

Connecting the Past and the Present: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*⁽¹⁾

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Since its publication in 1992, Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* has attracted a great deal of critical attention. This is not surprising, given its ambitious dialogues with some of the most vexing theoretical issues in postcolonial criticism and its concomitant narrative complexity. The piece consists of two different stories which are alternately narrated. One strand is mainly concerned with what the Indian narrator experienced in the early nineteen-eighties while carrying out ethnographic fieldwork in the rural Egyptian villages of Lataifa and Nashawy. Ghosh himself went to Egypt to conduct his research while he was working on his Ph.D in social anthropology at Oxford. Partly because of its autobiographical nature, *In an Antique Land* has been read as a fine example of experimental ethnography. Notably, Clifford Geertz and James Clifford, two leading anthropologists, have applauded Ghosh's writing.⁽²⁾ The second component of the narrative tells a story about a twelfth-century Jewish merchant and his Indian "Slave," which the narrator gradually unearths and imaginatively reconstructs through his archival research. This other thread of the work has also invited various readings, mainly because another, more scholarly, version of it was collected in one of the volumes of *Subaltern Studies*.⁽³⁾ Ghosh's attempt to uncover the hitherto hidden relationship between a Jew and an Indian in medieval times has been evaluated highly as an exemplary challenge to historiography based on colonialist and elitist viewpoints.

Nevertheless, precisely because *In an Antique Land* can be read as a piece of self-critical ethnographic writing and also as self-critical historiography, scholars tend to focus upon one of these two aspects. Those few readers who do analyse the correlation between them almost exclusively discuss the nostalgic tone that the modern section of the narrative assumes in contradistinction to

its medieval counterpart. Ghosh himself may be partly responsible for this curious neglect. On the narrative form of *In an Antique Land*, he comments: “the structure is really that of a double helix, where you have a moment in the twelfth century and a moment in the twentieth century being pulled together solely by a single narrative that has no interactions.”⁽⁴⁾ While there may be no direct “interactions” as such, the two narratives are closely intertwined. In fact, the one functions as a mirror that defines and emphasises the characteristics of the other. This paper examines how these two stories resonate with each other, and how this resonance builds up the central theme of *In an Antique Land*, namely the poetics of cross-cultural relationship. To put it differently, I will focus upon the *literary* aspect of the writing in question, which critical readings of it either as ethnography or history – genres more or less dealing with “facts” – often underestimate. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which Ghosh characterises his narrative persona. The characterisation of the narrator, I demonstrate, is crucial in connecting the two stories. The connection is of a less pessimistic nature than many critics think; something more than nostalgia is at stake. Let me start with an examination of the modern section of the narrative.

The Narrator as a Vulnerable Ethnographer

Discussing *In an Antique Land*, some readers criticise that the narrator's authority as an ethnographer is too stable and therefore questionable. For instance, claiming that “the author's own authoritative persona is continually reaffirmed rather than subverted,” Javed Majeed complains that the text lacks “a reciprocity of perspectives between ethnographer and informants.”⁽⁵⁾ According to Leela Gandhi's reading, the narrator “remains too self-consciously the social anthropologist ‘doktor al-Hindi,’ surrounded, with a few exceptions, by caricatures asking endless questions about circumcision and holy cows.”⁽⁶⁾ Both Majeed and Gandhi think that the empathy with which the narrator reconstructs the medieval past – more on this shortly – is not sustained in the autobiographical account of his fieldwork. But is it really the case ?

In fact, the narrator from the start presents himself as an unpromising ethnographer. Ahmed, one of the many Egyptian characters appearing in the piece, is “a great deal more heedful of my duties as a gatherer of information than I.”⁽⁷⁾ Ahmed even tells the narrator to write down what he has to say in his notebook (44). Sometimes the ethnographer makes a comical blunder precisely because he is oversensitive to cultural difference. For instance, at an early stage of his stay, he tries to avoid looking at Egyptian women in the face. He recalls: “I was so cowed by everything I had read about Arab traditions of shame and modesty that I barely glanced at them, for fear of giving offence. Later it was I who was shame-stricken, thinking of the astonishment and laughter I must have provoked, walking past them, eyes lowered, never uttering so much as a word of greeting” (41). It is probably too far-fetched to claim that such an emphasis on apparent professional incompetence creates a textual equality of power between the ethnographer and his Egyptian informants. Nevertheless, the narrator’s confession of his own clumsiness does make the narrative much less authoritative than that of conventional ethnography. Interestingly, based on his fieldwork in Egypt, Ghosh also published research papers which were written in a recognisably traditional mode of ethnography. Using the so-called ethnographic present tense, these pieces banish the speaking subject “I” from their textual space. Consequently, they sound more scientific, objective and impersonal.⁽⁸⁾ The presence of these essays suggests that the narrative voice of *In an Antique Land* is a carefully chosen one. In other words, it consciously “seeks to do away with the authoritative persona of the ethnographer.”⁽⁹⁾

Instead of establishing an “authoritative persona,” the narrator repeatedly dramatises the inter-human friction that he experiences. The opening of the narrative’s modern section is a revealing example. Recalling his psychological conflict with Abu-‘Ali, his greedy and intimidating landlord, he confesses:

That evening, at sunset, I was standing on the roof, looking out over the tranquil, twilight cottonfields, when Abu-‘Ali’s voice exploded out of the porch below, roaring abuse at his wife. I went back into my room and in an effort to shut out the noise, I began to turn the dial on my radio,

scanning the waves for the sound of a familiar language, listening for words that would make me feel a little less alone. As the night wore on, the thought of hearing Abu-'Ali's voice for months on end, perhaps years, began to seem utterly intolerable. (31)

This passage can be read as a parody of what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "monarch-of-all-I-survey scene,"⁽¹⁰⁾ a trope frequently appearing in Victorian travel writings. Whereas the promontory description used to produce in a self-congratulatory manner a climactic moment at which the traveller "discovers" and symbolically conquers colonial landscape, the status of Ghosh's narrator as a powerful seer is immediately undermined by Abu-'Ali's intrusive voice. Oppressed by a sense of loneliness and psychological stress, he ends up by seeking escape in "the sound of a familiar language" from his shortwave radio. There is no residue of Victorian heroism here. It is equally significant that the quoted passage is at the beginning of the modern section of *In an Antique Land*. In other words, as Srivastava also notices,⁽¹¹⁾ there is no description of the arrival scene. According to Pratt, the importance of the arrival scene in conventional ethnographic writing lies in its role of situating the formal description "in the intense and authority-giving personal experience of fieldwork."⁽¹²⁾ In contrast, Ghosh's narrator is already psychologically entangled with Egyptians to a great extent before the narrative starts. It would be difficult to expect scientific detachment from such an opening.

Given travel writing's generic nature, it is not surprising that interpersonal conflicts often have wider cultural repercussions. In *In an Antique Land*, religious difference particularly influences the narrator's relationship with Egyptians. Based on their simplistic understanding of Hinduism, they repeatedly direct at the narrator a barrage of questions about holy cows, cremation and circumcision. The devout Muslims are curious about, and at the same time shocked by, his cultural and religious difference. On one occasion, their inquisitiveness is more than the narrator can endure, and he simply walks out:

I looked at the eyes around me, alternately curious and horrified, and I knew that I would not be able to answer. My limbs seemed to have passed beyond my volition as I rose from the divan, knocking over my shusha. I pushed my way out, and before anyone could react, I was past the crowd, walking quickly back to my room.

I was almost there, when I heard footsteps close behind me. It was Nabeel, looking puzzled and a little out of breath.

‘What happened?’ he said. ‘Why did you leave so suddenly?’

I kept walking for I could think of no answer.

‘They were only asking questions,’ he said, ‘just like you do; they didn’t mean any harm. Why do you let this talk of cows and burning and circumcision worry you so much? These are just customs; it’s natural that people should be curious. These are not things to be upset about.’ (204)

In the final section of this article, I will examine the crucial role that this friend of the narrator’s, Nabeel, plays in Ghosh’s exploration of the possibilities of cross-culturalism. For the moment, suffice it to say that his words illuminate a potential friction inherent in ethnographic research. The questions ethnographers ask in the hope of understanding the objects of their study better can inadvertently irritate their informants. This is exactly what is occurring in the quote, although there is once again an interesting twist here; it is the informants, the Egyptians, who are questioning the ethnographer/ narrator. Probably a similar point can be made about cross-cultural communication in general. If, as Nabeel comments, “it is natural that people should be curious,” this very curiosity can be much upsetting to those who are at the receiving end of their gaze, partly because it often results in highlighting, rather than overcoming, cultural difference.

As this example shows, in the modern strand of the narrative, cultural difference often manifests itself as an almost insurmountable barrier to the cross-cultural understanding the narrator tries to establish. As Roma Chatterji observes, these symbols of cultural difference “do not open sites of cultural interaction but rather point to its absence.”⁽¹³⁾ Still, it should be noted that

even while inter-cultural communication is seemingly collapsing, the narrator succeeds in maintaining good relationships with most, if not all, Egyptians. While they are often horrified by the difference of cultural and religious customs, they still accept him in a heart-warming manner.

What is more, in the section following the quote, the narrator seeks an answer to Nabeel's question. Probing early memories, he locates the source of his own anxiety in a communal violence that he witnessed in Dhaka in his childhood (204-10). It is certainly true that he does not relate the incident directly to Nabeel. He somewhat sadly recalls: "But I was never able to explain very much of this to Nabeel or anyone else in Nashawy.... I could not have expected them to understand an Indian's terror of symbols" (210). For some readers, his unwillingness to share the experience epitomises the lack of negotiation between him and his informants.⁽¹⁴⁾ Nevertheless, the very fact that he recounts the violent episode and its psychological impact renders the narrative quite self-reflective, if not dialogic in the way a certain type of postmodern ethnography seeks to be. The modern section of *In an Antique Land* thus dramatises how inter-personal contact with Egyptians affects the narrator. Still, what makes the work much more complicated than many autobiographical accounts of fieldwork is the presence of its medieval section, which will be examined next.

Seeking a "Sense of Entitlement"

The second strand of the narrative recounts the life of Abraham Ben Yiju, a twelfth-century Jewish merchant, and his Indian "Slave." Many critics have offered careful analyses of this section, partly because, as mentioned earlier, around the time of the publication of *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh produced another version of Ben Yiju's story as an academic article for the seventh volume of *Subaltern Studies*. How Ghosh's alignment with one of the most significant movements of recent historiography affects his vision has been the central focus of critical readings.

Nevertheless, precisely because of its theoretical and ideological complexities, relatively little attention has been paid to the way in which

the medieval section is narrated. What is at stake is not only “those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world” (17). The narrator also dramatises his own attempt to unearth them. The process whereby the background of the “Slave” is gradually revealed illustrates this point. At the opening of the narrative, the narrator does not know the identity of the “Slave.” He is simply called “The Slave of MS H.6,” a name taken from the catalogue number assigned to one of the extant letters in which his presence is mentioned. Coming across references to this enigmatic person several times, the narrator decides to conduct research on him. To his initial disappointment, scholarly works in Jewish studies are not much help in obtaining information on the “Slave.” The narrator then teaches himself to read the manuscripts in the original, although they are written in Judaeo-Arabic, “a colloquial dialect of medieval Arabic, written in the Hebrew script” (101). Surmising from his painstaking archival research that the “Slave” presumably originated in Mangalore, a port town on the southwestern coast of India, he takes the trouble to visit the area. With the help of a local expert, he tentatively identifies his name as “Bomma.” Predictably, these efforts are not mentioned in the *Subaltern Studies* article which is written in the scholarly third-person. Comparing the two versions, it is quite striking that *In an Antique Land* recounts Ben Yiju’s life story in the form of the narrator’s quest narrative.

In order to consider the significance of this narrative form, it will be useful to examine briefly the nature of the medieval story Ghosh relates. As many critics have already pointed out, Ben Yiju’s world is strongly characterised by cultural syncretism. For instance, the linguistic and cultural fluidity, as epitomised by Judaeo-Arabic, forms a conspicuous contrast to what is narrated in the modern section of *In an Antique Land*. For instance, while discussing the issue of circumcision with the Egyptians, the narrator feels “trapped by language” (62), because he cannot explain that in Hindustani the word “circumcise” does not connote purity as its Arabic counterpart does. In the nineteen-eighties, language is definitely a marker of a cultural barrier.

The fluidity of cultural boundaries in medieval times is perceived to have enhanced, and to have been enhanced by, inter-personal relationships across

geographical borders. The narrator recounts the connection between Ben Yiju and his "Slave" Bomma as the prime example. Ben Yiju was a Jewish merchant from what is now Tunisia. He went to India by way of Egypt, and spent seventeen years there. Bomma was from an area around Mangalore, where a local culture distinctively different from the orthodox Hinduism thrived. He often travelled to the Middle East as Ben Yiju's business agent. Their relationship was not restricted by geographical and religious boundaries. Moreover, the narrator emphasises that "their arrangement was probably more that of patron and client than master and slave" (259), because, according to him, the very concept of slavery was first and foremost a "spiritual metaphor" (260) in medieval times. Therefore, he concludes, "the elements of slavery in the ties that bound an apprentice to a master craftsman, an accountant to a merchant, would have appeared, perhaps, not as demeaning bonds, but rather as links that were in some small way ennobling – human connections, pledges of commitment, in relationships that could just as well have been a matter of a mere exchange of coinage" (263). Whether this interpretation is historically accurate or not is not so important here;⁽¹⁵⁾ what is interesting is that the narrator almost obsessively highlights the humaneness of the relationship between Ben Yiju and Bomma, and its underpinning cross-cultural dynamics.

On one level, such an emphasis upon the richness of cross-cultural connection between the Middle-East and India in the medieval age can be read as Ghosh's attempt to challenge the West-centric understanding of history, according to which "the unarmed character of the Indian Ocean trade" questionably symbolises "a lack, or failure, one that invited the intervention of Europe" (287). In this respect, it should be noted that the very title *In an Antique Land* is taken from Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," which begins with the lines: "I met a traveller from an antique land/ Who said: two vast and trunkless legs of stone/ Stand in the desert..."⁽¹⁶⁾ Ghosh's description of energetic cross-regional activities is an effective counter to the imagery of Oriental decay that the poem powerfully evokes. Nevertheless, his project is more than the typically postcolonial attempt to "write back" to the West. This is because he attempts to problematise what the narrative calls "History,"

history with a capital H. “History,” it seems, refers to a totalising worldview that seeks to exclude any heterogeneous element within. Among its examples are not only Western historiography, but also religious orthodoxy – whether it be Islamic or Hindu – and nationalism – whether it be Egyptian or Indian. As Robert Dixon also points out,⁽¹⁷⁾ it is in order to criticise History that Ghosh uses the medieval world as a reference point in relation to which the present is constantly problematised. The fruitfulness of cross-cultural encounters in the twelfth century illuminates their relative absence in modern times.

It is now possible to come back to the question as to why the medieval section is narrated partly as the narrator’s quest narrative. Ben Yiju’s travel route is opposite to the narrator’s. While the Tunisia-born Jewish merchant went to India, the Indian narrator travels to Egypt, as Bomma did to the Middle-East more than eight hundred years ago. It is in bearing this overlapping trajectory that the narrator claims in “Prologue” that Bomma gave him “a right to be there [Egypt], a sense of entitlement” (19). In other words, he characterises himself as an heir of the rich cross-culturalism that the relationship between Ben Yiju and Bomma symbolises. Clifford Geertz points out that the narrator does not explain why he is so interested in Bomma.⁽¹⁸⁾ The reason, as I hope to show in the remainder of this article, is that by fashioning himself implicitly as the one who inherits Bomma’s legacy, he seeks to create some continuity between the medieval and the modern for the purpose of challenging the rigidity of cultural and religious boundaries in the latter.

Nevertheless, the gap between Bomma’s world and what the narrator actually experiences presents itself as an immense obstacle for his project. One clash with a local imam forces him to recognise how idealistic he has been. Their initial argument about the difference of religious customs soon turns into a heated and somewhat childish quarrel over whether India or Egypt is more advanced in military technology. The narrator regretfully notes:

At that moment, despite the vast gap that lay between us, we understood each other perfectly. We were both travelling, he and I: we were travelling in the West.... In the end, for millions and millions of people on the

landmasses around us, the West meant only this – science and tanks and guns and bombs.

I was crushed, as I walked away; it seemed to me that the Imam and I had participated in our own final defeat, in the dissolution of the centuries of dialogue that had linked us: we had demonstrated the irreversible triumph of the language that has usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences....

I felt myself a conspirator in the betrayal of the history that had led me to Nashawy; a witness to the extermination of a world of accommodations that I had believed to be still alive, and in some tiny measure, still retrievable. (236-7)

The last sentence in this quote clearly indicates that the narrator has tried to regard himself as a last descendant of Bomma's world, "a world of accommodations." Nevertheless, his attempt is doomed to be a failure, because the hegemony of the West is so overwhelming that the degree of technological advancement – "the ascending ladder of Development," in the narrator's phrasing (237) – has become the only yardstick with which non-Western people can map out their own cultural positioning. As a result, even an intercultural relationship among non-Westerners is no longer possible without the experience of "travelling in the West," without referring to so-called Western values as the sole basis of mutual understanding. What shocks the narrator is his sudden realisation that he has also been deeply enmeshed in such a West-centric ideology. He himself has betrayed the centuries of cross-cultural dialogue without knowing it. Hence the awareness of "having participated in our own final defeat." "History" seems to completely wipe away the rich cross-culturalism of the medieval world.

Commemorating Friendship

Inevitably, such a perception of History/ history renders the narrative deeply nostalgic about the past that was characterised by cultural syncretism. Some

readers question this underlying tone of *In an Antique Land*. For instance, Gaurav Desai points out that the nostalgic impulse in Ghosh in fact “flatten[s] out the micropolitics of the [medieval] world.”⁽¹⁹⁾ While I agree with Desai on the narrative’s tendency to romanticise the past, his discussion of the (in)accuracy of the writer’s interpretation of history does not seem to take into consideration the fact that *In an Antique Land* is first and foremost a literary piece. In fact, whereas the contrast between “the fluidity of the medieval world and the inflexibility of modern boundaries,”⁽²⁰⁾ which results in a sense of nostalgia, is certainly a dominant motif, something more than this is at stake in Ghosh’s writing. Despite the narrator’s pessimism, the piece demonstrates in a subtle manner that the “world of accommodation” is still alive.

It should be recalled here that the narrator, who often feels much frustrated by the rigidity of modern cultural boundaries, joyfully recounts episodes which he thinks testify to their breakdown. For instance, in Mangalore, he finds that a warrior-deity of Tulu myth, bearing the name of Brahma, is different from that of classical Sanskrit cosmology (253-54). He presents this small discovery as a proof of “an equal mixture of local forms of worship...and the high Sanskritic tradition” (252). Syncretism assumes particular significance, because it proves the survival of the medieval spirit of cultural tolerance in the face of a “History” – in this case, epitomised by a fundamentalist Hindu political organisation that has been gaining ground for some time (272-73). Even national boundaries are called into question from time to time. For example, both in Egypt and in India, the narrator hears a very similar story according to which the divine power of a local shrine hindered road construction, keeping its sanctity intact, so that authorities had to change their plans in the end (139, 265). The juxtaposition of the two stories can be read as the narrator’s attempt to imagine cultural boundaries as more fluid than they at first seem, and to thereby conceptualise continuities between the past and the present.

In fact, the narrator himself embodies the possibilities of cross-cultural relationship in the late twentieth century. As I already pointed out, in spite of occasional psychological and cultural conflicts, he succeeds in constructing a surprisingly good rapport with most Egyptians. In addition, the fact that he

revisits Egypt twice, apparently not for research purposes, indicates his deep attachment to the place. He even feels “the lassitude of homecoming mixed with a quiet sense of dread” (111) at the time of his first revisit in 1988 after eight years’ absence. In a sense, Egypt has become his second home.

In this respect – and in terms of the larger themes of *In an Antique Land* – the narrator’s friendship with a young man called Nabeel is particularly significant. The narrator’s first impression is that Nabeel is “serious and earnest, never saying anything or committing himself without a good deal of prior thought” (148). His thoughtfulness greatly differentiates him from other Egyptians. Invited to the narrator’s room for the first time, Nabeel makes a detailed observation of it and says: “it must make you think of all the people you left at home...when you put that kettle on the stove with just enough water for yourself” (152). His remark impresses, and probably even moves, the narrator. He recalls:

The conversation quickly turned to something else, but Nabeel’s comment stayed in my mind; I was never able to forget it, for it was the first time that anyone in Lataifa or Nashawy had attempted an enterprise similar to mine – to enter my imagination and look at my situation as it might appear to me. (152)

Here, as in the scene which I quoted earlier, Nabeel once again observes the narrator-ethnographer. The presence of his gaze lessens, if not totally nullifies, the unequal power relationship that is inherent in traditional participant-observation. The criss-crossing of the gaze opens up a textual space in which their relationship can be represented as an inter-subjective one.

Although the narrative does not say so in an explicit manner, their friendship is important for Nabeel, and for the narrator. In his first revisit to Egypt in 1988, he finds that Nashawy, a sleepy rural village a couple of years ago, has been much affected by globalisation. Seeking better salaries, most young men have gone to the Gulf States where workers were much in demand. Nabeel was no exception. With many other Egyptians, he went to Iraq, where a labour

force from “outside” was badly needed as most Iraqi men were conscripted for the war with Iran. The money migrant workers send back has greatly transformed Nashawy’s rustic atmosphere. The mud-walled rooms of Nabeel’s house, for instance, “were gone and in their place stood the unfinished shell of a large new bungalow” (318). Despite such disorienting changes, however, the narrator finds that the memory of his friendship with Nabeel has been kept in a surprising form; his younger brother Hussein recounts almost word by word the conversation that the narrator once had with Nabeel. The narrator feels as if he “had witnessed an impossible, deeply moving, defiance of time and the laws of hearsay” (323). This small episode testifies to how close the Egyptian must have felt to the Indian visitor.

It is all the more tragic that Nabeel was apparently not able to get out of Iraq. The narrative ends in August 1990, immediately after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Revisiting Egypt once again at that time, the narrator finds that Nabeel decided to stay in Iraq as late as possible in order to obtain money to finish the construction of his family house. The novel ends with the scene where the narrator and his Egyptian friends are watching on television thousands of Egyptians seeking to escape from Iraq:

There were more than a dozen of us in the room now. We were crowded around the TV set, watching carefully, minutely, looking at every face we could see. There was nothing to be seen except crowds: Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History. (353)

History, taking the form of Iraq’s aggressive nationalism and the resultant Operation Desert Storm, again wins, destroying the inter-personal relationship between the narrator and Nabeel. Still, the importance of Ghosh’s decision to end *In an Antique Land* with this passage should not be overlooked. Just as Nabeel’s repeated mentioning of his friendship with the narrator retains the trace of his presence in the Egyptian village, so his narrative elegiacally commemorates him. Such an emphasis upon the preciousness of friendship is more than a personal tribute to Nabeel. This ending implicitly pulls together

the two different narratives that comprise *In an Antique Land*, giving depth to Ghosh's exploration of cross-cultural poetics. If Nabeel's sojourn in Iraq as a temporary migrant worker points to cross-regional dynamics that have been alive since medieval times, the deep affection between Nabeel and the narrator mirrors the warm understanding between Ben Yiju and Bomma. In other words, the narrator's close relationship with Nabeel itself can be read as a fine example of the survival of "a world of accommodation."

It is certainly true that this imagined continuity with the past is extremely fragile, considering that Nabeel is one of the tragic casualties of the Gulf War. Still, the narrator's decision to tell his friend's story enables him to preserve "those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world," just as Ben Yiju's extant letters bear testimony to the presence of Bomma and their friendship across geo-cultural borders. Constructing his narrative persona as an inheritor of the spirit of twelfth-century cross-culturalism, Ghosh, against considerable odds, succeeds in connecting the past and the present. Conceptualising his personal experience as overlapping Bomma's, the narrator expresses his movingly humanistic belief in the possibility of cross-cultural understanding.

(Endnotes)

- 1) An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference "Borders and Crossings: Seuils et Traveres," held at the Woodbrooke College, University of Birmingham, in September 2004. I thank my colleague Michael Gardiner for his incisive comments and suggestions.
- 2) See Clifford Geertz, "A Passage to India," *The New Republic* 209. 8-9 (1993). See also James Clifford, "Looking for Bomma," *London Review of Books* 24 March (1994).
- 3) Amitav Ghosh, "The Slave of MS. H.6," [1992,] Rpt in *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2002).
- 4) Amitav Ghosh, "An Interview with Amitav Ghosh," *World Literature Today* 76.2 (2002): 90.
- 5) Javed Majeed, "Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*: the Ethnographer-

- Historian and the Limits of Irony,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 30.2 (1995): 53.
- 6) Leela Gandhi, “In an Antique Land: A View,” [1993,] Rpt in *The Novels of Amitav Ghosh*, ed. R.K.Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige, 1999) 193.
 - 7) Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (1992; London: Granta, 1994) 26. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
 - 8) Ghosh, “The Relations of Envy in an Egyptian Village,” [1984,] Rpt in *The Imam and the Indian*, and “Categories of Labour and the Orientation of the Fellah Economy,” [1987,] Rpt in *The Imam and the Indian*. For a closer comparative reading of Ghosh’s doctoral thesis and *In an Antique Land*, see Neelam Srivastava, “Amitav Ghosh’s Ethnographic Fictions: Intertextual Links between *In an Antique Land* and His Doctoral Thesis,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 36.2 (2001).
 - 9) Srivastava 46.
 - 10) Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 201.
 - 11) Srivastava 53.
 - 12) Mary Louise Pratt, “Fieldwork in Common Places,” *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 32.
 - 13) Roma Chatterji, “Between Myth and Ethnography: An Anthropological Reading of *In an Antique Land*,” *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Brinda Bose (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003) 97.
 - 14) Majeed 53.
 - 15) Examining what Ghosh did not quote from the academic sources he refers to – *In an Antique Land* contains lengthy ‘Notes,’ which make generic classification more difficult – Gaurav Desai offers an interesting critique of the writer’s interpretation of history. See Gaurav Desai, “Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia,” *Representations* 85 (2004).
 - 16) Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1943) 550.

- 17) Robert Dixon, "'Travelling the West': The Writing of Amitav Ghosh,"
Journal of Commonwealth Literature 31.1 (1996): 21.
- 18) Geertz 40-1.
- 19) Desai 132.
- 20) Majeed 51.