Chapter 4

a) Quest for an Authentic Literary Grain: Two Versions of “The Eyes are not Here”.

The unconscious in Ruskin Bond is formed through his everyday encounters with the world before it objectifies the world of his fictions. A particular episode in the adolescent days of the author’s real life will be a case of much relevance to my present analysis. I will analyze two versions – the first is a newspaper publication and the second a revision of the first by the author himself for inclusion in an anthology – of a fantastic story written for young-adults during the budding stage of the author’s career.

Although the socio-cultural implications of the story is thin (I will not say, nil), its significance lies in it being an allegorical reflection upon the metafictional crises that engender the transference of the romantic desires of a young man into inscribed fantasies. A comparison of the two versions of the story will lead us to understand how contingencies of the zeitgeist sometimes intervenes in confusing the author in his experimental stages about the authenticity of the literary grain that should represent him best. The version that least represents him might get circulated as an odd gimmick in his oeuvre when the better one is forgotten due to its unavailability in book form. It is the task of critical scholarship to rescue the most representative version from obscurity.

For both the versions of the story under discussion, the author’s title is “The Eyes are not Here”. Of them the popular version in circulation is also available in two other headings: “The Eyes Have It” and “The Girl on the Train”. To make the readers aware of
the slender plot of the story I will use the popular version having the title “The Eyes are not Here” as reproduced in the Sahitya Academy compilation, Contemporary Indian Short Stories in English (hereafter referred to as the SA version) (36-39).

A blind man, the first person narrator, was traveling by train in the foothills of the Himalayas. He was going to Dehra Dun and from there to Mussoorie. He “had the compartment to himself till Rohana. And then a girl got in.” From her conversation with her mother who had come to see her off, the man came to understand that she was almost his age. From the way her slippers slapped against her heels the man imagined her looks. The girl was startled when the man tried gallantly to open a casual conversation with her; she did not know there was anyone else in the compartment. The man began talking and behaving in such a manner that he could hide his blindness from the girl. He moved to the edge of the window and pretended to look out of it, describing all the workaday details that any person from a moving train can presume to observe in the forested foothills of Gharwal. Romantic feelings for his companion seethed within the young man. He pretended to stare at her and described her eyes as “interesting”. The girl laughed at this, “a clear, ringing laugh” that sounded like “the clear sparkle of a mountain stream”. The man wanted to laugh with her but the thought of laughter deepened his sense of loneliness. He wished he could sit and talk with her eternally. The perfume from her hair tantalized him and he imagined whether she wore her hair in a bun. He wanted to touch it but he could not bring himself to do it. A feeling of languishment overcame him when the girl got off the train at Sharanpur. There was a commotion at the gate; while getting down from the compartment the girl might have collided with another man who was getting into it. The blind man resumed his journey and the game of simulation once again, this
time, however, with the new man in the compartment. When the narrator asked the new
entrant how the girl looked like, he answered: “She had beautiful eyes but they were of
no use to her. She was blind. Didn’t you notice?”

The first version of this story with several changes, the most significant of which
is the absence of the end-twist, appeared in the May 29, 1955 issue of the The Sunday
Statesman Magazine, published from Calcutta. This version of the story is one of the first
fictional sorties of the author after his return from exile. The girl in the train is referred to
as Punjabi, and unlike the blind girl of an indeterminate cultural origin of the SA version,
she had the benefit of using normal vision. The first person authorial narrator alone was
portrayed blind; and that too, implicitly. The confession, “As I was totally blind at the
time […]” at the beginning of the second paragraph in the SA version resulted from a
later revision by the author. Upon the suggestion of a friend Ruskin turned the girl in the
train blind, thereby adding not only an unwonted twist to the story but also a new
dimension to its interpretative possibilities. I call the end-twist “unwonted” because that
is not what Ruskin’s stories usually have. The way it stands out in the Statesman version,
the girl getting down at an unnamed station (Sharanpur in the SA version) and the blind
man resuming his journey in the empty compartment all alone, highlights the pathos
inherent in the authorial narrator’s sensibilities that have engendered the occasion of the
story’s original composition. Let me take up this latter aspect briefly before venturing
into a comparative study of the two versions in the way of interpreting the story and
finding out the aesthetic relevance of the twist at the end.

In 1997, Ruskin Bond reminisces over the kind of personality he possessed in
1951:
[...] I was very much my own person [...] ready to discover things about myself and come to terms with a wayward, sensual nature; above all, eager to express myself in the language I'd learnt to love; ambitious enough to want to see my name in print (if not in lights!). To love and be loved; to be free.” (Bond, A Memoir 78-79)

The sensibilities of the blind man in the train can be traced partly to Ruskin’s relationship with his friend Ranbir’s sister, Raj, whom he missed on his return to Dehra Dun from his three-year-long sojourn in England:

It would have been nice to see Raj again, the Punjabi girl with whom I used to play badminton the year before I left for England. A fine, athletic girl, she used to beat me 15-0, 15-1 (the last point in my favour being an act of mercy on her part), and I used to put up with these walkovers just so that I could be with her. The things we do for love! But now her father, like my stepfather, had lost his money in ill-conceived business ventures and had left Dehra Dun with his family. In the 1950s, Dehra Dun was going through a slump; it would recover a decade or so later. (Bond, A Journal 5)

The memory of Raj was stored in a layer of the authorial unconscious. I have pointed out in the previous chapter that Mrs. Kapoor in The Room was designed out of the author’s libidinal urges for several figures of which Raj was one. In England, dislocated from the spatial coordinates that bound his immediate experiences during leave taking, the entire repertoire of Ruskin’s Indian experiences was vigorously rummaged to produce palimpsestic objects of literalized desire. Back in India, in 1955, in physical contact with the memory-inducing markers of space, the object of his desire could have assumed more focus. In support of this psychological hypothesis, I should point out that the author of the Vagrants took care to add an apparently minor but actually significant spatial detail to the Kapoors’ house which was absent in The Roof. The house, which was associated with the memory of Mrs. Kapoor, now dead, was imprinted with the pathos of a heart-rending loss – “the gravel path, the litchee and mango trees, the grass badminton court, now
overgrown with weeds” (Bond Collected Fiction, 676). It sounds partly like the loss Ruskin suffered when he found, on his return to Dehra, that Raj, with whom he played badminton, had moved out of the place. Incidentally, unlike The Roof, Vagrants was written in Dehra within a year and half of Ruskin’s return from exile and conception of “The Eyes”.

In England, Ruskin fell in love with a Vietnamese girl, Vu Phuong, who leaving for her country in the wake of the US-Vietnam war permanently stepped out of the world of the author. The incidental “abjection” (Kristeva, Powers of Horror 4) he suffered due to this could have possibly been resolved had he on his return to India found his youthful emotions redeemed in the company of Raj, especially, when Dehra Dun and its surroundings were redolent with the nostalgic memory of his tender moments with the girl. The disappointments suffered in succession, however, inspired the authorial self in Ruskin to transfigure his personal experiences into an objective metaphor in keeping with his foremost desire to “express myself [himself] in language” and “see my [his] name in print”. The result is the allegory of the journey, the psychological trope of blindness and the transience of the scene which acts as a hyperreal marker of temporal distance. Such a cultural sublimation is one of the ways in which the Symbolic has traditionally governed the exclusion of the abject. The first thing that the child learns at this stage is to abject its bodily dependence on the mother. The abjected object, tropicalized broadly as the sexual Other, becomes, therefore, an object of desire in the subject’s unconscious. The unsatisfiable desire for the abject in the Symbolic works into the substitutive logic of repression or displacement or sublimation. The imperative of psychological abjection works in conjunction with the hegemonic conceits of cultural idealism. The conservative
culture of Dehra Dun in the 1950s was not congenial for the explicit rendition of such desires in reality, especially when it involved a relationship between a Punjabi Hindu girl and an Anglo-Indian (presumably Christian) man. Perhaps, that was one reason why the ethnic part of the girl’s identity is dispensed with in the SA version. The need to adhere to the norms of propriety is referred to by the author in another short story, “The Death of a Familiar”, that he wrote during this time. Set in Shahganj, a small town, like Dehra Dun, in the Terai, the story depicts the furious social reaction Sunil’s womanizing spree incites. Sunil is not only manhandled for trying to be intimate with girls, but the author chooses an Anglo-Indian woman – much more liberal according to the 50s standard of Indian social norms – for him when he has to get romantically involved with someone. Small town Indian society was so disinclined to premarital love (emotional as well as physical) that any sort of dissent attracted social stigma, disreputable more for women than men.

In 1950-51, in Dehra Dun, Ruskin befriended a Punjabi boy, Ranbir, and his sister, Raj, who lived with their mother in the neighbourhood. Ruskin was enamoured of Raj’s lithe, athletic figure and was bowled over by “one sidelong look from her dark, friendly but fiery eyes” (Bond, A Memoir, 84). He describes how he lingered beside her courtyard to enjoy “the warmth of her frank appraising gaze” (84). Raj’s eyes and their gaze on him were so memorable that Ruskin makes eyes and gazes leitmotifs of expressive passion in the story. Her athletic figure with “a few male chromosomes” (85) in it did not create for her the typical feminine look that we would call beautiful. This aspect of her, however, is the cause of Ruskin’s attraction; enough reason to inspire the blind man in the story to imagine the girl in the train to have an ‘interesting’ face rather
than a pretty one. In what appeared to be a benign occasion for Ruskin, once Raj had to lie in bed with her foot operated upon and bandaged after a sewing needle accidentally pierced and got into it. Ruskin sat by the bedside watching her “one bandaged foot on a pillow and the other elegant bare foot tracing patterns on the wall” (85). In his desire to touch her, he pretended to be a good masseur and offered to massage her foot (not the injured one) on the pretext that it would be good for the blood circulation and bring about quick healing of the injury. When she was all right and could walk again, he was invited to play badminton with her. In contrast to Raj, who was a champion of the game at school, Ruskin did not even know how to play it. But he acceded to Raj’s wish only to be with her and be able to continue to satisfy his desire for her in the process of satisfying her desires. This is how Ruskin describes his feelings in the Memoir:

She played barefoot on the dew-drenched early morning grass, and I shall always remember her that way as she darted about the badminton court, lissome, gazelle-like, sparkling in the sunrise. Sometimes I stood still in order to admire her and she would call out, “What are you staring at?” (86).

The game of badminton changes into a game of masquerade in the story and Ruskin, who pretended to play badminton while actually using the occasion to feast his gaze (and thereby his passion) on Raj, morphs into the narrator’s disguise of a normal seeing person when he is actually blind. The one-to-one correspondence between these two gaming conditions is evident in the fact that physical gaze is the motif around which the relevance of the game is actualized, both for the narrator of the Memoir and the blind man in the train. The psychoanalytical role of the “gaze” in establishing the identity of the narrator and (non)rapport between the blind man and the girl in the two versions of
the story is attempted later on. Now it suffices to say that Ruskin’s pretensions at playing badminton and the blind man’s simulated gaze on the girl are both intended to satisfy the deceiver’s desire to arouse the other’s desire for him.

In the autobiographical narrative of the Memoir, the author lays emphasis upon his sensual urges which were hinged on Raj’s gaze, figure and especially her feet. His interests in the “bandaged foot”, the “other elegant bare foot” and her bare feet on “the dew-drenched morning grass” coalesce into the transformed sensibility of the blind man’s pleasure in hearing the girl in the train compartment slapping her slippers against her heels. In the absence of his normal vision, the man depends on the sound of the girl’s slippers to fantasize her looks. Ruskin’s interest in the girl’s foot can be explained by the help of the Freudian idea of the “fetish” (Freud, Fetishism). “No male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital” (Freud 354). The vision of the absence of the penis in the erotogenic part of the female body creates within the male child a feeling that the organ might not constitute an integral part of the body and therefore he is in danger of losing it. The vision is loaded with the trauma of the possibility of castration which is deepened by the prohibitive aspect of the father in the child’s Oedipal stage. The male child in his search for assurance fills in that female absence with a fetish. Fetish is usually the last visual organ in the female body that the male child observes before discovering the shocking absence. Raj’s bandaged foot or the other elegant bare foot in her inclined posture in bed might then, for obvious reasons, act as a fetish object to allay Ruskin’s fears. This assurance, says Freud, ultimately leads the male fetishist to realize his biological difference from the female and intensifies his desire for the female “other”. So, fetish is one of the devices through which the male
restores his sense of identity and begins to fantasize the presence of the female. When Ruskin, the author of “The Eyes are not Here”, fictionalized the autobiographical experiences of the Memoir into a fantasy, this fetish syndrome acted as a psychological and tropical converter. That this experience holds much importance in Ruskin’s life as an author becomes clear when well into the 1990s he fondly reminisces over the incident saying: “If this were fiction, I would launch into a romantic story” (Bond, Memoir 86). After all, his identity as an author and his identity as a male lover are not at variance.

In October 1951, Ruskin set sail for England. The farewell he received from his Dehra friends was sentimental. The genesis of the journey metaphor in the story can be traced to this memorable leave-taking. Ruskin took the train from Dehra Dun to Bombay and from Bombay he boarded the P & O Liner, “Strathnaver”, to Jersey, one of the British Channel Islands. His friends saw him off at the Dehra Dun station on October 14, 1951. The author’s Journal entry of that date records his feelings:

The engine shrieked, drowning his [Somi’s, one of Ruskin’s Dehra friends] voice. The platform, fruit stalls, advertisement boards, all slipped away; the darkness came on, the station lights twinkled, fell away, grew fainter till they [sic] were flickering pinpoints in the distance. The stars came out. And the forest moved in around us” (Bond, Memoir 130).

The description is real as well as metaphoric: real, because in the 1950s the outskirts of Dehra Dun was densely forested and someone traveling the stretch between Dehra Dun and Rohana by train had to move through dark forest; metaphoric, because the leave-taking had an immediately sad effect on the traveler who was leaving behind a world of love and longing to enter into an unknown (“dark” and “forested”) world of mystery and adventure. Three years later when the author returned to Dehra for good, the journey was
reversed. The feeling of abjection that Ruskin suffered when he found on returning to Dehra that Raj was gone, inspires the fantastic portrayal of the train journey in the story. An expressionistic telescoping of time occurs between the impressions of his journey out of Dehra in 1951 and that of his homecoming in 1955. The correspondences between Ruskin’s life and the train journey and between the transience of the Raj episode and the brevity of the Rohana-Sharanpur (where the girl got down) journey in the SA version are obvious. The feeling of the blind man following the girl’s exit in the Statesman version is inscribed in the following lines:

The train gathered speed, and the wheels took up their song, and the carriage groaned and rattled, I found the window and sat in front of it, staring into the darkness (The Statesman 10).

The description is remarkably similar to the author’s feelings of leave-taking in 1951. What the girl leaves behind is the perfume of her hair. It works like a metonymic absence in sustaining the desires of the man and fills the place where the object was with memories of happiness. In the SA version, the author quotes (with some deliberate or forgetful changes) the last lines of Thomas Moore’s Irish melody, “Farewell! But whenever you welcome the hour”:

You may break, you may shatter [sic], the vase if you will
But the scent of the roses will linger [sic] there [sic] still […] (Moore, http 2007).

In Moore’s original version of the song, the word “ruin” occurs in place of “shatter”, “hang” in place of “linger” and the phrase “round it” in place of “there”. It is interesting that the song underwent morphophonemic changes in its performative renditions by different singers. One of them, however, is by Mary O’ Hara who changed “ruin” into “shatter”. Ruskin heard the song in its varied forms available in different albums to conveniently depend on the version that suited his feelings and/or interpolate words and
phrases for those he had forgotten. Such linguistic changes are metaphorical of the changes that occur between the author’s autobiographical experiences and their fictional representations. The adaptability of Moore’s lines for symbolic purposes in the realm of signs and signifiers is similar to the process of transference of desire through synesthesia into iconic gestalts. The “tantalizing” perfume of the girl’s hair leaves behind a trace in the realm of desire that subsequently constitutes and alienates the subject in one of the semiotic versions of Moore’s song. The “rose” and the “vase” are lyrical symbols for the subject’s sensual pleasures whose alienating effect is dramatized by T S Eliot in “The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock”:

And I have known the arms already, known them all –
Arms that are bracelet and white and bare
But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume/
And how should I begin? (Eliot, Poems 13)

The inability to presume the unconscious patterns of desire engendered by the digressive effects of perfume and the sight of the “light brown hair” besets the poet’s self in the language of the poem because the imperceptible unconscious is itself structured like a language. The denial of the self is metonymically complemented by language.

I have already referred to Ruskin’s journal entry of October 14, 1951 to describe the transcreative process of the journey metaphor. What I have not yet mentioned is the record of Ruskin’s feelings for Raj at the time of leave-taking, entered against the same
date in the Journal. Before leaving for the station, he goes up to Ranbir’s place and meets Raj there:

Raj looked up from the mirror she held in her hand. She was combing her hair and it hung down to its full length, filling the air with perfume, reminding me of the actress Nimmi (Bond, Memoir 128).

The appearance of Raj with her hair rolled down, supplemented by the olfactory sensation of the perfume that emanated from the latter, works through synesthesia in Ruskin to create an iconic object (actress “Nimmi”) to fill the subjective vacuum which Eliot in his more psychoanalytically presumptive dilemma chooses to leave vacant.

“Nimmi”, in the fictionalized version of the experience, turns into Moore’s figurative vacancy of the “vase” and the “rose” gestalt. Ruskin’s desire for Raj is consonant with the resurgence of the maternal-type desire in adolescence, a wish to fuse with the Other. The child’s desire to fuse with its mother’s body in the mirror stage is slightly modified now as the mother-child relationship is substituted by an almost identical relationship between the adolescent and his peer group or the adolescent and the media hero/ine who acts for his fragmented self a perfectly complete Other. To restore the stable Oedipal condition the adolescent needs to reabject his desire. Karen Coats maintains that in this stage of subject formation “Artistic sublimation of abjection requires an image that merges the perfect with the imperfect but maintains the tension between the two” (Looking Glasses 144). Ruskin’s first step towards this reabjection process enlists the intervention of a media image, here “Nimmi”, the tinsel star, to approximate the Raj imago. The final stage, perhaps, is reached by the authorial narrator conjuring up the “vase” image as the disembodied substitute for the Other. The unconscious inspirations of the memory by associative sensory experiences work on the principle of “differance”
(Derrida) to postpone self-realization indefinitely. The blind man continues to play the game.

In Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness*, self-realization was promised to Kurtz who died with a fixed stare at the forest, crying “Horror! Horror!” This provided the model for T S Eliot’s “Those who have crossed/ With direct eyes, to death’s other kingdom” (Eliot, *Poems* 77) in “The Hollow Men”. The hollow men, on the other hand, who were denied those “direct eyes”, lived in “death’s dream kingdom” with their wills unfulfilled and hanging like shadows between conception and reality, “essence and descent”. The blind man in the SA version of Ruskin’s story appears to come very close to fulfilling his desire when he presumes to touch the girl’s hair, but the story ends with his desire remaining unaccomplished and the girl impalpable. The shadow intervenes dramatically between dream and reality. Interestingly, Ruskin coins the title of the story from the poem “The Hollow Men”:

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The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms (Eliot, *Poems* 79)
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The “hollow valley” is the “excavated valley, full of derelict objects and hopeless native labourers that [Conrad’s] Marlow comes to on his way to the interior of the Congo” (Southam, *Eliot* 107). Marlow compares the place to Dante’s portrayal of the Inferno. In fact, Eliot’s models for “The Hollow Men” were Dante, Conrad and the Gunpowder plotters in James I’s London. The plotters died with their desires unfulfilled, exhibiting their hollowness; Kurtz dies with a revelation of his hollowness and Marlow comes back
affected by the darkness and therefore unable to face the direct gaze of Kurtz’s fiancée; Dante, during his peregrinations in the *Divina Commedia*, moves from the Hell of punishment and lost souls (in Inferno) to the Purgatory of suffering towards redemption to come close in sight of Paradise, the higher world of beauty, light and music. In the last world of light (“death’s other kingdom”, according to Eliot) he visualizes Beatrice’s ideal beauty. The kind of self-scrutiny and purgation of desires he had to suffer in the dark and sightless hovels of Hell and Purgatory, which are likened to “death’s dream kingdom” by Eliot, prepared him for transcendence from darkness to light. In the “dream kingdom” the eyes are but a memory. By their absence from the real world they signify their presence in the shadowy world of the past in the recesses of the subject’s psychic history. The psychical insistences of desire have to be overcome to come to the pure light of vision. Vision is deferred and compensated by the imaginary objectification of the self. Here I would add, in conformity with Leo Bersani, that the refashioning of the world with the non-phenomenological, psychic colours of the memory is actuated through the powers of the aesthetic subject insofar as “The past’s disappearance as events is the condition of a new permanence, the permanent persistence of possibility” (Bersani 169). By tracing the autobiographical elements that cohere in the fantasy, we have implicitly acknowledged that the objective world, in which Raj was the objective correlative, was originally instrumental in creating the psychical patterns of the subject’s desire which has now taken its turn in contaminating the world. Suppose, the incident on the train was real, and the author with his normal vision had enjoyed the company of the girl. Then, the girl could well have been the site where the different strands of the author’s desire for Raj intersected. “There is”, in fact, “no specified unconscious prior to the material from the
external world in which it at once recognizes and constitutes itself” (Bersani 169). For the author this aesthetic objectification takes place in the realm of art, in the creation of the shadow between the word and the deed. Eliot refers to this self-reflexive pursuit of the artist to explain the complementarity of the relationship between the sensual desires and the desire for aesthetic qualification in the artist. In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot cites James Thomson’s line from “Art” to illustrate the process that constitutes the artist’s self: “Lips only sing when they cannot kiss” (156).

Ruskin’s coinage of Eliot’s line for the title of the story throws implicit light upon the self-reflexive concerns of the authorial narrator hidden in the blind man. These psychological concerns are patterned against the alienating norms of signification – the desire of the authorial self for that aspect of himself which is detached from him and placed in the whirlpool of language. The man’s desire to possess his other by masquerading a self that he imagines to be himself (the man’s Imaginary other is a normal seeing self) remains unsatisfied because the girl, whose eyes were his imagined mirror, turned to be blind. The ego’s role in misrecognizing the counterfeit as real fails. The self is cast once again in the shadow between desire and fulfillment. It is an irresolvable Beckettian “Endgame” where the identity-seeking concerns of the authorial self travel in the realms of fantasy for the realization of its dreams. Therein it faces the eternal paradox of the lure of misrecognition of the self in the absence of any true self-realization as such.

In the Statesman version of the story, after the girl gets down at her destination, the man once more has the compartment to himself. He sits beside the window and continues to guess the probable happenings outside. In the absence of the girl, his other,
he becomes tired of the game and feels a psychological necessity to move beyond the self-deception of seeming to a fantastic world of perceiving. The restricted game of self-deluding chicanery will find release in the game of recognition of the authorial potential for an epiphanic transcendence. No sooner had the promise been shown than it is blighted by recursive introjection into the old memory game; symptomatic of the Freudian “fort/da” game. The only release in fantasy, however, is the collapse of space and time in a psychical order. The partial domain of vision is extended to the blind man’s hypothetical angle of vision:

[...] It was a fascinating game wondering what could be outside, but I knew I would soon tire of it. The window was a limited field of vision. I had all the world to roam. And to roam the world was a game that need never end (Statesman 11).

In this version, since the girl has her normal vision, the man appears to have won his game of masquerade, winning a victory for the ego’s role. But the recognition of the self deception is dramatized all the same when the authorial narrator tells the story to his readers. His pretended gaze on the girl, reminiscent of young Ruskin’s actual behaviour with Raj during the badminton games, elicits a satisfactory response from her:

“Don’t stare at me like that,” she said. She didn’t sound annoyed, but no doubt she was uncomfortable with my immobile gaze fixed on her (Statesman 10).

In his essay, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”, Freud explicitly connects different types of fantasies indulged in at different phases of development. “The creative writer does the same as the child at play” (Art and Literature 132), Freud avers by relating the writer’s fantasy to the wish-fulfillment acted out in play by the child in the writer. If Ruskin, the badminton player, is creating a story in his autobiography, then Ruskin, the
writer of "The Eyes are not Here" is fantasizing the ghost of the event to fill the absence ("lack") of the thing that he yearns for in his past.

The girl's response is "satisfactory" both to herself and to the man; satisfactory to herself in the sense that it fulfills her desire to be gazed at and to the man in terms of fulfilling his more active desire to objectify the girl. Freud, in his lecture on "Femininity" (Introductory Lectures 160-168), explains the effect of the male gaze on women. The trace of the Oedipal complex in women makes them vulnerable to a sense of "genital deficiency". The fear of the lack of the phallus makes them very sensitive to their "charms" as "a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority". Her "sexual frigidity" and characteristic "shame", which according to Freud is ascribed to the wish for concealment of the deficiency, cause the girl to feel "uncomfortable" when exposed to the man's "immobile gaze". The man's satisfaction, however, is made plain in the narrator's description of the girl's "pleasant, clear, ringing laugh" (same in both the versions) at being addressed as having "an interesting face". The man is assured of the approval of his gaze and therefore an implied approval of himself in the girl's eyes. "We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world" (75), says Lacan in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis and goes on to theorize subjectivity in terms of the subject's desire formulated by the "gaze". Here the blind man's desire for the girl's voice ("Her voice had the sparkle of a mountain stream") and gaze is his Lacanian objet petit a ("little other") which resides both in the realms of cause and reason (logic), while the signifying expression that he "gallantly" vouchsafes to utter - "interesting face" - is his "big other", residing in the realm of alienating logic alone. Perhaps, he wanted to describe the girl as pretty to ensure the arousal of desire for him in the image of his "little
other", but being unable to see her visage he stops short, calling her face an indeterminate "interesting" instead. This is a dramatization of the alienation effect that the subject suffers in his Symbolic (linguistic) "big other". Although the blind man's response in the SA version and that of the seeing girl in the Statesman version are the same, in the former case it is not unusual for readers to presume in the girl's "clear, ringing laugh" a sense of relief at finally being recognized (accepted) for what she is. She is tired of being called "pretty", because the epithet implicitly emphasizes in her mind a sense of crippledness that has hitherto turned her into an object of pity to visual scrutiny. The girl's speech and actions from the time of her boarding the compartment to this point of the scene have a delicate air of caution about it, lest she be detected as "gazeless" and denied an identity by being pitied once more by her companion ("peer"). When the man wants to know "What is it like outside?" she simply says: "Why don't you look out of the window?" And when the man says "Have you noticed that the trees seem to be moving while we seem to be standing still?" she retorts innocuously: "That always happens." The girl does not say anything that might reveal her inability to see despite the fact that she realizes she is mistaken as possessing a normal gaze. So, in this version, the girl, too, masquerades, and successfully objectifies the man as her "little other" on the assumption that he is blind like she in not discovering her blindness or in the imagined sense of relief that she has been desired by the man for what she actually is. The objectification is reciprocal and the readers can well guess the man's mental condition when he comes to know from the other man who replaces the girl in the compartment at Sharanpur that she possessed beautiful eyes which were blind. The blind man in the train realizes that he is defeated in his own game. When he imagined to have objectified the girl, he, too, has been
objectified by her. Like “hollow men” and hollow women their subjectivities are denied in a world where the sensory eyes cannot see. The authorial narrator has the occasion to repeat the game now with the new entrant in the compartment, especially when the latter showed signs of failure at detecting his blindness. “Didn’t you notice” asked the man, that the girl was blind? The curious ending of the story in the SA version intensifies the effect of the game metaphor and inspires the reader to make obvious speculations about the narrator.

Although the girl in The Statesman version enjoys her normal eyesight, she is blind, all the same, to the blind man’s subterfuge. Her satisfaction and discomfort when she takes the blind man’s fixed gaze on her to be real, delivers a sense of pleasure to the blind man who senses a success in his game of objectifying the girl. The “little other” and the “big other” of the man supplement each other to create a feeling of self-gratification. This is the gratification of the ego that makes a false connection between his desire for his “little other” and the superego which is engendered by the notion that conventional normalcy is the desirable object of the female gaze. That is to say, the man’s superego is constituted by the idea of the normal male gaze as the desirable object of the female gaze. The false connection or lie is comparable to Marlow’s lying to Kurtz’ fiancée, that Kurtz died with her name on his lips. Marlow could not bring himself to stun the woman’s belief in Kurtz’s goodness. With this compulsive lying Marlow enters the heart of darkness. The blind man in “The Eyes are not Here” in telling the story reveals that the ego’s mediation has created in him an imagined sense of rapport with the girl when in reality a feeling of distance and non-rapport intensified. When the girl becomes happy at the assurance of the male gaze calling her looks “interesting”, the man feels “more
troubled and lonely”. In the SA version, the man’s discovery at the end that the girl, too, suffered from blindness allows the reader to speculate how his anguish might have deepened with the recognition of failed desire. The recognition of mutual objectification, when none of the players win the game of simulation, becomes cause for a self-directed humor to the author. But it might also inspire a sense of alleviation in the blind man. Marlow’s anxieties of lying to a truthful woman are suddenly overcome at the discovery that the woman too is “hollow”. The man’s desire for what he lacked, the other’s eyes, and to touch the girl’s hair remaining unsatisfied, he is likely to suffer a deeper sense of frustration. But imagine if Dante had met Beatrice in the “death’s dream kingdom”, he would have been denied the revelation, and the requirements of courage and self-scrutiny would have turned superfluous. Perhaps, the blind man in the train is spared the psychological anguish of self-scrutiny as he and his companion in their hollowness meet in “death’s dream kingdom”, coming nowhere near the sight of the ideal.

The idea of revelation confers ontological status on human beings, who in psychoanalytically defined relationality are considered products of their unconscious. Revelation presupposes the existence of the aesthetic subject independent of the mappings of the human unconscious. But as Leo Bersani explains, the self loses its ontological presence in the dynamic correspondence between the conscious and unconscious processes of the human mind. Part of all that the consciousness registers of the aesthetic subject transforms into the unconscious. The conscious and the unconscious then work in tandem to inform the presence/absence dialectic in the subject. Looked from the Lacanian point of view, misrecognition of the other constitutes the subject. If Lacan is filtered through Bersani’s idea of the conscious subordination of the
unconscious, misrecognition becomes synonymous with the inherent human inability to acknowledge the world's independence. Looked at in this way, the blind man's recognition of his misrecognition of the other in the SA version of Ruskin's story is equivalent to the discovery of the independence of the world. The blind man's desires in the SA version remaining unfulfilled he grows to believe in the independent potency of the world. In that case the twist at the end of the story debunks the validity of simulation and appears, by inference, to restore the author's faith in reality by highlighting the impotence of fantasies. This sort of ending goes against the literary grain of Ruskin Bond, an intertextual reading of whom confirms the authorial convictions of the self. He cannot but think of himself other than a writer, deeply immersed in a world of fantastic signification.

In the Statesman version, the act of storytelling attaches more self-reflexive value to itself. What the blind man succeeds in claiming from the girl is her choice of the hyperreal. In the absence of any aleatory act of recognition, the author is simply vindicating his right of simulation. In the alienating world of language, we always act as simulators in restoring an “affective” (Bhaskar, Dialectic 2) value of the self, egotistically urged on by the desire to conceal the sense of deprivation. Significantly, in this version, the girl has been ascribed a cultural identity – she is Punjabi – which qualifies the man’s desire for an affective identity. The vision of the paradisal beauty, which was Dante’s prerogative, is never to be obtained in the world of shadows. The blind man in both the versions confesses that he is unable to tell what the girl looked like. In a world where the copy precedes the original and the simulacrum cannot be distinguished from the real (the girl with her truthful satisfactions in the Statesman version is a projection of the blind
man's desire), textual play is a child's game like the blind man's game in the train. The reality of the aesthetic subject gets invariably diffused in an imaginatively affected duplication. It is true that the play between the self and other assumes the status of a game only in the recognition of the separation of the subject and the object. Fantasy is a play space in which the subject inscribes the object in conscious recognition of its otherness. An infant in his state of inseparability with the mirror image is not aware of the otherness of the image so that he can call his relationship with it playful. Only when he grows up to recognize the separation he can "play" with his other. But, if the other of the fantasy assumes a subjectivity of itself instead of remaining a passive recipient of the self's imagination, the play metaphor loses its significance. The fantasy author's relation with his literary material becomes frayed. In using the title "The Eyes are not Here", the author is self-reflexively commenting on the impossibility of portraying reality because the "real" is invisible to him when he is portraying it. The undecidability of whether the real is present or absent is what he is hinting at by the blindness of the narrator. He is telling his readers that he feigns he can see the real when he actually cannot see it. His art thrives on this game; the blindness of the girl would divest the game of its meaning. Art, despite its disavowal of any claim to truth, makes itself meaningful anyway. It is possible to read the story as a literal adaptation of Joseph-Benoit Suvee's "Butades, or the Origin of Drawing" (1791), a painting of the young Corinthian woman Butades in Greek antiquity who, facing separation from her lover, traces his shadow on the wall. When Butades draws, she cannot see her lover. The object or model, even if facing the artist, cannot be seen at the same moment as the mark of the drawing is made on the canvas. The gap or delay makes the artist rely on memory for the mark. And when memory is
invoked the artist becomes blind to the present object. Drawing, like language, is impossible without the play of presence and absence, a process in which the phenomenological consciousness of the real gets inadvertently permeated through traces of the unconscious. It is significant that Derrida, who critiqued the claims of phenomenological purity of subjective consciousness by underscoring the structuralist framework of thought's linguistic vector, should use Suvee's painting to open a deconstructionist painting exhibition — "Les Memoires d'Aveugles" ("Memoirs/Memories of the Blind") — in Louvre, Paris, in 1990. In "The Eyes", the author through the transference exchange with his reader is yielding to the therapeutic process of his gaming desires. He has disclosed to the reader the subterfuge he has adopted to fulfill his desires; if he had recognized the absurdity of the ploy itself, there would have been no requirement for the reader. The reader takes the position of both the psychoanalyst and the patient. Such an ending, therefore, is normal for Ruskin Bond and reconfirms his belief in the vocation of the author. Why, then, did he introduce the "unwonted" twist at the end of the SA version of the story? I told you, it was not a spontaneous change that he made but resulted from a temptation of a friend's suggestion that he could not resist on the anticipation that it would increase the market price of the story. Ruskin Bond as an author/anlysand has his own neurotic assessment of his reader/analyst and the transference exchange is governed more by the subjective notions of the writer than the demands of the analyst. This is why he maintains that only the "gentle kind of reader" will appreciate his stories. It is unusual for him to give in to the suggestion of a reader that mars the aesthetic objective of his creation. He wrote stories in the 60s and 70s in which fantasy does not take the direction of wish-fulfillment, but becomes a play space
for negotiation between desire and defense. In such works, however, the game metaphor is absent. I will take up the transference exchange value of such works presently. But as for “The Eyes”, the Statesman version could have accommodated some of the changes — like the inclusion of Moore’s lines in the SA version - but certainly not the end-twist, which contradicts the purpose of the story.

I will now take up a few texts that Ruskin composed in mid-career, in the 1960s and 70s, to diagnose how the authorial unconscious betrays itself in the process of signification. I will begin with a short autobiographical anecdote, “The Last Time I Saw Delhi”, that embodies the author’s feelings on his visit to see his mother who was lying in a hospital bed in Delhi, awaiting the operation of her left breast at 54. Although the story is written in present continuous, we are not supposed to think that the author was actually putting the words in paper during the conversation. Published in The Illustrated Weekly of India in the late 1980s, the original draft of the sketch was made in 1967.

Ruskin recounts the story from his memory and notes jotted down in a Delhi hotel. Through the metonymic absence of the factual reality of the incident, traces of the entire history of the retroactive past permeate the signifying procedure. This trace is like the “faded negative” of the photo of the author’s maternal grandparents that the narrator says was lying with him before he cared to print it with the intention of presenting it to his mother in hospital bed. The printed photo becomes the metaphoric mirror for the subject to anticipate union with the mother. The act of printing metaphorically secures the unconscious from obscuration, a fact that can be testified in the repetitive literalization of the historically inflected moment of the Imaginary event twenty years later, in 1997, when Ruskin speaks about his mother in his Memoir. I will come to that. Meanwhile let us advance a little further in our project of observing the authorial unconscious restore itself into print from the negative.
Ruskin revives the past by showing his mother the photo of her parents and creates a context for him as an author to engage with his mother into a dialogue about his own childhood days. The printed photo becomes the signifier with two different signifieds for the mother and son. The transference exchange conditions between two sets of interlocuters highlight the interference of the analyst's unconscious in the interpretive process. The photo does not provide an unruffled surface for the analysts. A split between the conscious and the unconscious of the subject does not perceptibly inform the anticipation/retroaction process in actual mirror stage, but the revival of the moment in adult stages entails formation of the fissure through which the unconscious emerges separately and permeates the conscious object of the systemic order of the signifiers, here the photo. The transference exchanges between the photo and the author and between the photo and the author's mother work in separate directions.

When the nurse leaves the room the narrator brings out the photograph. "I can't see without my glasses", said the author's mother. The author retrieves the glasses from the locker near her bed and hands them to her. The glasses act as egotistical filter to allay her moral qualms for neglect of the child's concern in the past by hiding memories of hedonistic passion, the cause of the neglect, under the pretext that the child had got a kind maternal being in his grandmother to complement her absence. When she puts on the glasses the photo elicits the following reaction from her: "Your grandmother was always very fond of you." The conversation takes a turn that highlights the very scruples that she wishes to cover up:

"It was her money that got you to Jersey, when you finished school. It wasn't much, just enough for the ticket."

"I didn't know that."
"The only person who ever left you anything. I’m afraid I’ve nothing to leave you, either."

"You know very well that I’ve never cared a damn about money. My father taught me to write. That was inheritance enough."

"And what did I teach you?"

"I’m not sure… Perhaps you taught me how to enjoy myself now and then."

She looked pleased at this (463)

The narrator’s grandmother who is seated in a chair in the photo takes all the attention of his mother. She does not mention his grandfather who stands behind her in the picture. It is a sense of bond between the grandparents that the picture signifies to the narrator, while to his mother it evokes the memory of how the grandmother took care of her child to relieve her of maternal obligations. She mentions how the grandmother’s money bought the narrator’s passage to Jersey, knowing “very well” that her son “never cared a damn about money”. She appears not to be responsive to her son’s sentiments. In trying to cover up her complicity in her son’s emotional suffering she invokes the same material iconicity that estranged her from her husband and traumatized her son.

The narrator had printed the photograph and brought it to her mother with the anticipation of receiving emotional succour that he had so badly missed in his childhood. Had he been able to elicit it from his mother now, he could possibly have been better equipped to tackle his Oedipal urges that continued to energize his subjectivity throughout his life. The printed photograph as a signifier for the narrator loses its intended meaning in becoming yet another signifier for the mother. The subject in the imagined signified of the photo is barred from itself in what becomes the mother’s signifier. The effect of alienation produces more semiotic complications in the dialogic process. The narrator becomes more steadfast in advocating his father and leveling an
indirect but resentful accusation against his mother. The unconscious urges become more pronounced and more manifest in the conscious dialogue. Taking his mother's foreknowledge of his inclinations for granted, he snubs her for looking upon his grandmother's legacy in terms of money: "You know very well that I've never cared a damn about money." The narrator's resentment is obvious in the scathingly worded vehemence of his response: "You know very well" and "never cared a damn". By referring to his grandmother as the only person who ever left him anything, she is alluding to his father's ineffectuality in not leaving any material inheritance for the son. The narrator assumes the role of his father and repudiates the veiled allegation: "My father taught me to write. That was inheritance enough". The mother still does not recognize the hurt feelings of the son. With the characteristic self-concern of an egotistic woman she asks: "And what did I teach you?" The narrator could have responded with the same aggressive vehemence had he not been able to adopt the semblance of cultural propriety that initiation into the Symbolic made available to him. His father's contribution to that effect is immense. He fumbles for words to answer his mother's awkward question; he searches for conscious signifiers to depict her contribution in his life and fails miserably. Being a persistent lack (and therefore an object of desire) in the son's life, the system of signification for her role in the son's life stands void. The narrator pauses in his indecisiveness; searches for a word – "enjoy" – that would satisfy her self-esteem; and guards it against his own conscious ego with the provisionality of a "Perhaps": "Perhaps you taught me how to enjoy myself now and then." Unlike his father, who was a passive victim of his mother's "fun-loving" nature, the narrator's unconscious desires energize his agency in objectifying her. He assumes the role more of
his father’s avenger than that of his father. She looks pleased with his answer and continues strutting her self-righteousness with a misplaced trust on her subjective capacities: “Yes, I’ve enjoyed myself between troubles. But your father didn’t know how to enjoy himself. That’s why we quarreled so much. And finally separated.” The narrator continues to stand by his father in a manner in which he has negotiated the repetitive conflict several times before. To his mother’s accusation that his father was unable to enjoy himself, the narrator retorts:

“He was much older than you”

“You’ve always blamed me for leaving him, haven’t you?”

“I was very small at the time. You left us suddenly. My father had to look after me, and it wasn’t easy for him. He was very sick. Naturally I blamed you.”

“He wouldn’t let me take you away.”

“Because you were going to marry someone else.”

I break off; we have been over this before> I am not here as my father’s advocate, and the time for recrimination has passed (Collected Fiction 464).

The author “breaks off”, because he knows from his past experience (“we have been over this before”) that it is an interminable conflict whose resolution is interminably deferred. Did he have this kind of verbal exchange with his mother before, or had he been through the dialogue with himself in the past? Perhaps, he did both. But the conflict in the second sense is what really matters to us.

Although the author appears to be representing the actual exchange that took place between him and his mother on the eve of her operation, the narrator’s reliance on her memory for the account is sufficient cause for occluding the real content of the incident and opening up cracks in the manifest text through which underlying fantasies heave out. When the mother accuses the son for blaming her for the marital rift between
his parents, the narrator says: "I was very small at the time ..." As though, he is not blaming her any longer; he did that when he was "very small". We have already seen how the son champions the father's position in the marital discord in spite of saying "I am not here as my father's advocate." The subject has already inscribed himself as a positive agency in the story teller's discourse when he intervenes reflectively as a narrator. He has entered into an unconscious tussle with his mother on the photo's signification. If he is barred from himself in his signifier, the crack between them (the self and the signifier) turns an avowed presence into an absence and vice versa. The negative particle, "not", in the predicative copula - "I am not here as my father's advocate" - affirms the virtual presence of the self as the father's advocate. It was "natural" for him as a child to blame his mother because she left suddenly, leaving him to the sole care of a father "who was very sick" himself. It was "natural", pertaining to the very nature of the unconscious instinct, as against any cultural consideration, for the self to feel aggrieved against the mother who leaves her husband and son to join another man. The Oedipal desire, which was "natural" in the child, was intensified not only because his mother left him but "us", causing more suffering to the father. Ruskin's mother left him when he was eight, at an age in which the child remains incapable of being conscious of the cause of the father's suffering for being the sole caretaker of the child. The child's "natural" desires worked unconsciously; only with a mature consciousness of the self that the subject identifies that it was "natural" for him to empathize with the father. The "natural" in the self informs the subject's conscious reflections at the present moment so that the temporal affect of the preterite being becomes a later inducement of retroactive nature. The narrator could have said: "I [thought] my father was sick that it was not easy
for him to look after me". The element of presumption ("thought") being absent, the statement carries the weight of a demonstrative assertion of an essence that is not to change for the narrator's not being there for his father's advocate. The father's suffering being of an essential nature, compounded by the mother's action, the subject's conscious realization of the mother's complicity does not necessarily turn her blameless by the temporally inflected word play engendered by cultural and humanistic propriety of the dialogic situation. The narrator continues to stand by his father.

His maternal grandparents had contrastive personalities, yet "they made a good match". That is what the photo signified to the narrator who brings it to his mother who claims to have separated from his father for their being of opposite characters. The inconsistent affect of the signifier in the dual exchanges embitters the dialogic situation and sends the narrator away unrecompensed and resentful. On the road, the "chaotic rush" of the Delhi traffic now symbolizes his discontent:

The blare of horns can be heard in the corridors of the hospital, but everyone is conditioned to the noise and pays no attention to it. Rather, the sick and the dying are heartened by the thought that people are still well enough to feel reckless, indifferent to each other's safety!" (464)

He assumes the role of his sick and dying father and sentimentalizes his suffering caused by the "reckless, indifferent" prevarications of his mother. The fallacious expression is exclamatory, bearing the culturally nuanced overflow of the son's chagrin. The city becomes the metaphor for his grief and pain. He visits his mother to comfort her during her illness and with the unconscious desire that perhaps a token gesture from her in recognition of the pain that he is bearing from childhood would serve to alleviate his distress. Not only are his expectations belied but his discomfort is aggravated to find that
she is not in need of comfort; she is comfortable enough to feel recklessly indifferent to his sentiments. She has no signs of suffering, observes the narrator:

   Her cheeks are slightly flushed, due possibly to fever, otherwise she looks her normal self. I find it hard to believe that the operation she will have tomorrow will only give her, at the most, another year's lease on life (463)

Her eyes retain their liveliness and she is her original sensual self, craving for the smoke and drink which have been temporarily prohibited. Her self-righteous spirit shows no sign of flagging. And then the photo incites her into egotistic badinage in narcissistic self-defense. When the son is about to leave disconsolate and so much the worse sufferer for his mother's insensate behaviour, she inflicts further damage to his feelings by wanting him to come in the evening so that he can meet his stepfather and half-brothers. The unconscious Oedipality in the narrator, I have explained in the course of my discussion of *The Room*, always made him hate his stepfather. The fact that his mother is insensible to his feelings, distraught by the memory of his father's suffering, compounds his trauma. "I haven't come to see the others," says he. "They are looking forward to seeing you," says mother. They can desire to see him because they have not suffered the pain and anguish of abjection in the way Ruskin has from his childhood. In such a state of mind he goes out to view Delhi's "chaotic rush".

   It is instructive to note the title of the story: "The Last Time I Saw Delhi". The narrator has come to see his mother and not Delhi. The meeting with his mother has sentimentally disposed him to inscribe the cityscape with his melancholy. His desire for an ideal mother is traceable in the insubstantial nature of the unconscious imago of the other. A normal transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic stage in a child takes place through the mediation of both the parents. It is through the familiarization of the
presence/absence ("fort/da" in Freudian coinage) dynamic of the "ideal" mother in the child's unconscious that the normal transportation takes place. Any distension in the dialectical process, for example, obscuration of the presence half of the binary, might make the transition less complete than in normal cases. The languishing desire for a constantly absent "ideal" (insubstantial imago) of the mirror stage intensifies the Oedipal instincts in the child and makes the unconscious trace in the symbolic stage more tangible than in normal cases. For a writer suffering from a subjective imbalance of the libido-cultural economy, the system of the signifier acts as a site for recompense of the loss of the ideal other. The subject's unconscious seepage in the systemic process becomes tangible. In my analysis of A Flight of Pigeons (1975) in chapter five, I have tried to trace the author's desire for the absent "ideal" of the mirror stage in the imago of Ruth's mother, Mrs. Labadoor. The disappointed feelings of the subject in "The Last Time I Saw Delhi" of 1967 are reconfigured again in a sublimational fantasy of a historical persona in 1975. That the repressive measures of the unconscious in the subject are not well managed becomes evident in the perpetual spill over of its Oedipal content on the barred other of the writer's discourse. The same trauma that he wishes to hide by saying he has not been to visit his mother as his father's advocate in 1967, makes itself felt in my reading of his attitude towards his mother that he embodies in his Memoir in 1997. Since the mirror stage is a historical moment of anticipation and retroaction in the unconscious, the trace of it in the subject's memory at later stages of expressive self-consciousness is bound to reveal the temporal dialectic in analysis. The subject's unconscious in 1967 anticipated its desire of 1997 and retroactively felt the absence of the "ideal" of 1957 when The Room was written. The same dialectic gets embedded in the transference of the
unconscious in the 1997 text. Although I will take up for discussion texts written in the
1990s and turn of the century in the last chapter, it is instructive to refer to the 1997 piece
from the author’s Memoir here because it throws retroactive light on the patterns of his
unconscious desires that informed the textual inscriptions of the self in the 1970s. There
is no reason to think that the subject has irrevocably repressed his Oedipal concerns and
successfully tackled his desires for the “ideal” other by means of conscious reasoning and
apparent legitimation of his mother’s “absence” in his life. The analysis of the 1997 text
will also equip us with a better understanding of the narrator’s relationship with Sushila
in Time Stops at Shamli (written in the early 1970s) which I will discuss subsequently.

In page 23 of his Memoir, Ruskin makes an abrupt insertion of a paragraph that
appears inconsistent with the normal sequence of the narrative progress. The paragraph
appears to be forcibly added as an afterthought at the end of chapter two with a marked
break of space with the core text of the narrative. As a sort of paratext it should have been
part of the prefatory material, if required at all, rather than being quirkily thrust under the
oppressive demands of cultural solicitude in the main body of the text which appears to
be already written with a spontaneous finality and does not beggar excuse for what it is.
Let me quote here the paragraph – the superfluous addendum – before explaining the
implications of what the narrator wishes to say and not to say in it.

If, in writing this memoir, I appear to be taking my father’s side, I suppose it is only human nature
for a boy to be loyal to the parent who stands by him, no matter how difficult the circumstances.
An eight-year-old is bound to resent his mother’s liaison with another man. Looking back on my
boyhood, I feel sure that my mother must have had her own compulsions, her own views on life
and how it should be lived. After all, she had only been eighteen when she had married my father,
who was about fifteen years her senior. She and her sisters had been a fun-loving set; they enjoyed
going to dances, picnics, parties. She must have found my father too serious, too much of a stay-
at-home, happy making the morning butter or sorting through his stamps in the evening. My mother told me later that he was very jealous, keeping her away from other men. And who wouldn’t have been jealous? She was young, pretty, vivacious – everyone looked twice at her!

(Memoir 23)

It suddenly occurs to the narrator after he has written the Memoir that he has taken his father’s side. It is quite unusual for him not to have done so, given the Oedipal concerns that compounded anxiety in him due to his mother’s behaviour during his childhood. The paternal affect of his gendered discourse is also obvious because the narrator’s entry into language marks an entry into the Symbolic which is the father’s domain. Temporalization of the paternal supersession of the affect manifests itself in the semiotic word play.

Ruskin has written the core text of the Memoir in the past tense. It appears, therefore, that he looks back on his childhood from a reflective adult perspective. Even then, he cannot avoid being partisan to his father. When he becomes conscious of this (unconscious) collusion, the core text is already written. In fact, he cannot extenuate himself from the bias because ideological underpinnings of the core text are of Oedipal nature which is always already written in his unconscious. If he reminisces over his childhood in what appears to take the father’s side, it is impossible for us to presume that he has assumed the child’s point of view in recounting his childhood days. So, when in the paratextual insertion he says “it is only human nature for a boy to be loyal to the parent who stands by him”, he is unwittingly referring to the instincts of the traumatic childhood subjacent in his adult consciousness. In trying to make amends for the spill over of the unconscious bias of the signified subject on to the signifiers, he is desperately trying to wrench himself from the system in which the unconsciously mediated perspective is already manifested. The author says, “Looking back on my boyhood, I feel
sure that my mother must have had her own compulsions, her own views on life and how it should be lived”. The dubious realization does not in any way resist him from taking his father’s side and resent his mother’s “own compulsions”. The resentment becomes obvious in spite of the narrator’s attempt at making amendments for his discursive bias. The author is unduly exerting himself in feeling “sure” (“I feel sure …”) when he is actually doubtful about his conviction. In using the word “sure”, he is splitting himself into being sure and not sure, riveting himself into the conflictual fissure and at the same time trying to escape the uneasy effect of the crack by repeating, “my mother must have …” and “she must have found my father too serious”.

The author says his mother “had only been eighteen when she had married my father”. The mother had married the father. The agency of the act is invested on the mother, the father being passive recipient of the effect of the action. The author alludes to the aftermath of the marriage and unconsciously shares the ruthless effect of it with his father. In trying to exculpate himself of the bias he again implicates himself in it. The author’s attributes for the two parents are significantly contrastive. His mother and her sisters “had been a fun-loving set”, while his father was “stay-at-home, happy making the morning butter or sorting through his stamps in the evening”. The phrase “fun-loving set” sounds deprecatingly stark against the appreciative mildness of the word “happy”. Besides, the narrator has a while ago appeared to show respect to the individuality of his mother, mentioning, although dubiously, that “she must have had her own compulsions, her own views on life …”. But now she is typified as belonging to a “fun-loving set”, which includes her sisters as well. The contradiction in the description of the mother highlights the fissure in the narrating self and renders the narrator’s alleged conviction
about his mother's veniality questionable. When she accuses the narrator's father of being jealous about her, “keeping her away from other men”, the narrator finally gives up all pretensions of defending his mother, and begins supporting his father overtly: “And who wouldn’t have been jealous? She was young, pretty, vivacious – everyone looked twice at her!” The author throws down his defenses and makes his Oedipal drives obvious in sharing the jealousy of his father for his “mother’s liaison with another man”. In “The Last Time I Saw Delhi”, we have already had a taste of it in the narrator’s envious reaction to his mother’s suggestion that he should visit the hospital in the evening to meet his stepfather and half-brothers. In the following discussion of *Time Stops at Shamli*, I will try to trace how this Oedipal envy informs the fantasmatic content of the narrator’s libidinal desires for Sushila.

The novella is structured as two Freudian dreams – a dream within a dream – transformed into experience. The interior dream of the narrator’s escapade with Sushila (Mrs. Dayal) occurs after the narrator has prepared the setting for it by dreaming himself in the company of lonely characters in a sort of boarding house in an isolated small town, Shamli, on the foot of the Himalayas. At the time of writing this novella, Ruskin was 36, living alone in a lonely cottage, Maplewood Lodge, in Mussoorie. Gone were the days of jovial vagrancy in the company of his Dehra Dun friends. The apprehended fear of loneliness that he projected in the characterization of Mr. Pettigrew and the aunt, from whom he received his father’s inheritance of books in *Vagrants*, had come true. He had rented the second floor of the lodge and shared his loneliness with the 86-year old Anglo-Indian woman Miss Ripley-Bean who lived in the first floor of the cottage. The author’s sense of loneliness at this point of time is sentimentalized in the sympathetic
characterization of Miss Mackenzie (modeled on Miss Ripley-Bean) in “The Prospect of Flowers”. She dies shivering in cold in the soggy dampness of a stormy night. Writing about how Prem Singh (his adopted son) came in his life in “From Small Beginnings”, Ruskin reminisces over his feelings of 1970, the narrating time of our present novella. He was fighting with his loneliness before Prem made his appearance in the official role of a cook but actually as a friend:

> It wasn't service that I needed but companionship. In the cottage it was very quiet. The ghosts of long dead residents were sympathetic but unobtrusive. The song of the whistling thrush was beautiful, but I knew he was not singing for me (Collected Fiction 489).

It was this feeling that triggers the authorial dream of discovering himself in the imagined community of lonely Anglo-Indian characters like Miss Deeds and Mr. Lin in the boarding house in Shamli. Although Mr. Lin is presumed to hail from Singapore, he resembles Ruskin’s mirror image with his Mongolian features of “full round lips and high, slanting cheekbones”. The melancholic man plays a tune called the “Funeral march” on the piano and begins inventing friendship with imaginary Major Roberts who does not actually exist. He is born out of the narrator’s figment of thought, a lost friend of his, in whose trail he has come to Shamli. The fabricated story serves him as a plausible excuse for his being there.

We soon find that the narrator is not alone pursuing an elusive objective in a time capsule called Shamli. Mr. Lin and Miss Deeds, too, appear to have no real reasons for being there except to bide time in lonely isolation. Both the narrator and Mr. Lin concoct imaginary relationship with Major Roberts. Their egos try to cover up their abjection by cementing ties with a fictive persona just as Miss Deeds tries to hide her loneliness saying that she does not receive any letters from the outer world because her friends have
stopped writing to her when she failed to respond to their correspondences. When Mr. Lin unexpectedly joins in the Major Roberts game, which is originally conceived by the narrator, the latter thinks he cannot hurt his friend's feelings by exploding the myth of the fictitious persona. "I felt sorry for him," says the narrator. "A happy man wouldn't take the trouble of inventing friendships with people who didn't exist. He'd be too busy with friends who did" (Collected Fiction 259). The comment is self-reflexive because it is the narrator who has invented Major Roberts in the first place and set the spool of the yarn rolling. Mr. Lin is his alter ego as much as Miss Deeds, living out the unconscious fears of loneliness that engender the historical bearings of his Anglo-Indian self.

Mr. Lin, in his dream fantasy, sends Major Roberts to Tibet where Kim’s other, the lama, in Kipling’s eponymous novel comes from. Kim, shorn of his colonial baggage, is the object of Ruskin’s identification in stories heavily imbued with the anxieties of self. It is instructive to note that, “From Small beginnings”, where the narrator speaks about Prem Singh’s advent in his life, begins with the sentimental epigraph from Kim:

> And the last puff of the day-wind brought from the unseen villages the scent of damp wood-smoke, hot cakes, dripping undergrowth, and rotting pine-cones. That is the true smell of the Himalayas, and if once itcreeps into the blood of a man, that man will at the last, forgetting all else, return to the hills to die (481).

Prem Singh becomes Prem Bahadur in “Would Astley Return?” and acts as the freewheeling Anglo-Indian protagonist Robert Astley’s double. Astley’s ghost returns to join Prem when the latter’s time for death arrives, and takes him away to sport fishing in mountain-rivers probably in the upper ranges of the Himalayas. No wonder, Robert Astley is an incarnation of the pastoralist Major Roberts who is envisaged as
A man with a dream, a man with brown skin and blue eyes, living in a hut on a snowy mountain top, chopping wood and catching fish and swimming in cold mountain streams (274).

Mr. Lin's dream of Major Roberts in Tibet is, like Kim's alter ego, the Tibetan lama, a dream of the narrator's own self. Prem Singh, who comes from a mountain village in Pauri, Garhwal, is Ruskin's Other in the guise of Prem Bahadur. The narrator in a network of intertexts dreams of his Anglo-Indian self (Major Roberts and Robert Astley), inscribing his Other in the likenesses of Indian beings belonging to mountain villages of the Himalayas. Major Roberts becomes an imago in which the author's subjective notion of his historical self, his English lineage in India on the paternal side, is conflated with his sense of belonging to the Himalayan atmosphere in the way Indian villagers on the mountains are part of it. By denying that Major Roberts is an Englishman or a Frenchman and asserting that he is a dream of the author's own self, the narrator unconsciously projects his own English heritage.

Major Roberts is a retired soldier who reminds us not only of Ruskin's father, who was an officer in the RAF and a pastoralist in his affinity for nature, but also of his paternal grandfather who as a private foot soldier in the Scottish Rifles was likened to "Kipling's Mulvaney, Otheris and Learoyd" (53) by the author in his Memoir. In search of such a Major Roberts, the narrator encounters the fearful imagery of the self in the abject solitude of Miss Deeds and Mr. Lin. The image of Miss Deeds is influenced by the author's own sympathies for the Anglo-Indian woman Mrs. Deeds who has been referred to as "the flotsam of Empire, jettisoned by the very people who had brought them into existence" (47) in the author's Memoir.

It is interesting to observe further that the boarding house in Shamli resembles the "bungalow-type" Green's Hotel where the author was allowed to live in an empty single
room by his mother — who worked as the manager of the hotel — during the post-war slump in Dehra Dun at the end of the 1940s. Mrs. Deeds, incidentally, stayed in another empty room of the same hotel. It appears quite obvious that in a state of intense loneliness in 1970 the melancholic images of the author’s biographical experience of the post-war Anglo-Indian crisis should revive to fashion his dreams. It is important to note here that in the Green’s Hotel Ruskin was staying in the company of his mother a couple of years after his father’s death and during a critical time in the life of the Anglo-Indians. Since then, Ruskin had deplored the prospect of living in a hotel. Underlying the fear psychosis of the experience works an Oedipal desire that can be read in the dream of a father figure in Major Roberts. I have tried to diagnose this unconscious instinct of the author in the analyses of his attitude to his mother in the preceding two texts. The envy that Ruskin’s mother alleges had engendered his father’s attitude to her is now replaced in the form of an Oedipal complex in the son who projects himself in the role of a desirously absent fatherer, Major Roberts, and plays out the dream sequence of libidinal gratification with a married woman, Sushila, who is conceived as much younger than her husband, Mr. Dayal. The narrator first revives his fears in the dream condition of a stifling Anglo-Indian abjection and then uses it as a basal platform from which to envisage the interior dream of his desire for a sensual incorporation of the self in the Indian other.

This other consists of his Oedipal desire for a mother as his father’s pastoralist inclinations would have liked to see in his mother. The interior dream, therefore, stems from a spiritual inheritance of the father and is problematized by the narrator’s libidinal instincts, which draw energy from a store of repressed Oedipal envy. Both the dreams are
preconceived, but the interior dream appears to be willfully anticipated in the basal fantasy so that the narrator gives his Oedipal secret away before its imagined fruition. His curiosity about Mrs. Dayal before she actually appears in the dream sequence seems to be odd. The narrator's day in Shamli has advanced and he has been too absorbed in substantial distractions to have any reason to think of the absent Mrs. Dayal. As he counts his hours at the day's end, resenting the fast passage of the peripheral dream, he gives the reader a priori hint of the climax to come:

In a few hours, I thought, the tonga will come for me and I will be back at the station. The mysterious charm of Shamli will be no more, but whenever I pass this way I will wonder about these people, about Miss Deeds and Lin and Mrs. Dayal (265).

There are reasons for him to wonder about Miss Deeds and Lin because he has encountered them in dream. But Mrs. Dayal has not featured in the basal dream, except as a metonymic absence, so that she can plausibly incite an apparently absent-minded mention of herself by the narrator here. The reference to Mrs. Dayal is occasioned by the demand of the plot, to sustain the reader's interest, a technique borrowed from the structuralist convention of the genre of detective fiction. The absence of Mrs. Dayal acts as a clue like the absence of the subject in the use of his signifiers to enable the detective narrator psychoanalyze his own unconscious, the unconscious of his repressed instincts. Written in introspective loneliness, "Time Stops at Shamli" becomes one of the author's most self-reflexive commentaries on identity.

With the anticipation of the impending climax, the author sets the stage for the interior dream which is, both to the narrator and the reader, the primary stake in the story's objective. The psychoanalyst author plays out his unconscious drives and defenses in the unfolding of the dream. The first person subject narrating the dream becomes the
object for the authorial persona who has preconceived it in the first place and also an
to that half of the narrator who has anticipated his Other in the basal stage. The
transition from stage one to stage two or from the shell to the core dream is cinematic.

After lunch the narrator goes out to lie in the garden where the little girl, Kiran, is
riding the swing. On the insistence of the narrator, Kiran begins telling him a story:
"Once there was a lazy man with long legs, who was always yawning and wanting to fall
asleep . . . " The girl and the swing slowly blur in the narrator’s vision as the girl’s words
fall on his ears as a lullaby. The girl explains that the lazy man fell asleep because he
liked to dream. The last words that the narrator hears before going off to sleep are
"Dreamt about, dreamt about . . . " What does the narrator dream about? Mrs. Dayal.
Because when he opens his eyes again — the beginning of the core dream — Kiran has
been replaced by Sushila on the swing.

Sushila comes “through the trees”. Taking Kiran’s place on the swing she begins
observing the narrator sleeping below her feet. A dream object, portrayed as a tree-
nymph, Sushila becomes part of nature, in which the narrator’s libidinal desires are
inscribed like the body’s nervous system. Here the displacement of the author’s psychic
intensities in literal projection follows the mode in which — Marie Bonaparte points out —
the libidinal transference in Edgar Allan Poe’s tales of the “mother-as-landscape”
(Bonaparte 105) takes place. Sushila is the liberating image in contrast to the narrator’s
suffocating fears of the self embodied in the decadent and lonely lives of the Anglo-
Indian inmates of the hotel. She is modeled on the Punjabi girl Sashi Kishore, Bhabiji’s
granddaughter (referred to in chapter 3), whom Ruskin fell in love with and dreamt of
marrying. Sashi becomes Sushila in “Love is a Sad Song” that the author wrote prior to
Shamli. The narrativized account of the experience in it follows the dream format as well. The narrator makes love to Sushila beside a mountain stream, jealously fights against her imagined boyfriends and feels maudlin pity on himself for being a poor author, financially ineligible to become a girl’s suitor. Back in Shamli, the core dream picks up the threads of the romance once more and plays out the repressed anxieties of the narrator.

The psychological implications of the narrator’s present dream take a problematic turn in Sushila’s status of being married to a man, Mr. Dayal, much older to her in years. The narrator was 30 when he fell in love with Sushila, 16, in “Love is a Sad Song”. His parental love for the girl had turned into conjugal desire, revealing the author’s Oedipal angst as it was unconsciously informed by the traumatic experience of his parent’s separation due to wide difference in their ages. The author’s libidinal anxieties seek alleviation in attributing his desires to that stage of his psychic development which Sushila’s uncle, Sunil, in the story refers to as “delayed adolescence”. In Shamli, the author willfully obviates the age factor to invest in both the narrator and Sushila the timeless qualities of nature (made jealously absent in Mr. Dayal) that the author knows constituted the object of his father’s desire. That Sushila should marry Mr. Dayal who is almost as old as the narrator compounds the intricacies of the latter’s Oedipal envy. He thinks that Sushila has no children who would have compensated her dislike for her husband and served to sustain the marriage. In making Sushila childless, the author divests his Oedipal instincts of their pathological content insofar as it hurt his position in the memory of the marital discord of his own parents. His repressed instincts do not only find a substitutive object for the mother in Sushila but take care to make egotistical
amendment to the nature of the woman by portraying her in broader relief against the lonely decadence of Miss Deeds. It is noteworthy that a counterpart of the narrator’s Oedipal self finds a maternal substitute in Miss Deeds when he dances a waltz with her and helps the inebriated lady get to her room:

She hadn’t opened her eyes all the time I’d been in the room, her arms hung loose, and one bare leg hung over the side of the bed. She was fascinating somehow, and desirable, but I was afraid of her. I went out of the room and quietly closed the door (Collected Fiction 276).

The narrator’s desire for Miss Deeds is fraught with fear because she resembles the author’s mother in her sad state of sensual dissipation. The Oedipal drive takes on an aesthetically edifying stance by creating a passionate object in Sushila who will replace the fear of his Anglo-Indian self in the therapeutic dream of the Other. Unlike the metafictional anecdote of the train journey in “The Eyes”, the authorial desires and fears are played out in Shamli as a test match for the subject’s defensive skills. One by one both the dreams are winded up: the hotel that harbours the lonely Anglo-Indians is almost dismantled when part of the old building collapses in storm, and the narrator reaches Shamli station to find that Sushila has not run away from her husband to join him there. The end of the dream sequence is marked by the signifying space that separates it from the incidental journey metaphor implicit in the details of the railway station:

Shamli station looked the same as it had the day before. The same train stood at the same platform and the same dogs prowled beside the fence. I waited on the platform till the bell clanged for the train to leave, but Sushila did not come (280).

The train, the station and everything therein look the same, as though it is yesterday when the train is held up due to obstruction on the track while the narrator absorbs his waiting time in day-dreaming.
Ruskin’s resentment at his mother’s behaviour and way of life does not reflect his notion of the Anglo-Indian women in general. True, some of the decadent features of Empire were shared by both men and women of the Anglo-Indian society, but Ruskin was witness to the lonely suffering of a far greater number of these people when the British left them emotionally and materially bankrupt at the end of the Empire. There were Anglo-Indian women, like Mrs. Labadoor, whose exploits are glorified by the author in *A Flight of Pigeons*, the text of my discussion in the next chapter. A woman like Miss Deeds embodies the identificatory fears of the author, who far from taking recourse to a detached stigmatization of these crestfallen women, shares his own sense of solitude with them. The Oedipal energy intensified by his parents’ divorce and lack of maternal nurturance in life is refracted by impressions of desolate suffering to engender his psychic states of melancholia. At such critical moments the self suffers from an “impoverishment of the ego” and is overwhelmed by the grandiosity of the ego-ideal. Sushila forms one such grand object in the problematic dynamics of the self/other debate. And insofar as the unconscious debate takes place in the churning of the psychic anthropology of historically inflected imagoes, the signifying ideal generates a chain of subjective relationship with multiple embodiments of the self. All the identificatory selves in relation to the ideal Other take on the melancholic brunt of suffering wrought by the ironies of Empire.

Although Ruskin stays clear of overtly political matters in selecting material for his stories, a well-informed reader is bound to discern logical connection between the author’s sympathy for the Anglo-Indian suffering and Britain’s betrayal of the community’s cause. For example, Miss Deeds and her model Mrs. Deeds could well have
been one of those “jettisoned” women who for all their services to the British Government during wars were ruthlessly disowned by it afterwards. During World War II, the Anglo-Indian women rendered yeoman service to save the British interest. The Indian Military Nursing Service and the Auxiliary Nursing Service “drew about 70 percent of their strength from the Community” (Anthony 141). These women served the British interest in wherever the war was fought around the world. Both the British soldiers and the Indian sepoys who joined the British regiments, “irrespective of caste or creed, owed an irreparable debt to the Anglo-Indian nurses” (142). Miss Helen Rodriguez, Matron of the Civil Hospital in Taunggyi, Burma, in 1942-43, evinced unprecedented courage and self-sacrifice in the face of Japanese bombing of the Army Hospital in the place. Miss Rodriguez ran to the military hospital under attack and carried patients upon her back, in the absence of stretcher-bearers, to safety. She was severely injured by mortar fire and shell splinters in the process but did not flinch from service. Except being bestowed with the citation of the George Medal from the English King, she received no compensation for her imperiled life after the War was over. Hundreds of such women, alluded by the condition of Mrs. Deeds, bore the agonies of Empire on its ruins, unaided by the hand that they once strove to strengthen. The impression of self-reflexive trauma of Empire suffered by Aubrey working for the Raj combined with the memory of British apathy to Anglo-Indian quandary to form Ruskin’s unconscious urges for identification. In the iconic ideal of Sushila the author seeks a reprieve from the agonizing chain of self projection constituted by the likes of Miss Deeds and Markham.

In Markham of “When Darkness Falls”, both the parts of Ruskin’s anxiety of Empire condense metaphorically. Markham, an Anglo-Indian soldier,
trops in Burma in the Second World War. In the story, he returns from war with his face completely disfigured by shrapnel, making him hide his intimidating look under a mask. Mutilated and destitute, he has to depend on the mercy of a former friend who, as manager of the Empire Hotel in a Himalayan hill station, helps him to stay hidden from society in one of the hotel’s empty cellar. His foods as pitiful alms are served under the door. He tires of the lonely incarceration after some days and yearns for company and the outside world. He emerges from his cellar one night after the inmates of the hotel have retired and the neighbourhood has fallen asleep. Ambling around the hotel campus he comes across the sight of a middle-aged lady, Mrs. Khanna, the wife of the hotel’s proprietor, tossing and turning in bed alone. Her husband, apparently on a business trip abroad, invested free time in parties and women, while she waited for him to return. Mrs. Khanna arouses Markham’s desire but he cannot outreach the feeling of self-pity that his own sad condition instilled in him. Nevertheless, he pursues his late night sorties. One night he enters the hotel’s old bar and comes face to face with the lady. Mistaking his unmasked grotesque look for a ghost, the terrified woman falls into hysterical screaming. Fearing that the uproar might stir the inmates of the hotel and reveal his sad state of affairs, Markham tries to stop Mrs. Khanna from screaming. In the wrestle that ensues, the oil lamp gets upturned and the rug catches fire. The fire engulfs the entire hotel and Markham resorts to rescuing the inmates from their suites. In the process, he gets killed and the Empire Hotel is burnt down.

Narrated in the spirit of the Gothic tale, the story is a concentrated projection of the author’s psychological angst. Markham’s travails are influenced by a displaced repertoire of historically inflected drives and defenses of his Anglo-Indian self. Anglo-
dismantling of the metaphoric Empire Hotel. It is also not impossible to read in Markham’s mutilation a displaced metaphor of the tropical backlash of the imperial domination on Aubrey’s physical health. In Markham’s lonely yearning for Mrs. Khanna, Aubrey’s emotional suffering due to his wife’s behaviour is perceptible. Mrs. Khanna is the ill-conceived product of the Empire, living within the make-believe fantasies about it—metaphorised in the Empire Hotel—and unable to face its horrors symbolized in the terrible countenance of Markham. I have pointed out earlier how Ruskin suffered from his mother’s egotistic insensitiveness to his and his father’s sufferings. Mrs. Khanna, in her fantasies, is equally insensitive to the emotional and physical tortures of Empire embodied in Markham. It is incumbent on Ruskin the author to dramatize the act of defense against the Oedipal drives of identifying with his father’s suffering by making Markham explode in the act of demonstrating the absence of the (mis)recognized signified in the signifier of the Empire Hotel. He is seen rescuing the buyers of the imperial myth—the inmates of the hotel—from dying in the conflagration of misconception.

The gutting of the Empire Hotel does not signify the death of the signifier as much as the demise of the particularity of its signified content. The signifiers in their surrogate replication constitute the Lacanian “big object” which does not die but are always present in their absence and replaceable by other signifiers. For example, in the Empire Hotel-Markham-Mrs. Khanna triad there are two other signifiers apart from the hotel. Mrs. Khanna as an object of Markham’s desire is his little object (“objet petit a”) and a signifier while Markham in turn is a signifier for Mrs. Khanna, which is replaced for its effeteless by the signifier of the Empire Hotel. Lacan’s phrase for desire—“desir
de l’Autre” – means both desire for and desire of the Other. Markham desired for Mrs. Khanna’s desire of him. Between the two signifiers Markham and the Empire Hotel, not different in their characters as signifiers but contrastive in meaning, Mrs. Khanna chooses the latter. Failing to engage the desire of Mrs. Khanna, Markham resorts to an erotically significant act of physically overpowering Mrs. Khanna’s desire and in the process gets rid of her little object, the Empire Hotel. With the end of the story, the chain of signification for the author should stop rolling. The signifiers do not die but resurface as traces in the author’s choice of substitute signifiers in other texts. Pleasure of the texts constitutes in conveying desire through the perpetuation of signifiers of lack.

Fantasy brings about the lack which makes the fantasy desirable. Markham’s desire is the author’s projected fantasy, a lack, which is historically inflected in the memory of his father’s suffering. If the signifier “Empire” gives birth to impressions of torture and loneliness, it also hints at a cluttering overlap between being and meaning, a space in which the author’s historical self resides as a sort of lack. Desire for such a lack recurs in the signifiers of the Other and constitute unconscious drives against the fulfillment of which the defenses of the self work to sustain the defining desires of his authorial fantasies. Desires are not meant to be fulfilled; they form perpetual lack, the sustenance of which is the task of the author’s vocational Other, the Other of the Symbolic. The relationship between the signifiers is one of substitution – either Markham or the Empire Hotel (the author chooses the former) – where traces of the substituted inhere in the substitute in the same way as the imaginary ideal of the mother is substituted in another woman in the sexuation of the adult man. I have tried to explain how the narrator’s dialogue with the two signifiers, Miss Deeds and Sushila (the anticipated ideal
and the retroactive real), is convoluted, so much so that any sense of meaningful choice of “either” is always refracted by the “or”. Drives and defenses always work in tandem because desires unfulfilled (resisted by the defensive subject) continue to desire. In the subject’s choice of Markham, the romantic ideal of the (mis)recognized “Empire” inheres inasmuch as Markham is originally a creation of the imaginary ideal prior to his present fragmented form. Ruskin is, in his state of being, the product of the ideal content of the historical eventualities of the (mis)recognized signifier, “Empire”. When he enters the domain of meaning and his experiences have barred him from the ideal, we see him inhabiting the confusing interface of Markham and the Empire Hotel, Miss Deeds and Sushila, and in the following story of the girl with yellow tresses and the old crone with no eyes.

Although “When Darkness Falls” was published as the title piece of Ruskin’s anthology of uncanny tales, “When Darkness Falls” and other Stories, in 2001, the travails of Markham were envisaged in the 1970s when the author was suffering from loneliness and melancholia. “Whispering in the Dark”, which does not belong to this anthology, however, is another uncanny tale both conceived and written during this time. The first person narrator had lost his way in the thick mist that shrouded the hill he was walking on a “wild night”. A frenzied desire for a companion amidst physical and emotional loneliness was shared by the nature around him: “Wind moaning, trees lashing themselves in a frenzy, rain beating down on the road, thunder over the mountains” (Collected Fiction 337). He tried to think of a remembered mountain path, a sign to follow back home, when a flash of lightning provided him with a glimpse of a barren hillside and a limestone house “cradled in mist”. “It was an old-world house … on the
outskirts of a crumbling hill station”. No light shone on its window since the electricity
was disconnected long ago. In the feeble moonlight that shone through cracks of the
overcast sky, he pushed through the mist to the door of the house. Finding it bolted from
inside, he broke a window pane and unlatched the door through the shattered glass. He
got into the “mustiness of a long-closed room”, lit a matchstick with difficulty and found
signs of care and tending all around, unusual for a long-closed house. The room was
neatly furnished with antique furniture, vases on the mantelpiece and portraits in water
colours and oil hanging from the wall. The narrator lit the candle, “a genuine antique with
cutglass hangings. He imagined the presence of somebody there, for that was natural for a
house maintained so well. But none answered his call. In the bedroom, he found himself
confronted by his own image in a full-length mirror: “My reflection stared back at me as
though I were a stranger, as though my reflection belonged to the house, while I was only
an outsider” (338). As he turned from the mirror, he thought he saw the reflection of a
pale oval face with burning eyes and golden tresses in it. He reexamined the mirror, but
this time found nothing in it except his own face pallid with fear. Putting off soggy
clothes that dripped water, he felt as though prurient gazes ogled at his nakedness unseen
from dark corners of that empty room. He slid under the bedclothes of a neatly made bed
on a four-poster and discovered there was no pillow: “That was odd. A perfectly made
bed, but no pillow!” He felt too tired to search for one; blew out the candle and closed his
eyes. It was then that whispering began in the darkness. Mingled with the sound of the
wind it appeared to come from a distance, “a distance not so much of space as of time…”
(339). He remembered the words:

“Mine, mine, he is all mine…”

“He is ours, dear, ours.”
“You’re late for supper...”

“He lost his way in the mist.”

“Do you think he has any money?”

“To kill a turtle you must first tie its legs to two posts.”

“We could tie him to the bed and pour boiling water down his throat.”

“No, it’s simpler this way.” (339)

The last remark gave him the creeps; it “sounded horribly near”. He sat up and lit the candle. The whispering stopped. He saw himself in the mirror again, but this time his image was superimposed by that of the girl with golden hair and shining eyes holding a pillow in her hands. He allayed his fears remembering that it was the story of two spinster sisters that he heard as a young boy. They lured rich men to their boarding house and smothered them to death in the night. But that was long ago: both the women had died and their house had long since fallen down. He put out the candle and tried to sleep again. The girl, whose image he saw in the mirror, stood beside his bed. He felt a suffocating embrace and a phantom kiss on his face. His hands moved reflexively to clutch at the thing on top of him. It was only a pillow that had somehow fallen over him. He became too frightened to stay in the “tortured house” any longer; relit the candle and moved into the front room to discover that one of the portraits on the wall he did not notice before was that of the girl who appeared with him in the mirror and kissed him in sleep. When he was about to leave the haunted house, there was a knocking on the door and a “low and insistent voice” moaned: “Please let me in, please let me in...” (340). He opened the door to accost “a wizened old hag with bloodless lips and flaring nostrils”, looking grotesque with no eyes. As she swept past the author inside the house, the narrator took to
his heels, ran outside in the pouring rain, leeches clinging to his flesh, yet feeling relieved to have escaped the fearful company of the dead.

In this story, the author fantasizes the past in a self-reflexive manner. He constantly demands that the readers suspend disbelief in the eerie conjurations, yet at the same time providing logical clues to rationalize what was happening. The effect is that of a conscious rewriting of subjective desire. The gap between the past and present is simultaneously bridged and breached in an intersubjective and intertextual play of references. We see the narrator’s relation with the signifier of the phantom house and its content shifting between subjective locations: a subject outside his dream, the dreamer; the transitory subject inside the dream house but conscious of being an outsider; and the reflected subject in the mirror. Outside the dream, the subject suffered from loneliness of heart and flesh, a state of melancholia in which the diminutive ego connected instincts with desirous objects of a presently desolate Anglo-Indian past. In the squally weather and enveloping mist, he “groped” in his mind “for the memory of a mountain path, some remembered rock or ancient deodar”. The absence of any became clear in the flash of blue lightning. A limestone house covered in mist stood upon the barren hillside.

Just across Ruskin Bond’s present dwelling – the Ivy Cottage – in Landour, Mussoorie, stands a lonely limestone hill, denuded of its flora and burnt by lightning. In his history of Anglo-Indian Mussoorie – *Mussoorie and Landour: Days of Wine and Roses* – Ruskin refers to this hill as “Pari Tibba” (Hill of Fairies), which some 70 or 80 years ago was well forested with deodars and pines. Anglo-Indian families lived in beautiful cottages on it. One of them housed the spinster sisters who lured rich men to their pleasurable doom. Indiscriminate felling of trees denuded the hill of its thick
undergrowth and exposed its limestone rocks which attracted electricity during lightning. The population moved away and the houses fell into ruin. It was this historical past that constituted the object of our narrator’s dream now. A reader familiar with Ruskin’s oeuvre is able to make the intertextual connection between the subject’s dream signifier and its historical referent in the author’s *Mussoorie and Landour*. The subject searched ("groped") his memory for a familiar sign of a mountain path, a rock or a deodar: a sign indicating metonymic trace of a historical past through the substitutive signifiers of intertexts. The subject outside the dream of the present story was in the process of establishing connection with the subject of his dream who also became a subject of anticipated allusion when viewed at retrospectively from his subjective recreation of the past in a text situated posteriori in objective time. *Mussoorie and Landour* was written in 1992, almost twenty years after “Whispering in the Dark”. But all this while the images were there in the subject’s unconscious memory, literalization of which as fantastic desire prior to their documentary representation, divested the latter of its impersonality.

When the narrator in the present story discovered his reflection in the full-length mirror of the haunted house, he had the following feeling: “My reflection stared back at me as though I were a stranger, as though my reflection belonged to the house, while I was only an outsider.” The relation between the self and Other – the subject and his mirror image – was actually an intersubjective dialogue located in time whose ontological bearing was frayed by the unconscious intervention of the narrating subject in the epistemological quest for selfhood in intertexts. If the narrator was a subject when he consciously espied his mirror image, from the point of view of the image staring at him, he was an object. The anticipatory/retroactive dialectic of the intersubjective formulation
of the metaphoric mirror stage found its copy in the imbedding of subjective dialogues across intertexts. The subject himself became textualized history through decomposition into intersubjective positions of the temporal dialectic. No wonder writing of history should be self-reflexive.

Was Ruskin writing history in the story? He was writing his self, which was not different from writing history when the self identified the Other in the company of historical personages who suffered loneliness the way he did now. By referring to the subject as textualized history, I do not indicate the possibility of any singular originary source of fixed and fetishized meaning of the past. Such a closure is impossible because the subject's status, far from being totalizing and unitary, was dispersed in refractive intersubjectivity: the Others took turns in being the subject as much as the self. The plurality of the textualized subject like polyvalent intertexts created a metafictional parody of the historiographic self by both enshrining the past and questioning it simultaneously. The dreaming subject recreated the past out of the mist of the wild night and located a limestone house. The subject who had lost his way in wind and rain then separated his Other, another subject of the decomposed self, and placed him inside the house as a subject of his dream who was conscious of the outside in the intimations of the hoary wind and rain playing through the shattered glass of the window. This subject was further divided into the reflected subject in the mirror who was an inmate of the house like the girl who accompanied him in the reflection. It was this third subject who enjoyed the "phantom kiss" and heard the spinster sisters arguing about their new possession: a subject belonging to the darkness of the past. The second subject in the intersubjective chain acted as the mediator among the outside world of wind, rain and leeches; the
archival space metaphorized in the antiques and portraits of the limestone house; and the space of the pure dream inhabited by the reflected image of the self in the mirror. It was the mediating subject that continued to question the self's relation with the recreated past by alluding to intertexts like stories of the two spinster sisters and portraits on the wall. Ruskin’s historical treatise, Mussoorie and Landour, does not only provide a literal documentation of the Anglo-Indian settlement on Pari Tibba but also provides an album of photos of Anglo-Indians and their houses taken by his friend Ganesh Saili. Some of these photos, like that of elderly Mrs. Garlah, depict elaborate Victorian furniture and antiques that decorated the interior of the houses. Description of the furniture and antiques of the limestone house in our story is a verbal representation of the visual representation of these photos that postmodern narratology would have us call “ekphrase” (Hutcheon 121). The mediator subject had been successfully hinting at the self-reflexive character of the dream by intertextual allusions. The hints he provided for the identification of the parodic nature of the fantasy subsume such allusions within a rational framework of the events that take place in the house. From his point of view, the third subject’s encounter with the ghostly boarders of the house was a symbolic codification of the self’s desires in emotional and physical loneliness. The pillow, for example, symbolized the houri face of the girl in the mirror. She was always there in her portrait hanging from the wall. Only the subject missed it in his cursory glance on the first occasion. It was not unnatural for the picture on the wall, hanging in such a manner, to cast a reflection in the bedroom mirror when the subject saw himself in it. The pillow, which was probably stowed away in some loft, hung loose in the wind that gushed in through the shattered glass of the window. When the subject saw himself in the mirror the
second time, the displaced pillow reflected in the mirror in a manner that created the illusion as though the girl carried it in her hand. It fell upon the subject in sleep and created the choking sensation. The reader's ability to rationalize the seemingly unnatural phenomena derives from the clues that the narrator self-consciously dispersed in storytelling. Intertextual reading questions the very presence of the house in the first place. Such houses filled with Anglo-Indian boarders existed on Pari Tibba in the past; their absence now caused a feeling of desolation in the narrator, who found in the trace a metonymic correlative for his loneliness. Ruskin dislikes old things and old places falling into ruin. His yearning for the past that no longer exists in reality informs his desire for it, which we saw the first subject in the story enacting by creating the limestone house in thin air, the first stage in the process of inventing company in solitude.

His parents' divorce, lack of maternal care, loss of father when he was a child, nationalist rejection during India's Freedom Movement, a critical sense of belonging, and an imagined kinship with the suffering Anglo-Indians, had instilled a keen sense of abjection in Ruskin Bond, the repressed energy of which was stirred during his lonely days in Maplewood Lodge, when and where the present story was written. The way the first subject entered the fantastic house, by shattering the glass pane of the window and unlatching the door, reminded the reader of a similar process adopted by Rusty to enter the defunct St. Paul's Church in Vagrants. Intertext intervened in parodying the wishful recreation of history. The authorial drives and defenses coincided in the narration of every act from the beginning of the story. Desires were projected upon the signifiers only to demonstrate the virtual lack that constituted them. The self's relation with the signifiers of the house and its content changed in a metafictional manner. The very
process of change was elucidated by the narrator through the self's intersubjective movement back and forth along the signifying chain. The third subject stared at the second from the mirror so that the latter felt himself a stranger in relation to the signifier of the house and was therefore none else but the first subject. However, the first subject's desire for emotional and physical company, which was accentuated in the second subject, placed in provocative relationship with the signifier of the girl's portrait on the wall, culminated in the third subject sharing a companionable belonging with the girl in the mirror. If the third subject in the mirror was the second's "objet petit a", the latter's anticipated fulfillment of desire in it was barred from himself not only by a sense of narcissistic deflation ("I was only an outsider") but also by a regressive displacement of the girl's signifier from the position in the mirror to that on the wall. The retroactive rupture of the little object from itself in the company of the girl in the mirror in the second subject's discovery of his fragmented relationship with the displaced signifier (the girl's portrait) on the wall was a symbolic deflection of desire. Such a deflection, which could be considered a defense against Oedipal drive, had benign implications if regarded in the light of the castration threat that the subject heard whispered between the two girls:

"We could tie him on the bed and pour boiling water down his throat."

"No, it's simpler this way."

I sat up. Most of the whispering had been distant, impersonal, but this last remark had sounded horribly near.

On the verge of jouissance the self realized the ineffectuality of it; because the promise of the desire's erotic satisfaction in the company of historical women who symbolized desolation was fatalistic. The self's desire was a death instinct whose fulfillment in the third subject required dismissal of the first and the second. In defensive recoil, the second
subject folded in the third and the first folded in the second; a move to rescue the self from the castrating influence of instincts. The insubstantiality of the object of the self’s desire was symbolized by the final displacement of the signifier when the girl with the golden hair and shining eyes morphed into a “wizened old hag” with no eyes, longing to be rescued from the world of desires (symbolized by the wind, rain and fog of the “wild night”) and be shut up in the repressed unconscious of the archive.

The self’s desired Anglo-Indian past is invested with idealism in Ruskin’s historical fiction, *A Flight of Pigeons*. The imagoes of suffering and dissipation, that constituted the subject’s unconscious are purified by the mediating ego in the historical correlative of Mrs. Labadoor. The implied endorsement of presentism in the subject’s disenchanted return from the past is interrogated once more through a renewed venture into the past, this time with suggestions of edifying results. In the following chapter, I have tried to identify the author’s textualized ideal in the novel through the prism of intertexts ranging from documentary records to mythical representations.