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ASSERTING THE LOCAL: WHITE SUBVERSIONS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

Priya Menon

The White termites on their way to work.
The White ladybirds on their way home.
The White beetles burrowing away from the light.
The White grasshoppers with whitewood violins.
The sad white music.
All gone.

- Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Race produces unconscious effects, and as a hybrid structure located somewhere between essence and construct, it determines the destiny of human bodies. It is our ethical and political task to figure out how destiny comes to be inscribed as anatomy, when that anatomy does not exist as such.

- Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness* (2000)

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* tells the story of the Ipe family through the eyes of Rahel, as she realizes that their lives have been controlled by and subjected to Kerala's color-coded norms. *The God of Small Things* has inspired articles and books offering intense discussions exploring questions of caste, untouchability, and loss in contemporary Kerala, India. While discussions have generally revolved dis/approvingly around Roy's mapping of the southernmost state of India, Kerala, on to the larger national palimpsest through her twin protagonists, reviews in mainstream media as well as from academics rarely seemed to consider the increasingly radical disruptions of whiteness in the text. These disruptions include the deaths of all the major white characters (Kari Saipu and Sophie Mol) and the routine integration of authority within color lines. Remarkably, in Roy's Kerala, which often gets referred to as *God's own Country* (symbolizing the utopian representation of a divinely sanctioned locale), whites are featured as being unable to survive. The text begins with and revolves around the arrival of white Margaret and Sophie Mol to Kerala. One of the primary causes of

the subsequent tragedy in the Ipe family is also depicted, as Rahel points out, as the result of the appearance of these white characters in Kerala: "it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem" (Roy 33). After her arrival from England, Sophie Mol quickly becomes the center of attention in all of local Ayemenam. However, Sophie coded as the next generation-white figure also dies while the local Estha and Rahel survive; in fact, Rahel is even credited with the final word in the text "Tomorrow," that anticipates a future in which she can thrive and overcome the tragedy of her household (Roy 321). These disruptions are not accidental and one possible explanation lies in Roy's reliance on critical race theory to dislocate the white hegemonic hold in Kerala, an interpretive lens not commonly used to study *The God of Small Things*. What Roy has accomplished through her text is to explore the color-coded relationships—its functions in Kerala, its dominance within social exchanges and the resistance it meets (and needs) by various subjectivities within and outside Kerala.

The concept of whiteness as a cultural hegemon interestingly intersects with postcolonial interrogations of colonial dominations and its repercussions. Melissa Steyn describes whiteness as "an ideologically supported social positionality that is accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of the economic and political advantage gained during and subsequent to European colonial expansion" (121). Steyn is of the opinion that the privileged position was originally facilitated by the construction of race, of the phenotypes, which acted as a marker of the entitlement to this privileged position. In a colonial setting then, whiteness can be viewed as a shared space in which the psychological, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalized as a referent. One of the reasons for whiteness to remain as a part of the postcolonial world is because of the few white settlers who refused to leave colonized countries, such as India upon its independence sustaining the white values of the colonial regime. The privilege of being white did not essentially or irrevocably come with the kind of concessions that it now enjoys in India, but as with other colonial cases, it has been at the expense of those who are not white, or white enough (Bhabha 23). The objective of this paper is not to undo or 'destroy' whiteness, as the *race traitor* school of whiteness studies argues, but to show how the position of whiteness within the Kerala context in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is neither uniformly dominant nor stable, and that the power of whiteness is contingent upon its performance (Hill 4). By merging gender and racial oppression, I examine the ways in which Roy subverts whiteness to provide visibility to the local characters in *The God of Small Things*.

Kerala society's hegemonic colorblind world synchronizes with the deceptive and arbitrary world created by Pappachi for the Ipe family. Pappachi, Reverend John Ipe—Rahel's grandfather—like Chacko after him, serves white hegemonic English idealness in Kerala. Oxford-educated, Pappachi was as Ammu tells us, "an incurable British CCP, which was short for *chhi-chhi poach* [which] in Hindi meant shit-wiper" (Roy 50). Pappachi "was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white" (Roy 171). However, Pappachi had a different face for the female members of his family. Pappachi is physically abusive to his wife and he even refused to believe his daughter, Ammu, as she confesses the reason for her divorce being the attempted rape of Mr. Hollick, her husband's English boss who "suggested that Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be *looked after*" (Roy 41). Rahel tells us that Pappachi's refusal to accept his daughter's testimony is "not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he didn't believe that an Englishman, *any* Englishman, would covet another man's wife" (Roy 42). Roy explains that such a foreknowledge of whiteness for Pappachi is a result of Anglophilia. Pappachi's particular brand of "Anglophilia" meant that his "mind had been brought into a state which made him like the English" (Roy 51). The syntax of the phrase *had been brought* underscores the conditioning effect of white hegemonic grasp over Pappachi and over many other Macaulay's minutemen like him that served British Raj. Clearly, Pappachi is a victim of the colonial project that ensured the production and proliferation of white hegemonic discourse throughout the Empire. By discourse, I refer to the structure of thinking that dominates how the British white power imagine colonial brown subjects and their relations with them. One such structure is the stereotype, and Roy's depiction of Pappachi as the stereotypical Macaulay's minutemen with the designation of the "Imperial Entomologist," wearing "three piece suits and the gold pocket watch" every day in the sultry heat of Ayemenem work well to mock and establish the ridiculousness of Pappachi's desire to mimic/conform to the hegemonic discourse of white law (Roy 45). Pappachi's dress and behavior clearly evokes the theme of artifice in the proliferation of the white law. Mammachi's imported violin and violin stands, Pappachi's expensive suits and cufflinks, and dressing tables made in Vienna are all liberally sprinkled throughout the narrative that describes the Ipe family home. European artwork adorns the walls and Pappachi's old Plymouth purchased from an Englishman gets referenced substantially, further suggesting links to whiteness, the start of British colonialism, and the perception of whiteness as endowed with superior humanistic attributes. Even though the text is set in postcolonial Kerala, most of the Ipe family members continue

to ascribe to white values. The local subjects struggle within an environment shouting whiteness representing those that have learned to value themselves only as imitators of whiteness. They show how domination and power is diffused throughout culture regardless of how one is racially classified.

The motif of distorted images, depicted through the near blind Mammachi, comments on the actual state of contemporary colonial Kerala and the façades of misrepresentation. Mammachi, Rahel's grandmother, is portrayed as the "blind mother widow with a violin" (Roy 159). Inconsistencies surface in the ways in which Mammachi deals with her son, Chacko. Pappachi's mistreatment of Mammachi and her failed marriage did not provide her with a mental vision to understand and accept Margaret as Chacko's wife but she "hated Margaret exactly for being Chacko's wife" (Roy 160). Yet, Mammachi tells Margaret on her arrival that she is "sorry that [she] can't see" Margaret (Roy 165). This courtesy is a privilege that Margaret receives from Mammachi simply because she is white. While Mammachi was known to usually pay off Chacko's women, she realizes that Margaret, being white, was "a different kettle of fish altogether" (Roy 161). Also, Mammachi is a victim of patriarchy and a perpetuator of its ideals. Ammu and Chacko, though born to Mammachi, live out different destinies. Chacko is sent to Oxford, England for his education that produces a brief marriage with the British-born Margaret. Chacko is continuously supported by Mammachi to fulfill his "Man's Needs," at the risk of ruining the family name while Ammu is punished for marrying a man she loved at that time. Rahel tells us that Mammachi's vision was distorted after a cornea transplant following which she could "only see light and shadow" (Roy 165). Mammachi's distorted vision also corresponds metaphorically to her uneven display of affection for her grandchildren wherein she is seen to clearly privilege her white grandchild Sophie over Rahel and Estha. Roy deliberately disfigures Mammachi's vision as Mammachi is never able to internalize the reality of her existence: that the difference she perceives between Sophie and her other grandchildren, and the *civility* she displays to Margaret whom she really hates, is based on her biased internalization of white hegemonic codifications. The racial parallels are obvious: white supremacy depends upon maintaining illusions that blinded subjects accept without resistance.

The God of Small Things is concerned with challenging white normalcy, the workings of hegemony and ideological domination. The text begins with the arrival of Margaret and Sophie to Ayemenem from England and how by being white, they *naturally* become endearing figures among the majority of the Ipe family members. Nevertheless,

through Rahel's narrative, the text very quickly narrows in on Sophie and Margaret's out-of-placeness in Kerala and questions seemingly unrelated core assumptions. For example, Rahel lays open Margaret's suitcase from England to us and describes how it is packed with a variety of medications, "quinine, aspirin, broad spectrum of antibiotics," that will not, ironically, help her child survive on her trip to Kerala (Roy 252). Rahel tells Velutha that Sophie Mol is so "delicate that if she gets dirty she'll die" (Roy 200). However, like the non-white Ipe family members, Roy's white characters too face the daunting task of trying to understand and exist outside, within, and around the colonial system that they now experientially know is faulty. For example, Margaret's visit to Kerala sets up some of the racial assumptions that she uses comparatively in her assessment of the local population. Roy tells us that Margaret's father "disliked Indians, and that he thought them as sly, dishonest people" (Roy 228). Margaret's travel to India and the *preparations* she takes for the trip as "you may never know," all explore the anxiety of Margaret's relationship with the colonial Other and the stereotypes associated with it (Roy 252). Yet Margaret, though divorced from Chacko, cannot fully sever her ties to India especially because of their child, Sophie.

The ways in which white discourse, mainly through the façade of the colonial past, is promoted in the setting of *The God of Small Things* through a variety of Althusserian ideological state apparatuses such as the church, police, the school and so forth, is revealed to be compromised and deceptive (70). In the initial pages of the text, Rahel connotes that there is something hideous that remains masked in all of Kerala's utopic representations—in its schools (that still cling to colonial British influences made visible by characters such as Comrade Pillai's children who comically recite verses from Shakespeare), its churches (where Baby went religiously to seduce the Irish priest, Father Mulligan), and even its police (who end up torturing innocent Velutha). Tying in with Kerala's continuous fascination with colonial ideology and Margaret and Sophie's out-of-placeness is the figure of Kari Saipu.¹ That Kari Saipu's whiteness is the symbol of his alienation, rather than the site of his privilege or power is apparent throughout the novel. Kari Saipu, "the black sahib," the Englishman "gone native," described as "Ayemenem's own Kurtz" is represented as lacking in presence, a ghostly colonial vestige, death-like owner of the legendary history house at Ayemenem (Roy 51). Significantly, Kari Saipu, who assimilated so well to the Kerala culture that he even "spoke Malayalam," does not survive in Kerala; rather he ends up "shooting himself through the head" (Roy 51). This inability of her

¹ *Kari* in Malayalam refers to Black and *Saipu* is a reduction of Sahib.

white characters to survive in Kerala brings to light one of the most salient aspects of Roy's critiques in how *The God of Small Things* refutes the naturalness of racialized constructions by exposing the relationship between commonly accepted stereotypes and exploitation.

Critiques of the interlocking relationships between gender and race characterize major parts of *The God of Small Things* that throw light on white hegemony. The novel depicts male characters dominating the scene. Strong and forceful male characters like Pappachi and Chacko, who are alike in desiring whiteness, give orders that reflect white ideology. Local males, like Valya Pappan, work in subordinate roles, and consistent with white patriarchal constructions, women are relegated to the domestic front. Mammachi, though adept and shrewd with business skills, is never given a voice and is "beaten by Pappachi every night with a brass flower vase" (Roy 4). Similarly, the only major white male character, Kari Saipu is depicted as far from being the stereotypical white male tower of strength, but as being trapped in Kerala, unable to resist the social forces he doesn't understand.

The answer for the Ipe family survival, primarily suggested through Rahel, doesn't lie in the imported colonial white culture in which they have been reared. Instead, Roy suggests recognizing how whiteness had succeeded in masking local subject formations and culture as the route to liberation. Unlike most members of the historically privileged Ipe family, who could choose to deny the disingenuousness of white oppression; many others have not had the option of ignoring Kerala society's ideological determinants. The most positive consequence of this awareness is the development of oppositional, subjugated knowledge. Such cultural and intellectual standpoints are alluded to in *The God of Small Things* through the depiction of Velutha, who by virtue of being an untouchable is the first *real native born* citizen of the land.² The moments in the text where Ammu, reared in patriarchal and whiteness ideology, recognizes Velutha as representing the history and culture of local Kerala metaphorically functions to be the only instance of happiness for her. The suggestive representation of Velutha as being quintessentially local and the resulting satisfaction it gives Ammu as she embraces him signals Roy's suggestion to explore Othered and local ideologies, ones that do not enforce white ideals. As a member of Pappachi's household Ammu is tied to systems and white ideology but her choice to recognize Velutha is celebrated by the author. Velutha, unlike any other figure in the text, has an identity based on a different expanded knowledge,

² Many sociological theories allude to the Dalit untouchable group as the original people of Kerala and others as immigrants who later established the Varna/caste system.

experiences and information. Velutha is the most industrious, talented and creative character in *The God of Small Things*. Roy explains that as Ammu “watched him [Velutha] she understood the quality of his beauty. How his labour had shaped him...Had left its stamp on him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace” (Roy 316). Velutha’s life is rooted in an organic non-white reality as he makes possible, as Saldivar says, a “qualitative cognitive reorientation through his beauty and his labor” for Ammu and her children (Needham 361). Velutha’s creative engineering skills are used at Ammu’s family’s business where he reassembled “bottle-sealing machines” and maintained “new cannery machines” and automatic fruit and vegetable slicers (Roy 72). Velutha’s creations and skill sets are in clear contrast to the Ipe family’s pretentious hoarding of European artifacts. Because indigenous skills and ability is glossed over by the mainstream culture of contemporary Kerala, Roy’s depiction of Velutha is her way of reclaiming the likes of his place in the grand and unified narrative of the powerful representations within historical Kerala. No doubt, Velutha the untouchable Paravan *is the god of small things*. In creating Velutha, Roy notes that the work of the marginalized bear silent testimony to the rights and abilities of such outcastes in Kerala. In his creative and indigenous existence, Velutha reveals an enormous ability to create culture and society for everyone around him. He has a vast imaginative and cognitive life of experiences that the *coloniality of power* in Kerala has denied him as a Paravan.³ That Roy names her untouchable-outcaste-paravan protagonist as Velutha (white) is indeed her way of endowing agency to the local subaltern. It is through this trope of naming that Roy relates the racialized Velutha with whiteness; obviously the most powerful signifier within Kerala’s color-coded power relations. Ammu’s subversive affair with an outcaste man named White (Velutha), who in actuality was ‘as dark as a slab of chocolate’, and their subsequent tragic ends represent the reality that genuine social change also requires a conceptual conversion, that mere appropriation of names will not blindfold the big things that dictate the “love laws” that condition this society (Roy 205). Through Velutha, Roy unearths a cultural production that challenges the colonial supremacist notion of white superiority.

Rahel, who has returned to Ayemenem after twenty-three years of agony that resulted in the loss of her mother and its subsequent

³ Aníbal Quijano discusses the concept of coloniality of power to argue that “modern regimes of power” are characterized by what he terms coloniality, which, as distant from colonialism, is not simply defined by a “formal redomination between empire and colony but primarily defined by global and national/cultural hierarchies (gendered, racialized, sexualized) that are articulated differently in time and space” (Saldivar 363).

effects on her personal life, narrates the tale of the *small things* to us. The *small things* that Rahel describes are really things that are generally missed out, glossed over by history and its various representations. The “Cost of Living,” significantly the title of the text’s last chapter, as Rahel finds out is that small things are often crushed by the larger hegemonic machinery operated in the name of societal norms. Roy’s success, however, rests in making visible the operations of power that comingles the historical and geopolitical, which gives precedence to *big things*. In the text, Rahel does not find the answers through conforming to what society requires her to do, i.e. continue a life of patriarchal subservience in Kerala. Instead Rahel exerts her independence by moving away from the oppressive environment and moreover, it is never made clear to us if she finds any answers at all. All we know for certain is that she is able to narrate the story to us, that she has reclaimed her muted twin, signifying her voice. Roy’s concern does not seem to be in providing solutions or even moralizing but to make visible the white gods of domination that rule over Kerala’s sociopolitical and cultural scene.

Roy’s Ayemenem disposes yet another ingrained understanding of whiteness—that white people are central to human progress and the pursuit of divine utopias. Consistent with global reality, Roy depicts a sampling of both white and non-whites that live in Ayemenem—not just groups of Keralites or whites alone. Both the white and non-white younger generation of the Ipe family—Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol—are all loving, intelligent, caring beings to each other and can be viewed as Roy’s hope for the future. The three form a defensive tripod, each supporting the other against adult/moral supervision when they go out to meet Velutha. This suggests unions not normally depicted in postcolonial texts. Chacko, the embodiment of white cultural capital and pretensions is compelled to choose between his own selfish needs and acquiescence into the trio’s demands. Their interactions are not reflections of stereotypical childhood fantasies enacted; instead they exude the essence of a creative, diverse humanity whose strength is a passionate, fiery hope for the future. Unlike the adult members of the text, they radiate an immediate vibrancy and enthusiastic life force in their play. Rather than reinforcing the white/non-white stereotypes, the interaction of the younger generation of the Ipe family members—Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol—represents a conjoined commitment to each other. They play freely, share and communicate, often transforming Ayemenem into a vibrant site of life. Yet Roy’s narrative cannot progress, however idealistic it may seem, without the death of Sophie Mol. This moving away from whiteness is not merely a backdrop to Roy’s text

as she searches for answers but it *is* the answer for postcolonized Kerala. The choice of Sophie Mol, a seemingly white child (Sophie is Margaret and Chacko's daughter and thus is half white) as a pivotal character does not necessarily negate a disruptive interpretation of the text. Realistically, Sophie Mol is perceived as white since she is "made in England," "her pale skin the color of beach sand," and as symbolic of whiteness, she is indisputably granted special privileges (Roy 137). Nevertheless, these advantages do not translate into the expected narrative formations of privilege and survival, but into an ultimate negation of self—white death. As a signifier of whiteness, Sophie's special privileges are in part authority; such authority can and must support dismantling of the system. This is suggested in the character of Kochu Maria, the family maid, who openly idolizes Sophie as the one who will save her: "See her?" Kochu Maria said when she got to Rahel with her tray of cake. She meant Sophie Mol. "When she grows up, she'll be our Kochamma, and she'll raise our salaries, and give us nylon saris for Onam" (Roy 175). Kochu Maria hopes that the white Sophie will free her from her current existence. Kochu Maria is testimony of the helplessness felt when interacting with people immersed in whiteness. Those afflicted with whiteness will not believe in non-white values unless an authoritative white endorses or appropriates marginalized viewpoints. However, Sophie differs from the other white characters in her spontaneous, pure, unadulterated interaction and affection for the twins. Sophie initiates a friendship with the twins and helps in setting up "a home away from home in the back verandah of the History House" (Roy 250). Sophie Mol "convinced the twins that it was essential that she go along" with them to "heighten the adults' remorse" (Roy 276). In alluding to interracial cooperation as necessary for postcolonial transformations, Sophie Mol, Rahel and Estha jointly function as interlocking role models working toward a transformed Kerala society.

Also, Kari Saipu, the white male subject of *Ayemenem*, does not initiate any changes in *Ayemenem* but it is the local Velutha who at first learns from the Oxford-educated Chacko, finds his place, and then attempts to fight in concert with the imported-Marxist group against the forces threatening them all. Accordingly, dirty roads and places of Kerala and exhibition of strong emotions show unpretentious humanity. Conversely, Kari Saipu's house that gets converted to a hotel chain with its manicured lawns and technologically engineered illumination suggest enormous amounts of energy spent in maintaining contrived appearances and spaces. It is a clear contrast to Velutha's house, where light comes from the kitchen fire—a natural and direct source of energy. Conversely, the hotel has no integra-

tion of natural light sources; only artificial lighting for its dark interior places, suggesting a comparative imbalance between knowledge rooted in experience and abstracted cold florescent epistemologies.

At any rate, the text does not deny white creativity or insights; the fascination that the twins have for *The Jungle Book*, their inherited attachment to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, their fascination with *The Sound of Music*, and their ability to use and love the English language allude to this. Nevertheless, it is within and through Rahel's narrative, structured like the ancient art form of native Kathakali⁴ that we get a glimpse of white productivity, which in turn reflects the centrality of localizing resistance for the powerless and raises the possibility of local ideology as a historical, tangible catalyst for acquiring agency. While *The God of Small Things* begins with the celebrations and performances associated with the arrival of Margaret and Sophie, by the end of the text Rahel's voice is the only remaining one in Ayemenem that is capable of creativity. This is unmistakably Roy's suggestion that Rahel can be seen as a model that subverts and resists whiteness, and that social reform and agency, of speaking out, may also begin with non-white Othered subjects, not with whites as inspirational saviors as depicted in countless colonial texts.

A further sign that *The God of Small Things* values subjugated knowledge surfaces in the novel's employment of Indian english.⁵ Although Rahel, the narrator of the text, is proficient in Standard English, it's precisely the subversion of this linguistic norm that disrupts the assumption of aesthetic creativity as uniquely white. Unlike the contrived nature of the language and demeanor of the quintessential Macaulay's minutemen Pappachi or even the *read aloud* cultivated style of Chacko's *proper English*, Rahel's narrative disrupts the idea of Indian english as inferior and also challenges its understandings as measured by standards of white superiority (Roy 52). Rahel and Estha's adept use of English disrupts another deeply held, but rarely overtly articulated, racist assumption—that western culture/wisdom is unique and pure. Sophie Mol's unfamiliarity with Shakespeare and Baby Kochamma's assumption of Sophie's fluency with the Bard has strong ties to how knowledge is structured as uniquely white. If basic Western intellectual discourses result from bi-directional interaction between races and nations, then there is no actual legitimacy to an

⁴ Kathakali is a traditional art form of Kerala. Philip Zarilli describes that in Kathakali, the "actor-dancers create their roles by using a repertory of dance steps, choreographed patterns of stage movement, and an intricate and complex language of hand gestures for literally 'speaking' their dialogue with their hands as well as using face and eye movement to express internal states" (58).

⁵ Indian english, is a hybrid variety of English used in India.

entire modern educational system promoting itself, and rationality as primarily and organically white. Indeed, culture can be understood as hybridization, where the notion of purity becomes just another function of Western hegemony. The new status that English language enjoys in contemporary India is in effect, whiteness without privilege, a whiteness made visible as a subverted performance of the past colonial legacy. Scholars of whiteness studies such as Alfred J. López claim that “if whiteness has been made to see itself, or more accurately to see itself as others see it, have seen it, it has now reached a moment of crisis” for no longer is it able to portray itself as either benign or “normal” (in the sense of constituting a norm) and thus whiteness must now reckon with its own history of aggression and hegemony (14). Roy’s movement towards rendering whiteness visible is to challenge its invisibility and its unspoken claims to an essential superiority in linguistic aesthetics.

White Sophie Mol’s presence in Kerala and her interactions with Rahel and Estha alludes to white feminists who can be the logical starting point for white transitions into larger understandings. Critiques of white masculinity proliferate throughout *The God of Small Things*, as Kari Saipu loses his mind and must be guided by his Malayalee wife. At the heart of the plot, Kari Saipu is removed from the scene—a clear commentary on the inability of whiteness to survive. His constant self-questioning shows his primary task is to understand his role, not to direct and guide the local population. He, as the symbol of whiteness’ future in Kerala, must in the end make a willing, deathly sacrifice. The physical appearance of women, as narrated by Roy, addresses contrasts in local and white femininity as opposed to Womanist constructions. Ammu is depicted as being sensuous and her affair with Velutha undeniably associates her with sexuality, but her quiet, almost demure persona suggests a spiritual purity traditionally associated with white women. Naturalized in most women characters of the text are ethnic markers such as curly hair and olive skin. This places local female standards of beauty on par with white ones, not as merely mimetic. Unlike white Margaret, Ammu is not depicted as the traditional type of wife, subservient and loyal. The social version of traditional femininity is dramatized even more when Roy describes Ammu’s life in Assam: “she wore backless blouses with her sari and carried a lame silver purse on her chain. She smoked long cigarettes in a silver cigarette holder and learned to blow perfect smoke rings” (Roy 300). These inversions more than anything else call attention to the problems of routinely assigning psychological and physical characteristics to any single gender or racialized group. It also calls attention to variance, to the ways group

members routinely don't fit stereotypes. What is also telling is the way the text portrays all its women as resisting social norms. White Margaret marries Chacko, divorced Ammu finds love in an outcaste, Baby Kochamma decides to live out her life as a spinster, Mammachi sets up her own business and finally Rahel exerts her voice to narrate the tale. All these women are contributors to the crucial struggle for female empowerment.

Another interesting merger of gender and racial critique is found in the text's life and death choices. When viewed through the phenotypic selection, the narrative shows the survival and reproduction of white people are not privileged over that of non-whites. This is a direct inversion of colonial ideologies that reward white women for their affiliations and alliance to white men with survival. Margaret and Joe, the only white couple in the text, do not survive as Joe is killed in an accident. Margaret appears to be nurturing and spends her time in taking care of Sophie, aligning her to concepts of white womanhood as Madonna-like and spiritually pure. She is depicted as being extraordinarily pale, with strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes. In control of her own life, Margaret tries to exercise power over the choices she makes and decides that her relationship with Chacko was not successful. As an employed woman, she is able to take care of herself and her child after Joe's death. Margaret embodies Richard Dyer's notion of white women positioned between privilege and subordination. However, her subsequent disintegration and Sophie's death reveal the lack of presence of white women in authoritative roles and positions which, consequently, do not signal a feminine version of white power structure. Margaret never enjoys a lasting union with Joe and Sophie's death contrasts with Rahel's survival and her subsequent reclaiming of her voice. Dyer alludes to the metaphorical significance of happy endings, of unions, in his descriptions of white women and what they signify. Dyer says white women are symbolic of home; reunion with her is an allegorical reward for and the purpose of successful imperialism and colonial efforts (34). In killing the prominent white males in the text, Kari Saipu and Joe, and their inability to survive with their love interests suggests that such an imperialistic understanding, however tragic, should end in death. Margaret is the only white subject that survives her days in Ayemenem but it is clear that her subjectivity is no longer based on fictitious and exploitative hierarchies as she returns to England.

"Tomorrow" is the word that closes *The God of Small Things*. Rukmini Nair claims that in a tragedy there is no tomorrow whereas in a fairytale "tomorrow always hovers around the corner" (17). Although Roy's text needn't be assessed as a fairytale, the evocation of

future through *tomorrow* at the end of the text encourages a deeper analysis of the term's contextual significance. In *The God of Small Things*, whiteness symbolically dies with Kari Saipu and Sophie Mol, and Rahel reclaims her voice, but Ammu's eventual mental deterioration and Velutha's death shows that the local culture is not given absolute agency. Patriarchy, as depicted by the policemen, survives as does the continuance of the Western-based civilization, signified by Rahel's narrative voice employing the English language, albeit a dislocated one. The survival of English suggests white culture, as opposed to white supremacy with its syntax and texture shaped into a new hybrid existence. Comrade Pillai, with his imported white political ideology, also lingers, but as a threat that has lost its former bite. This is signified when he is presented as "slapping himself all over to get his circulation going" (Roy15). His altered behavior patterns and continuance suggest the threat of glorified systems of cultural and racial ideologies may still resurface and dominate with perhaps new racial or ethnic sources. Western media invasion through television—Hulk Hogan and Bam Bam Bigelow—dispersing a world of white abstract ideas and mental constructions also survive and, presumably, the likes of Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria chose to reside there. What changes, however, is knowledge and choice, the possibility of a neo-ideology outside the dictates of "love laws," as represented by Rahel's creative output that commemorates the death of Sophie Mol. Rahel's text is narrated through the eyes of a child and respects Sophie Mol's "choice to be human," to join the twins in their rebellion against adult rules (Roy 180). Sophie's death suggests that privilege is not the most worthy or life-sustaining human goal.

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