it reminded him of “personal associations”; not that he was a religious person or liked going to churches, but Anglo-Indians whom he had known were interred in the church ground and “some of the people his father had known” lay there too. Rusty’s decision to stay there had both literal and figurative meanings: literally, the abandoned building served the homeless boy with a shelter in time of need; and symbolically, he found home in a place that bore signs of a part of his cultural and racial connections. Material concerns and an unconscious sense of partial affiliation were combined in the decision. The colonial history that brought the church and its sepulcher into existence was also responsible for Rusty’s existence and predicaments. But when the boy broke in and with his friend Kishen slept on the aisle wrapped in old, dusty cassocks, the symbolic sacrilege divested the place of its iconic content of evangelical zealotry, one of the many tools that served the colonial mission.
The act gained postcolonial significance in the political sense of the term as well as in the sense of cultural and racial miscegenation.

From this point of narrative time the memory of Rusty’s British association resurfaced more prominently. The subsequent sequence of events propelled the restive desires of the boy towards the direction of affective “Progress”. On the outskirts of Dehra Rusty came across Mr. Pettigrew who knew the boy’s father and that he had left a legacy for the son with an aunt who lived in the higher ranges of the Garhwal Himalayas. His and Kishen’s courses of life forked. As Rusty in Pettigrew’s house on the town’s fringe discovered things about his British heritage, Kishen went through the initial rituals of absorption ensconced in the comforts of a middle class Indian home downtown. Ruskin was decomposed into Rusty and Kishen, bearing a dynamic relation with both of them as the decomposed selves maintained between themselves in spite of their seemingly different trajectories of life. Kishen’s new life signified a change of atmosphere, towards which Rusty maintained an ambivalent attitude. He desired to belong to it but abject fears held him back. Abjection and racial-cultural liminality have posted him in an “in between” space which did not prepare him for a ready absorption in either of the two cultural domains he had encountered. Kishen’s life with the Bhushans had the inflections of libidinal economy but resulted from a cultural breach with the past while the lives of Mr. Pettigrew and Rusty’s aunt appeared too lonely to live. The atmospheric change had alienated them. Kishen was to be sent to school by Mrs. Bhushan, Devinder was studying for a degree and Sudheer could live on his wits. Rusty’s dream was fading. That’s life, thought he:

You can’t run away from it and survive. You can’t be a vagrant for ever. You’re getting nowhere, so you’ve got to stop somewhere. Kishen has stopped. He’s thrown in his lot with the settled
incomes – he had to. Even Mowgli left the wolf-pack to return to his own people. And India was changing. This great formless mass was taking some sort of shape at last. He had to stop now, and find a place for himself or go forward to disaster (753).

Somi’s mother had earlier offered to provide shelter to Rusty. On his maternal side Rusty was an Indian, so a sense of belonging to Somi’s family was not warped. But he could not square with the idea of dependence when he was struggling for an independent existence in a manner an abject boy tries to master his Oedipal desire yet always being subjected by it. His independence lay in the direction of the Symbolic order, the initiation into which was instrumentalized by his father’s legacy of books and the language in which they were written. When he went up to his aunt he found his father had left nothing for him but the books that he grew up with during his childhood. The act of his aunt’s delivering them to him was a metaphorical gesture in which the psychoanalyst would read the mother’s role in the initiation of her infant to the symbolic order of language and independence. Curiously enough, Rusty’s aunt was invested with the same characteristics that I have pointed out Ruskin’s libidinal fantasy treasured in his own motherers. She had an elaborate hookah placed before her when Rusty was ushered into her presence:

She looked surprisingly young. Rusty had expected to find an older woman. His aunt did not look over thirty-five; she was, in fact, forty. Having met an aged contemporary of his father’s in Mr. Pettigrew, he had expected his aunt to be an old woman; but now he remembered she had been the wife of his father’s younger brother. She came from a village in the higher ranges and this accounted for her good colour, her long black hair – and her hookah. She looked physically strong, and her face, though lacking femininity, was strikingly handsome (733).

With her robust physique, “handsome” look and hookah Rusty’s aunt was a conflation of Mrs Singh and Ruskin’s ayah. Rusty’s initial surprise at finding her unusually young in relation to his father’s friend Mr. Pettigrew was explained as a suppositional anomaly.
But according to the principle of psychoanalytic transference the fictionalized image of
the woman objectified Ruskin’s unconscious Oedipal notion of his own mother, who was
almost 17 years younger than his father. She made Rusty lie down and stroked his
forehead and temples with the tender affection of a mother, told her folkloric ghost tales
of churels (the same that young Ruskin heard from Mrs. Singh) and soothed him to sleep.
The fact that she was a “handsome” Indian woman who “came from a village in the
higher ranges” of the Himalayas reminds me of mythical Gulabi, the village woman from
Harsil near Gangotri whose relationship with Pahari Wilson was fashioned into a
supernatural tale (“Wilson’s Bridge”) by Ruskin. I have psychoanalysed the story’s self-
reflexive relation to Ruskin’s subjectivity in the last chapter. Here it suffices to say that
this Gulabi-like aunt of Rusty acted as his motherer and delivered him the books,
reminding the abject boy of his entry into the Symbolic order of language and into the
world of independence.

Back in India, at a time not well disposed to a fiction writer in English, the author
of the Vagrants felt anxious to see the potential of his literary cravings not marred by the
atmospheric changes. The symbolic reenactment of the initiation-to-independence ritual
was imperative for psychological conviction. Ironically, the fantasmatic content of the act
as projected in Rusty’s dilemma had unconscious association with an abject crisis
inasmuch as the priests of the ritual, Mr Pettigrew (symbolic fatherer) and the aunt
(symbolic motherer), were themselves reeling under the anxieties of loneliness. The
English language as a means of livelihood in India was fraught with the fears of
alienation. The abject boy had a hard time negotiating with the crisis of this
psychological association. He connected his literary aspirations with his fatherer’s
loneliness and his psychic angst was informed by the author’s own abject fears of
c conventional social modes of affiliation like marriage and business. The fragility of his
 parents’ marriage was a childhood trauma that Ruskin could never overcome. He posited
 Rusty amidst such psychological ennui when Kishen was shown following the
 conventional sociological codes of belonging in the company of Aruna and Mrs Bhushan
 and contextual subjectivity was shown to be incompatible with the yearnings of the
 literary self. The omniscient narrative of Rusty’s thoughts spoke volumes for the
 authorial predicaments:

In a week Rusty had found two lonely people – his aunt and this elderly gentleman [Mr.
Pettigrew], moving slowly through the autumn of their lives. It was beginning to affect him. He
looked at Mr. Pettigrew and wondered if he would be like that one day – alone, not very strong,
living in the past, with a bottle of whisky to sustain him through the still, lonely evenings. Rusty
had friends – but so had Pettigrew, in his youth. Rusty had books to read, and books to write – but
Pettigrew had books, too. Did they make much difference? Weren’t there any permanent flesh and
blood companions to be found outside the conventions of marriage and business? (754)

Ruskin himself encountered contemporary social prejudice against bachelors
when in the early 1960s he searched for a place to stay in Delhi. Hardly anybody was
prepared to rent a room to a young bachelor. Although he relates such experiences with
characteristic humour in his autobiography, The Lamp is Lit, underlying the account is an
identity-driven concern that informs Rusty’s anxiety at the end of the Vagrants. Ruskin had
been to stay with the middle-class Punjabi family of Bhabiji and proposed marriage to her
granddaughter, Sashi Kishore. Like his character Kishen in the company of the Bhushans
he felt at home in Bhabiji’s household, but his marriage proposal was not taken seriously
and he did not belong to any family who could mediate for him. However, Rusty’s
reflections were envisaged prior to Ruskin’s own experiences, and were informed by his
lovelorn relation with the Vietnamese girl Vu Phuong in England. In fact, the traumatic memory of his parents’ unhappy marriage, a slight self-pity about his financial insecurity and his romantically inflected sensual desire posed marriage as a hindrance to Ruskin’s libidinal fantasies. That these sentiments combined in Ruskin to form an unconscious inhibition towards marriage can be realized in the portrayal of the abject character, Sunil, in “Death of a Familiar”.

Written at the end of the 1950s, the story is given a significant title that illuminates the author’s psychological anxiety to get rid of the abject sociopath in his own self. A victim of the Partition trauma, the boisterous influence of an Anglo-Indian public school and the travails of the post-Independence socio-economic change, Sunil is a juvenile delinquent. Set in Shahganj, a small town in Terai (foot of the Himalayas), the story, told by the first person narrator, depicts the “familiar” as a seducer of women, aggressive, capable of all sorts of crooked things and yet possessing a heart for love and sentiments. Otherwise a social castaway, he is able to maintain friendship only with the narrator. Together they go to visit Shimla, where Sunil’s sexual escapades with an Anglo-Indian woman much older to him in years culminate into an emotional attachment. His love for Maureen results in casting a sober spell on Sunil’s abject syndromes; he wishes to marry her and goes in desperate search of a job to acquire economic eligibility to enter into the social institution. He fails to get one and loses Maureen to another man. Lovelorn Sunil hits the bottle while the narrator resorts to desentimentalizing his “familiar” friend with the sedate detachment of a philosopher. Maureen is not young and she cannot wait for ever for Sunil to get a job, rationalizes the narrator. Sunil’s abject syndromes are revived for narrative consistency and he is ultimately killed by two cuckolded men, who
take revenge on him for their wives' seduction. There are similarities between Sunil and Ruskin's Bishop Cotton School friend Azhar (Omar in the author's autobiographical sketch, "The Playing Fields of Shimla"), which I have analyzed in chapter five. Omar's aggressivity stems from double abjections, one of which is Partition. Sociopath Sunil is a product of Partition as well, although his dissipations are informed by authorial sensuality, expressions of which we find in Ruskin's Oedipal instincts involving the ayah and Mrs. Singh, and reflected in Rusty's desire for Kishen's mother. Above all, the authorial sentiments regarding love and marriage are first embodied and then exorcised in Sunil in the manner in which, my reading of "Playing Fields" will show, Ruskin's identity crisis is enacted and redressed in Omar's diseased existence and death. Perhaps, a sort of psychic fear about marriage had intervened in bungling the author's marriage negotiations in actual and fictionalized lives. Needless to say that the author has to some extent overcome the fears of loneliness and business by adopting a family out of wedlock and making a living by pursuing a freelance writing career in English without having to leave India since 1955. But behind the success lie grit and fortitude almost as legendary as that of Peter Westcott, the protagonist of Hugh Walpole's Fortitude, from whom Ruskin drew inspiration during his formative days. The dilemma that he had been through in negotiating with the crisis informed his works in the past and the memory of it continues to influence his writings to the present day.

Rusty, for that matter, was the product of the authorial angst. He brought the books that his aunt gave him to Mr. Pettigrew. Among them was the first edition of Alice in Wonderland, one of the two or three copies still to be found. It would fetch a good price – five or six hundred pounds – as an object of rare value. Mr. Pettigrew's idea of
selling the copy to a prospective book-collector in England did not seem likeable to Rusty because the books were of sentimental value to him as his father’s legacy. The necessity of commodifying literary objects to make a living appeared potentially dangerous for its deleterious effect on the young writer. The ability to sell words in the changing scenario made tropical sense of the notion of independence as entry into the Symbolic order but at the same time implied a willingness to cater to the interests of a reading community whose tastes were being increasingly fashioned by capitalist zeitgeist. Ruskin clung to the old world values where writing the self per se was tantamount to fulfilling a subjective desire, coming to terms with one’s own identity. The tension inherent in such identitarian transcripts does not readily lend itself to the dominant ideology of the capitalist market. The dialogue between the writer and reader becomes rewarding for Ruskin only if his readers are of a “gentle kind”. Writing the reader’s desire to sustain an authorial vocation in the former sense was a stupendous imperative that clashed with his aesthetic bearings. Mr. Pettigrew had explained the desperate situation to him. He had to yield to the pragmatic demands of the market, go to his father’s land where there was some prospect for a wordsmith in English, and fashion his craft according to the demands of the popular taste. In fact, Ruskin’s hardship on his return to India energized in him the psychological debate between the claims of the contextual self and authorial vocation. The dialectical uncertainty was projected in the form of Rusty’s half-hearted desire to leave for England at the end of the Vagrants. The authorial unconscious at this point can be interpreted as reviving the temporal ideal of the mirror stage. I have pointed out in chapter one that Jane Gallop in her reading of Lacan has rightly emphasized the temporal dialectic between the anticipatory and the retroactive in the mirror stage. Back in Dehra Dun from exile, the
agency of the authorial ego retroactively projects the fictional self in anticipatory relation
to what he has already become. This is characteristic of Ruskin’s fictionality: the present
and future of his fictional time are always already informed by the unconscious of his
biographical time. Demands of the commercial zeitgeist claiming commodification of the
literary object made a dent on the young author’s formative discipline. In a struggle to
find the appropriate strain amidst contesting claims of the self and pervasive ideology of
the capital market, Ruskin at times was misled into skimping his artifacts. In an attempt
to designate his aesthetic verve and authorial identity, I have explored one such work of
the author in the following chapter.