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'INDIAS OF THE MIND':

THE CONSTRUCTION OF POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY

IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S FICTION.

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PH.D THESIS

UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT CANTERBURY

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ABSTRACT

This study will examine both the technical development of Salman Rushdie's fiction and its reflection and representation of different levels of psychological stability on the part of the post-colonial subject. Rushdie's writing is introduced by way of a discussion of the work of earlier British writers - chiefly E.M.Forster and Paul Scott. These authors' writing on India serves primarily as an exploration of British self-image and the role of India as a psychological bulwark to British imperial identity rather than its significance as a geographical reality. Paul Scott's work also serves ironically to illustrate shared themes and characteristics between his writing and that of Rushdie. Chief among these are concerns with the individual's role in history and the physical and psychological determinants of identity.

Enoch Powell is discussed briefly as another linking figure; this time between Scott and Rushdie. For Scott, he illustrates the extreme manifestation of imperial self-imagining, while for Rushdie he is seen as largely responsible for creating the demonized persona of the 'immigrant' against which a text like The Satanic Verses seeks to assert itself.

The remainder of the thesis is a detailed exploration of the ways in which Rushdie achieves the representation of a re-integrated and non-demonized identity for the post-colonial subject. This representation is similarly achieved within the framework of texts which increasingly assert their hybridized nature - a blend

of eastern and western techniques and ideas - as a positive characteristic.

NOTE: The term 'Anglo Indian' is used in this study to denote those British men and women who lived and worked in India and the literature they produced as a result of their experiences. The term 'Indo-Anglian' is used to denote the work of Indian writers writing in English.

INTRODUCTION

BEYOND THE THREE-STAGE THEORY

When British rule over India in the late nineteenth century took on the ideology of an Anglo-Saxon mission to the dark peoples of the globe, the British-Indian encounter became a battle expressed as a political struggle and experienced as a psychological crisis.¹

Benita Parry's assessment of the psychological factors involved in British colonialism in India is one that ultimately reaches beyond the British half of the imperial equation to describe the nature of the struggle for both coloniser and colonised. Both parties, as the literature of the colonial and post-colonial eras reveals, figured the relationship of the two nations as the site of emotional and psychological trauma, self-doubt, confusion and paranoia. It is the aim of this study to show firstly the shifts in psychological self-assessment and awareness in the 'colonial' novels of Forster and Scott, and then to demonstrate how the condition of postcoloniality in the work of Salman Rushdie progresses through various stages of both technical and psychological development, in a positive advance away from the negations of the colonial era.

It seems to be common practice for critics of both Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian literature to assess the development of the genres as progressing through three stages of transition. Concentrating solely on Anglo-Indian writing between 1880 and 1960, Allen J. Greenberger's 1969 study The British Image of

¹ Benita Parry, Delusions & Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880 - 1930, London:Allen Lane, 1972, p.2.

India² separates its territory into the Eras of Confidence (1880-1910) of Doubt (1910-1935) and of Melancholy (1936-1960). Typical writers from each period would be Kipling, Forster and John Masters respectively.

Three years later in 1972, Meenakshi Mukherjee in The Twice Born Fiction is offering a three-stage theory for Indo-Anglian writing. The first is a period of valorization of India's heroic past as a 'backdoor' means of asserting contemporary nationalist sentiments. The second, dating from the twenties and thirties, sees the employment of social realism and a more direct nationalism. The third stage is that of post-independence introspection and exploration of the individual's psyche.³

There is clearly some considerable value in the employment of such neat categories for the literary critic, otherwise encumbered by the study of decades of fictional output. It gives thematic and historical structure to what might otherwise seem an amorphous mass of texts.

Timothy Brennan in his Salman Rushdie and the Third World⁴ adopts a three stage theory from the work of Jose Carlos Mariategui⁵ to order his own pronouncements on Rushdie's

² Allen J. Greenberger, The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880-1960, London: O.U.P., 1969, p. 5 & c.

³ Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English, Delhi: Heinemann, 1971, p. 22.

⁴ Timothy Brennan, Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation, London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 46.

⁵ Jose Carlos Mariategui, Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality, trans. Marjory Urquidi, Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1974, p. 191.

treatment of the nation. Mariategui's idea that literature passes through the stages of 'colonial', 'cosmopolitan' and 'national' is used to assess what Brennan sees as Rushdie's Third World Cosmopolitanism.

On a more personal level, the writer Ruth Praver Jhabvala describes in her essay 'Myself in India' how, in her experience, the attitude of outsiders to India follows its own three stages of disintegration (though in her view it is a process which, in the best Hindu tradition of samsara⁶, repeats itself endlessly) in a way that mirrors the moods of Greenberger's three literary 'eras':

There is a cycle that Europeans - by Europeans I mean all Westerners, including Americans - tend to pass through. It goes like this: first stage, tremendous enthusiasm - everything Indian is marvellous; second stage, everything Indian not so marvellous; third stage, everything Indian abominable. For some people it ends there, for others the cycle renews itself and goes on.⁷

This thesis will seek to demonstrate a circularity in the development of themes and techniques in both colonial and post-colonial writing - to join up two separate three-stage theories of development to form a whole. Beginning with Forster, in Greenberger's middle era, it will then move on to the work of Paul Scott, whose major literary achievements were produced after Greenberger's cut-off date of 1960. It will aim to show how Scott's work plays a crucial part in what could be called 'the colonial reckoning' - Anglo-Indian literature's

⁶ R.C. Zaehner, in Hinduism, Oxford:O.U.P., 1980 defines 'samsara' as 'the "course" or "revolution" to which all phenomenal existence is subject.' p.4.

⁷ Ruth Praver Jhabvala, 'Myself in India', in An Experience of India, London: John Murray, 1971, p.7.

coming-to-terms with the part India has played in Britain's own image of itself. From this point, it will trace the development of Salman Rushdie's oeuvre from the first tentative surfacings of the condition of postcoloniality in Grimus to the formidable complexity and assertiveness of The Satanic Verses, what could be termed 'the post-colonial reckoning'. This is not to suggest that Scott's and Rushdie's writing is unique in demonstrating these impulses, but rather that their work clearly illustrates the shifts in psychological self-awareness in literature of the colonial encounter and its aftermath. The discussion of the novels will also illustrate how Rushdie's writing, like that of the Anglo-Indians, corresponds to different and changing psychological states.

In this case, it is a development out of the confusion, not just of identity, but of location, argument and technique in Grimus, through Rushdie's testing out of a more hybridized voice and technique in his later work, on to the assertion of a reconstituted, indeed reborn, post-colonial identity in The Satanic Verses. A diagram may help to illustrate the pattern of the argument -

CONFIDENCE
(Kipling)

REBIRTH
('The Post-Colonial
Reckoning')

DOUBT
(Forster)

SCHIZOPHRENIA

MELANCHOLY
(Masters)

CONFUSION

SCOTT ('The Colonial Reckoning')

RUSHDIE

The validity of examining this background of the prevailing 'mood' of the texts under discussion, is borne out by the cultural theorist Ashis Nandy, who, in The Intimate Enemy states that :

Such a culture [as India's] becomes a projective test: it invites one not only to project on to it one's deepest fantasies, but also to reveal, through such self-projection the interpreter rather than the interpreted. All interpretations of India are ultimately autobiographical.⁸

It is a sentiment that has to be acknowledged and underlined by any observer of critical, analytical or personal and emotional responses to India. A recent study of Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian novels, Richard Cronin's Imagining India, is intriguing in the way it inadvertently illustrates the paradoxes of interpretation, despite its author's initial disclaimers as to the inadequacy of his response to the country.

'India', says Cronin, 'was a text that I was unable to unravel, a book that I could not read...'⁹, thereby revealing simultaneously his inability to fathom India and his responses to her, at the same time as highlighting his continuing desire to map and codify her. From the opening paragraphs of his preface, where Cronin shares with his reader his sense of helpless guilt at using a man-powered cycle rickshaw¹⁰, we are made aware that here will be another testament to India's ability to lay bare the souls of her interpreters while her own goes

⁸ Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism, Delhi:O.U.P., 1983, pp.79-80.

⁹ Richard Cronin, Imagining India, London:Macmillan, 1989, p.2.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.1.

unprobed. The awkwardness of Cronin's position, perched so to speak atop a heaving and inexplicable mass of humanity, is a dilemma shared by Jhabvala (so much more than a casual, academic visitor to India herself) who speaks of '...the horrors with which one lives, on which one lives, as on the back of an animal.'¹¹ It is an awkwardness which also appears to find an expression in the curious and seemingly arbitrary distinctions that Cronin, like others, makes between the merits of different writers. Rushdie admires Forster but dislikes Scott, whom he crudely lumps together with M.M. Kaye. His objections will be examined in greater detail in Chapter One, suffice to say that he objects primarily to the fact that Scott wrote The Raj Quartet at all. David Rubin, in After the Raj¹², is one of the few critics prepared to champion Scott, reserving his criticisms instead for Ruth Praver Jhabvala and her stereotypes of Indians. Cronin's own standpoint sees him throwing this particular pack of cards in the air so that they fall yet differently again - dislike of Rushdie and Scott, defence of M.M. Kaye and admiration for Jhabvala. In the face of such manoeuvres, often based on the flimsiest of critical distinctions, one is inclined to sympathise with Scott's own paranoia; that the treatment often meted out to him was a consequence of partisan literary snobberies.¹³ The writers Cronin admires - Kipling, Naipaul, N.C. Chaudhuri, Jhabvala, Anita Desai - all produce a very 'English' narrative

¹¹ Jhabvala, 'Myself in India', pp. 8-9.

¹² David Rubin, After the Raj: British Novels of India Since 1947, New England: Univ. Press, 1986, pp. 76-102.

¹³ Hilary Spurling, Paul Scott: A Life, London: Hutchinson, 1990, p.209.

style, in the sense that they operate within western, European notions of what constitutes good prose, with no attempt to explode established norms of expression and construction. In the case of the non-European writers in this group, this choice of style acts as a clear statement on whom they regard as the antecedents of their particular narrative sensibilities. Not to be outdone by his predecessors, Cronin of course has his own three-stage theory, which interestingly for a text which chooses to assess both Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian writing, revolves around the European camp. His proposition is that European assessments of India have passed through three stages; firstly, the 'heroic', represented by Kipling as a 'male' writer in every sense; secondly, the 'ironic', a 'homosexual' phase represented by Forster; thirdly, the 'hysteric', unsurprisingly 'female', as evinced by the heroines of Jhabvala's fiction.¹⁴ The middle homosexual phase is seen as a developmental staging post between male and female. Leaving aside the conflation of genders and sexualities, the idea that homosexuality is a discrete sexual identity in itself seems to have escaped Cronin.

Cronin seems to acknowledge the autobiographical element of Anglo-Indian responses, discussed by Nandy and mentioned earlier, when he says of the white woman/Indian man relationship in The Jewel in the Crown, the first book of The Raj Quartet, that it may '...[reflect] Britain's post-war sense of itself.'¹⁵ But the observation is tempered by the distressing idea that the image also represents '...an uneasy recognition that there are

¹⁴ Cronin, p.159.

¹⁵ Cronin, p.155.

Indians who exercise their wealth and power more flagrantly than any Briton can aspire to.'¹⁶ Cronin's book has been discussed at some length because its tone, indeed its whole project, is representative of a particular literary critical response to India - one that dresses up its bigotries and arbitrary pronouncements with the veneer of impartiality. It is in the distinctions he draws (or rather fails to draw) between Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Balraj Khanna's Nation of Fools¹⁷, that Cronin is least able to preserve this veneer. Of the success of Midnight's Children, he writes :

We shall never know how much of its popularity in Britain [it] owes to its capacity for generating the kind of indignant satisfaction with which, even now, too many of the British like to contemplate the political difficulties of their former colonies.¹⁸

This speculative nonsense is compounded by the difficulties in which Cronin finds himself when he attempts to distinguish between the linguistic merits of Rushdie's and Khanna's texts. Cronin fails entirely to appreciate that Rushdie's use of language is in any way out of the ordinary. Thus he informs us that :

Rushdie suffers because he is forced, absurdly, to write his novel in a language that is not Indian at all. Khanna laughs because he chooses to write his novel in the most absurd of Indian languages.¹⁹

Is English, then, an Indian language or not? Cronin's judgement

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Balraj Khanna, Nation of Fools or Scenes from Indian Life, Harmondsworth:Penguin, 1984.

¹⁸ Cronin, p.14.

¹⁹ Ibid.,p.24.

is as clear as mud. It is the result of modern Indian history that English has indeed become an Indian language - and one used to help change forever the European reader's understanding of what English is. In fact, twenty years ago, well before Rushdie's first foray into literature, Meenakshi Mukherjee confidently declared that :

...the vigorous attempts to wield the English language in a different way must be construed as a sign that writers have ceased to regard it as an alien tongue.²⁰

The crux of Cronin's objection to Rushdie's project seems, ultimately, to rest not on a critical evaluation of the literary merit of Rushdie's work, but on Cronin's objection to the 'overweening'²¹ ambition of a writer who would dare to attempt such a task. Cronin's text is weighed down with platitudinous pronouncements and sub-Wildean conceits on the subject of the Englishman abroad :

It is not to be wondered at that Englishmen travelling in India should ask themselves what India means to them, and it is unsurprising that they should form an English view of India. What they may properly be held to account for is not whether their view of India is English, but whether it is intelligent.²²

The apparent generosity of this declaration does not extend as far as embracing Scott's fictional treatment of India.

The peculiarly peripheral position that Paul Scott has occupied for both British and Indian commentators perhaps owes much to an unarticulated, even unconscious desire to separate the experiences of colonialism in India for the two countries

²⁰ Mukherjee, p.172.

²¹ Cronin, p.18.

²² Ibid., p.166.

concerned. Critics seem to desire that a British writer should be sufficiently aware of both sides of the colonial encounter to write as knowledgeably and sympathetically of the Indian players in the drama as of the British, but at the same time to require some acknowledgement from the writer concerned that there are two distinct stories to be told.

It seems absurd to suggest, as even Rushdie does, that Forster demonstrated any greater awareness of or exploration into the Indian psyche than Scott. He certainly attempted more in that he could not convey the complexity of India and the conflicting emotions it inspired in him without an attempt at capturing the elusive essence of 'Indianness'. But Forster's idea of what constituted 'Indianness' was as much a British construct as the civil lines and the cantonment - an arbitrary concept linked more to emotion (the Indians' child-like capacity to madden or delight; the mysterious source of their sexuality; India's mystical air) than intellect. Scott's Quartet may have as equally unlikely or unconvincing Indian protagonists as A Passage to India but it nonetheless resists the urge to characterise 'Indianness', turning its gaze instead on the more powerful, because self-defined, notion of 'Englishness', where Forster's text can only begin to protest at its damning certainties.

Scott's refusal to participate in this 'orientalist' enterprise has, paradoxically, proved the very reason for the disfavour into which he has fallen with some critics. John Bayley in 'The Matter of India' falls into the trap outlined by David Rubin in After the Raj of always desiring to see the 'romance' of India. Bayley is disappointed that the Quartet avoids adopting a motif

like the Marabar echo to convey the bewildering effect of India on the British psyche, and criticises Scott for ignoring 'all the stories made up about it.'²³ Salman Rushdie's criticism of Scott in his essay 'Outside the Whale' is that the Quartet 'tries to taste Indian, but ends up being ultra-parochially British.'²⁴ He goes on to suggest that the Quartet's form leaves the reader with the impression that the British story of the Anglo-Indian encounter is more important than the Indian. He sets up his own straw target by ostensibly offering an 'argument for the defence' of Scott, namely that Scott gave 'bit-parts'²⁵ to Indian characters because such was their role in their own history, and then proceeds to knock it flat. But in so doing he evades the issue of whether a more serious defence of Scott cannot be made and supported. The 'ultra-parochially British' ambience of the Quartet is a reflection of the accuracy with which it portrays the stifling proprieties and unyielding hierarchies of Raj society. That the British could remain 'ultra-parochially British' in the most un-British of surroundings was the result of a monstrous piece of egotism and self-determination with which many of Scott's critics feel unable to deal. Far easier to make wistful noises in the direction of Forster's masterpiece of evasion. V.S.Naipaul's perception of the Raj in An Area of Darkness is interesting precisely because it looks beyond both the arenas of Indian outrage (Rushdie) and British whimsy

²³ John Bayley, 'The Matter of India', London Review of Books, Volume 9, No.6, (19.3.87), p.19.

²⁴ Salman Rushdie, 'Outside the Whale', Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991, London:Granta, 1991, p.90.

²⁵ Ibid.

(Bayley) to a 'deconstruction' of the Raj's idea of itself, something at the heart of Scott's project :

With one part of myself I felt the coming together of England and India as a violation; with the other I saw it as ridiculous, resulting in a comic mixture of costumes and the widespread use of an imperfectly understood language. But there was something else, something at which the architecture of the Raj hinted...Their grounds were a little too spacious; their ceilings a little too high...they were neither of England nor India; they were a little too grand for their purpose, too grand for the puniness, poverty and defeat in which they were set. They were appropriate to a conception of endeavour rather than to endeavour.²⁶

Naipaul here touches on another aspect of the texts under discussion - the use of definite and indefinite, real and unreal geography and topography, employed in proportion to the sense of self-definition and self-knowledge of the text's protagonists and, ultimately, their authors. The Raj's houses and gardens, maidans and cantonments spoke to Naipaul of a desire to embody an unreal concept of 'Englishness', yet one that was sufficiently real in its everyday appearance to provide an ethic of duty, stability and permanence to which the Raj could aspire.

Scott himself had sensed this motivation - the sense of self-importance undercut by fear - in the second book of the Quartet, The Day of the Scorpion:

To leave the narrow streets and crowded chowks behind and enter the area once distinguished by the title Civil Lines...is to pass from one period of history to another and to feel that the people from the small and distant island of Britain who built and settled here were attempting to express in the architectural terms that struck them as suitable their sense of freedom at having space around them at last, a land with length and breadth to it that promised ideal conditions for concrete and

²⁶ V.S.Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, pp.190-1.

abstract proof of their extraordinary talent for running things and making them work. And yet here too there is an atmosphere of circumscription, of unexpected limits having been reached and recognised, and quietly, sensibly settled for. Too late to reduce the scale and crowd everything together, each road and building has an air of being turned inwards on itself to withstand a siege.²⁷

If, as Benedict Anderson writes in Imagined Communities, 'communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'²⁸ then the Raj's style of self-imagining represented the paradox at the heart of its existence - a grandeur that was entirely dependent on the perpetuation of a myth of imperial strength and superiority. The idea of the imagined community runs through both the colonial and post-colonial texts under discussion, even through the frantic post-imperial pronouncements of Enoch Powell discussed in Chapter Two. Part of the process of reckoning provided by Scott's work is to undercut the definiteness of the colonial self-imagining and reveal it to be as much an act of collective will on the part of the servants of the Raj as is India's creation for Rushdie in Midnight's Children. Rushdie himself predates Anderson's definition of the imagined community in the title essay of his collection Imaginary Homelands. Here he muses on the migrant's necessary distance from home and the tricks that memory plays on his perception of it:

...our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely

²⁷ Paul Scott, The Day of the Scorpion, London: Pan, 1988, p.11.

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, London: Verso, 1983, p.15.

the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.²⁹

Not only is Rushdie's observation pertinent to the geographical locations of his own texts, which will be discussed later, but it serves as a reminder to all commentators on and 'creators' of India that she exists for them, ultimately, as an individualised vision and experience, created anew and differently with each change in the observer's stance. Rushdie's own fictional landscapes become more solid as his work develops. From the unlocatable geography and borrowed topography of Grimus, he goes on to create an India of the mind in Midnight's Children, a divided India in Shame and a displaced India in The Satanic Verses. As his sense of himself as a chronicler of the migrant experience develops, so his fictions become ever more rooted in a recognisable geographical reality.

The idea of migration, of flight, of dis-location is a perpetual theme in Rushdie's writing and is the means through which he seeks to express the peculiar sensibility of the migrant writer as it searches for new forms, new techniques, new worlds in which it can define itself. Musing on the unlocatable dystopia of Terry Gilliam's film Brazil Rushdie declares :

The effect of mass migration has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things, people who have been obliged to define themselves - because they are so defined by others - by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being,

²⁹ Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', Imaginary Homelands, p.10.

he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier.³⁰

This was written in 1985, when Rushdie had not yet produced The Satanic Verses - a work which in its essence is a record of 'strange fusions' and 'unprecedented unions'. For Rushdie, the result of the migrant's imagining will be 'plural, hybrid, metropolitan'³¹ - a positive embrace of cultural and experiential difference that celebrates its polymorphous nature. Hybridity becomes the watchword for this artistic expression as it reaches its apogee in Rushdie's work in The Satanic Verses - but a hybridity which rejoices in its diverse parts rather than apologising for its borrowings and graftings, its multiplicity and iconoclasm.

The following chapter outlines give an indication of the form this study will take -

Chapter One will examine the psychological mood of British writing about India, by looking at the self-reflexive nature of the work of Forster and Scott and, to a lesser extent, John Masters and George Orwell. It will also discuss the ways in which Scott's treatment of the individual's relation to history is closely linked to Rushdie's own depiction of India in Midnight's Children.

Chapter Two will include a short discussion of Enoch Powell and the curious position he occupies between the colonial and the post-colonial writing under discussion. It posits Powell as the embodiment of the racist imperialist for whom India and the

³⁰ Salman Rushdie, 'The Location of Brazil', Imaginary Homelands, p.124-5.

³¹ Ibid., p.125.

empire had provided the mainstay of British psychological well-being. It will show how Powell served as a negative inspiration for both characterisation and technique for Scott and Rushdie.

Chapter Three will begin the discussion of Rushdie's texts in relation to the themes highlighted earlier in the introduction. This discussion of his first, unsuccessful, novel Grimus is shorter, reflecting both Grimus' slight position in Rushdie's oeuvre and the confused and submerged nature of the concept of postcoloniality within it. It also illustrates the first indication in Rushdie's writing of the culturally and politically confused attitude towards women and their effect on the specific self-image of the male which he shares with the earlier colonial writers and which recurs in his work.

Chapter Four will be a longer examination of Rushdie's Booker Prize winning novel, Midnight's Children whose amorphous shape reflects the assortment of concerns finally coming to the surface in his work - the birth of a new independent nation in the shadow of colonialism, expressed through the emergence of a new, developing style of literature, owing allegiances to both Eastern and Western traditions of writing.

Chapter Five will look at Rushdie's next and much more tightly constructed work, Shame and its attempts to rein in the excesses and over-abundances of Midnight's Children's style and preoccupations. It will look in particular at the text's associations with allegory, as well as exploring the continuing problems of Rushdie's ambivalence to women, even here within a text which seeks to champion their cause when oppressed by the

forces of patriarchy and religious fundamentalism.

Chapter Six will discuss The Satanic Verses as the high-point of Rushdie's development in depicting migrant experience in innovative and dramatic forms. Partly through comparison with V.S. Naipaul's account of migration in The Enigma of Arrival it argues for Rushdie's more far-reaching achievement in his radical treatment of the subject.

Chapter Seven will close the thesis by examining some of the theoretical and artistic influences on Rushdie's writing and the authorial postures he has assumed, to argue for the achievement of a hybrid style, as outlined earlier, in his latest major work The Satanic Verses. It will also attempt to locate Rushdie less in relation to a western concept of postmodernism than a global, polymorphous concept of migrant hybridity.

CHAPTER ONEPSYCHOSIS AND SELF EXPLORATION: FORSTER, ORWELL, SCOTT.

Writing in 1984, the year of Orwell's projected evocation of a state-controlled world without hiding-places, Salman Rushdie was highly critical of what he saw as an unhealthy resurgence of interest in the British Raj as popularised in the media. Thatcher had been returned to power in the wake of the Falklands War and Rushdie saw that the jingoistic sentiments of the time were contributing to a wider and more worrying revival of imperialist ideology. He states in 'Outside the Whale' that :

...the popularity of Raj fictions put one in mind of the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb. Britain is in danger of entering a condition of cultural psychosis, in which it begins once again to strut and to posture like a great power while, in fact, its power diminishes every year.¹

Two of the objects of his scorn are David Lean's film version of Forster's A Passage to India and the television dramatisation of Paul Scott's Raj Quartet under the title of The Jewel in the Crown. Rushdie's major criticisms of these enterprises, and his considerable antipathy to Scott, will be returned to later. But what lies behind his stance and the anger he expresses is a refusal to recognise how far British writing on India serves primarily as an exploration of British self-image. V.S.Naipaul, in his first major study of India, An Area of Darkness, lends some credence to this view. He writes :

¹ Salman Rushdie, 'Outside the Whale', Imaginary Homelands, p.92.

The Raj was an expression of the English involvement with themselves rather than with the country they ruled. It is not, properly, an imperialist attitude.²

The extent to which narratives of British involvement in India address or evade the social and political realities of the country derives largely from the degree of their self-involvement with the British side of the English-Indian encounter.

A Passage To India

Tolerance, good temper, and sympathy - they are what matter really, and if the human race is not to collapse, they must come to the front before long.³

Forster's 1939 essay 'What I Believe', published in Two Cheers for Democracy, states the writer's belief in the importance and sanctity of personal relationships. The imperative of Howards End to 'only connect' is the creed of a man who uses the success or failure of individual relations as a yardstick by which to judge greater institutions. A frequent criticism levelled at A Passage to India was that it failed to convey the true political atmosphere of India - failing to reveal the increase in nationalist activity which had developed between the conception and final publication of the text. The book was still in progress at the time of the notorious Amritsar massacre of 1919 when a British commander, General Dyer, ordered troops to open fire on an unarmed crowd in the Jallianwala Bagh, killing 379 and

² V.S. Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p.201.

³ E.M.Forster, 'What I Believe', Two Cheers for Democracy, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965, p.75.

wounding over 1200.⁴ Its eventual publication in 1924 coincided with a libel case brought and won by Dyer's superior, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab at the time, Michael O'Dwyer, who had been effectively accused of terrorism.⁵ Despite his own expressions of outrage at these incidents, Forster gives no narrative space to what was a galvanising moment in the quest for Indian independence.

Forster's faith in individual human relationships and the failure to conceive or represent collective activity are related tendencies in his work. Despite his evident fascination with India and his love of individuals among its people, it is important to question how far this evasive liberal humanist position acted as a subtle endorsement of the right to colonise. The place of affection and human sympathy ranks high as an ideal in the value system Forster proposes but it is not an unconditional affection. It is hedged around with an ingrained respect for social status and the often exacting demands of good taste and decency. Like Orwell, Forster's response to 'natives' was problematised by his own class position. Orwell punished himself with the knowledge of his own snobberies as The Road to Wigan Pier demonstrates.⁶ The problem both he and Forster faced as a result of their class consciousness was one of being unable to accord full humanity to the colonial subject.

⁴ Percival Spear, A History of India: Vol.2, London: Penguin, 1978, p.191.

⁵ P.N.Furbank, E.M.Forster: A Life, Vol.2, Polycrates' Ring (1914-1970), London: Secker and Warburg, 1978, p.122.

⁶ George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962.

The ambivalence of Forster's position in relation to India was no doubt due in part to the problematic position he himself occupied in British society as a homosexual. P.N.Furbank's detailed biography of the writer, together with the posthumous publication of accounts of his sexual activity in India⁷, show Forster forced to walk a tightrope between satisfaction and indiscretion. His affairs with an Egyptian bus conductor and servants of the Maharajah for whom he worked in India - people with whom this genteel intellectual should have had no more than the contact that passes between master and servant - no doubt led to confusion in his own mind over the nature of social divisions. Indeed, his employment of D.H.Lawrence's cross-class relationship from Lady Chatterley's Lover at the centre of his own study of homosexual love, Maurice, reads as a bizarre exercise in fantasy or wish-fulfillment; an Edenic blurring and disintegration of social and sexual divisions in buttoned-up Edwardian England.⁸ Sexuality, its expression and exploration, therefore becomes a key factor in the interactions of the protagonists in A Passage to India. The crisis in the Marabar caves at the centre of the text arises partly from Adela Quested's emotional and sexual naivety, and partly from the problem of having to distinguish between Aziz as an Indian and as a man. Edward Said in Orientalism describes just such a mental process of division in the west whereby, as he puts it, 'an Oriental man was first an

⁷ Furbank, pp.36-40 and 82-85.

⁸ E.M.Forster, Maurice, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

Oriental and only second a man.'⁹ Aziz is shown, in contrast to Adela, to experience no such agonies of conscience in satisfying the demands of his sexuality. A widower, he visits a Calcutta brothel when he desires sexual gratification - a process treated with no less equanimity by him than sitting down to dinner when hungry. This is not to say that Forster makes Aziz a debauchee, victim of his own insatiable appetites. Rather, the sexual barrier between him and Adela is shown to be a mutual one. Aziz is quick to make a physical appraisal of her, and one that is to her detriment - something that offends Fielding's more delicate sense of propriety. It is the jolt of brief physical contact in the Nawab's car which prompts Adela and Ronny to throw caution to the wind and resume their attachment to one another.

Following the incident in the caves, Adela experiences a heightened awareness of physical sensations. At Aziz's trial, the punkah-wallah who fans the assembled audience acts as a mute symbol of the possibilities of mutual sexual attraction between Indian and Briton. The image of the punkah-wallah - a 'god', 'divine'¹⁰, yet socially untouchable - illustrates once again Forster's confusion over and inability to pronounce on the blend of matters social and sexual. On a purely social level, Forster's essay 'Me, Them and You' shows him levelling his caustic humour at a glorification of gassed soldiers in a painting of the Great War :

⁹ Edward Said, Orientalism, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978., p.231.

¹⁰ E.M.Forster, A Passage to India, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979., p.220.

...the upper classes only allow the lower classes to appear in art on condition that they wash themselves and have classical features.¹¹

a process no different to his own treatment of the punkah-wallah who, we are told, 'had the strength and beauty that sometimes come to flower in Indians of low birth.'¹²

The text opens with a discussion of the possibilities for friendship between English and Indians. For Forster, good manners in the relation between coloniser and colonised are as important as a sense of justice.

Englishwomen in India fail as a breed precisely because they lack the good grace of manners. Forster puts in a good word for Cambridge when he notes that that institution had granted Hamidullah 'a cordial welcome'¹³. Forster sees problems arising when products of the English public-school system who have not been exposed to Cambridge's refining qualities are unleashed on the colonies. His essay 'Notes on the English Character' makes his case succinctly. Such men :

...go forth into [the world] with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds and undeveloped hearts. And it is this undeveloped heart that is largely responsible for the difficulties of English-men abroad.¹⁴

What Forster fails to do is probe the surface veneer of oil that 'breeding' throws on the otherwise troubled waters of cross-cultural relations. Effectively, it is an argument that

¹¹ E.M.Forster, 'Me, Them and You', Abinger Harvest, London: Edward Arnold 1936, p.29.

¹² Passage, p.220.

¹³ Ibid.,p.34.

¹⁴ E.M.Forster, 'Notes on the English Character', Abinger Harvest, p.5.

endorses imperialism when tempered by a cosmetic application of manners, even when coupled with genuine affections and sympathies as with both Fielding and Forster himself. The authorial voice in A Passage to India wants to see imperialism tinged with regret - 'the true regret from the heart.'¹⁵ To argue for imperialism ameliorated by good grace is not, importantly, an argument for Indian self-government. The kindest light in which to view Forster's fence-sitting would be to say of him, as he himself says of Margaret Schlegel in Howards End, 'Imperialism always had been one of h[is] difficulties.'¹⁶

In his assessment of Indians themselves, Forster is sometimes in danger of letting sympathy slide into sentimentality, and admiration into patronage. Such sympathy and admiration as he had did not prevent him from indulging in the 'orientalist' practice of offering summaries of national characteristics, however partial and indefensible. For a man whose own sexual expressions of affection and attraction were forced to fly between repression and release, 'Indianness' offered itself as an alluring if bewildering concept:

What they said and what they felt were (except in the case of affection) seldom the same. They had numerous mental conventions, and when these were flouted, they found it very difficult to function.¹⁷

It might be argued in his defence that Forster relinquished the opportunity to add a political dimension to A Passage to India in favour of offering a spiritual one in its place; concentrating

¹⁵ Passage, p.70.

¹⁶ E.M.Forster, Howards End, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941, p.185.

¹⁷ Passage, p.125.

on religious and philosophical arguments, if not to explain, then at least to attempt to illustrate the 'muddle' of India. But this concept of muddle as it is debated and deployed throughout the text, comes in itself to represent the profounder evasions of Forster's political position. Unable to voice political partisanship one way or another in the debate, he took to using the catch-all of muddle to illustrate the blend of personal, national and religious characteristics that he felt prevented Indians from galvanising their own nationalist activities. It is paradoxical when one considers how successfully Forster is judged to have articulated the end of empire, that the text itself should slide 'stealthily away from a dangerous and incomprehensible situation', just like the train-load of departing British that pulls away from the scene of a communal riot at the end of Scott's Quartet.¹⁸

Muddle, for Forster, is the term that covers all misunderstandings and mysteries in life; the disharmony and confusion to which all attempts at order are reduced. Muddles connect the actual with the spiritual or philosophical in the text. The mysteries of Islam and Hinduism are reduced to a muddle of abstractions, but nevertheless employed - apolitically - as the means of reconciliation between Indian and Briton. Mysteries and muddles are one and the same to Mrs Moore - 'nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else.'¹⁹ 'Only

¹⁸ Paul Scott, A Division of the Spoils, London: Pan, 1988, p.701.

¹⁹ Passage, p.101.

connect' advocates the writer, and yet a 'spurious unity'² is all that can be shown to connect people to things and to each other. Is the serpent a rope, or the branch a snake? Are affection or passion the same as love? Pondering what is seemingly unanswerable is an unsettling business as Mrs Moore discovers. 'Poor little talkative Christianity'²¹ can only fire squibs into the darkness left behind by the experience of the caves. The Marabar echo becomes the medium which reduces all higher feeling - love, religion, friendship - to the same monotone; 'everything exists, nothing has value.'²² This would seem to be the ultimate evasion, with one political programme as bad as another. But the seeming unanswerability of Mrs Moore's spiritual confusions are the blind to Forster's and the text's own confusions and evasions over more concrete problems thrown up by his story. This inherent problem of the great insoluble question at the back of each line of the text is what spins it further and further away from its initially tight narrative structure into the centrifugal chaos of the Gokul Ashtami festival at the end.

'Spiritual muddledom'²³ is the most depressing factor of the passage to India for Mrs Moore. God has served her as a bulwark against oblivion, but India's great expanses, its mysteries and confusions, make Him harder to locate. Unable to trust in the 'practical' Christianity of Anglo-India, where God is usefully

²⁰ Ibid., p.103.

²¹ Ibid., p.161.

²² Ibid., p.160.

²³ Ibid., p. 212.

employed to reinforce social and moral values, Mrs Moore becomes increasingly distracted by the realisation that death may be the end of all things. 'Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence.'²⁴ Fielding tells Adela that to accept the reality of death is to succumb to it. Mrs Moore merely succumbs to a sense of its finality against the formlessness of infinity. But even spiritual muddledom cannot be divorced from the social and political questions which Forster attempts to sidestep.

Mrs Moore's connection with Professor Godbole illustrates another area of ambivalence in Forster's attitudes, and one which sits disturbingly on the sidelines of the narrative, awaiting a response. Early in the text, Mrs Moore encounters a wasp and thinks it a 'pretty dear.'²⁵ After her death, Godbole conjures up images of Mrs Moore and the wasp - 'he loved the wasp equally.'²⁶ The devoted but ineffectual young missionary Mr Sorley is vexed by the proposition that such a lowly creature as a wasp might be capable of God's mercy - 'we must exclude someone from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing.'²⁷ The sentence is left hanging at the end of a chapter, seeming to serve as a silent rebuke to those who would exclude any from the company of the saved. Yet Forster states, both here and elsewhere, that there exist sections of society who are simply beyond the social or literary concerns of men - 'humanity grading

²⁴ Ibid., p.71.

²⁵ Ibid., p.55.

²⁶ Ibid., p.283.

²⁷ Ibid., p.58.

and drifting beyond the educated vision.'²⁸ (In Howards End, the authorial voice declares - 'We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet.'²⁹) Save for the god-like punkah-wallah, all the Indians 'invited' for inclusion in the text are of the professional classes. Forster, too, had detailed the exclusivity of his own invitation, responding, perhaps even unconsciously, to his own social impulses.

The solution that Forster proffers to the dilemma of a world where personal relationships must be of paramount importance, but where religion is a comfortless palliative, is a belief in the infinity of love and of spiritual communion between men rather than with a divine force. Fielding senses this - 'that we exist not in ourselves, but in terms of each other's minds.'³⁰ But even this cannot withstand close analysis. Within the text itself, personal relationships are problematic. Aziz and Fielding are reconciled in one sense, only to be swiftly and, it seems, irrevocably parted. Fielding's own marriage to Stella Moore is shown as less than satisfactory and, far from allowing him to develop his liberal instincts, has made him feel he has 'thrown in his lot with Anglo-India...'³¹. The text's ultimate refusal to face up to and deal with questions of race, class and power demonstrate that it too, despite the claims made for it even by such sceptical readers as Rushdie, (he regards it, in

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Howards End, p.44.

³⁰ Passage, p.249.

³¹ Ibid., p.313.

'Outside the Whale', as 'much finer' than Scott's Quartet³²) is part of an internal debate among the British liberal literary establishment. It is not a debate concerned with the position of the Indian in relation to British imperial power. The 'Raj' texts of Forster, Scott and Orwell, despite dealing ostensibly with inter-cultural relations, serve in the final analysis as examinations of British self-image, of the psychological effects of colonisation on the British themselves, and how this contributed to and affected Britain's image of itself as a nation.

The Raj Quartet

Anglo-India has obviously acted as an irritant from the beginning.³³

Paul Scott's fascination with the phenomenon of Anglo-India, whether central or tangential to his narratives, was the abiding interest of his literary career. His achievement was not merely the development of a complex though lucid narrative style, but also the searching exploration of what was essentially an historical peculiarity - the British Raj - an insight into its characteristics and motivations, and a powerful sense of the individual's role in history. Scott's treatment of history is important for establishing the (presumably almost involuntary) links between his work and Rushdie's and needs to be examined in some detail to afford these comparisons. The chapters on

³² 'Outside the Whale', Imaginary Homelands, p.89.

³³ Paul Scott, 'India: A Post-Forsterian View', Essays by Divers Hands, Vol XXXVI, (1970), p.119.

Rushdie's work will draw attention to some of these connections; connections largely attributable to Scott's use of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays in the Quartet.

Although Emerson's views on history and society do not make themselves explicitly apparent in Scott's work until the third book of the Quartet, his ideas can be seen retrospectively to exert an influence on both the structure of the tetralogy and the presentation of ideas within it. Just as each of the books has its characteristic voice or voices, revealing events to us as seen through particular eyes, so each can be seen to convey varied perceptions of history both in its personal and its wider manifestations. Emerson's ideas concerning the power of the individual and the ultimate subjectivity of history are explored through the respective narratives of Scott's individual 'historians'.

The figure of the narrator, who reappears at intervals throughout the Quartet, ostensibly provides the reader with the 'facts' to enable images to form, both of specific events and the wider demise of the Raj itself. This narrator figure reflects Scott's own interests in the relativity of individuals' experiences of a particular historical event. As Sister Ludmila observes of him:

...there is also in you an understanding that a specific historical event has no definite beginning, no satisfactory end? It is as if time were telescoped? Is that the right word? As if time were telescoped and space dovetailed? As if Bibighar almost had not happened yet, and yet has happened, so that at once past, present and future are contained in your cupped palm.³⁴

³⁴ Paul Scott, The Jewel in the Crown, London: Granada, 1977, p.133.

This process of re-animation through repetition becomes Scott's technique for enabling the reader to relive the events of the rape of Daphne Manners in the Bibighar gardens, the Quartet's central image, as if for the first time, despite the number and variety of its presentations. The continuing fascination generated by this incident in different characters in the course of the Quartet's narrative, illustrates a number of concepts discussed in Emerson's essays, particularly those specifically referred to by Scott in the texts. Emerson writes in 'Nature' of man's ability to apprehend absolute truth across space and time.³⁵

Time is a relative concept and truth is beyond and unbounded by it. While Scott's approach clearly opposes the concept of an absolute truth, the idea that an intuited understanding of an historical event can be apprehended outside the limits of temporality is the key to different characters' fascination with Bibighar. The agent of this intuitive understanding is, for Emerson, the all-powerful soul or 'over-soul' of the individual, imbued with its own special relation to nature and to God. 'The soul', he writes, 'is the perceiver and revealer of truth...'³⁶. 'Thoughts come into our minds by avenues which we never left open...'³⁷. 'When we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams.'³⁸

³⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Nature', Complete Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. G.T.Bettany, London:Ward, Lock & Bowden, (no date), 6th edition, p.323.

³⁶ R.W.Emerson, 'The Over-Soul', Complete Prose Works, p.70.

³⁷ Ibid., p.72.

³⁸ R.W.Emerson, 'Self-Reliance', Complete Prose Works, p.20.

Scott is less optimistic, or less philosophically naive, than Emerson when he chooses to allocate this openness to truth more sparingly. Because the Anglo-Indian society he depicts is so stiflingly restrictive, patched up by inherent conservatism to withstand the winds of change, Scott couples openness with the demonstration of a generally liberal humanist awareness of possibilities for personal and social relationships beyond the strictures of imperial rule. What prompts this liberal impulse in the first instance is itself individualised in Scott. For Barbie Batchelor, the Emersonian awareness that she is 'part or parcel of God'³⁹ provides a Christian basis for her feelings. For Sarah Layton it is prompted by fundamental doubts about her role as a memsahib, while for Guy Perron it is his capacity for cynicism and his ability to laugh at himself and the pomposities of his compatriots.

For Barbie in The Towers of Silence, Emerson comes to provide something of a personal credo; revealing to her the divinity within herself to replace the 'secret sorrow'⁴⁰ of her apparent distance from God. Despite this, however, Barbie's initial experiences of Emerson are concerned with man's relation to history rather than to God. She physically encounters a volume of his essays at a point when vicious cantonment gossip is turning over the salacious details of Daphne Manners' rape. Emerson provides Barbie with the insight that 'man is explicable

³⁹ 'Nature', p.311.

⁴⁰ Paul Scott, The Towers of Silence, London: Pan, 1988, p.10.

by nothing less than all his history'⁴¹, an observation whose resonances extend into the treatment of post-colonial personal histories in Rushdie's writing. For Barbie, the validity of Emerson's pronouncement extends beyond her own personal situation to include Daphne's 'true' history. If man 'can live all history in his own person'⁴², as, again, Rushdie intimates in his creation of Saleem Sinai, then the individual must look within him or herself to answer history's riddles and conundra. By so doing, Barbie sees Daphne's image transmuted from that imagined by the gossips - the pale, violated heroine - to one of her own intuition, a white woman holding the hand of an Indian man, voluntarily and with love.

A criticism of Scott's characterisation of Barbie might be the aura of other-worldliness that surrounds her on occasion; her sixth sense detecting spirits of evil or despair around her. But this too has its roots in an Emersonian conception of human value. The 'visible miasma' of evil⁴³ which she senses on seeing Ronald Merrick is linked in the narrative to the intuitive responses of Sister Ludmila, to whom Merrick 'smelt all wrong'⁴⁴ and of Guy Perron who detects the 'foul, sweet smell'⁴⁵ at the scene of Merrick's murder. Scott's employment of this olfactory sensitivity to link like-minded characters ties in with Emerson's observations in 'Self-Reliance' :

⁴¹ Quoted in The Towers of Silence, p.87.

⁴² R.W.Emerson, 'History', Complete Prose Works, p.6.

⁴³ The Towers of Silence, p.438.

⁴⁴ The Jewel in the Crown, p.134.

⁴⁵ A Division of the Spoils, p.603.

Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment.⁴⁶

The 'breath of virtue' emitted in the text is the smell of Edwina Crane's sacrificial death, becoming sati in her own private ceremony of remorse at the murder of her Indian colleague, Mr Chaudhuri.

For Guy Perron as a historian, Emerson's conclusions lack the necessary political dimension and social particularity - all of history - without which an institution such as the British Raj is inexplicable. Emerson's conception of society expressed in 'Self-Reliance', is as a 'wave' :

The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is only phenomenal. The persons who make up a nation today, next year die, and their experience dies with them.⁴⁷

The wave does not account for such factors as the British class system. Perron knows from first hand that the old Chillingburians who people the pages of the Quartet are well equipped to hold their heads above the swirling waters of Emersonian social change, while men like Merrick go under. Perron twists Emerson's words to make of him an advocate of the imperial mission, just as the mission itself cleverly effected its transformation from one of financial self-interest to one of moral duty.

It is interesting that Sarah Layton should find Emerson's

⁴⁶ 'Self-Reliance', p.18.

⁴⁷ 'Self-Reliance', p.168.

pronouncements 'tiresome and self-righteous.'⁴⁸ Barbie leaves Sarah her volume of essays, which is then handed on to Perron like an unacknowledged talisman passed between sympathetic personalities. Yet for such as Sarah and Guy who possess the potential to expand beyond the limits of their previous existences, Emerson is hardly required, much less seen as a moral and spiritual guide.

Ronald Merrick's contrivance of 'situations' - the charades in which his chosen victims are treated to a display of his controlling powers - serves to illustrate a further interpretation of history within the Quartet. Hari Kumar recalls this bizarre aspect of his humiliation at the hands of Merrick:

He said history was a sum of situations whose significance was never seen until long afterwards because people had been afraid to act them out. They couldn't face up to their responsibility for them. They preferred to think of the situations they found themselves in as part of a general drift of events they had no control over, which meant that they never really understood those situations, and so in a curious way the situations did become part of a general drift of events.⁴⁹

In one sense, Merrick's obsession with control allows him room to assert his agency in the face of the evident power and authority of the ruling classes in India. He acknowledges the importance of the individual's role within the framework of history, but only to deny man the consciousness of having played his part. History confronts man with 'situations' and by refusing to act these out he becomes the passive agent of history. Merrick's assessment is problematised by the fact that

⁴⁸ A Division of the Spoils, p.465.

⁴⁹ Paul Scott, The Day of the Scorpion, London: Pan, 1988, p.356.

Perron and (eventually) Hari are able to escape his control over them; Hari by withholding information from him and Perron by his display of a refreshing moral cowardice that Merrick would find inconceivable.

Part of Perron's analysis of history, and presumably one of the bases of his rejection of Emerson, is the realisation that the liberal approach which informs the latter's writing and seeks to embrace all of mankind within its sweep, is totally alien to a man of Merrick's construction. He 'lacked entirely that liberal instinct which is so dear to historians that they lay it out like a guideline through the unmapped forests of prejudice and self-interest as though this line, and not the forest is our history.'⁵ The dehistoricizing tendencies of Emerson's assessments do not allow for such peculiarities as Merrick and the Raj.

The complexity of Scott's structuring of the Quartet and his insistence that we understand and accept concepts of sympathies shared and felt across spatial and temporal boundaries, allies his work with the complexity and transcendental bent of Emerson's arguments. In both Scott and Emerson, the circularity of individual experience and of history is a common image. It is as if what Emerson calls the 'self-evolving circle'⁵¹ of man's life repeats its pattern outwards, so that the circle of one life touches upon another and seems to see within that the reflection of its own experiences. In this way it is not necessary for Guy and Sarah to have known Daphne and Hari. The psychological

⁵⁰ A Division of the Spoils, p.369.

⁵¹ R.W. Emerson, 'Circles', Complete Prose Works, p.76.

factors of Sarah's doubt, her relationship with Ahmed Kasim and her varying sexual experiences conspire to give her a window on Daphne's consciousness and make her more receptive, more open, to the 'truth.' Just as Barbie feels that her own history is explained by the accumulated baggage of a missionary's career, so Sarah feels closer to the historical reality of Daphne by seeing her possessions on board Lady Manners' houseboat. As she had done for Barbie,

...[Daphne] flared up out of [the] darkness as a white girl in love with an Indian.⁵²

The problem for Sarah in sustaining this image is the gulf between what she can comprehend in emotional terms and what in social. The act of confessing to having visited Lady Manners and Daphne's daughter Parvati is self-revelatory for Sarah. She unlocks that great Emersonian gift, 'her own precious individuality.'⁵³ It is an act of apostasy - rejecting faith in her imperial historical role for a belief in new possibilities. Light must be turned on past events to illumine their unexplored and confused corners. Even her family, despite its manifest faults, is to her a 'circle' of safety and light to which she can return.⁵⁴ The sequence of small lights turned on apparently insignificant episodes of history in the narrative also explains Scott's treatment of events more far-reaching in their consequences. He consigns Hiroshima to the background of the Quartet to concentrate on the individual fires that surround

⁵² The Day of the Scorpion, p.185.

⁵³ Ibid., p.248.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.266.

Susan Layton's baby and Edwina Crane. He does not do so in order to suggest that one woman's act of self-sacrifice is of greater historical significance than such an act of immense destruction, but to illustrate that the 'telescope' of which Sister Ludmila speaks, when directed at history, reveals more clearly the small and individualised incident while the background remains a blur. Scott's introduction of Emerson and his ideas into the Quartet suggests that their role in its construction and conception is a significant one. The ultimate subjectivity of history in Emerson's terms is used as a central tenet behind Scott's narrative technique. He utilises Emerson's views on the innate divinity of the individual to allow his protagonists to intuit truth within a corrupt and corrupting society. Where Emerson was unable to assist was in the provision of a political dimension to this analysis of history. Because of this, Emerson's 'entrance' into the narrative is held off until such time as Scott has suitably politicized and historicized his setting. Ultimately, it was Scott's own experience and understanding of history that fitted him to recreate the image of a long-established and subtly justified system of oppression, and to record its death throes so convincingly. The conviction derives in large part from the skill with which Scott analyses the manufactured self-image of the British in India and, more importantly, demonstrates the breakdown of that self-image as a result of the contradictions inherent in the imperial encounter. Scott was aware that the liberalism apparent in the Quartet would lead to inevitable comparisons between his texts and Forster's Anglo-Indian monolith. The parallels between Forster's text and,

in particular, The Jewel in the Crown, are obvious and, in so far as Scott sought a more serious examination of cross-cultural relationships, intentional. Whether this or any other text by an Englishman which deals with the relation of a subject people to his own, can ever be read in isolation - in its own individual contemporaneous climate of social and political situations - is almost impossible to say. It may be that both reader and writer are conscious of the weight of tradition carried within the writing, and the sense of its being produced within a specific literary framework.

Critics who attempt to construct such a framework highlight a number of characteristics that are apparent in Anglo-Indian writing, prior even to Kipling, and which are still in evidence in Scott's work. B.J. Moore-Gilbert in Kipling and Orientalism attempts to differentiate between what he sees as a distinct Anglo-Indian tradition of 'orientalism' and the 'metropolitan' strain discussed and reviled by Edward Said.⁵⁵ Moore-Gilbert is ultimately unsuccessful in his professed intention of providing a critique of Said's work in terms of this distinct tradition. What he does establish, however, and what proves of use in assessing Scott's Raj texts is that Anglo-Indian fiction was indeed concerned largely with defining the role of the British themselves when uprooted and transplanted to inhospitable and intemperate colonial outposts.

The features of Anglo-Indian society as outlined in the Quartet, A Passage to India and Orwell's Burmese Days are fundamentally

⁵⁵ B.J. Moore Gilbert, Kipling and Orientalism London: Croom Helm, 1986, p.24.

the same across all the texts. There is the rigid social hierarchy in the community, dictated by a man's rank and seniority in the army and the Indian Civil Service, rather than by social class, though this had its influence on personal relationships conducted away from the glare of public service as Scott demonstrates. In his texts, it is the difference between the grammar and the public school boys. It is the lower-middle class background of the police superintendent Ronald Merrick in The Jewel in the Crown that marks him out as 'not quite quite' - not truly the pukka sahib. In the Quartet as a whole, we are introduced to a number of characters who have all at one time or another attended the same public school. It reinforces both the sense of the insularity of the society which ruled such a vast country, and the importance attached to the notions of honour and duty which the public school system stressed and which were major psychological factors in maintaining the imperial status quo. In A Passage to India, Ronny Heaslop is the archetypal public schoolboy; one who, despite physical maturity, retains 'the spiritual outlook of the fifth form.'⁵⁶ God clearly entered into the education of these young men, but never enough to confuse the issues at stake; only enough to sanction their imperial enterprise. The coloniser's education was designed to confirm as natural and justified, his sense of his superiority over the subject race. Even with his dangerously un-British attitude to natives and his morally dissolute behaviour, Flory in Burmese Days manages to derive some strength from the petty brutalities and humiliations of his school days - 'He was a liar

⁵⁶ Passage, p.256.

and a good footballer, the two things absolutely necessary for success at school.'⁵⁷ Problems arise for the coloniser when the image fostered by such an education fails to tally with that which others have of him. Hari Kumar in The Jewel in the Crown, despite his upbringing as a member of the British ruling class, is nevertheless an Indian; a fact brought home to him most forcefully on his return to his native land. Too Indian for the English and too English for the Indians, the self-image here becomes a distorted one.

One of Scott's specific intentions in writing the Quartet, an intention outlined in his lecture 'India: A Post-Forsterian View'⁵⁸, was to show the empire at work. Scott was highly critical of Forster for failing to show the machinery of empire in action. All of Forster's oeuvre, not merely A Passage to India, illustrates his tendency to depict as many caricatures as characters, and the Turtons and Burtons of Chandrapore are a prime example of the former. They are types, rather than individuals in the way that Fielding or Aziz are. Scott's criticism of Forster's tack was that by showing the Turtons and Burtons doing nothing in particular, he was both failing to demonstrate what it was exactly that helped them maintain control over another nation, and failing to examine the vital contribution made by work to the individual's self-image and sense of purpose. As he puts it in his lecture :

...one is not writing just about men at work, but about the

⁵⁷ George Orwell, Burmese Days, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989, p.64.

⁵⁸ Scott, 'India: A Post-Forsterian View', p.113-132.

human idea that while love, as Eliot...wrote, is most nearly itself when here and now cease to matter, life is most nearly itself when here and now matter very much, when here and now are governed by a philosophy in pursuit of whose truth and rewards men know they can employ them-selves. A story about men deeply involved in, obsessed by, their occupations, is an extended metaphor for that idea.⁵⁹

Orwell, too, echoes this sentiment in his essay on Kipling. He felt that despite its gung-ho sentiments, Kipling's work gained much from, as he puts it, 'having at least tried to imagine what action and responsibility are like.'⁶⁰

This element of obsession with the work of empire is characteristic also of the Anglo-Indian fiction of John Masters, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Scott's first novel, Johnnie Sahib, dealing as it does with working relationships and concepts of loyalty, should be very much in the Masters' mould. As an interesting aside, Hilary Spurling records Scott's publisher sending a copy of Scott's 1958 book The Mark of the Warrior,⁶¹ with its depiction of an Indian Army officer pushing his cadets to the extremes of endurance, to Masters for comment. The fiction was too close to the realities of Masters' own experience of Burma, and failed to elicit a response.⁶²

The heroes of Masters' Indian fiction, the Savage dynasty (a name no doubt intended as an ironic reproof to the indigenous population of India), are envisaged as a long line of colonial

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.122-3.

⁶⁰ George Orwell, 'Rudyard Kipling', The Penguin Essays of George Orwell, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, p.221.

⁶¹ Paul Scott, The Mark of the Warrior, London:Grafton, 1979.

⁶² Spurling, p.208.

administrators, each taking up the mantle of imperial duty laid down by his predecessor. In Johnnie Sahib⁶³, Scott falls prey to Master's tendency for stilted, stereotypical characterisations - two-dimensional personifications of abstract ideals.

Johnnie himself is the archetypal honest Tommy. His quasi-spiritual hold over his men is ill-defined; a Masters-like conception of Indian response to and reflection of the qualities of the leader. If loyalty and duty are the highest ideals of the imperialists, then they are the characteristics most sought after and applauded in their subjects.

A more serious consideration of these ideals, and a far more competent early novel is Scott's The Birds of Paradise from 1962. In this, the young William Conway has been groomed, like the Savages, for a career in colonial administration, only to see his ambitions thwarted by the advent of independence for India. Here we see Scott's interest in the juxtaposition of illusion and reality - the illusions under which men labour to rule India and the reality of their situation. With independence also comes the destruction of the illusion of Britain's permanence in India:

I measured my old expectations of arrival against the reality of journey's end, and shrugged at my expectations. I'd been led by the nose to act out the part of an old-fashioned flag-wagger. The whole of India could sink into the ocean and I wouldn't care.⁶⁴

The concept of journeys which defy the expectations of arrival will be returned to in the discussion of post-colonial writing. As for Scott's position in the body of writing about India, if

⁶³ Paul Scott, Johnnie Sahib, London: Panther, 1979.

⁶⁴ Paul Scott, The Birds of Paradise, London: Grafton, 1969, p.117.

Masters provides the rallying cry to the British in India, then Scott's role is to be responsible for their valediction. Underlying the scene played out between Conway and his father is the dismantling of the entire basis of the Masters' Indian ideology - that the British were in India to provide it with a stability and purpose it could not achieve of itself. It is similarly the ideology that hangs in the air in A Passage to India. Aziz asks Fielding why the British are in India, and Fielding toys with producing the customary response, replete with all its Forsterian ambivalence - 'England holds India for her good.'⁶⁵

As for the pattern of characterisation in all these narratives of the 'colonial' tradition, recurring binaries and inter-relationships present themselves to the reader. In Masters' texts, the Indian characters are easily divisible into treacherous or trustworthy categories. In his Far, Far the Mountain Peak⁶⁶, the milestones in the colonial career of Peter Savage are marked by the corresponding achievements and disappointments of his college friends, among them the Indian Adam Khan. Once Savage's ambition to work through the system to as near the Viceregal throne as possible is apparent, Khan's home ground provides Savage with the base on which to exercise his imperial ideals. That Khan falters and dissipates his energies in the process is no coincidence. It is the old imperialist adage in practice - that the British achieved much on behalf of

⁶⁵ Passage, p.124.

⁶⁶ John Masters, Far, Far the Mountain Peak, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957.

the Indians that the Indians were considered incapable of achieving for themselves. Khan requires the force of Savage's albeit manic personality to galvanise his own. Those who fall by the wayside must be sacrificed, as Scott later put it, 'the chance victims of the hazards of a colonial ambition.'⁶⁷

Masters saw things in black and white, both literally and figuratively. To have made of Khan a Hari Kumar - transported him back to India without the status symbols of wealth and position - would have been to divest him of his narrative interest. It required the considerably subtler talents of Scott to make of the English-educated Indian a 'Philoctetes'⁶⁸, unable to 'belong' to either India or England. Masters' conception of the relation between ruler and ruled was an arrogant and naively simplistic one.

In Scott's Johnnie Sahib, the loyalty of Johnnie's men towards him is treated as a mysterious phenomenon. In the Quartet itself, we are offered images of the extent of British delusion concerning their 'benevolent' patronage of the Indians, and what they believed was the Indians' grateful response to it. With violence in the case of Teddie Bingham and pathos in that of Colonel Layton, representatives of the Raj are disabused of their belief in the power of manbap; the belief that they are father and mother to their Indian subjects in a relationship which will continue to inspire loyalty against the odds.⁶⁹ This assumption

⁶⁷ The Jewel in the Crown, p.82.

⁶⁸ A Division of the Spoils, p.645.

⁶⁹ The Day of the Scorpion, p.463. [The sentiment of manbap is echoed in Godbole's chant in the final section of A Passage to India as he celebrates Gokul Ashtami - 'Tukaram, Tukaram, Thou

of a parent/child relation between coloniser and colonised is often remarked on by observers and theorists of the colonial encounter in India. Allen J. Greenberger in The British Image of India describes the belief in the parental relation thus:

Among people of a childlike 'race' [the Briton] was the leader by race and he had an obligation to play the father to their child. The British...knew what was right for the Indians just as a father would for his children. Above all he knew that it was dangerous for the Indian child to be given authority over himself or, even worse, others.⁷⁰

Similarly, Edward Said in Orientalism quotes Chateaubriand on this relationship:

Of liberty, [Orientals] know nothing; of propriety, they have none: force is their God. When they go for long periods without seeing conquerors who do heavenly justice, they have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father.⁷¹

Scott's achievement is to provide a critique of this assumed relationship through the action of his narratives. Teddie Bingham trusts to the loyalty of his Indian troops and pays for it with his life, while the brand-new bush shirt of the returned POW Colonel Layton sags pathetically on a chair back waiting to be worn, suggesting 'a claim to occupation, but...a claim made in awareness of the insecurity of any tenure.'⁷² Scott seems to be attempting to deflate the myth of benevolent paternalism even as early as Johnnie Sahib, with the realisation that the bond between Johnnie and his men is exploited on both sides. In the second book of the Quartet, The Day of the Scorpion, Hari Kumar

art my father and mother and everybody.' Passage, p.281.]

⁷⁰ Greenberger, p.43.

⁷¹ Said, p.172.

⁷² A Division of the Spoils, p.110.

delivers Ronald Merrick's interpretation of the relationship, distorted perhaps by his own peculiar brand of malevolence, but nonetheless cutting through the layers of Raj self-deception :

What they were stirred or flattered by was an idea, an idea of bravery or loyalty exercised on their behalf. The man exercising bravery and loyalty was an inferior being and even when you congratulated him you had contempt for him.⁷³

This is the pathos behind the crumpling bush shirt of British authority. Colonel Layton, fresh from the indignities of his captivity, must be shielded from the truth that his entire career and the ethos of his life have been founded on a massive piece of self-deception; that a people would thank him for their subjection simply for the reward of being taught the virtue of loyalty.

An important aspect of the Anglo-Indian tradition, and one which unites both the perception of India's mysteriousness and the otherness of its people, is its treatment of sexuality. Rape is a central feature of the plots of both A Passage to India and The Jewel in the Crown, a fact strongly criticised by Rushdie in 'Outside the Whale' not least because in both instances the victim is a white woman, either apparently or in reality suffering at the hands of an Indian man, or men in the case of Scott's text.⁷⁴ The 'political correctness' of Rushdie's pronouncements on matters sexual will be called into question later, but it is certainly true that this scenario is repeated in other depictions of Anglo-Indian society, even when the sexual relationship being examined is a non-violent one. Ruth Praver

⁷³ The Day of the Scorpion, p.359.

⁷⁴ 'Outside the Whale', Imaginary Homelands, p.89.

Jhabvala's Heat and Dust⁷⁵ from 1975 depicts two separate relationships, one contemporary and one in the days of the Raj, but both between an Indian man and an English woman. Rushdie's objection to such a scenario is that if a writer chooses to use rape as a metaphor for Indo-British relations then it should rightly be the rape of an Indian woman by a British man.

The fact that Forster, Scott and Jhabvala all choose to depict the mirror image of such a relationship can be explained by seeing such depictions as inextricably linked to the general concern of Anglo-Indian writing with British self-image. Two specific components of this self-image which are important to an understanding of the impulses behind such narratives are, firstly, the role of the Englishwoman in Anglo-India, and secondly, that of sexuality, both as it was expressed or repressed by the British and as it was ascribed to the Indians by them.

On the first of these points, the role of the memsahib in India had become clearly defined by the middle of the nineteenth century. Following the disintegration of the Moghul Empire, Britain's interests in India were looked after by the East India Company, whose chief consideration at this time was economic; namely the legitimised plunder of the country. But following the Mutiny of 1857-58 and the subsequent passing of control over India to the British Crown and Parliament, notions of what Britain was in India for, and consequently the role of both men and women in the running of the country, changed significantly,

⁷⁵ Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Heat and Dust, London: Futura, 1976.

though the plunder continued, perhaps giving rise to Forster's ambivalence towards imperialism - 'England holds India for her good.' Missionaries poured into India to convert the 'heathen', while British army officers and administrators began to see their role as including concern for the social, religious and moral welfare of their subjects. Women were part of this process. The end of the East India Company had seen the demise of tacit acceptance of relationships between white men and native women. The Raj had to maintain an image of its own moral and racial superiority; its right to rule India, and part of this was achieved by importing women from home who would bring even more of Little England with them. Plain Tales from the Raj, a collection of first-hand accounts of life during the period of British rule, offers a glimpse of the memsahib's cloistered existence :

They never entirely integrated with India and this was terribly important as far as the whole ethos of the Raj was concerned. The men were very closely integrated but not their wives. We were in India, we were looked after by Indian servants and we met a great many Indians...but once you stepped inside the home you were back in Cheltenham or Bath. We brought with us in our home lives almost exact replicas of the sort of life that upper middle class people lived in England at that time. It was very homogenous in the sense that nearly everyone in official India sprang from precisely the same educational and cultural background. You went from bungalow to bungalow and you found the same sort of furniture, the same sort of dinner table set, the same kind of conversation. We read the same books, mostly imported by post from England, and I can't really say that we took an awful lot from India.⁷⁶

While this was clearly a tedious and limited lifestyle, it was also one designed to keep out any potentially damaging or

⁷⁶ Lady Vere Birdwood, quoted in Charles Allen (ed.), Plain Tales from the Raj, London: Futura, 1976, pp.82-3.

disorientating influences from the peculiar hothouse culture the British had created. Ultimately, it was a defence against doubt. In terms of Anglo-Indian writing, Forster seems to lay much of the blame for the way the Raj conducted itself at the door of the memsahib. Aziz and his Indian friends find English women 'haughty and venal'⁷⁷ and the suggestion in A Passage to India is that they complicate what might otherwise be a more straightforward relationship between coloniser and colonised if it was conducted man to man. With the exception of the women who cross the demarcation lines between the races, such as Adela Quested and Mrs Moore in Forster's text, Daphne Manners in The Jewel in the Crown and Olivia Crawford in Heat and Dust, the memsahib in Anglo-Indian writing is seen as brittle, dried out by the sun and the demands of etiquette, and constantly required to remain aloof from the native population. Forster's feelings are mirrored by those of his friend and fellow princely secretary, J.R. Ackerley in Hindoo Holiday:

I felt I did not like any of them (the women) very much - though the men seemed kinder and were certainly quieter ...⁷⁸

Scott goes further than earlier writers such as Forster and Orwell in attempting to understand and illustrate the strain on the memsahib of maintaining this imperviousness and rigidity over years of service. In one of his essays, Scott demonstrates that he understood better than Forster and Orwell just what the importance of the woman's role was in India :

⁷⁷ Passage, p.36.

⁷⁸ J.R. Ackerley, Hindoo Holiday: An Indian Journal, London: Chatto & Windus, 1932, p.12.

...having given the subject quite a lot of thought I've come to the conclusion that the women made a vital contribution to the important and lasting impression India has of the way an Englishman did his job, because of the indispensable part that used to be played by women in the Englishman's image of himself.⁷⁹

The 'vital contribution' of the women was that they served as another mirror to reflect back on the British coloniser an image of himself. The threat of sexual violence directed at the English woman therefore never needed to be more than an imagined possibility. It would not so much be sexual violation of the individual woman as a transgression against the sanctity of the image that the Englishman had of her, and in turn, the image he had of his own imperial mission. In A Passage to India, the Anglo-Indians do not rally to Adela's support out of personal liking for her. Rather it is the case that, in appearing to attack one of its representatives, an Indian has launched an attack on the Raj's inviolable image of itself. Orwell mocks the sexual paranoia of the memsahib in Burmese Days:

U Po Kyin had touched Mrs Lackersteen's weak spot. To her mind the words 'sedition', 'Nationalism', 'rebellion', 'Home Rule', conveyed one thing and one only, and that was a picture of herself being raped by a procession of jet-black coolies with rolling white eyeballs.⁸⁰

But the potency of the mental image of violation is clearly what lies behind the siege at the club. In such a situation, the nightmare presents itself as a possible reality. This complex interplay of fantasy and reality lies behind Scott's use of the rape image in the Quartet:

⁷⁹ Paul Scott, 'The Raj', quoted in Robin Moore, Paul Scott's Raj, London: Heinemann, 1990, p.158.

⁸⁰ Orwell, Burmese Days, p.142.

In the Bibighar Gardens case there were several arrests and an investigation. There was no trial in the judicial sense. Since then people have said there was a trial of sorts going on. In fact, such people say, the affair that began on the evening of August 9th, 1942, in Mayapore, ended with the spectacle of two nations in violent opposition, not for the first time nor as yet for the last because they were then still locked in an imperial embrace of such long standing and subtlety it was no longer possible for them to know whether they hated or loved one another, or what it was that held them together and seemed to have confused the image of their separate destinies.⁸¹

The image is a controversial assertion of the nature of the Indo-British relationship, but the concept of 'the imperial embrace' and the inter-mingling of British and Indian self-images is significant, particularly in the light of Scott's conclusions about the relationship which will be examined later.

To take the second point concerning the sexuality of coloniser and colonised, Ashis Nandy in The Intimate Enemy outlines the argument that :

...the white women in India were generally more exclusive and racist because they unconsciously saw themselves as the sexual competitors of Indian men, with whom their men had established an unconscious homo-eroticized bonding.⁸²

In terms of Anglo-Indian literature, this would read as a sexualised or sexually charged version of manbap as it appears in the Quartet. The parent/child relation as it is expressed in Scott is, for Nandy, transmuted into one more closely resembling the situation of unequal lovers. Such a scenario is less likely to occur in a text like Burmese Days where the native population is on the whole depicted as corrupt and as venal in its own way as that of the British. However, Flory's relationship with Dr Veraswami, which in some ways mirrors that of Fielding and Aziz

⁸¹ The Jewel in the Crown, p.9.

⁸² Nandy, p.10.

in A Passage to India, does offer Orwell the opportunity to express a view on what are the acceptable emotions for the coloniser to feel towards the colonised:

Affection, even love - yes. Englishmen do often love Indians - native officers, forest rangers, hunters, clerks, servants. Sepoys will weep like children when their colonel retires. Even intimacy is allowable, at the right moments.⁸³

This reads as an intermediate stage in the process which Nandy outlines; occupying a halfway point between paternalism and sexual interest. Fielding in A Passage to India shies away from intimacy with Aziz despite their friendship, though there is an example of the kind of relationship Nandy is referring to earlier in the text. Here, Aziz has decided not to attend the 'Bridge' party but to play polo on the maidan instead, where he encounters a young British subaltern practising:

The newcomer had some notion of what to do, but his horse had none, and forces were equal. Concentrated on the ball, they somehow became fond of one another, and smiled when they drew rein to rest. Aziz liked soldiers - they either accepted you or swore at you, which was preferable to the civilian's hauteur - and the subaltern liked anyone who could ride.

'Often play?' he asked.

'Never.'

'Let's have another chukker.'

As he hit, his horse bucked and off he went, cried 'Oh God!' and jumped on again. 'Don't you ever fall off?'

'Plenty.'

'Not you.'

They reined up again, the fire of good fellowship in their eyes. But it cooled with their bodies, for athletics can only raise a temporary glow. Nationality was returning, but before it could exert its poison they parted, saluting each other. 'If only they were all like that,' each thought.⁸⁴

The 'subalternity', quite literally, of the coloniser in this

⁸³ Orwell, Burmese Days, p.80.

⁸⁴ Passage, p.76.

scenario, may have something to do with the ease of their relationship. More likely, however, is Forster's own ability as a homosexual for whom India had offered a degree of sexual release to detect something beyond mere patronage in the relation of coloniser and colonised. With Forster, Orwell and Scott, the bonding of the men is always juxtaposed with the hardbitten contempt of the women. The women in Nandy's terms recognise and react to the relationship between the men, which excludes them through its totality. The rape of the white woman thus becomes a doubly loaded image by focussing the white man's guilt at his bond with the native.

Discussion of these texts serves, then, to narrow the exploration of British self-image in Anglo-Indian writing down to the self-image of the white male - his duty, his work ethic, his sexual identity - marking off the concerns of both the native Indian population and the imported British females as peripheral to the imperial enterprise. This finds its most striking and politically pertinent expression in the different writers' attitudes to the concept of liberty. Orwell's classic essay 'Shooting an Elephant' shows the writer coming to terms with the iniquity of imperialism, but through a process that is very much centred on the needs and concerns of the coloniser and not of the colonial subject. Having cornered a rogue elephant, Orwell finds himself compelled by the collective will of the native crowd around him to act the part of the sahib and shoot the animal, despite his own reluctance to do so:

Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd - seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind.

I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.⁸⁵

The focus there is on the constraints imposed on the white man's freedom by imperialism. A similar sentiment finds its expression in Orwell's Burmese Days. For Flory, his desire to talk, to express his frustrations and resentments at his situation, and his inability to do so freely within the strict framework of Anglo-Indian society, is used by Orwell to represent the real tyranny of the Raj. This lack of personal freedom to talk and feel unhindered by protocol is one of the chief factors fuelling Flory's obsession with Elizabeth Lackersteen. Despite her obvious unsuitability as a soul-mate for Flory, he has nevertheless ear-marked her as a possible confidante through his own desperation.

Forster's political position was of course built on the shifting sands underlying his own concept of 'muddle', though even Paul Scott seems to offer some support for the profound political evasions of his predecessor. The 'club' mentality as it is recreated by all three writers is seen as the institutionalisation of a bar on freedom of expression for the coloniser, with the losses that entails to his liberties. Scott reinforces the idea that even 'muddle' is preferable to the dogmatism that characterised the Raj when he writes :

the most valuable thing I or someone like me had to offer the world, as an Englishman, was the uncertainty of having anything to offer at all...Without the freedom to express

⁸⁵ Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', Penguin Essays of George Orwell, p.28.

its uncertainty, a society will finally be oppressive.⁸⁶

The words 'as an Englishman' show Scott aware of the uncharacteristic diffidence of his position. He steps back from the idea that his nationality automatically gives him the right to declaim on such a huge issue.

Eventually, the self-assertion that had characterised the Raj in its heyday gave way to the kind of doubts expressed in these novels of Anglo-India. It was a doubt not merely of the imperial mission itself, but of the image it had given the Englishman as a result. The stagnant nature of Raj society was such that it very soon bore no real resemblance to England as it actually was, despite its superficial desire to replicate a fossilised sense of its values. The holes that are beginning to form in the British self-image in these texts are, as Scott himself believed, indicative of a general mood of post-imperial and specifically post-Second World War disillusionment in British writing. Scott's last novel, Staying On, depicts an elderly couple who decide to remain in India after independence. It explores the problems they encounter through the loss of status automatically afforded them under the empire, and their corresponding gloom at the rise of the Indians, in social and financial terms, whom they once commanded.⁸⁷ Scott felt and expressed the blow to British self-image that the loss of India had occasioned. For the colonial subject who had aspired to the image of his master, like Veraswami in Burmese Days, the problems of such a separation

⁸⁶ Paul Scott, 'After Marabar: Britain and India, A Post-Forsterian View', My Appointment with the Muse, Shelley C.Reece (ed.), London:Heinemann, 1986, pp.113-4.

⁸⁷ Paul Scott, Staying On, London: Grafton, 1978.

would be even worse. It is a problem pondered by Guy Perron in the last book of Scott's Quartet, A Division of the Spoils :

Getting rid of India will cause us at home no qualm of conscience because it will be like getting rid of what is no longer reflected in our mirror of ourselves. The sad thing is that whereas in the English mirror there is now no Indian reflection...in the Indian mirror the English reflection may be very hard to get rid of.⁸⁸

There were those of course who would argue that the loss of India had caused a fracture to the British national psyche from which it could never fully recover.

⁸⁸ A Division of the Spoils, p.136.

CHAPTER TWOPOWELL - THE SAHIB'S FACE

Guy Perron's image of the Indian mirror which continues to throw back an English reflection, is one that reverberates through the work of all the authors under discussion here. The stance of the 'liberal' colonial writers, Forster, Scott and Orwell, is to lament this state of affairs and, in the cases of Forster and Orwell, to imply that it arises from a natural desire for mimicry on the part of the colonised subject; Forster's 'levels of humanity', Orwell's 'yellow faces', a blurred and indistinct mass in need of a force to shape and delineate it, give it individualised features. Orwell's Dr Veraswami - a reptilian creation with his 'hissing'¹ - is only too willing to accept the superior make-up of even the lowest representatives of British Imperialism :

...consider how noble a type iss the English gentleman! Their glorious loyalty to one another! The public-school spirit! Even those of them whose manner iss unfortunate - some Englishmen are arrogant, I concede - have the great, sterling qualities that we Orientals lack.²

V.S. Naipaul, so keen in his early work on India to berate the Indian's capacity for mimicry and self-abasement, finds himself speaking poignantly of his own father's loss of identity in the face of colonialism and cultural dislocation. In Finding The Centre, he records how his father's mental disintegration took the form of being unable to see any image of himself reflected

¹ Orwell, Burmese Days, p.35.

² Ibid., pp.36-7.

in a mirror, let alone one that was a bastardised version of an English face.³ For Rushdie, particularly in The Satanic Verses, the post-colonial subject shares a similar problem to that of the elder Naipaul. For Gibreel it is a problem of disintegration through lack of self-recognition, while for Saladin there has been a coalescing of British and Indian identities where the Indian is finally in the ascendant.

For the colonial writers, the use of the mimicry motif can be seen as something of an exercise in liberal bad faith when viewed against the general thrust of their narratives. As discussed earlier, these tend to assert themselves as explorations of British self-image. Mimicry is therefore a side-issue, but one inevitably attendant on the creation and maintenance of such powerful self-imagining. What space is left in either actual or narrative terms for the colonised subject to assert an identity untainted by that of the coloniser? Is not the mirror, instead, one that reflects the English imperialist's image back upon himself - tinged by glory or dishonour depending on the writer's political stance - but nonetheless presenting a vision where the Indians themselves are purely the indistinguishable hordes behind and beyond the image of the ruler?

Such an assertion is borne out by the personality, politics and arguments of Enoch Powell - an interesting figure in relation to these writers, both as the advocate of a new kind of post-imperial British self-image, and as the figurehead of a

³ "What form did my father's madness take?" "He looked in the mirror one day and he couldn't see himself. And he began to scream." V.S.Naipaul, Finding the Centre, London: Andre Deutsch, 1984, p.82.

particular conservative ideology against which Rushdie's The Satanic Verses seeks to assert itself. Both Scott and Rushdie, the former directly, the latter indirectly, locate themselves and the arguments of their narratives against the image of Britain espoused by and embodied in Powell himself.

Powell's connection with India dated from the Second World War when, as a major in army intelligence, he was requested to assist in assessing the extent of the military presence required in India after the cessation of hostilities. Paul Foot⁴ rightly links the force of Powell's eventual outbursts over immigration policy to his experience of empire in India - his love of the country which at one and the same time confirmed and problematised his stance in relation to imperialism. He was convinced by his personal response to India that England, for the sake of her national self-image, must not let her go⁵, only to claim in later years that Britain's imperial past was a figment of the British collective imagination.

Tom Nairn's study of Powell's rhetoric and ideology in The Break-Up of Britain - 'English Nationalism: The Case of Enoch Powell'⁶ - illustrates not only the peculiar twists and turns of position adopted by a very British demagogue - but also the ways

⁴ Paul Foot, The Rise of Enoch Powell: An Examination of Enoch Powell's Attitude to Immigration and Race, London: Cornmarket Press, 1969, p.12.

⁵ "The story goes that on one occasion he went to brief the Conservative leader, Winston Churchill, on Indian policy and tried with a flood of statistics and logic to impress Churchill with the case for holding India, and, if it was abandoned by the socialists, of reconquering it.", *ibid.*, p.19.

⁶ Tom Nairn, The Break-Up of Britain, London: New Left Books, 1977, pp. 256-290.

in which Powell was able to tap into the sources of British racism and of British self-image.

Powell's personal history is, perhaps unsurprisingly, similar in many areas to that of the liberal intelligentsia to which he was opposed. A product of Birmingham Grammar and Cambridge, and a senior academic at a remarkably early age, Nairn remarks that Powell 'acquired the traditional culture of the English ruling elite...'⁷. There is a striking similarity, if not claustrophobic replication, in the educational careers of these authors, whether black or white, Marxist, liberal or reactionary. Like the old Chillingburians of the Quartet, this cross-section of imperial commentators were products of private secondary education, or Oxbridge or both - Forster: Tonbridge and Cambridge, Orwell: Eton, Naipaul: Oxford, Rushdie: Rugby and Cambridge, Powell: Cambridge.

Interestingly, only Scott's educational profile differs. Although privately educated, he attended the lowlier Winchmore Hill Collegiate School for the children of what could loosely be described as 'distressed gentlefolk'. Hilary Spurling in her biography of Scott describes this school as one that :

believed in King and Empire, church and country, loyalty, patriotism, the ethics of service and sacrifice, and the moral imperative of games-playing.⁸

Clearly this was a school for inducing its own form of cultural mimicry - a cheaper version of the gung-ho sentiments instilled by the major British public schools - here designed for the lower

⁷ Ibid., p.260.

⁸ Spurling, p.27.

middle-classes. The historian Robin Moore, in Paul Scott's Raj, draws a link between Powell's education and persona and that of Ronald Merrick in the Quartet and the racist attitudes shared by them both.⁹ What he does not probe is the difference between Merrick's continuing embrace of his grammar-school education in the teeth of his Chillingburian colleagues (and enemies in the case of Hari Kumar) and Powell's dissociation from this humble step in his own meteoric rise. Foot cites an example of Powell's class-consciousness dating from his days in India :

Powell's fellow officers found him prickly, over-sensitive about his Midland middle-class background, which contrasted with their own simulated orthodoxy. He was at once hypnotized and irritated by the ease and arrogance of the officer class, and, while carefully studying every aspect of officer manners, he seldom missed a chance to demonstrate that he was 'different' - a cut below by birth, perhaps, but a cut above in every other way.¹⁰

The thrust of Spurling's biography is to suggest a closer link between Scott and his creation Merrick in terms of a shared streak of sadism and repressed homosexuality, compounded by a sense of class-conscious inferiority. Scott himself, in his lecture 'Enoch Sahib: A Slight Case of Cultural Shock'¹¹ is clear about how easy it is for a Briton such as himself to share the prejudices of such as Powell; to allow the despised 'Sahib's face', as he calls it, to obliterate whatever more humane visage was originally there. Powell lifts himself by force of will and by virtue of his intellectual achievements out of the realm of

⁹ Moore, p.152.

¹⁰ Foot, p.12.

¹¹ Scott, 'Enoch Sahib: A Slight Case of Cultural Shock', My Appointment with the Muse, p.95.

the grammar-school boy made good, where Scott, acutely self-consciously remained.

Scott had first outlined the realisation of a link between his own 'Sahib's face' and that of Powell in the original version of his lecture, 'India: A Post-Forsterian View', given to the Royal Society in December 1968, some eight months after Powell's notorious 'rivers of blood' speech was delivered in Wolverhampton. He comes to Powell as Nairn does through the overwrought archaisms of his verse. Scott quotes in his lecture from one of these lyrics:

The autumn leaves that strew the grass,
The flocks of migrant birds,
They all are poems; but alas,
I cannot find the words.

and adds, 'Since then of course, Mr Powell has become articulate.'¹²

For Nairn, the poetry is representative of the 'symbol-fetishism'¹³ of Powell's rhetoric of nationalism as a whole, with its reliance on the empty or illusory iconography of 'Britishness'. Powell serves as a curiously controversial linkage point between the British and Indian writers. Nairn believes he recuperates the 'hollowness'¹⁴ of Edwardian culture and its fag-end torpor, a notable part of which was 'the gloomy cosmic truth of Forster's Marabar caves.'¹⁵ Powell also shares Forster's class-cultivated sense of decency and good taste, which

¹² Scott, 'India: A Post-Forsterian View', p.131.

¹³ Nairn, p.271.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.265.

¹⁵ Ibid.

he sought to transmit, however unsuccessfully, through his own poems.¹⁶ This is interesting when one is forced to note as earlier, how many of Forster's irritations with and sensitivities towards India and her people stemmed from this well-honed instinct.

The significance of Powell as the embodiment of British racism has not been lost on another mediator of the post-colonial condition; the writer and film-maker Hanif Kureishi. In The Rainbow Sign, Kureishi writes of his youth in an English suburb, his initiation into the forms of British racism and the attendant crisis of identity and 'belonging' occasioned by his mixed English and Pakistani parentage. His story mirrors that of Rushdie in many ways - a family split as a result of India's partition, the link with Pakistan and the fascination with its ruling elite, explored by Rushdie in Shame, and the need to reconstruct, through memories, a sense of identity.

Powell is the recurring image of British racism in Kureishi's narrative - a figure from which the young 'immigrant' cannot escape for very long. It is as if Powell must be reckoned with, by both Kureishi and Rushdie, as the figure who offers them a negative conception of identity - that of the dirty, unassimilable 'Paki'. Kureishi also reflects in his narrative the different psychological phases of his own development - the 'temporary' period¹⁷ of dislocation, caught between the different kinds of racial abuse offered by 'friends' and enemies

¹⁶ Ibid., p.262.

¹⁷ Hanif Kureishi, My Beautiful Laundrette & The Rainbow Sign, London: Faber and Faber, 1986, p.11.

alike. Kureishi's cry of resistance to this negative imaging has a certain retrospective overstatement about it, as if the mature Kureishi resents the uncertainties of his 'temporary', turbulent period :

I wasn't a misfit; I could join the elements of myself together. It was the others, they wanted misfits; they wanted you to embody within yourself their ambivalence.¹⁸

This last observation is an incisive statement of the complex love/hate emotion experienced by figures such as Powell, and of the perpetuating cycle of self-loathing on the part of the designated 'immigrant' engendered by endemic racism, leading to rebellion and the fulfilment of Powell's prophecies of unrest and riot.

A way out of the cycle for Kureishi comes with his growing awareness of American movements towards the assertion of black identity. After a brief flirtation with the concept of revolt represented by the Black Panthers, Kureishi turns instead to the moderation and anti-separatism of James Baldwin. Again it is a reflection of a phase passed - away from revolt, like the 're-invented' identities explored in Rushdie's fiction and indeed the '"invented" past'¹⁹ to which the black Muslims turned, towards the concept of a rebirth; to Baldwin who, for Kureishi, '...was all anger and understanding. He was intelligence and love combined.'²⁰ The concept of embrace of Islam and an African identity, with the resulting submission to a different 'master'

¹⁸ Ibid., p.11.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.14.

²⁰ Ibid., p.13.

became for Kureishi '...a symptom of extreme alienation.'²¹
A visit to Pakistan does not help matters for Kureishi; only confuses his sense of belonging even further. He becomes subject to an inverted racism on the part of the Pakistani elite, who also categorise him as a 'Paki'²², neither deserving of Pakistani or British allegiances. Bringing his readers up to date with his current position in 1986, seventeen years after Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, Kureishi is both disturbed at the now engrained racism of Britain with its latent and manifest conservatism, and assured of a continuing inter-relationship between the two identities embodied within himself. In echoes of Rushdie's 1981 essay, Kureishi derides the separatism and ghettoisation of the Pakistani community in Britain which rests, as he sees it, upon the '...pathetic elevation of an imaginary homeland.'²³

There is a link here between the fantasies of the dis-located Pakistani community in Britain and those of one of their chief oppressors; Powell. Both cling to individual unrealities where their sense of national, social and cultural self are thought to reside. Nairn outlines the process whereby Powell, disabused of his personal hope that Britain might reassume control of India in the 1950's, then proceeded to disclaim the idea that Britain had ever been an imperial power. The language Powell uses to make this extraordinary assertion carries intriguing resonances of the psychopathology of imperialism as it is outlined by Scott,

²¹ Kureishi, p.15.

²² Ibid., p.17.

²³ Ibid., p.30.

Rushdie, Naipaul and others. Just as India, for Saleem Sinai in Midnight's Children is imagined into existence by an enormous act of collective will, so for Powell also, 'the life of nations...is lived largely in the imagination.'²⁴ Empire thus becomes myth; an imaginary construct.

In a speech delivered at Trinity College, Dublin on 13th November 1964, Powell declared :

The myth of the British Empire is one of the most extraordinary paradoxes in political history. During the whole of the period in which Britain is imagined to have been creating her empire, she was not only unconscious of doing any such thing, but positively sure that she was not.²⁵

Nairn demonstrates the amazing intellectual 'footwork' by which Powell attempts to tease Britain out of decline and post-war disillusionment by trying to convince her that she never was what she thinks she has ceased to be. Just as for Gibreel in The Satanic Verses, the collapse of certainties of identity and location result in his schizophrenic inhabiting of dream personae, so Britain for Powell has experienced a similar process of psychic disordering over her belief in herself as an imperial power. Nairn shows him speaking of Britain's domestic and monetary policies as instances of her 'schizophrenia'²⁶, while her only hope for recovery of self-esteem is to 'wake up' and 'free herself from the long servitude of her 70-year-old

²⁴ Nairn, p.266.

²⁵ J.Enoch Powell, Freedom and Reality, John Wood (ed.), Surrey: Elliot Right Way Books, 1969, p.327.

²⁶ Nairn, p.269.

dreams...'.²⁷ The language of the amateur psychologist is often at work in Powell's speeches, diagnosing the national malaise as one of divided personality:

We have been a nation with a split personality, rent between illusion and reality, withdrawing ever and again like the schizophrenic into a dream existence peculiar to ourselves.²⁸

His Gaullist sympathies find expression in the image of the mirror turned on the self which, as with Naipaul's father, reveals all or nothing depending on the psychological stability and sense of identity of the one who gazes :

The face which we see in de Gaulle's mirror is our own, and we had better look at it firmly and steadily... What sort of people do we think we are ?²⁹

What Britain - or in Powellist terms white Britain - must do is embark on the very process that white British commentators on India embarked on. She must examine herself and her own image for flaws and failings and reconstitute herself anew. Using the example of Kipling's story Naboth, Sara Suleri demonstrates in The Rhetoric of English India how Ahab's 'encounter with the other of culture is only self-reflexive...'³⁰. Ultimately, '...Ahab tells Naboth's story in order to know himself.'³¹ For Powell, the problem is one of self rather than literary imagining, but the process is the same - 'How is Britain to

²⁷ Ibid., p.268.

²⁸ Powell, p.315.

²⁹ Nairn, p.268.

³⁰ Sara Suleri, The Rhetoric of English India, Chicago: University Press, 1992, p.2.

³¹ Ibid.

fulfil the Delphic Command, "Know thyself" ?' he asks.³² His answer according to Nairn, and one which Rushdie recognises as having happened to a great degree, is for Britain to know herself by knowing what she is not - not black. Rushdie's own rhetorical enemy of the eighties was Thatcherism rather than Powellism. Thatcherism did not bother to attempt a denial of Britain's imperial past. Rather it was a banner to be held aloft and aspired to. No Powellist disavowal for 'Mrs Torture'! In his essay 'The New Empire Within Britain', Rushdie quotes her Falklands victory speech of July 3rd 1982 :

'We have learned something about ourselves,' she said then, 'a lesson which we desperately need to learn. When we started out, there were the waverers and the fainthearts...The people who thought we could no longer do the great things which we once did...that we could never again be what we were. There were those who would not admit it...but in their heart of hearts -they too had their secret fears that it was true: that Britain was no longer the nation that had built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world. Well, they were wrong.'³³

Though writing two years before his denunciation of Raj revivalism in the media, Rushdie is nevertheless able to recognise at this juncture that such evocations of Britain's imperial history as Thatcher lays claim to are part and parcel of Britain's self-image. He forgets in 1984 in 'Outside the Whale', as mentioned earlier, that such texts as Passage and Quartet are in a very significant sense not about India or Indians at all. He seemed to have a clearer understanding of what the Empire signified for Britain in 1982 when he recognised

³² Nairn, p.269.

³³ Salman Rushdie, 'The New Empire Within Britain', Imaginary Homelands, p.131.

the importance of the spirit of imperialism 'to the self-image of white Britons of all classes.'³⁴ He goes on:

I say white Britons because it's clear that Mrs Thatcher wasn't addressing the two million or so blacks, who don't feel quite like that about the Empire. So even her use of the word 'we' was an act of racial exclusion...³⁵

But then, of course, Thatcher knew as well as Forster that 'we must exclude someone from our gathering or we shall be left with nothing.'³⁶

Kureishi, too, sees that the label of 'British' is withheld from many and insists that the way forward is for '...the white British...to learn that being British isn't what it was.'³⁷ He shares Rushdie's belief that the roots of identity are to be found through memory and that the fictions created from such rememberings tell us who we are. This patchwork created from artefacts and stories, the belongings that denote 'belonging', is the very model of Rushdie's fiction :

A picture in a house that contained fragments of my past: a house full of stories, of Bombay, Delhi, China; of feuds, wrestling matches, adulteries, windows broken with hands, card games, impossible loves, and magic spells. Stories to help me see my place in the world and give me a sense of the past which could go into making a life in the present and the future.³⁸

It is interesting in view of Rushdie's reaction to his work, that Kureishi's stance on the relation between Britain and her former

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Passage, p.58.

³⁷ Kureishi, p.38.

³⁸ Ibid., p.35.

colonies is closely allied to Paul Scott's. Like Scott, or at least Guy Perron, Kureishi recognises the complex and irreversible nature of the 'imperial embrace' for Britain and her former colonies. It is virtually an echo of Scott's image :

The two countries, Britain and Pakistan, have been part of each other for years, usually to the advantage of Britain. They cannot now be wrenched apart, even if that were desirable. Their futures will be inter-mixed.³⁹

Rushdie's fiction has developed in an attempt to encompass the multiplicity of stories that Kureishi felt needed to be told to 'explain' post-colonial identity, and to come to terms with the different components of that identity. To do so requires a new kind of writing, a new kind of fictional representation that thumbs its nose at the old definitions and characterisations of 'immigrants'. By the time he comes to write The Satanic Verses, Rushdie is clear that, despite the horrors of the new colonial army of Thatcher's police state, the rot set in with Powell, and it is the ghost of Powell's sixties demagoguery that must be exorcised by the post-colonial writer :

Like the Roman, the ferrety Enoch Powell had said, *I seem to see the river Tiber foaming with much blood*. Reclaim the metaphor, Jumpy Joshi had told himself. Turn it; make it a thing we can use.⁴⁰

If white Britain can reimagine itself out of an archaic past of imperial aggression, then black Britain must not seek as the lawyer Hanif Johnson does in The Satanic Verses, merely to appropriate and mimic the white man's old language of power, but learn instead :

³⁹ Ibid, p.38.

⁴⁰ Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses, Harmondsworth: Viking Penguin, 1989, p.186.

how to bend it shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned wells, how to master the river of words of time of blood...⁴¹

The development of that fictional style of representation was neither particularly smooth or speedy for Rushdie. Just as the colonial encounter itself passes through different stages of development and psychological self-expression, so too is the path of the post-colonial writer towards 'rebirth' a complex and difficult one, as Rushdie's first major work of fiction illustrates.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.281.

CHAPTER THREE

GRIMUS - "REHEARSING VOICES"

Rushdie's first novel Grimus offers an important insight into stylistic and thematic preoccupations developed more fully in the author's later work. The models for Grimus within both Eastern and Western traditions are diverse - Dante's Divine Comedy, Farid ud-din Attar's Conference of the Birds (Mantiq Ut-tair), even Johnson's Rasselas; with the hero Flapping Eagle and his sister choosing to escape the particular social restrictions and conformities of their own less-than-Happy Valley. At this stage in Rushdie's development, the diversity remains just that; the elements insufficiently blended to make the novel appear a skilfully amalgamated whole.

Viewed from the standpoint of The Satanic Verses, Grimus allows us to see areas of debate which are subsequently handled with greater depth and maturity in Rushdie's later work - ideas of personal and national identity, the legacy of colonialism, the problems of exile and even the first signs of a tendency to demonise female sexuality. A crucial aspect of these discussions in Rushdie's later novels is his use of a specific geographical setting, not only to evoke a particular atmosphere but, through its cultural and historical associations, to raise certain issues for the reader. For Timothy Brennan in Salman Rushdie and the Third World, Grimus' lack of a specific and identifiable geographical location is its chief failure:

It would be hard to find a novel that demonstrated better the truth of Fanon's claim that a culture that is not national is meaningless...they must be anchored in a

coherent 'structure of feeling', which only actual communities can create.¹

Fanon's discussion of the need for a post-colonial national culture in The Wretched of the Earth highlights Rushdie's own problem, in Grimus and beyond it, of producing a new kind of literature; a new kind of cultural representation that is an amalgam of both the Eastern and Western influences that comprise his experience. The native intellectual experiences the desire 'to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped'² says Fanon, but then encounters the obstacle whereby the 'national culture' to which she turns:

...can hardly supply any figureheads which will bear comparison with those, so many in number, and so great in prestige, of the occupying power's civilisation.³

This is, in a sense, the 'problem' of Grimus - its desire to incorporate a variety of literary styles and products into a framework which, as Brennan puts it, '"tries on" cultures like used clothing.'⁴

In so far as Grimus is located anywhere, its depiction of the Amerindian culture of the Axona makes tentative first steps towards an examination of postcoloniality. As with the inhabitants of Johnson's Happy Valley, 'no Axona had ever descended from this plateau to the plains beneath.'⁵ The voyage out is both an exploration of alternative societies and a

¹ Brennan, p. 70.

² Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, p.168.

³ Ibid., p.176-7.

⁴ Brennan, p.71.

⁵ Salman Rushdie, Grimus, London: Grafton, 1977, p.17.

confrontation with the forces of change, here linked to the image of an oppressive white power. Phoenix, Flapping Eagle's first port of call, combines the material trappings of progress with the soulless conformity of Western capitalism - 'automobiles and launderettes and juke boxes and all kinds of machines and people dressed in dusty clothes with a kind of despair in their eyes.'⁶ The Axona, for all their own prejudices, possess customs and a social framework that offer a sense of community and identity which the people of Phoenix lack.

The link with Rasselas may also hint at the concern with postcoloniality that is the undeveloped side of Grimus. Johnson's full title, The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, provides a link to a minor and somewhat feeble comic motif in Grimus. The mysterious Nicholas Deggle, expelled from the town of K for his attempted destruction of the source of Grimus' power, first encounters Flapping Eagle in Phoenix and, eventually and unwittingly, leads him towards his final confrontation with Grimus:

...[Deggle] came and went his unknowable way, sauntering in and out of Mrs Cramm's villa on the southern coast of Morispain, and every time he left, he would wave unsmilingly and say:- Ethiopia! It was a complex and awful joke, arising from the archaic name of that closed, hidden, historical country (Abyssinia...I'll be seeing you) and it drove Flapping Eagle out of his mind every time it was said.⁷

This mention of Rasselas' kingdom may indicate just how submerged the question of postcoloniality is in the novel. As the only African country never to be colonised, Abyssinia/Ethiopia

⁶ Ibid., p.21.

⁷ Ibid., p.28.

continues to hold a particular significance for all those whose identities are a product of colonialism.

The links to Johnson's tale of utopian disaffection are reinforced when Flapping Eagle drinks the elixir of life brought to him from Grimus by his sister Bird-Dog. His centuries-long sea journey illustrates the burden of perpetual existence for Flapping Eagle. The problems of longevity are equally oppressive to Rasselas :

He had been before terrified at the length of life which nature promised him, because he considered that in a long time much must be endured...⁸

Rushdie's familiar preoccupations with protagonists of confused or mysterious parentage is there in Flapping Eagle's characterisation, alongside the customary whiteness of his skin that sets apart the hero, like Rushdie himself, from the majority of his compatriots. In his various guises of Born-from-Dead, Joe-Sue and Flapping Eagle, Rushdie's hero prefigures the divided identities of Gibreel and Saladin in The Satanic Verses. As the demonised Saladin is informed, it is the fate of the migrant post-colonial subject to be 'invented' by his oppressors, and to succumb to the requirements of that character invention. The mutations of Flapping Eagle's identity demonstrate a growing awareness of the cultural and political implications of names. Just as Saladin Chamcha re-embraces India through the identity of Salahuddin Chamchawala, so Flapping Eagle is granted true Amerindian status by the eagle that names him,

⁸ Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, in The Oxford Authors: Samuel Johnson, Donald Greene (ed.), Oxford: O.U.P., 1984, p.340.

leaving behind the stigmata of androgyny and posthumous birth. Flapping Eagle's voyage away from Phoenix elicits a passage of illuminating if rather self-indulgent prose. The deployment of a multiplicity of narrative voices has been one of Rushdie's most notable achievements. It is an idea he is clearly grappling with notionally in this passage. Flapping Eagle encounters an Eliot-like figure on his travels :

A man rehearsing voices on a cliff-top: high whining voices, low gravelly voices, subtle insinuating voices, voices honeyed with pain, voices glinting with laughter, the voices of the birds and of the fishes. He asked the man what he was doing (as he sailed by). The man called back - and each word was the word of a different being:- I am looking for a suitable voice to speak in.⁹

It is not so much that The Satanic Verses speaks in one voice, but that Rushdie's 'ear' for dialogue, and the ease with which he moves between cultures and historical periods is more sophisticated in his later work. This passage shows an alternative narrative voice breaking out, but the skilful manipulation of polyphony and the endless readings this can produce is debated here rather than embarked on.

Alongside the reference to polyphony goes a description of Flapping Eagle's chameleon nature, constantly adapting to the changes in his environment and others' attitudes towards him :

Stripped of his past, forsaking the language of his ancestors for the language of the archipelagos of the world, forsaking the ways of his ancestors for those of the places he drifted to...he lived, doing what he was given to do, thinking what he was instructed to think, being what it was most desirable to be...and doing it so skilfully...that the men he encountered thought he was thus of his own free

⁹ Grimus, p.32.

will and liked him for it.¹⁰

This is surely an attempt at assessing the condition of the post-colonial subject that stops short of the direct and personalised accounts that we find in Shame and The Satanic Verses. The prose touches on the acquiescence of the native subject in his own reinvention, but fails to push its argument home. Flapping Eagle is at one and the same time the hero of a nascent and tentative study of migrant identity, and a chaotic fantasy with no immediately discernible arguments of any import. The 'message' of the text is lost amid the clutter of different elements it seeks to assimilate.

Where Grimus' links with Rasselas are largely thematic, Rushdie's borrowings from Dante consist of topographical and stylistic devices. His most obvious debt to Dante is the use of Virgil Jones as Flapping Eagle's guide. As the poet Virgil leads Dante through Hell and Purgatory to a vision of God in Paradise, so Virgil Jones leads Flapping Eagle in his ascent of Calf Mountain towards Grimus.

In the introduction to her translation of the Divine Comedy, Dorothy L. Sayers notes that, in popular tradition, Virgil was often regarded as a white magician. In this vein, Virgil Jones is able to master many of the supernatural obstacles on the path to Grimus and protect his charge. When the poet Virgil assumes his role as Dante's guide in Canto I of Hell, he indicates that a worthier soul than he will actually lead Dante to his culminating vision of Paradise. This figure is Beatrice. For Flapping Eagle, Virgil Jones' place is taken by the

¹⁰ Ibid., p.32.

far-from-beatific Media, a whore from Madame Jocasta's brothel in K.

The topography of both Dante's Hell and Rushdie's Calf Mountain is such that their navigation entails journeys within journeys. The routes up Mount Purgatory and Calf Mountain require travellers to negotiate other dimensions existing simultaneously with the overriding geographical features in the narratives. Cantos V through to VIII of Hell correspond almost exactly to the movements of Flapping Eagle and Virgil Jones in two chapters of Grimus. In the latter, the travellers enter the Inner Dimension of Calf Mountain. They must negotiate a series of concentric circles in order to be brought back into a waking state. They journey on bicycles through a tunnel which takes them to a river bank. In the distance is a lake with a tall, stone circular building at the centre. Flapping Eagle passes across to the tower in a boat and, after his encounter with the goddess Axona, is brought back to consciousness.

In the Divine Comedy, Dante and Virgil begin their descent through the circles of Hell in Canto V. They find Hell-Gate in the wilderness of Mount Purgatory and cross the River Acheron on the edge of Upper Hell. In Canto VII they spy the watchtower by the marsh of Styx and in Canto VIII a boat is despatched to fetch the two men to the tower. Just as Calf Mountain both rests on and effectively is Calf Island, so Mount Purgatory, as Sayers informs us, is 'a lofty mountain on an island in the Southern Hemisphere.'¹¹ Both are banked by sandy shores and both Dante

¹¹ D.L.Sayers, 'Introduction' to Purgatory, Dante Alighieri, trans. D.L.Sayers, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, p.69.

and Flapping Eagle have to negotiate forests and bad weather on their ascents. The final, less directly transferred correspondence between the two texts is the use of a symbolic rose in both narratives. The Stone Rose is the source of Grimus' power which must be broken to destroy his continuing control over the mountain and the people of K. The Celestial Rose in Dante's Paradise is a symbol of divine love - rather than the authority of a mystical deity - and depicts the saints in heaven on each of its white petals.

Grimus does not restrict its eclecticism to Western literary models. The most direct Eastern influence upon its construction is the Conference of the Birds (Mantiq Ut-Tair), a 12th century religious poem by the Sufi mystic Farid ud-din Attar. Despite Rushdie's declaration in a 1984 interview that his interest in Sufism had diminished,¹² it is to some of the figures within Attar's narrative that he returns in Haroun and the Sea of Stories. It is possible to speculate on the comfort offered by such a model to a writer so beleaguered as Rushdie was when writing Haroun. Despite its more sophisticated handling, there was something of a return to the earlier 'innocence' of Grimus in the move. The return to Sufi symbolism may mark an attempt to reconcile the fundamental conflict between the expression of unity that is the basis of Islam - 'There is no god but God.' - and Rushdie's own movement towards, and increasing embrace of, multiplicity: cultural, social, linguistic and spiritual. The professed project of a union between Islamic culture and the

¹² Rushdie, Interview in Scraps, Vol.III, nos.2 & 3 (1985), p.125.

demands of post-colonial post-modernity (for those who do not believe or care that it was achieved in the Verses) will perhaps require the influence of Sufism to reassert itself in his writing.

The Conference depicts the search of the bird 'kingdom' for a ruler. That ruler is the Simurgh (of which Grimus is an anagram) who dwells on Kaf (Calf) Mountain. The birds are led by the Hoopoe (who also figures in Haroun), who is singled out by his markings as particularly favoured. He examines the birds to see who is willing and able to undertake the journey to the Simurgh. The Hoopoe sets out the difficulties of the journey ahead in a way that similarly describes the mysterious power of Grimus:

We have a true king, he lives behind the mountain called Kaf. His name is Simurgh and he is the king of the birds. He is close to us but we are far from him. The place where he dwells is inaccessible, and no tongue is able to utter his name...He is the sovran lord and is bathed in the perfection of his majesty. He does not manifest himself completely even in the place of his dwelling, and to this no knowledge or intelligence can attain.¹³

As with Rasselas, there is a link to ideas of longevity and immortality. The poem mentions the water of life drunk by Al Khizr in the time of Abraham which conferred the gift of immortality on him.

The notion of the quest is central to Sufism. It is the means by which the adherent moves towards the divine centre, where the multiplicity of existence is seen to be gathered into totality and unity. The birds in the Conference thus discover that their ultimate goal is realisation of their unity with the Simurgh.

¹³ Farid ud-din Attar, Conference of the Birds, trans. S.C.Nott, London: Janus Press, 1954, p.12.

Only thirty of them survive the quest - Simurgh itself means 'thirty birds' - and are taken up into a unity of being with their creator:

...they did not know if they were still themselves or if they had become the Simurgh. At last, in a state of contemplation, they realized that they were the Simurgh and that the Simurgh was the thirty birds.¹⁴

The cosmic mountain of Kaf/Qaf in Sufism has a significance beyond the merely topographical detail it provides in Grimus. That mountain-climbing for Rushdie, Dante and Attar possesses some symbolic significance is evident, but it varies between the texts. For Rushdie, it would seem no more than a stylistic device that an arduous ascent is called for from Flapping Eagle in order to achieve his desired goal, though reunion with his sister Bird-Dog seems somewhat lame as a directing force for such a generally aimless character. Timothy Brennan sees it as a representation of the social climbing of the emigrant¹⁵ but such a meaning is not sufficiently apparent in the text to validate this argument. Its spiritual rather than social symbolism is far greater.

For the Sufi :

...mountain climbing corresponds to the inner aspects of life...One needs a guide to climb: one can climb a mountain by many paths, but one needs to follow one made by experienced people...one passes the tree-line and enters the world with-out forms. One passes from form to formlessness, from sensible to intelligible. The name of the person who reaches the top of the cosmic mountain is

¹⁴ Ibid., p.131.

¹⁵ Brennan, p.72.

Simurgh.¹⁶

The topography is repeated in Grimus - there is a point at the edge of the Forest of Calf where the travellers enter alternative states. The Sufi quest entails a passage through four Gardens of Paradise - the gardens of the Soul, Heart, Spirit, and Essence. The Fountain of Life or Immortality is encountered in the Garden of the Heart, while the Garden of Essence requires of the Sufi-to-be a surrender of individual identity. Brennan sees the goal of the quest in Grimus as 'a transcendent vision of heterogeneity.'¹⁷ This in some ways is the central quest of Rushdie's writing - the assimilation of cultural diversity within artistic unity and not the homogeneity, so often ascribed to post-colonial writing, which he berates in his criticism. Rushdie arguably loses - or at least fails to establish - his own authorial identity in Grimus. The successful assertion of heterogeneity and hybridity comes much later. Rushdie's failure to engage fully with questions of migrant identity in Grimus has led to a dissipation of critical interest, away from the seeds of the engagement and towards more abstruse theorisation of the novel's complex structure. A rare assessment of the novel, Ib Johansen's essay 'The Flight from the Enchanter'¹⁸ acknowledges a Prospero/Caliban relationship between Flapping Eagle and Grimus, but fails to explore the novel's (admittedly flimsy)

¹⁶ Laleh Bakhtiar, Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest, London: Thames & Hudson, 1976, p.27-8.

¹⁷ Brennan, p.77.

¹⁸ Ib Johansen, 'The Flight from the Enchanter: Reflections on Salman Rushdie's Grimus', Kunapipi, Vol.VIII, no.1 (1985), pp.20-32.

treatment of postcoloniality. Johansen likens Grimus to the forms of Menippean satire as defined by Bakhtin. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics reveals the close links between the genre and Rushdie's construction of Grimus. According to Bakhtin, Menippean satire :

...is characterized by an extraordinary freedom of plot and philosophical invention...[while its] bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure is internally motivated, justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end: the creation of extraordinary situations for the provoking and testing of a philosophical idea, a discourse, a truth, embodied in the image of a wise man, the seeker of this truth.¹⁹

Brothels and taverns we are told, such as Madame Jocasta's and the Elbaroom in Grimus, are the kind of place where the adventures of Menippean satire occur. The confusion of genres and philosophies in Grimus means that the truth sought by Flapping Eagle is never clear, never entirely spiritual in a Sufi sense, nor entirely secular, as the book's modernist tendencies might seem to demand. The undeclared quest for the explication and re-integration of the post-colonial identity is side-stepped, and the goal of the journey dissolves in the final moments of the novel's apocalyptic denouement.

At this stage of Rushdie's writing, Grimus offers little more than a mirror of the techniques and conventions of Menippean satire as Bakhtin sees them. But there is within Bakhtin's study an interesting precursor to the treatment of multiple realities and divided identities in Rushdie's later work :

Dreams, daydreams, insanity destroy the epic and tragic

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. & trans. Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, Vol 8, Manchester: Univ. Press, 1984, p.114.

wholeness of a person and his fate: the possibilities of another person and another life are revealed in him, he loses his finalized quality and ceases to mean only one thing; he ceases to coincide with himself.²⁰

Grimus can only register that disjunction and multiplicity through a jarring blend of fantastic episodes and philosophies. The Verses, with its integral use of dream sequences and its implicit and explicit concern with 'cultural schizophrenia', is the exemplification of Bakhtin's idea within the context of post-colonial writing.

The notion of Flapping Eagle's 'difference' is established without recourse to any examination of the 'othering' of the post-colonial subject. Flapping Eagle is too white for the Axona and different from them by the manner of his birth. But there is nothing about him to suggest any fundamental difference from the figures of oppression that appear in the novel. He is no Saladin Chamcha; the ubiquitous 'Paki' confronting the prejudices and bigotry of Proper London. The idea of exile within the novel subsequently retains a Joycean rather than migrant aspect - the misunderstood young man, forced to leave home on a literal and figurative voyage of discovery. There are, however, glimpses of the greater understanding of exile as intimately connected to the condition of postcoloniality. Flapping Eagle, newly arrived in K, sees through a window an old woman examining her past in the form of a photograph album. 'It is the natural condition of the exile - putting down roots in memories.'²¹ In this context, the statement is almost a non sequitur. The link between the old

²⁰ Bakhtin, p.116-7.

²¹ Grimus, p.107.

woman's nostalgia and the concept of exile is a tenuous one. It is as if the important concerns and messages of Rushdie's writing as a whole are attempting to surface through the confusions of this bizarre narrative. Later, Virgil Jones' ex-wife reads to Flapping Eagle from Virgil's diary of how Calf Island was created and how Grimus plans to populate it with figures from different dimensions. It serves as an acknowledgement of the problems of cultural integration in society :

Will there be a problem in assimilating immigrants from these different planets in the one society ? Grimus is cheerfully optimistic. The differences are too minute to matter, he says. I trust he is right.²²

Though peripheral in some ways to the admittedly obscure project of Grimus, the novel's treatment of women and of female sexuality is interesting in that the embrace of women's rights to social, political and sexual autonomy seem as equally matched by the tendency to demonise female sexuality. If Rushdie's agenda for women is to depict their lives and loves without fear or favour, he seems curiously obliged always to demonstrate both rather than neither. In Liv Jones, we get the first of many 'ice-women' in his novels - someone who embodies a kind of crystalline perfection (in this case limited to Liv's beauty and sexual prowess) while at the same time maintaining the air of being unapproachable and unassailable. Both Farah Zoroaster in Shame and Allie Cone in the Verses have the epithet of ice-woman ascribed to them. With mysterious women such as Liv and Farah, this may simply be a way of depicting the distance they seem to desire between themselves and those, particularly the men,

²² Ibid., p.212.

around them. But in a character as live and 'explicable' as Allie Cone, it smacks of a perverse desire to establish the otherness of woman, particularly as a sexual being.

Similarly the use of the brothel as 'a place of refuge'²³ in both Grimus and the Verses suggests the ambivalence if not outright confusion that Rushdie seems to feel when confronting overt manifestations of female sexuality. The 'tart with a heart' he so fondly depicts is as much a male construction as Islam's concepts of female purity and untouchability, so derided by him elsewhere. As with the image of the brothel, female sexuality contains both a promise and a threat. It is at once liberating as an expression of individual identity and oppressive in itself when it reminds man of his own weakness. In Flapping Eagle's journey through the Inner Dimension, the threat/ promise dichotomy of female sexuality is embodied in Bird-Dog. Having been the woman who initiated him into the pleasures of sex, her body under Grimus' thrall becomes a labyrinthine tunnel, in a passage that displays the more disturbing traits in Rushdie's presentation of women:

The hole between her legs yawned: its hairs were like ropes. Ten yards away. She was a house, a cavern lying red and palpitating before him, the curtain of hair parting. He heard her booming voice. - Why resist, she was saying. Give up, little brother. Come in. Give up. Come in.²⁴

The two women in the town of K who find their attention drawn to Flapping Eagle; Elfrida Gribb and Irina Cherkassova, in themselves represent this dichotomy. Irina, sexually rapacious

²³ Ibid., p.133.

²⁴ Ibid., p.71.

and worldly, Elfrida, innocent and naive. It is arguable that Rushdie's treatment of women in later novels represents something more complex than a division between virgins and whores, but Grimus seems disturbingly simplistic on this count. Much of the novel's sexual content is gratuitous, adding nothing to the storyline or the development of character (witness Virgil's oft-repeated, rather tedious breast fetish) while sexual degradation as a means of controlling women occurs too regularly for comfort. Whatever problems still adhere to Rushdie's treatment of women in his later novels, he is at least able to allegorise, politicise and humorise the sex according to demand. Here it is purely mechanised and would have done well to have remained behind closed doors.

Rushdie's desire to draw on the genre of science fiction may account in part for some of the ingenuousness of the narrative, even perhaps for its presentation of women; sadly two-dimensional in much male science fiction. In his interview with Scripsi, Rushdie says he turned to the genre because it was 'traditionally a good vehicle for the novel of ideas.'²⁵ But as Eric S.Rabkin points out in The Fantastic in Literature:

...a good work of science fiction makes one and only one assumption about its narrative world that violates our knowledge about our own world and then extrapolates the whole narrative world from that difference.²⁶

This is clearly not the case with Grimus. Here, the reader is expected not only to suspend all normal narrative expectations

²⁵ Scripsi, p.125.

²⁶ Eric S.Rabkin, The Fantastic in Literature, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976, p.121.

and enter 'an other world', but also to be and remain as fully in tune with the real world, its literature, philosophies and religions as is intellectually possible. Rushdie is nothing if not a demanding read.

Rabkin posits the notion of a narrative continuum along which science fiction moves, embracing more and more elements of fantasy to take it away from the recognisable-but-not-quite-real situation of 'true' science fiction. Such 'technology' as appears in Grimus, most notably the powers of the Stone Rose, is clearly at the fantastic end of Rabkin's scale, while Rushdie's own working definition of sci-fi as the novel of ideas would seem inadequate as a reason for employing the genre.

Elsewhere Rabkin speaks of the feelings of alienation and transformation that prompt much science fiction writing²⁷ and it is perhaps these moods that Rushdie is trying to recreate in Grimus. The alienation is not as yet politicised, the transformation is still more of a fantastic than a social nature. The desire to employ specific genres at this stage, however inappropriate they might ultimately prove, is perhaps a defence against the impending loss of narrative control that might come from the attempt to create the truly hybrid novel.

Grimus represents the beginning of a conception of literature as an orchestration of voices - one in which the art of the oriental story-teller is blended with a diversity of literary techniques to form something entirely individual. The 'baggyness' of Grimus' narrative is of a different nature to that of, say,

²⁷ Eric S. Rabkin (ed.), Science Fiction: A Historical Anthology, New York: O.U.P, 1983, p.4.

Midnight's Children. One can accept Elfrida Gribb's views on narrative without feeling that Rushdie successfully implemented them in the novel :

I do not care for stories that are so, so tight. Stories should be like life, slightly frayed at the edges, full of loose ends and lives juxtaposed by accident rather than some grand design.²⁸

Grimus is clearly a novel of a period when Rushdie had not yet achieved the synthesis of diverse cultural strands and narrative forms. He rightly attributes the novel's failure to this lack of a defined voice at its heart, or even, to borrow from Sufism, a unified voice which expresses its own diversity :

I feel very distant from [Grimus], mainly because I don't like the language it is written in. It's a question of hearing your own voice, and I don't hear it because I hadn't found it then.²⁹

²⁸ Grimus, p.141.

²⁹ Scripsi, p.125.

CHAPTER FOUR**MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN - POST-COLONIAL EXPLORATIONS**

Rushdie regarded Grimus as an attempt at amalgamating both the eastern and the western influences on his writing - 'I wanted to find a way of taking themes out of Oriental thought and expressing them in a western novel...'¹ It is interesting that this comment shows Rushdie's desire to utilise eastern themes but in such a way that does not recognisably alter the form of 'the western novel'. The reason for Grimus' failure is that the graft does not take. His later work demonstrates a growing awareness that the western novel form must mutate and develop to become something else entirely; the hybrid post-colonial text. It is not until some six years after Grimus appeared, with the publication of Midnight's Children, that Rushdie developed a more successful fusion of recognisably distinct eastern and western techniques in his writing.

This chapter will illustrate the growing depth and diversity of themes and techniques explored in Midnight's Children. The chapter is sub-divided into sections which separately examine different preoccupations of post-colonial writing thrown up by the text. The need to do so is an indication both of the enormity of the task which Rushdie sets himself in producing the text, and the fact that it struggles to contain the huge issues which it raises and attempts to answer. It is as if the dormant

¹ Salman Rushdie, Interview in Scripta, Vol.III, Nos.2 & 3, (1985), p.125.

postcoloniality of Grimus has erupted, presenting Rushdie with the imperative of providing a text which explains both his own situation and, more generally, that of the migrant, post-colonial subject in history. Each section separately examines major textual and thematic concerns generated by the text's ambitions.

Indian 'Tradition'

Comments made by Rushdie at a lecture given in Denmark in 1983 show him keen to acknowledge the influence of eastern exponents of his particular brand of narrative. He spoke of the power of the Indian storyteller to draw the undivided attention of his largely illiterate audience.² At this formative stage in Rushdie's literary career he is keen to emphasise the complex debt owed to both east and west. His Western audiences had been startled by his latest display of literary fireworks and had made the assumption that such a talent must be 'coming from' two places at once - providing them with a taste of the orient in a western form.³ Up to this point, the names most often on Rushdie's lips in the roles of acknowledged influences on his work stretch no further east in origin than Russia - Rabelais, Joyce, Dickens, Gogol, Boccaccio, Kafka.⁴ It is as if Rushdie

² Rushdie, Lecture/Interview, Kunapipi, Vol.VII, No.1 (1985), pp.1-19.

³ Witness critical responses to its publication - "India has found her Gunter Grass." Sunday Telegraph.

⁴ References in Kunapipi, Vol.IV, No.2, (1982), p.20; Scripsi, p.115 and 'Imaginary Homelands' in Imaginary Homelands, p.21.

was either unaware at this stage of the nature of his writing or was unwilling or unable to see the place it might hold in the body of Indo-Anglian fiction until Midnight's Children arrived and proclaimed its hybrid parentage. From that point, Rushdie's awareness of his relation to earlier Indian writing in English, shifts towards one of greater acceptance.

Part of the difficulty he seems to have experienced in locating his writing possibly stems from the tension of whether to embrace or refute the notion of an Indian 'tradition' in writing. In his essay ' "Commonwealth Literature" Does Not Exist', Rushdie asks how critics can speak of an Indian tradition when Indianness itself defies categorisation by virtue of its heterogeneity and diversity. But in the same year he is telling the audience at his Danish lecture that he wishes to speak about 'the sense in which [Midnight's Children] derives out of an Indian tradition...'.⁵ He clearly argues for the existence and continuance of a distinct oral tradition in Indian culture, exemplified in this instance by the crowd-pulling storyteller of Baroda. An Indian narrative tradition - if it exists and if it is exemplified by Midnight's Children - would be multi-faceted, sending out shoots in the directions of the political, the spiritual and the folkloric.

The discussion of the language of Midnight's Children later in this chapter will question how far the text, or any text, is able to embody an element of orality within it. But Rushdie's primary interest in oral narrative is in relation to the text's structure rather than its mode of expression - namely oral narrative's

⁵ Kunapipi, (1985), p.6.

defiance of linearity. The complexity of such a narrative, with its 'swoops', 'spirals', digression and reiteration⁶ can be seen as the perfect correlative of Rushdie's technique in Midnight's Children. Both the novel and its Indian oral models set out to give the impression of random construction, but it is a pretence belied by the eventual pattern of these narratives.

Some of the feel of the oral narrative is translated onto the written page in its handling of time as the seconds slowly tick away to the moment of India's independence. Like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Saleem recounts a substantial part of his personal and family history before he finally gets round to being born. He leads us backwards and forwards in time between his present standpoint of 1978, back to the events of his father Adam's childhood, down through the intervening years to the simultaneous birth of himself and of free India. The model for this pendulum movement in the narrative is what Saleem calls 'the metronome music of Mountbatten's countdown calendar' to independence.⁷ The metronomic beat of the tick-tock of Saleem's time-scale not only leads the narrative to midnight on August 14/15 1947, but also provides the model for its movement from the outset. Just as a metronome or pendulum picks up the speed and regularity of its beat from the initially wider swing which provides it with its momentum, so the narrative intermittently takes a swing further back into family and national history before resuming its steady tick-tock drift between two historical

⁶ Ibid., p.7.

⁷ Salman Rushdie, Midnight's Children, London: Pan, 1981, p.106.

points.

As previously mentioned, a central feature of the novel's technique is the generation of an air of chaos over the reality of Rushdie's control of the narrative. Though ultimately exercising supreme control over the different directions in which the narrative is pulled, Saleem is in constant fear that his story will, like his own cracking body, disintegrate into tiny, unreconstructable pieces. He is obliged by the internal propulsion of his own story to reach a certain point in history and the narrative, while his omniscience allows him to meddle with and distort both. Such internal propulsion is provided in one way by the physical movement of people and events in the text as they edge nearer to a central position in the storyteller's consciousness :

Tai is getting nearer. He who revealed the power of the nose, and who is now bringing my grandfather the message which will catapult him into his future, is stroking his shikara through the early morning lake...⁸

Tai the boatman is himself a storyteller, spinner of yarns and inhabiter of fantasies, who mirrors in his own technique the formal construction of Saleem's narrative and the novel as a whole with his 'magical talk, words pouring from him like fools' money...soaring up to the most remote Himalayas of the past, then swooping shrewdly on some present detail...to vivisect its meaning like a mouse.'⁹

Time exerts its authority over Saleem both within and outside his narrative. Just as the seconds ticked down to midnight for

⁸ Midnight's Children, p.14.

⁹ Ibid., p.15.

India, so Saleem, pursued and compelled by the demands of his critic-within-the-text Padma and the cracks that threaten his disintegration, is forced like Scheherazade to preserve his very existence through the continuation of his narrative.¹⁰ Just as Rushdie proclaimed the value and appeal of storytelling for Indian audiences, so the figures of illiterate consumers and producers of stories are introduced into the body of Midnight's Children in the forms of Tai and Padma. Both are illiterate but Tai is able to spellbind the young Aadam Aziz with his tales, while Padma is a vital spur and judge of Saleem's autobiography; his 'necessary ear.'¹¹ Her temporary departure from Saleem's house threatens to give his story the one thing Padma felt it lacked and which he had strongly resisted. Her absence presents him with the prospect of a narrative strait-jacket; a descent into 'the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line'¹² rather than the continuous ebb and flow between past and present, 'pulling away' from events 'in a long rising spiral.'¹³

In many ways, Padma's role in Midnight's Children is representative of the separate technical and even cultural demands that writing the novel made on Rushdie. On the one hand, Padma can be seen as a deliberate exemplification of Barthes' arguments on the role of the reader subsequent to the 'death' of the author; 'that someone who holds together in a single field

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.9 & 24.

¹¹ Ibid., p.149.

¹² Ibid., p.150.

¹³ Ibid., p.103.

all the traces by which the written text is constituted'¹⁴, apparently affirming the novel's status as postmodern production. On the other, she provides a link back to the culture which Rushdie insists informs his work most strongly. Padma, taken on these terms, becomes a vocal and individualized member of the multitude which sits at the feet of the storyteller, hanging on his every word.

Padma's role within the text is a symbolic one. She becomes critical of the processes of construction and reconstitution of personal and national history in which the text is engaged. She is not merely a symbol of the Indian storyteller's audience - its captivity or credulity crystallized into a single identity - but a symbol also of a wider critical position in relation to the narrative mode itself. Like Rushdie's treatment of factual error in the relating of historical incident, which will be discussed later, Padma serves to embody an authorial scepticism about the narrative and to suggest a relationship of contestation between the text's form and content. As Keith Wilson puts it in his essay 'Midnight's Children and Reader Responsibility', 'out of the distance between his readers and Padma, Rushdie makes the "meaning" that Saleem can only, frenetically, hope to find.'¹⁵ A criticism which can easily be levelled at this book, regarded by so many as Rushdie's finest, is a lack of subtlety in some of its features. That it offers itself up so readily to critics as

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', Image Music Text, trans. S. Heath, London: Collins, 1977, p.148.

¹⁵ Keith Wilson, 'Midnight's Children and Reader Responsibility', Critical Quarterly, Vol.26, No.3, Autumn (1984), p.27.



an archetypally postmodern text is perhaps an indication of Rushdie's desire to draw in both the form and content of the novel with such a firm hand. Wary on the one hand of falling prey to the 'Indian disease', the 'urge to encapsulate the whole of reality'¹⁶, he nevertheless attempts it. It is as if the novels that follow Midnight's Children have slowed the hectic pace of ideas, curbed the sometimes contradictory impulses of his writing (what claim can a 'dead' author make for the necessity and excellence of post-colonial writing?), and led to the production of texts which ultimately say more, with greater coherence. Like the magicians of Picture Singh's ghetto, Midnight's Children allows us to admire the display of literary fireworks, conjuring tricks and fantastic items pulled from the artist's hat. But a narrowing of the focus, an antidote to the Indian disease, produces a more powerful, because more condensed, effect. There is a suggestion in Midnight's Children itself of Rushdie's awareness of this fact. Saleem's plea to the children of midnight is to establish an identity particular to themselves and their condition which is not conceived in purely negative, re-active terms:

Do not permit the endless duality of masses-and-classes, capital-and-labour, them-and-us to come between us! We...must be the force which drives between the horns of the dilemma; for only by being other, by being new, can we fulfil the promise of our birth.¹⁷

Such an argument for a middle path when applied to the text itself demonstrates an awareness on Rushdie's part, however vague

¹⁶ Midnight's Children, p.75.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.255.

at this stage, that the fully hybridized text can and must fall between the extremes of postmodern plurality on the one hand and the desire of nationalist narratives to essentialise Indianness on the other.

Language

To understand the significance of Rushdie's handling of language, it is first necessary to accept the arguments made both by himself and other Indian writers in favour of the idea of Indian-English, or English used in a specifically and recognisably Indian way. In '"Commonwealth Literature" Does Not Exist', Rushdie states that 'the English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago.'¹⁸ Clearly, to dismiss English as a medium for communication for the Indian artist is neither desirable nor possible for a writer in Rushdie's cultural situation. Though able to speak Hindi and Urdu, he learnt English from the age of five at school, and his move to England at fourteen made it the predominant language of his thought, communication and creativity.¹⁹ For a writer in Rushdie's position, employment of English is less contentious than it would have been for pre-independence Indian writers, whose work needed to operate on one level as a contestation of colonial authority in itself. Raja Rao, writing the foreword to his novel Kanthapura in 1937, described English as a language

¹⁸ Salman Rushdie, '"Commonwealth Literature" Does Not Exist', Imaginary Homelands, p.70.

¹⁹ Scripsi, p.124.

that was simultaneously alien and not alien.²⁰ For him, the split manifested itself between the areas of intellectual and emotional life. Forced to recognise and accept the dominance of the coloniser's language, to then attempt to deny its influence - its permeation of the Indian psyche - is to pretend that the Indian writer faces a different socio-cultural situation than is in fact the case.

Rushdie's attitude, understandably more positive in some respects than Rao's, is that the use of English by any writer from a formerly colonised nation is an assertion of identity rather than an indication of its loss :

Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles ...To conquer English may be to complete the process of making our-selves free.²¹

But of course, the Indian writer does not defeat the hegemony of English by mere assertion. Mulk Raj Anand, another of the first major Indian writers to work in English, attempted an analysis of the process by which English is Indianized in his essay 'Pigeon Indian: Some Notes on Indian-English Writing.'²² Having accepted the centrality of English as a language for Indian fiction to employ, Anand attempts to distinguish some of the characteristics of such usage. He differentiates between its uses in spoken and imaginative contexts. His term 'pigeon

²⁰ Raja Rao, Kanthapura, New York: New Directions, 1963, p.vii.

²¹ Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', Imaginary Homelands, p.17.

²² M.R.Anand, 'Pigeon Indian:Some Notes on Indian-English Writing', World Literature Written in English, Vol.21, Spring(1982), pp.325-36.

Indian' is coined to denote the imaginative employment of Indian-English in literature. An important feature of 'pigeon Indian', which is borne out in Rushdie's writing, is its complex and symbiotic relationship with the writer's Indian mother tongue

...even when Indians know English grammar, and have been used to speaking the alien tongue for a long time, they tend to feel and think in their own mother tongues. Often, the native speech enters into the shell of the sentence in the foreign language.²³

The process is reciprocal for the coloniser, as Anand points out by referring to the large number of Indian words which have filtered into everyday English usage.

One aspect of Indian-English literature, harder to probe because of its literal invisibility, is that of linguistic variety within the text. As with all India-based novels in English, characters moving between different parts of the country are clearly required to speak in different dialects but, ultimately and inevitably, such linguistic difference is ironed out by the presentation of the novel as a whole in English. In a 1984 interview, Rushdie described how he attempted to circumvent the problem in Midnight's Children :

I had to invent a kind of idiolect for them to talk in so that the particular problem of which language the characters were speaking wouldn't get in the way.²⁴

'A kind of idiolect' is not particularly helpful as an analysis of Rushdie's own technique. Anand is more specific about the tensions operating behind the transference of dialect :

²³ Anand, p.328.

²⁴ Scripsi, p.124.

I found that while writing spontaneously I was always translating dialogue from the original Punjabi into English...This self-analysis has enabled me consciously to incorporate and transform Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi words...²⁵

Rao, in 1937, had seen Indian writers as 'instinctively bilingual.'²⁶ This instinct may be hard to pin down, but it is the impulse that leads both Anand and Rushdie to speak of their ability to dream in different languages.²⁷ This hidden, unconscious level of translation is perhaps the key to the relative fluidity of such writing, given the cultural boundaries that have to be crossed both by the writer and within the text itself. Rushdie is forced to admit the flexibility of English,²⁸ a flexibility which allows him to convey both the rhythm and sense of Indian dialects without needing to employ them. This is the source of such phrases as 'donkey-from-somewhere', a direct translation of a Hindi expression,²⁹ as is Naseem Aziz's repetition of 'whatsitsname.'³⁰ The rhythm of the language is, of course, partly a product of the influence of Indian oral narrative and of the Indian epics. 'We tell one interminable tale,' writes Rao. 'Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and

²⁵ Anand, p.331.

²⁶ Rao, p.viii.

²⁷ Scripsi, p.124 & Anand, op.cit., p.331.

²⁸ Scripsi, p.124.

²⁹ Observation made by Upamanyu Chatterjee in an interview with myself at the University of Kent at Canterbury, 5.12.91.

³⁰ Scripsi, p.118.

still is the ordinary style of our storytelling.'³¹

The skill with which the rhythm is conveyed by the writer is a measure of its 'authenticity' for Anand³² - not the bogus authenticity heralded by the critics of Indian-English, who seek the source of 'ethnicity' in such writing; a search derided by Rushdie³³ - but an authenticity that is peculiar to the internal logic and agenda of English-as-an-Indian-language. In short, for Anand, the compulsion behind such authentic Indian-English is 'a natural expression of a bilingual, sometimes multilingual, talent nourished mostly by the mother tongue, and seeking a communion beyond communication.'³⁴

But in the final analysis, can we accept Rushdie's claims to a relationship between his writing and oral narrative as being something more than a desire to forge a link with his cultural heritage? Walter J. Ong's study of the relation between oral and print cultures, Orality and Literacy,³⁵ would suggest that we can. He explains how oral narratives such as the Ancient Greek form of epic, the products of a primary oral culture, never proceeded to develop linear plots, and that Horace's injunction to begin *in medias res* had more to do with necessity than a deliberate diversification from an established norm.

Saleem Sinai himself draws our attention to sequentiality in the

³¹ Rao, p.viii.

³² Anand, p.333.

³³ ' "Commonwealth Literature" Does Not Exist', Imaginary Homelands, p.67.

³⁴ Anand, p.334.

³⁵ Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, New York:Routledge, 1982.

narrative of Midnight's Children, when he reaches the 'story's half-way point, one that reeks of beginnings and ends, when you could say it should be more concerned with middles.'³⁶ A chronological approach to such complex narratives as the epic poems would lead to too many errors and omissions. Ong's assessment of the skill of the epic poet lends some weight to Rushdie's claim of affinities between Midnight's Children and earlier oral narrative structures. According to Ong, the good epic poet displays the :

...tacit acceptance of the fact that episodic structure was the only way and the totally natural way of imagining and handling lengthy narrative, and, second, possession of supreme skill in managing flashbacks and other episodic techniques.³⁷

Midnight's Children, with its thirty chapters, or 'jars' of pickled personal and national history, its Shandean digressions and metronomic swings through time and space, illustrates a link between Rushdie's chosen style of communication in the text and the forms of oral narrative that he seeks to reproduce. How deeply a text can be imbued with a sense of orality is harder to judge. One can find written expressions or versions of the oral, as is the case with the Arabian Nights, but the reproduction of oral narratives through writing becomes a contradiction in terms. The oral and the written are introduced to each other in the text without them being equivalent.

Aside from a certain cross-fertilization of oral techniques into his writing, a further consideration would be to determine how

³⁶ Midnight's Children, p.223.

³⁷ Ong, p.144.

far the individual listening to the discourse of a storyteller coincides with the position occupied by the reader of a text. Rushdie's own frequently expressed views on his sense of a reader serve to confuse the otherwise relatively direct relation between orality and literacy. As Ong says :

Spoken utterance is addressed by a real, living person or...persons, at a specific time in a real setting which includes always much more than mere words...Yet words are alone in a text. More-over, in composing a text, in 'writing' something, the one producing the written utterance is also alone.³⁸

Establishing Rushdie's conception of the reader within and outside his texts requires one to piece together often conflicting opinions. Writing just after the publication and triumph of Midnight's Children, Rushdie declared that :

I have never had a reader in mind. I have ideas, people, events, shapes, and I write 'for' those things, and hope that the completed work will be of interest to others.³⁹

Eight years later, at the height of the furore over The Satanic Verses, the reader of a Rushdie text is characterised as being drawn into a symbiotic relationship with the writer, where the reader is involved in the text and colludes in the very act of creativity.⁴⁰ It is a complex and dramatic view of the act of creation-through-interpretation performed by the reader of a text. The creation of this 'unique' work is, of course, problematised by the fact that reader and writer can come to widely differing conclusions about what the text actually says,

³⁸ Ibid.,p.101.

³⁹ 'Imaginary Homelands', Imaginary Homelands, p.19.

⁴⁰ 'Is Nothing Sacred?', Imaginary Homelands, p.426.

certainly in its implicit if not explicit form. Questioned specifically on the reader/writer relation the following year, Rushdie is again explicit about the writer's solitude as characterised by Ong :

...when I'm actually in the act of writing, I do not really envisage an audience. I really have the sense of being entirely by myself, doing something by myself.⁴¹

He goes on to say that an awareness of possible readers and their responses can arise subsequent to the act of creation. The reader in such a context becomes a moveable feast. To avoid 'misreadings', such as have dogged The Satanic Verses, the reader must occupy a shifting position both in relation to the text itself and as he or she is envisaged by the writer. This would reinforce the idea of Padma as the representation of one who listens at the feet of the storyteller. Through her eyes we are made aware of our own self-consciousness in dealing with the demands of the text.

To return to the literary precursors of Rushdie's style, we are again confronted with the problem of unravelling the claims of a recognisable cultural continuity from the reality of writers' individualised techniques and agendas. In a 1982 newspaper article, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance',⁴² Rushdie spoke of the influence of the Indian writer and philosopher G.V.Desani on his work. Desani's 1948 novel, All About H.Hatterr, is the 'autobiographical' of a native and his

⁴¹ James Fenton, 'Keeping Up with Salman Rushdie', New York Review of Books, 28.3.91, p.31.

⁴² Salman Rushdie, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance', Times, 3.7.82, p.8.

encounter with the seven sages of India.⁴³ It is a comic novel, but one whose comedy has a peculiar edge to it through the linguistically taxing nature of the text. Do we laugh at Hatterr or at English itself as we experience the absurdities of the language when forced through Desani's hoops?

The disruption of English is the classic gesture of defiance towards Western cultural imperialism on the part of the post-colonial writer. The effectiveness of such defiance as Desani's and Rushdie's is questionable, however, when the very fact that it is the English language which they seek to hybridise allows them to be subsumed within the newly extended confines of Western literary production. One can never underestimate the West's ability to claim even the products of its decolonised or still-colonised subjects as its own; witness the place of much Anglo-Irish literature at the heart of the canon of 'Eng.Lit.' Desani's novel certainly seems to offer itself as a model from which later writers could draw lessons in the construction of the linguistically hybrid novel, though Rushdie goes beyond this level of linguistic hybridity in his work to imbue every aspect of his novels with a sense of their own and his own confused 'parentage'. 'I write rigmarole English,' declares Hatterr, 'straining your goodly godly tongue...'⁴⁴ The links between Midnight's Children and All About H.Hatterr are clear. Published in the year following Indian independence, Desani's novel is a world away from the ponderous, politicised work of Rao and Anand.

⁴³ G.V.Desani, All About H.Hatterr, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

⁴⁴ Desani, p.37.

Its tone is one of exhilaration, if not in new-found freedom itself, then in the liberation of language and expression that seem to have resulted from it. Its quality of orality leads one to imagine that it would work well - if not better - as a monologue on radio. The tone is exclamatory, breathless, and its habit of running together groups of nouns and adjectives for emphasis is a clear link with a later characteristic of Rushdie's prose :

There was no transparent amber and cider sunshine-glow, which I had accustomed myself into imagining as a perpetual God's gift aura over England, from stolen peeps into Rev. the Head's privately-owned Our Lovely Homeland type of sunny Devon-Cornwall illustrated-in-tricolour publication...No: instead by Pitt ('88) and Gladstone ('86)! lightning, clang o'doom, thunder, and Glasgow fury!⁴⁵

Rushdie's style in Midnight's Children is a smoothing out of the disjointed tone of Hatterr's narrative. Part of the effect of stringing unpunctuated words together is to give the narrative greater fluidity. The style of Hatterr's speech - often discarding pronouns and other extraneous matter - is a curious mixture of the clipped, militaristic style of India's former rulers (the staple of any 'club' conversation in a Raj novel) and the natural disjointedness of anyone unfamiliar with the syntax and grammar of a language, who has picked up phrases, catchwords, expressions and exclamations which are then pieced together to give the impression of familiarity with the language. In this sense, the language of Desani's novel can be said to correspond to the wider impression gained of India itself and Indian culture

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.35.

in Midnight's Children, with its blend of English and Indian, epic art and Bombay talkie, political rhetoric and street-traders' lingo. The result is inevitably hybrid. Anthony Burgess in his introduction to the 1969 re-issue of All About H.Hatterr describes Desani's style as 'Whole Language'⁴⁶ - combining both high and low culture usages of English, alongside specific references to Indian cultural forms. Rushdie makes the claim for Hatterr that it :

...showed how English could be bent and kneaded until it spoke in an authentically Indian voice...Desani's triumph was to take Babu-English ...and turn it against itself: the instrument of subservience became a weapon of liberation. It was the first great stroke of the decolonizing pen.⁴⁷

Rushdie's characterization of this voice takes us back to the earlier arguments surrounding authenticity, but in such a way that emphasises the multiform nature of the 'authentically Indian'.

As for the exploration of Indian identity in both novels, Maria Couto in 'Midnight's Children and Parents' feels that 'Desani reveals the more sharply divided self.'⁴⁸ Certainly the burden of Western culture seems to weigh more heavily on Hatterr's narrative and, presumably, on Desani's project as a whole. That Anthony Burgess likens the impurity of Desani's English to 'the English of Shakespeare, Joyce and Kipling'⁴⁹ indicates the immensity of the task faced by Indian-English writers in

⁴⁶ Anthony Burgess in Desani, p.10.

⁴⁷ 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance', p.8.

⁴⁸ Maria Couto, 'Midnight's Children and Parents', Encounter, Vol. LVIII, No.2., February (1982), p.63.

⁴⁹ Burgess in Desani, p.10.

developing and asserting an individual style. Couto feels that Desani's language is more dissonant than Rushdie's because it lacks the metaphorical quality of the later writer's work.⁵ The metaphorical nature of language, and the question of how far language itself can be a bar to communication, are both explored in Midnight's Children. Rushdie enjoys playing with the literal and metaphorical meanings of different phrases - Ahmed Sinai's 'frozen assets'; the failing business venture symbolised in his icy testicles, and the declining standard of Amina Brand towels which force his wife literally to wash her dirty linen in public. In one instance, the shift from reality to metaphor is plotted for us by Saleem. Facing financial ruin following the collapse of his land reclamation programme, Ahmed Sinai is further tormented by the government's plans to alter the system of taxation:

...my father flung down the Times of India with a violent gesture and glared around him with the red eyes I knew he only wore in his tempers. "It's like going to the bathroom!" he exploded, cryptically... "You raise your shirt and lower your trousers! Wife, this government is going to the bathroom all over us!" ...He stomped off, leaving me with a clear understanding of what people meant when they said the country was going to pot.⁵¹

It serves as a possible explanation of one of English's many cryptic metaphors while at the same time redefining it - an example of the Indianization or Rushdification of English. It is also interesting to note that Ahmed's failure as a businessman is accompanied by a decline in his own storytelling abilities.

⁵⁰ Couto, p.63.

⁵¹ Midnight's Children, p.201.

Rather like Rashid, the 'Shah of Blah' in Haroun and the Sea of Stories who finds his own creative powers curtailed by domestic crisis, Ahmed's bedtime stories lose their excitement and conviction - 'in his perfunctory voice we could hear the creaks and groans of a rustling, decayed imagination.'⁵²

Language is shown to be the site of conflict in the novel in the form of language riots between Marathi and Gujarati speakers. Importantly, Saleem chooses to communicate with the other children of midnight in a way which reaches beyond this site of conflict - '...language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words.'⁵³ But like the Indian storyteller, Saleem is not merely a 'transmitter' but a creative artist who imposes his personality on the form of communication, which eventually comes to reflect rather than negate the author/creator's centrality:

...I was obliged to get beneath the surface veneer of front of mind thoughts in incomprehensible tongues, with the obvious...effect that they became aware of my presence.⁵⁴

Perspective

The question of perspective is always at the centre of Rushdie's debates on the literary and non-literary constructions of reality. Partly it is a play on the Hindu concept of maya - the illusory quality of what we perceive to be reality or the world - and partly a slight parodic dig at the adoption of this concept

⁵² Ibid., p.202.

⁵³ Ibid., p.168.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.219.

by British writers in their representations of India. (Much of the action of Scott's Quartet takes place in the 'imagined' India of the aptly-named Mayapore). Rushdie's use of the cinema screen as metaphor for the illusion/reality split can be seen on one level as a debunking of the quasi-mystical language sometimes adopted by writers such as Forster and Scott to convey that aspect of specifically Indian 'reality' which they cannot comprehend or assimilate into their existing view of the world. To question the nature of perception through the brash artificiality of the Bombay talkie is to introduce a new dimension into the discussion, perhaps specifically chosen to jar with the abstraction of the Marabar caves or the romanticised attitudes of many of Scott's characters.

If reality itself becomes questionable, then realism as a mode of representation of reality becomes equally open to examination. Different narrative techniques are effectively debated in the text of Midnight's Children. Saleem's film-making uncle Hanif discovers a passion for realistic screenplays to set against the mythical, fantastic preoccupations of the Bombay film industry. Saleem dissociates himself from this by virtue of his 'miraculous nature, which involved [him] beyond all mitigation in the (Hanif despised) myth-life of India...'⁵⁵ Saleem's miraculous nature is in one sense his postcoloniality, his contemporaneity with India's new-found freedom. The freedom to express oneself emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and politically must find its free expression in art. This leads into the argument around which literary form is best suited to the depiction and

⁵⁵ Midnight's Children, p.244.

reflection of a new democracy emerging from beneath the yoke of colonialism.

Midnight's Children shows that subversions of realism can be used as much for the purposes of oppression as liberation. Saleem's arch rival and alter ego Shiva adopts the 'technique' of inverting the emotional responses that would normally attach to certain situations. Murders are thus described casually, while a good hand of cards is cause for poetic licence.

He creates alternative realities of a sort, in that his distance from the object or situation viewed colours his perception of it. The problem is that his own psychosis means that he is unable to distinguish between events and get close enough to perceive the realities of the murder. Moreover, Hanif's rejection of the Bombay talkies as socially escapist and diversionary, demonstrates Rushdie's belief in the artistic and political usefulness of realism.

What, then, of the fact that both Rushdie himself and critics of his work have frequently likened his writing to that of Latin-American magical realist writers such as Garcia Marquez and Borges.⁵⁶ The Jaguar Smile, which recounts Rushdie's sojourn in revolutionary Nicaragua, reads like the saga of a writer discovering the literary as well as the political sympathies he shares with another culture. But the label of magical realist carries with it an attendant baggage of concepts and accretions which threaten to alienate the post-colonial writer from his

⁵⁶ For example, Margaret Drabble, Rushdie's friend and compiler of the Oxford Companion to English Literature, lists next to Rushdie's name in her index 'see magical realism' (Oxford: O.U.P., 1985).

roots, rather than affirm them.

In many ways, magical realism would appear to be an obvious style for post-colonial writing to adopt and Homi Bhabha for one speaks of it in Nation and Narration as 'the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world'.⁵⁷ The experience of colonialism is to disrupt the historical narrative of a country. Magical realism with its juxtaposition of alternative realities and alternative versions of history is a way of figuring this disruption. In the case of Midnight's Children, colonialism occasions a double disruption in the text, through the presence and then the departure of the British. And if, as The Satanic Verses later argues, colonialism induces a form of cultural schizophrenia in the post-colonial subject, then magical realism would seem to offer itself up as the literary expression of the disintegration and disruption that it causes to history and national identity. Just as the Verses speaks of the post-colonial psyche splitting, yet preserving and nourishing its separate divisions, so magical realism can show the cultural and national identity of post-colonial societies dividing and preserving their different versions of history. The conceptualisation of alternative realities allows for the exercise of a liberty within the text. If the argument against any totalising grand narrative is that it ultimately oppresses through its strictures, then a multiplication of possible realities is a way out of the strait-jacket.

But it is possible to acknowledge the debt that Rushdie's writing

⁵⁷ Homi K.Bhabha, introduction to Nation and Narration, (ed.Bhabha), London:Routledge, 1990, p.7.

owes to the forms of magical realism, without trusting the generic label to 'explain' and contain the processes and achievements of his work. Aijaz Ahmad in his recent study, In Theory, is dismissive of the claims Bhabha makes for magical realism, seeing his statement as 'doubtful' and the pronouncement itself as characteristic of what he calls 'the metropolitan theory's inflationary rhetoric'.⁵⁸ It is also important to recognise that magical realism's effectiveness is dependent on the very existence and continuance of the grand narratives against which it asserts its difference. In the wake of the Satanic Verses 'affair', Rushdie became keen to distance himself somewhat from this Latin-American sector of influences. The sub-text of his refutation of such connections is that he was gradually embracing a different and discrete literary and cultural identity; not dissociated either from eastern or western influence, but a positive hybridized blend.

The crisis over the publication of The Satanic Verses seems to have galvanised Rushdie's views on what kind of writing he wanted to produce and how he wanted it to be read. Before the storm broke he was still appearing confused in his relationship to magical realist writing, declaring that he saw his work as allied to surrealism rather than magical realism.⁵⁹ It is another of the instances where Rushdie - perhaps because of his very hybridity - is unable to decide which strand of his make-up, Third or First World, he wishes to be allied to. He says :

⁵⁸ Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures, London: Verso, 1992, p.69.

⁵⁹ Salman Rushdie, interview with Mark Lawson, Independent, 10.9.88, pp.58-62. ('Fishing for Salman').

Of all the European artistic movements, surrealism is the one I most respond to, the idea that you have to make the world fresh, scratching away at the surface of expectation and habit...realism to me just means arriving at a definition of the world which feels true. And in order to do that you might be required to use the most fantastical images...as long as the purpose is not to escape from the world but to capture it, that seems to me to be realism.⁶⁰

This reiterates a point he makes at the end of The Jaguar Smile when he refutes the binary opposition of realism and fantasy :

Unhappy endings might seem more realistic than happy ones, but reality often contained a streak of fantasy that realism...lacked. In the real world, there were monsters and giants...⁶¹

Rushdie addresses the question again, indirectly, in a review of Marquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold :

El realismo magical, magical realism, at least as practised by Marquez, is a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely 'Third World' consciousness...It would be a mistake to think of Marquez's literary universe as an inverted, self-referential closed system.⁶²

The complexity of Rushdie's stance derives from his belief at this stage that magical realism as much as straightforward realism was capable of capturing the world with all its extremes and peculiarities. The definition and the defence of magical realism proposed here are useful for judging the true nature of Rushdie's claims for the cultural and political validity of his own writing.

'Third World' writers such as himself and Marquez take what they require from the dominant discourses of powerful, colonial

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.60.

⁶¹ Salman Rushdie, The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan journey, London: Picador, 1987, p.169.

⁶² 'Gabriel Garcia Marquez', Imaginary Homelands, p.301-2.

cultures and reshape it to serve their own ends. There is also the desire to be seen as more than a literary dilettante, playing with the form of the novel for no other reason than that he can (witness the work of his contemporaries Julian Barnes and Martin Amis), serving a discourse which ultimately addresses itself. He is straining at the ties that bind him to postmodernity on the one hand and postcoloniality on the other. He has questioned Western assessments of Midnight's Children as a fantasy novel, comparing it to the responses of Indian readers who have seen it as 'a novel of history and politics. And memory.'⁶³ Despite its play with historical chronology and causation, Midnight's Children, unlike magical realist fiction, is a deeply historicized text.

Invisibility

The discussion of invisibility within Midnight's Children can be seen as part of the process of questioning identity and the position of the post-colonial writer in relation to the society s/he observes. Invisibility can be a political necessity. The poet Nadir Khan fears for his life following the murder of Mian Abdullah, seeking refuge in the cellar of Aadam Aziz's house. He is able to do so because 'concealment has always been a crucial architectural consideration in India.'⁶⁴ Invisibility is also the refuge of the voyeur as well as the social and

⁶³ Kunapipi, (1985), p.15.

⁶⁴ Midnight's Children, p.53.

political exile. In describing the value of a washing chest as a hiding-place, Saleem acknowledges the element of danger that attaches to the invisible observer of society :

A washing chest is a hole in the world, a place which civilisation has put outside itself, beyond the pale; this makes it the finest of hiding-places.⁶⁵

The post-colonial writer becomes the spectator on the periphery of society, able to view the actions of others because he is literally or socially invisible. Following the ignominy of his discovery in the washing chest, Saleem's next hiding-place becomes the old clocktower, where he observes strangers rather than those bound to him by ties of kinship. From the straightforward voyeurism of his observations of his mother and of Lila Sabarmati, we now see the power of the peripheral observer, with his ability for transcendental communication, beginning to coalesce. Through his vision, we are able to witness the diversity of Indian social, cultural and political experience, in such a way that emphasises both the individuality of the Indian masses and of Saleem himself. Rushdie has said of Midnight's Children that he wanted it to deal with heroism and individuality against a backdrop of India's vast population.⁶⁶ Saleem says of his experiences in the clocktower :

I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift...⁶⁷

a feeling he is able to hold onto in the face of desperation at

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.156.

⁶⁶ Kunapipi, (1985), p.11.

⁶⁷ Midnight's Children, p.174.

the impending loss of his own identity :

If I had not believed myself in control of the flooding multitude, their massed identities would have annihilated mine.⁶⁸

Invisibility also allows Saleem to reflect on the very nature of his narrative. Just as the cinema screen was used to illustrate the way reality alters according to your perspective on it, so Saleem when spying on Amina and Nadir (now Qasim the Red) sees himself in control of a film camera; zooming in or drawing back for different perspectives on his 'actors'. As with the rest of the narrative, we are left to wonder who really is occupying the 'centre-stage', the actors or the movie-maker himself, as we are increasingly made aware of the staged construction of Saleem's account of history. The text demonstrates Rushdie's awareness of the 'illusion' of control, and its importance in the maintenance of an authorial identity.

Parvati-the-witch's role in securing Saleem's safe return to India from Bangladesh in Book Three links the question of invisibility in the novel with the idea of woman as refuge which is a recurring feature of Rushdie's novels. Parvati's wicker basket enables her to make men disappear until she wills them to return. It is another 'basket of invisibility'⁶⁹ in the narrative, but one where far from being the observer empowered by his own invisibility, he is instead preserved in a curious state of limbo :

Present, but insubstantial, actual, but without being or

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.175.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.385.

weight...I hung in a sphere of absence at whose fringes, like faint reflections, could be seen the spectres of wickerwork.⁷⁰

The situation differs from that of the washing chest in that it is controlled by a woman, Parvati. Like the brothels of K in Grimus and Jahilia in The Satanic Verses, women and female sexuality are both the refuge and the abyss.

Woman is prepared to aid man's escape and secure his safety, but through the exercise of her power and ultimate control. Paradoxically, Parvati is also the agent for restoring Saleem's identity to him. By recognising him, she effectively gives him back the name he has forgotten following the loss of his family, and his sister's treachery.

Like Saladin Chamcha in The Satanic Verses who rediscovers his Indian identity through the intercession of Zeeny Vakil, Saleem also finds his identity restored to him in large measure through the aid of a woman. As with Liv Jones and Bird-Dog in Grimus (both texts demonstrate the treachery of wives and sisters), Parvati's power is illustrative of the nurturer/destroyer dichotomy that Rushdie so often depicts in women :

In the grip of Parvati's sorcery, I felt my hold on the world slip away - and how easy, how peaceful not to never to return!...in short I was in mortal danger.⁷¹

Woman can therefore confer and destroy the sense of a man's identity. As with the four female demons encountered by Saleem and his fellow soldiers at Kali's temple in the Sundarbans, women promise the fulfilment of men's dreams which then serve as the

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.381

⁷¹ Ibid.

agent of their destruction. What keeps Saleem's fragile and slowly disintegrating identity intact in Parvati's basket is the silver spittoon. Previously divested of nearly all remnants of his identity, including for a while his name, the spittoon provides the one link with his (literally) destroyed past as he teeters on the brink of annihilation. It is the thread that leads him back through the labyrinth of absence or non-being.

Memory

One of the chief achievements of Midnight's Children is the way in which it serves as a testament to the importance of memory in the recreation of history and the constitution of the individual's identity. As Saleem puts it, 'morality, judgement, character ... it all starts with memory.'⁷² It is Parvati's memory of Saleem which gives him back his name, and the memory of his former life symbolised by the spittoon that keeps him in touch with that newly rediscovered identity. Rushdie describes a similar process where he himself experienced a restoration of the past to him through memory. The effect of looking at an old black and white photograph of his childhood home in Bombay was dramatic :

...that was when my novel Midnight's Children was really born; when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself...⁷³

Rushdie admits that the act of reclaiming the past is subject to the vagaries of the memory on which its reconstruction relies.

⁷² Midnight's Children, p.381.

⁷³ 'Imaginary Homelands', Imaginary Homelands, p.10.

His essay on unreliable narration in Midnight's Children is a study of the tricks which memory plays on the writer attempting to recall the past, and also of the tricks the writer can play on the reader in the name of unreliability.⁷⁴ By confusing us as to why certain incorrect details have been included in the narrative - through genuine authorial error, through the desire to indicate the subjective nature of Saleem's recollections, or to allow information to fall somewhere between the two - Rushdie is able to forefront memory itself as an integral feature of his depiction of India, and to make the subject of the novel 'the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool.'⁷⁵

The 'intentional' error arising from the date of Gandhi's assassination in the text is a case in point. Rushdie, through Saleem, seems to be toying with the idea of how much control one can exert over even misleading chronology and how much this ultimately matters. In terms of history as it affects the individual, it does not matter when Gandhi was assassinated, only that he was, and how this impinged on the individual and collective consciousnesses of Indian citizens.

Saleem's statement that 'in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time'⁷⁶ draws attention to the passage of time in which the reader reads the text and not the more abstract, because distanced, concept of historical chronology. When the

⁷⁴ ' "Errata": or Unreliable Narration in Midnight's Children, ' Imaginary Homelands, p.10.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.24.

⁷⁶ Midnight's Children, p.166.

novel is re-read, Gandhi will always die at the wrong time and the error will always be pointed out after the fact. The answer to the question posed to the reader by Saleem - 'Does one error invalidate the entire fabric?'⁷⁷ has to be no when considered from this angle. Rushdie's project as stated in 'Imaginary Homelands' was to capture and depict post-independence India in such a way that it displays human history as it appears to the individual, with all the confusion that implies. This is one of the chief points of connection between his project in Midnight's Children and Scott's in the Quartet. How the western reader sees his/her position in this scenario is debatable. Rushdie speaks with evident amusement of the Indian readers who rebuked him with the novel's 'errors' in Hindu mythology and bus-timetabling and says we should entertain 'a healthy distrust'⁷⁸ of Saleem's narrative.

But it may be that Rushdie's obvious erudition creates a textual double-bind here. Can the 'average' western reader of a Rushdie novel be expected to know that Ganesh acted as amanuensis to Vyasa in the creation of the Mahabharata and not to Valmiki in that of the Ramayana? Timothy Brennan, for example, falls over himself to suggest that this is a 'variation of the myth' of Ganesh's involvement, apparently failing completely to pick up on Rushdie's 'in-joke'.⁷⁹ Or maybe this is in itself proof of Rushdie's arguments that individual recollections and assessments of history or reality as a whole are ultimately self-validating.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ ' "Errata" ', Imaginary Homelands, p.25.

⁷⁹ Brennan, p.116.

Individual versions of reality provide a version of 'truth' for the individual. For Saleem, memory :

...selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also, but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own.⁸⁰

The art of memory is itself constructed around the objects and artefacts which come to represent its fabric in the narrative. This is closely bound up with Rushdie's adoption of the leitmotif in the text - a 'non-rational network of connections'⁸¹ which carries with it a cumulative rather than symbolic weight. The silver spittoon is one of the chief of these, helping to crystallize Saleem's sense of his personal history, as previously stated. Like the formulaic phrases of ancient epic poetry which help the poet to locate his position in the recounting of the narrative, the spittoons, washing chests, globes and perforated sheets of Saleem's past map out his memory of growing up alongside the new India. The letter from Nehru celebrating the illustrious moment of his birth and the photograph of the baby Saleem from the Times of India are preserved for posterity inside Saleem's old tin globe and buried in the garden of Buckingham Villa before the family's final departure for Pakistan. The incident is mirrored by an account in Ved Mehta's book A Family Affair of the discovery of Mrs Gandhi's own desire that posterity should remember her :

In the first summer of Janata rule, politicians, and officials were gossiping and tittering about a ten-thousand-word document that had been encased in steel

⁸⁰ Midnight's Children, p.211.

⁸¹ Kunapipi, (1985), p.3.

and buried forty feet underground at the Red Fort...The document was a time capsule that had been prepared by Mrs Gandhi's government at a cost of thirty thousand rupees...and it contained an account of Indian history from Independence...through August 15, 1972.⁸²

It is one of the occasions where Saleem's remembered history intersects with that of the 'official' text book versions. The flying spittoon which brains Saleem at the end of Book Two and 'liberates' him from his past by inducing a state of amnesia, occasions a loss which is more than a loss of memory. For Saleem to lose his memory is to lose his identity; his link with the past which places him in the social and historical context that outlines his individuality. Memory is the chain which connects the post-colonial subject to his or her disrupted history. The forefronting of memory dictates the form of the narrative. Rushdie's essay on the errata in the text can be read differently in the light of this - less as a description of a postmodern artist's exploration of unreliable narration than an illustration of the 'erratic' processes by which the migrant's sense of history reconstitutes itself through memory. Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller' links the chain of memory to the progression of the oral storyteller's seamless narrative. For him, memory :

...starts the web which all stories together form in the end. One ties on to the next, as the great story-tellers, particularly the Oriental ones, have always readily shown. In each of them there is a Scheherazade who thinks of a fresh story whenever her tale comes to a stop. This is epic remembrance and the Muse-inspired element of the

⁸² Ved Mehta, A Family Affair: India Under Three Prime Ministers, New York: O.U.P., 1982, p.26.

narrative.⁸³

Memory as the key to constructing narrative is fragile, and unwilling to obey external demands made upon it. Rushdie, in "Errata", recalls his own surprise that he had not in fact been in India during one of her border wars, despite his memory of events convincing him that this was the case.⁸⁴ The same is true of Saleem's recollection of India's 1957 elections, placing them after his tenth birthday rather than before - '..although I have racked my brains, my memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events.'⁸⁵ The demands Saleem makes on his memory are enormous - the process of remembering must be made to speed up, so as not to be overtaken by his own physical disintegration. One of the strengths of Midnight's Children's argument about memory is that through its disrupted narrative, Rushdie makes the reader acutely aware of the important part played by his or her own memory in 'reconstructing' the text as meaningful narrative.

The Individual In Society

The text's linking of memory and objects to the idea of the interconnectedness of individuals with history is a feature that Midnight's Children (whether Rushdie would like it or not) shares with Paul Scott's account of British departure from India in his

⁸³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', Illuminations, (ed.H.Arendt), trans.H.Zohn, New York:Schocken Books, 1968, p.97.

⁸⁴ "Errata", Imaginary Homelands, p.24.

⁸⁵ Midnight's Children, p.222.

Raj Quartet. The copy of Emerson's essays passed between characters in Scott's work, and the trunk of 'belongings' which Barbie Batchelor insists on transporting with her wherever she goes, speak of the connections which exist between individuals across temporal and geographical divisions. Benedict Anderson in his Imagined Communities describes the concept of simultaneity, whereby such innovations as newspapers and literature could convey the idea of different things happening at the same time to different people in the same society, without them being aware of their interconnectedness.⁸⁶ Anderson believes this idea is analogous to that of the nation - an entity moving calendrically through time with its inhabitants largely unaware of each other except through their sense of simultaneous existence. In terms of the importance of the individual's place in history, the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima is figured in both Midnight's Children and the Quartet by more domestic crises; Emerald's revelation of Nadir Khan's whereabouts to Major Zulfikar in the former, and Barbie's death in the latter. As for the sense of nationhood being conveyed through the notion of simultaneity, Saleem himself sees India as just such an imagined community :

...a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history...was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will - except in a dream we all agreed to dream.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Anderson, p.30 &c.

⁸⁷ Midnight's Children, p.112.

In the Quartet, one of Scott's chief concerns is the way in which the British Raj had survived and supported itself with an effectively 'imagined' conception of England. The world they sought to represent and the values they believed to be inherent in it had in fact changed beyond all recognition. As a result, the way the individual Briton saw him or herself had suffered a depreciation. It was the realisation that they were maintaining a way of life which no longer existed back home, for people who no longer cared.

As for the importance of the individual, in this case Saleem, to the history of a nation, this is treated in a more playful way than one finds anywhere in Scott. Saleem explains the different relations of the individual to history with all the pompous pontification of Polonius addressing Hamlet on styles of acting; the 'passive-metaphorical', 'passive-literal', 'active-metaphorical' and so on.⁸⁸ Saleem's 'literal' interventions in history are moments such as that when he rides into the language marchers on his bicycle and literally collides with history and alters the course of events.

The text also makes itself intertextual with other individual recollections of history. References in the text which might otherwise slip past un-noted as mere embellishments of Saleem's narrative are in fact instances of just such a borrowing. References to 'Mountbatten's countdown calendar'⁸⁹ mentioned earlier, and 'his wife who ate chicken breasts secretly behind

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.238.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.106.

a locked lavatory door'⁹⁰ demonstrate how the reality of history-in-the-making bears its own resemblances to the absurdities and incongruities of the fictionalized process. Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre in Freedom At Midnight⁹¹ give the true accounts behind these two images. Edwina Mountbatten on arriving at Viceroy's House and asking for food for her dogs was amazed when roasted chicken breasts were brought for them. Apalled at this decadence, she took the chicken herself, and ate it, locked in her bathroom.⁹² Her husband's desire for efficiency in the hasty arrangements for Independence led him to construct :

...a rip-off day to day calendar which he ordered displayed in offices everywhere in Delhi. Like a countdown to an explosion, a large red square in the middle of each page of the calendar registered the number of days left to 15 August.⁹³

If the nation itself is an imagined community, then nationalism and a sense of national identity seem also to be products of individual and collective will. Saleem's embrace of Pakistani citizenship at the beginning of Book Three is seen as an act of submission. Nationalism in this instance becomes an embrace of non-identity. Saleem's lack of consciousness as he becomes a tracker dog for C.U.T.I.A leads to a split in him which mirrors Pakistan's own split as she divides to form Bangladesh. This can be seen as an important stage in the development of The Satanic

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.65.

⁹¹ L.Collins & D.Lapierre, Freedom at Midnight, London: Collins, 1975.

⁹² Ibid., pp.70-71.

⁹³ Ibid., p.168.

Verses' argument that the lack of consciousness of one's identity is a specific product of postcoloniality. In contrast, Saleem sees the Brass Monkey's newly constructed stage personality of Jamila Singer as a by-product of emergent Pakistani nationalism. Her patriotism in the land of the pure is counterposed by Saleem's 'nose' for the seedier side of life, away from the virtues of nationalistic fervour. Aadam Aziz and Saleem both suffer from the gaps in their identities left by the god-shaped hole, while the national identity of Pakistan uses religion as the 'glue' to hold itself together.⁹⁴

As for the political dimension of Midnight's Children, the text together with its author occupies an ambiguous position between espousals of individualist and collectivist ideologies. In the wake of the publication of Shame, Rushdie described his politics as 'broadly speaking Marxist'.⁹⁵ He went on to speak of his own view of the alternative to the politics of the Widow, Indira Gandhi :

...I would have thought that Marxist politics have much more relevance in India than they have in some Western countries. Some of the Marxist rhetoric which now sounds very passe and dated when you apply it to Western countries still means very important things when you apply it to those countries. So I suppose if you want a simple answer to the solution, I would propose it in largely Marxist terms.⁹⁶

The vagueness of his actual position is perhaps implicit in the terms of its declaration a 'broadly', 'largely' Marxist position may just mean liberalism that is radical as well as

⁹⁴ Midnight's Children, p.351.

⁹⁵ Kunapipi, (1985), p.17.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.17.

woolly. Richard Cronin, in Imagining India, believes this to be so :

In place of Kipling's imperialism Salman Rushdie offers his own, somewhat vague liberal prejudices which he sometimes - mistakenly - imagines to be consistent with Marxism. It is the defining characteristic of this kind of liberalism that it cannot reconcile its values with any political machinery that would enforce them, so that its exponents are forced to choose their heroes from the ranks of political failures.⁹⁷

The debates thrown up by Rushdie's present circumstances surrounding the concept of a writer's freedom of expression, highlight the difficult, even impossible political position which Rushdie seems to occupy. Rushdie's current position shows him increasingly drawn towards John Stuart Mill's individualist conception of liberty rather than Engels' view of freedom as the consciousness of necessity. Within Midnight's Children, there is the tension between the desire to explore heroism and individualism as previously mentioned, and the attraction of the collectivist politics of Mian Abdullah and Picture Singh. One need not doubt the sincerity of Rushdie's desire for an egalitarian, socialist solution to India's dire and perennial *problems to argue that he cannot be regarded seriously as a philosophical Marxist*. The novel illustrates the complexity of Rushdie's position - he achieves the individualisation of Saleem's identity through his very relation to the social units of family and community. Saleem is as handcuffed to society as he is to history. The most hopeful site for political compromise in the text may again be sought through Padma. Her interventions

⁹⁷ Cronin, pp. 46-7.

in Saleem's narrative contrast with the spellbound passivity of the Indian storyteller's audience. Through her, Rushdie may be suggesting that in the future India's 'masses', rather than being passive spectators in the construction of their stories, may become the producers and consumers of their own histories.

CHAPTER FIVESHAME - THE FIXITY OF THE 'MODERN FAIRYTALE'

A fascinated love-hate relationship with the elite of Pakistani society, such as that experienced by Hanif Kureishi and discussed in Chapter Two, is the subject of Rushdie's third novel Shame. In tracing the stages of Rushdie's development toward a hybridised projection of the post-colonial subject's identity, one might almost have expected Shame to have appeared after Grimus; its tight structural framework serving to order the author's thoughts and arguments in a way that is missing in the first novel. In fact, Shame is a model of closed construction, very different from both the digressive 'baggy monster' which preceded it and the differently explosive nature of The Satanic Verses that was yet to come. Shame is aware of its narrative trajectory from the outset. Peter Brigg, in his study of the text, speaks of 'the presence of destiny which sees all of the elements of the plot dovetail into a coherent pattern.'¹ From the umbilical cord wrapped around the neck of Raza Hyder's dead child² to the noose around the neck of Hyder's deposed rival³, the cyclical pattern of the imagery is clear and unwavering. As with Rushdie's other fictional enterprises, it is a case of

¹ Peter Brigg, 'Salman Rushdie's Novels: The Disorder in Fantastic Order', World Literature Written in English, Vol.27, No.1 (1987), p.119.

² Salman Rushdie, Shame, London:Picador, 1984, p.82.

³ Ibid., p.238.

content dictating form. The nature of his arguments demands representation and explication through forms which display a corresponding tone, whether of chaos, confusion, fantasy or moral and political didacticism. Rushdie desires to tell a cautionary tale about the Pakistani elite in Shame - a tale that demonstrates the numerous ills bred by oppression and in which violence and corruption gain their just rewards - and it is this internal compulsion that contributes to the impression of the text as closed; bearing a pre-determined argument.

The blend of fairy-tale with hard-hitting social realism which characterises both Midnight's Children and The Satanic Verses is handled less deftly in Shame. It fails to create either the psychological 'reality' of the latter or the characteristic exuberance of the former. It is by attention to the structural differences between Shame and Rushdie's other novels, and the structural 'options' that the text rehearses, that one can judge the problems that still adhere to what, on the surface, is a more clearly envisaged and executed literary enterprise than its predecessor.

'When a tyrant falls, the world's shadows lighten, and only hypocrites grieve...' wrote Rushdie at the news of General Zia Ul-Haq's death in a plane crash in 1988.⁴ Rushdie's attitude to the styles of government of Zia and his predecessor Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is as evident in the construction of Shame as in his non-fictional outpourings in the name of democracy and free speech. At the centre of his allegory of Pakistani society move the figures of Bhutto and Zia, only thinly disguised by the veil

⁴ 'Zia Ul-Haq.17 August 1988', Imaginary Homelands, p.53.

thrown across them. So thin is the 'disguise' that Rushdie has always attempted to deny that his 'Virgin Ironpants', daughter of his Bhutto figure, Iskander Harappa, is modelled on Bhutto's daughter Benazir a political animal in her own right and chief bearer of the sacred flame of her executed father's memory.⁵ Aside from the thorny question of intentionality raised by Rushdie's disclaimer is the confusion apparent in his own pronouncements on the text concerning its form and structure. In one interview he calls Shame a 'realistic' novel⁶, in another it is 'not entirely a roman a clef'⁷. Similarly the setting for the novel is both 'slightly fantasized'⁸ while 'behind the fantasized or mythologized country in the book there is a real country...'⁹ It is this fact of parallel 'realities' in the text - the fictional nation and her dictatorial oligarchy overlaying but never obscuring their 'factual' counterparts - and the arguments that are generated by the fictional realities, that dictate its structure. The moral imperatives behind and within its conception (for instance, Rushdie's own statement that 'the book is set in Pakistan and it deals, centrally with the way in which the sexual repressions of that country are connected to the

⁵ "Benazir..does not correspond to Iskander Harappa's daughter in Shame." (Kunapipi, Vol.VII, No.1 (1985), p.18 'To say that Arjumand Harappa is Benazir Bhutto is nonsense, she isn't, that was never the intention.' (Scripsi, Vol.3, Nos.2&3, (1985), p.108).

⁶ Scripsi, p.108.

⁷ Kunapipi (1985), p.18.

⁸ Kunapipi, Vol.IV, No.2 (1982), p.26.

⁹ Kunapipi (1985), pp.15-16.

political repressions'¹⁰) contribute to what is, after Midnight's Children, an increased feeling of pre-determination in the text.

The shift in perspective from the panoramic sweep of Midnight's Children to the channelled focus of Shame's gaze is reflected in the reader's relationship to the text's central figure. Where Saleem Sinai called upon us to see him as occupying a central position in the history of post-independence India - if not, in some instances, as the very motor of its progress - the narrator of Shame asks us to view Omar Khayyam Shakil, the text's putative hero, as 'a creature of the edge: a peripheral man'.¹¹ Here the notions of heroism and individuality explored in Midnight's Children are examined in relation to a man of dubious personal and moral integrity. Indeed, the very shift of focus away from and then back to Omar demonstrates his peripheral position in the text itself. Born in his grandfather's death-bed to an apparent triumvirate of mothers, Omar is assailed from the outset by contradictions and inversions; birth and death, the real and the fantastic. The 'world turned upside-down'¹² which he appears to inhabit threatens to plunge him into a void; a nightmarish existence where such a birth and such a childhood presage annihilation of identity.

In an attempt to lift the threat of this disintegration, Omar assumes an illusory or dream persona, one which the authorial voice refuses to pin down as either good or evil; either 'caped

¹⁰ Ibid, p.13.

¹¹ Shame, p.24.

¹² Ibid., p.21.

crusader or cloaked blood-sucker.'¹³ Once again, as in Midnight's Children and his lecture 'Is Nothing Sacred?', Rushdie plays with the idea of the 'secret identity' behind which both writers and 'ordinary' mortals hide, reinforcing the sense of their exceptionalism. For Saleem, the washing basket of invisibility was an ideal place for the observer/voyeur because it was on the periphery of society. Omar occupies just such a space without the necessity for concealment :

From his position at the edge of the school's life, he took vicarious pleasure in the activities of those around him...¹⁴

Here he is able to experience the benefits of his own brand of social 'near-invisibility.'¹⁵ Interestingly, the narrator figure makes no bones about the fact that he regards Omar's activities as those of a voyeur. Unlike those of Saleem in Midnight's Children and Baal in The Satanic Verses, these activities are not complicated by the consideration that the watcher is an artist (Omar is a poet in name only) and therefore possesses license to observe and to derive a vicarious satisfaction from the activities of others. Omar's experience of 'the infinitely rich and cryptic texture of human life and...the bitter-sweet delights of living through other human beings'¹⁶ is a confession of the illicit pleasures of life experienced at a remove from one's own direct participation in

¹³ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.46.

it. By assuming the career of physician, Omar can achieve the ultimate in legitimate voyeurism. Like Aadam Aziz in Midnight's Children, sanctioned in his negotiation of the perforated sheet separating him from Naseem, Omar is permitted to probe the secrets of the human body; a figure simultaneously central and peripheral to the mechanics of existence.

Rushdie's exploration of the writer's peripheral position in society through the various 'invisible' observers in his texts, becomes linked to the fascination/obsession with the domestic and sexual power of women more strongly in Shame than anywhere else. The text's declared project to voice the silenced stories of Pakistan's oppressed women is often admired by critics without consideration of the way it is undercut by the representation of the women themselves. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, for example, celebrates 'the complex ways in which women and their histories are recovered and inserted into the "alternate" history of Pakistan.'¹⁷ But Omar's resentment of his peripheral position in relation to his mothers serves as yet another instance of the blend of confusion, frustration and even outright hostility towards the relative autonomy of women which surfaces in Rushdie's fiction. Rape often bursts through as the ultimate signification of this resentment - Flapping Eagle's rape of the goddess Axona, for example, and in Shame, Omar's assault on the hypnotised Farah Zoroaster. Sexuality is explored and exploited by rendering the woman in the equation effectively powerless. Omar's resentment of his mothers' closeness, already figured in

¹⁷ Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, 'The Politics of Post-Colonial Identity in Salman Rushdie', Massachusetts Review, Vol.29, No.4 (1988/9), p.624.

sexual terms, has an extra edge of unpleasantness to it when viewed alongside other instances of such resentments in his texts:

he hated them for their closeness, for the way they sat with arms entwined on their swinging, creaking seat, for their tendency to lapse giggling into the private languages of their girlhood...¹⁸

One is reminded of the 'mood' of this confrontation in The Satanic Verses when Saladin takes an instant dislike to the '...self-contained...essence' of Allie Cone.¹⁹ The suggestion is offered to us that 'all [Omar's] subsequent dealings with women were acts of revenge against the memory of his mothers.'²⁰ This impulse is highlighted in a reference to the shared adulteries of Omar and Iskander. Here, Omar's ability to hypnotise women for sexual purposes - an extreme representation of male manipulation of women - is undercut by the ambivalence of the authorial voice. The objects of Omar's attentions are merely 'white women of a certain type' who possess 'admittedly scanty inhibitions'²¹; the perversity of their semi-rape undermined by the authorial voice's value-judgements on women.

Rushdie's treatment of the sisters' 'arrested sexuality'²² depicts them as sexually naive, but this is counterbalanced by the prurience with which the authorial voice ponders on the nature of the sisters' solidarity. This bond, it is suggested,

¹⁸ Shame, p.35.

¹⁹ The Satanic Verses, p.428.

²⁰ Shame, p.40.

²¹ Ibid., p.128.

²² Ibid., p.13.

may have been sealed in menstrual blood - a seal representative in itself of secrecy, otherness and a vague menace.

We are told that they inhabit their father, Old Shakil's, 'labyrinthine'²³ mansion and, as in The Satanic Verses, this concept of the labyrinth seems somehow feminised. Just as the whores of 'The Curtain' wait at the centre of their labyrinthine brothel and protect Baal in the Verses, so the Shakil sisters, once their collective pregnancy becomes known, withdraw into the secret corners of their own labyrinth, sealing themselves off from the penetrating gaze and prying curiosity of the outside world. The stiletto blades that lurk lethally inside the dumb-waiter - the only means of access into their protected stronghold - come to represent what we are made to regard as the twisted sexuality of the sisters; something destructive rather than creative. They become a direct image of the threat posed by female sexuality which seems to lie behind so many of Rushdie's characterisations of women. Should man succeed in penetrating the defences a woman constructs around her, there might still be a surprise in store for him, waiting to destroy him.

'Nishapur', the Shakil home, is also a labyrinth for the young Omar Khayyam Shakil; an 'underlit corridory edifice'.²⁴ It is presented as a limbo world between real and unreal, material and spiritual. The woman-centred claustrophobia of 'Nishapur' is presented as a womb to which Omar seeks to cling. The decaying bowels of the house become like a parallel universe of faded

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p.30.

antiquity to set beside the real world outside. Omar's accidental glimpse of this outside world through a crumbling wall strikes immediate fear into him and sends him running back indoors - back to the womb - rather than risk venturing forth.

That Rushdie slips into such a clichéd use of a womb image to represent Omar's home illustrates both the structural imperatives imposed on the text by its desire for circularity and to resonate symbolic meaning, and also, once more, the idea that a female refuge from the dangers of the outside world would represent a threat as well as a haven. The 'womb' of 'Nishapur' serves more as a revelation (albeit involuntary) of Rushdie's psychology than an interesting elaboration of the narrative.

How far then is Rushdie guilty of self-deception in his apparent belief in himself as a champion of women? It is certainly true that there is a male/female split in the storyline of Shame as there is in his other texts, and that this does serve in many respects to point up and humanise the stories of his heroes. But this formal manoeuvre and superficial even-handedness finds itself time and again in conflict with other forces, presumably stemming from the same culture- and gender-based prejudices and conditioning which Rushdie purports to explode. In Chapter Seven of the text, the authorial voice intervenes to declare its understanding of the Moslem fathers who feel compelled to murder their 'shameless' westernized daughters. (It is of course surprising that this empathy with the Moslem mind did not prevent his more serious breach of Islamic izzat with the presentation of Mahound in The Satanic Verses). Rushdie imagines just such a daughter whom he calls Anahita Muhammed :

She danced behind my eyes, her nature changing each time I glimpsed her: now innocent, now whore, then a third and a fourth thing. But finally she eluded me.²⁵

It is an image he returns to in The Satanic Verses. The choice of name emphasises the importance of Sufi mysticism to Rushdie, while the 'Anahita' of Anahita Muhammed and the 'Sufiya' of Sufiya Zinobia are taken up again to create the two worldly Asian sisters, Anahita and Mishal Sufiyan who live at the Shandaar Cafe in the Verses. The way in which Anahita is imagined in Shame, 'now innocent, now whore', cuts deep to a culturally conditioned belief that will not allow him to conceive of women except in extreme terms. It also exposes his sense of frustration at being unable to control this image - unable ultimately to bid a woman to be one thing or another. The innocent/whore binarism extends beyond the actual women who appear in the text to embrace abstractions and inanimate objects. Karachi itself is shown to age from 'slender girlish town' to 'obese harridan' - a 'painted lady' of 'overblown charms.' Bilquis' father Mahmoud comments on the emotions and images that attach to the word 'Woman' :

Is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word?²⁶

Therein lies the root of both the innocent/whore and shame/shamelessness binarisms in the text - that the concept of Woman like women themselves can embody both sides of each of these coins. In societal terms, it is the understanding that, for example, great sexual repression and extremes of uninhibited

²⁵ Shame, p.116.

²⁶ Ibid., p.62.

and unconstrained sexual activity can not only occur within the same society but are interdependent; equal and opposite forces, with repression fanning the flame of abandon. Even Sufiya Zinobia herself - the embodiment of the desire for revenge against the nation's collective shame - also serves as the ultimate manifestation of the destructive capabilities of female sexuality. Destroying those who seek sexual union with her, she becomes as much like the black widow spider as she does Nemesis - indeed, an amalgam of the black burqa of shame and oppression and the 'shameless' autocracy of the 'black widow' Indira Gandhi as we see her in Midnight's Children. Aijaz Ahmad sees Sufiya becoming 'the oldest of the misogynist myths: the virgin who is really a vampire, the irresistible temptress who seduces men in order to kill them...'²⁷ Even the too-perfect Moslem daughter, Arjumand Harappa, becomes one of a number of Rushdie's characters whose obsessive love refuses to recognise the taboos of kinship. Her near-identification with Iskander as lover - rejecting the needs of her body to punish it into becoming the repository of his memory - mirrors Saleem Sinai's incestuous love for Jamila Singer, Flapping Eagle's sexual relationship with his sister Bird-Dog in Grimus and the cloying closeness of Gibreel Farishta and his mother in The Satanic Verses. As Ahmad again says:

...throughout, every woman, without exception, is represented through a system of imageries which is sexually overdetermined; the frustration of erotic need, which drives some to frenzy and others to nullity, appears in every case to be the central fact of a woman's existence.²⁸

The setting of the opening chapters of Shame is 'the remote

²⁷ Ahmad, In Theory, p.148.

²⁸ Ibid., p.144.

border town of Q'²⁹ - a more generalised and anonymous location than the Ellowen Deeowen of The Satanic Verses, but nevertheless closely identifiable with Quetta in Pakistan. Geography and topography are as central to the construction and argument of Shame as they are to Rushdie's other texts. The authorial voice informs the reader that the text's treatment of Pakistan is a matter of 'off-centring' :

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality.³⁰

The haphazard and senseless nature of the division of India after independence to allow for the formation of Pakistan, and the subsequent secession of Bangladesh, has confronted writers in the Indian sub-continent with the image of a land mass separated by divisions which seem more imagined than concrete. It is an idea taken up by Amitav Ghosh in his 1988 novel The Shadow Lines where Calcutta and Dhaka seem split only by the ethereal divisions of the title, and in which the narrator states that 'a place does not merely exist,...it has to be invented in one's imagination.'³¹

These shadow lines, the frontiers that cross the thematic, textual and geographical terrain of Shame, are everywhere apparent. There is the boundary line on the frontier of 'Peccavistan' patrolled by Farah Zoroaster and her father; the

²⁹ Shame, p.11.

³⁰ Ibid., p.29.

³¹ Amitav Ghosh, The Shadow Lines, London: Black Swan, 1988, p.27.

hinterland of 'respectable' society where those who have transgressed against its rules must live out their days. Farah's father turns prophet of doom in the wilderness of the desert, perched naked on a bollard like the hermits of the Middle Ages, talking to the sun and 'begging it to come down to earth and engulf the planet in its brilliant cleansing fire.'³² This father/daughter relationship played out on the demarcation line between sin and respectability, is the obverse and mirror of Arjumand and Iskander's life. Arjumand preserves the sanctity of her father and his mission in the 'respectable' world of the Pakistani elite, while Farah and her father eke out an existence on the edge of the nation, of society and of sanity. Designated as 'different' from the outset; a Zoroastrian in Pakistan, looked after by a Goan and possessing something of the independent spirit of 'Anahita', Farah, as proven sexual reprobate, inhabits the borderline area; her sexual otherness consigned to the margin which marks out the limits of shame's acceptability.

The horizon is also the place 'out there' where fantasies and dreams settle and take root. Haroun Harappa fixes his sights on the horizon - on the limits of his existence - to focus on his uncle Iskander whose world of power and success seems to lie just beyond it. For Omar Khayyam Shakil there is the fearful border between sleep and waking which is patrolled with a watchful eye on the approach of nightmares and the void beyond, while Bilquis Hyder makes a dual journey across the frontiers of sanity and madness, life and death. Omar's own circular trip back to the 'womb' of 'Nishapur' is linked to his terror of the frontier.

³² Shame, p.54.

Though a peripheral man, the world still has an edge to it, a limit over which it is still possible for him to slip into oblivion :

...he ought to know that the border is the edge of his world, the rim of things, and that the real dreams are these far-fetched notions of getting across that supernatural frontier into some wild hallucination of a promised land.³³

Just how much control this schema exerts over the narrative is illustrated by Rushdie's own remarks on the subject of textual frontiers :

You know how Shame uses ideas of the frontier a lot, the frontier is like a trap, people faint when they get near it and beyond the frontier is the void, and so on? Well, having set up that idea it seemed that the characters had accepted it more than I had, so whenever I got them anywhere near the frontier they would refuse to cross it.³⁴

Despite the disingenuousness with which Rushdie abdicates from the creative and controlling responsibility for his characters, as he did with Saleem in Midnight's Children, his comments highlight the rigidity of the framework imposed on the text by the internal structure of such motifs as the frontier. Having constructed a pattern and a 'point' for the narrative, the two features are forced to coalesce in a way that suffocates the internal movement that was so apparent and defining a feature of Midnight's Children.

Within the general framework of the narrative, the stories of the individual protagonists assert their right to be told and to leave their imprint on the shape of the collective narrative. Shame reinforces Saleem Sinai's declaration in Midnight's

³³ Ibid., p.268.

³⁴ Scripsi, p.110.

Children that an individual's sense of personal history is the 'glue of personality'. The women of Bariamma's zenana recount their individual histories to each other, picking out the details of the weave that makes up the complete fabric of the text :

...such stories, were the glue that held the clan together, binding the generations in webs of whispered secrets.³⁵

Each woman's story gains the right to be recounted and heard over time, just as that of the post-colonial subject has forced itself to be heard and given credence. Alongside these stories are the gaps or holes which help to delineate the pattern of the textual fabric. For every story recounted there are countless untold alternatives. 'All stories', the text informs us, 'are haunted by the ghosts of the stories they might have been.'³⁶ It almost reads like the argument of a deconstructivist critic; that what is missing from the text, its absences, articulate as much if not more than what is present. In the case of Shame, the authorial voice worries that the story of 'Peccavistan' is excluding that of 'Proper London', eventually told in The Satanic Verses. An alternative angle on the presence/absence dualism is that offered by the 'feminisation' of the 'masculine' plot. The stories of the women's lives which provide the framework for the exploits of the heroes, are seen as the natural obverse of the intended male-centred narrative - the '"male" plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and "female" side.'³⁷

What then is the effect of the authorial voice's declaration in

³⁵ Shame, p.76.

³⁶ Ibid., p.116.

³⁷ Ibid., p.173.

the second section of the text that he is not attempting a realistic portrait of Pakistan, but a general discussion of oppressive and repressive social and political regimes? He goes on to outline some of the historical facts that such a realistic novel would deal with, effectively performing the task he claims to avoid. The reason given for side-stepping 'factuality' is that such a work of realism centred on a recognisable society would lead to its being banned and burned, and that he was therefore under an obligation to universalize Pakistan's story in order to get round this. This statement, however, is immediately undercut by the 'list' of subjects he would have had to avoid, thereby providing the accusation of Pakistan's oppressions that he said he was forced to forego. To have made the book any less obviously 'about' Pakistan would have undercut the oft-declared political motivation of Rushdie's writing. Even within the very act of espousing the universalising anti-realist or 'magical realist' form, Rushdie makes an implicit criticism of it :

...I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken either. What a relief!³⁸

This supports the argument that Rushdie's work abjures the label of magical realism precisely because the latter can induce in its readers a feeling of quietism; a feeling that its arguments - conducted at a remove from political reality - can ultimately be ignored. Magical realism may be the ideal form for representing the fragmented histories of post-colonial societies but it may

³⁸ Ibid., p.70.

also, by its lack of specificity, allow its (particularly western) readers to abdicate from any responsibility for changing the realities. The irony with which Rushdie plays on the concept of fairy tale in his construction of Shame is borne out by his treatment of the central 'historical' figures in the text and in the corresponding drama of Pakistani politics. Like the Black Widow of Midnight's Children and Mrs Torture of The Satanic Verses, 'Virgin Ironpants' and 'Old Razor Guts' are clearly recognisable objects of criticism. The reader is never left in any doubt as to who (individually) or what (socially, culturally, politically) Rushdie is pointing his less than subtle satirist's finger at. This is no fairy-tale for children.

Timothy Brennan suggests that Rushdie assigns a 'shadow genre' to both Midnight's Children and Shame - 'melodrama' and 'historical novel' to Midnight's Children and 'comic epic' and 'modern fairytale' to Shame.³⁹ But one can argue that the 'modern fairytale' is a generic label which can easily be applied to all of Rushdie's texts. The concerns of all four major novels are modern enough - so modern or current as to remain pressing issues for the post-colonial subject. Similarly the techniques used to delineate these issues are some of the stock characteristics of modernist and postmodernist fiction. 'Fairytale' as mentioned above can suggest the genre of magical realism with its duality of the 'here' and 'not here'. Either way, Brennan does not read Rushdie's self-categorisation of his text as being in any way ironic. It is indicative of the mode of generalised abstraction which characterises much of Brennan's

³⁹ Brennan, p.122.

approach to Rushdie. To claim as he does that 'the genre is the message'⁴⁰ is to claim, if one accepts Rushdie's own tongue-in-cheek assessment of the failure of modern fairytales to produce change, that there is effectively no message in Rushdie's writing.

Both the real and fictional Pakistans were born out of the experience of migration - the mass migrations, particularly in the Punjab, following the partition of India in 1947, which led to the splitting of Rushdie's own family. The concept of migration builds in layers upon that initial movement of peoples, the historic migration of Mohammed's followers - the *mohajirs* - out of Mecca and into Medina during their early persecution. The text of Shame itself also illustrates the loneliness of internal exile for those out of political favour, the exile of Farah Zoroaster and Eduardo Rodrigues to atone for her sexual 'indiscretion' and the act of destruction which forces Bilquis out of her old world and into a new one. Though Bilquis adjusts admirably to the role of Mrs Raza Hyder at first, her own increasing sense of dis-location, brought about in part by her failure to 'locate' herself firmly in the role of good Moslem wife by producing sons, is figured in her paranoid fear of the Loo wind. Although she ceases to have any contact with it, she still clings desperately to her furniture and possessions, longing for fixity in a world that threatens her with dispersal and disarray.

Rushdie provides a long digression on the relationship between migration, flight and gravity. He writes :

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.124.

I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown.⁴¹

Gravity, for Rushdie, is the physical force that corresponds to the more abstract notion of 'belonging.' To oppose gravity is to be like the migrant, to engage in 'flight.' The one thing the migrant can use to locate him or herself after migration is possessions. To lose them, leave them behind or abjure their influence is to threaten oneself with dis-location, loss of 'belonging'. Farah and Eduardo are unsentimental about possessions; resigned to the idea that through cultural difference and sexual transgression, they do not 'belong' in Q. Omar Khayyam Shakil's way of destroying the tyranny of 'Nishapur' and its suffocating history is to literally destroy the artefacts which represent it. His 'illogical tears'⁴², shed at this act of wanton vandalism, register his own implicit understanding of the loss at the very moment that he wills it. Unlike Dolores O'Toole's trunk, Saleem Sinai's globe and Saladin Chamcha's lamp, the broken artefacts do not register a cherished connection with the past but are merely 'the corpses of his useless massacred history.'⁴³ This is perhaps one of the reasons why belongings and 'belonging' are treated somewhat differently in Shame than in Rushdie's other texts. As Pakistanis, the history of Farah, Bilquis and Omar is necessarily one of massacre and division in itself. Those objects which come to represent it therefore speak

⁴¹ Shame, p.85.

⁴² Ibid., p.32.

⁴³ Ibid.

of a past which is painful rather than affirmative. Old Shakil's purchase of a British library in its entirety symbolises the less painful option of a surface borrowing from other cultures, a bastardization, rather than the attempt to assert that one's own past was more than a record of disruption and destruction. Iskander Harappa's attitude to history is similarly informed by an impulse towards social Darwinism; a rejection of maudlin nostalgia in favour of progress :

History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance, new species of fact arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blind-folded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutations of the strong survive.⁴⁴

It would seem however that Rushdie's own attitude to this stance is that a distinction can be made between the negative connotations of mutation and the positive ones of hybridity. The image of a continuum between cultural 'purity' at the one extreme and hybridity at the other can help to illustrate this. 'Cultural purity' embodies essentialist ideas of what constitutes a particular cultural identity. This identity is seen as clear, because undivided. At the other extreme is hybridity, suggesting an amalgam of different strands and components of cultural identity. Mutation would then lie somewhere between the two. The products of cultural mutation are, like the manticore in The Satanic Verses, neither one thing nor another but a composite of disparate elements. Hybridity, in contrast, manifests itself in Saladin Chamcha who, by the end of the Verses, is reconciled with his formerly estranged Indian 'self'. He cannot unlearn either Englishness or Indianness - it is a question of whether the two

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.124.

can repose in some kind of harmony, or at least create a dynamic from their conflict. Rushdie is right to state that the gap between Englishness and Indianness is 'an immeasurable distance.'⁴⁵ Perhaps the only way to negotiate that cultural divide when it is manifested in a single individual is through the concept of a cultural continuum, with hybridity as the achievement of a positive balance of differentiation.

The extent to which Shame can be embraced as a truly hybrid novel is, however, problematised by its relation to allegorical forms of writing and the suggestion that this leads to the creation of less sophisticated portraits of the post-colonial condition. Of all Rushdie's texts, Shame is the one that could most readily be categorised as allegory. The text's shifts between reality/unreality; Pakistan/'Peccavistan'; fiction and 'factual' authorial comment, point up the strong representational or allegorical function of the narrative. If we accept Saleem Sinai's argument that India could not exist except by virtue of an enormous act of collective imagining, then it may be that Rushdie felt 'moth-eaten' Pakistan, 'a country so improbable that it could almost exist'⁴⁶, would seem to require the sturdier, if rather heavy handed delineation offered by an allegorical framework, for it to be fully realised. It is as if a series of directly transferable correspondences between people, places and politics helps to shore up the idea of a nation.

The passage which describes Rani Harappa's shawls, depicting the excesses of her husband Iskander's political rule, is the

⁴⁵ Verses, p.41.

⁴⁶ Shame, p.31.

embodiment of the text's movement towards allegorical forms to represent its arguments. Each shawl becomes progressively more allegorical, from the more straightforward 'realist' depictions of Iskander's sexual indiscretions with his white concubines, through the various Machiavellian faces of power - espionage, corruption, electoral abuse, physical repression and torture. With Rani's thirteenth shawl, Iskander is shown with his hands literally round the throat of Democracy, strangling the life out of it. Rani herself becomes Mohenjo, an exiled woman whose very being merges with the elements of the house and the landscape that effectively imprison her.

The last of the eighteen shawls depicts a seeming paradise - Mohenjo as the incarnation of all the ideals on which the 'land of the pure' was conceived - but contaminated centrally and fundamentally by murder. In this instance it is the murder of 'Little' Mir Harappa, but essentially; allegorically, the paradise is contaminated by the sum of all the murders, abuses and corruptions sanctioned by Iskander. The act of collective will or imagining required to dream Pakistan into existence is perverted by the contradictory and conflicting forces of the individual wills of such men as Hyder and Harappa. Instead, the collective forces responsible for dreaming the nation into existence become channelled into the 'creation' and motivation of Sufiya, the Beast - 'the collective fantasy of a stifled people'⁴⁷, destroying shamelessness in her apocalyptic fury.

But what exactly is the role of allegory in the text as a whole? Is it sufficient to brand Shame a 'national allegory' along with

⁴⁷ Shame, p.263.

the rest of so-called third-world literature as Fredric Jameson does.⁴⁸ Timothy Brennan refers us to Aijaz Ahmad's reply to Jameson's influential if wide-ranging argument, in which Ahmad criticises this generalising slant along with the 'epistemological impossibility'⁴⁹ of classifying literature as third-world and the 'empirically ungrounded'⁵⁰ nature of Jameson's binary opposition between a capitalist first-world and a pre- or non-capitalist third world. For Ahmad, the predominantly Eurocentric viewpoint of American theorists blinds them to any 'third-world' literature not written in English, allowing them to valorize the work of a writer such as Rushdie for offering a 'voice' to what appears to them to be the otherwise intellectually silenced hordes of the subcontinent. Similarly, the complexities of a Rushdie text which Ahmad sees arising out of his involvement with modernism and postmodernism⁵¹ could not be farther from the allegedly naive realist impulses of third-world fiction for which Jameson seeks to act as apologist.

But Brennan too, while rejecting the sweep of Jameson's generalisations, nevertheless refers repeatedly in his study of Rushdie's writing to the latter's mode of allegorising in his

⁴⁸ Fredric Jameson, 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', Social Text, No.17, Fall (1987), pp.65-88.

⁴⁹ Aijaz Ahmad, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"', Social Text, No.17, Fall (1987), p.5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.7.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.17.

texts. Grimus is 'uninterpretable allegory'⁵², Midnight's Children provides an 'allegory of narrative composition'⁵³, Shame 'allegorically describ[es] the decline in Western dominance as a crisis in European art'⁵⁴ while he sees in The Satanic Verses 'another allegorical level - the scientific...' where 'the immigrant is contending with the barbarous survival strategies of "natural selection"...' ⁵⁵. This would suggest a general acceptance that Rushdie's writing, despite its theoretical and linguistic complexities, is nevertheless tuned into another (an 'other'?) literary form - namely allegory - specifically employed to convey the social/political/national arguments of its producer.

What seems singularly lacking in the arguments and counter-arguments around the notion of 'national allegory' is any clear or even approximate definition of what exactly is meant by the term. Jameson, for all the open-handedness with which he applies it to third-world literature, offers us little in the way of concrete categorisation of this genre. For the reader to whom allegory traditionally conjures up the image of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Jameson offers the elusive re-definition of the 'allegorical spirit' as one that is 'profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous

⁵² Brennan, p.70.

⁵³ Ibid., p.105.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.139.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.154.

representation of the symbol.'⁵⁶ In relation to third-world literature, the chief characteristic of this, its own brand of allegory, is that 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.'⁵⁷ Jameson's generic label - its neo-colonialist generalisations aside - cannot account for writing which, like Rushdie's, speaks of the fragmentation of post-colonial history and identity. The opposition between the allegorical and symbolic modes of writing is something that is stressed by Gay Clifford in The Transformations of Allegory in which she attempts to assess the developments in allegorical styles as adopted by medieval and post-Romantic writers. She writes :

The strength but also the weakness of symbols is that they tend to be static, with all the ramifications of meaning focused within the symbol. In allegory the concern is always with process, with the way in which various elements of imaginative or intellectual system interact, and with the effects of this system or structure on and within individuals.⁵⁸

This sets up binaries of stasis and progress, of continuity and discontinuity, between symbolism and allegory according to both Clifford's and Jameson's definitions. As for allegory itself, Clifford isolates for us its main generic features as 'the extended...use of personification and personified abstractions and...the incorporation of commentary and interpretation into the

⁵⁶ Jameson, Social Text, p.73.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.69.

⁵⁸ Gay Clifford, The Transformations of Allegory, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p.11.

action.'⁵⁹ Clearly Rushdie's interventions in the text serve to point up and universalize the particular problem of oppression in Pakistan, while Jameson, too, declares that 'authorial intervention, no longer tolerable in realistic narrative, is still perfectly suitable to the allegorical fable as a form.'⁶⁰ But Clifford also, as the title of her study suggests, regards transformation as a recurrent theme of allegory, where a writer embodies his or her belief in the ability of readers to transform themselves by effecting such a transformation in the central characters in their texts.⁶¹ Does Rushdie, then, believe that his readers 'can be changed and made wiser by the meaning of his work'?⁶² Does his continued espousal of political motives in writing necessarily mean that he believes in the transformative powers of literature? It may be so, without it being the case that Shame effects such a transformation. It serves more as an anatomy of corruption and repression rather than a study of its transformation, either in the person of an individual or in the nation as a whole. In this sense, the only transformative novels in Rushdie's oeuvre are The Satanic Verses and Haroun and the Sea of Stories where change, for individuals at least, is brought about. Haroun with its employment of the stock allegorical motifs of the quest and of direct correspondences between characters and abstractions is the most deeply allegorical. Along with The Satanic Verses, it demonstrates allegory's 'belief

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.5.

⁶⁰ Jameson, Social Text, p.83.

⁶¹ Clifford, p.29.

⁶² Ibid.

in the possibility of transformation'⁶³ in a way that his earlier texts do not. Nemesis and/or apocalypse are transformative in a wholly negative sense, in the way that death 'transforms' life without offering anything in its place. Clifford's line of argument goes on to suggest that modern allegories have become increasingly satirical and negative, which could be applied to Grimus, Midnight's Children and Shame, in particular the 'no place'/Utopia of Grimus. Also if we follow her example of Orwell's Animal Farm as an allegory which asks us to link Napoleon to Stalin at the same time as allowing us to see him as the type of all dictators⁶⁴ then we can establish a link with Rushdie's repeated claim that Hyder and Harappa both are and are not Zia and Bhutto, at the same time as being the archetypes of dictators the world over.

But is all this still too tenuous to allow us to regard Shame in any definitive sense as allegory, national or otherwise? In an interview with Scripsi in 1985, Rushdie resisted the claim that Shame was indeed allegory :

Allegory asks readers to make a translation, to uncover a secret text that has not actually been written. In that sense I don't think my books operate as allegories. I like to think of them as realistic novels myself.⁶⁵

A solution to the confusion generated by the text can perhaps be seen to lie, as always, in the acceptance of Rushdie's writing as occupying a midway, hybridised point between two polarities of writing - between the symbolism of modernism and postmodernism

⁶³ Ibid., p.29.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.45.

⁶⁵ Scripsi, p.108.

and the directly transferable correspondences of national allegory or allegory proper. It is nearer to the reality of Rushdie's writing to speak of an allegorical instinct in his work, modified by his own grounding in and affinities with symbolist literature. Such an instinct can be located in his depiction of General Zia in a piece written after the dictator's death :

Eleven years ago he burst out of his bottle like an Arabian Nights goblin, and although he seemed, at first, a small, puny sort of demon, he instantly commenced to grow, until he was gigantic enough to be able to grab the whole of Pakistan by the throat.⁶⁶

It is the self-same image as that of Iskander, picked out in Rani Harappa's matchless embroidery with his hands round the throat of Democracy. Democracy or Pakistan become personified; allegorised, while the perpetrators of these crimes against the nation maintain their 'realistic' proportions. In the same year as his Scripsi interview in which he rejected the label of allegory for Shame, he offered another image of this blending and hybridising technique :

what I hoped for is that one would make figures in the book who were somehow bigger than the particular instances of them that history had offered us.⁶⁷

Rushdie's technique in Shame therefore becomes a way of playing with reality, with real figures and national entities that puts them, as he says of his fictional Pakistan and of himself, 'at a slight angle to reality'. A discussion of the migrant's cultural and historical situation attempts to force its way out of the closed circle of the text, but Shame was the arena for

⁶⁶ 'Zia Ul-Haq 17 August 1988', Imaginary Homelands, p.53.

⁶⁷ Kunapipi (1985), p.18.

Rushdie to display his political credentials rather than his skill at depicting that situation. Like Grimus, it hints at the necessary next stage of development in Rushdie's writing, towards the expansion of the idea of migration as flight and the rejection of mutation in favour of hybridity.

CHAPTER SIX**THE SATANIC VERSES - REINVENTION AND REBIRTH**

How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is?¹

These questions posed by the narrative voice at the beginning of The Satanic Verses signal the text's key role in Rushdie's developing project to re-create and re-present migrant identity. The compass of these questions extends outwards beyond the immediate confines of the 'story' it tells, to embrace debates about religious, psychological and aesthetic change. 'How does newness come into the world?' - the newness of a re-integrated identity, of religion, of love, of the post-colonial text itself? 'Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?' - fusions of language, of disparate cultural identities, of religious doctrines?

It is in seeking to answer these questions, and in so doing square the circle of representation of the colonial subject in literature, that Rushdie has found himself, like so many of his heroes, a truly peripheral man. Pushed literally to the edges of society, into its most secret spaces, a terrible unmaking of his own identity has been occasioned. His name now conjures up not just images of an affronted and enraged religious force²,

¹ The Satanic Verses, p.8.

² It is interesting to note that Malise Ruthven's account of the so-called 'Rushdie affair' changed its title between hard and paper-back editions. The subtitle of A Satanic Affair; Salman Rushdie and the Rage of Islam, was amended for the 1991 Hogarth Press reprint to Salman Rushdie and the Wrath of Islam, presumably to concede at least an element of direction in the

but also for Britain's own white majority, an image of a fanatical, book-burning section of its own population; an apparent fulfilment of the Powellian prophecies of the chaos that attaches to unassimilable difference. Whether as the face on an imaginary 'WANTED!' poster, or as the object of the liberal intelligentsia's genteel disdain³, his identity, his work and his ideas are as open to re- and mis-interpretation as the lives and actions of earlier colonial subjects. 'Salman Rushdie' is what Islam, critics, the media and the general public say he is. It is as much the tragedy of the text as of its author that The Satanic Verses is now a byword for trouble - trouble within and between cultures, religions, different sections of society. Since its publication in 1988, the text has all but lost its ability to be judged as an artistic enterprise rather than a cultural and political crisis. Discussions of its qualities and merits - let alone an acknowledgement of it as the culmination of Rushdie's own writerly development - are lost in the welter of debates that variously locate themselves around, behind and beyond the so-called 'Rushdie affair.' A refusal to discuss the text as an exploration of the condition of the migrant, post-colonial subject, fails to recognise that the dynamism of

anger of Moslems towards the book.

³ "The lawyer Francis Bennion was quoted, on his resignation from the Salman Rushdie Defence Committee, as saying: There are several reasons why Rushdie is not worth defending....He has decided not proceed (sic) with the paperback, so surrendering to would-be murderers. He has decided not to proceed with translated editions of the book, another form of surrender. Worst of all, he has now confounded his supporters by embracing the bigoted creed that holds its followers entitled to murder a novelist for what he has written..." Quoted from James Fenton, New York Review of Books, 28.3.91, p.24.

the novel resides in its handling of the issues that have developed in importance in Rushdie's work - the relationships between location and dislocation, past and present, memory and history.

Rushdie's controversial treatment of events within the life of the prophet Mohammed allows him to deal with his different agendas through a comparison with a particular historical situation, namely the founding of Islam. Mohammed's vision of the angel Gibreel delivering to him the message of the Quran, holds within it the problem of distinguishing whether such voices come from within or outside the individual. One man's prophet is another man's schizo. The incident of the satanic verses themselves, around which the text is structured, is accepted by some historians and contested by others. The scholar and translator of the Quran, N.J.Dawood, describes the accepted pre-history of Islam thus :

Long before Muhammad's call, Arabian paganism was showing signs of decay. At the Ka'bah the Meccans worshipped not only Allah, the supreme Semitic God, but also a number of female deities whom they regarded as the daughters of Allah. Among these were Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat, who represented the Sun, Venus, and Fortune respectively.⁴

In The Satanic Verses Uzza, we are told, represents beauty and love; Manat, Fate; while Lat is the omnipotent mother-goddess, Allah's female counterpart.⁵ The point of contention among historians of the Quran is whether verses were inserted into the holy book in the early days of Islam, in order to placate the polytheistic peoples of Mecca and bring about greater tolerance

⁴ N.J.Dawood, translation with notes of The Koran, Harmondsworth:Penguin, 1990, p.ix.

⁵ The Satanic Verses, pp.99-100.

of the new religion. The Islamic source al-Tabiri stated that Mohammed received the verses praising the intercession of the goddesses but that these were removed from the Quran when Gibreel informed the Prophet that they were verses inspired by the devil.⁶ The recitation and subsequent rescinding of the verses are separated by just ten pages in The Satanic Verses. 'Mahound', the dream-prophet of the text, is offered tolerance in return for acceptance of the goddesses. He provides it :

Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other?...They are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed.⁷

That the goddesses were a significant obstacle to Islam's development is clear from the fact that they still appear in the Quran itself. Within the text of Dawood's translation of the holy book, there is reference to the pagan triumvirate, in surah 53:20-26 entitled 'The Star':

Have you thought on Al-Lat and Al-Uzza and on Manat, the third other? Are you to have the sons and He the daughters? This is indeed an unfair distinction! They are but names which you and your fathers have invented: God has vested no authority in them.⁸

Part of the significance of these verses to Rushdie's text is their central debate about the importance and power of women. The Verses does not set itself up as a project to espouse the cause of women in the same way as Shame, but it quite deliberately hinges the course of events in the text on the actions and interventions of its many female characters. The

⁶ Reference taken from W.J.Weatherby, Salman Rushdie: Sentenced to Death, New York: Carroll and Graf, 1990, p.26.

⁷ The Satanic Verses, p.114.

⁸ The Koran, p.525.

importance of the women to the central theme of reconstructing migrant identity will be returned to later.

The problems faced by Mohammed and his early followers resulted in their ten year enforced exile in Medina. Those worshippers of the one god, Allah, who made this journey were the *mohajirs* - the migrants. It is a title and identity Rushdie continues to employ for all the uprooted and displaced characters who people his texts. Shame, despite its apparant departure from the diversity of Rushdie's other work, nevertheless expanded the metaphors of flight and translation which are again taken up in The Satanic Verses to illustrate and explain the condition of the migrant. In Shame the narrative voice declares 'I...am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation. I cling to the notion...that something can also be gained.'⁹

The idea of translation as a metaphor for the migrant's condition was expanded in a conversation between Rushdie and Gunter Grass in the Channel 4 television series *Voices*. Rushdie says :

I discovered that if you look etymologically at the meaning of the word metaphor and the word translation for example, it turned out they meant the same thing. See, translation from the Latin means to carry across. Metaphor from the Greek means to carry across...this comes back to my preoccupation with the idea of migration. People are also carried across...they find themselves in a new place, a new language. And so they have to reinvent the sense of the self, you know, and make it.¹⁰

The applicability of the metaphor is attested to in Eva Hoffman's 1989 autobiographical account of migration from Poland to Canada,

⁹ Shame, p.29.

¹⁰ Rushdie in Voices: Writers and Politics, Nottingham: Spokesman, 1987, p.63.

entitled Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language.¹¹ Translation is again alluded to in The Satanic Verses as one of the processes by which something new is formed. Flight, too, is taken beyond the idea introduced in Shame of the mohajirs who conquer gravity.

Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, the free-falling protagonists of the Verses, provide the most direct image in Rushdie's fiction of the post-colonial subject in collision with his world. Their descent on England, the 'fabled country of Vilayet'¹² from the wreckage of a hijacked aircraft, is replete with the tensions of their condition - on the one hand, defying the laws of gravity, on the other, 'just two brown men, falling hard, nothing so new about that you may think.'¹³ This fall encapsulates the process of transmutation, or translation, whereby the migrant's identity is transformed through the very act of migration. Gibreel, famed for his halitosis, is granted full movie-star perfection, while Saladin receives the gift of foul breath along with that of sprouting horns as he begins to assume demonic characteristics. Here the flight, the journey downwards to earth, illustrates the active processes of change that take place in the migrant as he moves between cultures. The previous chapter posited the idea of mutation existing on a continuum between the extremes of cultural purity and hybridity.

¹¹ Eva Hoffman, Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language, Minerva: London, 1989.

¹² Verses, p.35. [Prafulla Mohanti in his Through Brown Eyes, describes the Indian reverence for 'Bilayat' and anything 'Bilayati'. Oxford: O.U.P., 1985, p.1.]

¹³ Verses, p.5.

Saladin, as he sits on the aeroplane prior to the explosion, seeks a typically English form of cultural identity which slips from him like a mask. Hybridity is the end of his journey, while mutation, physical and metaphorical, is the tumultuous process he must pass through en route. The zone in which the changes to the two men occur is 'illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic'¹⁴. It is an arena of transformation and translation but one which, through the idea of discontinuity, introduces a jarring note into this process of change. The struggle with discontinuity of identity takes place within a twilight zone for both men. Their identities, their selves, are at this point porous and vulnerable, open to both positive and negative possibilities of transformation - '...there was a fluidity, an indistinctness, at the edges of them...' ¹⁵

The extent to which Rushdie has achieved a positive reassertion of the migrant's identity in the Verses can be judged in part by a comparison of the text with V.S.Naipaul's The Enigma of Arrival¹⁶ published the previous year. Similar issues of location and dislocation, of the reintegration of the past into the present are examined by both writers. Similar images and scenarios are presented in both, but the conclusions reached and the sentiments evoked differ widely.

Both the Verses and Naipaul's Enigma illustrate the migrant's problems of self-contextualisation - of being both located and

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁶ V.S.Naipaul, The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987.

dislocated, having to orient himself to his new surroundings and of feeling alienated from them, as well as from aspects of his own history and identity. The shifts that have taken place in the settings of Rushdie's texts themselves, from the unlocatable geography of Grimus, through India where he was born, Pakistan to which his family moved after partition, and now England, reflect the need to explore the effects of migration and dislocation through to the point where they become manifest in the internalised disorder of divided personalities. The specific topography of the Verses also suggests a greater commitment to his arguments about migration. The Vilayet of the Verses moves away from the curious paralleling of Shame. With its capital, the mysterious Ellowen Deeowen, it is both imaginative territory and geographical reality - both the arena onto which the fantasies of the migrant are projected and the harsh reality which confronts them when they literally come down to earth. The imaginary, fantasised nature of Vilayet, the migrant's preconceptions about his new home and the identity he invents to coincide with those preconceptions, are concerns of both the Verses and Naipaul's Enigma. For Naipaul, this reinvention of identity leads to the process of mimicry that he describes in An Area of Darkness and which recollects the 'imagined' India of the colonial novelists discussed earlier. He states that it 'is a mimicry not of England, a real country, but of the fairy-tale land of Anglo-India.'¹⁷ For Rushdie, the two are not so easily separated - the real and the imagined, England and Vilayet, fade in and out of each other.

¹⁷ Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p.57.

Saladin and Gibreel are both actors, both adept at mimicry of one kind or another; cultural chameleons. Saladin's personality, we are told, is 'a half-reconstructed affair of mimicry and voices.'¹⁸ With his female counterpart Mimi Mamoulian, he monopolises the market for advertising voice-overs; creating multiple unrealities of identity for commercial exploitation. To his Indian lover, Zeeny Vakil, his personality is like a palimpsest; a slate wiped clean of its Indianness and reinscribed by Anglophilia. Gibreel's identity as star of the Bombay talkies seems equally an affair of temporary and transient construction, as figured in the decaying images of him on street hoardings. His speedy disintegration after disappearing from his film sets is likened to the death of God - the failure of an image to continue to inspire belief in its existence. Like the text itself, Gibreel's identity within and outside his films, breaches the interfaces between fantasy and reality, mortal and deity, sacred and profane.

Gibreel is not a *mohajir* in the same sense as Saladin. Saladin has fulfilled his desire to leave India, to make the journey from Indianness to Englishness, while Gibreel is making the trip in order to pursue the mountain climber Allie Cone with whom he is infatuated. But Gibreel's acting career in the theologicals, personifying the various avatars of the Hindu pantheon, has seen him employed to perform constant reinventions of identity. His very name, like Saladin's, is reinvented. Name-changing and its consequences is a central feature of post-colonial writing; Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine has been both Jyoti and Jane as her

¹⁸ Verses, p.9.

environment has dictated¹⁹, while in Toni Morrison's writing, black Americans seek the names that have been taken from them in their servitude. The relinquishing and reacceptance of names as the index to identity is as crucial to such texts as it is to all of Rushdie's fictions. Saladin, who was Salahuddin and will be once again, is able to consolidate the diffuse elements of his identity by the end of the text. Gibreel, who was Ismail but who is forever alienated and disconnected from that former self, remains incapable of drawing together his shattered, schizophrenic personality. His adopted persona has been that of the fulfiller of dreams, first the dream of his mother that he should be an angel - a farishta - then the dreams of thousands of cinema-goers.

Gibreel's perspective on reality is unlike that of the migrant Naipaul in his Wiltshire cottage. In The Enigma of Arrival, Naipaul's hold on this English reality is obscured by the initial insipidity and regularity of his surroundings; the incessant rain outside his window which mirrors the blankness of his own gaze. Gibreel, in contrast, is able to see below the iceberg surface of reality to the nine-tenths beneath. He has a confirmed belief in the supernatural, while Naipaul has nothing but contempt for fantasy and anti-realism. The reality which eventually becomes so clear to Naipaul that he feels he understands it fully is, for Gibreel, 'dense' and 'blinding.'²⁰

Naipaul makes an early distinction in the text between England

¹⁹ Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine, London: Virago, 1991.

²⁰ Verses, p.22.

and 'the tropical street where I had grown up.'²¹ The new land is not invested with any meaning for him. It only acquires this through a corresponding drainage of meaning from his memories of his past in Trinidad. Things seemed blurred and indistinct. Naipaul's narrative presents the paradox of a clear vision which is nevertheless unable to see clearly. It is the migrant's dilemma of being unable to contextualise himself; to find a framework in which he can see his relation to the world. It is the fragmentation and disintegration of identity which arises from the strangeness and unfamiliarity of a new location. For both Naipaul and for Saladin Chamcha in the Verses, the initial process of location that we witness is achieved through the relation to the image of the coloniser. Naipaul finds a space for himself in an image of Salisbury recollected from a print of Constable's painting of the cathedral, on a wall back home in Trinidad.

Naipaul's commentary on his surroundings in Wiltshire; the landscape, the old farm buildings, makes clear the distinctions the narrative sets up between past and present. This contrasts with Rushdie's writing which attempts to evoke the past as a living presence, helping to shape the migrant's identity. Naipaul's narrative chronicles the dereliction of parts of history both for himself and for the English rural community he lives among. Here the past is merely preserved for its antique value; it is effectively dead. It mirrors a similar dereliction through dissociation in Naipaul himself. 'That idea of ruin and dereliction, of out-of-placeness, was something I felt about

²¹ Enigma, p.11.

myself.'²² It is the same sense of disorientation experienced by Gibreel in London as he wanders its streets with his A-Z. Both narratives share the sense of being informed by the writers' sense of their own mortality. It pervades The Enigma of Arrival, which contains an account of the death of Naipaul's sister and is dedicated to the memory of his brother. Death, for Naipaul, highlights processes of change and decay. For Rushdie in the Verses, it seems more positive, providing closure for the unfinalized Saladin, a sense of realness. The death of his father Changez draws together past and present for Saladin, reaffirming the validity of Saleem Sinai's declaration in Midnight's Children that 'what you were is forever who you are'.²³ For Naipaul, the outlook is bleaker - 'Change was constant. People died. People grew old.'²⁴

Naipaul's racial and cultural placing of his identity is highly problematic. In speaking of the difficulties of having a brown skin in England, he refers to himself as 'someone like me'²⁵, almost a racist designation in itself. What he is really like is something we are required to deduce from the narrative itself, and often not through direct revelation. He refers retrospectively to Trinidad and 'the colonial smallness that didn't consort with the grandeur of my ambition',²⁶ but it is not a statement from which the older Naipaul would easily be able

²² Enigma, p.19.

²³ Midnight's Children, p.368.

²⁴ Enigma, p.34.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p.87.

or necessarily willing to dissociate himself.

The discomfiture experienced by Naipaul on arriving in England is often figured through associations with food, as it is with Saladin. Naipaul speaks of the secrecy and embarrassment with which he attempts to consume the food of his own culture he has been given for the journey; the bananas which ripen drastically on the flight to London and the roasted chicken provided to spare his Brahmin sensitivities from the contamination of others' hands.²⁷ Saladin's first trip to England with his father is crucial for establishing the alienation between them. Forced to look after the expenses of their trip, in other words to take responsibility for his decision to become Anglicized, Saladin feels unable to allow himself proper meals and he too is forced to consume a roasted chicken secretly in his room :

Chicken-breasted beneath the gaze of dowagers and liftwallahs he felt the birth of that implacable rage which would burn within him for over a quarter of a century...which would fuel perhaps his determination to become the thing that his father was-not-could-never-be, that is a goodandproper Englishman.²⁸

Later, at public school in England, Saladin experiences his confrontation with the indigestible kipper of British social customs.²⁹ His father's ability to buy him a place in society does not guarantee a corresponding acceptance from those around him, or indeed his own ability to swallow on the kipper. Naipaul was embarrassed by his association with the food of his old culture, while Saladin struggles with the bones of the new.

²⁷ Ibid., p.105.

²⁸ Verses, p.43.

²⁹ Ibid., p.44.

Memory plays a crucial part in Rushdie's writing as the force which shapes the migrant's sense of history. Memory for Naipaul is that which allows him his passport to Englishness; his ability to memorise facts and figures in school in order to pass the necessary examinations to get into Oxford. His description of this process is interesting in its relation to the disorientation of the migrant and the way this also comes to be figured in the Verses. He writes:

So much of my education had been...abstract, a test of memory: like a man, denied the chance of visiting famous cities, learning their street maps instead.³⁰

The A-Z of London streets becomes the migrant's key to the labyrinthine secrets of the city for Gibreel in the Verses.³¹ Naipaul says of his experience of the city that he 'was used to living in a world where the signs were without meaning, or without the meaning intended by their makers.'³² In London he becomes 'like a man trying to get to know a city from its street map alone.'³³

The process of 'translation' to England for Naipaul brings about a division. 'I could feel the two sides of myself separating one from the other, the man from the writer.'³⁴ Writing for Naipaul is the assumption of an identity that is other to himself rather than an amalgam of experience. Until the publication of The

³⁰ Enigma, p.108.

³¹ Verses, p.322. [Prafulla Mohanti also attests to the totemic significance of the A-Z in Through Brown Eyes, op.cit.,p.33].

³² Enigma, p.120.

³³ Ibid., p.121.

³⁴ Ibid., p.111.

Enigma of Arrival, his career had largely been the record of narratives of colonial experience which had successfully excised his own involvement with it. This separation of the parts of his identity is the source of the lofty disdain of his later work which has earned him the role of bogeyman to many writers and theorists of the effects of colonisation. Even in Enigma, the question of race is carefully excluded from his self-narrativisation of his initial arrival in England. Forgetting becomes a crucial part of Naipaul's narrative of arrival. It is not the deliberately foregrounded distortion of memory that we see in Midnight's Children. It is rather a record of how the post-colonial migrant, with a self-image almost wholly derived from the coloniser, seeks to remove all traces of that subject position from his recollections. He admits to the suppression of memory. Whereas history is a crucial aspect of Rushdie's texts and memory is for him the key to the reconstruction of the migrant's distorted history, history for Naipaul is too grand a narrative to be associated with the colonial subject. In An Area of Darkness he expresses his belief that Indians can :

...have no sense of history, for how then would they be able to squat amid their ruins, and which Indian would be able to read the history of his country for the last thousand years without anger and pain?³⁵

History becomes instead the safe and sanitised record of events and dates which assist him in his own conquest of Englishness; history de-contextualised and de-politicised.

It is only through the persona of writer that Naipaul is able to

³⁵ Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p.201.

achieve at least a partial coming to terms with his own history and identity. He can no longer conceive of this persona in terms of its western, colonial designation as the record of the development of inward sensibility. By coming to terms with this realisation, he opens the way for memories of his Port of Spain childhood to reassemble and override the attempt to construct a narrative around the fantasy of a sophisticated metropolitan existence. His subject now becomes not the writer's inner development and introspection but 'the world I contained within myself, the worlds I lived in.'³⁶ Through the fog of obscurity that has blurred his sense of location comes an image of the street where he lived as a child.

The part that objects and possessions play in the art of memory is again imbued with that same sense of change and decay for Naipaul. Rushdie's own attitude to such keys to memory is that they do possess a value but that that value can diminish the further the object recedes from the place of 'belonging'. In Shame he writes that :

all migrants leave their pasts behind, although some try to pack it into bundles and boxes - but on the journey something seeps out of the treasured mementoes...until even their owners fail to recognise them, because it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history.³⁷

But the effects of such objects can be enormously important, as was the photograph of his Bombay childhood home to Rushdie's recollection of India in Midnight's Children. For Naipaul, 'photographs' and 'snapshots' are:

³⁶ Enigma, p.135.

³⁷ Shame, p.63.

melancholy in their effect: each snapshot, capturing a moment of time, with all its unconsidered details, forcing one to think of the tract of time that had followed, and being a kind of memento mori.³⁸

Naipaul is further able to distance himself from the past and some of its harsher lessons by using the figures of Pitton the estate gardener and Alan the failed writer as people through whose lives he can fictionalise his own experiences of alienation. The text itself is subtitled 'a novel in five sections' which suggests a desire for distance from his subject.

He speaks of being distanced from the reality of his experience in the past, yet the text itself engages in a kind of dual process of concealment that purports to be revelation. It is as if after the confessional section of 'The Journey', Naipaul feels obliged to examine alienation, solitude and social discomfort through others. It then perhaps becomes as true of Naipaul as he believes it is of Alan, that 'one could never touch the true person.'³⁹

Naipaul acknowledges towards the end of his narrative that men need history to help them understand who they are, but concludes rather feebly that it can remain in the heart, presumably unexplored and unexpressed, because 'it is enough that there is something there.'⁴⁰ It is as if Naipaul has started to rake over painful and long-suppressed memories but cannot write the full narrative of that life because he has so fully entered into a wholly other identity. To attempt to write the whole story

³⁸ Enigma, p.173.

³⁹ Ibid., p.264.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.318.

would perhaps occasion the dislocation of the schizophrenic Gibreel.

What then of Rushdie's decision to attempt such a task? How can a text hold such separations within it? As previously mentioned in the discussion of Grimus, The Satanic Verses illustrates Bakhtin's ideas on how dreams can disrupt text and characterisation; where man 'ceases to mean only one thing' and 'ceases to coincide with himself.'⁴¹ For Gayatri Spivak, the text's disrupted narratives and dream sequences are indicative of the disruptions caused to identity by imperialism. In 'Reading The Satanic Verses', she states that:

the confident breaching of the boundaries between dream and waking in the text - not merely in the characters - ...can earn for The Satanic Verses a critic's subtitle: 'Imperialism and Schizophrenia'. Not because empire, like capital, is abstract, but because empire messes with identity.⁴²

Saladin's identity has been disrupted from the start. His voice-overs and his role in The Aliens Show are just the externalised forms of his reinvention. Underlying them is his desire for cultural assimilation and his obsessive pursuit of Englishness which alienates him from his father and from Zeeny. As the opening chapters demonstrated, England, the Raj and the British Empire, defined themselves - Indianness, like the post-colonial subject, is defined by others, usually in negative terms. Saladin becomes subject to this process after his demonic transformation - the dehumanisation of the alien or other taken to its extreme. In the detention centre with the other

⁴¹ Bakhtin, pp.116-7.

⁴² Gayatri C.Spivak, 'Reading The Satanic Verses', *Third Text*, 11, Summer (1990), p.49.

designated aliens he experiences a nightmarish encounter with the manticore - a bizarre amalgam of different creatures, demonstrating the dehumanisation of the migrant's identity by the coloniser. 'They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.'⁴³ Gibreel in his schizophrenic state sees this; sees 'fictions masquerading as real human beings' on the streets of London.⁴⁴

In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon defined in the terms of the clinical psychologist what he called 'a regular and important mental pathology which is the direct product of oppression.'⁴⁵ Ashis Nandy in The Intimate Enemy sees the roots of this pathology embedded deep within the minds of both ruler and ruled. For Nandy, colonialism results in a division of the mind into the 'self' and the 'not self', mirrored, as mentioned earlier, in both the characterisations and the structural divisions between dream and waking.⁴⁶ Gibreel's inability to distinguish between dream and reality leads to his treatment for paranoid schizophrenia, while Saladin's demonic persona is seen by his friend Jumpy Joshi as 'psychological breakdown, loss of sense of self.'⁴⁷ Both Nandy as theoretician and Rushdie as writer see this division as a defensive mechanism on the part of the post-colonial subject. For Nandy, he becomes other to

⁴³ Verses, p.168.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.192.

⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, p.201.

⁴⁶ Nandy, p.107.

⁴⁷ Verses, p.253.

himself in order to, as he puts it, 'disaffiliate the violence and the humiliation he suffers from the essential constituent of his self', making his world 'partly dream-like or unreal.'⁴⁸ The Satanic Verses virtually paraphrases this: 'A being going through life can become so other to himself as to be another, discrete, severed from history'⁴⁹, while Gibreel's mental confusion illustrates the defensive impulse of the schizophrenic; 'his splitting of his sense of himself into two entities, one of which...by characterising it as other than himself, [he] preserved, nourished, and secretly made strong.'⁵⁰

There is a striking similarity between the characterisation of Gibreel's dreamlike existence and Naipaul's unconscious fears about his situation in The Enigma of Arrival. The journey section of the text shows him experiencing a recurring dream which, like Gibreel's, seems to arise from the sense of cultural and geographic dislocation. Naipaul writes -

In this dream there occurred always, at a critical moment in the dream narrative, what I can only describe as an explosion in my head. It was how every dream ended, with this explosion that threw me flat on my back, in the presence of people, in a street, in a crowded room, or wherever, threw me into this degraded position in the midst of standing people, threw me into the posture of sleep in which I found myself when I awakened.⁵¹

This description, his 'degraded position in the midst of standing people', gives an insight into the sense of inferiority experienced by the colonial subject in relation to authority; its

⁴⁸ Nandy, p.109.

⁴⁹ Verses, p.288.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.340.

⁵¹ Enigma, p.93.

public nature the index of all the humiliations of his situation. The Satanic Verses shows Gibreel prostrate on a number of occasions, usually waking up at the feet of Allie Cone. She seems to offer a temporary hope of re-integration for Gibreel, but both he and Naipaul are, at the end of the day, alone with themselves. How then does the migrant avoid this disintegration? The earlier quotation from the Verses which spoke of the migrant as severed from history provides the clue to Rushdie's answer. Naipaul's position is to seek a clarity of viewpoint in the present through a disavowal of the migrant's hybridised cultural and historical situation. In Midnight's Children, Saleem Sinai stated the argument :

The awareness of oneself as a homogeneous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality, holding together our then and our now.⁵²

Saladin's pursuit of Englishness is a repression of his own personal and cultural history. He cuts down the walnut tree planted by his father to celebrate his birth, attempting to excise those years from the narrative of his existence. Zeeny's role is to show up the chasms in his re-invention of himself; the gaps between past and present through which his real self is slipping.

The crucial role that Rushdie assigns to Zeeny in the text is undercut somewhat by his presentation of her, and by the continuing tendency to demonize the female. Timothy Brennan senses that Rushdie's characterisations of women in the Verses are 'strangely demeaning'⁵³, but seems unable to pin down the

⁵² Midnight's Children, p.351.

⁵³ Brennan, p.126.

cause of his reservations. The Verses shows Rushdie caught once again between the threat and the promise that women simultaneously seem to embody for him. The body of Tavleen, the Sikh extremist who causes the explosion that destroys the hijacked aircraft, is in many ways the ultimate figuring of woman as destruction in Rushdie's fiction :

...they could all see the arsenal of her body, the grenades like extra breasts nestling in her cleavage, the gelignite taped around her thighs...⁵⁴

Beauty and destructiveness, fear and desire, appear simultaneously as they did with Bird-Dog, Liv Jones and Parvati. Gibreel is presented as both the 'beneficiary' and the 'victim' of female emotional and sexual generosity⁵⁵ - a victim in the sense that he is allowed to continue philandering and breaking hearts without being made aware of the consequences of his actions. But is this just a piece of sophistry on Rushdie's part? To locate Gibreel between the twin dilemmas apparently offered by unencumbered sexual gratification is to exonerate him from ultimate responsibility for his actions; conscience, like gratification, becomes the gift and the responsibility of woman. In his account of the Satanic Verses 'affair', Malise Ruthven is keen to suggest correspondences between the characters of Pamela Lovelace and Rushdie's first wife, Clarissa, and Allie Cone and the Australian travel writer Robyn Davidson with whom Rushdie was involved before his second marriage to Marianne Wiggins.⁵⁶ Such

⁵⁴ Verses, p.81.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.26.

⁵⁶ Ruthven, pp.21 & 23.

an overlaying of text onto life is rarely particularly useful, but in this instance it may shed some light on the depiction of Zeeny Vakil and her crucial role as the 'saviour' of Saladin's Indian self.

Zeeny is a doctor, a part-time art critic who mirrors Rushdie's own views on artistic eclecticism, and a committed and unselfish political activist to boot. The fact that Ruthven hazards no suggestion of a correspondence between Zeeny and a 'live' woman in Rushdie's own past or present contributes to the general air that Zeeny has of being a fantasy figure, strangely two-dimensional and not very far removed in her presentation from the 'lurid painting of a bare-breasted myth-woman' that hangs in the Shandaar Cafe.⁵⁷ The conflict apparent in Rushdie's presentation of women is given a different dimension in Zeeny. One does not have to doubt the sincerity of Rushdie's belief in the force of love as the 'prime mover' in effecting the rebirth of identity to feel that Zeeny's role is too comfortably appropriate. It diverts attention from the fact that the crucially important love affair for Saladin is the one between himself and his father, Changez. The scenes around the latter's death bed convey a poignancy that is only hinted at in Zeeny's offer to Saladin at the end of the text. As the narrator declares, 'to fall in love with one's father after the long angry decades was a serene and beautiful feeling; a renewing, life-giving thing...'⁵⁸

The reconstruction of Saladin's identity cannot take place on his

⁵⁷ Verses, p.184.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.523.

initial return to Bombay, because at that time his old self is effectively dead. His subsequent experiences in London and the death of his father provide the necessary impetus for the change, which has to be a rebirth rather than a reinvention. His father withholds the gift of his lamp; the lamp that had been imbued with magic for the young Saladin, until they are reconciled on Changez's deathbed. Parentless children have always been a symbol of the post-colonial subject's division from parts of his or her own history in Rushdie's writing. Flapping Eagle in Grimus who is 'Born-from-Dead', Omar Khayyam Shakil and his three mothers in Shame, the confusion that surrounds Saleem's birth in Midnight's Children - all separate the individual protagonists from their pasts, the past which Saladin allows to regather around him in India.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the themes of the birth of new identities and of a new religion are inter-linked in the text. Saladin argues for flexibility from the Sikh separatists who hijack the aeroplane - he asks this particular 'idea' to compromise, to reshape its imperatives. Islam, if one accepts the episode of the 'satanic verses', accepts and then rejects the notion of flexibility. Saladin himself is the embodiment of flexibility - moulding himself to the shape of 'Englishness'. His identity in the early stages of the text is mirrored in the form of the dream-city of 'Jahilia' (meaning literally 'ignorance'; the period before Islam). Jahilia is a city of sand, its 'newly invented permanence'⁵⁹ a metaphor for the attempts to construct a solid identity made by such as

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.94.

Saladin.

Here again, the text links to Naipaul's project in its concern with journeys and arrivals. For the previously nomadic people of Jahilia, 'the journeying itself was home..' ⁶⁰ Where Naipaul's text suggests that the certainty of having 'arrived' is illusory and even unattainable, the Verses asserts that 'for the migrant...the point is to arrive.'⁶¹ The concept of 'arrival' is multi-layered for the migrant. On one level both Naipaul and Rushdie speak of a ritual central to the formation of the artist's identity - a ritual encapsulated by Janet Frame in The Envoy from Mirror City:

Standing with my luggage on the grimy London steps I felt fleetingly at the back of my mind the perennial drama of the Arrival and its place in myth and fiction, and I again experienced the thrilling sense of being myself excavated as reality, the ore of the polished fiction.⁶²

On another, there is 'arrival' in the sense of social acceptance. This is the feeling that eludes Naipaul as he ponders the significance of the de Chirico painting entitled 'The Enigma of Arrival' and the mental image it conjures up for him of the migrant who '...lose[s] his sense of mission...' and 'know[s] only that he was lost'⁶³, while for Rushdie, 'arrival' is the literal end of the migrant's 'journey', be it a physical or psychological one.

To return to Bakhtin's ideas is to see a way of theorising the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Janet Frame, The Envoy from Mirror City: An Autobiography, Vol.3., New Zealand: Century Hutchinson, 1985, p.10.

⁶³ Enigma, p.92.

contrast in Rushdie's and Naipaul's narratives of migrant experience. Bakhtin saw the dialogic form as possible only in certain examples of the novel form, in this instance Dostoevsky's, rather than in poetry or drama. Its achievement was to allow the free play of a multiplicity of voices within the text which did not appear to be subordinated to the controlling authority or voice of the writer. Such dialogic forms could then clearly offer opportunities for more subversive and politically liberating works. In opposition to the polyphony of the dialogic form is the monologic; a univocal form where all ideas and characterisations are manifestly subject to the writer's own voice.

Naipaul's narrative is clearly monologic; no tensions are registered in the surface smoothness of the language and all disruptions caused to his identity by the process of migration are nevertheless controlled and filtered through this univocal text. Language itself is not seen as the site of struggle when, as elsewhere, Naipaul is content to operate within the dominant discourse of 'Eng.Lit'. He believes that his migration from Trinidad to England has 'given [him] the English language as [his] own.'⁶⁴

It would be problematic to assert that Rushdie achieves a contrastingly successful implementation of the dialogic form. Even though The Satanic Verses is largely concerned with who is the controlling power and guiding force behind any utterance, the very foregrounding of the argument and Rushdie's own intrusive authorial interventions make it difficult to argue that he steps

⁶⁴ Enigma, p.52.

back from the narrative in any true sense. That aside, the idea of polyphony and a multiplicity of textual voices is at the heart of Rushdie's ideas about fiction and his own belief in its ultimate validity as a vehicle for social and political ideas. It is a concept he embraced when defending the Verses in his 1990 Herbert Read Lecture, 'Is Nothing Sacred?' 'Literature', he writes, 'is the one place in any society where, within the secrecy of our own heads, we can hear voices talking about everything in every possible way.'⁶⁵ Beyond the wider arguments of those voices is the disruption and subversion of language itself; something the dialogic form is also capable of. In the Verses, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Jumpy Joshi, socialist and amateur poet is infuriated with the lawyer Hanif Johnson whom he feels is unwilling to grasp the importance of this issue of language for the migrant :

Hanif was in perfect control of the languages that mattered: sociological, socialistic, black-radical, anti-anti-anti-racist, demagogic, oratorical, sermonic: the vocabularies of power. [But you bastard you rummage in my drawers and laugh at my stupid poems. The real language problem: how to bend it shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned wells, how to master the river of words of time of blood: about all that you haven't got a clue]...⁶⁶

One of the important features of Rushdie's texts is that, even within the course of such a diatribe, he is playing with words, the structure of sentences, and attempting to reclaim some of the coloniser's preconceptions about migrants: in this instance the rivers of blood that Enoch Powell prophesied would foam through

⁶⁵ Rushdie, 'Is Nothing Sacred?', Imaginary Homelands, p.429.

⁶⁶ Verses, p.281.

the streets of Britain if the immigration laws were not changed. Rushdie's controversial use of the name 'Mahound' for his dream-prophet, the medieval demonization of Mohammed's name, is intended as a similar rebuff to the Powellian impulse in man - 'To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn.'⁶⁷ The text's own movement through the reinvention of identity, to rebirth, is linked to Jumpy's desire to rework Powell's metaphor. To be that which is designated as 'other' is to be reinvented. To stem the tide of abuse and remake the abuser's language anew is to be privy to a rebirth.

Ultimately, it is the deployment of polyphony that provides the opportunity for effecting a positive reconstruction of the divided migrant identity. The use of a novelistic form which can contain a multiplicity of voices, allows for the establishment of an identity that is inclusive rather than exclusive; capable of embracing past and present, memory and history, rather than, as is the case with the univocal Enigma, having to renounce or dissociate oneself from one's origins. For Rushdie the implications of this strategy extend beyond the discussion of migrant identity to define our expectations of literature itself. As he puts it in 'Is Nothing Sacred?', -

The only privilege literature deserves - and this privilege it requires in order to exist - is the privilege of being the arena of discourse, the place where the struggle of languages can be acted out.⁶⁸

Rushdie is here echoing the sentiments of Carlos Fuentes who,

⁶⁷ Verses, p.93.

⁶⁸ Rushdie, 'Is Nothing Sacred?', Imaginary Homelands, p.427.

shortly after the crisis of the Verses began, applauded the Bakhtinian dialogism of Rushdie's text :

Rushdie's work perfectly fits the Bakhtinian contention that ours is an age of competitive languages. The novel is the privileged arena where languages in conflict can meet, bringing together, in tension and dialogue, not only opposing characters, but also different historical ages, social levels, civilisations and other, dawning realities of human life. In the novel, realities that are normally separated can meet, establishing a dialogic encounter, a meeting with the other.⁶⁹

In his defence of The Satanic Verses in his essay 'In Good Faith', Rushdie speaks of '...the process of hybridization which is the novel's most crucial dynamic...'⁷⁰ In part it is a dynamic created from the dialogism of multiple textual voices - dissenting, lying, asserting identity against a 'tide' of demonization; voices once rehearsed discordantly in Grimus, now harmonized into a work that reflects the Sufi ideal of diversity within unity. The final chapter will attempt to argue that this 'process of hybridization' in Rushdie's work has taken the representation of the post-colonial subject into an area that is no longer circumscribed by the arguments of the coloniser; where the 'self' explored is no longer subject to western, colonial assessment but asserts its multiform nature as its defining characteristic.

⁶⁹ Carlos Fuentes, Guardian, 24.2.89., quoted in The Rushdie File, ed. L.Appignanesi & S.Maitland, London: Fourth Estate, 1989, pp.245-6.

⁷⁰ Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', Imaginary Homelands, p.403.

CHAPTER SEVENHYBRIDITY - CHANGE-BY-FUSION

The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. The Satanic Verses is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.¹

The previous chapter examined the birth of 'newness' as embraced by The Satanic Verses. Rushdie's defence of the novel in 'In Good Faith' extols the idea of newness as agglomeration, mongrelization, eclecticism. Newness as amalgam rather than total difference, as variation rather than mutation to borrow terms from genetic science, makes discussion and categorisation of Rushdie's writing problematic. Chapter Four examined the difficulties of relating Midnight's Children to 'traditions' of Indian storytelling, while Chapter Five showed Rushdie wary of the de-politicising tendencies of the 'fairy-tales' of magical realism. Aside from its dehistoricizing tendency, discussed in Chapter Four, there is also the problem of how far magical realism is able to address the interests and concerns of the post-colonial subject it seeks to represent. Malise Ruthven, in A Satanic Affair, gives an account of a seminar held in Bradford at the height of the uproar over the Verses, where a lecturer in

¹ Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', Imaginary Homelands, p.394.

English attempts to 'explain' the novel to its Moslem critics:

He explained how the form of 'magic realism' developed by Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez in South America had deliberately subverted the dominant mode of narrative realism...This subversion of narrative form...had a political dimension: it involved a deliberate, self-conscious attempt to break with the 'cultural imperialism' of European forms. This lucid exposition...proved too much for several young Asians in the audience, who staged a noisy walk-out. One of those who remained, a young woman, expressed the outrage all of them obviously felt when she jumped up and said, 'There is something wrong when a book of this kind is called literature.'²

This passage is illuminating, not least for the light it throws on the ostensibly disinterested liberal stance of its author. In choosing to recount this episode, Ruthven seems to be mocking blinkered 'fundamentalism' as much as Rushdie's literary apologists. There is a layered absurdity in the scenario - Rushdie's attempts to explain post-coloniality to post-colonial subjects, being mediated to them by a representative of western 'cultural imperialism' - and underneath it all a hint of disdain on Ruthven's part for those who require such explanations of literature in the first place. Ruthven's motivations aside, the elucidation of Rushdie's art by his literary admirer links interestingly to the responses of other of his erstwhile supporters, mentioned in the previous chapter. By seeking to categorise him as primarily a post-modernist/magical realist writer; by situating his work within First-World genres and traditions of literature, such critics serve to de-radicalise the nature of the texts themselves and the arguments they contain, and to misunderstand what kind of writer Rushdie is and whose story he seeks to tell.

² Ruthven, p.132.

Naming or labelling is the means by which the west categorises and consequently appropriates people and literature of other cultures. As Rushdie himself says of the putative category of 'Commonwealth Literature':

...the creation of a false category can and does lead to excessively narrow, and sometimes misleading readings of some of the artists it is held to include; and again, the existence...of the beast distracts attention from what is actually worth looking at, what is actually going on.³

'Postmodernist' and 'magical realist' are not in themselves 'false' categories, if the plethora of theories that surround them is anything to go by. But they can, like 'Commonwealth Literature', serve as classifications that carry with them pre-ordained ideas for readers - ideas that sometimes reinforce the sense of a lack of originality in contemporary literature. To label Rushdie's writing as postmodernist, magical realist or fantasist is often to deny its arguments, its formal innovativeness and its political dimension. What defies labelling or eschews the existing categories available must be reckoned with differently.

This chapter will seek to argue for a way of using the hybrid nature of such a post-colonial writer as Rushdie and his work as an alternative designation - one which refuses to align the work of art with any specific strand of that hybridity - Western or Eastern - but leaves the notion of the hybrid post-colonial text to stand by itself as self-explanatory and self-validating.

In order to do this, it is first necessary to examine some of the confusions which Rushdie's work clearly presents to any critic

³ Rushdie, '"Commonwealth Literature" Does Not Exist', Imaginary Homelands, pp.63-4.

intent on labelling it. The level of engagement of Rushdie's writing with the tropes of postmodernism is inevitably a major distraction for critics. The occasions when Rushdie has himself entered into the debate about the relation of the writer's art to theory illustrate the confusion and ambivalence that surrounds this question. Cora Kaplan, in her essay 'The Feminist Politics of Literary Theory', recalls a discussion of the relationship between creative writing and theory at an ICA conference which Rushdie attended. Kaplan notes that Rushdie:

...tended to see its [theory's] uses in imaginative writing as marginal, pointing out that he took his models and examples from the popular storytellers still practising in the sub-continent.⁴

Chapter Four has already demonstrated how far Rushdie's work can be said to emerge from an oral tradition, but this disavowal of theoretical engagement seems somewhat disingenuous when one is confronted with the theoretical, let alone fictional intertextuality of such novels as Midnight's Children and the Verses.

Theories of postmodernism simultaneously embody a promise of validation for the post-colonial writer and a threat to his or her 'authority'. The 'postmodern condition' by Lyotard's definition - simplifying to extremes as he puts it, is characterised by what he terms our 'incredulity towards metanarratives.'⁵ We no longer subscribe to a totalising world view, so the arguments go, any view that formerly served to

⁴ Cora Kaplan, 'The Feminist Politics of Literary Theory', Ideas from France, London: I.C.A. Publications, p.33.

⁵ J-F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Manchester U.P., 1984, p.xxiv.

explain the world and man's relation to it. Centres of power are allegedly dispersed. In terms of art, acknowledgement of this breakdown of centred authority is mirrored in the now familiar techniques of postmodern literature - the death of the author and concomitant valorization of the role of the reader outlined by Barthes in Image Music Text, along with the concept of the intertextuality of all writing. Self-referentiality, unreliable narration, multiple voices, perspectives and endings are some of the forms in which this incredulity towards metanarratives finds expression in literature.

As mentioned earlier, Midnight's Children toys with the idea of using Padma to occupy the role of reader as designated by Barthes. Linda Hutcheon in A Poetics of Postmodernism, regards Midnight's Children as a prime example of what she terms 'historiographic metafiction', a term used to incorporate:

those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages.⁶

The Satanic Verses similarly displays Rushdie's awareness of the tropes of postmodernist discourse and of magical realism in its presentation of the apparent superficiality of contemporary existence, and in the obvious homage it pays to both Borges and Marquez. The schizophrenia at the heart of Gibreel's disintegration extends beyond Rushdie's arguments about migrant identity in the text to define an aspect of the postmodern world in which it is produced. Fredric Jameson, in 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', isolates pastiche and schizophrenia as the two

⁶ Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction, New York: Routledge, 1988, p.5.

significant features of postmodernism. He singles out pastiche rather than parody, as the latter requires 'that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic.'⁷ Rushdie has Saladin's co-mimic, Mimi Mamoulian, echo this sentiment in the Verses:

I have read Finnegan's Wake and am conversant with post-modernist critiques of the West, e.g. that we have here a society capable only of pastiche: a 'flattened world.'⁸

Jean Baudrillard also reinforces Jameson's pronouncements on the postmodern era when he declares in 'The Ecstasy of Communication' that 'we are now in a new form of schizophrenia'.⁹ Like Gibreel himself, Baudrillard's schizo 'can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself'.¹⁰

As for the Verses' engagement with magical realism, the protagonists' crash-landing on the English coastline enables Rushdie to indulge in the kind of stylistic 'improvisation' that was one of the besetting sins of Grimus. Here, Gibreel is introduced to the aged Rosa Diamond, a figure straight out of Garcia Marquez with her history of passion, deceit and violence in Latin America. Interestingly, this is in many ways the least successful episode in the text, included more for its obvious literary resonances than for its links with the text's central themes. This suggests that Rushdie is making a kind of obeisance

⁷ F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Postmodern Culture, (ed. Hal Foster), London: Pluto, 1987, p.114.

⁸ Verses, p.261.

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', in Postmodern Culture, p.132.

¹⁰ Ibid.

to those non-Indian literary figures whose work he so admired, without necessarily wishing his own text to be regarded as part of that genre.

A similar strategy which speaks more of homage than discipleship is Rushdie's deployment of labyrinth in the Verses. In his short story, 'The Garden of Forking Paths', Jorge Luis Borges provides a classic comparison of the art of the novelist and the Daedalean task of constructing a narrative:

Ts'ui Pen must have said once: I am withdrawing to write a book. And another time: I am withdrawing to construct a labyrinth. Everyone imagined two works; to no one did it occur that the book and the maze were one and the same thing.¹¹

Rushdie's use of labyrinth, aside from offering echoes of Borges' magical realism, creates a similar effect to that produced by the spiralling and digressing storytelling technique of Midnight's Children; namely to convey an impression of loss of control within what is a tightly ordered narrative. Wendy Faris in Labyrinths of Language examines the use of the labyrinth in modern fiction both as structure and meaning, or effectively non-meaning; the paradigmatic inconclusiveness of the post-modern text.¹² The urban landscape of London in the Verses is presented as a centreless labyrinth which the hapless Gibreel attempts to navigate with his A-Z. Similar labyrinthine structures are allocated to the dream city of Jahilia and 'The Curtain' brothel, confusing those who venture into their

¹¹ J.L. Borges, 'The Garden of Forking Paths', Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings, ed. D.A. Yates & J.E. Irby, H'worth, Penguin, 1970, p.50.

¹² W.B. Faris, Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction, Baltimore: John Hopkins U.P., 1988.

complexities:

...even though Gibreel did not have any idea of the true shape of that most protean and chameleon of cities he grew convinced that it kept changing shape as he ran around beneath it, so that the stations on the Underground changed lines and followed one another in apparently random sequence. More than once he emerged, suffocating, from that subterranean world in which the laws of space and time had ceased to operate, and tried to hail a taxi; not one was willing to stop, however, so he was obliged to plunge back into that hellish maze, that labyrinth without a solution, and continue his epic flight.¹³

It is a 'text book' use of labyrinth as discussed by Faris - decentred, multicursal, offering options to the traveller (both Gibreel and Saladin are confronted with forking paths at critical moments in the text and choose, symbolically, the left-hand fork) and 'defying the laws of space and time.'. Faris tells us that 'part of the labyrinth's attraction as an image results from its potential to oscillate between existence in space and time', seeming even 'to represent the very "shape of time"' itself.¹⁴ In both Midnight's Children and the Verses, the communication networks of advertising and cinema compete with the written word for man's attention and allegiance. The cinema screen becomes a symbol for the changing perspectives on 'reality'¹⁵ that are offered by the post-modern novel. In 'The Ecstasy of Communication', Baudrillard writes that:

today the scene and mirror no longer exist, there is a non-reflecting surface, an immanent surface where operations unfold - the smooth operational surface of communication.¹⁶

¹³ Verses, p.201.

¹⁴ Faris, p.12.

¹⁵ Midnight's Children, p.166.

¹⁶ Baudrillard, p.126-7.

Like the cinema screen in Midnight's Children which disintegrates into a series of dots when the viewer gets too close to it, the riot of self-reflexiveness within the postmodern novel offers its readers the individualised elements of a once composite and unified whole.

Television, for Baudrillard, is 'the ultimate and perfect object for this new era'¹⁷ and Rushdie again appears to keep in step with postmodernity by making a transition from the power of the Bombay talkies in Midnight's Children and the Verses to the transparency and levelling tendencies of a t.v. based culture.

[Saladin] watched a good deal of television with half an eye, channel-hopping compulsively, for he was a member of the remote-control culture of the present...what a leveller this remote control gizmo was...it chopped down the heavyweight and stretched out the slight until all the set's emissions, commercials, murders, gameshows, the thousand and one varying joys and terrors of the real and the imagined, acquired an equal weight.¹⁸

But to acknowledge even this apparently high degree of engagement in Rushdie's writing with the vocabularies of postmodernism and magical realism is not to see either label as sufficient in itself for explaining the various impulses and projects within his work. The Satanic Verses appears to revel in the truisms of postmodernity - the society of the spectacle, Mimi's flattened world, the centreless labyrinth of life through which the individual conducts his goalless quest. But the text itself is at odds with the often depressing and alienating conclusions of postmodern discourse. Rushdie's very facility with these debates becomes a way of refuting the ascendancy of these arguments as

¹⁷ Ibid., p.127.

¹⁸ Verses, p.405.

a means of explaining the world, and of demonstrating the seeds of a discontent with the self-congratulatory cleverness and even slick amorality of much postmodern discourse - both fictional and theoretical. Its denouement provides a sense of closure and resolution that is uncharacteristic of postmodern novels in general and of Rushdie's earlier work in particular with their variously pessimistic and apocalyptic endings:

Deprived of its connection with all relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself, its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal, unmade energy.¹⁹ (1975)

...cracking now, fission of Saleem, I am the bomb in Bombay, watch me explode, bones splitting breaking beneath the awful pressure of the crowd, bag of bones falling down down down.²⁰ (1981)

And then the explosion comes, a shockwave that demolishes the house, and after it the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene.²¹ (1983)

It seemed that in spite of all his wrongdoing, weakness, guilt - in spite of his humanity - he was getting another chance. There was no accounting for one's good fortune, that was plain. There it simply was, taking his elbow in its hand. 'My place', Zeeny offered. 'Let's get the hell out of here.'²² (1988)

The Verses also demonstrates an increasing insistence on the importance and value of human relationships, resisting the alienating and selfish individualism of late eighties Britain under Mrs Torture. Zeeny's hand on Saladin's arm offers not only the hope of a relationship that is emotionally fulfilling, but

¹⁹ Grimus, p.253.

²⁰ Midnight's Children, p.463.

²¹ Shame, p.286.

²² Verses, p.547.

one that, through her nationality and her cultural and political interests offers to validate Saladin's past and help to reassemble his fragmented identity. Even Haroun and the Sea of Stories, written for Rushdie's son and so at odds with their own family situation, insists on an ending that offers both narrative closure and the resumption of family roles. Such a contrived 'happy ending' may seem to do nothing more than bow to a narrative convention in children's fiction. But in its 'adult' form in the Verses it marks an important and distinct move towards a literature that affirms the culture and identity of the post-colonial subject, that truly sings a love song to the migrant, mongrel self.

Recent post-colonial theory has attempted to engage with the concept of hybridity as it affects and informs post-colonial literature. The Indo-Anglian novel is regarded as a 'peculiarly hybrid cultural/textual form...' by Anuradha Dingwaney Needham,²³ while in 1984, Homi Bhabha's 'Signs Taken For Wonders' argued for the positive nature of the contestation of authority posed by hybridity. Colonial authority, for Bhabha, will always display ambivalence towards the hybrid Other (the ambivalence at the heart of Forster's and Orwell's projects) on account of its construction from elements of the Self:

The display of hybridity - its peculiar replication - terrorises authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery.²⁴

²³ Dingwaney Needham, p.614.

²⁴ Homi Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority, Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1917.', Europe and its Others, Vol.1, (ed.F.Barker et al), Colchester: Univ.of Essex, 1985, p.100.

By 1990, Bhabha was declaring in 'DissemiNation' that The Satanic Verses heralded '...the emergence of a hybrid national narrative.'²⁵ Such writing offers a challenge to existing standards of critical assessment and defies existing modes of categorisation. Bhabha had himself made it clear in 'Representation and the Colonial Text' that neither Leavisian discourse with its normative tendencies, nationalist criticism with its leanings towards essentialism, nor ideological analysis on the Althusserian model was equipped to critique and theorise post-colonial writing - chiefly because each of these methodologies has its own agenda, whether acknowledged or not.²⁶ The acceptance of hybridity as a defining characteristic of both the post-colonial artist and his/her art allows for the circumvention of this critical triumvirate. The authors of The Empire Writes Back certainly see it this way. They see both the displeasure of nationalist critics at the lack of true authentic 'Indianness' in Rushdie's work, and the blindness of the European critics who are oblivious to its presence, as indicative of the failure to recognise hybridity as a positive cultural form rather than an expression of artistic fragmentation or confusion.²⁷ Hybridity, for Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, is 'the primary characteristic of all post-colonial texts.'²⁸ The irony here is

²⁵ Bhabha, 'DissemiNation' in Nation and Narration, p.318.

²⁶ Bhabha, 'Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism', The Theory of Reading, (ed.F.Gloversmith), Brighton: Harvester, 1984, pp.93-122.

²⁷ B.Ashcroft et al, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, London: Routledge, 1989, p.184.

²⁸ Ibid., p.185.

that these critics still seek to situate this hybridity in relation to postmodern discourse. They seem reluctant to assert hybridity as a definition of Rushdie's work rather than just a description. The answer to the problem, and to Rushdie's own resistance to the label of postmodern author²⁹ must lie in accepting the hybridity of the post-colonial text, not just as a way of describing the make-up of such writing as Rushdie's, with its different cultural strands, but as a new and separate category of literature in itself. Thus each of the facets of a text such as Midnight's Children which have been variously attributed to the dominant cultural form of postmodernism - its self-reflexiveness, its allusive style, its use of traditional models - is not in itself the defining characteristic of Rushdie's work, but rather representative of the whole as a unified, hybrid entity. The end product goes beyond the pastiche and inversion of postmodernity's flattened world in its unique demonstration of the discrete and even conflicting cultural influences that bear on Rushdie's writing, and which have been explored in the preceding chapters. The hybrid text is an artistic production which, like the artist himself who is both a product of colonialism and an exemplar of postcoloniality, displays simultaneously its indebtedness to other cultural forms, and its originality.

The Satanic Verses plays a crucial role in the assertion of hybridity as a positive and distinct characteristic. As previously mentioned, it toys with postmodernism's definitions

²⁹ Rushdie, Interview with Sara Rance ('Things Fall Apart, the Centre Holds'), Observer, 3.5.1992., p.54.

of the world and the text, but the text itself strains against these strictures and pronouncements, creating that 'crucial dynamic' from which hybridity is created and of which Rushdie speaks in 'In Good Faith'.³⁰ Indian art itself is offered as an index of the validity and success of a project of hybridization. Zeeny Vakil as art critic seeks at the root of Indian art:

an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest?³¹

Interestingly, there is an echo of Brennan's criticism of Grimus here, the text which to him "trie[d] on" cultures like used clothing.'³² The criticism of that text is fair, but the importance for The Satanic Verses is that such a composite structure is here validated. Grimus' structure operates like the quick-change artist who moves in and out of disparate and unrelated 'outfits', while Indian art, and alongside it, the Verses, displays its parti-coloured wardrobe and rejoices in its mismatches and eclecticism. Hind Sufiyan's famed cooking at the Shaandaar Café serves as a similar metaphor for such hybridity and eclecticism, her 'gastronomic pluralism'³³ representing the different influences upon her own 'art', Western as well as Eastern, as her husband recognises:

...and let us not pretend that Western culture is not present; after these centuries, how could it not also be

³⁰ Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', Imaginary Homelands, p.403.

³¹ Verses, p.52.

³² Brennan, p.246.

³³ Verses, p.246.

part of our heritage?³⁴

The chameleon-like changes and allegiances implicit within hybridity are made clear by Mimi Mamoulian, even in the midst of her apparent embrace of postmodernism. We can read Rushdie's own response to this discourse through hers:

When I become the voice of a bottle of bubble bath, I am entering Flatland knowingly, understanding what I'm doing and why.³⁵

Rushdie's fear of 'the absolutism of the Pure'³⁶ is apparent in the Verses, not only in its rejection of over-simplified categorisation, but also in its handling of the absurdities and injustices of 'social Darwinism'. Muhammad Sufiyan, so keen to acknowledge the multicultural influences on his wife's eclectic cooking, ponders on Darwinian theory's confrontations with Lamarck as a way of explaining the existence of his peculiar, horned house-guest, Saladin. Darwin's final edition of The Origin of the Species accepts the possibility of mutation occurring to ensure the survival of a species. But Sufiyan knows this is not intended to apply to individuals within species, and also that any mutation should demonstrate some utility in order to explain the necessity of the change. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Timothy Brennan thinks the Verses works as an allegory of Darwin versus Lamarck - migrants either lose out to whites in the process of natural selection or they adapt to their environment.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p.261.

³⁶ Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', Imaginary Homelands, p.394.

³⁷ Brennan, p.184.

Rushdie's actual employment of these theories is subtler and more sophisticated than this implies. Brennan does not see Islam itself as caught between the theories of natural selection and Lamarck. Mutation both for Islam (the question of whether or not it will compromise with polytheism) and for Saladin, is a pivotal process; a crisis out of which a new coherent and determined identity is born with both Islam and Saladin finally able to assert their own unity. It cannot be argued that Saladin mutates to adapt to his environment. He embraces Englishness and effects the relevant changes to his life and personality, but this is a process of what might be called cultural rather than natural selection. His choice of Englishness cannot survive intact in the face of English racism, nor can it tell him who he is. Clearly, he does not embrace or positively seek the mutation conferred on him by his demonization. It is a crisis of identity out of which the certainties of his new self are born. Mutation suggests a qualitative change where natural selection suggests a quantitative one. Gibreel is destroyed because his own pivotal crisis entails the heightening of the weaker aspects of his personality - his egomania, his jealousy, and ultimately his psychological instability. Saladin survives his crisis of mutation by becoming something else, something new; reborn, rather than remaining demonic, that which is purely 'other.' His obsession with 'the conquest of "Englishness"'³⁸ has been an experience of false consciousness; a search for a culturally and psychologically invalid concept of newness. Related to this, and reflecting back on the imagined Indias of

³⁸ Verses, p.256.

his colonial forebears, is Rushdie's refusal to subscribe to the concept of psychological as well as cultural purity. British writers and figures such as Powell had sought to shore up and assert an image of Britain through their imagining of India, but Rushdie's ultimate rebuff to this position is his refutation of the 'intentionalist fallacy' that the self can be '(ideally) homogeneous, non-hybrid, "pure"...'³⁹ To refuse the absolutism of purity in any guise is both to question the image of the self that is promoted in colonial literature and to argue for an identity and a form of literature to represent it that will eschew such certainties and intransigencies. Importantly, it leaves him offering the gift of uncertainty to the reader as Forster and Scott had before him, if for different reasons. Forster, Orwell, Scott and the British writers that preceded them had offered a representation of India that was a reflection of the British self-image. Rushdie's Verses offers a picture of 'Vilayet' that, in its labyrinthine construction, its casual brutalities and temptations, becomes a test of the solidity of migrant identity. India, for the colonialists, tested identity through opposition - Englishness defined itself in relation to what it was not. Rushdie's achievement is to show a dialectical process at work here. While England still uses images of an alien other to shore up a national identity for itself, the post-colonial subject is no longer passive in the face of such demonization, but can define his or her own identity by a similar process of opposition; opposition to English racism and English responses. It is the project in which the Verses itself is

³⁹ Ibid., p.427.

engaged - to refute the insult of 'difference' by embracing it. The important factor is that the restoration of identity to the post-colonial subject is then affirmed, as it is for Saladin, by his return to India - by the acceptance of an unalienated self-image, a culture and nationality that defines rather than disrupts that self. In the midst of his channel-hopping, Saladin chances on an image that represents the hybridization at work in Rushdie's writing as well as in Saladin's own life; an image that validates diversity within unity and sets the seal on his own process of rebirth and synthesis:

There it palpably was, a chimera with roots, firmly planted in and growing out of a piece of English earth: a tree, he thought, capable of taking the place of the one his father had chopped down in a distant garden in another, incompatible world. If such a tree were possible, then so was he; he, too, could cohere, send down roots, survive.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.406.

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