

Judit Molnár

University of Debrecen, Hungary

Such a Long Journey (1991): Topophilic Sentiments in Rohinton Mistry

Abstract

In *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Rohinton Mistry's second book of fiction, the city of Mumbai (Bombay in the novel) surfaces as a character of its own. Spatiality is of extreme importance in this novel. The multifaceted matrix of different spaces and places are in the focus of the narrative among them: domestic, personal, intimate, spiritual, cultural, real and fictional ones. Through an in-depth analysis of these spatial formations my aim is to prove that Mistry has a strong sense of nostalgia towards his homeland, including the colonial past of India and its post-independence present.

Résumé

Dans le deuxième ouvrage de fiction de Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey* (1991), la ville de Mumbai (Bombay) s'impose pour ainsi dire, en tant que personnage de plein droit. En effet, la spatialité revêt dans ce roman une importance extrême. Le réseau complexe des différents espaces et lieux – domestiques, privés, intimes, spirituels, culturels, tant réels que fictifs – constitue le centre d'intérêt de la narration. Dans mon étude, je me propose de montrer, par une analyse poussée des diverses formes de la spatialité, que Mistry ressent une profonde nostalgie pour sa patrie, le passé colonial de l'Inde et son présent depuis l'indépendance.

Mistry's second book of fiction, his 1991 *Such a Long Journey* (*SLJ*), which was turned into a movie in 1998, follows in the footsteps of his 1987 *Tales from Firozsa Baag* (*TFB*), but it also departs from it in many ways. According to Dutt, "The most impressive novels of South Asian fiction writers are set outside Canada, have nothing to do with the 'Canadian experience', or the Canadian landscape [...]" (188). Her statement certainly holds true for *SLJ* because it is exclusively set in India. Genetsch, meanwhile, says, "[i]t is safe to suggest that Bombay becomes to Mistry what Dublin was to Joyce and Jefferson to Faulkner" (138). *SLJ* takes us from *Firozsha Baag* to *Khodadad Building*, from one Parsi housing complex to another one. The insular world of *Khodadad Building*, "an islandlike space" and "a microcosm of the Parsi community in India" (Genetsch, 154), serves as a reference point for reaching out to other significant places. So it is that spatial expansiveness is much more in evidence here than in *TFB* period. As Leckie contends:

The persistent themes in Mistry's work are eclectic: the intersection between sacred religious rituals and personal secular concerns, violated property, bodily functions, garbage, secrets, and forms of spiritual and material inheritance are woven into his unique and idiosyncratic evocation of people and *places*. (232; emphasis added)

In the following, I concentrate on the “idiosyncratic evocation” of places – that is to say, the way in which Mistry's “Bombay”, an amalgam of a real and fictive place, is mapped within the novel to extend both character and theme. The whole existence of the main character, Gustad Noble, is closely linked to the place where he lives i.e. to Khodadad building, and within that to his very *home*. His extremely strong attachment to his home is the basis of his consolidated personality: “For a man swimming the tidewater of his fifth decade of life, they said, he looked so *solid*” (10; emphasis added). Khodadad Building resembles Firozsha Baag in many ways: “Although it was only six stories, that was enough, for *Khodadad Building* was but three, being short and wide: ten flats in a row, stacked three high, with five entrances and stairways for each adjacent set of flats” (106; emphasis added). Gustad's friend, Jimmy, on his deathbed in Delhi also affectionately remembers the housing complex: “How I miss Khodadad Building [...] wish I never took Delhi posting. But I can come back [...] in four years. [...] Early morning. *Kusti* and prayers together, in the compound” (327-8; emphasis in the original). The novel begins with a scene in which we see Gustad Noble praying his *kusti* in the compound outside his flat. (9) Genetsch writes, “[t]he compound [...] is a *space* where Gustad can derive meaning from practicing his religion in comfortable seclusion” (153; emphasis added). Genetsch also notes, focusing on home, “With the exception of burial, marriage and initiation rites, the majority of rituals to be celebrated can be celebrated at home. The most important ritual in Zoroastrianism is ‘kusti’, a prayer in the course of which the threads of a praying belt (‘kusti’) are tied and untied in a special order” (Genetsch, 143).

In the opening passages of the novel domestic space is imbued with great importance. On the occasion of Gustad's daughter's birthday celebration, the reader is familiarized with the inside of the Nobles' dwelling. Relph observes:

To be inside a place and to experience it as completely as we can does not mean that existentially we are insiders. The most fundamental form of insideness is that in which a place is experienced without deliberate and selfconscious reflection yet is full with significance. It is the insideness that most people experience when they are at home [...]. (55)

We are led through the different parts of the house where the characters are “rooted”. Kort designates such a place “personal or intimate” (20). In turn, setting extends character for the reader who becomes gradually acquainted with all the cozy corners and nooks within the house. For example, the place set aside for Sohrab to spend the nights was separated by “a slatted door”: “Sohrab promptly named it bed-with-the door, and found the addition a useful appendage when he constructed a *bed-house* out of all the bolsters and blankets and pillows he could gather” (18; emphasis added). The psychological and spiritual attachment to the house is emphasized throughout the novel in ways that suggest this space is not merely a house, but a home or spiritual dwelling in Martin Heidegger's existential sense. He says that “dwelling



is a building in which man takes *shelter* [...]" (145; emphasis added). Noble goes so far as to equate his home with his life. Yet, this identification of Gustad with his home also presents additional difficulties for extended family relations. He shouts at his son: "I kicked him once to save his life, and I kick him again. Out of my house, this time! Out of my life!" (155). In turn, material changes in the house reflect the history of both its inhabitants and the nation. The self-imposed isolation of this place is emphasized by the blackout paper that has covered the windows since the war with China in 1962. The blackout paper becomes both a material fact of his domestic space and a trope which extends his interior psychic universe. The novel is set in the turbulent year of 1971 when finally, the 13-day war resulted in the defeat of East Pakistan that became today's Bangladesh. Gustad considers the blackout paper as a possible means against enemy's air strikes. Gustad's wife, Dilnavaz, remarks, "With the black paper everywhere, even starlight and moonlight is blocked out" (64). The blackout paper almost becomes a character in itself; it appears many times. The events of the 1971 war certainly provide a background for the narrative but what we have instead is a fully realized fictional world. In Genetsch's view:

For Gustad [...] the paper is a mechanism of defence holding chaos, i.e. an erosion of meaning, bay. The every day reality of 1971, together with the psychological reality of his traumas, is unpleasant and threatening for the protagonist of Mistry's first novel. Both have the power to unsettle the microcosm of his world. (152)

Miss Kutputia's gothic residence is the microcosm of her world of sorcery where she practises witchcraft and where she keeps the dead body of two of her relatives as well. Later she burns them in her house and, mysteriously enough, it is only the one particular room where the bodies are kept that is damaged; but not the rest of her home. Malashri Lal observes, "For Miss Kutputia, the past is not dead, although visitors can see the past emblematised in the artifacts of deadness" (65). To resort to Foucault's terminology, it could be an example of "heterotopia of deviation" (25). Interestingly enough, on the one hand, this is a closed-in place, but on the other hand, this place establishes bonds among people in the community, too; it is a lived place that is simultaneously mythic and real. It is "real" because it is only Miss Kutputia who has a phone, which she allows others to use: "Those who went to telephone were never allowed more than two steps inside: the coveted black instrument squatted on a little table beside the front door. None the less, everyone had strange tales to report. Long conversations from the landing outside, they said and when the door opened there was only Miss Kutputia inside" (110). Gustad's wife often visits this place for different kinds of "medical" advice. However, Gustad valorizes other "ordinary" places because for him they are endowed with spiritual values. His grandfather's *furniture shop* and his father's *bookstore* are pre-eminent in this regard and both locations are often remembered in the course of the narrative. He can situate the birth of his own identity only in relation to these particular places. He has some of the old furniture in his own house. He gently remarks: "Some of it here, in my *house*" (15; emphasis added) Later on: "Once again, the furniture from his childhood gathered comfotingly about him. The pieces stood like parentheses around his entire life, the sentinels of his sanity" (16). David Williams reminds us that, "The childhood home is not so easily foregone, it would seem;

its loss looms large within and without the text, as does the nostalgic yearning to reconstitute that absence in language [...]” (61). Gustad dreams that “[his] humble flat would fill with the happiness and merriment that used to reside in his childhood *home*” (31; emphasis added). The craft of furniture making is in Gustad’s veins; he plans to make a bookcase for his son. Like Mistry, himself, and his father, who owned a bookstore, the character is an avid reader of books. Psychologically, the spaces of the *furniture store* and that of the *bookstore*, a cultural space, merge into one another as the formative spaces of his childhood years. As both real and fictional spaces, they are indissolubly connected with the past as sites of memory.

Grandpa’s chair, that used to sit with the black desk in the *furniture workshop*. What a wonderful world, amid the din of hammering and sawing, the scent of sawdust and sweat and polish. And in Pappa’s *bookstore*, with its own special sounds and smells [...], where even the air had a special quality, as in a temple or mausoleum. (177; emphasis added)

When Gustad’s father is in hospital, “the finest bookstore in the country” (130) goes bankrupt in the hands of his drunkard uncle. In Coleman’s reading the disappearance of the bookstore and the furniture stores are examples of “[t]he decline of the Parsi community” (141). Gustad’s workplace, the bank (Mistry also worked for some time in a bank), is less personalized – with the exception of the *canteen* which is the most important part of this “social place” (Lefebvre, 33) for Gustad. It is here where he most often meets his friend, Dinshawji, and where many jokes are cracked that build bridges among cultures: “No linguistic ethnic group was spared; perfect equality prevailed in the canteen when it came to jokes” (92). We leave Khodadad Building by passing a *wall*, which is “the novel’s dominant “visual image” (Gabriel, 38); it separates the housing complex from the outside. It functions as a demarcation line between the homogenous space of the apartment building and Bombay.

In what follows, I attempt to illustrate what renders this “monumental space” (Kort, 163) of the *wall* significant. It serves as a continual reminder of the Parsi community’s complex richness, but also of its isolation from the majority Hindu community. The wall keeps apart the social space behind it: “social spaces are [...] projections of hope and desire, and they have an effect on the human spirit. Social spaces have not only their own force but also their own real or possible significance for *human potential*” (Kort, 165; emphasis added). The wall “writes” this community into existence denoting its “potentials”. Gustad develops a deep and significant attachment to it, as “the wall was dear to him” (106).

With the increase in traffic and population, the black stone wall became more important than ever. It was the sole provider of privacy, especially for Jimmy and Gustad when they did their *kustis* at dawn. *Over six feet high*, the wall ran the length of the compound, *sheltering* them from *non-Parsi eyes* while they prayed with the glow spreading in the east. (107; emphasis added)

Gustad’s “topophilic sentiments” are hurt when the urban dwellers urinate against the wall: “Ignorant swine pissing on the road should be shot on the spot!” he would say. Or, “Blow up the bloody wall with dynamite, then where will they shit:” (106). According to Tuan: “Topophilia takes many forms and varies greatly in emotional range and intensity. It is a start



to describe what they are: [...] the sensual delight of physical contact; the fondness for place because it is familiar, because it is home and incarnates the past, because it evokes pride of ownership or of creation [...] (247). Gustad decides to save the wall when he learns that there are plans to demolish it in order to widen the municipal road. He reads the “petition [that] was the landlord’s response to the municipality, detailing the hardships that would be imposed on the tenants if the compound was narrowed” (116). To deploy Lefebvre’s terminology, we can say that the wall is a kind of border; it is a “point of friction” and a “point of junction” (193) at the same time. Williams regards it as “A refuge from the Hindu majority, the concrete wall is a border marked off by the odour of a counter-territoriality” (60). Gustad wants to preserve it and turn it into something that is multifunctional. Gustad’s idea is to convert it into a sacred wall; therefore he asks a pavement artist to paint different gods and goddesses on it. As Genetsch suggests: “When Gustad decides to fortify his defenses by having the pavement artist paint the wall with Indian deities he appropriates art to turn a profane wall into a sacred place of worship” (152). The wall’s centrality as an extended trope in the novel has been pointed out by many critics. Leckie argues that: “The wall [...] serves as a symbol of religious tolerance, aesthetic innovation, and local improvement” (253). The artist begins by painting: “Trimurt. Of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the gods of *creation, preservation and destruction*” (226; emphasis added). The images foreshadow what happens to the wall in the end when it is finally torn down. Then the artist asks Gustad to give him some twigs that his “wonder” tree grows so as to secure the health of his teeth. He says, “Sir, one request. Is it O.K. if I take some twigs from your tree? I like to control the *creation, preservation and destruction* of my dental health” (412; emphasis added). Gustad’s desperate endeavours to do justice to the “ecumenical” (Williams, 60) wall, however, fail due to circumstances beyond his control. The territorial confrontation from which the municipality emerges wins with a sweeping victory over the people’s protestation in the riot, in the *morcha*. The authoritative forces demolish the wall that by then has been transformed into a celebrated and honoured edifice and institution on its own and with its own well-deserved merits. It is covered by a huge number of deities, prophets, saints and other religious figures. The pavement artist’s intention is clear: “There is no difficulty. I can cover three hundred miles if necessary. Using assorted religions and their gods, saints and prophets [...]. But I always like to mix them up [...]. Makes me feel I am doing something to promote tolerance and understanding in the world” (226). As Leckie sees it: “The wall is also a potent example of the congenial cohabitation of antagonistic religious views” (254). At one point, Gustad stands at the wall and is at a loss: “[h]e bent down to get a better look at the wall featuring a painting of the wall a painting of the wall featuring a painting [...]” (350). He does not comprehend this *mise en abîme* that “[p]uts into an abyss the social reality of a wall which on its painted side displays the face of universal brotherhood, but on its blank side reveals the face of social partition” (Williams 67). Or, in Gabriel’s interpretation: “This *mise en abîme* challenges metaphorically the notion of a single origin, and calls attention to the constructedness of cultural systems – a lesson that Gustad has yet to learn” (38).

Other places for worship that gain significance in the novel are the fire temple for Parsis and Catholic churches for Christians. Interestingly, Mistry dwells less upon the fire temples than on the churches. A unique site for prayers is the Tower of Silence because it is also a burial place, a theme to which I will return. Gustad pronounces his *kusti* prayers almost exclusively

at home, more precisely in his garden, which he treats as a holy place. In all probability, this is why the fire temples are only rarely referred to in the novel. His garden is his “paradise” and, as Genetsch writes, “Etymologically, the word paradise, which is Persian for ‘garden’, is derived from the Avestan word ‘pairidaeza’, translating as enclosure” (153). It comes as no surprise that Gustad is deeply disturbed when he finds the corpses of a rat and cat in his garden. And, later, his bushes are ruined out of revenge for his not having supporting his friend’s morally questionable deeds: “Gustad emerged to pray at dawn and found the rose plant, the vinca and the subjo bush hacked to the ground. Every stem, every branch had been slashed off, chopped into little pieces” (255). His precious garden, of which he regularly takes good care, is de-sanctified this way: “He went to the two bushes growing in the small patches of dusty earth under his window, opposite the black wall, and performed his daily bit of gardening” (27). Among his heterotopias, Foucault attaches a major cultural importance to the garden. In ways that seem directly relevant to Mistry’s novel, he notes the extended meaning of this space, which refuses the oppositions of inside-outside, within non-Western contexts, he also notes the spiritual meaning which accrued to this space.

We must not forget that in the Orient the garden, an astonishing creation that is now a thousand years old, had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings. The traditional garden of the *Persians* was a *sacred space* that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center (the basis and water fountain were there) and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to [...]. (26; emphasis added)

Yet, spiritual practice is not exclusively confined to the space of the garden in Mistry’s novel. Gustad follows his friend to a Catholic church before they go to Crawford Market. It has become a kind of routine for them: “On Sunday mornings, Gustad would set off with Malcolm for Crawford Market, but their first stop was always the church where Malcolm attended Mass” (36). After not seeing each other for years, the two friends bump into each other again at the market place by accident. They decide to go to the famous Mount Mary Church in the suburbs of *Bandra*. This is a place where many pilgrims go each year with the hope that the sick will be cured with the help of Virgin Mary. The amount and the variety of the devotional objects to be found there defies imagination. It is a memorable location for people from all faiths where they pray in their own idiosyncratic ways.

Being both a communal and personal place, the church is another vital place marked out within the novel with its own meanings and activities. But, it is also an enclosed space, one which contrasts with the ocean to which Gustad repairs to enjoy a sense of freedom evoking childhood memories. In a sense, this unconfined space recalls Relp’s “perceptual space”, “[t]he realm of different emotional encounters with the space of the earth, sea and the sky or with built and created places” (10). He feels calm and serene by the ocean, where he can restore himself before he has to return to the hustle and bustle of Bombay.

As we have seen, the city’s clearly delineated spatial organization is vividly described throughout the novel permeating the narrative throughout. As Wilson observes: “Mistry has a way of painting a description of a scene and putting the reader in the middle, so that one



feels as if he/she is actually seeing sights, actually hearing the sounds, feeling, touching, and even smelling the environment that Mistry brings alive" (1). The story moves through the busy spaces of the city to create a mimesis of the "real" world. Crawford Market and Chor Bazaar are social places where people live mainly their pragmatic and everyday life. For Gustad both of them are personalized because they constantly make him remember the times when he, together with his father, regularly visited these places. His father was "accompanied at least by one servant, arriving and leaving by taxi [...]" (32) while Gustad can rely only on his "meager wallet" (32). He "[f]elt intimidated by *Crawford Market*. [...] For Gustad [it] had no charms" (32). *Chor Bazaar* is a crowded place with a "maze of narrow lanes and byways" [...] And so many people everywhere - locals, tourists, foreigners, treasure hunters, antique collectors, junk dealers, browsers" (127). His father used to buy books here and Gustad follows in his footsteps and often stops at the book stall to purchase books so that he can enrich his collection at home. It is a unique place where culture/s and business live side by side. As Leckie observes: "Mistry creates [characters] rambling from street to market, many voiced, containing the place as part of who they are" (230). Several lengthy passages are devoted to evoke the pressing urgency of the diverse locations; the reader becomes part of the throbbing pulse of this metropolitan complexity.

Place names or toponyms are of paramount importance in the large comprehensive space of Bombay. Scholars widely agree on the significance of place names in their respective areas of toponymic studies. Cox Harvey firmly asserts that "[o]ur sense of identity as a society is mediated to us through the names of the places and occasions with the history of our people" (422). The Parsis' history in a decolonized India is a clear case in this regard. Dinshawji's anger is unambiguously articulated when he says: "Names are so important: I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared, in its place is Dudasahab Bhadkhamkar Marg. [...]. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with all these new names?" (96). The dislocations produced by the historical shift from a colonized space marked by the names of the colonizer and the new names that mark independence induce profound ruptures in memory and identity. Experiencing the shift in the place names chosen for the streets sensitizes the community's historical awareness of the radical transformation in their everyday lives. In the past their experiences of places, together with their names, privileged multivocality. The Parsis felt close to the British colonizers and they were indeed a favoured group by them; thus independence produced even more radical adjustments for them as a community: "For inasmuch as the names of the streets and places change, the place of the community in contemporary India is on the agenda; to the same extent that the old names of places vanish, the Parsis feel displaced" (Genetsch, 139). Williams believes that "[Dinshawji] experiences the rewriting of the map of his neighbourhood as an interruption in his self-presence. A life by another name would not be the same life" (57).

Genetsch's observation reminds us of another "naming episode" in the narrative. The new doctor, Dr Paymaster has not changed the board of the old dispensary where he started to do practice. After a while, he manages to do so with an increased income but his endeavours are not appreciated by the community. This cultural landscape includes the two movie houses and The House of Cages, a well-frequented brothel. Not too far from here we can find

a restaurant which is like a labyrinth; it provides its guests with clandestine intimacy: “The restaurant was crowded downstairs. The waiters spreading the usual odours and noises as they dashed back and forth. [...] Upstairs, the private rooms were empty. A flight of stairs as a ladder led to the mezzanine” (216). Among the indoor public places mentioned should be made of the two hospitals, too: one in Bombay and one in Delhi. These also become highly personalized for Gustad; in each case the place is associated with death, the deaths of his two best friends. They, Dinshawji and Jimmy, find their final peace in the Tower of Silence where they are “buried” according to Zoroastrian traditions. Gentesch says: “The elements, especially water, earth and fire, are divine emanations, and have to be kept pure from defilement. The so-called Towers of Silence were erected in order to grant the purity of these elements. On top of these buildings the Parsis have their deceased eaten by vultures” (142). The Tower of Silence has the same function as a cemetery but it is different since the dead bodies taken there are consumed by vultures. What Foucault says about cemeteries in general, however, holds true for this special place, too. It is a “strange heterotopia” (25). “The cemetery is a place unlike ordinary cultural spaces” (25). The Parsi community in our age is split over this long tradition of theirs. Bank clerks in the novel discuss it heatedly in the canteen, and ironically enough it is Dinshawji, who wants to end the debate by a joke. He says, “Better that my dear domestic vulture eats me up than the feathered ones. With her I have a guarantee – she at least won’t scatter pieces of my meat all over Bombay” (93). Mukherjee thinks “[t]hat the Parsi method of disposal of the dead is not only environmentally sound but also suggests a profound acceptance of the interconnectedness of all life” (149). Mistry gives a long description of the ceremony that is held when Dinshawji dies. (306-312) Malashri Lal emphasizes that: “Some rituals of sacred space are the most carefully guarded secrets of a culture. [...] The philosophic dimensions of this ritual are difficult for non-Parsis to understand. Mistry is one of those few writers to break the silence about the Tower of Silence” (66). Jimmy’s Muslim friend, Ghulam Mohammed, arrives to be with him on his last journey, but he is not allowed inside this sacred area because it is strictly reserved for the Parsi: “Your Parsi priests don’t allow outsiders like me to go inside’, sadly remarks Ghulam” (391). It is only the *nassasalers* carrying the brier to the well of the vultures who can go inside. Only men are admitted to the prayer room, so it is a gendered place just like the *bungalee* which is allocated to women and from which they cannot advance. Borders are set up to separate people from each other in the funeral ceremony. Williams asserts, however: “In the end Gustad’s story takes down the wall between Parsi and non-Parsis alike” (70).

The book’s “predominant visual figures” (Williams, 71) disappear in the end. The big wall is demolished and Gustad takes down the blackout paper from his windows because the war is over. The Parsi’s hope for territorial recognition vanishes but it does not follow that the communal identification with Khodadad Building itself is endangered. But Gustad, personally does suffer from a sense of loss: “For the briefest of moments he felt the impending loss cut deeply, through memory and time; the collapse of the wall would wreck the past and the future” (400). Gentesch points out that: “The fall of the wall destroys a source of refuge and meaning for the future because it destroys the memory of the past. [...] A reduced awareness of time and place, i.e. the loss of spatial and temporal deixis, signifies a severe threat to the resources of meaning in Gustad’s life” (153). How-



ever, Edward Said warns us, “Borders and barriers which enclose us within safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often beyond reason and necessity” (qtd. in Gabriel, 38). On the one hand, Gustad wants to prevent the wall from being brought down, and on the other hand, it is he, himself, who decides to take away the blackout paper: “As the first sheet tore away, a frightened moth flew out and circled the room” (413). This final sentence in the novel makes room for believing in a confident and trustful future in the long run by “[blurring] the boundaries of subject-object division [...] doing away with borders [...]” (Williams, 71). Gabriel comments:

With the wall down, we are left with the final image of Gustad removing the blackout papers from his window, With light pouring into his war-darkened house for the first time in more than a decade, Gustad begins to see that borders are provisional, merely constructs. This final scene underlines the novel’s critique of any cultural system that valorizes retreat from external influences. (39)

Mistry managed to illustrate that “Eastern identity has always been given to ceaseless change” (Williams, 71) by integrating two most important spatial markers: the wall and the blackout paper into his narrative weaving through the text in such a way that by the end they become furnished with new meanings.

Commenting on the end of the novel, Gabriel asserts: “[...] *Such a Long Journey*, reinforces [the] fluid idea of home by announcing in its title the difficulty, perhaps even the impossibility of ‘homecoming.’” (31). Further on, she relies on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope: “We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spacial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin, 84). Gabriel convincingly argues, “It is the chronotope of the “journey” itself, the passage between arrivals and departures, which the text suggests carries the meaning of culture” (31). Finally, new perspectives develop: “The blackout paper which the protagonist takes down [...] allows us to see in as much as it allows Gustad to see out” (Williams, 71). In the end spatial barriers are replaced by spatial freedom, which, however does not exclude disappointment and a sense of belonging certainly remains.

In sum, I find a very strong sense of nostalgia in Mistry’s work. Edward Casey claims: “One of the most eloquent testimonies to places’ extraordinary memorability is found in nostalgia. We are nostalgic primarily about places that have been emotionally significant to us and which we now miss: we are in pain (*algos*) about a return home (*nostos*) that is not presently possible.” Casey tells us that the word was coined by Johannes Hoffer, a Swiss medical student in 1688. Hoffer said that it was a synonym for homesickness and that “admits no remedy other than a return to the homeland” (qtd. in Casey 201). There is such a strong attachment towards the Bombay Mistry describes that it makes the reader assume that despite the fact that these are discourses of cultural difference he strongly identifies himself with India. I agree with Vijay Sharma, who notes that “Distance from one’s homeland lends the writer not only an intense desire and nostalgia but the unique perspective to examine what is apparently the past” (qtd. in Lal 67). The novel is, among other things a guided tour of the Bombay of his time. We are familiarized with the city and our place experiences stay with us. At the same time we are fully aware of the ambivalence to an

extended set of oppositions, home and nostalgia for what has been lost, the colonized past of India and its post-independence present, childhood and adulthood caught in the warp and woof of memory. In the end, what unites all these oppositions is the imagination of the exilic and transplanted author, himself, writing the imagined space of Bombay from his own re-located space in Canada.

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