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East / West: Salman Rushdie and Hybridity

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EAST / WEST: SALMAN RUSHDIE AND HYBRIDITY

By

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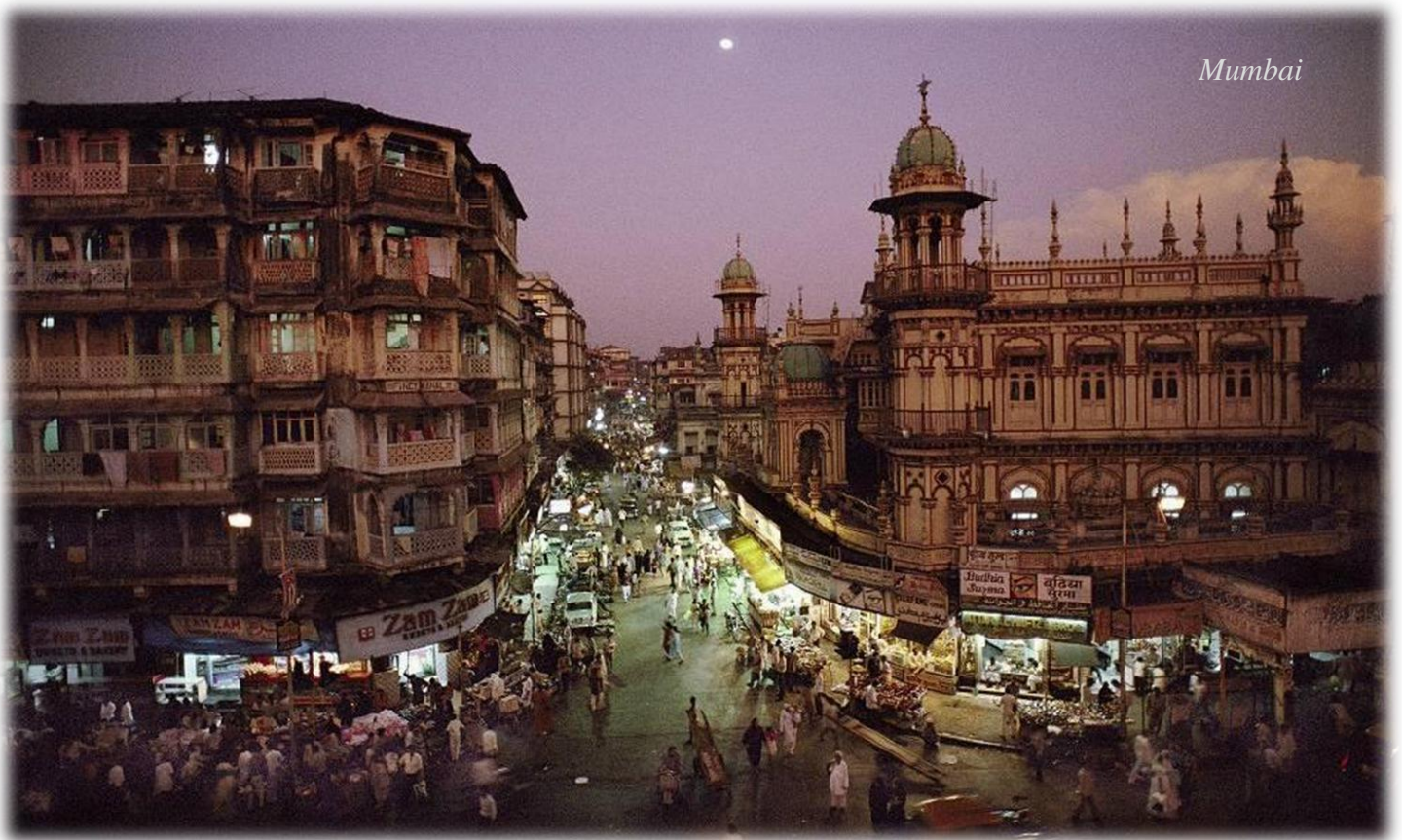
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Mumbai



*“How far did they fly? Five and a half thousand as the crow.
Or: from Indianness to Englishness, an immeasurable difference.
Or, not very far at all, because they rose from one great city, fell to another.”
---Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses*



East / West: Salman Rushdie and Hybridity

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which the novelist Salman Rushdie advocates a hybrid world—a world in which difference and heterogeneity are not only tolerated, but are eagerly celebrated as a means of cultural newness. In the 21st century, instantaneous communication, global economics, and increasing migration of people across continents have drastically destabilized old views on the formation of cultural identities. In his novels, Salman Rushdie explores these questions which plague the postcolonial and cosmopolitan world—what is the migrant? How can a person survive between cultures? What do those grand ideas of *home*, *culture*, or *nation* even mean? This study endeavors to prove that Rushdie's works show that he strongly believes in mixing cultures and identities, rather than limiting identification to a singular place or idea. I focus on four different areas of cultural identity for which Salman Rushdie advocates hybridity: postcolonial history, national narratives, individual migrant identity, and the English language. To do this, I particularly examine three of his novels, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*. I also discuss the ways in which political and personal events have shaped his opinions and the impact that his writing has had on the larger field of postcolonial literature. This study ultimately argues that his novels illustrate that while cultural change and translation may be difficult or painful, the process is a beneficial one for all. Rushdie's collected work is clearly dedicated to the idea that cultural blending will create a better and more peaceful world in the future.

Keywords: Rushdie, hybridity, postcolonial, culture, identity, India

Chapter One

The Contexts of Hybridity

-It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation;

I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained. ||

--*Imaginary Homelands*

Ahmed Salman Rushdie, Bombay-born and England-bred, has emerged during the last several decades as an extremely important voice in the field of postcolonial and world literary studies. Since the publication in 1980 of his second novel, *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's works have made a dramatic mark on the field, influencing countless other Indian and migrant writers and sparking an extensive body of critical and theoretical writings based on his ideas. His masterful yet innovative novels playfully mix magical realism with biting social and political commentary. In the 36 years of his publishing career, Salman Rushdie has been the subject of intense attention and debate, receiving both adoring praise and scathing reviews. He is now, whether he likes it or not, a celebrity—appearing in British tabloids, acting in cameo roles in films, dating reality television stars—as much as he is an acclaimed author. Much has been said and written about Salman Rushdie over the years, but ultimately, his books speak for themselves.

Rushdie's work teems with the overflowing life of India, packed to the brim with larger-than-life characters, tangential storylines, pop-culture references, existential musings,

and an effusively polyglot language and style. Rushdie repeatedly addresses identity issues that have bearing on his own life—what is the migrant? How can a person survive between cultures? What do those grand ideas of *home*, *culture*, or *nation* even mean? Writing about the East from London or New York, Rushdie easily admits the ambiguity of his cultural and national affiliations, embracing the dislocation and -in-betweenness¹¹ of his identity as a migrant. Many of his novels center on characters who, like Rushdie, have made the journey from India to England or America, and the novels explore these characters' efforts to articulate their own experiences. Yet all of these protagonists—Saladin Chamcha, Umeed Merchant, Ormus Cama, Malik Solanka, Gibreel Farishta, Moraes Zogoiby, and Saleem Sinai—discover that their identities are not so easily established, defined, or isolated. Instead, both those characters who migrate and those who stay in India learn that they can be more than one thing.

Salman Rushdie argues for *hybridity* of culture, asserting that in today's postcolonial, postmodern world, no one can or should try to retain a singular identity. In fact, he affirms, living between East and West or embracing the hybrid mixture of India is a positive thing, one which brings about newness in the world. Immigrants do not have to feel compelled to return home or to resist being influenced by their new locations. In the same way, those living in India today do not have to support divisive communalist movements or the essentializing efforts of the nation's leaders. In "The Courter,"¹² the last story in Rushdie's collection *East, West*, the narrator discusses his own struggle for identity as an Indian living in England. Yet in his last lines, the narrator finally decides his position on the matter in words that echo Rushdie's own declarations about his place in the world. He says, "I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and

West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *choose, choose*...Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoos, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose|| (*East, West* 211)¹. Ultimately, according to Rushdie, people do not have to choose either one identity or the other; instead, they can live and thrive in the interstices between them.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which the author Salman Rushdie advocates a hybrid world—a world in which difference and heterogeneity are not only tolerated, but eagerly celebrated as a means of cultural newness. Throughout my work, I use Homi K. Bhabha's foundational book of postcolonial theory, *The Location of Culture*, to interpret the hybridity of which Rushdie writes and dreams. To prepare for my discussion of the hybridity in his works, I have read seven of his eleven novels, his collection of short stories, and his two books of collected essays. Though all of his works are worthy of discussion, I focus mainly on several of Rushdie's earlier novels, *Midnight's Children* (1980), *Shame* (1983), and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), as they are generally considered to be his best and most important works. Furthermore, these novels contain the first explorations of the themes, ideas, images, people, and places that recur throughout his collected fiction. In my last chapter, however, I do address the ways in which his subject matter and ideas have evolved in the last two decades. I will briefly discuss important aspects of his later work through three novels, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), and *Fury* (2001). The main body of my study is separated into four chapters that discuss Salman Rushdie's use of hybridity in the context of the history, the nation, the migrant, and language.

¹ After the first reference to one of Salman Rushdie's works, the title will be abbreviated in subsequent citations.

Preview

In this introduction, I endeavor to lay a foundation for the rest of my study by exploring three contextual aspects of Rushdie's writing: historical, biographical, and literary. First, I give a brief overview of India's political history after its independence from the British Empire in 1947, including moments that are significant in Rushdie's work, such as the Partition and Indira Gandhi's state of Emergency. Second, I give a biographical overview of Salman Rushdie, with specific focus on his migration to England, his relationship with religion, and his struggles after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Third, I briefly discuss how, over the last few decades, the paradigm concerning what and how immigrants can write has shifted drastically. Rushdie, among others, refuses to continue to see himself as an –exile from India, someone who desperately wishes to return to an idealized homeland. Instead, Rushdie advocates writing from the perspective of a –migrant, one who willingly embraces the ambiguity of belonging to more than one place or culture. This shift in perspective has opened a space for migrant writers to explore, in literature, their unique experiences of cultural ambiguity or blending. Ultimately, the field of –postcolonial studies continues to expand, drawing critics to question whether that term still fits the literature.

The next four chapters explore specific ways that Rushdie endeavors to write about the hybrid world—either of the migrant experience or of India—in his novels. I have chosen to break up this study into four chapters, each of which focuses on a different form of hybrid identity: the narrative of history, the postcolonial nation, the individual migrant, and the hybridity of English in the postmodern world. Chapter 2, titled –The Hybridity of History, shifts the focus of my study to the way that narration and storytelling combine with history and politics in Rushdie's works. While much of Rushdie's work addresses the political and

social problems of modern India, Pakistan, or migrant communities abroad, his novels also offer important metafictional studies on the legitimacy of the narrator and his narration. In *Midnight's Children*, widely considered to be his masterpiece, Rushdie uses his narrator Saleem Sinai to question established methods of historical discourse and storytelling. *Midnight's Children* creates a history for India that is extremely heterogeneous and diverse, stuffed with stories and images and ideas—a hybridized history. I endeavor to show how Saleem's narrative opens up a place in the historical record for those who previously were marginalized by essentialist national histories.

Chapter 3, "Refusing National Hybridity in *Shame*," explores Rushdie's depiction of the national narrative of Pakistan. He argues that Pakistan, which was intended to be a "Land of the Pure," is fundamentally flawed because such a singular national identity is impossible in the postmodern and postcolonial world. He asserts that such a refusal of hybridity in a nation causes violence, repression, and corruption of its leaders. In this chapter, I look at several aspects of Rushdie's portrayal and condemnation of Pakistan's narrative. In *Shame*, he tells the story of a nation that is almost, but not quite, Pakistan, thus using this "modern fairy tale" to show the inherent weakness and backwardness of trying to forcefully create homogeneous nations. I discuss Rushdie's emphasis on the violent repression of history and diversity, the fictionality of such nations, the instability of binary relationships, and the inevitable collapse of nations built on such rigid ideals. Ultimately, Rushdie uses this story as a warning of the dire consequences for nations that turn away from the national hybridity that he so eagerly celebrates in India, as represented in *Midnight's Children*.

In Chapter 4, titled "Migrant Hybridity in *The Satanic Verses*," I explore the identity crisis that the two central characters, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, undergo after

their migration from India to England. I endeavor to connect the journeys and trials of these two characters to the larger questions of cultural identity that all migrant peoples face: how to reconcile home and the new place, what should be retained, and what can be gained.

Ultimately, I hope to show that Rushdie's novel proves that one does not have to choose between the two. In fact, those who live between cultures are the source of newness and change in any given culture.

Chapter 5, "The Hybridity of Language," focuses on Rushdie's exploration of India's and postcolonial literature's ambiguous relationship with the English language. I discuss how, in the past, many Indian critics have argued that writers ought to abandon English and return to vernacular languages. Rushdie and others disagree, asserting that English has been remade into an Indian language, a language capable of uniting such a diverse nation. Furthermore, Rushdie works to delegitimize "Standard English" throughout his novels by giving his characters an "Indianized" version of English, one that reflects how people actually use the language, influenced by vernacular, pop culture, and street slang. Rushdie uses this form of English in order to show, once again, that cultural mixture is preferable to strict "purity" or isolation. For this chapter on language, I draw on the novels *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* for examples, as well as several of his nonfiction essays on the English language and the Indian novel.

In my concluding chapter, titled "The Future of Hybridity," I briefly discuss Rushdie's later works and how his works have evolved or changed in the last two decades. Perhaps the most important shift that has occurred in these later works is that he has set two of his novels in New York City. In *Fury*, Rushdie explores the breakdown of the American dream at the end of the century, and, in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, he tells of the rock-

and-roll world of New York in the late 20th century. In both novels, Rushdie illuminates his New York with as much love and intricate detail as he had shown for Bombay and London in earlier novels. I also discuss the ways in which Rushdie has inspired a younger generation of Indian writers in English, such as Amitav Ghosh and Jhumpa Lahiri. These authors echo and expand upon his ideas of cultural hybridity and the illusory nature of boundaries. Finally, in this chapter, I endeavor to bring together all of the disparate aspects of my discussion of Rushdie's hope for hybridity of culture. I discuss the fact that Rushdie's novels are, despite the subject matter, very personal and passionate works. His love for India and for the world around him compel him to imagine a better future for all.

Historical Contexts

On August 15, 1947, the nation of India was officially formed out of the former colony of British India. As the stroke of midnight fell, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave a speech in English demonstrating the nation's great optimism for the future. He said, "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge....A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance" (Nehru). This pivotal moment in India's history and national consciousness has long inspired Rushdie. Four of his major novels take place in the years surrounding the moment of independence, while *Midnight's Children* uses this moment as the hinge for the entire story.

Yet even in this time of great optimism, shadows of the conflicts that would plague India for decades were evident. At the same moment of India's independence, Pakistan—made up of two large northern provinces of British India—was declared to be its own

separate nation. This Partition, as it was called, sparked brutal violence, rioting, and mass displacement throughout both nations. Since the Partition, the two nations have been gripped in tense conflict, going to war over the disputed Kashmir territory in 1947, 1965, and 1971 (–Background||). The moment of Partition and its ensuing violence have been a major source of material for Rushdie's novels, particularly *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*.

The nationalist movement within India in the early 20th century also raised questions about *what* and *who* India is. Currently made up of around 1.17 billion people, more than 2,000 ethnic groups, 18 official languages, and a plurality of religious groups, India is truly a diverse nation (–Background||). The only way India can survive is to be a nation that allows the diversity and heterogeneity of the people to coexist within it. Such a unified India is, according to Rushdie, –a dream we all agreed to dream...a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madras and Jat|| (*Midnight's Children* 150). Yet that dream of a democratic and egalitarian India was soon threatened. On June 21, 1975, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru) was convicted of election fraud for using state machinery to advance her campaign. Four days later, stating that the security of the nation was at threat from —internal disturbances,|| Ms. Gandhi declared a national state of emergency. This gave the Prime Minister the power to essentially rule by decree, suspending elections and many civil liberties. The Emergency ended after 21 months when Ms. Gandhi organized an election, hoping for a mandate for her rule. She was defeated that year, but returned to power in 1980, holding it until she was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Indira Gandhi's time as Prime Minister and the Emergency remain one of the most controversial times in India's political history. Rushdie writes extensively about that dark time in *Midnight's Children*. Through her rule, –The Widow||—as he calls her—

effectively reversed all of the earnest dreams of early India, replacing them with solidarity and singularity. To Salman Rushdie, her campaign slogan –Indira is India and India is Indira showed just how her rule went against the original dream of India.

Biographical Contexts

Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born on June 19, 1947 in Bombay, India to a wealthy Muslim family. His father Anis Ahmed Rushdie was a Cambridge-educated businessman and his mother Negin was a teacher. His family spoke Urdu, but he learned English at an early age in school and was encouraged to speak it at home, as well. Catherine Cundy, author of the *Contemporary World Writers* book on Salman Rushdie, states that —this dual consciousness, created as a result of this linguistic division, is the source of much of the versatility and play in Rushdie’s use of English in his fiction (1). As a child growing up in India, Salman was enchanted by books and film and the way they could transport him to new worlds. Some of his earliest influences were *The Wizard of Oz*, Superman comics, and Bollywood films, all of which recur in the novels and short stories throughout his publishing career, according to Karen Hanggi of Emory University. He wrote his first story when he was ten years old.

At the age of fourteen, Salman was sent to be educated in England, first attending the Rugby School. Rushdie’s time at Rugby was marked by alienation from his peers. About that time he said, –I had three things wrong, I was foreign, I was clever and I was bad at games, and it seemed to me that I could have made any two of those mistakes and I’d have been alright.... three was unforgivable (qtd. In Hanggi). He then read history at Kings College, Cambridge University. While he was abroad, his family reluctantly moved to Pakistan, faced with the pressure of being Muslim in India while that nation was at war with Pakistan. After

graduating in 1968, he moved to Pakistan and briefly worked in television advertising before moving back to England permanently to focus on his writing career. He has been married four times and has two sons, Zafar and Milan.

An important moment in Rushdie's youth that molded him into the writer he is as an adult was the loss of his faith in Islam. Cundy states that this loss, —and the resulting god-shaped hole in his own identity, is the source of much of the religious debate in his novels (2). In an article defending himself against accusations of heresy, Rushdie asserts, —I believe in no god, and have done so since I was a young adolescent....To put it as simply as possible: *I am not a Muslim* (Imaginary Homelands 405). Despite Rushdie's self-proclaimed atheism, his works explore questions of faith and the interplay of the many different religions present in India. He states that he does —have spiritual needs and that his work has —a moral and spiritual dimension, but [he is] content to try and satisfy those needs without recourse to any idea of a Prime Mover or ultimate arbiter (IH 405).

Rushdie's literary representation of religion was brought under strong scrutiny after the publication of his fourth novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1989. Various Muslim groups accused Rushdie of heresy for his portrayal of a prophet named Mahound who receives —satanic verses from a fallible angel, Gibreel. The book was quickly banned in India and South Africa, and it was burned in the streets of Yorkshire by the very immigrant Muslims whose experience he writes about in the novel. Furthermore, the Islamic leadership of Iran, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, declared a *fatwa* against Rushdie on February 14, 1989. Contrary to many people's understanding of the concept, a *fatwa* is not always a death sentence. Instead, *fatwas* are opinions on Islamic law issued by Islamic scholars, often relating to everyday legal actions and not always considered to be binding. The *fatwa* about *The Satanic*

Verses, however—which called for devout Muslims to kill Rushdie and the publishers of the book—was taken very seriously. After the *fatwa* was declared, Rushdie went into hiding for ten years, protected by the British Special Branch and constantly moved from one safe house to another. Because the Ayatollah Khomeini died before lifting the *fatwa*, technically the edict can never be rescinded. In 1998, however, the Iranian government disassociated itself from the call for Rushdie's life, and he began appearing in public again.

The –Satanic Verses‖ affair had a drastic impact on Rushdie, not only personally but also as a writer. He has expressed how painful it was to be rejected and hated by migrant Muslims in the West, especially because the novel was actually an attempt to write about their world and experiences. Furthermore, in the article –In Good Faith,‖ written in 1990, Rushdie expresses his concern that the novel has been forever tainted because of what happened. He states, –There are times when I feel that the original intentions of *The Satanic Verses* have been so thoroughly scrambled by events as to be lost forever‖ (IH 403). Some critics have expressed the same idea. Catherine Cundy states, –The text has all but lost its ability to be judged as an artistic enterprise rather than a cultural and political crisis‖ (65). This opinion, however valid it might have appeared to be in 1990, does not seem to be relevant today. The uproar over the book has been replaced with honest discussion about the novel as a work of literature, not as a political event. Rushdie has also chosen to move forward in his personal and literary life, though recently he has mentioned the possibility of writing a memoir about the experience.

To date, Rushdie has published eleven novels and one book of short stories. With the exception of the controversial novel *The Satanic Verses*, his books have been very well-received among readers both in the East and the West. *Midnight's Children* was awarded the

Booker Prize in 1980, the 1993 –Booker of Bookers,|| and the 2008 –Best of Bookers|| awards, thus twice being named the best of all the past Booker Prize-winning novels.

Rushdie has been awarded countless other literary prizes, including the Whitbread Prize for Best Novel (twice) and the Crossword Book Award in India, and he has been given six honorary doctorates from various European and American universities. Salman Rushdie is also an Honorary Professor in the Humanities at MIT and the Distinguished Writer in Residence at Emory University. In 2007, Rushdie was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for –services to literature.||

Literary Contexts

During the last half-century, postcolonial literature and its associated theory have emerged as a rapidly evolving area of literary studies, one in which critics and writers are continually editing and emending previously held ideas. The body of postcolonial literature has evolved and proliferated from its early days, when many non-Western writers felt compelled to –write back|| to the empire by responding to and correcting the misrepresentations of themselves found in colonial literature. Classic postcolonial novels like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, published in 1958, demonstrate this endeavor.

Yet the paradigm of –postcolonial|| literature has shifted greatly over the past several decades. The style, intentions, and perspectives found within the literature have diversified to such an extent, in fact, that the term –postcolonial|| often fails to represent aptly the literature. Thus, many new literary subcategories have emerged, such as Commonwealth literature, transnational literature, exile literature, migrant literature, or Third World literature. While many writers living and writing from within those previously colonized nations may still write in response to colonialism, many writers and critics choose to look to the present or the

future, rather than continually referring to the past. Homi Bhabha addresses the problems of continuing to look backwards in his book, *The Location of Culture*. He states that —if the jargon of our times—postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism—has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the ‘post’ to indicate sequentiality—*after*-feminism; or polarity—*anti*-modernism (6). Instead, he argues, these terms —only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment (Bhabha 6). Thus, only when writers focus on the present can the tenets of postmodernism or postcolonialism have any meaning or relevance.

In the last few decades, many writers who have immigrated to the West have discovered a new way of perceiving themselves, one which allows them to look forward rather than behind. In the past, those who immigrated were considered to be —exiles, people forcibly or unwillingly scattered from their cherished homeland. Furthermore, because the literary establishment believed that —exile or diasporic literature was based entirely on personal experience, these writers were expected to write about the same ideas. Rose Marangoly George, professor of English and Cultural Studies at University of California San Diego, has written extensively on South Asian and postcolonial literature and theory. She states that at the center of Indian diasporic literature —is the haunting presence of India—and the anguish of personal loss it represents. It is precisely this shared experience of absence that...unites the literature of the Indian diaspora (183). According to this theory of —exile, these writers can consider the issue of home only nostalgically, as a cherished moment from the lost past.

But while many writers, Rushdie included, still look back at their home countries fondly, this label of —exile is constricting for people who have adapted to living in their new

locations. Rushdie strongly condemns this perspective of exile in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. Gibreel's angelic visions take him to observe the –Imam, living in a state of exile in London. Interestingly, this character is a thinly-veiled depiction of the Ayatollah Khomeini's exile in France before the Islamic Revolution. Rushdie says that exile –is a dream of glorious return. Exile is a vision of revolution: Elba, not St. Helena. It is an endless paradox: looking forward by always looking back (The *Satanic Verses* 212). The exiled Imam is –frozen in time, translated into a photograph; denied motion, suspended impossibly above his native earth, he awaits the inevitable moment at which the photograph must begin to move, and the earth reclaim its own (SV 212). Ultimately, because exiles are tightly bound to the past, they can never change, grow, evolve, or move. It is, as Rushdie says, –a soulless country (SV 214).

In place of this constricting perspective, Rushdie and other immigrant writers propose a different viewpoint for their literature. He considers himself to be a –migrant, one who embraces the ambiguity of belonging to and living in more than one place and culture. Carine Mardorossian, professor of English at SUNY Buffalo, states that migrant literature –reconceptualizes the notion of ‘home’ from the pre-existing meanings it represents in the discourse of exile (stability, comfort, identity, or inversely, oppression, poverty, etc.) to a transformative site of constant renegotiation of the migrant's identity (22). Migrancy is not simply a –mere interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but a mode of being in the world (Mardorossian 16). As migrants, people can be free to create their own cultural identities or relationships to home, based on their own unique experience. Furthermore, migrant literature –offers a transnational, cosmopolitan, multilingual and hybrid map of the world that redraws boundaries by building bridges between Third and First Worlds

(Mardorossian 17). Migrant literature shows that all categories—even newer ones like –migrant‖ or –transnational‖—simplify the complex nature of cultural identity and location.

Just like Salman Rushdie, an Indian and a British citizen now living in New York City, authors such as Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, and Kiran Desai live or write in the West, yet they do not write only of their –anguish‖ for the loss of India. Instead, they openly embrace their connections to both the East and the West, writing about –movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages‖ (Mardorossian 16). Rushdie is an enthusiastic and optimistic advocate of such rootlessness and hybridity, frequently discussing the potential beauty of the migrant condition. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the narrator Rai ruminates on the experience of leaving home behind. He says, –Suppose that it's only when you dare to let go that your real life begins? When you're whirling free of the mother ship, when you cut your ropes, slip your chain, step off the map, go absent without leave, scam, vamoose, whatever; suppose that it's then, and only then, that you're actually free to act! To lead the life nobody tells you how to live, or when, or why‖ (GBF 177). By stepping away from the past and looking to the future, migrant writers can live, imagine, and create however they wish.

Chapter Two

The Hybridity of History in *Midnight's Children*

–This is what we brought with us on our journey across oceans, beyond frontiers, through life: our little storehouse of anecdote and what-happened-next, our private once-upon-a-time. We were our stories.¶

–Fury

At the exact stroke of midnight, August 15, 1947, Saleem Sinai was born—a twin of the newly independent nation of India. Saleem's birth begins Salman Rushdie's sprawling and richly complex novel *Midnight's Children*, celebrated as his greatest work and winner of the Booker Prize in 1981. At the beginning of the novel, Saleem, the novel's narrator, unabashedly proclaims that he has been –mysteriously handcuffed to history, [his] destinies indissolubly chained to those of [his] country¶ (MC 3). From that moment on, the novel follows its convoluted path through the twinned histories of Saleem's family and India itself. Yet Saleem's narrative often veers widely from the commonly accepted order of events, causes, and results that make up India's pre- and post-Independence years. The mistakes, elisions, exaggerations, and solipsism that litter the book, however, are not simply the result of a foolishly unreliable narrator. Not only are these alterations and additions intentional on Saleem's part, but they are also intentional on Rushdie's part. In his book of essays entitled *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie states that he made Saleem –suspect in his narration¶ through –mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of

circumstances to show the inevitable problems in any historical discourse (*IH* 10).

Throughout the novel, Rushdie consistently works to deconstruct not only the established method of historical discourse but to question the very notion of what *history*, in its broadest sense, means. In its place, he offers up Saleem's narrative—expansive, meandering, and at times fantastic—to attempt a new way of writing one's own history, one which allows for the infinite variety of experiences, lives, cultures, and perspectives that make up our world.

For the past several centuries, the Western historical discourse has been concerned with creating and maintaining grand, overarching narratives that give an entire nation a single, unifying identity. This, of course, is a generalized accusation, one that ignores the great variety of thought in Western discourse and the many dissenting voices that have emerged from the West throughout the centuries. Nonetheless, it is in response to this almost nameless ideal, this bias that undergirds Western civilization, that Rushdie proposes Saleem's historical narrative. Tim Gauthier, professor of English at UNLV, argues that the Western historical academy has been obsessed with these –all-encompassing, totalizing, and teleological constructions because they –[imbue] our lives with transcendent metanarratives of eventual human emancipation (2). The long political dominance of the West over the rest of the world has ensured its philosophical and *ideological* dominance, which manifests itself in the commonly accepted views of the general sweep of history. History created by the West—in its most idealized form—is a linear and progressive narrative of colonization and civilization, expansion and profit. It was engineered in the Enlightenment to explicate and justify the dominance of certain peoples and the subjugation of others. At its worst, the overarching metanarrative of world history is, as Michael Dash claims, nothing more than a

–fantasy peculiar to the Western imagination in its pursuit of a discourse that legitimizes its power and condemns other cultures to the periphery (qtd. in Gikandi 7).

In a similar way, postcolonial nations are now trying to establish their identities by addressing the past, yet they still must use the Western discourse in order to do so. Salman Rushdie contends, then, that the majority of narratives written about India's own post-Independence history have been intended to construct –India, the new myth—a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God (MC 150). According to Neil ten Kortenaar, professor in the Humanities at University of Toronto Scarborough, *Midnight's Children* is an effort to envision a history of India which does not simply replicate the –received history, the story of the nation as made by middle-class nationalist politicians, some version of which citizens are taught in schools and everyone knows (31). That national story, since it must fit within the strictures of Western historical discourse in order to be legitimate, has a –well-defined narrative form: established origins, turning points and climaxes, and an agreed chronology of significant events (ten Kortenaar 31). Anything written outside of these particular strictures is branded as –fiction or –myth, thus removing all legitimacy or potential truth.

Yet with the increasing body of work exploring the postcolonial experience, both in literary and historical fields, these assumptions about the nature of history are being called into question. A growing willingness of the historical academy to face the horrors of the past, as well as its own role in perpetuating them, has revealed just how falsely optimistic the metanarratives are. The dream that society as a whole has been constantly improving now proves itself to be faulty, as this progress has always been based on subjugation and inequality. For the colonized subject, that version of history created a –feeling of inevitability

or irreversibility [that] often contributed to an overwhelming sense of pessimism among those people who held no power in society (Gauthier 134). The metanarrative of world history had no legitimate place for the citizens of the colonized peoples; in those stories they were either savages, slaves, or simply forgotten. According to Gauthier, Rushdie believes that such –progressive history is –fundamentally untrue and repressive—untrue in that it does not accurately speak for the multitudes, repressive in its attempt to eradicate those differences that undermine its wholeness (136). Thus these progressivist histories must necessarily include a –cleansed reading of the past that simply washes away whatever does not accord with the imagined national narrative, thus negating the supposed historical value of such readings (Gauthier 144). These purified stories of a nation’s history are simply incomplete if they ignore either the trauma of the past or the lingering inequality in society.

Furthermore, the rise of postmodern thought in the late twentieth century has worked to completely destabilize and decenter these essentialized myths about national and cultural history. Postmodern theorists argue that absolute truth can never be found, even through supposedly objective historical research. Michael Reder, professor at Connecticut College and editor of *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, states that –the whole notion of truth and reality is relative and dialogic—not absolute and monologic....It is the job of the artist—of the writer of ‘fiction’—to bring these ‘truths’ to light (239). Reder goes on to argue that –beyond the cold, vacant ‘truth’ preserved by the pure logic in philosophy and mathematics, truth is no more than memory. Memory mimics the artistic process (240). Rushdie, a dedicated advocate for plurality of meaning, echoes these statements. In *Imaginary Homelands*, he says, –History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable

of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge (25).

In addition to his exploration of the impossibility of absolute truth, Rushdie embraces the postmodern concept of the hybrid. According to Meenu Gupta, professor of English at Panjab University in Chandigarh, India, Rushdie –privileges a postmodern space or third principle that blends both sides of binaries: east/west, secular/religious, real/fantasy, and colonizer/colonized and foregrounds hybridity over clarity and open-endedness over closure. In this the work is adaptable, creative, fluid and imaginative (32). Just like Rushdie himself, Saleem is a perfect representation of the hybrid man, born with –multiple allegiances and identities (Gupta 32). He is a character of mixed backgrounds—the son of a colonial named William Methwold and a poor Indian woman, yet raised as a son by the middle-class Sinais.

Working from the position that both progressivist and essentialist historical discourses are limiting and incomplete, Rushdie writes Saleem's story. He emphasizes and exploits the weaknesses of traditional historical narratives, often embracing the postmodern ideal of the indeterminacy of truth. Rushdie's intention, however, is not to completely *negate* the typical Western historical discourse, but rather to *decenter* it. Michael Reder states that Rushdie –wants to open up the notion of one 'Truth,' showing the many versions of possible truths (234). Throughout *Midnight's Children*, Saleem alters the facts of India's history, mixing up dates or altering the reasons and consequences in order to fit the specific story he wants to tell. While some of these errors could be attributed to Rushdie's mistake or Saleem's ignorance, many appear to be quite intentional. One example of this is when Saleem mentions the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. As he reveals to the audience later, however, he had (perhaps intentionally?) mixed up the chronology of how the assassination

fit with the events in his life. Yet he claims that in —his| India, —Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time| (MC 230). Saleem wonders at first, —Does one error invalidate the entire fabric?| (MC 230). He later decides, however, that the error is simply a part of his narrative, indicative of the true nature of memory. He explains, —Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It 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| (MC 292). Thus memory, which is inherently malleable and flexible, plays an integral role in the creation of history or story.

This postmodern destabilization of traditional historical discourse is also explored in the focus of Saleem’s narrative. As he proclaims, his story tells of the life of India, not just his own. Yet, the story is extremely egocentric, constantly connecting Saleem to the major events of the post-Independence years. Saleem’s self-centered view of his own importance to India is clearly represented through his role as the most powerful of the —Midnight Children,| the 581 children born during the midnight hour of August 15, 1947, all of whom have fantastic powers. These Midnight Children symbolize a new, hopeful generation of Indians. Yet Saleem sees his own version of the story to be more important than the external history, such as when he narrates the moment of Independence of India. He says, —For the moment, I shall turn away from these generalized, macrocosmic notions to concentrate on a more private ritual....I shall avert my eyes from the violence in Bengal and the long pacifying walk of Mahatma Gandhi. Selfish? Narrow-minded? Well, perhaps; but excusably so, in my opinion. After all, one is not born every day| (MC 150).

Furthermore, though Saleem asks the readers how —the career of a single individual [can] be said to impinge on the fate of a nation,| he declares that he is indissolubly linked to

the fate of India (*MC* 330). He claims that he is —linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively‖ (*MC* 330). Michael Reder states that Rushdie suggests that individual history—where the individual privileges his own experiences and interpretations—can be an —alternative historiography for the recapturing of Indian history‖ (228). The individualized nature of this historical discourse —avoids creating a version of history that homogenizes as much as it defines‖ (Reder 228). This opens up space for experiences that do not fit within that progressive or pure image of a nation. Ultimately, Saleem’s individualized perspective suggests a new way of seeing history, one that embraces the inevitable influence of a narrator on a story.

Though the novel is expansive and varied enough to qualify for several different genres—fantasy, magical realism, historical novel, autobiography, political allegory, and so on—perhaps the categorization that best illuminates the novel’s relationship to history is —historiographical metafiction.‖ Metafiction is a particularly postmodern approach to literature which discusses the idea of writing fiction within the fiction itself.

Historiographical metafiction works, then, are novels that feature —conscious self-reflexivity and concern with history....[They] are novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge‖ (Gupta 16).

Not only does Saleem alter the facts of the story or focus on himself—actions which go entirely against the traditional sort of historical discourse—but he frequently remarks on the very nature of history and historical discourse, questioning his role as a narrator.

Midnight’s Children contains a frame story through which Saleem is able to step outside the story and comment on the process of writing the narrative. Nearing the end of his thirtieth

year, Saleem owns a pickle factory in Bombay that makes famous chutneys. He writes his story in the factory office at night and narrates it to a factory worker named Padma. Since the entire novel is being narrated to a specific person, Saleem frequently makes comments about what he includes or leaves out of the story and why, justifying himself to Padma. According to Meenu Gupta, –historiographic metafiction is closely related to the problematic and intricate relationship between real-seeming versions of the past and reality (16). Thus, she argues, its –self reflexive techniques [stir] us to question our own credibility of interpretation of the history.... Historiographic metafiction emphasizes that all past events are those that are *chosen to be narrated* (Gupta 16-7). Padma’s presence even affects Saleem’s ability to tell his story. He feels off-balance when she leaves for a while, saying, –I feel cracks widening down the length of my body; because suddenly I am alone, without my necessary ear, and it isn’t enough (MC 207). This need for an audience once again emphasizes the narratological nature of any historical discourse. Without an audience, Saleem’s story has no meaning.

Saleem’s metafictional asides extend a step beyond Padma to the readers themselves, since he is attempting to write a grand narrative of post-Independence India. He says, –I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I’m afraid, with the shadows of imperfection (MC 642). Thus, once again, Saleem deliberately emphasizes the flexibility of memory and narrative. Tim Gauthier states that Saleem’s metafictional asides –simultaneously question the veracity of any historical reconstruction, thereby investing Saleem’s own narrative with as much probability as that of the dominant discourse (134). This, Gauthier goes on to assert, is Saleem’s truest desire for the readers of his narrative. He says, –All Saleem wants is for his listeners to consider and not discount the

conceivability of the story he tells, for in doing so he makes us question those narratives we have simply come to accept unconditionally as official and historical truth¹¹ (Gauthier 134). Ultimately, the historiographical metafiction as displayed in *Midnight's Children* allows Rushdie to openly address the issues plaguing historical (and literary) discourse today: how should it be written, what should it include, and, most importantly, who gets to write it. Saleem's story, though full of conflicting statements, asides, tangent storylines, and self-referential comments, offers a glimpse of a new type of historical narrative, free from old limitations or expectations. His history is expansive yet intensely personal, one of the millions of possible versions of India.

At the end of the novel, Rushdie's postmodern, hybrid, and imaginative form of historical discourse is summed up in a single image. Saleem equates the project he had undertaken—to tell the story of his and India's lives, with all of the density, variety, and plurality he so loves about the nation—to that of the pickling process of creating chutney. According to Michael Reder, "History, like making chutney, involves both preserving and combining a finite number of ingredients from an almost indefinite number of choices. It also involves the altering of form, changing yet preserving¹² (242). Saleem, when setting out to tell his tale, echoes this feeling of the infinity of possibilities: "And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane!" (MC 4).

Yet through this new type of historical discourse, he can attempt to express the whole of the story. Saleem claims, "Every pickle jar (you will forgive me if I become florid for a moment) contains, therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! ...in words and pickles, I

have immortalized my memories (MC 642). This —chutnification of history (MC 642) represents a way of writing history that purposefully celebrates diversity, imperfections, and the contributions of imagination. Thus, —to pickle is to give immortality...and above all...to give it shape and form—that is to say, meaning (MC 644). Tim Gauthier says that Saleem is driven by a feeling that —what makes India truly India is slowly being eradicated by persistent reductionist/essentialist/communalist tendencies with the country, particularly as it emerged during the time of Emergency under Indira Gandhi. Saleem seems to hope that his story will give an alternate history of India, which, despite the difficult bits, will in the end represent it more fully and honestly than the types of histories its leaders may think it needs. He says, —One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth...that they are, despite everything, acts of love (MC 644). Saleem thus defends his alternate view of history, pleading for understanding because he spoke out of love for India, out of a hope that the nation might have a brighter future.

Midnight's Children doesn't offer any simple answers; even the symbol of the chutney is extremely complex and varying. Instead, it suggests a new way to view the past, one that turns from the essentializing and exclusive history of colonization and progress to an always-evolving, ever-expanding narrative of the nation. In the novel, Saleem hopes that by —recreating the nation in his own image, he may be empowered to propose some alternate paths for the nation's future. By taking control of the narrative, by investing himself with narratorial agency, Saleem becomes the subject rather than the object of history (Gauthier 155). This opens up incredible possibilities for all postcolonial subjects, then, not just for

Indians. The chutnification of history allows those who never found themselves within the traditional historical discourse to write their own stories, to embrace their diversity or reconcile themselves to the suffering or joy of the past. Furthermore, a celebration of hybridity and diversity in history will ultimately open a place for the growing number of migrant or transnational people, such as Rushdie himself, who do not fit into expected national or cultural categories. The constant revision, additions, and emendations that are perfectly acceptable in this type of historical discourse will ultimately keep history alive because it will be flexible enough to change as the world changes.

Chapter Three

Refusing National Hybridity in *Shame*

—Do not let this happen! Do not permit the endless duality of masses-and-classes, capital-and-labour, them-and-us to come between us! We, I cried passionately, —must be a third principle...!

—*Midnight's Children*

For decades before India and Pakistan gained their independence from Great Britain, Muslim intellectuals and politicians had dreamed of having their own homeland where they could be free from the oppression of the Hindu majority that dominated India. Despite the efforts of Indian leaders like Gandhi and Nehru, who desired a nation that could rise above religious differences, the colony was officially divided along religious lines in 1947. While India was to be a secular country united in its diversity, Pakistan—made up of two geographically separate wings, East and West Pakistan—was intended to be a haven for Muslims and a pure land set aside for Allah. In Urdu and Persian, in fact, the name Pakistan translates to —land of the pure, reinforcing that original intention for the nation. Yet since its beginnings, Pakistan has been rife with political corruption, violence, and repression of women. In his novel *Shame*, Salman Rushdie condemns the idea of the —pure nation, a constructed entity founded upon strict binaries like male/female, pure/impure, and us/them. Rushdie uses the story of an imagined country—a thinly-veiled Pakistan—to show the instability of such constructions and hierarchies. Ultimately, this novel serves as a harsh

warning of the bitter consequences for a nation which refuses to embrace the freedom and flexibility that come with hybridity.

Ideas about what the nation is, what it ought to be, and who gets to decide are undergoing major revisions in the postcolonial age. As nations in Africa and Asia began emerging from under colonialism during the mid-twentieth century, many theorists and critics began to wonder if the Western Enlightenment idea of the nation-state was still relevant. According to Homi Bhabha, –The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities...are in a profound process of redefinition (7). Because of the complexities of the contemporary world, he argues, the idea of a nation containing one single, homogenized national culture is no longer tenable. This issue of nationhood is one that plagues Rushdie, continually appearing throughout his work. In *Midnight’s Children*, he presents a vision of India as his ideal hybrid nation. According to Patrick Hogan, professor of English at University of Connecticut, this hybrid nation is a –pluralistic imagination, a view of nationhood not as a place where individual and group diversity are subjugated to absolutism but where national unity provides instead a common ground for multiple forms of democratic participation (512). In this view, the nation does not need to repress the natural heterogeneity of a population, but can actively embrace it.

Yet Pakistan, though once part of India, stands in stark contrast to this idealistic hybridity. In *Shame*, published three years after *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie explores a nation whose vision is completely opposite to India’s hybrid mixture. This novel tells the story of the families of two men who rise to positions of power in a country that pursues its vision of a perfect and pure nation as ruthlessly as the men pursue political power. In that

national narrative, –the oneness of nationhood is authoritarian-centralized, homogenous, dominated by a single individual, a single party, a single ethnicity. This vision of the nation seeks to eliminate or control diversity and is...continually embattled, for it is endlessly challenged by rival authorities, centers, homogeneities (Hogan 511). The leaders declare what the nation will be like, and then do whatever they must in order to make that vision reality. According to Homi Bhabha, creating this sort of nation can only be achieved through violence and repression. He states that the –extremity of nationalist movements, as in Serbia during the late eighties and nineties, –proves that the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood (Bhabha 7). The nation must remove any history, culture, or people who do not fit into that national identity, or else the nation will not be legitimate by its own standards.

Furthermore, according to Hogan, national identities of this type are not intrinsic, but must be taught. He says that a person’s identification with categories such as –sex, race, religion and –nationality and economic class are not –the result of introspection. Rather, they derive primarily from explicit or implicit imputation. A child cannot look into a mirror or into his or her heart and discover that he or she is Indian or Pakistani, Hindu or Muslim. These are categories he or she learns from others, directly or indirectly (Hogan 517). Thus Pakistan, and other nations that desire a pure identity, must first use violence to purge any impurities and then must train its people to accept the new truth. According to Rushdie, the main way that Pakistan compels its people to accept that new version of the truth is through religion. He asserts that –autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith, because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore

up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked (Shame 266). The faithful Muslims of Pakistan, in Rushdie's perspective, were too afraid to confront leaders who used the rhetoric of religion to justify their actions, and eventually lost even the ability to see the truth behind their lies.

Not only does this vision of national purity spark violence and repression, but it is inherently false and must be intentionally constructed on top of the true nature of things. According to Rushdie, Pakistan is the ultimate constructed nation. The two Wings (now Pakistan and Bangladesh) were separated by 994 miles of Indian territory. Pakistan was —that fantastic bird of a place, two Wings without a body, sundered by the land-mass of its greatest foe, joined by nothing but God (S 186). The only thing that held the fragile nation together during the 24 years before the Bangladesh Liberation War was Islam and determination. Rushdie states that the —famous moth-eaten partition of India only gave —Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without. (Al-Lah's new country: two chunks of land a thousand miles apart. A country so improbable that it could almost exist) (S 57). Thus, Rushdie argues, religion was also used to try to hold the two very disparate parts of the nation together, giving them one identity.

The country's name is just as much a forced construction as its geographic location. While the name does translate to —Land of the Pure, it was also constructed to refer to the different people groups who would make up the nation. The Muslim intellectuals living in England who conceived the idea for the nation itself created an acronym that would reference all of the various Muslim homelands of Northwestern India. —Pakistan thus also translates to —P for the Punjabis, A for the Afghans, K for the Kashmiris, S for Sind and the _tan, ' they

say, for Baluchistan (S 85). Thus its very name is, as Rushdie's narrator asserts, a –word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past (S 85-6). Rushdie uses –palimpsest, a term originally used to refer to manuscripts on which the text was scraped or washed off and written over again, to describe the sudden existence of a purely Muslim nation when only one day before it had been a hybrid place. He states that –a palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. The past was rewritten; there was nothing else to be done (S 85-6). Yet as later events and Rushdie's novel show, the palimpsest of Pakistan was incomplete and fragile, ultimately unable to completely cover over the words beneath it.

Finally, Pakistan removed itself from its true past by embracing all of the people that migrated in after the partition. These new people, –the distant cousins and half-acquaintances and total strangers who poured in from the east to settle in the Land of God, were the ones who –took over and got things going (S 80). As Rushdie reflects elsewhere in his work, because migrants are disconnected from their history and original identity, they must find a new way to understand themselves. In *Shame* he states, –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 and old photographs, until even their owners fail to recognize them (60). Having been stripped of their personal histories, these migrants have no choice but to accept as truth the new myth of Pakistan's purity.

To further emphasize the constructed fictionality of a –pure nation, Rushdie's novel *Shame* is not set in Pakistan, or, at least, –not quite (22). The narrator frequently interrupts

the flow of his narrative to discuss his motives and intentions for writing the novel, repeatedly insisting that his novel is not just about Pakistan. He then lists all of the things he would have to mention if he were writing a novel about Pakistan: corrupt politicians, extreme censorship, political nepotism, rampant anti-Semitism, drug smuggling, and unreliable newspapers. Yet after extensively detailing these problems of Pakistan, he says, –By now, if I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing!|| (S 67-8). But –fortunately,|| the narrator says, –I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that’s all right, nobody need get upset|| (S 68). So while the story is clearly meant to be an indictment of both the corruption of Pakistan’s leaders and the instability of its national narrative, he asserts that the lessons of not-Pakistan’s story can be applicable for many nations and peoples around the world.

The story of his nameless nation begins in a small border town simply called –Q,|| which he repeatedly asserts is *not* the Pakistani city of Quetta, nor is the national capital, Karachi, the same as the real city of Karachi. Two of the major political and military leaders in the novel, Chairman Iskander Harappa and President Raza Hyder, clearly parallel Pakistan’s Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia ul Haq, respectively. Rushdie’s narrator asserts that, despite the similarities, his imagined nation is not exactly Pakistan. Just like the true palimpsest of Pakistan, he states, –there are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality|| (S 22). The fact that his imaginary country and the real Pakistan occupy the same space shows that the real nation is just as fictional, imaginary, and false as the other. Catherine Cundy states that the –fact of parallel ‘realities’ in the text—

the fictional nation and its dictatorial oligarchy overlaying but never obscuring their ‘factual’ counterparts—and the arguments that are generated by the fictional realities—is foundational to the message of the novel (45). With every parallel—similar leaders, similar religion, similar political upheaval, similar wars, similar female repression—the distinctions between the ‘real’ world and the ‘imagined’ world become less clear.

In addition to violently enforcing purity and erasing a more hybrid past, the ‘pure’ nation must also reinforce established hierarchies in order to retain that national purity. In Rushdie’s imagined Pakistan, the one hierarchy that is most strictly upheld is the dominance of men over women. When Raza Hyder’s wife fails to give birth to a son, he hysterically tries to persuade the doctor that he misdiagnosed the baby’s sex. When Iskander Harappa decides to have a mistress in the city, he banishes his wife Rani to a solitary life at his estate in the country. Arjumand, Harappa’s daughter, desires so much to be worthy of her father that she disguises her own feminine beauty and earns the nickname ‘virgin Ironpants’ (S 164). When a man wants to marry Raza Hyder’s mentally-delayed daughter Sufiya, her parents agree, never asking her opinion on the matter. Bilquis’ father earns the nickname Mahmoud the Woman meaning ‘Mahmoud the Weakling, the Shameful, the Fool’ (S 58).

Over and over again throughout the novel, the male characters try to emphasize their dominance over the women in their lives and over the ‘feminine’ in general. Rushdie laments this treatment, saying that ‘repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well’ (S 181). He straightforwardly accuses Pakistan of harsh gender repression: ‘—Their chains...are no fictions. They exist. And they are getting heavier’ (S 181). Samir Dayal, professor of English

at Bentley University, has written many articles and books on Postcolonial and South Asian literature, including several important essays on Salman Rushdie. According to Dayal, –Rushdie’s disenchantment with Pakistan as a nation...and his questioning of its metaphorically and geographically defining boundaries, is homologous with his deflation of a rhetoric of phallic self-sufficiency, a rhetoric that bolsters ‘nation-ness’ in a patriarchal Symbolic (–Liminalities 45). Pakistan’s dependence on its masculine and patriarchal dominance, Dayal and Rushdie assert, actually cause harm to the nation as a whole.

Throughout the novel, Rushdie works to destabilize those hierarchies, revealing the inherent weakness of such distinctions. According to M. Keith Booker, director of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at University of Arkansas, Rushdie frequently embraces confusion and ambiguity in his fiction by privileging the –plural over the singular, the polyphonic over the monologic (978). One of the clearest ways he does this is through –the careful construction of dual oppositions...only to deconstruct those oppositions by demonstrating that the apparent polar opposites are in fact interchangeable and mutually interdependent (Booker 978). This is a very important aspect of *Shame*. At the same time that the characters insist upon strict categorization, Rushdie frustrates their efforts by blurring character, gender, and nature boundaries. The story begins with three sisters, Chhunni, Munnee, and Bunny, who are so close to one another that, despite a large difference in age, they –began to resemble each other so closely that even the servants made mistakes (S 12). When one of the sisters becomes pregnant, the other two feign the symptoms as well, and they raise their son together, so that he never knows exactly who his mother was.

Another character who undergoes a transformation is Sufiya Zinobia Hyder, the daughter who suffered from —brain fever,|| freezing her mind in childhood while her body grew. The narrator states that he made Sufiya slow —to make her pure|| (S 123). Because of this slowness, he says, —she remains, for me, somehow clean (*pak*) in the midst of a dirty world|| (S 123). Because she is clean, however, she becomes a sort of scapegoat for all of the —emotions that should have been felt, but were not—such as regret for a harsh word, guilt for a crime, embarrassment, propriety, shame|| (S 125). She seems to sense these unfelt emotions and somehow take them into herself. As the years pass, the crimes of the political leaders, the public lies, the repression of women—all of which go by unashamedly—increase, until Sufiya is transformed by the Shame inside her. Her father notices that —the edges of Sufiya Zinobia were beginning to become uncertain, as if there were two beings occupying that air-space, competing for it, two entities of identical shape but of tragically opposed natures|| (S 248). This description echoes that of the imaginary nation —sharing the same space|| as the real nation. M. Keith Booker states that —such metamorphoses powerfully question the view of the self as a stable, self-contained entity|| (980). Finally, Sufiya literally transforms into a physical representation of that Shame: —On all fours, the calluses thick on her palms and soles. [Her] black hair...long now and matted around her face, enclosing it like fur; the pale skin of her *mohajir* ancestry burned and toughened by the sun, bearing like battle scars the lacerations of bushes, animals, her own itch-scratching nails. Fiery eyes and the stink of ordure and death|| (S 269-70). Booker states that this —ability of the self to be transformed into something that was formerly alien to itself interrogates the boundary between self and other, challenging the validity of even that fundamental duality|| (980). By detablizing the

identities of these characters, Rushdie shows that all identities, whether national or personal, are mutable and flexible, not rigidly pure or singular.

Ultimately, as Rushdie shows in *Shame*, the true nature of things will show through, no matter how hard one works to cover it up. The monster within Sufiya hunts down and destroys the men who had controlled her life, her father Raza Hyder and her husband Omar Khayyam Shakil, the powerfully shameless leaders of the nation. The novel ends when Pakistan's unfelt shame finally overwhelms Sufiya, sending out a -shockwave that demolishes the house, and after it the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the seall (S 305). In the end, the pressure grew too great and the suppressed truth broke forth, destroying the entire nation.

Despite the dark ending to the novel, Rushdie does not entirely condemn Pakistan. He seems to argue that the blame rests on corrupt leaders who supported the violent repression of difference. Perhaps, he muses, Pakistan was just a miracle that could never work. He says, -Pakistan, the peeling, fragmented, palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind....Or perhaps the place was just *insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements, midriffbaring immigrant saris versus demure, indigenous Sindhi shalwar-kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then: a miracle that went wrongll (S 86). By telling the story of a nation which has been destroyed by its singular vision of a homogenized culture, Rushdie warns his audience to avoid these pitfalls. He states that nations built on such premises usually end in one of two options— -disintegration, or a new dictatorshipll—yet, he hopefully suggests, -there is a third...the substitution of a new myth for the old onell (S 266). He then recommends three replacement myths available on short notice: —liberty, equality, fraternityll (S 266). While hope may not be

possible for *Shame's* imagined nation, Rushdie seems to hold hope for a brighter future for the real one.

Chapter Four

Individual Hybridity in *The Satanic Verses*

–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.¶

--*Shame*

–‘To be born again,’ sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, ‘first you have to die’¶ (SV 3). Thus begins Salman Rushdie’s sprawling epic *The Satanic Verses*, a novel that explores the difficult and ambiguous evolution a migrant undergoes in the translation from East to West, from purity to hybridity. Many of its characters are British Asians—immigrants from South Asian nations—who are making new lives for themselves in London while simultaneously attempting to determine their cultural identity. How much should one retain from home, and how much can be added from the adopted nation? The journeys of the two protagonists, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, particularly illuminate the difficulty migrants face when coming to terms with their place in between cultures. Rushdie uses the experiences of Gibreel and Saladin to show that this –in-between¶ position, though difficult, is ultimately a positive one through which newness can enter global culture.

The novel begins with the explosion of the *Bostan*, a plane flying from Bombay to London and carrying Saladin and Gibreel. As the passengers fall from the plane, among them are –the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten

meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home* (SV 5). This metaphorical debris symbolizes the dislocation and loss of identity that occurs when a person moves from one country to another. In his book of essays *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie states that the real issue of *The Satanic Verses* is –the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis...that is the migrant condition (394). Throughout the novel, the characters are forced to accept that their identity is no longer singular, though their past also prevents them from fully entering the culture of their new homes. They are split between the two worlds. An inability to embrace this newness or a refusal to adapt to a new life in the West could, according to Rushdie, ultimately destroy the migrant.

Homi Bhabha, in fact, asserts that this –split subject—one divided between two cultures—is actually the most relevant characterization of the modern age. He states that –it is the schizoid or ‘split’ subject that articulates, with the greatest intensity, the disjunction of time and being that characterize the social syntax of the postmodern condition (Bhabha 307). Thus, as Rushdie argues, the most poignant expression of the ambiguous nature of today’s world is the individual migrant. Throughout his collected works, Rushdie reveals a strong bias for the individual over the communal, focusing on personal struggles with these existential questions of identity and homeland. In *Midnight’s Children*, the narrator Saleem Sinai defends this focus by claiming that every individual’s story contains the entirety of India’s story, as well. He states, –I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, and, in fact, –every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you’ll have to swallow a world (MC 535). Thus, by telling the story of a single migrant, Rushdie is able to simultaneously expound on the larger, communal concepts of home and identity.

While Rushdie does attempt in *The Satanic Verses* to express the experience of the South Asian community of East London—its diversity, its struggles, its hopes—the true heart of the novel lies in individuals who must confront their inner dichotomy between East and West. Rushdie uses the characters of Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta as symbols to explore this issue of personal hybridity. He does not make the mistake of asserting that all migrants have the same experience as Saladin and Gibreel—that would essentialize what is actually a widely varied and intensely personalized experience. As wealthy actors from Bombay, their journeys West are certainly not like that of many immigrants who leave home in search of better lives for themselves or their children. Rushdie does, however, make the point that while the material circumstances of migrants may vary widely, the issue of coming to grips with one's in-between-ness is the same for all those who migrate.

This fundamental struggle is clearly depicted in the seemingly divergent lives of Saladin and Gibreel. Saladin Chamcha—originally Salahuddin Chamchawalla—was born among the wealthy elite of Bombay, yet he was never satisfied with India. From an early age, he dreamed of leaving –that Bombay of dust [and] vulgarity‖ and escaping to his –dream city, *ellowen deeowen*‖ (SV 37). When his father offers to send him to England for school, Saladin leaves and never looks back. Throughout his adult life, Saladin does everything he can to become British, so that he can be –worthy of the challenge represented by the phrase *Civis Britannicus Sum*‖ (SV 412). He claims that he –pursued his own idea of *the good*, sought to become that which he most admired, dedicated himself with a will bordering on obsession to the conquest of Englishness‖ (SV 265). To achieve his goal, Saladin cuts out anything within himself that does not fit his idealized image of England, even going so far as to change his name and his accent.

In contrast to Saladin's desperation to shed his Indianness, Gibreel is proud of his —inviolately subcontinental heart‖ (SV 6). Gibreel—born Ismail Najmuddin—is also from Bombay, but is the son of a poor man who spent his life delivering lunches to workers across the city. He took his new name, which means —the angel Gabriell in Urdu, when he entered the Bombay film industry. By the time that the novel begins, he had established himself as a mega-star in Hindu —theologicals‖—films in which he plays various Hindu gods. He is proudly religious, proudly Indian. Yet when he falls in love with an English woman named Allie, the intensity of their relationship and his willingness to ignore his old convictions frighten him. He flees India —because of her, the challenge of her, the newness, the fierceness of the two of them together, the inexorability of an impossible thing that was insisting on its right to becomell (SV 32). What Gibreel truly rebels against is not the relationship, but the idea that he cannot any longer remain —*continuous* —that is, joined to and arising from his past‖ (SV 441).

The Satanic Verses is, as Rushdie states, —the story of two painfully divided selves‖ (IH 397). For Saladin, —the division is secular and societal: he is torn...between Bombay and London, between East and West. For the other, Gibreel Farishta, the division is spiritual, a rift of the soul‖ (IH 397). Both strive to retain wholeness in their identity, despite being pulled in two different directions. Yet after their fateful fall from the *Bostan*, neither man can continue to ignore his multiplicity, his ambiguity, whether cultural or spiritual. Upon their miraculous landing, Saladin is arrested by immigration officers who refuse to listen to his protests that he is an upper class British citizen. Instead they brutally beat and mock him, and, to his horror, he discovers that his legs have transformed into —tough, bony, almost fleshless calves, terminating in a pair of shiny, cloven hoofs, such as one might find on a

billy goatll (SV 163). He is taken to a sanitarium, where he encounters many other half-human, half-animal creatures. He learns that they are all immigrants, transformed into these strange monsters by the British perception of them. A half-man, half-manticore tells Saladin, –They describe us... That’s all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they constructll (SV 173-4). He escapes but is forced to take refuge in a South Asian immigrant neighborhood in London, the only people who will accept him. At first he chafes among them, declaring, –You’re not my people. I’ve spent half my life trying to get away from youll (SV 262). Yet as his condition deteriorates, he finds himself increasingly identifying with these immigrants, people who still cherish their homes and culture while living in and embracing England.

Gibreel’s transformation after the fall is the exact opposite of Saladin’s—he morphs into an angel, complete with a halo that sheds a –warm golden light...coming from a point just behind his headll (SV 199). He fears that his intense dreams—in which he is the archangel Gabriel, speaking to the Prophet Mahound—are bleeding into his real life. When confronted with the idea that perhaps the delineations between deity and devilry or between truth and lies are not as clear as he had imagined, he begins to go mad. He projects his confusion onto the city of London, that –most protean and chameleon of citiesll (SV 207). Gibreel becomes convinced of the city’s truly sinister intentions: –In this pandemonium of mirages he often heard laughter: the city was mocking his impotence, awaiting his surrender, his recognition that what existed here was beyond his powers to comprehend, let alone to changell (SV 338). As he dips further into madness, Gibreel fully embraces his angelic nature, declaring that he will finally solve all –of these England-induced ambiguities, these Biblical-Satanic confusions!ll (SV 364). Floating high above London, he declares that the problem

with the English, the reason for their moral ambiguity is *—in a word...their weather* (SV 365). He declares that *—when the light is not brighter than the dark, when the land is not drier than the sea, then clearly a people will lose the power to make distinctions and commence to see everything...as much-the-same, nothing-to-choose, give-or-take* (SV 365). To solve this problem of *—moral fuzziness*, Gibreel declares that he will *—tropicalize* the city, turning it into another Bombay, where truth is not so indistinct (SV 365). He does manage to increase the temperature over London, yet ambiguity and hybridity remain in the world. In the end, despite Allie's attempts to save him, Gibreel takes his own life, unable to bear his moral ambiguity.

Saladin, on the other hand, does survive. His time among the eclectic and inclusive immigrants at the Shaandaar Café teaches him that he cannot entirely escape his past and that there are many different ways to be British. After recovering his human form, he becomes involved in the political issues of his adopted community, finding a camaraderie there he had never imagined. Furthermore, Saladin eventually faces up to his own past as well as *—the great verities of love and death* (IH 398). Saladin comes to understand the deep importance of family, of home, of roots—no matter where one goes in life. While he works to reconstruct his life in London, he receives news that his father—with whom he'd always had a broken relationship—is gravely ill and near death. Without a second thought, Saladin flies back home to Bombay. He realizes that *—only a few days ago that back home would have rung false*. But now his father was dying and old emotions were sending tentacles out to grasp him (SV 528). As he reconnects with his father in his last days, Saladin feels *—hourly closer to many old, rejected selves, many alternative Saladins—or rather Salahuddins—*

which had split off from himself as he made his various life choices|| (SV 538). This return to India allows him to finally reconcile both his past and his present.

Ultimately both men are faced with the challenge of accepting and understanding their own hybrid natures, as every migrant must do. The task is certainly difficult, and Rushdie admits it: –not all mutants survive|| (SV 49). While Gibreel is unable to accept his own spiritual ambiguity and thus commits suicide, Saladin finds a way to maintain both his Indian roots and his English influence. This cultural multiplicity is, as Rushdie argues, a positive thing. In fact, he states that –*The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs|| (IH 394). This intermingling—which could never happen without a migrant to perform it—is exactly –*how newness enters the world*|| (IH 394).

Homi K. Bhabha based his discussion of cultural evolution on the truths expressed in *The Satanic Verses*. Bhabha states that the act of negotiating the migrant identity—the sort of journey that Saladin undergoes—is crucial in the development of newness in culture. He says, –[T]he regulation and negotiation of those spaces...are continually, *contingently*, _opening out_, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference|| (Bhabha 313). As migrants find their places within the cultures of home and location, they are simultaneously opening new spaces, dissolving boundaries and erasing limits on who or how someone can be. Finally, Bhabha states that these subjects who are neither –One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between*|| find their –agency in a form of the _future_ where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory|| (313). As Saladin says, –*I must think of myself, from now on, as*

living perpetually in the first instant of the future (SV 549). The migrant, living inside the -in-between spaces of culture, is neither wholly dependent on the past nor simply passing a meaningless present.

While the process may be difficult, Saladin's redemption shows that finding completion and a fulfilling identity is possible, even while living between cultures. Throughout his works, Rushdie uses his own life as a prime example of the benefits of cultural plurality. He discovers that the -in-between places—between cultures, between nations, between languages—are actually the only places where something new can be created. Ultimately, Rushdie states that this cultural newness is the -great possibility that mass migration gives the world and [he has] tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love song to our mongrel selves (IH 394). Saladin's journey towards accepting his hybrid cultural identity illuminates the hope and beauty of a life -in-between.

Chapter Five

The Hybridity of Language

—All these different lingos cuttofy us off from one another,||
she explained. —Only English brings us together.||

--*The Moor's Last Sigh*

In Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame*, the narrator repeatedly claims that his story is about an invented nation, a –looking-glass Pakistan|| (87), despite the similarities between his imaginary land and the real nation. The narrator does this to avoid condemnation for both the content of his story—he sharply critiques the nation's leaders—and the language in which he tells his story. He imagines his critics shouting, –*Poacher! Pirate! ... We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies?*|| (S 22). This controversy over the legitimacy of an outsider writing about Pakistan in English reflects the larger debate in postcolonial literary studies about the significance of the language. Many of Rushdie's novels, all of which are written in English, explore this foundational issue of language. His diverse characters—Bombay businessmen, Bollywood actors, East London café owners, artists, musicians—consistently grapple with the implications of speech and language. Ultimately, Rushdie uses unique language throughout his novels to emphasize the linguistic hybridity of India, and, in a larger sense, the hybridity of language itself in the postmodern age. English, he argues, is no longer the property of the colonizers alone, but is being remade into the global language –english,|| a language that reflects the truly hybrid nature of today's world.

Rushdie's exploration of the migrant experience in *The Satanic Verses* points out that the loss of language is among the most striking and poignant losses migrants may undergo. The South Asian community that gives Saladin a haven after he has been transformed into a devilish goat-man represent the various reactions that migrants have to this crucial issue of language. Though she is responsible for creating and running the very successful Shaandaar Café, Sufyan's wife Hind carries about her –the miasma of defeat|| (SV 257). In comparison to Sufyan's peaceful acceptance of their new life in England, –she look[s] extinguished, like a lightbulb with a broken filament, like a fizzled star|| (SV 257). Hind realizes that –this process of translation|| has altered everything she had valued about her life, particularly her language. Hind is –obliged, now, to emit these alien sounds that [make] her tongue feel tired|| (SV 257). Her sadness about this new language she is –obliged|| to speak is inextricably bound up with her grief for the loss of her home, her community, and her customs. Yet in contrast to Hind's reaction to English, her own daughters have easily adopted the speech of the young Londoners around them. Having left Bangladesh as very young children, they feel no connection to their –homeland|| and instead identify themselves as British. Mishal confides to Saladin: –Bangladesh in't nothing to me. Just some place Dad and Mum keep banging on about,|| and Anahita concludes, –Bungleditch....What I call it, anyhow|| (SV 267).

Saladin's reaction to the language transformation that migrants face is diametrically opposed to Hind's. Rather than mourning the language of his home, Saladin enthusiastically embraces the supposed prestige and class of Standard English. His wife Pamela comes to realize that he had never truly loved her, but had loved –that voice stinking of Yorkshire pudding and hearts of oak, that hearty, rubicund voice of ye olde dream-England which he so desperately wanted to inhabit|| (SV 186). As soon as he gets to England, Saladin changes his

accent to match the speech around him, earning him the nickname of –Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice,|| famous for his successful career as a voice-over actor (SV 60). Saladin becomes a master of mimicry. Yet when he returns to India with an acting troupe, he finds –those long suppressed locutions, those discarded vowels and consonants [beginning] to leak out of his mouth|| (SV 49). His ability to maintain the image of the consummate Briton weakens when he is surrounded by the voices of his past. Despite this, Saladin refuses to accept that he could combine his disparate voices. He states, –When I attempt Hindustani these days, people look polite. This is me|| (SV 58). Having trained himself to be purely English for so long, he begins –to hear, in India’s Babel, an ominous warning: don’t come back again. When you have stepped through the looking-glass you step back at your peril. The mirror may cut you to shreds|| (SV 58). Saladin convinces himself that since he has adopted English, he cannot ever return to India, linguistically or otherwise. In his mind, the two are so intrinsically different that they cannot ever intermingle or coexist.

The ambiguous relationship towards language that the migrants of *The Satanic Verses* display is relevant to the experiences of many people around the world. The issue of language is a vital aspect of postcolonial studies in general, because, as Ngugi wa Thiong’o states, –Language *is* culture|| (qtd. in Ghosh 135). Bishnupriya Ghosh, professor of English at University of California Santa Barbara, asserts that –the reckoning between authentic vernaculars and hybridized tongues/foreign languages is as old as the field of postcolonial studies|| (132). Ngugi’s is perhaps the most famous name out of a group of postcolonial scholars who advocate that all formerly colonized people should write exclusively in their native vernaculars rather than in English. Ghosh states that Ngugi believes that –English, as an elite language of privilege spoken by the urban few, further entrenches and continues the

uneven and violent hegemonic social relations of colonialism¹¹ (132). This controversy over writing novels in English rather than continuing to write in vernacular languages has long been debated in India as well. Ghosh states that for the first fifty years of the Indian novel in English, 1930-1980, authors adhered strictly to Standard British English, reinforcing its apparent superiority over anything non-Western (133). In an essay in his book, *Step Across This Line*, Rushdie states, –For some Indian critics, English-language Indian writing will never be more than a post-colonial anomaly, the bastard child of Empire, sired on India by the departing British; its continuing use of the old colonial tongue is seen as a fatal flaw that renders it forever inauthentic¹² (148). These critics believe that, because of its colonial past, English can never truly represent the Indian experience.

Yet both Ghosh and Rushdie—along with many other writers—believe that this fear of English has lost its relevance in the past decades. Ghosh states that –the cultural anxiety that [writers like Meenakshi] Mukherjee locate in the Indian novel in English, the essentializing and homogenizing gestures she reads there,¹³ describe a phase of English writing in India that has passed (149). That time span of 1930-1980 –corresponds to the Nehruvian vision of a modern progressive India when there was a dire need to establish common national registers and a field of communication¹⁴ (Ghosh 149). The use of English was a problem then because they were still trying to establish the idea of India as an unified, secular nation. But as Ghosh goes on to argue, –in post-Emergency postmodern India, the new novelists do not even attempt to capture the whole Indian reality¹⁵ (149). Beginning in the eighties and nineties, she states, Indian writers in English have –twisted, pulled, broken, and played with the language,¹⁶ effectively making it something new (Ghosh 133). This new language is not, as critics like Mukherjee feared, a –wrenching away from the mother tongue

and an ‘indigenous’ experience of India (Ghosh 133). Instead, writers like Salman Rushdie infuse their specific vernacular or cultural backgrounds into the language, thus creating a “situated hybridity...that expresses their relation to the world” (133). This opens up a space for many different versions of language and speech, setting them all as equal and legitimate modes of representation.

Rushdie furthermore argues that most Indians of the younger generation do not think of English as the “invaders’ language,” but rather as just “one of the tools they have to hand” (1964). As the years pass, the memories of colonialism also recede, diminishing the need within postcolonial subjects to react or respond to colonialist hegemony. Instead, Rushdie writes from a forward-looking perspective, in which one can reappropriate aspects of the old European hegemony and make them into something new. In *Step Across This Line*, he states, “English has become an Indian language. Its colonial origins mean that, like Urdu and unlike all other Indian languages, it has no regional base; but in all other ways, it has emphatically come to stay” (149). In fact, he asserts that the real language debate occurring in modern India is not about the use of English, but rather the dominance of Hindi over the many other vernacular languages. Ghosh states that despite “political opposition from non-Hindi-speaking regions to the language policy,” the Bombay film industry has effectively spread Hindi throughout India (135). Yet, she continues, “Resistance to Hindi... remains strong in many parts of the country” (Ghosh 135). Thus, since many non-Hindi speakers have ambiguous feelings toward that language, a “typically South Asian variant of English has developed that is highly Indianized in incorporating speech patterns from not only Hindi but also other Indian languages” (Ghosh 135). Rushdie concludes that English is essential in India, if only because it permits “two Indians to talk to each other in a tongue which neither

party hates (IH 65). English, in this sense, is able to unify such a uniquely heterogeneous nation.

In fact, Rushdie uses the issues surrounding English in India to construct that hybrid national identity that he so desires for India. According to Michael Gorra, *–Midnight’s Children* explores a complicated set of questions about cultural identity and allegiance, yet Rushdie further complicates them by locating them in –the ground of the novel’s language itself (191). The emphasis on language and linguistics carries throughout the novel, recurring in images, themes, and metaphors. Samir Dayal states that –Saleem chutnifies, or re-members his own story, his own birth and growth, in a linguistic metaphor, as a progress from a ‘full stop’ to an encyclopaedia—even a whole language (–Talking 439). The very words with which Saleem chooses to tell his story contribute to the discussion of what India is, or ought, to be. According to Bishnupriya Ghosh, Homi Bhabha argues that –postmodern hybridity...must be understood as an act whose enunciative space and context becomes the locus of inquiry (134). This means that, as is shown in *Midnight’s Children*, language is a crucial location for the discussion of cultural hybridity. Michael Gorra asserts that Rushdie uses a hybrid English in order to –imagine a unifying form for the subcontinent as a whole, from Kerala to Kashmir, from Bombay to the jungles of Bengal; a country that has indeed made a fresh start at the moment of independence, in which the differences between Hindu and Muslim and Sikh, Brahmin and beggar, are contained within a single structure (189). Ultimately, the narrative of *Midnight’s Children* tries to imagine a sense of –Indian national identity capacious enough to include someone like Saleem, or indeed like Rushdie himself (Gorra 198).

Throughout his novels, Rushdie enthusiastically celebrates this hybridized form of English that has been remade into an Indian language. According to Michael Gorra, Rushdie –makes English prose an *omnium gatherum* of whatever seems to work, sprinkled with bits of Urdu, eclectic enough even to accommodate cliché, unbound by any grammatical straight-jacket. The very structure of the sentence seems to open possibilities, to recut the borrowed clothes of English until they’ve become those of that new Indian language Angrezil (193). –Angrezil is a made-up name for Indianized English, first mentioned by Rushdie’s narrator in *Shame* who feels constrained by the limits of the language. He laments –this Angrezi in which [he is] forced to write, and so forever alter what is written (S 33). Yet Gorra argues that Rushdie shows throughout his works that *Shame*’s narrator is wrong to feel frustrated by –Angrezi, because it actually opens up possibilities for new meanings and truer representations. In all of his novels, Rushdie allows his characters to speak English just as Indians—particularly those from Bombay—would speak it. At the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel Farishta shouts, –Proper London, bhai! Here we come! Those bastards down there won’t know what hit them. Meteor or lightning or vengeance of God. Out of thin air, baby. *Dharrraaamm!* Wham, na? What an entrance, yaar. I swear: splat (SV 4). In *Midnight’s Children*, Padma, the Bombay pickle factory worker who listens to Saleem’s narration, encourages him to take care of himself: –Eat, na, food is spoiling....But what is so precious....to need all this writing-shiting? (SV 24). Both of these examples contain syntactical structures and words borrowed from Indian languages.

Ghosh identifies some of these common markers in the dialogue of Rushdie’s 1995 novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. She states, –Hindi and Urdu syntax molds conversations: –[W]here is the air to breathe?’ says one character, instead of the more standard, –Where is

there any air to breathe?’ (*The Moor’s Last Sigh* 23). General Hindi phraseology—‘hate me, don’t me but,’ references to ‘my good-wife,’ idiomatic expressions such as ‘wallow-pallow’ or ‘art-shart’—litters the speech of various characters (MLS 139). Though the narration of these novels is in (mostly) Standard English, many of his characters ‘speak in an indigenized, Indian ‘english,’ that is full of ‘transliterated native words’ (Dayal, ‘Talking’ 433). This peculiar mix acts as a method of reappropriation of the colonizer’s language. As Rushdie says, ‘those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it...[and] carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers’ (IH 64). Rushdie argues that English is the only language in which this is possible, owing to its massive vocabulary and flexibility. The only language ‘to narrate adequately this morphing, layered, globally penetrated locale that is Bombay can be only a cultural resonant vernacular, a hybrid Bombay English’ (Ghosh 139). Thus Rushdie utilizes an Indian form of ‘english,’ one which represents the way that citizens of the cosmopolitan and heterogenous Bombay would actually speak.

Rushdie also plays with the grammatical and syntactical structure of English in order to emphasize the novels’ postmodernity and to further destabilize the long established ideas about what ‘good’ English is. Throughout his writings, Rushdie breaks the accepted rules about sentence length, sentence structure, and, at times, the need for punctuation. One example of this occurs at the very end of *Midnight’s Children*. All his life, Saleem Sinai—as the first of the Midnight Children—had tried to contain all of India within himself, all of its incredible diversity and heterogeneous mix of peoples, languages, and cultures. Eventually Saleem literally begins to crack up, unable to retain wholeness because of the pressure of the enormity of India. As he reaches the end of his narrative, Saleem begins to lose his grip on

his story, and the words and images flow almost without punctuation or pause. As Saleem finally disintegrates, he says, –I hear lies being spoken in the night, anything you want to be you kin be, the greatest lie of all, 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|| (*MC* 647). Rushdie’s disregard for such conventions once again reinforces the idea that he has created a version of the English language that does not have to be constrained by old rules. Rushdie also often combines words or uses short phrases as separate sentences in a list, such as when Saladin Chamcha lists his father’s offences: –Of what did the son accuse the father? Of everything: espionage on child-self, rainbow-pot-stealing, exile. Of turning him into what he might not have become. Of making-a-man of. Of what-will-I-tell-my-friends. Of irreparable sundering and offensive forgiveness|| (*SV* 69).

Along with breaking grammatical conventions, Rushdie fully embraces –low|| culture and language—his novels are rife with the voices of the streets, filled with slang and curse words and crass language. In Rushdie’s Bombay, –always there is the All-India Radio of the streets—its film music, its channa-wallah’s calls, its curses and epithets and endearments and interjections|| (Ghosh 195). Yet at the same moment, Rushdie emphasizes his own hybridity (and that of Bombay) by juxtaposing the specificity of the indigenous voices with Western allusions, references, and idioms. He appears to be equally knowledgeable about the Bombay film industry as he is about American Western films; he references William Shakespeare as often as classic Persian poets like Sa’di or Omar Khayyám. Rushdie quotes French poetry or Latin prose with the same ease with which he uses Hindi, Urdu, or Arabic phrases.

Ultimately, Rushdie places Indianized Bombay English alongside his Oxbridge-trained English, encouraging the intermingling of the two. Thus, Rushdie’s –double-voiced

narration puts into question and ultimately delegitimizes a hegemonic structuration of English as the original and ‘_english’ as the derived form (Dayal, –Talking 433). According to Bill Ashcroft and others, the hybridity of his language destabilizes that binary relationship between English, –the language of the erstwhile imperial centre, and –english, the language which –has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world (qtd. in Dayal, –Talking 433). Michael Gorra states that –the inventive impurity of Rushdie’s heteroglot style provides a challenge to the idea of proper English, the King’s English, and therefore to British colonialism (196). Writers and speakers around the world no longer need to feel that the way that they use English—which is truest to their experience—is somehow not as legitimate as standard British or American English. Rather, Rushdie shows that the English language can be and is being transformed to represent all varieties of experiences and cultures. English is now a truly global language.

Chapter Six

The Future of Hybridity

-The future, even when it was only a question-shrouded glimmer, would not be eclipsed by the past;
even when death moved towards the centre of the stage, life went on fighting for equal rights. ||

-*The Satanic Verses*

The world has changed drastically in the 36 years since Salman Rushdie published his first novel *Grimus*. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, violent religious conflict in India, and the end of Apartheid in South Africa, the political landscape has been altered irrevocably. The advent of the internet, cell phones, and 24-hour news television has made global communication instantaneous and constant. International travel is much faster, allowing people to move between nations and continents with ease. The pace of life and the interconnectivity of nations and cultures have increased remarkably, even in that short span of years. Throughout this time, Rushdie has written about these political and historical changes as they occur. His works have evolved to reflect the changing nature of culture, migrancy, and national identity during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. While his important novels written in the 1980s focus on the early years of India and Pakistan, his later fiction has increasingly emphasized his transnational identity as an immigrant and as a writer. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) range across several continents, with characters frequently moving back and forth

between India, Europe, and the United States. *Fury* (2001) takes place entirely within the West, the first and only novel of his to do so. Finally, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), unlike all his other books, is set in the 15th century and connects the Mughal Empire in India and Renaissance Florence.

Set between the novels of the 1980s, which focus on the creation of the nation and early questions of migrant identity, and the novels of the 2000s, which emphasize transnational and transcultural identities, is *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Published in 1995, the novel explores the way that rising Hindu fundamentalism has threatened the tolerance and hybridity that Rushdie so treasures in India, especially in Bombay. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie writes about the move in the 1980s and 90s to –reclaim‖ Mumbai from the Muslims, and the horrific violence that resulted. The destruction of the 17th century Babri mosque in 1992 set off a deadly chain of events: an attack on a train full of Hindu activists, vicious riots against an innocent Muslim population, and a set of thirteen bombings in Mumbai in response to the riots. Rushdie's narrator, Moraes, though not religious, finds himself caught up in the violence and conflict of Mumbai in the 1990s. He mourns the new face of Bombay, renamed *Mumbai*, made up of reclaimed land and shoddily constructed tenement buildings. Moraes says, –O Beautifiers of the City, did you not see that what was beautiful in Bombay was that it belonged to nobody, and to all? Did you not see the everyday live-and-let-live miracles thronging its overcrowded streets?‖ (*MLS* 350-1).

Rushdie's frustration with the issue of communalism—and what it has done to Bombay—has not dimmed with time. In 2002, Rushdie published a column in *The New York Times* in which he expresses outrage that Indians have not been disturbed or dismayed enough by the increase in Hindu/Muslim violence. He says, –The horrible truth about

communal slaughter in India is that we're used to it|| (*Step Across This Line* 344-5). Yet the root of the problem, he argues, is –something we don't want to look in the face: namely, that in India, as elsewhere in our darkening world, religion is the poison in the blood|| (*SAL* 346). Rushdie's position as an increasingly more recognized public figure and political critic allows him the platform from which he will most likely continue to condemn such divisive communal attitudes in the future.

In contrast to *The Moor's Last Sigh* and his earlier novels, Rushdie's work beginning in the late 1990s shifted to focus almost exclusively on the blending of East and West among migrants. Furthermore, reflecting his own move to live in New York City, Rushdie began writing his novels in and about the United States. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* tells the story of Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, the stars of the pop supergroup VTO who move from Bombay to New York City to pursue a career in music. The novel explores that journey of leaving home as much as it explores the world of sex, drugs, and rock and roll in 1960s and 70s New York. The narrator, their childhood friend Rai, wonders, –What if the whole deal—orientation, knowing where you are, and so on—what if it's all a scam? What if all of it—home, kinship, the whole enchilada—is just the biggest, most truly global, and centuries-oldest piece of brainwashing? Suppose that it's only when you dare to let go that your real life begins?|| (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 176-7). Ultimately, like Vina and Ormus, Rai chooses America's blend of culture and backgrounds over that sense of home, belonging, or place. Throughout this novel, Rushdie praises the hybridity of America. When Ormus leaves India for good, he thinks, –I want to be in America, America where everyone's like me, because everyone comes from somewhere else. All those histories...all that yearning, hope, greed, excess, the whole lot adding up to a fabulous noisy historyless self-inventing citizenry

of jumbles and confusions (GBF 252). Thus *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* seems to assert that America has found the kind of hybridity that could save India from communalism and Pakistan from its cultural rigidity.

Yet Rushdie's praise of America is not without its reservations. In his 2001 novel *Fury*, Rushdie explores the darker side of the American dream. Whereas *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* celebrates the nation's cultural mixture and open-armed acceptance of new people, *Fury* despairs of the meaninglessness of current American culture. Malik Solanka, the narrator, proclaims, —0 Dream-America, was civilization's quest to end in obesity and trivia, at Roy Rogers and Planet Hollywood, in *USA Today* and on E!; or in million-dollar-game-show greed or fly-on-the-wall voyeurism....Who paved paradise and put up a parking lot? Who settled for George W. Bush's boredom and Al Bore's gush? (Fury 86). Solanka is an Indian-born Englishman who —exiles himself to New York in order to protect his family from a deep-seated rage within him. Malik arrives in New York at the pinnacle of its success, wealth, and prestige, a city —in the highest hour of its hybrid, omnivorous power (F 44). Yet simmering beneath that veneer of plenty and ease, Malik senses the same unabated fury that is within himself. He finally realizes that that anger was not the result of American excesses, but rather the failure of the American dream. He argues that this is —the only subject: the crushing of dreams in a land where the right to dream was the national ideological cornerstone, the pulverizing cancellation of personal possibility at a time when the future was opening up to reveal vistas of unimaginable, glittering treasures such as no man or woman had ever dreamed before (F 184).

Despite this, in keeping with Rushdie's other works, the novel ends on a hopeful note: Malik returns to his wife and son. He finds them at a fairground near their home in

London and jumps into the bouncy castle to catch his son's attention. In a moment of lighthearted joy, he imitates –Jay Gatsby, the highest bouncer of them all...[who] lived out, before he crashed, that brilliant, brittle, gold-hatted, exemplary American life (F 82). He jumps higher and higher, hoping for his son Asmaan to see him, –his only true father flying against the sky, *asmaan*, the sky, conjuring up all his lost love and hurling it high into the sky like a white bird plucked from his sleeve (F 259). –Look at me, Asmaan! he cries, –I'm bouncing very well! I'm bouncing higher and higher! (F 259). No matter what happened in the past, no matter what will happen in the future, Malik chooses to embrace hope instead of the fury. Ultimately, the story of Malik Solanka reveals Rushdie's love for the unquenchable hope of America, the same hope that –blazes undimmed from the eyes of all migrant peoples (*Shame* 85).

Not only do Rushdie's later works point towards a hybrid future—one where that hybridity and cultural mixture is an already accepted fact—but so do the works of many authors who write after Rushdie. The publication of *Midnight's Children* sparked a flowering of Indian literature in English, both within India and abroad. Salman Rushdie's innovative use of language, unabashed celebration of the migrant experience, and persistent refusal to accept binary relationships opened a path for writers of the next generation to explore those same issues. Some have stayed in India—such as the highly celebrated Arundhati Roy—but many others have migrated to the West, such as Bharati Mukherjee, Kiran Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Of these authors, two in particular represent Rushdie's ideals about culture and identity. Born only nine years after Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh is an Indian author, now living in New York, whose novels reflect Rushdie's ideas about the fictionality of strictly formed identities. He often writes about the illusory nature of

boundaries, or the –shadow lines,¹ as he calls them. In his most recent novel, *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Ghosh imagines a world where the separations between class, race, religion, and nationality all fade away and a new, hybrid identity emerges. Set amid the Opium Wars of India during the 19th century, the novel portrays a varied group of people who end up aboard a ship named the *Ibis*. Despite their differences, these people are forced to work together to survive, and soon the old separations between them are gone. The ship stands as a symbol for the new, hybrid world of which Ghosh—and Rushdie—dream. One of the characters realizes that –her new self, her new life, had been gestating all this while in the belly of this creature, this vessel that was the Mother-Father of her new family...an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties yet to come² (Ghosh 372). Thus, the idyllic community aboard the *Ibis* is, for Ghosh, a harbinger of a new sort of society that does not need to rely on shadow lines to know itself.

Another important author who reflects Salman Rushdie is Jhumpa Lahiri, an American writer of Bengali decent. Born in 1967, she published her first collection of short stories *The Interpreter of Maladies* in 1999, winning the next year's Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Her stories, split between India and America, often deal with the struggles of finding one's identity as a migrant. Her novel *The Namesake* particularly addresses the identity crisis of being a second-generation Indian immigrant in the US. Like Rushdie, Lahiri does not shy away from presenting her characters ambiguously, leaving readers to interpret how they ought to feel about a character's choices. Some of her immigrants cannot adjust to life in America, but many others find adjusting back to India after living in America equally difficult. Ultimately, Lahiri asserts that migrants can be proud of the brave journey that they have made into a new world. In the last story of her collection, –The Third and Final

Continent,‖ the narrator says, –Whenever [my son] is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years‖ (Lahiri 197-8). Though he knows that his achievement –is quite ordinary,‖ he says, –[T]here are times when it is beyond my imagination‖ (Lahiri 198). Like Rushdie, Lahiri finds the new life of a migrant to be a remarkable, beautiful thing.

Despite the differences in location, characters, and style between many of these writers, they all echo the central theme of Rushdie’s work: hybridity. The idea that newness can come into the world through the hybridity of the nation, the individual person, the language one uses, and the narrative of history is threaded throughout his collected works. In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie works to create a new way of viewing the history of a nation and a people, one which allows room for diversity and heterogeneity. In *Shame*, however, Rushdie shows the dangers of refusing hybridity when a nation forcefully declares what its identity will be. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie tries to articulate the experience of translation and transformation that all migrants undergo when they immigrate West. His characters discover that they must reconcile themselves to the complexity of their cultural and national identities. And finally, Rushdie uses a unique, Indianized form of English throughout these three foundational novels in order to question the established hierarchy of Standard English over personal, hybrid forms of the language.

Hybridity allows for new combinations, new mixtures and new relationships to form between formerly disparate peoples and ideas. Throughout every one of his works, Salman Rushdie praises the –hybridity, impurity, intermingling‖ that comes when cultures are brought in contact with one another (*IH* 394). This newness of culture and understanding is,

as Rushdie states, —the great possibility that mass migration gives to the world‖ (*IH* 394). The position of the migrant—one living between cultures—no longer needs to hold the negative connotations of dislocation, displacement, or homelessness. Rather, as Homi K. Bhabha states, the migrant can live within the —empowering condition of hybridity‖ (325).

Furthermore, Bhabha asserts that the story of the migrant is the most relevant and applicable model for understanding today’s world culture. He states, —Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature‖ (Bhabha 17). In that way, Rushdie’s exploration of the migrant experience is relevant to all who live in these times, not simply to those who relocate to new countries. The content of his novels clearly reveals that his desire in writing is ultimately to say something about *all* human life, not just the migrant life. His subject is nothing less than life itself, with all of its pain and loss and joy and triumph.

Salman Rushdie’s novels are—in spite of their global scope, their wide-reaching themes, and their attempts to embody all humanity—intensely personal affairs. Echoes of his own life experiences appear in nearly every novel. Two of his novels, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010) were written specifically for his sons. He frequently returns to Bombay, his hometown and most beloved city. Even in his later novels, he still appears to be working through his relationship with India. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie calls India —my *terra infirma*, my maelstrom, my cornucopia, my crowd. India, my too-muchness, my everything at once, my Hug-me, my fable, my mother, my father, and my first great truth‖ (249). He admits that as a migrant writer, he can never quite

capture India accurately, but instead will only be able to create –fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (IH 10). His perspective on the world will always be impacted by the fact that he is a –translated man (S 23) Yet, as he repeatedly shows throughout his many novels, essays, and shorts stories, being a translated man is not necessarily a bad thing. Ultimately, whether his stories are accurate or not, whether they capture the migrant experience or not, whether they are true or not, they are, in Rushdie's words, –despite everything, acts of love (MC 644). To Salman Rushdie, these novels are a declaration of love to a world for whom he dares to imagine a new, brighter future—a future that finally dissolves the boundary between East and West.

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