

Under the Same Sky—Spatial Representations in Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day (2001) and Tan Twan Eng’s The Garden of Evening Mists (2013)

Chao LONG

School of Humanities

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Abstract: This paper sets out to examine the psychological implications of space on individual perceptions of self in subaltern literary studies. The word “subaltern” is used to refer to a state of non-speaking in which the characters discussed in the paper are embroidered, due to different degrees of traumatic experience. Through the lens of retrospection (or memory narrative), the two authors, Anita Desai and Tan Twan Eng, are able to delineate the constitutive relationship between space and subjectivity, writing and trauma-healing. In a time of Brexit, refugee crisis and alt-right nationalism in the so called First World, a change of perspective in time-and-space coordinates can help readers gain new insights on the intricacies of (in) voluntary transnational encounter in our contemporary setting.

Keywords: space representation, subject formation, narrative structure, remembering, healing

1. Introduction

“But it’s never over. Nothing’s over, ever.”

-- *Clear Light of Day*

“Before me lies a voyage of a million miles, and memory is the moonlight I will borrow to illuminate my way.”

-- *The Garden of Evening Mists*

In the effort to articulate self-identities or personal histories, contemporary literature tends to employ a variety of narrative techniques to creatively bridge the past with the present in the form of memories. It is also through the act of remembering that characters are usually able to re-examine themselves and thus achieve personal transcendence. In the two novels, *Clear Light of Day* (2001) and *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2013), by means of depicting their experiences with some spatial images, the characters are able to recount their personal stories and in doing so eventually overcome their psychological wounds. Space thus becomes the premium conceptual framework in this essay. But space as a critical concept has garnered many a signification across the spectrum of intellectual disciplines. The rest of this section attempts then to reach a specific meaning for this term in tune with this paper’s argument.

Many of the contemporary discussions have since shifted their focus on time to space. Henri Lefebvre contends that “space is a (social) product” (Lefebvre 26). So space denotes more than mere the absolute meaningless physicality of places. It also reflects, reinforces and sometimes transforms social relations. Yet space is never independent of time. As Doreen Massey further discusses that, “space must be conceptualized integrally with time; indeed that the aim should be to think always in terms of space-time” (Massey 2). This has practical applications in literary narratives. For every single episode of the narrative is consisted of its temporal and spatial sides. Time thus can be seen as another dimension of space, and oftentimes, it is “experienced in and through the experiencing of space” (Middleton and Woods, 138). Conversely, through the change of time, the dynamism of the social relations reflected through space is presented to the readers. On the other hand, on a narratological note, the nonlinear representations of the narrative time are in effect manifested through its specific structural designs. As Joseph Frank in his essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” succinctly demonstrates, “since language proceeds in time, it is impossible to approach this simultaneity of perception except by breaking up temporal sequence” (Frank 231). Accordingly, a new spatial structure predicts a new temporal sequence, and vice versa. Hence, in this essay, space is defined as both the actual places in the novels imbued with overtones of social relations and the narrative structures as the textual space.

This essay, therefore, investigates the spatial representations in the two novels by first exploring some specific geographic coordinates and their cultural connotations. It will explain how space is employed by the authors to reinforce or transform the characters’ perceptions of themselves. Furthermore, by scrutinizing the respective narrative structures, how the novels as a whole are constructed to function as different paths of healing through the act of remembering is to be revealed. Through such an analysis, an understanding of how space is utilized in redefining personal histories is hopefully to be achieved.

2. The Representations of “House” in *Clear Light of Day*

As an important component of space, a physical place is usually “linked to identity, and not only to identity-formation but also, under given circumstances, to a sense of threatened identity” (Lange xiii). In Desai’s *Clear Light of Day*, the characters’ identities are negotiated

through their respective experiences in and with the family house. Set in the historical context of the partition of India and its aftermath, the novel attempts to unveil the social conflicts by telling a family saga of the Das'. The story begins with Tara, the younger daughter of the family, returning to her family's old house in Old Delhi after a long stay in a foreign land. Her interaction with Bim, the older sister and now master of the house, prompts them to think back their childhood in that house and ruminate on their identities. As Gaston Bachelard further points out, "the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting" (Bachelard 15). Thus, each character's perception of the house in essence underlies a different layer of social relations. By the same token, a delineation of those relations would uncover the process of each character's path to a new self. This following section focuses on the representation of the house from both Tara's and Bim's perspectives. For them, the house serves as the agency through which the external social and cultural forces inscribe on the two women's identities.

2.1 The House in Tara's Eyes

The house in Tara's eyes spells disillusionment and permanent decay. Impervious to time, it is a place where life repeats itself over and over again. Her encounter with the same childhood snail in the garden testifies to her contemplation. More than once, Tara has mistaken that snail with a pearl. Later when she discovers the truth, she laments "that was life – a snail found, a pearl lost" (Desai 103). But Tara's judgment appears gratuitous even to herself. When asked about a possibility of a change to the house by Bim, she overturns her previous opinion by being "truly shocked by the possibility" (4). In a way, her dialectical views on the house can be seen as her projection of herself onto the house. The ground for that is several-tiered. In the first place, the house in Tara's mind emblemizes the female subordination to the masculine power, which is implicated by her accidental observation of her father injecting insulin to her mother. As Tara notes,

She had seen him *lean over* her mother's bed and *quickly*, smoothly press a little shining syringe into her mother's arm that lay crookedly on the blue cover, press it in very *hard* so that she *tilted her head back with a quick gasp of shock, or pain* – Tara saw her chin rising up into the air and the grey head *sinking back* into the pillow and heard a long, *whimpering sigh* like an air-bag minutely punctured... (22; italicized mine)

The description much resembles an ambush in the nature where a weak prey has fallen victim to a vicious predator. And this, "with its projection of female helplessness in the face of male aggression within the sanctioned framework of matrimony, carries explicit associations of sexual violence and death" (Chakravarty 83). Tara is thus constantly haunted by this ghostly scene and more importantly, on this account, her desire for fatherly love deems more futile in this house. For Tara's father has constantly absent from her life and with the advent of her younger brother Baba, she always feels a sense of abandonment by her family. Despite her aunt Mira's care and love, she is psychologically isolated from her family and instead seeks comfort from her neighbor the Misras' sisters. That Tara's wish to be a mother in the future is what bonds her and the two sisters suggests the notion of traditional femininity has been inscribed on Tara's subconscious. It is no coincidence then that Tara finds her husband Bakul in the Misras' house to whom she intends so eagerly to marry.

Tara's marriage to some extent symbolizes her quest for a new male-female relationship. Instead of the violent dominance represented by the house, she seeks love and tenderness. Nevertheless, by marrying into Bakul does not rid her of the sense of female submission,

although it takes on a different form. Bakul, an aspiring diplomat, has been training Tara to become “an active, organized woman who looked up her engagement book every morning, made plans and programmes for the day ahead” (Desai 21). Yet this pretense of being a decisive and independent spirit is, as she comments, “all just dust thrown into his eyes, dust” (12). In addition, the exhaustion this pretense has exerted on her only makes her realize “how entirely dependent on him for her own calm and happiness” (150). Thus the male violence disguises itself in a passive aggressive way in their marriage. Furthermore, the fate of the two Misras’ sisters also intimates the rigidity and pervasiveness of this male dominance. After the two sisters are rejected by their husbands, they return to the old house and are forced to become the sole breadwinners of the whole house by teaching local students the traditional India music and dance which celebrates “sexual freedom, equality of women, pastoral harmony and an overall feeling of plentitude” (Mukherjee 197). Contrary to its liberating overtones, the music and dance exemplifies the sisters’ unending toil and their brothers’ unrelenting deprivation of them.

Consequently, on Tara’s return, the stagnation of house for her acts as a reminder of the prevalence of this masculine dominance. In the meantime, her unwillingness to do any change to the house insinuates her inability to subvert and thus submission to this male-female relation. The house thereby erects in Old Delhi as a reinforcement of this patriarchal rule.

Notwithstanding, this shared sense of suppression is exactly what binds her and her sister Bim. By reflecting on her past, Tara gradually accepts the house as it is and learns to understand her sister from another perspective. Moreover, as she increasingly empathizes with Bim, her guilt of leaving the family burden to her older sister accentuates. In the end, coupled by the same sentiment aroused by their incident in the Lodi Gardens, Tara finally propels herself to confess and apologize to her sister. While Bim never truly holds a grudge against Tara, it demonstrates Tara’s determination to make peace with the shadowy past.

2.2 The House in Bim’s Eyes

On the other hand, the house is rendered by Bim as a battle ground against the patriarchal and colonial subjugation. For Bim embodies the unrelenting strive for a new ideal of femininity characterized by freedom and gender equality. This is evident even as a child. When Raja, the older son in the family, declares he wishes to be a hero, Bim adamantly avows, “with glistening eyes, that she would be a heroine” (Desai 112). And the key to achieving this is through education. As Rajeswari Mohan argues, “education is narrativized as the process that brings women out of their homes and into the public sphere as economically able subjects who gradually gain critical consciousness of the forces ruling their lives as women in postcolonial societies” (Mohan 48). In contrast to Tara’s dismissive attitudes towards school, Bim considers school as a means to her individualism, which leads to her success at school. Furthermore, her love for facts and history, as opposed to Raja’s obsession with literature, reverses the gender dynamics between the two in the house. While Raja derives his heroic fantasy from all the poetry he reads, resulting in his lack of grip on reality, it is Bim’s pragmatism that carries the family through its vicissitudes. In the exigencies of their father’s death, Raja relinquishes his responsibility of being the provider of the family to his mentally challenged brother Baba. He is so consumed by his ideal of being the savior of his neighbor Hyder Alis whom he much admires that it appears much inconsequential to “worry about a few cheques and files in father’s office” (Desai 67). Bim thus steps up and assumes the maternal head of the house.

Interestingly, the time of Raja’s departure from the house parallels the historical time of the partition of India. Therefore, Bim’s ascent in the house is of symbolic implications. As Fredric Jameson astutely expounds, the rise and resistance of nationalism often seeks its recourse

to the “elements of that outside and transnational mass culture” (Jameson 75). In India’s context, the cultural imposition of the British Empire is usually appropriated to mold a new national identity. As a result, there always exists a colonizer-colonized dialectic in the postcolonial society. Similarly, Bim’s education empowers and facilitates her transition of roles in the house. Yet her education itself is of dialectical nature as well, since much of her education is aligned with western traditions which Raja epitomizes. In that regard, when her exasperation of Raja’s absence elevates itself into an opposition against him, her intention to totally sever the tie between them is bound to fail. The ghost of Raja still lurks around the house, as is evidenced by Bim’s constant citation of his beloved poetry by Byron or Elliot. The ubiquity of his haunting influence finally culminates in his last letter to Bim. The family house originally belongs to Hyder Alis, upon whose death Raja has been given the rightful ownership of the house. Thus in the letter Raja informs his sister in his English handwriting that she “may continue to have it at the same rent” and he “shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it” (Desai 27). For one thing, the letter intimates the formidability of the patriarchal dominance represented by the house and Raja over Bim. Her effort to sustain the family house by way of becoming a maternal head figure is thus overturned now that Raja becomes her landlord. For another, the use of English language as the medium in the letter also signifies the indelible imprints of western traditions over India.

Such a power struggle is further intensified through Bim’s interactions with another two groups of people. The first is with Dr Biswas who as Raja’s doctor has grown fond of her. Unfortunately Bim shows the least of interest in him. After her visit to his family house, she ditches him at the bus stop. Their following and last meeting ends with Dr Biswas’ long speech which bewilders and then enrages Bim.

“‘Now I understand everything,’ he said with a deep sigh.

[...]

‘Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others – to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed you own life for them.’” (97)

What underlies this seeming compliment is that Biswas’ involuntary imposition of traditional femininity on Bim. Like the two Misras’ sisters, it is a putative norm for women to devote themselves to the well-being of the whole family. In Biswas’ mind, Bim’s dedication to her own family falls into the same category. In a way, his failure to see Bim’s sacrifice as a mockery and defiance of the patriarchal rule betokens a general perception in the public. Hence, the house is feminized as a site for the traditional women to perform their sacrificial rituals. It is exactly because of such discrimination that Bim, upon hearing the speech, “hissed slightly in her rage and frustration – at being so misunderstood, so totally misread” (97).

The second interaction is with Baba, her young and retarded brother. It is through this that Bim finally attains her epiphany. The house Baba resides is two overlapping worlds of silence and music. The music he plays on his gramophone is brought by “World War and the American GIs and British Tommies” (74). It is infused with old imperial encroachment. Yet his silence “marks him as uniquely able to simultaneously participate in imperial standards and to reject them by escaping reality” (Lacom 143). However, Baba’s silent rejection of the external world entails that of Bim too. As a result, not only does the music played in the house serve as a constant reminder for Bim of the colonial rule, but Baba’s exclusion of her denies her pursuit of solidarity. For Baba is “feminized by his disability in overt ways: he is not self-supporting, he

does not participate in the public world, and he is very gentle” (143). That this gendered identity refuses Bim’s longing for companionship adds another layer of suppression on Bim from the house. In the end, Bim unleashes her anger on this innocent brother for the reason that “it was Baba’s silence and reserve and otherworldliness that she had wanted to break open and ransack and rob” (Desai 164). She wants to intrude into Baba’s world and establish an alliance with him. The result is certainly of no avail, since “Baba knew neither grudge nor punishment” (166). But nonetheless, Bim’s guilt forces her to realize corrosiveness of her wager of war against the patriarchal tradition. Her bitterness has stupefied her sense of time and her judgment of family relations. Years have gone by without her realizing it and Tara becomes the only family member whom she remains in touch with and shares family history with. In retrospect, she is finally able to leap out of her own pitfall of resentment and gain a new insight on the house. Despite the predominance of the patriarchal rule that it represents, the house also stands to her as the soil “where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her” (182). Forgiveness and love would eventually transcend everything and liberate herself. As she hears the music sang by Mulk’s guru, she gradually comes to terms with the past and sees the clear light of the day.

Both of Tara and Bim achieve their personal transcendence on the cusp of an identity crisis. The house to them functions as a reinforcement of the male subjugation of their femininity. Only by admitting to it can they free themselves from the self-devised entrapment and negotiate new identities for them at last. But sometimes space itself can be conducive to transforming the characters’ subjectivity in a positive way by reacting back upon the social relations which produce it. As Edward Soja keenly observes, “that social and spatial relationships are dialectically inter-active, interdependent; that social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent” (Soja 211). It is precisely the exercise of those spatial images in *The Garden of Evening Mists* that eventually contributes to the healing of the protagonist Yun Ling’s psychological trauma.

3. Spatial Imagery in *The Garden of Evening Mists*

The Garden of Evening Mists focuses on the life experience of the narrator-protagonist Teoh Yun Ling. Diagnosed with aphasia, Yun Ling comes back to Yugiri, the garden of evening mists, in Cameron Highlands after an early retirement and harks back to her days with the Japanese gardener Aritomo. The recall of her past experience not only sheds light on how her life there has guided her to overcome her psychological trauma and acquire a new understanding of life, but also mollifies her grief over the loss of Aritomo. So the main focus, in this part, is on some central spatial imagery, namely the garden Yugiri and the tea house.

3.1 The Garden Yugiri

Resting among mountains and tea plantations in Malaya, the Japanese garden is overshadowed by the brutal years of Japanese Occupation. Despite Aritomo’s effort to protect some local employees and friends, the thought of meeting him still frets Yun Ling with attacks of old traumatic memories. Yet obliged by her wish to keep her promise to her deceased sister, she summons up her courage to face him and asks him to design a garden. Much to her surprise, Aritomo, as if undisturbed by the external reality, calls to her attention the metaphysics of his garden upon the first time of their meeting. Before Yun Ling could step into the house, he demands her to “take off your shoes” as she will “bring the problems of the world inside” (Tan 54). Aritomo’s unyielding attitude on the matter of his garden denotes, on the one hand, his firm belief in what a garden truly stands for and, on the other hand, his resolution to separate his garden from the shadow brought by the Occupation. And it is indeed such resolution that

eventually heals and transforms Yun Ling. After Aritomo declines her request, he offers apprenticeship to Yun Ling who, marred by her enslavement experience, “had vowed to myself that no one would ever control my life again” (87). Baffled as she is, Yun Ling decides to accept his offer and thus is granted access to a world of tranquility, harmony and impermanence.

The beauty of the garden lies in its play on perspectives. For instance, when Yun Ling peeks through a gap in the hedge near a water basin and discovers in clear vision the peak of a mountain, her emotion is elevated. “The sight of it was so unexpected, so perfectly framed by the leaves, that my mind was momentarily stilled. The tranquility in me drained away when I straightened up, leaving me with a sense of loss” (61). The undulating feelings that she leans towards are manipulated through the mechanism of shakkei, borrowed scenery. As Aritomo himself points out, “every aspect of gardening is a form of deception” (150). But this kind of deception is no more than to present the nature in a creative manner. This is also suggested by the garden’s name, evening mists, which “fuses time and space, earth and sky, light and dark” (Fincham 136). The purpose, then, is to awaken and in still in its observers a sense of transience of everything in this world. In that way, the garden would “reach inside you. It should change your heart, sadden it, uplift it” (Tan175). What it does to Yun Ling is that this overwhelming force of nature in a way dwarfs her worldly troubles. For one thing, in recognition of the ephemerality, the trauma she suffers from would eventually fade away, as does everything else. For another, as a human, her life will someday also come to end and therefore, she herself is and should be considered as an element of the nature. As she immerses herself in the nature, she is empowered and transposed into a state of total tranquility. Much like her lessons on archery, the power of drawing the string should derive from the earth. Subsequently, in absolute conformity to that rule, her sensory experience while pulling a bowstring is amplified. “Even with my eyes closed, I was conscious of everything around me: the rustle of the wind, a bird picking its way across the roof tiles, the itching on my leg” (157). The uncanny sensation will then guide her and, according to the principle of archery, kyudo, transfer her mental power into the physical strength. As a result, in between the shooting the arrow, Yun Ling “discovered a quiet place I could escape into, a slit in time in which I could hide” (157).

Hence, in the process of Yun Ling’s garden training, this notion of immersion with the nature eliminates and transcends ethnic boundaries and racial conflicts. The dynamics between her and Aritomo also changes along the way and culminates on the night when they watch a meteor shower together.

“It was a storm of meteors, arrows of light shot by archers from the far side of the universe, igniting and burning up as they pierced the atmospheric shield. Hundreds of them burned out halfway, flaring their brightest just before they died.

Standing there with our heads tilted back to the sky, [...] I forgot where I was, what I had gone through, what I had lost.” (215)

The contrast between the brightness and the death consolidates the evanescent nature of things in the world. However, it is precisely this epiphany that connects both Yun Ling and Aritomo at a spiritual level. No longer merely the master and the apprentice, they consummate their love and trust for each other therein. In a sense, the garden thus subverts Yun Ling’s previous conception and in the process prompts her to renegotiate her own perception of the self. It bespeaks a harmonious state of mind to her and alleviates her pain of her sister’s death. She used to be consumed by the guilt she feels at the thought of her sister, Yun Hong, who initially conjures up Yun Ling’s love for Japanese gardens. The tranquility she obtains from the garden then

counterbalances that negativity by creating a space of emptiness where there is a possibility “of ridding myself of everything I had seen and heard and lived through” (90). Such a sense of harmony is also evidenced by the Taoist symbol of harmony formed by the grass lawn in the garden through the interplay of light and shadow. “From where I stood, the Taoist symbol of harmony was visible on the clearing between the trees, the two teardrops of its positive and negative elements forming a perfect circle” (111).

However, like everything else in the garden, this harmony created requires as much mental effort as accurate physical pruning. The slightest outgrowth will unsettle the whole. And when the harmony is broken, the danger often impends, which encapsulates Yun Ling’s interaction with the communist-terrorists (CTs). Since the CTs launch their guerilla war in the jungle, the mountains are fraught with death and horror. Entitled “Black Areas”, the regions which are infested with those terrorists are now invading into the “White Areas” that “were completely free from infiltration by the CTs” (237). The two forces can be seen as colored with the Taoist symbolism of yin and yang. The imbalance between the two spaces then alters the overall political circumstances and endangers civilians’ life. Situated itself at the hillside of the jungle, the intersection between the white and black areas, Yun Ling’s bungalow is in the center of the national war. Although she insists on staying alone, the horror of unknown danger still looms large and casts a psychological weight on her, as she notes “the cicadas in the trees sounded louder than usual that night, and the jungle felt denser and much closer” (136). After she has helped Ah Cheong’s brother, the CTs eventually take their revenge on her. Fortunately she survives the injury and moves into Yugiri to live with Aritomo. The garden now turns into her shield from the unrest and turmoil outside.

Her life with Aritomo in the garden continuously strengthens their bond and the haunting effect of her past abates alongside. On their trek to the Temple of Clouds, Yun Ling finally confides her past to Aritomo. Enclosed by the dense forest, the temple withdraws from the world. Less trodden trail suggests the scarcity of population in the temple. As Yun Ling discovers, the temple “was a collection of low, drab buildings barnacled to the side of the mountain” (253). The dilapidated state of the temple in a way chimes with the simplicity it pursues. When asked what she would change the side garden in the temple, Yun Ling reflects, “Simplify everything. Open up the garden to the sky” (256). In the meantime, its seclusion also conveys a sense of both purity from the secular world and utter piety to the God it worships. Yet the nuns living in the temple adds a new layer of meaning to its existence. For some of them, the temple connotes a final sanctuary for their misery and shame in that they used to be the comfort women for the Japanese soldiers. The end of the war fails to erase the public’s memory of the shame these women bring to the family names. At last they are outcast and exiled into the temple. Thus its long standing existence throughout the years stands as a contrast to the narrow-mindedness of the civil society, demonstrating its capacity to forgive and embrace all that which is wronged by the outer world. Interestingly enough, as Yun Ling later finds out, it is Aritomo who “had been to see the regional commander to have all of the *jugan ianfu* in Tanah Rata released” (311). Much like Tominaga, the officer of the enslavement camp, who saves her life, Aritomo the Japanese gardener saves those nuns’ lives. So when Yun Ling and Aritomo climb all the way up to the temple to pray in memorial of Tominaga, Yun Ling is so touched by the aura of the open and forgiving temple that she willingly discloses her internment experience to Aritomo which her father and brother refuse to hear. In addition, enlightened by the story Aritomo recounts in which a murderer is offered a chance to escape Hell but fails in the end, Yun Ling, by revealing this

long buried churning secret, is given herself a second chance to toss away her guilt that has been following and haunting her and start anew.

3.2 The Tea House

Even though the garden is instrumental in healing Yun Ling's trauma, Yun ling finally makes peace with the pain of Aritomo's disappearance in Magnus's tea estate. In spite of his successful tea business which has provided shelter and livelihood for many local workers, Magnus sticks to his South African cultural heritage, which is shown by the overall design of his estate. Featured as a "Cape Dutch house", the Majuba house is "filled with reminders of Magnus's homeland" (43). On the roof of the house, the Transvaal flag is hoisted proudly, asserting its sovereignty while defying the government's imposition. Furthermore, Magnus's wife Emily holds on to the same principle. For instance, on the Middle Autumn Festival, she would gather around the young children and share the cultural origin. Such sense of historicity and continuity coincides with one stone statue standing in Magnus's lawn, Mnemosyne, the goddess of Memory. However, Mnemosyne is always accompanied by her twin sister, the goddess of Forgetting, who coexists and faces against Mnemosyne. As Yun Ling pinpoints, "Mnemosyne's features were defined, her nose and cheekbones prominent, her lips full. Her sister's face looked almost blurred; even the creases of her robe were not as clearly delineated as Mnemosyne's" (45). The physical attributes of the two statues vividly captures the essence of the two symbols. And their standing positions also symbolize the dialectical relationship between them. When such a dialectics concretizes itself, it translates into a soothing power for both Emily and Yun Ling.

When the CTs attack the Majuba tea house and threaten to kill Yun Ling for the clue of the hidden place of some rumored treasure, Magnus bravely sacrifices himself by convincing them that he knows the place. The devastating news of his dead body sweeps the whole Cameron Highlands after a few days and in the attempt to console Emily, Yun Ling receives the help from the valleys by lighting up the lanterns Aritomo has made. Following the moral in the story of Hou Yi, the lanterns are to commemorate Magnus. As "countless lanterns were being set free, light streaking up into the darkness", Emily lets her grief drift away with them, acknowledging with "a single nod, tears shining on her cheeks" (308). The best way to remember Magnus and carry on his legacy is to forget the pain of his death and derive strength from his indefatigable strives for a triumphant life. By the same token, by reflecting on what Aritomo and his teaching have meant to her, Yun Ling at last frees herself from the agony she endures from both the loss of her sister and Aritomo. As the lantern flies up, the emotional weight is taken off of her like "releasing a bird from my grasp" and the thought of Yun Hong for her entails no sadness, since "she is only a memory" (346).

All in all, the spatial imagery employed in *The Garden of Evening Mists* plays a transformative role in the renegotiation of Yun Ling's subjectivity. She evolves a new appreciation for her life and like the blue envelop from the Japanese captain Hideyoshi that she eventually sends away after keeping in her journal for so long, the trauma endures fades away and the path to healing that turns into her most treasured life experience. Nevertheless, the paths of healing in both *Clear Light of Day* and *The Garden of Evening Mists* take the form of retrospection. Thus the narrative structures are of essential significance in constructing the textual space where by the past interacts with and transforms the present.

4. The Embedding Narrative Structures in *Clear Light of Day* and *The Garden of Evening Mists*

The narrative structures in both novels are defined as embedding in this essay in that under the main present narratives are embedded the past ones which, as Elana Gomel remarks, become “a locus for unresolved tensions within historical time and social space” (Gomel 94). In *Clear Light of Day*, the story begins with Tara’s return to the old family house to visit Bim and Baba. Years’ separation brings forth clashes between the two sisters’ views on the house and life and the stifling air prompts Bim to think back to some crucial moments in the past. The second chapter then focuses on the summer of 1947 in which as the partition takes places, the house is also emptying out. As the narration proceeds in the third chapter, the time rewinds to their early childhood. Such a structure illustrates in a way Bim’s deliberation on life in the novel. For her, life “won’t flow, like a river, but moves in jumps, as if it were held back by locks that are opened now and then to let it jump forwards in a kind of flood” (Desai 42). As Bim meditates on her relationships with her siblings, the buried memory floods back. The earlier time she traces back, the happier she feels about her family and the more clarity she attains on what really counts in her life. The house in the end designates a shared history of the ebb and flow of the family. Therefore, when the time fast-forwards to the present time in the last chapter, the overall textual space is shaped like a spiral in an upward fashion, signifying that Bim finally acquires a new momentum in life and, by extension, resonating with Tara’s comment that “nothing is over, ever” (174). A brighter future awaits both Tara and Bim.

Likewise, in *The Garden of Evening Mists*, as the symptoms of Yun Ling’s aphasia become increasingly prominent, she decides to transcribe her past experience at Cameron Highlands from her memory in that “the palest ink will endure beyond the memories of men” (Tan 155). Yet her bodily function conditions that her memory returns in a discrete manner. As she comments herself, “now and then the light will fall on a particular point in time, illuminating it for a moment before the wind seals up the gap, and the world is in shadows again” (309). Accordingly, the narrative forms a space comprised of tightly interwoven episodes from the past and the present. By this means, not only is the healing power of Yugiri revealed, but through Yun Ling’s interactions with Tatsuji some new light has been shed on Aritomo. In hindsight, Yun Ling readily recalls some shades and obscurities in her knowledge of Aritomo’s life. And as the narration progresses, Tatsuji’s speculation about Aritomo’s involvement in the war further stimulates her suspicion. The narrative thus evolves into the horimono on Yun Ling’s back. Apart from the experiences Yun Ling has shared with Aritomo, inscribed as well in the horimono are symbols that she fails to decode, leaving only the readers to ponder on. Regardless, in the end she chooses to brush aside the skepticism in the hope to keep Aritomo’s reputation intact. And like the empty space in the horimono whose contours match that of Yugiri, the narrative ends with Yun Ling’s determination that the only legacy left should be the garden. As for her, like Lao Tsu and Aritomo, when her work here is finished, she would depart.

In brief, the embedding narrative structures in both novels allow the characters to reevaluate themselves by way of remembering the past. In the end, they succeed in reconstructing new identities and overcoming their psychological traumas.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, space in contemporary context is reckoned the production and reproduction of social relations. In this light, the image of the “house” constructed in *Clear Light of Day* is construed as the reification of the patriarchal domination over traditional femininity whereas the spatial imagery employed in *The Garden of Evening Mists* transcends the petty political antagonism by virtue of their metaphysical profundity. But nonetheless, the embedding narrative structures in both novels enable the characters to reflect back on their perceptions of

themselves and the world around them through the act of remembering. As a result, the past succeeds in intervening and inspiring new insights on their present and the future. In the end, they are able to regain new strength for life and vanquish their psychological wounds.

(Word Number: 5960)

Works Cited

1. Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969. Print.
2. Chakravarty, Radha. "Figuring the Maternal: 'Freedom' and 'Responsibility' in Anita Desai's Novels". *ARIEL* 29.2 (1998): 75-92. *ARIEL*. Web. 28 Apr 2015.
3. Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of Day*. London: Vintage, 2001. Print.
4. Fincham, Gail. "Ecology, Ethics, and the Future: Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists*". *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies* 31.2 (2014): 125-137. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Web. 28 Apr 2015.
5. Frank, Joseph. "Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts". *The Sewanee Review* 53.2 (1945): 221-240. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Apr 2015.
6. Gomel, Elana. *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2014. Print.
7. Jameson, Fredric. "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue". *The Cultures of Globalization*. Ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. 54-77. Print.
8. Lacom, Cindy. "Revising the Subject: Disability as 'Third Dimension' in *Clear Light of Day* and *You Have Come Back*". *NWSA Journal* 14.3 (2002): 138-154. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 28 Apr 2015.
9. Lange, Attie de, etc. *Literary Landscape: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.
10. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991. Print.
11. Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994. Print.
12. Middleton, Peter and Woods, Tom. *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000. Print.
13. Mohan, Rajeswari. "The Forked Tongue of Lyric in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*". *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 32.1 (1997): 47-66. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 28 Apr 2015.
14. Mukherjee, Arun P. "Other Worlds, Other Texts: Teaching Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* to Canadian Students". *College Literature* 22.1 (1995): 192-201. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Apr 2015.
15. Soja, Edward W. "The Socio-Spatial Dialectic". *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70.2 (1980): 207-225. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Apr 2015.
16. Tan, Twan Eng. *The Garden of Evening Mists*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2013. Print.