

Reimagining Bombay: Postcolonial Poetry and Urban Space

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Abstract

This thesis considers the ways in which poets writing in English in Bombay have represented the city and negotiated its particular challenges, focusing in particular on poets starting to publish during the 1950s and 1960s. Examining in detail work by poets whom Bruce King refers to as constituting a “Bombay circle”, this project examines how Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel and Arun Kolatkar in particular have represented the modernity of the city (*Modern Indian Poetry in English* 45). Despite Bombay’s significance in postcolonial studies, this highly mediated city has been disassociated from its material histories by recent critical and imaginative portrayals. The over-determination of Bombay is countered and nuanced, this thesis suggests, by examining the ways in which poets have represented the city. Evaluating Bombay poetry closely, and considering the relationship between poetic form and language and the articulation of space, this project asks how poetry written in the city contributes to, intervenes in or disarticulates dominant readings of Bombay.

The material contexts in which poetry was written and circulated provide further significant and under-researched sites of engagement with this postcolonial city. This thesis thus turns to a period in the city’s cultural and literary history that has not been extensively documented: to the emergence of its poetry scene from the 1950s onwards. This project combines close, poetic analyses with archival research, examining Bombay’s little magazines and small press publishers, and tracing the various local and international affiliations evidenced in this body of work. In doing so, its aim is to historicize and contextualize the city and the work of its poets, enriching a critical and materialist understanding of this paradigmatic city.

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Introduction

There is no story behind it.
It is split like a second.
It hinges around itself. (Arun Kolatkar "The Butterfly" *Jejuri CP 52*)

This project considers the ways in which poets writing in English in Bombay have represented the space of the city and negotiated its particular demands and challenges. I focus on the work of innovative poets who began writing in the 1950s and 1960s, and whose reputations were established during the 1960s and 1970s, seeking both to draw attention to poets whose significance has yet to be accounted for in postcolonial literary criticism, as well as to examine a period in the city's history that has not been well documented. While much critical attention has been directed at the city's recent history, in particular in relation to its contentious renaming as Mumbai in 1995, cultural production in the decades following independence has not received the same level of inquiry.¹ The poets whose work I analyse in particular detail – Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel and Arun Kolatkar – are part of what Bruce King termed a "Bombay circle": writers whose poetry has responded to the particular forms of modernity located in the city, and who have been associated in some way with Ezekiel (*Modern Indian Poetry in English* 45). I consider how these poets represented Bombay during an unsettling period of change in the city's

¹ Bombay was renamed by the Shiv Sena in 1995. The poetry examined in this thesis was predominantly written before this, and even later works, such as Arun Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda Poems*, refer to the city as Bombay. This thesis thus refers to the city as Bombay, signifying its interest in a particular period of the city's history. The poets included, moreover, and more recent novelists, poets and journalists, tend to continue to use 'Bombay', distancing themselves from the regional associations of Mumbai. (See Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* and Sonia Faleiro's *Beautiful Thing: Inside the World of Bombay's Dance Bars*).

history, identifying in their formal practices an increasing investment in articulating its local, specific and experiential dimensions. Their emphasis on what sociologist Henri Lefebvre identified as the socially produced and “directly *lived*” experience of space, I suggest, prompts a critical reconsideration of the way in which this particular city has been discursively and politically mapped, contributing to and substantiating a body of pre-existing work on Bombay (*The Production of Space* 39). I not only identify the prevalence of a “lived” spatial aesthetic in individual poems, however, but trace too the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the “Bombay circle”, examining the material cultures of poetry publishing in the city (King 45). By reading Bombay poetry and situating it within its historical and material contexts, this thesis poses such questions as: what opportunities and challenges faced poets writing in and about Bombay in the decades following 1947? What can this poetry reveal about the city? In what ways do the poets’ use of form and language evidence the political and social changes taking place in the city? Is there an identifiable aesthetic of Bombay? In what ways does this work intervene in dominant accounts of this city?

While this project is concerned with examining the thematic and formal concerns of particular poets, it is motivated too by a deep sense of critical frustration – not merely at the lack of attention that has been paid to these specific poets, but more generally at the relative under-representation of poetry in postcolonial discourses. The research objectives for *Reimagining Bombay: Postcolonial Poetry and Urban Space* are thus threefold, originating from a desire to recuperate postcolonial poetry in general – and the work of certain poets long over-due for critical appraisal in particular – into a productive discussion about representations and contestations of urban space and

modernity. It is borne out of a conviction that postcolonial poetry provides a particular and under-evaluated vantage point from which to reflect upon the relationship between aesthetics and material reality, space and place, subject and environment.

As Akshaya Kumar observes in his recent book *Poetry, Politics and Culture: Essays on Indian Texts and Contexts*, “[L]iterary space is singularly monopolized by the aesthetics of prose”, going on to note that “the spatial strengths of poetry have...been ignored in favour of its temporal depth” (1, 11). The poem, in other words, is often assumed to occupy a space apart from contextual interference or influence – rendering it a peripheral literary form for postcolonial critics, who have traditionally been engaged in uncovering precisely these external relations. Yet if, as cultural geographers have increasingly shown since the early 1970s, space is in part *produced* by ongoing cultural and social forms of “human activity”, then poetry – which is a particular form of human activity – contributes in a meaningful way to ongoing discourses of space (Harvey *Social Justice* 62). Drawing on the work of (predominantly Marxist) cultural geographers and thinkers including Lefebvre and David Harvey, this thesis contends that poetry’s “spatial strengths” – evidenced in its formal style, use of language and intertextuality, as well as its modes of production and dissemination – gives expression to the postcolonial city and its complex histories in significant ways (Kumar 11).

Elleke Boehmer, however, notes that addressing the aesthetic and formal concerns of literature constitutes a particular challenge for many postcolonial scholars, who have traditionally been concerned with uncovering the power relations and contextual engagement of a work: depending on the critical use of the term postcolonial, she suggests, “there is little sense in which

postcolonial writing can be both political and implicated in a (purely) aesthetic stance” (170). Eli Park Sorensen, too, observes that “it has become taboo to raise aesthetic-formal concerns”, features which have traditionally relied on the disassociation of a text from its socio-historical context (3). By repositioning poetry as a privileged site of engagement with the world, this thesis thus seeks to open up the range of existing and productive discussions about the relationship between form and politics, introducing a particular way of reading the postcolonial poem that attends simultaneously to its political and aesthetic dimension. In Arun Kolatkar’s poem “The Butterfly”, for instance, taken from his Commonwealth Prize winning sequence *Jejuri*, a reader is confronted by a moment that resists allegorical or thematic interpretation: “There is no story behind” the sudden appearance of the butterfly, but its startling appearance in the sequence confirms poetry’s singular ability to affect change, even from within a politically “wretched” situation: “It’s a little yellow butterfly./ It has taken these wretched hills / under its wings” (*CP* 53). The poem thus raises questions about the affect of language, the particularity of poetry and the nature of its import – concerns that complement Boehmer’s own searching questions about the aesthetic implications of postcolonial writing. Kolatkar’s poem, like all the poetry examined in this thesis, prompts a reconsideration of the methodological and interpretive tools of postcolonial literary studies, issuing a challenge to the critic that extends far beyond the parameters of the poem itself.

There has been a recent and notable interest in theorizing the affect and effect of postcolonial literature, however, in particular from Marxist critics who have drawn on earlier work by Fredric Jameson, as well as the Frankfurt School. As Jameson insists in the preface to *Marxism and Form*:

any concrete description of a literary or philosophical phenomenon

– if it is to be really complete – has an ultimate obligation to come to terms with the shape of the individual sentences themselves, to give an account of their origin and formation. (xii)

Jameson remains committed to exploring the dialectical relationship between form, aesthetics and style, on the one hand, and political veracity on the other, arguing elsewhere for “the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts” as a fundamental and inherent principle of reading (*The Political Unconscious* 17). Recent work in postcolonial and world literary studies, then, has continued to search for a vocabulary with which to account for the heuristic strength of the literary and aesthetic sphere: Deepika Bahri’s *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics Politics and Postcolonial Literature*, Robert Spencer’s *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literature* and Neil Lazarus’s *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, for instance, all seek to formulate a new approach to postcolonial literary interpretation, one that can account for what Lazarus terms the “affective intensity” and “*materialist* gesture” of such writing (86, 87). Lazarus is referring here specifically to work by Jibanananda Das and Derek Walcott respectively, but these two ideas – of affectivity on the one hand, and materialist critique on the other – express something of the challenge and particularity posed by postcolonial literature. These studies turn to the work of Jameson and to the earlier writings of the Frankfurt School theorists, in particular Theodor Adorno, for whom the aesthetic object critiqued social and political conditions without ever being defined by them. In fact, according to Adorno, art was most able to critique the social and political status quo by its apparent distance from the world, its impact emerging by virtue of its formal particularity rather than its objective ‘message’: “The less the work thematizes the relationship of ‘I’ and

society, the more spontaneously it crystallises of its own accord in the poem” (“On Lyric Poetry and Society” 346).

This thesis develops these critics’ ideas about literature in general in order to consider the particular heuristic salience of the poem. This project is an attempt to re-evaluate critical postcolonial assumptions about poetry’s political effectiveness and aesthetic affectiveness, in order to understand how it can destabilize assumptions about the constitution of space in general, and the city of Bombay in particular. By insisting on the dialectical relationship between text and city and by bringing together poetic analysis, spatial theory and urban cultural history, my thesis will widen the definition of the aesthetic, revealing it to be, as Bahri has shown, “a powerful mode of engaging with otherness” (9).

Given the multiple concerns of this project, and its interventionist agenda, it is necessary in this introduction to map existing debates – to demonstrate the timeliness of the thesis, and to situate its concerns within ongoing literary, theoretical and materialist debates in postcolonial studies. In providing a brief overview of existing scholarship on postcolonial poetry and on Bombay, certain questions emerge, which I then go on to address in the body of the thesis: why has poetry continued to occupy such a marginal position in the field? How have certain images of Bombay become authenticated in postcolonial discourses at the expense of others? What histories and experiences are occluded by the dominant conceptualization of the city? First though, I provide an overview of the city’s history, and an introduction to the work of the poets I consider, situating my research in its historical and cultural contexts.

Bombay: a historical and textual survey

As critics have noted, cities have constituted particularly salient sites for the affirmation and articulation of colonial power and influence. Bombay's history, however, sets it apart from other Indian cities: unlike Delhi, Madras or Calcutta, it was "not an indigenous city" and did not emerge around pre-existing "cardinal points" of religious or cultural significance (Dwivedi and Mehrotra 8). Instead, the city was quite literally "an invention of colonialism" that came into being according to the demands of the colonizing powers (Ashcroft "Urbanism, Mobility and Bombay" 498). Indeed, what now constitutes the material ground of the city was, when the Portuguese conducted their initial raids on the area in the early sixteenth-century, seven separate islands populated by fishermen and farmers. As Gyan Prakash describes, these islands were so bountiful, lush and tropical – the very antithesis of the urban – that the Portuguese gave their acquisition the name "*a ilha da boa vida*, or the island of the good life" (*Mumbai Fables* 31). However, even a hundred years after the Portuguese invaders arrived, Prakash reveals, "only eleven Portuguese families lived on the islands", evidence, he suggests, that this early conquering power was not primarily interested in expansive territorial or commercial gains (33). They were more concerned with introducing Catholicism to Bombay, a legacy evidenced in the Christian demographic and architectural designs of certain suburbs, but which Prakash terms "mere footnotes to the massive presence of British colonialism" (27).

Although other historical accounts of the city, such as Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra's *Bombay: The Cities Within*, and Amar Farooqui's *Opium City*, might take issue with Prakash's dismissal of the impact of the Portuguese conquest of the islands, they all agree that the city's emergence as an economic and political centre can be dated to the transfer of Bombay to British

control. The city was gifted to the British as a dowry in 1661, when Charles II married Catherine of Braganza. In 1668, the Crown leased the islands to the East India Company, prompting the beginning of the transformation of the city's economic, social, political and geographical terrain. The construction of Bombay Castle and the Fort clearly signifies the strategic significance of the city as a port, and the East India Company's relocation of their headquarters from Surat to Bombay conveys its importance as an imperial trading post (Prakash 35). Farooqui gives an indication of the revenue generated by the opium trade from the end of the eighteenth-century, pointing out that the export of opium paved the way for much of the city's accumulation of wealth during the following century (9).

This wealth inevitably attracted people from across the country and from abroad, prompting the increase in its population that in turn necessitated various land reclamation projects during the nineteenth-century. Statistics show, for instance, that the city's population stood at 230,000 in 1827, a figure that had risen to over 800,000 by 1865 (Dossal 90). As the land and sea were themselves "colonized" by resulting reclamation schemes, so too did the streets and buildings of the city reflect the ideological markers of British culture (Prakash 44). Dwivedi and Mehrotra note the particular significance of Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of the city from 1862 until 1867, who undertook a "momentous" process of deconstruction and reconstruction in South Bombay (85): like Baron Haussmann contemporaneously in Paris, Sir Bartle Frere initiated a grand project of architectural and infrastructural revision, tearing down the walls of the Fort and commissioning the design of new public spaces in which monuments and buildings like the Rajabai Clock Tower would later stand. The wide covered walkways of Colaba and Kala Ghoda and the Gothic

Revival style of the city's new iconic buildings all paralleled British styles, emphasizing the omnipotence of imperial authority.

In many ways, therefore, Bombay became synonymous with British imperial values, and was seen as a microcosm of a colonial state and its idealised imaginary. Anthony D. King has shown that the city served as a testing arena for British policies of social reform and public health, noting that: "norms of London, Manchester, and Leeds (such as the "Sanitary Idea", health and density statistics) was used to shape the form of Bombay" (qtd. Varma *The Postcolonial City* 127-128). Similarly, the educational institutions founded in the city, J.V. Naik has noted, were based on British models: the Wilson Institution, for instance, the Geographical Society, Bombay's Medical School, Bombay's School of Industry, Elphinstone College, all of which projected a rhetoric of colonial modernity and sought to make the city "an urban centre of enlightenment and learning" (61). Naik is at pains to demonstrate the role such institutions played in fostering Indian scholarship, showing that despite the British model of many of these societies, they had an important role in the formation of a local intellectual community. However, as he concedes, popular and critical discourse has tended to reiterate the underlying imperial ideology of such educational investments and continued to see Bombay as a city reliant on, and produced by, a British legacy alone.

The visual design of the city, moreover, was so familiar that British visitors arriving in India for the first time would often remark on its uncannily recognizable features. Mrs Colonel Elwood, for instance, remarked in the late 1820s at the sight in the Fort area, in particular "the cheerful appearance of several good looking white houses, promising English comforts and accommodation" (qtd. Kosambi 13). The British residential areas, with their

“enclosed pleasure grounds, and...succession of gentlemen’s houses, reminded me of the neighbourhood of London”, she wrote (14). The rest of the city meanwhile – the ‘native’ town – exerted a parallel exotic appeal: Elwood wrote that the “difference of costumes, and equipages, reminded me of the two or three last days of the Carnival at Florence” (15), while another visitor, Maria Graham, described the atmosphere in the “Black Town” as reminiscent of “the Arabian nights entertainment” (13).

Investment in the cultural, economic, artistic and social administration of the city thus explains why so much writing – before and after the departure of the British – has positioned Bombay as a “derivative” space, seen as embodying the ideals of a distanced state and having little relation to the everyday lives or needs of its local subjects (Varma 19). Subsequently, as Rashmi Varma notes, the city has been interpreted with a notable “ambivalence” by many postcolonial critics (121). Sunil Khilnani observes, too, that the imperial organization and design lent the “modernity of the colonial city...a stately grandeur...but it remained external to the life of society” (110). Hence, after independence, some critics and writers continued to position the city as external to nationalist movements and ideals: it “is already marked as western and foreign while the village becomes a symbolic referent for the nation’s pre-colonial history” (Varma 122). The valorization of the village and (semi) rural life over and above the modern city is apparent in the rhetoric of Gandhian policy, and exemplified creatively in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi described in the novels and short stories of R.K. Narayan, which “reject[s]...any real engagement with the modern world” (Mishra P. 205).

At the same time, Varma notes, the city was central in “the language of national policy” and planning, and “came to symbolize the culmination of

postcolonial ‘development’” (121). Even Gandhi, Khilnani observes, who valorized the rural way of life in his political rhetoric, behavior and dress, “acted” extensively in the cities: “his audience was found here, and it was his incomparable ability to mobilize urban classes that explained his initial successes” (125). Gandhi’s public demeanour, moreover – the homespun clothing that he wore even when meeting dignitaries in Bombay and Delhi – can further be interpreted not as an outright rejection of urban modernity, but a demonstration that the city contained the possibility for alternative and non-Western ways of inhabiting it. As Khilnani suggests, Gandhi “invented ways in which Indians could occupy and act in the public spaces of the Raj”, thereby making the city politically and socially relevant to ordinary citizens for the first time (126).

The city was especially vital for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and other leading nationalists, seen as the “indispensable” means through which India would access and create its own modernity (128). As a commercial port city, Bombay had always had a more heterogeneous demographic than other Indian cities, and continued to draw economic migrants from all caste, religious and social backgrounds. This combination – of linguistic and cultural diversity and economic entrepreneurship – made Bombay a particularly appealing city for nationalists eager to establish and consolidate a secular space of modernity. Hence, as Varma and Prakash have shown, the city is figured in filmic and literary discourses of the 1950s as an idealized space of secular nationalism, a city in which the individual could negate the demands of gender or caste affiliations. While Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand portray Bombay in their films as a threatening and overwhelming space, for instance, the city is simultaneously

figured as a place of “enterprise and tolerance” and an eventual utopian belonging (Varma “Provincializing” 71).

This peculiar valorization of Bombay, I suggest in Chapter Two, continues to be reflected in more recent portrayals of the city. This is curious, considering that Bombay has undergone a series of crises in its recent history, its idealized image undermined by regional and state sponsored violence. As commentators have shown, the rapid rate of increase in the city’s population throughout the 1950s, and the subsequent demands made on Bombay’s resources, produced the social and economic inequalities that paved the way for the founding of the right-wing Hindutva Shiv Sena Party in 1966. This party, headed by Bal Thackeray, has its origins as a party of dissent: as Thomas Blom Hansen and Khilnani have shown, Thackeray deliberately appealed to working and lower middle-class anxieties about jobs and housing in the wake of the city’s expanding population, inventing a populist “vernacular political imaginary” designed to target disaffected voters (Blom Hansen 41). The Shiv Sena, whose name translates as the ‘army of Shivaji’, began as “an anti-immigrant party” and has, over more than forty years, identified ever new targets for its exclusionary rhetoric – South Indians, Tamils, Gujaratis and, more recently, Muslims (Khilnani 141). It appeals to the communal identities of Marathi speaking citizens, who identify themselves as having unacknowledged rights over Bombay, and has deliberately co-opted the disaffected working classes – a demographic that has not historically been represented by mainstream parties. Hence, the Sena valorizes the ordinary man, operates by “its use of ordinary street language”, and projects a particular image of masculinity and violence (Blom Hansen 49). The Sena have been responsible for organizing and fuelling violent clashes in the city – especially during the riots of 1984 and again in

1992-1993 – and implemented an act of epistemic violence on the city by renaming it Mumbai in 1995.

It is not only the “goonda politics” of the Sena that have fractured the idealized image of the city, however. The declaration of Emergency in 1975 (which the Sena publically endorsed), arguably eroded the confidence placed in political leaders by ordinary citizens; the decline of the city’s manufacturing industries (especially its textile mills) transformed the economic structure of the city, leading to increasing unemployment and the subsequent growth of unregulated, informal (and exploitative) sectors; the criminalization of the city’s political sphere and increasing levels of crime and corruption has encouraged industrial capitalists to relocate their businesses, making “capital in Bombay...more anxious” (Appadurai “Spectral Housing” 635); while the communal violence of 1992-1993, and the international terrorist attacks of 2008 and 2011, have further damaged the city’s former image as an ideal space of belonging (Khilnani 142).

As Caroline Herbert observes, Bombay’s passage “from paradigmatic icon of...postcolonial modernity, to a central symbol of its crisis is, by now, a well rehearsed narrative” (98). However, as I suggest, the narrative is so very “well rehearsed” as to have developed into a somewhat linear myth of the city, one that inevitably occludes certain cultural and social phenomenon. Raymond Williams and David Harvey have shown this to be the case with the city more generally, observing that there are powerful “ideas and images of country and city [that] retain their great force” over a long period of time (Williams *The Country and the City* 289). Williams recognizes that the prevalence of archetypal readings of the city encourage a de-historicized understanding of its social and political context, arguing that what is required is an examination of

“the persistence and historicity” of compelling images of the city (289). The city, Harvey notes, has historically been caught “in the freight of metaphorical meanings that the word ‘city’ carries”, which makes it difficult, yet all the more vital, to “untangle” it from its more “grandiose metaphorical meanings” that tend to either celebrate or denigrate it (*Spaces of Hope* 157). As a man-made space, the city is imbricated in individual and communal aspirations and desires, much more so than other locales, and is thus bound up with the ideologies and narratives of these groups. ‘Untangling’ the city thus involves reflecting on how and why the city has been authenticated by certain discourses, and examining the relationship between its “metaphorical meanings” and its wider socio-political changes (Harvey 157).

In relation to Bombay, therefore, Prakash echoes Williams when he suggests that the challenge is to “reveal the historical circumstances portrayed and hidden by the stories and images produced in the past and the present” about this city (*Mumbai Fables* 23). This thesis is concerned to intervene in and contribute to this narrative of Bombay by asking what histories and experiences are excluded by its salience? How have postmodern conceptions of space, in particular, led to the occlusion of certain spaces, histories and subjects from the narrative of Bombay? Furthermore, what literary forms have been occluded in popular city discourses? This thesis thus has a comparable, if much more circumscribed, agenda as Rashmi Varma in her recent book *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay*, in which she analyses how certain texts engage with and reorient modernist and postmodernist conceptions of the colonial and postcolonial city in order to illuminate significant gaps in their conceptualization of its space. Like Varma, I am interested in how literary texts work to challenge dominant readings of the city, although my focus

lies explicitly in poetry of a specific period. Turning to the poetry and poetic practices of particular Bombay poets, I suggest, enables us to reconsider the city's complex identity: the work of poets alerts us to differential formations of modernity, to the co-existence of pre-colonial, colonial and global cultural intertexts, and to moments in Bombay's post-independence history that have eluded critical analyses.

In many ways too, this thesis reflects Prakash's insistence that research into the formation of the city's dominant image is required. However, Prakash concentrated his attention on Bombay's popular cultural forms, reading tabloid journalism, cinema texts and comic books as interventions in, and disarticulations of, Bombay's mythological rise and fall. My approach is more specific, examining how poetry and its modes of production and circulation shed new light on the city's cultural context. In analyzing the work of poets writing in English, moreover, this thesis works against the grain of Prakash, as well as Partha Chatterjee and other political and historical theorists, who have tended to focus their analyses on popular texts and contexts. Amit Chaudhuri and, from a different disciplinary perspective, Timothy Brennan, have both criticized this somewhat exclusive focus on popular forms of postcolonial culture, remarking on "Indian cultural studies' silence on the location of Indian 'high' modernist culture" (Chaudhuri "Introduction" *Clearing a Space* 17). For Chaudhuri, this silence leads to a neglect of particular writers, as well as a tendency to assume that high culture is unchanging and fixed, while popular culture is the arena in which political and aesthetic inventiveness occurs. For Brennan, the over-privileging of popular culture means that the hard fought for processes by which a culture imagines itself and articulates its ideas, becomes lost: "the intellectual effort to *produce* an aesthetic of access for popular use has not been merely

ignored but explicitly attacked” (82). This thesis responds to Brennan’s remarks, therefore, turning to the niche and supposedly high cultural space of Indian poetry in English in order to examine how a postcolonial canon of poets emerged, and to better understand the challenges facing these poets when negotiating the city. This project thus raises questions about the relationship between literary form and politics in postcolonial studies that have widespread repercussions and implications.

Postcolonial poetry: an overview

As detailed at length in Chapter One, poetry occupies a peripheral position in the field of postcolonial studies. As Bahri explains, it is prose writing that is often assumed to be “readily responsive to ‘authorized’ questions and pedagogic imperatives”, seen as the literary form most able to express prevalent social and political conditions (10). As she notes, “[p]oetry is more likely to invite acknowledgement of its formal and aesthetic modality”, features that she goes on to suggest are deemed anathema to the objective and interventionist ‘aims’ of postcolonial scholarship (24).

Jahan Ramazani’s *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English and A Transnational Poetics*, Rajeev S. Patke’s *Postcolonial Poetry in English*, and Ashok Bery’s *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry*, are among the only sustained critical engagements that privilege the poetic as a site for the articulation of wider, political postcolonial concerns. Their work has shown that poetic form and language registers the experience of colonialism and its repercussions, demonstrating that an “alertness to language and form provides

new orientations to experience and history” and “bears witness to the nomadic dimension of contemporary existence” (Patke 7, 12).

Although this thesis draws on these studies by Patke, Ramazani and Bery, it seems to me that their work at times stages an attempt to recuperate poetry by figuring it as operating in a comparable way to prose. Patke remarks, for instance, that “poetry enriches the connotations of ‘postcolonial’”, implicitly maintaining a stark divide between poetry and the more politically invested activity of postcolonial theorization (14). These theorists, moreover, frequently turn to poetic texts in order to uncover thematic concerns, thereby perpetuating the ideological bias I identify in Chapter One, that continues to value postcolonial texts insofar as they express pedagogic intentions. Hence Ramazani argues that: “[w]hether going abroad or staying home, postcolonial poets have been unhoused by modernity, by war and politics, by education and travel, even perhaps by their own artifice, and are thus unable to rest securely” (*Muse* 12). Such a statement reinforces the idea that poetry – like prose – is primarily and most importantly ‘about’ a situation, and that, in spite of the specificity and sometime opacity of poetry, careful analysis can extract from it its central thematic and political intentions.

My research thus departs from these approaches in significant ways in order to demonstrate that poetry itself constitutes a theoretically innovative discourse. As Marjorie Perloff notes of the contemporary British and American situation, “ideologically motivated criticism has elicited a curious form of backsliding”:

[w]hen, on the one hand, we talk theory, we continue to talk of ‘difference’ and ‘erasure’, of ‘decenteredness’ and ‘supplementarity’. When on the other we engage in practical criticism...we read texts as if language were a mere conduit to a truth beyond it. (51)

In other words, it is theory that is perceived as active and transformative, while the literary text is assigned an ancillary role as simply illustrating particular theoretical points. Perloff recognizes that the poetic text is as interventionist and dynamic as the discourses used to analyse it: “Some of the most interesting poetry today theorises its particular positions” (5). In view of this, my approach has more similarities with Akshaya Kumar’s recent book, *Poetry, Politics and Culture: Essays on Indian Texts and Contexts*, in which he argues for poetry as “a competing as well as a complementary discourse of participation” that in and of itself is deeply implicated in the “continuum” of poetry, politics and culture (1, viii). Hence, my intention is to ask not what a particular poem is about, or what it might mean; this would only reinscribe the notion of language as Perloff’s “conduit” (51). Instead I ask *how* a poem works, examining how its use of language and form imparts singular effects, and considering how these aesthetic aspects re-evaluate the modern space(s) of the city. Chapter One in particular examines the possibilities inherent in postcolonial poetry, introducing a dialectical way of reading individual poems in order to attend simultaneously to their aesthetic and worldly dimension.

It is, moreover, not only in theoretical discourses of (postcolonial) literary theory that poetry’s specific modalities have been overlooked. The situation of exclusion is an historical one as well, and appears especially pronounced in the context of Indian poetry in English. As Chaudhuri explained recently, poets writing in the 1950s and 1960s were “perceived to be elite” by virtue of their knowledge of English and their decision to write in this language (“The Sideways Movement”). Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, too, has further reflected on the “animosity” directed at poets writing in English by commentators, critics and readers, noting that it “stems

in large measure from the animosity towards the social class English has come to be associated with: a narrow, well-entrenched, metropolitan based ruling elite” (“Introduction” *Indian Literature in English* 20).

Although even a cursory look at the careers of the poets under consideration here calls such a homogenous idea of their supposed elitism into question, it is the case that proficiency in English continues to indicate a privileged social position in India. Indeed, the poets whose work I examine often engage precisely with their own culturally tenuous position in mainstream culture, their poetry evidencing a level of anxiety and uncertainty about the role of the poet working in English. However, many of Bombay’s, or India’s, notable English language poets have parallel careers as writers in other languages, or as translators: Arun Kolatkar, for example, was a well-known Marathi poet and translator of bhakti writing, as well as achieving success with his English poetry. Dilip Chitre, another of the poets included in King’s “Bombay circle” (45), wrote extensively in Marathi, and translated the Dalit poet Namdeo Dhasal’s work into English in 2007 (*Poet of the Underworld*), while A.K. Ramanujan published poetry and translations in Tamil and Kannada while working simultaneously in English. This thesis is interested, therefore, in identifying poets’ negotiations of modernity and the city, as well as their own position as middle-class English speaking writers.

What is striking, however, is the extent to which “animosity” towards poets writing in English comes not only from nativist critics, but from other writers working in English too (Mehrotra 20). In Salman Rushdie’s introduction to his anthology *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, for instance, the novelist makes the – by now notorious – claim that:

Prose writing – in both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period by Indian writers working in English, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what

has been produced in the sixteen 'official languages'. (x)

Rushdie has been castigated for his dismissal of writers working in languages other than English – Amit Chaudhuri's introduction to *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* is a particular case in point – but his comments are just as dismissive towards writers of other genres, especially poetry. Rushdie goes on in fact to declare that “the English language poets, with a few distinguished exceptions...do not match the quality of their counterparts in prose” (xi). This animosity does not stem from the animosity directed at writers for reasons of social class or supposed elitism; on the contrary, there is in Rushdie's remarks a notable implication that the standard of poetry writing in English is poor and parochial when compared with the “rich poetic traditions of India [that] continue to flourish in many of the sub-continent's languages” (ix).

Rushdie's comments, made in 1997, parallel those made by the Indian poet Rajagopal Parthasarathy in 1979. In a letter sent to Jayanta Mahapatra, a fellow poet and editor of the journal *Chandrabhaga*, Parthasarathy expresses his admiration for Ramanujan's poetry, praising in particular his successful translation of his “deepest roots...[from] the Tamil and Kannada” into English (qtd. Chaudhuri “The Sideways Movement”). Ramanujan's work, Parthasarathy insisted, expressed the “*validity* of Indian English verse” by conveying an indigenous tradition in an English idiom (*ibid*). As Mehrotra in particular has argued, however, Parthasarathy's comments ascribe an essential Indianness to the vernacular languages, maintaining English as an unnatural, ‘foreign’ influence while Tamil and Kannada are revered as ‘authentic’. Parthasarathy had reinforced this in the introduction to his earlier 1976 anthology *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets*, writing that the Indian poet working in English is “alienated” from his native tradition, explicitly figuring English poetry as an

inauthentic and invalid mode of expression (3). Consequently, he misses what Mehrotra notes to be the “multilingual...mottled...incohesiveness” of Indian writing in English, and the continual interplay between languages, intertexts, traditions and registers in the work of individual poets (“The Emperor Has No Clothes” 176).

Perhaps unwittingly, therefore, Rushdie’s distinction between the “rich poetic traditions” found in vernacular languages and the inadequacy of poetry in English demonstrates that poetry as a literary form is weighted down by cultural assumptions that it expresses traditional and authentic experience. Since, as Mehrotra recognizes, “most Indian English writers acquire the language they write in” rather than be born into it, English seems to represent an inauthentic imposition (“Emperor”164). Hence, while postcolonial poetry has been critically overlooked because of the extent to which it is assumed to be unconcerned with the wider political project of the postcolonial, Indian poetry in English is further occluded from critical readings because of its very association with foreign and colonial cultures.

Moreover, Rushdie’s comments and his comparison of Indian poets to Indian novelists suggests a real and concerning absence of critical frameworks with which to discuss poetry on its own terms. Even the “distinguished exceptions” to whom Rushdie does refer (among them Arun Kolatkar, Jayanta Mahapatra, and A.K. Ramanujan) are aligned with Indian novelists, placed into a comparative framework that does little to elucidate what is particular about this poetry. This thesis is thus concerned with introducing a way of reading and interpreting postcolonial poetry, one that attends to its specific modality and effect without subsuming it within broad postcolonial vocabularies. Certainly, the poets I interviewed during this research were unanimous in their rejection of

postcolonial paradigms, particularly critical of its propensity to occlude from analyses a local, materialist understanding of the text. Eunice de Souza was especially vehement in her criticism, stating that: “Postcolonial studies makes things up; it invents them” (interview 10.8.11). This is perhaps what Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri had in mind in their recent introduction to *The Indian Postcolonial*, in which they detail the irony that despite the pre-eminence of theorists and writers of Indian origin in the field of postcolonial studies, “the specific tracery of locale and region their ideas bore tended to be erased either in whole or in part, and their connection with the form giving cultural geography of India suspended” (5).

In turning to the formal style of individual Bombay poets, therefore, and by examining the material circumstances in which poetry was written, published and shared in the city, this thesis intends to affirm poetry’s “form giving cultural geography”, departing from the forms of postcolonial academic practice identified by Boehmer and Chaudhuri (5). In doing so, I focus on the work and practices of a particular group of poets who constituted a “Bombay circle” from the 1950s onwards, introducing critical readings of individual texts and situating this work within the social and cultural space of Bombay (King 45).

Bombay’s poets: an overview

The peripheral situation of poetry in postcolonial studies, and the animosity identified above that has been directed at poets writing in English, has meant that Indian poets working in English constitute a markedly less visible group than the highly recognizable group of Indian novelists. King’s 1987 study *Modern Indian Poetry in English* is as yet the only historical survey of post-

independence Indian poetry in English, and his work has proven invaluable to this project. King focuses, however, in this early book and in his 1991 *Three Indian Poets*, on a handful of key figures in postcolonial Indian poetry, in particular Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Dom Moraes, whom he qualifies as “three of the best, best-known and most significant” (*Three* 1). These poets have become representative in many ways of a canon of Indian poets in English, the most internationally recognized of its practitioners.

Ezekiel has been cast as the instigator of modern Indian poetry in English in other critical accounts too: according to Rajeev S. Patke, “it is the example of Ezekiel that has prevailed” in subsequent poetic styles and in scholarly accounts of the field (“Poetry After Independence” 245). Born in Bombay in 1924 in the minority Bene Israel Jewish community, Ezekiel’s carefully crafted, ironic, intellectual and stylized poetry enacted a timely departure from the Romantic and sentimental verse taught while he was a student at Wilson College. He was, moreover, involved in founding and editing little magazines from the 1950s onwards, influential as a promoter as well as a practitioner of poetry. However, while his individual poems are among some of the most frequently anthologized in collections of Indian poetry – “Night of the Scorpion”, “Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher” and “Background Casually” feature in significant anthologies by Saleem Peeradina, R. Parthasarathy and Jeet Thayil – criticism has not tended to analyse the changes apparent in his own poetic development, focusing instead on his undeniably vital role as a poetic role model for subsequent generations. As John Thieme argues, Ezekiel’s “considerable contribution to the development of Indian poetic discourse...should not cloud the originality and distinctiveness of his own poetic output” (“Introduction” xx): yet, this is precisely what has happened, as evidenced by the relative scarcity of appraisals of the

actual craft and inventiveness of his writing.

The other poets whose writing I examine in particular detail are Adil Jussawalla (1940 -), Gieve Patel (1940 -) and Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004). I examine too the work of Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (1947 -), although his poetry is less concerned with Bombay's specific transformations than it is with challenging the reader to note and overcome their preconceptions about the interpretation of poetry. There is little that obviously draws these poets together in terms of their writing styles; Ezekiel's clipped and ironic poetry is worlds apart from Kolatkar's beatnik style, for example. My case studies thus might have examined poetry by other contemporaries also included in King's loosely termed "Bombay circle", such as Moraes (*Modern Indian Poetry* 45). It could have incorporated later poets too, whose work does feature in this thesis, but not as single chapter case studies – Eunice de Souza, Saleem Peeradina and Amit Chaudhuri. However, this thesis is concerned with these poets' changing relationship to the city and modernity, examining their responses to transformations in the urban sphere and their continuing participation in its poetic and cultural spaces. Moraes rarely engages directly with Bombay, and spent the majority of his career living outside India entirely. By comparison, although Jussawalla lived abroad for some time, and Mehrotra was based in Allahabad after completing his MA in Bombay, the poets I discuss here have remained intimately connected to the city and its poetry scene: either by virtue of frequent visits, or by their continuing participation in establishing little magazines and organizing poetry events. Unlike writers coming to maturity in the 1970s, moreover – which would include de Souza, Peeradina and Manohar Shetty, as well as Melanie Silgado and Santan Rodriguez – the poets whose work I examine closely were involved in the very creation of a forum for the writing,

production and dissemination of poetry in Bombay.

Considerably less has been written about these poets' work than Ezekiel's, and there is to date no single monograph on any of their work. Patel has published just three volumes of poetry – *Poems* in 1966, *How Do You Withstand, Body* in 1976, and *Mirrored Mirroring* in 1991– and is better known in India and abroad as a playwright and painter. In King's study, Patel is included as a poet of the "circle", but his writing is referred to primarily in relation to his literary relationship with Ezekiel (King 45. See also 116-119). Jussawalla, too, is not a prolific poet, with just three volumes of work – *Land's End* from 1962, *Missing Person* from 1976, and *Trying to Say Goodbye* from 2012. I consider his critical reception in more depth in Chapter One, but in King's study and in Patke's historically contextual chapter on Indian poetry in English, he too appears as an unquestioned member of the Bombay scene even as his style and aesthetics are discussed in vague and abstracted ways. Indeed, as he remarked to Eunice de Souza, it is his non-creative work on which his reputation resides – his edited anthology *New Writing in India*, for example, as well as regular articles in newspapers and cultural magazines: "There's no doubt in my mind that I am known more as an editor than as a poet. My poetry books haven't been available for some time" (de Souza "Adil Jussawalla" 80). Mehrotra has written and published more verse, but his work has also been read in a similarly abstracted way: the opacity and difficulty of his writing, and the notable changes in style his work has undergone, has perhaps discouraged critics from closely analyzing his poetry. Finally, the late bilingual Marathi / English poet Arun Kolatkar was, until recently, also a particularly peripheral figure, about whom relatively little was known.

This situation does show some signs of changing – especially in relation

to Kolatkar, whose work has captured the critical attention of Anjali Nerlerkar, Vidyan Ravinthiran and Laetitia Zecchini, the latter of whom is currently completing a monograph on the poet. However, the majority of work on these poets comes not from academic scholars, but from other poets themselves. Amit Chaudhuri, for instance, provides a detailed commentary of Kolatkar's *Jejuri* in his introduction to the 2005 New York Review Book issue of the sequence, while Mehrotra's 2010 introduction to Kolatkar's *Collected Poems in English* is rich with literary insights and contextual information. The poet Anand Thakore, likewise, has written one of the most engaging essays on Jussawalla's work to date, "On the Music of A Missing Person: Adil Jussawalla and the Craft of Despair", in which the younger poet examines the style and form of Jussawalla's poetry. In anthologies of poetry – edited, overwhelmingly, by other poets – individual poets are introduced with revealing commentaries provided by fellow-writers. Hence, for example, *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, edited by Mehrotra in 1992, contains critical overviews of all the poets' work, written by the editor. Similarly, poet and art critic Ranjit Hoskote introduces a younger group of poets in his 2002 anthology *Reasons For Belonging*, looking back to the innovative practices of this earlier generation.

This thesis hence seeks to provide new critical readings of these poets, tracing in their work and in their involvement with the material cultures of poetry in Bombay, a complex engagement with the city. Ezekiel, for instance, was involved in establishing many of the little magazines in Bombay – such as *Poetry India* – that would prove so important to the formation of a "Bombay circle" (King 45). Likewise, Jussawalla, Mehrotra, Patel and Kolatkar, were co-founders of the Bombay small press Clearing House in 1975, thereby enabling subsequent poets to secure publication in a space not dictated by the demands

of metropolitan pedagogy. Hence, in spite of the stylistic differences between Ezekiel and Mehrotra, or between Patel and Kolatkar, these five figures were all instigators of a new attitude towards modern poetry in the post-Independence decades.

Methodology

This thesis is informed by aesthetic and formal Marxist theory, and insists on the importance of immanent criticism in analyzing poetry, as well as in better understanding cities, spaces and political situations. Interested in the manifestations of modernity in Bombay, and concerned with uncovering how these experiences are aestheticized – and to what effect – I draw on the philosophical and political writings of the Frankfurt School theorists. Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin in particular established a sense of the dialectical nature of the literary text, detailing again and again art's simultaneous autonomy from, and embeddedness within, its contexts. My methodological approach might therefore be described as an aesthetic materialist and formalist one, that draws on the work of these critics and thinkers, as well as later postcolonial critics their work has inspired.

This thesis has been informed too by cultural geography, Indian political and social history and literary analyses, approaches that have required a certain degree of openness to other discourses and disciplines. It draws extensively, moreover, on archival research – especially on interviews and conversations with poets in India during the summer of 2011, as well as time spent in the Study Centre for Indian Literatures in English and Translation in Madurai (SCILET). My interest in material cultures of poetry publishing, evident in chapters Three and

Four particularly, led me to undertake a search for some of Bombay's lost little magazines, a search that proved insightful if not necessarily comprehensive. For although archival research constitutes a primary approach of literary scholars, the challenge facing this project lay in the lack of a central archive in India. Indeed, as detailed in Chapter Three, there is no catalogue of little magazines; instead, where copies do exist, they are preserved by the poets themselves, many of whom were generous enough to lend them to me for photocopying and analysis. On the one hand, therefore, this project encountered original material and had to continually negotiate with the very real demands and challenges of the research: how was I, for example, to photocopy the fragile pages of *The Bombay Duck* without tearing them? How was I to make sense of the boxes of personal papers that Jussawalla so kindly let me peruse? How to reference these wonderful, engaging, but often undated letters and papers? How was I to inform the librarians at the SCILET library of the material I needed in the absence of any form of computerized catalogue or electronic search facilities?

It became apparent to me that my own background and training in literature had not fully prepared me for these specific questions. As a result, I am aware that there are unavoidable gaps in these archival chapters. I was, for instance, particularly interested in locating correspondence sent between the four founders of Clearing House, as well as drafts of poets' work they edited, in order to ascertain whether the press had undergone any conflict not apparent in the work it eventually published. Jussawalla had all these papers, but, just weeks before, had loaned them to the poet Jerry Pinto – who is currently writing a book about 1970s literary and artistic Bombay. In the UK too, archival problems presented themselves, especially when trying to locate specific magazines. The British Library has holdings of *Quest* from 1966 onwards, for

example, but none of its early issues. Instead, I had to rely here on a recently collected volume *The Best of Quest* for earlier references – an imperfect substitute for those original issues themselves.

The challenges of the archive are revealing, however, about the situation of postcolonial literary studies. For, despite the frustration that accompanied my own undertaking in India, it struck me that perhaps the reason I was so uncertain about how to proceed was due to the restrictions in my own pedagogical practice. Trained in postcolonial theory, and accustomed to reading poetry for its political import and information from the distance of a classroom, the actual material process of gathering information proved challenging. However, while I went to India hoping to find a completely preserved archive of Bombay's little magazines, what I found instead was in fact *more* revealing about literary modernity in the city: for here was a collection of material - some incomplete, some missing, most very fragile - preserved by the poets out of a belief in its continuing importance and relevance for literary critics. This testifies in an interesting way to the combative processes and experiences of these Bombay poets, who have had to forge out a space in which to write. My own difficulties then served as a reminder that just as postcolonial literary canons are not readymade, neither are theoretical or academic approaches simply given. Instead, the experience of poetry – of writing and producing it, and studying it – invites critics to reflect on what Mehrotra has termed the rich “literary landscape” that “is made up of more than isolated works of literature” (“Introduction” *Partial Recall* 1).

Although my thesis draws on a range of critical and theoretical approaches, I am hesitant about its claims to interdisciplinarity. It is important to emphasise that this is above all a postcolonial *literary* project, one that is

founded in poetic analyses and literary archival research. Interdisciplinarity has become something of a buzzword in postcolonial studies, and is now a commonplace invocation of academic practice. Although my thesis does make recourse to other disciplines, I do so in order to strengthen my literary and theoretical understanding of postcolonial poetics, and in this sense, therefore, would like to emphasise that my intended approach is what Graham Huggan calls “*interdiscursive* rather than *interdisciplinary*” (*Interdisciplinary Measures* 5). I agree with his contention that a genuinely interdisciplinary approach presupposes collaborative, collective research and implies the continuing exchange – rather than the appropriation – of information, ideas, and methodologies. Indeed, I am compelled to turn to Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri’s introduction to *The Indian Postcolonial*, in which they write that the postcolonial insistence on interdisciplinarity introduces a real danger that the critical “focus is thinned to the point where it might justifiably be asked whether it has any interpretive force left in it at all” (2). Proceeding with a self-consciousness of both the pitfalls of over enthusiastic interdisciplinary intentions, and yet keen to avoid adopting a culturally imperialist analytical stance, my thesis aims to use different disciplines in order to better understand the one in which I am situated.

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Chapter One introduces my theoretical contention that the postcolonial poem has been either occluded by postcolonial criticism, or else has been over-determined by theoretical approaches. This chapter examines the salience of Adorno’s approach to postcolonial criticism, developing from recent work by Neil Lazarus, Deepika Bahri and Asha Varadharajan in order to analyse the particular significance of Adorno’s thinking to reflections on the poem. This

chapter includes close readings of Jussawalla's sequence *Missing Person*, which I argue has been subjected to particularly limiting interpretations in the field – as well as individual poems by Eunice de Souza and Arvind Mehrotra. Close analysis can, I argue, constitute a new and dialectical way of reading that has bearings on wider debates in postcolonial studies.

Chapter Two argues that, like the poem, Bombay has also been over-determined by theoretical and allegorical vocabularies. I examine the influence of postmodern spatial theory on cultural representations of the city, suggesting that Bombay has been rendered almost invisible precisely because of its citationality. Here, I propose an immanent approach to the city, reflecting on the ways in which its lived and experiential dimensions are expressed in poetic language and form. This chapter includes close readings of some Bombay poems by Dilip Chitre and Amit Chaudhuri, both of whom provide an impressionistic and sensory account of Bombay that has resonances with cultural geography – the work of Lefebvre in particular. The chapter then goes on to consider how particular places in the city in which poetry was written and read can further nuance dominant portrayals of the city.

Chapters Three and Four realize the materialist investment of this thesis, analyzing in detail Bombay's little magazines and its small press poetry scene. By examining the circumstances surrounding poetry publishing, I suggest, we are able to recalibrate and enrich our critical thinking about the city, and question certain assumptions about the development of Indian literature in English more generally. Rather than be engaged in a process of what Ashcroft et al. termed 'writing back' to a metropolitan canon, these magazines and editorial practices evidence the simultaneously local and transnational intertexts to Bombay poetry (*The Empire Writes Back*).

Chapters Five, Six and Seven take, as case studies, poetry by Nissim Ezekiel (Five), Adil Jussawalla and Gieve Patel (Six) and Arun Kolatkar (Seven), in order to examine – via a process of historical formalism – the representational practices employed by poets when negotiating Bombay. Chapter Five, for instance, argues that Ezekiel's early work struggles to reconcile the act of writing with the modern Indian city to which he had returned from London in 1952. Subsequently, his poetry seems unsettlingly distanced from the city, even as it uses urban images as tropes and metaphors. This chapter traces a shift in his style, however, observing that his work comes gradually to explore the local experience of the city.

Chapter Six considers how poets negotiated Bombay during a particularly difficult and violent period in its history. Jussawalla and Patel both engage directly with the repercussions of economic, political and physical violence, departing from celebratory accounts of Bombay's modernity in order to demonstrate the violence undermining its hybridity and cosmopolitanism.

Chapter Seven examines Arun Kolatkar's complex representations of Bombay and its surroundings, focusing on his 2004 sequence *Kala Ghoda Poems*. His poetry attends to the forgotten subjects and objects of the postcolonial city, and like Jussawalla and Patel, he is alert to the impositions and exploitations that have produced Bombay. Disarticulating the national idealization of Bombay as a city of progress, rejecting its global significance as a city of hyper-capitalism, and disavowing the claims made over its spaces by right-wing political groups, Kolatkar's poetry turns up-side-down an entire set of discourses used to analyse the city. His work, moreover, recalibrates the experience of reading postcolonial poetry too, by inviting his reader to involve themselves in the poems in such a way as to call into question the approaches

to postcolonial literature that I identified as limiting in Chapter One.

The concluding reflection will bring together the different approaches of the thesis, consolidating my research and suggesting how and why these questions have assumed such significance. As Robert Spencer has argued, the very act of criticism, and the very processes of reading texts, performs a significant and enabling function: “works of postcolonial literature provide a fascinating deviation from orthodox ways of understanding and representing the postcolonial world” (42). As I hope to have demonstrated, the poem – as well as the cultural space of its production and dissemination, its various modalities, and the methodological approaches critics take to it – can complicate and re-fashion ongoing discussions about the nature of belonging in the postcolonial city.

Chapter One

“our monthly dialogue’s / always out of tune”:² an immanent poetics of the postcolonial poem

In art knowledge is aesthetically mediated through and through.

(Theodor Adorno “Reconciliation Under Duress” 160)

This chapter introduces the particular challenges presented by the postcolonial poem. As outlined in the introduction and demonstrated in this chapter, poetry has been particularly underrepresented in postcolonial literary studies. This chapter further suggests that the postcolonial poem has been over-determined by postcolonial literary analyses, which have imposed limitations on what a poem can ‘do’ by virtue of their exteriority of focus. After examining some of the ways in which postcolonial poetry has been positioned in the field, therefore, this chapter proposes instead taking an immanent approach to the poem, introducing a dialectical way of reading the text that attends to its materialist and textual dimensions. In doing so, I turn to the writings of the Frankfurt School theorists, and in particular Theodor Adorno, for whom the work of art evidences its social and material conditions in its very form and structure. Despite the disjunctions between the historical context in which Adorno was writing, and the more recent circumstances of postcolonial debates, critics including Neil Lazarus, Deepika Bahri and Asha Varadharajan have increasingly recognised the implications of Adorno’s ideas to a postcolonial project. These critical discussions will inform this chapter, although I depart from their predominant

² Lines taken from Adil Jussawalla’s poem “Dog” (*Missing Person* 49).

concern with the aesthetic dimension of *prose* writing, in order to examine the implications of Adorno's aesthetic praxis for postcolonial poetic criticism.

After detailing the peculiar position of poetry within postcolonial studies, this chapter uses Adil Jussawalla's 1976 sequence *Missing Person* as a case study in order to examine how its use of form and language enacts a critique of material conditions. This challenging sequence of poems is widely acknowledged as a watershed and canonical text in Indian poetry in English, but there exist few analyses of its form or language. Instead, critics either choose not to engage with the text's opacity – restricting their comments to instances in the poems where a thematic project is clear – or else they use the sequence in order to serve particular theoretical (predominantly poststructuralist) ends. As Pascale Casanova has argued, this supposed divide between the external/historical implications of a text and its internal/formal dynamic is misleading: rather, these factors have a “relative dependence and independence”, each term imbricated in, constitutive of, and critical of, the other (xiii). This chapter thus engages with the formal dynamic of *Missing Person*, doing so in order to introduce a way of reading the text that bears witness to its simultaneous external and internal dynamics. Close reading and detailed, formal analysis, for Adorno, allows the critic proximity to the social and political formation of the text – enabling them to identify what Terry Eagleton terms the “ideology of form”, whereby “it is possible to find the material history which produces a work of art somehow inscribed in its very texture and structure, in the shape of its sentences” (11). This chapter demonstrates, therefore, in its analyses of *Missing Person* – as well as individual poems by Jussawalla's contemporaries Eunice de Souza and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra – that an examination of a poem's specificity enables postcolonial critics to avoid the pure

formalism of a New Critical approach as well as to counter the pitfalls of what Benita Parry critiques as the “linguistic turn in postcolonial studies” (55). The final section looks forward to subsequent materialist chapters, introducing an immanent theory of the poetic archive. Following from Adorno, for whom there was no contradiction between material, political and formal analyses, this chapter proposes a dialectical approach to the poem that raises hitherto occluded questions about the relationship between form and context.

Postcolonial poetry: some problems

As conveyed in the introduction, poetry is “much less visible than fiction and drama” in postcolonial studies, occupying a particularly marginal position in the field (Ramazani *The Hybrid Muse* 2). As Ramazani notes, collections of essays on poetry tend to be concentrated according to national clusters: he mentions, for example, Robert Fraser’s *West African Poetry*, J. Edward Chamberlain’s *Come Back to Me My Language: Poetry and the West Indies*, and Bruce King’s *Modern Indian Poetry in English* as important introductions to poetry of specific regions (186-187). However, influential anthologies of essays and critical volumes on postcolonial theory and culture rarely make more than a cursory mention of poetry, while university courses on postcolonial literature might spend no time examining works of poetry at all: *The Empire Writes Back*, for example, privileges prose fiction, while the later volume of essays by Ashcroft et al., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, further reinforces the predominance of the novel. Similarly, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, with papers arranged by theme, does not include work on aesthetics or poetry, a fact more recently evidenced too in Ania Loomba’s *Colonialism /*

Postcolonialism and Wilson et al. *Rerouting the Postcolonial*. As critics note, postcolonial studies has a historical and disciplinary investment in understanding the thematic concerns of literary works: Neelam Srivastava, for instance, comments on the “pedagogic function” of postcolonial literary texts, observing that academic departments or courses in postcolonial studies frequently turn to particular works in order to better understand, and then disseminate, their socio-political concerns and challenges (“Anthologizing the Nation” 153).

Such “curricular expeditions into the history of the Third World” rely heavily on a text’s relative thematic transparency: as Ramazani contends, “postcolonial criticism is largely grounded in mimetic presuppositions about literature”, with ‘literary’ analyses invested in uncovering the circumstances in which a work was written (*Hybrid* 4). It is the novel – the literary form that Mikhail Bakhtin argued to be expressly social and dialogic in its form – that seems to best express the social and anthropological interests of the field therefore: the postcolonial novel has been read as secular, for instance, by Neelam Srivastava; as amenable to national allegorization, by Fredric Jameson; and as expressive of national history by Priyamvada Gopal – perspectives that all reinforce the form’s inherent sociality. Moreover, as critics such as Gauri Vishwanathan have shown, the novel was a particularly vital ideological instrument of colonial rule, especially in India where it was used as a means of transforming Indian subjects into Macaulay’s ‘minute men’. It is thus this same literary form that has been taken up by postcolonial writers to express their resistance to, and subversion of, colonial literary and cultural values.

The formal complexity and figural density of the poem, on the other hand, might seem incompatible with such a recuperative social and political

agenda. As Bakhtin wrote of poetry:

The language in a poetic work realizes itself as something about which there can be no doubt, something that cannot be disputed, something all encompassing. Everything that the poet sees, understands and thinks, he does through the eyes of a given language...The language of the poetic genre is a unitary and singular Ptolemaic world outside of which nothing else exists and nothing else is needed. The concept of many worlds of language, all equal in their ability to conceptualize and to be expressive, is organically denied to poetic style. (286)

Hence, when Akshaya Kumar argues that “the spatial strengths of poetry...have been ignored”, he indicates the implicit prevailing hegemony of Bakhtin’s view of the poem, which figures it as unable to articulate the social and contextual shifts registered by prose (11): while the novel, therefore, has been shown to be expansive in form and thereby expressive of historical and material realities, poetry has been seen as personal, ahistorical, purely aesthetic and subjective – superfluous, in other words, to a socially committed postcolonial project.

Despite the obvious differences between poetry and prose, however, commentators and reviewers of postcolonial volumes of poetry have tended to concentrate primarily on its themes. In the case of Indian poetry in English, critics such as G. J. V. Prasad have been particularly concerned with uncovering the poets’ “awareness of their possible alienation” and distance from a sense of national belonging, for instance, arguing that poetry written in English expresses the poets’ “need to authenticate their Indianness” and to negotiate the various “dilemmas” posed by British colonialism (15, 31). Even Ramazani’s *The Hybrid Muse* identifies certain thematic concerns that postcolonial poetry shares with prose writing, referencing poetry’s ability to represent “the postcolonial condition” as one of ambivalence, alienation,

uncertainty and hybridity (4). For Patke, likewise, poetry evidences a “decolonizing impulse”, often displaying a concern with validating, or evading, the demands of the new nation (*Postcolonial Poetry* 19). According to such perspectives, the postcolonial poem is primarily a vehicle for writing back against the impositions of colonialism, in particular the dissonances of the English language and colonial forms.

A concern with what a poem is about, therefore, and a post-Foucauldian/Saidian investment in uncovering the counter-hegemonic propensities of a literary text, are apparent in the critical vocabularies used to comment on postcolonial poetry. When Arun Kolatkar’s debut volume *Jejuri* was published in 1976, for instance, it received wide critical acclaim. The regard in which it was held, however, as well as the terms according to which it was criticized, were reliant on a limited emphasis on what the poems were ‘about’ rather than on the distinctive qualities of the poet’s voice. Hence Rajeev S. Patke commends the poems for their indictment of the continuing forms of “internal colonization practiced on Indian society by Brahminical belief systems”, reading the narrator’s religious skepticism as evidence of the poet’s own critical stance towards Hindu religion and culture (*Postcolonial Poetry* 197). Usha Kalyani, too, refers to the sequence’s “ironic parody of a pilgrimage”, reading the poems as an expression of anti-Hinduism that, she notes, “look[s] like desecration” (57, 55). Kolatkar’s less favourable critics were offended by the content of the poems, arguing that the poet’s uncomplimentary portrayal of Jejuri’s priest and his direct engagement with the town’s poverty, constituted a stand against a particular conception of Indianness. In a review by Brijraj Singh published in *Chandrabhaga* in 1979, for instance, Kolatkar was accused of having

“secularized and trivialized” the Hindu religion (76), and, more recently, of expressing an inauthentic and anti-nationalist sentiment (Chindhade 103).

These critics, Mehrotra explains, “confused the poem with the place and followed it as a work that indicates the poet’s own attitude towards religion” (“Arun Kolatkar” *Oxford India* 54) – remarking elsewhere that “[O]nly incidentally is *Jejuri* about...matters of faith” at all (“Introduction” *Collected Poems* 13). As suggested in the final chapter of this thesis, *Jejuri* is engaged in a much more complex process than that of critiquing organized religion; while Kolatkar *is* critical of Brahminical hierarchies, his poetry expresses a similar aversion to all binary modes of classification – between the material and imaginative spheres, between the spiritual and secular realm of experience, and between high and low linguistic registers. As the poet observes in the first stanza of “A Scratch”:

what is god
and what is stone
the dividing line
if it exists
is very thin
at jejuri
and every other stone
is god or his cousin (*CP* 53)

His poetry thus cannot be reduced to a set of thematic interests. The formal and stylistic mode of Kolatkar’s writing disarticulates both the praise and criticism directed at the volume, which have either valorized the challenge his work poses to continuing forms of colonialism or denigrated the poet for his unorthodox portrayal of Hinduism.

In the poetry of Kolatkar’s contemporaries too, we can identify a similarly excessive focus on what a poem is about rather than how it is expressed. In Eunice de Souza’s writing, for instance, there is an underlying tension between

the cultural categorisation of her work as a female, postcolonial Indian writer, and the complex and variable dexterity of her actual writing. Like Kolatkar's, de Souza's poems are deeply critical of patriarchal and religious systems; her first volume *Fix*, published in 1979, Anjum Hasan explains, was actually "denounced from the pulpit of St Peter's in Bandra", so disruptive was its content deemed to be (Hasan "The Sympathetic Ironist"). However, as de Souza emphasized in an interview, it is a very specific community she directs her poetry against: not, as Ramazani might contend, the former imperial centre and the patriarchy of the British Empire, nor the impositions of the English language, but instead the exclusions of women in Bombay's Goan Catholic (Portuguese) communities (interview 10.8.11). In the poem "de Souza Prabhu", for instance, the poet contemplates the implications of her Portuguese heritage: "No matter that / my name is Greek / my surname Portuguese / my language alien", the narrator contends, "There are ways / of belonging" (de Souza *CP* 26). Not only does this poem defy certain thematic expectations by negotiating with the repercussions of Portuguese – rather than British – control; it also rejects, at the level of its form and rhythm, the stereotypically thematic assumption that the postcolonial (female) subject is alienated and displaced. The repetition of "my name", "my surname", "my language", with the tonal stress falling on the first word "my" each time, suggests that the poem is an affirmation of sorts, a formal rejection of the victimization sometimes projected onto postcolonial female writers. This is a label de Souza is especially concerned to deny, challenging me in her characteristically unapologetic way: "Who are *you* to tell *me* that I'm alienated?" (interview 10.8.11).

Many of de Souza's poems portray everyday scenarios, referencing the innocuous moments, exchanges and misunderstandings that occur within every

community. In her short poem “Conversation Piece” for instance, de Souza examines the cultural dislocation between the Catholic Portuguese community in Bombay and the ‘mainstream’ Hindu one:

My Portuguese-bred colleague
picked up a clay shivalingam
one day and said:
Is this an ashtray?
No, said the salesman,
This is our god. (14)

This poem, on one level, expresses cultural misunderstandings and tensions between Hindu and minority religious cultures in the city. The sacred associations of the clay shivalingam – the phallic Hindu symbol of fertility associated with Lord Shiva – is misappropriated by the speaker’s Portuguese colleague, who mistakes it for something far more banal. However, the poem does not represent this encounter as combative: the salesman answers the Portuguese man’s question in a deadpan, pragmatic tone: “No”, he says simply, “This is our god”. The juxtaposition of a shivalingam and an ashtray – the proximity in the poem between its sacred and secular, public and domestic, Hindu and non-Hindu connotations – demonstrates that instead of constituting a divisive and defining experience, misunderstandings of this kind are a daily and unremarkable occurrence. As King notes, de Souza has a tendency to conclude poems with “abrupt endings”, which allows her to “avoid[] making poems literary artifacts” (*Modern* 157). Instead, poems like “Conversation Piece” evidence the ordinary, banal moments in which cultural differences are worked out, while the humour of the situation disarticulates the notion of such differences as insurmountable or definitive.

As is apparent above, poetry has, like prose, been subjected to overly thematic readings by postcolonial critics interested in uncovering the socio-political relevance of a text. This reflects what Bahri notes to be the institutional history of postcolonial studies, which first emerged as a field of study in feminist studies programs and African American history classes, and which then gained currency following the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (38). Bahri demonstrates the prevalence of a functionalist attitude to postcolonial literature and the incorporation of postcolonial reading "as a practical skill" involving an agenda of social activism (53). Hence Aijaz Ahmad notes that postcolonial literature is expected to engage with particular themes and tropes, listed as "representations of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruptions" (124). These concerns become markers, Ahmad, Bahri and others suggest, for a specific kind of postcolonial academic practice. The thematic approach to poetry, moreover, reflects what critic Peter Middleton argues to be the limited way in which much poetry is taught and read in the (Western) classroom, as "a single artifice out of which meaning can be distilled by patient exegesis" (xii). Students and readers, he suggests, are conditioned to isolate the poem on the page, to decipher unfamiliar words and phrases, and to identify the social context informing the poem –interpretive approaches that make little space for an examination of its performativity, formal inventiveness and aesthetic techniques.

At the same time however, a parallel strand of criticism – one more associated with a poststructuralist approach and the "linguistic turn", and distanced from an overtly Marxist agenda – has turned to postcolonial texts in order to deconstruct the imperial subject of discourse (Parry 55). Lazarus lists the features of postcolonial approaches that might be classified as belonging to

this 'turn', remarking that they tend to involve "a constitutive anti-Marxism; an undifferentiating disavowal of all forms of nationalism...and a refusal of antagonistic or struggle-based model of politics" (*Unconscious* 21). In her hugely influential essay "Can The Subaltern Speak?", for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautioned against assuming to retrieve knowledge of the other – or their voice – from colonial texts, using deconstructive paradigms in order to suggest the essentialism involved in such a recuperative project. Homi Bhabha takes a similar theoretical approach in *The Location of Culture*, also rejecting the notion of retrieving an authentic account of the other. Bhabha argues, rather, that the ambivalences of the literary text signify subaltern and postcolonial resistance to the hegemony of colonial power, using the postcolonial text as evidence of the resistance and hybridity of the formerly colonized. In Bhabha's view, therefore, the "move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories" means that it has become possible as well as "theoretically innovative, and politically crucial [...] to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus instead on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (2). Instead of examining postcolonial literature in order to extrapolate the historical and political circumstances and context of the work then, deconstructive critics turn to the postcolonial text in order to undermine the signifying power of the colonizer, reading resistance and agency onto postcolonial expressions.

The following account of the dominant interpretations of Jussawalla's sequence *Missing Person* demonstrates the continuing salience of such oppositional views of the literary text. Responses to this volume either validate a thematic reading of the poems – at the expense, I suggest, of their internal

and formal dynamic – or deconstruct the historically informed complexity of Jussawalla’s writing in order to project deconstructive readings onto the poem.

Missing Person: between politics and performance

Jussawalla is recognized as one of the most influential poets working in English, and his poetry appears in significant anthologies of Indian poetry, including Mehrotra’s *Oxford India Anthology*, Vinay Dharwadker and A.K. Ramanujan’s *Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*, and Jeet Thayil’s more recent *Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets*. He is not, however, a prolific poet, and has produced just three volumes in a writing career spanning over forty years, the most recent of which is still being reviewed in the Indian press. His debut 1962 volume *Land’s End* was well received, although the poems are given relatively little attention in King’s book, or in historically contextual accounts of Indian poetry in English such as Patke’s or Dharwadker’s, and repercussions of Jussawalla’s most recent volume *Trying to Say Goodbye* have yet to be registered in postcolonial criticism. The strength of his reputation thus rests on *Missing Person*, the “difficult and sometimes opaque” experimental three-part sequence Jussawalla published on his return to India after more than a decade spent living in Britain (Thomas 43). *Missing Person* examines the experiences of a representative middle-class subject, portraying his marginality abroad and increasing sense of obsolescence in India. The protagonist is “Lost, running from acid to Marx”, his struggles to find a place in modern India recorded in a variety of styles and idioms throughout the sequence (*MP* 16).

Missing Person consists of three interdependent sections. The long title sequence, mostly written in 1975 after Jussawalla's return to India, presents the shifting and often nightmarish visions of a postcolonial subject who feels ostracized in Britain and out of place in India. The poems in the second section, "This Room and That", were written between 1962 and 1975 in Britain and India, and are more thematically transparent, frequently reflecting on the historical rupture and repercussions of Partition. The final section, "Travelling Separately", was also written in the mid-1960s, and consists of a series of poems written in song form which evidence the contemporary influence of American blues music and popular culture on Indian writers. It is the poems in "This Room and That" which are most often anthologized and which have received more evaluations, however, perhaps owing to the readily discernible events being evoked: "Partition's people stitched / Shrouds from a flag", Jussawalla writes in the evocative "Sea Breeze, Bombay", making a clear critique of the human cost of Partition (39).

It is the opening sequence, "Missing Person", however, which is both particularly innovative and yet the most bewildering – and which has received perhaps the least detailed critical attention. Mehrotra notes that *Missing Person* is considered an "uninviting" text that "the faint-hearted reader might decide to leave" ("Adil Jussawalla" *Oxford* 125-126), while the poet has also acknowledged the challenge his work poses for the reader: "While I try to break down defenses...I also build a few between the reader and the poem" (qtd. Mehrotra 125). In the opening, for instance, clear narrative perspectives are effaced in favour of a fragmentary succession of hallucinatory scenarios, juxtaposed styles, and an accumulation of broad historical references that eventually overwhelm and obliterate the subject. Different metanarratives –

Communism, Christianity, and Hinduism – compete and overlap, appearing to vie for the protagonist’s commitment. The style, too, draws on multiple traditions; scenes taken from the cinema are juxtaposed with incantatory religious images, while the violent language of racism is contrasted with depictions of English literature being taught in Indian schools. The shifting images, and the constant movement from one register to another, lends the text a surreal and unsettling quality.

Missing Person can, and has, been read as an exploration of the predicament of the middle class subject – a view reinforced by the poet’s use of Frantz Fanon’s pronouncement to frame the second section of this volume: “In underdeveloped countries the bourgeoisie phase is impossibly arid” (*The Wretched of the Earth*). The protagonist in the poems is continually relocated and displaced, positioned in disparate and unconnected settings: in one section he is in a cinema hall; in another a school room – which in turn gives way to “a library in Boston / a death-cell in Patna” (15). He seeks meaning in brief sexual encounters, attempts to find religious absolutism, reads Marx, takes drugs – and yet he remains unfulfilled and uncertain of his place in society, “his adventures as flat as beaten tin / original only to the extent of / their extent” (31).

There are, moreover, many images of invisibility in the poem, reinforcing the view that the middle class subject is in the process of being effaced in the text. The protagonist is “a quiet mirror with hair all over” (13); “our two-bit hero” (22); “an invisible man” who is “faintly penciled / behind a shirt, / a trendy jacket or tie” (29). These images offer a self-reflexive critique of what Fanon called the “under-developed middle class...[which] is unable to give free rein to its genius”, and which is struggling with its new political and social responsibilities

in a decolonized context (121). The reference to a mirror – and the image of the protagonist wearing a “trendy jacket” – clearly indicates the danger of simply replicating colonial power structures or continuing to be, as Fanon would have it, “the Western bourgeoisie’s business agent” (122). In an ominous early scene, Jussawalla goes further, aligning images of absence with the threat and possibility of violence. In a setting that has clear connotations of an interrogation cell, undisclosed voices are overheard talking about – rather than to – the protagonist: “Lock up his hands. / *His hands aren’t there / and we know of no work they’ve done*” (17). The protagonist’s very body is being effaced, and his captors do not know why they are holding him:

What was it our first file
accused him of? *It’s missing.*
Start all over again.
Start: Missing Person. (17)

By the final section of “Missing Person”, the protagonist is metaphorically and literally ripped apart by a rioting crowd, suggesting the impotence and social insignificance of the bourgeoisie: “his shouts for law and order / won’t shake the posse off”, the omniscient narrator intones; “its dogs / harry, attack, / are at his throat and back” (23).

Analyses of *Missing Person* – insofar as they engage with the text closely – tend to concentrate on these moments of invisibility and obliteration, reading the sequence as evidencing the marginal status of the postcolonial intellectual. Alex Sterling, for instance, argues that the section expresses the acute “identity crisis” (34) of the postcolonial subject, a view that parallels Ramazani’s general claim that the postcolonial subject is “unhoused” by

colonialism and its repercussions (*Muse* 12). Bhabha too, as one of the few critics to analyse the poem from a postcolonial perspective, concentrates on examining such moments of invisibility and indeterminacy in the text. However, in Bhabha's view, the poem's repetitive use of mirrors and tropes of invisibility serves to deconstruct *all* claims for a colonial or hegemonic power: the dissolution of the subject of the poem, in other words, is read by Bhabha as a provocative statement that expresses the inherent resistance and defiance of the colonized and formerly colonized.

In an analysis of the following lines from the opening of the second section of *Missing Person*, for instance, Bhabha claims that Jussawalla evidences the "impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous vision" (66):

No Satan
 warmed in the electric coils of his creatures
 or Gunga Din
 will make him come before you.
 To see an invisible man
 or a missing person
 trust no Eng. Lit. (29)

Bhabha's analysis draws particularly on Jacques Derrida's concept of the supplement as being an "adjunct...subaltern instance which takes – the – place" (qtd. Bhabha 78), in order to argue for the "supplementary nature of the subject" (78). Bhabha insists that subjectivity is a continual performance, deconstructing, rather than reading, Jussawalla's poem in order to demonstrate that neither the colonizer nor the colonized possess a stable identity: "[W]hat is interrogated is not simply the image of the person, but the discursive and

disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally poised” (68).

It seems, however, that Bhabha’s extensive recourse to poststructuralist paradigms is replete with equally “strategically and institutionally poised” assumptions and practices (68). The complexity and formal experimentalism of *Missing Person* is not, in Bhabha’s analysis, acknowledged: instead, the text serves as a means to allow him to – as he describes it – stage “an attempt to develop Jacques Derrida’s *passing remark*” (emphasis added, 84). Using highly selective sections of Jussawalla’s sequence – out of a volume of fifty-eight pages, Bhabha refers to just two short sections from two pages – Bhabha establishes his argument that the poem’s concern is with dismantling the very possibility of subjectivity. Hence, despite Jussawalla’s references to the violence that accompanies the protagonist’s unraveling in the sequence, Bhabha is able to interpret the missing person as performing a revolutionary role, contravening the hegemony of what he identifies as a Western emphasis on identity as “the sign of resemblance” (70). The missing and invisible postcolonial subject of the poem thus, for Bhabha, undermines epistememes of Western thinking and subjectivity, constituting a challenge to impositions of colonial models of knowledge.

As Parry argues, Bhabha’s investment in poststructuralist paradigms is problematic, in that his approach tends towards “collapsing the social into the textual” (4). In identifying the resistance of the postcolonial subject, Bhabha displays an “incuriosity” about the various historical forms of violence to which the missing person of Jussawalla’s text has been subjected (26). In particular, Bhabha’s analysis makes no mention of the historical moment or geographical space in which Jussawalla’s sequence was written, thereby occluding questions

as to the text's negotiation of local and national cultural contexts. Other Marxist critics including Lazarus have raised similar concerns over Bhabha's deconstructive vocabulary, while Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik have expressed criticism of deconstruction more generally, arguing that such an approach fails to consider material, historical and economic circumstances, as well as its own complicity in late capitalist enterprise. Bhabha's reading of this poem, moreover, chooses not to engage with its formal specificity, nor to account for the relationship between Jussawalla's style of writing and the intellectual, political and material conditions in which it was written. Instead, Bhabha's complex and dense theoretical analyses – what Benita Parry aptly calls his “unruly and indeed obfuscatory prose” – effaces the very historical materiality and literary presence of the poem itself (56). In fact, when I asked Jussawalla for his thoughts on Bhabha's analysis, he smiled, shrugged and remarked: “People say it's a favourable review of my poem, but to be honest I don't know what it's all about” (interview 12.8.11).

Bhabha's analysis is concerned with uncovering the extent to which the missing person undermines the validity and authority of the colonial subject, further suggesting that in doing so, the poem also critiques the reading subject's sense of their own identity: the poem introduces a “disturbance of your voyeuristic look” that “enacts the complexity and contradictions of your own desire to see, to fix cultural difference” (72). This emphasis on the subject of discourse is problematic for Varadharajan and Bahri, both of whom argue that poststructuralism has neglected to take into account the *object* of postcolonial discourse. In Varadharajan's study of the postcolonial object, she argues that poststructuralist paradigms have foreclosed on serious and considered understandings of the postcolonial object. In her work, this object constitutes

the “feminine ethnic other” who has been silenced and appropriated from all sides and disciplines in the field (21). The continual silencing of the women is suggestive, Varadharajan claims, of a bias towards the subject in theoretical debates: “Critical attention remains focused on reconstituting the self...rather than making room for other voices clamouring, precisely, for self-recognition” (20). Varadharajan argues that there has been, historically, a cultural and philosophical emphasis on the subject, which has subsequently assumed prominence at the expense of the object. In traditional Hegelian dialectics, she observes:

the subject engages with the object only insofar as the latter’s powers of contradiction and predication are subsumed in the process of *Aufhebung*, which produces a subject whose presence has been preserved at the expense of the object. (xxii)

For Varadharajan, the work to decentre the fixity and authority of the subject and identity positions has resulted in the effacement of the presence and particularity of the object: “deconstruction all too often lapses into an empty and a-historical affirmation of contingency...at the expense of a cogent analysis of the systems of determinations that produce...alterity” (70).

Varadharajan’s work looks to the particular modes of resistance of the female subject, presenting the feminine other not as defined by her difference from the subject, but as “the inhabitant of different cultural and material locations who reverses the limits of masculine and ethnocentric knowledge” (21). Varadharajan’s insights have suggestive implications for a postcolonial poetic project too, if we take the postcolonial poem to be such an object of “recalcitrance” (xviii). Like the female object, silenced by competing discourses, the postcolonial poem exists in a peculiar space; disassociated from historical

and material conditions on the one hand, or read as a cipher for social and political concerns on the other. As the above discussion has suggested, a poem like *Missing Person* – which is challenging, and which resists thematic interpretation – requires analysis on its own terms rather than being likened to prose. How might a reader approach *Missing Person* and other postcolonial poems, therefore, in order to attend to the specific heuristic dimension of the poems? How can a critic recognise what is particular to the poem without circumscribing it within a single local, national or political space? At the same time, in what ways does the poem negotiate with these spatial dimensions? In what follows, I examine the ways in which modernist Marxist aesthetic theory might help formulate a new and dialectical approach to the postcolonial poem that manages to retain the political interventions of the text even while confirming its distance from the global marketplace.

An aesthetic dialectic

This chapter opened with a statement from Theodor Adorno's 1958 essay "Reconciliation Under Duress", written as a response to Georg Lukács's study *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. In this seminal work, Lukács criticized modernist experimental literature for what he viewed as its aversion to, and distance from, social and political concerns. Writing soon after the Hungarian revolt in 1956, Lukács insisted that the realist novel was the "form appropriate to the epoch of socialist revolution", proposing formal opacity to be a decadence ill-suited to political moments of upheaval (Livingstone, Anderson and Mulhern 144). Lukács's suggestion that formal analysis constituted an apolitical practice bears striking similarities with certain postcolonial methodologies already

introduced, in particular those positions that might see inventiveness and complexity as an unnecessary and “unaffordable indulgence” given the more practical agenda of postcolonial criticism (Boehmer 172).

Lukács’s view, for Adorno, evidenced a particularly narrow and empirical conception of the literary text that failed to differentiate between imaginative and documentary writing. As demonstrated, the text operates in a different way than reportage, and he cautioned critics against approaching it in order to uncover a certain set of facts: “the work of art never focuses directly on reality [so] it never makes the sort of statement found elsewhere in the realm of knowledge” (“Reconciliation” 168). In an earlier essay on lyric poetry, Adorno further insists that it is art’s relationship to – but significant departure from – the world in which it is written that lends it its critical potential: “The less the work thematises the relationship of ‘I’ and society, the more spontaneously it crystallises of its own accord in the poem” (“Lyric Poetry” 346). Hence, for Adorno, it was the specificity of the art-object – which would include its use of formal language, imagery and style – that lent it its critical potential and “which alone permit any real relationship with art” (“Reconciliation” 153). Adorno’s insistence that the particularity of a work of art lent it its critical potential implicitly called for critics to take a new approach to the text, noting not its external referents or the extent to which it resembles or reflects reality, but to attend rather to its internal processes: “hermeneutics have to proceed from within the text” (Hohendahl 153).

Adorno remained sensitive to what he recognized as the totality of art’s immersion in its administered, capitalist context. “Nothing remains of the autonomy of art” in contemporary society, he contends in *Aesthetic Theory*, noting that the writer’s use of formal language, style, imagery and format are

predicated by the text's historical and economic situation (22). As Bahri explains, "aesthetic norms" are "historically determined" (6). The work of art's "status as a commodity [is] a crucial component of its composition [and] its truth content [is] a formal virtue rooted in textual aspects not readily assimilated to established trends of thought" (6). Hence, when Adorno invited critics to reflect on the dissonances within the art object, he located in its formal disjunctions and unexpected imagery a critical gesture towards related – but not determining – macrological political antagonisms. As Adorno contended, resistance is not found at the level of a text's content, but is "refracted" in its moments of formal and linguistic discontinuity (AT 6). It is, Lazarus suggests, art's "mode of being as a text" that renders it a critical and interventionist medium, its aesthetic particularity enabling it to critique the "overdetermined conditions" in which it is written ("Modernism and Modernity" 135). Or, as Adorno expresses in *Aesthetic Theory*, "the social relationship in art is the immanence of society in the work itself, rather than the immanence of art in society" (304)

Adorno's work was prompted by the changing conditions of modernity, the crisis facing cultural production in an increasingly administered environment, and the repercussions of Nazi ideologies. Despite this specific context however, and his designated interest in high modernist texts and art forms from a European frame of reference, Bahri and Lazarus have both observed similar social and economic shifts in the conditions of a more recent modernity. The implications of decolonization, the rise of neo-colonial – and neo-liberal – practices, increasing urbanization, differentiated access to cultural, natural and economic resources – all of these experiences, evidenced in the so-called Third-world, constitute modernity, albeit in different locations. Modernity – and the aesthetic modernism it prompted – is thus not, critics are noting, coeval

with the early twentieth-century, or with European and American formations, but is found, and continues to be produced, in altered forms and in divergent parts of the world. As Susan Stanford Friedman contends, the varied cultural responses to modernity by writers and artists from across the globe demonstrate the existence of “polycentric modernities and modernisms” (426).

Indian poets writing in English in the period following decolonization, alongside rapid industrialization and urbanization, and against a background of increasing access to different artistic intertexts, thus reflect what Sudesh Mishra calls the “ideology of modernism” (7). Mishra lists certain stylistic and formal qualities associated with a modernist literature, noting that poetry’s “analogical structures, its multiple and intersecting voices, genres and styles, its hardening of images and disruption and reclamation of traditional forms, its linguistic experimentation and unbridled technical virtuosity” all “resulted from the heterodox climate and iconoclastic mood” of the period (72). Like the writers Adorno analyses therefore, whose work encodes, at the level of form and imagery, the historical and political dislocations of the early twentieth-century, poetry written in the 1960s and 1970s by Adil Jussawalla, Eunice de Souza, Arun Kolatkar, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and others, responds in vital ways to conditions of modernity in India, evidencing what Lazarus recently termed “the *ongoing* critical dimension of modernist literary practice” (*Postcolonial Unconscious* 30).

As Lazarus explains, Adorno was concerned with the “expressivity of artistic form”:

In the deep structures of the most opaque and elusive modernist works he was able to discover an aesthetic of resistance and, beyond

that, a rationale not at all incompatible with Marxism. (“Modernism and Modernity 142)

Adorno insisted on “the premise that what modernism resisted, above all, was *modernity*”, contending that literature possesses the ability to resist capitalist and commercial cultural forms by virtue of its departure from the world in which it was produced (Lazarus “Modernism” 142). It does this, for Adorno, by experimenting with literary forms, thereby constituting a “prohibition against a message” and a caution against mimetic expectations (AT 28). As he argued in *Negative Dialectics*, a textual representation can never be coeval with the world it represents, but rather introduces an excess: “objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder” (5). It is this remainder – what Lazarus term’s literature’s “disconsolation” (*Unconscious* 30) and what Varadharajan describes as a “radical negativity” (66) – that characterizes the poetic object, and which remains consistently out of the reader’s and critic’s grasp.

Mehrotra’s poetry, for instance, is – like Jussawalla’s – provocative in its formal experimentation and craftsmanship, and invites an attendance to formal styles and “everything particular” to the text (Adorno AT 5). In “Continuities”, a poem taken from Mehrotra’s 1976 sequence *Nine Enclosures*, the “disconsolation” of the poem-as-object is revealed in the very opening lines (Lazarus 30):

This is about the green miraculous trees,
 And old clocks on stone towers,
 And playgrounds full of light
 And dark blue uniforms.
 At eight I’m a boy scout and make a tent
 By stretching a bedsheet over parallel bars,
 And a fire by burning rose bushes,

I know half a dozen knots and drink
Tea from enamel mugs. (58)

These lines evidence the poem's double-edged nature: on the one hand, Mehrotra begins with the phrase "This is about" – apparently disclosing the intentions and introducing a narrative to the text. However, it soon becomes apparent that the poem will defy linear, narrative convention: instead it is "constructed by assemblage" and by the accumulation of details, memories and objects, thereby disarticulating the subject matter of the title (King 192). In fact far from being a poem of or about "continuities", the text suggests the incomplete nature of personal and collective memories, and the perpetual interaction between unassimilated events and experiences. The narrator seems to continually be on the verge of remembering something else, expressing these partially formed thoughts as elusive fragments: "I wear khaki shorts, note down / the number plate of cars" (58).

Mehrotra's use of montage thus deconstructs the expectation of the poem's unity, reiterating the gap between these disparate memories and the poem's apparent project of recollection. For Adorno, such a self-reflexive fragmentary formalism served a political purpose, demonstrating the impossibility of representing the world in unmediated, mimetic, form. As he explained, "[a]rtworks themselves destroy the claim to objectivation that they raise", consistently undermining the unity of their own 'whole' (AT 134). In Mehrotra's poetry, this fragmentary, disconsolate style is reinforced by his frequent adoption of a surrealist vision, which transforms events and facts into unexpected and irrational scenarios. In "Continuities", the various scenes of the narrator's childhood give way, for instance, to a surreal and destabilizing series of observations towards the poem's conclusion:

I bend down from the swaying bridge
 And pick up the river
 Which once tried to hide me:
 The dance of the torn skin
 Is for much later. (60)

As Bibhu Padhi observes, Mehrotra's poetry has "a ghostly, nightmarish quality" about it, with facts incompletely represented "in half-light, with edges blurred. Something...comes to the front in an important way and then suddenly gives way" (42-43). The fragmentary form of his writing demonstrates the impossibility of reading a poem in order to gain empirical knowledge about its circumstances – a feature of modernist art forms that Adorno emphasized in all his work: "As soon as one imagines having a firm grasp on the details of an artwork, it dissolves into the indeterminate and undifferentiated" (AT 134).

The dissolution of the artwork was, in Adorno's view, indicative of the inherent inadequacy of art to represent modern society and its demands. As he claimed in an early essay on music, music that is easy to listen to is little more than a commodity, although its uncomplicated composition attempts to mythologize its status as such: "The more reified the music, the more romantic it sounds to alienated ears...in this way it becomes 'property'" ("On the Fetish Character of Music" 281). Listeners, prevented from engaging critically with the music, become "temple slaves", adversely affected by "[i]rrelevant consumption" (281). For Adorno therefore, it was art's jarring and innocuous moments that prompted the listener or reader to act and to notice the inadequacy of commodified culture.

Mehrotra's poetry, and, as we shall see, Jussawalla's too, actively guards against straightforward thematic interpretation, incorporating moments

of unease and dissonance into its formal structure. Hence in “Continuities”, the narrator’s accumulation of observations is constructed in such a way as to undermine each one’s own authority as fact. The remarks themselves seem clear at first: “I collect my cousin’s books / And find out the dates of the six Mughals” the narrator recollects of his childhood: “My first watch is a fat and silver Omega”; “We live in a small cottage” (58). These details however, are then followed by dislocating scenes that bear no relation to the narrator’s own position in a particular place or time: “I see Napoleon crossing the Alps / On a white horse”, he declares, introducing a dizzying and disconcerting perspective into his apparently domestic series of events (58). King and Mishra both remark on the influence of European surrealism on Mehrotra’s style of writing, noting that poems like this one seem almost automatic (a convention he did indeed experiment with extensively). His “extreme use of discontinuity” (King 190) thus counters a particular kind of reading, one based on “reason-oriented reflexes” and an assumption that the subject of the poem is the producer of meaning (Mishra 280). Instead, in a poem like “Continuities”, the unease induced by the sudden interruption of childhood memories seem, in Adorno’s words, to “put meaning on trial; they unfold its history” (AT 201).

Many of Mehrotra’s poems started out as a word game, before being edited and re-drafted by the poet in order to “create as many accidents” as possible (Mehrotra qtd. King 188). These accidents have an unsettling impact on the reader, who as Adorno notes, has been conditioned to try and explain the artwork with reference to the world and himself: previously, therefore, the “subject who viewed, heard or read a work was to lose himself, forget himself, extinguish himself. The identification carried out by the subject was ideally not that of making the artwork like himself, but rather that of making himself like the

artwork” (AT 23). Rather than explaining the poem, therefore, a reader of Mehrotra’s must take a new approach to the text, adopting what Bahri terms “[A] mode of reading that accepts the necessary pause and allows the reader to inhabit the experience of being confounded” (21).

Mehrotra’s poetry, like Jussawalla’s, seeks to “enclose the reader within the poem” rather than referring to a reality outside the text (King 184). It thus “speak[s] by virtue of everything particular” to it, inviting reflection on the history of its formation (Adorno AT 5). This in turn compels the reader to attend to the historical and material context of the poem, even as it counters against reading the text as representative of these historical, contextual formations. Hence, for instance, Mehrotra’s extensive use of fragmentary forms, and his automatic experimentation, reflects the particular influence of early European surrealists on his work – a fact acknowledged by King and discussed by the poet in a recent essay (“Partial Recall”). In the poem “Eleven Cross-Sections”, for instance, the poet accumulates and juxtaposes a series of unsettling images that call to mind André Breton’s instruction in his 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto* to write in an automatic manner, unguided by reason: “I’ve seen cats / Sulking beside the sea”, Mehrotra records, “There lies at its bottom / A submarine full of mice” (24)

At the same time, the images themselves are often drawn from contemporary (American) culture, indicative of the poet’s interest in Beat poets – and suggestive of wider economic and social changes that brought Indian poets like Mehrotra into contact with the work of writers from New York and California. Mehrotra’s long 1968 poem *Bharatmata: A Prayer*, for example, takes inspiration – and imagery – from Allen Ginsberg’s poem “America”: both offered a critical, ironical perspective of their respective nations, laying bare

their hypocrisy and inequalities. “india / my beloved country, ah my motherland”, the poem begins, “you are, in the world’s slum, the lavatory” (*Intrepid* 1968, unpaginated). The poem continues to recount specifically Indian problems, all relayed in an Americanised idiom: “i am so used to your cities with a / chain reaction of suburbs / where whole families live in bathrooms”; “i am used to seeing pot-bellied children ride the dog / with jockey’s confidence” (*ibid*).

Mehrotra makes a direct appeal to American literary traditions, recalibrating the idea of the postcolonial poet writing back against a former colonial canon: “ah / walt whit”, the narrator cries, “wish you were around / and tried to contain these multitudes / and tried being our representative man” (*ibid*).

Likewise, however, Mehrotra’s poems bear simultaneous traces of early, pre-colonial Indian writing too – in particular to the colloquial informality of the bhakti poets whose work he would go on to translate. Like Kabir and Tukaram, for instance, whose medieval song poems typically conclude with an irreverent final statement, Mehrotra’s poems also often finish with a striking image or observation that seems almost prophetic: “The beggar of the city / Walks down the road / Like a dying planet” (“The Book of Common Places IV”, *NE* 37); “Beware, my son, / Of those old clear-headed women / Who never miss a funeral” (“Canticle for my Son”, *Distance in Statute Miles* 25). In concluding his work with cryptic parables, Mehrotra implicitly gestures towards those earlier Indian poets, translating their style and attitude into a modern mode of writing. Hence in Kabir’s so-called upside down poems, translated recently by Mehrotra, there are familiar unsettling and prophetic conclusions: “This verse, says Kabir, / Is your key to the universe. / If you can figure it out”. (*Songs of Kabir* 3); “The mind’s a knot, says Kabir / Not easy to untie” (*Songs of Kabir* 13).

By alluding to such divergent histories in the formal construction of even an individual poem, therefore, Mehrotra historicizes and spatialises the development of his own sensibility as a poet, figuring the poem itself as an archive of influences, intertexts and forms. In using different traditions and forms, moreover, these poems reveal that pre-existing and familiar literary traditions can be “revivified and open to interpretation by the imagination” (King 193). Mehrotra thus does not imitate modernist styles and forms so much as remake them and his work demonstrates what, for Ramzani, constitutes the spatial stretch of the poem: “individual poems give expression to locality at the same time that they turn formally, linguistically, in other directions” (*Transnational* 10). Close attention to Mehrotra’s form and language thus counters the “standardization of expectations and responses” to postcolonial literature, which we have seen continue to be predicated on its supposed engagement with the culture and politics of the former colonial power (Bahri 34).

Returning to *Missing Person*, therefore, in order to examine its formal dexterity and aesthetic inventiveness, a reader is able to identify instances of resistance – not, as Bhabha would have it, to the imperialism of subjectivity, but to the predominance of certain reading methodologies, themselves a precondition of the pedagogic and economic institutionalization of postcolonial literary studies and the contemporary situation in which “artistic expression is increasingly regulated by technological expansion and market considerations” (Bahri 1). The formal experimentalism of Jussawalla’s writing – which has perhaps prevented critics from undertaking detailed formal analyses of the text – bears witness to political and contextual ruptures, but does so without becoming itself a “documentary social text” (11).

The poem, moreover, mitigates against certain stereotypical readings of Indian literature by Western critics, which, at the time of writing, were especially in evidence: as Jussawalla noted in his introduction to his anthology *New Writing in India*, “[t]here are unfortunate misconceptions about Indian writing”, including the assumption that it reflects “India [as] a land of wisdom and love”, spirituality and eroticism (17-18). Just as the material Jussawalla selected for the anthology rejects such a view, so too does his own poem guard against other-worldly interpretation. As the poet writes in *Missing Person’s* “Dog” – a poem that Jussawalla has described as being explicitly “about non-readers of poetry” and the experience of “not being understood” as a poet (de Souza interview “Adil Jussawalla” 79) – there are “Strange / earless creatures” who “go about their ways / hearing no music, making none / who find plain talk enough” (49). In the text, the poet – figured as a dog – turns away from these “earless multitudes” to address the “Unstinting moon” instead: “our monthly dialogue’s / always out of tune”, the poet notes, “a long-drawn howl on one side / and you, sweet pudding, silent” (49). The poet here suggests that as a writer, he occupies a marginal position in relation to his mainstream “earless” readers. His poetry will be “out of tune”, he observes, indicating its refutation of expected thematic and stylistic qualities (49).

One of the most striking features of *Missing Person* is Jussawalla’s stylistic and formal dexterity and his inclusion of multiple forms and registers. *Missing Person* is a text of continual code switching, moving between vernacular street slang, high religious diction, filmic language and political rhetoric. The sequence is replete, moreover, with a variety of non-standard “yowling” sounds: “war-cries”, “riddles”, a “giggle”, “coughs” – in punctuating the text, they undermine the formal coherence of the poem and the traditions that

inform it. The opening lines of “Missing Person” make this immediately clear: Jussawalla describes the birth of the protagonist, but disputes the notion of his – or the text’s – origins. Instead of providing contextual information about the subject of the text, the opening lines begin abruptly, the event told as if in film stills of unconnected scenes: “House Full. It’s a shocker. Keep still. / Blood crawls from a crack. / Keep still” (13). Dispensing with conventional textual practice therefore – which might introduce the protagonist, provide details of his family and background – the poem instead opens in the middle of a chaotic childbirth scene. These lines immediately raise considerations that remain unresolved throughout the poem, not least the question of who is speaking and where the scene is occurring. By referring to the protagonist using the impersonal “It’s” – “It’s a quiet mirror... / born / to a middle-class mother” – moreover, the poet indicates his relative lack of concern for the conventional considerations of subject formation and their progressive development. Rather, his protagonist is figured as an object of sorts – lacking the individuality or interiority of the first person lyric ‘I’ and being presented instead as an entity produced by contextual forces.

Unlike his earlier work *Land’s End*, which Anand Thakore notes uses the traditional formal arrangements, poetic structures, and Christian symbolism of much British writing to indicate the poet’s “faith in a traditional poetic” lineage, *Missing Person* consists of an amalgamation of competing forms and registers, all of which have made the missing person what he is (Thakore “On the Music of a Missing Person”). “His thoughts were bookish”, states the poet, but goes on to acknowledge the confusion that arises out of so many divergent influences: “a squall from the back of his skull / suddenly fluttered their pages, / making him lose his bearings” (29). The range of “bookish” materials incorporated in

Missing Person is vast: Mehrotra lists, among others, Jussawalla's incorporation of extracts from nursery rhymes, quotations from Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly", classical Greek myth and Hindu narratives – all of which are compounded by the poet's use of puns and word games: "Reading it is like entering an echo-chamber that is sometimes also a hall of mirrors" (Mehrotra "Adil Jussawalla" *Oxford* 126).

Thakore insists that despite the juxtaposed form of *Missing Person*, and its multiple use of registers, it "needs to be read in full form beginning to end, for it is only by means of such a reading that its underlying unity can be felt" ("Music"). The unity he identifies is not a thematic unity; nor is it a formal unity in an obvious sense: it is rather the unity that informs the poet's materialist tracing of the histories and forms that have produced the poem. *Missing Person* thus undermines the uncritical and celebratory account of hybridity as presented by Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists, which argue that the hybrid text or subject "contests genealogies of origin" (Bhabha 225). Instead, Jussawalla demonstrates the violent and dislocating experiences that produce hybridity, revealing it to be a phenomenon that emerges in the various and contradictory acts of translation to which the protagonist is subjected. Hence, far from being able to "mediate seemingly unresolvable contradictions", the poem bears witness instead to the upheavals and rupture inherent in modernity (Ramazani *Muse* 6). As the narrator implies in the second section of the sequence, this is a violent and imposing process: "He was the bloodied parts / that thumped the ground / around a rope that went into the sky" (33).

Mishra suggests that Jussawalla rejects the assumption that his poetry – or any poetry – might have a social or political role: the text has "no transcendent function" (315), and is continually undermined by the protagonist's

“dribble of curses”, confusion, and recognition of the human cost of literary and political modernity (21). Instead, Mishra argues, Jussawalla demonstrates an interest in the construction of the poems, in the structural composition – from the raw materials of intertexts, images and events – of the text-as-object. It is in the accumulation of raw materials – rather than in their resemblance to any external reality – that *Missing Person* makes a social and political statement: the poem “uses techniques to create other perspectives”, and to discredit the notion of any single narrative (King 248). In drawing attention to the processes and materials of its own construction, moreover, the poem enacts what Adorno noted of modern art and literature: it “accents the once hidden element of being something made, something produced” (AT 33).

However, for Adorno and the Frankfurt School, chaos and rupture in art signified the possibility of transformation in the external world: “The cryptogram of the new is the image of collapse; only by virtue of the absolute negativity of collapse does art enunciate its unspeakable: utopia” (AT 41). Utopia – which has its roots in the Greek words *ou-topos*, meaning no place, and *eu-topos*, meaning good place – is an important and largely strategic concept in Adorno’s work. In particular, it was “utopian negation” that Adorno was concerned with, arguing that while art could not change the world directly, it could, by its nonidentity or critical distance, critique and challenge the systems of power in the world (Bahri 92). Hence, the radical and experimental formalism of modernist art, and its characteristic valorization of the fragment, “attempts to uncover alternative agencies within modernity’s universalism” (Austin 6). As Bahri explains of Adorno’s thesis, and which gives a sense of the unrealized yet latent potential within the literary:

it is precisely the aesthetic distance of art from the real world that

permits art to yield its promise of nonrepresentational integrity...
 The truth-content of art, therefore, is its ability to signal a future
 true society rather than a pseudoreflexion of its shape from the
 given reality. (114-115)

As Lazarus has argued recently, it has become routine practice in postcolonial studies to deny the possibility of representation, a position that willfully overlooks the numerous instances whereby writers are engaged in a process of forming a “deep-seated affinity and community” through their work (*Unconscious* 19). The formal dexterity of *Missing Person*, its code-switching and intertextual stretch, suggests its own project of aesthetic reconstitution: the supposed nihilism of the text, therefore, can be figured instead as indicative of the poet’s attempt to reconstitute and reclaim a mode of expression that is suited to the conditions in which Jussawalla was writing. Hence, while Jussawalla’s sequence has been likened to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Thakore observes that there is a greater sense of affirmation in Jussawalla’s poetry, identifying in the collection of cultural and textual fragments a recuperative gesture towards an (unrealizable) utopia. At the end of the opening series of poems, for instance, when the protagonist is physically ripped apart by “a rioting people”, he expels the detrimental colonial and neo-colonial influences that have created, and effaced him: “historical poisons, / bookdust, lies / that turn his words to sand” (24). As he “coughs and kicks” them away from his ailing body, the register of the poem shifts, and the protagonist incants:

Hope
 which periodically triggers
 some men to act
 and looses the bonds of the earth,
 has set a bright tide revolving inside me, a door.
 Give up your seats and join the cast of thousands,

revolve about his pieces too
(brown slaves, black vamps, white faggots,
deceivers, women who rend and claw). (25)

The poem forges syntactic connections with various dispossessed groups – some of whom have featured briefly in the earlier sections. By formally bringing together different marginalized groups – “brown slaves, black vamps, white faggots” – linking them through the repetition of conjunctive commas, the poet indicates his text’s attempt at forging new allegiances and associations following the expulsion of the old.

Immanent, internal analysis of the postcolonial poem(s) in this chapter reveals the poetic text to be in potential tension with certain dominant ways of reading it. *Missing Person*, for instance, has been assumed to represent the most nihilistic and deconstructive of sequences, taken as evidence of the postcolonial subject’s disorientation, and the inability of metanarratives to account for the demands and compulsions of nation or subjectivity. In fact, however, the formal inventiveness of Jussawalla’s writing, and his code-switching and intertextual borrowings, signify instead the historical and material formation of the text itself, providing a deeply contextualized, highly specific notion of the postcolonial poem. The poem disarticulates, therefore, at the level of its form and imagery, the assumption that the postcolonial poem is unconcerned with contemporary political realities, as well as the expectation that the poem will express a personal and subjective view of the world.

Despite the useful formulations offered by some poststructuralist inspired postcolonial theory, this chapter has suggested that modernist theory – which reflected on art’s response to the disjunctures of modernity – provides particularly useful analytical vocabularies with which to read the postcolonial

poem. Later case study chapters on individual poets develop the immanent approach introduced here, while chapters Three and Four ask how critics can adopt a similarly immanent methodology in relation to material artifacts – to little magazines and published volumes of poetry. In the following chapter, however, I reflect on critical accounts of Bombay, suggesting that this city, like the postcolonial poem, has been over-determined and materially and historically effaced by postmodern, poststructuralist readings. This chapter thus takes the immanent approach proposed in chapter one and uses it as a new lens through which to consider the representational terrain of Bombay.

Chapter Two

“City uncontained / by movie screen or epigram”:³ an immanent reading of Bombay

The previous chapter suggested that the postcolonial poem has been over-determined by abstract literary analyses, the specificity of the text occluded either by thematic or poststructuralist approaches. This chapter argues that Bombay too – that most iconic and recognizable of postcolonial cities – has been similarly disassociated from its specific material histories and contexts. Extending Adorno’s ideas about the importance of close formal criticism, this chapter thus proposes an immanent reading of Bombay, examining some of its local sub-cultural contexts of poetry production and dissemination, and the representations of these, in order to nuance and enrich a critical understanding of this postcolonial city. As Shirin Kudchedkar notes, Bombay’s poets “take us in their first instance to their own Bombay, the milieu they know most intimately”, providing the reader with an intimate and personalized portrayal of the city (127). This chapter thus examines the spatial significance of the city’s poetry, using the approach of the previous chapter in order to reflect on the dialectical relationship between the actual city of Bombay, the places in which its poetry was produced, and creative representations of it. Rashmi Varma contends that “Bombay’s literary texts create a set of representations in productive relationship with material transformations in the postcolonial city” (*Postcolonial City* 137). To this observation, this chapter would further add that poetic representations of the city are able to counter some

³ Lines from Arundhati Subramaniam’s poem “Where I Live” (*Where I Live* 49)

dominant representational portrayals of Bombay, providing critics with a highly specific and intimate vantage point from which to better understand the cultural context of this city.

As I argue in the opening section of this chapter, Bombay occupies a problematic position in postcolonial studies. It has often been depicted as a space of undifferentiated hybridity, a globalized and almost unreal city that is, in Arundhati Subramaniam's recent poem, "condemned to unspool / in an eternal hysteria of lurid nylon dream" (49). At the same time, however, the effects of its more recent neo-liberal economic policies and exclusionary religious politics have arguably led to what Varma has termed its "provincialization", noting that its celebratory image has been undermined by historical moments of crisis ("Provincializing" 76). Consequently, it is possible to observe a proliferation of dystopian and/or nostalgic literary stylizations of Bombay.⁴ Arjun Appadurai has observed that in economic terms alone, Bombay "has no clear place in the stories told...that link late capitalism, globalization, post-Fordism, and the growing dematerialization of capital", noting that Bombay's informal economies, and the ubiquity of its informal or 'spectral housing' sector, defies any attempt to situate the city within a progressive urban narrative ("Spectral Housing" 627). Developing from Appadurai's critique, I suggest that it is not only Bombay's economic structures that do not fit into dominant paradigms; the very geo-cultural conceptualization of the city, too, requires rethinking in relation to its specific material, social, and imaginative demands. Departing from a tendency that Varma identifies as prescient in postmodern geographical discourses to disassociate the city from the materiality of its histories, therefore, I introduce here the ways in

⁴ In *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis projects a dystopian portrait of the city, provocatively calling it a "charnel house" (146). In recent fiction and non-fictional works, writers have emphasized its crime, corruption and seedy underside: Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City*, for example, and Vikram Chandra's novel *Sacred Games*, invoke the city as a world of survival against all odds.

which poetry – via its particular use of language and form – can produce a more nuanced articulation of Bombay, attending to what Henri Lefebvre termed the “directly *lived*” dimension of space (*The Production of Space* 39) and what, for other Marxist geographers, constitutes the “intimate practices of emplacement, embodiment and location” (Blair “Cultural Geography and the Place of the Literary” 547). Close readings of some Bombay poems by Dilip Chitre and Amit Chaudhuri – poets writing about the city from different situations and times – reveals the poem to be particularly able to draw out the intimacies of the city, disarticulating the dominance of “polyvocal” projections of it outlined in the first section (*Varma Postcolonial City* 138).

The final section of this chapter examines the significance of certain poetic sites in the city, drawing on Caroline Rooney’s recent essay on “locally embedded cosmopolitan cultures” in colonial Rhodesia and Cairo in order to re-materialise and re-contextualise a particular moment and cultural space in Bombay (139). A consideration of the places and spaces in which Bombay poetry was produced and shared, as well as a dialectical consideration of poetry of the city, this chapter argues, destabilizes the dominant and somewhat polarized narratives of Bombay, both of which posit the assumption that the city can be comprehensively known and qualified. Chaudhuri has argued that “a history of Bombay cosmopolitanism would beg to be written that is different than, or distinct from, an account of variegated urban co-existence” (“Cosmopolitanism’s Alien Face” 96); this chapter aims to provide precisely this alternative configuration of the city by examining specific areas of the city at a particular point in its history.

The ambivalent projection of Bombay: “within yet ‘beyond’ the nation”⁵

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha ascribes a degree of openness and potentiality to the postcolonial city in general, configuring it as a space of provisional and shifting social affiliations and identities: “it is to the city that the migrants, the minorities come, to challenge the history of the nation...it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements are played out” (243). Bhabha’s comments position the city as the very antithesis of the nation, reflecting what Varma identifies as a characteristic of both “contemporary postmodern and Left analyses of the city [which] continue to read a binary opposition between the city and nation” (*Postcolonial City* 8). Indeed, Bhabha’s attitude towards the nation reflects what Neil Lazarus recently suggested to be a typical postcolonial theoretical response to the state: there is, he argues, a prevalent trend to make an “undifferentiating disavowal of all forms of nationalism and a corresponding exaltation of migrancy, liminality, hybridity” (*Unconscious* 21). Accompanying this tendency is the critical concern with economic and cultural globalization – which Saskia Sassen observes has led to the global city being “increasingly disconnected from their broader hinterlands or...national economies” (xxi).

The global city, for Sassen, is “a new type of city” that is indicative of the way in which the global economy has restructured economic and social life (4). While earlier cities were founded around a particular manufacturing industry, for instance, the global city is more likely to be defined by its commercial and financial services, and by its links to other major global cities (344). The new

⁵ From Bill Ashcroft “Urbanism, mobility and Bombay: Reading the postcolonial city” 499.

global city is thus increasingly disassociated from its national and local economies and cultures. As Sassen repeatedly emphasizes, all cities are world cities – a fact that might be true with regard to the global interrelations between different cities, but which nevertheless risks projecting what Andreas Huyssen refers to as the “giddy utopianism of the 1990s, with its celebration of global flows and limitless markets” (*Other Cities, Other Worlds* 14). In fact, the ease with which the global city can and has been heralded as epitomizing the overturning of national and local affinities is deeply problematic.

In a postcolonial context, for instance, such a view reinforces Bhabha’s provocative contention that the postcolonial city provides the opportunity for new forms of belonging and citizenship that were disavowed in and by the authoritarian, rigid nation state. Bhabha’s position, however, neglects to recognise the city’s imbrication in competing nationalist discourses: the postcolonial city “retained its national identity *and contained furious contestations* of it” (emphasis added, Varma *Postcolonial City* 122). The postcolonial metropolis, in other words, is in simultaneous collusion and conflict with the political space of the nation. The postcolonial Indian city was on the one hand, central to the construction of a nationalist sentiment after 1947: in a speech delivered shortly after independence, for example, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru contended that:

The life of a nation, and more specifically of a nation like India, is lived principally in the villages. Nevertheless, it is the cities that represent the highest cultural achievements of the age, as they also do sometimes the most unpleasant aspects of human life. So these cities remind me of the cultural growth of India.

(“Aiming at a Democratic India” 52)

Nehru's language figures the city as an aspirational space in which it is possible to become modern. Hence, Bombay and other major cities were the sites of huge investments, figured in the political imagination as idealized microcosms of the new India. What Varma has referred to as the "Nehruvian effervescence about the possibilities of a modern, socialist, and secular nation as embodied in the space of a well-planned city" ("Provincializing" 68) is thus apparent in the post-independence planning boom detailed by Gyan Prakash, which aimed to "reengineer an organic urban space to meet the needs of capitalist industrialization" (*Fables* 261). Plans for new housing, for industrial zoning in the city, and for shopping centres, put forward by planners and engineers working in the years immediately preceding and following independence, were thus intended to epitomize the city's pan-Indian identity. As the Indian engineer N.V. Modak wrote to American architect Albert Mayer in 1949, such a process was intended to align modernity and national sensibility: "We must vastly improve and modernize, not de-Indianize" (qtd. Prakash 262).

At the same time, however, the city's colonial heritage, and association with Western political and cultural forms, led many to reflect on the city as an inauthentic national space. Hence for Mahatma Gandhi in particular, the modern city and the forms of capital found there were not representative of the 'real' India, but were, he described to his friend Henry Polak in 1909, little more than "plague spots" of foreign rule (qtd. Parel 130). These cities were contrasted with the *truly* Indian space of the village, which emerges in political and literary discourse as a quintessentially Indian locale. For instance, and in spite of his criticism of nationalist sentiment, Rabindranath Tagore identified the village as the site of communal allegiances and close, convivial relationships, arguing in

1904 that the creation of a utopian community was only possible in a village:

“We can only make a small village directly our own” (qtd. Chatterjee 104).

These divergent readings of the relationship between the city and nation cannot, moreover, elide Bombay’s particular – and problematic – imbrication in the very formation of the nation state. As Prakash details, Bombay was the setting for the meeting of the Muslim League in July 1946 in which Muhammad Ali Jinnah first pledged the league’s support for the creation of a separate Muslim nation (140-143). This, and Jinnah’s declaration from Bombay that 16 August would become ‘Direct Action Day’, prompted riots across India between Hindus and Muslims, in particular in Calcutta, where the ‘Calcutta Killings’ claimed thousands of lives. The refugees arriving in Bombay throughout 1946 and 1947 therefore – fleeing the Punjab in particular – or the later waves of refugees who arrived in the city during India’s conflict with China in 1962, and again, during the Bangladesh liberation war – were thus not arriving, as Bhabha’s comments imply, to “challenge the history of the nation”, but rather as a *result* of national (and regional) conflicts of which Bombay was a part (243).

Moreover, as Varma notes, the city is a visual and architectural “palimpsest”, bearing traces of its imperial and neo-imperial past as well as its more recent history of neo-colonial and regional appropriation (*Postcolonial City* 121). South Bombay, for instance, with its wide streets and Gothic Revival architecture, makes apparent the city’s colonial past: imposing buildings like the Victoria Terminus (now renamed the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, or CST), whose entrance is flanked by two statues of regal lions and on whose roof is a statue of ‘progress’, continue to reflect the historical period of British control even more than sixty years after its conclusion (Prakash 47-48). This same site, however, has been the locus of more recent conflicts over the city’s identity:

renamed by the Shiv Sena in deference to the Maratha warrior Shivaji, the building now simultaneously embodies the fraught terms under which the city has been fought over. Street names in the city, moreover – as well as the official name of the city itself – bears further witness to the different claims made over Bombay by political groups, demonstrating its continuing imbrication in discourses of citizenship and national and regional belonging.

Bhabha's remarks, however, disassociate the heterogeneous and "*conjunctural*" social demographic of the city from its recent historical and contextual (de)formation (Varma 1). In fact, Bhabha's suggestion that cities like Bombay provide flexible sites for new social movements is accompanied by his valorization of the minority or migrant perspective, a position that effectively overwrites the particular histories of displacement and dispossession imposed upon different groups of people, according to different ideologies and political circumstances. As Varma observes, though, many familiar critical and literary evocations of Bombay reflect the salience of Bhabha's utopian claims, portraying the city as a "cacophonous, polyvocal space of 'excessive' postcoloniality" (138). Bill Ashcroft, for instance draws associations between the differentiated visual and architectural spaces of the city, its varied social demographic, and its supposed autonomy from national configurations when he refers to "the expansive character of the postcolonial city as embodied in the radically hybrid nature of the metropolis and its subjects" ("Urbanism" 501). Roshan G. Shahani too implies that the structural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of Bombay "lends itself to postmodernist literary plurality", remarking that the heteroglossia of certain well-known 'Bombay novels' epitomize the sense of novelty and "variety" found in Bombay (105, 104). Hence, in an essay on Satyajit Ray, Salman Rushdie refers to Bombay as a city of "linguistic verve,

and...metropolitan excitement”, neglecting to mention that the linguistic heterogeneity of the city has been predicated on various historical ruptures, and the movement – voluntary *and forced* – of communities of people to Bombay (*Imaginary Homelands* 110).

The “standard literary evocations of Bombay” seem particularly concerned with presenting it as a city unaffected by the demands or upheavals of the nation, or else, as an embodiment of the very heterogeneity and hybridity of the nation; a city in which individual and communal identities are revealed to be contingent and flexible; and a place in which linguistic variety stands in for the heterogeneity of the city and state (Varma 138). In Rushdie’s novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, for instance, the city is positioned as an emphatically global space by virtue of its linguistic diversity:

Bombay’s garbage argot, *Mumbai ki kachrapati baat-cheet*, in which a sentence could begin in one language, swoop through a second and even a third and then swing back to the first. Our acronymic name for it was Hug-me. Hindi Urdu Gujarati Marathi English. (7)

As Neelam Srivastava notes, such portrayals of the city by Rushdie “celebrate[]...cultural globalization as an inevitable by-product of economic globalization”, figuring the city as a participant in a new and flexible world order (*Secularism* 177). Similarly in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Rushdie figures the Moor Zogoiby as an embodiment of the diversity of the city, and in doing so, deconstructs the very notion of identity: “I...was raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur...Yessir: a real Bombay mix” (104). Although the novel does chronicle the violent history of the city, Bombay is portrayed primarily as a flexible and performative city: it was “a human sea. It was an ocean of stories;

we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once” (350). In *The Satanic Verses* too, the city is personified as a “metropolis of tongues and whispers”, yet again emphasizing its polyvocality (14).

It is not only in Rushdie’s portrayals that Bombay is represented as a shifting, protean space. For Suketu Mehta as well, the city provides the opportunity for subjects to transcend the restrictions of class or ethnic identities, and he draws attention to its performative dimension by calling it a city of “multiple aliases” (15). David Gregory Roberts’s *Shantaram*, likewise, characterizes the city by the “intensity” of its “carnival” atmosphere: “it was as if I’d found myself in a performance of some extravagant, complex drama” (21). Referencing its status as a mediated space, Amrit Gangar calls it “the most *cinematic* [of] cities” (“Mumbai and Cinema” 134) and, in an earlier article, “the city of dreams” (“Films from the City of Dreams” 210). Literary portrayals of the city thus seem to self-consciously draw on spectacular and filmic imagery to describe Bombay in typically over-the-top, unrestrained style. It is no surprise that quintessential Bombay novels – by Rushdie as well as Vikram Chandra and Rohinton Mistry – are characteristically vast, complex in structure, heterogeneous in style, and making use of cinematic images and themes, formally embodying, for Ashcroft, the “expansive” physical dimension of the city (“Urbanism” 501).

Varma has observed the irony that the city’s economic and political decline – captured most spectacularly in the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1992-1993 that were incited by the Shiv Sena, and epitomized further in the city’s renaming in 1995 – has been accompanied and followed by the increasing visibility and citationality of Bombay in literature: “it is only now that Bombay is being taken seriously in the global city literature” (“Provincializing” 81). However, the

currency of such portrayals of Bombay's heterogeneity, and the dominance of representations of the city as a space of difference, resistance and exuberance, perhaps emerge precisely as a result of the new political threats facing the city. As Varma, Appadurai and others have chronicled, the city's recent problems make apparent the extent to which what is now Mumbai is caught within neo-liberal, neo-colonial, and chauvinist ideologies. Subsequently, nostalgic literary imaginings of the city's plurality become all the more urgent. As Bruce King remarked of Jeet Thayil's recent novel *Narcopolis*, it is "an elegy for the tolerant bohemian Bombay" of the 1970s – even though, I would add, this tolerant earlier city was itself imbricated and inscribed within various sets of imperial, neo-imperial, national and regional discourses ("Review Essay" 444).

The projection of Bombay as a "melting pot", moreover, and its portrayal as a city of new and contingent identities and social formations, provides only one perspective on the city – one that seems intent on capturing something of the city in its entirety (Ashcroft 499). As Ashcroft and Shahani observe, the most well-known Bombay novels – or at least those circulated in postcolonial syllabuses in the predominantly Western academy – are written by diasporic writers, looking back on Bombay from a distance (Shahani 107). As I go on to suggest, however, the city is resistant to such comprehensive mapping: instead, and as Marxist geographers have demonstrated, it is in its immediate and social interactions and exchanges that the city is situated. As Henri Lefebvre argued in *Right to the City*, the city has a "specificity" that "depends...essentially on relations of immediacy, of direct relations between persons and groups which make up society" ("The Specificity of the City" 100-101). Drawing on Lefebvre's work in particular, and tracing parallels between his immediate approach to space and Adorno's immanent approach to the work of art, this chapter

examines how Bombay poetry remaps the city from an intimate and embodied perspective. Recent prose works from Bombay-based novelists might be said to fulfil a similar spatial remapping: Cyrus Mistry's debut novel *The Radiance of Ashes*, for instance, remaps Bombay from the perspective of a single peripatetic narrator, while Thrity Umrigar's *Bombay Time* details the interconnected lives of the Parsi residents of one particular building in the city, building up an intimate portrait of a specific group of friends via a detailed mediation on the domestic spaces of just one neighbourhood. However, this chapter suggests that it is *poetry* of the city – the formation of its verses and sentences, the geographical and temporal stretch of its imagery, the resonances of its use of language, and what Ramazani contends to be its “place-enjambling potentialities” – that provides access to what more expansive accounts cannot: the experience of being and living in Bombay, and the social and phenomenological textures of the city (*Transnational* 14).

The intimate, lived experience of Bombay

In his poem entitled “Bandra”, taken from his debut 1980 volume *First Offence*, Saleem Peeradina imagines the Bombay suburb as a living, physical body. The opening lines emphasise the intimate relationship that exists between the poet and the city:

I love the environs
 of your body
 and its many insights. I recognise
 every act, every gesture, every foul thought
 though I'll never understand
 your central purpose. I do not wish to.
 To grasp you is to cease to need you. It is

your incompleteness, inconstancy
attaches me to you. (13)

The poet begins as though he is addressing a lover, personifying the city and the “environs / of your body”, and expressing the emotional bond that exists between them. The poet needs Bandra, and is compelled by its familiar “act[s]”, “gestures[s]”, and by its “inconstancy”. Their relationship is physical and intimate, the use of sensuous images and sexual connotations reinforcing the immediacy of their encounter. Like a lover, however, the city does not fully disclose its secrets or “purpose” to the poet: instead, in these lines and throughout the poem, Peeradina can only grasp Bandra in intimate snapshots and impressions – of its various smells, colours, textures of “blackened tiles and water tanks” – compiling a list of the suburb’s features without ever seeking to “grasp you”. Acknowledging the impossibility of defining Bandra, or his relationship with the place, Peeradina articulates instead its continual defiance of categorization: “Your mud is versatile”, he writes (13). This image is striking, for the contingency and indefinability the poet locates in this suburb is explicitly not an abstracted notion of fluidity or hybridity. Rather, the very material of Bandra – its “mud” – is what renders it so “versatile”.

Peeradina’s poem projects Bandra as impossible to map or define, but his portrayal of the ‘versatility’ of the suburb does not suggest that Bandra is simply an endlessly mutating, protean space that is unaffected by historical or material events. Instead, the poet chronicles the specific histories and contexts of Bandra, individuating this particular area of Bombay. He pauses, for instance, to note the “flower-seller” at work in “the shadow of the mosque’s cool minars”, observing that he “keeps himself going on tea and tobacco spit” (13). Peeradina captures something of the atmosphere of Bandra in his poem, a part of the city

that is as familiar to him as a lover, and yet which retains unknowable “environs”. Writing of Bandra more recently, Amit Chaudhuri too articulates the pace of these lanes, reflecting on the area’s “cottages hung with flora, and fainting, drooping / bougainvillaea,” and where “men inside their / single rooms / sing quaint Portuguese love songs” (“St Cyril Road, Bombay”, *St Cyril Road and Other Poems* 5).

Both poems provide a partial snapshot of Bandra, offering the reader a glimpse into a way and a pace of life not readily associated with Bombay. As Chaudhuri remarks, this world is far removed from the Bombay of his poem’s title, which is portrayed, in contrast, as an overwhelming environment:

There, rootless, garish, and widely
cosmopolitan,
where every executive is an executive, and every other man a
Caliban
in two-toned shoes, and each building is a brooding tyrant
that towers
over streets ogling with fat lights (5-6)

The narrator is unable to relate to such a generic space: the alliterative repetition of “every executive is an executive” implies a uniformity to this alter-Bombay, and a flattening out of the specificities of the city. This “garish” city is, moreover, an ominous place: street lights are disassociated from their protective function and are “ogling” over citizens, while “each buildings is a brooding tryant”. Such negative associations of the city – as lecherous, sinister, monotonous – invite a reconsideration of the celebrated cosmopolitanism of the city, which, as Timothy Brennan has argued in a different context, has become “less an analytical category than a normative projection” in much contemporary theory (1). As Brennan contends of New York’s Lower East Side, the claims that

have been made for its cosmopolitan make-up occlude the social and temporal “pluralism of the area” in favour of a kind of branded and “performative” understanding of the term (170). As Chaudhuri’s narrator notes above, Bombay is “widely / cosmopolitan” – an interesting choice of words that implies a similar homogenizing of the city and a disarticulation of its particular localities. The elongated sound of “widely”, and the multi-syllabic “cosmopolitan” reinforce the impression that the city centre is subsuming physical terrain and imaginative experience; these words thus capture not Ashcroft’s “expansive” envisaging of the city but, on the contrary, something of the expanding and encroaching dimension of Bombay (Ashcroft 501). The narrator’s decision, therefore, to situate himself on St Cyril Road in Bandra, is presented as a conscious decision over the representational space of the city: he chooses the local neighbourhood of “here”, as opposed to the vast scale of the city, “[t]here”. As the narrator of the poem explains: “I won’t live in a / pillar of stone, / as ants and spiders live in the cracks of walls...”; “That’s why I’ve come to / St Cyril Road” (6).

Peeradina and Chaudhuri contemplate the city in general, and Bandra in particular, as a site of immediate, local and sensory experiences. In privileging such small spaces of the city, these poets put into practice what Sara Blair observes to be pressing concerns for Marxist cultural geographers – thinkers like David Harvey and Lefebvre, who typically “eschew the pleasures of postmodernspeak...for their own sake [and] seek to open that discourse to a kind of ethnography, one that considers the effects of late stage capitalism on the ground and close in” (548). The contrast in Chaudhuri’s poem, for instance, between the languid afternoons and evenings in Bandra on the one hand – formally and rhythmically realized by the elongated sounds of “fainting, drooping / bougainvillaea” – and the monotonous and automated pace of central Bombay

on the other, with its quick paced, staccato declaration that “every executive is an executive”, reveals that capital in Bombay does not function in the same way across the entire city. Modernisation, industrialization, urbanization – these are all variable and differential experiences that demonstrate “the powers of capital to fragment, divide and differentiate, to absorb, transform, and even exacerbate ancient cultural divisions, to produce spatial differentiations” in the city (Harvey *Spaces of Hope* 40).

In departing from the wide, macro-scale of the “There” of the city, these poems disarticulate the colonial and neo-colonial conception of space as something that can be controlled and ordered. As Sara Upstone notes, colonial strategies used to chart and document newly acquired territory perpetuated a “myth of spatial order”: maps were produced showing clearly segregated cities, for example; lands were divided; peoples categorized according to narrow understandings of caste and race, and private, domestic spaces were projected as “idealized and apolitical location[s]” – strategies that were all reliant on an assumption of space as neutral, passive material to be simply reshaped according to an ideological will (8, 115). The “chaotic reality” of space, Upstone argues, was elided by such projects and has continued to be overwritten by neo-colonial paradigms of urban re-development, for instance (which would include the routine slum clearances / beautification projects carried out in Bombay and other Indian cities) (8).

Upstone argues that postcolonial representations of space overturn the “myth of spatial order” and challenge, in particular, the primacy of the nation as a space of political community (8). Although I find this disarticulation of the nation problematic, especially given Bombay’s own fraught relationship with India and the national scale, it is possible to identify in Chaudhuri’s poetry

above a reappraisal of the claims of the global city. His explicit focus on individual houses and experiences in a particular Bombay suburb distances his work from the highly mediated image of Bombay, while his animation of the domestic sphere – of houses and the daily routines of householders – imbues a new significance to the private realm in the city. As Upstone suggests, the home in colonial discourse is often figured as a female space of domesticity, but is at the same time popularly identified as being a “microcosm of the colonial tabulation of space”, a sphere where the values of Empire are articulated (117). In Chaudhuri’s re-imagining, on the contrary, the home is an unpredictable series of impressions, alerting us to what Edward Soja calls “life’s intimate sociality” (104). Hence the narrator often notes the particular sounds of his surroundings, which lend the lane and neighbourhood its particularity. In “St Cyril Road Sequence”, the narrator recreates the felt environment of his quiet lane: “I’m lulled by the sound of workmen / delving the road” (9). As the narrator listens to the comings and goings around him, he is all too aware that these rhythms are fleeting:

Each sound lacks permanence, each wakeful image
and its sharp flowering and slow fading to a zero
in this white, sunwhite noon, is a constant loss
of itself, and then a recovery, a glowing echo
surfacing from a dark, centreless well (9)

Chaudhuri’s lack of end-line punctuation here, and long elongated phrases – “flowering and slow fading”, “surfacing from a dark, centreless well” – indicates something of the pace of life on St Cyril Road. Even the workmen’s labour is soothing, “like a recurrent Chinese / gong”, rather than mechanical and jarring. In fact, by breaking down the impressions into “Each sound”, “Each wakeful

image”, the poem indicates the intimate way in which a subject relates to their surroundings, breaking down the abstract space of Bombay into the experiential units of individual sounds.

The poets suggest a way of conceptualizing and knowing the city that is founded not on visual representation, nor on empirical, quantifiable facts, but on what Lefebvre noted in *The Production of Space* to be the “lived” and embodied experience of space (39). Lefebvre introduced the term “representational spaces” to refer to “space as directly *lived*” (39):

Representational spaces...need obey no rules of consistency or cohesive-ness. Redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history – in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people. (41)

He continues:

Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus ultimately implies time...it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic. (42)

Lefebvre’s words suggest that to study space and to fully understand it, theorists have to do more than simply describe what is present there in terms of its infrastructure, buildings, planned areas and institutions. These “mere descriptions...never achieve analytical, much less theoretical, status”, unless accompanied by some understanding of the social experience of the subject in these spaces (7).

Lefebvre was more explicit about his concern with realizing the intimate experience of space in his co-authored work, with Catherine Régulier, “Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities”. In this essay, Lefebvre addresses a central problem facing urban theorists and sociologists: compiling data and information about the city is vital, he recognized, if the city is to be changed in any meaningful way; but comprehensive knowledge of space is an unrealizable project, one associated with the dogmatic practices of the state. Lefebvre thus encouraged the urban researcher – or rhythm analyst – to immerse themselves in the immediacy of the city, urging them to abandon their methodological preconceptions and learn instead to listen. The rhythm analyst is “more aware of times than of spaces, of moods than of images, of the atmosphere”, and is attuned to the mood and experience of a place as much as its visual or political features (229). Rather than gaining objective knowledge about the city therefore, the rhythm analyst will instead emerge with an attuned sense of the “polyrhythmical” dimension of even the most inconsequential areas (230).

Poetry and lived space

The rhythms of the city, and the intimacy of social relations, Lefebvre noted in “Seen from a Window”, cannot be represented according to a linear, empirical narrative, even though the things seen in the city “position themselves to your eyes in a permanence, in a spatial simultaneity” (222). However, every building, tree, street – every tangible space the analyst encounters in the city – “has its [own] rhythms” which “[n]o camera, no image or sequence of images can show” (222, 226). The local space, in other words, has a “complex phenomenological quality” that is not suited to conventional, or linear narrative expression

(Appadurai *Modernity at Large* 178). Hence, although Ashcroft referred to the “expansive” dimension of Bombay, indicating that its vast scale lent itself especially well to similarly expansive prose or filmic portrayals, Lefebvre’s words caution against analysts or writers attempting to encompass or map the city in such a way (501). To do so, for Lefebvre, was to be complicit with the hegemonic agenda of the state – an authority that is “refused by the intimate” (“Rhythmanalysis” 238).

Lefebvre insisted that attending to the smallest rhythms of the city constituted a specific act of resistance to the control and authority of the state. The approach he encouraged researchers to take bears striking parallels with Adorno’s contention in *Negative Dialectics*, *Aesthetic Theory* and “On Lyric Poetry and Society” that the artwork’s resistance resided in its nonidentity with the empirical world. For a poem to seek semblance with the world, Adorno argued, would be to concede power to the administered sphere: instead, “[t]he less the work thematises the relationship of “I” and society, the more spontaneously it crystallises of its own accord in the poem” (“Lyric Poetry” 346). For both thinkers, therefore, it was *form* – the form of urban data collection, or the form of aesthetic expression – that lent the text its ability to counter capitalist hegemony and state control and elucidate the various experiences offered in and by the city. Lefebvre and Adorno would both insist that to figure space, or to articulate a response to modernity, required a particular kind of representational approach, one that could attend to those fragmentary and transient experiences that could not obviously be ‘mapped’.

To return to Chaudhuri’s poems, then, written in the wake of the neo-liberalisation of Bombay’s economy and his own family’s move from the central location of Marine Drive to the Christian suburb of Bandra, we can identify the

repercussions of his imagery and what, for Adorno, would comprise the “noncommunication” of his writing (AT 6). Detailing a Sunday afternoon at home in Bandra, the poet writes:

This Sunday raptness, this biblical
 quietude unlabouring in waves, the crows pre-arranged on the
 boughs, the leaves
 a parrot green, and the flies re-learning
 a disciplined dance...No movement but this dance, no
 movement
 but a mimicry of shadows. And no voice
 to be heard but the newspaper's, as it crackles peremptorily in
 an old man's tangled fingers. (11-12)

These lines do not attempt to describe Bandra: there is no indication who the old man is, for instance, and the poem does not recount an event or story. Instead, the peculiar resonance of a Sunday afternoon is expressed, implicitly rejecting what Arjun Appadurai notes to be the “inherently colonizing” agenda of neighbourhoods and city planners, which rely on circumscribing specific spaces as belonging exclusively to certain groups (*Modernity* 183). Chaudhuri's Bandra is a far cry from the conflicted space of Bombay with its clearly demarcated Hindu-Muslim areas. Instead, what has precedence is the experience of “*This Sunday*” moment and “*this dance*”(11).

The poet Manohar Shetty has described writing poetry in Bombay during the 1970s as a way of coming to terms with the overbearing environment of the city, “which retched (sic) you out every evening from crammed trains and buses and regurgitated you the next morning. The queues at bus-stands were like the tails of reptiles which grew back tirelessly and the traffic an endless purring, choking chain” (“Drifting on a High Tide”). Crafting a poem in response to this

overwhelming environment was thus, for Shetty, an alternative way of inhabiting Bombay, and a means of capturing something of its immediacy. His own Bombay poems, like those of Peeradina and Chaudhuri, can be read as a deliberate mode of resistance against the “pulsating...energy” of the city, and a counter to representations of Bombay that over-determined it as a city of spectacular hybridity. His work often focuses on one specific scene or individual, situating them clearly within the local and particular context. In “Neighbourhood”, for instance, taken from his 1980 volume *A Guarded Space*, Shetty depicts an old woman searching for lice in her grand-daughter’s hair, emphasizing the familiar and domestic routine of this activity: “in the shaded veranda / The same scene played / over and over” (in *Domestic Creatures* 13). The narrator goes on to depict the ordinary routines ongoing in this area, watching “a servant boy’s scooped back” as he “rubs and scrubs /[...] / Steel spoons and cups”, “A cow gazing with baleful eyes” and a man “who flogs / Sodden clothes with a squat / Wooden bat” (13-14). The poem makes use of rhyme throughout, lending the verse a sense of structural and rhythmical cohesiveness. As Shetty’s essay implies, and as his poem reiterates, poetry written in such an overwhelming city can resist its homogenizing impulses by its structural particularity, his words reinforcing Adorno’s contention that it is poetry’s form that enables it to counter commercial and pedagogic expectations: poetry “speak[s] by virtue of everything particular” to it (AT 5).

Bombay’s poets do not seem concerned to chronicle the city, or represent it in its entirety. Returning to Chaudhuri’s poetry, it is possible indeed to identify a disarticulation of objective or comprehensive representation, and an attendance instead to the various rhythms of a single space. The various impressions the narrator records in “St Cyril Road Sequence” leave a deeply

personal impression on him, the poet demonstrating, therefore, that space and our geographical surroundings, have a deeply intimate and imaginative impact. As the darkness falls on the lane, the narrator “imagined / an impassioned movement beneath the still surface” of the darkness, “as if ants were travelling by hidden routes under / the sleeping earth, or a fin was dipping again, again, / past the calm skin of water” (13). This image of a fin alludes to a scene from Virginia Woolf’s novel *The Waves*, its incorporation in Chaudhuri’s poem revealing the imaginative and creative prompts contained in a particular setting. The narrator can no longer see the lane or its features: however “Twice, I sensed hands / behind windows, strike a match, and a swift badge of flame / open and shut like a hot mouth” (13). The more details the narrator accumulates about the lane, the more impressions he records about its sights and sounds, smells and ambience, the further away the poem moves from representation in its factual or documentary sense. The city is instead figured as a richly evocative and imaginative space – a space in which single and apparently inconsequential details and impressions come together to articulate a deeply personal invocation of Bombay.

The local production of hybridity

For Lefebvre, as well as for critics and geographers he inspired, such as Harvey and Jane Jacobs, finding a way to articulate the complexities of space in its immediate and social contexts did not mean abandoning any intention to understand (or change) the city. On the contrary, as Jacobs argues, an articulation of the micro-level enables a better understanding of political and economic power structures at the macro: “through the local, rendered in

palimpsest, a space that constantly reveals its past uses and histories.

“Mumbai: A Song” includes very few full stops or end-line punctuation, making use instead of fragmented running lines that embody, visually and sonically, the sense of accumulation constitutive of the city.

Ramazani has suggested that poetry has “place-enjambling potentialities” a quality he locates in poetry’s formal “compression [that] demands that discrepant idioms and soundscapes, tropes and subgenres, be forced together with intensity” (*Transnational* 14, 4). Ramazani examines the ‘stretch’ of poetry, analyzing the way in which an individual poem can bring divergent locations and historical pasts into contact with each other – often within a single line unit. Poetry’s ability to bring together vastly different geographical and historical references he suggests, demonstrates “global modernity’s interlinking of widely separated sites”, formally embodying the impact of modernity and globalization on the world (14). As Chitre’s poem demonstrates, however, the spatial stretch of poetry does not only enable the poet to reveal associations between different nations and periods; the stretch is apparent too in poetry written about one specific location, city, or street. His poem draws together the divergent histories of Bombay – its colonial, literary and economic pasts – revealing each to be a constitutive element in the city’s present day configuration.

When commentators refer to the hybridity of Bombay, the term is often disassociated from the various and sometimes contradictory histories that have produced the city. Chitre is critical of writers and theorists who use the city in such a de-historicized way: in “The View from Chinchpokli”, the poet juxtaposes the official and monumental spaces of the city – those that have captured the attention of historians and writers – with the hidden everyday reality of Bombay. The poem depicts the narrator’s experiences on a particular day, chronicling his

own partial experience of the city, as a privileged, middle-class male. Satirising his own obliviousness to the city's poverty, the poem begins with the narrator at the breakfast table: "I begin to read / The morning's papers and cover my naked mind / With global events" (55). The protagonist seeks refuge in these "global events" in order to avoid encountering the more local realities of the city – the "gross millions are temporarily out of sight" (55).

The hidden "gross millions", however, inform the narrator's own experience of the city, haunting him as he continues with his day. As his taxi prepares to drive him across Bombay, he pre-empts his own reactions to his surroundings:

I will pass the Victoria Gardens Zoo without blinking.
 Byculla Bridge will give me the first line of a poem.
 And the Christians, Jews and Muslims on my way
 Will inspire a brilliant critique of contemporary
 Indian culture. Of course I will ignore
 The junk-shops, the tea-houses, the restaurants, the markets
 I zig-zag through. (55)

The present tense, and the poet's repetition of "I will", suggests his criticism of writers and artists who use the city simply as material to work with, as well as reflecting on his own privileged position as a poet. He is especially critical of writers who draw on Bombay's multicultural demographic in order to project generalized accounts of its plurality, the poem pre-empting and critiquing, it seems to me, the kind of "cacophonous, polyvocal" portrayals that have become more recently familiar (Varma 138). The cosmopolitanism of Bombay, Chitre's poem suggests, lies not in referencing the multiculturalism of the city – "the Christians, Jews and Muslims" the narrator passes – but in the overlooked and intimate spaces of individuals. The poem responds in advance therefore to

Chaudhuri's dispute with an official understanding of Bombay's cosmopolitan identity as owing to its "variegated co-existence": as both poets realize, the hybridity and cosmopolitan constitution of the city is found at a far more intimate, personal level ("Cosmopolitanism's Alien Face" 96).

Subsequent chapters examine in detail how poets from the 1950s onwards have responded to the particular challenges involved in representing Bombay. Nissim Ezekiel, I suggest, developed an increasingly vernacular idiom and style, moving away from his early engagement with the city-at-large in order to focus instead on the nuances of its class and gender specific spaces. Adil Jussawalla engages more extensively with Bombay's politically violent history, using poetic forms to give voice to the increasingly disorienting experience of modernity in the city. In Gieve Patel and Arun Kolatkar's Bombay poetry, there is an increasing concern with representing the way Bombay is experienced – with the affective dimension of the city, and its sensory encounters. Kolatkar's work in particular offers a response to the challenges of this global city, creating a material portrait of its built and lived environment. As the poet writes in the opening poem of *Kala Ghoda Poems*: "the city slowly reconstructs itself, / stone by numbered stone", each small unit of space rendered significant and meaningful to the constitution of the city. "Trees arrive at themselves, / each one ready / to give an account of its leaves" ("Pi-dog" CP 75). These poets, I show, alert their readers to such peripheral and invisible experiences of the city, revealing them to be constitutive of Bombay itself.

The material contexts of poetry in the city

If close, formal analyses of individual poems is revealing of the complex local and phenomenological experience of the city, then a materialist excavation of Bombay's poetry further reinforces its cultural and spatial specificity. As Sara Blair has argued in a recent article on the Bloomsbury group, there is a tendency in modernist scholarship to simply mythologise 'Bloomsbury' as an abstract conceptual idea rather than a specific geo-cultural site, situated in a particular area of London at a particular moment in time. Critics, she notes, "impl[y] that Bloomsbury is constituted by an 'aura'...that makes its projects and politics notoriously difficult to situate" ("Local Modernity, Global Modernism" 813). In particular, for Blair, Bloomsbury and its literature needs to have "its life as a local phenomenon" re-emphasised, for modernism "is among other things a determined response to the specific spaces in which it takes shape" (814). Blair goes on to make the claim that by conducting research into the specific geo-cultural situation of Bloomsbury, literary critics are better able to understand how literature by its members went on to make such a larger-than-local impact: "It is paradoxically...the distinctive entanglement of Bloomsbury (the project) with Bloomsbury (the place) that enables the former to become more than a local phenomenon" (814). Hence, for instance, Blair demonstrates that in tourist guide books and maps of the early twentieth-century, the area of Bloomsbury was explicitly located as a marginal area: it was not central London, nor financial London, nor proximal to the city's state power. This geographical marginality, she suggests, is later formally evidenced in the aesthetic of the Bloomsbury group writers – as is the progressive politics, which has its geo-cultural roots in this particular area of the city.

Blair thus encourages a rethinking of urban space as a set of social variants and cultural sites, inviting a critical engagement with the abstracted

terms by which London, and Bloomsbury, have been defined. In a (post) colonial context too, Caroline Rooney recently suggested that materialist, historical, archival research into certain meeting places and arts centres in colonially administered Harare or Cairo could dislodge certain assumptions made about these respective cities. In her recollections of Harare, for instance, Rooney reflects on places such as the Book Café (formerly Hunter's Lodge), noting its function as a meeting place for variously marginalized social groups in Rhodesia. These "locally embedded cosmopolitan cultures", she suggests, went against the grain of political hegemony, their existence calling into question dogmatic readings of Rhodesian culture as limited and perpetually segregated (139). Of course, Rooney emphasizes, it was a segregated and restrictive context, but the places in which a "pariah" culture of artists, writers, misfits, and dissidents met and socialized, does disarticulate the absolutism of this segregated model. Blair and Rooney's historical, archival excavations of particular places in the city thus suggests the significance of a geo-cultural understanding of place, intervening in the dominant myths surrounding particular metropolises. Their approach implicitly concurs with Lefebvre's insistence that analysts of cities must attend to the social dimension of the city, or else they can do little more than achieve a "purely descriptive level" of understanding about its culture, economy and politics (*Production 7*). The city thus remains conceptualized according to a descriptive stereotype, while the critical understanding of certain city groups – Bloomsbury writers, for instance – remain superficially understood.

In the case of Bombay, there has been a notable critical interest in alternative materialist mappings of the city, especially studies that examine it 'from below'. In her 2000 study *Rediscovering Dharavi*, for example, the

journalist Kalpana Sharma conducted research into the formal and informal economies of the area of the city known as Asia's largest slum. Her study interrogates the derogatory connotations of slums, attending to the complex and makeshift economies and social practices emerging in such urban communities. Similarly Robert Neuwirth's 2004 *Shadow Cities, A Billion Squatters: A New Urban World* analysed the informal economies of the megacities of the global south. During his research, Neuwirth spent time living in slum housing in Mumbai, Istanbul and Nairobi, making an ethnographic study of the social interactions of slums via an on the ground approach. Neuwirth's and Sharma's studies thus reorient critical attention onto an alternative image of the city, disarticulating the salience of Bombay's uncritical hybridity as well as its dystopian portrayal as the ultimate space of contemporary abjection.

This thesis, however, is concerned with uncovering alternative spaces in the city that have not, as yet, received critical attention – specifically its marginal spaces of high literary culture. It is the city's slums that have captured the critical and sociological imagination, while South Bombay, the suburbs, and the downtown parts of the city have not featured in remappings at all. Perhaps, as Rooney suggests in her essay, the critical unease with examining affluent areas of the city relates to a comparable disquiet, on behalf of cultural critics, concerned to avoid seeming to ignore the urgent racial, class, caste and gendered divisions so apparent in the (post) colonial city. Moreover, shanty and slum dwellings are defined by their very vulnerability and impermanence: the buildings are under continual threat of damage or removal by the state, making these places particularly pertinent to theorise counter-cultural urban movements, social formations and spaces.

Just as Blair details the relationship between modernist literary and artistic practices and the particular parts of London in which modernist figures worked, so too does Prakash give a sense of the “intellectual hub” in downtown Bombay in the years preceding and following 1947 (*Fables* 126). Before independence, the city was home to writers including Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai, as well as those involved in the Progressive Writer’s Association (Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmed Ali, Rashid Jahan) and the Progressive Artist’s Association (M.F Husain, S.H Raza, Francis Newton Souza). As Prakash notes, the writers “fell into disarray” after independence, and their previously nationalistic agenda was replaced instead with a politically combative approach (148). Writers who went on to work for the film industry, for instance, such as Sahir Ludhianvi, produced “angry and searing critiques of society” prompted by – and situated in – Bombay (149).

Reflecting on Indian poets working in English, however, specific local places in the city become apparent as being especially significant. As Ranjit Hoskote has remarked, the early group of poets associated with Ezekiel “operate[d] in an informal network of reading circles and discussion platforms”, many of which were located in the Kala Ghoda area of South Bombay (xix). The area’s imposing buildings – a legacy of the colonial period – indicate its significance to the British administration: it was here that the Courts were located, and this part of the city that was especially invested in during the mid-nineteenth century. It was also, moreover, a vibrant cultural centre, and remained significant after 1947: the Prince of Wales Museum, the Jehangir Gallery, the Army and Navy Building – home to the architectural radical group *MARG*, among others – the National Gallery of Modern Art, Rhythm House Music store and Elphinstone College are just a few of the centres and

institutions in the area that lend the neighbourhood its artistic and cultural vibrancy. The Samovar Restaurant at the Jehangir Gallery, for instance, was a regular meeting place for poets including Ezekiel and Patel in the 1960s, and the site for informal recitals and readings (King 24). As Pavankumar Jain told me in an interview at the Samovar, its proximity to arts centres, the library, university campuses and transport links made it the “ideal venue” for poets and artists to convene. Hence, the Samovar has garnered a reputation as a place amenable to creative events in a way that Jain suggested had far exceeded the significance of the official exhibits on display in the gallery itself (interview 19.8.11).⁶ The Samovar was, for instance, a key venue in which Mehrotra was able to sell copies of his little magazines *damn you* and *ezra* to receptive artists and friends: indeed, if, as Anjum Hasan suggests, Bombay was “a place that, uniquely, made the writing of poetry possible”, then specific places like the Samovar can be viewed as particularly enabling for the production and dissemination of early work (Hasan “Your Missing Person”).

As King notes, many of the city’s well-known poets studied or taught at Elphinstone College, St Xavier’s or Mithibai – which were affiliated with the University of Bombay. Naresh Fernandes describes these campuses “bubbling with discussions about what exactly the nation had managed to achieve” in the early 1970s (*Time Out* 25), while Eunice de Souza referred in an interview to the exhilarating atmosphere of the mid-1960s onwards, when the beginnings of teaching unions mobilized a previously politically invisible group of middle-class citizens: “there was a palpable sense of something going on at the university”, she recalled, indicating the strategic importance of the university as a site of creative insurgency (interview 10.8.11). King notes that poetry readings were

⁶ The artistic history of the restaurant is the subject of a recent book by Usha R. Kanna, *The Making of Samovar*.

regular occurrences at college campuses from the 1960s onwards, while the early experimental little magazine *The Bombay Duck*, was actually funded by the English department of Mithibai College. While it can be surmised that the college regretted its patronage of the magazine, the support they lent their student projects does suggest that the city was, by the 1960s, a receptive space for the arts and poetry.⁷

Hence, for instance, a volume of *Kavi India* from 1982 carries a centre page report of a recent evening of poetry and music, organized by the magazine's editors and the Max Mueller Bhavan and held at Stuttgart Hall (Vol. 3, No. 2). The grainy photograph depicts Imtiaz Dharker and Saleem Peeradina reading in an auditorium, while the double-page spread mentions that music was provided by the upcoming musician Nandu Bhende. Such events, King notes, were commonplace throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, and were typically organized by university students and staff working at the city's university campuses (38-39).

It is impossible to evaluate the impact of such events – and difficult to produce a detailed account of similar readings: given that they were intermittently reported in the city's press, they now exist often as vague recollections of the poets themselves. However, these literary events constitute a vital archive, evidencing a specific example of Lefebvre's famous maxim: as he argued, "(social) space is a (social product)" and is generated in the interactions and activities of people in a certain time and place (*Production* 26). Poetry reading groups, public readings and the interactions between poets in Bombay thus enable critics to come to understand the processes that have been involved in producing the city and, to borrow from Lefebvre, "to help us to

⁷ *The Bombay Duck*, edited by S.V Pradhan and R. Parthasarathy, was published in 1965. It lasted just one issue however, before being banned for its explicit content.

grasp *how* societies generate their (social) space and time” (emphasis added 91). As Mehrotra reminds us, “[A] literary landscape is made up of much more than isolated works of literature”; rather, it is in these Lefebvrian lived moments of poetry readings and events, chance encounters and friendships, that the literary and cultural space of Bombay can be located (“Introduction” *Partial Recall* 1). Such events demonstrate the sense of community that existed between poets – an affinity that might have elided critical attention. Peeradina and Dharker, for instance, both of whom left the city and went on to pursue respective careers in the US and Europe, can be seen in this instance as part of a common event, brought together by the cultural circumstances of Bombay. The opportunities for meeting like-minded poets and artists in the city, whether in class at university, at poetry reading groups, in bookshops and music stores, working on newspapers and in advertising agencies, arguably prompted some of the collaborative projects detailed in subsequent chapters: the four founding members of Clearing House, for instance – Jussawalla, Mehrotra, Patel and Kolatkar – had met each other years previously and were familiar to one another through friends and colleagues. Likewise, little magazines founded in the city – mainstream titles such as *Poetry India*, as well as the more avant-garde examples such as *Dionysus* – were characteristically collaborative projects, a material effect of the social interactions and opportunities found in the city.

In re-situating poets and poetry in particular places of production and dissemination, it becomes possible to identify how and to what extent Bombay was an enabling city in the decades after 1947. As the following chapter notes, many of its little magazines were short-lived, many of the contributors now unknown, and many early volumes of poetry out of print and almost impossible

to access outside of Bombay. However, as Anjum Hasan suggested recently, the emphatic “localness” of this poetry is “also the mark of an achievement: the contribution to a ‘scene’ in Bombay” that would have significantly wider national and transnational implications on Indian poetry in English (“Your Missing Person”).

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of a critically immanent consideration of the city. Drawing on the insights made available by Lefebvre and Adorno in particular, I have sought to examine Bombay in a comparably grounded, formal way. Bombay is a striking city, written about and projected so much in postcolonial studies that the city itself – its particular topography, its microcosmic histories, its local areas – seem almost to have disappeared. By analyzing poetry and the spaces and places in which it was written, however, this abstracted image of Bombay is disarticulated somewhat, revealed instead to be a historical circumstance of the city rather than a definitive account of its hybrid reality. Departing from theories of space that deconstruct its materiality, moreover, this chapter has identified how poetic form and language can nuance a critical understanding of Bombay in particular, and space in general. This chapter thus introduces some of the ideas developed further in subsequent chapters, showing how – and why – an alternative trajectory of Bombay warrants critical examination.

Chapter Three

The material cultures of poetry: Bombay's little magazines

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. (Homi Bhabha *Nation and Narration* 7)

The previous chapters suggested ways in which poetry of the city is able to disarticulate certain assumptions made about Bombay in postcolonial discourses. This chapter develops my interest in the particularity of Bombay, examining the context in which some of the city's little magazines were started, and going on to consider some key titles in detail. In doing so, I suggest that it is not only the individual poem that can resist the conditions of modernity in which it was written, but the constellation of little magazines as well, which demonstrates the uneven, contradictory and contested production of modernity in India. The magazines and the poetry published in them constitute specific responses to the urbanization of the country, to new forms of cultural access, and to political upheaval. To this extent, then, they provide tangible examples of Theodor Adorno's conviction that art resists the impositions of modernity, and can "resist by its form alone the course of the world which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads" ("Commitment" 190).

As Bruce King notes, Bombay was the location in which a range of little magazines were founded, especially from the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s (*Modern Indian Poetry* 11-46). From the better-known titles such as *Quest* (1955- 1975), *Opinion* (1959-1983) and *Poetry India* (1966-7), to the more avant-garde, including *Tornado* (1967-71), *The Bombay Duck* (1968), *damn*

you: a magazine of the arts (1965-68), *ezra* (1967-71), (which was also simultaneously known as *ezra: an imagiste magazine*) and *Dionysus* (1965), magazines in this city provide critics with a highly specific material archive that invites a nuanced approach to Bombay and its particular forms of literary culture.⁸ As Bahri suggests, postcolonial studies is often seen as “operating within... global and macroscopic scales that gives a general picture by blurring specific histories”: the challenge facing critics then, is to reverse this scale and attend instead to the specific historical trajectories of material texts (23). The first section of this chapter thus develops from Chapter Two and its general introduction to Bombay’s poetry scene, asking more specifically how an examination of the city’s little literary magazines prompts a reconsideration of certain trends in postcolonial literary studies. Just as the poems I considered in Chapter Two repudiated fixed or bounded definitions of Bombay as being *either* a national or a global metropolis, the little magazine – with transcultural and trans-historical affiliations inscribed into the very materiality of its design, layout, intellectual intent and readership – rejects what Ramazani terms the “culture-of-birth determinism”, which figures postcolonial writers as speaking to or for a prescribed set of national concerns (*Transnational* 35). As Suzanne Wintch Churchill contends of the American little magazine *Others*, and which is true too, I suggest, of Bombay’s own little magazines, it “inhabited and brought into being” a set of “alternative spaces” and should be analysed not only as a single artifact, but as a product embedded in its wider social and political environment (26).

⁸ *damn you* was published from Allahabad and *ezra* from Bombay. However, King includes both titles in his “Bombay circle”, and both were primarily distributed and read in the city (45). For this reason, I consider both titles as Bombay publications here.

The postcolonial archive: a material constellation of Bombay's modernity

As detailed in the introduction to this thesis, the magazines I accessed during my research were predominantly those that were in the possession of poets generous enough to share this material with me – in particular Adil Jussawalla and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. King's study had briefly mentioned some of the key titles, but conceded that there is no central archive of Bombay's little magazines from the post-independence years. Instead, it is precisely in the personal collections of poets like Jussawalla and Mehrotra that vital magazines are found, preserved as much by chance and good fortune as by the far-sightedness of the poets themselves. Jussawalla has been especially vigilant about keeping copies of the early little magazines: when I asked him whether he knew whether it was even possible to locate a copy of *The Bombay Duck*, for instance, he simply left the room and returned a short while later with a yellowing padded envelope containing the one, and only, volume that Pradhan and Parthasarathy were allowed to publish. "I thought they would be important one day", Jussawalla told me when I asked him why he had kept the magazine (12.8.11). I have addressed the limitations of the magazine archive in my introduction, but would like here to consider briefly what the informal, material archive has to offer postcolonial critics seeking to understand the development of Indian literature in English as well as the literary cultures of Bombay.

The very fragility of the little magazines – the yellowing paper worn almost transparent by age, the fading lettering, the missing pages – immediately evidences the historical dimension of postcolonial Indian poetry. They thus dispense with what Amit Chaudhuri refers to as "the creation myth" of

Indian literature in English, which is centered in particular on Salman Rushdie and the subsequent generation of writers whose work he inspired (“Beyond Confidence” 308). This myth, Chaudhuri notes, tends to overlook the long history of Indian writing in English – and certainly of Indian writing in the vernacular languages – in order to explain the Indian writer within a largely commercial and recent “narrative of success and record growth” (309). For Timothy Brennan, the imposition of this kind of linear narrative reflects the particular salience of discourses of cultural globalization which, he argues, have paid extensive attention to popular cultural texts at the expense of attending to “the intellectual effort to produce an aesthetic access for popular use” (82). The informal, personal archive of little magazines thus provide a timely glimpse into the processes through which a canon of poets was formed, historicizing the Indian poet within a particular cultural context and gesturing to a period prior to the emergence of postcolonial studies. Jussawalla recently spoke of the “rather depressing” history of little magazines in Bombay, pointing out their relative lack of longevity, and the lack of funding and support they receive (*Nether* May/June 2011, 25). However, the very peripheral position they occupy does in fact convey something of their significance: it is precisely *because* magazines are positioned apart from capitalist ventures, and from corporately funded projects, and precisely because they require so much from the editor as an individual producer, that they are so critically insightful. The very existence of an archive of magazines, however incomplete it might be, thus historicizes and materializes Indian poetry in a way that reveals the “insurgent act” at the heart of postcolonial literary practice (Bhabha *Nation* 7).

As demonstrated in Chapter One, individual poems evidence, formally and stylistically, the heterogeneous intertexts and influences to which poetry

lays claim, revealing the accumulative and collaborative dimension of the single image. This heterogeneity is even more apparent when faced with material little magazines, because in their visual format, content, editorial style and modes of circulation, the magazines bear witness to the collaborative practices of poetry, constituting a physical manifestation of the various relationships and affiliations fostered between poets writing during the 1950s and 1960s. The list of contributors to these magazines, moreover – not only poets, but also illustrators and advisors – further reveals the spatial and material extent of literary networks during this time. Pavankumar Jain's *Tornado*, for instance, an experimental little magazine I discuss below, contains drawings and visual work by Jain's artist friends, including the eminent Bhupen Kharker and M.F Husain, showing that the 'literary scene' was a fluid and inter-medial sphere; Nissim Ezekiel's mainstream title *Quest* published early work by the experimental Arun Kolatkar, as well as some of his translations of Marathi bhakti poets, revealing the overlap between avant-garde writing and more conventional publications; Kolatkar himself was a co-founder, with Dilip Chitre, of the influential Marathi little magazine *Shabda* (1955-60), reinforcing the sense of reciprocity between English and vernacular literary cultures; and the list of magazines that exchanged with Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's *damn you* and *ezra* indicates the increasing influence of American and European avant-garde publications on Mehrotra's readers, thereby revealing the divergent influences on emerging Indian writers who were doing so much more than 'writing back' to and against metropolitan literary culture: the list includes, "*The University of Tampa Poetry Review, Wormwood Review...Manhattan Review, open skull...South Florida Poetry Journal, Outcast*", as well as the German beat magazine

"*Klactoveedsedsteen*" and the Bombay title "*Tornado*" (*ezra* No. 4, 2; *damn you* No. 5, back cover; also qtd. Mehrotra "Partial Recall" 72).

These relationships and connections thus prompt a rethinking of poetry as a collaborative venture rather than as an individual and isolated activity. Printing relies on the imposition of a degree of uniformity and standardization, and on what Robert Fraser calls the "imperialistic claims to superior efficacy" on behalf of print culture (55). In his historical account of print culture in South Asia, Fraser notes that printing emerges in tension with manuscript traditions, observing that while Western print culture valorizes the individual author, manuscript and oral traditions are "collaborative and cumulative" (46). The networks and relationships fostered by the little magazines in Bombay thus dispense with the "imperialistic" agenda associated with print culture, inviting critics to trace instead the local and international networks of which they are a vital part.

This chapter cannot hope to provide a comprehensive overview of Bombay's little magazine scene, and focuses on just a small selection of the city's titles. However, in examining some key mainstream and avant-garde titles, it does suggest ways in which material artifacts can nuance an understanding of 'the modern' and of the postcolonial city. In what follows, I thus contextualize two parallel trajectories of little literary magazines in the city: first, I introduce two mainstream publications primarily associated with Ezekiel (*Quest* and *Poetry India*), suggesting that the poetry they published and the format and style in which they did so, inaugurated a particular kind of literary modernity, contributing to the idealisation of Bombay as a paragon of progressive modernity. As I suggest, however, by the time the little magazine *Kavi* was founded in 1976, this particular conception of literary modernity

appears to be under threat. I thus turn to the more experimental titles of the 1960s (specifically *Tornado*, *The Bombay Duck*, *Dionysus* and *damn you*) in order to examine the transformation in the public role and value of the poet in the city, identifying an intervention in the image of Bombay projected by the earlier and more established publications. The little magazine thus emerges as a vital means for poets to engage in simultaneous processes of articulation and disarticulation, construction and deconstruction, part of a small and peripheral archive that is nonetheless historically and politically revealing.

Bombay's little magazines: a contextual overview

'Little magazine' is a term that immediately calls to mind European and American modernist writers such as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, and the periodicals like *The Little Review*, *Poetry* and *The Egoist*, in which they published their work. These early twentieth-century titles were founded by poets and intellectuals who felt that the arts were undergoing a crisis: "poetry alone has been left to fend for itself", declared Harriet Monroe in her opening editorial for *Poetry*, for instance, clearly indicating the high literary space her magazine intended to fill (Vol. 1, No. 1, 26). Sara Blair, among others, has characterized modernist little magazines as reactions against Victorian literary styles and cultural values, identifying these magazines as "a political force" against the literary and political context of the early twentieth-century ("Modernism and the Politics of Culture" 159).

Although this chapter does not read Bombay's little magazines as derivative of Western precursors, critics have noted the existence of what Marathi scholar Philip Engblom calls a "carefully qualified" version of modernism

in Marathi and English language poetry of the mid-twentieth-century: “something at the very least analogous to a modernist movement took place...from the 1940s to the 1960s, and one of the focal points of this development was Bombay” (37). This movement was enabled by a variety of socio-political factors, in particular, Engblom argues, the “post-industrial landscape of India...[and] the additional massive burden of ‘cultural dislocation’...brought on by its colonial experience” (37). Engblom’s words invite critics to dispense both with a historicist, linear notion of modernism as a movement that lasted from approximately 1890 – 1930, and to notice instead that modernism has emerged in geographically divergent places in different periods.⁹ Andreas Huyssen, among others, has thus demonstrated that “metropolitan culture was translated, appropriated and creatively mimicked” across the globe and has “cut across imperial and post-imperial, colonial and de-colonizing cultures” (“Geographies of Modernism” 6). Engblom, along with Mishra and Ramazani, contends that Indian poets working from the 1940s onwards stage a negotiation with the new demands of the modern city, and with the transformations modernity had wrought in the social fabric of everyday life. They read postcolonial poets as staging a response to the new material conditions in which they found themselves, analyzing postcolonial texts for evidence of what Ramazani characterizes as the tendency to “negotiate, accept, indigenize, resist, and transform foreign influences and global historical forces in accordance with their specific historical and cultural conditions” (*Transnational* xiii).

The proliferation of little magazines that were founded in Bombay in particular from the mid-1950s might thus be interpreted as a reaction against

⁹ 1890 – 1930 are the dates Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane take as ‘the modernist period’ in their influential study *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1980-1930*.

the status quo of literary culture in the post-independence period. For, while the city was an artistic and “intellectual hub” prior to and following 1947, its official literary values, reflected in the educational texts taught in the city’s schools and universities, continued to reflect the now outmoded values of imperial culture (Prakash 126). Literary syllabuses at universities, for example, taught the same predominantly Romantic canon as they had done during the colonial period, promoting a particular kind of model for younger writers to follow. Copies of Wilson College’s magazine *The Wilsonian*, published in the period immediately after independence, reveal that literary standards continued to be based on British Romantic forebears: a poetry competition advertised just months after independence, for instance, asked contributors to write a poem in imitation of Wordsworth’s ‘Happy Warrior’ (Vol XL, No. 1, October 1947). The winner, a student called Mr D. G. Nadkani, was announced in March 1948, although the editors lament even his failure to mimic the British poet: “the lines...do not even approximate to the meter of ‘Happy Warrior’” (Vol XL, No. 2, March 1948, 6).¹⁰ Letters sent more than ten years later to Jussawalla in London from his friend and fellow writer Faroukh Dhondy, further show the frustrating situation in modern institutions. Dhondy writes to Jussawalla to request that he send him some contemporary poetry, remarking that at his university just outside Bombay:

Eliot, Auden, Spender, even Yeats are very hazey (sic) figures. Our professors don’t know or don’t care and deal with anything of our own century very generally, in lazy vignettes.
(12 August 1962, Jussawalla private papers)

¹⁰ This institution, incidentally, was where Ezekiel studied in the 1940s, the magazine’s content giving some idea of the cultural hegemony he would later resist in his work.

Mehrotra made similar comments in an interview with Eunice de Souza, reflecting that at the same time as he was discovering American beat poets and contemporary literature, he was preparing for his official literature exams, which were based upon more traditional texts: “For the university exams...we read ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and ‘To a Skylark’, and Maurice Bowra’s and Graham Hough’s books on the English Romantics” (de Souza “Arvind Mehrotra” 103).

In view of this continuing hegemony of British Romanticism, and the fact that, as King points out, there were few opportunities for young poets to have their work published in the years after independence, establishing little magazines assumes a politically insurgent significance (17). In Calcutta, Purushottama Lal (P.Lal) and some of his friends at St Xavier’s College founded the Writer’s Workshop in 1958, starting their own magazine *Miscellany*, in 1959.¹¹ As suggested in Chapter Four, however, Writer’s Workshop pressed for few critical standards in the work it included in *Miscellany* and has been referred to as “the Cottage Industry of Indian Writing in English” (Singh “Another Look at P.Lal”). As Lal himself remarked in an essay for the Writer’s Workshop website, his view was that “criticism should flash the torch not wield the sceptre”, declaring that any writer who “showed promise” should be encouraged, or else “they might stop writing altogether” (“The Torch not the Sceptre”).

In contrast to *Miscellany*, the magazines I discuss below that appeared in Bombay, all evidence the editors’ and poets’ concern with showcasing the quality – rather than quantity – of Indian writing in English. In a special issue of *Quest* published by Macmillan in 1972 (*Quest* No. 74), for instance, Saleem

¹¹ Founding members of the Writer’s Workshop were Lal, Deb Kumar Das, Sasthibrata Chakravarti, Anita Desai, William Hull, Jai Ratan, Pradip Sen and Kewlian Sio (see Lal “The Torch not the Sceptre”).

Peeradina opens his editorial with a direct quote from an article in the British magazine *Encounter*, in which a writer in residence had argued that writers needed “discouragement” above all; writing amounted to the “survival of the fittest...Encouragement is like putting fertilizer on a garden full of weeds” (qtd. Peeradina ix). While the magazines that appeared in Bombay, therefore, can be read on the one hand as a reaction against hegemonic literary culture and its continuing espousal of colonial ideals, both the mainstream and avant-garde titles stage a decisive break with what one commentator has referred to as the “in-group cuteness” of Lal’s Writer’s Workshop (Hess *Quest*, No. 49, 29).

Mainstream little magazines

King has declared that “[t]here was no continuity between the new poetry and that written before independence”, identifying in individual texts and spaces of publication the emergence of a new attitude towards poetry (11). Although the poetry written by early poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, Kersey Katrak and Dom Moraes introduced new thematic and aesthetic concerns to Indian poetry, there was no obvious place in which to publish their modern work: “The initial group of modern English-language poets had few contacts with and no support from the earlier generation” (12). There was, King reports, some opportunity for poets to have single poems published in *The Illustrated Weekly*, noting that its editor C.R. Mandy was responsive to emerging writers: Ezekiel, Moraes, Katrak, Lal and Kamala Das are among the names King lists as appearing in the newspaper’s fledgling poetry pages, Ezekiel sending Mandy his poems from London where he spent three years between 1948 and 1952 (12).

However, King suggests that it was not until Ezekiel began to edit the

newly founded monthly cultural magazine *Quest* in 1955 that individual poets – who had up until this point been simply sending in their poems to a distant editor – became part of a larger community of writers. *Quest* was financed by the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom, a local branch of the International Congress for Cultural Freedom, and was headed by Mino Masani. The international branch was famously undermined in the 1960s following revelations about its links to the CIA, although there is some dispute about the extent to which individual patrons and editors were aware.¹² In spite of the controversy surrounding its patrons, however, and despite the fact that *Quest* was a general interest magazine with a large circulation of two to three thousand copies per month, its poetry section “helped make modern Indian poetry part of contemporary Indian culture”, providing an early platform for poets like Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawalla, Keki Daruwalla and Arun Kolatkar to publish their work (King 15, 56. See also chart 1, 389-396). These poets “became the nucleus of those with a serious interest in writing poetry”, the first-generation who had a place in which to publish their work (16).

Although he only served as its editor until 1957, it is Nissim Ezekiel who is most often discussed in relation to *Quest*: “The principles which Nissim laid down for himself have shaped the character of *Quest*” (Futehally “Someone Like Nissim” x). After he handed over editorial control, Ezekiel remained a literary consultant; his advice to emerging writers is legendary, and is chronicled at length in *The Best of Quest* volume. What set *Quest* apart, Futehally suggests, was that “[e]verything about it must have some relevance to India. It was to be written by Indians for Indians – for in those days we still glamorized

¹² For a detailed history of the Congress for Cultural Freedom see Peter Coleman’s *The Liberal Conspiracy: the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Post-War Europe*.

anything foreign” (x). Although this ‘rule’ would prove to be more flexible, admitting, for example, the publication of Allen Ginsberg’s poetry in Number 34, the emphasis remained on Indian writers (Winter 1962-Spring 1963). In articles on politics and culture, too, as in the advertisements for Indian industries, the poetry selected for publication then can be interpreted as constituting a strident reminder of the vibrancy and validity of Indian writing in English and of strengthening the cultural position of India. As referenced in Chapter Two, Nehru identified the Indian city as the site of “the highest cultural achievements of the age”: a Bombay based little magazine thus served as an ideal conduit in which to celebrate the high literary standards of Indian writing (“Aiming at a Democratic India” 52).

Despite the implicitly national parameters of the content, the format of *Quest* belies Ezekiel’s own insistence to distance his publication from other Indian contemporaries. Each number was published on thick and richly textured paper, and is without any illustrative design or superfluous detail. The covers are in muted colours, with the title running across the top in a block, flat, font. As Ezekiel wrote to his friend Abraham Solomon after the publication of the second issue in September 1955:

The cover this time is blue, but the geometrical set-up remains and is even reinforced inside. It suits my taste. Any sort of illustrative, pictorial (sic) or decorative designing would have been quite unacceptable. (qtd. Rao, R 121)

As scholars working in book history have noted, bibliographic details like the cover design, font, layout and the visual appearance often provide vital “clues” as to the allegiances and ambitions of magazines (Brinkman 20). Ezekiel’s insistence that *Quest* avoid any ‘illustrative’ element, and the magazine’s visual

uniformity, thus suggests his attempt to create as much distance as possible between *Quest* and more overtly decorative magazines – more specifically perhaps instigating a departure from P. Lal’s Calcutta based journal *Miscellany*, in which many poets also had work published.¹³

King emphasizes similarities between Ezekiel’s magazine and Stephen Spender’s *Encounter*, suggesting that *Quest* was, like its English counterpart, primarily a vehicle for the discussion of national issues and for the publication of national literature (15). Ezekiel’s decisions about the visual design of *Quest*, however, also position his magazine in an identifiably modern, Bombay setting. As Norma Evenson notes, the city was undergoing significant physical and infrastructural transformations in the period following independence, and was increasingly figured as a leading city of innovation and architectural individualism: it was “the principal focus for the architectural profession in India”, and the first city in which architectural investment was made by the new nation state (177). Bombay, for instance, was the first Indian city in which a skyscraper was built; it was the site of multiple land reclamation projects – resulting, in the creation of the business district at Nariman Point; and the model locale, in many ways, for Nehru’s idealized vision of planned soviet design. Ezekiel’s decision to enforce a uniform, modern, minimal style to his magazine can thus be likened to wider modernization projects in Bombay itself.

If Bombay’s print cultures implicitly figure the city a space of new poetic creation, modernity and intellectual discovery, the language used in the magazine –particularly in its reviews – further reinforces the idea of *Quest* as a cultural space of new beginnings and critical discernment. Unlike the ‘open to all’ approach favoured by Lal and his Writer’s Workshop, the reviewers featured

¹³ See Fig. 1 for an image of *Miscellany*. The cloth bound magazines parallel the design of the Writer’s Workshop book volumes discussed in Chapter Four.

in *Quest* make close and deeply critical analyses of recently published work, picking out for particular praise poetry that conveyed a strong sense of individualism and modernity. Hence in No. 49, the American critic Linda Hess commends Ezekiel's poetry for its individual style, "craftsmanship, maturity, range and depth of sensibility" (Apr-June 1966, 29, 30). Hess goes on to call Ezekiel a "poet of the city", citing in particular his work's exploration of the "attempt of man to define himself" as indicative of a new urban sensibility (30). Hess thus aligns the economic and architectural individualism associated with Bombay with the poetics of its modern writers, reiterating at the same time the role a magazine like *Quest* had to play in giving voice to such modern voices.

In 1972, Macmillan issued a special issue of *Quest*, edited by Saleem Peeradina – himself a poet who had first been published in the magazine (No. 74). The slim volume includes poems by some of the major poets writing in English, prefaced by a critical commentary that is typically written by another contributing poet. Peeradina is clear in his editorial that this selection seeks to avoid "the indiscriminate and irresponsible promotion of hacks, dopes, and outright frauds" whom he sees as having tainted the poetry scene in India (ix). The poets included, Peeradina emphasizes, are attentive to the formal craft of poetry: they work "diligently" and are "scrupulous as far as polish and precision and exact image is concerned" (ix). In the critical introductions to Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Kolatkar, Katrak, Parthasarathy, Daruwalla, Das, Mehrotra and Patel, the critics continually evoke this language of modernity, precision, and craftsmanship: Katrak is praised by Elizabeth Reuben for his "ordered" structure (61); Ezekiel admires the "rigorous process" apparent in Daruwalla's poetry (68); Jussawalla, Nita Pillai suggests, "has a feel for language within the structured cage of a poem" (93). Where commentators are critical about a

poets' work, it is frequently on account of its lack of control or its over-sentimentality: Eunice de Souza, for instance, praises Kamala Das for writing extensively about one or two subjects and themes, but calls the writing "sometimes weak and self-indulgent" (85). Its theatricality is, de Souza suggests, problematic, and she is especially critical of Das's extensive use of the first person. Like Bombay itself, visually and structurally setting itself apart from other Indian cities and from its colonial past, the city's poetry too seems to have consciously adopted a new, modern, and formally precise style.

As suggested in Chapter Two, magazines constituted important meeting places for poets too, and alongside its significance as a magazine, *Quest's* offices, located in the Army and Navy building in Kala Ghoda, offered a significant opportunity for contributing poets to gather, to discuss their work and socialize (King 15-16). King's research demonstrates that it was through this magazine – either from publishing poetry in it, from working on its editorial team, and from being part of the community that emerged around Nissim Ezekiel – that later collaborations were made possible. Ezekiel met Patel, for instance, after the younger poet sent in poems for publication in *Quest*, and he later went on to publish Patel's first, critically acclaimed volume, *Poems*. It seems possible, moreover, that later collaborative ventures like Clearing House were enabled by early meeting places such as those surrounding *Quest*. Jussawalla told me that "we all knew each other, more or less, from meeting at Nissim's office, or running in the same circles" – circles of which *Quest* can be considered as the first part (interview 8.8.11). *Quest* was, on the one hand, a general intellectual magazine that granted Indian politics and Indian literature a

prominent place, a precursor to such titles as *Opinion* (1959-1983).¹⁴ Its literary section can thus be seen as a significant new national literary space, the quality of the poetry it published serving as a provocation to critics who might otherwise question the validity of Indian literature in English. As I have suggested, however, *Quest* is more accurately viewed as a *Bombay* publication: the poetry it published, and the format of its production, set the writers apart from other Indian writers, and implicitly positioned this city as a new and modern space of literary culture.

The literary section of *Quest* can be seen as a precursor to subsequent magazines that were associated with Ezekiel and which chose to focus exclusively on poetry. In 1966, *Poetry India* was founded. Like *Quest*, it also began with secured funding – this time from the Parichay Trust, Bombay, a non-profit organization that promoted educational programs in English and Gujarati. The Trust initially employed Ezekiel as its editor – providing him with a salary, and the necessary administrative support for what was intended to be a long running, established forum for poetry in English and translation. The organization ran into financial difficulties however, and the second number carries a note “transferring ownership and management” solely to Ezekiel (Vol. 1, No. 2, 2).

This sudden responsibility, Gieve Patel suggested to me, might explain the unfortunate short-run of the magazine, which lasted for just six issues despite its high standards and critical acclaim (interview 16.8.11); for certainly *Poetry India* was critically agreed to represent “one of the high moments of

¹⁴ *Opinion* was founded by A.D. Gorwala in 1959, one of the founding members of the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom. Gorwala was especially critical of Indira Gandhi’s policies and had to stop publishing during the Emergency. In 1974, this general interest magazine started a separate, but affiliated, literary journal *Opinion Literary Quarterly*, edited by Kersey Katrak and Gauri Deshpande. King calls it an “excellent” magazine, noting that it was the first to publish Arun Kolatkar’s *Jejuri* – but it only lasted for four issues due to poor subscription rates (33).

modern Indian poetry”, a magazine that demanded high aesthetic criterion and exacting poetic standards from its contributors (King 25). Indian contributors included R. Parthasarathy, A.K. Ramanujan, Keki N. Daruwalla and P. Lal – young writers with well-esteemed reputations even by 1966. *Poetry India* also revealed itself as adept at selecting talented new writers: Arun Kolatkar’s translations of Tukaram’s poetry appear in the opening volume, for instance, as do a selection of Gieve Patel’s poems from his debut volume *Poems*, while Hubert Nazareth – a poet whose only volume *Lobo* would not be released until 1984 by Clearing House – also contributes poems to the first issue (19-20).

The title *Poetry India* gives a clear indication of the pan-Indian content and national agenda of the magazine. Each issue was intended to introduce the rich literature of a particular Indian language by translating its texts into English, putting into practice a process of nation building through the medium of print. In this way, the poetry it published complemented the slightly later literary journal *Indian Writing Today*, edited by Prabhakar Padhye and Sadanand Bhatkal between 1967 and 1970. This title did not print poetry, but included quarterly round-ups of literary developments in India’s regional languages. In both, English is thus figured as the lingua franca in which writers from different backgrounds were able to come into contact with one another.

However, while each issue of *Poetry India* contained translations – the very opening pages of the first issue began with Lal’s translations from the ancient *Rig-Vedas*, as well as carrying Ramanujan’s translations of Tamil love poetry and Kolatkar’s translations of Tukaram – English poetry is granted a predominant place. In the third issue, *Poetry India* even carries an advertisement for the “Ulka Poetry Prize”, a new poetry prize sponsored by the magazine and intended to commemorate “the best poem written originally in

English by a young Indian poet” (Vol. 1 No. 3, 28). As historian Ramchandra Guha observes, the 1950s witnessed a high level of political anxiety in India, as different communities pushed for the creation of the linguistic states to which Nehru was so opposed (198). In a very specific way, therefore, *Poetry India’s* projection of English as a language of cohesiveness and national unity, thus seems to express and extend the views of Congress – that English offered Indians a means of common communication and togetherness. However, as the pages of this magazine show, it was not only national sentiment and political values that English was able to perpetuate, but literary values and standards as well.

The suggestion that this was an exclusively Indian magazine, however, is countered by its ‘International section’, which included poetry by Linda Hess, Roy Fuller, Howard Sergeant and Thomas Blackburn (Vol. 1 No. 1). The magazine, moreover, advertised its price not only in Indian, but also in British and American currencies (Rs 1.50, 2s 6d or 50 cents), indicating further that *Poetry India* intended to reach both foreign and national audiences. In the reviews, critics evoke international comparisons too: in the first number, Nita Pillai compares Kamala Das’s *Summer in Calcutta* to poetry by Ted Hughes (Vol. 1, No. 1, 63-66), while in the second, Katrak likens Patel’s debut *Poems* to work by William Carlos Williams (Vol. 1, No. 2, 65-68). Moreover, like *Quest*, *Poetry India* adopts a visually unified format; each of its covers is a different colour, but otherwise, there is no extraneous detail, no illustrations, and a general minimalism of composition.¹⁵ There is, it seems, a deliberate attempt so situate contemporary Indian poetry in an international space, implicitly showing the validity and ‘worthiness’ of this writing.

¹⁵ See Fig. 2 for an image of *Poetry India’s* first issue.

Like *Quest*, however, *Poetry India* carries many references to its specific location as a Bombay production. From the second number, the address is given as Ezekiel's own home address, "The Retreat, Bellasis Road Bombay", while the publication received extensive support from major businesses and art centres in the city, whose advertising features prominently in the magazine: among them Asia Publishing House, Gallery Chermould, and the Strand Bookshop, as well as clothing manufacturers, Bombay banks, and retail stores. Indeed, the first issue stands at seventy-four pages, more than ten of which are advertisements for (predominantly) Bombay businesses and products. Taken alongside the international content, the overt references to the specific situation of the magazine's production and dissemination is suggestive of *Poetry India's* involvement in the creation of a particular kind of artistic scene in the city. Bombay is figured as being the city in which American and British writers were read and discussed, and the city in which writers could construct a new kind of global literary consciousness. By explicitly referencing Bombay's meeting places, yet at the same time using the magazine as a platform for the convergence of international writers, Ezekiel figures *Poetry India* as constituting a new cultural space – one in which a national sensibility meets an international one, and in which Bombay comes to stand for a particular ideal of urban modernity.

Quest and *Poetry India* both constitute – in their format, content, and even their titles – an attempt to situate Indian poetry in English within a new cultural space, and to distance modern poetry from earlier traditions and other contemporary publications. The magazines both posit themselves as arbiters of a new literary sensibility, implicitly suggesting that Bombay was the ideal setting for the emergence of this new poetic. By appealing to a familiar rhetoric of the

city as a pan-national, modern and progressive space, therefore, these little magazines were paradoxically able to convey their specific imbrication in the city. The magazine, in other words, can be identified as contributing to the production of a particular kind of image of the city – one that Chapter Two has shown would continue to exert an influence on the cultural imagination for some time.

By the 1970s, however, this image of Bombay was undergoing a transformation. The gradual deindustrialization of the city's economy and the consolidation of the Shiv Sena's power from the late 1960s, as well as increasing dissatisfaction with the Congress government, meant that a conception of the city as unequivocally progressive was no longer sustainable. In *Kavi* (later renamed *Kavi India*), we can identify a negotiation with the troubled contemporary environment of the city, with conflicts manifested at the magazine's level of form and content.¹⁶ King calls *Kavi* an "offshoot" of *Quest*, *Poetry India* and the Ezekiel 'group', in part because it was founded by some of the students of the more established poets and because it maintained associations with the University of Bombay and with Ezekiel (45). The editor, Santan Rodrigues, and the two co-editors Rajiv Rao, and Ivan Kostka, were known to consult Ezekiel's opinion on submissions and as a result, the work they selected tended to be by already established Bombay poets – Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar, Nissim Ezekiel – or by new Bombay-based writers such as Melanie Silgado or Jimmy Arasia.

¹⁶ *Kavi* was founded in 1976. However, because it was not registered, it had to stop publication during the Emergency. In 1978 it was re-started and re-named *Kavi India*. As King details, *Kavi-India* continued intermittently until 1984 and "published a variety of known and younger poets" (40). However, he notes the difficulty in dating the volumes that appeared after 1978, observing that some were "unnumbered" and "poorly printed" (41).

The name *Kavi*, however, invites reflection on the perceived cultural ‘role’ of a little magazine. The word has etymological connotations with folk culture: *Kavi* quite literally refers to a poet or singer who composed work spontaneously, and has its roots in oral, pre-print culture. Unlike *Quest* or *Poetry India*, therefore, which both suggest something of the aspirational and modern outlook of these respective magazines, *Kavi* deliberately references pre-print cultures and oral traditions in its choice of name. The shift to *Kavi India* in 1978 introduces a further tension between the folk connotations of *Kavi* and the national space of India, implying that the magazine sought to introduce the work of poets who were at a sub-cultural angle from the hegemony of the state. Vol. 1, No. 1, for instance – the first issue under its new name – is a commemorative issue that celebrates Arun Kolatkar’s Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Despite receiving the prize, the poet was better known as a beatnik figure by the late 1970s, and the presentation of him on the cover of *Kavi India* is much more reflective of his sub-cultural allure: long haired and broody, the image perpetuates the image of Kolatkar as a rebellious and counter-cultural figure – and, by extension, of *Kavi India* as a counter-cultural space as well.¹⁷ It is interesting to note, moreover, that this commemorative issue does not feature any poems from *Jejuri*; instead, the editors choose to print the poet’s “Hospital poems”, work which he had translated from his 1977 Marathi volume *Arun Kolatkarchya Kavita* and which would be unlikely to be familiar to his English language readers.

The poems printed in *Kavi India* are especially dissenting in tone, further suggesting that the magazine was positioning itself as a space in which writers were encouraged to express their departure from the values and hegemony of

¹⁷ See Fig. 3 for the cover image of *Kavi India* that commemorated Arun Kolatkar.

the state. Vol. 1 No. 1, for example, contains poems by Beheroze Shroff, now better known as a feminist documentary film-maker. In “Mother”, the poet chronicles the hardships facing women in modern India, opening with an image of the narrator’s mother “Sucked into currents of married life at nineteen” (16). In the poem, Shroff figures the female body as a “production unit”, critiquing the continuing expectations levied at women from within even the most ‘modern’ families to subjugate themselves to the “family machine” (16).

In the joint No. 2-3, issued in October 1978, there are further contributions that critique the modern nation. Savia Viegas, for example, a student at Elphinstone College, writes in “The Letter” of a rural woman, left behind after her husband moves to the city to look for work. Written in her voice, the poem evidences the anxiety associated with the modern city, which is “unknown” and “fearsome” (5). Viegas is critical, too, of the individualism of the male migrant workers, who leave their wives to look after children and work the land: “there is still no news of the city / and you”, the female narrator repeats; “please don’t forget to write” (5). “Dadar Beach”, a poem by Hubert Nazareth in Vol. 1 No. 4, expresses his disdain for Bombay directly, undermining the city’s idealized and glossy image by casting it as a dirty and foreboding place: “The crematorium lies along the shore”, the narrator begins, “and boys report that there they’ve heard / explosions of the burning heads” (26). Instead of a picturesque coastline, there are “rotting wreaths and rags / that curl about a paddler’s legs”, while even the sky is ominous, its “clouds like smouldering cigars” (26).

Despite the critical portrayals of the city and of modernity in many of the poems published by *Kavi* and *Kavi India*, these magazines are located emphatically in Bombay, making repeated references to particular sites in the

city – its restaurants, theatres, universities, and arts venues. These sites of culture and the arts constitute an antithesis to the image of industrial, patriarchal, poverty-stricken Bombay critiqued in the poems above, implicitly suggesting that the Bombay to which *Kavi* and *Kavi India* were identifying was its peripheral and bohemian scene. In Vol 1, No. 4, the editorial statement lists various venues and institutions found in the city, and thanks them for distributing or supporting the magazine. Thacker's & Co Bookshop, the Strand, the Samovar Restaurant and the Taj Intercontinental Hotel, are all referred to as "members of the growing KAVI family" (3). *Kavi India* had, the editor noted, "been well received by the Bombay press", further reinforcing the magazine's imbrication in the cultures of this city (3). By likening a network of distributors, publishers, vendors and readers to a family, Rodrigues implies that the economies of publishing are flexible and convivial structures. *Kavi* and *Kavi-India* then, more so than the magazines with a wider commercial appeal, are more clearly situated within a particular community of writers in the city, part of an informal literary scene that was reliant on city book-sellers, cafes and restaurants.

Between *Quest* and *Poetry India*, and *Kavi/Kavi India*, the perceived role of the little magazine in Bombay, and its centrality to literary narratives of modernity, appears to have undergone a shift. Whereas the earlier titles sought to impose a degree of homogeneity on Indian writing, and position contemporary poets as part of a global and modern 'moment', the founders of *Kavi* deliberately situated their publication more precisely within a specifically Bombay setting. The city in *Kavi India*, moreover, is figured not as a paragon of commercial modernity – as in *Quest*, for instance, with its advertisements for city banks, products and industries – but rather as a sub-cultural space of

innovation and poetic conviviality. In order to examine this shift in the conceptualization of poetry, from being synonymous with modernity to being resistant to it, the following discussion considers some of the more experimental titles that appeared during the 1960s.

Bombay's 'little mags'

If the title of *Kavi* signifies a shift in the relationship between poetry and intellectual mainstream culture, a brief look at the titles of many of the earlier experimental publications demonstrate the emphatically counter-cultural intentions of these magazines. *Tantrum*, *Tornado*, *The Bombay Duck*, *Dionysus*, *damn you*, all point to a notion of rupture, newness, or irreverence, values that are quite different from the affirmative associations of *Quest* or *Poetry India*. These titles, their format, and the poetry they published, thus seem to represent an alternative literary trajectory, one motivated in part by a desire to counter expectations and to shock the literary sensibilities of middle-class intellectuals. As the founder and editor of *Tornado*, Pavankumar Jain, told me, he chose the title because of its cataclysmic associations: “it suggested the destruction of all norms” and complimented his intention to “shock the audience as much as possible” (interview 9.8.11).

Jain was “completely unconcerned” with making money, gaining new readers, or “toeing the line”; instead, *Tornado* represented his own contribution to what he describes as a subcultural “scene” (interview 9.8.11). “Everyone I knew was producing little mags”, he said, indicating that *Tornado* would be read primarily – and intentionally – by his own group of friends and associates, many of whom were aspiring poets or visual artists (interview *ibid*). What prompted

these young men and women in Bombay – which by now had an established literary circle associated with Ezekiel and centered around *Quest* and *Poetry India* – to make such a radical departure from contemporary modes of poetry production? If it is possible to locate the influence of publications like *Encounter* on *Quest*, what traditions and publications might be influential on the production of *Tornado* or *Dionysus*?

The experimental poetry and the irreverent attitude of Bombay poets can in many ways be related to the wider international counter-cultural movements of the period, of which the Beat poets and the San Francisco Renaissance writers were a part. As Deborah Baker has shown, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and other writers of this generation were heavily inspired by Indian texts and the somewhat romanticized image of ‘the East’ (*A Blue Hand*). What is less often discussed, however, is the influence of these beat writers on a generation of Indian poets. In a recent essay, Mehrotra discusses the “euphoria” of coming across City Lights volumes by Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso in Bombay’s bookshops: “for the first time, we had come across poems that were funny, clever, sad, irreverent” and which had a profound effect on their own literary sensibility (“Partial Recall” 18). The availability of poetry from the United States and Britain – enabled by the “paperback revolution” – meant that young poets could now read, for the first time, the work of contemporary beat poets and experimental European writers, picking up volumes relatively cheaply in Bombay’s bookstores (Chitre “Introduction” 5). For young writers like Mehrotra, frustrated at the content of their official literary education, these discoveries were formative, and as Dilip Chitre notes: “new writers very much unlike the academic men of letters in the past began to emerge” (5).

What one commentator has called Beat poetry's "sustained, authentic and compelling attack on post World War Two American culture" found a receptive audience in an India that was struggling with its own conflicted journey to capitalist modernity (Savage "Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl' and the Paperback Revolution"). In the experimental writing of the Beats, Mehrotra, Jain and others found a form and language in which to express their doubts about their own surroundings, their own literary past and present, and with their own position within a fragile cultural economy. It was, in other words, not a case of imitating American texts and writers but of drawing on these models to articulate their own particular contextual crises. As Ramazani puts it, "poets...transform foreign influences...in accordance with their specific historical and cultural conditions" (*Transnational* xiii).

Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky visited India in 1962-1963 as part of Ginsberg's reading tour, a visit that Baker details in *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India*. Although they spent most of their time in Calcutta, Ginsberg visited Bombay in April and read at Abraham Alkazi's apartment. Jussawalla was in Bombay on a short visit from London, and recalled the deep impression Ginsberg's work made on him. It seemed as though the poet was attempting to "shock his Indian audience with his outrageous behavior", Jussawalla told me, describing Ginsberg's repeated use of offensive language and strange habits; Jussawalla noted, however, that "most people" simply admired Ginsberg's innovation (interview 8.8.11). Jussawalla admits though that, as King and Baker also indicate, Ginsberg was deeply critical of many of the Bombay writers, particularly "the fastidious, thin-lipped Nissim Ezekiel" whom he saw as being too polite and genteel in his work (Baker 149). The Bombay poets, according to

Ginsberg, were “still writing old fashioned British verse” and had not yet “found their own voice” (King 19).

Ginsberg made his comments in 1962, and in 1965 Mehrotra – along with his friends, brothers Amit and Alok Rai – founded *damn you: a magazine of the arts*.¹⁸ Two years later, under the imprint of his own ezra-fakir press in Bombay, Mehrotra would also found *ezra: an imagiste magazine*, a publication King finds less irreverent in style than *damn you* but with overlapping contributors and attitudes (23).¹⁹ Although Mehrotra himself was not present at Ginsberg’s reading, he does recollect being inspired to begin his own magazine after reading about one of the New York beat magazines in a copy of *The Village Voice*, sent back to Allahabad by Amit and Alok’s uncle who was studying in the United States. Here, they read a report of a counter-cultural magazine published and edited by Ed Sanders called *Fuck You: a magazine of the arts*: “We now decided to steal the name for ourselves, modifying it slightly”, the poet remembers wryly (“Partial Recall” 60).²⁰ Working on an old Gestetner machine that belonged to the Rai’s’ father, the three aspiring publishers brought out the first issue of *damn you* in September 1965 – the same year they had read about Sanders’s daring magazine, and just a month after reading *Penguin Modern Poets 5* (Mehrotra 59).

damn you adopts an identifiably Americanised idiom in its language, style, and format. Contributors are invited, on the reverse of each issue, to “send us your poems, angelic ravings, prose, your spontaneous bop prosody” – directly echoing Sanders’s own call, on the reverse of *Fuck you*, for poets to “send me your banned manuscripts, your peace-grams, your cosmic data, your

¹⁸ See Fig 4.

¹⁹ See Fig. 5

²⁰ See Fig. 6.

huddled masses yearning to be free, your collections of freak-beams, plans for the pacifist holocaust” (No. 1). Like Sanders, who deliberately situates his magazine in a counter-cultural space by stating cryptically that it is produced “at a secret location in the lower east side”, Mehrotra also ensures that the editors are figured as rebellious figures working against the grain of cultural hegemony, writing on the back of each issue: “for reasons other than copyright it may be smuggled in all the countries of the world”. Mehrotra further positions his imagined community of readers as conspirators in this subcultural moment, referring to them as “our unappointed salesmen” and calling on them to “first read it and sell it for what this effort is worth, and send us the money”. Here, as with American magazines, the editors can be seen as creating their own alternative economy – one founded not on strict exchange value, but one which implicitly critiqued the market by setting itself up as different from mainstream modes of cultural exchange.

It was, moreover, to America that Mehrotra predominantly directed his search for contributors to *damn you* and *ezra*. As he wrote recently in “Partial Recall”:

The English poets we were familiar with were the sort to have monuments in Westminster Abbey, and it did not occur to us that we could ask Indian poets... This left the United States, a country just fifty yards down the road, at whose entrance stood not the famous statue, but a bright red letter box nailed to a neem tree. (69)

From the second issue onwards, *damn you* contained a number of contributions from aspiring American poets, as did *ezra*. In *damn you*, No.4, the experimental poet George Kimball published an untitled erotic poem on the “spurred half-seconds / from the phallic moment”, while an unknown Pheobe Coan- who had

heard of *damn you* and petitioned Mehrotra with submissions for this magazine – has haikus printed (9, 10). Howard McCord, who would remain a friend of Mehrotra's, contributed experimental poems to *ezra*: a found poem called "Bumperstickers" in *ezra* No. 3, for example, lists slogans McCord noticed on American cars, using the montage technique that Mehrotra developed in his own poetry (7). The British Adrian Mitchell too, who would later become the UK's alternative Poet Laureate, published "you get used to it" in *damn you* No. 4, an angry poem in which he critiques the racism of the segregated deep South (3). Mitchell's cultural references and images are predominantly American – there is the "beautiful blossom of napalm / sprouting from the jungle", a clear reference to the war in Vietnam, and frequent references to the "begging-bowl eyes" of poor black communities living a "life in hell in Alabama" (3).

The poetry submitted by Indian writers makes frequent use of American idioms and styles too. Mehrotra's work from this period evidences the influence of American cinema, popular culture and the beats in particular: In *damn you*, No. 3, for example, Mehrotra includes a short, pseudo-religious poem entitled "dal mandi, benares", in which the narrator rejects religious traditions: "weary of god", the poem begins, "bent under a morality load" (3). The narrator addresses a lover in the second stanza, using Americanised language in order to remark at "these peepers / of yours" (3). Mehrotra described recently too that he consciously made a decision to sound American, referring wryly to his and his friends' attempts to "speak like Holden Caulfield" ("Partial Recall" 59). In individual poems, though, this influence is more palpable and serious. Mehrotra's long poem *Bharatmata a Prayer*, which was first printed as a single volume by the *ezra-fakir* press and re-printed in a special issue of the American

magazine *Intrepid*, is even more emphatically part of an American tradition, apparently an Indian answer to Ginsberg's "America": "india / my beloved country, ah my motherland", the poem begins, "you are, in the world's slum / the lavatory" (*Intrepid* No. X., Spring 1968, unpaginated). The poem proceeds by invoking the various social problems of the country, just as Ginsberg had done in his text. Mehrotra makes a direct appeal to American literary tradition too, dispelling the assumption of Indian poetry being somehow in exclusive dialogue with a British canon: "ah / walt whit" the narrator cries, "wish you were around / and tried to contain these multitudes / and tried being our representative man". These poems and little magazines invite reflection, therefore, on the multiple influences on Indian poets, as well as allowing critics to historicize the emergent imperialism of American culture.

In *Tornado*, No.4, moreover – a magazine that Pavankumar Jain told me was "directly inspired by Arvind's success with *damn you*" – the entire issue is devoted to "Beat Boetry" (sic), a clear creative riff on the American movement (interview 9.8.11).²¹ Inside, poets including Dilip Chitre, Jain, and Mehrotra, as well as lesser-known writers like Chinu Modi and Aadil Mansoon, write verse that is replete with the slang, sexual images, and political references, of the Beats. An untitled poem by Kulamarva Balkrishna, for example, begins with the declaration: "the president of the US is a / tragic masturbator", going on to refer to his "flowing / own sperms / down the Saigon drains" (*Tornado* No. 4, 8). This particular poet might be (quite justifiably) long forgotten now, but the kind of references he was making does indicate the direction in which young new writers were looking in the late 1960s.

²¹ See Fig. 7.

If the experimental poetry and the rebellious magazines that appeared from 1965 onwards can be seen as a partial response to Ginsberg's earlier remark that Indian poetry did not push enough boundaries, they can also be identified as responding to specifically Indian circumstances too. Hence *Dionysus* and *The Bombay Duck* establish in their respective editorials that they were founded as a reaction against Bombay's specific cultural environment, and its industrializing consumerist economy. *The Bombay Duck*, founded in 1965 and edited by P. Parthasarathy and S.V. Pradhan at Mithibai College, takes its name from a character in the Ramayana who refused to align itself with Rama: "It alone had the courage to remain neutral in the face of a crisis!" the editors note, and "[A]s is to be expected, it paid heavily for its neutrality" (Vol. 1, No. 1, editorial, 2).²²

After explaining why they decided to call the journal *The Bombay Duck*, the editors launch a critical litany against Bombay's culture, declaring that their magazine is "interested in asking questions about ourselves":

How is it that this city with a population it can't bear has only one art gallery worth the name?...How does one explain the paradox that this city has innumerable arts and science colleges, but not more than a few book shops worth visiting? Why is it without a literary journal and a literary café though it has a number of rag-sheets and Grade 1 restaurants?...Why do Indians pick their noses in public and spit on lamp posts? (2)

Parthasarathy's and Pradhan's comments here are interesting on many levels. On the one hand, they clearly identify Bombay's pressing inequalities, referencing its expanding population that by 1965 "it can't bear" to support. The rapid rate of migration to the city from 1947 onwards is thus viewed as a source

²² See Fig. 8.

of anxiety, and an unsavory reminder of the injustices of living in the city for most of its citizens. The editors, however, are not positioning their magazine as a mouthpiece for these impoverished masses; instead, their editorial evidences a distinctly modernist anxiety about what the city's overcrowding means for intellectual production and aesthetic standards in Bombay. The reference to the city's "rag sheets and Grade 1 restaurants", too, suggests a certain level of snobbery on behalf of the editors: the city's social problems and its capitalist expansion are perceived as threats to intellectual and aesthetic standards.

It is the middle-class, educated community – the ideal consumer and visitor of Bombay's "Grade 1 restaurants" – that is subject to the most sustained critique in these avant-garde magazines. A short story in *The Bombay Duck* by K.N Nutt, entitled "The Grand Finale", for instance, portrays a young boy's sexual fantasies about his mother, accompanying them with his critical appraisal of his father: "Who is a good Hindu?" the narrator asks; "Certainly not his father, who evaded income tax and visited prostitutes when his mother was ill" (16). Nutty – and the magazine's editors – thus challenge the hegemony of the normative Hindu middle-class family, exposing it for its double standards, sexualized violence, and gendered exploitation.

The Bombay Duck was banned after its first issue, ostensibly for quoting Henry Miller and for the aggressive stance it adopted towards the family unit and the middle classes in India (King 23). The little magazine *Dionysus* appeared a few months later in 1965, edited by one of *The Bombay Duck's* founders S.V. Pradhan - along with A.S. Benjamin.²³ In their opening statement, the editors criticise the lack of freedom of expression found in the city, particularly in cultural spaces that one might assume to be liberal: "unfortunately

²³ See Fig. 9.

in Indian universities one comes across many specimens of blind, unthinking, strait laced, blinkered humanity” (7). They go on to call these institutions “a huge monolithic column of shit”, quite clearly situating their magazine at a distance from official spaces of hegemony (8). Like *The Bombay Duck*, *Dionysus* too was shut down – its combined second and third issue was seized by the police due to its publication of an “obscene” short story by the two editors (King 23). The autonomy of the individual – which both titles sought to defend – thus existed precariously in relation to the hegemony of the city and the state.

More specifically, the critical appraisal of Bombay’s middle-class communities by these little magazines can be interpreted as a critique of the literary intelligentsia and their authority. In *ezra* No. 3, for instance, Mehrotra includes – instead of an editorial statement – a series of reviews of his magazine, mostly from American little magazines like the *Manhattan Review*. One comment reproduced from *The Century*, stands out:

Anybody cheesed off (sic) the literary establishment in India will welcome these two magazines (damn you and ezra)...The Illustrated – Ezekiel – Lal axis if they are not already awake ought to be aware. (2)

The reviewer identifies in little magazines like *ezra* a challenge to what he suggests is Ezekiel’s monopoly on literary culture, calling these new publications “desperately needed” (*ibid*).

It seems, therefore, that while *Quest* and the mainstream titles associated with it responded to an absence of poetry publications in India by creating magazines that bore resemblances and shared intentions with international titles, there was a growing sense, by the 1960s, that poets and editors might find ways to resist this model. Hence, at the same time as *damn*

you, ezra, Tornado and others sought to borrow from American models of rebellion, there is an identifiable attempt to find a specific form and vocabulary in which to enact a political and aesthetic leave-taking from the “Illustrated – Ezekiel – Lal axis”. It was the experimental magazines, for instance, that were particularly enthusiastic about publishing bhakti poetry in translation, or contemporary poetry that was heavily inspired by ancient bhakti traditions, as well as more overtly counter-cultural, politically defiant verse.

Visually, Bombay’s little magazines reveal the particular relationship between painting and the arts, and literature, with frequent crossings over between the two spheres. The front covers of both issues of *Dionysus*, for instance, were designed by Kolatkar – who was at that time working as a visualizer for an advertising agency in the city. *Tornado*, too, bears traces of its interstitial existence between the literary and artistic scenes, each issue including illustrations and sketches by Jain’s friends and fellow students at the J.J School of Art in Bombay. The front cover of *Tornado* No. 5, for instance, is a print by the now renowned artist Jyoti Bhatt; the explicit illustration of an apparently intoxicated Vishnu on p.16 is by Jain’s brother and art critic Jyotindra Jain; and Bhupen Kharker – who would later become one of India’s foremost artists – contributed drawings and sketches to *Tornado* no. 2, 3, and 4.²⁴ Contrary to *Quest*’s deliberate lack of any “illustrative” detail, these experimental little magazines incorporate work by visual artists, revealing the little magazine and its poets to exist in dialogue with other cultural products and producers in the city.

damn you, ezra and *Tornado*, moreover, frequently changed their design and format: each issue of the magazines adopted a different style or cover

²⁴ See Fig. 10.

image, was a different length, and was issued at infrequent intervals. Jain went even further, going through copies of *Tornado* and sticking in unexpected items into its pages. As he told me, “it might be a bus ticket, a cinema stub, a feather, a stamp...even a pubic hair, but whatever it was it meant that every reader would know their copy was unique” (interview 9.8.11). Similarly, Mehrotra did not adopt a standardized format for *ezra*: the cover of No. 4, for example, has a children’s paper mask glued to it (see fig. 5), the only volume to carry such a design.

Unlike the more mainstream titles, these little magazines did not carry advertisements, and often did not set a price for subscription – although a typical suggested price for *damn you* was Rs.1. Instead, the magazines reference each other: *damn you* No. 3, for instance, advertises *ezra*, while *ezra* No. 3 carries an advertisement for *Dionysus*. The magazines thus position themselves as part of a word-of-mouth, informal literary economy, founded not on monetary exchange value but on reputation. It is interesting to note, moreover, that while the magazines published many of the same poets – Chitre, Kolatkar and Mehrotra are recurring names – they do not carry advertisements for the poets’ individual volumes of work. Instead, their references are always to other magazines rather than to individual writers – implying that the magazines were interested in the collaborative activity of poetry rather than with focusing on the work of any single poet. The emphasis placed on collectives in these experimental magazines thus redirects a reader’s attention to the notion of a community of poets and writers; they can be interpreted as existing at a critical angle from the standardized mainstream productions, which deliberately sought an international readership and which promoted pan-national literary and cultural products. Instead, these magazines reorient the reader to notice the

vibrancy of small-scale local cultural projects, and to recognise that these literary spaces existed at a conflicted point within more mainstream culture.

These magazines remind us of Raymond Williams's observation in *Keywords* that culture is "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language", something that involves negotiation and conflict, and which is uneven and impossible to define (76). Hence, although this chapter has not been able to provide a comprehensive overview of Bombay's little magazines – reliant as such research is on the availability of material that is, as I have discovered, so often missing or incomplete – it has sought to demonstrate that Bombay's poets were part of a conflicted and uneven literary environment in the decades following Independence. Little magazines dislodge the assumption that the city passes from one cultural stage in its history to the next in a linear fashion. As suggested, the continual critical and creative attempts to define Bombay, to mark its demise, or to celebrate its hybridity, occlude the various historical and material processes by which the city produced itself. Little magazines are thus a vital and largely forgotten part of its story, and invite a critical reflection on the conflicting and often contested experiences of Bombay's literary history.

The following chapter explores the material cultures of poetry publishing in more detail, analysing the city's small poetry press Clearing House – its format, book design, and editorial decisions. In doing so, I suggest that poetry production in the city inhabits an in-between space, situated in the interstices between national and international cultures, and between high and popular cultural formations. A close study of the small press in the city thus further nuances a critical understanding of Bombay.

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Chapter Four“We take our Slim chances”:²⁵ Clearing House and the small poetry press in Bombay

The previous chapter examined Bombay’s little magazine scene, identifying its experimental titles in particular as participating in the creation of a new cultural space in the city. The various intertexts of Bombay’s little magazines, I suggested, counter prevalent expectations postcolonial literary critics might have about the relationship between Indian poetry and the former colonial centre, as well as undermining the hegemony of the somewhat linear narrative of Bombay’s journey to modernity and postmodernity identified in Chapter Two. This chapter considers in more detail the publishing of poetry in Bombay, focusing on the independent publishing co-operative Clearing House. It draws on recent work by Sarah Brouillette, Gail Low, and Graham Huggan, which has examined the material processes by which postcolonial authors and texts accumulate cultural value, revealing “book history [to have] methodological insights that are useful to postcolonial literary criticism” (Low 141). However, while these critics are concerned above all with the metropolitan circuits of cultural and literary value, I focus instead on the processes and networks of *non*-metropolitan poetry publishing and on the accumulation of what Pierre Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital” (7). In doing so, I position Clearing House in an in-between cultural space: on the one hand, the co-operative set critical and aesthetic standards, evidencing the presence of ‘high’ literary culture in Bombay in the 1970s. This counters what Amit Chaudhuri has noted as the

²⁵ From Manohar Shetty’s “Bards on the Run”.

contemporary critical tendency to equate postcolonial formations with mass or popular culture, to the extent that “there’s a huge, under-theorized, and even sentimental gap in the discourse; the gap involves not only an elision of the post-colonial ‘high’ cultural, but an elision of a tension between the ‘high’ and the ‘low’” (“Introduction” *Clearing a Space* 16). This cultural literary space, moreover, is independent of any national literary model: the work selected for publication by Clearing House, and the format in which it appeared, can thus be contrasted to poetry issued under Oxford University Press’s Three Crowns series, and to work published by Calcutta’s Writer’s Workshop, both of which were ideologically and financially invested in creating a specifically Indian canon of poets.

In the opening section, I examine the particular circumstances that led to the formation of Clearing House, discussing its reputation and the influence it continues to have on contemporary writers. Before analyzing Clearing House volumes in detail, I reflect on the publishing context of this period – in particular the publication in 1976 of volumes by Oxford University Press under its Three Crowns imprint. Work issued by OUP, I argue, perpetuates a particular public image of the Commonwealth Indian poet, positioning representative writers like Nissim Ezekiel and Jayanta Mahapatra in a public arena governed by metropolitan literary tastes. Clearing House, by comparison, makes no concessions to metropolitan values; instead, the books appeal precisely to a niche market of fellow writers, generating “symbolic capital” by virtue of their distance from economic, popular, or metropolitan tastes (Bourdieu 7). In my analyses of the poetry Clearing House issued, I reflect on the ways in which these books disturb dominant preconceptions about postcolonial literature – in particular its engagement with the nation, and its appeal to a popular

readership. In analyzing volumes of poetry produced by Clearing House, moreover, I simultaneously consider how these individual texts invite critics to attend to an alternative intellectual history of Bombay. As Ben Highmore notes, “culture is not simply something that demands explanation...[but] is itself a form of explanation” (18): hence, by turning to these specific volumes of poetry, I suggest, we are further able to recognise a specific yet under-represented history of Bombay as well.

Context of Clearing House

As Bruce King notes, the poets working in Bombay from the mid-1960s onwards knew each other well: they were friends, and often – as was the case for those like Ezekiel, Parthasarathy, de Souza, and Peeradina, all of whom taught English at university level – they were colleagues as well. As the previous two chapters have shown, moreover, little magazines and the networks they fostered in the city had primarily brought poets into contact with one another *as poets*: Kolatkar contributed poems to Mehrotra’s *damn you*, for instance, and young writers met at the regular poetry recitals held at the Samovar Restaurant in South Bombay. By the time Adil Jussawalla, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Gieve Patel and Arun Kolatkar decided to found their own small press, therefore, they were all already well-established figures in their own right. Patel’s 1966 debut *Poems* had been critically acclaimed, and he was, by the mid-70s, enjoying success as a playwright and artist as well. Jussawalla too had met early success with his first volume of poetry *Land’s End*, a collection written during his years living in Britain and published by the Writer’s Workshop

in 1962. He had also just completed editing *New Writing in India*, an anthology that he intended as an informed antithesis to exotic and stereotyped portrayals of Indian writing. Mehrotra and Kolatkar too were both well-known in avant-garde literary circles: Mehrotra had edited *damn you*, and *ezra*, and founded the ezra-fakir press in Allahabad and Bombay, while Kolatkar was involved with Marathi little magazines, and had published work in English, Marathi – and translations – in experimental and mainstream titles.

Hence, although the poets all knew each other well, Clearing House never resembled one of the many “vanity presses” that Jussawalla refers to in a 1977 interview with Peter Nazareth (Nazareth “Iowa interview”). By the mid-1970s, Jussawalla recalls, there were increasing opportunities for emerging poets to publish in high quality little magazines, but few publishers of repute who would issue single volumes. The vanity presses he mentions – which he is careful not to name – were of “variable” standards, and lacked the editorial professionalism one might expect of a publishing house. It struck him and Mehrotra in particular as “necessary” to start publishing volumes of work themselves; indeed, with Mehrotra’s own experience in producing little magazines, it seems a logical next step (Nazareth “Iowa”). In a more recent discussion with Anjum Hasan, Mehrotra described the decision to start Clearing House in similarly pragmatic terms:

In the early 1970s we all realized we had manuscripts. There were no publishers. Then Oxford University Press under R. Parthasarathy started the New poetry in India series. Some titles did appear under that. But what would happen to the others? We decided not to wait and formed a co-operative. (“Your Missing Person”)

The “necessity” of the venture that Jussawalla refers to is thus not the same kind of necessity that led poets to found little magazines in the previous decade.

Instead, Jussawalla's and Mehrotra's words are interesting in that they explicitly acknowledge the existence of other publishing opportunities. Indeed, as Mehrotra's statement shows, Oxford University Press began its New Poetry in India series in the same year as Clearing House released its debut titles. In 1976, as Clearing House published volumes by its four founding members – Kolatkar's *Jejuri*, Mehrotra's *Nine Enclosures*, Jussawalla's *Missing Person*, and Patel's *How Do You Withstand, Body* – OUP released four of its own 'new Indian' texts by Shiv Kumar (*Subterfuges*), Keki Daruwalla (*Crossing of Rivers*), Nissim Ezekiel (*Hymns in Darkness*), and A.K. Ramanujan (*Selected Poems*), as well as R. Parthasarathy's anthology *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. If Indian poetry in English had finally been given the metropolitan "seal of approval" by OUP, why was Clearing House deemed so "necessary" (King 37)? What distinguished Clearing House from OUP, or from Lal's Writer's Workshop? What does Clearing House reveal about the poets' attitudes towards their own writing, their role as poets and editors, and towards the literary culture of the city at this particular point in time?

The critical reception of Clearing House

Apart from its debut titles, Clearing House issued just four other volumes of poetry: Dilip Chitre's *Travelling in a Cage* and Jayanta Mahapatra's *The False Start* in 1980, Mehrotra's *Distance in Statute Miles* in 1982, and Hubert Nazareth's *Lobo* in 1984. Despite its short list, Anjum Hasan has recently reflected on the significance of these books. Recalling the first time she saw a Clearing House volume, Hasan focuses in particular on describing the visual impact of the book, its "unusual squarish size and elegant font, the simplicity of

the design and the wide space given to the poems on the page...and the beauty of the yellowing pages” (“Your Missing Person”). I examine the visual aesthetic of Clearing House in detail later in this chapter, but Hasan’s words are revealing of a more general sense of admiration elicited by these books. They had, she writes, “an air of fragility, an aura of having come out of a set of circumstances that was now history” (*ibid*). The respect commanded by Clearing House is evident too from Ranjit Hoskote’s emails sent to Mehrotra in 1999 – fifteen years after the last volume appeared. In correspondence sent in April and May, Hoskote – himself already an established literary figure who was about to release his collection *The Sleepwalker’s Archive with Single File* – approached Mehrotra to ask whether he might issue his book instead as an “imprimatur of Clearing House” (18. May. 1999). Mehrotra and Jussawalla refused – not because of any misgivings about the younger poet’s work, but rather because they felt Clearing House to be of a particular moment that had by then passed (Jussawalla interview 12.8.11). This is revealing of the particular attitude towards the industry of poetry publishing held by Clearing House’s founders – that publishing institutions should respond to the demands of the context in which they were founded, rather than attempting to establish themselves as the single authoritative place of publication. Like the experimental little magazines in Chapter Three, which seemed to deliberately express the collaborative nature of poetry over the “imperialistic claims” of print culture more generally, Jussawalla’s and Mehrotra’s decision suggests a rethinking of the ‘business’ of writing, publishing and distributing poetry (Fraser 55).

The critical reputation of Clearing House then seems not to be the result of the longevity of the co-operative, nor its prolific output. Indeed, as Jussawalla

stressed, it was “never our intention” that Clearing House would become a permanently established publisher; it was rather intended to serve a purpose for a limited period of time (interview 8.8.11). It was hoped – “perhaps too optimistically”, Jussawalla noted – that its existence would not even be required for very long, but might act as a prompt for other young poets to start their own, similar, projects (interview *ibid*). Hoskote approached the founders not because Clearing House would yield greater material benefits than a more commercial publisher therefore, but in fact, for the opposite reason. His request demonstrates that, as Bourdieu argued, literary and cultural value accumulates when its practices are “based on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies”, and when the literary work seems most removed from the demands of the mass market (39). The value that Hasan finds in Clearing House – the “aura” of the books – thus increases in relation to the peripheral cultural position of the publisher (“Your Missing Person”).

The very structure of the co-operative indicates that it existed at the margins of, or independently of, commercial considerations. Each of the four poets took a different role, lending their particular expertise to a certain part of the production. All of them, Jussawalla told me, had to agree on the selection of a poet’s manuscript, but while Jussawalla and Mehrotra were largely responsible for liaising with poets, printers and distributors, Kolatkar took sole charge of designing the covers, and Patel kept a check on the group’s finances (interview 8.8.11). As might be expected of such a small project, the poets relied on their own money to supplement the relatively low uptake of the pre-publication offer: as King notes, 750 copies of each of the four 1976 books were issued, and far less of the later titles (54). There was, moreover, no comprehensive strategy for distributing the books and no-one to assume overall

responsibility for sales. Jussawalla took some copies to Iowa with him in 1977 during his year of residency at the Iowa Writer's Program, and they had sent specially designed flyers to bookshops in New York – but received no orders. Indeed, “most books did not make their way out of Bombay”, revealing that the literary space created by Clearing House was rooted explicitly within the parameters of this particular city (Hasan *ibid*).

Chaudhuri suggests that postcolonial discourses have not fully considered the significance of high culture, arguing that much postcolonial theory tends to examine popular texts, popular culture, and mass cultural forms at the expense of considering practices that might be designated as belonging to an elite or niche space. There has been, as Chaudhuri and Timothy Brennan both acknowledge – albeit in different contexts – a tendency to conflate mass culture with democracy, and cosmopolitanism with popular forms. What Brennan refers to as the “rhetoric of globality” and cosmopolitanism – which he notes is deeply appealing to left intellectuals and readers – is typically focused on popular – and Western - cultural forms (8). Hence Brennan notes the irony that Western audiences “see big budget films about imperialistic conflict...but not the films of formally experimental filmmakers from the countries themselves...they listen to... 'world music', but not to the locally influential musics that, for unexplained reasons, cannot be part of that world” (45-46). In creating a space for itself in Bombay – rather than in a global network of cultural products – and in evidencing, in its format, style, and editorial choices, its distinctiveness from other more globally mobile formations, Clearing House thus goes some way to reorienting critical attention to those areas that postcolonial literary studies has overlooked: local spaces of ‘high’ culture. Such spaces – which do not fit into the global cultural model of postcolonial studies – might

help critics rethink their conceptions of Bombay; for indeed, as Chaudhuri argues “a history of Bombay cosmopolitanism would beg to be written that is more than, or distinct from, an account of variegated urban co-existence” (“Cosmopolitanism’s Alien Face” 287). In my later close readings of individual Clearing House volumes, I consider how these books open up discussion about the intellectual and artistic atmosphere of Bombay, suggesting that unlike the clearly defined strategies of OUP or Writer’s Workshop, the very lack of a defined policy on behalf of Clearing House speaks volumes about the literary culture of the city.

Oxford University Press and the metropole

Caroline Davis and Gail Low have recently considered the influence of Oxford University Press’s Three Crowns Series on a generation of West African and Caribbean writers in particular. The Three Crowns imprint was conceived by Rex Collings as a paperback series, and was published under the auspices of the Overseas Education Department. As Low notes, the series – intended to provide educational books for the African market – aimed too at “capitalizing on what was perceived as a metropolitan vogue for reading matter about Africa” (27). Hence, while the imprint was first and foremost an educational series that was intended to profit from the expanding African market for literary texts in English, the publishers were able to fulfill a somewhat more niche role in Britain, too, introducing Western readers to writers from a continent that was gradually decolonizing and who were new, compelling and exotic.

Davis is particularly sceptical about the political aspirations of the British publisher in newly decolonized African states, noting their ability to exploit the

education markets in its former colonies. As she reminds us, education syllabuses in Nigeria and Kenya continued to be based on a colonial model, over which international publishers like OUP held considerable sway. Hence, although the publisher had regional branches in Nairobi and Lagos, for instance, these had no authority to select which Kenyan or Nigerian texts were published. This decision was taken centrally in London: “Each had to demonstrate its suitability for the schools market...and manuscripts frequently had to be approved by British ‘experts’” (236). Despite the press’s importance then in the careers of individual writers, it was involved in what Gail Low terms a complex process of “restrictive gate-keeping”, ensuring that only writers whose work looked likely to promise returns on the educational market were supported (28). For some commentators, Britain’s control over indigenous publishing reflected the continuing neo-imperial economic relations with its former colonies. Indeed, for Davis, the Overseas Education Department and the Three Crowns Series enabled OUP to occlude the exploitative dimension of their continued presence in these former colonies, a view expressed more stridently by Peter Sutcliffe, who remarks in his history of OUP that “[A]s the old Empire dissolves, the Overseas Education Department set out to build a new one” (266).

Despite individuals within the firm pushing, at various points, for the broadening of its series and for the publication of more experimental works, its editorial choices were restricted by financial and political demands, and by its insistence that any book published should appeal to the commercial education markets. Davis finds it no surprise, for instance, that during Jon Stallworthy’s time as editor of the Oxford Poetry List (1968-1971), “only two titles by black Africans were added to the list”, evidence, she suggests, of Britain not wishing

to risk losing its major buyers of textbooks, of which the racially divided and deeply conservative South Africa was one (236). As Low notes too, the texts patronized by OUP and other metropolitan publishers tended to be about a set of expected themes – the colonial encounter, African traditions, the conflict between city and rural living – and expressed in a particular and familiar style. When Faber accepted Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1952, for instance, the editors were particularly struck by his expression of 'authentic' African traditions, and charmed by his non-standard use of English. Indeed, as Low demonstrates, Faber even introduced more grammatical 'errors' into the text "in an effort to mimic Tutuola's style" and capitalize on his text as "an exemplar of naïve art" (12, 2). Even though later writers like Chinua Achebe – and I would add, Nissim Ezekiel – were championed because of the formal elegance and metropolitan appeal of their writing, there continued to be certain thematic expectations levied at writers from the Commonwealth. In particular, Low shows, texts were expected to engage with the notion of national and regional identity, and to provide the reader with a sense of the non-West. Ron Heapy's reservations about Fugard's *People are Living There* in 1968 expresses precisely the extent to which thematic rather than aesthetic considerations were of more importance. Writing to Stallworthy, Heapy remarks: "what bothers me is the...setting...There's no question of race or colour anywhere" (qtd. Low 38).

Although the Three Crowns Series had ceased to be a British corporation by the time it began publishing the works of selected Indian poets in 1976, the selection and editorial processes continued to position this writing in a distinct and ideological light, with the result that experimental or avant-garde work tended to be overlooked. Individual volumes, and the poems that were selected

as 'representative' of a particular poets' oeuvre display a marked sense of caution, and there is implicit in the poetry and its stylization and marketing, the construction of a particular notion of the metropolitan publisher. When OUP released volumes by Ezekiel, Kumar, Ramanujan, and Daruwalla in 1976, it perpetuated a distinct and highly ideological notion of Indian writing in English too. Despite the vast differences between the poets endorsed by the Three Crowns Series in India, the cover designs for each volume are the same: a plain cream background, with the poet's name and title in simple, italic font that lends the volumes a feeling of continuity.²⁶ Interestingly, the covers contain – in much larger font than the titles or writer's names – the 'brand' term "New Poetry in India": not only is such a term misleading in suggesting that Ezekiel and the others were part of a fledgling poetic community (rather than acknowledging that each of the poets was already established, and prolific, in India); it is also a highly suggestive term that effectively re-writes the genealogy of Indian poetry in English. The definitive assertion that this poetry is "new" ignores the variegated and innovative history of Indian writing in English prior to 1976, ideologically manufacturing a historical moment from which to 'date' the emergence of a 'new' genre. In its appeal to a Western reader interested in the relatively recently opened up field of Commonwealth literature therefore, OUP self-consciously diverts attention away from the various differences between the writers, emphasizing instead their apparent shared origins.

In the introduction to his edited anthology *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, Parthasarathy endorses this notion of correspondence and linearity. He begins by differentiating the modern poets from earlier figures who had used English, contrasting them in particular with Toru Dutt, Saronjini Naidu, and

²⁶ See Fig. 11 for cover images of the 'New Poetry in India' series by Ezekiel and Parthasarathy.

Aurobindo Ghose. Parthasarathy goes on to situate Ezekiel as the originator of modern poetry, pre-empting the well-known developmental narratives of King, Mishra, and G.J.V. Prasad by examining what he sees as the poets' shared attributes or characteristics. His statements reinforce the notion that there is a distinct and identifiably 'Indian' poet: "The Indian who uses the English language feels, to some extent, alienated" (3); "writers in English are conscious of their Indianness because, at the bottom of it, one suspects a crisis of identity" (4). Parthasarathy reinforces the expectation that the postcolonial writer is engaged in a process of coming to terms with the colonial encounter – a view put forward much later by postcolonial literary critics. Ramazani suggests, for instance, that "poets have been "unhoused by modernity, by war and politics, by education and travel" and are thus "unable to rest...securely" in any subjective or epistemological position (*Muse* 12). Although Ramazani is here at pains to examine the ways in which poetry speaks to 'the postcolonial', there is a risk that building a set of thematic expectations becomes a way of reading all such texts – a way, in Brennan's words, of reading postcolonial literature as "literatures-of-use" instead of as individual creative responses to the world (39).

The editorial and selection processes apparent in the *New Poetry in India* series reveals a sustained attempt to create a particular and partial canon. The work OUP chose to publish perpetuates certain stereotypes of Indian writing, and compliments, rather than challenges, the cultural and political environment of the period. *Hymns of Darkness*, for instance, represents perhaps the most explicitly 'Indian' period of Ezekiel's career: in poems like "Background Casually", the poet examines his own alienation at school and in society, casting himself as the "poet-rascal-clown" and a "mugging Jew among the

wolves" (*CP* 179). The poet chronicles his loneliness in London too, and the sense of difference that plagues him. By the end of the poem, the speaker has come to terms with India – becoming one, indeed, with his environment: "The Indian landscape sears my eyes. / I have become a part of it" (181). Other poems in this volume examine the experience of being an outsider in India ("Subject of Change"; "On Bellasis Road"; "Distance"; "Entertainment"), while others draw extensively on 'native' cultural references ("Ganga"; "Tribute to the Upanisads"). Throughout the sequence however, Ezekiel's writing adheres to certain metropolitan standards: indeed, as Parthasarathy praised, "[T]he ease with which he is able to modulate one of the commonest of English measures, the couplet, is commendable", and his ability to use prosody is also remarked upon (10). This volume thus seems to reinforce the values that are seen to be particularly appealing to a publisher that was, at the same time, casting itself in a paternalistic light. The poet is alienated; he is critical of the metropole even as he uses its forms and resources; he introduces the reader to some 'native' references, managing to do so in such a way as to ensure they are comprehended by this Western audience; and he writes in a form and style that is reminiscent of a British tradition.

Ezekiel had published extensively prior to *Hymns in Darkness* and, as I note in Chapter Five, much of his early work was relatively unconcerned with what Ron Heapy might have termed the "local colour" of his Indian surroundings. It strikes me as significant therefore that the work most critics see as marking his turn towards India and the local sphere, was also the first volume to directly appeal to a metropolitan readership. The poet Jayanta Mahapatra provides a similar case in point. His *Life Signs* was issued by Oxford University Press in 1983, by which time he was also a well-established poet –

with volumes published by Clearing House, the Writer's Workshop, The University of Georgia Press and Samkaleen Prakashan. His was, as King describes, "a difficult, often obscure poetry of meditation, recording reality as an unknowable flux", predominantly concerned with articulating one's place in the spiritual cosmos (195). His first volume of poems, *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (Writer's Workshop, 1971) had introduced images of loneliness, dreams, absences, and recurring mythological symbols, all of which would reappear in subsequent volumes of poetry. Rather than socially realist documentary observation, Mahapatra's poetic embraces the enigmatic sphere of myths and psychic states. His work is frequently concerned with questioning what might be found beneath the external facade of the landscape, and his epistemological questions are often addressed to an omniscient listener. The opening poem in *The False Start*, for instance, the volume published by Clearing House, contemplates what is hidden by the landscape ("A Day of Rain"):

...There's
 a summer hiding away behind the hills,
 a haunting dream whose meaning
 always escapes me (13)

The persona of the poem asks repeated questions throughout the verse, as if engaged in a continuing attempt to unearth layers of meaning from his surroundings: "what's dying underneath / a blade of grass?" "what habit palpitates / inside the dark pit of love: / art, ceremony, or voice that lies / under my aimless hearing of the rain?".

Mahapatra's poetry calls into question the certainties of material and imaginative boundaries, replacing them with questions, ambivalences, and introspective comments. Poems such as "Suppose", "Absences" and "The

Secret” are suggestive of Mahapatra’s tendency to examine states of uncertainty, and he continually sets up a contrast between the apparent tangibility of the world and the uneasiness it induces in him. “Through the Stone” begins by contrasting the physicality of stone, sky and clouds, with the narrator’s personal sense of doubt – a doubt that is spiritual and epistemological rather than political or subjective in tone:

Here is the stone, the taste
of the poison in the lungs,
the broad polished gestures that say
the world will not come to an end.
A blue sky stands
on a white cloud above the earth,
and in your eyes my hands tremble
to touch you. How can I believe
in the cloud that shifts against
the sky’s shoulder? (*The False Start* 22)

Mahapatra’s poetic intention is suggested later in the poem, when he writes:

Every day awakens something;
however large the day is,
it fails to enclose
the tiny space of doubt
we are trying to understand. (22)

By the time *Life Signs* was published by Oxford University Press, however, this questioning aesthetic has been partly occluded. Instead of mystical references and ambiguity, the poems presented together under the imprint of the Three Crowns Series are predominantly concerned with questions of the poet’s colonial heritage, history and inheritance; most are thematically clear, with a linear narrative that critics like King would not immediately associate with Mahapatra. The title poem of the collection, for instance, begins by reflecting on

the changes wrought by independence on the individual: “What’s in my father’s house / is not mine” (12). The poem proceeds by presenting the tension between the modernity of the poet and the tradition of his father’s generation, and between his father’s “beliefs” and the narrator’s skepticism. It is in this moment of tension that the poet seems to situate India itself, moving to reflect on the ‘state of the nation’ at this particular moment: “It is thus the odour / of a captured country lingers” (12). OUP implicitly suggests that Mahapatra’s is a poetry that negotiates the tension between the past and present, and introduces the expectation that his work will examine a wider sense of national identity.

Life Signs, moreover, grants a relatively privileged space to the colonial encounter – a feature that Brennan, Bahri, Huggan and others note distinguishes postcolonial writers for a metropolitan commercial audience. Hence in “Grandfather”, the poet depicts his grandfather’s conversion to Christianity during a devastating famine in the late nineteenth century: the conversion, the poem reveals, was undertaken because the British were offering food to those who renounced their religion. The poem opens as the grandson finds the “yellowed” diary of his grandfather, which “whisper in vernacular. / They sound the forgotten posture” (19). This clearly perpetuates the notion that English was a homogenizing cultural force, pre-empting Parthasarathy’s later and oft quoted phrase about his generic foreign educated narrator “whoring / after English gods” (*Rough Passage* 75). The narrator in “Grandfather” wonders at the desperation of hunger that led to his ancestor having “turned coward and ran”, “left your family behind, the buried things, / the precious clod that praised the quality of a god” (19). Here, Mahapatra seems to allude to the conflict between Christianity and Hinduism, doing so in a way that reinforces the naivety, ‘authenticity’, and primitivism of the latter. Hence,

although his grandfather's conversion is portrayed as a betrayal, it is at the same time figured as a turn towards modernity – a modernity that is now inhabited by the grandson poet. Indeed, the narrator indicates the repercussions of his grandfather's decision in the opening stanza, when he notes – reading in the vernacular – his own difficulty reading a language other than English: “Now I stumble in your black-paged wake”.

“Grandfather” is a poem, therefore, that can be seen to correspond to Brennan's characterization of the commercially popular Third-World text in that it figures the postcolonial writer as “an intermediary” between East and West: on the one hand, the narrator seems nostalgic for a lost local tradition, and offers a clear criticism of the West, but at the same time, is clearly writing for a Western audience – with whom he appears to share linguistic and cultural values (41).

OUP seems deeply invested in publishing poetry from the Commonwealth that would appeal to a new generation of metropolitan readers who had come to expect a certain set of themes and aesthetics from such third-world figures. The poetry thus could not be too opaque, nor too culturally specific – both features that I later suggest Clearing House did not have to take into consideration. OUP's poetry, moreover, appealed to a reader seeking to better understand a historical situation and the colonial legacy in India, as well as to students and teachers in new ‘Commonwealth literary programs’. It is interesting to note that the poets selected for its initial Indian series were all not only well known already, but wrote verse that was particularly pedagogical. Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, for instance, had proven educational credentials: in 1969, the Writer's Workshop reissued *The Unfinished Man* (originally 1960), with an accompanied study guide written by Eunice de Souza, purposively aiming the new edition at university students. De Souza, moreover, had

collaborated with Adil Jussawalla to edit *Statements* in 1976: this had the intended aim to “provide passages of prose for study in general English courses at B.A Level”, and contained excerpts and accompanying analyses of modern Indian texts which students would be expected to know for their exams (1). It is more difficult to imagine OUP endorsing a poet like Dilip Chitre, who writes explicitly about “The stale aroma of fucking behind florid curtains” (*Travelling in a Cage*, “I Laugh, I Cry” 63).

The Writer’s Workshop

If OUP sought to construct a distinct and ideological aura around the writers it published, the Writers Workshop can also be seen as imbricated in a comparable process of cultural revisionism. Unlike OUP however, which we might consider to represent a continuation of imperial economic exploitation and regulation, Writer’s Workshop was an Indian organization, founded in Calcutta in 1958. Just as many of the ‘Bombay poets’ had work published by Writer’s Workshop’s magazine *Miscellany* before founding their own, so too did many Indian poets first publish volumes with the co-operative (among them Adil Jussawalla Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das). Although the Writer’s Workshop provided a significant opportunity for poets to publish, it was recognised by the mid-1960s as having a distinct lack of critical rigour in its selection of manuscripts, or in its editorial policies. As Lal wrote in an advertisement for The Writer’s Workshop – found in the back pages of K.D. Katrak’s 1979 volume *Underworld* – the collective was “concerned with practice, not theorising”, and was particularly enthusiastic at publishing the work of “young and unpublished

writers” (30, 31). As King contends, Writer’s Workshop and the poets involved in it belonged to a group “still defending the validity of Indian poetry in English” (31), while poets based predominantly in Bombay and associated with Ezekiel, tended to be “those who felt the issue had been superseded by the need to make critical discriminations between the good and the bad” (31).

The Writer’s Workshop, moreover, presents itself as an explicitly ‘Indian’ co-operative. As Lal sets out in the advertisements, poetry could only be considered for publication if it was concerned with exploring Indian identity; as such, he describes, [it] “publishes only such work by foreigners as deals with, or is inspired by, or has relevance for Indian life and culture” (*Underworld* 30). Despite Lal’s undoubtedly vital role as a champion of young writers, his insistence that works should display a thematic concern with issues of Indian cultural identity reveals that, perhaps unwittingly, he was perpetuating the kind of values that had plagued Indian writing in English for decades; namely, the supposed authenticity or inauthenticity of the profession. In the visual design and production of the books moreover, The Writer’s Workshop plays upon cultural stereotypes about Indian writing in English: the volumes are all bound in brightly coloured sari fabric, embossed with an emblem of the publishers in gold. There are many advertisements inside a single volume for other books published by Writer’s Workshop (over 600 titles in circulation by the time Katak’s *Underworld* was published), in Lal’s own handwritten, flamboyant style. Visually then, Lal presents very different writers as somehow united by their shared national identity, while his use of sari fabric and elaborate calligraphy appeals to an audience of metropolitan readers who Graham Huggan has shown to be responsive to exotic stereotypes about the orient – in particular to the “imperial nostalgia” prevalent in the West (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 77).

For Lal, the Writer's Workshop was an opportunity to discuss poetry with like-minded friends, and in his description of weekly meetings, they appear as informal and genteel as those of a bridge club: "Discussions are held on Sunday mornings at 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta" he writes, and the membership to the co-operative "requires the support of two members and approval by majority" (*Underworld* 30, 31). This structure, and the highly intimate location of its meetings (in Lal's own home), lends the co-operative a parochial dimension that is at odds with the idea of a publisher. Until the 1990s, Writer's Workshop continued to be almost entirely run by Lal from his home – a feature in *The Hindu* shows the poet surrounded by manuscripts, answering correspondences by hand, while the editor repeatedly emphasized that "Writer's Workshop is not a professional publishing house. It does not print well-known names" (qtd. Mukherjee. "Writer's Workshop at Fifty"). In fact, although the most significant poets in India were often published by the Writer's Workshop, Lal claims no responsibility for their success: "[Writers Workshop] makes names known...and then leaves them in the loving clutches of the so-called 'free' market" (*ibid*). The success of Jussawalla, Ezekiel, Das and others might thus be contrasted with the sheer number of poets whose work has appeared in these beautiful sari bound volumes. The publisher's 1969 anthology, for instance, *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and a Credo*, contained over one hundred poets, displaying what Eunice de Souza saw as a complete lack of discernment. It is "a mess" she contended: "To choose the odd poem that happens to catch one's fancy from among these and to anthologize it is surely to make the anthology representative of nothing" (qtd. Peeradina *Quest* 125, 126-127).

OUP and Writer's Workshop made a simultaneous appeal to

metropolitan and local audiences. The Oxford New Poetry in India Series, for instance, targeted a metropolitan reader with their artistic and political fascination with the decolonized Third World – even while seeking to profit from an Indian education market. For Lal's co-operative, the emphasis on Indian-ness also appealed to a metropolitan reader attracted by the exotic, even as it fostered a close and personal relationship to the poets whose work appeared under its imprint. Despite differences between them, both present their poets first and foremost as Indian writers, concerned with articulating their own sense of national identity. For OUP, this negotiation seems to take the form of 'newness', with the publisher favouring work that expressed the conditions of alienation and exile that were expected from postcolonial cultural texts. For the Writer's Workshop on the other hand, the poetry and its stylization projects a much more traditional sense of Indian identity: far from being alienated from India, its poets reaffirm their belonging to a long and rich tradition of Indian culture.

This central concern with the nation is, it seems, notably absent from the poetry published by Clearing House. In what follows, I analyse the visual and editorial decisions of the co-operative, suggesting ways in which Clearing House invites a reconsideration of the hybridity and cosmopolitanism of poetry itself in the city of Bombay.

The form, style and format of Clearing House

When Mehrotra, Jussawalla, Patel, and Kolatkar made the decision to start their own publishing press, it was, we have seen, because they "all had manuscripts"

at that time (“Your Missing Person”). Clearing House was not, in other words, established as a rival publisher to mainstream presses; nor did the poets intend the press to outlast other imprints. It was, by contrast, a product of the here-and-now, designed as a means for these particular four poets to release their own volumes of poetry. Without the monopolizing commercial aspirations of OUP, Clearing House also lacked the paradigmatic intent of the Writer’s Workshop – founded by Lal as a kind of riposte to those critics who maintained the inauthenticity or invalidity of Indian poetry in English.

The four volumes of poetry published by Clearing House in 1976 are stylistically very different from one another: Kolatkar’s *Jejuri* represents a city-dweller’s day trip to the temple town of the same name in Maharashtra, its non-committal style reflecting the influence of the early bhakti saint poets Kolatkar translated as well as the Beats. *Missing Person*, by contrast, is a politically bleak and bewildering sequence that chronicles the physical and psychic breakdown of the postcolonial middle-class writer. Mehrotra’s first sequence draws heavily on European surrealism, and might seem to owe more to André Breton than to the process of decolonization. Finally Patel’s volume turns to the body, presenting a detailed series of observations and social commentaries about how the individual experiences pain in the contemporary city. There is little thematic content to bring these volumes together. In fact, only Jussawalla’s work engages with any of the features critics identify as expected of postcolonial literature – and even then, he does so in such a bewildering manner that the pedagogical force of the text is unsettled.

What these poets and texts do have in common, however, is a commitment to aesthetic standards and quality, and each poet evidences the trans-historical and trans-cultural range of influences on their work. In this,

Clearing House seems to have more in common with the experimental little magazines than to a typical publishing house, which one might expect would issue work written in a similar aesthetic style in order to lend the series a branded identity. Indeed, as demonstrated in Chapter One, *Missing Person* makes the heterogeneous heritages of the postcolonial poet manifest, incorporating a range of intertextual references that Mehrotra notes include Shakespeare, Marx, Hindu and Greek mythology, Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly", children's nursery rhymes, and contemporary Hollywood cinema ("Adil Jussawalla" *Oxford* 126). Similarly in *Nine Enclosures*, Mehrotra constructs poems from an amalgamation of cultural and textual references, creating a highly composite image of poetic traditions. In a poem like "Genealogy", for instance, the poet emphasizes that the subject is not simply a product of a single historical narrative:

My shadow falls on the sun and the sun
 Cannot reach my shadow; near the central home
 Of nomad and lean horse I pick up
 A wheel, a migratory arrow, a numeral. (55)

The image of the sun – suggesting chronology and the passage of time – "Cannot reach" the subject, and is thus not solely responsible for his experiences in this poem. Instead, as the poet remarks in an earlier line, "Each man is an unfinished fiction", formed out of a series of sometimes contradictory and conflicting heritages.

Clearing House's debut volumes all present a particular style or set of interests that, moreover, previously had little place in the public market of Indian poetry in English. When many other editors and poets remained focused on

justifying the very existence of writing in English and of 'writing back' somehow to the colonial centre, Jussawalla, Mehrotra, Kolatkar, and Patel appear interested instead in exploring new and overlooked aesthetic traditions.

Surrealism and humour in particular feature in much of the work published by the Clearing House writers – a characteristic that is not frequently represented in volumes by OUP or the Writer's Workshop and which Jussawalla told me was "sadly lacking" in much Indian poetry in English (interview 8.8.11). Kolatkar especially adopts a wry, sardonic tone in *Jejuri*, using humour and an off-hand manner to cast a critical eye on the commercialization of pilgrimage sites. In the sequence a city dweller comes to Jejuri by bus, and spends the day there wandering around the temples, most of which are little more than ruins, populated by pariah dogs and the odd rat. Throughout the sequence Kolatkar uses what would become a characteristic blend of humour, irony and playfulness. His portrayal of the arrival of the bus-load of pilgrims in "The Priest", for instance, figures the religious man as a ridiculous and sinister presence. The priest waits for the pilgrims – "Is the bus a little late? / the priest wonders" – thinking all the time about the material offerings of food and money the devotees will bring him. His authority is undermined by Kolatkar's grotesque and irreverent descriptions, such as the following:

With a quick intake of testicles
at the touch of the rough cut, dew drenched stone
he turns his head in the sun

...

and under his lazy lizard stare
it begins to grow
slowly like a wart upon his nose. (CP 43)

Kolatkár shows no hesitation in writing about the unsightly and un-godly aspects of the town and its inhabitants, offering an image of the priest that is here almost carnivalesque in its emphasis on his body. Indeed, the entire sequence is primarily concerned with attending to the sights and experiences that might otherwise be dismissed as unsightly, mundane or unexceptional. As I suggest in Chapter Seven, this exemplifies Kolatkár's ability to capture the lived reality of the everyday – a characteristic that is often accompanied with a wry humour that borders on the irreverent.

The poetry published by Clearing House does not correspond to expected postcolonial literary models: its subject matter might just as likely be shopping or sex as colonial history and the imposition of the English language. In fact, in Kolatkár's, Jussawalla's, Chitre's and Mehrotra's work in particular, we can identify a particular desire to negate the tradition of the cosmopolitan Third-World writer that Brennan would later examine. In Kolatkár's refusal to conflate Indian identity with a belief in Hindu practices, for instance, or in his incorporation of American blues rhythms and bhakti stanzaic patterns, a critic can identify a particular insistence to situate his poetry apart from stereotyped portrayals of 'Indian' writing. As Jussawalla remarked in the introduction to *New Writing in India*, the expectations of Western readers that Indian literature will be concerned with the spiritual realm is countered by the actual content of much modern writing, preoccupied, he suggests, with "poverty", "overcrowding" and violence (17-20). The inclusion of humour by Clearing House poets, the intermixing of local and international intertexts, and the secular tone of work like Kolatkár's, thus further guards against abstracted and stereotypical readings of it as expressively or exclusively Indian in character or style.

At the same time, however, the poets published tend to acknowledge the kinds of stereotypes they set themselves apart from, drawing attention to the aesthetic departure enacted by their writing. Indeed, although these poets were certainly not part of what we might now recognise as the cosmopolitan global cultural marketplace, their tendency to examine the traditions and stereotypes their work differs from does pre-empt what Sarah Brouillette would later term the “tension between self-articulation and its market constraints” (82). Brouillette identifies an anxiety on behalf of eminent writers like Rushdie about the demands of the global market, arguing that this anxiety is evidenced in the form of his novels. Similarly, in the work patronized by Clearing House, there is a comparable engagement with the demands and expectations of a Commonwealth metropolitan market: a deliberate evocation of stereotypical visions of India, followed by a self-conscious denial of these same images. Hence in Mehrotra’s poem “Songs of the Ganga”, the poet explicitly engages with the Indian landscapes and the spiritual connotations of the river, beginning with the statement “I am Ganga / Snow from the mountains / The keeper of water” (*Nine Enclosures* 16).

The poet goes on, however, to disassociate this sacred river from any essentialised or exclusive notion of India at all, beginning the second stanza:

I go out onto the world
 I am the world
 I am nations, cities, people
 I am the pages of an unbound book. (17)

The poem makes its criticism of the arbitrariness of the nation even more apparent later on, when the voice of the river says: “I make two lines in the sand / And say they are unbreakable walls // I make the four directions one” (18).

This poem thus enacts what so much of Mehrotra's writing does: it invokes certain stereotypes of India – its national iconography, or scenes from 'national' myths – and then dispenses with the exclusivity of these things entirely. The Ganga or Ganges then is here repositioned not only as an Indian river but as an international, worldly one, "the great dissolver of men". Such an image denotes, on the one hand, specific Hindu funeral rites, even as the river's status as a "dissolver" also suggests the erosion of national boundaries and identities.

The poets whose work appeared under Clearing House's imprint were writers who would not explicitly identify themselves as either postcolonial or Indian. In interview with de Souza, for instance, Patel – a Parsi by birth – reflected on the way in which his community has "absorbed" influences from the British and Indian traditions: "They are a complete mix" (de Souza "Gieve Patel" 88). Kolatkar, similarly stated his aversion to being categorized according to his nationality: "I've never stopped to ask myself whether I am an Indian poet or not." (de Souza "Arun Kolatkar" 22). As a result, a characteristic of the poetry issued seems to be its incorporation of trans-historical and trans-cultural references, and the heterogeneous range of the poets' cultural and aesthetic intertexts.

The very presentation of Clearing House's books reinforces the departure of its poetry from both OUP and the Writer's Workshop. Each of the eight covers, all designed by Kolatkar, is unique, and portrays a specific dimension of the poets' work. Hence, the press is able to reinforce the space that Clearing House occupies – apart from national literary models – even whilst ensuring that each individual volume is recognized for being the individual work of labour that it is.

The front cover of *Missing Person* is a photograph of a man's head and

shoulders.²⁷ He wears a suit and tie, indicating his middle-class status and his Western aspirations, but his face is a blur – no features are discernible, and his appearance is completely negated. This image reinforces the sense of displacement and alienation that *Missing Person's* poems present, while the man's unsettling lack of facial features captures the bewildering and uncomfortable form of the poems inside.²⁸ Kolatkar uses a similar strategy in the design for Nazareth's *Lobo*: here, the cover superimposes a black and white photograph of a wolf's head ('lobo' translates in Portuguese as 'wolf') onto the body of a contemporary young man wearing a leather jacket.²⁹ The wolf faces the reader head on, and the somewhat disconcerting image introduces the unsettling experience that Nazareth's writing exacerbates. In particular, Kolatkar invites the readers to identify that the poems cannot be taken literally: the anachronistic and strange cover image indicates that this work will not be thematically transparent. The use of surrealist images is found again on the cover of Chitre's *Travelling in a Cage*, where Kolatkar superimposes a photograph of a walking boot onto a metal bird cage – which has itself been manipulated so that it has transformed into the silhouette of a man's face.³⁰ The connotations of this image – the movement of walking as opposed to the entrapment of being in a cage – suggest the sense of conflict found in much of Chitre's poetry, which often deals with the individual's negotiations of sexual and social guilt.

The cover of *How Do You Withstand, Body*, also suggests the tension in Patel's poetry.³¹ Here, Kolatkar presents a photograph of a man's torso, but

²⁷ See Fig. 12

²⁸ The figure on the cover of the volume is in fact Jussawalla.

²⁹ See Fig. 13

³⁰ See Fig. 14

³¹ See Fig. 15

casts it onto the background of a kite. As I suggest in Chapter Six, Patel is often interpreted as being a poet of the body to such an extent that the other aspects of his writing – its philosophical and political commitments – are occluded. This image of a kite – implying movement and freedom – thus seems designed to warn against making thematic assumptions about the poetry inside. Similarly, Kolatkar's cover for his own *Jejuri* seems designed to appeal to a reader's preconceptions. The photograph is of a plaque from the town, showing the local deity Khandoba sitting on a horse with one of his wives.³² The image has not – unlike the other covers – been manipulated in any way: it is simply an artifact from the real town of the same name. However, as Mehrotra has noted, many critics tended to interpret the sequence thematically as a direct critique of religion, assuming the poems represented a direct metaphor of Jejuri itself. The image thus plays with the critical reception of the volume, in that it invites the reader to take the work literally – even though readers familiar with Kolatkar's style will know not to take such an invitation for granted.

Kolatkar was not only responsible for the cover designs of individual volumes, but for the overall production of the books as well. Hasan and Anjali Nerlerkar have commented on the characteristic visual layout of Clearing House titles, remarking on their unusual square size and the “air of fragility that lent them their characteristic quality” (Hasan “Your Missing Person”). Picking up a Clearing House book, a reader is certainly struck by the quality of the publication: by the inclusion of two black pages that frame the poems, by the central positioning of the text on each page, with plenty of surrounding white space. Unlike the Writer's Workshop books, which advertised other titles in a poets' book, there are no advertisements or illustrations in these Clearing

³² See Fig. 16

House titles, and the paper itself is thick and heavy. As Bartholomew Brinkman notes, these bibliographic details – font size, paper quality, binding – are significant in that they enable a reader to formulate an impression of the poetry before they read even the first stanza. In his work on high modernist magazines, for instance, he suggests that in granting a single poem an entire page, or in the policy of “isolat[ing] and aestheticiz[ing] a poem”, the editors ascribe a cultural value to poetry that was previously not granted (30). In the case of *Clearing House* then, the central alignment of the poems on a page, and the decision to keep plenty of white space around the text, similarly suggests a conscious desire to position this work in a serious and ‘high’ cultural space.

Ashok Shahane, Kolatkar’s friend and Marathi publisher, recollected to me Kolatkar’s “fastidiousness” about the visual presentation of poetry (interview 19.8.11). He insisted, Shahane said, that the ‘meaning’ and impact of a poem lay not only in its language and imagery, but equally in its design, format, and layout. Shahane went so far in fact as to call Kolatkar “someone who wrote books, not poems”, referencing Kolatkar’s equal investment in the visual and literary spheres. This made him, Shahane said, a publisher’s nightmare, not least because most commercial publishers were restricted by their requirement to adopt a standardized visual format. OUP in fact offered Kolatkar the chance to publish *Jejuri* with them, but as Shahane told me, the poet refused because the publisher wished to shorten some of the long line lengths in his poem “Between Jejuri and the Railway Station”. To Kolatkar, this was unacceptable – a stance Shahane shares too: “if you break a line of the poets’ into two, you ascribe an arbitrariness to that poem”, he argued: “the poem is like a child – you wouldn’t break a child because it didn’t fit into a crib” (interview *ibid*).

When we turn to look at Clearing House's books, then, we can observe a non-conformist and non-standardized aesthetic at play, indicating that the press did not need to change the layout of the poets' work in order to adhere to an established format. Like the experimental little magazines that appeared in the 1960s, Clearing House did not seek metropolitan approval or conformity. Indeed, on the reverse of *Travelling in a Cage*, the editors list the other titles issued by Clearing House, acknowledging that even as early as 1980, *Missing Person*, *Nine Enclosures*, and *How Do You Withstand*, *Body*, were all out of print. Longevity then, and economic success, seems to have had little direct influence on this small press. Instead, its commitment to reproducing the work of poets as they themselves would have it presented, and the press's high editorial and visual standards, signifies the emergence of a particular cosmopolitan community in the city. As King shows, Clearing House was the model on which slightly later small press ventures were based – in particular Newground, the co-operative founded by Melanie Silgado, Raul d'Gama Rose, and Santan Rodriguez in 1978, which brought out debut work by Saleem Peeradina and Eunice de Souza (*First Offence* and *Fix*). Like Clearing House, which began as a result of the working relationships fostered in the city's artistic spaces, Newground was founded by young poets who knew each other from St Xavier's and from the regular public poetry readings held at the college and in Bombay's arts venues. It represents an attempt on behalf of emergent poets in the late 1970s to build on the project of Clearing House, signaling that this period was especially rich for creative collaborations and sub-cultural arts projects.

The relationship between Clearing House and Newground was not competitive, and it is significant, I think, that their work overlapped: de Souza's

Fix was issued by Newground in 1980 and Clearing House continued to publish titles until 1984. Hence, unlike OUP, which Davis demonstrates was in a constant state of competition with its rivals such as Heinemann, Clearing House did not seek to monopolise – and thereby dictate – the local market for poetry. Thus while Hasan emphasizes Clearing House’s significance in the formation of a canon of Indian poets working in English, the press seems not to have consciously held such designs, aiming instead at simply providing an opportunity for quality poets to publish their work in a space that was free of national, Commonwealth and pedagogic expectations.

It seems important that critics return to these spaces, for as Brennan has shown, postcolonial and ‘cosmopolitan’ criticism has tended to ignore what he terms “subcultures of utopia” (82). There is indeed a notable hostility to analyzing such self-consciously intellectual or small-scale subcultures, even though, as Brennan recognizes, the “intellectual effort” involved on behalf of marginal, individual figures contributed to the very creation of “an aesthetic of access for [later] popular use” (82). Like the little magazines analysed in the previous chapter then, Clearing House – the poetry it published, its marketing and production strategies, and the visual design of its volumes – can be repositioned as part of a vibrant literary and cultural moment in Bombay. The intellectualism of Clearing House, for instance, and the kind of poetry it patronized, resists the popular myth of the city as cosmopolitan simply *because* of its varied and ‘hybrid’ population. Such an understanding of cosmopolitanism, as Chaudhuri notes, is deeply indebted to a purely political understanding of the term: on a cultural level, however, cosmopolitanism is located in precisely these inassimilable projects and ventures (“Cosmopolitanism’s Alien Face”). The aesthetic range of the Clearing House poets testifies too to the intellectual and

artistic environment of Bombay in the 1970s, interrogating simultaneously the short-hand invocation of the city as a city of spectacle and popular cultural forms. Together with the little magazines that flourished from the mid-1950s therefore, *Clearing House* is revealing of the specificity of Bombay's poetry culture, demonstrating the potentials of materialist and archival research into poetry and the city. The following chapters consider the work of individual poets in more detail, analyzing the ways in which their poetry responds to the particular circumstances of Bombay. Complementing the archival material collected here and in Chapter Three, these close analyses further demonstrate poetry's embeddedness within the particular social, historical and spatial contexts of the city.

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Chapter Five“Always, in the sun’s eye”:³³ Nissim Ezekiel and the city

Nissim Ezekiel is a poet who comes prefaced by the urban: “He is *the* poet of the Indian city” according to Rajeev S. Patke (“Poetry Since Independence” 248), and the figure Bruce King cites as being central to, even constitutive of, the “Bombay circle” (*Modern* 45). In an interview, Gieve Patel credited Ezekiel with first encouraging him to pay closer attention to his surroundings, pointing out that his reputation as an urban poet rests to a large extent on his insistence that poets should attend to the context in which they were writing (interview 16.8.11). This chapter considers Ezekiel’s own complex reactions to Bombay, analyzing the development in his writing of what might tentatively be termed a Bombay aesthetic. I argue that rather than simply being the iconic city poet, Ezekiel *became* one over time, his changing writing style evidencing his gradual turn towards the city. Indeed, his early work barely registers the city at all, or else it portrays it according to a rather derived modernist model. However, later sequences begin to articulate the variegated social spheres of Bombay, finding a formal and stylistic way to express the particular, and uneven, experiences of modernity found there. His Bombay poems negotiate the demands of the city, problematizing in particular dominant notions of its progressive or secular dimension. As a privileged, English-speaking, urban-dwelling, male poet, however, the form of Ezekiel’s critique and disarticulation of Bombay’s hegemony comes from within the very parameters of the city’s modern literary culture, reinforcing Theodor Adorno’s conviction that art offers resistance to

³³ From Nissim Ezekiel’s “In India” (*CP* 131). All references are taken from his *Collected Poems* and are cited parenthetically in the text.

political systems and ideologies only from within its own structural and discursive space: “Social struggles and the relations of classes are imprinted in the structure of artworks” (*AT* 303).

This chapter thus examines the stylistic and formal changes in Ezekiel’s work, suggesting that they are indicative of ongoing changes in the material sphere of Bombay. I argue that his poetry stages a representational conflict between, on the one hand, dominant preconceptions of the city as an inclusive and idealized locale, and on the other, what Henri Lefebvre would call its immediate and “*lived*” social dimension (*Production* 39). In this way, Ezekiel’s poetry provides a nuanced expression of the city, increasingly seeking a way to articulate the class and gender divisions undermining the “conceptualized” narrative of Bombay as a secular, modern and progressive space (38).

The “paved solitude”³⁴ of the city in Ezekiel’s early poetry

Ezekiel’s first volume, *A Time to Change*, was published while he was living in London in 1952.³⁵ King notes the significance of this volume in the subsequent context of Indian poetry in English, observing that it is the debut “usually thought of as [marking] the start of modern Indian poetry” (*Modern* 62). The title of the work indicates that the poet was instigating a stylistic and thematic departure from the literary practices and traditions inherited from the colonial period, signifying what Sudesh Mishra has called the young poet’s “clean break with the Romantic past” (14). This Romantic lineage is apparent from the literary

³⁴ From Burton Pike, *The Image of the Modern City*, 3

³⁵ Nissim Ezekiel spent three years in England from 1949-1952, where he lived what King has described as “an impoverished, bohemian” life, studying philosophy and working part-time (*Three Indian Poets* 4). *A Time to Change* was issued by Fortune Press, a small independent press.

section of Ezekiel's college magazine *The Wilsonian*, which as demonstrated in Chapter Three, continued to instruct students in the classics of English Literature – especially Wordsworth, Shelley and Shakespeare. The editors of the first issue following independence even implied that writing poetry in English was only for the prodigal minority: "It is given to very few to be able to write verse in an acquired language" (Vol XL, No. 1, Oct 1947, 4). These words indicate the relatively low expectations directed at poets working in English in the late 1940s, and the prevailing assumption that Indian writers should aim no further than imitating a pre-existing (European) canon.

In this context, Ezekiel's poetry, with its crafted verses and tempered, balanced tone, can be seen as strikingly defiant. As fellow writer Keki N. Daruwalla argues, Ezekiel was "the first Indian poet to express a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom", avoiding employing the imitative or clichéd language associated with earlier poets like Sri Aurobindo, Michael Madhusudan Dutt or Saronjini Naidu ("Introduction" xvii). Ezekiel is particularly known for his concern with precision and form, and his insistence that "poetry is a discipline...and is not a hobby for amateurs" (King *Three Poets* 3). As John Thieme notes, Ezekiel's work "is centrally concerned with perception", and continually reflects on what he insisted was the responsibility of the modern poet to encode reality in an exact manner (xxi). Younger poets who benefitted from Ezekiel's advice have written of his ceaseless attention to the details of grammar, rhythm and craft. Menka Shivdasani, for instance, remembers the way the poet would correct the smallest mistakes of grammar in her adolescent poetry: it "was a frequent criticism – a comma here, a full stop there, a colon where I had put a semi-colon" (qtd. Sattar xxviii). When she asked him why he was so preoccupied with what she felt to be the minor attributes of a poem,

Ezekiel told her: “This is the age when you perfect the craft”; “No matter what level you are at...you should always go a little higher” (xxviii).

The poems in *A Time to Change* are distinctive not merely for their concern with precision and clarity of expression, however, but for the extent to which they reveal the young writer’s anxiety about the role and responsibility of the poet in a postcolonial context. In “Poetry”, the narrator draws attention to the discrepancy between the reality of the ordinary world, and this reality as it is mediated and produced through language by the poet. The verse begins with a conditional statement, exacerbated by the opening ‘if’:

If it were so as I say it is
 In poetry, precisely so,
 A face, a savage, singular
 But well-defined identity,
 Homage would be done to it
 By such a sleep, such a lucid flow
 Of time, that I would be
 In poetry defined
 As in reality I should be so. (CP 13)

These lines acknowledge the difficulties facing the poet who attempts to render people and experiences “precisely so” in language. The narrator imagines an ideal scenario – an untenable one, as conveyed by “*If it were so*” – in which he is able to distil all the intricacies of one “savage, singular” face into poetic discourse. The idealism of this vision is confirmed a few lines later, when the narrator again uses, and repeats, the provisional statement: “I would be / In poetry defined / As in reality I should be so” (13). The narrator articulates his attitude towards poetry, continuing:

A poem is an episode, completed
 In an hour or two, but poetry

Is something more. It is the why
The how, the what (13)

This notion of poetry as the source of meaning and knowledge about the world was an attitude Ezekiel would develop throughout his career. Later poems would continue to focus on the spiritual and social role of the poet, often adopting a less ambivalent tone in which to describe the position of poetry: “Do not be satisfied with the world / that God created. Create your own” (“Advice to a Painter” 205). In 1952, however, the poet’s evident desire to find an original voice is tempered with his recognition of the challenges involved. The narrator in this early volume is often isolated: “I am / Exposed to life and know it quite alone” (“The Great” 21); disenchanted with literature: “Sometimes I do not want to read anymore, but still I do it, moving up and down the lines of even print, like a train” (“Reading” 33); and frequently overwhelmed at his inability to find the right word for the situation: “I cannot find a word for the wind; / Blind as Homer, brooding on the wine-dark sea” (“A Word for the Wind” 21).

Ezekiel’s reference to Homer in “A Word for the Wind” is suggestive of what critics have termed his “derivative” early style, which they argue draws too heavily on Western intertexts (Mishra 82). The poems in *A Time to Change* and his next, 1953, volume *Sixty Poems*, confirm Ezekiel’s erudition, but his evident familiarity with the work of high modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot threatens, at times, to overshadow the originality of his own voice. As King observes, “too often the diction, phrasing, forms are those of other poets”, these early poems appearing to seek validation through their allusions to more established writers and literary traditions (*Three Poets* 37).

This appears particularly the case in his explicitly urban poems, where the city being portrayed is not Bombay, but London, and appears as a place of

subjective alienation. In “The Double Horror”, Ezekiel reflects on the terrifying anonymity of the city crowd:

I am corrupted by the world, continually
 Reduced to something less than human by the crowd,
 Newspapers, cinemas, radio features, speeches
 Demanding peace by men with grim warlike faces,
 Posters selling health and happiness in bottles,
 Large returns for small investments (7)

The accumulative list of capitalist cultural artifacts – “newspapers, cinemas, radio features” - overwhelms the narrator, and he depicts this technological, consumerist environment as a “jungle growth of what so obviously intends / to suck life from life” (7). Mishra and K.D. Verma have noted the influences of Eliot and W.H. Auden in this poem, in particular in its metaphorical use of the city to convey the dislocation and existential despair of the narrative persona. Like Auden, who “consistently transforms the perceived world into symbolic, allegorical and metonymic modes”, Ezekiel too seems to use the modern city as a trope and setting for the individual “quest” of the subject (Marchetti 205). The narrator of “The Double Horror” experiences the erosion of their own humanity within the metropolitan crowd: in the second stanza they “rejoice” upon hearing that “fifty thousand Chinese have been killed”, and by the closing lines, the narrator has become a part of the frightening atmosphere of the city, a perpetuator of the violence and dehumanization the poem began by lamenting: “infected I corrupt the world” (8).

There is a prevailing sense of spatial and social dislocation in Ezekiel’s early poems, with the protagonist often presented as being distanced from their geo-cultural surroundings. This is symptomatic of what Burton Pike has characterized as a modernist tendency to invoke the city as a metaphor for the

“paved solitude” of contemporary social life, using it as a means to reflect on the threatened individuality of the writer or artist (3). In Ezekiel’s “Encounter”, it is London that is portrayed, but it is presented as an unreal space of over-stimulation:

The city pressed upon me; shops, cinemas and business houses
spoke in unambiguous accents. Only the people said nothing.
They bought the evening papers, hurried to a tube station,
ceasing to exist. (35)

The relationship between the narrator and his material setting in “Encounter” is decidedly un-reciprocal, despite the poem’s title. The metropolis, it appears, is fundamental to the narrator’s poetic development (it “pressed upon me”), but he cannot attend to its existence independently of himself: “only the people said nothing”. London – and by extension, the cultural and literary values of the metropole – is formative to the narrator’s professional poetic development, even as it offers little opportunity for social interaction. Indeed, the crowd of commuters “ceas[e] to exist” after they disappear from his line of vision, a phrase that indicates the narrator’s inability to imagine how individuals experience and live there.

Ezekiel’s early London poems suggest a pervasive anxiety surrounding the city, and a desire to bring the “pandemonium of the street” under the narrator’s figurative control (34). In “Encounter”, for instance, the poet’s muse appears and advises him how best to make ‘use’ of the material of his urban surroundings:

Move in living images, he said. Rhythms, shapes,
colours, forms, they are yours. In them is embodied

the language with which the laws of the universe
brighten existence. (35)

These lines convey a sense of ambivalence in the poet's own notion of space. On the one hand, the instruction to "Move in living images" can be read as indicating the writer's responsibility to address their contemporary situation rather than representing and replicating historical scenarios. At the same time however, these "living images" are then listed, likened to artistic material that is ready to be shaped, ordered, and selected by the poet: "Rhythms, shapes, colours, forms, they are yours" (35). The city thus appears as a rich source of artistic material for the poet, who is able to exert a claim over the things, people and social forms found there.

These early poems demonstrate a tendency to use the actual city as a metaphor for the individual's own anxieties, subsuming the historical and material reality of London, in the poem above, with the narrator's innermost feelings and insecurities. There is little attempt to attend to the city's history, and the poet maintains a sense of distance from the "pandemonium of the street" (34). As the narrator of "Something to Pursue" (an early poem from *A Time to Change*) states: "poets are so serene, / Moving like the moon across a busy street, / So detached, so above the common world" (19). Such images project the poet as a timeless figure, whose work is unaffected by and unconcerned with material and historical changes. At the same time, the poet's detachment from the "common world" reflects, perhaps, Ezekiel's own sense of dislocation in London. As the poet recollected to Eunice de Souza, his time in London was dispiriting, and he felt distanced from the city and its inhabitants: "It was as if it was *their* city" (de Souza "Nissim Ezekiel" 5). His biographer similarly wrote that Ezekiel was "a spectator, not a player" during these years, noting that while the

young poet took advantage of the cultural events and resources in London, he remained apart, socially, from the London 'scene' (Rao R. 75). Ezekiel's early emphasis on the disorienting and overwhelming perception of the protagonist in the modern capitalist city can hence be read as revealing of the poet's own sense of distance from his surroundings.

Bombay in Ezekiel's poetry

When Ezekiel returned to Bombay in 1952, he returned to a city that was at the centre of India's drive to modernization. The first five-year plan initiated by Congress had begun its reorganization of India's economic structure in 1951, with the intention of addressing pressing questions of food distribution (Guha 206). Bombay – as the wealthy 'gate-way' city, historically Westernized and paradigmatically modern – was co-opted to embody the Nehruvian socialist principles of urban planning and progressive modernity. As detailed in the introduction, Bombay was seen to “embody the possibilities of a modern, socialist and secular nation”, an idealized site for the projection of Nehru's aspirations for a wealthy, modern, civic new nation (Varma “Provincializing” 68). For Nehru, speaking shortly after independence, it was the city to which he looked at to “represent the highest cultural achievement of the age...of the cultural growth of India, of that inner strength and balance” (“Democratic India” 52).

Nehru's socialist vision of the ideal city, and his rhetoric of a particular kind of modernity – one founded in post-Enlightenment principles of rationality, progress, and social responsibility – is evidenced by remarks he made ten

years before as well. Addressing the Calcutta Corporation in November 1936, Nehru intimated his vision for India's cities:

I like this idea of trying to look after great cities, trying to raise their level, of making them beautiful cities, not only with beautiful buildings but also with healthy, efficient human beings, or loving people, cooperating with each other and not trying to knock each other down and make each other miserable. This is the ideal of the great city that I should like to have and I like to work for.
("The Functions of a Municipality" 629)

In the wake of the Partition violence in 1947, such a harmonious urban ideal became even more pertinent an image to disseminate, one that Gyan Prakash has demonstrated was replayed and incorporated in a range of post-1947 literary and filmic texts (117-157). Cultural producers, writers and filmmakers thus became vital instruments for the projection of this urban ideal, their work fulfilling an important social role. As the director Raj Kapoor declared, for instance, his films represented his attempt to complement the new nation's socialist vision: "He [Nehru] was a visionary and I tried to follow him, to do my best, whatever I could, through films" (qtd. Varma "Provincializing" 68).

Cities like Bombay were thus paradigmatic sites for the construction of a national imaginary in the early 1950s, when Ezekiel returned from London. The presentation of the city as an ideal space of modernity was reliant on what Lefebvre would term the "conceptualized" domain of space, whereby certain values and judgments about the spatial are projected onto it (*Production* 38). The ease with which certain spaces were mythologized as being a certain way – the city as progressive and secular, for instance – depended on a set of "signs" or "codes" that would translate local realities into signifiers of greater spatial consequence (33). Lefebvre argued that the conceived realm was "the

space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent” – those in charge of forming a particular ideological vision or plan of space (38). This “is the dominant space in any society”; as values attach themselves to space, they become imaginatively and politically enshrined as a given (39). As Edward Soja contends too, “the imagined geography tends to become the ‘real’ geography”, as ideals of space and how it should function or appear, act as a simulacrum for the “[a]ctual material forms” (79). Hence, the city, which is vital to a modern, post-independence narrative of progress, is so prominently figured as a space of opportunities, secularism and new beginnings that it becomes difficult to imagine its alternative realities.

Ezekiel may have been among the first generation of writers to come to cultural maturity in an independent India, but unlike those writers or artists of the cultural mainstream whose work seemed to be assigned a social function, the young poet occupied a distinctly marginal position. As suggested earlier in this chapter, prevailing attitudes towards poetry figured it as unavoidably imitative of European Romantic texts, considering the use of English as particularly restrictive and inauthentic. There were few opportunities for aspiring poets to publish when Ezekiel returned from Britain, moreover, apart from a recently started poetry page in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (the newspaper on which Ezekiel started work). To be a poet – and to be a poet from a Jewish background within mainstream Hindu culture – was thus to exist at an angle from hegemonic cultures and narratives of Bombay. Moreover, as a middle-class English speaking poet, Ezekiel occupied an especially peripheral space, apart from the popular project of creating a modern cultural consciousness.

In this context, *Sixty Poems*, published in 1953, and *The Third*, published in 1959, can be read as tentative and anxious explorations of what it meant to be a modern poet in a newly independent, modern city like Bombay. The poems negotiate the poet-narrator's colonial education, drawing on a wide range of cultural influences as if to suggest that the poetic persona is trying to find his own voice. However, there are few direct references to Bombay itself: in fact, many of the poems seem to deliberately retreat from their spatial and temporal context, a stance that suggests the anxiety elicited by the city. The opening poem of *Sixty Poems*, for instance, is told from the self-consciously isolated position of "basement rooms" by a narrator who actively turns away from his surroundings: "The view from basement rooms is rather small, / A patch or two of green, a bit of sky, / Children heard but never seen" ("A Poem of Dedication" 39). The narrator equates poetic creativity with his self-imposed exilic situation, noting that the windows have "high curtains to block the outward eye", and declaring at the end of the first stanza, "I close my eyes to see with better sight" (39).

The "landscape" the narrator refers to throughout the rest of the poem is an imaginative one in which he appears to find inspiration and solace. As he turns away from the meager material confines of his basement room, the poem shifts: "suddenly the mind is loosed of chains / And purifies itself before the warm / Mediterranean" (39). In retreating into his imagination, away from the sterility of his real surroundings in which "nothing changes, nothing grows", the narrative persona of "A Poem of Dedication" removes himself from the circuits of artistic responsibility that assume a writer must speak to, or for, a representative community (39). The poet's positioning of his protagonist in a far-flung locale, away from both India and Bombay, suggests that Ezekiel is in the

process of negotiating with the expectations levied at the postcolonial writer. It is the image – rather than the theme or political intent – that is of concern to the poet, who counsels:

The image is created; try to change.
Not to seek release but resolution,
Not to hanker for a wide, god-like range
Of thought, nor the matador's dexterity. (40)

The narrator describes his objective as a poet: "I want a human balance humanly / Acquired, fruitful in the common hour" (40). This appears to signify the poet's intention to focus on the ordinary features of contemporary life, yet he rarely directly engages with his surroundings in this volume. There are merely brief references to his impressions of the world – particularly to the ominous sound of "children heard but never seen" – which denote a sense of anxiety about how to figure this new space. The poetic persona expresses unease about what he terms elsewhere "The flare and flux of what is merely show" in the surrounding sphere ("The Stone" 40). Having stated his intention as a poet to articulate, in his work, the particularity of experiences, he nevertheless appears unable to come to terms with this new urban setting.

Sara Upstone has argued that the fundamental chaos and unpredictability of space – economic, social and material – was particularly threatening to colonial administrators, proposing that their organization of cities belied an "attempt to obscure an existing diversity with order" (6). This fear of space, and the subsequent attempt to overwrite or domesticate it is evident too in postcolonial literary representations, including, I think, Ezekiel's early configurations of the city. Hence, the few external features Ezekiel includes in "A Poem of Dedication" – windows, washing lines, trees – can be read as an

attempt to tame the chaotic space of the modern city via a trope of domestication, “overwriting” and managing space (Upstone 6). Similarly, in a poem from *The Third*, the narrator lists the objects and people he encounters in the city, ascribing to them a clearly defined and passive role: “women, trees, tables, waves and birds, / Buildings, stones, steamrollers”, he writes, “are there to be enjoyed” (“Conclusion” 96). Their function, in the poem, is to:

Remain and reflect
The oblique light of mind,
Directly, not from a distance,
But like a mirror on the kitchen wall. (96)

By configuring his material surroundings as a mirror, the narrator suggests a desire to know and control them, as well as a continuing tendency to dwell predominantly on how his surroundings relate to himself. In likening objects and other people to a mirror, moreover, the poet conveys his own continuing preoccupation with the perceived space of the individual. As Michel Foucault wrote of the trope of the mirror, it provides an ambivalent figuration of the individual subject and the space they inhabit as simultaneously real and unreal: “The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place”; it “enables me to see myself where I am absent” (“Of Other Spaces” 25, 15). In imagining his external surroundings as a mirror, the narrator in “Conclusion” reinforces his attempt to domesticate space and relate it to himself.

The domestication of space is accompanied in many of the poems by a stylistic attempt to find a singular and authentic voice. What critics identified as the derivativeness of Ezekiel’s London poems becomes the source of anxiety in *Sixty Poems* and *The Third*, as he plays with various lineages and styles in order to find a ‘new’ one. Often, this involves the incorporation of references

from famous, more established literary works, or the citation of other writers, the shifting stylistic register suggesting the poet's attempt to integrate the range of influences with his own voice. In "For William Carlos Williams", for instance, the poet reflects on the appeal of Williams's imagism, and his minimal poetic style. Like the older poet, Ezekiel's poem uses direct, non-metaphorical language, and is presented minimally on the page. The opening stanza begins:

I do not want
to write
poetry like yours
but still I
love
the way you do it. (45)

The will of the postcolonial poet here – "I do not want" – is countered by the seemingly inevitable consequences of his education, which appear to contrive to produce such an inspired engagement with Williams's work. Ezekiel's poem could almost be an exercise prompted by reading Williams's more well-known imagist poems like "The Red Wheelbarrow" or "This is Just to Say", which showed the resonance of an apparent lack of form, and an absence of punctuation.

The articulation of the difficult relationship between the poet and their literary influences is evidenced further in "The Crows", which is dedicated to Arthur Rimbaud's *Les Corbeaux* (The Ravens). The narrator in Ezekiel's poem is once again an isolated figure, and the verse opens with a plaintive prayer:

Lord, when I am numb, alone,
When, in my small, domestic room
The heart has quietly turned to stone,
I hear again a cry of doom

And think of Rimbaud's odd delights
 Descending from symbolic heights. (41)

The narrator is positioned within and yet apart from his surroundings, and the word “quietly” further emphasizes his separation from the social sphere. It is his sympathy for Rimbaud’s poem that inspires him, and he reveals that he turns to this text for comfort: “Rimbaud’s ancient Calvary / Imagined of the common road / Consoles me with a different code” (41).

Towards the end of the poem, Ezekiel’s narrator reimagines the “Strange birds” of Rimbaud’s text transposed into an identifiably Indian setting: as he lies on his “narrow bed”, he listens to birds outside “on mango-trees / Lost in the gloomy close of day” (41). This is striking, and suggestive of what Ramazani has argued to be poetry’s particular cross-cultural scope, and the postcolonial poets’ specific relationship to literary history: “postcolonial poets have had to refashion [modernism]...for resisting local and imperial monisms...They have reshaped it through indigenous genres and vocabularies, have re-centered it in non-Western landscapes” (*Transnational* 100). The presence of Rimbaud’s crow in a contemporary Indian setting thus seems to suggest Ezekiel’s indigenization of Rimbaud’s work, and his attempt to use the texts and writers with whom he was familiar in order to examine his own material surroundings and experiences. However, in the concluding lines, the narrator turns away from the “mango-trees” and appeals: “But let me be – with no retreat, / Bound by Rimbaud’s old defeat” (41).

These early volumes articulate the uncomfortable experience of what it meant to be a modern poet in a ‘modern’ setting. The narrator’s configuration of modernist literary forebears as providing a retreat from the world at the end of “The Crows” suggests that at this stage, acknowledging the presence of

European influences was not felt to be compatible with the cultivation of a modern Indian sensibility. The poem "The Stuffed Owl" (70) identifies the danger in drawing extensively on 'foreign' forms and imagery: it is subtitled 'After reading much bad poetry', and details how easy it is for a poet to write verse that is derivative: "What is the poet but a bore?" the narrator asks early on, before presenting an unflattering image of the aspiring writer as he "strays disconsolately / From a mystic image to a sterile phrase" (70). The poem implies that the postcolonial poet is condemned to imitate a metropolitan model: "Cypresses or roses add the final touch / To non-existent landscapes", he writes, before concluding with a witty self-critique in the form of a pun: "A calculated couplet ends the game, / The tired poet quickly signs his name" (70). These lines attend to the difficulties of negotiating a learned literary tradition, and express derision for the poet who considers poetry to be a mere "game".

The narrator of the poems in *Sixty Poems* and *The Third* is typically represented as unsure of his own identity, staging a search for meaning, voice and subjectivity. As the narrator notes in "Portrait", the modern writer "walks the hard, accustomed way" – a phrase that figures modern life and the act of writing as a trial (87). The narrator continues, depicting the poet's tenacity in an uncertain context: "Against the grain he keeps at it / And checks his progress week by week" (87). Writing poetry, Ezekiel implies, is a labour, a hard process of craftsmanship that makes demands of its practitioners. The challenge that remains for the modern poet, therefore, is how to use the forms, language and techniques with which he is evidently so familiar, in order to express a new and original set of experiences that are particular to his own contextual situation.

'Coming to terms with Bombay'

In an interview with de Souza, Ezekiel spoke of his increasingly outward looking perspective from the publication of *The Unfinished Man* in 1960: “[It] contains the first poems on the theme of coming to terms with Bombay”, he acknowledged (5). Rather than the lone narrator retreating inside buildings and basements, the narrator in many of these poems is out in the city – albeit uncomfortably. Often images are drawn explicitly from Bombay, although they are expressed in the poet’s characteristic iambic prosody. He thus uses the style and vocabulary of European modernism to represent, and undermine, his own modern setting, starting to develop a self-reflexive poetic approach to the city. In “Urban”, for example, imagery, metaphors and tropes are taken from the city:

The city like a passion burns.
 He dreams of morning walks, alone,
 And floating on a wave of sand.
 But still his mind its traffic turns
 Away from beach and tree and stone
 To kindred clamour close at hand. (117)

This concluding stanza reinforces the centrality of the city for Ezekiel’s developing poetic, and his rejection of the pastoral – “Away from beach and tree and stone” – suggests his parallel rejection of the kind of quaint writing filled with “cypresses and roses” he criticized in “The Stuffed Owl” (70). The poet, it seems, may want to dream of “floating on a wave of sand”, but knows he is no longer able to avoid engaging with the realities of his surroundings in the modern city (117).

The narrator in “Urban” adopts a logocentric conception of Bombay: it is a metaphor, “*like a passion*”, and prompts his very thoughts to take on the form of “traffic turns” (117). However, the metaphorical language is explicitly drawn from Bombay, and the “kindred clamour close at hand” (117). The quest-motif of Ezekiel’s earlier poetry is thus explicitly relocated into a modern urban setting, one in which – unlike the London of his previous collections – the narrator experiences a connection with.

“A Morning Walk” more overtly combines a traditional modernist style and idiom with specific material references to Bombay. The poem begins with the poet-narrator “[D]riven from his bed by troubled sleep / In which he dreamt of being lost” (119). In his dream, the persona finds himself in an in-between space “where several highways crossed”, and from where he “saw the city, cold and dim, / Where only human hands sell cheap”. As Verma and Mishra note, there are clear echoes of William Blake’s critical descriptions of eighteenth and nineteenth-century London in these lines, which have been so instrumental in associating the industrial city with abjection and exploitation. The influences of such literary and cultural forebears, however, is combined in the following, famous stanza, with an attentiveness to Bombay’s specific social problems:

Barbaric city, sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs. (119)

There is no antagonism here between Ezekiel’s European literary heritage – evidenced in his allusions to Blake and Dickens, as well as by the iambic

structure of the poem – and the specific realities of Bombay – with its “slums”, its “hawkers, beggars” and its evidence of poverty. The poem displays what Ramazani considers to be postcolonial poetry’s specific ability to bring together different cultural influences, to “interanimate foreign and indigenous genres” in a way that denies the hegemony of either (*Transnational* 4). The integration of Indian and European references in “A Morning Walk” is very different from the poems in *Sixty Poems*, which displayed a deep sense of anxiety about drawing on modernist, European models. Instead, “A Morning Walk” provides a space for differing influences and lineages to come together, and in this way can be seen as one of Ezekiel’s first poems to engage, expressly, with the circumstances of an Indian city.

The language used in “A Morning Walk” is notably antiquated, evidenced in phrases such as “It was an old recurring dream / That made him pause upon a height”, as well as the Anglican references to “purgatorial lanes” and the individual’s “formal dress” (119). This archaic register does more than simply convey the stylistic influence of British texts; indeed, the deliberately old-fashioned style transposed onto a contemporary setting provides a particularly effective way for the poet to critique the social inequalities found in modern Bombay. What appears initially to be a historical poem is revealed instead to refer to the situation in Bombay, a shocking realization for Ezekiel’s contemporary readers in a city that was popularized as “the city of dreams and possibilities” (Varma “Provincializing” 65).

The poem’s critique of the city’s poverty is compounded by the way in which it interrogates the socialist, secular inclusivity Bombay was meant to represent. The proliferation of religious images – of the narrator nearing the “middle of his journey”, of the poor as “masses” and the roads as “purgatorial” –

suggests that the modern city is far from a secular space, and continues to be divided along religious and class lines. Bombay is referenced as “The marsh where things are what they seem”, suggesting further that no ideological or rhetorical ‘dressing’ can alter the deprivations of its poorest citizens. Despite its increasing significance as a modern and progressive city – a city assumed to offer new possibilities for social interaction and opportunity – the reference to the “marsh” attends to the material history of Bombay’s development. It might now be part of a macro-rhetoric of progressive modernity, but it is also a result of land reclamation and of accumulative geographical and social processes.

The narrator in “A Morning Walk” seems unable to intervene in the conditions he observes, and refers to his impotency throughout: he has a “fragmented view” of the world; “Too late and small his insights came”; “His will is like the morning dew” (119). The narrator’s powerlessness and separation from the pressing problems of the city, however, is countered by the poem’s concluding lines, in which he expresses his own commitment to the city “where fame is cheap, / And he belongs, an active fool” (120). Indeed, “A Morning Walk” and “Urban” both use a distinctive form and style to perform an “active” critique of dominant projections of Bombay. They illuminate the disparity between Bombay’s popular image and its “Barbaric” reality, juxtaposing contemporary references to Bombay’s inequalities with traditional allusions to high modernist writers and sentiments.

Ezekiel thus undermines his own poem, revealing the hidden social and economic inequalities that haunt his lyrical mode of expression. In this way, his work demonstrates what Adorno insisted: that it is the mode of expression and the form in which resistance is conveyed, which renders art capable of articulating political dissent. As he wrote in *Aesthetic Theory*:

The clichés of art's reconciling glow enfolding the world are repugnant not only because they parody the emphatic concept of art with its bourgeois vision and class it among those Sunday institutions that provide solace. These clichés rub against the wound that art itself bears. (2)

As Neil Lazarus contends, Adorno was alert to the discrepancy between “European bourgeois humanism [that] has always insisted upon its civility” and the fact that “it has never delivered on this promise, except, arguably to the privileged few” (*Nationalism and Cultural Practice* 3). The “wound” that Ezekiel's Bombay poems bear witness to is thus the underlying barbarism of the city, and the manifestations of its poverty that might seem to belong to an entirely different place and time.

Throughout *The Unfinished Man*, and more explicitly in his next volume, *The Exact Name*, published in 1965, Ezekiel's poetry is most often concerned with exploring the class specific spaces found in Bombay, rather than representing the city-at-large as he does in “A Morning Walk”. By setting many of his poems in art galleries and museums, or at poetry readings and cultural events, Ezekiel stages a very particular critique of Bombay's modern and progressive image, exposing the underlying “wound” of inequality, gender imbalance and class prejudice that informs these public arenas (Adorno AT 2). In “Poetry Reading” for instance, Ezekiel portrays the peculiar atmosphere at a public reading of poetry, casting an ironic gaze on the way in which the poet is fawned over and flattered. The poet in the verse “stood infirmly, tall and dim, / With half a halo round his head” (136). The figure acts as he pleases: “He drank, he drugged himself, he went / With wives and whores galore” (136). The poem implicitly critiques these cultural events that foster such a sense of dislocation on behalf of the poet from the wider world, and reveals the

pervasiveness of unequal power relations even within such a modern cultural space.

Similarly in “A Woman Observed”, a poem set in the “neutral” space of an art gallery, the narrator watches a young pregnant woman make her way around the exhibits, objectifying her body in an ominous display of power: “The life / in the woman’s belly / swelling her erotic lines” is unsettling for the reader, and reveals the extent to which power is manifested along patriarchal lines even in such a supposedly modern, “neutral” locale (140). Only the poet – middle-class and male – is able to fully enjoy the modernity offered by the space of the gallery, the poem demonstrating the uneven distribution of cultural access and freedom in Bombay.

“In India”, another poem from *The Exact Name*, is one of Ezekiel’s most anthologized poems, and is revealing of the myths of modernity upon which Bombay’s dominant image is founded. The opening lines of its first stanza are situated explicitly “in the sun’s eye, / Here among the beggars, / Hawkers, pavement sleepers”, and as a result it tends to be interpreted as a poem that concerns the inequalities of the big city (131). It is, however, a poem most notably concerned with evoking the spaces of middle-class Bombayites, detailing experiences and events with which Ezekiel was most familiar. Indeed, the autobiographical narrator is uncomfortable in the “Here” of the homeless, and is depicted as out of place: “Suffering the place and time, / I ride my elephant of thought, / A Cézanne slung around my neck.” (131) The poor pavement dwellers lack any sense of historicity, and their economic deprivation almost seems inevitable: They are “Always in the sun’s eye, / Here”. The poet, on the other hand, is mobile; he may “ride [his] elephant of thought” and move through the varied spaces of the modern city with ease (131).

The three subsequent sections of the poem examine different spatial locations in the city; a middle-class school, a New Year's Eve party, and the final seduction (and implied rape) of a young woman by her British boss in his apartment. Ezekiel is attentive to the different forms of social and religious divides that continue to mediate the lives and movements of these modern citizens, and in doing so, the poem enacts a further critique of the secular and socialist claims of both the city and nation. The second section is set in one of the city's prestigious modern schools, and opens by drawing attention to the continuing power of the signifier of religious difference:

The Roman Catholic-Goan boys
 The white-washed Anglo-Indian boys
 The musclebound Islamic boys
 Were earnest in their prayers. (132)

As Sanjay Srivastava has argued in his study of the Doon school in Dehradun, schools remained highly ideological spaces and continued to be modeled on colonial ideals, long after 1947. The environment of a modern and progressive education, he shows, fosters a highly individualized sense of identity at the same time as it re-inscribes notions of collective difference – of religion or class background for example. In one of the school magazines Srivastava analyses, the headmaster praises the individualism and distance between the boys at the Doon school: “we pride ourselves...in the fact that two boys can sleep in adjacent beds for six years and be friends without ever finding out each other's backgrounds” (qtd. Srivastava 408). The “progressive anonymity” of urban school life is problematized in Ezekiel's lines above (408); on the one hand, the boys are not depicted as fully realized characters, described instead as little more than stereotypical caricatures. At the same time, however, it is their

religious backgrounds that demarcate their actions and friendship groups, the reiteration of their different groupings suggestive of the continuing mediation of 'secular' spaces by the parameters of religion.

The repetition of "The.../The..." formally stresses and spatialises the distance separating the boys from one another, even in the supposedly secular space of a modern city school. Ezekiel redeploys dominant cultural stereotypes to describe each religious group, further conveying the extent to which religious identity continued to play a significant role in social interactions: "The Roman Catholic-Goan boys / Confessed their solitary joys" while "The Anglo-Indian gentlemen / Drank whisky in some Jewish den", and the Muslims are "slowly creeping in / Before or after prayers" (132). In a later poem "Background Casually", the poet again uses the setting of a school to redeploy stereotypes. The narrator then is a "boy of meager bone" whose Jewish background makes him the target for the violence of other children; the Catholic students "told me I had killed the Christ"; a "Muslim sportsman boxed my ears", and the "Hindu lads" are "strong / But undernourished" (179)

Ezekiel's own secular attitude, combined with his Jewish background, gave him a particular perspective from which to consider and critique religion in India. He belonged to the Bene-Israel Jewish community, a small group whose name translates as 'the lost tribe of Israel'. As Nathan Katz notes, the Bene-Israel were marginalized by other religious communities in Bombay, and were not readily accepted by Bombay's more orthodox, wealthy Baghdadi Jewish society because they were considered to be too readily assimilated into dominant Hindu culture. The Bene-Israel "did not actively construct their own identity, but rather responded to identity forming events" (162). This readiness to adapt to non-Jewish customs and traditions (of food and dress especially)

was disadvantageous in India, where “an immigrant group gains status precisely by maintaining its own identity” (3). The Bene-Israel did not seem to have a discrete collective identity, and were thus unable to participate fully in the nationalist ideal of ‘unity in difference’.

Ezekiel would have been the first to object to the suggestion that his Jewish background was in any way alienating, telling Eunice de Souza that “I don’t for a moment feel I’m in an unenviable position” in not being a Hindu (de Souza “Nissim Ezekiel” 10). However, Ezekiel’s non-orthodox sense of religion put him in a position to be able to recognise the hypocrisy of more orthodox forms of belief. The final line of each stanza in the school section of “In India” describes the boys attending their prayers, and their “earnest” acts of worship appear deeply ironic considering they have previously been engaging in vandalism and bullying (132).

The third and fourth sections depict the chasm separating women from the city’s promises of secular modernity. The setting of a New Year’s Party – with its resonances of new beginnings and fresh starts – appears cosmopolitan: there are, the narrator says, “twenty-three of us in all, / six nations represented” (133). It is the ubiquitous nature of capital, these lines imply, that has granted the male guests access to cosmopolitan and “foreign styles”, even as its uneven distribution has excluded their wives from the same experiences:

The wives of India sit apart.
They do not drink,
they do not talk,
of course, they do not kiss.
The men are quite at home
among the foreign styles
(what fun the flirting is!) (133)

Commentators on modernity in various manifestations have stressed that it is

an overwhelmingly male experience (Aguiar 20; Chakrabarty 189). These lines spatialise the disjunction between the women's experience of modernity and their husbands' by revealing that even in the same room, urban modernity operates in unequal ways. In describing the women as "The wives of India", the poet aligns them with a national sense of identity, while the men seem to have a more flexible relationship to the notion of Indian-ness. The verse demonstrates the overlapping spaces apparent even in one place; the party is not only the location of a transnational consciousness, but is at the same time the locus of gendered and class affiliations, and the site of national identity formations.

Existing outside the pleasures offered by the modern city, the women in the third stanza are figured as static and passive subjects. The fourth stanza goes further, however, elucidating the dangers of modernity for women by suggesting that the promises of liberal, modern society are little different from the illusory civilizing promises offered by colonial rhetoric. The setting of "the large apartment / With cold beer and western music" is an aspirational space for many young Indians, and the young woman depicted is impressed by her British boss:

This, she said to herself
As she sat at the table
With the English boss,
Is IT. This is the promise (133)

At their "second meeting", however, the girl "sat in disarray" after a "struggle", with the concluding lines suggesting their encounter had not been consensual: "Certainly the blouse / Would not be used again" (133-134).

"In India" evidences Ezekiel's interest in the different and sometimes contradictory ways in which ordinary Bombayites experienced and related to the

city. The poem was published in 1965, the same year that Ezekiel wrote his essay “Naipaul’s India and Mine”, a piece that provides an important insight into the poet’s changing attitude towards his own surroundings. In his essay, written in response to the publication of V.S. Naipaul’s *An Area of Darkness*, Ezekiel criticizes the way in which the novelist portrays India and Indians. He objects not to the content of Naipaul’s criticisms – indeed, Ezekiel emphasizes that he shares many of Naipaul’s attitudes towards poverty, the caste system, hygiene, and other issues that are raised in the text – but rather to what Ezekiel considers to be the generalized conclusions Naipaul makes about the country and the “uninvolved and unconcerned perspective” from which he writes (74). Naipaul’s book, Ezekiel argues, is so intent on projecting the writer’s own view of India, that it is unable to take account what is really there. Ezekiel suggests that writing should seek a material, historical and contextual understanding of the problems in India, uncovering actual conditions and situations if it is to have a useful “objective function” (89). Pointing particularly to a passage in which Naipaul portrays all Indian clerks as ignorant, Ezekiel intervenes by noting that Naipaul has dismissed the set of circumstances that constitute the life of a clerk:

I know these clerks, their background, their problems, their conditions of work, their income, how they are transported to and from their places of work, their educational and cultural limitations, their sense of dignity and worth, their humanity, in short...Mr Naipaul shows little humility, spiritual or other” (77).

The essay itself makes the case for detailed, observational accounts of the everyday in India, which is what Ezekiel’s poetry begins to articulate from this point on. Some critics, such as Chetan Karnani, find the shift to a more observational style to be limiting, arguing that from *The Exact Name* onwards, his poetry is “too matter-of-fact and pedestrian to make any profound or

permanent appeal” (177). On the contrary, I find this shift to be indicative of the poet’s increased concern for the specific social environment of the city, and his interest in undermining generalized conceptions about the modern secular sphere of Bombay. From the mid-1960s, his work contemplates what it means to live in the city, chronicling a relatively unexplored site of middle-class experience.

In Ezekiel’s 1976 volume *Hymns in Darkness*, and in his 1982 work *Latter Day Psalms*, the poet frequently draws on objects or events he came upon in the city. Indeed, in these sequences, it is possible to identify a marked increase in his use of free verse, indicative of Ezekiel’s adoption of a more socially embedded style. Unlike the carefully structured form and prosody of his earlier poems, which Daruwalla conceded sometimes “did not do full justice to the passion in his poems” and imposed a strong sense of “rigidity” in his writing, Ezekiel’s increased use of free verse from the mid-1970s suggests his desire not to order and compartmentalize the world, but rather to express it as it is lived and experienced by ordinary people (xxxii).

“Bellasis Road”, for example, is a poem that exemplifies the shift in Ezekiel’s attitude towards the city and his surroundings. The poem begins as the narrator watches a local woman who is standing on his road. Initially, he looks at her and only notices the colours of her clothes and ornaments, which he lists as follows: “purple sari, yellow blouse, / green bangles, orange / flowers in her hair” (188). Part way through, however, when the narrator actually turns to “look at her”, he confronts the reality of life for this woman, attempting to represent her as a real figure rather than as an abstract image of poverty or femininity. “I look at her...”, the ellipses indicating that this figure prompts the poet to renegotiate the stereotypical terms and vocabulary he has previously

used: “the colour disappears, / she’s short, thin and dark” (189). He wonders about her life as she stands “waiting for her / hawker or mill-worker, / coolie or bird-man”, and concludes by accepting that this woman’s life exceeds his own ability to understand and represent it. He thinks of her, he says, “without a single / desperate moral / to keep it in focus”, instead coming towards an engagement with the actual reality of her life (189). In acknowledging this woman, and her disenfranchisement, the poet reveals the pervasiveness of poverty and inequality, even, and indeed perhaps especially, in his own fairly affluent, middle-class neighbourhood. The poem demonstrates the proximity between poverty and privilege in Bombay, dispelling the image of the city as a paragon of modernity. Indeed, this woman stalls the poet, her social position compelling him to attend to the uneven distribution of wealth and power in the city.

In repudiating the conceived image of Bombay as a nationally inclusive and secular city, and by focusing on examining particular middle-class spaces of neighbourhoods and areas, Ezekiel’s poems come closer to engaging with what Lefebvre contended to be “*lived*” or “representational space” (39).

Lefebvre recognized that lived spaces were above all dynamic and socially interactive, declaring that: “Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel (*noyau*) or centre...It embraces the loci of passion, of action, of lived situations” (42). By recognising the significance of how space is experienced therefore, and in articulating the affective dimension of space – its “qualitative, fluid and dynamic” properties – Ezekiel’s work introduces an alternative incarnation of Bombay, one that is alert to the fact that the city is experienced differently by different people depending on their specific circumstances (42).

This is perhaps most notable in Ezekiel's found and dialect poems, some of which were collected as his "Very Indian Poems in Indian English". These initially began, King explains, as "experiments", written when Ezekiel was starting to produce work for the stage, and were included in *Hymns in Darkness* and *Latter Day Psalms* (*Three Poets* 49). However, these poetic "experiments" enabled the poet to capture a sense of the social space of the city, revealing his marked concern for examining the specific circumstances and settings of Bombay. In "Irani Restaurant Instructions", for example, the short verse reveals how English is used in the city. The poem is simply a list of rules, and was taken directly from a sign hung in one of the city's Irani restaurants which stated how customers should behave:

Do not write letter
Without order refreshment.
Do not comb
Hair is spoiling floor. (240)

This list epitomizes the kind of notices found in cafes across Bombay, and animates a particular kind of encounter in the city. The Irani cafes of Bombay, moreover, are representative of a particular social space – one that exists at the margins of its more glamorous, Westernised milieu, and which had earlier been captured by Arun Kolatkar in his 1962 poem "Irani Restaurant Bombay". In Kolatkar's verse, the Irani restaurant is the domain of "the thirsty loafer", an anachronistic space from which the poet can observe his surroundings (*CP* 224). Ezekiel's decision to poeticize an Irani restaurant sign thus conveys his own interest in local and particular spaces of Bombay, and his desire to express a sense of their social environment.

If the inclusion of reportage or found text reflects Ezekiel's intention to examine the relationship between the discursive and non-discursive spheres, his dialect poems further represent a sustained attempt to represent how ordinary people in Bombay use the English language. In doing so, the poet reproduces the kinds of conversations overheard in particular circumstances across the city, and animates not merely the speakers of his poems but also the social and political class to which they belong. In poems like "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.", Ezekiel captures the particular inflections of speech heard in the city, reproducing the non-standardized grammar and syntax used by Indian English speakers. The poem is set at a leaving party for a young teacher, and takes the form of the address given by one of her colleagues. The poem opens as the speaker addresses the staff and school:

Friends,
 our dear sister
 is departing for foreign
 in two three days,
 and
 we are meeting today
 to wish her bon voyage. (190)

Throughout the poem, the speaker makes inadvertent mistakes that at times introduce an unintended meaning to a sentence: "she is most popular lady / with men also and ladies also" (190).

Many critics have interpreted these language poems as evidence of Ezekiel's satirical propensities, objecting to what they felt to be his caricatures of the English speaking middle-classes of the city. Even critics who liked the poems consider them to be intended as ripostes to a certain community of English speakers in India. C.J. George, for instance, calls the "Goodbye

Party..." a "laughter-provoking...poem in which Ezekiel makes a hilarious mimicry of the type of English proudly spoken by the ill-educated or half-educated Indians" (67). Rajeev S. Patke also focuses on the satire in the poems, arguing that: "Ezekiel targets Indian English as individuated largely through error. The failure to adhere to the norm of Standard English offers limited scope for more than anything but mild satire" (*Postcolonial Poetry* 62). Ezekiel insisted to de Souza, however, that he was "not sneering", reiterating that his intention was to capture the ways in which language is used in the everyday, on the streets of Bombay: "I am using the language actually used in the city. In the case of 'Goodbye Party...' I even showed the poem to the person concerned. He felt that it is the English we speak and hear around us" (de Souza "Nissim Ezekiel" 5).

By focusing on Ezekiel's portrayal of the speaking subjects of the language poems, critics are inevitably led to make judgements as to the poet's own attitude towards the people of whom he writes. If, however, we consider the "Very Indian Poems in Indian English" to be an exploration of the class-specific spaces of Bombay, it becomes possible to recognise the extent to which Ezekiel's writing is an attempt to represent the dynamic social exchanges taking place in the city. As King notes, "language reveals the speaker's mind and social context", and it is this context – of class differentials in Bombay – that Ezekiel's language poems bring to life (*Modern* 101). In his essay on Naipaul, Ezekiel describes as "detestable" Naipaul's "refusal to see it [a particular social community] in human and historic terms" (82): his own use of speech patterns found in Bombay implicitly historicizes and humanizes the people he overhears. As the speaker in "Goodbye Party" states, Miss Pushpa is "departing for foreign" in the next few days (190). Miss Pushpa is thus explicitly part of an

upwardly mobile middle-class who, from the 1960s onwards, would increasingly travel abroad for work or study. The modern capabilities of travel, however, are at odds with the conservatism expressed by the narrator, who digresses in his speech in order to give an account of Miss Pushpa's family origins: "Miss Pushpa is coming / from very high family", he tells the audience, alluding to her father's profession as a judge (190). The speaker thus reflects the ambivalent relationship of Bombay's middle-classes to notions of modernity, problematizing the assumption that the city was a space where familial and traditional ties were superseded.

Lefebvre's notion of lived space as "alive" and "affective" implies that material space is somehow animated through everyday interactions and exchanges (42). Representational spaces, he argued, are deeply historical and reflect "the history of a people as well as...the history of each individual belonging to that people" (41). In detailing the conversations of some of Bombay's citizens then – recorded in the present tense in order to emphasise this animation is continual and contingent – Ezekiel's dialect poems provide a sense of each speaker's own history and circumstances, as well as the wider social group to which they belong. These unsettle any monistic conception of Bombay, and attend to the various conflicts and uneven power relations that always mediate the city.

In "Soap", for instance, the poem is spoken by a man who has just had a confrontation with a local shopkeeper. The speaker describes his outrage at finding he had been sold a "defective version of well-known brand soap", and relates how he raised the issue with the shopkeeper:

I'm saying very politely -
though in Hindi I'm saying it,

and my Hindi is not so good as my English,
 Please to excuse me
 but this is defective version of well-known brand soap. (269)

These lines immediately reveal that the narrator occupies a minority position in the city; unable to communicate as he would wish to in Hindi, and making grammatical mistakes in English, he is caught between two dominant languages and cultural heritages. The shopkeeper reacts aggressively to the complaint, and the argument is taken outside:

Now small crowd is collecting
 and shopman is much bigger than me,
 and I am not caring so much
 for small defect in well-known brand soap.
 So I'm saying
 Alright Ok Alright Ok
 this time I will take
 but not next time. (269)

What strikes me about these lines is their revelation of the narrator's social and economic vulnerability in the city. The shop, he says, is "nearby in my lane", but even in the local area in which he lives, he is disempowered and made to feel the effects of his marginalization (268). That the "shopman is much bigger" than the narrator reiterates the former's social, linguistic and cultural dominance, both as a native Hindi speaker, and as a businessman (269). The poem is thus revealing of the dynamics of a certain neighbourhood or area of Bombay, demonstrating that the modern, secular and progressive city continues to divide and disempower its subjects along religious, economic and linguistic lines.

The "Very Indian Poems in Indian English" typically focus on recording the conversations of specific classes of Bombayites, and Ezekiel's observational style gives a glimpse into the dominant aspirations and political

views and prejudices of these communities. In “The Patriot”, for instance, the ageing narrator begins by stating his political position very clearly:

I am standing for peace and non-violence.
 Why world is fighting fighting,
 Why all people of world
 Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
 I am simply not understanding.
 Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct.
 I should say even 200% correct.
 But Modern generation is neglecting -
 Too much going for fashion and foreign thing. (237)

The figure of the Patriot seems to embody a quaint and out-moded optimism in the state that, by the time of the mid-1970s, appears naïve. He tells the listener that he has been reading about a recent attack on Indira Gandhi, but he seems unable to relate this event to the wider political unrest of the period: “one goonda fellow / Throw stone at Indirabehn. / Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking” (237). Unable to read between the lines of his daily newspaper, the Patriot is revealed to be restricted by his education, by his limited knowledge of English that enables him to only accept news reports literally, and by his out-of-date faith in the ideals of the independent pan-Indian nation.

Ezekiel’s Bombay poems from *The Exact Name* onwards, increasingly turn towards the city, examining the everyday experiences of its citizens. The state’s projection of Bombay as a secular, modern, aspirational and liberal city is undermined in many of these poems, which use form and language to disarticulate hegemonic narratives of the city. The promise of Bombay’s modernity, the poet increasingly recognizes, is an unequal one, and is experienced in very different ways according to the individual’s class and gender background.

Ezekiel's portrayals of Bombay are not, however, entirely negative: in uncovering the uneven distribution of wealth and power, the poet nonetheless comes to a certain kind of acceptance of the city, which he famously calls "My backward place" ("Background Casually" 181). Indeed, the uneven experience of modernity is shown to be a vital and constitutive part of the city's identity: as the narrator remarks in "Island", the city is "Unsuitable for song as well as sense", and cannot be understood within any homogenized and rational narrative of national modernity (182). Unlike the anonymous and overwhelming city of London, in which Ezekiel attempted to situate himself in the early 1950s, Bombay is increasingly figured as a place animated by individual experiences and interactions, a city that required a new style and formal approach on behalf of the writer. From 1965 onwards, therefore, it seems that Ezekiel begins to take his own advice in writing about his surroundings, instigating a marked turn towards the material, social and historical specificity of the city that is even more apparent in the slightly later work of Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel and Arun Kolatkar.

Chapter Six

“Tape record our screams”:³⁶ Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel and the representation of violence in Bombay

The previous chapter examined the shift towards Bombay in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, chronicling the formal and stylistic changes in his work and his attitude to the city. This chapter considers the work of two Bombay poets, Adil Jussawalla and Gieve Patel, both of whom have talked of Ezekiel’s influence on their writing style and attitude towards poetry (Patel interview 16.8.11; Jussawalla interview 8.8.11). Despite the differences between their work and Ezekiel’s – and between each other’s – Jussawalla and Patel both negotiate the increasingly complex material and social sphere of Bombay, seeking a way to represent the social, political and economic transformations underway in the city throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The creation of Maharashtra in 1960, for instance, prompted an increased sense of regionalism – as opposed to nationalism – centered around the city, with Marathi speakers coming to view Bombay as *theirs*.³⁷ The emphasis on claiming rights over the space of the city subsequently created the conditions for the formation of the right-wing Shiv Sena in 1966. The Sena clashed violently with South Indian migrant workers in 1969, and with the Dalit Panthers in 1971, while their accumulation of political power introduced a more general sense of anxiety to Bombay, prompting an increased sensitivity to ethnic, caste and religious differences. Other events –

³⁶ From Gieve Patel, “Bodyfears, Here I Stand” (*How Do You Withstand, Body* 34)

³⁷ For a detailed overview of the historical context to the creation of Maharashtra state and the rise of the Shiv Sena, see Blom Hansen’s *Wages of Identity: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*, especially ch.2, 37-69 and ch.3, 70-100.

the declaration of the Emergency in 1975 and the resulting suspension of civil liberties, the decline of the city's manufacturing industries, the expanding population – wrought further changes in the social and political conceptualization of the city. In Jussawalla and Patel's poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, it is possible to identify a specific reaction to these changes: in different ways, their writing engages with the violent political terrain of Bombay and the contested experience of living there, thereby disarticulating further the myth of the city's secular, inclusive and democratic image.

This chapter opens by examining how Bombay is negotiated in Jussawalla's poetry. In *Missing Person* in particular, Jussawalla's fragmented use of form, and his incorporation of a range of intertextual references, serves to register the city's violent and contested historical formation, revealing Bombay's overly celebrated social hybridity to be occluding a historically violent past. Jussawalla's Bombay poetry, moreover, is especially concerned with undermining the mediated images of the city projected in advertising and filmic discourse: his poetry incorporates a range of tropes and metaphors from film, which constitute a self-reflexive critique of the ways in which the city has been portrayed and marketed for cultural consumption by local and global spectators. His writing acknowledges that the city's modernity relies on the exploitation of groups and individuals, and discloses the complicity of the affluent middle-classes in allowing such exploitation to occur. Like Jussawalla, Patel too faces similar challenges in his poetry, which reflects on the violent experience of inhabiting Bombay. As a practicing physician as well as a poet, artist and playwright, Patel bore professional witness to the repercussions of poverty, violence, rioting and war: his poems often replicate a medical consultation, with the narrator/doctor attempting to diagnose and heal the body through a process

of scientific and poetic representation. Like Jussawalla, Patel recognizes the futility of such a project, his poems confronting the inability of ever fully comprehending the city. As suggested in the final section, however, Patel's concern with the sensory experiences of the body in the city – especially the body in extreme pain – marks an increasing recognition that there are experiences that exceed the doctor's or the poet's objective understanding. Patel's poetry seems to gradually accept, therefore, that both the body and Bombay constitute elusive and dynamic spaces of contingent, lived experience. Hence while both poets undermine the idealized image of Bombay as circulated in local and transnational discourse, Patel introduces a way of coming to terms with the complexities of space and of recreating the material experience of being in the city.

Adil Jussawalla and the violence of history

In "Geneva", an early poem from his debut volume *Land's End*, Jussawalla depicts the veneer of neutrality that characterizes dominant conceptions of this European city: "Geneva, one of the neutral cities / Here to relax you" (3-4).³⁸ Speaking in the voice of the city itself, "Geneva" celebrates the city's cleanliness and lack of social problems, advertising its appeal to visitors and tourists by claiming "I do not rot, or run / With sores like children" (4-5). Instead, "spotless sunburnt backs / Is all my shining citizens may (publically) show" (6-7). The use of brackets here, however, implies that the public image of Geneva as clean and respectable is in fact a façade, a position reinforced by the

³⁸ As *Land's End* is out of print, Jussawalla photocopied his own revised manuscript for me in 2011. This manuscript was unpaginated, so all references taken from this volume give the line numbers, rather than page numbers, in parenthesis. References from *Missing Person*, on the other hand, are to page numbers.

repeated refrain describing the toys on display in the “glazed shop windows” (8): “A Stuffed eagle and a clapping, clockwork bear” (10, 20, 30). In the context of the early 1960s, these pointed references to Russian and American cultural contexts is unsettling, suggesting that even here – in this pristine European city of civility – the tension between these two warring nations is being played out. The city’s invitation to “Smile, love, mix in my cafes”, hence takes on a sinister tone, indicating that the outward appearance of cosmopolitanism and hybridity occludes other less welcome fault lines (21).

As Anand Thakore notes of *Land’s End*, it makes extensive use of traditional – primarily British – poetic styles, intertexts and forms (Thakore “On the Music of A Missing Person”). Thakore recollects finding these poems of Jussawalla’s aesthetically “reassuring” in their use of stanzaic rhythms and imagery: “I was relieved – surrounded as I was by students who were trying so hard to ‘decolonise’ themselves – to find a poet who wasn’t ashamed of his fascination with Christian symbolism” or with modernist poetics. The sinister forces underlying the city’s public façade, however, exist in tension with this use of ‘traditional’ poetics and the formal, visual coherence of the text. For Thakore, a poet has little choice what “formal stance” to adopt in writing; the form, he suggests, is dictated by the writer’s reaction to the “chaos” of his contextual environment. Jussawalla’s use of a traditional poetic in “Geneva”, and the poem’s visual uniformity, can thus be interpreted as an ironic imitation of the city itself, which Jussawalla implies is trying to project a particular image of itself as politically neutral. Hence, while Thakore finds the poetic voice in *Land’s End* reassuring, it is possible to identify an implicit critique of the histories and conflicts occluded by such traditional, recognizable formats. In fact, just as the poem reveals the presence of competing political forces, and indicates that

neutrality is a performance in “Geneva”, so too might the poem suggest the hidden histories and elisions behind the use of certain poetic forms and styles.

Other poems in *Land’s End* suggest the violence behind familiar forms and images. “March”, depicting the narrator’s walk through English woodland, is replete with images of violence and disruption: the narrator’s mouth is “fouled / With clotted silence”(3-4) as he walks through what might traditionally be a quiet pastoral scene, but which he imagines instead as “the steaming floor of Hell”: “Beech skins snap. / Roots dangle, mushrooms smell” (6, 9-10). Even the trees are nightmarish: “The trees (like trunkless legs, trooped / From ogrish hills, their pubic fan / Of leaves knotted, webbed / With coupling, carnage)” (12-15). Similarly, the title poem “Land’s End” presents a dystopian vision of arriving “in the cramped, pig-footed country at last”, its three stanzas each almost conforming to the conventions of a sonnet (1). The final couplet of each stanza, however, does not rhyme; the poet thus unsettles the reader’s expectations, presenting them with a poem that has an uncanny resemblance to a sonnet in all but its final stanzaic rhythmic patterns.

Form and structure are, for Jussawalla, a way to unsettle expectations and – according to Thakore – to demonstrate the underlying “chaos” of the poem’s context. In *Land’s End*, the tension between the violent images and the traditional poetic style seems to indicate the presence of occluded contextual histories and experiences: in poems like “Land’s End”, in particular, which chronicles the postcolonial subject’s arrival in the metropole, the images of disappointment, loneliness, and violence are especially revealing of the uneven nature of the migrant’s experience. For, as Rashmi Varma suggests, despite London’s significance as the foremost site of imperial power and authority, it frequently appears in colonial and postcolonial representational texts as a

space tainted by danger and threat, features that “disturb the standard urban narratives” of modernity (*The Postcolonial City* 56).

Despite differences between *Land’s End* and *Missing Person*, Jussawalla’s second volume also contemplates the occluded historical tensions and violence that inform the use of particular literary and cultural forms and tropes. In “Sea Breeze, Bombay”, which opens the second section of the volume “This Room and That”, the poet reflects on Bombay, calling it a “Surrogate city of banks” that is home to different communities of refugees from across the country (39). The poem recalls Bombay’s historical significance as a refuge, reminding the reader that the city has been founded by migrants and, in many cases, on their coerced movement, suffering and labour.

The poem opens with a horrifying image, drawing attention to the city’s imbrication in the fracture of Partition:

Partition’s people stitched
Shrouds from a flag, gentlemen scissored Sind.
An opened people, fraying across the cut
Country, reknotted themselves on this island. (39)

Throughout the poem, Jussawalla uses images of fabric and textiles, metaphorically alluding to Bombay’s textile industry – a mainstay of its economy until the mill strikes, and subsequent closures, of the early 1980s. The refugees and labourers, upon whom the city depends for its wealth, are themselves likened to fabric: “An opened people, *fraying* across the cut / Country, *reknotted* themselves on this island”; later, “Communities tear and re-form” (emphasis added, 39). Such images – of fabric and of labour – draw attention to the invisible subjects of the postcolonial city, reiterating the violently formed economic and social ‘fabric’ of Bombay. As the opening image recognizes,

“Partition’s people” – the masses displaced by the arbitrary act of Partition, which is itself depicted in the poem again using the image of cutting fabric, when “gentlemen *scissored* Sind” – are responsible for the continuing prosperity of the city. These lines are thus critical, not only of national politics and the violence visited upon hundreds of thousands of people, but also of Bombay’s particular rate of consumption, which has rendered these victims of Partition anonymous automatons.

The visual and formal uniformity of the poem, with its four verses of equal line length, seems initially to formally embody the “island” city, reinforcing Bombay’s significance as a “city of banks” and refuge. It is this city, the narrator declares, that refugees call upon to “Restore us to fire”: the word ‘restore’ here reads like an incantation, with displaced communities making an appeal to their new “Surrogate” city (39). The city’s offer of sanctuary and a fresh start unencumbered by regional, ethnic, religious and caste differences, however, is subtly undermined by the final stanza - and the concluding line of the poem, which appears separated from the rest of the text on a line by itself:

Restore us to fire. Still,
Communities tear and re-form; and still a breeze,
Cooling our garrulous evenings, investigates nothing,
Ruffles no tempers, uncovers no root,

And settles no one adrift of the mainland’s histories. (39)

The poem here expresses a tension between the idealized conception of Bombay – that it is a city of refuge and new beginnings – and its reality – that, in spite of its modernity, its subjects are “Still” unable to move beyond the inscriptions of social and communal boundaries. The final line redirects the reader to notice that while the city might project an image of itself as a sheltered

island city, it and its inhabitants continue to be affected by “the mainland’s histories” (39). The repetition of the negative “no” – the wind “investigates *nothing* / Ruffles *no* tempers, uncovers *no* root” – suggests that contrary to appearances, Bombay does not provide the space for the restoration hoped for by the arriving refugees: rather, the negative phrases indicate the city’s lack of interest in these arrivals and their differently conflicted pasts. Offering a rebuke to Homi Bhabha’s conviction, discussed in Chapter Two, that the postcolonial city provides subjects the opportunity to “challenge the history of the nation”, this poem thus reveals the city to be embedded in a fraught relationship with the events of India at large (243).

As observed in Chapter One, Jussawalla’s *Missing Person* is especially notable for its experimental use of form and language. While few of the poems in the opening sequence ‘Missing Person’ are explicitly about Bombay, they were written shortly after the poet’s return to the city following more than a decade spent living in England, and the stylistic shift in his work invites a reader to reflect on the wider changes taking place in the city to which he had returned. The overwhelming range of intertextual material and registers in the poems led Mehrotra to liken the sequence to “an echo-chamber that is also sometimes a hall of mirrors” (“Adil Jussawalla” *Oxford* 126). The intertextual density of the poem bears witness to the particular intellectual and cultural context in which Jussawalla was writing: on the one hand, the poet’s incorporation of such varied transnational intertexts conveys the Bombay poets’ particular access to, and familiarity with, different cultural forms and texts, revealing the city to be the location of a divergent range of influences. At the same time, however, the juxtaposition of such different styles, forms and registers, and their unsettling amalgamation in the volume, indicates that the city is a space of conflicted and

jarring heritages. By incorporating such different codes and influences in a single volume, Jussawalla is thus able to allude to the wider social and cultural sphere of Bombay in the early 1970s, capturing what Theodor Adorno argued in *Aesthetic Theory*; that the formal properties, style and intertexts of an art work gesture towards, but are not mimetic representations of, the historical and social situation of the text: “unresolved antagonisms of reality return in the artworks as immanent problems of form” (7). The poem, he wrote elsewhere, constitutes “the subjective expression of a social antagonism”, registering in its particular use of form and language problems or conflicts in the political sphere (“Lyric Poetry” 348).

Undermining the city of dreams

The social antagonism in Bombay – the disjunction between the city’s idealized projected image and its less palatable reality – is evidenced in *Missing Person’s* particular use of filmic and media imagery. As Thomas Blom Hansen notes, the period from the early 1950s onwards, in which the Bombay film industry expanded exponentially, altered the relationship of local, regional and national subjects to the city being presented in its cinematic texts: “millions of Indians saw the city in terms of the glamorous life of film stars, the home of intense desires for individual success, fame, and riches” (39). Similarly, as Ranjani Mazumdar contends, the city served as a vital site on which to project “the fantasy of a lifestyle unblemished by the chaos and poverty” of everyday life in Bombay (110). In Jussawalla’s text, the poet draws on the centrality of the cinema to Bombay, but does so in order to undermine its configuration as the “city of dreams” (Gangar 210). The opening poem in “Missing Person”, for

instance, presents the protagonist's birth, recounting it using the montage format of a cinematic production:

House Full. It's a shocker. Keep still.
 Blood crawls from a crack.
 Keep still.
 It's all happening. (13)

This opening scene turns the idealization of the city in cinematic texts on its head. Rather than providing a new space "unblemished" by material realities and hardships, the city is instead presented as being both a highly mediated space and under siege by threatening historical forces. Hence, Jussawalla's use of short, abrupt and staccato sentences – which replicate and reinforce the fast pace of the cinema – also and at the same time introduce a sense of danger and urgency to these opening lines, a fact reinforced by the omniscient voice-over, who describes the political unrest apparent in the city: "There's trouble outside: / crowds, stammering, guns, the sea / screaming from side to side" (13)

Further key moments in the protagonist's life are portrayed using the language and imagery of the cinema and media. Hence in the second poem of the opening sequence, the protagonist is clearly situated in a cinema hall, watching a film about a slave – "MISSING JACK / A slave's revolt and fall" – when he first feels an affinity with other marginalized groups (13). As he watches the event unfolding on the screen, the protagonist declares that "It is my life / Those *are* my hands, Believe me that's me on the screen" (14). The protagonist's response to the film might be interpreted as melodramatic in nature: his affinity with the slave appears an excessive and exaggerated claim, which in turn suggests the mediated forms that social interactions and

relationships assume in Bombay. Indeed the film critic Vijay Mishra has noted that Bollywood cinema makes extensive use of melodrama, observing that “the idea of loss is staged melodramatically, not tragically” in popular Bombay films (37). The poem seems to draw on the conventions of melodrama offered by filmic texts here, in order to indicate the superficiality of relations in the city. Later in the sequence, the protagonist is described as if he were a character in a popular film: he is “our two-bit hero”, a phrase that further reveals the urban dwelling, modern subject’s lack of individuality and depth (22).

In the final scene of the opening sequence from the first section of the volume, ‘Missing Person’, the protagonist’s physical destruction at the hands of “a rioting people” is portrayed as though it were a scene from a film, complete with directorial instructions:

Bright angels – where?

[the final scene: so choir]

so faintly heard by you,
 ...
 his shouts for law and order
 won’t shake the posse off;
 its dogs
 harry, attack,
 are at his throat and back.
 Watch his murder. (23)

As the protagonist is torn apart by the pack of dogs, the omniscient voice-over portrays his death as a media event: “this is how you will end: / Before the final fade-out, like an ad” (24). This devastating metaphor, likening the protagonist’s death to an advertisement, suggests and critiques the aggressive consumerism of the city, which has rendered individuals anonymous and two-dimensional tropes. As the poem continues, and the disembodied protagonist lies “in the

dark with the dogs, in pieces”, a voice-over interrupts with a refrain that is reminiscent of television advertisements: “Here is our smug little watch that’s lost its hands. / Here is our own Bugs Bunny who acted funny” (24). Such an unexpected interruption to the poem makes apparent the relationship between commercial, media culture, and violence – both epistemic and literal. The juxtaposition, moreover, between a ‘glossy’ image of contemporary Bombay, and the protagonist’s demise, embodies what Caroline Herbert has suggested with regard to the recent Hindi film *Taxi 9 2 11*: that advertising images celebrating a fantasy lifestyle of certain products portrayed in the text in fact “grate against the experience of surviving the city, putting a strain on everyday life” (107).

The protagonist is often presented being subjected to violence and intimidation in the sequence, and frightening scenarios are prevalent in the text: at one point he is in “a death-cell in Patna” (15); at another he is held, blindfolded, by anonymous interrogators; later he is described “paling at riots and slaughter” (22); and at the end of “Missing Person” he is ripped apart in front of an audience. His surroundings are equally threatening: towards the end of ‘Missing Person’, the voice-over describes the chaos of conflict that has turned ordinary people into violent perpetrators: “Heaven burns to ashes / the masses crouch in prayer”; “It’s now / commando comrades butcher” (21). The use of alliteration and assonance here – closing the divide between such different terms as “ashes / masses” and “commando / comrades” – indicates the potential violence of language and discourse too, as the poet reveals how quickly “commando” can become “comrade” and “butcher”.

The violence is accompanied by stereotypical images of a hyper-masculinity: the protagonist is “docked in a bar with a criminal friend” (19); he is

“tricksy with whisky and sin” (35); and he has multiple, meaningless encounters with “women not worth a leaking bucket” (31). Such images seem to borrow from notions of masculinity portrayed in Bombay cinema, which as Mishra notes, rely on a particular idea of Indian masculine identity (3). The ‘angry young men’ films of the early 1970s in particular – for example Prakash Mehra’s 1973 film *Zanjeer*, starring a young Amitabh Bachchan – projected the hero as “disaffected, cynical, violent, rebellious”, thereby implicitly authenticating a hyper-masculine notion of urban Indian male identity (Rao S. 59).

As Blom Hansen explains, however, such a masculine sense of modern male identity has also been a central feature of the Shiv Sena’s ideology, which “gave historical legitimacy to manliness and violence” by extolling the bravery of the Maratha warrior Shivaji, and “made a populist political idiom of the defiance of public authority as a way to protect fundamental cultural values and the chastity of women” (72-73). As he details, the Sena rely on multiple *shaktas* or local committees to reinforce the party’s power: these *shaktas* take responsibility for settling neighbourhood disputes, organizing festivals, providing welfare – and distributing ‘justice’. At the heart of the Sena’s appeal, Blom Hansen argues, is its self-stylisation as a party for the ordinary (Hindu, Maharashtra) man, and as a group founded on the principles of action, masculinity and performance – what he calls “a plebian discourse of masculine assertion” that appears to empower the angry young men of the modern city (72). By incorporating stylized images of masculine identity in *Missing Person*, Jussawalla is thus able to critique the salience of the aggressive ideal of Indian masculinity as perpetuated by regional political discourses *and* by globally successful filmic texts, revealing both to share a common projection of the urban male as violent, chauvinistic, rebellious, and a threat to the social order of

the city. Indeed, in making apparent similarities between Bollywood cinematic texts and the divisive ideology of the Shiv Sena, Jussawalla is able to undermine the idealized way in which film texts portray the city and its subjects, revealing such representations to be informed by and reliant on the threat of violence.

Missing Person does not only use filmic imagery to counter the projection of the city circulated in popular Bollywood films, however. It also disarticulates the negative portrayal of the city, and of India itself, in news and documentary media, indicating that such projections tend to disassociate political and social problems from their historical contexts. In particular, the poem calls to account middle-class perspectives of the city, suggesting that the disregard for the poor evidenced by the local and internationally wealthy community is an attitude fostered by the proliferation of certain mediated images. Early on in 'Missing Person', for instance, the omniscient narrator describes a vast collection of television sets, piled up on top of one another, and reflects on the stereotypical images of India they are responsible for circulating:

See Famines. See Wars. Their heaped-up dead
on the world's plate of gold, its food
ranged in sweet hills beside them.

A place for bones.

See Indians bite the dust. (16-17)

The same poem invokes further stock images of Indian poverty and overcrowding: there are the "childbrides bundled to a knot", and the overwhelmed country "letting their people out like hair" (15-16). In "Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay", a poem from "This Room and That", the poet

suggests that even the middle-class Indian intelligentsia have been co-opted into sharing the views of India presented in the global media. The narrator describes a journey back to Bombay, chronicling the plane's descent into the city over the slums; "A union of homes as live as a disease" (45). The returning narrator and his fellow passengers reflect on the slums and on the city using the stereotypical language inherited from the media: the doctor, for instance, remarks that "We've lost all hope, all pride", while the Indian diplomat is "confident the poor / Will stay just as they are" (45).

Missing Person repeatedly examines the dissonances between the public image of Bombay – as a city of refuge, safety, glamour and modernity – and its less appealing realities – its aggressive rate of consumption, the erosion of social bonds in the city, the stark reality of its poverty, and the constant threat of religious and ethnic violence. The overwhelming range of intertexts, and Jussawalla's tendency to switch between different styles and registers, further reinforces the unsettling context of the poems, implicitly suggesting that Bombay at the time of writing was a city whose public image was being threatened. The poem thus seems to examine and display the city's fractured image, a fact reinforced by Jussawalla's inclusion of a range of guttural, non-standardized sounds: the text is punctuated by "screaming", a "giggle", "an er", "a cough", "silly vernacular cries", "war-cries", "a rash of yowls", "riddles" – all of which lexically undermine the idealization of the city as a safe, "Surrogate" place. Laetitia Zecchini reads these unexpected interruptions as evidence that the modern urban subject can no longer "convert the multiplicity of lineages" found in the city "into creative affiliations, and dissolves [instead] into derision and derealization" ("Breaking from Origins"). To this I would add that Jussawalla's gesture of "derealization" does not amount to a retreat from the

socio-political conditions of the city, but instead acknowledges that, in such a contested, overwhelming and variously claimed city as Bombay, the poet can do little more than attempt to register the violent context in which he is writing.

Gieve Patel and the violence of the urban investigator

Like Jussawalla, Patel too disarticulates the idealization of Bombay as a city of refuge, responding to a politically turbulent context and the violent political claims made over the city and its subjects. However, the violence visited upon Jussawalla's protagonist in *Missing Person* is strangely disembodied; the subject is continually relocated in different scenes, and the anonymity of him and his perpetrators lends a film-like atmosphere to the text. The violence in Patel's poetry, however, assumes a much more tangible quality: in his work – from *Poems* and *How Do You Withstand, Body* – the poet registers the repercussions of Bombay's political deterioration on the very bodies of its citizens, asking in the title poem of the latter volume "How do you withstand, body, / Destruction repeatedly / Aimed at you?" (12). Hence while Jussawalla undermined the popular cultural image of Bombay and revealed it to be informed by violent and divisive discourses, Patel is concerned with understanding how the individual relates to and experiences the political ideologies of the state or family. His work reorients a critical understanding of Bombay by attending to the violence, or threat of violence, directed at the individual, valorizing the experience of the physical realm in order to reveal the various ways in which it been excluded and subjugated by hegemonic discourse.

As the poet noted in an interview with Eunice de Souza, he could not fail to be affected, as a young writer, by the events of the 1960s and 1970s: “we had Vietnam, Bangladesh, the Shah of Iran, and of course the endemic riots in our own country”, all of which had a profound impact on his work (de Souza “Gieve Patel” 90). In the face of such events, it struck Patel that it was vital “not to forget it, somehow to give it a permanent place” by directly engaging with such manifestations of violence (91). In a more recent interview in his studio off Marine Drive, Patel spoke of his desire to “apprehend a thing or an experience”, to try and understand it by expressing it in language – or paint (interview 16.8.11). Patel credits Ezekiel with encouraging such a response: “it was Nissim who first encouraged me to write about what was before me; for instance, to engage with the complex feelings one might have towards beggars in this country, or poverty. His advice was a revelation to me at the time” (*ibid*).

The situations that were presented to Patel were, unlike Ezekiel’s, those of sickness, poverty and trauma: Patel was until recently a doctor as well as a poet, painter and playwright, and the reality he was prompted to incorporate into his poetry was the reality of illness, old age, powerlessness, poverty, trauma and manifestations of communal violence. When he completed his debut *Poems* in 1966, he was just finishing his medical training at St Xavier’s college, and, as he told Arundhathi Subramaniam in an interview for *Poetry International*, this volume “deals with [his] early experiences of death” (Subramaniam “The Poet as Profane Monk”). His early work, he described to me, “registered [his] sense of shock” at the trauma he witnessed as a newly qualified doctor, as well as his “sense of wonder at the capacity of the human body to endure” (interview 16.8.11). Many critics have interpreted Patel’s poetry as a creative response to his medical experiences, King noting, for instance,

that Patel's "perception is influenced by his medical career" to such an extent that "there is no reality beyond the physical" (*Modern* 118-119). "I tend to be branded as the clinical one", Patel commented recently, a fact he does not deny, although he notes that "it does limit the project somewhat" (interview 16.8.11). Hence, in the language of Patel's reviewers and commentators, there is an apparent conflation of his medical profession and his style of writing, which is deemed to be "sufficiently clinical" (Pillai 96), evident of "clinical detachment" (Naik and Narayan 152), and being "technically immaculate" (Katrak 66). In what follows, I argue that Patel's poetry displays a marked sense of anxiety about his clinical and empirical training, reading in his portrayals of the body of the patient an ambivalence about his own role as doctor, poet and urban chronicler. As Patel remarked in interview, "I like to think I'm doing something more interesting than just itemizing the body" (16.8.11). I suggest here that Patel's poetry stages a coming to terms with the impossibility of comprehending the body or the city, formally and structurally recreating instead something of the physical experience of living there.

Medicine and mapping: the violence of discourse

Many of the poems in *Poems* and *How Do You Withstand, Body* represent medical consultations, replicating the encounter between the doctor and the body of his patient. It is the dead body – laid bare for anatomical and poetic mapping – that especially dominates the first volume of work. In "Post-Mortem Report", for example, a sub-heading informs the reader that the body being dissected is that of a four-year-old child who has died from tuberculosis (*Poems* 19). Apart from this detail, however – presented as an aside – the body is

entirely un-individuated. Instead, it is portrayed as a composite of parts: “Bacillus, - soft brain, liver gel” (19). These are then “reduced / To singleness” during the doctor’s examination (19). Similarly in “Post-Mortem”, the poet presents the process of conducting an autopsy, displaying the level of “clinical detachment” M.K. Naik, Shyamala Narayan and others would later praise (152): “It is startling to see how swiftly / A man may be sliced / From chin to prick”, the narrator contends, remarking at “How easily the bones /.../ May be snapped”:

With what calm
Liver, lung and heart
Be examined, the bowels
Noted for defect, the brain
For haemorrhage (21)

As the doctor in the poem considers each of the body’s organs in turn, so too does the poet display them for the reader’s curious gaze. After reducing “A man” into his separate organs, they are then “dumped back into the body / Now stitched to perfection” (21). These lines are suggestive of the doctor’s dispassionate attitude towards the cadaver: instead of an individual, it consists only of “the bowels” and “the brain”. By the poem’s closing lines, the doctor has not even been able to determine why the subject died, “announcing death / As due to an obscure reason” (21).

The tone of the above poem – which Subramaniam refers to as evidencing Patel’s characteristic “flat, dispassionate” style that is “wary of any attempt to enoble, prettify or sentimentalise”, is unsettling, for it implies that the doctor is only interested in the physical terrain of the cadaver (“Introduction”) The doctor / poet uses his empirical knowledge about the body in order to exert control over it: by describing the different organs as he lifts them out of the

body, and examining or noting their external features, the doctor demonstrates his authority over the body, which is a passive amalgamation of organs and 'defects'. The 'slicing' of organs and 'snapping' of bones is recounted in a pragmatic manner, and further suggests the doctor's dominance over the cadaver's body. The doctor 'examines' and 'notes' the features of the body, but otherwise is not concerned with the intricacies of the person to whom the body belongs.

Such a poem appears to draw self-consciously on the cultural role of the doctor in Indian society. Throughout the colonial period in India, as David Arnold notes, the body was a site upon which the administration would exert its political and scientific authority. The British "attempted to use the body as a site for the construction of its own legitimacy, authority and control", classifying and categorizing it in order to exert dominance over the bodies – and thereby the economic products – of its colonized subjects (8). Western medical science in particular constituted a vital way in which the administration sought to 'order' and regulate its subjects: "bodies were cleaned up and prepared by the technologies of modern medicine, taught the correct way to function in schools, prisons and asylums"; "Non-Western bodies were portrayed as weak, barbarous, unclean, diseased or infantile in comparison with the idealized bodies of the West" (Mills and Sen 1-2). Hence, James Mills notes that that psychiatric treatments developed throughout the nineteenth-century were used in Indian asylums in order to instil a certain kind of bodily behaviour in the subjects – aiming to 'cure' mental health problems by compelling subjects to conduct themselves in certain ways: "The body was to be ordered and made efficient through the regulation of its functioning, so cleanliness and eating were emphasized and the working of the body was closely observed" (82).

In colonial cities in particular, ensuring and maintaining the health of native labourers took on a vital significance for the colonisers. As Gillian Tindall notes in her historical study of Bombay, and other critics have observed more generally, the colonial powers typically kept the native workforce as far apart from the colonial quarters as possible: hence the Black Town, or “the Bombay of the bazaar, the small workshops, the stalls” which was, implicitly, the Bombay of relatively higher mortality rates than in the ‘White’ or colonial neighbourhoods (35). The Western educated colonial medical practitioner was thus imbricated in the process of maintaining a healthy workforce, and, in accordance with Michel Foucault’s work on the ideological regulation of the body by political and scientific discourses, was the perpetuator of a prescribing “gaze”, which Foucault dates to the eighteenth-century: “This is the period that marks the suzerainty of the gaze...the illness is articulated exactly on the body” by a process of visual imposition and regulation (*The Birth of the Clinic* 2).

The doctor was thus working to further the gains of the administrators in an indirect way, and Arnold observes that they were viewed with distrust by the Indian population. In particular, he explains, certain practices, including internal examinations and autopsies, were prohibited by traditional Ayurvedic medicine, which held such procedures to be invasive and detrimental to health. The body of the colonized patient – doubly disempowered by virtue of their race and poor health – can thus be figured as a site of conflict between tradition and modernity. For, on the one hand, colonial medical practice intended to cure, realign and regulate this body in order to contribute to the imperial project, even as advancements in medical knowledge and technology arguably had a positive impact on life expectancy and physical health. As Varma details, for example, because of investments made in medicine and public health policy in Bombay,

the city had a “lower mortality rate than London in the 1860s and...[a] better health and hygiene record”, developments which benefitted all subjects, even those for whom reform and progress was not explicitly intended (*Postcolonial City* 128).

After independence, the new government had a similar interest in maintaining the health of the subjects, especially in its cities. Long before 1947, Nehru had envisaged a “healthier and more vital society”, an imperative that assumed greater importance into the 1950s (“The Basis of Society” 7). As the Prime Minister declared ten years after independence, the nation must come to accept modern advances in medicine: “We cannot expect to improve our standards [of health] unless we take full advantage of science and modern scientific methods” (“Foreword” 431). Such words reinforce the importance placed upon the health of subjects by the state, and invite reflection on the significant improvements made in the development of vaccinations, standards of sanitation, and improved living conditions. At the same time however, India’s public health policy throughout the 1950s and 1960s was predicated on population control, which was itself reflective of concerns over the economic progress of the nation – rather than the welfare of individual subjects (Amrith 148). State investment in public health services was thus unsettling, directed as it was by financial and political – as well as altruistic – agendas. Frank Dikötter reveals, moreover, that eugenics was a particularly appealing field in the sub-continent, noting that “parts of the world on the periphery of scientific research...harboured strident eugenicists”, especially in circumstances where there was “a concern over the decline of modernity, a sense of nationalism, and an expectation that the government should reform society” (471, 475). Scientific and medical discourses therefore had a vital role to play in safeguarding the

political economy of the nation, ensuring the state would not have to bear unnecessary costs for the poor health of its subjects.

Patel's poetry evidences the ambivalent attitude towards health and the individual in postcolonial India, registering in particular the peculiar position and role of the doctor in the modern Indian city. His portrayal of the doctor's disinterest in his patients can be read as indicative of a deep anxiety about the role and impact of the Western-educated medical practitioner. Many of the poems in *How Do You Withstand, Body* are explicitly concerned with the role and function of the doctor, often depicting the physician's encounter with the body of his patient. In "Public Hospital", the newly qualified narrator stands in front of his clinic, exclaiming aloud at his social position: "How soon I've acquired it all!" (15). He reflects on the expectations levied at the doctor, and notes that his official role requires him to cultivate a specific set of mannerisms: "Autocratic poise comes natural now: / Voice sharp, glance impatient, / A busy man's look of harried preoccupation" (15). The narrator contemplates his role as a doctor in purely pragmatic terms, listing the skills and attributes that he needs:

My fingers deft to manoeuvre bodies,
Pull down clothing, strip the soul.
Give sorrow ear upto a point,
Then snub it shut.
Separate essential from inessential tales.
Weed out malingerers, accept
With patronage a steady stream
Of the underfed, pack flesh in them,
Then pack them away. (15)

The language used to describe the doctor's actions is abrupt and economical, the doctor's movements designed to take up as little time as possible: "fingers deft", to "strip", "snub", "pack flesh in them" (15). These images are suggestive

of industrial production lines, and implicitly alludes to the transformations that the modern city has had on the relationship between the doctor and his patients: the “steady stream” of patients are an anonymous mass, likened to products for the doctor to quickly “Separate” out and administer practical support to (15).

As the poem continues, moreover, the language becomes increasingly violent: the doctor refers to himself as an “Unwelcome guest”, who must

Touch close, cure, throw overboard
Necessities of distance, plunge,
Splice, violate,

With needle, knife, and tongue,
Wreck all my bonds in them. (15)

The narrator is aware of his patient’s distrust of his profession, and is prepared to “Wreck all [his] bonds in them” (15). The reference to the doctor’s work as a violation reiterates the notion of the doctor as an invasive impostor, while the phrase “throw overboard” again suggests that the physician’s function in the context of the modern city is to ensure the productivity of the workforce – rather than to take care of the individual patient (15). In referring to his “tongue” as one of his instruments used to examine and objectify the body, moreover, the poet indicates the violence of medical and scientific discourse, which has sought to regulate the body in a comparable way to “needle[s]” and “kni[ves]” (15). At the same time however, the narrator figures himself as integral to the physical reconstruction of the nation: in the poem’s closing lines, the young modern doctor stands “under the flagpole” outside the clinic – an image that denotes the Indian flag – in order to “Watch the city streaming / By the side of my hands” (15). The doctor in this poem is thus both central to the project of modernization

and national reconstruction, even while being at the same time distanced from the very people he must treat.

The doctor figure in Patel's poems is often figured as a chronicler of the body's experiences and events, and it is striking that many of the poems make extensive use of cartographic metaphors and imagery. Bill Ashcroft notes the ideological connotations of the map, observing: "Geography, maps and mapping have arguably had a greater effect on our ways of imagining the world than any other discourse" (*Post-Colonial Transformation* 128). In the nineteenth-century in particular, as Britain and other colonial powers accumulated scientific and demographic knowledge about new territories, the map came to be an especially vital resource: cartographers now possessed "an ability to see the world as a whole, an ability which amounted to an ability to know the world" (129). While some critics including Graham Huggan have demonstrated that maps can provide the means for modes of counter-resistance to colonial hegemony, the instrumentality of cartography to the colonial project is undeniable – an integral part of the material production of the Orient and vital to the Empire's own sense of self (Huggan *Interdisciplinary Measures*). As Benedict Anderson notes, imperial maps "worked on the basis of a totalizing classification" and sought "to put space under surveillance" (173).

In Patel's "The Difference in the Morgue", the narrator chronicles the body in the "dissection hall" as if it were geographical terrain to be charted and objectified:

In the dissection hall the head
Is shaved, the outline clear,
Cranium, grand dome, contained
In my gloved hand. (*Poems* 29)

The image of the cadaver's head "contained" in the "gloved hand" of the narrator is striking here: like the cartographers of Empire, the doctor seeks to regulate and impose order upon the body under examination. It is the doctor's "gaze" or cartographic vision that enables such a detailed composition of the cadaver, moreover (Foucault 2): as the narrator approaches the dissection table, the body is "Cut into sight, / Sharp fresh images" (29). The poem perpetuates what Martin Jay terms the "ocularcentricism" of Western philosophy, which has traditionally privileged sight as the dominant means of knowing the world (3). The images of vision in Patel's poem are intrusive: the body is "Cut into sight", suggestive of the violence that accompanies such ocularcentric discourse. Ashcroft observes that ocularcentricism is especially apparent in colonial cartography, a practice in which the "linking of knowledge, reason, and sight" is paramount in the violent conquest of land and peoples (126).

In "Forensic Medicine, Text Book", Patel explores the relationship between the accumulation of knowledge – about the body and space – and the perpetuation of violence. The poem, from *How Do You Withstand, Body*, replicates an autopsy, chronicling a student doctor as they are led through their examination by an omniscient authority figure. The doctor is invited to look at the body of an aborted foetus before him as "A case in point", and encouraged to view it from every angle: "Change vantage point inch by inch / To discover them all" (22). The poem is replete with images of landscape and geography, reiterating the close relationship between visual objectification, colonial cartography and empirical knowledge: the dead baby's skin is described as covering "the gentlest dunes" of muscle and fibre, while the neck supports "the globe of sight and sound" (23). The omniscient narrator directs the doctor in his

exploration of the body as if reading from a text book: “The pictures in my book will instruct”, the doctor is told (22).

As the doctor studies the body, his approach becomes increasingly invasive, until it is difficult to differentiate the actions of the physician from those of the ‘in-laws’ who have enacted this abortion. “Lop off limbs”, the voice-over instructs:

Smash teeth. Push splinters
Underneath nails and lever them
Off fingers; offer acid in a drink of wine,
The house of song is blasted. Soft skin
That clothes the gentlest dunes will retract
Before knife and bullet. Proceed.
Flick pages. (22-23)

The doctor dominates the body, subsuming it under his control in the same way as the women’s family exerted control over her body to abort her child. For both doctor and in-law, the approach is systematic, concentrated on a complete eradication of the body’s individuality: as the doctor examines the body, he is instructed to target the sensory organs, further rendering it passive: “chop off tongue, / Gouge eyeballs out, hammer nails into the ear” (23).

The poem thus confronts the rhetorical and epistemological violence that informs the practices of medicine, cartography and poetry, all of which rely on the passivity of the body or land. Such “mere descriptions” of space, Lefebvre argued, “may well supply inventories of what *exists in* space”, but allow the analyst no opportunity to understand the implications of what is occurring; instead, descriptive language constitutes a form of violence and imposition, as the urban theorist, poet – or in Patel’s case, doctor – use their empirical knowledge to objectify and subjugate the body or environment (*Production 7*).

Patriarchal violence in Bombay

“Forensic Medicine: Text Book” makes apparent the spatial situation of the body and the violence it has experienced. The young mother, we are told, has been the victim of “Puerile in-law practice”, and has been forced into aborting what we might assume to be a female foetus: “A woman thrust glowing faggots / Where properly / Her son’s sparrow should rest” (22). The implements of torture, and the language used to describe the reproductive organs, is anachronistic, suggesting the prevalence of various and contradictory methods of bodily regulation in the city. While the doctor, for instance, exerts his authority through his modern medical knowledge, the in-laws display their dominance over their daughter-in-law using more traditional, rustic methods, of “glowing faggots” and “rope and hatchet, knife, stone” (22). Caught between tradition and modernity, the mother’s body is the site of patriarchal power relations, the victim of a society that privileges sons over daughters. The poem thus exposes the omnipresence of such systematic practices of gendered violence, even within the supposedly modern space of the city.

Similarly, in another poem detailing a physical examination, the narrator considers the female body before him and reflects on its imbrication in public and private conflict:

...Each war sees bayonets
Struck like flags in
A flash of groin blood.
The vicious in-law

Places spice or glowing cinder
 On that spot. (“What is it Between” 37)

The female body, the poet notes, is a conflicted site that is both private and public terrain. On the one hand, it is women’s bodies that are fought over during national and communal conflict, and women who have been the victims of the most shocking acts of violence in India – during Partition, for instance, and in more localized incidents of fighting and riots.³⁹ At the same time, the reference to domestic forms of violence – perpetrated by a “vicious in-law” or jealous lover – attends to the prevalence of patriarchal values, which are focused on the control and regulation of female sexuality and desire.

The women’s bodies in both of these poems are presented as passive and sexually victimized, “ravished” by the descriptive language, medical examinations and patriarchal violence of the poet, doctor and familial perpetrators (“Forensic Medicine: Text Book” 23). As Marcus Wood describes of the bodies of slaves represented in European and American art, an observation that applies too to the female body in Patel’s work, they are typically rendered “as an object afflicted, not as a subject capable of describing his or her affliction” (216). The poems demonstrate that the female body in particular has been what Patel refers to as a “target spot” for ideological and physical violence, “Showered / With kisses, knives” (37). Patel’s work thus disarticulates the dominant notion of Bombay as a progressive space in which gender – as well as class, religion and caste – ceased to matter. The modern urban setting of Patel’s poems cannot detract attention from the fact that women in Bombay

³⁹ Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin’s study *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition*, provides accounts of women’s experiences of Partition, while Rashmi Varma’s “Uncivil Lines: Engendering Citizenship in the Postcolonial City”, focuses specifically on women’s imbrication in the Bombay riots of 1992-1993.

continue to be coerced and controlled by patriarchal and familial power relations that are at odds with the connotations of the city.

As Patel's doctor / narrator observes in "Just Strain Your Neck", women are especially vulnerable in the city, where traditional affiliations found in the village no longer hold. Indeed, paradoxically, women are more reliant on patriarchal figures in the modern city: "Father, friend, brother and husband / Have let her adrift" (40). Varma notes that languages of nationalism and modernity have implicitly related to a male subject, while women continue to be associated with the rural and traditional spheres (*Postcolonial City* 126). The woman in Bombay, therefore, occupies "an especially tenuous position of (in)authenticity" – present within, but external to, the project of urban modernity (129). The poor woman in particular, sent to the city from her village, and unable to participate in the modern lifestyle that Bombay offers and celebrates, is especially invisible; yet, as Patel suggests here, her experiences of the city invite a critical reflection on the very images that Bombay continues to author about itself.

The poet accepts his inability to help the women he encounters, and in his examination poems, confronts his own complicity – as a Western educated, male, middle-class, urban subject – in the continuing invisibility of women's experiences in the public sphere. In "Forensic Medicine: Text Book", for instance, it is the doctor / poet who has "ravished" the body, his examination becoming increasingly conflated with the gendered and sexual violence of the perpetrators until he, too, has obliterated the individual before him (23).

“at times of riot”:⁴⁰ communal violence, torture and trauma

As a doctor, Patel witnessed first hand the traumatic injuries inflicted on the bodies of ordinary people caught up in the ethnic riots instigated, primarily, by the Shiv Sena between 1969 and 1972. His torture poems evidence an attempt to represent the repercussions of such violence, often raising the question of how the body can endure such conflict. Patel’s struggle, staged in his poems themselves, counters statements the poet has made in interview, which seem to indicate that trying to understand the violence is futile: “It’s more practical today to teach our children survival rather than an ethical code”, he declared in *The Illustrated Weekly* in 1974 (qtd. King *Modern* 119). The questions raised by many of the torture poems suggest the poet’s attempt – and failure – to register the experience of pain in a form or style that was familiar to him, evidencing what Elaine Scarry contends of pain more generally: that it “does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (4). In a poem set “at times of riot”, for example, the doctor / narrator watches as a man “comes to hospital with a slit belly, / Bewildered, but firmly holding / A loop of his own gut / In his hands” (“What’s In And Out (Round And About)” 17). The doctor makes no attempt to understand the circumstances, or to represent the man’s pain, instead using stark images – of a “slit belly” and a “loop” of internal organs – to actively guard against such an attempt (17). As the narrator declares in “Say Torture”, language is insufficient to denote what the individual has endured: “Say torture: It is event. / Is it stake, fire, instrument” (20). The poet attempts to break down the word ‘torture’ into its composite parts, detailing the implements of this term.

⁴⁰ From “What’s In And Out (Round And About)”, *How Do You Withstand, Body*, 17.

He acknowledges the inadequacy of doing so, however, noting that the body itself is continually changing: “Flesh endlessly replicated, / And divided as often” (20).

Ezekiel’s early advice to the young poet, to confront the realities of his own surroundings, is thus rendered inadequate when faced with bodies subjected to torture. How is the poet to represent the body in pain, when the body itself is beyond his linguistic grasp? Likewise, how can the poet come to terms with the city when faced daily with manifestations of communal violence? Patel’s torture poems often contain rhetorical questions about how to represent violence, and these introduce a note of anxiety to the text that mitigates against his direct engagement with the situation before him: “What is it between / A woman’s legs draws destruction / To itself?” (37), the poet asks, for instance; “Could / Violence performed on me / Register anywhere at all / Outside?” (34). For Vrinda Nabar, these questions, and what she contends to be the increasingly “obscure” style of writing in *How Do You Withstand, Body*, detract from the social and political commitment of the work (54). This second volume, Nabar argues, and its portrayal of (sexual) violence, is “disturbing to the average reader” – while *Poems* on the other hand, is praised for its clear social commentary and commitment: it is “one of the finest instances of an enlightened attitude to the oppressed in the whole body of contemporary Indo-English poetry” (55, 53).

As argued in Chapter One, however, moments of uncertainty in the poem gestures towards particular conflicts in the material world. For Adorno, as we have seen, art does not represent the world, nor offer solutions to political problems: instead, it works by “noncommunication” with the material sphere, evidencing the failures of the real, social world by virtue of its difference from it

(AT 6). It seems to me, therefore, that the formal and stylistic shift in these later poems far from implies the withdrawal of Patel's political and social commitment, but rather demonstrates the poet's struggle to render pain and suffering into meaningful language: his work demonstrates a desire to take seriously Ezekiel's advice, but must acknowledge his own inability to represent the suffering of the tortured body in new, extreme circumstances.

Consequently, the empirical confidence of *Poems* is replaced by a disorienting style in the torture poems: instead of visually and geographically mapping the body in order to objectify it, the body instead is often portrayed as existing in multiple spatial and temporal dimensions at once, thereby evading the poet and doctor's attempts to fix or diagnose it.

In "Say Torture", for instance, the concluding image of atoms like "trailing flies" is disorienting, introducing an unexpected new spatial dimension to the poem: for after trying to articulate the "event" of torture by listing the implements used to inflict pain, the poet shifts its focus to gesture towards what is invisible – the atoms and the micro-biological reactions of the body (20).

Similarly in "Bodyfears, Here I Stand" the poet begins by contemplating his own body, arms "outstretched", wondering aloud how he would react were he to be subjected to torture (34). The speaker's exploration of his body, however, is followed by a vastly macrocosmic spatial stretch a few lines later:

After cremation do ashes writhe,
Remember the living body's
Fright? Orbit ashes
Around the moon, fling them at
Planets' faces! (34)

The empirical, documentary style of Patel's earlier work has been replaced by a poetry that moves in between spatial scales: from the individual's body, to the broken down units of the body's ashes, to the cosmos. The body's dialectical position between the micro and macro spheres makes apparent that the body in pain exceeds the narrator's rational understanding, or the poet's realist style of writing.

Patel's early attempt to map the body and imagine it as geographical terrain is thus replaced, in his torture poems, by a tendency to portray the interconnected relationship between the individual body and the various and overlapping spaces it inhabits. For, while imagining the body as geographical terrain belied an attempt to regulate and "overwrite" its contradictory and contingent experiences, an invocation of the city space as a body indicates the opposite: that political violence has immediate and intimate consequences for the individual (Upstone 6). As Scarry notes, violence and pain always have a material, geographical situation, the experiences of a single subject constitutive of space in a vital way:

physical pain happens...not several miles below our feet or many miles above our heads but within the bodies of persons who inhabit the world through which we every day make our way, and who at any moment may be separated from us by only a space of several inches (4).

Scarry's words reflect on the extent to which bodily experience and pain mediates and produces the space in which the body lives. Or, as Michael Dowdy explains, bodily experience is not only a private phenomenon but is "the province of situations embedded in material and social space" (46). In emphasizing the body's imbrication and embeddedness in particular material

spaces, therefore, Patel's poetry reclaims the sensory experiences of the anonymous, dispossessed, wounded subject as central to the narrative of Bombay: as he writes in "Continuum", the body is the site on which political conflict is played out: "I am continuum with the century's skin. / I am horribly bruised each time it is struck" (36). In "Soot Crowns the Stubble", Patel imagines the city itself as a damaged body, allowing him to reiterate the impact of physical violence. The poet contemplates an expanse of grass, burnt during a riot, describing the singed grass corporeally as "stubble" and likening it to his own body: "It could've been hair off my chest" (16).

In moving between the immediate, local space of the individual body, the wider contextual surroundings of the city, and, at times, the extra-geographical sphere of the cosmos, Patel makes explicit the repercussions of acts of torture: "A thin continuous cry / Hounds the universe, accompanying / The turning earth", the poet writes in "Audience", connecting, in one sentence, the cries of one individual with the world at large (35). The experience of pain is thus shown to be foundational to the composition of space, Patel's work allowing for the anonymous and subjugated subjects who have no place in dominant narratives of the city or nation but whose bodies continue to constitute it to be heard. In a way therefore, the poet reveals, as Jussawalla does in "Sea Breeze, Bombay", that the city's built environment is produced and maintained by the bodies of its subjects; but whereas Jussawalla's poem emphasizes the economically constitutive dimension of Bombay's workforce, Patel reiterates instead that the city's hybridity is reliant on the material bodies and extreme experiences of its citizens. The body, as Upstone contends, is "central to the folding of space", and to its continuing production (167).

The lived experience of the body in Bombay

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Bombay's image – as a city of spectacle, of unfettered modernity and progress, of hybrid cosmopolitanism – is called into question by poetic reflections on what it means to live there, to inhabit and experience the city every day. In imagining the city as a living body, Patel seems to come towards an articulation of the embodied experience of the city, and in doing so, is able to contribute to a critical re-reading of Bombay. As Lefebvre argued, the impositions of the state are “refused by the intimate” (“Rhythmanalysis” 238). In articulating the violence that has threatened and coerced the bodies of the city's subjects, therefore, and in drawing attention to the corporeality of Bombay itself, Patel's poetry introduces a nuanced conception of the city, dispensing with the regulatory attempt at mapping its space in favour of a contingent and intimate reflection on what it feels like to live here.

In “Urban”, Patel uses the form and style of the poem to reinforce the intimate and sensory experience of the city. The elderly woman the doctor / poet encounters on his rounds is convinced that eating chicken soup has cured her illness:

...mis
 taking the hum in
 her veins
 for the ima
 gined chicken's part
 ing gift
 while
 I know it to be
 no more
 than hot

water's mo
mentary warming (31)

Although the narrator claims to “know” that her feeling of wellbeing is an illusion, the tonal dissonance between “*know*” (to have empirical knowledge of) and “*no*” (to deny) structurally suggests that the certainty of the narrator’s knowledge is undermined. The form and visual layout of the poem – its short lines and the formal fracture between “mis / taking”, “ima / gined”, “part / ing”, “mo / mentary” – structurally suggests the sensation of heat pulsing through her body, replicating the subjective, physical sensations of the woman in the city. In contradiction to the doctor’s empirical knowledge, therefore, is the poet’s recognition of the fleeting sensations the woman experiences, and a desire to render these into discourse.

Patel’s most recent volume of work *Mirrored, Mirroring*, continues to reflect his concern with the sensory experience of the city. In “From Bombay Central”, the poet boards a local train and notes the myriad of smells, sounds and sensations that he encounters as he settles into his seat: “the odour of human manure / Vague and sharp drifts in / From adjoining platforms” (3). This smell, the poet knows, comes from the social demographic of “population of porters, / Stall-keepers, toughs and vagabonds” who live and work at the station, and is part of the experience of the city: other impressions he lists as:

...amalgam
Of diesel oil, hot steel, cool rails,
Light and shadow, human sweat,
Metallic distillations, dung, urine,
Newspaper ink, Parle’s Gluco Biscuits,
...all
Hitting the nostril as one singular
Invariable atmospheric thing. (3-4)

The poem lists the different and divergent impressions of the station, recreating a sense of the city as a composite of brief sensory experiences. Like the old woman's experience of eating chicken soup in "Urban", these resist geographical mapping: the narrator chronicles not the built features of the city but its fleeting, passing smells and sounds. As Lefebvre noted of smells and odours, they:

do not signify; they *are*, and they say what they are in all its immediacy: the intense particularity of what occupies a certain space and spreads outwards from that space into the surroundings.
(*Production* 198)

Smells are "expressive", Lefebvre continues, and give a sense of a particular space at a specific moment in time (198). In privileging these "expressive" impressions of the city, Patel's work thus conveys the impossibility of ever fully knowing or mapping Bombay: instead, this city is experienced in the very bodies of its subjects, a fact the poet accepts he can only gesture towards.

This chapter has examined the work of two Bombay poets, analyzing the ways in which their work negotiates a particularly violent period in the city's history. Varma has noted the irony that Bombay's celebratory image, circulated in film and literary discourses, emerged alongside – and in the aftermath of – the emergence of the Shiv Sena as a political force, and against the backdrop of the city's economic and political deterioration ("Provincializing" 81). Although she is specifically referring to the more recent crises experienced in the city in the wake of the 1992-1993 Hindu-Muslim riots, and the transformation of Bombay into Mumbai, her words can be applied to the context in which Patel and Jussawalla were writing too. For, on the one hand, Bombay's film industry

was increasingly projecting a stylized and highly aspirational image of the city to local and global audiences as the state continued to look to the city as the epitome of secular modernity: on the other hand, however, right-wing political groups were inciting communal violence, prompted by the exponential increase in the city's population and the new demands made on its resources. Both poets intervene in this dichotomy, chronicling the violent narratives and experiences on which the myth of the city has been founded. The work of both poets recognizes, moreover, that the popular narrative of the city's progress has rendered invisible the economic labour and physical experiences of the individual subject, and stages an attempt to recuperate these overlooked citizens into a reimagining of the city.

When Ezekiel was writing poetry in Bombay in the early 1950s, he appears to have struggled with how to engage directly with his own surroundings, gradually coming to terms with the reality of the city by the 1960s and 1970s. As suggested in this chapter, Ezekiel's advice that poets should write about their own surroundings is taken seriously by Jussawalla and Patel; but, unlike Ezekiel, they face the new challenge of how to expose and express the violence undermining the city. In the next chapter, I look to a poet whose work further engages with the occluded realities of the city. Like Jussawalla and Patel, Arun Kolatkar evidences a concern with the smallest of scales and experiences in the city, reincorporating the objects, bodies and textures of Bombay in a way that rejects regionalist, nationalist and global imaginings of the city. Kolatkar's writing goes further, however, critiquing not only dominant paradigms of the city but also dominant reading strategies of postcolonial poetry as well.

Chapter Seven

“Let the city see its lion face / in the shaky mirror of our flesh”:⁴¹ unhomely figures, objects and textures in Arun Kolatkar’s poetry

The previous two chapters have reflected on the turn towards Bombay in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla and Gieve Patel, suggesting that the city increasingly emerges in their work as a site of distinctive and locally produced material histories and experiences. This final chapter reflects on the work of Arun Kolatkar, the poet whom Anjali Nerlerkar has argued was “not just aware of, but obsessed with, the understanding of space” (2). I suggest that Kolatkar’s representations of Bombay and its surroundings go further than just acknowledging the violent and contested histories of the city; rather, his poetry makes a vital attempt at reimagining the possibilities latent, but as yet unrealized, in the city. Bombay is thus, as Amit Chaudhuri notes, “fundamental for Kolatkar as a way of seeing [and] as a means of renovating experience” (“Introduction” *Jejuri* xx), a city in which he expresses what, for Theodor Adorno, constituted the utopian dimension of the art-work; its “longing for the new, not the new itself” (AT 41).

This chapter examines Kolatkar’s representation of Bombay and its surroundings, suggesting that his concern with the most disadvantaged subjects and communities, his attention to the smallest of details in *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems*, and his continual emphasis on the textures and materiality

⁴¹ From Arun Kolatkar, “The Boomtown Leper’s Band” (*Collected Poems* 154). All references from Kolatkar’s poetry are taken from his *Collected Poems* and are cited parenthetically in the chapter.

of place, enables him to negotiate the complex demands made of the writer in Bombay. His particular interest in the tangibility of the city, I argue, further counters both the religious mythologization of Bombay as an exclusively Maharashtran, Hindu space, as well as what Andreas Huyssen terms “the giddy utopianism” of globalization studies that position global megacities like Bombay as progressive spaces of economic and social movements (*Other Cities, Other Worlds* 14). Like Patel, whose poetry privileges sensory experience as constitutive to the very production of space, Kolatkar consistently turns to the smallest of scales in order to suggest that Bombay is primarily an embodied, tactile experience. Kolatkar goes further, moreover, strategically figuring *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems* as microcosms of their spatial referents in such a way that the reader is invited to experience the city in an intimate and involved manner too. Moving continually between local and global scales, therefore, Kolatkar’s poetry presents a particularly inclusive view of the postcolonial city that affects both the representation of Bombay and the way in which postcolonial poetry is read.

I begin this chapter by reflecting on Kolatkar’s portrayal of the most disadvantaged and overlooked subjects and objects. Rashmi Varma recently deployed the term “unhomely” in order to analyse the presence of women in the postcolonial city, modifying the Freudian term in order to suggest ways in which the figure of the female subject in the city might “disturb the notion of the ‘proper’ urban subject” (*Postcolonial City* 26). Drawing on the interventionist presence of unhomely figures, I suggest that the proliferation of undesirable subjects in Kolatkar’s poetry – stray dogs, lepers, drop-outs, drunks, prostitutes – perform a critical function, demonstrating the occluded experiences and histories found within the urban sphere. I develop the idea of the unhomely

here, however, extending it to the urban details and localized incidents Kolatkar portrays more generally – to the “junk of the urban everyday” (Chaudhuri xxiii). The emphasis Kolatkar places on the textures and materiality of these urban details intervenes further in narratives about Bombay and the postcolonial city more generally: I thus reflect on the affective dimension of Bombay that Kolatkar’s poetry conveys, examining his invocation of tactile “lived space” (Lefebvre *Production* 39). Kolatkar extends the affective experience of the city to his readers too, moreover, and in the final section of this chapter, I consider the implications and utopian potentialities of reading his work.

Unhomely subjects and objects

Jejuri and *Kala Ghoda Poems* are both set in hegemonic centres of religious or economic power respectively. *Jejuri* captures a single day in the temple town of the same name near Pune, which is “one of the most important centres of Khandoba worship in Maharashtra” and a major pilgrimage site for Hindu worshippers of the folk-deity (Sontheimer 22).⁴² Kolatkar’s more recent sequence depicts the people and events in the commercial and artistic Kala Ghoda district of South Bombay, an area of the city that is also weighted with historical and economic associations. The connotations of these areas, however, are undermined by the poet’s decision to focus on their unofficial and undocumented features. In *Jejuri*, for instance, the narrator deliberately distances himself from the town’s religious narratives, and avoids participating in the various acts of worship and traditional practices he observes. Hence in

⁴² Günther-Dietz Sontheimer’s collected essays provide an insight into the cult of Khandoba and the forms of worship performed at Jejuri. In an interview with Eunice de Souza in 1999, Kolatkar mentioned having read some of Sontheimer’s earlier work, and being inspired by his research on Indian folk cultures and traditions (18-19).

“Makarand”, the narrator responds to an invitation to join in with a pooja ceremony with an emphatic denial that is further emphasized by the double line break: “No thanks. // Not me” (60). Instead, he declares, “I will be out in the courtyard / where no one will mind / if I smoke” (60).

The narrator occupies a physical and metaphorical position “out in the courtyard” throughout the sequence (60). From here, he is able to observe the apparently inconsequential features of his surroundings, noting in particular the disrepair of the town and the impoverishment of its subjects. The devotional musicians performing in “The Blue Horse”, for instance, are physically impaired: the singer has a “half burnt tongue” while the accompanying drummer has “a face fallen in on itself / and a black skin burnt blacker in the sun” (65). The presence of the elderly woman begging on the street in “An Old Woman” is, too, a reminder of the economic deprivation found in Jejuri: grabbing the narrator by the hand and offering to take him to a particular shrine in exchange for money, the old woman addresses him with her helplessness, asking “What else can an old woman do / on hills as wretched as these?” (50).

As discussed in Chapter One, Kolatkar’s portrayal of the unsightly and dispossessed figures in the temple town was interpreted by some critics as sacrilegious, and evidence of the poet’s own rejection of Hindu and Indian values. The presence of stray dogs and beggars certainly do serve as a critical reminder of the pervasiveness of poverty in public spaces, and counters the myth of a sacred, sanctified Hindu town. In fact, the poet seems to suggest that it is *because* of the town’s religious significance that its subjects are reduced to poverty: as the elderly woman notes above, she has little choice but to beg from visiting pilgrims such as the narrator, because the town relies to such an extent on their patronage. The disabled musicians participate in the industry of Jejuri in

their devotional performance, too, and even the priest's young son "comes along as your guide" after school, informally employed to tell the narrator about the history of Jejuri's surrounding area ("The Priest's Son" 52).

Rather than interpreting the presence of unsightly and liminal figures as initiating a critique of religion, however, they might instead be seen as disruptive and unhomely apparitions that intervene in any comprehensive conception of space. Drawing on Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* as denoting "everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light" (qtd. Bhabha 14-15), Rashmi Varma has suggested that the postcolonial city is the space of numerous disruptive and unhomely figures who unsettle expectations about urban citizenship and belonging. The presence of women in particular, she contends, and textual representations of their physical labour, "disarticulate[s] the city as the site of masculinist and colonialist publics" (2). As Varma notes, modernist responses to the city have tended to be masculine: even the alienated figure of the flâneur is male, and occupies a privileged position in the city. By contrast, the unhomely figures the narrator encounters in *Jejuri* are part of an invisible underclass that is overwhelmingly female – even down to the "mongrel bitch" of "Heart of Ruin", who has "found a place for herself / and her puppies" amidst the debris of a falling down temple (44). These unhomely subjects thus prompt reflection on the occluded subjects and histories that constitute a particular place, emphasizing the efforts involved in maintaining what is a precarious socio-economic position in the town.

The depiction of the elderly woman with eyes like "bullet holes", for instance, introduces an unexpected and troubling image of violence into the sacred space of *Jejuri*, inviting the reader to consider what conflict she has been caught up in (50). The contemporaneity of the reference to "bullet holes",

and its obvious allusions to twentieth-century conflict, further historicizes the woman's disenfranchisement – making apparent the extent to which she has been affected by relatively recent political events. This counters the somewhat dehistoricized associations of the poem's title, which figures her simply as a permanent and unchanging feature of the town. It challenges too certain Brahminical narratives – which, as Laetitia Zecchini observes, can be characterized by their insistence that every individual and object has a pre-ordained position in the order or *dharma* of the world (“Moving Lines” 10). Poverty and disenfranchisement thus become simply a given, with subjects like the old woman seen as occupying their ‘rightful’ place in the order of society. As Zecchini suggests, Kolatkar was deeply critical of such a hierarchical and a-historical view, reliant as it was on the idea of a single “harmony which regulates the universe and defines the behavior of each caste” (10). His work, she argues, consistently defied such principles, transgressing religious hierarchies by contextualising those figures deemed to exist outside of history. The contemporary reference to “bullet holes” in “An Old Woman”, and the poet's historical and materialist invocation of the disenfranchisement of the town's populace, thus enacts a departure from a particular kind of spatial and social narrative, which would seek to maintain conditions as they are (50).

If the figure of the beggar woman enacts an unhomely and disconcerting departure from the narrative of Jejuri as a timeless space of order and worship, the narrator's discovery of prohibited sexual liaisons in the town further undermines the notions of purity on which Brahminism relies. As the narrator prepares to travel home in “Between Jejuri and the Railway Station”, he passes the house of the temple dancer, whom he hints “owes her prosperity to another skill. / A skill the priest's son would rather not talk about” (67). This reference to

sexual encounters – possibly prostitution – further demonstrates the omnipresence of violent and gendered power relations in Jejuri. The contrast here between the temple dancer's official role, and her parallel position as lover or prostitute, moreover, introduces an unexpectedly transgressive register to the sequence, revealing desire and sexual contact to be found simultaneously within supposedly 'pure' spaces of worship.

It is not only occluded subjects that the narrator encounters in *Jejuri*, however, but a proliferation of unexpected things and unhomely objects as well: "broken tiles" and a "broken collection box" ("Heart of Ruin" 44); "a conduit pipe" ("Water Supply" 45); a door hanging on its broken hinge ("The Door" 46). Such broken and discarded things further reinforce the poet's disarticulation of the sanctified myth of Jejuri, and indicate the uneven distribution of wealth and power in pilgrimage sites. Hence the priest, waiting for the arrival of the pilgrims, is concerned with what offerings the visitors will bring him: "Will there be a puran poli on his plate?" he wonders ("The Priest" 43). Meanwhile, the town itself is physically crumbling, its inhabitants compelled to make a living from begging and sex work.

The unexpected appearance of unhomely figures in *Jejuri* continually surprise the narrator, revealing that even within a prescribed space of religious worship and orthodox beliefs, space is resistant to comprehensive or ideological mapping. Like the body in Patel's poetry, the town continually evades the ways in which it has been represented in hegemonic discourse, exceeding the narrator's expectations and understanding. As the narrator's companion steps inside a building in "Manohar", for instance, he "thought / it was one more temple":

He looked inside.
 Wondering
 which god he was going to find. (49)

Kolatkár's words here suggest the homogenization of the town; Manohar assumes "it was one more temple", which shows how much similar buildings dominate the view of Jejuri. Instead, however, he is startled by a surprising discovery:

He quickly turned away
 when a wide eyed calf
 looked back at him.

 It isn't another temple,
 he said,
 it's just a cowshed. (49)

The disparity between what Manohar expects to find and what he in fact discovers, demonstrates that even this most ideological site exceeds and evades the process of being conceptually mapped.

Similarly in "The Doorstep", the narrator encounters a tangible disruption in his passage through the streets, pausing to consider an object before him:

That's no doorstep.
 It's a pillar on its side.

 Yes.
 That's what it is. (45)

His initial uncertainty over whether this is a doorstep or a pillar, moreover, provides a particularly literal example of the unhomey, as his inability to place the item is at the same time an inability to differentiate between private,

domestic space (suggested by the “doorstep”), and the official, public one (indicated by the “pillar”): “the line dividing public from private space is never final” (Chaudhuri xxii). The decisive stanza break in the middle of the verse is suggestive of the narrator’s actual pause as he considers what the object before him could be and where it might belong, formally encoding its interruption of his physical journey. This line break, moreover, and the attention the narrator pays to this particular object – evidenced by the repetition of demonstrative pronouns (“That’s”; “It’s”; “That’s”) – constitutes a further interruption in the *reader’s* interpretive passage through the text too. For, in assigning this discarded and indeterminate object such a central place in the sequence, Kolatkar disrupts cultural connotations about what is appropriate poetic material for poetry. This discarded pillar is thus an unhomely apparition to the narrator and reader simultaneously, prompting them both to recognise that even the most predictable spaces contain unexpected scenes and objects.

Unhomely subjects and objects in *Kala Ghoda Poems*

Kolatkar’s interest in the unhomely elements of *Jejuri* disrupted the spatial logic of the town as an exclusively Hindu place of worship. In *Kala Ghoda Poems*, his portrayal of unhomely subjects, objects and events further interrupts the spatial narrative of Bombay as the paradigmatic, progressive global city. Departing from what Varma has termed “standard literary evocations of Bombay”, which tend to uncritically emphasise its conviviality and hybridity, Kolatkar instead focuses on detailing the subaltern populace of the city, historicizing and contextualizing the very terms of their disenfranchisement (*Postcolonial City*

138). The subjects he recuperates into his poetry – young prostitutes, drug dealers, a “frail old fisherwoman” and the “scrawny little / motheaten kitten” who follows her around, shoe-shine boys, cleaners, lavatory attendants, discarded bicycle tyres, piles of rubbish lining up along the kerb – thus interrogate the progressive social and economic narrative of Bombay (“Bon Appétit” 156). As Zecchini and Nerlerkar have both recently shown, moreover, the presence of such occluded subjects also interrogates the “aggressive nationalist hinduization (sic) of the cultural and political landscape in India”, which perpetuates a particularly ideological spatial ideal of an ethnically ‘pure’ Maharashtran city (Zecchini “Moving Lines” 16).

Kala Ghoda Poems is set on one particular spot in the city; a traffic island that is “just about where the equestrian statue / of what’s-his-name / must’ve stood once” (“Pi-dog” 75). The unhomely figures depicted in the sequence are thus located in the literal and metaphoric shadow of some of Bombay’s most iconic attractions and historically significant sites, including the Jehangir Gallery, Elphinstone College, the David Sassoon Library and the Lund and Blockley shop, all of which are referenced in the poems. The statue of “what’s-his-name” is a reference to the so-called black horse statue of Edward VII that lent the area its name. The monument – an imposing visual marker of colonial rule – was defaced in the mid-1960s and replaced by a statue of the Maratha warrior Shivaji. This too was later relocated to the more significantly placed Gateway of India; and, as the dog recounts in the opening poem, the spot is currently neglected, a traffic island that “doubles as a parking lot / on working days” (75). By setting his sequence in an area of the city that has been contested by different groups and ideologies – but which currently lies abandoned – Kolatkar thus reinforces his critique of the exclusion of certain subjects, objects and

experiences from accounts of Bombay.

Like the old woman in *Jejuri*, shown to be disadvantaged due to her historical circumstances, Kolatkar continually references the context and wider social history behind the figures he portrays. The image of the blind man in “Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda”, for instance, who “strokes / his vaguely military-looking moustache // with divide-and-rule fingers”, invites the reader to contemplate whether he was displaced during Partition – the violent rupture produced by the British administration’s own policy of divide and rule (133). The canine narrator of “Pi-dog”, too, is revealed to be a product of history: in his ironic re-telling of his genealogy, he traces his origins on his mother’s side to “the only bitch that proved / tough enough to survive” being imported to India by the colonial governor Sir Bartle Frere in the nineteenth century (76). The poem, however, avoids the suggestion that the dog is a product of a single historical narrative, dispensing with the notion that the city and its subjects continue to be defined by India’s colonial past. Hence the dog details his family history on his father’s side, tracing his origins further back to “the dog that followed / Yudhishtira” (77). The multiple heritages to which this stray dog has access reveal the impossibility of according Bombay, or its subjects, any single identity. In fact, the dog’s hybrid origins serve as a metaphor for the city’s itself: his own body is “a bit like / a seventeenth-century map of Bombay”, with skin “the colour of old parchment” (75). This poem locates what Kolatkar called, in *Jejuri*, “the spirit of the place”, in the daily life and contested history of a stray dog, signaling his absolute rejection of official discourses and narratives of Bombay (“The Railway Station” 70). The poet then, like the dog, is far less concerned with Bombay’s official past – with “what’s-his-name” and the city’s colonial legacy – than he is with articulating the lives of the city’s stray and unhomey

figures.

The unhomely subjects living in the “exact centre” of Bombay are idiosyncratic in their disruption of certain myths about the city (“Pi-Dog” 75). In “The Boomtown Leper’s Band”, for instance, an impromptu street performance by a band of disfigured lepers brings the reader into contact with the very underside of the city’s public political image: “Let the city see its lion face / in the shaky mirror of our flesh” (154). This band – led by a “noseless singer” who is being pushed along in a wheelbarrow – provide a visually provocative reminder of the destitution found within even the wealthiest areas of the global city. By using such an intimate and proximal image to invite the reader to look into the “shaky mirror” of their disfigured bodies, Kolatkar expresses the close relationship between the upwardly mobile middle-classes and the most destitute of the city’s population. As Rahul Mehrotra observes, communities that would have had little contact with one another during the colonial period now “share the same space” even as “they understand and use it differently”, resulting in the creation of a new and unsettling urban environment in Bombay, characterized by “intense dualities” and inequalities (205, 217).

The poem, moreover – which as Zecchini notes, alludes to Bob Geldof’s band The Boomtown Rats in its title, and to a particular American tradition of rock n roll music in the singer’s lyrics – reveals that the poorest Bombay citizens and the more privileged, occupy a common cultural space too (“Moving Lines” 11). On the one hand, the lepers’ familiarity with Western popular music demonstrates the extent to which texts are increasingly globalized, revealing the city to be a site of multiple and transnational intertexts. At the same time, however, the vast disparity between the living conditions of this Bombay band and the privileged context in which Geldof and other rock stars perform, draws

attention to the uneven ways in which cultural access is mediated in the city, and allows the poet to critique any straightforward and celebratory narrative of global city culture. Such a “rhetoric of globalism”, Timothy Brennan has argued, risks implying the existence of a homogenous world culture in cities like Bombay, when in fact, as these lepers remind us, the city is a contested space of different and uneven forms of modernity (8).

Like the watermelon vendor, the street cleaners, the traders in rubbish, and the shoe-shine boy, the lepers are part of Bombay’s multiple and precarious “shadow economies”, making their living in the unregulated and unofficial spaces of the city (Appadurai “Spectral Housing” 628). Arjun Appadurai details the relationship between these shadow enterprises and the city’s official spaces of commerce, observing, along with Saskia Sassen, the paradox that the more an area is re-developed and invested in, the greater the disparity between the lives of the poorest subjects working in its service economy and the conditions of the wealthiest recipients of their labour. Sassen notes that as urban areas undergo extensive improvements, a “vast supply of low wage jobs [are] required”, with informal and low paying work becoming apparent as a marker and “function of growth” (10). The unhomely figures in *Kala Ghoda Poems* thus evidence what is hidden by the myth of global cities like Bombay: that “growth rests, to a significant extent, on deep structural processes of decline” and inequality (12). Hence in “Meera”, the poet observes the “sad-eyed feminine half / of the municipal street-cleaning team” as she clears away piles of rubbish outside the Jehangir Art Gallery (83). She works early in the morning, “When most art critics are still in bed”, and she is “unseen by any // save a few discerning crows and a kitten” (84-85). Her physical labour, however, is fundamental to the maintenance and production of the city, even

though the poet notes with irony that as she clears away the debris, “more and more of Bombay / keeps mushrooming” in its place, “reclaimed by sweepings / such as this trolley collects” (86-87).

The social activities of these subjects further reject either the notion of the city as an idealized space of modernity, or as a pure, sanitized Hindu space. As Zecchini shows, the sequence contains numerous references to bodies engaged in unsightly and transgressive behavior (“Moving Lines” 9-10): there is the small boy who “shoots a perfect arc of piss” onto the pavement (“The Ogress” 98); the woman performing her morning ablutions in public (“The Barefoot Queen of the Crossroads” 120); the young girl “producing arpeggios of lice” from her lover’s hair (“Lice” 109); and many hungry, sexualized, ugly, or intoxicated bodies. Zecchini reads the proliferation of these bodies as indicative of Kolatkar’s resistance to “conventional proprieties and to all kinds of frontiers, barriers and finitudes”, suggesting that they constitute a defiant and carnivalesque presence that defends against all claims over the city’s ‘true’ identity (“Moving Lines” 9).

Nerlerkar also argues that the activities these figures are engaged in – eating, defecating, cleaning themselves, or simply loitering – can be interpreted as a ‘tactical’ re-appropriation of the authority of colonial and neo-colonial spatial practices. Drawing on the distinction offered by Michel de Certeau between strategic and tactical uses of space, Nerlerkar contends that the unhomely subjects Kolatkar portrays “resist the well laid out narratives of power that are structured from the top down” by introducing practices and experiences “that [are] not part of the institutional charting of them” (4, 9). In poems like “The Barefoot Queen of the Crossroads”, for instance, the poet conflates the body and dress of the abject homeless woman with the official map of the city,

revealing the former's imbrication in the latter: "One end of her sari" is "(red like the city in May / with all its gulmohurs in bloom)" (122). As the woman dresses, the fabric layers of her sari make onomatopoeic sounds against each other, and as they do, seem to gather the various environs of the city into their folds:

(flip flap, flip flap,
 Dadar, Parel, Lalbaug, Byculla, Bori Bunder,
 flip flap, Flora Fountain
 and flip, we come to Kala Ghoda,
 which is where
 we've been, all along) (123)

This poem, for Nerlerkar, demonstrates the poet's interest in re-thinking the processes of mapping. This woman is positioned in the very centre of the city, folding its different neighbourhoods within her clothing. Such a gesture "places the daily practices of the people of Bombay on the map", demonstrating that the city is found not in the official monuments of "what's-his-name", nor in traditional maps, but in the ordinary activities of its poorest subjects (Nerlerkar 5).

It is not only the economic roles and bodies of Bombay's subjects that constitute unhomey interruptions to the conception of the city, however. As in *Jejuri*, Kolatkar incorporates a multitude of random and idiosyncratic objects into the poems as well, referencing their significance to the formation and constitution of the city. In "David Sassoon", the inanimate narrator of the poem – the bust of the well-known Jewish Baghdadi benefactor that hangs above the library of the same name – itemizes the various commercial products his shipping firm dealt with, all of which "bore the mark of Sassoon & Co.": "Gold and silver; / gums and spices; cotton, silks and wool; / opium, wheat and tea"

(171). The use of a list here, with items linked by the repetition of the conjunctive “and”, makes apparent the materiality of Bombay’s colonial and contemporary wealth, tracing the origins of its economy back to the individual products and resources that were first traded through the city’s port. More often though, it is discarded materials that Kolatkar incorporates into the sequence, inviting a comparison between the city’s official commodities that fuel the city’s wealth and their unsightly parallels. In “Meera”, for instance, the poet pays attention to the things that make up the “modest piles of rubbish”, deconstructing the city into its smallest, composite parts (85):

and consisting of dry leaves, scraps of paper,

prawn shells, onion skins, potato peels,
castoff condoms, dead flowers
- mostly gulmohur and copper pod. (85)

This list of items, separated by successive commas, indicates the amalgamation of materials involved in forming the city. The list continues later in the poem as the cleaner begins to compress the rubbish “like a vineyard wench / in a tub of grapes”:

eggshells and dead flowers,

dry leaves and melon rinds,
breadcrumbs and condoms,
chicken bones and potato peels (88)

While the city’s official economy is founded on the circulation of such commodities as tea, coffee and silk, its geographical materiality consists of such everyday detritus compounded into what appears to be the solid ground of the city. By attending to precisely what is in these piles of rubbish, moreover –

differentiating between the various kinds of flowers and types of vegetable peelings – Kolatkar is able to produce a highly specific itinerary of Bombay’s formation. The accumulation of objects in “Meera”, formally and rhythmically reinforced by the repetition of commas and the conjunctive “and”, shows the contingent and idiosyncratic origins of the city, locating it in the interactions between such ordinary items as “eggshells and dead flowers” (88).

Lists of objects appear again in “Kerosene”, when Kolatkar watches a young woman as “She grabs an empty plastic jerrycan” and runs after the boy selling kerosene (111). As she reaches among her things for the container, the poet focuses his gaze on the assortment of items she has collected, detailing them as follows:

... (Oh, odds and ends:

cardboard cartons, pots and pans,
 bundles of cloth, a beheaded doll, a small
 transistor, a beachball on a Primus stove) (111)

This rather random list of objects, on the one hand, evidences the girl’s poverty and subalternity: like the other figures in the sequence, she is compelled to use the public space of Bombay to perform her private routines, indicated here by the domesticity of the “pots and pans” and the “Primus stove”. By itemizing these very different things, however, the poet reiterates the idea that the city is a montage of disparate objects, things and textures, prompting the reader to give due recognition to exactly what “odds and ends” the city is formed out of. As Zecchini notes, Kolatkar had a sustained “vigilance to everything that ‘is’”; the care he takes in this poem to detail exactly what constitutes the city thus enables him to attend to the material and historical specificity of Bombay and of the lives of young girls like this one (“Moving Lines” 6). His work thus avoids

producing an abstracted image of the city's poverty, identifying it instead in the scant material possessions she lays claim to.

In fact, what is notable about the objects and things that appear in *Kala Ghoda Poems* is the emphasis the poet places on their particularity to the scene. Hence in "Knucklebones", the narrator addresses a young female drug pusher, pointing out the "bright red plastic haircomb / stuck at a rakish angle just above / the helix of your ear" (114); in "The Ogress", "an empty sky-blue plastic mug / bobbing up and down gleefully" captures the poet's attention (96); and in "To A Crow", the narrator cheers on a bird as he selects a particularly appealing addition to his nest, formally evidencing its significance to the crow via the use of excessive exclamation marks: "A twig! A twig! A twig! A twig! A twig! / You got it! You got it! You got it!" (92). These items are unhomely in so far as they interrupt expectations about the city, in particular the notion that it can be comprehensively and visually mapped. Instead, Kolatkar demonstrates, it is a composite of unexpected interruptions, mundane apparitions, collected rubbish, and incidents that pass unnoticed every day. Consequently, these unhomely objects also compel a reconsideration of how to represent the city in poetry; for if, as the poems indicate, the city is a composite of unexpected events and things, the poet must find a way to express these apparitions in language. The exclamations and excitement of the narrator in "To A Crow" for instance, not only conveys the significance of this particular bird and that specific twig, but also expresses a formal and stylistic response to the incursions of the city.

By placing such an emphasis on particular objects and things, moreover, Kolatkar signals his interest in the substance and texture of his surroundings. In "Pi-dog", the canine narrator is less concerned with the statue of "what's-his-name" than he is with detailing what it feels like as he lies "at the exact centre"

of the city: “the concrete surface hard, flat and cool / against my belly, / my lower jaw at rest on crossed forepaws” (75). Like Patel’s poetry about the body in the city, Kolatkar’s invocation of how the street *fee/s* suggests that knowledge of space is a sensory and embodied experience rather than a matter of empirical mapping. The sensations offered by the street are hence revealed to be as much a constitutive part of the city as its touristic locales and official monuments. As Michael Dowdy has suggested of recent Puerto Rican poets but which holds true for Kolatkar too, their poetry “poeticize [s] a felt knowledge of geographical and sociopolitical space” and “foregrounds feeling as a real condition of global capitalism” (41, 51). The dog’s body in “Pi-Dog” thus allows Kolatkar to signal his interest in the physical experience of being in the city, and to the various and sometimes discordant textures of space. At the conclusion to “Pi-dog”, the narrator’s “nose quivers” with “A many-coloured smell” as commuters and vendors begin to arrive on his previously deserted spot; the different smells he then lists – of “mildly acidic perspiration / and nail polish, / rosewood and rosin” – comprise his particular experience of this exact spot in the city (81). Like Patel in “Bombay Central”, Kolatkar’s dog uses his sense of smell – which is emphatically contingent, fleeting, and resistant to mimetic or realist expression – to register the changes in his surroundings; it is his sense of smell that alerts him to the moment when he must clear out of sight to “surrender the city / to its so-called masters” (81). The poem, in Dowdy’s words, “validates feeling as a way of knowing” one’s surroundings, drawing attention to the relationship between the conception of a place and the various sensory perceptions of it (41).

As the poet watches the young cleaner compress the various items of rubbish in “Meera”, he notes the different textures and subsequent feelings

elicited by these objects. The “dry leaves and melon rinds / breadcrumbs and condoms, / chicken bones and potato peels” and all the other items Kolatkar lists

...floods
 the cracks of her heels,

 licks the soles
 and arches of her feet,
 anoints

 calluses,
 and rises
 between her toes. (88)

Zecchini interprets the “unrestrained tactile immediacy” of such poems as evidence of Kolatkar’s refusal to reinforce Sanskrit hierarchies and Brahmin propriety in his writing, suggesting that the privilege he grants to the sensory realm enacts a carnivalesque departure from the “sanitized” image of Bombay projected by the Shiv Sena (“Moving Lines” 12). This image of religious cleanliness, as Thomas Blom Hansen notes, is not only prompted by their religious ideology but is also associated with the Sena’s involvement in many corporate real estate projects in the city: “most Shiv Sena mayors and municipal corporators have aimed at creating *Sundar Mumbai*, beautiful Mumbai”, instigating slum clearances, beautification initiatives and other structural attempts at homogenizing the appearance of the city (70). The lengthy descriptions of rubbish in the poem above therefore undermines the Sena’s deliberate attempts to efface difference and ‘extraneous’ elements from the city, reclaiming these discarded objects as central to a reimagining of Bombay. In this scene above, moreover, Kolatkar uses imagery and language associated

with religious ritual, which as Zecchini notes, has the effect of further valorizing the ordinary textures of the city (“Moving Lines” 5).

The repetition of soft “s” sounds in the poem – rubbish “licks the soles / and arches”, “anoints // calluses, / and rises” – is further suggestive of the material softness of the items the cleaner touches, and enables Kolatkar to express, formally and linguistically, the relationship between different registers and objects. In examining the sensations produced by different objects in the city, Kolatkar goes further than making a critique of the spatial politics ascribed to by the Sena therefore; he provides an example of Lefebvre’s contention in *Right to the City* that the “specificity of the city” can be apprehended only by attending to the “relations of immediacy, of direct relations between persons and groups which make up society” (“The Specificity of the City” 100-101). Indeed, as David Harvey points out, the body and its experiences are deeply imbricated in its wider material context; the body “cannot be understood independently of its embeddedness in socio-ecological processes” (*Spaces of Hope* 16). By contemplating how the city feels to the cleaner, the poet introduces an affective remapping of the street, revealing that the various items of discarded rubbish are not only economically and materially constitutive of the city – but are experientially constitutive of it as well.

When a “winning flower” falls onto the couple playing a board game in “A Game of Tigers and Sheep”, the speaker notes this small item’s ability to affect a significant change in the course of events (118). As the poem begins, the narrator is losing the game. However, “help comes from unexpected quarters: / above”, as a tree “paradrops a winning flower / -yellow / and irrelevant –“ onto the board (118). This yellow flower is followed by a second:

- just as yellow
and just as irrelevant – except
that it comes down even more slowly;

a flower without a search warrant (119)

The narrator repeatedly refers to the flower as “irrelevant”, but its appearance introduces an unexpected diachronic temporality into the otherwise synchronic poem. The poet is concerned with the texture of this flower, describing it using soft, expansive sounds: “it brushes past her earlobe / grazes her cheek”. The falling flower is portrayed in sensuous language, falling into the private space of the woman’s person as it “disappears down the front / of her low-cut blouse” (119). The city, it seems, and its unexpected and unhomely features, is an intimately experienced and interactive space, as proximal to the subject as a lover.

Unhomely objects and utopian possibilities

The textured, detailed objects incorporated into Kolatkar’s poetry thus reorient the reader to notice localized incidents and interruptions in the city, foreclosing on any abstracted conceptions of its space. The accumulation of such specific details, however, does not amount to an exclusive localism: the poems avoid the risk that Deepika Bahri identifies in postcolonial realist texts, which she suggests encourage the reader to “mistake the representational for the representative, the artistic copy for the exact replica” (123). Instead, as Zecchini notes, Kolatkar frequently undermines the appearance and identity of the object he portrays: “[B]ehind an everyday thing, often reduced to its utilitarian dimensions...the poet discovers and reveals another reality” (“Moving Lines” 7).

The proliferation of unhomey subjects and objects, therefore, not only intervenes in the ideological construction of Bombay: they also constitute temporally and spatially disruptive apparitions in the texts, and are able to mediate continually between different times, places and meanings. Like Patel's work, Kolatkar's poetry reveals the interconnected relationship between the smallest of details and scales and the macrological political sphere, building up a portrait of the city that attends to the "*conjunctural*" amalgamation of histories and experiences that have produced it (Varma *Postcolonial City* 1). Kolatkar's portrayal of alternative realities informing the urban objects in his poetry performs an imaginatively utopian gesture too, realizing – albeit briefly – the creative potential inherent in Bombay, and in doing so simultaneously disavowing official narratives of the state sponsored urban utopianism of slum clearances, beautification projects and redevelopment.

Kolatkar's particular insistence that local things and details granted access to global and historical formations, invites parallels with the modernist theorisations of the Frankfurt School, in particular Adorno and Walter Benjamin, whose earlier work had contemplated the dialectical relationship between the things, spaces and texts of modernity. As discussed in Chapter One, Adorno developed a conception of the art-object that attended to its simultaneous significance as, on the one hand, a singular artifact that was resistant to mimetic interpretation and, on the other, as a means for coming to terms with the social and political sphere by virtue of its singularity: "the social relationship in art is the immanence of society in the work itself, rather than the immanence of art in society" (AT 304). The objects and things Kolatkar incorporates into his poetry, and the multiple meanings, times and places they gesture towards, reveals "postcolonial literature as recalcitrant even when administered": his poems

resist being interpreted according to a national, religious, theoretical or allegorical mode, tendencies identified in Chapter One as common to the postcolonial (Bahri 93).

Like Adorno, Benjamin too developed a dialectical, materialist mode of analysis that was concerned with salvaging the heuristic dimension of things and objects. Benjamin, perhaps more so than Adorno, had a particular interest in the ordinary details and objects of the modern city: writing of Paris in his unfinished *Arcades Project*, and chronicling the encounter with tangible features of the city, Benjamin displayed a “topographical imagination, passionately embracing thingness, seeing, hearing, and feeling” (Merrifield 49-50). While some commentators such as Chaudhuri have suggested that Kolatkar’s wandering peripatetic narrator can be interpreted as a modern day invocation of Benjamin’s nineteenth-century flâneur, his essays that reflect on the ‘thingness’ of his surroundings and the relationship between single objects and history offer particular insights for a contemporary reader of Kolatkar’s (Chaudhuri “Introduction”). For both writers, the single object – whether a book, a stone, a paving slab or a charas pill – enables the city dweller to connect with the wider political and social past of the city, as well as their own personal memories.

In “Unpacking My Library”, Benjamin contemplates the relationship between the books of the collector and the times and spaces in which they were bought. As he reflects on a single book, he considers the access it grants him to past events, personal memories and experiences: “Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious...the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object” (62). For Benjamin, the texture and feel of these books is vital – but not insofar as it situates the book in the exclusive space of the here-and-now: on the contrary,

the collector of books has “a relationship to objects that does not emphasise their functional, utilitarian value”, but which instead provides access to multiple times, spaces and narratives (62).

The relationship between the single object and the macrological scale of memory and history is thus one that Adorno would term “noncommunication”: objects relate to, but are incommensurable with, history or memory (*AT* 6). As suggested in the previous chapter, Patel’s portrayal of the body adopts a similar strategy, his work demonstrating the impossibility of comprehending the body via a process of descriptive or discursive mapping. As Patel’s work shows, the body exists in defiance of temporal and spatial divides, occupying simultaneous spatial spheres and scales. In Kolatkar’s poetry, he extends this incommensurability to ordinary objects and things, thereby unsettling any attempt to know or map the city. Here, objects possess more than one function: the concrete blocks in Kala Ghoda on which the locals sit are simultaneously “road dividers” and “traffic-island markers”, even as they make “great settees” and “pillows” for example (“Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda” 141).

As Jahan Ramazani has shown, metaphorical language enables poets to bring divergent contexts and intertexts into contact with one another, making it possible to create and reiterate connections between discordant times or contexts: “‘metaphor’ metaphorizes semantic and hermeneutic change as spatial movement from one place to another” (*Muse* 72). Kolatkar’s portrayal of a road divider as a settee thus enacts the convergence of such different items, enabling the poet to suggest the epistemological and practical fluidity of space. Similarly, as the poet watches a young girl talking to her friends in “Lice”, he notes that the “upright concrete block” on which she sits is “hardly broad enough / for a kitten to curl up on”; nonetheless, she sits on it “as if it were a

throne”, with the “wooden pillar / of the Wayside Inn porch” rising behind her “*like* some kind of exotic backrest” (emphasis added 108).

The metaphorical language undermines empirical realism, disarticulating – as Patel’s work does too – the “ocularcentricism” of poetic representation (Jay 3). The metaphor introduces the disparity, moreover, between the tangibility of this narrow pillar, whose parameters are clearly defined, and the narrator’s description of it “like some kind of exotic backrest”: this image is incommensurable with the stone block’s meager dimensions and rudimentary style, the metaphor thus reinforcing Kolatkar’s critique of the prevailing social conditions in Bombay. There is a similar incongruity in the poet’s description of the street cleaner in “Meera” too. As the cleaner “climbs to the top” of the basket of rubbish, she

..begins to dance
 within the narrow compass
 of the wicker bin

 like a Meera before her Lord,
 a Meera
 with a broomstick for a lute; (87)

Previously described as “a dropout” and “a performing bear”, and personified as having “befriended” the cleaner, the coconut frond she uses becomes, for this instance, a “lute”, while she in turn is imagined as the contemporary incarnation of the bhakti saint Meerabai (87).

This poem does not in any way deny the woman’s disenfranchisement, nor does it divert attention from the abject conditions in which she works. In fact, the discrepancy between the conditions in which the woman lives and the poet’s configuration of her as a saint, critiques the political status quo that

maintains her as invisible in the public sphere of the city, and recognizes the failure of modernization drives that have been directed at the city. As Adorno insisted, aesthetic forms were deeply critical of their contexts, not by virtue of direct commentary, however, but through contrast with the world itself. The ordinary items in the poem – a coconut frond, a rubbish cart, even the cleaner herself – are shown to harbor alternative meanings and significances, which in turn invites the reader to question their material positioning in the political sphere. As Bahri notes, “[r]epresentation puts in question that which is represented, rather than resolving its contradictions” (109). Hence, every time Kolatkar uses metaphorical language in this poem, he draws attention to the discrepancy between the reality for this “sad-eyed” cleaner, and her possible portrayal in aesthetic discourse. The coconut frond is “*like* a performing bear”; the piles of rubbish are likened to art “installations”; the compacted detritus is “a tub of grapes” – all metaphors that seem incongruous to describe the life of a street cleaner in Bombay. In inviting his readers to view this woman in a different way that is not defined by her economic powerlessness, Kolatkar demonstrates the impossibility of ever fully representing and comprehending her daily existence. The “transfiguration of matter” (Zecchini “Moving Lines” 4) that the poet details then – from cleaner into saint, broom into lute, concrete blocks into “street furniture” – thus indicates the incommensurability between poetic language and external reality, drawing attention to what Bahri contends is the “excess that lies beyond [the] grasp” of instrumental and conceptual reality (109).

Unhomely objects and figures also provide a prompt for the poet to engage with vastly different temporalities and geographical locations – thereby moving beyond frameworks of exclusively regional, national or global scales. In

“The Rat-poison Man’s Lunch Hour”, for instance, Kolatkar evokes in detail the wall of the Wayside Inn café against which the pest controller has lent his poster advertising rat poison. The wall itself is described using the poet’s characteristic tactile depth, the alliteration of “its peeling paint and plaster” ensuring the wall’s surface and tangibility is explicated (163). However, Kolatkar goes on to imagine the things and events the wall can “remember[.]”: referring to it as “spongy with nostalgia”, the wall – like Benjamin’s books in “Unpacking my Library” – brings into direct contact the divergent histories of the Wayside Inn (165). The wall’s recollections situate the café within a national historical context, for instance, remembering when the untouchable politician B.R. Ambedkar (or Babasaheb) used to frequent it in the 1930s: “It remembers Babasaheb sitting all by himself / with a pot of tea and scribbling notes (164). Ambedkar was instrumental in drafting India’s constitution: a campaigner for the abolition of the caste system, he lived in Bombay for some time before independence, his appearance in the poem suggesting the location’s imbrication in a national political scale. Ambedkar was, moreover, a particularly unhomely figure himself, once remarking to Mahatma Gandhi that his untouchable caste set him apart from any conception of Indianness: “Gandhiji I have no homeland” (qtd. Rao A. 159). It seems fitting that a man who identified himself as being at an angle from the project of nation building should appear so prominently in Kolatkar’s poem, drawn as he was to the outsiders and marginal figures who did not obviously fit into the Hindu space of the nation. This particular reference is to Ambedkar “dreaming”, moreover, which demonstrates that Bombay was the city in which political and social change and agitation historically occurred. The wall’s recollection of Ambedkar and his ideals thus implies that the city’s significance as a space of political agitation

and campaigning is not forgotten, but continues to be found in the form of residual traces in the very walls of its buildings.

The wall also brings together the more local histories of the Wayside Inn, incorporating smaller incidents and details into the poem:

The wall can talk about an old hat shop
that doesn't even exist any more.

It can talk about cheerful red-checked tablecloths,
blue Delftware and rose windows,

cut-glass vinegar bottles with round stoppers
and antique silver-plated cruet stands.

Boy meets Girl at the Corner Table
is a story it never tires of telling,

and remembers all the old songs from the thirties onwards
- from Saigal and Bessie Smith to Guns and Roses –

as new ones keep percolating from the music shop next door
and creating new neural pathways in its cement. (164)

The “nostalgia” evidenced by the wall is on the one hand for a specific moment in this café’s – and Bombay’s – past (165). The anachronistic references to “silver-plated cruet stands”, and to shops that are no longer in the area, implies that the point in history the wall returns us to is a point well before the commercialization of the city centre, and prior to the Sena’s violent and exclusionary claims over the new Mumbai. The moment evinced in this poem is one in which social relations were slower, a point where young couples romanced in the open in quaint city cafes. The poem suggests that this alternative history of the city is not over, however, but is omnipresent – just one

of a variety of narratives found embedded in the things of Bombay that are continually “creating new neural pathways in its cement” (164).

Other poems use the tangible objects they portray to gesture towards histories or periods at an even greater remove. The female drug dealer who narrates “To a Charas Pill”, for example, holds up one single pill and contemplates its past: “Little devil, / did you grow up on a farm / on the shadowy slopes of distant Afghanistan?” she wonders (117). This pill has “travelled a thousand miles; / crossed many rivers and deserts; // got past many fences, checkpoints, borders and boundaries” before it has come to “rest” in the intimate space “between [her] breasts” (117). The spatial scales relayed in the poem gradually become more restricted – from the vast open spaces of “rivers and deserts” to the confines of “fences, checkpoints, borders and boundaries” and finally to the physical scale of the woman’s own body – suggesting the restrictions and limitations of international movement and migration (117). The poem calls into question the notion that globalization has eroded national borders and bounded places: this charas pill has had to negotiate multiple boundaries in its journey to the here and now of Bombay.

The pill prompts the drug dealer to imagine various stories about its journey: “Did you have a rough ride / in a pickup truck”, she wonders; “Or did you cross the Khyber Pass on a camel’s back / in the company of brigands?” (117). On the one hand, the contemporaneity of the narrator’s references to a “rough ride / in a pickup truck” prompts a consideration of Afghanistan’s recent history, and the cartels that smuggle drugs into India from there. At the same time though, the reference to travelling the Khyber Pass “in the company of brigands”, draws on older and more traditional narratives of travel, inviting parallels between the journey of this pill and the travel accounts of early

explorers and traders who negotiated the Khyber Pass, as well as with colonial expeditions undertaken through this contested terrain. The narrative possibilities inherent in the pill are thus historically and spatially wide, and the emphasis on the conjunction “Or”, serves to reiterate the multiple possibilities and stories that *might* be told about it. The unhomeliness of the charas pill thus calls into question the divide separating the contemporary from the historical, as well as the separation between real and imaginative narratives.

The unhomely subjects and objects that appear in Kolatkar’s poetry prompt the narrator to consider their real and imaginative pasts and histories, tracing, on the one hand, their political and economic contexts, and imagining, on the other, multiple alternative stories about them. In “Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda”, for instance, the poet details and individuates the disenfranchised subjects who congregate for their morning meal, differentiating the people and objects in order to build up a tactile portrait of this community. At the same time though, he uses the conventions of a fairytale in order to describe the “convergence / of all the loose appetites in the air”, remarking that after the lady selling idlis has gone:

The pop-up cafeteria
disappears
like a castle in a children’s book

- along with the king and queen,
the courtiers,
the court jester and the banqueting hall,
...

and the island returns
to its flat old
boring self. (143-144)

By juxtaposing this portrayal with the earlier emphasis on the various unsightly, unproductive bodies and discarded objects in the scene, the poet invites reflection on the disjunction between the reality of life in Bombay and this brief fantastical conception of it. By referring to figures from fairytales, and by imagining the gathering as a host of characters from children's stories, Kolatkar shows that the city is not determined by any one discourse: hunchbacks and lepers are just as likely, in his re-telling, to be kings and queens; sambar and idlis are transformed into pheasants and pigs; and the space of downtown Bombay – mediated by colonial and neo-colonial power relations – is imaginatively freed to become the setting of fairytale scenarios.

This utopian projection of Bombay that Kolatkar evinces is fleeting and all too brief, and bears no resemblance to real conditions in the city. However, the incongruity of these fairytale images makes apparent the jarring experience of the text, suggesting – as Adorno and Benjamin would contend – that “the function of art is...in its purposeless purposiveness...that reformulates its political relevance in terms of import rather than impact” (Bahri 115). In the concluding section of this chapter, I consider the utopian gesture of Kolatkar's reimagining of space in more detail, examining the ways in which his writing compels the reader to acknowledge precisely the import of poetry rather than reading it for its documentary impact.

The reader and utopia

Of all the poets discussed in this thesis, Kolatkar had a reputation for being the most resistant to self-promotion and publishing. Although his poetry, in both Marathi and English, had appeared in various little magazines from the mid-

1950s, Kolatkar did not publish single volumes of work in either language until *Jejuri* in 1976 and *Arun Kolatkar's Kavita* in 1977. His poetry thus reached only a small and select audience, predominantly made up of other poets and writers. When *Jejuri* won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1977, therefore, the dynamic of Kolatkar's position as 'poet' was transformed: a reclusive figure who remained uncomfortable being in the spotlight, he now had to grant some interviews and face the emergence of a wider critical interest in his work.

Kolatkar remained uncomfortable discussing or analyzing his own poetry, however, telling Eunice de Souza: "I don't like questions and answers about poetry, even at a poetry reading" and "feel a certain fear and distaste in talking about poetry" (de Souza "Arun Kolatkar" 15). Kolatkar's "fear" can perhaps be related to his anxiety over how his work might be interpreted by critics according to their own political agendas: as detailed earlier, *Jejuri* had been criticized by Marathi critics for its critical portrayal of organized religion, for instance, even though the poet repeatedly stressed his attraction to Hinduism in interview with de Souza (23). Kolatkar was similarly resistant to a postcolonial and academic interpretation of his poetry: as his friend and publisher Ashok Shahane stressed to me in an interview, Kolatkar "would be horrified to find his work on university syllabuses, and appalled at the idea of academics studying it" (interview 19.8.11). A humorous poem called "awards have many uses", indicates Kolatkar's unease with public recognition: "awards have many uses", including being able to "silence the critics / convince the illiterates" (343). However, the poet nonetheless remarks in the same poem that: "awards are also like silver nails in the poet's coffin" (343).⁴³

The verse indicates Kolatkar's unease with having his writing practices

⁴³ This poem was written in 1999 and appears in the appendices to Kolatkar's *Collected Poems*.

analysed, and demonstrates an anxiety over how his work might be read. Such an anxiety, Sarah Brouillette has argued, is found in the work of many postcolonial writers – in particular in circumstances where the text has been circulated “to reading communities accessing privileged metropolitan markets” (4). Although Brouillette focuses her analyses on major diasporic writers, it is possible to identify a similar discomfort on behalf of the poet in *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems*, as the poet struggles to ensure the reader is unable to make abstracted readings of his work. In unsettling the reader’s expectations about the sequences, however, and in forcing his audience to reconsider certain assumptions and expectations, Kolatkar transforms his authorial anxiety into a distinctive poetic – one that is reliant on the reader’s participation even as it guards against mimetic or allegorical interpretations.

Jejuri and *Kala Ghoda Poems* are both sequences that refer directly to the places in which they are set. Even for a reader unfamiliar with the significance of Jejuri as a place of worship, the site-based title encourages an approach that assumes the poems to be a referential and objective expression of the place. In the original 1976 volume of the poems – designed by Kolatkar – the front cover further reinforces this expectation of referentiality: the title page features a photograph of one of the metal and bronze plaques found in the town, showing the god Khandoba and one of his wives (see Chapter Four Fig. 16). By using an image of an artifact to frame the sequence, Kolatkar thus seems to suggest the alignment between his poems and their worldly spatial referent. As Mehrotra describes, many of Kolatkar’s early “simple...critics” interpreted the poems in this way, conflating “the poem with the place and followed it as a work that indicates the poet’s attitude towards religion” (“Introduction” *CP* 54). Similarly, the *Kala Ghoda* in the title of Kolatkar’s 2004

sequence implies that the poems can be read as a direct embodiment of this specific area of downtown Bombay, while the cover image – of a yellow flower on top of a paving slab – emphasizes the materiality of the poems and parallels the numerous references to small items and things found within.

However, the microcosmic spatial and temporal configuration of the poems can be read as a strategic provocation to the reader, for in spite of their titles, the poems themselves resist straightforward or thematic interpretation. As we have seen, the frequent juxtaposition in Kolatkar's poems of transnational and local references, and the incorporation of idiosyncratic objects and subjects, deconstructs the notion of representational mimesis, drawing attention instead to the various moments of dissonance within the text. Many poems, for instance, refer to cultural texts or contexts familiar only to a decidedly local reader – one who would know that the *vaghyas* depicted in *Jejuri* refer to a particular band of male devotees of Khandoba who choose to present themselves as dogs (56). Similarly, specific references in *Kala Ghoda Poems* – to places in the city, or to certain food items listed in “Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda” – appeal to readers already familiar with the city's culture and neighbourhoods. At the same time though, anachronistic references and images, and the poet's incorporation of global texts and intertexts undermines the assumption that the reader will of necessity be a local one. Hence in *Jejuri's* “Ajamil and the Tigers” – a poem based on a local folk story – the speakers talk in an Americanised idiom, with characters from the religious narratives wearing “leather jackets” (54). Likewise in “Pi-dog”, the canine narrator traces his origins to colonial and pre-colonial contexts as well as to science fictional texts – to “Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and his Dog*” (77)

The temporal construction of both sequences might further appear to invite the reader to make a mimetic reading of the poems, as they both take place over the course of a single day: *Jejuri* opens in the morning as the narrator journeys to the town “in what little light spills out of the bus” (“The Bus” 42), and concludes later on as he waits for his train, watching as “the setting sun / touches upon the horizon” (“The Railway Station” 69), while *Kala Ghoda Poems* begins very early on the quiet street, concluding on this same “empty street” late at night as traffic lights “send signals to each other / throughout the night” (“Traffic Lights” 182). However, this temporal arrangement mitigates against any selective readings of the sequences: each poem refers to the one that precedes or follows it, ‘fitting’ into the text in a way that parallels the passage of time unfolding in the real world. In *Jejuri*, for instance, “The Priest’s Son” details a conversation between the narrator and his young guide as the latter tries to convince him to believe in the legends of Khandoba (52). Towards the end of the poem, the boy “looks away // and happens to notice” something moving (52). This poem ends with the boy pointing out what he has seen to the narrator: “look / there’s a butterfly / there” (52). The following poem then shifts to depict this butterfly, capturing the creature’s transience and fleeting movement across the viewer’s line of vision: “Just a pinch of yellow / it opens before it closes / and closes before it o” (“The Butterfly” 53). The temporal construction of the text thus ensures these poems are read sequentially, their arrangement in the book paralleling the events in the place. In *Kala Ghoda Poems* too, Kolatkar often chronicles the passage of time and events from one scene to another: from watching the cleaner compress her load of rubbish in “Meera”, for instance, the narrator then looks at the overloaded rubbish cart in the following

poem “Song of Rubbish”, emphasizing the poems’ reliance on one another in the real and imagined time of the place/text.

The arrangement of the poems in Kolatkar’s volumes renders it impossible to make selective readings of the poems, which, as I suggested in Chapter One, threaten the cohesiveness and totality of the text. Each poem’s reliance on the one preceding or following it ensures that both sequences are read in the order they are intended. The act of reading these poems is thus figured as being as much of an involved and constitutive activity as the narrator’s physical journey through their settings. The chronological arrangement of the poems, moreover, also means that the narrator’s passage through Jejuri, or his casting glances at one of the many subaltern figures of Kala Ghoda, occurs in real-time. Kolatkar thus dispenses with the separation between the events described in his writing, and the narrator’s experience of them: a proliferation of imminent language ensures the narrator is located in “this place” (“Heart of Ruin” 44), and repeatedly instructed to “look” (“A Song for a Murlī” 58), “look / there’s a butterfly / there” (“The Butterfly” 52). In *Kala Ghoda Poems*, the emphasis remains on locating the narrator in the present: “there you are / NOW!” (“To a Crow” 91); “here comes the legless hunchback” (“Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda” 125).

The people and objects are in continuous motion: the fisherwoman in “Bon Appétit” is “tearing a piece of bread / with her sharp claws” (155); a “big bumbling ball” of rope “keeps getting smaller and smaller / as it plays hopscotch” on the pavement in “A Blind Man Strings his Cot” (157); young woman are “playing a game of cards” in “Knucklebones” (114); and sunbeams are “playing hide and seek / in the scalloped shadow” of the homeless woman’s undergarments in “The Barefoot Queen of the Crossroads” (120). The

prominence of such present tense verbs allows Kolatkar to emphasise the contingency of these scenes, capturing the here-and-now of the city in which both the narrator and reader are present.

Indeed, Kolatkar's poems often refer directly to the reader, especially in *Jejuri* when they are addressed using the second person pronoun "you": "You look down the roaring road" ("The Bus" 42); "You lend a matchbox to the priest" ("A Low Temple" 47). This personal address is accompanied by a preponderance of active verbs: the reader is not only present, but is looking, walking, or otherwise participating in the events as they are described. By reinforcing the presence and involvement of the reader, the poet is able to ensure they experience the narrator's own reactions and moments of surprise during his visit. In "Between Jejuri and the Railway Station", for instance, the narrator is suddenly "struck" by the unexpected appearance of "a dozen cocks and hens in a field of jowar / in a kind of harvest dance. The craziest you've ever seen" (67). As the narrator stops to watch the incongruous sight of the birds dancing, the poem gives way to a typographically experimental section in which the birds' movements are recreated - the words "up" "and" "down" arranged on the page in a seemingly random, jerky manner (68). This sight is disruptive to both the narrator's physical passage through the streets, and to the reader's own expectation that the poem will consist of verses that will be read from left to right, unsettling expectations about the town itself as well as the very activity of reading the sequence.

In *Kala Ghoda Poems*, the reader is addressed less frequently, but is figured as being aligned with the narrator as they cast their glance upon the various people living in Kala Ghoda. As a result, the close and detailed observations of the poet are at once extended to the reader too, who is granted

an intimate insight into the lives and interactions of this urban community. Consequently, when the poet refers to the various characters in the sequence using familiar pet names – “the hipster queen of the crossroads”, “the old pirate”, “the funkiest kid on the block” (135, 136) – the reader too enters into a close relationship with these figures. Mehrotra refers, in his introduction to Kolatkar’s poems, to the poet’s “gift” for “identifying closely with each part” of a scene, even while maintaining the necessary distance to portray the city using his characteristic laconic style (28). By aligning the reader with the narrator and poet too, Kolatkar is thus able to prompt a sense of empathy on the behalf of the reader; the poet knows their lives inside and out, and, for the duration of the sequence, so does the reader.

This is not to say that Kolatkar is unaware of the position of power occupied by both himself and his audience, however. As the narrator remarks in “The Barefoot Queen of the Crossroads”, the people watching the young homeless woman are “dirty old men with clean noses”, and “poets with their tongues hanging out, / and other jerks and assorted assholes” (124). Such statements reveal that in spite of the proximity of the reader and the subaltern in these poems, it remains beyond the realm of possibility for the reader to fully know them. The poems’ utopian impact thus derives from the realization they elicit in the reader, of their own preconceptions, prejudices and assumptions, demonstrating what Robert Spencer recently reflected to be as the vital and revitalizing effect of reading. The act of literary interpretation, Spencer suggests, is a process that can result in “the critical examination of one’s position in relation to the dehumanizing forces of the market and of the increasingly untrammelled power of states and corporations”, and he argues that the demands a text makes of a reader prompts the development of a critical and

ethnic consciousness (171).

In *Jejuri's* "An Old Woman", the poet prompts the reader to examine their own attitudes about poverty and their relationship to it. As the poem opens, an old woman approaches the narrator and "grabs / hold of your sleeve" (49). The narrator is initially dismissive of her, and his tone co-opts the reader into sharing his attitude: "She won't let you go. / You know how old women are" (49).

However, when the narrator finally turns to face her and looks "Clear through the bullet holes / she has for her eyes", the separation between the old woman and the narrator and reader are undermined:

And the hills crack.
And the temples crack.
And the sky falls

With a plateglass clatter
around the shatterproof crone
who stands alone (50)

This dissolution of the fundamental physical and ideological referents of the world – conveyed through the cracking of "hills" and "temples" and the falling in of the "sky" – shows that the narrator and reader are undergoing a transformation. By the very final stanza, the previously fixed relations of power have completely shifted, and as the narrator gives the elderly woman a few coins, he notes: "you are reduced / to so much small change / in her hand" (50). It is this unhomey woman – poor, dispossessed, with no place in dominant narratives of India's sacred space – who is made briefly visible in these final lines. The narrator and reader on the other hand have been "reduced", forced to recognise their own complicity with the structures of power that have rendered this woman powerless.

In *Kala Ghoda Poems*, the reader has to make a comparable renegotiation of their expectation of exteriority to the poems, the poet providing such intimate observations that by the end of the sequence it has become impossible to imagine Bombay using abstracted or empirical terminology. In “Bon Appétit”, the poet watches a “frail” fisherwoman as she stops for breakfast at one of the makeshift hole in the wall restaurants found in the city (155). The poem is written in the first person, with the ‘I’ extending to the reader as well. As the speaker observes the “tiny” woman start to eat her “plate of peas”, he notes as an aside that it is “her favourite dish”, demonstrating here just how intimate he is with her habits and routine (155). This intimacy is emphasised further as the poet remarks that her

...mouth is watering
at this very moment, I bet,

for I can almost taste
her saliva

in my mouth. (155)

The emphasis on the first person here, conveyed by the repetition of “I” throughout the poem, demonstrates the level of immediacy and empathy attained by the narrator and reader. The body of the observer – the narrator and reader – has become so imbricated in the city that it seems possible they can experience the tastes and sensations along with the woman. As Neil Lazarus has observed, the recreation of “what it *feels* like” to inhabit a particular space and time “depends on [the writer’s] ability to find the words, concepts, figures, tropes, and narrative forms” most appropriate and “*transmissible*” (*Unconscious* 79-80). In Kolatkar’s poem, the proximity between the “I” of the narrator and

reader, and the “her” of the fisherwoman, structurally reiterates the intimacy of the poem, while the poet’s repeated use of bodily imagery further fosters a sense of personal closeness between the observer and the observed: the woman is “frail”, “tiny”, “an armload of bones” – descriptions that direct and appeal to the reader’s empathy.

The lines above, however, simultaneously draw attention to the limits of understanding and of representation. The narrator imagines how the woman is feeling – “I bet” – and can “*almost* taste / her saliva” in his own mouth (emphasis added). In dramatizing this final moment of incommensurability, Kolatkar demonstrates the excess experiences that will always escape the poet’s capabilities, revealing in this instance the impossibility of knowing the subject or the city in its entirety. Kolatkar’s city poetry invites readers to inhabit this incommensurable gap, to take notice of the shortcomings of language in order to rethink the terms in which they imagine the city and the subjects living there. His writing is thus a form of “critique, discussion, and discovery” about the world, and a coming into contact with the unhomely other, even as it is also an acceptance of the incompleteness of such a project (Spencer 42).

In *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems*, Kolatkar unsettles the hegemony of the ideological claims made over space by religious or political groups. In *Jejuri*, the sanctified image of the site is undermined by the narrator’s encounter with various unhomely objects and subjects, offering a reminder of the exploitative and contested terrain on which pilgrimage towns like Jejuri are formed. *Kala Ghoda Poems* too disarticulates the idealization of Bombay, revealing the modern city to be founded on the labour of various lost subjects and objects. In this way, Kolatkar’s poetry takes a comparable approach to both Jussawalla’s and Patel’s, uncovering the different forms of collusion and occlusion in the city.

However, while their poetry calls to account dominant portrayals of the city, Kolatkar goes further in his final sequence *Kala Ghoda Poems*, daring to imagine an alternative city space in which the pressing conditions of poverty and chauvinistic hegemony are overturned. Kolatkar invokes an image of Bombay that is utopian in a dialectical sense, gesturing as it does to the (unrealizable) possibilities within the city. As Adorno wrote in *Aesthetic Theory*:

The relation to the new is modeled on a child at the piano searching for a chord never previously heard. This chord, however, was always there; the possible combinations are limited and actually everything that can be played on it is implicitly given in the keyboard. (41)

What is briefly possible in art, in other words, is resolutely that which is not in the material sphere: “art communicates through its design that which could, but does not, exist in actuality” (Bahri 230). Hence in “Breakfast Time At Kala Ghoda”, the “convergence” of all the different people and animals in one space is described as a brief moment:

a bubble in time,
shimmering with the joy of living,

reflecting all the colours
of hope,
and about forty-five minutes across. (144)

The poet acknowledges that this is temporary, avoiding romanticizing the event by noting that it is only “about forty-five minutes across” (144). Nonetheless, what does remain in the city and in Kolatkar’s poem is “a sort of after-image, a glow”, which the poet then extends to his reader (144).

Kolatkar’s poetry requires the reader to abandon pedagogic expectations

and assumptions, and submit themselves to the experience of reading the poems. In this sense, therefore, his work both critiques and reimagines Bombay and its surroundings. In comparison to Ezekiel's early anxiety over how to represent Bombay, and developing from Jussawalla's and Patel's historically informed deconstructions of the idealization of the postcolonial city, Bombay is, in Kolatkar's work, a space of competing historical and social forces as well as, to paraphrase one of the poems from *Kala Ghoda Poems*, a city that is "Backlit by [the] dreams" of its inhabitants ("The Potato Peelers" 160).

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how, and in what circumstances, poets represented and responded to Bombay in the decades following independence. Bombay is a highly mediated city, but despite its iconicity and paradigmatic status as the “sine qua non of the postcolonial city”, its poetry and the specific contexts of its poetry production, have yet to receive critical attention (Ashcroft “Urbanism” 498). My project has thus turned to the work of Bombay’s poets in order to demonstrate that renewed attention to the form and language of poetry, and to the material contexts in which it was written, redirects attention to the overlooked cultural, political and social spaces of the postcolonial city. In doing so, it has sought to uncover an overlooked social context of the city via formal and materialist analyses of the work of some of Bombay’s leading poets, thereby demonstrating the political and spatial significance of the aesthetic. My intention in this thesis has been simultaneously specific and yet implicitly broad: on the one hand, I have aimed to contribute new readings of the work of certain poets otherwise relatively neglected by postcolonial literary criticism, enriching too a historical understanding of Bombay’s intellectual and literary ‘scene’ that exists alongside, and in tension with, its popular invocation as a commercial and filmic “city of dreams” (Gangar “Films” 210). On the other hand, the thesis has also contributed to a re-thinking of space and place more generally, disarticulating dominant spatial vocabularies in order to show what cultural, political and social experiences they elide.

Before I go on to detail the specific contribution made by this project to postcolonial literary scholarship, and before indicating some of the limitations and future possibilities of this current work, I wish to recount a particular

experience I had during the course of my research – an experience that confirmed to me the political and spatial salience of the postcolonial poem. During my research trip to India in 2011, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, who had completed editing Arun Kolatkar's *Collected Poems in English* the year before, shared some of Kolatkar's diaries and notebooks with me. These drafts of the poet's sketches and uncollected poems are unlikely to ever be published, resistant as Kolatkar's literary executor Ashok Shahane is to any drafts or personal papers being issued in the public domain.⁴⁴ In his many volumes of personal papers, dating from the early 1960s to the late mid-1980s, the poet had chronicled the life of the city, detailing the sights he witnessed over many years in and around Kala Ghoda. The material offered a fascinating insight into Kolatkar's method of writing poetry, and confirmed that even in his personal notes and diaries, he attended to the smallest and apparently most insignificant of details in the city.

Many of the details appear in finished poem form in *Kala Ghoda Poems*. On 10 March 1983, for example, Kolatkar records in his so-called "yellow diary" that he watched the very first watermelon cart of the season being pulled along through downtown Bombay, reproducing in extensive detail how the cart looked, and replicating the ambling pace of the two bullock pulling it along (Yellow Diary 4). This watermelon cart and many of the features the poet records in his diary, appears in "Watermelons", and the poet depicts the cart's "bellyful of hay / stuffed in a lowslung hammock/ below the buckboard" (*CP*

⁴⁴ Shahane is well-known for his defensive attitude towards Kolatkar's literary estate. Amit Chaudhuri recalls meeting the poet in Bombay and being given a prior vetting by Shahane and other friends first - a "grilling by the 'firm'" is how he describes it ("introduction" *Jejuri* ix). When I interviewed Shahane in Bombay, he was generous with information, but opposed to my suggestion that Kolatkar's visual art and his uncollected poems might be of interest to academics and readers: "academics should leave well alone", he insisted, arguing that Kolatkar's work was of "no interest" to a wider reading public (interview 19.8.11). It is for this reason that I am unable to reproduce these extracts in full below.

150). A later diary entry from 24 March 1983 lists the various subjects working, playing or loitering on the streets near the Jehangir Gallery, among them a young female road sweeper loading rubbish into an iron cart, and a toddler running around while her dope-pusher mother is at work. The cleaner is recognizable as the street worker of “Meera”, who is using her “footloose coconut frond” to sweep up the piles of rubbish “installations”, before compressing them down into the decrepit collection trolley “like a Meera before her Lord” (83, 87). The young child, too, informs the portrayal of the “infant strumpet” of “Silver Triangle”, “running around with nothing on” while her young mother talks to “a crooked cop” (99). Kolatkar’s diaries, when read alongside the later sequence, thus prompt a materialist recalibration of the poem as grounded in the details, exchanges and events of the urban everyday.

The diaries further invite reflection on the long process of crafting a poem; individual images are shown to have a long history, rooted in specific circumstances and events recorded decades before being incorporated into a finished text. The material thus enables us to historicize particular poems, and to identify that each poem is an amalgamation of different and collated details and observations. Like the city itself, which Rashmi Varma calls a “*conjunctural*” space of accumulated and discrepant material, historical events and social forms, the poem too is a composite of co-existing things and scenes noticed and stored up over a period of many years (*The Postcolonial City* 1).

Kolatkar’s diaries and notebooks combine detailed observations of fruit vendors and playing children, with autobiographical and political contextualization. In one short entry from 12 March 1983, for example, Kolatkar notes – in a single sentence – that “the budget session of the legislative assembly” has started; that there is an increased police presence in Kala

Ghoda; and that his wife Soonoo has bought “fresh figs” home from the market (Yellow Diary 4). By including such different types of statements in a single syntactic unit, and by bringing together political, social and domestic information in such a way, Kolatkar’s notes reveal something of his conception of Bombay. It is, in his diaries as in his published work, a space that exceeds any single discourse. It is made meaningful by such localized details as fresh figs and watermelon vendors, even while his writing remains vigilant to the wider political backdrop of the city and the changes being wrought in the economic and political environment of Bombay.

The portrayals of Bombay in Kolatkar’s published and unpublished work demonstrate what Akshaya Kumar has termed the “spatial strengths of poetry”, which, he argues, have traditionally “been ignored in favour of its temporal depth” (11). Kolatkar provides a date, and often, a time of day, for his personal notes, and writes down exactly where an event or scene took place. His poetry, too, as demonstrated in Chapter Seven, is expressly concerned to situate the scenes in a specific spatial and temporal context, thereby challenging the notion of poetic discourse as uninvolved with the historical or material sphere. His work does not simply describe the city, however, but rather reproduces its lived and localized experiences – which Kolatkar shows are not defined in terms of local, national, regional or global affiliations. Vidyan Ravinthiran has reflected recently on Kolatkar’s use of “careful description” in his poetry, which he calls a “strategy or ritual whereby he and contemporary India...approach a condition of intimacy” (“Kolatkar’s Spontaneity”). The details in the poet’s work evidence the “intimacy” between Kolatkar and Bombay as well, revealing it to be a city that is primarily lived through, and a space in which macrological political events are registered in the ordinary lives of its inhabitants.

Kolatkar's poetry, and that of the other Bombay writers discussed in this thesis, provides the critic with a different perspective and approach to the city, their texts capturing something of its specificity. The insight granted by these poets is quite different from the insight of urban theorists or historians, who have mapped Bombay's colonial past or economic present, and which present readers with empirical data about the city. Instead, Kolatkar and his contemporaries express the social dynamic of the city – encapsulated in the activities of street vendors, cleaners and playing children. As William Carlos Williams noted so aptly, "it is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" (*Asphodel, That Greeny Flower*). This thesis has analysed poetry written in and about Bombay, therefore, not in the expectation of accumulating objective information or "news" about this city, but rather out of a desire to recuperate poetry as a form that has something particular, and different, to say about it.

The spatial "turn" and poetry

This project can in many ways be read as developing from the "spatial turn" that Sara Upstone identifies in much recent critical theory, and has drawn particularly on the re-thinking of space and place prompted by philosophers and geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Edward Soja (2). These thinkers have interrogated the notion of space as a passive tabula rasa and revealed it to be a contingent and ongoing process that is "constituted through interactions" (Massey *For Space* 9). Upstone's own work is part of this "turn" in postcolonial studies, demonstrating that colonial and neo-colonial powers have mythologized space by "overwriting" its heterogeneity,

enabling them to exert their own hegemonic authority over landscapes, nations, cities and individuals (6). Upstone proposes that postcolonial literary texts subvert and resist such overwriting, representing space instead as unpredictable, chaotic and multiple (8). This thesis shares with Upstone a concern with the ways in which literature can recalibrate definitions and values of space, and, like her study, can broadly be read as a particular response to Edward Said's call for critics to engage in "contrapuntal reading" of discursive representations (*Culture and Imperialism* 78).

However, this thesis has been explicitly concerned with attending to the political and spatial dimension of poetry, thereby departing from Upstone's exclusive focus on prose fiction. As detailed in Chapter One, poetry is especially under-represented in pedagogic accounts of postcolonial studies, traditionally seen as a subjective and personal form of expression with little to contribute to a wider postcolonial project. Jahan Ramazani, Rajeev S. Patke, Ashok Bery and Akshaya Kumar are among the few critics to have engaged extensively with poetry's contribution to postcolonial issues, showing that "[p]oetic subtlety does not obfuscate reality or postpone history; rather it brings it into prominence" (Kumar viii). This thesis has insisted on what Kumar refers to as the "agency of poetry", therefore, turning to the work of the above critics in order to attend to the specific ways in which poetry 'speaks' (121).

However, with the exception of Kumar, Ramazani, Patke and Bery are predominantly concerned with uncovering the way in which postcolonial poets resist colonial hegemony, identifying in their use of form and language a specific attempt to "creolize Standard English" and its colonial ascendants (Ramazani *Muse* 16). Similarly Upstone – developing in many ways from Said in *Culture and Imperialism* and from Ashcroft et al. in their influential *The*

Empire Writes Back – is interested in identifying the practices of “overwriting” perpetuated by the *colonizer*, and of uncovering subsequent moments of resistance within postcolonial texts. Departing from these approaches, which figure the postcolonial perspective as inherently subversive and counter-hegemonic, I have explored instead poets’ responses to the specific circumstances of postcolonial Bombay, examining the way in which their work reflects not only on the city’s colonial history but also, and simultaneously, on its postcolonial present. In analyzing such representations of Bombay, I have been able to show that resistance is directed not only towards colonial culture and its spatial ideologies, but also towards postcolonial practices and discourses as well.

Indeed, as suggested in Chapter Two, Bombay is a city that has been over-determined by the salience of certain dominant narratives – in particular, the narrative that seeks to position the city as an exemplar of postcolonial modernity and national progress, as well as the more recent and somewhat polarized notion that a cosmopolitan and hybrid Bombay exists in direct opposition to a dystopian, divided Mumbai. These projections of Bombay, I have argued, are reliant on a particular kind of spatial vocabulary, one that is overly indebted to the paradigms of post-structuralist theory. As Varma contends, such approaches – exemplified in the language of Homi Bhabha, whose thinking I examined in Chapter Two – work to disassociate the city from its temporal dimension, and threaten to occlude the very real economic, social and political divisions that continue to mediate it. Hence, she notes, cities become “delineated as spaces of hybridity, of heterotopias and newer, more diasporic subjectivities” that are assumed to have little bearing on “older notions of locality and nationality” (5, 6).

This thesis shares Varma's concern with such abstract and de-historicized approaches to the city, and, like her, has shown "a more general skepticism towards postmodernist celebrations of difference in the city from the standpoint of a materialist critique" (171). In Chapter Two, for instance, I argued that the contemporary tendency to valorize Bombay has been irresponsibly and deliberately blind to the historical and material realities of this city, and has neglected to attend to the different yet pervasive forms of gender, class, colonial and neo-colonial power dynamics that continue to mediate the experiences of individuals in the city. Thus, while this project develops from and contributes to the "spatial turn" that Upstone references in her work, and has demonstrated the specific ways in which poetry resists and reformulates the city, it has not suggested, as Upstone has argued in her work, that postcolonial literature offers an "empowering" or radical reconceptualization of the city (24). Instead, this project has examined how poetry – from a materialist standpoint – elaborates "telling contestations of identities and subject formations that have taken place in reference to material locations of postcoloniality" (Varma 32). In Chapter Two especially, as well as in the case study chapters, I have identified the disjunction between dominant representations of Bombay and its portrayal in the work of specific poets, suggesting that their writing disarticulates paradigmatic readings of the postcolonial city.

In close analyses of poetry by Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel and Arun Kolatkar in particular, I have identified a tension between mediated projections of Bombay as a national, glamorous or global space and their works' own concern with excavating the experiences of the individual in the city. Lefebvre's notion of space as "lived experience" has provided a useful frame of reference with which to analyse certain poets' work (*Production* 93): if

critics wish to further their knowledge of space, Lefebvre insisted, they must move beyond “mere descriptions” and recognise instead that “[s]pace is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure” (7, 94). This thesis has thus considered what kind of knowledge poets can provide about Bombay, arguing that what emerges in this body of work is an increasing concern with the felt, affective and experienced dimension of the city.

Chapter Five chronicled the stylistic changes apparent in Ezekiel’s poetry. When he began writing, he did so against a backdrop of national optimism about modernity and the city; yet, his poetry evidences the ambivalence of this optimism, and he increasingly uses a range of formal and stylistic devices to undermine the secular and liberal conceptualization of the modern city. Although Ezekiel is a well-known poet, this chapter has analysed the changes in his work and approach to the city, countering the commonly cited notion that Ezekiel was simply “*the* poet of the Indian city” (Patke “Poetry Since Independence” 248). Rather, I have suggested, he *became* the poet of the city via a long, contested and uneasy process.

In Chapter Six, I analysed poetry by Jussawalla and Patel, both of whom were writing during an unsettling political period in the city. On the one hand, Bombay’s iconic image as a city of glamour was forming, even as politically chauvinistic groups introduced a palpable sense of anxiety into the public sphere of the city, inciting violence against its religious and ethnic minorities. The celebrated secularism and modernity of Bombay is thus undermined in their writing, as they articulate the violent and contradictory experiences on which the city’s economy and public image have been founded. Moreover, this chapter involved reading the work of both poets against the grain of critical

accounts of their poetry: as I demonstrated, Jussawalla's sequence uses an apparently fragmented form in order to undermine political and spatial hegemony in the city, while Patel's more realist style of writing does not only reveal a concern with mapping the body or the city, but with acknowledging the impossibility of doing so.

The final case study chapter examined Kolatkar's poetry, reading his detailed observations of unexpected and unhomely subjects and objects as enacting a further departure from national, global and regional narratives of the city. I suggested that Kolatkar's attention to the most insignificant of details prompts a reconsideration of the city as a space produced and maintained by the least visible subjects and objects. His work, moreover, is interested in capturing the experience of Bombay, extending this experience to his readers via a strategic use of formal structure and language. This chapter developed from previously published work on Kolatkar's *Jejuri*, in which I argued that the form and style of this early sequence presented a challenge to a reader's preconceptions, and invited them "to question the set of practices, methodologies and expectations they work within" (Bird 241). In Chapter Seven, I have focused especially on *Kala Ghoda Poems* and on what such a revisioning of the reader means in relation to the space of Bombay. This chapter has thus shown that in making an appeal to the reader – a utopian gesture – the poet includes them in a process of reimagining the postcolonial city, as well as the poem.

The case study chapters introduced close readings of a selection of Bombay poetry, its detailed analyses of Jussawalla and Patel making a particular contribution to the regrettably few critical readings available of their work. I have demonstrated that formal, close reading does not amount to a

strategy of *closed* reading: rather, I have sought to identify the political and social formations of the poets' use of language and form, relating individual poems and sequences to the wider context of Bombay. In doing so, I have drawn especially on the writings of the Frankfurt School theorists, most notably Theodor Adorno, whose work repeatedly returns to the social dimension of aesthetic forms. As Adorno argued in *Aesthetic Theory*, it was not what a work of art was *about* that rendered it politically and socially effective, but rather how it was expressed:

The immanence of society in the artwork is the essential social relation of art, not the immanence of art in society. Because the social content of art is not located externally...but rather inheres in individuation, which is itself a social reality, art's social character is concealed and can only be grasped by its interpretation. (304)

In Adorno's view, "interpretation" of a text or a piece of art does not equate to a straightforward deciphering of its themes (304). Instead, it is up to the critic to attend to the formal ways in which a text "refracts" social and political concerns – a perspective that recuperates the practice of close formal analysis as a meaningful activity with widespread implications (6). As Peter Middleton has contended of Adorno's critical and negative approach, he "offers a perspective of expectation of cultural labour that would be needed to instantiate its productivity", conceiving the act of literary interpretation as a rightfully difficult and challenging task (13).

As introduced in Chapter One, therefore, this thesis has found in the work of Adorno, and later critics who have drawn on his work – including Fredric Jameson, Neil Lazarus, Asha Varadharajan and Deepika Bahri – a vital reminder that even the most opaque and obscure literary text is informed by,

imbricated in, and potentially critical of, its political context. As Bahri notes, Adorno compels critics to adopt an “interpretive stance that approaches [the text] as an artifact at once sociopolitical and aesthetic, in fact as simultaneously so, with each element inextricably bound up with the other” (6). Hence in my analysis of Jussawalla’s *Missing Person*, I identified moments of ambivalence and critique inscribed in the very form and style of his writing, which act as a challenge to the postcolonial reader who might otherwise approach a work of literature with more thematic, pedagogic preconceptions.

The archival turn

A related and parallel intention of this thesis has been to consider Bombay’s material cultures of poetry, suggesting in chapters Three and Four that the city’s little magazines and small poetry presses provide hitherto neglected insights into poets’ sensibilities, their range of literary and cultural influences, and the emerging communities of writers to which they belonged. Little magazines evidence the fraught and precarious position occupied by Indian poets writing in English during the 1950s and 1960s, enabling critics to historicize particular poets’ careers through the “print lives” of their poetry (Suhr-Sytsma 41). My analyses of mainstream and avant-garde little magazines thus demonstrated how certain well-known poets such as Ezekiel and Mehrotra developed, as well as tracing the various transnational affiliations and relationships fostered through the print medium of magazines. Chapter Three read Bombay’s little magazines, moreover, as informed by, and specific to, the city, identifying in their pages a contribution to a historically informed rethinking of the postcolonial city. In Chapter Four, I examined the small press *Clearing House*, suggesting

that its editorial processes and selection criteria, and its visual formatting of volumes of poetry, is specifically embedded in Bombay. As conveyed in the discussion in the opening of this concluding chapter, material artifacts introduce the postcolonial critic to the historically specific dimension of the literary text, enabling them to situate a poets' work more squarely within its context.

My materialist approach to Bombay has affinities with Gyan Prakash's *Mumbai Fables* and Naresh Fernandes's *Taj Mahal Foxtrot*, two recent books that have re-chronicled the city through its popular cultural history or its jazz scene respectively. As Prakash contends, his study sought to "ask what lies behind the powerful fable about the city's past and present", aiming to challenge the widely accepted historical narrative of the city's development from Bombay to Mumbai by paying attention to archival documents from tabloid journalism, films, urban planning and comic books (23). His book uses archival material in order to substantiate his claim that the 'real' history of the city has been obscured by the myth of a hyper-visible Bombay.

Like Prakash and Fernandes, my approach in Chapters Three and Four has been directed by the availability and accessibility of this archival material. The little magazines in particular, which Bruce King lists in *Modern Indian Poetry* but of which there exists no central archive, were particularly striking. Some, like S.V. Pradhan and R. Parthasarathy's *The Bombay Duck*, lasted for just one issue, preserved, by chance, by the editors' contemporary poets. Nonetheless, this single issue, banned for its obscene content, reveals the tension between the conservatism of attitudes towards poetry and the arts in Bombay in the mid-1960s, and an emerging literary sub-culture. Other experimental titles, like Mehrotra's own *damn you: a magazine of the arts*, and *ezra: a neoimagiste magazine*, lasted for longer and were exchanged with beat

magazines in the United States, Germany and the UK, their print trajectories revealing the multiple locations of identifications being played out by postcolonial Indian poets (Mehrotra “Partial Recall” 72). Other more mainstream titles associated with Ezekiel, such as *Quest* and *Poetry India*, project Bombay as a city of commercial and literary modernity, implicitly figuring the city as the locus of a specific form of cultural value.

These titles have largely been forgotten, and in analyzing them, my thesis has sought to intervene in the “creation myth” of Indian literature in English that Amit Chaudhuri describes (“Beyond Confidence” 308). However, the process of archival research has presented its own set of obstacles and challenges, some of which I detailed in the introduction and in Chapter Three. In particular, the project was limited by the availability and accessibility of certain resources and there were many items I was unable to find: the first and second volumes of *ezra*, for example; early issues of Ezekiel’s *Quest*; letters to and from the Clearing House poets, which were, as of August 2011, in the possession of Jerry Pinto; and a short film made by Dilip Chitre, chronicling the life and career of Kolatkar. Jussawalla had donated his only copy to the National Centre for Performing Arts in Bombay, but they have no digital record of the donation and, in spite of three visits to the library, I was unable to find the film on its shelves.

It was a challenge, too, to negotiate the demands of the material that was available. The SCILET library prohibits the photocopying of any cover images, for example; the experimental little magazines like *The Bombay Duck* were exceptionally fragile, and could not be copied in full; and many papers, letters and articles made available at Jussawalla’s apartment were undated or incomplete. However, archival research includes the conversations and

exchanges that have significantly enriched this thesis. Often, the value of such encounters has been largely serendipitous: I met Shahane, for example, in order to request access to Kolatkar's manuscripts and drafts, and was obviously disappointed when he refused. However, he was more than willing to spend time – along with Avinash Gupte, another of the poet's friends – discussing Kolatkar's work and attitude to writing. His reminiscences about Allen Ginsberg's visit to Bombay in 1962, and the affinities between these two poets, in turn prompted me to consult the work of Deborah Baker, whose book *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India*, contained useful information about Indo-American literary relationships.

The experience of conducting research in Bombay, moreover, alerted me to the informal nature of the literary economy of its poetry 'scene', found not in universities or state run archives, but in the city's cafes and the poets' homes. In this respect, it seems that very little has changed since the mid-1950s, when poets associated with *Quest* met Ezekiel at his offices in the city. It reveals that despite the iconicity of Bombay, and the prominent position of Bombay texts within postcolonial studies, a specific cultural space of the city remains peripheral to international circuits of publicity and publication. This is an exciting prospect for researchers; for, despite the challenges involved in negotiating this incomplete, partial and at times anecdotal archive, there are rich and telling resources available for those who are interested in mapping this alternative literary and cultural space.

Future projects

In his afterword to *Taj Mahal Foxtrot*, Fernandes notes that by the late 1970s, “Bombay jazz became museumised, a musical form that harkened back to an older, almost forgotten time” (176). He goes on, however, to observe that many of the prominent figures in the city’s jazz scene went on to work in the industry of Bollywood cinema, thereby demonstrating that not only do projects such as his give a valuable insight into the evolution of jazz itself, but also on subsequent cultural phenomenon. Fernandes’s comments reveal that even though the music (or in this case, poetry scene) may be largely forgotten, the incomplete, challenging and sometimes indecipherable archive of material literary artifacts can pre-empt a critical reflection on the historical formulation of a Bombay canon. Further research, therefore, might extend the historical range of this current project further, tracing the influence of early figures like Ezekiel on a contemporary generation of Bombay poets.

This thesis has been particularly interested in examining the poetry of those who were coming to literary maturity during a period of political and social transformation in Bombay. As a result, there are many innovative poets whose work has not been analysed – especially those second-generation of the “Bombay circle” starting to publish from the 1980s onwards, such as Anand Thakore, Ranjit Hoskote and Manohar Shetty (King *Modern* 45). Moreover, female voices are barely registered in this thesis, an omission I felt keenly during the research process. However, with the exception of Kamala Das, who published early work in *Quest* and issued her debut volume *Summer in Calcutta*, in 1966, female poets writing in the city did not begin publishing until the late 1970s or after. Das, moreover, barely engages with the city, or with the

problems of modernity, in her writing. Later poets like Eunice de Souza, Melanie Silgado, or even much more recently, Arundhati Subramaniam, do explore the city explicitly; future research is very much needed into these female perspectives and experiences of the city.

This thesis has been able to analyse only a relatively small selection of Bombay's magazines, and in doing so it was concerned primarily with introducing the key mainstream and experimental titles. A further and more comprehensive project, focused entirely on material cultures of publishing, might extend these findings, chronicling a history of poetry publishing in the city from 1947 until the present. This would build explicitly on recent scholarship in the area of book history and postcolonial publishing, focusing not on the Caribbean or West Africa – as Gail Low and Caroline Davis have both done so exemplarily in recent work – but on publishing conditions in India. Such a project would involve further analyses of little magazines, as well as literary relationships and collaborations – which were beyond the scope of the current thesis. This project has, I hope, opened up many opportunities for such related and extended research – on the work of specific poets who remain under-represented in postcolonial studies, and on peripheral literary cultures and formations in Bombay.

Concluding remarks

Postcolonial studies is a field constantly besieged by its own shortcomings, and has experienced various moments of crisis – over its terminology, over who it includes and excludes, over the privileged position of its practitioners, and over its continuing relevance in a period of economic and global change. There is a

proliferation of anthologies and monographs, papers and conferences, all of which register the anxiety over the field in their very titles. Edited anthologies such as *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, edited by Loomba et al. and *Rerouting the Postcolonial*, edited by Walsh et al., for instance, evidence the pressing concern over the ability of postcolonial inquiry to make a difference, while Graham Huggan's *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* grapples with the limitations of the theoretical approaches predominant in the field.

Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri are particularly skeptical about such broad attempts to remap postcolonial studies, arguing that it amounts to something of a "repetition compulsion" (2). Instead, their own anthology presents a series of essays that are exclusively concerned with introducing materialist readings of Indian cultural texts, insisting that this highly specific mode of inquiry contributed in particular ways to what has become an academic field defined by a "bewildering multifariousness and ambivalence" (1). This thesis has taken a similar approach in order to examine a particular period and context in Bombay's literary history via a specific set of poems and poetic discourses. In many ways, therefore, its intention has always been explicitly small in scale: to read poems closely in order to reflect on how certain poets related to the city; to contextualize the emergence of a fledgling group of poets in the city in its little magazines and printed cultures; and to insist on close, formal analyses as a meaningful postcolonial methodology. However, at the same time, its findings do have implications that reach beyond the scope of this thesis, re-thinking some of the ways in which postcolonial poetry is read, studied and interpreted.

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