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Crossing Lines:
The Theme of Transgressing Social Boundaries in
Arundhati Roy's
The God of Small Things

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Introduction

Everywhere we turn, we come across moral boundaries that we at least think we are not supposed to cross, but that we do cross nonetheless. “As ye sow, ye shall reap” is a proverb we all have heard sometime (Roy 31). But is it really true? Do we get what we deserve? And if so, who decides what is right and what is wrong? Who decides what we should and should not be punished for?

In Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, most of the characters cross moral boundaries. Eventually, they all get punished for doing so. In this novel, Roy presents two kinds of morality. One of them is social morality, which can be defined as what a group thinks is good and right or the way one should behave. The other one is individual morality – what oneself thinks is the right way to act. These two kinds of morality inevitably clash. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy presents and, in some way, even encourages her characters to stand in the middle of this clash. She pushes her characters to pursue their personal truths. They are seen reveling in their freedom and courage for doing so. But, eventually, they get punished by their families and society.

The God of Small Things takes place in the Indian state of Kerala, a state where all the largest religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism – exist. This is the part of India which includes the largest number of Christians, the group to which the Kochamma family belong to. This is also the part of India with the lowest literacy rate in the country. Kerala is described as developed in comparison to other parts of India. However, it is not as developed as one might think or wish it was. In an interview with David Barsamian in the book *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile*, Roy explains that the caste system is still used in Kerala, that “Even among the Syrian Christians – who are the oldest, most orthodox Christians in India – you have caste issues” (2). She claims that the caste system, which is often seen as something made up and used by Hindus, is used all over India, no matter what religion or social class people belong to. In the same interview, Roy tells about the status of women in Kerala. She explains that women from Kerala work and earn their own money, which can be interpreted as high status. Nevertheless, they still “will get married, pay a dowry, and end up having the most bizarrely subservient relationship with their husbands” (Barsamian 5). Both these things – the caste issue and the gender issue – are dealt with in *The God of Small Things*. Probably the biggest issue in the novel is how influenced all parts of society are by social norms, the rules that decide how every single person in their society should, or should not act. These are the rules that underpin both the gender and the caste

divisions, social norms that decide that men and women who act similarly should be treated differently and the social norms that also decide that people who have had the misfortune of being born into a low caste have much less rights than people who are born into a high caste.

The novel is about the Kochammas, an upper middleclass Syrian Christian family, who live in a village called Ayemenem. It tells about Ammu, a divorced mother of twins, who lives in her parents' home, the Ayemenem house with her mother, Mammachi; her brother, Chacko; and their great aunt, Baby Kochamma. Most of the plot takes place during a two-week's period in the year 1969, when Chacko's British ex-wife, Margaret Kochamma, and their eight-year-old daughter, Sophie Mol, come to Ayemenem to visit their Indian family. During this visit, Sophie Mol tragically drowns, and a scandalous love affair between Ammu and the low caste Paravan, Velutha, is revealed. Both these occurrences are blamed on Velutha, and as punishment, he is beaten to death by the police. But the novel does not merely tell about these two weeks; it is about much more than that. The narrative shifts back and forth in time and place, from one narrative voice, to another, throughout the whole novel.

The life of Roy, before she became the famous writer that she now is, and the life the character of Rahel in her novel are very much alike. However, Roy insists that this novel is not autobiographical. She claims that she has based the atmosphere of *The God of Small Things* on her own experiences of what it was like to grow up in Kerala, but not on the details of her life. However, it is impossible to miss that her childhood in Kerala has not only inspired the setting of the novel, but also the characters.

On an internet site, John Simmons writes about Roy's childhood: she was born in 1961, the child of a Mary Roy, a Syrian Christian woman from Kerala and a Bengali Hindu tea planter. Just like Rahel in the novel, her parents later got divorced and the children grew up in the house of their mother's parents, without a father. There are a lot of resemblances between Roy's life and Rahel's. However, the person in Roy's life who seems to have most similarities with a character in the novel is Roy's mother, Mary Roy, who now is a well-known social activist and who also married a Hindu and later got divorced. Nevertheless, in an article by Vir Sangvih, Roy claims that "In many ways, Ammu is totally unlike Mary Roy in the kind of person she is" (1)

In order to focus on the theme of crossing boundaries, I am going to focus on two characters – Ammu and Velutha – that both cross boundaries in their lives. The "mistake" that first comes to mind is maybe the fact that they are lovers: an untouchable, cast-less man has a sexual relationship with an upper middle-class, Syrian Christian woman. But this is not the

first time this couple has crossed social boundaries. Before they even think about becoming a couple, they break social codes on their own.

Ammu Transgressing Boundaries

The women in *the God of Small Things* belong to men throughout their whole lives. From the day they are born until the day they get married, they are the property of their fathers. The fathers decide how their daughters should live and act; they are supposed to make sure that their daughters act according to the social norms in their community. One way to see the oppression of the female characters in the novel is by looking at how they get married. In order to marry off their daughters, the fathers have to pay a dowry to the prospective husband. To have a woman in the family is therefore such a burden that the fathers even have to pay to get rid of them, to “burden another poor soul” with them. Therefore, to in any way invest in women is worthless. One example of this is when Ammu wants to go to study in college, but Pappachi refuses to send her. He does not want to waste any money on a woman’s education. According to him, it is much better that she stays at home, with her mother, and learns household chores. Pappachi does not think that sending her to college will pay off; staying home, on the other hand, is something she will get use of, since when married she is going to stay at home anyway.

As a young, unmarried woman, Ammu spends a summer in Calcutta with a distant relative. This seems to be when she starts to get into trouble, and when she starts to cross social boundaries. During this summer, she meets her future husband, the father of her future children. This man is not the kind of man her parents want her to marry; he is a stranger to the family, and, worst of all, he is a Hindu. And for a young Christian woman from the upper middle-class, a Bengali Hindu is not the right kind of man to marry. Therefore, by marrying this man, she brings shame to not only herself, but to her whole family, something that the rest of the family of course is not so pleased about.

Because the women are owned by men all their lives, the only way to leave their fathers’ home is by marrying their second owner. Just moving on their own is something impossible for these women – and this is also the case for Ammu. When she accepts his proposal, the only thing Ammu has in mind is to get out of Ayemenem, to escape the life she will have if she returns home. At the time, “She thought that *anything*, anyone at all, would be

better than returning to Ayemenem” (Roy 39). She wants to flee Ayemenem and everything that has to do with her home town; so, for her, marrying him seems to be the only solution of her problems. However, as Nirmala C. Prakash in the article “Man-Woman Relationship in *The God of Small Things*” claims, this kind of marriage, a marriage of convenience, can be as terrible as any other unsuccessful marriage (81). It is not painful for Ammu just because they do not get her parents’ approval. Furthermore, what Ammu does not realize immediately is that, by marrying this man, she does not merely cross social boundaries. Unintentionally, she also continues the family-tradition of living in a loveless marriage. And this is, as she later realizes, an even bigger mistake; by marrying him, by putting herself in a loveless marriage – a situation she is not happy in – she also crosses her personal boundaries.

Obviously, marrying a Hindu is, according to the society Ammu comes from, a huge mistake, and her subsequent actions do not exactly raise their thoughts of her.

In the end of their marriage, Ammu’s husband asks Ammu to spend some private time with his boss. But when Ammu refuses, he beats her in punishment for not obeying him, as if she does not really have a choice. Because she is a woman, it is seen as her duty to just do as he pleases. However, when her drunken husband starts to not only beat her, but also the children, the rebellious Ammu leaves him to live in her parents’ house again. Her return, if possible, is seen as even more scandalous than marrying a stranger. The reason why Ammu leaves her husband is irrelevant; no matter how terrible a husband he is, no matter how he treats Ammu and their children, according to their society, divorcing him is even worse. There are no excuses for divorces; they are just the wrong thing to be part of. End of story. Baby Kochamma, who seems to have some “wise” words for every moment someone crosses societal boundaries, explains what she, and the rest of their society, think about the way Ammu lives her life:

She subscribed wholeheartedly to her commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a *divorced* daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a *divorced* daughter from a *love marriage*, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from a *intercommunity love marriage* – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quaveringly silent on the subject. (Roy 45-46)

The family actually treats Ammu according to Baby Kochamma’s sentiments. This is something that is revealed already in the first few pages of *The God of Small Things*. When beginning to read this novel, one immediately understands that Ammu and her children must

have done something terrible. One section in the novel where this is really shown is during the funeral of Sophie Mol: “Though Ammu, Estha and Rahel were allowed to attend the funeral, they were made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them” (Roy 5). They are allowed to go to the funeral, but they are not treated as a part of the family anymore. Now, their social standing is as low as Velutha’s, or one of the other Paravans’. Nobody wants to talk with them, nobody wants to come near them; they are, as Mohit Kumar Ray in her article “’Locust Stand I’: Some Feminine Aspects of *The God of Small Things*” calls it, “virtually untouchable” (52). Ammu and her children are not at all wanted in the Ayemenem house; which is clearly indicated by the rest of the family. Nothing they do, from here on, will improve their standing. After Sophie Mol’s arrival, this starts to seem very clear. From that moment on, the true feelings of their family slowly become more and more evident. However, after the big revelation of the love affair of Ammu and Velutha, and the death of Sophie Mol, one really comes to see how resented Ammu and the twins are by their own family. Because of the way the novel is narrated, because it constantly switches from one time to another, this is something one as a reader gets to experience very early in the book. However, the bad treatment of Ammu and her twins is something that is written about earlier in the plot too. These three people do not seem to be seen as worthy family members, as, for example, Chacko, Baby Kochamma or even Sophie Mol are. A place where this is shown is when the Kochamma family welcomes Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol to their country. Their British cousin gets a kind of welcoming that Rahel and Estha have never and probably will never get from their family, and the reason for this is that their mother married the wrong man.

Ammu, of course, loves her children. All she wants is for them to be loved. But all she sees, and has seen, since the day they were born, in her own, or rather, her parent’s home, and in the rest of their community, is her children being unloved. However, this changes the day she sees the way Velutha treats them; with him, they can play and laugh as much as they want. All Velutha does is to make them happy, loving them and accepting them. This must be one of the reasons, a big reason, why “She loves by night the man her children love by day” (Roy 44).

Velutha Transgressing Boundaries

Also Velutha does things that he, according to his society, is not supposed to do because he is a Paravan, or an untouchable. To make things easy, one can say that he is supposed to do everything in his power so that no touchable person has to go through the disaster of coming into contact with him. This includes obvious physical contact like touching, but also breathing directly on another, or talking to a touchable. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy presents the history of the Paravans. She writes about Velutha's father who lived during "the Crawling Backwards days" (76) – when Paravans had to crawl backwards and sweep away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians did not have to step into a Paravan's footprint and, by this, be polluted by any untouchables. And the Paravans still, to a certain extent, live by the rules of those times.

Vellya Paapen is always worried about his son who does not seem to "know any better". He has really accepted the boundaries he, as a Paravan, cannot cross. He does not seem to even think about questioning them. When Vellya Paapen tells Mammachi about Ammu and Velutha's love affair is one passage in the novel where Roy really shows how ingrained the rules about castes are. Just going over to the Kochamma home and telling the story shows how important it is for him to please them. Before telling it, Vellya Paapen already knows that the Kochammas knowing about the love affair will probably kill his son, but this is not enough to stop him. Instead of just telling the Kochamma family what he knows, and then at least going to warn his son, he even offers to kill Velutha himself. The social norms about castes are even more important too him than his own son's life.

The "problem" with Velutha is that he does not let the caste he is born to prevent him from doing what he wants. Although normally Paravans do not go to school, or at least finish high-school, he does. But were most people would stop, he just continues. He does not think that maybe this is too much for a Paravan to do. So he learns to be a carpenter and starts working at a place where he still does not have the rights a touchable would have, but where he is allowed to do a lot more than other Paravans. It is shown that the way Velutha lives his life, and the way he is treated, is something unique; that he is not really like the other Paravans:

To keep the others happy, and since she knew that nobody else would hire him as a carpenter, Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would pay a Touchable carpenter but more than she would pay a Paravan. Mammachi didn't encourage him

to enter the house (except when she needed something mended or installed). She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed to the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan. (Roy 77)

Velutha is treated differently than the other Paravans, and, as Mammachi seems to see it, the only reason for this is the kindness of her good heart. However, in a way, Mammachi takes advantage of the knowledge that Velutha possesses. She knows that given his capability, he deserves to get a much better job. But, along with this, she also knows that because he belongs to this very low caste, there is no possibility for him to get a better job than the one she has to offer him. Therefore, she can take advantage of the situation and pay him less than he deserves.

For Velutha, being treated differently is not necessarily something painful; as long as he does not cross any boundaries seen as awfully important, he is still, to a certain extent, accepted. Velutha is allowed to do things that Vellya Paapen and other Paravans seem to not even dare to dream about. However, the thing that annoys a lot of people is not just him having these rights. The thing that is so unique about Velutha is that he does not seem to think that he is fortunate. By the way he acts, it seems like he does not really care about the caste laws that so clearly control, among many others, his own father's life. It seems as if he almost cannot see that he is a Paravan, that he has a lower caste than a lot of people, and, that being a Paravan, being Velutha, should not be something to be proud of, as social norms dictate. But Velutha does not think about these things. He does not see the difference between a touchable and an untouchable. He does not see why a Brahmin or a Syrian Christian should be worth more than him, or why he should be thankful to them, when he knows if it was not for his own intelligence, for his own capability with machines, he would never be where he now is – and that none of it is because of the touchables' kindness. The touchables in Ayemenem must be very annoyed by this, and they probably think him clueless; they probably see Velutha as ignorant because he does not seem to realize that he is subordinate to them. What he rather should do, according to society, is to be ashamed of who he is. He should think less of himself; he should be grateful; he should be thankful to the touchables who allow him to live the life he lives, who allow him to have the advantages he has. In a way, it seems like they want him to be grateful to them for letting him live at all. It seems like they in some way even believe that it is thanks to them he is alive, that without them, there would never even be a Velutha. They do not see the kind of gratefulness that, for example, Vellya Paapen shows them. To a certain extent, by the way he acts, he does not let them feel superior to him. And

this, to not really admit that he is less worthy than the touchables, is one of the worst things he does.

Ammu and Velutha Breaking the Love Laws

So both Ammu and Velutha have already transgressed several boundaries on their own. The negative picture people now have of them is unchangeable; they can do nothing to erase it. However, they can easily do things that make the situation worse; and, probably the worse thing they can do is have a love affair.

Several relationships are described in *The God of Small Things*, but, as Nirmala C. Prakash writes in her article “Man-Woman Relationships in *The God of Small Things*,” this relationship between Ammu and Velutha is “...the only one which germinates from the innermost core of two human hearts” which actually grows to “...the perfect kind of man-woman relationship, and the only one which is illustrated with scenes resonant with love, sex and feelings of mutual fulfillment” (82). This statement is very true. None of the other couples in the novel are described like this one is. In the other relationships, both partners are never really happy in the relationship – one person in the relationship is either beaten or not loved back. There is no giving and receiving in the other relationships, but here, between Ammu and Velutha, there is. Even though this probably is a relationship between two people who have the most difficulty actually meeting and showing their love to each other, they seem to be the only ones who realize what a relationship actually is all about: “He saw too that he was not the only giver of gifts. That *she* had gifts to give him too” (Roy 176-177). This couple does not let the rules about how men and women are supposed to be stop them; nor do they let the fact that they are from different castes be in the way for their love. The only thing that is important is that they want to be there for each other, in every kind of way. There are not a lot of scenes in the novel depicting Ammu and Velutha together; the only place where one can really read about the two of them together, where one can see how they are to each other, is in the last chapter, the last scene of the book, the love scene. Here, by describing the two of them having sex, Roy shows that they care for each other, that both of them want to make sure that they satisfy the other, and that the satisfaction is mutual.

What in a way unites this couple, except the physical attraction, is, I believe, also the fact that neither of them seem to care about the social boundaries that exist. They both

obviously know that the relationship they have is never going to be accepted in the community they live in. Nevertheless, they will not let that obstacle stop them. They always seem to do exactly what they want to do, although they always are aware of the opinions of others that actions are going to lead to. For example, Velutha knows that not showing that he is grateful to the touchables for the advantages he has in life will upset people. Ammu knows that intercommunity “love” marriages and divorces will upset both her family and society. But neither of them seem to care about what other people think. They always seem to act according to what they themselves think is best. This, the fact that they both are rebels against some kind of repression, unites this couple. An example that shows that at least Ammu is attracted by the fighter in Velutha is when Rahel says she sees him in the march. Ammu later wishes that it really was him, that: “...he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against” (Roy 175-176). Because they both are rebels against the social norms, they do not cross a lot of individual boundaries. Most of the time, they decide to transgress societal boundaries so that they will be spared from transgressing their individual boundaries.

The Love Laws

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy writes about the love laws, “the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (33). These love laws are in a way another word for social boundaries. In the novel, Roy writes about the love laws as something that has always existed and that probably will always be there. She claims that it came before Marxism arrived to Kerala, before the British, the Dutch and the Portuguese, and that they even existed there before Christianity came to Kerala.

Some specific characters represent society and its social norms. One of these, and the most important one, is Baby Kochamma. She has always got something to say about when someone else acts against the social norms. She seems to look for mistakes being made by other people all the time, and she is always ready to at least take note of the “mistake” being done. It is as if she wants to prove her innocence and goodness by showing how much worse other people behave. For example, when Ammu and Velutha’s love affair is revealed, Baby Kochamma is very quick to ask how Ammu can stand that awful smell the Paravans have. She keeps “an organized, careful account of Things She’d Done For People, and Things

People Hadn't Done For Her" (Roy 98). In her eyes, she sacrifices herself for people. She is flawless and free from sin, while she very quickly judges other people and points out their burdens and sins.

The police also function as social norm controllers. They are the ones who beat Velutha to death when the affair is discovered. After Sophie Mol's funeral, when Ammu finds out what has happened to Velutha, and tells them that it all is an awful mistake, they do not listen. Instead of regretting causing the death of Velutha, the police tap Ammu's breasts with their baton to show that they think that it all happened because of her inappropriate behavior.

What is frightening with the police is that they have the power to punish people for acting against the love laws. Baby Kochamma, in that way, seems rather harmless. She says a lot, and tries to rule, but she does not really have the power to directly and physically punish people for not acting as she thinks they should. The police, on the other hand, have this kind of power, and they are not afraid of using it. Proof of this is Velutha. He acts against the social norms, and, for this, the Police beat him to death. However, the reason why they attack him in the first place is Baby Kochamma. She is the one who tells the police what they need to hear to be able to punish Velutha as they do. So harmless is perhaps not the right word to describe Baby Kochamma. She lies and manipulates to get what she wants and again, to show that she is much better than everyone else, no matter what the cost is, even if the cost is somebody else's life.

The Gender Issue

The major way Ammu crosses boundaries is by acting against the gender roles in her society. The Indian Syrian Christian family she is a part of does not accept any behavior that in their society is seen as "morally wrong" from women. And Ammu's actions are the total opposite from what she is expected to do.

One way to see the difference between women's and men's roles is by comparing the way Ammu is treated by society, and especially her own family, with the way her brother Chacko is treated. As in most societies in the world – if not all – there are a lot of differences and double standards in the way people expect the two sexes to act. All in all, Ammu and Chacko act very similarly throughout their lives; however, because of their sexes, they get treated very differently for their actions.

For example, Chacko marries a British woman, has a child with her, and later gets divorced. When he returns to Ayemenem, without his family, he is still welcomed with open arms and continues to be the rightful inheritor of the family fortune as well as keeping an important place in the family. Ammu's life, on the other hand, is not as easy to live. The things she does in her life are very similar to the actions of Chacko: she marries someone outside her own community, has children with him, divorces him and returns to her parent's home. Although Chacko does the same, none of the things Ammu does seem to be accepted by her society or her family. Marrying outside her community is wrong, but divorcing him is, no matter how good the reason, even worse. It seems like whatever Ammu decides to do, she is already doomed: "She was twenty-seven that year, and in the pit of her stomach she carried the cold knowledge that for her, life had been lived. She had had one chance. She made one mistake. She married the wrong man" (Roy 38). But Chacko, the man, can make the same mistake, ten times worse, and still get away with it.

Another way to see that the two siblings are treated very differently is by looking at the way they are viewed and treated for having extramarital sex. Chacko has several lovers who he often invites to the Kochamma house for some special one-on-one time. Instead of condemning extramarital sex inside the walls of her house, Mammachi has a separate entrance built for Chacko's mistresses so that she does not have to see them go through the house. And, additionally, Mammachi's only explanation for accepting this behavior from Chacko is that "...he can't help having a man's needs" (Roy 168). However, the women who help him with these needs are never seen as normal human beings with needs or feelings. After they have "done their job," Mammachi puts money in their pockets "because in her mind, a fee *clarified* things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from Feelings" (Roy 169). In Mammachi's eyes, these women are nothing else than prostitutes hired to satisfy her son. She never thinks about the reason why these women do what they do with Chacko. She never seems to think about what Ammu says about Chacko being "a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood" (Roy 65). Neither Mammachi nor the rest of the family stops to think that maybe Chacko's behavior should not be accepted, that Chacko is using these women, who do not really have a choice if they want to be there for Chacko and his "needs" or not. They all seem to hold the opinion that these women, and all other women too, for that matter, are just supposed to be there for a man like Chacko. However, when Ammu's relationship with Velutha is revealed, hell brakes loose. In this particular matter, needs and feelings do not mean anything; they do not even seem to exist to Ammu's family. This relationship includes their daughter, and is therefore an insult to the family. A daughter, a

woman, is not supposed to have a sex life, at least not until she gets married, and even then, the only times she is supposed to have sex is for breeding, or, of course, to satisfy her husband and his “needs.” The fact that a woman can have sexual needs is unthinkable to the Kochammas and the rest of the Ayemenem community.

Punishments

As discussed earlier in this essay, Roy encourages her characters in the *God of Small Things* to follow their hearts. However, following your heart does not necessarily mean living happily ever after. Following your heart and seeking your personal truth seems to a lot of times also mean acting against the social norms of society. In this novel, Roy does not try to write a happy ending. So, the people who transgress the social boundaries eventually get punished for doing so. This does not necessarily mean that they get what they deserve. They get punished for being good, or for just following their heart, without harming other people. And, in the same time, people who bring a lot of evil to the world still go through life rather easily. Both Ammu and Vetutha are very good examples of people who act against the social norms and who are punished, fairly severely, for this.

The first example of people getting punished, for crossing the societal boundaries, which comes to mind, is probably Velutha. He is a good person who happens to be born in the wrong caste; he is born a Paravan, but he does not let that stop him from doing what he wants. He seems to really think that all people are equal; that being born a Paravan or a Syrian Christian does not make you worth more or less than anyone else. However, him thinking that everyone should be treated alike does not mean that everyone else will agree with him. The way he thinks and the way he acts upsets a huge amount of people. Even before the love affair with Ammu, he seems to be an outcast wherever he goes. For the touchables, he is just a Paravan, a worthless untouchable. However, he is in a way seen as even worse than other Paravans in their community; he does not feel subordinate to the touchables, and this is probably one of the worse things for an untouchable to do. But even with his own people, his own caste, he is an outcast. And the reason for this is probably the same as why he is an outsider for the touchables. The way Velutha acts and the way he is treated upsets the other untouchables. They probably feel that because Velutha does not let the touchables be superior to him, he is superior to other untouchables, that he is unique and worth more than them. So

both castes want Velutha to know his place, like the other untouchables already do. His love affair with an upper middleclass, Syrian Christian young woman, only makes people more upset than before, much more upset. He crosses almost all social boundaries that exist for his caste. Roy shows here that acting against social norms, crossing social boundaries is not something easy. She shows that crossing these boundaries is not something you can just do and then live your life the way you have always wanted to live. She shows that rebellious people, people who refrain from doing things they in their hearts know are wrong, eventually get punished, that the fairy tales do not correspond with reality; being good does not most of the time, pay off. And this is something Velutha experiences. The love affair with Ammu is the last straw, and for acting the way he does, the punishment he gets is death.

One could maybe think that Ammu gets off much easier than Velutha that she has done at least as much wrong as Velutha, but that Velutha is the only one to get punished. Nevertheless, I actually believe that Ammu is the one who gets the harder punishment; she is made to suffer for a very long time, for the rest of her life. Velutha did not get off easily, but at least he did not suffer for years. Only twenty-four hours before dying, he was happy. In the chapter called “The Crossing,” the last couple of hours Velutha has before being found by the Police are presented. Here he is described as happy; he knows that his affair with Ammu is revealed and that he has to pay for it. However, he still seems to be quite optimistic about the future: “*Things will get worse*, he thought to himself. *Then better*” (Roy 290). And the beating and killing does not take a very long time. The happy thoughts in his mind do not have a chance to disappear entirely before he dies.

Ammu, on the other hand, does not immediately die. She suffers for a long time before she finally dies. Even before the affair with Velutha is revealed, Ammu pays for the “mistakes” she has made in her life. As I have written earlier, Ammu is treated differently in her family because she one time chose the wrong man. However, Ammu is not the only one suffering for this; her children, also Rahel and Estha, have to suffer because their mother chose the wrong father for them. They are treated differently for not having a father, for being children of a “*Veshya*” – children of a whore, a prostitute (Roy 8).

After the reveal of her love affair with Velutha, Ammu is locked in a room, and later, she is taken away to live a life without her beloved children and they to lead a life without their dear mother. Ammu dies all alone in an empty, dirty room, without love, without any new happy thoughts in her mind. Therefore, her punishment is in a way much worse than Velutha’s. Furthermore, even after her death, she is in a way not allowed to rest in peace. The choices she has made in her life, all the times she has transgressed societal boundaries, haunt

her and her children, even after her death. One example of how wrong her actions are seen as is in the section where Ammu is dead and Rahel and Chacko have to decide what to do with the body; when it is told that the church refuses to bury Ammu, and she is sent, wrapped in a dirty bed sheet, to the crematorium, where beggars, abandoned people, and people who have died in police custody are sent to be cremated after their death (Roy 162). Here, I think, it is really shown how lonely Ammu must have been those last years. The fact that the church does not even want to bury her and that the bedsheet she is sent away in is dirty shows how little she is worth in people's eyes; she cannot even get a decent burial or cremation, but is sent as this useless object, almost as just some piece of garbage they need to get rid of. She has to pay for the mistakes she has made in her life with every single day, for the rest of her life, and even after this, in loneliness.

In spite of all the violence and death in this novel, it in a way ends quite happily, and especially, hopefully. It ends with the scene with Ammu and Velutha, when Ammu tells Velutha “naaley”, meaning tomorrow (Roy 340). And, in a way, this “tomorrow” gives hope. It feels like a future will come, that better times will come. And better times do actually come, eventually. This is discovered twenty years later after the scandal of Ammu and Velutha, when Rahel returns to Ayemenem. She has, just like her mother, married into an intercommunity love marriage and has also gotten divorced; but the difference now is that she does not really get punished for living the way she does and for making the choices she has made. People still see divorces and intercommunity love marriages as something bad, as something one should not do. But Rahel and other divorcees do not get punished as hard as for example Ammu did, for choosing to do what they do. It is shown that their society is slowly progressing, with great losses, but still, progressing.

Conclusion

The social norms in the novel are called the Love Laws, “the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (Roy 33). These are the rules that Ammu and Velutha break. They both know exactly how these laws work, and what will happen if they break them, but they never let that stop them.

What Ammu does to cross the social boundaries is particularly break the gender roles. To show this, I have compared Ammu with her brother Chacko. They both marry

someone outside their community, and they both have children and later divorced. However, only Ammu is treated badly for acting like this; Chacko is welcomed back with open arms and immediately assents the patriarchal place in the family. Moreover, Ammu has a love affair with an untouchable, and Chacko has numerous affairs, but only Ammu gets punished for this kind of behavior. For Chacko, however, a separate entrance is built so that it gets even easier for him to fulfill his sexual needs. To show more clearly that Velutha crosses the class boundaries and how he does this, I have compared him to his father, who in a way seems to – according to the touchables – be the ideal kind of Paravan, if such a person can even exist. I have also tried to show the response his actions get from touchables.

Throughout her whole life, Ammu has acted against the social norms of her society; she married the wrong man, she got divorced and moved back to her parents' home, and she had a love affair with the worst man possible, an untouchable. Despite the fact that she knows that her actions are seen as wrong in her society and that she will be treated badly for living the way she chooses to live, she never lets that stop her. She crosses the social boundaries so that she does not have to cross her individual ones. And this, the fact that she is a sort of fighter against the social norms, is a big reason why she is attracted to Velutha. He, just like Ammu, has also acted against the social norms throughout his whole life. He is born an untouchable, and therefore, he is supposed to act a certain way, subordinate to touchables. However, being the person he is, he never cares about those rules. He gets an education and learns a job that untouchables are not supposed to have. He even gets a job and is paid more than other untouchables. Even though he has all this, which is much more than other untouchables usually have, he does not seem to be grateful to the touchables for this special treatment. He does not even care to thank them in any way; he never lets them feel superior to him.

In the novel, it is shown that life is not necessarily always good. It is much more likely that bad things happen throughout life, things that are not always fixable. Both Ammu and Velutha are punished for following their hearts. Velutha is beaten to death as soon as their love affair is revealed, and Ammu is sent away to live the rest of her life and die alone. However, the fact that they get punished for transgressing the social boundaries does not mean that they deserve it. Roy just shows how the real world works, that following your heart does not guarantee a perfect life, that social norms are so deep-rooted in peoples minds, that one does not even see if they are good or bad, if people who act against the social norms do the right thing or not. She shows how narrow-minded society, represented by not only Baby Kochamma and the Police, but also all the other characters in the novel – Mammachi,

Chacko, Margaret Kochamma, Vellya Pappen – is, that we all, as members of a society, have a responsibility in judging and punishing other members of our society. However, the plot, as well as the last chapter, ends with a sense of hope for better times. It is shown that Rahel follows her mother's footsteps. She, like her mother, got married to a man outside their community and later got divorced; unlike her mother, she is not punished for breaking the Love Laws as her mother was. It is shown that society is progressing, even though with baby steps, and that tomorrow, "*naaley*" is a new day (Roy 340).

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