

# The Elusive Double: Mirror Effects and Perplexity on the Roads of India

**Abstract.** Among modern fictions based on travel in India, two short novels, apparently without any common ground, unexpectedly echo each other in several aspects: *Hariyā harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (1994, *The Perplexity of Hariya Hercules*) by Manohar Shyam Joshi (1933–2006), and *Notturmo indiano* (1984, *Indian Nocturne*) by Antonio Tabucchi (1943–2012). In both novels—the first written in Hindi, the second in Italian—an enigmatic Western double causes the main protagonist to embark on an initiatory quest on the Indian roads (the Himalaya in the first one, South India in the second). In both cases the object of the quest seems ultimately to elude the protagonist and in both cases the dominant feeling of the story is one of uncertainty. But beyond their many similarities (reflections on Indian philosophies, significant relations between India and Europe, identity crisis, mirror effect, women as active witnesses of the story, etc.), what do their differences teach us about the knowledge conveyed by the two authors about India on the one hand, and their respective representations of encounters between India and Europe on the other? To answer these questions, this chapter will favour the comparative method by analysing how each of these two texts has developed the central idea of the “double”.

**Keywords.** India, travel, quest for identity, Manohar Shyam Joshi, Antonio Tabucchi

## Introduction

While the literary exchanges and influences between India and Europe from antiquity to the mid-twentieth century have been the subject of numerous studies, comparative research on the literary productions of recent decades appears to be much rarer, especially outside of works written in English. Yet, among modern fictions based on travel in India, two short novels, apparently without any common ground, unexpectedly echo each other in several aspects and invite comparison: *Hariyā harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (1994, *The Perplexity of Hariya Hercules*) by Manohar Shyam Joshi (1933–2006), and *Notturmo indiano* (1984, *Indian Nocturne*) by Antonio Tabucchi (1943–2012). In both novels—the first written in Hindi, the second in Italian—an enigmatic Western double causes the main protagonist to embark on an initiatory quest on the Indian roads (the Himalaya in the first one,

South India in the second). In both cases the object of the quest seems ultimately to elude the protagonist and in both cases the dominant feeling of the story is one of uncertainty.

The notion of the “double” is thus at the centre of these two stories, together with the Indian territory that forms their background. Both can work as a main theme of comparison—several other aspects (such as the presence of mirrors, crisis of identity, philosophical thoughts, women as active witnesses of the story, etc.) can also play this role, but at a secondary level. A comparison between the two narratives seems therefore legitimate. However, it is the analysis of the differences in the way they are treated by their respective narrators that will make the comparison relevant to the purpose of this paper. The differences analysed will focus on the *nature of the double* and its role in the two narratives. We will examine this theme in relation to the successive phases constituting the journey and quest of the two main protagonists.

Unlike ancient Western philosophy, and in particular the Socratic method, which proceeds by questioning, following a rigorous path to arrive at a concrete, reliable, and stable result,<sup>1</sup> Tabucchi and Joshi’s contemporary and postmodern writings do not follow a linear path and do not lead to a clear-cut and definitive result. Instead, the narrative plot of their respective stories and the interpretive direction their events are supposed to indicate follow a seemingly random path, determined by the encounters and pieces of information that arise at the different stages of the two protagonists’ “initiator” journey. And in the end, the double they were searching for seems to elude them, or to be but another form of the “self”. But what “self” are these authors talking about? What initiatory journeys and Indian scenes (*paysages*<sup>2</sup>) do their stories tell us about? Answering these questions will help us to perceive what these differences teach us about the knowledge conveyed by the two authors about India on the one hand, and their respective representations of encounters between India and Europe on the other.

After a very short presentation of the two novels and a short commentary on the comparative method chosen for this study, the chapter will focus on the analysis first of *Indian Nocturne* (hereafter called *Nocturne*), and then of *The Perplexity of Hariya Hercules* (hereafter abbreviated as *Hariya*). A short synthesis will compare the topic of the double. Finally, we will examine the way the two authors deal with the explicit and implicit relations between India and Europe in their novels.

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1 Ganeri 2012: 174.

2 *Paysages* (scenes) should be understood here as the perception and representation of a place, as the expression by an author of her/his relationship to the world. See Thévoz 2010: introduction.

## 1 The two novels

*Nocturne* is the English translation by Tim Parks, first published in 1988, of the Italian text *Notturmo indiano* (published in 1984 by Sellerio editore).<sup>3</sup> English-speaking readers are provided with a completely faithful and reliable version, since Parks' translation perfectly respects the syntax, punctuation, and tone of Tabucchi's version. Furthermore, the (few) terms of Indian origin (*karma*, *maya*, *atma*, etc.) are reproduced exactly as they appear in the Italian text; Parks makes no use of explication nor does he add footnotes. The novel, and the film adaptation of it by Alain Corneau (*Nocturne indien*, 1989), have been the focus of several studies.<sup>4</sup> Tabucchi (who is well enough known not to be introduced here) has commented on the writing of his book and the trip to India that preceded it. In a short essay entitled "L'Inde. Que sais-je?", he explains that he knew nothing about India at the time, that he was travelling completely "ignorant" of Indian cultures, and wonders a posteriori, "if, at the time of *Indian Nocturne*, I had gone to India with the amount of information I have today, would I have written my novel? [. . .] Certainly not".<sup>5</sup> In the same book, his short essay on the books that inspired him with regard to India ("Tante idee dell'India") invites us to see the result of *Nocturne* as a fictionalised version of Pasolini's book *L'odore dell'India* (1962), "the book of a man [. . .] who has realised that India possesses this strange spell: to take us on a circular journey at the end of which we may actually be facing ourselves. Without knowing who we are".<sup>6</sup>

The Hindi novel *Hariyā harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (published in 1994 by Kitabghar Prakashan)<sup>7</sup> was translated into English by Robert A. Hueckstedt in

3 Tabucchi's novel follows the journey through India (Mumbai, Chennai, Mangalore, Goa) of the narrator Roux in search of a friend named Xavier, about whom he has been without news for a year. His journey turns into a quest of identity and becomes the pretext for a meditation on India and its colonial past, particularly Portuguese.

4 For instance, Jansen 2014; Millner 2007; Wren-Owens 2020.

5 My translation (this collection of essays is currently being translated by Elizabeth Harris under the title "Travels and Further Travels" [<https://readingintranslation.com/2021/04/12/images-of-imagination-saskia-ziolkowski-reviews-antonio-tabucchis-stories-with-pictures-and-interviews-translator-elizabeth-harris/>]). Original: "se a quell'epoca di *Notturmo indiano* fossi andato in India con la quantità d'informazioni che oggi possiedo, avrei scritto il mio romanzo? [. . .] Certamente no" (Tabucchi 2010: 137).

6 My translation. Original: "il libro di un uomo [. . .] che ha capito che l'India possiede questo strano sortilegio: farci compiere un viaggio circolare alla fine del quale forse ci troviamo davvero di fronte a noi stessi. Senza sapere chi siamo" (Tabucchi 2010: 118).

7 Joshi 2016. *Hariyā harkyūlīz kī hairānī* is the fourth novel by Manohar Shyam Joshi. It was first published in serial form in *India Today* between March and August 1994, before being published in book form later the same year. Its main character, Hariya, is a middle-aged bachelor who spends most of his time caring for sick people and especially his authoritarian father, Rai Saip Girvan Datt Tiwari, who is suffering from chronic constipation.

2009<sup>8</sup> and it is the English edition that has been used for the textual analysis here. Hueckstedt's translation is apparently targeted at an Indian readership (living in India or belonging to the diaspora), or at least at connoisseurs of Indian religions and philosophies: Hueckstedt closely follows the Hindi text and does not hesitate to keep the pronunciation and kinship names that are specific to the Kumaoni language ("everybody elshe", "bhau", etc.) or insults and religious terms in Hindi ("machod", "poojaree", etc.). The English-speaking reader can therefore, as with *Nocturne*, rely on the English translation, which perfectly recreates Joshi's tone, local flavour, and stunning humour.<sup>9</sup>

Another key feature of the novel is the style of narration adopted. Joshi made this book one of the first fictions in Hindi literature to be part of the postmodern literary trend.<sup>10</sup> Uncertainty is prominent in the narrative, as are a multiplicity of points of view, the absence of an unequivocal and "objective" truth, and the insis-

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Hariya's life unfolds in a mechanical and unsurprising way, and nothing seems to surprise him, until one day, one of his cousins, Atul, shows him in an atlas of Australia an unlikely name for a town: Goomalling. This name, because of the similarity of its prefix with the Hindi word *gū* (excrement, shit), awakens—at last!—Hariya's astonishment. His astonishment turns to bewilderment when Atul explains to him that in Goomalling too, as in Delhi, a person perfectly similar to him is certainly experiencing the same difficulties as he is and sharing a life similar to his own. From that moment on, Hariya becomes obsessed with the idea of this double. Shortly after, following his father's death, he discovers an old trunk in the family's house containing an unexpected treasure: jewels, gold and silver antique coins, precious stones, a gold plate engraved with the Shri Yantra . . . but also pornographic pictures of his father and a letter from a mysterious lama. In this letter, Hariya's father is accused of having stolen this sacred trunk, this *pitar*, from the deity of Gūmāling, a mysterious place located somewhere in the Himalaya—and an improbable homonym of the Australian city. If the treasure is not returned to its owners, Girvan Datt and all his descendants will be cursed. From then on, Hariya is firmly convinced that he must go to Gūmāling to return the trunk and make amends for his father's sin.

8 Joshi 2009.

9 Manohar Shyam Joshi was born in 1933 in Ajmer (Rajasthan) to a family of Kumaoni Brahmins from Almora (in the present state of Uttarakhand, northern India). In 1953 he left Uttar Pradesh to work in Delhi as a freelance journalist, before joining the All India Radio. He then wrote his first poems and became assistant editor to the famous Hindi poet Agyeya for the magazine *Dinmān*. Since the publication of his first novel, *Kurū kurū svāhā*, in 1980, Joshi has made his mark as an outstanding storyteller of unique language, playing with the multiple linguistic registers of Hindi. Making fun of the shortcomings of his contemporaries with finesse and humour, he did not hesitate to write about the most disturbing and perilous aspects of Indian society, such as sexuality or corruption. Although known and respected as a short story writer, novelist, and editor, Joshi is perhaps best known as the scriptwriter of the first Indian television series, *Ham log* (1984, "We People"), which depicts the daily life of a middle-class family. This series and the one that followed it, *Buniyād* (1986–1988, "Foundation"), were so successful that members of Indian families at the end of the twentieth century identified with these characters.

10 On postmodernity, or at least its traces, in Hindi literature, see Pacauri 2010; Ghirardi 2021.

tent presence of the notions of desire and pleasure. Thus, if the beginning of the story seems to follow an ordinary, linear, “modern” type of narrative, it is the uncertainty, the multiplicity of embedded narratives and interpretations that ends up taking over, in a jubilant whirlwind of contradictory and often absurd arguments. Of course, *Hariya* should not be interpreted merely as a by-product of Western postmodern writing. To do so would be to ignore both the tradition of Hindi satire (*vyaṅgya*), of which Joshi became one of the most prominent writers, and the traditional Urdu genre of the *qissā*<sup>11</sup> that the author has revisited and to whose current revival he has personally contributed.

The interpretation proposed in this chapter is only one of the many possibilities offered by these two very rich and expressly “open works” (to use the terminology of Umberto Eco<sup>12</sup>). As Veronica Ghirardi comments on Joshi’s novel, “Hariyā’s story appears to the reader as a cubist painting where every single element can be seen from several points of view and there is no possibility of establishing a final truth. [. . .] Every aspect of the story is, therefore, suspended in uncertainty”.<sup>13</sup> The end of the book does not contradict this interpretation. The following extract is clear on this point:

The more we investigated and theorized, the more facts and theories piled up, making it all the more difficult to determine what was true and what false. Was something false that seemed true or was it a truth that looked false? For those who had not taken sides, was nothing true? Or nothing false? If impartiality means uncertainty, then is our own perplexity at the perplexity of Hariya Hercules the best we can ever hope for? At night, at the corner paan shop, the facts and theories of one side clashed with those of the other sides and since our community held dearly to the principles of democracy, it was almost impossible for us to accept any one fact or theory as forever and ever true. (150/124)<sup>14</sup>

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11 On the *qissā* (and *dāstān*) genre, see Pritchett 1991.

12 Eco 1989.

13 Ghirardi 2020: 244–245.

14 Here and throughout, paired page references (such as 150/124 above) following quotations correspond respectively to the translated English editions (Tabucchi 1988 / Joshi 2009) and original Italian or Hindi editions (Tabucchi 1984 / Joshi 2016 [1994]). Hindi original: Ham jitnā hī anumān-anusandhān karte cale gaye, hamāre pās utne hī tathya aur kathyā jamā hote cale gaye. lekin unke viṣay meṁ satyāsatyā kā nirṇay karnā kaṭhīntar hotā calā gayā. kyā ve sac-jaise lagne vāle jhūṭh the? yā ki jhūṭh-jaise lagne vāle sac the? yā ki ve kuch sac aur kuch jhūṭh the? kyā jo pakṣadhar nahīm haiṁ, unke lie kuch bhī sac nahīm hai? yā ki unke lie kuch bhī jhūṭh nahīm hai? agar niṣpakṣatā kā matlab anirṇay hai, to kyā ham hariyā harkyūlīz kī hairānī kī kahānī par bas isī tarah hairānī hī hote rah sakte haiṁ? rāt ko nukkaṛ ke panvārī kī dukān par pakṣadharom ke jhūṭh ṭakrāte rahe aur unmeṁ se kisī ek ko hameśā-hameśā ke lie sac mān lenā birādarī meṁ loktantra ke zor pakāṛ lene ke kāraṇ asambhavprāy ho gayā.

## 2 On comparison

In order to compare the two texts and extract the most relevant information possible from them, the question arises of the order in which the texts and the elements to be analysed should be presented. An analysis of one text in its entirety followed by the second according to the same principle brings consistency to the narratives and helps to highlight the structure of each of the texts as well as the arguments that link the different parts together. An analysis which, on the contrary, favours the comparison of some elements or the successive phases of the narrative by alternating the passage of one text with that of the other will have the advantage of strengthening the comparison itself, to the detriment, however, of the internal coherence of each of the texts. An interesting heuristic approach would be to develop both models, which would eventually provide a means of comparing the results obtained. However, due to lack of space, only the first model of comparison (analysis of one text and then the second) will be adopted here.

The comparison here focuses on the theme of the double. The interpretation of this theme is closely linked to the development of its argumentation in each of the two texts. The order of presentation of the texts (*Nocturne* and then *Hariya*) has been chosen according to a basic criterion, that of their original publication date: 1984 for Tabucchi's novel (1988 for its English translation), 1994 (reprinted 2016) for Joshi's (2009 for its English translation). This does not imply, however, that the former may have inspired the author of the latter, despite the prominent place of intertextuality in the writings of both authors.

The second model of comparison (i.e. the comparison of phases and elements) was, however, carried out as a preparatory step, and the results obtained have been incorporated into the subsequent analysis. One finding is that the two books show a certain similarity between the phases of the characters' journey: (i) acknowledgement of the double and beginning of the quest; (ii) state of crisis; (iii) appearance of an important "informant"; and (iv) naming of the Other and disappearance of the "I". This division will be used hereafter in the analysis of the texts. A few elements have been privileged over others to make the comparison of the two books more eloquent in the reader's mind.

### 3 Analysis of the texts

#### 3.1 The “double” in *Nocturne*

Phase (i): The very beginning of the novel (3), when Roux arrives in Mumbai (Bombay),<sup>15</sup> immediately sets the scene (nightlife, darkness, power relations between different social classes, etc.), as well as the perspective, according to the narrator, that one should adopt to understand India, and any reality at large: any picture we see in a frame is only a *trompe l'œil*, a fragment of reality, if not a total deformation of it.

Cage District<sup>16</sup> was much worse than I had imagined. I'd seen it in the photographs of a famous photographer and thought I was prepared for human misery, but photographs enclose the visible in a rectangle. The visible without a frame is always something else. (5/15)<sup>17</sup>

This anticipates the explanation given by Christine, the photographer the narrator meets at the end of the novel who explains to him her artistic approach: to be suspicious of “*morceaux choisis*” (in French in the text). In the case of this novel, it is a matter of being wary of pre-established identities, as in the case of Roux, the main character and homodiegetic narrator who has come to look for a friend in India, Xavier Janata Pinto, who seems to have disappeared a year ago (39).

The friend is therefore the reason for Roux's journey, “short for Rouxinol, Portuguese for nightingale” (23). If his personal identity seems real and distinct from Roux's, unlike Hariya's double, it will become apparent as the journey progresses, that things are not as clearly defined and definable as one would like to believe. From the beginning, however, textual and semantic clues are provided to convey a feeling of confusion. For example, Roux takes a nap after reaching the hotel in Mumbai and when he is awakened by a knocking at the door, he “do[es]n't know how long [he] slept. Perhaps two hours, perhaps longer” (8). Similarly, the girl who had knocked at the door expresses “total amazement” when Roux mentions to her the name of his friend Xavier (9).

Phase (ii): The next phase, in a hospital in Mumbai where Xavier could have been cured, clearly casts doubt on the stability of identities and personal choic-

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15 In what follows, the official names of cities that are currently in use are adopted. The names used in the texts are indicated in parentheses.

16 The notorious red-light district in Mumbai.

17 Il “Quartiere delle Gabbie” era molto peggio di come me lo ero immaginato. Lo conoscevo attraverso certe fotografie di un fotografo celebre e pensavo di essere preparato alla miseria umana, ma le fotografie chiudono il visibile in un rettangolo. Il visibile senza cornice è sempre un'altra cosa.

es. Boundaries and paths become blurred. Thus, when Roux tells the doctor who is supposed to have treated Xavier that “he’s a Portuguese who lost his way in India”, the doctor replies, “A lot of people lose their way in India, [. . .] it’s a country specially made for that” (12/23)<sup>18</sup>. But it is not only their way that visitors lose in India. Their psychic integrity can also be subject to the same effect, as is demonstrated by the narrator’s comment some pages later when he finds himself overwhelmed in observing his surroundings: “I watched with greater pleasure, with the perfect sensation of being just two eyes watching while I myself was elsewhere, without knowing where” (25/37)<sup>19</sup>. The narrator feels he has lost his grip on the world around him and is no longer able to discern the meaning of the sounds he hears:

From far away came a slow monotonous voice, a prayer perhaps, or a solitary, hopeless lament, the kind of cry that expresses nothing but itself, asks nothing of anyone. I found it impossible to make out any words. India was this too: a universe of flat sounds, undifferentiated, indistinguishable. [. . .] I had lost myself in distant thoughts. (26/38)<sup>20</sup>

A dozen pages later, we find Roux, after a journey of more than a thousand kilometres, at the Theosophical Society of Adyar, in the suburbs of Chennai (Madras). When his host asks him if he is “familiar with India”, he replies, “No, [. . .] this is the first time I’ve been here. I still haven’t really taken in where I am” (40/55)<sup>21</sup>.

Phase (iii): After this episode, as the narrator travels back across the country to Mangaluru (Mangalore), his sense of disorientation and doubts about his identity take a further step when, in the middle of the night, at an unlikely bus stop in the middle of nowhere, he comes across an *arhant*, described by the boy accompanying him as a “Jain prophet” (51). Intrigued by this fellow, whose appearance is more that of a “monkey” or “monster” than of a human being (66), and whose occupation is to read “the karma of the pilgrims” (67), the narrator asks him if he can say anything about his own karma. This is the dialogue that follows:

“I’m sorry,” he said, “my brother says it isn’t possible, you are someone else.”

“Oh, really,” I said, “who am I?”

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18 “è un portoghese che si è perduto in India”. [. . .] “In India si perde molta gente”, disse, “è un paese fatto apposta per questo”.

19 E così guardai con maggiore voluttà, con la perfetta sensazione di essere solo due occhi che guardavano mentre io ero altrove, senza sapere dove.

20 Da lontano veniva una voce lenta e monotona, forse una preghiera oppure un lamento solitario e senza speranza, come quei lamenti che esprimono solo se stessi, senza chiedere niente. Per me era impossibile decifrarlo. L’India era anche questo: un universo di suoni piatti, indifferenziati, indistinguibili. [. . .] mi ero perduto in considerazioni lontane.

21 “No [. . .] è la prima volta che ci vengo, non mi sono ancora reso bene conto dove sono.”



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The boy spoke to his brother again and the brother answered briefly. "It doesn't matter," translated the boy, "that's only *maya*."

"And what is *maya*?"

"It's the outward appearance of the world," the boy replied, "but it's only illusion, what counts is the *atma*." Then he consulted his brother and confirmed with conviction: "What counts is the *atma*."

"And what is the *atma*?"

The boy smiled at my ignorance. "The soul," he said, "the individual soul." [ . . . ]

"I thought we only had our *karma* inside us," I said, "the sum of our actions, of what we have been and what we shall be."

[ . . . ] "Oh no," explained the boy, "there's your *atma* as well, it's there together with the *karma*, but it's a separate thing."

"Well then, if I'm another person, I'd like to know where my *atma* is, where it is now."

The boy translated for the brother and a rapid exchange followed. "It's difficult to say," he came back to me, "he can't do it. [ . . . ] you're not there, he can't tell you where you are."<sup>22</sup> (51–53/68–69)

The blurring of Roux's identity increases. The boundary between the narrator, who is looking for his friend, and the Other, that friend at the origin of this search, becomes blurred. However, there is not yet an amalgam or a fusion between the two "characters", even if Roux is clearly no longer himself, no longer the persona he thought he was: "you are someone else". Roux's conviction that the person is limited to her/his actions, to her/his karma, wanes in the face of the destabilising context of India (particularly in that bus shelter lost in the middle of the countryside, in the midst of the night, in the presence of an indescribable being). But if he is not the one he thought he was, who is he, where is he, where is his *ātma* hiding, whose existence he seems to learn? Apparently not in him ("he can't tell you where you are"). In his double perhaps?

Doubt and confusion increase and take over in the next chapter. The narrator, who has come to a Portuguese monastery in Goa in search of information about Xavier, falls asleep in the library and has a strange dream. In his dream he ex-

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22 "Mi dispiace", disse lui, "mio fratello dice che non è possibile, tu sei un altro." / "Ah sì", dissi io, "chi sono?". / Il ragazzo parlò di nuovo al fratello e costui gli rispose brevemente. "Questo non importa", mi riferì il ragazzo, "è solo *maya*". / "E che cos'è *maya*?". / "È l'apparenza del mondo", rispose il ragazzo, "ma è solo illusione, quello che conta è l'*atma*". Poi si consultò col fratello e mi confermò con convinzione: "quello che conta è l'*atma*". / "E l'*atma* che cos'è?". / Il ragazzo sorrise della mia ignoranza. "*The soul*", disse, "l'anima individuale". [ . . . ] "Credevo che dentro di noi ci fosse solo il *karma*", dissi io, "la somma delle nostre azioni, di ciò che siamo stati e di ciò che saremo". [ . . . ] "Oh no", spiegò il ragazzo, "c'è anche l'*atma*, sta con il *karma* ma è una cosa distinta". / "E allora se io sono un altro vorrei sapere dov'è il mio *atma*, dove si trova ora". / Il ragazzo tradusse al fratello e ne seguì una fitta conversazione. "È molto difficile dirlo", mi riferì poi, "lui non è capace". [ . . . ] "tu non ci sei, non può dirti dove sei".

plains, in Portuguese, to an old man he believes to be mad, that he has come to find his brother. But the old man tells him that “Xavier doesn’t exist [. . .]. He’s nothing but a ghost. [. . .] We are all dead, haven’t you realized that yet?”<sup>23</sup> (60/78). Everything in this chapter is a source of unease: “I looked at him in amazement”; “I felt a deep embarrassment”; “the room was getting darker and darker”; “I got up, confused”<sup>24</sup> (57–60/75–79).

Phase (iv): As he gets nearer the end of his journey, still in Goa, and starts whistling an old song, he suddenly realises that his friend must have been called “Nightingale” here, in reference to a dialogue he had had with him, during which he said to him: “I have become a night bird” (90). Pinpointing this name finally helps him to find a clue in the hotels of Goa. The story continues for the next few pages as if there were still two separate individuals, Roux and Xavier. But “Nightingale” is also the full English name of Roux himself, as we saw at the beginning of this section. Moreover, we also know that the identity of the narrator has been challenged and that the Other sought is perhaps just another figure of the narrator’s self.

This is confirmed in the last chapter where we find Xavier having a tête-à-tête with Christine, a photographer he has just met by chance. Both are having their dinner in some renowned luxury hotel—a common symbol in the novel of the colonial past and the Western world. And there, the narrator, trying to summarise for Christine the book he is writing (“let’s suppose I’m writing a book, for example”, 100), suddenly inverts the roles: he is Xavier, whom a long-time friend is trying to find.

“The central idea is that in this book I am someone who has lost his way in India,” I repeated. “Let’s put it like that. There is someone else who is looking for me, but I have no intention of letting him find me. I saw him arrive and I have followed him day by day, we could say. I know his likes and his dislikes, his enthusiasms and his hesitations, his generosity and his fears. I keep him more or less under control. He, on the contrary, knows almost nothing about me. [. . .]”

“But who are you?” asked Christine. “In the book I mean.”

“That’s never revealed,” I answered. “I am someone who doesn’t want to be found, so it’s not part of the game to say who.”

“And the person looking for you who you seem to know so well,” Christine asked again, “does he know you?”

“Once he knew me, let’s suppose that we were great friends, once. But this was a long time ago, outside the frame of the book.”

“And why is he looking for you with such determination?”

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23 “Xavier non esiste”, disse, “è solo un fantasma. [. . .] Siamo tutti morti, non l’ha ancora capito?”

24 “Lo guardai con stupor”; “provai un grande imbarazzo”; “la stanza era sempre più scura”; “mi alzai confuso”.

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“Who knows?” I said. It’s hard to tell, I don’t even know that and I’m writing the book. [. . .] In a way he is looking for himself. I mean, it’s as if he were looking for himself, looking for me: that often happens in books, it’s literature.” [. . .]

“[. . .] the book is mainly that: his travelling. He has a whole series of encounters, naturally, because when one travels one meets people.”<sup>25</sup> (82–83/102–104)

Thus the “I” has merged into the “double”, or rather the “double” has taken the place of the “I”. No matter who is who, who is looking for whom, it seems that the quest has vanished, the game is over: “He has been looking at me for a long time, and now that he has found me he no longer has any desire to find me. [. . .] And I have no desire to be found either”<sup>26</sup> (86/107).<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2 The “double” in *Hariya*

In this novel everything is about echoes, reflections, mirrors, doubles. In short, the existence of the “Other” (*dūsṛā*)—which looks like the self without being completely identical to it—is paramount. The expression “*maim hī vah dūsṛā*”, “I myself am that other” (97/81), which provides an attempt to explain the enigmatic meaning of the place name “Gūmāling” in the Himalaya, sums up these “mirror

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25 “La sostanza è che in questo libro io sono uno che si è perso in India”, ripetei, “mettiamola così. C’è un altro che mi sta cercando, ma io non ho nessuna intenzione di farmi trovare. Io l’ho visto arrivare, l’ho seguito giorno per giorno, potrei dire. Conosco le sue preferenze e le sue insofferenze, i suoi slanci e le sue diffidenze, le sue generosità e le sue paure. Lo tengo praticamente sotto controllo. Lui, al contrario, di me non sa quasi niente. [. . .]” / “Ma lei chi è?”, chiese Christine, “voglio dire nel libro”. / “Questo non viene detto”, risposi, “sono uno che non vuole farsi trovare, dunque non fa parte del gioco dire chi è”. / “E quello che la cerca e che lei sembra conoscere così bene”, chiese ancora Christine, “cos’hai la conosce?”. / “Una volta mi conosceva, supponiamo che siamo stati grandi amici, un tempo. Ma questo succedeva molto tempo fa, fuori della cornice del libro”. / “E lui perché la sta cercando con tanta insistenza?” / “Chi lo sa”, dissi io, “è difficile saperlo, questo non lo so neppure io che scrivo. [. . .] In qualche modo sta cercando se stesso. Voglio dire, è come se cercasse se stesso, cercando me: nei libri succede spesso così, è letteratura”. [. . .] / “il libro è principalmente questo: il suo viaggio. Fa tutta una serie di incontri, naturalmente, perché nei viaggi si incontrano persone”.

26 “Mi ha cercato tanto, e ora che mi ha trovato non ha più voglia di trovarmi [. . .] E anch’io non ho voglia di essere trovato.”

27 This notion of an identity that lacks unicity, that is multiple, seen as a “confederation of souls” in Tabucchi’s works, is briefly analysed by Ganeri 2021: 26–28 in his monograph on Fernando Pessoa, a major source of inspiration to Tabucchi. My thanks to Philippe Bornet for pointing this out.

effects”. We will discuss this crucial passage in detail later, but first let us look at the first appearance of the notion of “double” and its context in the text.

Phase (i): The mention of a “double”, a person in every way similar to Hariya, and its association with the Australian town of Goomalling, is the central element of the story, which triggers Hariya’s initial astonishment and transforms the linear narrative hitherto adopted into a multidirectional one, with embeddings (the first one starting, significantly, with the opening of Hariya’s father’s trunk), commentaries, and multiple interpretations. The mention of this double, which awakens Hariya from his routine torpor, comes just after a consideration by Atul, Hariya’s cousin, of two issues that are at odds with each other: a discussion, in very crude and colourful terms, on Hariya’s father’s chronic constipation, and a set of ontological questions about the link between one’s fundamental being, one’s self, and the body:

Not only was Atul not revolted by what he heard, but Girvan Datt-ji’s inability to shit prompted him to extend his own speech by adding to it a profound question. That was this: “How is it that a man’s body cannot be entirely within that man’s control? The part of your babu’s body that is paralysed no longer functions, but if it is still his, then why doesn’t it do what he says? If it isn’t in your babu’s control anymore but is still in the control of a part of your babu’s brain, then is your babu a being separate from his brain? Or does he fill up only that part of it that works? Where does your babu exist in his body? If his heart keeps working, but his brain dies, then are you going to think of your babu as being alive or dead?”<sup>28</sup> (26/24)

Readers will have acknowledged the implicit reference to the ancient Vedantic debate on the link between the self and the body, here ironically addressed by the context of constipation at the origin of Atul’s questioning on the one hand, and by the connotations of the name of the town of Goomalling that the cousin discovers “by chance” at that moment on the other. The existence of a town with such a strange name is therefore the cause of Hariya’s initial astonishment. But it is Atul’s explanation that in the whole world—and even in such an unlikely place as Goomalling—a person exists who is in every way similar to another living elsewhere and sharing his fate, that definitively throws Hariya into surprise, perplexity, and his continuous questioning about the meaning of life and human condition:

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28 Sunkar atul ghināyā nahīm, balki usne girvāṇ datt jī ke apne hī mal ko niškāsīt na kar sakne ko ek vyāpak praśn se joṛkar carcā āge baṛānī cāhī. vah yah ki ādmī kā śarīr pūrī tarah se ādmī ke bas meṁ kyom nahīm hotā? āpke bābū ke jo aṅg laqvā paṛne ke bād kām nahīm kar rahe haiṁ ve agar unke hī haiṁ to unkā kahnā kyom nahīm mān rahe haiṁ? agar ye aṅg āpke bābū ke nahīm, unke dimāg ke kiśi hisse ke bas meṁ the, to kyā āpke bābū apne dimāg se koī alag hastī rakhte haiṁ? yā vah utne bhar hote haiṁ, jitne unke dimāg ke hisse kām kar rahe hote haiṁ? āpke bābū apne śarīr meṁ kahām sthit haiṁ? agar dil caltā rahegā lekin dimāg mar jāyegā to āp apne bābū ko zindā mānemge ki marā huā?

## The Elusive Double

“A double?” Hariya’s perplexity was now complete.

“Yes, someone exactly like you, in every detail. Just like the one who looks back at you from the mirror.”<sup>29</sup> (28/26)

It is therefore the purely imaginary, hypothetical existence of some Australian double that first prompts Hariya to reflect on his situation and to question his identity.

Phase (ii): The second mention of the double appears some twenty pages later and comes in a crisis situation. Since the atlas episode, everything is subject to astonishment and questions, be it the existence of Goomalling or, because of the presence of the word “ling” (short form for *lingam*) in this mysterious name, sexuality in general (to which he had previously paid no attention).<sup>30</sup> When Hariya visits his father’s doctor, Dr Nilambar, he embarks on a series of endless questions, ranging from the deepest to the most absurd, such as whether there is a cult to the “goo” in Goomalling. Also present at the doctor’s house, Ganesh Datt Shastri, an expert in religious matters and supporter of the Jan Sangh, cannot help but contradict the answers of Dr Nilambar, a convinced Marxist:

“That’s the kind of absolute nonsense you come up with when you read little books in English about your own religion. ‘Ling’ does not mean penis. It is a particular mark or sign that is capable of producing in human beings a thorough understanding of creation and destruction. And believing that all things are sacred does not mean we worship our own shit! Don’t use that Marx god of yours, Doctor Saheb, to make a goo-explanation of the most profound aspects of our dharma!”<sup>31</sup> (44/39)

It is just after this new philosophico-scatological episode that Hariya has a kind of fit with the characteristics of epilepsy and starts to speak in English, which he had never done before, moreover with a perfect Australian accent, unintelligible to his interlocutors!

At this point in Hariya’s life, identification with the double, with the Other, is therefore equivalent to a crisis, to a loss of orientation, to the loss of meaning too. But this identity crisis is not limited to the presence of a single double. After the

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29 “ḍabal?” hariyā kī hairānī barakrār rahī. / “hām.” atul bolā, “hū-ba-hū āpkā-jaisā koī. jaisā āpko āne meṁ dikhāī dene vālā hotā hai.”

30 “If this world of pleasure and enjoyment has, actually, no stable essence, then why do people worship that, (whadayacallit?), main tool of pleasure and enjoyment?” (agar yah bhog-vilās kī duniyā nissār ṭhahrī to use kyā pūjnā jo, kyā nām kahte haiṁ, bhog-vilās kā khās hathiyār ṭhahrā?, 40/36).

31 “apne dharm ke bāre meṁ aṅrezom kī pothiyām paṛhoge to aisā hī anargal pralāp karoge. liṅg kā arth śiśn nahīm hai. uskā arth hai sṛṣṭi aur samhār ke kāraṅ kā bodh karāne vālā cihn. aur sab cizom ko pavitr mānte haiṁ kā arth yah nahīm hai ki apne hī mal kā pūjan karte haiṁ! apne mārks devatā kā nām lekar hamāre gūrhātigūrh viṣayom kī aisī gū-vyākhyā mat karo ḍokṭar!”

death of his father, who represented the community's tutelary and authoritative figure, Hariya's personality is multiplied—at least that is how the members of the community perceive this phenomenon. And here, too, philosophy and sexuality appear together:

The explanation of Doctor Nilambar's reached Hariya's ears, too, causing him to think and ask: "If it's possible for many mes to be inside me, why can't it be possible for others just like me to be outside me? One of those would be the one who lives in Goomalling, Australia, whose address—why can't you people find that out? [ . . . ] To all my doubles, wherever they are, send a telegram."<sup>32</sup> (72/61)

However, this multiplicity of personalities disturbs a large part of his community, which sees this phenomenon as proof of his madness, or the sign of a brain tumour.

Phase (iii): The next major episode related to the question of the double is also linked to a severe crisis. It comes as a heart attack which strikes Hariya upon being informed by the Himachal Pradesh government that there is no place called Goomalling in the state. Refusing to be hospitalised, he continues looking for any valuable information about Goomalling, until the day a man named Harry Smith comes to his house. Smith has a copy of a book entitled *My Travels in North-West India*, the author of which is said to be a "John Moore".<sup>33</sup> Moore explains in the book his journey in the Himalaya in search of Goomalling and his meeting with a "Captain Trevor Meredith". For Hariya, the similarity of his first name with the visitor's name (Harry) and their respective fathers' names (Girvan and Gary) is a surprising but obvious proof of the existence of Goomalling. This reinforces his will to go there to bring back his father's trunk and atone for his sin. He will be accompanied by Piruli Kaiñja, a distant relative linked to Girvan Datt's former life, whose personality is dual, or perceived as such by the community: she is "a

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32 Dākṭar nīlāmbār kā yah viśeṣaṅ hariyā ke kān meṁ hī parā. aur ab vah yah soctā-pūchtā rahā ki jab mere bhītar kā "māim" ho sakte haim, tab mere bāhar thīk mere-jaise dūse kyom nahīm ho sakte? inmeṁ se ek vah dūsrā, jo gūmāliṅ āstreliyā meṁ rahtā hai, uskā patā āp log mālūm kyom nahīm kar dete? [ . . . ] ek se do bhale, do se cār, mere-jaise jitte bhī dūse haim sabb ko de do tār.

33 One could elaborate on the origin of this John Moore and the source of Joshi's inspiration. Among the many possible sources of inspiration, one of the most likely is that of the veterinary surgeon William Moorcroft (1767–1825), who was one of the greatest British explorers of the Himalaya. Otherwise, it can be the naturalist and explorer John Muir (1838–1914), author of *Travels in Alaska*, but who—to my knowledge—never went to India. Or is it an allusion to Thomas More (1478–1535) and his famous *Utopia* (1516)? Another clue, more pertinent regarding the novel and Hariya's quest than to Moore's name itself, could be Rudyard Kipling's famous Bengali agent, Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, in *Kim*. Or perhaps it is even an allusion to John Murray's handbooks for travellers (my thanks to Philippe Bornet for this last suggestion).

Buddhist nun devoting herself to the liberation of the Dalit women” to some (84), a prostitute without morals “whose name the community thought improper even to mention” to others (77).

It is the appearance in the story of Harry Smith, Hariya’s Anglo-Indian double, that convinces the latter to embark on the quest for this mysterious place, hidden somewhere in the Himalaya. In this episode too, as in the other passages involving the notion of a “double”, ontological questions form the background of the discussion. This time, in the excerpt from Moore’s book provided by Harry, it is the meaning associated with Goomalling that constitutes the main issue. The extract is a little long, but since it brings together all the elements of the theme of the double (double, shadow, mirror, Other), it deserves quoting extensively:

[John Moore:] “Do you mean to say that ‘Goomalling’ is a word without a meaning?”

The Captain replied seriously, “Actually, it’s said to be so meaningful one could spend one’s entire life trying to understand it. As far as I’ve been able to fathom it, ‘Goomalling’ means ‘I myself am that other.’”

“That other,” said I, surprised.

“Yes,” he said, “in this people’s philosophy of life, one’s double is extremely important. They believe everyone has a double, and one’s double accompanies one in the manner of a shadow. That’s why they have such strict superstitions about simulacra. Everyone here is extremely careful about his own shadow because it is a belief that whatever is allowed to happen to one’s shadow will occur also to the individual himself. [. . .] Similarly, mirrors fill them with dread and when they have to collect water from a pond or a river, or if they have to bathe, then they do so with their eyes firmly shut.” [. . .]

Carefully folding the map and slipping it into my rucksack, I asked a final question. “What material thing is worshipped there?”

Downing the last gulp of brandy and arranging his pack into a pillow, he smiled and said, “A mirror. The poojaree places in front of the pilgrim a mirror that is otherwise always covered with the skin of a musk deer. Then he hands over to the pilgrim the implements necessary for shaving, goes behind the mirror, and lifting back the deerskin, he begins the recitation of mantras. Repeatedly, both the name of the worshipper and ‘Goomalling’ are heard, as if both were being praised at once. Meanwhile, the worshipper finishes his shave. Then the poojaree leads him with his eyes shut to the sacred lake for a bath. When the bath is completed, the worshipper, with the same mantras recited again, is allowed to see his reflection in the water. With that, the pooja is completed.”<sup>34</sup> (97–99/81–82)

34 “āpke kahne kā yah matlab hai ki gūmāliṅg ek bemaṭlab śabd hai?” mairṅne pūchā. / kaiṭen gambhir hokar bolā, “yah to itnā zyādā mānīkhej batāyā jātā hai ki matlab samajhte-samajhte zindagānī bīt jāye. jahām tak mairṅ samajh pāyā hūm, gūmāliṅg kā arth ‘mairṅ hī vah dūsrā’ hai.” / “vah dūsrā!” mairṅne āścarya se kahā. / “hām.” vah bolā, “in logorṅ ke jīvan-darśan meṅ pratirūp kā mahattvapūrṅ sthān hai. ye log mān ke calte haim ki har vyakti-jaisā ek dūsrā vyakti bhī hotā hai. ye dūsrā uske sāth chāyā kī tarah caltā hai. isīlie inmeṅ chāyā ke bāre meṅ baṛe andhaviśvās haim. yahām har vyakti apnī chāyā ke

The mirror also refers to the notion of the metaphysical double in Indian philosophy, the *vah dūsrā* (that Other). This enigmatic formula obviously echoes the famous Vedantic *mahā-vākya* (great word) *tat tvam asi* (that thou art). But here too, as elsewhere in the novel, Joshi seems to enjoy juggling the most revered Indian concepts (such as the theory of illusion, or the world seen as a divine game) into a parody of philosophy, into a big joke.

Phase (iv): Following this episode, Hariya leaves for the Himalaya in search of Goomalling, which is said to be located near the pass of Takling La (Spiti District, Himachal Pradesh). The route, tortuous and not very precisely described, passes through Shimla, Kullu, and the Shipki La (Kinnaur District, considered on websites as “the world’s most treacherous road”!), but there is also mention of a village named Hansi, which means “laughter” or “joke” in Hindi!<sup>35</sup> Hariya is accompanied by Piruli Kaiñja. The story of the journey itself is then described by the latter, for an obvious reason: she returns alone. Nobody knows exactly what happened to Hariya—she is herself not very clear about it—and her community argues about the correct interpretation to give to Hariya’s disappearance and indeed the meaning of the whole story. In the end, as in Vedantic philosophy, it is the absence of a univocal interpretation that prevails, in favour of the multiplicity of perspectives and points of view, offering to readers of *Hariya* a contemporary version of the enigmatic phrase *neti neti*.<sup>36</sup> This is anticipated by Piruli Kaiñja in her account to the community of Hariya’s disappearance:

A little while after the sun had set, the poojaree returned with Chachang. I asked where Hariya was. He said he had crossed over to the other side of the mirror.

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vişay meñ bahut satark rahtā hai kyomki mānyatā hai ki chāyā ko jo kuch kar diyā jāye vahī fauran vyakti par bhī ghaṭit ho jātā hai. [ . . . ] isī mānyatā ke calte ye log darpaṇom ke virodhī haiñ aur nadī yā jhīl se pānī bharte hue athavā unmeñ nahāte hue apñī āñkheñ band kiye lete haiñ.” [ . . . ] nakṣā acchī tarah moṅkar mairñne apne piṭṭhū meñ dāl diyā aur ek antim jigyasā kī, “vahāñ pūjan kis cīz kā hotā hai?” / brāñḍī kā antim ghūñṭ lekar, apne piṭṭhū kā sirhāñā banāte hue vah muskarākar bolā, “darpaṇ kā. pujañī tīrthayātrī ke sāmne apñā vah darpaṇ rakhtā hai jo sadā kastūrī-mṛg kī chāl se dhakā rahtā hai. phir tīrthayātrī ko hajāmat kā sāmān dekar vah svayam darpaṇ ke pīche calā jātā hai aur mṛg-chāl haṭākar mantroccār śurū kartā hai. uske mantra meñ bār-bār tīrthayātrī kā nām aur gūmāliñg kā nām ātā hai. māno uskī stuti donom ko hī samān rūp se samarpit ho. is bīc yātrī apñī hajāmat banā letā hai. phir pujañī pavitr jhīl meñ āñkheñ mīce-mīce snāñ karne ke lie le jātā hai. snāñ kar cukne ke bād punaḥ usī mantroccār ke sāth yātrī ko jhīl meñ apñā pratibimb dekhne diyā jātā hai. iske sāth hī pūjā samāpt hotī hai.”

35 An imaginary place name, but not so different from the existing village name of Hansa in Spiti District.

36 This phrase, which first appears in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* (3.9.26), expresses the impossibility of qualifying, defining, or describing the *ātman*, which does not belong to the phenomenal world.



## The Elusive Double

My heart stopped. I asked, “What are you saying? You mean he just now passed away?”

He said that after meeting the First Female Other, he had crossed over to the other side where it is very difficult to be certain if something is or is not. Or is but also is not. *Or neither is nor is not*. The lama said Hariya has brought peace to his babu’s spirit, he himself has achieved moksha and provided release and prosperity for everyone in his community.<sup>37</sup> (129/107–108; my emphasis)

According to this passage, the narrator has the poojaree-lama say that “moksha” (liberation) is to be understood as a state beyond characterisation, corresponding to the non-duality of the Advaita Vedānta. However, the theoretical framework in which this ultimate “disappearance” occurs is inspired by what seems to be a borrowing—as parody—from the dualistic system of Sāṃkhya: the double of the I, a Woman, is created in response to the ultimate loneliness of the masculine I. But this “compendium” of Sāṃkhya philosophy is coupled with a parody of Vedic etymologies, explaining the origin of words and expressions through episodes from Vedic mythology and cosmogony. The following explanation is given by one of the lamas Hariya and Piruli Kaiñja meet on the way to Goomalling.

“In the very beginning, when there was nothing in the world, He was alone and His loneliness was so complete He could not stand it. There being no one else, it was even very difficult for Him to believe that He Himself existed. In order to convince Himself, He would shout, ‘I am, I am!’ That’s why even today everyone refers to himself with the name ‘I’. But when there was no one else, who could hear what He said and respond ‘Yes, bhैया, you are’? So He made a woman just like Himself. Only because of the existence of that woman did He exist. Therefore, in His eyes women are more important. So the very first Other was female, right? Where we’re going is where that female Other is worshipped.”<sup>38</sup> (128/106–107)

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37 Sūraj chipne ke kuch der bād pujārī chachāṅg ko leke lauṭā. maimne pūchā ki hariyā kahām hai? usne kahā ki vah āine ke pār calā gayā hai. / merā dil dhak se rah gayā. maimne pūchā, “kyā kah rahe ho? kyā vah nahīm rahā ab?” / vah bolā ki āine merī assal strī se milkar vah us pār vahām calā gayā hai, jahām kiś bhī cīz ke bāre merī yah kah saknā kaṭhin hai ki vah hai? yā nahīm hai? yā hai, magar nahīm bhī hai? yā na hai aur na nahīm bhī hai? usne apne bābū ke pret ko mukti dilā dī hai, āp bhī mokṣa pā gayā hai aur uske parivār merī, birādarī merī jo bhī bace hue horiṅge, unkā bhī uddhār karā gayā hai.

38 “Sūrū-śurū merī jab kuch nahīm ṭhahrā duniyā merī tab vah akelā ṭhahrā aur uske lie bhī akelāpan bardāśt karnā kaṭhin-jaisā ho gayā ṭhahrā. dūsrā koī na hone se uske lie yah mānnā tak kaṭhin ho gayā ṭhahrā ki maim hūm karke. kahne ko vah kāfī zor-zor se kaṭhā rahā ki maim hūm, maim hūm. isī māre duniyā merī sabhī log āj tak apne ko maim nām se hī pukārte hairī. lekin jab koī dūsrā thā hī nahīm, to kaun jo uskī bāt suntā aur kaun jo ye kaṭhā ki hām bhaiyā, tū hai. to phir usne apnī hī jaisī ek aurat banāyī. aurat ke hone se hī vah huā. islie āj talak uskī nazar merī to aurat hī baṭī hai. to vah pahlā-pahlā dūsrā asal merī ‘dūsrī’ thā nā. jahām ham jā rahe hairī vahām usī dūsrī kī pūjā kī jāī hai.”

Moreover, no matter the topic, any discourse in *Hariya* that looks serious, academic, or philosophical is perceived as uninteresting, inappropriate, and boring. Thus Piruli Kaiñja's narration is systematically interrupted each time she tries to provide a philosophical explanation of the events that occurred during their journey in the Himalaya. This is the case, for example, when she explains to the community members how she was trying to make Hariya understand the impermanent nature of the "self", reproducing a kind of précis of the Buddhist philosophy:

"I explained to him that the world is ever-changing and we are ever-changing. You weren't yesterday what you are today, and what you are today you won't be tomorrow. You keep calling yourself 'I', but that 'I' is hardly just one entity. One moment it is one thing, the next it's another. In always becoming something else, you can also become that which you were before. The world changes every moment and so does man. Therefore, in neither is there an eternal essence. [ . . . ]"

It does not need saying that, bored and irritated by Piruli Kainja's summary of Buddhist philosophy, we requested her to please get on with the story.<sup>39</sup> (113–114/94)

Any fundamental issue of identity or any serious attempt at explaining the truth is thus systematically rejected by the members of the community. This constant discrepancy between the readers' expectations that ontological questions will be given an answer and the absurdity with which these questions are ultimately treated provides the novel its deeply satirical tone. The incredible story of Hariya, which abounds in philosophical considerations—as very few other contemporary stories do—turns out to be an inexhaustible parody of the philosophical and religious debates of the subcontinent, be they attached to Buddhist, Hinduist, or Orientalist doctrines:

[Lama Namyang No, to Hariya:] "This piece of garbage written by Moore Saheb you have with you—he was a member of one of London's secret societies. All the Moores-Hoores in that society had one and only one occupation: they made up this Goomalling teertha and wrote about it wherever

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39 "Maimne use samjhāyā ki duniyā bhī barābar badaltī rahtī hai aur ham bhī barābar badalte rahte haiñ. tum āj jaise ho vaise kal nahīñ the aur kal jaise ho jāoge vaise āj nahīñ ho. tum apne ko 'maim' to kahte cale jāte ho, magar yah 'maim' hameśā ek-jaisā thoṛī rahtā hai. vah to pal meri rattī, pal meri māśā ho jātā hai. badalkar kuch aur banne meri tum vah bhī ban hī sakne vāle thāhre jo tum bahut pahle kabhī the. duniyā kṣaṇ-kṣaṇ badaltī hai aur insān bhī. islie donoñ meri koī sār-jaisā hai nahīñ. [ . . . ]" / kahnā na hogā ki pirulī kainjā ke bauddh-darśan ke is saṃskaraṇ par hamārī birādarī ne ūbkar aur khījkar kahāñ āge sunāye jāne kī māñg kī.

## The Elusive Double

they could in order to confuse and make fun of other scholars and to mock India and Tibet.”<sup>40</sup> (119/98)

In the end (142), the double is the driving force that allows the protagonist to reach liberation for some or madness for others. Or neither one nor the other. . .

### 4 Comparing the two novels and their representation of India

Both texts use the pretext of the Other, a form of double, to narrate the quest for a goal that ultimately eludes its protagonists, Hariya in one case, Roux in the other. The successive phases of the narrative eventually lead to the loss of the initial protagonist, whether he has disappeared into the enigmatic Other of Goomalling somewhere in the Himalaya (in the case of *Hariya*) or whether the Other has been substituted for him (in the case of *Nocturne*). In both cases, the narrative itself is paramount. It is the telling of this quest that provides its meaning, its *raison d’être*. This observation echoes Atul’s point of view, which nearly concludes *Hariya*: “a story [can] not exist without perplexity and our community [can] not exist without stories”<sup>41</sup> (154/127). But, unlike in modern narratives, the final result leaves room for doubt and lacks unambiguous interpretation. After a linear narrative beginning, rather classic in its form, each of the two texts uses the crisis and the journey that follows (including its preparatory phase in *Hariya*) to completely destabilise the persona of the traveller, his certainties, his postulated identity. Although the literary context of her essay is different, the following remark by Cécile Kovacsazy perfectly fits the model we have seen in *Nocturne* and *Hariya*:

The look-alike (*le sosie*) involves moments of surprise and then of *recognition*, moments of suspension of meaning and then acceptance of identity that allows for openness. The appearance of Sosie suddenly introduces a wedge (*une faille*) and triggers a crisis phenomenon. The figure allows to break an established narrative order, to renounce the postulate of unicity and to bring about an open literature.<sup>42</sup>

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40 “Ye jis mūr sāhab kā likhā huā kūrā tum sāth lā rahe ho vah landan kī ek khufiyā sosāyī kā member thā. is sosāyī meṁ jitne bhī mūr-hūr the unkā ek hī kām ṭhahrā ki apne man se ek gūmālīng tīrth garh do aur uske bāre meṁ yahām-vahām likh-likhkar dūsre vidvānoṁ ko cakkār meṁ ḍālne kā aur bhārat-tibbat ko badnām karne kā sukh lūṭo.”

41 Hairānī ke binā kahānī nahīm hotī hai aur kahānī ke binā birādarī nahīm hotī hai.

42 My translation. Original: “Le sosie implique les moments de surprise puis de reconnaissance, moments de suspension du sens puis d’acception d’identité qui permet l’ouverture. L’apparition de Sosie introduit brusquement une faille et enclenche un phénomène de crise. La figure permet de casser un ordre narratif établi, de renoncer au postulat de l’unicité et d’amener à une littérature ouverte” (Kovacsazy 2012: 195).

Regardless of the differences between the two novels, in the end, in postmodern fictions it is the *telling* of the quest—the way it is told and the interpretations that are made of it—that matters, much more than the facts.

In relation to the representation of India, it can be extrapolated from *Nocturne* that India symbolises for Tabucchi both an attractive and repulsive destination. But concrete, real, contemporary India seems to remain elusive for him (“India is mysterious by definition”, 33), even if such reductive statements subsequently disappear in the novel.<sup>43</sup> It is essentially through the filter of the colonial past, of archives in libraries, of its ghosts too, that India is deciphered and interpreted. As Wren-Owens rightly notes, “[r]eflections on empire and postcoloniality are an important element of the Italian hypotext, as the novel represents a romanticised image of empire: far-off, distant, and embodied through the appearance of a conquistador in a dream encounter”.<sup>44</sup> Let us take this “conquistador” (whom we already met in section 3.1) as an illustration of the encounter between India and the Italian author. Everything related to this chapter of *Nocturne* evokes the strong presence of the Portuguese past (we know how much Portugal, its history, and its literature meant to Tabucchi): the Portuguese monastery in Goa, where the narrator hopes to get fresh information about Xavier, and where he has come for his archival research, looking for old chronicles; the old mad man who introduces himself, in the narrator’s dream (or, rather, nightmare), as “Afonso de Albuquerque, Viceroy of the Indies” (58); the affirmation of the man who says that Xavier is but a ghost; and his transformation in “Pied Piper of Hamelin”, kicking a dead mouse (60). As the saying goes, for Tabucchi, *Dillī abhī dūr hai!*

What about Joshi’s novel and its representation of India? The West is of course very present, as the two key moments of the story are linked, on the one hand, to Australia (Goomalling and Hariya’s double) and, on the other, to the British colonial past (John Moore’s account found by Harry Smith). However, the journey undertaken by Hariya with Piruli Kaiñja in the Himalaya is precisely the opportunity to travel through regions that are not clearly mapped, and therefore outside the political and symbolic power exercised by the former British empire, in a mysterious space on the border between India and Tibet (this mysterious place might also allude to mystical Shambhala, of course). A place from which one does not return exactly the same. . . or from which one simply does not return.

As we did with *Nocturne*, let us briefly return to our analysis of *Hariya*. This episode, which corresponds to the account of John Moore’s journey to Goomalling, is much longer than the chapter on the Portuguese monastery in *Nocturne*. We will therefore limit ourselves to pointing out that the picture that emerges from this

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43 In Millner’s words: “L’Inde n’est jamais un objet réel de la narration, mais une forme d’absence sur laquelle se détachent les faibles traces de la quête” (2007: sec. 12).

44 Wren-Owens 2020: 496.

description is much more complex, the characters much more numerous, and the interrelations between the two worlds (India and Europe) much more diversified than in *Nocturne*. Nevertheless, while there is question of “tantric siddhis” living on the Indo-Tibetan border (97), information on the route to be taken and the meaning of “gūmāliṅg” is mainly provided by British explorers and missionaries. It is Captain Meredith who provides John Moore with the most explanation . . . even though it turns out later that the captain has died a long time ago and that his remains lie in Hansi—here too, ghosts of the colonial past haunt India! The colonial presence is thus very real, as in Tabucchi’s novel. But unlike in Tabucchi, the scene described in this “Goomalling gatha”, as the narrator calls it (105), is not a nightmare. In Joshi’s text, what prevails is the great joke behind the serious explanations provided by the European travellers. A great joke that echoes the philosophy of “the followers of the Goomalling sect”, according to whom (says Reverend William Black to John Moore) “the only reason this false world seems so real is because it is an elaborate joke made up by the Supreme Being”<sup>45</sup> (104/87).

## 5 Concluding remarks

Whatever perspective is adopted in contemporary writings, India seems to represent a place that eludes ready-made answers and suspends any formatted identity. Both novels adopt a fairly similar narrative development, beginning with a linear and assertive narrative, before shifting to a format dominated by multiple voices and uncertainty. In both cases, too, a *woman* plays a crucial role in the outcome of the story: it is a woman who narrates, or has the narrator narrate, the “disappearance” of the initial character.<sup>46</sup> And in both cases, the notion of *reflection* is crucial: it is associated with photography in *Nocturne* and implies showing only a part or an aspect of the reality while hiding the others (the “*morceaux choisis*”). In *Hariya*, it refers to the mirror, both as a way to see one’s double and as the path to the other side of reality, with all the risks this involves. Not to forget, of course, the television screen—which is mentioned in the very first lines of the novel, as well as in the concluding paragraphs—that captures the attention of the members of the community and makes them forget the story of their “herculean” Hariya.

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45 “Gūmāliṅg viśvāsī sampradāy ke anusār yah mithyā jagat sārvaṅ islie lagtā hai ki yah param sattā kā racā huā ek pecidā mazāk hai.”

46 This situation—a woman facing a character and his double—strangely echoes a similar pattern in some works of the famous Tamil writer “Mauni” (S. Mani, 1907–1985): “Mauni sometimes complicated the trope in another direction, introducing a third character who witnesses the two members of the double, who constructs their identity in her gaze, and who can, in her reflections, comment on its significance” (Ganeri 2012: 183). My thanks to Leticia Ibanez for pointing this out.

What differs between Joshi's approach and Tabucchi's is the way in which India—its scenes and its philosophies—is described. Tabucchi's novel is limited to a few major Indian concepts—those that have come down to us, in Europe, through the filter of Western writers and travellers (such as Marco Polo, Francesco Saverio, E. M. Forster, Henri Michaux, Hermann Hesse, Romain Roland, Alberto Moravia, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, to name some of the writers Tabucchi mentions in *Viaggi e altri viaggi*). The surface of the Indian landscape seems too difficult to pierce: there are too many odours, too much darkness, too many pasts, too many detours. . . the Western self gets lost. On the other hand, Joshi's novel offers an anthology of multicultural references, whether linguistic (with the presence of local Kumaoni expressions, but primarily through the gorgeous puns on "Goomalling"), philosophical (Vedantic, Buddhist, Tantric, etc.), or politico-historical (Indian politics, Marxism, Orientalism, etc.). In Joshi's case, the readings are truly plural and open. The multiplicity of the interpretations on Hariya's experience thus illustrates the plurality of perceptions at work in India, from the rejection of the Western world (by the pandit Shastri) to the fascination it can exert on others (Atul, Dr Nilambar), not to mention the intermediate and fluctuating opinion of most of the other characters. Joshi's *Hariya* certainly supports Ganeri's statement that, "[i]n the global circulation of ideas, India has always been a major player, and the combination of 'internal pluralism' and 'external receptivity' has fashioned for India a 'spacious and assimilative Indian identity'".<sup>47</sup>

This chapter will end here. But an additional, more personal interpretation of its author's academic journey and the role that the recipient of this volume may have played in it could just as easily be applied to this surprising story of doubles.

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<sup>47</sup> Ganeri 2012: 3, in part quoting Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian* (2005), p. 346.

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