Metamodernism in Post-Millennial Hindi Literature: Geet Chaturvedi’s “Gomūtr”

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<td>This master’s thesis will examine a piece of recent Hindi literature, Geet Chaturvedi’s novella “Gomūtr”, through the theoretical framework of metamodernism. The metamodern characteristics argued for in the first part of the analysis have to do with issues of truth, belief and ontology. It will be argued that the novella makes a demand for the appreciation of affective and personal truth regardless of an event’s ontological status or absolute truth value. Intertextuality is looked at as a sign of human interconnectedness instead of an obstacle to making judgements on authenticity. The second part will analyze the concept of advait (‘nondualism’) as a central metamodern, and specifically South Asian, motive; it encompasses a discussion within the story on problems in a society concerning the distribution of knowledge and power on the one hand, and intersubjectivity on the other.</td>
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1. Introduction

The project that became this thesis grew out of a personal wish to find out more about the current Hindi literary scene. Apart from a handful of names, I wasn’t even aware of a lot of writers from about the 1980’s to the present. The task was not easy. A search through a sample of university curricula showed me that it is not just at my university, but at universities both in India and abroad that courses on Hindi literature mainly introduce earlier 20th century classics, many times omitting recent works altogether. Very little academic research is being done on Hindi literature, and even less on recent writers. From my own experience, it is not easy to find articles on contemporary Hindi literature on Indian news media, even in Hindi.

One obvious reason for this inaccessibility could be the enduring prestige of English as the language of the educated elite, and the corresponding position of Hindi as a language of the poorer, less educated — the language maybe of Bollywood cinema, but not of high class literature. Geet Chaturvedi writes about this attitude:

I worked for twelve years in the largest media house of this country which publishes the largest circulated Hindi daily, and I have seen it there, too. The employees were asked repeatedly to write all communication, either in-house or external, in English. The reason? It will improve the company’s brand image. I still remember the words: ‘Although we produce a Hindi newspaper, we don’t work in Hindi because we don’t want to encourage the “Hindi psyche”. What we communicate is what we think. We want our people to think in English, but make a product that is in Hindi.’ … One doesn’t find Hindi book reviews even in Hindi newspapers. ... The Hindi papers publish reviews of English books only because ‘the stuff in Hindi is not good’ (Chaturvedi 2017).

Still, there are ambitious young writers who choose to write in Hindi, and there is an enthusiastic and lively literature blog scene in Hindi (where many contributors are writers themselves). The several interconnected issues concerning the situation of Hindi and Hindi literature — language attitudes and the publishing scene, to take just two examples — would make interesting and important topics for future research.

This thesis does not attempt to give any kind of complete picture of the current situation. The choice of author for this particular study was made purely out of personal interest. Chaturvedi’s novellas have not, as yet, and as far as I am aware,
been translated into any other language², and there have not been any other academic studies done on his work.

My choice for a theoretical framework came about during the course of my reading. Chaturvedi is using a lot of devices in his writing which have been defined as typical of postmodernism (and of modernism to a lesser, or less radical extent): metafiction, a heavy amount of intertextual reference, and ontological play. Yet, all the stories in *Pink Slip Daidi* (of which “Gomūtr” is one) engage in social commentary that centers on the description of a fragmented corporate society, one of rivalries, competition, and of individuals who have been left out, either of love, knowledge, or of a means to exercise meaningful agency. Metamodernism is an analytical framework that endeavours to find in post-postmodern thinking and art an enduring wish for truth, togetherness and holism in the present age that is still very much postmodern, too: an age of no absolute truths, of fragmentation, polarization, and even of post truth.

Metamodernism has thus far been studied mainly with regard to Western literature. With this study, I aim to show that it is just as relevant and workable on this example of contemporary South Asian literature that describes a fictional, globalizing urban India during the financial crisis of the late 2000’s. Liberal market economy — a central topic of the novella “Gomūtr” — has often been described as a perfect example of a postmodern system, with its free competition with products, ideas and images. The protagonist of the novella notices that agency and truth, and consequently success, seem to reside with those with knowledge and power — a very postmodern conception of truth. And, when he as a consumer makes a choice, he alone has to bear the responsibility of his mistakes. Economic savvy may not consist of eternal truths, but that knowledge seems essential for survival for the protagonist of the novella. My analysis will focus in particular on the questions of truth and knowledge, and on their intersubjective nature — in other words, the metamodern thematics of truth and reality, and of community.

The theoretical framework of metamodernism will be introduced more thoroughly in Chapter Three, and my methodology and general research questions in Chapter Four. In the following Chapter Two I will give an overview of modernism and

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² Anita Gopalan received the PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant in 2016 to translate Chaturvedi’s novella “Simsim”; at the time of writing, it is yet to be published.
postmodernism in Hindi literature in the light of previous research, and refer to some points of convergence with the present study. Modern and postmodern features in Hindi literature, for Chaturvedi (well-versed in world literature and Indian traditions alike) and writers that came before him, are a mixture of indigenous and international influences. One important aim for this study is to look for metamodern characteristics that arise from the Indian context, yet speak somehow the same language of metamodernism.

As a brief note on diacritics, I will not use any diacritics for names of people, institutions and such that have a generally recognized English spelling. With frequently occurring words, I will use diacritics for the first instances (and if used in a direct quotation), after which mention will be made of their subsequent omission. Direct quotations from Hindi will be fully transliterated. As a deviation from standard transliteration, the combination long vocal + nasal will be marked $V + \text{ṁ}^2$ (this deviation is due to technical difficulties). All English translations of the novella “Gomūtr” are my own.

2. Contextualization

2.1 The author: Geet Chaturvedi

Geet Chaturvedi is a young writer (born 1977) currently residing in Bhopal, Central India. He has so far published poetry and short stories; among them are two poetry collections, Ālāp mē Girah (2010) and Nyūnatam Maï (2017), and two collections of novellas, Sāvant Ānṭī kī Larkiyāṁ (2010) and Pink Slip Ḍaiḍī (2010). He has won the Bharat Bhushan Agrawal Award (2007) for his poetry, and the Krishna Pratap Katha Samman (2014) for the collection of novellas Pink Slip Ḍaiḍī. He has translated into Hindi poetry by Adam Zagajewski, Czesław Miłosz, Eduardo Chirinos, Federico García Lorca, Pablo Neruda, Adonis, Iman Mersal, Dunya Mikhail, and Bei Dao (Bera & Chaturvedi 2016).

\[\text{In this, I am following McGregor; see McGregor, R. S., editor (1993). The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.}\]

\[\text{All the works listed here have been published by Rajkamal Prakashan.}\]
When asked about the evolution of his own writing, he commented:

We are living in difficult times. Globalisation, identity politics, estrangement, alienation, and liberal market economy — they all have added a certain amount of pressure to the repertoire of castelist and communalistic aspects of Indian society. I don't find social realism or a direct realism to be an adequate tool to address these. For the past 5-6 years, I have been practicing Meta-Reality. It is stylistically metaphorical reality and philosophically metaphysical reality (Bera & Chaturvedi 2016).

2.2 The novella: “Gomūtr”

“Gomūtr” (“Cow’s Urine”; hereafter “Gomutr”) is a long short story (novella, or lambī kahānī in Hindi, eighty-six pages in length) from 2008; it is one of three novellas (together with “Simsim” and “Pink Slip Ḍaṇḍī”) published as Chaturvedi’s second collection of novellas Pink Slip Ḍaṇḍī in 2010. It is a story — narrated in first person by an unnamed protagonist — about a youngish middle-class man who lands himself in financial trouble that causes him shame and frustration. He would like to save his reputation and strike the market back, but he feels he doesn’t have the intellectual means or social position necessary to do so. He feels free market economy is a game that is being played in a language that he doesn’t understand, and that he is being dragged into it by force and trickery. He has been thinking about non-dualism (advait, which in India has been a popular religious-philosophical idea about the nature of the universe), which in his everyday world seems to always be described in terms of opposites, that nevertheless are supposed to be somehow “the same”. He gets turned from a king (as in “customer is king”) into a subject (when the bank wants its money), and everything that happens to him seems to him to be out of his control.

The main characters in the story are the protagonist, his (unnamed) wife (they have a young daughter, too), his boss that he calls Bābā, and his work colleagues (whom he always refers to en masse). The protagonist works in a construction company, where his boss is suffering from an identity crisis as a result of having abandoned a youthful socialist ideology. The novella is relatively scarce in plot: for a large part it consists of the protagonist’s philosophical and mundane ruminations on his money troubles, and the society and people around him. He recounts in flashback-mode how he acquired a credit card from a bank representative who came to do business at his
workplace, and how he was subsequently drawn to the stock market and over-spending. At some point he started to neglect his credit card bills, and it turns out that he has been trying to hide from the bank in various silly ways. In real time, the bank manages to get into his home by sending representatives who initially masquerade as the Tele Sky Shop and tell him he has won a washing machine.

Within the story there are also extensive accounts of dreams — most significantly the one where the protagonist meets Sant Gyaneshwar (on this, see 5.1.1). There are also hallucinatory-like episodes: most central is the train rebellion, where the protagonist manages to arouse a mob on his way home to revolt against the financial exploitation of the weak; it ends in a blood bath and the appearance of the Finance Minister, who gives the protagonist a death sentence for his actions. On another trip home he is (supposedly; this general questionability of events will be addressed in my analysis) rounded by a TV candid camera crew who start to mock his stupidity and poverty. One more important incident, that is told as a flashback, and which no one in the story believes, is the one where the protagonist goes to buy his wife an expensive watch that turns into a worm on his way home. The story ends with his death, which happens according to his previous theorizing; this death can be regarded as real or symbolic, and it will be discussed in the analysis part. At the end there is a chapter entitled “Post Script”, written in cursive, that reads like a suicide note or a final manifesto that encapsulates his theories.

2.3 Modernism and postmodernism in Hindi literature

In this section, I will take a brief look at modernist and postmodernist tendencies that have been discussed with regard to Hindi literature. The discussion on Western influence is particularly relevant to my analysis of metamodern characteristics: Geet Chaturvedi is known for his well-versedness in modern and postmodern world literature, and his writing is, in the age of globalization, enmeshed in global and indigenous thematics (most obviously in the case of “Gomutr”, liberal market economy and the concept of advait, respectively). Likewise, the dialectic between realism and authenticity on the one hand, and philosophical metacommentary on the other, as has been discussed in conjunction with Agyeya’s short stories and naī kahānī (see later in this section), shares commonalities with Chaturvedi’s work,
including “Gomutr” where the protagonist’s ruminations on the nature of existence add a philosophical metalevel to the story.

In Hindi, the terms ādhunik and ādhuniktā (‘modern’ and ‘modernity’) are commonly used to refer to a broader cultural-political time period extending from circa the 1850’s (the intensification of British colonial influence in India) to the present; according to this periodization, ‘modern’ Hindi literature encompasses the first writing in the novel format during the late 19th century (such as Devaki Nandan Khatri’s epic fantasy Chandrkāntā, published in 1888, which is generally recognized as the first novel in Hindi) and the social realism of Premchand (alternatively referred to as pragativād, or ‘Progressivism’). The derivative ādhuniktāvād (‘modernism’) is hardly used at all, not even to distinguish between artistic modernism and a more general social condition, as is regularly done in the West (‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’, respectively). The term uttar-ādhuniktāvād is however quite widely used in common parlance to denote postmodernism. This is a Pan-Indian phenomenon: Dharwadker notes (2008: 143) that “the Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature begins chronologically with Michael Madhusudan Dutt (born in 1824) and ends with Sunetra Gupta (born in 1965)”.

Hindi prose fiction possessing similar characteristics to Western forms of literary modernism is generally regarded as to have had its first proponents in writers such as S.H. Vatsyayan (Agyeya) (1911-1987) and Jainendra Kumar (1905-1988). In the wake of the popularity of the interior monologue in European modernist literature, Hindi fiction had its first notable first-person narrators in Jainendra’s Sunīṭā (1935) and Tyāgpatr (1937), and Agyeya’s Shekhar: Ek Jīvnī (1941, 1944). It was an unprecedented turn to the interior of a character: Govind stresses that the “grammatical” use of first person came combined with narration that was “suffused with a desperate and extended sense of affect” (Govind 2012: 61). Themes such as nationalism and political revolutionalism were treated through relationship and internal perspectives (ibid. 65).

These writers were familiar with Western modernism, and were inspired by it. Agyeya himself writes (in his introduction to Shekhar, 1944) about his admiration for Luigi Pirandello, particularly his classic of metatheatre, Six Characters in Search of an Author (Govind 2012: 74). Agyeya’s own short stories display metafictive
characteristics (typical for both modernism and postmodernism) in the form of narrators ruminating on the writing process, the aim of it, and on being a writer (see Orsini 2012). The stories frequently involve the reader in this, too, by “commenting on the reader’s experience and expectations of the story” and “how the stories ought to be read” (Orsini 2012: 104-5). According to Orsini, Agyeya used the short story “form as an aide à penser, as a way for readers to ‘think through’ what the short story form entails and who a writer is” (ibid. 123). Moreover, Orsini notes that these issues, and other problems that the protagonists in these stories face, are “presented ... with a great deal of irony” that “destabilizes meaning and suggests different possible stances toward the same issue or the same character” (ibid. 122-3).

Agyeya’s short stories have a lot in common with naï kahānī (hereafter nai kahani), or new story, which was a loose literary movement that flourished particularly from the late 1950’s to the early 1960’s, and is most commonly connected to writers such as Mohan Rakesh, Bhisham Sahni, Nirmal Verma, Rajendra Yadav, Kamleshwar, and Amarkant (although some, particularly Nirmal Verma, didn’t themselves identify with the movement). These similarities and differences have been analyzed by, for example, Damsteegt (1986). He claims that whereas “authenticity (the author writes about the areas of life of which he has personal experience) ... and realism” are important characteristics of nai kahani, “realism is not a matter of primary importance in Ajneya’s philosophical stories” (Damsteegt 1986: 217, 225). The protagonist of Agyeya’s “Alikhit Kahānī” famously states:

\[ Jo kahānī keval kahānī- bhar hoṭī hai, use aise likhnā kī vah sac jān parē, sugam hotā hai. Kintu jo kahānī jīvan kī kisī pragārḥh rahasyamay satya ko dikhāne ke lie likhī jāy, use aīsā rūp denā kathīn nahōn, asambhav hī hai. Jīvan ke satya chīpe rahnā hī pasand karte haṅ, pratyakṣa nahiṅ hotē. (To write a story that is only a story in a way that seems truthful is easy. But to give shape to a story written in order to show a complex, mysterious truth of life is not only difficult but impossible. Truths of life prefer to remain hidden, they do not come out in the open.) (Agyeya 1934; 1994: 232; translated by Orsini 2012: 104) \]

Damsteegt proposes (1986: 225-6), that Agyeya’s idea of realism as not reflecting a deeper truth but rather the misery of everyday existence, is a reaction to Progressivism and the social realism depicted in those stories. In the end, however, he notes that nai kahani authors, too, “want their stories to suggest a deeper meaning” “by means of [a] realistic story” (ibid. 226, 217).
The central themes and techniques of nai kahani, as they have been analyzed by Meisig⁴, reveal an affinity with Western modernism’s interest in interiority. He argues, first of all, for less importance on plot: instead, the stories characteristically create “atmosphere”, where “physical sensations are depicted in great detail but severed ... from any meanings: thus characters never know why they feel what they are feeling ... and experience a sense of confusion” (Orsini 1998: 84). Related to this, “linear time is [often] abandoned in favour of psychological time” (ibid. 84). Accompanying this effort at authentic depiction, there can be found a modernist focus on textuality as well: Meisig identifies a “high suggestiveness” in the use of “leitmotifs and key-words” (ibid. 85). Additionally, and in contrast to earlier social realism (Premchand, for example), the role of the writer is no longer that of a “path-finder or moral guide/preceptor ... but [of] an observer, a reporter” (ibid. 85). However, it is important to remember that the writers associated with nai kahani were different from one another. Madhu Singh rightly observes, that Bhisham Sahni’s focus was more on the “material and physical realities of life”, and thus he was closer to Premchand’s social realism; Nirmal Verma, on the other hand, preferred to explore experientiality and the inner workings of the mind (Singh 2016: 329).

Roadarmel singled out “alienation” as the defining characteristic of nai kahani in his 1969 dissertation “The Theme of Alienation in the Modern Hindi Short Story”. According to Mani, Roadarmel also “stresses” that nai kahani works often offer “self-reliance” as a solution to alienation, instead of finding “contentment and solace” in traditional forms of sociality, such as the joint family (Mani 2012: 16).

Indeed, the wider cultural milieu in which nai kahani arose was one where “social patterns” were changing, particularly as a result of urbanization, and there was an increased availability of Western ideas (de Bruijn 2017: 57). De Bruijn suggests, that these fast occurring changes “made the nationalist, Gandhian idealism of Premchand, the socialism of the progressive writers or the escapist introversion of Ajneya, Jainendra Kumar and others irrelevant” (ibid. 57). Instead, nai kahani wanted to give voice to new and contemporary identities, and the anxieties and contradictions that were born in a changed environment. De Bruijn’s assessment echoes that of

⁴Meisig, Konrad. Erzähltechniken der Nayī Kahānī: die Neue Erzählung der Hindi-Literatur. Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996. Here I am quoting Orsini’s review (1998) of Meisig’s work, the German original being unavailable to me.
Damsteegt’s above, in that he, too, stresses an avoidance within nai kahani for a “retreat into idealism”, and an authenticity that, however, is a reflection of a radically different social environment from the one depicted by previous generations of writers (ibid. 57).

Many of the nai kahani writers had spent time abroad, and received criticism for too much Western influence. For de Bruijn it is clear that the nai kahani writers found the (Western) modernist themes of “disenchantment and loss of moral values” and the description of personal “emotions and experiences” fruitful for their own project of writing about an authentic, contemporary India (De Bruijn 2017: 60).

Writer and academic Krishna Baldev Vaid, too, reminds his — and others’ — critics⁵ that these so-called Western modernist influences (such as the theme of alienation), are, even historically speaking, not so foreign after all. It is, in my personal assessment, a sharp-sighted argument in favour of not totally discarding the idea of a universal humanism (something that incidentally metamodernism, too, stands for), that is worth quoting at length:

To read these [Vaid’s own] novels disparagingly in the alien light of modernism and existentialism is to lose sight of the fact of our own traditions in which alienation — our own name for it is virakti or vairāgya — is an inevitable part of the sādhana that may or may not lead to self-integration and enlightenment. Our sufis and bhaktas went through phases and degrees of alienation before they became sufis and bhaktas. Our poetic literature, in more than one language, is rich with examples of illumination that is preceded by intense alienation. We, in India, I repeat, have a hallowed tradition of metaphysical alienation and exilic states of mind enshrined in our great epics, our myths and legends, our great devotional poetry, our philosophical systems and our fourfold phases or ashrams of human life. ... These ideas may not be operative now on the scale they were in traditional times, but they are still part of the samskāras, the inner stream of the consciousness, of a vast majority of Indians. Arjuna, when he was assailed by paralyzing doubts and self-doubt in the battle field of Kurukṣetra, was experiencing a profound variety of alienation. The great response he evoked from Kṛṣṇa, in the form of the Bhagavad Gītā, in its essence is a philosophy of the sublimation and transcendence of alienation and the exilic states of mind through the noble and difficult doctrine of nīskāmakarma, anāsakti, non-attachment. The concept of jīvanmukta — someone who is in the world but not of the world — is the noblest form of alienation. In my representation of the alienated Indian in the contemporary text, I am as aware of the Indian tradition as I am of the Western concept of alienation (Vaid 2017: 105-6).

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Postmodernism has been very little studied in terms of Hindi fiction. Veronica Ghirardi has found postmodern traits in Manohar Shyam Joshi’s Ṭṭā Profesar (2008), Mridula Garg’s Kaṭhgulāb (2013), and Krishna Baldev Vaid’s Ek Naukrānī kī Ḍāyrī (2014), that all deal with the thematics of writing. She argues that these three works all speak for “the impossibility of representing a monolithic reality or indisputable truth” (Ghirardi 2017: 11). Instead, writing is optimistically identified as an important device for “self-realisation” (Garg) and self-understanding (Vaid), whereas the protagonist of Joshi’s novel remains disillusioned at his failure in capturing the true essence of outer reality in words (ibid. 11, 5). In conclusion, Ghirardi cautiously suggests this “self-reflexive dimension” as a “possible postmodern clue” (ibid. 11).

Laura Brueck (2017) and Alessandra Consolaro (2011) have studied postmodern elements in recent Hindi literature about dalits. Brueck proposes the term ‘postrealism’ (mixing realism and postmodern metafiction) to describe Uday Prakash’s “Mohandās” and Ajay Navaria’s “Uttar Kathā” (entitled “Hello, Premchand!” in the translation by Brueck). Consolaro, too, analyzes metatextual elements in “Mohandās”, arguing for a postmodernism that possesses strong postcolonial (expressing a marked collective dimension in the rewriting of history) and South Asian elements (“time as a spiral-like process” where “the collective or cosmic value of acts of rebellion inspired by a sense of justice and truth, remain[s] and reappear[s] from age to age” ) (Consolaro 2011: 14). She also argues that the novella is “calling for an alternative canon in Hindi literature, resisting the mainstream”, in that the story places characters with names of unjustly forgotten writers from the past, namely Gajanand Madhav Muktibodh, Shamsher Bahadur Singh, and Harishankar Parsai, as characters who are “actively engaged in helping the protagonist” (ibid. 15, 17). In the same article, Consolaro argues for a similar agenda in Prakash’s novel Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī (2001).

Based on this short review of previous research on Hindi modernism and postmodernism, it can be observed that this discussion, very prominently, appears as a dialectic between theoretical articulations that have been born in the European / North American context and indigenous Indian thematics, and their possible/impossible compatibility. I argue, that in the case of the writers discussed here, this approach is justified, since they have clearly drawn inspiration from various
international influences. In this respect, my analysis on Chaturvedi’s work continues a similar tradition: I will be looking at an author who has been extensively inspired by different literatures of the world. Furthermore, I think a cautious search for common human themes (regardless of where a theory is born) is also warranted. The framework of metamodernism will reveal itself as illuminating in the context of the novella under analysis; likewise the theory will be enriched by its application on the South Asian concept of non-dualism (advait).

3. Theoretical framework for this study

3.1 What is metamodernism?

Metamodernism is a word that has been used in different contexts — including literary studies — at least since the 1970’s. This thesis takes up the concept as it was presented by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their 2010 essay “Notes on Metamodernism”. Their call to debate, in turn, is part of a larger discussion about the possible death, or dying out, of postmodernism, which has been going on (with ever increasing intensity) since the late 1980’s. Within literary studies, a significant criticism towards postmodernism has had to do with its supposed moral relativism and a certain attitude of apathy as a result of holding on to too much of a non-referential, linguistically mediated, and hence hopelessly fragmented view of reality. Vermeulen and van den Akker define metamodernism as a “structure of feeling” (after Raymond Williams’s term; see van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017: 6-8) that they describe as an “oscillation” between modern and postmodern ideas (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010: 5; van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017: 11). It is exemplified by a human being who, on the one hand, is reaching towards a possibility of absolute knowledge, sincerity, human connectedness, myth or utopia — and thus towards ideas not just of modernism, but earlier ones, like those of Realism and Romanticism as well (see Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010, 2015; van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017). On the other hand, he/she is not being able to ignore the tenets of the linguistic turn and postmodernism that spoke (and still speak) of a fragmented and fragmenting reality constructed via
language, and the impossibility of ultimate knowledge or unmediated self-identity. Metamodernism, according to Vermeulen and van den Akker, is a “pendulum” that swings “between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment” (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010: 6, 2). It is not intended as a hybrid that would, first and foremost, seek to pass over contradictions, or to “combine the ‘best of both worlds’” (van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017: 11). Rather, its essence “should ... be conceived of as a ‘both-neither’ dynamic”: it is “an informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism” that bounces indefinitely “between naïveté and knowingness, ... unity and plurality, ... purity and ambiguity” (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010: 5-6). Out of this dynamic, metamodernism even endeavours to produce new or alternative ways of looking at things, some of which will be presented in this study. These include, for example, the heightened importance of trust in New Sincerity (3.3.1), the possibilities offered by undecidability in historioplastic metafiction (3.3.2), and the suggestion offered in my own analysis to look at intertextuality as a sign of connectedness, instead of as an element that merely creates suspicion about authenticity (5.1.2).

3.2 A new dominant?

Vermeulen and van den Akker are eager to attribute the emergence of this metamodern sensibility to the current state of the globalized world with its financial, geopolitical and environmental uncertainties, and an urgency to find solutions to global problems (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010: 4-5). Gibbons has formulated metamodernism in literature as taking on “ethical, political, social and environmental commitments” (Gibbons 2015: 3). Van der Merwe phrases this as a shift in focus vis-à-vis postmodernism: metamodern literature commits itself to looking more closely at acting and feeling human beings in their environment, as opposed to a more classically postmodern, Foucauldian tendency to examine reality primarily as linguistically maintained (power) structures (van der Merwe 2017: 131).

However, there is disagreement about whether this “human turn” is enough to posit a new era that is truly after postmodernism. Bertens prefers to draw attention to a “postmodern humanism” that’s always been native within postmodern literature (see Bertens 2012). He points a finger at poststructuralism-oriented criticism itself for not
detecting ethical or human concerns in postmodern literature. As the principal parties responsible for the somewhat different reputation of postmodernism, he singles out the academic debate centered on poststructuralist, “anti-foundationalist” thinking — spearheaded by philosophers such as Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault — and the more general cultural critique on postmodernism/postmodernity exemplified by Frederic Jameson’s classic essay “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (1984), where he famously lists the “constitutive features of postmodernism” as “a new depthlessness”, “a consequent weakening of historicity” and a “waning of affect” (Jameson 1984: 54, 60; Bertens 2012: 304). Bertens (ibid. 304) agrees on a growing prominence of human and ethical concerns in contemporary literature, but by opting for the word postmodern to discuss this literature he signals that he doesn’t feel the need to replace postmodernism with a new term. However, as others have argued, there is more to metamodernism than just humanist thematics.

Joanette van der Merwe, in her 2017 dissertation “Notes towards a Metamodernist Aesthetic with Reference to Post-Millennial Literary Works”, looks at literature that she judges metamodern with the help of three theoretical frameworks that she argues possess metamodern qualities, namely affect theory, chaos theory and posthumanism. These theories are all “characterized by a renewed emphasis on ontology, a relational understanding of subjectivity, and the formulation of both ontology and subjectivity to respond to an ethical imperative” (van der Merwe 2017: ABSTRACT). She then goes on to suggest relationality as an “underlying organizing principle”, by which she means relationality both as a main defining aspect of each of the metamodern characteristics and theories, as well as relationality between these (ibid. 8). In conclusion, she proposes modernism as the “age of rationality”, postmodernism as that of “irony”, and metamodernism as the “age of relationality” (ibid. 227). Here she seems to be offering to metamodernism a status on a par with modernism and postmodernism. In fact, her formulation of the “underlying organizing principle”, though not explicitly stated, echoes that of McHale’s (1987) theory of the “dominant” (see McHale 1987: 6-11), where his central premise for distinguishing postmodernism from modernism is a change of dominant from an epistemological (van der Merwe’s “age of rationality”) to an ontological⁶ one (“age of irony”). Eve

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⁶ It should be noted that van der Merwe’s ontology as a metamodern characteristic is intended in a more traditional sense, as modes of being in the world, in distinction to Brian McHale’s description of
(2012), in contrast, argues, through a reading of recent novels by Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace, for the continuing preeminence of McHales’s ontological mode of multiple possible worlds; he argues that metamodernism cannot be regarded as a free-standing category (Eve 2012: 8). He does, however, find the concept useful in order to “productively unearth critically-neglected ethical tropes in postmodern fiction”, that is, “the ‘meta-modern aspects’ of a text that point towards a regulative utopianism” (ibid. 8).

I tend to concur with van der Merwe in that “[t]he terrain of metamodernism is still relatively uncharted, and it has not been sufficiently consolidated in academic or public discourse” (van der Merwe 2017: 284). As regards metamodernism as a possible new dominant that would be sufficiently different from postmodernism, the debate is ongoing, whether for example the oscillation between epistemology and (McHale’s) ontology would be enough to assert that we have decidedly moved away from a markedly ontological dominant to a relational one (as van der Merwe seems to suggest). This is a tricky question, additionally attested to by the fact that there is still disagreement on whether modernism is at all over. There exist several other current analyses on what post-postmodern literature, and art in general, has to offer; among them are digimodernism, cosmodernism/planetarity, postirony, altermodernism, and performatism. Most of them are more modest in their focus, and many have been discussed lately in conjunction with metamodernism.

3.3 The question of truth: three post-postmodern formulations

In this section I will discuss metamodern elements in literature as something that enables a reading that shifts focus away from a postmodern emphasis on a linguistically constructed world, where there are no absolute truths, to a world where there are other possibilities of negotiating truth. I will look at three formulations of this — New Sincerity, historioplastic metafiction, and Nealon’s post-postmodernism the “ontological dominant” (McHale 1987: 10) of the postmodern worldview, with ontology there referring to Pavel’s definition of it as description of a world, thus implying multiple possible worlds (see McHale 1987: 27).
— and see how they differ from each other and what they have in common. At this point it needs to be reiterated, that the debate on metamodernism is part of a larger discussion on post-postmodernism, and similar or related arguments are being presented, and reciprocally commented upon, in studies that employ different terminology. In my subsequent metamodern analysis, I will make use of ideas proposed by New Sincerity, Nealon’s post-postmodernism, and historioplastic metafiction.

3.3.1 New Sincerity and post-postmodern belief

The term New Sincerity has been used to “describe a significant wave of cultural production” that

[i]n popular usage ... tends to be regarded as a sturdy affirmation of nonironic values, as a renewed taking of responsibility for the meaning of one’s words, as a post-postmodern embrace of the ‘single-entendre principles’ invoked by [U.S. writer David Foster] Wallace in an essay now regularly cited as an early manifesto of the New Sincerity Movement7 (Kelly 2016: 198).

Kelly takes a look at the literary critical history of the term sincerity, and introduces Lionel Trilling’s 1972 work Sincerity and Authenticity as a “classic account” (Kelly 2016: 198). Trilling defines sincerity as “a congruence of avowal and actual feeling” (Trilling 2009 (1972): 2), and traces its literary history from Renaissance Humanism until the twentieth century. In sincerity, being truthful to one’s self is seen as a necessary step towards “ensuring truth to others”, whereas authenticity emphasizes personal truth, striving at accurate “self-expression rather than other-directed communication” (Kelly 2010: 132). The latter is something that Trilling associates with literary modernism, particularly with the “artist as aloof genius” (ibid. 132).

However, the events of the linguistic turn have caused that there cannot be a simple return to the old sincerity. Kelly finds this fact not debilitating, quite to the contrary: the very notion of sincerity gains an extra punch of urgency and intrigue from the postmodern legacy of doubt. As he puts it,

Among the things that theory has taught contemporary writers is that sincerity, expressed through language, can never be pure, ... [y]et this threat should not be

understood as the privation of sincerity, but as its very possibility. That sincerity can always be taken for manipulation shows us that sincerity depends not on purity but on trust and faith: if I or the other could be certain that I am being sincere, the notion of sincerity would lose its normative charge (Kelly 2016: 201).

Although Kelly does not refer to metamodernism, I argue that there is a clear indication of a metamodern oscillation between a will to truthfulness and doubt about it, and a “mood of possibility for connection within self-conscious acts of language” (Holland 2013: 201). Sincerity also implies a strong intersubjective element that is likewise central for metamodernism: “acute self-awareness includes the awareness of how one will be seen by others, resulting in an infinite regress that makes full self-knowledge an endlessly deferred impossibility” (Kelly 2016: 204). Kelly describes how writers like Dave Eggers have woven this problematic explicitly into their stories — how for example a character is reflecting on how stories are manipulated “in the interest of drama and expediency” (ibid. 204). Often the reader, too, is directly engaged in this dialogue (ibid. 205).

To give a slightly different example, Frangipane (2016) observes in his analysis of Jeffrey Eugenides’s novel *Middlesex* (2002), how the protagonist Cal is using self-narrative as a way to understand who he is. Cal is being open about making things up (because there are gaps in his knowledge about his family history); however, his act of narration, according to Frangipane, is “both an epistemologically and ethically important move” that makes a point about the “value and necessity of stories to help us understand ourselves and others” (Frangipane 2016: 528). Frangipane’s analysis is similar to Kelly’s above, in that he clearly stresses trust as a defining characteristic of New Sincerity writing: he argues that perhaps precisely because of the obstacles to absolute truth that are evident in *Middlesex*, the element of trust becomes central (ibid. 528). The novel, according to Frangipane, acknowledges “postmodernist incredulity of the epistemological value of stories by reminding us when our narrator cannot know the things he is narrating, but it works toward sincerity by using narrative to construct truths that are necessary to the characters” (Frangipane 2016: 528-9). Here two intertwined metamodern characteristics are highlighted: the need for some kind of truth, and the intersubjective nature of it. Cal is asking the reader to believe in the importance of meaningful stories, regardless of their absolute truthfulness.

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*Achak Deng in Dave Eggers’ What Is the What (London Penguin 2008: 56)*
3.3.2 Historioplastic metafiction

The value of truth is central to this next formulation, too, but here the metamodern oscillation appears in the act of embracing the possibilities inherent in a condition of “undecidability” (Toth 2017: 52). Josh Toth calls “renewalist” (see, for example, Toth 2010) the kind of literature that tries to reach beyond postmodernism by adopting an “ethics of indecision” (Toth 2010: 122). He suggests renewalism as a “finally successful POST-modernism” (in distinction to a mere post-MODERNISM): that is, it is neither singularly obsessed with arriving at absolute truths, nor paralyzed by the alternative (absolute) truth that there are no absolute truths (ibid. 119; original italics).

Through a reading of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Toth gives an example of renewalist literature, something that he in his 2017 essay terms “historioplastic metafiction” and describes as metamodern. In the novel, the protagonist Sethe’s attempts to narrate her story are arrested by the flesh and blood appearance of Beloved, the daughter that she had killed as an infant, and who had been haunting her as a ghost. Toth explains:

Beloved as ghost represented the possibility and the impossibility of remembering and/or forgetting, of reforming. The space of doubt left open by the ghost was a space in which claims could be made, stories told, histories (re)cast. Beloved’s presence refuses anything but the ossified truth, the event itself (now and forever) (Toth 2017: 49).

Beloved as ghost represents the “ethics of indecision”, whereby a human being is free to dream of possibilities, or work towards attaining whatever goal (here for instance Sethe making peace with herself), knowing that everything is possible but equally impossible at the same time. This is close to how Vermeulen and van den Akker describe metamodernism as a return of the concept of utopia with a twist (see Vermeulen & van den Akker 2015). *Beloved* as metamodernist/renewalist fiction tries to “negate postmodern irony while negating its negation” (Toth 2017: 53; original italics). In other words, Sethe doesn’t want (the harsh) absolute truth but still needs the conditions of possibility to search for one (of her own).

The term historioplastic metafiction is a response to Linda Hutcheon’s definition of postmodern fiction as historiographic metafiction (see Hutcheon 1988). Hutcheon sought to defend postmodern literature from the attacks of very often Marxist critics, such as Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton, by stating that postmodern fiction does
engage with history and society\textsuperscript{9}, even if incompletely from a humanist (or in the following quote a feminist) point of view, since “postmodernism has no theorized agency; it has no strategies of resistance that would correspond to the feminist ones” (Hutcheon 1989: 163). That is, historiographic metafiction does not propose a solution to the problem of relativism. Toth, with his historioplastic metafiction, uncovers such a form of agency and resistance to both modern and postmodern ideologies. Historioplastic metafiction implies being free to manipulate history as long as the truth remains unfixed; it means embracing postmodern undecidability as it enables one to dream of utopia. In the end, Toth still has his doubts about whether this “ethics of indecision” (as opposed to a postmodern certainty about the non-existence of absolutes) would not out of necessity become just as overpowering an ideology (the certainty about uncertainty) as the ones that it tries to surpass (Toth 2010: 143-5). All things considered, however, there is a hopeful oscillation between truth and its impossibility, and a clear focus on human concerns.

3.3.3 Language and the individual in post-postmodern society: Nealon’s intervention

James Nealon’s *Post-Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (2012) builds on Frederic Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) (an enlarged version of his 1984 essay, mentioned at 3.2). Nealon argues that we have entered a fast moving post-postmodern era “where it’s not clear that mediated representations or signs matter as much as direct flows of various kinds — money, goods, people, images”, and where corporate reality has become a game of *Survivor* (he makes an apt observation about how the primitive setting of the reality television series mirrors the naturalization of an elimination culture) (Nealon 2012: 150, 3). In other words, one’s “whole life, public and private, [has become] the surface area of biopower” (ibid. 149). He suggests that if literature and criticism want to make their mark in today’s world, they should move “from the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion to a post-postmodern hermeneutics of

\textsuperscript{9}For Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is postmodern fiction proper, that is, literature that acknowledges for human beings a shared experiential reality that nevertheless is linguistically mediated. She calls extreme metafiction “late modern” to make this distinction (see Hutcheon 1988: 40).
situation”, “[f]rom a focus on understanding something to a concern with manipulating it — from (postmodern) meaning to (post-postmodern) usage” (ibid. 150, 148).

Nealon is relying on Deleuze and Guattari’s division between “a linguistics of flows and a linguistics of the signifier” (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 241), where “a linguistics of the signifier remains territorialized on tautological questions of representation (on the question, What does it mean?), rather than on axiomatic determinations of force or command (the question, What does it do?)” (Nealon 2012: 159). Consequently, as regards language and literature, Nealon’s argument comes with an imperative to harness a post-postmodern “strong power of the false” (ibid. 163), that essentially works to falsify “the idea that art or language primarily strives (and inexorably fails) to be ‘true’” (ibid. 158). The function of art in today’s world, in order for art to have an impact still, should be to “create error” rather than merely deconstruct or interrupt truth (the “weak or postmodern power of the false”) (ibid. 163).

Nealon’s argument is provocative, and it has to be pointed out that as such it is very explicitly directed at English departments at American universities who struggle with their self-image. The examples he gives of his proposed post-postmodern literature are very avant-garde, for instance language poet Bruce Andrews, if only to clearly illustrate what he means by, “Nobody in music theory, architecture theory, or art theory ever really asks what the work of Beethoven, Brunelleschi, or Jackson Pollock means. These days, maybe that question doesn’t make much sense for literary theorists either” (Nealon 2012: 145). Yet he stresses that the strong powers of the false can be put into effect in any kind of literature (ibid. 168). Significantly, he lists David Foster Wallace among authors that do not represent this performative kind of literature (ibid. 168). There is indeed a difference between Wallace’s tentative search for self and intersubjective sameness (see, for example, Timmer 2010; Timmer 2017), and Nealon’s strong power of the false that “produces effects of truth in an alternative fashion” (Nealon 2012: 162). Yet in Nealon’s post-postmodern formulation, too, the legacy of postmodernism is inescapable:

[T]his post-postmodern ... set of stances is not exactly a return to essentialism .... but rather a recognition that not all deployments of force (social, biological, historical, unconscious, etc.) can easily or satisfactorily be modeled on a Saussurean understanding
of linguistics — that we’re looking at a mutation or evolution of paradigms rather than a simple return to the essentialist past (ibid. 149).

In other words, it entails a shift within a linguistically constructed world towards a more performative function for language and literature, where they can be agents of successful and active biopower (affecting a person’s innermost being), not just of deconstruction.

In each of the three examples presented above one can discern a desire for truth that is balanced by the knowledge of the limits and problems inherent in that desire. What is arrived at in each case, I argue, is a metamodern transcendence of Enlightenment ideas of absolute truth, and the assertion in its place of an alternative “truth”, that in all its incompleteness can be deemed helpful for people (be they fictional characters, readers or critics) who want to actively engage with life in a meaningful way, instead of giving in to postmodern apathy.

4. Methodology and research questions

My chosen methodology will be close reading of the novella, with attention to the metamodern framework. I will address intertextuality in the novella as far as I have been able to detect those influences, and as far as they are relevant to my chosen theoretical viewpoint.

I have found it best to keep the questions very general, which will allow me to let the text speak for itself. I am interested in what the metamodern characteristics in the story are, and how they manifest themselves on different levels of the text: in its themes, motives, narration, character analysis, philosophical metacommentary, or language. An important objective is to determine whether there are any metamodern aspects in the story that are specifically Indian.

Given the narrow scope of this study, I will not attempt an answer to the question of whether metamodernism is or is not an independent category distinct from postmodernism; I will nevertheless try to evaluate the usefulness of the concept as an independent analytical category.
5. Analysis: “Gomūtr”

I will analyze metamodernism in this novella in two main parts. First, I will discuss the problematics of truth and belief. I will propose that in the novella this is strongly related to issues of ontology and intersubjectivity. The story that the protagonist tells is influenced by other texts and other people, and in his lived experience, the lines between objective reality (for lack of a better expression), dreams and hallucinatory experience are constantly blurred. He is strongly affected by all of these different media and states of being, yet the ontological uncertainties disturb him greatly. The reader is equally mistrustful of the authenticity of his story which seems to borrow freely, and many times unannounced, from other texts. Intersubjectivity is again highlighted in the second part, where I will look more closely at the concept of advait, the issues of knowledge and of being included within a system, and the recognition of a sameness between people.

In general, I will argue that metamodernism in the novella appears in the form of dissatisfaction and anxiety over certain lacks and deficiencies within the novella’s fictional world: as the protagonist’s obsession with what is real and his despair at other people not believing, or as the concept of advait in its anything-goes avatar. These issues, together with the problems posed to authenticity by intertextuality, produce the kind of oscillation between opposites that is typical of metamodernism.

5.1 The problematics of truth and existence

In this part, I will propose a metamodern reading of the protagonist’s account, one in which intertextual reference can be taken as a sincere expression of personal circumstances, regardless of whether the reference is implicit or explicit, consciously or unconsciously employed by the narrator (5.1.2). It is also a reading that will recognize all modalities of being — waking reality, possible hallucinations, dreams — as valuable if they produce urgent and true feelings and thoughts that seriously and decisively affect the narrator-protagonist’s lived reality. That being said, it will become obvious that the protagonist, rather than embracing a metamodern frame of mind, is with the reader in his/her doubt — many times equally disbelieving of
different media, and unsure of the reliability of, and demarcation between, different levels of consciousness (5.1.1).

The above observation will lead me to a final claim on this topic: that the theory the protagonist comes up with — pronouncing the futility of trying to fight those in power — is an unsuccessful attempt by the protagonist to explain away his feelings of powerlessness and shame, since he continues to experience a nagging guilt. In this light, his desperate mantra of the Post Script (“no one is going to believe”) gains an ambiguous character: it could be that disbelief is what he wants, because as long as no one believes, his theory declaring his hopeless fate will remain in a contested state, unpronounced by society as a brute fact. I will call this a “loser’s historioplastic metafiction”, where a state of prolonged undecidability is sought after; however, it is a condition that requires disbelief from others, and as such is not an ideal solution for the protagonist who wants his experiences recognized, too (5.1.3). I will contrast the protagonist’s failed attempts at credibility with the successful performance of advertising and sales speeches. There the aim is not necessarily sincerity, but a successful effect of truth (5.1.3).

5.1.1 Sincerity 1: ontological ambiguities versus their underlying embodiment

This section will highlight two aspects of metamodernism: intersubjectivity, and the metamodern “quest” of finding reasons to believe in spite of debilitating factors. Regardless of whether events occurred in a dream, during a hallucination, or were just unbelievable otherwise, they affect the protagonist on the level of everyday reality in the form of affective and bodily symptoms that make him pronounce that life as it is for him is not worth living. In this and the following section, intersubjectivity will be looked at specifically as a discussion on sincerity. I intend ‘sincerity’ and ‘authenticity’ as they were defined at 3.3.1: authenticity as personal truth, and sincerity as an attempted conveyance of that truth to others.

The protagonist’s sincere attempt at telling his story is complicated by problems concerning authenticity; he doubts himself, and is thus having a hard time convincing others:
Kaī din aise guzre haĩ, jab mai kaise ghar pahũctā hũm, kaise ghar se nikaltā hũm, kaise calltā hũm aur kaise ruk jātā hũm, kaise nũnd mē jātā hũm aur kaise jāg mē lauũtā hũm, patā nahĩm cal pātā. Kaunsā lamhā nũnd kā hai, kaunsā lamhā svapn kā hai, kise mai sac mõiniũ, kise jhātũh, nahĩm jān pātā. (Several days have passed, that I can’t figure out how I get home, how I go out, how I walk and how I stop, how I go to sleep and how I wake up again. Which moment I’m asleep, which moment I’m dreaming, what I should consider true, and what a lie, I cannot know; 81.)

Read in this light the Post Script with its repeated “koī nahĩm mānegā” (“no one is going to believe”) is an expression of this dilemma: his sincerity about his confusion could induce more doubt in an other, instead of fostering belief.

He is himself sceptical about dreams, making fun of his boss Bābā’s (hereafter Baba) dreams about Gandhi and Che Guevara (see the next part); yet he is also inspired by them. One can see the influence of the lives and deaths of Gandhi and Che Guevara in the formulation of his theory according to which “apne samay kī cintā karne vāle saikrō santō-mahātmāō ko ātmhatyā karne par majbūr kiyā gayā thā...” (hundreds of sants and mahatmas concerned about their times were forced into suicide; 98-9), and in the questionable episode of the train rebellion that ends with the Finance Minister’s proclamation to him, “tay hai, terī hatyā hogī”. (It is decided, you shall be destroyed [murdered]; 60.)

When Sant Gyaneshwar10 appears to him in a dream he confesses: “Batā dūm ki merā dimāğ is samay bahut vicārśīl ho rahā hai, jaisā ki práyaścitt ke mauqō par har kisī kā ho jātā hai”. (I am telling you that my mind is becoming very serious and contemplative right now, as happens to everyone on occasions of penance; 46.) He remembers his mother telling him, “jo hamāre sāth honevālā hai yā bahut pahle ho cukā hotā hai, vahī bātẽ sapne mẽ ātī hai. Ham pūre jīvan mẽ do hālat mẽ sabse pavitr hote haĩ. Ek to bālpan mẽ, dūsrā gārũhī nũnd mẽ”. (That which is about to happen to us, or has occurred long ago, those are the things that come to us in dreams. In our entire lives we are most holy in two conditions. First, in our childhood, second, in deep sleep; 31.) She thinks dreams are sent by God (32). He is sarcastic about this by remarking that God must be like

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10 Gyaneshwar was a thirteenth century sant, a religious sage or saint, whose most well known accomplishment is a commentary on the Bhagavadgita that he composed in his own vernacular, Marathi. In this he went against the convention of his times, when the norm was to write in Sanskrit. To this day he is revered as someone who brought the knowledge of the Gita — particularly the doctrine of salvation through bhakti, loving devotion — to the common man not educated in Sanskrit. Sant Gyaneshwar is told to have chosen sajīvan samādhī — to meditate himself to death and into union with the Absolute — at the age of twenty-one. On Gyaneshwar, see, for example, Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism: https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism/jnandev-COM_9000000111
his wife, his boss, the mayor and other politicians: “In sabko bhī jāge hue log bilkul acche nahīṁ lagte”. (All of them don’t like people who are awake, either; 32). After the dream the protagonist is overcome by an almost religious feeling of having had a sublime encounter; but he ends the chapter where he recounts his dream by revealing again his doubt:

Mujhe samajh mē nahīṁ ā rahā hai ki mere sāth kyā ho rahā hai. Kyō aisī ūljalūl cīzē mujhe dikh rahī haĩ. Kyā āparvāle kī taraf se yah koī īśārā hai? Yā phir mai pāgal ho rahā hūṁ, bahut adhik dabāv le lene ke kāraṇ? Kyā baǐkvālā lāṛkā koī ētanā karke gayā hai? Kyā hai ye sab? (I don’t get what is happening to me. Why I am seeing these pointless things. Is it a sign from Upstairs? Or else am I just losing my mind under too much stress? Did the boy from the bank cast a spell on me? What is all this?, 47-8.)

Correspondingly, he experiences repeated disbelief from others. His wife does not take it seriously that a massacre happened at the train station (62); she doesn’t believe either that the watch he bought her had turned into a worm on the way home (44; see 5.1.3). Baba doesn’t believe the worm story (44), nor his theory of the market as advait (81-3).

According to van der Merwe, “the themes ... most commonly addressed” in metamodern criticism are a “postmodern ... solipsism and the lack of a stable subject ... that limit the possibility of meaningful intersubjective communication” (van der Merwe 2017: 40). Timmer states in her analysis of post-postmodern American literature, that “subjective experience is crying out for a recognition by an other” (2010: 115). In “Gomutr”, an unsteady sense of self and a missing recognition by others are clear themes. It all culminates in the Post Script, where each sentence (bar a couple) begins with “no one is going to believe”.

For the protagonist, the problem of belief seems to indeed be a vicious circle between lack of belief in the self and lack of belief from the part of others. Thus he recounts the ensuing unbelievable episode after Baba has refused to believe in the worm incident, where Baba suddenly transforms into the watch salesman and stares at him unblinking (in disbelief) for half an hour:

Bābā kā cehrā hī badal gayā. Vah dukāndār ban gayā ... Pāre ādhe ghanṭe tak vah binā palkē ḫapkāe mujhe dekhtā rahā. Pāre ādhe ghanṭe tak. Mujhe mālūm hai, āp yah bāt nahīṁ māṅēge. Kisī ne nahīṁ māṁī thī. Na Bābā ne, na afis ke dūsre logō ne. (Baba’s very face transformed. He became the storekeeper. He kept staring at me without batting an eyelid for a full half hour. A full half hour. I know that you won’t believe this. No one did. Not Baba, nor the other ones at the office; 44.)
The entanglement of self and other is, I argue, highlighted when the protagonist tries to wake Baba back into his normal self by throwing water at him, only to realize, with amazement, that he has thrown it on himself (44-5).

A final ingredient to this dialectic is, that the protagonist struggles almost equally with understanding reality. He repeatedly expresses incredulity at events that happen to him, but seem unreal, as if from a film. Towards the end, when the group of film-like thugs representing the bank (see, for example, pp. 26, 30-1) come to his home to confiscate his scooter, he marvels at the leader of the group:

Usne calte-calte hāth jore, ‘namaste bhābhījī’ ... Yah kisī phūhar film ke phūhar vilen jaist phūhar harkat thī. Filmō mē dekhe the ab tak aise sīn. Filmō aur zindaqī ek ho gat hai kyā? (Going out, he joined his hands, ‘Goodbye sister-in-law’ [to the protagonist’s wife, honourable address] ... It was like some sleazy gesture by a sleazy villain in some stupid film. Until now I’d seen these kinds of scenes in films. Have films and life become one?; 89.)

Everything that happens to him, it doesn’t seem real, and in this way adds to his feeling of ontological disorientation. Moreover, this filmy quality is not something that he appreciates. It is always associated with a low quality production, like in the above quote, and for example at the point where Baba is crying over his dream about Che Guevara, and the protagonist mocks the scene as resembling a cheap film: “Yah sab mujhe bahut filmī aur lizlizā lag rahā thā. Do kaurī kā sīn, jise koī bahut ghatiyā dāirekṭar sūt kar rahā ho. Par maĩne uskī rulāha ṭsokh lī”. (All this seemed very filmlike and soggy to me. A scene worth nothing\textsuperscript{11} that was being shot by some really bad director. But I soaked up his tears; 35.)

*The underlying embodied self*

All the events of his reality, his dreams and possible hallucinations are tied together and cause the same kind of bodily and mental symptoms. Just like his real financial troubles have given him constipation and a “gīniyas vālā māigren” (“ingenious migraine”\textsuperscript{12}; 23), he explains that since the dream where he met Sant Gyaneshwar, he has had a light fever, the smell of cow’s urine (see below in this section) is back, as

\textsuperscript{11} do kaurī kā — ‘worth two shells’: an idiom (shells were used at one time as a token of very low currency)

\textsuperscript{12} He is proud of this migraine because he hopefully associates the suffix with ‘pertaining to a genius person’ instead of the quality of the ailment.
are his headache and his troubles breathing (47). Many times he cries or feels like crying (for example, at pp. 37, 83), is afraid of being disgraced (41, 68), and expresses a will not to live (65).

Van der Merwe names affect theories as an essential component of metamodernism. Affect theory, according to her, is “grounded in dissatisfaction with what is perceived as the privileging of the epistemological ..., and the exclusion of subjective experience and the ontology of a lived reality” (2017: 151). She argues that what affect theories and metamodernism have in common, is the way they are committed to addressing corporeality and immediate experience while at the same time taking into account the ideas of postmodernism and poststructuralism (ibid. 153). Within the scope of this study, I do not wish to partake in the discussion on affect theories proper; rather, it will be sufficient to point out that this problematic stance towards affect is, I argue, indeed evident in “Gomutr”. It appears as something akin to what Timmer describes in her study of American literature as “an inability to appropriate feelings, while feeling them nevertheless” (2010: 43). With the help of the examples given next, I will demonstrate how it specifically has to do with an inability to place value on corporeal experience, and a neglect of feelings. After that, I will argue that the motive of gomūtr (cow’s urine), being also the title of the novella, in fact speaks for the centrality of embodied experience in the story.

The protagonist himself observes the inadequacy of language to describe the way his hands shake after the dream where he meets Sant Gyaneshwar, or the contents of the dream itself (38). When the protagonist becomes the butt of a joke for a candid camera show, he is left unsure of what actually happened, but in the end it is his affective reaction that remains with him:

*Patā nahīṁ, mere māṁ se āvāz nikāh hai yā nahīṁ, patā nahīṁ, merī is kuśti kā prasāraṇ kiśī ḳīvī caīnāl par kiyā jā rahā hai yā nahīṁ, patā nahīṁ, merī kamar par camṛe kā koī belṭ bāṁdābā gayā hai yā nahīṁ, par ye sāt log mere sāmne ākār ḳhaṛē ho gae hai, inhōne mujhe būṛī tarāḥ ḍarāh dairā āiḥāi.* (I don’t know whether any sound is escaping my mouth, whether this wrestling and struggling of mine is being broadcast on some TV channel, whether there is a leather belt tied around my waist, but these seven people standing in front of me have scared me badly; 72; italics my own.)

Baba, on the other hand, looks like the perfect antithesis to metamodern affect, when he later decides to believe in the worm story, but makes it symbolic: “*Ham ek kēcuā*
samay mě jī rahe haĩ. ... ham sab hĩ kēcuā haĩ, jo jāne-anjāne kisī ke lie zamīn upjāũ kar rahe haĩ”. (We are living in a time of worms. All of us are worms who, wittingly or unwittingly, fertilize the ground for someone else; 45.) The protagonist is not happy:

*Mujhe Bābā kĩ ek bhī bāt pasand nahīṁ paṛī. ... Mere samay mě yahī ho raḥī hai. Bābā aise hĩ logō kā pratinīdhī hai, jo khud ke svapnō ko kilīt karke rakhīe hāĩ aur dūsrō ke yatharth ko svapn batākar śāstrīyatā peleī hai.* (Nothing that Baba said pleased me. This is precisely what is happening in my time. Baba represents those people, who keep their own dreams in check, and, having declared others’ reality as dream force some science into it; 45.)

As for the protagonist’s wife, she comes forward with a practical plan of repaying the debt by reselling their various household equipment (chapter twelve); the bank likewise presents a payment plan (89). His debt may not be an impossible hurdle to surmount in economic terms; more importantly, it is the feelings of powerlessness and lack of informed agency that no one near him seems to pay attention to. From a metamodern perspective, it is less important, whether he is right in believing that market prices are dictated by faceless big-bellied people “*fens ke us taraf*” (“on the other side of the fence”; 64); rather, I want to focus on the fact that he feels that way. His wife just looks at him speechless, as he pronounces his sentiments on the topic of resale (he does not accept the reductions in value), right after she has prepared a careful list of resale values of their property: “*Maĩ is duniyā mē nahīṁ rah pāũngā. Maĩ apnā nām vāpas letā hūṁ, jīne vālō kī fehrist mē se*”. (I can’t go on living in this world. I take back my name from the list of the living; 65.) It can of course be further remarked upon how selfish this attitude might be. Indeed, I have already touched upon the protagonist’s inability to understand other people’s perspective, making him thus no more ideal as a metamodern character than the others (this will be further discussed in part two). In any case, intersubjectivity once again comes forward in the above episode, that is, one can observe a failed sincerity in the unsuccessful communication between the protagonist and his wife.

Finally, there is the motive of gomūtr. It highlights a second aspect of corporeality, in addition to the intersubjective element discussed above: that of mind and body as intertwined. Gomūtr means cow’s urine. It is considered sacred by Hindus. Thematically I will propose it as a symbol of the protagonist’s predicament: as a
combination of, and interaction between identity as physical embodiment, and identity as cognitive interpretation in a post-postmodern society.

The protagonist’s sweat starts to smell like cow’s urine. To him it is a bad smell, and he interprets it as an alien substance that’s part of a “ploy” (ṣadyantr; 16), whereas before he used to smell good to women, and that was more like his own smell (16); he also says his own sweat let the smell in (16). Thus there is a loss of identity as well as of agency implied. He reiterates over and over, how he doesn’t understand what it means (for example, at pp. 72, 92). Several people have told him it’s holy: an old man he met as a child (17), and Mātā (Goddess) who possesses him in a dream (a dream that appears to be influenced by a discussion he had earlier with Baba, where Baba suspected he was possessed by Che Guevara (34)), and tells him he shouldn’t worry about it because “jo dukkh hai, vahī sukh hotā hai. Yahī advait hai”. (What is pain is also happiness. This, indeed, is non-dualism; 92.) At that, he protagonist remains equally perplexed as he did by the old man as a little boy. Thus gomūtr is something both good and bad, and he is confused.

I suggest that the motive is both a focal instance of the protagonist’s embodied experience (highlighting the importance of affective experience that has been the topic of this section), and additionally represents the market both as a “holy” system (advait, explained in the next part), and as the enticing but destructive fire that the protagonist is drawn to (borrowing Zagajewski; see 5.2.3). The fire leaves him embittered and he feels exploited by it, like the poor cow that in his childhood account got hit by a scooter, and “Gāy ne apnī hṛṛbaṛḥaḥ pūṛī saṛak ko dān kar dī”. (The cow gifted her confusion all over the road; 18.) In other words, he feels made part of a system (the market) despite himself (his body let it in; see the next part on his ideas about how he was forced and tricked to get a credit card); it is a system that he feels he was lured into, but in the end he feels left used and powerless by it — an innocent, holy cow of the market, like the cow in his childhood memory.

And above all, the presence of gomūtr takes him over, and drowns all else:

Merī kalpanāḥ mē ṣāṅkho se na dikhnevālī nainoṭeknologī kī sāṛī karāṃṭē hulas raḥī hai. Par is vaṭt mujhe sac kā patā cal gayā hai. Yah sab mithyā hai. Ūṁcī imāratoṁ se lekar Śāṃgḥāṭ-Lḥāṣāṭ ren tak. Ṣṭṛāvenyas injekśanō se lekar opan hāṛṭ tak. Sab mithyā hai. Sac yah hai ki gomūṭṛ hai, cāṛō or hai. Ye sāṛī cīzē usī mē lithṛī huī hai. Maī gomūṭṛ ke samay mē tair raḥā hūṁ. (In my mind’s eye, all the invisible feats of nanotechnology rejoice. But right now I have come to realize the truth. All that is in vain.
From tall buildings to the Shanghai-Lhasa trainline. From intravenous injections to open heart surgery. All useless. The truth is cow’s urine, all around. All these things are smeared in it. I am swimming in the time of cow’s urine; 17.)

If one takes the name of the novella to be of significance, one can say that for the protagonist, his psychological experience very much culminates on the physical sense of being: a sense of powerlessness and conspiracy that invades his physical being. It is the “being embodied” which Calvin O. Schrag evokes as a rethought way of looking at the body after postmodernism, instead of as “an object among other objects, an extension of material substance” that is “placed at a distance from consciousness” (Schrag 1999: 51, 53). The motive of cow’s urine seems to encompass metamodernism on two levels: first, as a symbol of the protagonist’s embodied experience, and second, in its connection to the problematic concept of the market (and society in general) as advait that is the source of the experience. This second aspect will be looked at in the second part (5.2).

5.1.2 Sincerity 2: from the epistemology of intertextuality to the ontology of an intertextuality of connectedness

The protagonist tells about his interest in reading:

Kitābō kā mujhe gahrā shauq hai. ... Sac kahūṁ, to innē gyān bharā hotā hai, jo āj kī tārīḵh mē jaldī militā nahīṁ. ... Hālāṁki mere sivāy un kitābō ko bhī nahīṁ patā hogā ki maṅe unhē parhā hai yā nahīṁ. Maṅ parhne lagāṁ hūṁ, to dhyaṅ bhaṭṭak jātā hai. Maṅ pāṁc lāṁnē parhāṁ hūṁ, to pacās kī kalpañā kar letā hūṁ. Is tarah us kitāb se bahut dūr calā jātā hūṁ. Aur is tarah kabhī pūṛī nahīṁ kar pāṁ. (I love books. To tell you the truth, they are filled with knowledge that in today’s day and age is hard to come by. Although I think the books, like me, don’t know either whether I have read them or not. When I start to read, my mind goes astray. If I read five lines, I imagine fifty more. This way I wander very far from the book. And so I am never able to finish it; 24.)

The novella’s intertextual engagement is such in its scope that will not be possible to fully address here. It makes reference to several writers, books, fictional characters, and songs. What is more important for this study, is what the protagonist himself points at in the above quote: that he is not sure where the line between intertextual influence and original expression is. The confession can be taken as a conscious expression of sincerity, comparable to what Cal in Middlesex does (see theory section); or it can be taken as accidental, sign of the protagonist’s inability to see how deep he is within the web of intertextuality with regard to his own story.
In this passage the protagonist relates about a dream:

Maĩ bār Rāmdās-Rāmdās, Mohandās-Mohandās, Ṭopī Śuklā-Ṭopī Śuklā, Gōgeś Pāl-Gōgeś Pāl budbudā rahā thā. Mujhe nahīṁ patā, kaun the ye log. (Again and again I was muttering 'Ramdas-Ramdas, Mohandas-Mohandas, Topi-Shukla Topi Shukla, Gongesh Pal-Gongesh Pal'. I did not know who these people were; 92.)

These three are all fictional characters (by Raghuvir Sahay, Uday Prakash, and Rahi Masoom Raza, respectively). Most importantly, a knowledgeable reader will realize that the entire last chapter is inspired by the poem “Rāmdās” by Raghuvir Sahay, but it is integrated into the protagonist’s personal story.

Here is an excerpt from Sahay’s poem: “Nikal galī se tab hatyārā / āyā usne nāṁ pukārā / Ḩāth taul kar cāqū mārā / chūṭā lahā kā favvārā / Kahā nahīṁ thā usne āḵhīr uskī hatyā hogi?”13 (Then from an alley appeared the murderer / he called out a name / Poising a hand he stabbed with a knife / a fountain of blood escaped / After all, had he not said that he would be killed?; my own translation)

Correspondingly, the protagonist relates: “Itne mē kahīṁ se hatyārā āyā. Usne lalkār kar merā nāṁ pukārā. Maĩ hairat mē use dekhne lagā. Is samay mujhe ābhās ho rahā thā ki merā koī nāṁ bhī hai. Usne Ḩāth taulkar cāqū mārā aur mere bhītar se lahū kā favvārā niklā”. (In the meantime the murderer appeared from somewhere. He shouted out my name. I stared at him in amazement. At that moment it began to dawn on me that I had a name, too. He poised his hand and stabbed [me] with a knife, and a fountain of blood came out from inside me; 97.)

Thus the protagonist’s idea about his murder (symbolic or not; see 5.1.3) in the middle of the street with everyone passively watching and knowing what will happen, turns out to be inoriginal, and as such will cast doubt on the truth value of the whole story. Finally, in the Post Script, the protagonist spells out the reference: “Koī nahīṁ mānegā ki hammē se har kisī ko caurāhe par gherkar Rāmdās kī tarah pūrvghoṣṇā ke sāth mār diyā jāṭā hai…” (No one is going to believe that every one of us is being surrounded at a crossroads and, like Ramdas, murdered with prior announcement), before remarking that it all happens like in García Márques’s novella “Cronicle of a Death Foretold” (99). Consequently, there is no resolution to the question of whether the protagonist has been borrowing consciously from the beginning or not, or whether he

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13 The poem was published in a collection of Sahay’s poems from 1970 to 1975 Hāso Hāso Jaldī Hāso.
is being consciously sincere about this contradiction or not — just like he himself confesses to not knowing the difference between lines in a book and his own imagination (24). I argue that this confusion, from a metamodern perspective, points precisely at the impossibility for anyone (including the protagonist himself) to always know this. Instead, I suggest an alternative reading, where intertextuality is an indicator of connections between people and stories, real and fictional, and where these kinds of borrowed elements can have a resonance of personal truth within an individual being despite them not being instances of original expression in the strictest sense.

I propose that it be considered how this kind of ambiguity combined with the urgency with which the protagonist approaches the possible unbelievability of his story might point towards an additional interpretative level that would focus on the meaning of the story as it is told by the protagonist-narrator, instead of pursuing a quite possibly futile task of trying to determine the truth about everything (a modernist-epistemological quest), or, out of mistrust perhaps, ignoring the protagonist’s distress (a postmodern-ironic disposition). It would be a shift towards an ontological approach to intertextuality — something that Hansen calls “ontological indifference” (Hansen 2004: 601) — that does recognize the (inter)textual, hyperreal (as the blending of real and various fictional or simulated worlds) nature of human existence, but instead of treating it as an insurmountable obstacle to some unmediated truth, it would underline how various parts of this kind of existence can be strongly and personally experienced, and consciously or unconsciously appropriated by an individual. This “ontological indifference” is similar to the re-evaluation concerning alternative ontological states, such as dreams and hallucinations, offered in the previous section; it means an indifference towards clear distinctions between ontological states and levels of textual originality, and, in its stead, the placing of importance on the affective ontology of one hyperreal reality. Both Hansen and Timmer touch upon these issues with regard to Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000). Timmer argues, that the novel seems to want to make clear that perhaps we should finally stop mourning this ‘loss’ — a loss of the real, a loss of an unmediated presence — and start finding our way through what Holstein and Gubrium call the ‘putatively real’, that which people ‘treat as real’ [Holstein & Gubrium 2000: 97]. And people are in the habit of treating as real that which *feels* real (Timmer 2010: 255; original italics).
I have already offered a metamodern reading that described the difficulties in appreciating experience as it is, instead of doubting it or questioning/ignoring its value (5.1.1). Now I am making a similar point when it comes to the intertextual elements in the story. It seems vital for the protagonist that his story be regarded as his own true story. At the beginning of chapter eighteen he asks the reader to consider a photograph of his family on his wall:

Priy pāṭhak, us tasvīr mē maī hūṁ, merī patnī aur baccī hai. Jaisā ki is kahānī mē mai hūṁ, merī patnī aur baccī hai. Yah kōī rūpak, upmā, udāharan, chavi yā śleṣ nahiṁ hai.

(Dear reader, in this picture there are me, my wife and my daughter. This is not an allegory, a parable, an example, an image or some double entendre; 90-1.)

But what does he have to show for reality, other than a photograph that is — like his story — a virtual version of reality?

His concern is additionally justified by the fact that the above quote hides another intertextual reference, to Uday Prakash’s novella “Mohandās” (2006). It is a story about a dalit protagonist who finds himself powerless in the face of identity theft. Prakash is playing with similar questions of identity and originality, and in the story, the narrator expounds on the main character Mohandās’s likeness to Gandhi:

I’d also like to ... solemnly affirm that the similarity of names is honestly and truly just a coincidence. When I sat down to write this, I had no idea these sorts of echoes could possibly be hidden in the story of Mohandas and his family from the village. ... It isn’t some symbolic story or allegory or coded fable. ... Mohandas is a living, breathing human being, and his life is at this moment in grave danger. Though you can count on my having played a little fast and loose with the truth, as I always do. ... Mohandas is real. If you’d like to verify this, you can do so by asking any inhabitant of our village, or any other village in this country. (Translated by Jason Grunebaum 2012: 50)

Apart from similar ambiguities regarding the presentation of a clearly demarcated identity and an original story, there can be found another related point in both texts, that of the generalization of a character’s predicament. The protagonist of “Gomutr” is disillusioned at the fact that nobody will believe in the massacre at the unnamed train station:

Yah Jaliyānvālā se baṛā narsanhār thā, śteśan narsanhār. Āpkā kōī bhī nazdíqī śteśan. 3417 log māre gae the, par kōī bhī mārā nahīṁ gayā thā. (This was a massacre bigger than Jallianwala, the station massacre. Any station near you. 3417 people were killed, but nobody was killed; 60.)
Here the protagonist, just like the narrator of “Mohandas”, is asking us to believe that something really happened, while simultaneously chipping away at the solidity beneath the credibility of the event (he can’t believe that there is nothing on the news about the massacre; 61). Despite these complications, the protagonist’s universalizing remark (“any station near you”, echoing “Mohandas’”s “any other village in this country”), is one attempt among many others at calling attention to his predicament not being his alone. He explains that “Vah samay thā, jab pūrā afis pink ho rahā thā. Merī galī, merā caurāhā, merā mohallā, merā šahar, merā deś, sab kuch pink thā”.

(That was the time when the entire office was becoming pink. My lane, my junction, my quarter, my city, my country, everything was pink; 23.) He criticizes his colleagues, who are all caught in the same pink spirit, for not helping (69; see 5.2.3). In the Post Script he expresses his belief that no one is inclined to believe, because there is nothing in it for them (100; see 5.1.3). Still, he warns that “aisā hī ho rahā hai cārõ taraf” (“this is what is happening all around”; 100), and that “every one of us is being surrounded at a crossroads and, like Ramdas, murdered with prior announcement” (99). It is, I argue, a call for collective action by a character that is however unable to convince even himself. It is what van der Merwe describes as the “lack of a stable subject ... and the consequent impossibility of meaningful intersubjective relations, the combination of which manifests in the problem of authentic self-expression” (van der Merwe 2017: 60).

Consequently, to connect the threads of the argument, intertextuality in the novella, from a metamodern perspective, exposes two interrelated functions, both shaky in their element but tentatively constructive. First, there is the “ontological indifference” of looking at hyperreal expression as a manifestation of some personal truth, accepting, with the protagonist of “Gomutr”, the uncertainty, even impossibility, of the concept of absolute originality. This, however, is a position that continues to be haunted by persistent questions about originality and authenticity. Second, there is an allusion to intertextuality as a medium for the seeking of parallels and communication, manifested in the protagonist’s integration of similar stories into his own.

I believe a metamodern analysis of “Gomutr” entails taking what Consolaro (discussing similarities and differences between postmodern and postcolonial literature) terms an “ideological position” (Consolaro 2011: 12) towards a narrative,
like “Gomutr”, that exhibits serious ontological instability, yet has a narrator that seems desperate about being trusted.

In this [postcolonial] literary production there is an abundance of unreliable narrators who blatantly omit, forget, or give wrong information about time and space, modify events, and yet still want to be trusted, even when it is possible to prove rationally and objectively that they are wrong. ... It is a narrative with a strong choral and dialectic connotation. These narrators do not write in order to save themselves, but rather in order to save India or a collective identity connected to the idea of India (Consolaro 2011: 12).

Indeed, the namelessness of the protagonist, his astonishment at the murderer calling him by his name (see above in this section), and the fact that the candid camera crew call him Anāmdās (Nameless) — reflecting both Mohandās and Rāmdās — draw attention to a possible universalizing project in the protagonist’s narration. However, as a significant departure from Consolaro’s analysis on postcolonial literary features, the collective drive in “Gomutr”, in my opinion, is most essentially intertwined with, and I would even say conditioned by, the protagonist’s personal mission of saving himself. This he cannot do without the help of others, something that in turn will not be easily forthcoming when he himself is not convinced. This brings us back full circle to the thematics of sincerity and authenticity introduced in the previous section.

5.1.3 Credibility: successful performance versus a “loser’s historioplastic metafiction”

The performance of persuasive language

The protagonist’s attitude towards a (post-)postmodern information flow oscillates between a hunger for valid knowledge and an ironic attitude towards the possibility of truth or trustworthy advice. He has read in a magazine, that a neem tree will take away a person’s debt: thus he has bought a sapling that he dutifully keeps watering on his balcony, even though there are no new leaves, and the water just drips down onto an angry downstairs neighbour’s balcony. He keeps nurturing the plant, but laughs sarcastically at an image that pops up in his mind of a group of indebted farmers who have hanged themselves, get offered a branch of neem each, and subsequently bounce back into life (20). He is following advice from a yoga
practising friend in order to alleviate his headache and constipation — even if it doesn’t help; he is watching self-help gurus on television, begging for them to demonstrate how things are done (22). In the same breath he damn journalism, saying “ye srṣṭi ke sabse bare labār hai, jo jhūṭh ko cillākar kahne se uske satya mē badal jāne ke siddhānt par yaqīn karte hai”. (These [journalists] are the biggest liars of all creation, who believe in the doctrine of turning a lie into truth by shouting it louder; 22.)

In the above quote truth appears as a function of power. Successful performance in the novella is directed at an individual (the protagonist, in his account of events) who is desperate for advice and/or lacking in knowledge. In this instance Nealon’s articulation on a post-postmodern function for linguistic expression (see theory section) runs contrary to the kind of ethical metamodernism elaborated upon in the previous two sections on sincerity.

The protagonist acquires a credit card from a bank representative who is a young college student who tells the protagonist about his sick mother and college fees (39). He makes a relatively one-sided sales speech that culminates on:

_Udhār aur qarze kī paribhāṣā badal gaī sar. Ham āpko paise udhār nahīṁ dete, balki āpko ek behtar bhaviṣya, behtar jīvan dete hai_. (The definition of loan and debt has changed, sir. We don’t loan You money, rather we give You a better future, a better life; 40.)

The end result is that the protagonist finally gives in to him after three days. He surmises, that the boy seemed knowledgeable about economic matters (the boy who proclaimed that his bank does not believe in liquidity and that a person who cannot control his spending would be their perfect customer), and in the end feels proud of the attention given to him (40). It can be said, that he becomes the object of a successful performance.

The story about the watch turning into a worm (43-5) illustrates quite well the position of metamodern truth as that which invites belief, regardless of its ultimate truthfulness. One might find the idea of finding a worm in a watch case fantastic, but if one really thinks about it, the idea of a watch bringing eternal happiness (a commercial that got the protagonist to buy the watch in the first place) is equally fantastic. Konstantinou states that “postironic” (variously defined by Konstantinou as post-postmodern (2012) or metamodern (2017)) belief is empty (Konstantinou 2012: 90): it means to not “advocate a stance of belief toward some aspect of the world but
rather the ethos of belief in and of itself” (Konstantinou 2012: 90). As such, it can be a convincing commercial that one decides to believe in the hopes of attaining happiness (or whatever one is after), or it can be belief in the worm as a cause of unhappiness.

The protagonist states in the Post Script:

Agar abhi ma'ai kah dam ki is kahani ki saath photocopii ... bainthe se apko sirf saath ghante me saubhagya ki prapta hogi, aur aisa na karne par apko Vaishno Devi ya Saim Baba ka kop jhela parega, to ise department hue bhi ap is par yaqin kar lega aur saath nahin, sattar ko bani deta, par mere kahe hue sac ko premijan ekalaap man lega, ek sanak gae admi ki beriyaat bhaga vail apaan lay-aasunn lay-barbaraha. (If I told you right now that by distributing seven copies of this story, in just seven hours you would attain fortune and bliss, and on not doing it you would have to endure the wrath of Vaishno Devi or Sai Baba, you would believe it even if you supposed it was a lie, and instead of seven, you’d distribute seventy; however, the truth voiced by me you will consider an endearing monologue, a crazy man’s unreadable, incomprehensible, ungraceful raving; 100.)

I take him to mean that we humans still have an ability to believe in anything, even if that ability was — as the protagonist here suspects — only triggered by selfish interest. I will address the problem of selfishness more thoroughly in the next part; here it is enough to observe, that the “strong powers of the false” as argued for by Nealon (see theory section), akin to the idea of true-until-proven-otherwise, can just as easily be put to insincere or unethical use, by marketers or advertisers, for example. Toth argues, that a

move beyond postmodernism rarely (if ever) denies the inescapability of the symbolic, of reality, as construct. It simply insists upon, or shifts the emphasis to, a ground that, while impossible to know (in full, or finally), necessarily effects the contours of its own disfiguration (Toth 2017: 42-3).

He means that the plasticity of truth, the persistence of constructivism, from the viewpoint of metamodernism, more than anything, offers a possibility to think about the responsibility that one has in terms of what it is one constructs — that it is still a thin line between an irresponsible use of post truth and an ethical and informed constructivism.

A “loser’s historioplastic metafiction”

Again and again, the protagonist comes back to his anxiety over other people not believing which, as noted before, underlines the intersubjective aspect (in other
words, sincerity) of belief. His dreams and theories aren’t convincing even to himself; he is having dreams,

Jiske bāre mē koi bhī parhā-liikhā ādmi sune, to mujhe pāgal qarār dene mē koi kothāi na barte. Par yah hamāre samay kā ajīb virodhābhās hai ki yah ādmi ko starū par le jātā hai — ek jismē ham pāgal hokar yā na hokar rahte hue bhī na rahe jaisā jivan jīte hai aur dūrē ham apne ātmhatyā kī guphā mē praveś kar jāte hai aur use ātmhatyā na sābit karne ke lie vidvānjan sajīvan samādhi jaisā koi shabd gara hote hai. (that if any learned man heard of them, he would not hold back in proclaiming me mad. But the strange paradox of our times is that it leads a man onto two [possible] levels — one, where we, crazy or not, lead a life that doesn’t resemble living, and another, where we enter the cave of our own suicide, and in order to not endorse it as suicide, scholarly folk will fabricate a word like sajīvan samādhi; 45.)

I will now make a final claim on the topic of truth, concerning the function of the motive “koī nahīṁ mānegā”. It can simply be regarded — even within the context of metamodernism — as an expression of his frustration at no one understanding his predicament. However, there is a strong element of shame present in his articulations on his powerlessness, his lack of knowledge, and of any means to fight. Over and over, he is trying to find the “truth of the times”, but the only answers he ever gets are “spending” (39) and “debt” (96).

Instead, Sant Gyaneshwar tells him in a hallucinatory episode, that he was driven to suicide by those in a position of power, because of his project of distributing inside knowledge to outsiders (79). This leads the protagonist to proclaim in the Post Script: “apne samay kī cintā karne vāle saikrō santō-mahātmāō ko ātmhatyā karne par majbūr kiyyā gayā thā...” (98-9; translation at 5.1.1). Moreover, he declares,

Koi nahin maneega ki hamare samay me harat ataik, bren haimrej aur haipartēnśan se hone valī lākhā mautē sahaj mṛtyu nahēm, balki sāf-sāf hatyā hai... Koi nahēm mānegā ki har ātmhatyā darasal hatyā thī, jiske lie marne vālā dośī nahēm thā. Koi nahēm maneega... ki mare hue log apnī hī āgātras mē lāś ki pairō par khaṛē hote hai aur lāśō jaisā jīvan īne lagte hai, zindā hone kā bhrum dete hue. (No one is going to believe that in our time the hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by heart attack, brain haemorrhage and hypertension aren’t simple deaths, but are plain and clear murders. No one is going to believe that each suicide was actually a murder, for which the victim is not guilty. No one is going to believe that dead people, in their very own appearance, rise up on their dead feet and commence a corpse-like life, giving out an illusion of being alive; 99.)

I propose that instead of finding the truth of the times he so desires, he comes up with a formulation of a temporally recurring truth, according to which benefactors will be either killed or driven to suicide, and if one decides to hide one’s knowledge (The
Eight Immortals\(^{14}\); 80), or does not have knowledge in the first place, one is damned to an existence as a dead man, which can also be interpreted as a life not worth living, something that the protagonist brings up on several occasions (pp. 45, 65, 99). Consequently, either way one looks at the ending of the story, he will die — or “die”.

If one adds to this the episode of the train rebellion and the consequent death threat he receives from the Finance Minister, and whatever he thinks of Gandhi or Che Guevara, it seems the protagonist is afraid he might have stumbled upon an “ossified truth” (Toth 2017: 49), an eternal truth that says all acts of rebellion will be futile and ultimately life-threatening. Still, he cannot help feeling guilty: of cowardice (during the train rebellion he thinks, “\textit{Sattā kā tilism na ṭūṭe, bhale na ṭūṭe, kam se kam mere andar ek kāyar to ṭūṭegā}”. (If the talisman of authority won’t break, so be it, at least a coward inside me will break; 58), or because of his inability to take care of his family (92-3).

Thus there begins to form a picture of what I have chosen to call a “loser’s historioplastic metafiction”. Toth stresses “undecidability” as a defining characteristic of historioplastic metafiction (see, for example, Toth 2017: 52). According to this loser’s metafiction, as long as the aforementioned state of affairs will prevail (that is, forever in his formulation), he can not see a way out of his predicament. In the Post Script, there is an almost invocation-like performative quality to the twenty-four consecutive sentences beginning with “no one is going to believe”: it is almost like he is prompting the reader to not believe, even as he accuses the reader of not caring. There I find a most curious metamodern oscillation: a character seeking belief yet at the same time exercising a kind of contingency plan that as long as no one believes, the state of limbo that he finds himself in (that of doubting himself, and of others judging him crazy), will be acceptable to him, since the impending judgement of others (again highlighting intersubjectivity) will guard him against his own hopeless version of truth slamming flesh-and-blood in his face.

In sum, it is as if he is saying that in the absence of immediate belief and solidarity from the part of others, it is maybe the next best choice to think oneself crazy for the moment, and instead cry out for someone, someday to come forward with the “truth of the times” that he cannot find.

\(^{14}\text{This is another free borrowing from Hindu mythology, that is, I argue, an additional example of the protagonist’s universalizing intentions.}\)
In support of this proposition I will describe how the protagonist, in the very last paragraph of the Post Script, suddenly aborts his mantra, and instead makes a final supplication for people to put his crazy babbling into context:

Par sabko qasam hai bace hue îmân kî, sac batânâ, kyá âpkî nahîn lagtâ ki jab Sant Gyânešvar ne khud ko ek guphâ ke bhitâr bandkar bâhar se bârâ patthar rakhvâ diyâ thâ, ... [next follows a long list of famous artists, fictional characters and real-life Indian farmers, who have committed suicide, been killed, or suffered any variant of looking at death face to face, that in the protagonist’s theory is never their own fault] ... tab ye säre log bî merî hî tarah barbaṛâthî huî ekâlêpî khámośi kî kisî patî-si dôr par, hunar bhûle gae ná tî tarah jhûl nahîn rahe thî? (But everyone must swear by the faith and honesty that [still] remains; tell the truth, does it not seem to you that when Sant Gyaneshwar had shut himself inside a cave and had had it sealed from outside with a large stone ... that at that moment all these people, too, were, like me, swaying in the dark on a thin rope of a babbling monologue, like dancers who forgot their skill; 100.)

I interpret this as a final confession of his mistrust in his own formulation born out of a solitary panic, and a call for help. True to his manner, he naturally draws some assistance to his argument, either for the common good or just to save his own face a little. Further, it must be commented upon, how he at this point is playing a game with language (even if once again unintentionally, it would seem), something that he accuses the leaders of society of doing (see 5.2.2). Thus, it is another example of the inescapability of textual construction (5.1.2), that can produce ambiguities, but likewise suggest sincere, but implicit intentions.

5.2 Postmodern versus metamodern advait

Ye kaisî bebasî hai. Is bâre mê koî kuch boltî kyô nahîn? Koî kuch soctî kyô nahîn? Kyá aîsî din âîgâ ek din ki kisî kî koi rây na hoûgi. Krodh hoûgi, par koî vîrodh nahîn hoûgi. ... Khatrâ hoûgi, khatre kî ghanîfî hoû gi aur use bâdshâh bâjâegâ? ... Pink peparô par gahrâ nilâ sût pahankar danturî dêkâkâr hâstu huâ udyoğpati bâdshâh? ... Yeh nolej lîdârîp hai, jismî sîrî va voh nolej bânhînâ hai, jise bânhînî vâle kâ koî nuqsân na ho... (What powerlessness this is. Why doesn’t anyone speak of it? Why doesn’t anyone think of it? Will a day come, when no one will have a say. There will be anger, but no resistance. There will be danger, there will be an alarm bell, and you think the emperor will sound it? The emperor industrial leader who in a dark blue suit smiles with rows of teeth showing on the pages of financial papers? ... This is knowledge leadership, in which only the kind of knowledge that would not harm the one sharing it is to be shared; 83-4; similar passage at 99.)

I have proposed that the novella is alerting at metamodern concerns by means of certain lacks and injustices that assert themselves in the course of the protagonist’s narration, on both individual and societal levels. In this part, I will demonstrate how
the story points at challenges within a community, where an individual feels deprived of knowledge and power, and consequently of a substantial sense of possessing agency. Related to this, there is also a notable human/affective element present: that of the feeling of being excluded. I will first explore these problematic aspects as representing a “postmodern advait” (5.2.1). The remaining sections will present a “metamodern advait” through an exploration of the things that are declared (by the narrator-protagonist) as missing, or only momentarily appearing. These I will analyze as aspects of a metamodern intersubjectivity: I shall look at the possibility of knowledge being an inclusive, human enterprise (5.2.2), and after that the affective element within metamodernism through the thematics of community, or what van der Merwe (2017: 105) discusses as “shared vulnerability” (5.2.3).

5.2.1 A postmodern advait: indifference and inequality

Postmodern Baba: powerlessness and loss of self

The concept of advait, as applied by Baba, turns out pretty arbitrary in its inclusiveness. He is in the habit of joking about his “viśiṣṭ-advait” (25) (‘qualified non-dualism’; see footnote 16): “Gālī maĩ nahĩṁ detā, merĩ deh detī hai. Cũṁtā maĩ nahĩṁ, merĩ rũḥ cũṁtī hai” (50). (I don’t swear, my body does it. I don’t kiss, my soul does it.) Laughter in the novella is a sign of control, knowledge and power, and it is many times contrasted with the protagonist remaining outside of it — baffled (18), afraid (83), or powerless (36). However, Baba’s laughter, resulting from his identity crisis as an ex-Leftist turned manager at the mercy of a shifting economy, is that of giving up, yet he is feeling uneasy about it. In metamodern terms, Baba seems to have lost connection with his true self. I shall call it a postmodern, ironic laughter, the time of which, if one takes the word of the protagonist, is not over:

Jis samay [Baba] mazdūrõ kā yug na āne par rotā hai, usṭ tarah vah hoṭhō ko golkar siṭṭ bajāte hue kuch logō ko chāṁtī detā hai. Phir hãṣtā hai. Bhayānak hãṣī. Jisse ek hilor īdhār se āṭt āi, ek hilor udhar se āṭt āi aur sabkuch darāvnev mē tabdīl hokar rah jātā āi. (The moment Baba cries over the worker’s era not coming, the same way he puckers his lips, blows his whistle and fires some people. Then he laughs. A terrible laughter. Of which one ripple comes from here and another from there, and everything transforms into something menacing; 83.)
The protagonist comments that this strange laughter makes him feel helpless ("lācār"; 36). Baba notices this: “Lācārī hī to hai, kyā kar sakte hai, batāo? Ismē to yahī ṭhīk hai ki apnā tel dekho, apnā dhār dekho. Mast raho mastī mē, āg lage bastī mē” (Helplessness it really is, but tell me, what can we do? Here it is indeed right that ‘see your oil, watch it flow’. ‘Keep happy at the party, even if the neighbourhood caught fire’; 36.) Baba is in the habit of telling the protagonist about the dreams that haunt him, like the one after which he was searching for Gandhi in his home (33); he says, “sapne rūh kā bhojan hote haĩ...” (‘dreams are the soul’s nourishment’; 37). Yet another, conflicting part of him is trying to forget about dreams, because “sapnõ ke pīche daurne vāle deśō, samājō, logō ko kaise zalīl hokar marnā paṛā hai” (How have the countries, societies, and people chasing dreams had to die humiliated; 37.)

The market as advait: inequality, lack of knowledge and agency

The protagonist gets fixated on the concept of advait17 that looks to him to be made up of glaring opposites: kissing is swearing (50), and fortune ("lakṣmī") and misfortune ("alakṣmī") are supposed to be the same (55). Likewise he wonders how truth and illusion can be the same: “Satya aur bhram donõ ek hī haĩ” (56). Besides the Advaita Vedanta distinction between ultimate reality (Brahman) as one and individuality as illusion (Maya; see footnote 16), I want to point out another connotation, more practically aligned with the analysis at hand: that of satya as the real real and bhram as fantasy or hallucination, and how that resonates with the protagonist’s struggle to distinguish between ontological states (81; 5.1.1). At 5.1.1 I proposed to look at them as more equal. To the contrary, the world around the protagonist doesn’t seem in any way equal to him, and most of all he feels like he himself has no control over which opposite will bounce into effect upon him. First he is told he (as customer) is king, then suddenly he is not (30). He comes to the

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15 proverb, meaning ‘relax and just see what happens’
16 proverb, meaning ‘keep happy even in the face of adversities’
17 Advait (or advaita in its philosophical, Sanskrit spelling) is a South Asian religious-philosophical concept of non-dualism, that historically has been advocated by philosophical schools such as Advaita Vedanta (8th century philosopher Adi Shankara is most widely known) and Kashmir Shaivism. Shri Vaishnavism, in turn, is the most prominent school of Vishishtadvaita, or ‘qualified non-dualism’, which proposes diversity as real, yet part of a singular Ultimate, Brahman. Advaita Vedanta looks at all diversity as an illusion (Maya). On these topics, see, for example, Smart, N. (1998). The World’s Religions, 89-90, 97-98. Cambridge University Press. Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism: https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism/vedanta-advaita-vedanta-and-the-schools-of-vedanta-COM_9000000078
conclusion that there are buyers who dictate the rules of the market, and sellers who obey the rules, and wants to have no business with that kind of system; in fact, he wants to die (63-4).

He comes up with a theory:

Is pūre samay ko dekhkar yah thyorī banī hai merī. Jab Shiv kā kānsepṭ banāyā já rahā thā, tab uskā hiḍen prāspekṭ thā ye bāzār. Aur use sahn karne ke lie, ātmsāt kar lene ke lie yah pūrā dharmśāstr racā gayā. (Looking at this whole time, this theory of mine has been born. When the concept of Shiva was being made, these markets were its hidden prospect. And in order for it to be tolerated, for it to be appropriated, this whole dharmashastra [codes of conduct] was composed; 82.)

His proclamation thus elevates liberal market economy onto a position of first cosmological truth (but it is doubtful whether he realizes this), and he even seems to imply that it is a fiction created by humans. In his version he is the buyer as Shakti (Shiv’s active nature) who keeps the market functioning but is kept in the dark, simply obeying the rules set by the seller as Shiv. Rebelling against Shiv would be hopeless and absurd, since they are one and the same. Significantly however, he refers to Shiv and Shakti as what they are according to Sāṁkhya philosophy (81), which in turn is an emphatically dualist philosophy, where puruṣa (Shiv) is consciousness and prākṛti (Shakti) is matter, something akin to a mind-body dualism, by a quick and simplified definition. Thus, one can say that he is confused. He feels trapped inside a system that he has been drawn into (see 5.2.3), as if it were a cosmological necessity; yet the system seems to him to be composed of unequal members.

5.2.2 Intersubjectivity 1: questions of language, understanding and power, and the need to be included

The protagonist remembers the humiliation of initially mispronouncing the word advait in front of the entire office staff, saying adaitya, confusing it with daitya, ‘monster’ (25). He does indeed seem to feel that he is living in a monstrous version of advait, that he doesn’t understand any further now that he knows how to pronounce it. He says, “Koi nahīṁ mānegā ki ye sārī rājnīti bhāṣā mē huī thī aur

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18 For more on Sāṁkhya philosophy, see, for example, Gupta, B. (2012). *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge, and Freedom*, 130-143. Routledge.
merī bhāṣā mē abhī bhī aise tamām akṣar hai, jinhē jān būjhkar kisi pāṭhśālā mē nahiṁ parhāyā jātā”. (No one is going to believe that all these politics happened through language, and in my language there are still all these letters that are deliberately not being taught in any classroom; 99.) Further, he states that

sārā khel bhāṣā ke mādhyam se khelā jā raḥā hai, aur maĩ jis bhāṣā mē jītā-khātā hūṁ, uske šabd chāṁt-chāṁtkaṛ khet banāne vāle apne šabdkoś mē ṭāṁk rahe haĩ. ... aisā lagtā hai, yah koī parāī bhāṣā hai. ... Maĩ bār-bār yah soc raḥā hūṁ ki jin panño par kredit kāṛd ke lie mujhse dastḵhat karāe gae the, ve merī bhāṣā mē kyō nahiṁ the, tāki maĩ unẖē ek nigāh parhne kī himmat to kar pātā? (The whole game is being played by means of language, and the makers of the game are cutting words out of my everyday language, and pasting them onto their dictionary. ... It seems like a foreign language. ... I keep wondering over again why the pages where I was made to sign for the credit card weren’t in my language, so I could have summoned the courage to even glance at them?; 45-6.)

He is also initially reserved about a credit card, thinking of all the horrible fates that characters in Premchand’s stories suffer at the mercy of creditors. Baba says he need not worry, because creditors today don’t have faces (38; italics my own). Yet they appear with very concrete faces when things go wrong.

Metamodernism seeks to emphasize that reality may be constructed through language, and that in society there are discourses, systems and structures, but that “they are no longer conceived of as ‘impersonal’ but rather as inter-personally constructed” (Timmer 2010: 52; original italics). In addition to feeling left outside of the symbolic negotiations of society, the protagonist is not able to identify, or reach out to, the people that have knowledge and power. He reads financial papers with a dictionary (23), converses in dreams and hallucinations, and hears soundwaves from the past (remarking how they are obviously impossible to have a conversation with; 78). Moreover, he is afraid of showing ignorance (he does not understand Baba’s philosophizing, but instead of asking, he just smiles knowingly; 50), and apart from Baba, he is not aware of who the people “on the other side of the fence” (64) are. All the conflicting advice on money (he has been instructed from his childhood to save, not to spend and borrow), are turning him into a mulatto (once again a reference to embodied identity; 41).

It would seem that, even if experienced as unreachable, and possibly hostile, the human beings behind the system is what he is after. When trying to picture these people, the image of big bellies and leftovers of a hearty meal (64) that he sees
instead of recognizable human faces can be read as a sign of his anxiety over not knowing who they are. When the murderer attacks, he doesn’t see his face at all:

\[
Vah \text{ patā nahīṁ kaun thā. Vitt Mantrī thā, sels egzīkyūṭiv thā, pahlvān thā, Bābā thā, mainejar thā, patā nahīṁ kaun thā. Śāyad vah merā samay thā. Śāyad vah āg thā, jiske prati maī ākārsit ho gayā thā. (Who knows who it was. The Finance Minister, the sales executive, the thug [from the bank executive’s entourage], Baba, a manager, I don’t know who it was. Perhaps it was my time. Perhaps it was that fire that I had been drawn to; 97.)}
\]

Yet it is the Finance Minister in person who declares his death sentence (60).

It is against this background that he ends up with his conspiracy theory, according to which social benefactors are not only driven to commit suicide, but \("\text{unkī kavitā mē vād-vivād kī taftīś karte hue unke aslī vicārõ ko hameśā ke lie dabā diyā gayā"}. (Who knows who it was. The Finance Minister, the sales executive, the thug [from the bank executive’s entourage], Baba, a manager, I don’t know who it was. Perhaps it was my time. Perhaps it was that fire that I had been drawn to; 97.)\) Wisdom won’t reveal itself to him, and he thinks someone is deliberately hiding it from him.

The need to be included

Van der Merwe argues for metamodern relationality as that which Ettinger defines as “differentiation in co-emergence” (2006: 218; original italics):

Differences are … formed only because self and other are always already "entangled", always already in a relational network with each other and interacting/intra-acting with each other. At this point, … the idea of a separating, binary creating boundary between them is rendered impossible (van der Merwe 2017: 235).

This essential relatedness results in what Timmer describes as “a structural need for a we” (Timmer 2010: 45): in other words, the need of an individual embedded in social networks to belong, exercise agency and receive validation for his/her experiences from others. This is what social psychologist Kenneth Gergen stresses in his idea of relationality: our ideas of what is “real, rational, and good” are intersubjectively produced (Gergen 2011: 281). “It is not individuals who come together to form relationships; rather, it is out of collaborative action (or co-action) that the very conception of the individual mind comes into existence…” (ibid. 281).

The protagonist remembers how proud he was of putting an English language paper on his desk for his colleagues to see (24). He cannot help feeling important for all the
effort put in by the bank in order to have him as their client, and, he adds, “maĩ is bāt se phūlā rahā ki maĩ ek upbhoktā hūṁ, jise apnī fehrist mē jornā in sab ke lie bahut anivārya hai”. (I was swelling with pride for the fact that I was a consumer whom all these agents [the bank, the share market, shiny shops] thought was essential to add to their list; 40.) But instead of a “better life” (40-1), he got into trouble, and the bank is threatening him with “action” (41, 68). “That is not the kind of economy that I wanted”, he says (41).

Feeling excluded, the protagonist seems to be using his ignorance and powerlessness as an excuse to evade responsibility, and is keen on blaming others for his predicament. He blames the bank for forcing him to get the card (28, 41, 86-7). He does not accept the logic of being responsible for using it:

\[ \text{Vaise bāth, āp logō ne jīnā muhāl kar rakhā haĩ. Aql ghs carne gaĩ thē merī, jab kārd liyā thā. Vah bhē maĩne nahīṁ liyā thā, zabardastī pakṛākar gayā thā vah, us par ehsān hē kiyā thā. (Besides, you people have made life impossible. When I got the card, my good sense flew out the window\textsuperscript{19}. And it wasn’t even me who took it, he [the boy] forced it into my hand, I was being kind to him; 86-7.)} \]

\[ \text{Maĩne use kitnī bār samjhānā cāhā ki maĩne nahīṁ māṁgā thē kārd, cāhe to vah vāpas le jāe, par vah kāhtā rahā ki sar, āpne yūz kar liyā hai, to paise to bharne hē hōge. (How many times I tried to explain to him that I had not asked for the card, he could take it back if he wanted, but he kept saying ‘sir, You have used it, so You will have to repay’; 41.)} \]

Consequently, the narrative alludes to problems on both individual and collective levels, once again highlighting the entanglement of self and other. There can be found pronouncements about a lack of communication and insufficient integration of an individual into a system, and about the subsequent withdrawal of the individual as an accountable member of that system. But things are not black and white, even for the protagonist: he would not like to blame his wife for any of it, but still he cannot help but blame her a little for not stopping him (42); then he goes on to recount the wife’s obsessive desires to buy things as a partial reason for the mess that he finds himself in (43). Yet he desperately asks for forgiveness of his family for not being able to fight (another indication of an antagonism, of a war within society) and give them a secure future: “Mujhe kṣamā karnā ki jo log havā, pānī, zamīn aur samay ko harap rahe the, maĩ unke ḵilāf na apnā krodh darj kar pāyā aur na hī virodh”. (Forgive me that I wasn’t able to put in my anger nor my resistance against those who were

\textsuperscript{19} “\textit{Aql ghs carne gaĩ}” is an idiom that literally means ‘good sense went out to graze’.

45
usurping our air, water, land and time; 92-3.) Many times his blaming of others is thus mixed with self-blame and mortification.

5.2.3 Intersubjectivity 2: sameness

The protagonist is also keen on blaming others for being insensitive, whilst himself acting precisely in the same manner. He ridicules his wife’s dreams and their ending in failure (21); he calls Baba a fool, because “uske sapnõ mẽ koĩ bhĩ ātã hai” (“anyone will come into his dreams”; 33). Instead of sympathizing, he proudly tells how he has been able to milk the occasions of Baba’s weakness by making him sign an advance salary check or give him time off (33). In fact, he isn’t sympathetic to anyone having worries similar to his. He accuses his colleagues for not helping him, each of them thinking their own problems “unparalleled” (advitīy; 69); he marvels how this can be, when they are, according to him, all the same as him:

... un sab kĩ bātẽ, ādatẽ, nārāžgĩ aur khusiyān ek jaisĩ thīn, ... ve taraqqī aur barkat ke ek jaise sapne dekhĩ karte the, ... kangālī aur tanghālī se sabko ek jaisā ďar lagta thā aur ek jaisā kharāb mālī hālat, ... ve sab protoṭāip the mere varg ke — jise madhyam varg kahā jātā hai. (All of their habits, their causes of discontent and happiness were alike, ... they had the same dreams about growth and prosperity, ... all feared poverty and adversity in the same manner, and all had the same wretched financial situation, ... all of them were prototypical of my class — that is called middle class; 69.)

Adam Zagajewski’s poem “Fire” is used in the narration to describe one big cause of this sameness that the protagonist above alludes to: it is the “pink spirit” (23) that has engulfed everyone20:

“Maĩ gungunātā hūṁ usĩ āg ke gīt / aur jāntā hūṁ / dūsrō ke sāth-sāth daunṛnā kītā bārā kām hai / Phir mūh mẽ ghus āī rākh ke svād ke sāth / maĩ suntā hūṁ āpne hī bhītar se nikalī / jhūṭh kǐ viḍambanā bharī āvāz / aur bhīr kĩ cīkhē / Aur jab chūtā hūṁ āpne sīr / to lagīṭā hāi / chū rahā hūṁ āpne des kĩ ke gol khopṛī ko / uske saṅktā kināṛō ko” (15; translated into Hindi by Geet Chaturvedi)

“I used to sing those songs and I know how great it is to run with others; later, by myself, with the taste of ashes in my mouth, I heard the lie’s ironic voice and the choir screaming / and when I touched my head I could feel / the arched skull of my country.

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20 The very first time the protagonist-narrator paraphrases the poem, he does it with “maĩne batāyā hai na” (I did tell you; 32), but the only instance that he can possibly refer to is the direct quote of the poem at the beginning of the novella; this is an example of the personalized appropriation of intertextual reference discussed at 5.1.2.
its hard edge” (Zagajewski 1985; translated from the original Polish by Renata Gorczynski)

The market is that fire (96) that everyone is drawn to but no one warned him about, maybe, he suspects, because they were equally mesmerized by it (42). Then he manages to arouse a rebellion, where thousands die (60); the following day at work all the colleagues who were there the day before refuse to admit it, and he says they have been bought by a conspiracy the danger of which they are unaware of (66). And those with knowledge, for their part, arrive to watch him get killed (97).

Any moments of hope, he realizes, are fleeting. He has an experience where he collapses on the train floor (the train is a central motive in the novella, representing society, very apt for India of course); people shun him, thinking he is drunk, but then someone helps him onto a seat regardless. Right then, “duniyā ek khūbsūrat bunāvat lagī, ... jismẽ cakkar khāe ek ādmī ko tamām gāliyān ke bād ab bhī baïthne kī jagah de dī jātī hai”. (The world seemed like a beautiful fabric where, after all possible insults, a man who felt dizzy is still offered a seat; 76.) But then he ends up pulling the moustache of a sleeping old man (because he keeps collapsing against him), grateful that he doesn’t fight back: he realizes that the beautiful fabric will be only momentary for those who cannot fight back. He wants to apologize to the man (“ham donõ ek hī varg ke haĩ”; “we are both of the same class”), yet shake him, too, and ask him why doesn’t he fight (77). So in the protagonist’s mind there seems to reside a pretty hard-settled idea of society being infused with necessary struggle, between equals and different classes alike. He does not believe anyone feels, for longer than the next blow, that “because everyone is equally vulnerable, everyone has a moral responsibility towards everyone else” (van der Merwe 2017: 289).

In the protagonist’s pronouncements, there is a demand for community, yet hope is crushed every time. I might paraphrase it thus: there exists a community, and he is part of it — the country exists inside his head (as in “Fire”); but, like in Zagajewski’s poem maybe, it’s an empty skull, empty of some true essence of community. Other people are to him either ignorant or indifferent, but he is himself none the better. Nevertheless, the few moments of hope (the train rebellion is another instance), create a metamodern oscillation between glimpses of togetherness and the return to antagonism and indifference.
5.2.4 Baba representing a metamodern hope shattered?

Finally, I will take one last look at the character of Baba. Throughout the story, the protagonist seems unsure about him: whether he is smart or a fool (25), whether he is a “seller” or a “buyer” (because, as it turns out, he is a manager up to his neck in debt; 55). He shows up to his aid in the train rebellion (59). Until the very end the protagonist holds out hope for Baba to believe him. He encounters Baba in the street right before he dies: “Vah [Baba] mujhe acchā lagā. Kisī khāmī cehre par duniyābhar kī gutthiyāṁ hotī haī. Unhē suljhāne kī kośīš mē ādmī kitnā sundar ho jātā hai”. (He looked good to me. On a genuine face, all the troubles of the world can be seen. How beautiful a man becomes trying to solve them; 97.) Baba believes the protagonist has attained knowledge. But then he declines the offer to join the protagonist in nirvana (whatever that will mean (death, “death” as giving up, suicide, murder), as discussed before); his entire body is smiling as he says his soul is on holiday. The protagonist realizes that Baba is not a fool, he is smart to leave his soul at home while he himself carries it around (97). All in all, Baba seems to be fighting a battle between irony and sincerity, that is, a battle between a postmodern detachment and a metamodern commitment to human concerns, however silly or unresolvable they might seem. It is a battle that the protagonist, I argue, is not able to even entertain as an idea — detachment for him is not an option. It may not be possible for Baba either, but the protagonist — in the absence of an honest dialogue between them — just thinks and fears so.
6. Conclusion

The framework of metamodernism has offered a means to systematically map out the contradictions that I have found a significant feature of this novella. I will now sum up these findings, and reiterate the kind of metamodern patterns — of oscillation between, or going beyond a pair of opposites — that have formed in the course of my research. In general, I have been able to discern four broad metamodern themes that appear and reappear throughout the variously interrelated sections of the analysis; these themes are also many times intertwined with one another. First, is a certain idea of holism, or an alternative to a fragmented or compartmentalized sense of reality (hyperreality, as presented in the context of ontological disorientation and intertextuality), self (the embodied self, or the idea of the “intertextuality of connectedness”), or society (the ideas presented as a “metamodern advait”). Second, is the theme of intersubjectivity (sincerity, and the idea of an inclusive and humane society). Third, is the thematics of truth, belief, knowledge, and reality. Fourth, is a focus on affective and bodily experience that appears in the context of trying to trust and appreciate affective, immediate and corporeal experience in spite of doubt, and in the search for a sameness, empathy and solidarity between people. For the sake of clarity, in the following discussion the remarks concerning these thematic categories will appear in cursive.

I argued that the protagonist is desperate to know what is real. This is complicated by ontological instability and the protagonist’s doubtful attitude towards it. He is not sure what to make of dreams: he cannot help sensing that they are somehow important, yet he makes sarcastic comments about his and other people’s dreams. He goes through episodes that no one else believes, and that could be hallucinatory; in fact, he is not sure himself, and the reader will doubt, too. Still, all of these events are a part of him, and are interconnected in the sense that they are provoked by his waking reality and the worries that he has there. They are a part of him most significantly in the sense that they remain with him in his waking reality causing strong feelings and bodily symptoms.

Based on this, I suggested a metamodern reading that would emphasize that all experiential levels are valuable, meaning that the emotions and thoughts caused by
events, whether actual, dreamed or hallucinated, are real, and can stubbornly persist in a person’s waking reality — as happens with the protagonist. *This part of the analysis, first of all, clearly engages with the first thematic category (holism).*

However, this being very much a discussion on emotional and bodily experiences, it also touches upon the thematics of the fourth category. The intellectual ponderings of the protagonist on how “real” or valuable these experiences might be, for their part, *introduce the third thematic dimension into the discussion.* In other words, there is a metamodern oscillation present in the protagonist’s uncertainty about how to relate to dreams (belief versus sarcasm), and in his search for (factual) truth that he is however unable to attain from dreams (nor from anywhere else for that matter). The protagonist keeps listing his feelings and bodily symptoms: they are always true for him; yet that doesn’t lead him to regard dreams — as the cause of those feelings and symptoms — as equally real. In addition, he constantly mocks other people’s dreams and the feelings they arouse. This, the protagonist’s search for knowledge, and his wife’s disregard for the emotional aspect of his money troubles are, I argue, manifestations within the novella of the primacy of facts before feelings. A metamodern analysis can single this out as a lack in the novella’s fictional world: namely, the persistence of brute reality as superior, and the disregard of emotions resulting from questionable events as an important alternative to absolute truth, that is, the truth about the events themselves.

In conjunction with the above, I argued for the motive of gomūtr, cow’s urine, to highlight the self as embodied: that is, a sense of self that is the union of the affective and the cognitive. Instead of a postmodern idea of a fragmented self constantly recreating itself responding to outside stimuli, the embodied self is deeply personal, and significantly held together by a physical and affective sense of itself. For the protagonist, it becomes a matter of life and death when that being is violated and dispossessed of control. *This section belongs to the first thematic category, but it also encompasses the fourth, affective and bodily dimension.*

The discussion so far looked at the “suspect” nature of experience from the viewpoint of the unequal value of various ontological levels (here intended as different states of consciousness), and the neglected position of affective and corporeal experience. The discussion on intertextuality, in turn, observed how the same suspicion is directed
against textually mediated experience: how doubts about the originality of a person’s narration can influence the audience’s judgement on the narrator’s authenticity or reliability. *This “thematics of suspicion” obviously belongs to the third broad category.* The text itself, the story told by the protagonist, is fertile ground for an onslaught of doubt: what really happened, and can one trust a narrator that cuts and pastes his story together from other texts and appears to suffer from severe hallucinations, yet asks us with a desperate forcefulness to believe him. Moreover, the protagonist himself accuses people in positions of power of manipulating other people’s texts with the aim of suppressing an original meaning, and of cutting and pasting words into a language that thus becomes unintelligible to him. In other words, he is (seemingly unbeknownst to himself) doing the exact same thing that he is accusing others of. I proposed that a metamodern reading exposes an alternative way of looking at truth in the novella, whereby an epistemological suspicion — questions such as what is real, what is borrowed — is pushed aside, in favour of a more affective and ontological (in Pavel’s sense of the word; see theory section) focus. In particular, this means shifting focus away from questions of originality, of who originally said what, seeing as that is many times impossible to know, and taking what the protagonist is telling as an expression of how he feels and how he looks at his situation, regardless of whether the words are borrowed or it could have been a hallucination.

I also proposed a possible universalizing mission in the protagonist’s narration, in his use of intertextual reference as a means to widen his personal condition into a manifestation of a general, and enduring, human state of affairs. The protagonist is referring to real persons and fictional characters alike, and appropriating their stories in equal manner. On the level of character analysis, this can be read merely as an attempt by the protagonist to alleviate personal guilt by seeking a kind of “group support”. On a more theoretical level, it is, I argue, an indication of intertextuality as something that brings people and stories together, and even breaks barriers: between fictional story and autobiography, between real person and fictional character. That being said, the protagonist, however, as maybe a reader, too, is aware of yet another metamodern oscillation: the always mediated, and consequently in a way “suspect” nature of any kind of narration. The passage where the protagonist is borrowing from “Mohandas” — considering his having referred to the character at an earlier point,
and the thematic content of the borrowing as addressing questions of reality, textuality, and originality — can be interpreted as an effect of the inevitability of (inter)textuality: that in the act of trying to convince the reader of a true story, he accidentally (or in an effort to make it look accidental, in order to prove this point, however one prefers to look at it) makes his story appear as more inauthentic. I proposed that this impasse actually opens up the possibility to look at intertextuality in a different, metamodern way: to acknowledge hyperreality and a muddled intertextual-interpersonal reality, but to consider that as something positive, sign of an interconnectedness, where stories and people become connected in profound ways, finding affective and cognitive resonance in each other. I think that is what the protagonist, too, is trying to say — explicitly through open reference and implicitly through unintentional ones. Which is which, is not always clear, but I argued that that is less important.

The above discussion on the connectedness of stories and people is most clearly related to the first thematic category. In addition, all of the above points concerning ontological instability and intertextuality were discussed within the framework of sincerity. By this I intended to underline how they encompass as shared characteristics the metamodern search for common ground and/or an honest dialogue between people (or between people and stories, for example, as argued for here), and the importance of being acknowledged and believed by others. Thus it can be stated that the second, intersubjective dimension is implicated in all of the discussions so far. Additionally, the emotional importance of another person taking one’s story or experience seriously (instead of doubting its authenticity, for example), is a topic of the fourth, affective category.

Having identified sincerity, as it is alluded to in the protagonist’s narration, as a difficult project, I took another look at the Post Script, and suggested that the protagonist’s mantra (“no one is going to believe”) could — in addition to being an expression of his desperation at no one believing his story — simultaneously reveal a somewhat contrary objective. He comes up with a theory that rebelling against a dominant system will be futile and/or life-threatening; yet he has a nagging doubt that he is somehow guilty for his inadequacy. I have argued for a metamodern entanglement of self and other: in this case, as long as others don’t believe him, the issue of whether he is crazy or not in his theorizing, will remain contested, open for
someone else to produce a more hopeful articulation on the future of society. His theory will remain in a state of desired undecidability, for which reason I chose to term it a “loser’s historioplastic metafiction”. It may not be the protagonist’s first choice — I still argue that above all he wants to be included and believed — but it is an expression of his loss of faith in other people. Consequently, I proposed to look at the incantation-like form of the Post Script as a manifestation of this “contingency plan”. This “loser’s historioplastic metafiction” concerns the production and acceptance of knowledge and truth as an intersubjective endeavour, and as such it mostly belongs to the second and third thematic categories; however, the protagonist’s call for help (as it comes across in the Post Script) signals the presence of the affective theme here, as well.

In the same section, I contrasted the protagonist’s loss of faith in people’s will to believe with the example of the successful performance of advertising and sales speeches. I argued that people still have an ability and a will to believe — even if it were solely connected with a selfish interest, as the protagonist suspects. An ethical (human, metamodern) angle to this suggests that in a discursive (constructivist) society, this can lead to a dishonest symbolic construction being swallowed whole by a human being in need. This is a discussion on knowledge, power and belief (third category) where the intersubjective (second) and affective (fourth) dimensions are strongly present.

I continued the discussion on intersubjectivity in the second part, focusing not on truth and credibility, but on the thematics of knowledge and community. I looked at Baba’s identity crisis as one between irony and authenticity. Next, I discussed the protagonist’s confused concept of the market as advait. I argued as “postmodern advait” the illusory holism of a society that is made up of opposites and unequal members.

The following two sections on intersubjectivity, in turn, had to do with what a metamodern kind of non-dualism might consist of. I first introduced the idea of knowledge not as “impersonal”, but as “inter-personally constructed” (Timmer 2010: 52). I argued that the protagonist is looking for precisely this: his desperate articulations on his inability to identify the people who have knowledge and power attest to this. He describes his society as being conducted via language games that are
being played by faceless people. I also argued that his sense of exclusion is causing him to withdraw further from society and responsibility, an indication of something that I described as a vicious circle of self and other. The idea of an inclusive society has to do with the first and second thematic categories, and the sublevel of the discussion (knowledge) with the third.

Related to the affective and intersubjective dimensions (and always within the discussion on society as an inclusive whole), the protagonist also identifies a certain sameness between people, but this sameness of circumstance and fate does not, in his formulation, predict solidarity. He realizes that moments of harmony and unity (such as the train rebellion or the experience of the “beautiful fabric”) are just fleeting instances of hope. I proposed that these instances, together with the protagonist’s less optimistic pronouncements on the ignorance and insensitivity of people, significantly create a metamodern pattern where glimpses of hope for solidarity and kindness — a “metamodern advait” — sometimes pierce the fabric of the “monstrous advait”.


